

Screening Tibet: Approaching New Tibetan Cinema from a
Postcolonial Perspective and the Field of Subaltern Studies

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Abstract

This research will identify and explore the intersections of social space and film space in new cinematic representations/aesthetics of Tibet. It will explore questions of postcolonialism, subaltern status, and the power of elite groups/ domination, as captured by the different social/cultural discourses and relations that characterise Tibetan social, cultural and historical issues. This will be done through a sociological analysis of the screening of Tibet in the New Tibetan Cinema. The research will also draw on the field of subaltern studies to provide an innovative and critical perspective on, and an empirical and theoretical understanding of, postcolonial power in the context of Tibet.

Two key concepts underpin this thesis. Firstly, the research will move beyond the conception of colonialism commonly applied to the cultural and representational issues of Tibet. More specifically, these issues will be explored using postcolonial theory in conjunction with subaltern studies, which can be considered to be of great significance in discussing Tibetan issues. Secondly, the research will ask: “Who are the subaltern subjects within the New Tibetan Cinema?” It will examine this from different socio-political and cultural perspectives: Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan. In this respect, the research will discuss the central question of subaltern studies – that is, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak, 1988) – through the analysis of New Tibetan Cinema. If the subaltern can speak, who is speaking and from where do they speak?

This research will concentrate on a subaltern studies approach to the positioning of the cinematic representations of Tibet/Tibetan issues in the interdisciplinary space. In so doing, sociology and film studies will speak to each other within the broad context of postcolonial studies. The research will be developed using a series of methodological approaches. These are cinematic approaches; they include discourse, textual/contextual analysis (semiotics analysis, narrative analysis and the auteurist approach), and a variety of sociological perspectives, including postcolonial and subaltern analysis.

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Chapter One Introduction: The “Lost Horizon”

Shangri-La (香格里拉 in Simplified Chinese, *Xianggelila* in Chinese Pinyin),¹ which adheres to the imagination as a mysterious Eastern paradise, means “the sun and the moon in my heart” in Tibetan. It was first written about by a British author, James Hilton, in his novel *Lost Horizon* (1933), which has resulted in Shangri-La becoming the name for utopia in the Western² world and also in Han Chinese³ cultural discourse. The film *Lost Horizon*, adapted from the novel of the same name, was made by the director Frank Capra in 1937 and remade in 1973 by Charles Jarrott. To this degree, Tibet in most non-Tibetan cultural/cinematic representations embodies a vast reservoir of utopian imagination, and conveys the key words of distance, mystery, and exotic other to the world. In this sense, the title of *Screening Tibet* in the thesis indicates two meanings of social/filmic reflections, which creates an interdisciplinary space to this research. The first layer points to the fact that this research is a Tibetan film-based and visual-cultural project, while importantly the second layer is to look at and test for the presence and absence of cultural issues from a sociological perspective, in order to evaluate and analyse such issues as Tibetan identity, ethnicity, and gender through cinematic representations, for a sociological purpose and application.

¹ The key terms for understanding in this paper have been listed in Appendix One, in Chinese Pinyin, English, and Simplified Chinese respectively, using the alphabetical order of Chinese Pinyin.

² The terms “Western” or “The West” will be mainly used in this thesis to discuss approaching Tibetan cinema in the postcolonial theme. The Western world is also known as the Occident, as contrasted with the Orient. The terms “Western” or “The West” are very complicated to explain when are they contextualised, as there is no strict international definition. However, in this thesis, the term “Western discourse” will be mentioned on several occasions. Sometimes the term has been used in a general geographic and cultural sense to refer to various nations, depending on different contexts usually at least including the most developed or capitalist parts of Europe, North America and Oceania (the countries of European colonial origin with substantial European ancestral populations), contrasted with the cultures and civilisations of three non-Western continents (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) in the postcolonial discourse. Further explanations and explorations of the term “Western” or “The West” will be given in the detailed discussion of New Tibetan Cinema, and literature reviews of postcolonialism and subaltern studies as the theoretical framework of the thesis.

³ The Chinese authorities claim that there are in total 56 ethnic groups in the People’s Republic of China, and Han Chinese make up the majority (about 92% of the total population). Tibetans, at around 0.5% of the total, are one of 55 ethnic minorities in the PRC (the data can be obtained from the official website of The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China: http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-07/26/content_17366.htm and the official website of National Bureau of Statistics of China: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search.htm?s=中国少数民族>). Therefore, in this thesis, as it involves discussion of the Chinese nation, ethnicity, and cultural diversity, the term “Chinese” needs to be more justified when we discuss Tibet and Tibetan culture, rather than simply using “Chinese” to interpret the relationship between the Chinese communist government and Tibetans. In this sense, Chinese (中国人 in simplified Chinese, *Zhongguo Ren* in Chinese Pinyin) can be understood in one of the ways underpinning “Chineseness” as a term referring to one nationality who are citizens in (or passport holders of) the People’s Republic of China. Han Chinese (or Han people 汉族 in simplified Chinese, *Hanzu* in Chinese Pinyin) have been claimed to be the major Chinese nationality in the People’s Republic of China. Further explorations of Chinese ethnic minorities will be presented in the Literature Review chapter in the context of postcolonialism and subaltern studies, to guide the discussion of New Tibetan Cinema in the later data chapters.

In this introductory chapter, there are in total four sections, setting out the theoretical and social backgrounds to the thesis. Section 1.1 focuses on introducing the substantive understanding of the notion of Tibet, such as the social, historical, political and geographical background, to explain and contextualise how and what Tibetan historical, social, and cultural issues have been applied to frame the social construction for this thesis. The research aims to study New Tibetan Cinema, so Section 1.2 proposes to outline and explore the contextualisation of New Tibetan Cinema, and also, importantly, to introduce the basic biographies and backgrounds of Tibetan directors as well as their filmmaking, in order to present an explanation of which Tibetan directors' films will be used and why they were used in this research analysis. Section 1.3 summarises the key theoretical understandings and research questions. It is necessary to introduce postcolonialism and subaltern studies in this section as these concepts deepen the research questions throughout the whole thesis, shape the theoretical framework in the literature review chapter, provide a comprehensive epistemological understanding of the methodology chapter, and frame the discussion and analysis in the data chapters. Finally, Section 1.4 will map and frame the structure of the thesis, and outline the themes, contents, and sub-structures of each chapter as well as echoing the knowledge contributions of the research.

1.1 Background of the Thesis: Where is Tibet?

The question of whether Tibet is an integral part of the territory of the People's Republic of China (the PRC) or in contrast is seen as a state with long-standing independence, as well as corollary issues of Tibetan human rights, have remained on the international agenda ever since the seminal events of 1951⁴ (Dickinson 2008), as "a critical factor for conducting US–[PRC] relationship" (Frangville 2009:2). As a result, Tibet, a stateless term in political interpretation, has been contextualised as a place that exists in various social and cultural discourses told from Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan perspectives.

⁴ "[O]n 23 May 1951 the [Seventeen-Point Agreement] on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet was signed" to define the relationship between Chinese communist government and Tibetans, and "is of relevance to the present day in interpreting this relationship." After the signing of the agreement, the People's Liberation Army entered Lhasa (the capital of Tibet) in September 1951 (Dickinson 2008:71-72; see also Goldstein 1998). In this way, Tibet as a part of the People's Republic of China has been written into "history", where it can be read that in the Agreement, "Article 1 provides that 'the Tibetan people shall return to the big family of the motherland – the People's Republic of China', thus emphasising that Tibet is an integral part of [the PRC's] territory. By Article 2 The People's Liberation Army were permitted 'to enter Tibet and consolidate the national defences', 'national' here referring to [the People's Republic of] China, and by Article 8 Tibetan troops were to become part of the national defence forces" (Dickinson 2008 72-73). The more Tibetan "historical" literature and social contexts will be explored and used in the Literature Review chapter to cohere the discussion of postcolonialism and subaltern studies in film criticism in this thesis.

More specifically, the English term “Tibet” is believed to be derived from the archaic Tibetan ‘*Tö-bhö*’.⁵ However, academic papers by several contemporary scholars have represented different interpretations of “Tibet”. For example, McKay (2003:9-10) has concluded that “Tibet” can exist in four possible manifestations. The first is the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR, 西藏自治区 in Simplified Chinese, *Xizang Zizhiqu* in Chinese Pinyin) in the contemporary PRC (see Figure 1). The second is the Tibetan Government-in-exile, “based in the north Indian town of Dharamsala,⁶ the residence of the current, 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet.” The third manifestation of “Tibet” “consists of a cultural zone stretching from [Gansu Province] south through the Himalayas, and from an eastward zone situated in the Chinese-designated provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and [Qing]hai, westwards into the Indian realms of Ladakh and even parts of the upper reaches of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal” (Figure 1 and Figure 2). This is closer to the notion of “Tibetan areas” (藏区 in Simplified Chinese, *Zangqu* in Chinese Pinyin) in Han Chinese discourse. The fourth manifestation of Tibet is “a ‘Mythos Tibet’ in which the actual Tibet is imagined as Shangri-La, a place beyond precise geographical definition, one located in the realm of fantasies of place.” In other words, it can be thought that “Tibet’s political currency surely is enhanced by the overwhelming Shangri-[L]a myth that has captured Western imagination” (Singer 2003:250).

Furthermore, according to the understanding of Sautman and Dreyer (2006:3–22), the term “Tibet” can be theorised in two geographical, political and cultural senses, cross-referencing to McKay’s (2003) first and third manifestations. One is “political Tibet” (the central-western Tibetan Plateau areas) for which the Han Chinese government reserves the term “Tibet”, or the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR, see Figure 1). On the other hand, “ethnographic Tibet” (the eastern Tibetan Plateau areas) has been suggested to describe another Tibetan area containing ten Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and two Tibetan Autonomous Counties distributed in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces, “where more than half of PRC Tibetans live” (Sautman and Dreyer 2006:17). This kind of understanding of Tibet is inspired by Goldstein’s conclusion (1998:87) about the 14th Dalai Lama’s conception of Greater Tibet⁷ (Figure 2; highlighted with yellow), in which Tibet “would include not only

⁵ Hastings, James, John Alexander Selbie, Louis Herbert Gray (1922) *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics: Suffering-Zwingli*. P331.

⁶ The Dalai Lama’s residence, and the headquarters of Central Tibetan Administration (the Tibetan government in exile) in Dharamshala, “functions as a surrogated Tibetan microcosm clustered in the Indian subcontinent” (Matta 2008-2009:26).

⁷ “Advocates of the [14th Dalai Lama and Tibetan government-in-exile’s] argument can though point to a general agreement that Tibet was fully independent after 1912, if not during the period of the Qing dynasty. By

the territory that had been political Tibet in modern times, but also [ethnographic] Tibetan areas in western China.” Simultaneously, “Tibetan exiles refer to the whole [Tibetan] plateau as Tibet” (Sautman and Dreyer 2006:17), which means Tibetans-in-exile agree that there exists a “distinctive national identity among disparate groups of people from various parts of [‘Tibet’] with a mix of religious, cultural and political elements” (Anand 2000:271).



Figure 1. Administrative Geographical Map of the People’s Republic of China (claimed territory included)⁸



Figure 2. Greater Tibet⁹

1912 Tibet was free of any Chinese control, and this freedom persisted until 1950, certainly with regard to Outer Tibet – what may be termed ‘political Tibet’ as opposed to ‘ethnographic’ Tibet” (Dickinson 2008:77).

⁸The resource is from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_administrative_claimed_included.svg.

⁹ The resource is from the website: <http://blog.snowliontours.com/2010/04/map-of-tibet/>.

It can also be seen from McKay (2003:9) that the Tibetan Autonomous Region (political Tibet) in the PRC was the Tibetan Autonomous Region in the Republic of China ruled by Dalai Lama(s) from 1912 to 1950. This “excludes, however, other areas [ethnographic Tibet] that were under the control of the Dalai Lama during that period, with large parts of his domain having been transferred to neighbouring Chinese provinces such as Sichuan [Yunnan, Gansu] and [Qinghai]”. The understanding of the term “Tibet” has been agreed to contain two meanings: political and ethnographic conceptions. Alternatively, it is worth noting that Tibet (西藏 in Simplified Chinese, *Xizang* in Chinese Pinyin) in contemporary Chinese is usually referred to as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Particularly in Chinese discourse, there are also two important terms touching upon the meaning of “Tibet” in the ethnographic aspect: *Zangqu* (藏区 in simplified Chinese) or *Zangdi* (藏地 in simplified Chinese) for Tibet/Tibetan areas, which include the other ten Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and two Tibetan Autonomous Counties distributed in Chinese Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. In this sense, “Tibet” refers geographically to how “political Tibet” and “ethnographic Tibet” have been contextualised, including both the Tibet Autonomous Region, and the other ten Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and two Tibetan Autonomous Counties distributed in four Chinese provinces neighbouring the Tibet Autonomous Region.¹⁰



Figure 3. Map of the three major regions of Tibet¹¹

Furthermore, if we look at the synopses of Tibetan films made by Pema Tsenden, usually there can be found a sentence like this: “the film features the Tibetan Amdo dialect”. So,

¹⁰ The table of “political Tibet” and “ethnographic Tibet” can be found in Appendix Two.

¹¹ The recourse can be found on these websites: http://www.jfdownload.com/d/w_2319078.html and <http://www.endread.com/3628>.

what/where is Amdo? In fact, it does not exist explicitly on the map of the administrative divisions of the People's Republic of China. It is closer to a geo-cultural conception in its understanding in Tibetan discourse, originating from the concept of the traditional Tibetan geographical regions. Before the collapse of the authority of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tibet was customarily divided into three major regions: Central Tibet (U-Tsang, 卫藏 in Simplified Chinese, *Weizang* in Chinese Pinyin), Amdo (安多 in Simplified Chinese, *Anduo* in Chinese Pinyin) and Kham (康巴 in Simplified Chinese, *Kangba* in Chinese Pinyin) (Singer 2003). In Figure 3, the map has been highlighted in three colours (red, green, and purple) to show the three traditional regions of Tibet within the administrative geographical map of the People's Republic of China. Central Tibet/U-Tsang (purple) covers almost all of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Amdo (red) is spread across most of Qinghai, part of Gansu, and part of Sichuan Provinces. Kham (green) contains five Tibet autonomous areas in Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, and a small part of the Tibet Autonomous Region. In other words, political Tibet consisted of Central Tibet (U-Tsang), while "the boundary of ethnographic Tibet extended to include Amdo and Kham" (Anand 2000:274). The understanding of "internal unity" for Tibetanness is shaped around their culture and identity within the stateless "Tibetan nationality" (Karmel 1995-1996:488).

However, this stateless Tibetan nationality is inevitably a political embodiment of powerless and subaltern status in the context of international relations and globalisation. As Goldstein (1998:83) observes, "the exiled Dalai Lama finds himself standing on the sidelines, unable to impede or reverse changes in his [homeland] that he deplures, and the frustration engendered by this impotence has seriously heightened the danger of violence." In other words, the political and cultural issues of Tibet are often labelled as sensitive issues caught between a relic of Western imperialism and contemporary (internal) colonialism under the Han Chinese government. It has been suggested that "the fundamental fault of communism all over the world is that it stresses collective values and deprives the individual of his or her right to choose" (Cao 1998:29). As a result, "during the 1980s the Chinese people's awareness of democracy improved greatly, reaching a climax in 1989 with a widespread call for the end of one-party dictatorship". In this context, Tibet's independence movement, Taiwan's separatist movement, and Hong Kong's autonomous movement all drew international attention (Xiang 1998:97). At the same time, Sautman (2006:243) observes that the Western media's coverage of colonialism and genocide in Tibet has been highly critical.

Alternatively, Sautman presents a highly positive picture, suggesting in an echo of the statements of the Chinese communist government that “ethnically-related problems exist in Tibet, but do not amount to genocide or colonialism” (2006:244). Although Sautman opposes accusations of genocide or colonialism, he still insists that there are problems of ethnicity. The Chinese communist government “considers that even an ‘ethnic’ solution to the Tibet question would be a potential threat to its position given the strong anti-Chinese and separatist feelings of Tibetans” (Goldstein 1998:95).

Nevertheless, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the issue of Tibet and the aspirations of the Tibetan people, “who are neither anti-Chinese [n]or anti-China, but rather anti-oppression” (Cao and Seymour 1998). As such, the research will explore how at “the moment when not only a civil but a good society is born out of domestic confusion, singular events that break the letter of the law to instil its spirit are often invoked” (Spivak 1988: 293). Therefore, to balance the different socio-political opinions, the most significant perspective in the research will exploit the social and cultural power relationships in the different discourses to discover the social oppression underlining subaltern studies; therefore moving beyond the conception of colonialism into postcolonial discourses, to look at Tibet and to consider Tibetan culture/ethnicity by the analysis of New Tibetan Cinema in the context of intersections of film space and social space. As such, the contribution of this research is to explore Tibetan cinematic representations as cases of Tibetan culture/issues in Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan socio-political and cultural discourses, through concentrating on sociology and film studies speaking to each other, approaching the social, ethnic and cultural power relationships, and the understanding of subaltern subjects in the context of postcolonial force.

1.2 Introduction to the New Tibetan Cinema and Tibetan Directors

In recent years, the cultural industry and its product of Tibetan film and television in the PRC has presented prosperity alongside an understanding of “film-as-culture” to display Tibetan customs, history and social vicissitudes, and development. In addition to the recent emergence of a series of Tibetan directors and Tibetan films, a landmark for Tibetan film/cultural celebration occurred in 2015, when construction of the PRC’s largest film and television production base in Tibetan areas began in Tongde Country, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province (Amdo, Tibet). This will serve Tibetan areas’ filmmaking, train the new talent in film and television in Tibetan areas, and promote the

development of Tibetan film and television culture.¹² In this period, Tibetan cinema has re-emerged and been reconstructed as a new wave after the arrival of a native Tibetan director, Pema Tseden. He entered the Beijing Film Academy in 2002 and is “well known as the first Tibetan feature filmmaker” in the PRC to “make films in the Tibetan language and with Tibetan casts and crews” (Berry 2016:89, Yau 2016:121). Barnett (2015:135–136) has also mentioned that Phagmo Tashi was the first Tibetan director to make a fiction film in the Tibetan language (*Longing* in 1992), but later, due to “lack of technical quality and professionalism”, the director “disavowed” his film work. After that, “[n]either [Phagmo Tashi] nor any other Tibetan in Tibet made an independent fiction film or drama in their own language for twelve years, when Pema Tseden’s first film was completed” (Barnett 2015:136). Afterwards, with the emergence of other Tibetan directors in the PRC (for instance, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi), Tibetan cinema can be thought of as constituting a new genre of Tibetan films, the social significance of which “reside[s] in their capacity of renouncing a mystical, idealised vision of Tibet” (Matta 2009:33).

In other words, Tibetan films made by Tibetans working in the PRC¹³ can be thought of as a significant new voice of Tibetan self-representation for their culture, identity and society, so that it is very important to identify this “new voice” of Tibet in the research thesis. However, regarding films on Tibet made by non-Tibetans, several scholars have suggested that “[Han] Chinese propagandist films and Hollywood pro-Tibetan [Western] films both promote similar orientalist and essentialising perceptions of an imagined and idealised Tibet”, embedded with an “exotic otherness” (Frangville 2009: 2, Yau 2016:121). For this reason, Pema Tseden’s Tibetan films have been given the title of New Tibetan Cinema (Yu 2014, Frangville 2016) in the PRC, to distinguish them from “old” Tibetan films, which were made by Han Chinese, other non-Tibetans (Westerners) and Tibetans-in-exile. However, I would like to borrow and expand the title of New Tibetan Cinema in this research to echo developments in Tibetan cinema in the past 15 years, during which there has been a new cinematic/cultural phenomenon of Tibetan films made by Tibetan directors, starting with Pema Tseden, who come from Tibet in the PRC.

Following the above understanding, the word “new” within the area of Tibetan film/cultural studies can be considered firstly in relation to the ways in which film is emblematic of

¹² The news report about this construction in Tibetan areas can be found on this website: <http://www.chinanews.com/yl/2015/05-12/7271435.shtml>.

¹³ Tibetan directors working in the PRC are hereafter referred to as “Tibetan directors” in the thesis.

modernity as a new/modern system of culture and form of art, and has become an important means of presenting contemporary Tibetan ethnicity and culture in the context of the PRC. Secondly, New Tibetan Cinema “is inscribed with the potential of [re-producing Tibetan] ‘collective national identity’” (Robin 2009:37) and takes the “subject position” to break down the circuit of Tibetan cultural/cinematic representations consumed within dominant cultural groups (Western and Han Chinese). Therefore, firstly, this section will introduce the New Tibetan Cinema, reflecting on what its aspects have been and how they will be explored and contextualised in this research. Secondly, it will look at the Tibetan directors who will feature in this thesis to shape the analysis of the Tibetan filmic and cultural sector, and explain why they were selected.

1.2.1 The New Tibetan Cinema

As the Tibetan director Sonthar Gyal has said, before Pema Tsenden started making films, the majority of films about Tibet were made and produced by outsiders (Westerners and Han Chinese in this case), mostly using non-Tibetan languages.¹⁴ So can they be understood as Tibetan films? This is a stubborn subject which we need to think about when looking at a theoretical approach for exploring Tibetan cinema. In other words, the shape of the notion of Tibetan cinema will be decided by the research process, in which Tibetan cinematic representations have been identified and contextualised in a broader sphere and an alternative perspective by previous scholars (Anand 2006, Matta 2009, Robin 2009 and Barnett 2015).

A recent study about Tibetan films has been published by Robert Barnett (2015). In the article, he uses the conception of Tibetan “DV-made” rather than Tibetan cinema to reflect the official and unofficial films and videos made by Tibetans in/for Tibet in the digital period. Tibetan digital videos have been divided into five types: home, civic, export videos, documentaries, and dramas. His contextualisation of Tibetan digital videos is that “cultural reconstruction and collective redefinition in one form or another underlie all unofficial and independent film and video production by Tibetans, no matter what category they belong to” (2015:122). However, it is not transparent, on the one hand, to recognise and introduce the conception and definition of Tibetan cinema. On the other hand, the author positions his argument in a very traditional and “Western” colonial way in terms of Tibetan digital

¹⁴ The information can be found in an interview with Sonthar Gyal, published on this website: <http://www.trace.org/profile/interview-sonthar-gyal>.

production, while not making a distinction in the discourse of “Tibetanness” between Tibetans living in the PRC and Tibetans-in-exile (or Tibetans-in-diaspora).

It cannot be ignored that some scholars, for example Matta (2009), have suggested that in the social/political reality, there are two ethnic lands for Tibetans drafting their culture and identity: “The PRC’s Tibet” and “diasporic Tibet”. Echoing this statement, Robin (2009:37) has referred to “China’s Tibetan-ness” and “exile Tibetan-ness”, meaning the identity of these two Tibetan lands. However, the most problematic consideration in terms of the cinema of “diasporic Tibet/exile Tibetan-ness”, or what we may call Tibetan diasporic cinema, is related to the issue of the “authenticity” of Tibetan culture and identity. That is to say, to echo what Matta (2009) has discussed, if Tibetan culture and identity in “diasporic Tibet” is fractured and dispersed, or what we have considered as “lost”; then even if we could decide to accept the notion of hybridity in the transnational or post-national discourses for “Tibetanness”, can we regard Tibetan diasporic cinema as “Tibetan cinema”? Therefore, Matta (2009) doubts whether Tibetan diasporic cinema could be a representative of “authentic” Tibetanness (which is non-westernised or not assimilated into local culture) and a voice of “native” Tibetans, as it has been stated that “Westerners, [Han] Chinese and Tibetans in exile are busy nurturing an imaginary Tibet which can satisfy their needs and their ideological and political exigencies” (Dodin and Rather 2001, cited in Matta 2009:25). In this sense, just as Western and Han Chinese-made films, the Tibetan diasporic cinema has permitted the “unreal frame of ‘Tibetan cinema’”. So, in fact “the cinema of Tibetans in the diaspora is an exercise in imagination” (Matta 2009: 26).

Needless to say, if Tibetan diasporic cinema is considered to be an exercise of imagination of “Tibetanness”, can we ask – is this New Tibetan Cinema (in “The PRC’s Tibetan cinema”) without imagination: representing, speaking and negotiating the “authentic” and “pure” Tibetanness instead of an ethnotype within the identity of “Chineseness”, in which Tibetan culture and identity in “The PRC’s Tibet” is not fractured and dispersed, and remains un-Hanified and non-westernised in the context of globalisation? These are the aspects of New Tibetan Cinema that will be explored in this thesis.

On 28th April 2016, the organisers of the events of the Lhasa Film Festival¹⁵ pushed a notification in Chinese through WeChat,¹⁶ announcing the Tibetan Cinema Panorama tour in

¹⁵ More information on the film festival will be given and discussed in the Methodology chapter, and in Chapter Four: “Tibetan” Film Festivals and the Cultural Identities of New Tibetan Cinema.

Mainland China.¹⁷ In reference to this film panorama, several perspectives have been repeatedly mentioned which show the central ideas of this event. Below I have quoted three paragraphs which indicate what conceptualised perspectives refer to the new form or “new wave” of Tibetan cinema within the different aspects of “Tibetanness” in the PRC’s Tibet:

Under the influence of the external situation of nationalism, cultural relativism and localism, alongside globalisation, the filmmakers of *Zangdi Yingxiang*¹⁸ are drawing support from the rational and critical spirit of the age, maintaining a high degree of intrinsic creative passion and enthusiasm, continuously breaking through those “imagined communities”, proceeding to create a **new form** of *Gaoyuan Yingxiang*.¹⁹

The expression of *Zangdi Yingxiang*, through the multidirectional attempts, is **reconstructing a narrative subject which is belonging to self**. A new fashion is presented by *Zangdi Yingxiang*; or we can state cautiously that the film image movement of “*Zangdi Xinlangchao*”,²⁰ is in the process of happening. **Tibetan filmmakers work in different ways, while in practice sharing the common belief, which has become a form of self-driven communitarian unity**. This has inspired people to look again at Tibetan areas under the mutual frames of both globalisation and localisation.

...**Tibetan filmmakers and their auteurist films are undoubtedly the backbone of this film “new wave”**...**The common belief of *Gaoyuan Yingxiang* filmmaking is that the Tibetan filmmakers are not intentionally presenting Tibetan landscapes and Tibetan religion**, but rather they are focusing on expressing the common themes of human nature; such as humanity and love, which become a form of self-driven communitarian concern.

(2016, 28th April)²¹

Reading through these three paragraphs, three Chinese terms should be noted: *Zangdi Yingxiang*, *Gaoyuan Yingxiang*, and *Zangdi Xinlangchao*. In this case, *Zangdi* literally means “Tibetan areas” and *Gaoyuan* refers to the Tibetan plateau, so that *Zangdi* and *Gaoyuan* can be both translated as “Tibet/Tibetan areas”. *Yingxiang* can be translated literally as “image” and “film” in English, and in the texts it refers to film and filmmaking. Therefore, the

¹⁶ WeChat (微信 in simplified Chinese, Weixin in Chinese Pinyin; literally, micro-message), is a mobile-based text and voice message communication service developed by Tencent in the People’s Republic of China. It provides text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcast (one-to-many) messaging, video conferencing, video games, sharing of photographs and videos, and location sharing.

¹⁷ *Zangdi Yingxiang Zuopin Quanguo Xunhui Zhanying* (藏地影像作品全国巡回展映 in simplified Chinese); literally, the Tibetan Cinema Panorama Tour in Mainland China. The film panorama tour lasted six months, taking in most Han Chinese cities and Tibetan areas. The tour’s curtain descended in October (22nd —29th), and the last station of film screening was in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region.

¹⁸ *Zangdi Yingxiang*, 藏地影像 in simplified Chinese; literally, Tibetan areas’ images and films.

¹⁹ *Gaoyuan Yingxiang*, 高原影像 in simplified Chinese; literally, the Tibetan plateau’s images and films.

²⁰ *Zangdi Xinlangchao*, 藏地新浪潮 in simplified Chinese; literally, Tibetan areas’ (films) new wave.

²¹ The data can be read through WeChat: <http://www.weixinnu.com/article/572ce59178bbb5730454d953>. The material, which was originally in the Chinese language, was translated by myself.

Chinese terms *Zangdi Yingxiang* and *Gaoyuan Yingxiang* can both refer to Tibetan cinema. On the other hand, in Chinese discourse we can also use *Zangzu/Zangren dianying*²² and *Shezang dianying*²³ to refer to Tibetan cinema. These concern Tibetan films made by/about Tibetan ethnicity and Tibetan films made about/for/with Tibetan cultures. In the texts, I have highlighted the material indicating that Tibetan cinema is in the process of creating a new form which attempts to reconstruct a Tibetan self/subjective narrative in the discourse of the New Tibetan Cinema.

The backbone of this New Tibetan Cinema is formed by Tibetan directors (Pema Tsenden as the leading director) and their auteurist films. In practice they share the common belief of “not intentionally presenting Tibetan landscapes and Tibetan religion”, in order to “become a form of self-driven communitarian unity” for their own voice in the contemporary PRC. This common belief of New Tibetan Cinema echoes what Pema Tsenden stated to be the notion of Tibetan cinema when he gave an explanation of his cinematic approach at the Busan International Film Festival in 2010:

[f]rom the very beginning, when we [Tibetan directors] made films, we have intentionally avoided succumbing to those images...of an exoticized Tibet you see in other [non-Tibetan] films. We emphasize reflecting the basic condition of people in Tibet as well as their basic emotional life. (Barnett 2015:158)

In this sense, the New Tibetan Cinema in this thesis will be contextualised to identify it with films made by Tibetans themselves, to speak for Tibet and Tibetan culture, using the Tibetan language, and taking advantage of a deliberate contrast with the exoticising and objectifying features made by non-Tibetans, whether documentary films or fiction films. This embraces the sentiment of Tibetans making their own films, no longer minorities’ representation and exotic otherness as in the non-Tibetan film industry. The New Tibetan Cinema aims to, on the one hand, have a very successful positive significance in contemporary social insights, so that the new voice of Tibetans in the cinematic representation can be heard in the contemporary PRC. This shows a kind of possibility of Tibetan people occupying the central “subject position” in their own cinematic, cultural and social representations. On the other hand, it indicates that a new/modern system of culture has been created through the medium

²² *Zangzu/Zangren dianying*, 藏族/藏人电影 in simplified Chinese; literally, Tibetan films made by/about Tibetan or Tibetan ethnicity.

²³ *Shezang dianying*, 涉藏电影 in simplified Chinese; literally, Tibetan films made about/for/with Tibet or Tibetan cultures. Normally, in most Tibetan and Chinese ethnic minorities’ discourses, the term is used to refer to Tibetan films made by non-Tibetans.

of film, representing what could be seen as a new/modern form of art in Tibet. This has become an important system for using contemporary culture to exhibit Tibetan culture/identity, contemporary Tibetan lifestyles and traditional Tibetan wisdom,²⁴ so that “particularly significant is that these [new Tibetan films] break the circuit of producing products for circulation and consumption within the culture of dominance” in the Western and Han Chinese discourses (Fry and Wills 1989:160, cited in Ginsburg 1991:97).

1.2.2 Tibetan Directors and Their Filmmaking

Director	Hometown	Feature Film(s) ²⁵	Film language	Film Location
Pema Tseden	Hainan, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, Amdo	<i>The Silent Holy Stones</i> (2006) <i>The Search</i> (2009) <i>Old Dog</i> (2011) ²⁶ <i>The Sacred Arrow</i> (2014) <i>Tharlo</i> (2015) ²⁷	Tibetan Amdo dialect	Amdo, Qinghai Province
Sonthar Gyal	Hainan, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, Amdo	<i>The Sun Beaten Path</i> (2011) <i>The River</i> (2015)	Tibetan Amdo dialect	Amdo, Qinghai Province
Agang Yargyi ²⁸	Aba, Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, Amdo	<i>Dream</i> (2013) <i>Her Name is Sola</i> (2015)	Tibetan Amdo dialect	Amdo, Sichuan Province

Figure 4. List of Tibetan directors in the PRC

²⁴ The reference can be accessed through the article, *On the Road with Pema Tseden* (Trace Foundation 2010). The website is <http://www.trace.org/profile/road-pema-tseden>. It is also presented in the video, *Trace Foundation Interviews Director Pema Tseden*, which can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvtmMV40Jgg>.

²⁵ The main focus of the analysis of the New Tibetan Cinema in this thesis is on their feature films. However, the three selected directors have also made a wide range of documentary features; for instance, *The Last Weather-Shaman* (2004), *Kathok Puja* (2007), and *Samye Monastery* (2007) by Pema Tseden, and *The Return* (2015) by Agang Yargyi. It has also been suggested by Barnett (2015) and Yau (2016) that *The Grassland* (2004), Pema Tseden’s student graduation piece at the Beijing Film Academy, should be recognised as his first film.

²⁶ *The Silent Holy Stones*, *The Search*, and *Old Dog* are also known and labelled as Pema Tseden’s “Tibetan Trilogy”.

²⁷ Due to the date of the film’s public release (during my writing-up stage), *Tharlo* (2015) will only be mentioned in some parts of Chapter Four with the aim of identifying New Tibetan Cinema in different social and cultural discourses, and will not be subjected to substantive and deep analysis in this thesis.

²⁸ His films, *Dream* and *Her Name is Sola*, are short fiction films, different from the other (long) fiction films listed in Figure 4.

It has been noted that New Tibetan Cinema starts with Pema Tsenden, marking the development of a new cinematic/cultural phenomenon of Tibetan films made by native Tibetan directors in the PRC in the past 15 years. Therefore, in this section, I will introduce three (male) Tibetan directors, and their film productions which will be used for analysis, and discuss why they have been selected for this thesis. In Figure 4, I have listed the three main Tibetan directors (Pema Tsenden, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi), who are all male and can be seen as new symbols of Tibetan cinema in most national and international spheres. Each of these directors has a strong presence in the public media and film festivals; in particular, their films have been released and screened in the public sphere in the PRC. Their features will be presented and analysed in the thesis as representatives of the new voice of “Tibet”, constructing self-awareness in the mode of new Tibetan cinematic representations, looking at their homeland of Tibet and featuring the Tibetan Amdo dialect, mostly employing a cast of amateur Tibetan actors, paying close attention to Tibetan culture and life, and rejecting the exoticisation and objectification of Tibet seen in the fiction features made by non-Tibetan directors. Although these three Tibetan directors and their film productions are the most nationally and internationally visible, this does not of course mean that there are only these three Tibetan directors, or that their Tibetan films made since 2002 constitute the whole of the New Tibetan Cinema. For example, Robin (2009) and Barnett (2015) both mention the Tibetan film *The Coral Necklace* (2006) by Shide Nyima²⁹ (西德尼玛 in Simplified Chinese, Xide Nima in Chinese Pinyin) who is a famous Tibetan performer, poet, and comedian from Amdo, Qinghai Province. Also, there is another Tibetan film, *The Driver and the Lama* (2009), made by Rinchen Drolma, who has been recognised by Barnett (2015:143) as “the first Tibetan woman film director in Amdo”.

It is necessary to explain why these two directors will not be included in this thesis. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, their filmmaking careers lack continuity and auteurist characteristics of filmmaking as each of them has only made one film. This thesis mainly focuses on the discussion of three selected Tibetan directors (Pema Tsenden, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi) who can be seen as career feature directors, and their filmmaking embodies the auteurist characteristics of films made in accordance with individual concerns, yet echoing a collective theme both across their individual filmographies and between the respective directors. This provides a sense of collective Tibetan self-representation through each filmmaker’s individual auteurist expression, through which it is possible to examine

²⁹ He also acts as Tharlo in Pema Tsenden’s Tibetan film, *Tharlo*.

Tibetan culture, ethnicity and identity. Secondly, the issue of access to film resources is very important. As Shide Nyima and Rinchen Drolma are not career directors, their films are very hard to find, whether through online resources or as DVDs for sale in the public sphere. At the same time, these two films are rarely screened in the cinema or at other film exhibitions/festivals. As such, these directors can be understood as unofficial film producers. In other words, because of copyright, the films are their private property, so according to the ethical practice of the British Sociological Association I would be unable to obtain them for the purposes of research if they did not want to share them with me.

In addition to these two films, many other unofficial and independent Tibetan films and videos have been made in Tibetan areas, but these are less well-known and are difficult to screen in public, making it hard for them to be recognised nationally or internationally as important Tibetan cultural representations in the contemporary period. As such, they have not been selected for analysis in this thesis. As Barnett (2015:120) has pointed out in his paper, the technological/digital movement “led to a wave of independent film and video production by Tibetan artists and intellectuals”, but these largely play the role of unofficial images as they are less well known and are forms of political activism. This echoes the reason why I have not chosen any women film directors for study in this thesis. The reason for this is that Tibetan women directors are consistently absent and invisible in the Tibetan filmmaking industry; most of their works have been recognised as unofficial and independent Tibetan films/videos that find it difficult to be screened/watched by the public. Although, as mentioned by Barnett (2015), there is a Tibetan film, *The Driver and the Lama* (2009), made by a Tibetan female director, Rinchen Drolma, due to the nature of its unofficial production it is difficult to search for or watch this film. Unfortunately, then, this thesis has been unable to include female Tibetan directors. This is a problematic limitation of this thesis; however, it is worth reiterating that this thesis is primarily concerned with those cinematic representations that are readily available within the public sphere (i.e. those of Pema Tsenden, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi) and seeks to explore how these films may be constituting a new space for the negotiation of Tibetan ethnicity and culture. The absence of female directors in this thesis is therefore representative of the absence of female directors amongst publicly available Tibetan films. This means that the emergent space of New Tibetan Cinema may be highly (male) gendered. With this in mind, this thesis pays particular attention to the representation of women in the films of the three chosen directors. Further justification for selecting these three Tibetan filmmakers can be found in the Methodology chapter.

It is worth noting that the three selected Tibetan directors (Figure 4), and in fact most Tibetan directors up to the present, are from Amdo Tibet. One possible reason for this is that “Amdo is one of the main regions in the larger Tibetan cultural realm [in the PRC], which exceeds the TAR” (Berry 2016:89) and which has produced the most Tibetan cultural, artistic, and literary productions (Liang 2016). There is another reason I would like to explore, which is the influence and power of Pema Tsenden. Pema Tsenden (万玛才旦 in Simplified Chinese, *Wanma Caidan* in Chinese Pinyin), is recognised as a native Tibetan filmmaker and a bilingual writer (Tibetan and Han Chinese), from Amdo, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. He is a son of Tibetan nomads, a voice of “New Tibet” as a sixth-generation Chinese³⁰/first-generation Tibetan director in the PRC. His films look at his homeland of Amdo, featuring the Tibetan Amdo dialect, usually a cast of amateur Tibetan actors, and his works can be seen as representative of Tibetan cultural symbols of Tibetan ethnicity. His signature films are recognised as the leading productions amongst Tibetan filmmakers, shooting the Tibetan struggles and exploring changes in the development of Tibetan civilisation in the context of Han Chinese domination and modernisation. Pema Tsenden has emerged within a relatively short period of fifteen years as the first Tibetan feature director in the PRC ever to make films entirely in the Tibetan language and with Tibetan actors in order to emphasise and represent Tibetan identity and culture (Lim 2009). His films have received wide attention and have been awarded top honours nationally and internationally, both in film festivals³¹ and in the academic arena (Robin 2009, Yu 2014, Barnett 2015, Lo 2016, Berry 2016, Yau 2016, Grewal 2016, and Frangville 2016).

As a result, “Pema Tsenden has established himself as a leading figure and an active promoter of cinema in Tibet” (Frangville 2016:106). In this way, it can be considered that his Tibetan filmmaking has greatly influenced other Amdo Tibetan filmmakers’ contributions to the New Tibetan Cinema. As Yu (2014:126) states, Pema Tsenden is “being celebrated as the founder of the New Tibetan Cinema in [the PRC], signifying not only the rapid growth of [independent] Tibetan-language films made by native Tibetans but also a particular genre and cultural theme concerning the current state of Tibetan life in [the PRC].” It may be seen that Pema Tsenden has established a Tibetan filmmaking team with a crew who are all from Amdo,

³⁰ Pema Tsenden’s status as a sixth-generation Chinese director has been accepted by the Chinese media in news reports. One can be found here: <http://www.chinanews.com/yl/dyzz/news/2007/04-16/916082.shtml>.

³¹ His films garnered excellent honours among Chinese national cinema including, such as, the Golden Rooster Best Directorial Debut Award (for *The Silent Holy Stones*), a Shanghai International Film Festival Jury Grand Prix (for *The Search*), and his *Tharlo* was included in the Orizzonti section in the 72nd Venice Film Festival.

aiming to make Tibetan films with completely Amdo Tibetan elements. I will call this Tibetan filmmaking team “The Iron Triangle”: they are Pema Tsenden, Dukar Tserang and Sonthar Gyal. They are all professionals with different skills – Pema Tsenden directs and writes screenplays, Dukar Tserang³² handles the sound and music, and Sonthar Gyal the cinematography. They have collaborated on the production of several successful films, especially Pema Tsenden’s “Tibetan Trilogy”: *The Silent Holy Stones*, *The Search*, and *Old Dog*.³³

Therefore, we can see that Sonthar Gyal was formerly a cinematographer who collaborated with Pema Tsenden. In other words, he is a Tibetan “cinematographer-turned-director” (Frangville 2016:107) and can be considered a symbol of Amdo who emerged from “Pema Tsenden’s filmmaking team”. Sonthar Gyal (松太加 in Simplified Chinese, *Song Taijia* in Chinese Pinyin), the Tibetan director, and importantly the first Tibetan cinematographer, comes from Amdo, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. He studied fine arts at Qinghai Normal University from 2001, and in 2004 he went on to study cinematography at the Beijing Film Academy. His Tibetan films have also been recognized internationally and have garnered top honours in Chinese national cinema, following Pema Tsenden. He has since worked as a cinematographer and artistic director on a series of films and documentaries, especially including his involvement in Pema Tsenden’s “Tibetan Trilogy” (*The Silent Holy Stones*, *The Search*, and *Old Dog*).³⁴ Due to Pema Tsenden’s leading position and his influence on New Tibetan Cinema, Sonthar Gyal’s Tibetan filmmaking contributions have been influenced by Pema Tsenden’s aesthetic language, use of the Tibetan Amdo dialect and a cast of amateur Tibetan actors. In Sonthar Gyal’s first film, *The Sun Beaten Path*, Pema Tsenden undertook the responsibility of art director; and in his second film, *The River*, Pema Tsenden was co-producer.

Finally, the shadows of Pema Tsenden’s and Sonthar Gyal’s influences on Tibetan cinema can also be found in Agang Yargyi’s Tibetan cinematic representations. Agang Yargyi (阿岗·雅尔基 in simplified Chinese, *Agang Yaerji* in Chinese Pinyin), from Amdo, Aba Tibetan and

³² Dukar Tserang (德格才让 in simplified Chinese, *Dege Cairang* in Chinese Pinyin) is a sound engineer; he records and produces the soundtracks for Tibetan cinema. Dukar Tserang graduated from Northwest Nationalities University in the PRC with a major in Tibetan, and he is a talented musician in Tibetan areas. At the same time, he has been encouraged by Pema Tsenden and Sonthar Gyal to go to the Beijing Film Academy and study composition.

³³ The information can be found in an interview with Sonthar Gyal, on this website: <http://www.trace.org/profile/interview-sonthar-gyal>.

³⁴ See footnote 33.

Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, has been labelled as the most famous and the most rewarded “young Tibetan director born after 1990” in both national and international spheres.³⁵ However, he is very different from Pema Tsenden and Sonthar Gyal (Tibetan directors born in the 1960s and 70s) as a Tibetan filmmaker. Firstly, he is currently a student majoring in film and television directing at the Beijing Institute of Performing Arts. Compared with Pema Tsenden and Sonthar Gyal’s mature filmmaking career, Agang Yargyi’s Tibetan films can be regarded as a student’s training productions, and he has been recognised as a Tibetan “student director”.³⁶ Secondly, because he is currently a student, up to now his Tibetan films have all been “filmlets” (less than 50 minutes long).³⁷

The thesis will mostly discuss the work of the New Tibetan Cinema’s leading figure, Pema Tsenden; and two other Tibetan directors, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi, whose works have been heavily influenced by Pema Tsenden. I would like to state a clear justification of the relationship between the definition of New Tibetan Cinema and the three selected Tibetan directors. Selecting these three Tibetan directors to analyse in the thesis does not mean that there are only three Tibetan directors in the discourse of New Tibetan Cinema. As I have already mentioned, many unofficial and independent Tibetan films and videos have been made in Tibetan areas; they are not included in this thesis as they are less well known and are difficult to screen in public. However, these can still be identified as New Tibetan Cinema as long as they are made by Tibetans themselves and speak for Tibet and Tibetan culture, using the Tibetan language, and taking advantage of a deliberate contrast with the exoticising and objectifying feature films made by non-Tibetans. In other words, I would like to explain that the selected three Tibetan directors and their films are not representative of the entire New Tibetan Cinema; however, they are the three directors who, within the discourse of New Tibetan Cinema, are the most publicly visible and present in current Tibetan cultural representations and filmmaking. Furthermore, as New Tibetan Cinema has emerged as a new cinematic/cultural phenomenon in the PRC over just the past 15 short years, starting with Pema Tsenden, and Pema Tsenden’s film productions are the first to have been given the title of New Tibetan Cinema (Yu 2014, Frangville 2016), he has inevitably been placed in a leading

³⁵ The information can be found in several Chinese news reports, three of which are here: <http://news.tibetcul.com/movie/201407/33499.html>, http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/U_txYiueZr9hO42jmuJkKA, and <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bPH16TKyyjn7xjqpZAtaSw>.

³⁶ The information of Agang Yargyi been given the title of Tibetan “student director” can be read on the website: <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/PUCc4s3HnClfJchMZAqIkA>. Actually, Tibetan student film productions make up a considerable proportion of the unofficial and independent films and videos made in Tibetan areas.

³⁷ See footnote 36.

position as a pioneer of New Tibetan Cinema. In his career, he has had significant influence over, and shown the ability to bring up and convene, further Tibetan directors.

1.3 The Key Theoretical Understandings and Research Questions

As already stated, postcolonialism and subaltern studies can be identified as the most significant theoretical perspectives used in this thesis. Therefore, the next section of the Introduction will take a general look at these two concepts. A more detailed discussion of how postcolonialism and subaltern studies are applied to the analysis of cultural/cinematic representations can be found in Chapter Two (the Literature Review). This section will also examine the research questions of this thesis, and the way in which they will be shaped and contextualised by these key theoretical understandings.

1.3.1 Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies

Postcolonialism adopts a politics of epistemology, from colonialism to its continuing legacies, concerning itself with “historically determined relationships of dominance and subordination” (Gandhi 1998:2), with specific reference to the Western colonial process and the way it has decisively shaped the economic, political, social, and cultural conditions of today’s world. It mainly seeks to address the wider cultural context of subaltern knowledge about differences in epistemology between the West and the East, which is not easily fixed in an understanding of the period after Western colonialism. As Young (2003:4) argues, “postcolonialism involves first of all the argument that the nations of the three non-Western continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America) are largely in a situation of subordination to Europe and North America, and in a position of economic inequality.” This economic inequality remakes nations and peoples, placing them in a new imperialistic context of political and cultural domination. As a result, postcolonial theory as a critical approach focuses on power relationships among political, economic and cultural aspects; not only between coloniser and colonised in (neo)colonialism, but also between elites and subalterns in postcolonialism. Therefore, postcolonial notions and subaltern studies conjoined speak to each other. To examine the word *subaltern*, it refers to any person or social group deemed to be “subordinate”, “inferior” or “lower-ranking” in status in a particular society, because of social/cultural factors, such as class, gender, ethnicity or religion. As Edward Said (Guha and Spivak 1988: vi) wrote in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, “the word ‘subaltern’, first of all, has both political and intellectual connotations. Its implied opposite is of course ‘dominant’ or ‘elite’”. The word “subaltern” originates from the *Prison Notebooks* of Gramsci (1891–1937).

There is a sociological research group promoting subaltern studies, known as the Subaltern Studies Collective, which began in South Asia, especially in India. Its scholars, for example Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, focus on post-colonial societies to explore and develop conceptions of the relationship between elites and subalterns in the general sense. This new approach to postcolonial criticism has produced a good supply of literature and its impact has been felt beyond India (Bahl 1997:1333). As Prakash (1994:1489) points out, subaltern studies provides a powerful intervention in dominant historical narratives through a “critique of the discipline of history” in the modern West (British colonialism, for example). This approach can be extended to other tricontinental (African, Asian, Latin American) countries to shift the original aim of discovering subaltern autonomy, and it forces us to rethink the discipline of history as the subaltern has emerged as a position in postcolonial discourse (Prakash 1994:1475-1490). Alternatively, subaltern studies can be tied to a discourse on Historiography, which is the study of how history is constituted as a discipline and how historians have written their history. Meanwhile, subaltern studies borrows from post-modernist and post-structuralist methods and techniques to deconstruct “history”. In this respect, subaltern studies, “claiming to rewrite history from the perspective of subaltern groups as a prelude to creating a new emancipatory politics, has deviated from its original intent and become mired in post-modernist debates about ‘difference’” (Bahl 1997:1333). As a result, theorists are not writing the history of how this or that group in Asia, Africa or Latin America resisted “the penetration of colonialism, but [are] instead trying ‘to take history to its limits’ in order to ‘make its unworking visible’” (Bahl 1997:1334). Therefore, beyond colonialism, subaltern studies provides a wider perspective to look at history – who can write history, or who can speak about/in history? The answer is that the historiography of internationalism and nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism, meaning that the subaltern is unseen, unheard and unable to speak. Therefore, postcolonialism “elaborates a politics of ‘the subaltern’, that is, subordinated classes and peoples” (Young 2003:6), which can be thought of as “the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous – women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles” in the West or those living outside of the West (Guha and Spivak 1988:vi).

With regard to discussion of the subaltern, Guha searches for the subaltern consciousness, while Spivak thinks about their voice-consciousness in historiography. In Spivak’s famous article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), she writes at great length on providing a critical review of woman as the subaltern, cohering with the conceptions of post-modernism, post-

structuralism and Marxism to discuss the subaltern classes “where oppressed subjects speak...[this] leads to an essentialist, utopian politics” (Spivak 1988:276). In this sense, in her discussion, the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. “There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (1988:307).

This perspective offers an alternative discourse for looking at Tibet and its cultural/cinematic representations in the postcolonial context. Several questions inspired by this will be considered: How to construct the “class consciousness/subaltern consciousness” within Tibetan social/cultural issues in the contemporary PRC and the global context? How to examine “the subalterns” and “the elites”; or, who are the subalterns and who are the elites in Tibetan questions as seen through Tibetan cinematic representations? Finally, and importantly, can the subaltern (Tibetan?) speak through the New Tibetan Cinema? More specifically, Spivak has discussed female subalterns, and she concluded that they cannot speak. However, in the Tibetan case, if the subalterns are male, can they speak in political, cultural and social discourse? Can we consider subaltern studies beyond the gendered subject? All these issues will guide the main research questions in this thesis. The New Tibetan Cinema and its social influence will provide good examples for helping to answer these questions, since as we have seen it involves both a relic of imperialism, following Western colonialist history, and a modern cultural/ethnic discussion in the context of the Han Chinese majority in the PRC. Therefore, the approach of subaltern studies will be extremely useful for discussion of postcolonialism and its practice within film criticism; especially for the New Tibetan Cinema in postcolonial discourse across the differences of Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan social contexts, which will be the main focus of this thesis.

1.3.2 Research Questions

Therefore, there are two key concepts in my research project, inspired by postcolonialism and subaltern studies. Firstly, the research will move beyond the conception of colonialism commonly applied to the ethnic and cultural issues of Tibet. More specifically, Tibetan issues will be explored using postcolonial theory, especially subaltern studies, which can be considered to be of great significance in discussing Tibetan issues to discover the power relationships among different discourses. Secondly, the research will explore the discourse of the “subaltern” within the New Tibetan Cinema, from three different socio-political and cultural perspectives: Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan, in the global context. In this respect, the research will discuss the central question of subaltern studies; that is, “Can the Subaltern

Speak” (Spivak 1988, 1990) in/through New Tibetan Cinema? In this way, the core research question can be extended to ask whether the subaltern (Tibetan?) can speak socially, culturally and historically through these new cinematic representations and aesthetics of Tibet? This thesis will thus attempt to deal with the following research questions:

1. How far can Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies provide the paradigms for discussing Tibetan social, cultural and historical issues as represented in New Tibetan Cinema?
2. To what extent can the different views and discourses of Tibet – Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan – be used to explore aspects of the history, culture, and identity of Tibet by examining and identifying New Tibetan Cinema?
3. How can New Tibetan Cinema offer insights into the postcolonial discourse of struggle and relationship between Western and non-Western (Tibetan/Han Chinese), between Tibetans and Han Chinese, and between elites and subalterns?

In short, the research will identify and explore the intersections of social space and film space in the new cinematic representations/aesthetics of Tibet. It will seek to explore questions of postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and the power of elite groups/domination that characterise Tibetan culture and identity, through a comparative analysis of New Tibetan Cinema. As such, the research will draw from the field of subaltern studies to provide a fresh and deeper perspective on, and an empirical and theoretical understanding of, postcolonial power in the context of Tibet by its cinematic self-representations. In this sense, New Tibetan Cinema actually plays a role of interlinkage in the research in attempting to (de)construct the interdisciplinary boundaries between sociology and (Tibetan) film studies/culture studies.

1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Following from the Introduction, the main body of the thesis will begin with Chapter Two, which is the literature review chapter. This chapter will attempt to review critically the substantive theoretical framework through discussion of the interaction between postcolonialism/subaltern studies and (Tibetan) film criticism in the relative cultural discourses. Firstly, Third Cinema will be introduced to set out the contextualisation of the cultural and historical relationships between the West and the East within the cinematic representations in postcolonial discourses, before moving on to cover the theoretical discussions of the PRC’s ethnic minority film studies. The second section of

the chapter will focus on the PRC's inter-ethnic relationship between the majority (Han people) and the minority (Tibetan) represented through the cinematic medium and paralleled by the application of postcolonialism and "minority discourse" in Third Cinema. The final section of the chapter will be informed by Fourth Cinema, as it provides a way to understand alternative explorations and platforms for the images and voices of minority peoples in the relationship between the elite and the subaltern through the postcolonial discourse.

The third chapter of the thesis will be the Methodology chapter. This will fully explain the process of conducting the research and the frame of the methodological design in the interdisciplinary space. The first section of the chapter will discuss two epistemologically sociological approaches: the postcolonial approach and the postcolonial feminist approach. This will be followed by a discussion of the methodological design for reading the New Tibetan Cinema, including textual/contextual analysis (semiotics analysis, narrative analysis and the auteurist approach), and discourse analysis. Following this, there will be a section discussing empirical research methods, which will introduce the process of data collection through the steps of reception studies and observational fieldwork, as alternative methods to approach the extension of film discourse analysis in the interdisciplinary argument. This will also be considered as a movement methodologically and empirically from film space to social space. Finally, the chapter will end with an explanation of the positioning of the research and some possible ethical issues that arose in the process of conducting the research.

Chapter Four will examine and contextualise the "self" and "collective" cultural identity of the New Tibetan Cinema through the understanding of postcolonialism and subaltern studies in three selected "Tibetan" film festivals, aiming to address the questions: Can the subaltern speak? If so, from where do they speak? in the different social/cultural discourses and representations. Firstly, the Tibet Film Festival in Zurich, given its transnationally multicultural nature in the context of globalisation, will be used to set out the discussion of the New Tibetan Cinema in the diasporic and Western discourses. Following from this, the second section of the chapter will explore the New Tibetan Cinema in Han Chinese and Chinese ethnic minorities' discourses, in reference to Bhabha's minority discourse, using the example of the Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival. Finally, by looking at the Lhasa Film Festival as part of the landscape of Chinese independent films and Chinese independent film festivals, the chapter will concentrate on drawing the attention to how New Tibetan Cinema can be contextualised in the "independent" and "Tibetan" discourses.

Chapter Five will mainly address self-representations of Tibetan ethnicity and culture in New Tibetan Cinema. The chapter will ask and answer the research questions of how the Tibetan (subaltern) can speak, who is speaking, and what has been “spoken” through New Tibetan Cinema, relying on knowledge of postcolonialism and the field of subaltern studies to highlight the interactions of film space and social space in this research. The chapter will be epistemologically shaped by the textual/contextual analysis of the films of three selected Tibetan directors, drawing upon the auteurist approach. The films of the leading Tibetan director, Pema Tsenden, will be analysed first; the films made by Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi will then follow. Through treating each director’s films as a group, the chapter will identify the elements of each director’s film style and structure and explore the directors’ individual voices and personal concerns, to echo the collective and repeated motifs of New Tibetan Cinema both across their individual filmographies and between the respective directors.

Chapter Six will identify the silent Tibetan women in the interactions of the Tibetan social context, and their representations in New Tibetan Cinema, to answer the questions: Who is the subaltern in the gendered discussion in Tibetan context? Can the subaltern speak through New Tibetan Cinema? If yes, from where can/do they speak? and What can/do they say? In this sense, the chapter will firstly contextualise the silent Tibetan women in the social space for the discussion of the sex-gendered Tibetan social construction, in reference to the specific ethnographic/sociological literatures. Then it will identify the invisibilisation and silence of female characters in the film space. The sections titled “The Silent Tibetan Women in the Role of Family Member” and “The Silent Tibetan Women in the Role of Cultural Member” will question the permissible subjectivity of female characters in New Tibetan Cinema through the consideration of the subaltern subject. Finally, employing the postcolonial feminist approach and the field of subaltern studies, the chapter will answer the question of whether the silent Tibetan women can speak, deepening the consideration of Tibetan gendered social construction by discussing whether Tibetan women’s invisibilisation/silence is the rejection of the objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan culture, ethnicity and landscape.

Chapter Seven is the Conclusion, which will consider comprehensively how the findings and key contributions shape the frame and understanding of the thesis. The chapter will firstly address a critical overview to dealing with the question of “Tibetanness”, echoing the research questions that were posted in the Introduction and discussed in the three data

chapters. Thereafter, the chapter will move on to discuss three key contributions of the thesis: the empirical contribution, which coheres with the disciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions; the theoretical contribution; and the implications for the cultural sector/film industries. Following from this, the chapter will attempt to indicate and acknowledge the limitations of the thesis. Finally, suggestions will be provided for future/further research.

Chapter Two Literature Review: The Practice of Postcolonialism within Film Criticism

Introduction

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the key theoretical concepts in this thesis are postcolonialism and subaltern studies. In this case, it can be seen that postcolonialism has been critically practised in the association within cultural representations, especially with cinematic representations (Bhabha 1989). Films as forms of social/cultural production have been considered “as conditioned on the one hand by the society where they were produced and on the other hand by the balance of power between different groups” (Robin 2009:38). In this sense, in terms of postcolonial cinematic representation, Eastern films “have created an audience with a taste for the consumption of foreign movies with alien structures and values” in the West (Armes 2005:7) and remind the non-Western filmmaker and colleagues that they should share their cultural identity. This creates a connection between cinematic representation and national/cultural identity. Therefore, film studies and “cultural studies share a common interest in textual analysis of popular forms and in the history of the culture and industrial systems which produce these forms” (Turner 2000:193).

[C]ultural studies stresses the important power, the different statuses of different kinds of social group and cultural product, the significance of control over the means of cultural production. Equally, cultural studies does not assume that cultural products are unified expressions of sections of society, but may often treat them as products of contestation within such sections or else of struggles of such sections against other social groups. (Dyer 2000:6)

From Dyer’s perspective, cultural studies emphasises the differentiated models in society, which treats cultural products as a part of social domination, but it also concentrates on the particularities of social differences dependent on class, gender, sexuality, race, and nation. Film can be seen as a kind of cultural/social media production representing the differences within our daily life. In some places, speaking from the perspective of postcolonial discourse, film can play an important role in combating social repression, including class struggle, anti-racism, gender issues, and anti-imperialism/colonialism. But it can also reproduce states’ hegemonic ideologies and national chauvinism. Therefore, postcolonial critique applied to film studies gives our history and the entire world the continuing significance of the relationships between dominance and subaltern. Pisters (2009:296) has echoed Bhabha’s argument that “in a postmodern, postcolonial world, art, including cinema, has a very specific

political function to show the underlying structures of thoughts of the relationship between words, stories, images and the world, and to call for social solidarity”. Nochimson (2010:356) has also noted that:

The word **postcolonial** has become common in current film criticism and refers to the situation in countries in Africa, Asia, and South and Central America that were once colonies of European countries or the United States, but have achieved independence. The phrase is often used ambiguously since there is often reason to believe that colonial domination remains in effect after official “independence”, but in a more subtle form.

Therefore, the focus of this literature review chapter will be to construct critically a substantive theoretical framework, through a discussion of how postcolonialism and subaltern studies have been theorised and explored in film criticism and relative cultural discourses; and to consider to what extent their theories have been conducted in the (Tibetan) cinematic representations, in order to see what research gap this thesis can fill in. More specifically, the chapter will be structured in three sections. Section 2.1 focuses on how Third Cinema has been contextualised and discussed in ways associated with the cultural/cinematic application of postcolonialism in the relationships between the “Third World” and “First World” or “West” and “East”. Section 2.2 moves into the PRC’s inter-ethnic relationships and outlines the PRC’s ethnic minority film studies, trying to explain how postcolonial “minority discourse” has been conducted and paralleled by previous scholars to analyse Chinese ethnic minority films. Following from this, Section 2.3, titled Fourth Cinema, will provide an alternative exploration of indigenous/minority media in the context of postcolonialism. Additionally, this chapter aims to systematically and critically sort out Tibetan films made by Westerners, Han Chinese, and Tibetans respectively as case studies adhering to the conceptual discussion diffusing in the different sections.

2.1 Third Cinema

“‘Postcolonial’ tends to be associated with ‘Third World’ countries that gained independence after World War II” (Shohat and Stam 1994:38). The question must be asked: what or where is the “Third World”? It has been argued that:

The definition of the “Third World” flows logically out of this prior definition of colonialism, for the “Third World” refers to the historical victims of this process – to the colonised, neo-colonised or de-colonised nations of the world whose economic and political structures have been shaped and deformed within the colonial process. The colonial relation has to do with *structural* domination rather than with

crude economic (“the poor”), racial (“the non-white”), cultural (“the backward”) or geographical categories. (Stam and Spence 2000:315)

“In relation to cinema, the term ‘Third World’ is empowering in that it calls attention to the collectively vast cinematic productions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America and of minoritarian cinema in the First World” (Shohat and Stam 1994:27). As such, there is an alternative discourse in postcolonial film studies: Third Cinema/Third World Cinema. This is what Homi K. Bhabha (1989) has called the third space, which “disrupts the binary logics of identity construction (colonised/coloniser, past/present, tradition/modernity, backward/advanced) and constitutes a pathway towards a creative re-vision or re-examination of cultural identities” (Frangville 2016:112), and simultaneously is a space of hybridity in and between cultural differences. As Bhabha in his paper “The Commitment to Theory” (1989) emphasizes, it is significant that “the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance”. The third space has a role of imaging and representation in political, social, cultural identification and negotiation, which “may open the way to conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism or multiculturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (Bhabha 1989:131). Hybridity is “dynamic, mobile, less an achieved synthesis or prescribed formula than an unstable constellation of discourse”. Hybridity is also “power-laden and asymmetrical” (Shohat and Stam 1994:42–43). Therefore, the hybrid forms display the importance of the Third World social relations of “contradiction and ambivalence” (Young 2003:73), which appear to “operate according to norms significantly different from its [the West’s] own, and which resist accommodation and incorporation into Western economic and ideological models” (Young 2003:76–77). This echoes Bhabha’s argument that “the cultural and historical hybridity of the post-colonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure” (1989:113). In other words, Bhabha has clearly given theory a new place, beyond the oppositions between theory and political practice, showing that meaning is always a site of struggle, traumatic negotiation and at the same time, “open transference of meaning, precisely in the act of Third World filming and the (theoretical) production of discourses” (Pisters 2009:301).

In some situations, such as in the academic arena, the term Third (World) Cinema is considered unfashionable, as the definition and classification of the “Third World” evolve depending on different social contexts in the contemporary period. This will be discussed later in the chapter. However, “Third Cinema still evokes a common project of (linked)

resistances, and has served to empower intercommunal coalitions of peoples of color” (Shohat and Stam 1994:40), for example with Algerian national films. This space is “opening up another contentious political and cultural site at the heart of colonial ‘representation’” (Bhabha 1989:126), which can be seen as a memorial practice of imperial domination for the Western countries in the aftermath of the colonial era. Gabriel (1989:37) also makes a statement about Third World Cinema, saying that in Third World Cinema “recognition is vested not only in genuine cultural grounds but also in an ideological cognition founded on the acknowledgement of the decolonization of culture and total liberation.” Furthermore, Gabriel defines three phases of Third World cinema. In Gabriel’s two papers – “Towards a Critical Theory of Third World films” (1989) and “Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics” (1989) – the three phases of Third World cinema (not chronological, and can be mixed) are listed as:

1. Phase One: the unqualified assimilation phase (mainstream phase) or First Cinema – Hollywood/Western cinema and its replicas.
2. Phase Two: the remembrance phase or Second Cinema – films on indigenous identity, struggles of decolonisation, popular memory, etc. “Folklore attempts to conserve what official histories insist on erasing” (1989:54).
3. Phase Three: the combative phase or Third Cinema – “a cinema of mass participation, one enacted by members of communities speaking indigenous languages...[cinema] for and by the people” (1989:33).

However, there is ambivalence on expressing ideology about Third World Cinema; both Bhabha and Gabriel are grappling mainly with issues of Third World Cinema in terms of colonial/decolonised discourse in the context of countries/regions’ postcolonial (period) setting. For my current purposes, I would like to separate the Third World into two sections/geographical areas depending on political and historical conditions. They are:

1. Ex-colonies: India, Hong Kong, Algeria, Senegal, etc.
2. Countries without an explicitly colonial history: Iran, Mainland China, Thailand, etc.

For example, Algeria was a colony of France before the 1960s. Its national films as weapons show the colonial-era struggle of anti-colonial/independence movements against French domination. When the films moved into the post-colonial era, they were made “with a strong cultural identity”, but one “which is now so French in style and tone that its hybrid origins are increasingly obscured” (Armes 2005:183:187). In other words, in postcolonial discourse, it

can be seen that the key features of the ex-colonial national films not only stress the so-called national “authentic” or “pure” culture, but also often express the ex-colonisers’ values and cultural identity. This can also be seen in films from other countries such as India and Hong Kong, and the intentionality of these expressions remains ambiguous. This offers a strong contrast with the cinematic representations of countries/regions without an explicitly colonial history. Let us look at the historical conditions of some countries/regions without an explicitly colonial history. Although, for example, both Thailand and Mainland China³⁸ accepted unequal treaties from the Western imperial powers to “cede the national land in order to avoid [becoming] a colony of Western imperialism in the nineteenth century” (Chua 2008:237), ironically the Thai state is proud of its “independence” and claims that Thailand has never been colonised (Ibid.). In contrast, the government of the PRC insists that Mainland China was a semi-colony, given the colonisation of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau, as well as a number of port cities in the contemporary PRC, after the First Opium War (1840). Unlike Thailand, the government of the PRC continues to lay claim to these territories. Therefore, compared with the cinema of ex-colonies, Thai and Mainland Chinese national films do not show the exact colonial structure and decolonised discourse; however, they are still involved in a postcolonial discourse because so-called national cinema also exists within an international context. This is clear to see in examples of Chinese films that win awards at Western film festivals, which then open them up to international distribution and marketing. For example, Zhang Yimou is a representative of the fifth-generation directors of Mainland China. As Lu (1997:1) states, Zhang has been taken as “an exemplary instance of the wilful surrender of Third World Cinema to the Orientalist gaze, as a classic case of the subjugation of Third World culture to Western hegemony.” In other words, Zhang’s films are/were made to show the alien structures and values from Orientalist discourse in order to obtain the Western gaze. Among the Chinese, as among many non-Western peoples, “there is a postcolonial way of expressing contempt for one’s fellow ‘natives’: *zuo gei waiguoren kan* – such-and-such is done ‘for the eyes of the foreigner,’ with ‘foreigner’ usually meaning those from the advanced industrial West” (Chow 1995:155). Furthermore:

Although Zhang may think that he is making films about China, what he is doing is representing a timeless China of the past, which is given to us in an imagined because retrospective mode. This “China”, which is signified mythically, is the China constructed by modernity – the modernity of

³⁸ Mainland China (中国内地/中国大陆 in simplified Chinese), or the Chinese/China mainland, is the geographical area under the direct jurisdiction/ domination of the People’s Republic of China; generally excluding Macao, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but including Hainan Province. Alternatively, in some discourses, the term “China” refers to the conception of Mainland China or the PRC.

anthropology, ethnography, and feminism. It is also a “China” exaggerated and caricatured, in which the past is *melodramatized* in the form of excessive and absurd rituals and customs. (Chow 1995:145)

In other words, as Chow argues, Zhang’s “China” in his cinematic representations is/was constructed by modernity, which can see its beginning and development in Western discourse. Therefore, Zhang’s Chinese (Mainland) films would not exist without an apparent observation and imagining of the Westerner’s gaze by consciously eroticising and exoticising China to the “outside” world. As a result, Chinese modernity and the self-representation of Orientalism have been Zhang’s Chinese national cinematic styles for his successful films. Zhang is a contemporary Chinese director who is a translator of the violence with which Chinese culture was “originally” put together, in which “the repeated associations of patricide typical of Oedipalization – the physical impotence, symbolic castration, and ultimate death of fathers – constitute a reading of China’s modernity and ‘ethnicity’ that is self-subalternization” (Chow 1995:148). That is to say, the films treat being Chinese as being fatherless and deprived of any power of domination. In this sense, (Mainland) China can be understood to be represented by Zhang as the subaltern in the global context of modernity.

Equally, there are films from the West that concern postcolonial discourse. As Paul Willemen argues, “the speaking of ‘Third Cinema’ as an ideological project, that is as a body of films adhering to a certain political and aesthetic program, whether or not they are produced by Third World peoples themselves” (cited in Shohat and Stam 1994:27-28). As such, as with my Third World Cinema classification, I would also suggest placing Western films in different postcolonial categories:

1. Western films involving colonial history/memory/conflict.
2. Western films looking at Eastern countries without an explicitly colonial history.

On the one hand, the first type deal with colonial history/memory/conflict and also look at the colonial aftermath in the relationship between colonisers and colonised. I would like to take as an example Michael Haneke’s 2005 film *Hidden* (also titled *Caché*), which again concerns the Algerian context. *Hidden* deals with a French upper-middle-class family terrorised by a series of surveillance videotapes. The film has “a political dimension that overrides techniques: the bringing of hitherto neglected groups onto the screen, the speaking of previously unheard truths and unexpressed attitudes” (Hallam and Marshment 2000:47, cited in Austin 2008:231). In the search for the sender of these anonymous images, “the largely forgotten or disavowed history of the Algerian War of Independence emerges” (Pisters

2009:302). The film is also labelled as representing “post/colonial conflicts”: the character Majid, a representation of an Algerian, has directly suffered trauma from personal and historical French colonialism. At the same time, the French bourgeois’ “nightmarish flashbacks” – colonial dreams, memories and repression – are the explanation of how “[c]olonial fantasy is the continual dramatization of emergence – of difference, freedom – as the beginning of a history which is repetitively denied” (Bhabha 1983:33). Their (French bourgeois’) silence about colonial crimes “meant that, according to the law of the return of the repressed, colonial racism would haunt post-imperial France” (Verges 1998:90, cited in Austin 2008:46).

On the other hand, there are some films by Western filmmakers set in Eastern countries without an explicitly colonial history. However, these also supply the Oriental/colonial dreams, fantasies, and utopias to the West without any traumatic colonial representation remaining in the films. For example, the film *The Last Emperor*³⁹ (1987 Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci) looks at the case of China. These films involve a postcolonial critique, especially represented in Orientalist discourse and “stamped with an otherness” (Abdel-Malek, cited in Said 1978:97). As Said states, “Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (1978:43). Such a conception can also be found in Said’s work *Orientalism* (1978:1), which argues that:

[The main European/Occident/Western countries] have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.

In other words, “Oriental/Eastern” countries “can furnish the west with a better reservoir for its dreams, fantasies and utopias” (Zhang 1988:110), The Orient is an “object” of study, labelled with an otherness which meant that in postcolonial discourse; the West is “us” and “subject”, and the Orient/the East is “them” and “other”. Otherness, as revealed to Western representationalist discourse, is “at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (Bhabha 1983:19). Bertolucci’s *The Last Emperor*, for instance, shows the mode of representation of otherness which “invokes the problematic image of China as myth and symbol of difference and as the

³⁹ *The Last Emperor* is a biographical film which tells the story of the life of Puyi, the last emperor of China.

ultimate Other/double of the West”, so that “China had become the front projection of our confused utopias” (Loshitzky and Meyuhis 1992:26). It can be argued that although the mode of representation of otherness can be applied to, for example, both an Algerian context and the case of China, a difference between those two types exists. Mainland China was not colonised by any one of the Western countries, although in that historical period the Western countries attempted to control and influence China as a large part of the “Far East” as a whole. Therefore, for the West, China as “them” and “other” looks stranger than Algeria and those colonies they are familiar with, and meanwhile this also offers a possibility of screening China through a hegemonic and nostalgic vision of the “Far East”.

Apparently, Tibet as an exotic other continues to be represented and explored in the imagination of Westerners as a part of the Orientalist fascination with the “Far East”. As Anand (2006:297) states, “[t]he exotic Tibet is also connected with the Western imagination of China.” Up till now, however, there has been no exact landscape to point out where “Tibet” is in Western cinematic space. But in social space, Western power draws its geographical, political and cultural conceptions of Tibet from the Tibet Government-in-exile. But actually, it can be considered that in the case of Tibet-in-exile, “Tibet in the West and the West in Tibet” has been promoted as a kind of awareness for a political agenda (Anand 2000). We can see this from examples of Western films set in Tibet. In the late 1990s, American Hollywood produced several films about Tibet: *Seven Years in Tibet*⁴⁰ (1997 Dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud) and *Kundun*⁴¹ (1997 Dir. Martin Scorsese) are examples that both involve the “free Tibet” discourse, assuming that China “invaded” Tibet and labelling this as “illegally occupying the country” from 1951. Frangville (2008 EastAsiaNet Workshop) has observed that “Free Tibet” or “Tibet fever” is much more than a cultural understanding, but is “the result of an internationalization strategy of [the 14th] Dalai Lama”, and has clearly had political influences in the relationship between Western countries (for example, the USA and France) and the PRC. For example, it can be thought that Tibet’s independence movement played an important role in anti-communism (Chinese communism) during the Cold War.

On this basis, Western films screening Tibet can be considered to represent Western power taking advantage of “Tibet” and Tibet-in-exile as a political strategy to maintain the

⁴⁰ The film is based on the biographical book *Seven Years in Tibet*, written by Heinrich Harrer, first published in 1953. This is a story of an Austrian mountaineer who spent seven years in Tibet as a refugee after being imprisoned by the British. In this period, he forms a close friendship with the young 14th Dalai Lama. At the same time, he becomes a tutor of the 14th Dalai Lama.

⁴¹ *Kundun* is an epic biographical film made by Martin Scorsese in 1997. It is a story based on the personal life and history of the 14th Dalai Lama.

movements of the “Tibet Question” or “Free Tibet”. In other words, it can be thought that the “Tibet situation is one of many examples where imperial efforts throughout the non-European world were empowered by the social constructions of Western understanding of non-Western political communities and ‘states’” (Anand 2006:289). From a Western perspective, screening Tibet provides a possible way to discuss the different imperialist/postcolonial discourses with Europeans. It can be seen that in the interactions of Tibet represented in social space and film space, the West plays the role of a spectator and adjudicator of Tibetan vs. (Han) Chinese history, making the “Tibet issues” into an international insight discussion about China and Tibet. As a result, unique questions emerge relating to Tibet being a non-European type of postcolonialism and a particular example of “Chinese imperialism”.

On the other hand, Tibet in Western cinematic representations also involves a postcolonial critique, especially represented in Orientalist discourse and embedded with an “otherness”. For example, in addition to *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Kundun*, there have been the films *Little Buddha* (1994 Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci), *Lost Horizon* (1973 Dir. Charles Jarrott), *Windhorse* (1998 Dir. Paul Wagner), and *Himalaya* (1999 Dir. Eric Valli), which “capitalize on the popularity of Tibet and succeed in capturing the attention of art house audiences” (Lo 2009:16). As was mentioned in the Introduction, McKay (2003) has set out a notion of four possible manifestations of Tibet, the fourth being a “Mythos Tibet”, in which Shangri-La is supposed to be a place on the Tibetan plateau, but one that exists in the realm of utopia in the Western discourse. In this way, Tibetan films made by Westerners bear finally the utopian imagination of the (Far) East. Mullen (1998:2) has explored the relation of those films with Orientalist themes representing the commercialisation of Tibetan Buddhism, in which “we [the Western audience/reader] again see the fantasy land of Shangri-La and nostalgia for a lost culture making popular appearances.” As a result, Tibetans on the one hand are “‘prisoners of Shangri-La’ with an image of themselves as a religious, peaceful, exotic and idyllic community” (Anand 2000:280). On the other hand, the East’s past (in this case, Tibetan and (Han) Chinese history) “was assumed to represent a pristine version of the West”, as a result of what Said identified as “nostalgia for ourselves” (Mullen 1998:2), which also supplies the Oriental/colonial dreams, fantasies, and utopias. In other words, this returns to “Otherness” discourse in which Said proposed a “semiotic of ‘Orientalist’ power, examining the varied [Western] discourses which constitute ‘the Orient’ as a unified racial, geographical, political and cultural zone of the world” (Bhabha 1983:22). From this, it can be understood that films screening Tibet are in many ways good representational examples and provide a

very different kind of imperialist/postcolonial discourse, as the Tibetan issue is about the relationships between the East and the West, Han Chinese and Tibetan, and the elite and the subaltern in the global context.

Finally, I would like briefly to give further attention to American Hollywood films, since most of the films about Tibet made by Westerners which I have mentioned above were Hollywood films presenting Tibet and Tibetan culture, in which Tibet “has been consistently counteracted by its fantasmatic representations” (Mullen 1998, Lo 2009:16). It is notable that America was colonised by the British, and has never established colonies in other countries, except for the Philippines; but it has built a cultural imperialism which has spread across the globe. For instance, Bollywood in India and Nollywood in Nigeria are a kind of hybrid between the West and the East in a geopolitical situation. In this way, America is also a representation of culture and value in Western modernity. However, it should be mentioned that Jean-Jacques Annaud is French and Bernardo Bertolucci comes from Italy. Therefore, it can be argued that Hollywood/American films are a kind of continuance of European/Western mainstream values. As Shohat and Stam (1994:29) argue, “in film studies, one name for Eurocentrism is Hollywoodcentrism”; therefore, Hollywood places America into the Western filmic type/ideology. That is to say, Hollywood films usually show the conceptions of American imperial values, and a kind of Western film style influences the film industry in other countries, especially Third World Cinema. As Armes (2005:2) states, “the Hollywood movie has consistently and consciously been given direct support by successive U.S. governments, in the 1930s, during the cold war, and subsequently, as an expression of U.S. ideology” and an expression of American imperial values. Combined with the theory of Third World Cinema, it can be seen that, for example, as Gabriel notices, India, Egypt, and Hong Kong are “not worried about being typed the ‘Third World’s Hollywood’, ‘Hollywood-on-the-Nile’, and ‘Hollywood of the Orient’ respectively” (1989:31). Therefore, Hollywood films, as a kind of American/Western imperialism, spread across the globe and influenced Third World cinema. The result is a phenomenon of assimilation with the West as the dominant culture within Third World/subaltern cinematic space.

2.2 The PRC's Ethnic Minority Film Studies⁴²

It is a question worth considering that if Tibet is represented as an exotic other and Orientalist fascination in the imagination of Western films, then how is its image represented in Han Chinese films? This is what will be explored in the current section. Generally, “Tibet” in the film space made by Han Chinese directors only refers to the Tibet Autonomous Region, as is the case in *Red River Valley* (1996 Dir. Feng Xiaoning) and *Once Upon a Time in Tibet* (2010 Dir. Dai Wei). It is also necessary to say that Tibetan films made by Han Chinese directors are considered to be a genre of ethnic minority films within post-1949 Mainland Chinese cinema. “It is precisely in the view of such solidarity achieved through shared experiences that [ethnic] minority film was gradually instituted as a genre in the late 1950s” (Zhang 1997:79). In other words, for Chinese cinema studies, “ethnic minority film” is considered to be a special genre of Chinese characteristics, concerning Chinese cultural representations in the context of ethnicity and nationhood. Furthermore, Zhang (1997:89) explains that Bhabha’s notion of “minority discourse”, “as a localized tactic within the hegemonic culture, on the other hand, may explain how...Chinese cinema could achieve so much...by skilfully negotiating its way through the fissures and cracks split open by the discourse of the nation-state itself”. Therefore, it is clear that the “minority discourse” can be applied to the film criticism of Mainland Chinese cinema.

2.2.1 Minority Discourse in the PRC

It can be considered that the minority is to the majority as female is to male, as “Third World” is to “First World”, and as subjectivised (we) is to objectivised (other/them) identity. On the other hand, “[t]he widespread definition and representation of the ‘minority’ as exotic, colorful, and ‘primitive’ homogenizes the undefined majority as united, monoethnic, and modern” (Gladney 1994:93). In the People’s Republic of China, usually, the word “minority” in discourse is used in reference to ethnic minority/minorities (少数民族 in Simplified Chinese, *shaoshu minzu* in Pinyin). The authorities state that the PRC is a large country and a multinational state noted for its dense population and vast territory, and that there are altogether fifty-six official ethnic groups “living in every province, region, and country,

⁴² “‘Minority nationality’ is the standard Chinese government translation into English for the term [*shaoshu minzu*, 少数民族 in simplified Chinese] that designates the smaller ethnic groups living in China alongside the Han Chinese, with the term translated as ‘nationality’ (民族) referring to what could also be termed in English as ethnicity” (Berry 2016:89-90). However, to clarify, in this thesis, the term 民族 in Chinese has been translated as “ethnicity” in English to back up my argument and discussion. In other words, the term “Chinese ethnic minorities’ films” refers to 中国少数民族电影 (*Zhongguo shaoshu minzu dianying* in Chinese Pinyin).

speaking a wide variety of languages that belong to four of the world's largest language families: [Chinese]-Tibetan,... Turkic-Altaiic,... Austro-Asiatic,... and Indo-European” (Gladney 2004:7). The majority of the population of the PRC are from the Han ethnic group, which accounts for around 92% of the total population. The other fifty-five (non-Han) ethnic groups, at about 8% of the total population, are customarily referred to as the ethnic minorities.⁴³ Clark (1987:19) has listed the main minorities in the PRC: Mongols, Tibetans and Uighurs in the north and north-west; the Miao, Yi, Zhuang, and Bai minorities in the south-west; Koreans and Manchus in the north-east, and so on. He also included in this listing the Moslems (e.g. Hui, Uighurs), whose religious practices set them apart from other Chinese. Therefore, it can be considered that the ethnic minorities play an important role in China's official vision of history, nationality, and development, in which the Han Chinese are the dominant group opposed to the other 55 ethnic minority groups in the PRC. In other words, ethnic minorities in the PRC become a marked category, “characterized by sensuality, colorfulness, and exotic customs”. Thus “[t]heir ‘primitivity’ contrasts with supposed Han ‘modernity’” (Gladney 1994:102).

As we can see, in some areas, the “Minority Question” is one of the Chinese political issues that has resulted in national and international controversies, for example the “Tibet Question” and the “Xinjiang Question”. While the government of the People's Republic of China insists that the Han Chinese people and the other fifty-five ethnic groups are united together as the people of China, this draws deliberate contrasts with the Western perspective that, for instance, Tibet (the Tibetans) and Xinjiang (the Uighurs, Kazakhs, etc.) are colonised by China (the Chinese/Han Chinese). In this case, it is important to discuss the conception of Chinese nationhood that relies on the modern idea of the “Five Peoples of China” (五族共和 in Simplified Chinese, *wuzu gonghe* in Pinyin): the Han, Man (Manchus), Meng (Mongolians), Zang (Tibetans), and Hui (a term that includes all Muslims in China, now divided into the Uighurs, Kazakhs, Hui, etc.). This model was advocated by Sun Yat-sen, who was the leader of the Republican revolution that toppled China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing (the regime of Man (Manchus)), and who founded the new National Republic of China⁴⁴ in 1912. On the other hand, Lo (2016:151) has suggested his “Three Principles of the

⁴³ The data is taken from the official website of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China: http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-07/26/content_17366.htm, and also the official website of National Bureau of Statistics of China: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search.htm?s=中国少数民族>.

⁴⁴ This national title has been used from mainland China to contemporary Taiwan as a marker of Chinese national identity.

People” (三民主义 in simplified Chinese, *Sanmin Zhuyi* in Chinese Pinyin) “as an alternative prescription for the modernization” of Five Peoples in China, and especially of Tibet in China. Therefore, when discussing the question of minorities in China, we should consider the different historical/cultural discourses; otherwise we may make the “Chinese” minorities’ questions more complex than others.

To echo what I have mentioned in the Introduction, postcolonial studies offers a wider cultural context on subaltern knowledge. Postcolonialism “elaborates a politics of ‘the subaltern’, that is, subordinated classes and peoples” (Young 2003:6), which can be thought of as “the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous – women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles”. Therefore, minority discourse is an important conception in subaltern studies. According to Homi Bhabha’s formulation, “minority discourse”, which acknowledges the status of national culture and the people, is “a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life” (Bhabha 1990:307). This is to be distinguished from JanMohamed and Lloyd’s (1990) “minority discourse”, which is a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to the dominant culture. “The discourse of the minority reveals the insurmountable ambivalence that structures the *equivocal* movement of historical time” (Bhabha 1990: 308). It can be understood that Han Chinese play a culturally and politically dominant role towards the other fifty-five ethnic groups in the social context of the People’s Republic of China. Therefore, it is often assumed that “Hanness” is generally equivalent to “Chinese”. For example, usually, in the international discourse, if we say “Chinese New Year”,⁴⁵ this refers to a traditional celebration originating from China and the Chinese people. However, “Chinese New Year” in Chinese discourse actually represents Han Chinese culture, celebrated by Han Chinese. As another example: in the PRC, all identity papers register a person not as “Chinese”, but as Han, Hui, Manchu, or any other of the fifty-six stipulated ethnic identities. Therefore, in the PRC, the construction of minority identities is directly related to that of the majority. “As Han-ness is related to ‘whiteness’, so the majority in

⁴⁵ Chinese New Year (or Lunar New Year), also famously named “The Spring Festival” (春节 in simplified Chinese, *Chunjie* in Pinyin), is traditionally celebrated by Han Chinese in the PRC. But other regions and nations within the traditional “Han Chinese-characters-cultural circle” (汉字文化圈 in Simplified Chinese, *Hanzi wenhuaquan* in Pinyin; literally, the nations or regions that are/were using/borrowing in/from Han Chinese spoken/written language), also have the custom of celebrating the Spring Festival. These include, for example, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South/North Korea, Japan, and Singapore.

China is invented as an unmarked category, courtesy of a subjugated...and identified minority” (Gladney 1994:118).

2.2.2 Chinese Ethnic Minority Film Studies

In this case, the question occurs of how to define an “ethnic minority film” (*shaoshu minzu dianying* in Chinese) in the PRC. So, what is the “ethnic minority film” in the Chinese context? Our answer to this will influence the discussion of cultural identities of the New Tibetan Cinema later on (in Chapter Four).

“The [ethnic] minority peoples of China scarcely ever appeared on China’s screens before 1949” (Clark 1987:17). After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, with some political issues involved in international discussion (for example the “Tibet question”), the space of Chinese film has changed considerably the position of minorities in cinematic representations. At this point I would like to consider the conceptions of previous scholars, such as Paul Clark (1987, 2008), Dru C. Gladney (1994, 1995, 2004), Yingjing Zhang (1997), and Chris Berry (1992), to set out the definition and conceptualisation of “ethnic minority film” in mainland China, as a special genre to approach the life and state of ethnic minorities living in the People’s Republic of China. Most such films are “main melody” (主旋律 in simplified Chinese, *zhu xuanlv* in Pinyin) films, which promote dominant state ideologies aimed at safeguarding national harmony, promoting ethnic unity. At the same time, they take “exotic otherness” into “minority discourse” as a critical practice within Chinese cinema. Some “ethnic minority films” are made by minorities themselves, for example the films of the Mongolian director Erji Guangbudao. Others are made by Han Chinese, for example *Sacrificed Youth* (1985, Dir. Zhang Nuanxin), which presents the story of a Han schoolgirl’s encounter with Dai culture during the Cultural Revolution in Yunnan province in south-western China, and also the ethnic minority films of Tian Zhuangzhuang, who is one of mainland China’s most famous fifth-generation Han directors. Such films are also made by “foreign/Western” directors, for example *The Wolf Totem*⁴⁶ (2014, Dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud), which is a story about Han students’ encounters with Mongolian culture during the Cultural Revolution in the Inner Mongolia region of China. Usually, in Chinese national/international film festivals such as the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film

⁴⁶ The film adapted from the novel *Wolf Totem*, written by a contemporary Chinese novelist, Jiang Rong (姜戎 in Simplified Chinese).

Festival⁴⁷ and the Beijing International Film Festival,⁴⁸ an Ethnic Minority Film Exhibition is held as a part of the festival to promote Chinese minorities' culture in a way relevant to the Chinese government's minorities policy, in order to express the one "national style" (民族风格 in Simplified Chinese *minzu fengge* in Pinyin) practised in the Chinese national cinema.

In other words, ethnic minority films in Chinese cinema usually aim to build Chinese nationhood, in order to promote the "main melody". An example of such an ethnic minority film in the Tibetan context is *Serfs* (1963, Dir. Li Jun), a Tibetan film made by Han Chinese. The film was made after 1959, with the Dalai Lama exiled in India, and concerns the political issue of Tibet as a part of the People's Republic of China. In keeping with "official" Chinese history, it tells the so-called "truth" about the war which occurred from 1950 between the Han Chinese and Tibetans, labelled as "The peaceful liberation of Tibet". We can see the same situation in another Tibetan ethnic minority film made by a Han Chinese director, *Red River Valley* (1996, Dir. Feng Xiaoning), which concerns a theme relating to the way in which Tibetans and Han Chinese united together to resist Western (British, in the case of Tibet) imperialism. Both *Serfs* and *Red River Valley* draw deliberate contrasts with the Western perspective that "Tibet is colonised by China" and instead claim that Western influences seriously interfere with China's internal affairs. In other words, building Chinese nationalism (民族主义 in Simplified Chinese, *minzu zhuyi* in Pinyin; literally, "ideology of the nation") in the public media or film productions, leads, in the case of minority films, to an emphasis on telling "the Chinese populace over and over again that China is a multiethnic and multinational state – a point that is critical to China's representation of itself to itself, and to the international sphere" (Gladney 1994:96).

Clark (1987:20) has mentioned that *Serfs* is "not a typical minorities film in terms of its depiction of oppression, but the strength of this portrayal may have only been possible in an exotic setting among a non-Han ethnic group". On the other hand, In contrast to *Serfs*, "many other minorities films from the pre-Cultural Revolution period blur the theme of class struggle by tending to glamorize the exotic" (Clark 1987:21). In other words, ethnic minority cinematic representation in the PRC traditionally serves to contain the alien and potentially exotic elements. Zhang (1997:80) has further explained:

⁴⁷ The Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival, 金鸡百花电影节 in simplified Chinese, *Jinji Baihua Dianyingjie* in Chinese Pinyin, is one of the most important Chinese national/language film festivals in Eastern Asia.

⁴⁸ This film festival will be studied in the discussion of the cultural identities of New Tibetan Cinema in Chapter Four of the thesis.

The Han cultural hegemony that ensues from the state discourse thus reinforces the existing structure of power and knowledge: secured in the Han-centered position, minority films worked symbolically as the celestial eye (I is the Han subject), placing remote alien territories and exotic cultural practices under constant surveillance. In other words, minority people hardly, if ever occupy the subject position in minority films. Instead of acting as agents of change in their own right, minority people are always directed to pay their homage to the nation-state.

Alternative discourse, with the Han Chinese elite as the controller of Tibetans, as such results in the Han Chinese also playing a culturally/politically dominant role towards Tibet.

Ethnic minority films offer another attraction seemingly in contradiction to their exotic appeal. These films have served as a mirror of national attitudes to the minority peoples. For example, the link between clothing and nationality, in which minorities are generally dressed in “costumes,” while the majorities merely wear national “clothes”, is clearly made in Chinese minority film (Gladney 1994:104). In other words, Chinese cinema presents the “national style” (*minzu fengge*), through the representation of minorities as sensual, liberated, and exotic. This being so, I would like to continue to employ a discourse that I used in the previous discussion in the Third Cinema section – the exotic otherness of Tibet for Westerners. The exoticness of Tibet for Han Chinese is also established. As such, the notion of “otherness” can also be used to explore a possible sentiment in the PRC’s minority discourse. The questions to be raised in this discourse are: Do the Han Chinese practise a (neo)Orientalism towards Tibet? Said’s conception was echoed by Robbins: “separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ – which is a repetition of the old sort of Orientalist model” (Robbins 1994:27). Therefore, in Tibetan-Chinese discourse, can we think of “us” as Han Chinese and “them” as Tibetan? Or does it fit that if you are too unlike “us” (Han Chinese), you are inferior; and if you are too like “us”, you are no longer “real” Tibetans?

The objectified portrayal of minorities as exoticized, and even eroticized, is essential to the construction of the Han Chinese majority, the very formulation of the Chinese “nation” itself. In other words, the representation of the minorities in such colorful, romanticized fashion has more to do with constructing a majority discourse, than it does with the minorities themselves. (Gladney 1994:94)

Zhang (1997:81) echoes Gladney’s statement, writing that “minority films have in effect participated in some kind of ‘internal colonialism’ and ‘internal Orientalism’; both proved to be effective discursive means to the establishment of the Han cultural hegemony.” These are a set of practices in which the conceptions of colonialism and Orientalism occur within the People’s Republic of China; in this case, it refers to the mainland Chinese, and exotic

minority cultures, in a dialogue between social space and film space speaking about political issues (Schein 1997:70). It can therefore be argued that the representation of minority and majority in China, especially in Chinese art, literature, and media, “will be shown to have surprising parallels to the now well-known portrayals of the ‘East’ by Western Orientalists” (Gladney, 1994:94). As Carrier (1992:197) notes, “[s]eeing Orientalism as a dialectical process helps us recognize that it is not merely a Western imposition of a reified identity on some alien set of people. It is also the imposition of an identity created in dialectical opposition to another identity”. To apply the concept of Orientalism to Chinese internal affairs, the Han Chinese majority is reified through the definition of the minority “other”, but minorities also define themselves in relation to the majority, the articulation of minority/majority is therefore a dialectical process. However, in Gladney’s reworking of Orientalism (1994:113–114), “the state has turned its gaze upon the internal other, engaging in a formalized, commodified, and oriental Orientalism, that may be focused on the minorities but represents a long tradition of fascination with the outsider in Chinese society”.

Undoubtedly, in Han Chinese cinema, these so-called “Tibetan ethnic minority films” express the Han central mind rather than the Tibetan viewer. Although *Horse Thief* (1985 Dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang), for example, a documentary-style film about Tibetan religious life, is different from the other minority films in that it deliberately avoids a clearly defined ideological/political message, “there is yet no denying that the viewing position is still fundamentally Han-centred” (Zhang 1997:81). This can be seen in most Tibetan minority films made by Han Chinese directors: in their minds the audience is the Han people rather than the Tibetan viewer. Another example can also be found in a Tibetan film made by a Han Chinese female director, *Once Upon a Time in Tibet*, which is a romantic love story set in Tibet involving a Tibetan girl and an American soldier during the Second World War. The film spaces show some common characteristics. Firstly, the leading actors are Han Chinese, and secondly, the main language used in the films is Chinese Mandarin, the standard Han Chinese spoken language. That is to say, “Tibetans” in films are played by Han Chinese, and they speak Han Chinese to express “their” culture and history. Therefore, it is very important to examine who (Han Chinese or Tibetan) is speaking and which language is used in this speaking. As Spivak (1990:66) remarks on this question:

what is very much a question for me at the moment is that if you are constructed in one particular kind of language, what kinds of violence does it do to your subjectivity if one then has to move into another language, and suppress whatever selves or subjectivities were constructed by the first?

In this context, “Han Chinese” is “Tibetan” or “Tibetan” becomes “Han Chinese” through Mandarin as the main language of personal/social communication. This indicates that Tibetans become a part of Han Chinese culture and practise their historical innovation through Han Chinese domination in order to construct a social ideology from one particular indigenous language to another dominant/elitist language. On the alternative discourse, as Young (2003:23) has argued,

[t]he individuals in such a society are subject to the painfulness of what Fanon recognizes as a hybridized split existence, trying to live as two different, incompatible people at once. The negotiation between different identities, between the layers of different value systems, is part of the process of... changing your race and your class by assimilating the dominant culture.

In other words, Tibetan social structure, Tibetan social ideology and cultural identity become a *hybridity* tied to a discourse of multiculturalism within contemporary Chinese culture (dominant culture) (Chua 2008:237). Tibetans are not only Tibetans, but also Tibetan-Chinese as an ethnic minority, which is a form of subaltern knowledge. As Clark (1987:17) argues, “[t]he ethnocentric attitudes of the majority Han Chinese towards the non-Han cultures was another factor in the minorities’ screen absence. Minorities may have also been exotic, but theirs was an old-fashioned, familiar exoticism apparently.” This is characteristic of the relationship between elites and subalterns in the postcolonial context. Therefore, it can be considered that in films screening Tibet from both Western and Han Chinese viewpoints, there appears a postcolonial discourse with Tibetans as the subaltern class in the Han-dominated social hierarchy. Furthermore, within different cultural discourses, it also can be seen that “[w]e [Western/Han Chinese] to ‘Other’ [Tibetans] are powerful because we are right, and we are right because we are powerful” (Shohat and Stam 1994:19).

It can be seen that, although Western films screening Tibet (for example, *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Kundun*) commonly reflect the Western claim that “Tibet is colonised by China” and “Tibet should be free from China”, at the same time they have tended to adopt an Orientalist fascination in their representation of Tibet as an exotic land. Obviously, the Western films screening Tibet cannot be included alongside minority films that promote the “main melody” to show “Chinese nationalism”, although some of them do involve the Tibetan peoples who are living in the People’s Republic of China. On the other hand, the films screening Tibet made by Han Chinese in Mainland China, such as *Serfs*, *Red River Valley* and *Once Upon a Time in Tibet*, usually represent the conception on which the government of the People’s Republic of China insists: “Western influences interfere seriously

with Chinese internal affairs” and “Tibet is a part of China written in Chinese history”. Meanwhile, Han Chinese mainstream cinematic representations of Tibet have also established a tradition of exotic “otherness”, and “Tibet is often portrayed in terms of its “premodern lifestyles and economic ‘backwardness’” (Zhu and Qian 2015:145). In this respect, the representations of Tibet in Western and Han Chinese films are actually an illusory-visual-political battlefield, in which “[c]inematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (Mulvey 1999:843). As a result, the “real” Tibet has been replaced by the Western and Han Chinese cinematic representations (Frangville 2009, Yau 2016). Therefore, it can be argued that “there is no neutral historical ‘truth’ that can resolve whether Tibet was always an independent nation or an integral part of [the PRC]” (Anand 2006:287), as the image and voice of Tibet/the Tibetan has already been monopolised in/by the cinematic representations of the West and the PRC through different ideological strategies to achieve their own political purposes.

Although *The Cup* (1999, Dir. Khyentse Norbu Rinpoche) and *Himalaya* (1999, Dir. Eric Valli) “deserve the credit for the late twentieth century’s worldwide popularization of Tibetan-language feature films” (Yu 2014:125), the cinematic voice of the native Tibetan living in the People’s Republic of China has not been heard and read until the twenty-first century. The fact cannot be ignored that both Chinese and Tibetans “are ‘prisoners of modernity’, a modernity whose terms have been dictated by the West as a political actor as well as an ideational construct” (Anand 2006:285). The “Tibet Question should not be seen in terms of Tibet vis-à-vis China, where the West is a disinterested onlooker, neutral arbiter, or interested intruder” (Anand 2006:287). Therefore, in this case, I would like to draw attention to the great macro-structural dominant/elitist groups in Tibetan matters, drawing upon Spivak’s article (1988) “Can the Subaltern Speak?” These are:

1. Dominant foreign/Western/imperialist groups.
2. Dominant Han Chinese groups.
3. Dominant Tibetan indigenous groups on the all-Tibetan level.
4. Dominant Tibetan indigenous groups on the regional and local levels.

This framework of ‘dominant/elitist construction’ of Tibetan issues updates Guha’s definition (1988) of social production in India and has been influenced by Spivak. Before making an analysis of these structural groups, I would like to ask some possible questions: How will we

determine dominance? Who does/does not speak in Tibetan society? Who is elite and who is subaltern? Who has authority to determine the elite and subaltern?

The limitation of Spivak's contribution is that "dominant/elitist groups" have the character of mobility, which in practice means they will change depending on different micro conditions (I will elaborate on this later in this thesis using Pema Tsenden's films applied to the theory of Fourth Cinema). In other words, it is difficult to define and identify dominant groups in any fixed terms as relations of dominance and subalternity are always shifting. However, this framework of dominant/elitist groups still has its significance for this research. It provides a macro socio-political structure which will enable us to look at Tibetan issues from different angles. For example, under "normal" political conditions, China can be seen as the subaltern relative to Western countries such as America, and then Tibet as the subaltern controlled by the Han Chinese in China. However, Western influence gives the Tibetan issue an international level and creates a discourse on power in which both Han Chinese people and Tibetans in the People's Republic of China become the subaltern in relation to Western political/economic/cultural conditions. It can therefore be seen that in postcolonial discourse, Han Chinese and Tibetans are both dominated by Western imperialism/postcolonialism, which in practice defines the Tibet question/issue. The "Tibet Question" is therefore an international discussion which is actually a result of international political conflict. For example, it can be argued that Tibet's independence movement played an important role in anti-communism (Chinese communism) during the Cold War, and that this issue was then utilised for political purposes by America to curb the development of the People's Republic of China on the international stage. This kind of conceptualisation and exploration of subaltern studies in the Tibetan context will impact the discussion in the data chapters, and it will also lead to a theoretical discussion in the contextualised literature review of Fourth Cinema.

2.3 Fourth Cinema

Over the last thirty years, the theory of Fourth Cinema "was proposed for both reading and making films" (Khanna 2008:106). "[I]ndigenous and minority people have been using a variety of media, including film and video, as new vehicles for internal and external communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination" (Ginsburg 1991:92). Ginsburg (1991:107) has defined indigenous/minority media as "work produced by indigenous peoples, sometimes called the 'Fourth World', whose societies have

been dominated by encompassing states, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia". This is different from the national media of the non-Western Third World in the tricontinental area (Latin America, Africa and Asia). Shohat and Stam (1994:32) also believe that "the concept of the 'Third World' also elides the presence of a 'Fourth World' existing within all of the other worlds." Therefore, the idea of Fourth Cinema, also called fourth space/fourth world, has been raised by some scholars (Ginsburg 1991, 2010; Shohat and Stam 1994; Khanna 2008). It is usually taken to mean cinema made and watched by indigenous peoples: "within 'indigenous media', the producers are themselves the receivers, along with neighbouring communities and, occasionally, distant cultural institutions or festivals" (Shohat and Stam 1994:33–34). It may still be in the Third World space, but it exists in all other countries as well.

Fourth world peoples tend to practice communal and custodial ownership of land, community-based childcare, [and] cooperative production. Unlike cultures of consumption geared to accumulation and expansion, fourth world societies are geared to subsistence need, using a variety of cultural mechanisms to disperse wealth and limit material acquisitiveness. (Shohat and Stam 1994:32)

Fourth World peoples more usually appear in ethnographic film, which "was originally conceived as a broad project of documenting on film the 'disappearing' life-worlds of those 'others'...it developed in the early 20th century" (Ginsburg 1991:95). Ethnographic filmmakers "of late have attempted to divest themselves of vestigial colonialist attitudes with the collaboration of the indigenous people themselves" (Shohat and Stam 1994:33-34). Although on the one hand, such films "facilitate forms of state surveillance and majority cultural hegemony, they have also enabled what scholars working in other contexts have called new practices of indigenous or minority 'cultural activism', to name 'a spectrum of practices of self-conscious mediation and mobilization of culture'" (Grewal 2016:137, citing Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002:7; and also Ginsburg 2010:90). However, subaltern studies aims to ask "the question of how the knowledge of history was produced and how to decolonise such constructed knowledge" (Bahl 1997:1334). Therefore, in this case, Fourth Cinema can be thought of as apparently serving the conception of the subaltern in that it is made by indigenous directors and producers and talks in the cinematic space about the local people's/minority ethnic group's culture in relation to the dominion, in order to raise social consciousness to pay close attention to vanishing indigenous cultures. Indigenous media, in fourth space, through indigenous language/visual representation, underlines the dominant and minority societies against "geographical displacement, ecological and economic deterioration,

and cultural annihilation” (Shohat and Stam 1994:34-35), thereby abandoning “the covert elitism of the pedagogical or ethnographic model in favour of acquiescence in the relative, the plural, and the contingent, as artists experience a salutary self-doubt about their own capacity to speak ‘for’ the other” (Ibid.).

Taking an alternative perspective, with the emergence and development of film, “indigenous people, scholars and policymakers have been advocating indigenous use of media technology as a new opportunity for influence and self-expression” to reflect local living conditions (Ginsburg 1991:97). It can therefore be argued that the ethnic minority films in mainland Chinese cinema have met some different conditions and challenges after 2002, as they have been reconstructed by the self-representations of the New Tibetan Cinema made by Tibetan directors. This raises another discussion about Tibetan films, on the way in which we can understand/read New Tibetan Cinema within Fourth Cinema discourse. In other words, can we say that New Tibetan Cinema, made and watched by Tibetan people themselves through indigenous media, in the Tibetan language and concerning Tibetan indigenous culture and issues, is Fourth Cinema within the practice of cinematic representations?

First, I would like to examine the term “Tibetan indigenous films”. As was discussed in the Introduction, due to historical conditions, there are two categories of “Tibetanness” in the Tibetan context: that of those living in the People’s Republic of China and that of those exiled overseas. If we see Tibet as a province in the context of the state of China, Tibetans are an ethnic minority dominated by Han Chinese culture. In this respect, we can examine Tibetan indigenous films within Fourth Cinema discourse. But if we see Tibet as a so-called “independent” country, cultural representation seems to fit Third World and decolonised discourses.

However, the problem is that Tibet now has stateless status and is effectively controlled by the PRC. It could be argued that the Tibetan elite in exile (the Dalai Lama has been exiled in India since 1959), lost their homeland (Tibet) and have adopted a “Western representation of what ‘Tibetanness’ is as their own self-image” (Anand 2006:295). Therefore, if this study discusses “Tibetan indigenous films” without geopolitical distinction, it will be difficult to explore Tibetan cinematic representation within the practice of Han Chinese cultural domination in the context of the PRC. As I have discussed above, Han Chinese films screening Tibet usually promote dominant and state ideologies. New Tibetan Cinema can, as Tibetan indigenous films, reveal Tibetans themselves through footage of life on the Tibetan

plateau. But it, Han Chinese films screening Tibet belong to a very different category of “minority films”, in which “[m]inorities are represented on film much as they are exoticized...in the public sphere” (Gladney 1995:174). Therefore, it can be considered that when dominant cultural media forms are no longer effective in reflecting the indigenous cultural identity, indigenous media themselves could offer “a possible means – social, cultural, and political – for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption” (Ginsburg 1991:94).

In this way, the New Tibetan Cinema can be contextualised in the Fourth Cinema discourse as Tibetan indigenous films made by Tibetan people, who come from the PRC and are also recognised as one of the PRC’s fifty-five ethnic minority groups, to express and represent Tibetan cultural struggle and identity exploration in the context of Han Chinese domination and globalisation. In other words, the films of the New Tibetan Cinema can be seen as examples of Fourth Cinema in the PRC that “transcend boundaries of time, space, and even language [and] are being used effectively to mediate, literally, historically produced social ruptures and to help construct identities that link past and present in ways appropriate to contemporary conditions” (Ginsburg 1991:94). Ginsburg has further explained:

Work being produced by memories about themselves, I suggest, is also concerned with mediating across boundaries, but rather than space and cultural difference they are directed more to the mediation of ruptures of time and history – to heal disruptions in cultural knowledge, historical memory, and identity between generations due to the tragic but familiar litany of assaults – taking of lands, political violence, introduced diseases, expansion of capitalist interests and tourism, and unemployment, coupled with loss of traditional bases of subsistence. (1991:104)

To dwell on this point for a while, I would like to use the example of the leading Tibetan director of New Tibetan Cinema, Pema Tsenden, to further aid the understanding of Fourth Cinema discourse. It can be seen from his films that Pema Tsenden aims, through individual Tibetan self-representation, to emphasise Tibetan indigenous/minority culture and community within the wider social, political, and historical context of Han Chinese dominance. However, there is a problem in analysing Pema Tsenden’s New Tibetan Cinema, in terms of how to identify his ethnic/national identity. The reason for this is that he can be seen as a native Chinese speaker, and he was educated at a leading Han Chinese University (Beijing Film Academy). At the same time, he is a Chinese independent film director and is also skilled at Chinese literary writing. In other words, Pema Tsenden is a Tibetan-Chinese; a

hybrid. His indigenous films through indigenous media can also be thought of as hybrids which search Tibetan culture and its social identity untouched by the dominant culture.

Two other questions should also be considered at the moment: who will be the potential audience of Pema Tseden's New Tibetan Cinema? If his New Tibetan Cinema is not watched by a Tibetan indigenous audience, can we also still approach the discussion of New Tibetan Cinema being part of Fourth Cinema discourse? Let us again discuss the great macro-structural dominant/elitist groups in Tibetan issues, and how they relate to the feature of mobility. Pema Tseden is a member of the Tibetan elite within the dominant Tibetan indigenous groups. The question is, does he also belong to the Chinese elite as a Chinese national in the People's Republic of China when he meets the Western discourse? If he is a Chinese national when introducing his films, are his films representations of Chinese culture within a Third World cinema discourse, or not? Is Fourth Cinema theory still applicable to Pema Tseden's films? We could discuss this in a little more detail. If we are following the definition of Fourth Cinema theory, Pema Tseden's films will challenge this definition. Usually his films are thought of as Tibetan indigenous films made by a Tibetan director in Tibet, but with Han Chinese producers, screening the relationship between Tibetans and Han Chinese. The audience is no longer just Tibetan, as there will be a wider audience among Han Chinese and the international market. As a result, his films will not completely fit into the Fourth Cinema theoretical framework. Therefore, though it can be considered that Fourth Cinema is a very good departure for looking at New Tibetan Cinema, when the Fourth Cinema theory meets different conditions, it can possibly be challenged by a case study (e.g. of Pema Tseden's films). Combined with Spivak's conception of "subaltern", some possible questions could be: Does the "Tibetan" speak through New Tibetan Cinema, and who will listen? Will they (Tibetans) be a "subject" as "us", to speak to "Other" (Western people/Han Chinese) as "them"? Does this fit into the Ginsburg's argument of "the construction of contemporary identity of Fourth World people...in which historical and cultural ruptures are addressed, and reflections of 'us' [Tibetans] and 'them' [Han Chinese/Western people] to each other are increasingly juxtaposed" (1991:105)? Further discussion and exploration will be undertaken in the data chapters.

Alternatively, a postcolonial feminist scholar, Ranjana Khanna, provides a different way to look at Third and Fourth Cinema, in which the representations of women dominated by patriarchal society within the Third Cinema underwent the process of fourth space. Khanna critiques Fourth Cinema, arguing that it "would point toward the inability of third cinema to

represent the different forms of symbolic violence played out by and on the body of the colonized women” (2008:129). For example, Algerian films are “a revolutionary cinema of the cocoon, where the metaphor of the birth of a nation is not repressed into a denial of the feminine” and are “beyond the guerrilla cinema where the camera is a weapon” (2008:124). Therefore, it can be seen that Khanna’s Fourth Cinema stresses women’s repression and representation in colonial/postcolonial discourse through the third space. That is to say, women are a subaltern class in the patriarchal representation of fourth space “in which self cannot simply speak the memory of trauma but can enact a space in which ‘silence’...is recognized as a symbolic space of political nonrepresentation” (Khanna 2008:124). In this way, Khanna’s conception reminds us of the need to re-read the theory of Fourth Cinema in researching New Tibetan Cinema, searching around a broader discussion of gender/women issues in the Tibetan context. Brought into the conversation is the question I have mentioned before: if Pema Tsenden is a Chinese national in introducing his films, are his films representations of Chinese culture within a Third World cinema discourse, or not? In other words, if Pema Tsenden’s films are installed under a Third World cinema condition (Chinese national cinema), the representations of Tibetan women participating in the struggle seem to occur within fourth space cinema.

In this case, taking a similar perspective, some questions about the “speaking” of the “subaltern” subject will also be raised regarding women as the permissible subject in Fourth Cinema and postcolonial discourse, in which a feminist discourse foregrounds “the need for a ‘space’ or a ‘voice’ from which one can ‘speak’ and therefore assume oneself to be politically represented” (Khanna 2008:128). In this sense, when we talk in this thesis about the “voice” and “speaking” of the gendered/sexed subaltern in New Tibetan Cinema, it cannot be denied that some of this discussion is also echoed by feminist film theory. It can be clearly seen that Spivak’s subaltern studies has also been informed by several critical fields, for example Marxism, post-structuralism and feminism. In particular, Spivak’s famous article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” develops a postcolonial feminist conception in order to discuss cultural productions and representations. This leads her to the conclusions that “[t]here is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (Spivak 1988:307) and that “[t]he subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (Spivak 1988:308). This conception has also inspired a series of questions to be asked in this thesis about sexed/gendered “subaltern” subjects represented in New Tibetan Cinema: When we pay attention to the representation of gender, are women the subaltern in New Tibetan Cinema? Do “Tibetan women” speak

through New Tibetan Cinema? If yes, from where can/do they speak? What can/do they say? As a result, it can be seen that if these questions can be explored in relation to the theory of Fourth Cinema, then it will also be useful for this research to connect with feminist film theory to evaluate whether Tibetan women are represented as a subaltern class who cannot speak in and through New Tibetan Cinema and at the intersection of the filmic text and the Tibetan social context.

Feminist film theory is an important contemporary film criticism approach that originated in the 1960s and was developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, alongside the second wave of feminism. It integrated several theories and approaches, such as semiotics, psychoanalysis and post-structuralism, to analyse the representation of women and read/interpret the ideology of the gendered/sexed narrative in the film text (Smelik 1993, Thornham 1997). In other words, cinematic representation “has been a fundamental aspect of feminist film theory, not simply in terms of the representation of women but more so in relation to how cinema produces a subject as an effect of a system of representation” (Rizzo 2012:155). In this sense, this theory has also inspired this thesis to consider to what extent this theory can be used to discuss the representations of women in New Tibetan Cinema, if we understand that the theory of fourth cinema has stressed women’s repression and the “silence” of women’s voices in colonial/postcolonial discourse. With this understanding, the thesis intends to engage with feminist film theory to thoroughly explore the question of “who is speaking?” and discuss the gendered/sexed “subaltern” subject in cinematic representations. This is done in order to broaden the discussion of gendered/sexed differences in Tibetan cinematic representations, to provide an informed discussion of the representation of women and to question the subjectivity of female characters within New Tibetan Cinema.

More specifically, it can be pointed out that feminist film critics began with a historical perspective, often drawing on Erwin Panofsky’s famous study, *Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures* (1936),⁴⁹ to look at women’s stereotyped images and gendered/sexed characteristics in classical and dominant Hollywood cinema; this has been done through a very structuralist approach. As Smelik (1993:67) has mentioned, typically in feminist film criticism, studies have stressed that “Hollywood movies do not show any ‘real’ women on the screen, but only a stereotyped image of women which gives the spectators no easy opportunity for identification”. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist film criticism, alongside the

⁴⁹ This article has been referenced from the book *The Visual Turn: Classical Film Theory and Art History* (2003) Vacche, Angela Dalle (ed.).

second wave of feminism, entered a fertile period and developed towards its semiotic and psychoanalytical turn, which has been a major influence upon feminist film theory. These approaches have made feminist film theory into a “productive discipline at the vanguard of post-structuralist theories of the subject and of identity” (Rizzo 2012:156). As a result, according to Johnston (1973), a study by a feminist film semiotician which focuses on the exploration of the signification of the “women” in classical films, women characters have been “in fact negatively signified as non-men: ‘woman as woman’ is absent from the film text” (Smelik 1993:69). In other words, women characters have been understood as male-coded signifiers, only representing and serving the meanings and ideologies of men. For themselves, as women, there is no signification (Johnston 1973).

Later, this crucial issue in feminist film criticism was echoed by Christine Gledhill in her essay “Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism” (1978). She notes that feminist film theory works towards “the examination of the fact that “women as women” are not represented in the cinema, that they do not have a voice, that the female point of view is not heard” in the classical/mainstream cinema (1978:458). This argument was developed into an approach that used Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to criticise filmic representation. In other words, “[w]omen, in any fully human form, have almost completely been left out of film....That is, from its very beginning they were present, but not in characterizations any self-respecting person could identify with” (Smith 13, cited in Gledhill 1978:458). In this case, Gledhill has questioned the “speaking” subject – can women speak and can images of women speak for women? – in the patriarchal symbolic order within cultural artefacts. However, her answers are very negatively echoed by Spivak (1988) when she claims that the female subaltern cannot speak in cinematic representations. For Gledhill, “[n]ot only can women not speak, but fully realized femininity is an unknown condition...[and] images of women cannot speak for women” (1978:480). The explanation she gives for this is as follows:

Because of the role played by the image of women in the formation of the (masculine) subject, representations of women in cultural artifacts are bound to return to and play on the regressive desire to reestablish for the viewer the desired unity with the real – thrown into question by the possibility of castration. (1978:480)

In this case, it should be reinforced that because of the possibility of castration, woman is not man in patriarchal symbolic order; therefore, women are silent and invisible and a film cannot represent a ‘real’ woman. At the same time, the use of images of women has only

served to re-establish and re-affirm male hegemony. Through this explanation, it can be seen that the question of permissible female subjectivity became increasingly central in feminist film criticism to consider who is “speaking” in the field of gendered/sexed cinematic representations, and to identify whether women are “absent, unnamed, and sexually indeterminate” in terms of the patriarchal symbolic order in the film space (Spivak 1996:70). Because this “subjectivity is intimately connected with desire, in cinema often represented by ways of looking, the question arises whether the gaze is inherently male” (Smelik 1993:72).

It also cannot be denied that there are some feminist film theorists (e.g. Mellencamp 1995:22) who do not believe that “psychoanalysis or other theories of male subjectivity would provide the answers for women”, as “many feminist directors self-consciously play on the tradition that has made women into a visual object” (Smelik 1993:79). However, to discuss women’s objectification by men’s desire to look and need for male visual pleasure, feminist film studies, through psychoanalytical approaches, has mainly revealed “how sexual difference functions to structure these two forms of visual pleasure in classical cinema” (Smelik 1993:69). For example, in her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975),⁵⁰ Laura Mulvey conceptualises “woman as image, man as bearer of the look” in order to discuss western classical films (mostly British and Hollywood films). This idea has been taken up in feminist film theory to discuss the ways in which women have been objectified by both male characters and the audience; as such, men take the position of the subject and women take the position of the object. In this sense, Lauretis (1984) has also echoed Mulvey’s argument that female subjectivity is defined and made by men through the psychoanalytical and semiotic perspective on film studies, where woman is a non-subject, objectified by men (characters, directors and audiences). In this sense, through feminist film criticism, female subjectivity in film is understood as the silent, absent and passive object, in which female images are represented as the male’s “other”. In the case of the Tibetan film industry, as has been pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, male (directors) mainly speak and women Tibetan directors are consistently invisible. This fundamentally raises the questions of “who is speaking?” and “can the subaltern (women) speak?” in the gendered dynamics represented in the film space of New Tibetan Cinema. If we understand that in New Tibetan Cinema the men (directors) dominate the screen, then feminist film criticism directs attention towards the question of whether Tibetan directors still render the women characters as silent, absent and

⁵⁰ This article has been referenced from the book *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (1999, 5th ed.), Braudy, Leo and Cohen, Marshall (eds). The article was written during the second wave of feminism in 1973 and in 1975 it was first published, reprinted again in 1989.

passive images. Detailed and nuanced discussion of the women characters in the new Tibetan cinematic representations will be presented in Chapter Six.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the stateless Tibetan nationality is an embodiment of the powerless and subaltern class in the context of political, social and cultural relations in both the Western and the PRC (Han Chinese-dominated) social hierarchies. As we have discussed in the sections on Third Cinema and the PRC's ethnic minority film studies, the Tibetan image and voice in cinematic representations has for a long time been monopolised by the powers of the West and the PRC to achieve their own political purposes. On the other hand, the notion of Fourth Cinema could offer a good departure and platform to look at New Tibetan Cinema, which has been considered as the new voice of Tibet representing indigenous/minority culture in the PRC. However, the discussion of the New Tibetan Cinema in the thesis is not in fact searching for its ontology; instead the research is going to reveal the "speaking" and "voice" in the deep inner relationships among social and cultural powers through analysing the New Tibetan Cinema. In other words, the research will attempt in the data chapters to identify the New Tibetan Cinema and sort out its representations of contested domination, cultural resistance and ethnic issues in the context of contemporary Tibetan issues, aiming to examine the power relationship between subaltern (Tibetan?) and elite (Western?/Han Chinese?), and to consider the questions of whether the subaltern can speak through the New Tibetan Cinema, and if so, how can the subaltern speak? From where does it speak? This will be done through the notions of postcolonialism and subaltern studies within the different cultural, international/national contexts. However, the breadth of available academic explorations of these aspects of the New Tibetan Cinema is very limited. Therefore, it can be considered that this is the first time the various perspectives have been gathered together to see what conceptualisations of the New Tibetan Cinema will be explored and discussed; this would be new both in Tibetan film studies and Tibetan sociological/cultural studies.

Chapter Three: Framing the Research Methodology

Introduction

This research into the aspects of epistemology and methodology is mainly concerned with the viability of the interdisciplinary spaces within which the thesis, in terms of studying New Tibetan Cinema, is linking between sociology and film studies, practising a series of qualitative approaches – reading Tibetan films and conversing with Tibetan filmmaking/film festival teams. In general, as has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the great significance/contribution of my research is that it will move beyond the conception of colonialism commonly applied to the issues of Tibet that have been observed by Western media eyes. In other words, this research will concentrate mainly on a postcolonial, especially subaltern studies approach to the cinematic representations of Tibet. In this respect, the research will discuss the central question of subaltern studies; that is, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak 1988), within the intersections of Tibetan social space and film space. This is not only the main research discussion permeating throughout this thesis, but also provides one critical thinking method or approach to my understanding of Tibetan society and its cinematic representations.

In this respect, sociology and film studies speak to each other in a broad context of postcolonial studies and social backgrounds. Therefore, this research will be developed using a series of epistemological and methodological frameworks. On the one hand, sociological text-based perspectives will be employed as a general level of exploring the Tibetan debate through postcolonial and subaltern analysis, alongside a variety of film studies approaches including textual/contextual analysis (semiotics analysis, narrative analysis, and the auteurist approach), and discourse analysis. The thesis will make use of different kinds of critical discourse analysis to explore the exercise of social/cultural/political power both in film space and social space. Combining these two disciplinary methodological approaches, the analysis of filmic representation will be expressed through the application of sociology, which can be understood as a kind of empirical genetic connection between film space and social space. On the other hand, I will also conduct some sociological steps of observational fieldwork and field conversations, and media reception studies.

In this methodology chapter, I hope to offer a clear and comprehensive description of my research methods. Firstly, Section 3.1 will discuss the epistemology of this research at a theoretical level, to explain why the thesis is adopting such sociological approaches, and what

their merits and limitations are. Following from this, in Section 3.2, the chapter will discuss the methodological design/organisation of the cinematic research to read the New Tibetan Cinema; it will also examine how this helps to interpret the “meaning” in the research. Section 3.3 will then describe the methods of data collection and explain how the data will be used and processed. Finally, Section 3.4 will discuss my positionality and possible ethical issues which appeared during the research process.

3.1 Epistemologically Sociological Approaches

Epistemological thought begins with the idea that the political and cultural issues of Tibet are often labelled as sensitive matters caught between a relic of Western imperialism and the dominance of the Han Chinese government. The biggest difference of the epistemology in politics between the Western powers and the Han Chinese government is focused on whether China/(Han) Chinese practice a contemporary colonialism and cultural genocide in terms of Tibet and Tibetan society (Sautman 2006). As has been fully elaborated in the literature review, in these social and historical contexts, the cinematic representations of Tibet in Western and Han Chinese terms are actually an illusory-visual-political battlefield, as the image and voice of Tibet/the Tibetan is already monopolised and centred by these two powerful groups, through their different ideological positions, to achieve their own political purposes in the national and international spheres. For a long time, Tibetan people entered a state of powerlessness as the subaltern/minority group in Western and Han Chinese discourses, who were not able to speak and self-express their history, culture and society through cinematic representations; until the arrival of Pema Tsenden. In order to examine the “speaking” and “voice” through the New Tibetan Cinema, postcolonialism and subaltern studies provide significant perspectives in this research that have not only shaped the theoretical framework, but also will guide and conceptualise the consideration of epistemology for this thesis.

3.1.1 The Postcolonial Approach

Following the postcolonial perspective, the relationship between the elites (who are elites?) and the subalterns (who are subalterns?) can be considered via New Tibetan cinematic representations, in order to think about whether relations between Tibetans and non-Tibetans (Westerners and Han Chinese in this case) and the elite and the subaltern are “an important position for political [cultural and social] mobilization” in the Tibetan context (Spivak

1990:60). Because of this, definitely, two “intellectual puzzles” have to be considered at the epistemological level; that is, a) to what extent the research applies postcolonial thought to Mainland China, which is a place without an explicitly colonial history? and b) if the research employs postcolonialism to discuss and explore the relationship between Han Chinese and Tibetans,⁵¹ does this mean it is being acquiescent in a “political” history of the Tibetan community as the colonised subjects and Han Chinese as the colonial authorities? To answer and consider these two questions, I would like to draw attention to how postcolonialism can be defined in the different social/cultural/historical layers. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (4th ed. John Scott: 581):⁵²

Post-colonialism originated in the work of the Subaltern Studies Group in their studies of Indian history.... [T]hey sought to speak on behalf of the colonized subjects rather than to write history from the standpoint of the colonial authorities....The aim was to let subaltern, or subordinate, voices be heard and to break with the dominant colonial discourse....Epistemologically, the post-colonial viewpoint proposes a standpoint theory of knowledge, according to which knowledge and ideas are shaped by the social location of the group in historical distributions of material and cultural resources.

This indicates that postcolonialism can be fixed in two layers: *post-colonialism* and *postcolonialism*. The first layer, *post-colonialism*, refers to a period of history after colonialism, and the second layer, *postcolonialism*, a standpoint theory/perspective of knowledge. As has been mentioned in the Introduction, postcolonialism adopts a politics of epistemology, from colonialism to its continuing legacies, historically concerning itself with the relationships between the dominant group and the subordinate group and between the elite and the subaltern, with specific reference to the colonial process and the way it has decisively shaped the economic, political, social, and cultural conditions and powers of today’s world. Therefore, if we put those two “intellectual puzzles” under the postcolonial understanding of the first layer, we will enter a cul-de-sac. The reason can be searched out. On the one hand, there are political reasons, as I have mentioned in the Literature Review. The government of the PRC claims that a) China was a semi-colony of western imperialism (Hong Kong and Taiwan were full colonies, but not the mainland) in its national history from the First Opium War of 1840; and that b) Tibet is a part of China written in Chinese history,

⁵¹ I agree that this is a non-European example empowered by the social constructions of Western understanding of non-Western communities.

⁵² This does not mean that the dictionary explanation can be used in a good way in academic discussion and argument. However, as a first step, it at least provides a “common sense” approach to understanding the meanings of words and cultures.

and the Tibetan issue is a PRC internal issue concerning Chinese ethnic minorities.⁵³ On the other hand, this research focuses on the exploration of Tibetan films/cultures rather than discussion of Tibetan vs. (Han) Chinese political issues in international relations studies. In other words, this thesis is not discussing whether colonialism itself is practised in the relationship between Tibetans and (Han) Chinese. Instead, the research takes advantage of the second layer of postcolonialism – postcolonial theory – throughout the methodological and theoretical research framework. As Young (2003:7) has said, “postcolonial theory is not static”, and is about “the relations between ideas and practices: relations of harmony, relations of conflict, generative relations between different people and their cultures.”

Looking back to the definition of postcolonialism in the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, and combining the theoretical frameworks which have been discussed before, postcolonialism elaborates a politics of “the subaltern” which can be thought of as women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees and exiles. Postcolonial theory as a critical approach focuses on power relationships between colonisers and colonised in colonialism, but also between elites and subalterns in postcolonialism. Therefore, postcolonialism offers a kind of method to accommodate from historical experience and testimony to the current global situation. Now, we will attempt to resolve those “intellectual puzzles” again: a) From a perspective of globalisation, it is important that postcolonialism concerns the argument that “the nations of the three non-western continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America) are largely in a situation of subordination to Europe and North America, and in a position of economic [also political and cultural] inequality” (Young 2003:4). This will also be informed by Foucault’s “power and knowledge” in the relationship between different discourse orders (elite/subaltern), and Said’s “Orientalism” in the notion of the subject/self and “exotic” otherness. b) I agree that “there is no neutral historical ‘truth’ that can resolve whether Tibet was always an independent nation or an integral part of [the People’s Republic of China]” (Anand 2006:287). The focus of this research is on new Tibetan cinematic representations, caring about the voice of the Tibetan (subaltern?) – how far their voice has been spread via the film text, and examining the significance of New Tibetan Cinema in the context of globalisation. In this sense, the research will demonstrate the wider cultural context on subaltern knowledge about the difference of epistemology between the west and the east, and the relationships between Tibetans and non-Tibetans (Westerners and Han Chinese in this case), and between the elites and the subalterns.

⁵³ See the discussion in Chapter Two.

Finally, I would like to briefly draw attention to the limitations of subaltern studies in the practice of the postcolonial approach and application to this research. Importantly, in reference to Spivak's article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), she writes at great length in providing a critical review identifying and examining the subaltern class(es), cohering the conceptions of post-modernism, post-structuralism and Marxism to discuss the subaltern classes. In her article, she has defined the conception of elitism according to Guha's definition of Indian social production within colonial/postcolonial discourse. Inspired by Spivak's thought, this offers a great perspective and approach to look at the relationship between Westerners, Han Chinese and Tibetans. However, following her contribution to the "dominant/elitist groups", this conception will be challenged by this research through contextualising, defining and categorising the "elite" and "subaltern". It ascribes a fundamental argument to those of whom Spivak concluded in her paper (1988:308) that "[t]he subaltern cannot speak". However, this forces me to consider the question that if the defined elite cannot speak in a particular situation, then will they become the subaltern? Or must the subaltern be unable to speak? If the subaltern can speak, are they apparently going to be the elite? I agree with those who say that there is a limitation to Spivak's contribution and to subaltern studies as a principle of epistemology, as the framework of "dominant/elitist construction" in Tibetan society has the character of mobility enclosed with Tibetans in their political position, as was discussed fully in the literature review chapter. Nevertheless, this framework of "dominant/elitist groups" still has its significance in this research. Two reasons can be seen: on the one hand, it provides a macro socio-political structure and approach which enables me to look at/think of Tibetan culture/issues from different sides and levels. On the other hand, it has forced me to rethink about positionality for this thesis in terms of research methods and process. This will be fully discussed in the section on "Positionality and Possible Ethical Issues" later in the chapter.

3.1.2 The Postcolonial Feminist Approach

Undoubtedly, in the past, the academic field developed a rich language to describe the postcolonial work in the disciplinary and interdisciplinary sites, grasping a variety of relations, standpoints and views; for example, between postcolonialism and poststructuralism, and between postcolonialism and feminism. The alternative epistemological approach in this section concentrates on considering the connections and applications between postcolonialism and feminism.

3.1.2.1 Why Feminism?

It has been evidenced (Young 2003, Harding 1986, Nielsen 1990) that postcolonialism and feminism in theory and practice have performed certain relations of similarities and consistencies; these two cultural theories study and show solicitude for marginalised and subordinated “otherness” in terms of structures of social/political/cultural domination. They disturb the order of social hierarchy, reject the superiority privilege and force an alternative knowledge and discourse into the (western culture/patriarchal society) power structures of dominance. Their “radical agenda [for social reform] is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on this earth” (Young 2003:7). In the book *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology* (1999), Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg have observed of the feminist approach:

Much attention has been devoted to exposing the underlying male biases in the disciplines, exploring differences between men and women and between sex and gender, and critiquing positivism’s knowledge claims. Those working in the social sciences, in particular, interrogated the opposition between researcher / researched, the concepts of “objectivity” and “subjectivity,” as well as the role of power and authority in knowledge building....In addition, the encounter of feminist theory with poststructuralism, which occurred in the context of the material and ideological complexities of a global, postcolonial, postindustrial, postmodern culture, at once transformed and intensified feminism’s critique of the disciplines and of its own interdisciplinary practice. (1999:2)

This is a productive demonstration of the feminist approach that has enabled a reconceptualization of the practices of feminist disciplinary and interdisciplinary functions. As Harding (1986:24) indicates, “[t]he feminist epistemologies imply a relation between knowing and being...that is an alternative to the dominant epistemologies developed to justify science’s modes of knowledge-seeking and ways of being in the world.” This points out that the methodology and epistemology of the critical tradition of feminism has provided an alternative to “the otherwise dominant view of the scientific method and its assumptions in its own interdisciplinary practice”, and has “contributed to postempirical epistemology by providing the impetus and inspiration for developing a satisfactory alternative to empirical-analytical social science” (Nielsen 1990:11).

However, feminist epistemological assumptions also lead to a conflict in relation to women of different groups. In other words, we cannot see women as a homogenous group, as “it is certainly true that racism, classism, and cultural imperialism often more deeply restrict the life opportunities of individuals than does sexism” (Harding 1986:17). Therefore, depending

on different historical and social conditions, women of each group would need to be analysed in their own particularity. Combining the feminist approach with ontology, this recognition has stimulated the conceptions of black, ethnic minority and postcolonial feminisms in the western and non-western world, and has also forced white feminism into self-critique (Bulbeck 1997). In this layer, feminist epistemologies with ontology attempt, in different historical and local conditions, to acknowledge not only the differences between women and men but also the importance of differences among women such as ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. In this sense, feminist epistemologies also lead me to think about my gendered position in the research process, and they also provide an insight into the discussion of gender issues in the Tibetan context.

3.1.2.2 Postcolonial Feminism

In this research, the feminist approach should link to the postcolonial approach to give my study a greater meaning. As has been discussed in the literature review chapter, the PRC is included in the discourse of “Third World”. Let us consider a question: if the Tibetan people has been recognised as one of the fifty-five ethnic minority groups in the PRC, do Tibetan women take a position as the minority of the minority, as the least powerful group compared with other ethnic-gendered groups such as Han Chinese men, Han Chinese women and Tibetan men? Therefore, this research will draw on the postcolonial feminist approach on this epistemological level. From a personal/emotional perspective, I am a Han Chinese woman researcher from the People’s Republic of China; this background of identity inspires me to set out the thesis in an (inter)disciplinary landscape more welcoming to postcolonial feminist analysis and interpretation. In this sense, to be honest, my ethnic identity (Han Chinese) forces me to think about postcolonialism/subaltern studies; and my gendered identity (woman) inspires me to embrace feminism.

It is essential for the research to think about what makes postcolonial feminism “postcolonial”. Young (2003) writes at great length in providing a critical and clear review of postcolonial feminism, saying that:

Postcolonial feminism involves any challenge to dominant patriarchal ideologies by women of the third world. Such political activism may consist of contesting local power structures, or it may be a question of challenging racist or Eurocentric views of men and women (including feminists) in the first world. (2003:109)

Later, Young (2003) adds:

Postcolonial feminism is certainly concerned to analyse the nervous conditions of being a woman in a postcolonial environment, whether in the social oppression of the postcolony or the metropolis. (2003:115)

Evidently, it has been stated that “‘postcolonial’ tends to be associated with ‘Third World’ countries that gained independence after World War II” (Shohat and Stam 1994:38). In other words, a series of cultural dialogues have been constructed in the patriarchal hierarchy and power of the “tricontinental” via ecology movements, at the margins of society by the forces of global capitalism, and in the exploration of cultural identity where women’s struggles are, under which “postcolonial struggles are directed against the postcolonial state as well as against the western interests that enforce its neo-colonial [Third World] status” (Young 2003:109). In this sense, I agree with Young’s argument that “postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics” (2003:116). Therefore, in terms of the application of postcolonial feminist approach, it should be focused on the notion of “postcolonial” as a macro structure and condition, with its fundamental solicitude for “the subaltern”. Any specific feminism begins with the ordinary women in their particular place, in/under a postcolonial frame, “thinking her situation through in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity” (Ibid.).

Several feminist scholars, such as Spivak (1988, 1990) and Khanna (2008), have provided insights into the practice of postcolonial feminist approach and theory. They critique the postcolonial feminist conception that stresses women’s repression/struggle and representation of colonial/postcolonial discourse via the Third World space (Spivak in terms of India, and Khanna in terms of Algeria). In other words, it is echoed in postcolonialism/subaltern studies that women are a subaltern class, and patriarchy is a system of gender domination in the speaking of sexual/gendered representation in the Third World. In general speaking, traditionally, postcolonial feminists (Khanna 2008:128) use terms like “underground,” “invisible” or “less visible,” or “the underside” to describe Third World women’s culture, history, and lives. However, “[t]his does not mean that all women are acutely aware of what they share with other women. But members of the subordinate group in any dominant-subordinate relational system will have the potential for this awareness” (Nielsen 1990:10).

Although the postcolonial feminist approach offers a very good departure for my research, there is ambivalence about expressing ideology with issues of the Third World in terms of colonial/decolonised discourse in a postcolonial setting. On the one hand, as in the words of

Mohanty (1995:260, cited in Hesse-Biber et al. 1999:5), it has been argued that the possibility of discursive colonisation has been considered, in which “material and historical heterogeneities” of Third World women’s experience were lost in Western feminists’ construction of a “composite, singular ‘Third World Women’”. This situation indicates that feminism in the postcolonial frame will be problematic if Third World women’s issues are explored and discussed by Western feminist principles and values without any qualifications. At this stage I would like to once again draw attention to the question I discussed in Section 3.1.1: to what extent postcolonial feminist thought can apply to Mainland China, which is a country without an explicitly colonial history?

As I have discussed in the literature review chapter and in the section on the postcolonial approach in this chapter, depending on political and historical conditions, the Third World can be separated into two sections/geographical areas: ex-colonies and countries without an explicitly colonial history. Therefore, in practice postcolonial feminism in the Third World should also be separated into different types: postcolonial feminism in ex-colonies and postcolonial feminism in countries without an explicitly colonial history. Most of the previous works by postcolonial feminist theorists (e.g. Spivak and Khanna) have been focused on ex-colonies. If analysis of “Han Chinese/Tibetan” women’s issues relies heavily on those “Third World” feminist constructions of postcolonial feminism, the research may also be problematic as the researcher may privilege existing postcolonial feminist methods that are not directly relevant to Chinese women in the PRC, rather than trying to develop a specifically Chinese (postcolonial) feminist methodological theory based on Chinese society, culture and history.

3.2 Reading New Tibetan Cinema

This research can be summarised in one sentence: it concentrates on identifying and exploring the intersections of social space and film space through cinematic representations/aesthetics of Tibet. In terms of the study of cinematic representation, which is a film-based and visual cultural research area, one of the important issues is “looking/watching/reading” – how to “watch/read” the films? What is the significance of “watching/reading”? This section will therefore discuss the specific methodological design for how to “watch/read” a single Tibetan film or a group of Tibetan films. Looking and listening are ubiquitous in our social and political life, which can be also read ubiquitously through cinematic media and its succeeding formations (TV, video, computers, etc.). In other

words, cinema is not only a particular form of art, but is also a ubiquitous principle for organising/reading the visual culture and social production in its general form. Therefore, it can also be thought that film studies contextualise a special connection between cinematic representation and cultural studies, which emphasises the differentiated models in modern society. In this sense, cinema makes cultural products visual/visible as a part of social domination, but it also concentrates on the particularities of social/political differences dependent on class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and nation, and may act as a medium for resistance (Dyer 2000). In other words, “[c]inema became a perfect medium to explore the relationships between images, identity and desire, especially in relation to gender but not necessarily history” (Nichols 2000:36). Cinema as a visual representation of culture, society and identity therefore reflects fully the value of the qualitative methods (textual/contextual analysis and discourse analysis) that will be explored in the following methodological discussion.

3.2.1 Textual/Contextual Analysis

Reading through a historical overview of the development of film, Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007) have mapped what is established and represented as “new” about the New Film history since 1985. There are three characteristics of New Film History that distinguish research and current research papers (e.g. Aldgate 1979, Taylor 1979, Welch 1983), as opposed to the Old Film History:⁵⁴

1. A broader perspective on methodological practice – “The New Film History has moved beyond reflectionism and is posited on a more complex relationship between films and social context....There is a greater attention to the cultural dynamics of film production and an awareness of the extent to which the style and content of films are determined by the context of production” (2007:6).
2. Paying close attention to primary sources – “The New Film History is source-based: it arises from the critical examination of primary sources, both filmic and non-filmic” (2007:7).
3. Films as cultural artefacts with their own aesthetics, visual style and aural qualities – “The New Film History recognizes that narrative is only one of the ways in which audiences read films: they also respond to the ‘look’ and ‘sound’ of films” (2007:8).

⁵⁴ “There are two paradigms within the old or traditional film history: one focused on the history of film as an art [and aesthetic] form, the other on the idea of film as a reflection or mirror of society” (Chapman, Glancy and Harper 2007:2).

Three key words can be abstracted from this conclusion: text (source-based), context and narrative. My approach to reading New Tibetan Cinema will be framed mainly in two ways: textual and contextual analysis. I would now like to briefly contextualise what is involved in these two types of analysis. Specifically, textual analysis links with writing and structure, based on a film, and through the signifying practices attempts to explore in detail the production of “significance” and “meaning” (Barthes 1981). In its general approach to textual analysis, the thesis will devote itself mainly to four different film techniques. Firstly, *mise en scène*, meaning that which is put into the scene. Secondly, cinematography; that is, framing a vantage point on an action/image, movement of the frame and focus. Thirdly, editing: identifying the relationship of one shot to the next, and conventions of graphic/rhythmic/spatial/temporal relations. Fourthly, shot duration: examining variation or consistency of duration of each shot in a film. Contextual analysis is that which “sees [a] film in relation to the context in which it [is] created and in which it is shown. Considerations of specific films and groups of films touch on history, politics, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines” (Bywater and Sobchack 1989:223).

Now, we return to the notion of “New Film History”. In this case, Tibetan film textual analysis would provide the visibility of reading film texts in the Tibetan cultural/social/historical contexts. In other words, the film texts offer a “data set” of “primary sources” and an “interpretative orientation” in a more complex social context. In the following discussion, three sub-methods will be introduced in more detail: semiotic analysis, narrative analysis and the auteurist approach. More specifically, semiotics analysis and narrative analysis will be dedicated to each individual textual analysis at the further methodological level, and the auteurist approach will be employed for the analysis of authorship within a group of film texts made in accordance with directors’ individual concerns, echoing a collective “interpretation”.

3.2.1.1 Semiotics Analysis

The study of semiotics, which is a general science of signs and is also dedicated to the structural systems of signification, concerns the theoretical proximity of the terms “significance”, “subject” and “symbolic order” within the importance of language and linguistics which makes “discourse” apparent for human culture and daily social life (Silverman 1983). In the book *Course in General Linguistics*, published in 1915 (cited in Wollen 1972, Silverman 1983), Saussure dedicated a new science, the science of semiology,

in which he not only constructed and recognised linguistics/language along semiotic principles, but also showed how its lines can be applied to all aspects of culture and society:

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems.

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology....Semiology would show what constitute signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology; the laws discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, and the latter will circumscribe a well-defined area within the mass of anthropological facts. (cited in Silverman 1983:4–5)

In this sense, signs should be studied from the social viewpoint, and language/linguistics is a social institution. Moreover, semiology indicates that language/linguistics is called the “code” pre-existing in the “message”. In Saussure’s use of the term, the sign is “unmotivated” as it is the “arbitrary nature of the sign” in which “[t]he signifier...has no natural connection with the signified” (Wollen 1972:117). Roland Barthes, an author of *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) and *Elements of Semiology* (1964), researching the language of costume, concluded that “[i]t is only in very rare cases that non-verbal systems present without auxiliary support from the verbal code” (Wollen 1972:118). In other words, words/languages enter a discourse of “other orders to contribute to the meaning which is either ambiguous...or to contribute to the meaning that cannot otherwise be communicated” (Ibid.). These conceptions can also be applied to other highly developed “signification” systems, such as fine art, music, dance, and of course cinema.

The practice of cinema indicates that a great complexity of meaning can be formed and expressed through the image and its systems. Cinematic semiotics is an attempt to elucidate a structural coherence to cinema (Nichols 2000), and is the study of signification via codes or systems in film texts. The pioneering work on cinematic semiology was done by Christian Metz. Metz’s understanding of film semiotics posits that cinema is structured like a language, and this draws attention to how cinema is constructed through its codes and conventions, in which “a logic of implication” is offered in which “image becomes language” (Metz 1974). Cinema is indeed a language, because it is text and it provides a meaning discourse. As Beller (2006:10) notes, “cinema took the formal properties of the assembly line and introjected them

as consciousness. This introjection inaugurated huge shifts in language function.” However, in Metz’s thinking, it is not transparent to consider how conception of “a logic of implication” should be gathered into the theoretical practice of semiology. This indicates that more discussion is needed on what we mean by a “sign”, and the series of words used to describe signs offered by Saussure, Barthes and Metz. Peirce, fortunately, has set out the different classifications of signs, in what is called “the second trichotomy of signs” – a sign is in an icon, an index, or a symbol, respectively (Wollen 1972). Cinema can be seen as a fantastic medium of communication and expression in social reality, in that it contains all three classifications of the sign: iconic, indexical, and symbolic, from natural to cultural, and from coded to uncoded.

Combining the notions of Malraux’s “montage” theory and Delluc’s “the pure cinema”, Bazin has pointed out that cinema could be understood within the ontology of the photographic image which photography takes of an impression, and the uses of light (Wollen 1972). This emphasises the existential frame between the sign and its object, which echoes Peirce’s definition of the features of the sign as an index, as well as the existential relations between reality and image, society and film, and social space and film space which is included in most of Bazin’s cinematic aesthetics. I agree to say that in my research, the cinematic aesthetic is based on the indexical characters of the photographic image provided by Bazin, as well as Metz’s conception of cinema being meaningful and symbolic. Through cinematic semiotics, the research will focus on two film languages: *mise en scène* and cinematography. As has been mentioned in the earlier section on Textual/Contextual analysis, *mise en scène* concerns what has been put/shown on the scene; for example, setting, costume, light and framing. On the other hand, cinematography involves framing a vantage point on an action/image; movement of the frame such as angle, height and distance from subject; and focus. These cinematic signs/languages can be seen as verbal languages consisting not only of the iconic and indexical characters (the signifiers), but also the symbolic meaning/signification (the signified).

3.2.1.2 Narrative Analysis

Ochs and Capps (1996) have elaborated on the conception that there are two basic aspects of narrative: temporality and point of view. This echoes the argument of previous scholars (Burke 1973, Goffman 1961, Ricoeur 1988, and Sacks and Jefferson 1992) that a narrative presents a chain of events which is situated in time and space. This embodies Ricoeur’s

discussion of how “history and literature share a common referent: the human experience of time, the structures of temporality” (Wood 1991:15). Narrative is “verbalised, visualised, and/or embodied framings of sequences of actual or possible events” (Ochs and Capps 1996:19). In other words, narrative refers to how a text is written, expressed and communicated. It can be considered that the analysis of narrative is actually not only an exploration of the presentation of the “self” and the individual in interactive communication, but also provides a means of engaging with broader fields, leading to the consideration of how are they put to use at the micro-scale of individual lives, and the macro-scale of societies’ and collective communities’ identities and practices in the context of sociological literature.

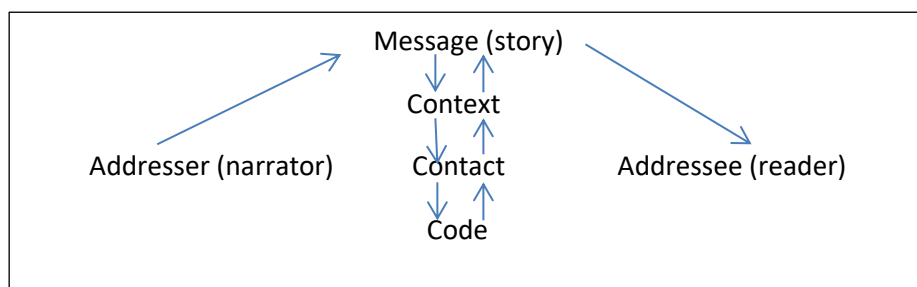


Figure 5. A model of how “The addresser sends a message to the addressee”⁵⁵

Film text can be seen as a narrative that implies a verbalised and visualised story. In this sense, it forces us to think about time and space, and reality and imagination together. Now, while going forward to discuss film narrative, let us also link back to the discussion of cinematic semiotics. If we look at cinema as a structural system and code of language/linguistics, cinematic narrative communication is most relevant to a model of verbal communication, drawing upon the work of Jakobson (1987:66, cited in Lothe 2000), which can be understood as a model of how “The addresser sends a message to the addressee” (Figure 5). More specifically, Lothe (2000:15) has given a clear explanation of how, if a message is to be operated, it requires a context “that is sizeable by the addressee and that is either verbal or capable of being verbalised”; a contact that is “a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication”; and a code that is “a system of norms and rules that is fully or at least partly common to the addresser and the addressee.” In this sense, if we understand the model by narrator, story, and reader instead of addresser, message, and

⁵⁵ This model draws upon the understandings of Jakobson (1987) and Lothe (2000), but has been adapted by myself.

addressee, we can look clearly at cinematic narrative, as all cinematic storytelling provides narrators to readers with an opportunity for understanding. Reference to another model of Lothe (2000) and Jakobson (1987), called “narrative text” (Figure 6), helps us to take the discussion further. Through this model, it can be seen how a narrative text is written and a film story is told. However, in terms of methodological discussion, two important questions need to be considered: What is a film narrator? and Who is the film author? This is connected with a conception of the difference between the author of a text and the narrator in the text.

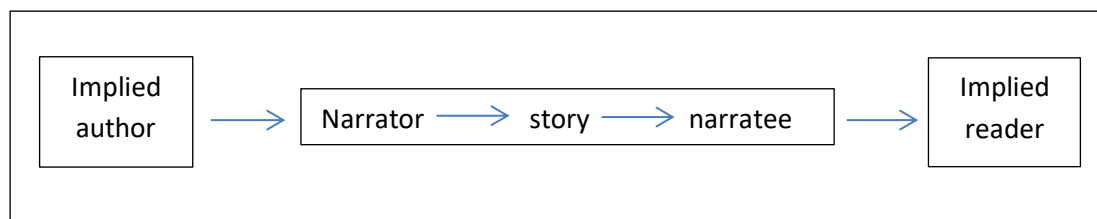


Figure 6. A model of “narrative text”

As Ochs and Capps (1996:22) mention, “each telling of a narrative situated in time and space engages only facets of a narrator’s or listener/reader’s selfhood in that it evokes only certain memories, concerns, and expectations.” Bruner (1986, cited in Ochs and Capps 1996) has also argued that narrators construct a dual landscape, one of action and one of consciousness. It is worth noting that the film narrator is very different from the literary narrator. Although the earlier section on textual analysis states that Metz agreed with applying semiotics of linguistic principles to film analysis, cinema looks like a very complex verbalised and visualised narrative, since Chatman (1990:124) comments that “film is not a ‘language’ but another kind of semiotic system with ‘articulations’ of its own”. Several scholars (Bordwell 1985, Rothman 1988, cited in Chatman 1990) believe that film has narration but no narrator. However, I agree with Chatman’s (1990) conception that the film narrator is the filmmaker’s communicative instrument. Drawing upon Chatman (1990:134-135), Figure 7 presents a diagram titled “the multiplexity of the cinematic narrator”, which is the “sum of these and other variables.” Reading this diagram, film stylistics/techniques analysis can be followed through two separate and interacting channels: the auditory channel and visual channel. As can be seen in Figure 7, I have introduced several narrators in semiotic analysis, as indexical codes/signs to express the symbolic meaning in film textual analysis. In this sense, certainly, film narrative analysis overlaps somehow with semiotic analysis in this research.

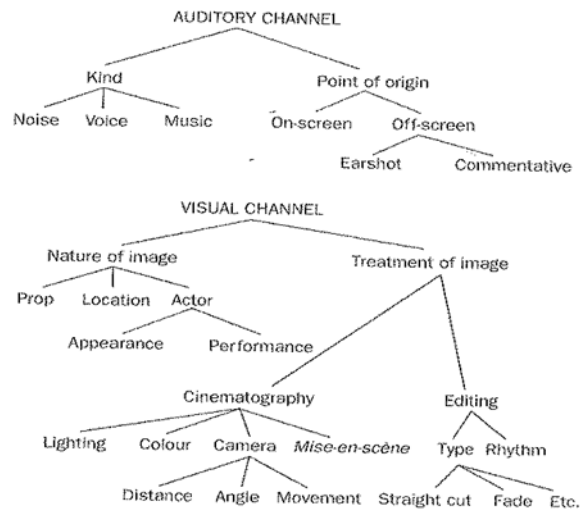


Figure 7 The multiplexity of the cinematic narrator (Chatman 1990)

Now let us consider the question: who is the film author, if the film narrator is as complex as is framed in Figure 7? Complex narrator systems could indicate that filmmaking is a complex production process involving “co-operation” and “co-creation” – the author of the script, the producer, the actors, the cinematographer, and so on. However, the director is usually recognised as the main author, since the director has “overall responsibility for according priorities and co-ordinating the activities that are part of the production process, but also functions creatively in relation to the screenplay and the thematics of the film” (Lothe 2000:31). In this sense, the discussion of “author” here in the methodological level could open a window for us to read how auteurist approaches function and guide this research.

3.2.1.3 The Auteurist Approach

It can be understood that compared with semiotics analysis and narrative analysis, the auteurist approach is closer to a theoretical/epistemological practice than a methodological approach in film contextual analysis. The auteurist approach coheres with auteur theory to provide a vehicle by which to identify authorship in filmic elements of style and structure, to express the director’s personal concerns (Cook 2007). So, what is auteur theory about? This theory:

says there is a person primarily responsible for the entire style and treatment of the content of the film. Generally used in reference to a director with a recognizable style and thematic preoccupation, the theory covers other production personnel (writers, performers, cinematographers, editors) who are seen as the major force behind a given film. More particularly, film auteurs function within the boundaries

of studio production systems and are distinguishable from film artists, who have nearly total control over all aspects of production. (Bywater and Sobchack 1989:222)

The auteurist approach is not only focussed on identifying formal and significant patterns in films to discover and analyse cinematic structure, thematic/artist style, and personal visions that are consistent across different films by the same director, but also involves considering that film is an interaction between film space and social space, between text and context, and between social history and a director's personal history through the questions and discussions of authorship, personal social influence and individual life experience/biography (Bywater and Sobchack 1989). Alternatively, Wollen (1972:80) has also summed up a conception of auteur theory, based on that of Geoffrey Nowell-Smith:

[Auteur theory] is the discovery [of] the defining characteristics of an author's work...The purpose of criticism thus becomes to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a hard core of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs...is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another.

Nowell-Smith has called this the "structural approach", which underlies the definition of a core of repeated and coherent motifs. In other words, auteur theory involves taking a group of films by one director, and analysing their filmic structures and the director's personal style within a series of identical themes (Wollen 1972). The auteurist approach therefore provides a way of gathering films together as a group to express one director's core of repeated motifs, in order to show the concerns of social, historical and cultural interactions with director selves and also to differentiate the texts of their work from those of others.

To return to the historical period, the first writings on film authorship were attempts by French intellectuals and scholars in the 1950s "to recuperate film from its designation as merely a commercial and industrial enterprise, and to incorporate it within the ranks of 'classical art'" (Hollows and Jancovich 1995:38). Their primary concern was to "look" at the film as a whole, and at a director's authorship as a whole (Bywater and Sobchack 1989). Questions will now be raised in the context of filmmaking and film analysis: Who is the author of the film text? Who defines/makes the meaning of the film text, and for whom? These echo the question that was raised in the section on "narrative analysis": who is the film author? The auteur theory, then, demonstrates that the director is not simply in command of a (pre-)existing film text, and also that the director does not subaltern to another author or other filmmaking crews (Wollen 1972). On the one hand, in the auteurist discourse, directors are

responsible consciously for their films' style, content, themes, and structure. On the other hand, the directors' personal experience and knowledge will influence actively and widely film production in its repeated and coherent style, motive and theme. As has been mentioned in the Introduction, in the case of the Tibetan directors whose films have been classified in this research under the title of New Tibetan Cinema, their filmmaking embodies the auteurist characteristic, which is also the backbone of representing the "New" in the context of Tibetan cinema. The auteurist approach will therefore lead this research to focus on the considerations of the function of the auteur (director) in film textual/contextual analysis, as this approach can be seen as a cinematic strategy for "organising audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur" (Hollows and Jancovich 1995:53).

3.2.2 Discourse Analysis

The issue of textual and contextual analysis is that we may read certain texts as the site of a partial notion to provide a particular view and a particular social/historical context. Whichever way we look at and read film texts, they are always from human subjective points of view, and those views are mobile and open-ended. For this reason, it can be useful to draw the theoretical conceptions of discourse into our research methods, in order to address and shape issues of subjectivity, power, and identity. This makes up for the disadvantages of textual analysis and highlights the theoretical similarities of these approaches to the historical/social/filmic spaces. Therefore, I would like to draw attention to identifying the distinction between text and discourse, which is the first step towards shaping the definition and contextualisation of discourse analysis. Despite the fact that they are more or less synonymous, "'discourse' and 'text' can be used in a much broader sense to include all language units with a definable communicative function, whether spoken or written" (Crystal 1987:116; emphasis in original, cited in Mills 2004:3). They can both be defined in terms of meaning, cohering text and discourse to shape the meaning of the whole (Nunan 1993). The differences between "text" and "discourse" have been noted for a long time. For example, Hawthorn (1992:189, cited in Mills 2004:4) drawing upon Michael Stubbs' (1983) treatment of text and discourse, attempts to comment on differentiating them in the detailed interaction between structure and function:

1. Text: may be written, non-interactive, short or long, and must be possessed of surface cohesion.

2. Discourse: is spoken, interactive, a certain length, and must be possessed of a deeper coherence.

On the other hand, Mills (2004:3), also drawing upon David Crystal's (1987) attempts to set down the meaning of "discourse" in language forms, by comparing and contrasting with the concept of textual analysis, stated that:

1. Text analysis focuses on the structure of written language, as found in such "texts" as essays, notices, road signs and chapters.
2. Discourse analysis focuses on the structure of naturally occurring spoken language, as found in such "discourses" as conversations, interviews, commentaries and speeches.

In other words, as I have discussed in the earlier section on Textual/Contextual Analysis, (film) text focuses on the structure of written language, leading to the provision of a "data set" of "primary sources" and an "interpretative orientation". It can be seen, then, that discourse not only lists the functions of text, but also offers a deeper and broader sense, against written language and structure, focusing on representations of personal/social communications to embody a requirement of the spoken/written ideology of social meaning, beliefs, values, and categories of classification. This is how Hawthorn defines discourse:

"Discourse" is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs etc. constitute ways of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience – "ideology" in the neutral non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which the discourse is embedded. (Hawthorn, 1992:48, cited in Mills 2004:5)

This coheres with Foucault's (1972:49) conception that discourses are practices which "systematically form the objects of which they speak", which produces the conception, effect, representation, relationship, and so on. Discourse is an important element of Foucault's thought; it embeds a productive function of shaping the relationship between power and social effects within a particular context. In other words, discourse transmits and produces power. I agree with Foucault (1981:52-53) that "discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized." Therefore, I would like to set out my understanding of the characteristics of textual analysis and discourse analysis, according to the previous literature, in order to show how I will apply them in practice in the data chapters:

1. Textual analysis: concrete (what is *written*), surface cohesion (what is shown), and meaning (what is its significance).
2. Discourse analysis: abstract (what is *spoken*), deeper coherence (what is to be shown under the surface), and power (what is its ideology/identity).

Therefore it can be considered that in this research, discourse analysis will shape a deeper discussion in the social, cultural and historical contexts. Film is illusory, but it bears a reflection or mirror of “real” society. Looking back to the notion of “New Film History”, in this respect, a film can be considered not only as a text but also as a discourse to show/speak a power/ideology. “Writing as if all you have to offer are ‘the facts’ or ‘the truth’ is also a *way of writing*, a way of using language to enact an activity and an identity” (Gee 1999:4). This project began epistemologically with different ideologies/knowledges/discourses in relation to Western and Han Chinese recognition of “Tibet”. They both insist that each of their writings is “the facts” and “the truth”. However, which one is “real” truth? What is “truth”? As Foucault states:

This a priori is that, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man’s [*sic*] everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true. (1974:158)

As we can read from Foucault, discourse analysis influences us to consider the factors of power, knowledge, and truth in the different cultural contexts and post-structural backgrounds. It can be argued that human thinking and behaviour in relation to a particular issue comes from our prior knowledge concerning that issue, that social power can be acquired by knowledge, and that this power enables one to claim the “truth” of certain statements, all of which shapes a type of discourse in one particular context and influences the further production of knowledge.

I agree with both Mills (2004) and Foucault (1981) that power is the key/important element in the discussion of discourses. Therefore, I would like to connect discourse analysis to the postcolonial approach, which tells us that power does not only exist in the relations between different groups/discourses, but also is a force to identify social classes/groups, and to shape the opposite classifications through, for example, treating one as dominant/elitist and others as subaltern groups. Subaltern studies has also been employed in this research. In other words, relying on discourse analysis to examine the “speech” of the “subaltern” within the

postcolonial context – what is spoken through New Tibetan Cinema, what is shown through the film text, what are the results of self-representation as power? In general, there are three macro discourses and ideologies to be found in this research: Western, Han Chinese, and Tibetan. I intend to explore New Tibetan Cinema to cohere the conceptions of subaltern studies (Can the subaltern speak?) by examining the “speech” through discourse analysis. Alternatively, the application of discourse analysis in this thesis indicates that New Tibetan Cinema has been put in the context of the social relations – the relations of powers and the relations of conflicts within the ideological layer and sociological purpose and discussion, in which discourse analysis as a genetic bridge coheres methodologically film space (text) and social space (context), film studies and sociology.

3.3 Empirical Research Methods

As this research uses an interdisciplinary approach – film studies and sociology – and is influenced by developments in the field of cultural studies and discourse analysis, it does not only rely on film textual analysis to explore the “meaning” and “representation”, but also has “investigated how meanings were generated...within specific historical and cultural settings” (Chapman, Glancy and Harper 2007:181). Therefore, the research also relies on certain empirical methods from the methodological discipline of sociology to collect the relevant extra-filmic data. These include some aspects of reception studies, and some sociological steps of observational fieldwork and field-conversations, in order to attempt to interpret the wider sociological/cinematic phenomenon in social institutions and human agents.

3.3.1 Understanding Data Collection

This section can begin by identifying the preliminary definition: what is meant by reception studies? One useful academic definition can be found:

The practice of reception studies seeks out the evidence of actual audience responses and locates these within the context of the audience’s time, place and identity. The contributions to the section on “Reception” demonstrate that there is much more to this complex process than simply quoting a few reviews: sources include publicity materials, audience surveys and online fan communities. (Chapman, Glancy and Harper 2007:7)

The reception studies of films will first determine how the film text is interpreted and analysed within a particular social/cultural/political context. Thus, reception studies explore how “an interpretation or various interpretations of a single film have arisen”, as “reception

studies do not offer their own interpretation of a film, and they do not comment on the value of any one interpretation” (Chapman, Glancy and Harper 2007:182). Therefore, it can be considered that film reception studies will help the research to reject the idea of a single meaning for the purpose of film textual analysis, and investigate how the meanings and interpretations have been provided that are inherent in a specific context, which will make up for the previously-mentioned limitations of textual analysis. However, it will be problematic if this research accepts fully the principles of reception studies in the methodological aspect, as this study is not really about audience reception. But within a framework of social discourse analysis, the perspectives of audiences and directors give some interesting and useful insights about film analysis, as well as filmmaking, distribution and marketing. In this sense, the research will consider collecting data from “traditional media”, “new media”, and film festivals for the extension of film discourse analysis, which is the movement of discourse from film space to social space, echoing with the interdisciplinary argument that the research explores the interactions between film space and social space through New Tibetan Cinema. That is to say, the consideration of extra-filmic/sociological data collection coheres with discourse analysis in engaging in film analysis.

The planned use of empirical research methods is inspired by the function of the mass media, in which the medium is an extension of the human senses. In other words, the research network/circle of New Tibetan Cinema data collection has been built using public media. Echoing with the discussion on reception studies, in this project, a qualitative reading of film production notes has been applied in the data chapters for further analysis of Tibetan cinema. The research intends to recreate the discursive practices of Tibetan films through examining a wide range of publicity materials, film reviews and other relevant documents from fan communities. The process of the thesis’s data collection has been designed using three strategies for gathering sources, although in practice they have overlapped.

1. News/reports/interviews written in the orthodox mainstream media.⁵⁶
2. “We Media”: personal film blogs/websites, WeChat⁵⁷ and Weibo.⁵⁸
3. Observational fieldwork: attending film festivals and field-conversations.

⁵⁶ Orthodox mainstream media includes TV programmes, newspapers, magazines, etc. Some of these sources can also be found online.

⁵⁷ See footnote 16, Introduction.

⁵⁸ Weibo (微博 in simplified Chinese, weibo in Chinese Pinyin; literally, a Chinese microblogging website), allows users to exchange and publish small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links. The media sometimes directly uses “Weibo” to refer to Sina Weibo. However, there are other microblogging/weibo services in China, including Tencent Weibo, Sohu Weibo, and NetEase Weibo.

On the one hand, some preliminary findings can be identified through the news/reports/interviews picked up from the orthodox mainstream media and transcribed for Tibetan film/sociological analysis, which is a relatively traditional way of collecting reception sources and has been practised over several decades for film or media studies. On the other hand, research relationships and connections with Tibetan directors and organisers of film festivals were established through “We Media”; for example, the most popular communication software among Chinese people, WeChat and Weibo, which are both free. “[T]hese simple easy-to-use tools have enabled new kinds of collaboration unrestricted by time or geography. The result is an advance of new social patterns and means for self-expression” (Bowman and Willis 2003:8). The notion of “We Media” first arose in Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis’s research report, “We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information”, published by the Media Center at the American Press Institute in July 2003. In this report, they provide an explicit definition of “We Media”, stating that:

We commissioned *We Media* as a way to begin to understand how ordinary citizens, empowered by digital technologies that connect knowledge throughout the globe, are contributing to and participating in their own truths, their own kind of news. (Dale Peskin, in Bowman and Willis 2003:v)

In other words, We Media is an internet platform through which citizens/people can publish/share their own news, such as eyewitness accounts, photo galleries and personal storytelling. As the report further elaborates in Chapter One, “Introduction to Participatory Journalism”:

The venerable profession of journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where, for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitions but, potentially, by the audience it serves. Armed with easy-to-use Web publishing tools, always-on connections and increasingly powerful mobile devices, the online audience has the means to become an active participant in the creation and dissemination of news and information. And it’s doing just that on the Internet...The response on the Internet gave rise to a new proliferation of “do-it-yourself journalism.” (Bowman and Willis 2003:7)

To put it differently, We Media offers a broader area for this research to collect information/data from directors/audiences’ personal journalism, which includes film reviews, articles and interviews concerned with directors and their films, notifications of events for films screening/film festivals, and the progress/plans of new filmmaking and distribution. It can be seen that WeChat and Weibo are the largest Chinese We Media outlets for audience

users in the PRC, and that the aimed research participants use them to publish the daily news about Tibetan cinema and relevant Tibetan filmmaking events/film festival exhibitions.

Moreover, WeChat can be considered to be the most popular personal communication software among PRC citizens. Therefore, it “can also provide...a deeper level of understanding about the reporting by illustrating” (Bowman and Willis 2003:53), through individual field-conversations with research participants in a virtual private space to ensure easy-to-use-to-record, and also a “group-chat” for further social communication. Therefore, it can be argued that communication through We Media can lead to a lasting trust and effective practice of empirical methods in my research studies, avoiding restrictions of time and geography.

3.3.2 Observational Fieldwork

The data for this study were also collected in a third way, from the recognition and ground of extensive observational fieldwork. This is also an extension of discourse from the “We Media” items and field-conversations during film festivals – getting reviews from Tibetan directors and hearing ideas from audiences. The behaviour and focus of the observational fieldwork in the research included attending/observing three selected “Tibetan” film festivals: the Tibet Film Festival (TFF) in Zurich, Switzerland (see Figure 8), the Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival (BFF) in Beijing, China (see Figure 9), and the Lhasa Film Festival (LSFF) in Lhasa, Tibet, China (see Figure 9). Methods used included field-conversations with Tibetan directors and the organisers of film festivals in Q&A sessions after screenings, and whatever other methods that might be relevant, such as collecting film festivals’ booklets, posters, flyers and so on. In other words, the main purpose of attending three selected film festivals was to get first-hand research data about Tibetan films made by Tibetans in the West (Tibetans-in-exile), Han Chinese, and Tibetan landscapes and discourses. Through these field trips, three expected targets were hit. Firstly, observing the film festivals, collecting any materials provided at the festivals, and making field notes in order to explore the nature of the film festivals. In this case, I collected archives and documents about the festivals, including the history of film festival establishment, lists of films screened, and previous interviews/Q&As with Tibetan directors. Secondly, having conversations with Tibetan directors, the film festival organisers, and the audiences (sociological data, based on discourse analysis). Thirdly, I collected the Tibetan films that serve as film data, based on film textual analysis.



Figure 8. Administrative Map of Switzerland⁵⁹



Figure 9. Administrative Geographical Map of the People’s Republic of China (claimed territory included)⁶⁰

⁵⁹The resource is from: <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/switzerland-administrative-map.htm>.

Of course, there are many film festivals concerning Tibet and Tibetan culture. The reasons for choosing these three film festivals were based on their scale and influence, and my research scope and field trip schedule. More specifically, my aim was to observe the “Tibetan” film festival in three different discourses: Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan. In the Tibetan discourse, the LSFF is the only festival to have been launched in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas, so it was the only choice for me. In terms of the Han Chinese discourse, there are no explicitly “Tibetan” film festivals in Han Chinese areas. However, the Han Chinese government has launched several film festivals in the name of “Chinese ethnic minorities”. The BFF is the largest-scale and most influential among them, and this was luckily held during the period of my planned field trip to attend the LSFF in the PRC. For the Western discourse, most Tibetan film festivals have been established in America; only the TFF is near me. This would also link to a typical and traditional “Western-European” discourse in the context of globalisation.

I would like to note that in this research there are two main types of data: filmic data, which consists of eight Tibetan features made by three selected Tibetan directors; and extra-filmic data, which includes news reports/interviews about Tibetan films and their directors, field-observational data/field notes and field conversations with Tibetan directors, and booklets collected at “Tibetan” film festivals and the information from their official websites.

Now I am going to provide a comprehensive description of how and when this data was collected, and what it includes. It is worth noting that during the first year of my PhD research, I was fortunate to have the chance to meet the leading Tibetan filmmaker, Pema Tseden, at the 10th Anniversary of the China Independent Film Festival UK Celebration, which was held from 12th to 15th May 2014 at Newcastle University.⁶¹ This, however, was not part of my formal observational fieldwork, although some film reviews and materials from the “celebration” have been included in the research data to support the analysis. In addition to being a member of the festival operations team, I had two tasks for my data collection: firstly, making careful notes during the *Old Dog* Q&A, and secondly, attempting to have an individual dialogue with Pema Tseden. On Wednesday, 14th May 2014, I was fortunate to conduct a casual conversation with Pema Tseden in a local coffee shop in Newcastle; we talked for about one hour. During the conversation, Pema Tseden provided an

⁶⁰ See footnote 8, Introduction.

⁶¹ Pema’s third Tibetan film, *Old Dog* (2011), was the opening film screening on Monday, 12th May 2014, and was followed by a Q&A session.

important notion of “New Tibetan Cinema”, different from “Tibetan films made by Tibetans”, which has been used to identify his filmmaking by other scholars. He also mentioned that there are two other Tibetan directors (Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi) who have gained well-known for Tibetan filmmaking in recent years. Pema Tseden’s comments indicated that the notion of “New Tibetan cinema” had become an important and contested concept that still needed to be identified and contextualised. At the same time, through my involvement in this film festival, I also collected materials which will be used to support analysis in this thesis, for example the Map of Chinese Independent Film Cinema, three Tibetan films (*The Silent Holy Stones*, *The Search* and *Old Dog*) from Pema Tseden, and film reviews/filmmaking information regarding *Old Dog*, also from Pema Tseden.

In fact, the observational fieldwork was inspired by this accidental meeting with Pema Tseden. It was in this way that it became a central endeavour of this research to explore the concept of New Tibetan Cinema and how the notion of “New Tibetan Cinema” is negotiated through Western, Tibetan and Han Chinese Tibetan film festivals.

I conducted two field trips to attend film festivals: 20th February 2015 to 30th April 2015 in the PRC, and 16–19 September 2016 in Switzerland. More specifically, I took in total 69 days for the first field trip, travelling to Beijing and Lhasa in the PRC. From 20th February to 30th April 2015, I was in Beijing, then Lhasa, then back in Beijing. The main purpose of this field trip was to attend the Lhasa Film Festival (LSFF) and the 5th Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival (16–23 April 2015), as well as meeting/conversing with three Tibetan directors (Pema Tseden, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi), and two organisers of the Lhasa Film Festival. The first month of my fieldwork in the PRC (23rd February to 27th March 2015) was dedicated to meeting with Pema Tseden, Agang Yargyi and one of the LSFF organisers, all of whom work in Beijing. During this period, I visited the studios of two Tibetan filmmakers where I collected copies of three films: *The Sacred Arrow* from Pema Tseden and *Dream* and *Her Name is Sola* from Agang Yargyi. I also had conversations with the directors. I then had a conversation with one of the LSFF organisers, which will be used in this thesis to explain the history and nature of the LSFF.

Following this, from 3rd to 9th April 2015, I was in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, where I met and conversed with another organiser of the LSFF and attended the Lhasa Film Festival. Between 6th and 9th April 2015, I was invited to attend the Lhasa Grassroots Image Exhibition and Lhasa Grassroots Film Forum, both of which are

side-lines of the Lhasa Film Festival. The aim of this field trip was to observe the LSFF from three perspectives: 1) who is the organiser of this festival, for example their ethnic identity and their occupation? 2) What genres of Tibetan films are screened at this film festival? 3) Who is watching Tibetan films, Han Chinese or Tibetans? This was in order to provide a cultural discourse/context for the analysis of New Tibetan Cinema in the thesis.

For the remaining half-month, from 15th to 30th April 2015, I returned to Beijing again in order to attend the 5th Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival (16–23 April 2015). I aimed to deeply understand the nature of a film festival which is not a “genuine” “Tibetan” film festival, as this film festival was framed by the general discourse of “minority ethnicity”, screening films pertaining to China’s fifty-five ethnic minorities. Here, I met with directors Pema Tseden and Agang Yargyi again. Pema Tseden’s fourth Tibetan film, *The Sacred Arrow*, was screening for four days: 16–19 April 2015. On Sunday 19th April, I watched this film with Tibetan director Agang Yargyi at Meijia Huanle Cinema in Sanlitun, Beijing. Interestingly, when I came into the screening room, I found that at this very “international” film festival, most of the audience was Tibetan, and those Tibetan people knew each other. They said “hello” to Agang Yargyi and me, and they spoke Tibetan with each other. It must be noted that at the screening, Tibetan audience members, including Agang Yargyi, said that they had watched this film several times, and came to watch it again because, as Tibetans, they wanted to support more Tibetan films at the box office and embrace the great Tibetan director (Pema Tseden). This inspired me to think about the identity of “New Tibetan Cinema” in the context of the broader ethnic/cultural/emotional significance of the films, in which New Tibetan Cinema is linked to building Tibetan nationalism from the perspectives of Tibetan directors and Tibetan audiences. Previously, on Saturday, 21st March 2015, I met Pema Tseden in Beijing at the Central Minzu University of China, and had a short conversation with him about his fourth Tibetan feature, *The Sacred Arrow*.

It is worth noting that between 17th April and 20th April 2015, I attended the 2nd Conference on “Visual Anthropology and Contemporary Chinese Culture” at the Central Minzu University of China. At this conference, several Tibetan and Han Chinese scholars presented papers concerning Tibetan filmmaking/visual culture and studying Pema Tseden’s films and his other cultural/literary productions. This provided a great deal of critical thought on Tibetan cinematic representations from the perspective of (Tibetan/Han) Chinese scholars, rather than Western researchers. This deepened the epistemological and methodological

complexity of my fieldwork. My only regret is that I did not meet with director Sonthar Gyal at any film festival or academic conference in Beijing or Lhasa during this field trip; this was because at that time he was making a film in Xining, Qinghai Province. However, during my field trip I briefly conversed with him via WeChat and followed him on his Weibo account, and we established a good relationship in the area of Tibetan film studies. At the same time, I also collected two of his films, *The Sun Beaten Path* and *The River*, which were sent to Beijing by post.

My second observational field trip lasted from 16th to 19th September 2016. I travelled to Zurich in Switzerland to attend the 7th Tibet Film Festival (TFF), aiming to observe it by attending each film screening and to obtain more Tibetan film materials, for example the TFF booklet/poster provided at the festival. I also made field notes in order to explore the nature of the film festival from the same three perspectives I used during the LSFF: Who is/are the organiser(s) of these film festivals; for example, their ethnic/national identity? What genres of Tibetan films are mostly screened at the film festival? Who is watching Tibetan films at the film festival; for example, their nationality/ethnicity?

Through these two observational field trips, it can be observed that the three selected Tibetan film directors are career directors and are the most publicly visible and present in national and international platforms (the three selected film festivals I attended). Their films have received a lot of attention from the public media. As I explained in the Introduction, there are not only three Tibetan directors in the discourse of New Tibetan Cinema; however, many of the other directors produce unofficial Tibetan films made in Tibetan areas which are less known and difficult to screen in public. There is a notable absence of Tibetan women directors; they are consistently absent and invisible in the public sphere. There is currently only one Tibetan woman director, Rinchen Drolma, who is mentioned by Barnett (2015); but her Tibetan film, because of its unofficial nature, is very difficult to search for and watch. I regret that I could not obtain this female Tibetan director's film to analyse in my thesis. However, this inspired me to think about the issue that the Tibetan film industry in the PRC (New Tibetan Cinema) produces a highly androcentric discourse of "men's talk", "men's stories" and "men's voices".

At the same time, I collected extra-filmic materials through both traditional media and new media (WeChat). When I started my PhD project, I read Tibetan filmmaking news reports every day, which provided me with a lot of background information about relevant Tibetan

cultural issues and the Tibetan filmmaking industry. This allowed me to keep up to date with the ongoing discussion of the issues that are addressed in this research. Furthermore, a quantity of film festival data used in this thesis was also collected from traditional media to identify the nature of the film festivals; for example, details of the main purpose of the Tibet Film Festival and the history of the Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival were obtained from their official websites. Data was also collected from the new media, particularly WeChat, which is a mobile-based communication service. WeChat can be considered the most popular personal communication software among PRC citizens. I engaged in individual field conversations with research participants in a virtual private space, to ensure an easy-to-use record, and also participated in a “group-chat” for further social communication. For example, I am a member of a “group-chat” named Lhasa Film Festival. There are 173 members,⁶² including fans of Tibetan films, two Tibetan directors (Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi), the organisers of the Lhasa Film Festival, researchers studying Tibetan films and culture, and other people who may work within Tibetan cultures. Usually, in the “group-chat”, members share ideas and discuss their ideas with each other. This data source can provide a great deal of extra-filmic data: news, interview articles, film reviews and notifications about Tibetan filmmaking are shared constantly, such as the news about the Tibetan Cinema Panorama tour in Mainland China 2016, the information about the 9th First International Film Festival, the interviews with Pema Tsenden by Fenghuang.com, Sonthar Gyal’s interview at the Lhasa Film Festival, and Pema Tsenden’s interview with Lu Yangqiao. I will use all of these in the data chapters.

At this point, I would like to briefly explain that although I have used several data forms derived from Pema Tsenden to support the analysis – more than I have used from the other two Tibetan directors, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi – this does not mean that I automatically assign a priority to Pema Tsenden in New Tibetan Cinema studies, nor that his opinions can be accepted uncritically. However, as I mentioned in the Introduction, his film productions were the first to be given the title of the New Tibetan Cinema, and he inevitably stands in the leading position as a representative voice of New Tibetan Cinema. In other words, over the past fifteen years, he has produced the greatest number of Tibetan feature films (up to now, he has made five feature films), has had the longest experience of Tibetan filmmaking, and has been given the most awards by national and international film festivals. As such, because

⁶² On 2nd July 2017 there were in total 173 members in this group-chat. This number of members is not fixed, as members can be added continuously by anyone in the group, but the new members must be invited by an existing member.

of his influence, is inevitable that the greatest volume of data concerning Tibetan filmmaking is concerned with the films of Pema Tseden. Additionally, and importantly, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi both acknowledge Pema Tseden’s influence in Tibetan culture, and Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal have developed a typical aesthetic of filmmaking which is defined as “Thangka visual style” (see the discussion in Chapter Five). Therefore, I use a large quantity of data concerning this leading director to develop and identify comprehensively the conception of New Tibetan Cinema in different discourses, and to offer a critical account of New Tibetan Cinema.

3.4 Positionality and Possible Ethical Issues

It can be argued that I need a much more complex and less linear notion of how to position my identity and my positionality in this thesis. To this end, I would like to say that subaltern studies as an epistemological approach has been used to demonstrate mapping and positioning research that is identifiable and movable within different layers. Therefore, the methodology chapter will epistemologically end with a positionality narrative, showing how the research is positioned theoretically in relation to my ethnicity, my gender, my social classification and my ethics.

3.4.1 Ethnicity

I agree with Stanfield (1993) that ethnicity is an emotion-laden issue and a difficult matter for a researcher to confront honestly. In terms of ethnicity, I am a member of the Han Chinese people, and therefore part of a dominant culture with respect to Tibetans in the People’s Republic of China. Inspired by subaltern studies and the book *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods* (Stanfield and Dennis 1993), I have considered several epistemological points about employing my ethnic position throughout the research process.

1. Are Tibetan people Chinese in Mainland China?

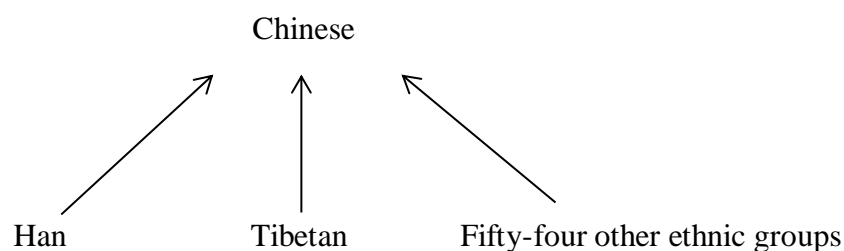


Figure 10. Who are the Chinese?

Answering this question will involve an embarrassing and ambivalent situation for me. As I have said before, I try to remain neutral on political matters to explore issues from different perspectives. However, is my ethnicity an indication that I agree that Tibetans are Chinese, and that I am anti-Eurocentric in terms of Chinese (Tibetan) issues? To address this puzzle, it is necessary to re-examine the word “Chinese”. In Western discourse, several scholars (Sautman 2006, Goldstein 1998, and Cao and Seymour 1998), have assumed that “Hanness” is generally equivalent to “Chinese”; however, in Chinese discourse, the term “Chinese” includes Han, Tibetans and fifty-four other ethnic groups (see Figure 10). I am a PhD researcher studying in the UK, and therefore an ethnic minority/“subaltern” in European discourse. I would like to say that I am anti-Eurocentric, and that Han people and Tibetans are both counted as “Chinese” in my research. However, it will be problematic if I say straightforwardly that I am anti-Eurocentric, because I am involved systemically in a western/European research education/environment as I am studying in the UK for four years. In other words, I may have already accepted European/western values/theoretical conceptions, and follow/understand/bear/rely on them when I meet to discuss “Chinese” issues and other relevant social issues, for example (post)modernity. Therefore, it can be seen that to explore the identity of the Tibetan is very crucial, as this will seriously impact on my research to identify the conception of New Tibetan Cinema in the data chapters, and on my research positionality throughout the thesis.

2. If I am anti-Eurocentrism, have I posed a Hancentrism in the research process?

Undeniably, in daily life, I have consciously accepted and practised my ethnic identity as Han, through language, logic, diet and custom. I do not want to falsely claim that I take an anti-Hancentric position in my research. The reason is that, in the research process, the limitation is that it is very hard to do research beyond my identity/cultural background/influences as a (Han) Chinese. As Stanfield (1993:4) has noted, “conceptualizations of research problems and interpretations of collected data in racial and ethnic research often have been preceded by a priori ideological and cultural biases that determine the production of ‘objective knowledge.’” In other words, collecting empirical data and interpreting those data may be easily rooted in one possible ethnocentric stereotype. For example, let us look again at the question of the definition of “Chinese”/“Tibetan”. It can be considered that I utilise a basically Han Chinese a priori ideological conception and cultural logic to determine the production of “objective knowledge” and the conditions of the issues discussed. At this level, it can be seen that I am a Hancentric researcher. However, it is dichotomous: I would feel

wronged if the research was thought to an example of Hancentrism, because my aim in the thesis is to try to be neutral, and to explore possible issues from different perspectives. In other words, I am looking at the inequality among three power discourses (Western, Han Chinese, and Tibetan) in the relationship between the elite and the subaltern. For my research, there is not only one language to understand and listen to, as a symbolic violence to Tibetan people and other readers, but you can find different languages (translated into English as a bridge) and cultural logics/epistemologies to understand and listen to.

3. If I am anti-Eurocentrism and anti-Hancentrism, who am I speaking for in the thesis? Tibetans?

This kind of epistemological consideration was also very hard to cope with in the research. From the standpoint of my epistemology, I am an independent researcher who cannot say firmly that in the research thesis I am speaking for any one specific ethnic group. In other words, I am subjectively rejecting any form of ethnocentric side, and would like to adopt the conception of cultural relativity. More specifically, the research process takes advantage of a relative attitude towards ethnic culture, society and values. For example, I stand by the fact that I believe in and respect the social value and sincerity of Tibetan culture and ideology, and evaluate and explore Tibetan social/cultural issues, such as power, inequalities, and interactions in the postcolonial discourse, via the case studies of Tibetan cinematic representations. To pause here, a sub-question has immediately been raised: as a Han Chinese researcher, have I spoken for Tibetans and can I speak for Tibetans?

The more deeply I understand and practise my research, the more a feeling of guilt and impotence comes out. From my perspective, being Han Chinese is like an ethnic sin – ethnic oppression exists in my consciousness, as I am not a Western person, but I am bearing a part of western values in my research; and I am not Tibetan, but I am evaluating Tibetan culture/films. Sometimes, I am almost lost in my own ethnic identity: whether I am involved in a potential position of being anti-Han Chinese. However, I am thankful for this mixed and ambivalent ethnic positionality, as it provides a predominant and comprehensive position for me to look at “Tibet”. In other words, this position enables me to think about issues and problems in a more neutral and balanced way, opening up a broader global horizon.

Therefore, I would not like to say whether I am speaking for Tibetans through the research. However, I can firmly state herein that I am speaking for “the subaltern” whose voices have not been heard (not only “Tibetans”, but maybe also myself, since I am “the subaltern” in

certain contexts). I would like to let the reader know that there is a (subaltern) voice existing in the world speaking their language, breeding their culture and thinking their philosophy. It is a fixed point in postcolonialism that it stands for “empowering...the disadvantaged, for tolerance of difference and diversity, for the establishment of minorities’ rights, women’s rights” (Young 2003:113). I cannot be sure that everyone will agree with me. However, I believe that there are many (Far) Eastern social science researchers who cannot move fully beyond the complexity of their ethnic identity: they were/are struggling in the epistemological thinking of “who am I?” in front of their theses.

3.4.2 Gender

Through the discussion and application of the (postcolonial) feminist approach at the epistemological level, one main question should be considered deeply within my gendered positionality in the research – does the research approach depart from the “feminist standpoint”?⁶³ Before discussing this main, I would like to consider an emotional question – does a female researcher necessarily have to adopt a feminist approach? Of course, it is not necessarily for a female researcher to use a feminist approach. However, I agree with Harding (1986:17) that “[a]s a symbol system, gender difference is the most ancient, most universal, and the most powerful origin of many morally valued conceptualizations of everything else in the world around us.” Therefore, if I am honest, my gendered identity as a woman inspires me to embrace feminism and the feminist approach in terms of my research. It is also useful to consider the feminist approach, working into the discussion of gendered hierarchies and representations expressed in Tibetan cinematic pictures.

Now let us think of the main question. It can be considered as a meaningful departure to thinking about whether the research stands in the feminist standpoint. The feminist standpoint argues that:

⁶³ This conception depends partly on Sandra Harding. In her book, *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986), three main feminist responses are divided into an apparently paradoxical situation to explain the epistemological problem for feminism: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint, and feminist postmodernism. I mainly focus on the discussion of feminist standpoint with my research in epistemology and positionality. But I would like to briefly introduce feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism as defined by Harding. The former “argues that sexism and androcentrism are social biases correctable by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry” (1986:24), and the latter “challenges the assumptions upon which feminist empiricism and the feminist standpoint are based...[postmodern] feminists ‘share a profound skepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about the existence, nature and powers of reason, progress, science, language and the “subject/self”’” (Flax 1986:3, cited in Harding 1986:27).

men's dominating position in social life results in partial and perverse understandings, whereas women's subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings. (Harding 1986:26)

In other words, the idea can be understood that women as a subordinated group are in a better position to arrive at an adequate representation of social reality than men, who are too caught up in their subject of control. This offers an explanation of "why inquiry from a feminist perspective can provide understandings of nature and social life that are not possible from the perspective of men's distinctive activity and experience" (Harding 1986:142). This epistemological benefit leads towards an understanding of society which incorporates reproduction, bodily work, and intimate relations – the concrete realities of women's everyday existence – instead of working with abstract notions of isolated individuals making rational choices.⁶⁴ In other words, this "standpoint" position recognises that a feminist approach can discover truths that a masculinist approach cannot. However, Flax (1986) identifies postmodern scepticism about feminist enlightenment. She says that:

[a]ny feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial. Each person who tries to think from the standpoint of women may illuminate some aspects of the social totality which have been previously suppressed with the dominant view. But none of us can speak for "woman" because no such person exists except within a specific set of (already gendered) relations – to "man" and to many concrete and different women. (cited in Harding 1986:164)

I would like to draw attention to the fact that this feminist postmodernist epistemology is ontologically different from the feminist approach (which has been mentioned when discussing the "postcolonial feminist" approach). In this sense, in postmodern philology, "feminist theory shares with other such modes of thought an uncertainty about the appropriate grounding and methods for explaining and/or interpreting human experience" (Flax 1986:37). In other words, feminist postmodernist scepticism leads me to consider a series of puzzles: can I speak for (Chinese) women? Can I speak for Tibetan women? Can I speak for one gendered subaltern? How can I speak for them?

Undoubtedly, in the People's Republic of China, the macro social gendered structure is defined by a patriarchal society. Whether Han Chinese society or Tibetan society, during my observational fieldwork, it could be easily observed that the Tibetan film industry in the PRC is close to the androcentric discourse of "man's talk", "man's story", and "man's voice".

⁶⁴ See the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, **methodology**, **feminist**, 4th Edition 2014, ed. John Scott. See also footnote 52.

Therefore, from my perspective, I would like to be a kind of “true” woman-centred/feminist voice within the arena of Tibetan film criticism to care about the “Tibetan”. This voice may not stand for all categories of women in the PRC, but it may represent a possible “subaltern” voice in gendered domination by the postcolonial feminist perspective. However, can I take advantage of the feminist standpoint to gain a truer distinctive picture of reality than a man’s view? Since the situation of Tibetan films in the PRC, from the filmmaking industry to film criticism, has been, at least up till now, a fully androcentric ecology, I therefore believe that many woman feminist researchers studying Tibetan films (I may be one of them) take/rely on men’s experience/analysis, and so they inadequately interpret Tibetan society at the first step. In this case, women’s distinctive practices and thinking remain part of the world created by (Han Chinese/Tibetan) masculine domination. In other words, for me, it looks like the route of research epistemology within my gendered position takes a departure from the feminist standpoint, and arrives at the epistemology of feminist postmodernism.

3.4.3 Social Classification

This idea emerges from the discussion of film textual analysis, in which some notions point out that textual analysis has a partial and modest character, and it can be attributed only to an object perceptible to the visual sense. Therefore, I would like briefly to draw attention to one relation in terms of social classification; that is, the relationship between the film text and audience/textual analysis and the reader. In terms of the relationship between audience and film text, this identifiable opposition will say in a general sense: How can we “look” at film textual data and how can we “read” film as data? Film space can be seen as a form of desire for history/society, in which “desire for the archive is presented as part of the desire to find, or locate, or possess that moment of origin, as the beginning of things” (Stedman 2001:3). This desire is represented through producing an illusory space which attempts to restore the historical/social space. That is to say, “[c]inematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (Mulvey 1999:843). “Real” has been replaced by representation, so that living becomes watching (Debord 1983). In this sense, cinema and its succeeding formations are “deterritorialized factories in which spectators work, that is, in which [audiences] perform value-productive labor” and “[t]he image...is the *mise en scène* of the new work” (Beller 2006:1). This indicates that labour has become ubiquitous, and ruled by the logic of the image, and other “semiotic [and narrative] systems for the production of meaning have all become subordinated to cinematic logic” (Biddle 2014). In other words, audiences become subordinated under the cinematic

representation, instead of the “real” society and history – audiences have lost the ability to “look” at the “real”, instead entering a cinematic logic.

Therefore, in this epistemological layer, it can be considered that I am inevitably a (subaltern) audience reading the cinematic text made by one of the social/historical readings. That is to say, texts can be understood as the “reading of reading of reading of readings” (Steedman 2001). When we read/analyse a text, we are interpreting others’ interpretations of earlier interpretations for culture, society and history. For example, in terms of film analysis, I am interpreting and exploring the “meaning” in a film, which was provided by cinematic interpretations of directors through their cultural, historical and social readings. Therefore, whether we read historical/social testimony as a primary source or secondary source, we are faced with the problem of “interpretative orientation”, where we will not know the so-called “original” truth/history, as they all can be seen as a reading of readings. As written texts are the products of human activity, only some history was preserved in text, which means some was “lost”, either actively or passively. For example, with the “Tibetan Question”, visual/cinematic representations that present Tibetan issues usually present only one possibility of multiple human historical views. In the research, the film texts about “Tibet” offer a “data set” and “an interpretative orientation” building upon the assumption of textuality as the primary site of evidence (Biddle 2014). Therefore, I should realise that, in the research, I interpret the films, but the films themselves are also interpretations of interpretations. This means that, for film analysis, it is better that the researcher should consider “how” to interpret the “meaning” in different social/historical/cultural contexts and discourses, rather than only interpreting the “meaning” represented in the film space. This is echoed in my methodological discussion on the connection between textual analysis and discourse analysis. It may be considered that in giving more different interpretations of history and society represented in the film space, the exploration of the research is closer to being “neutral” and “independent”.

3.4.4 Ethics

To end this section, I would like to mention some ethical considerations. As I have mentioned before, for data collection I attended film festivals and had conversations, for example with Tibetan directors. In this manner, Tibetan directors became my research participants, therefore this raises a slight consideration of ethnical positionality in the relationship between the PhD researcher and participants. Therefore, this research adheres to the statement of

ethical practice for the British Sociological Association; to care about and understand my relations with and responsibilities towards research participants, and the relationships between me and research participants in the research process.

I was concerned about two matters that emerged during the research period. Firstly, during the field trip, I found that the three Tibetan directors were not comfortable about discussing or mentioning any sensitive political/ethnic issues between (Han) Chinese and Tibetans in the public arena. Guideline 34 of the statement of ethical practice decrees that “[t]he anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research should be respected....In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive information.” This reminds me to put the field-conversation into the ethnic-cultural-different discourse within the “Chinese internal social structure”, and to not record or make notes of any kinds of sensitive information provided actively or passively by the directors, in order to avoid a possible situation of Tibetan directors “making/committing a political mistake/crime” in the public sphere.

Secondly, following a postcolonial epistemology, on the one hand I would like to consider a question throughout the thesis: do I have authority or power to determine the elite and the subaltern in the research? It is the hardest question to answer – can we describe the Tibetan as the subaltern? Can we describe Han Chinese as the elite? Can we describe women as the subaltern? Can we describe men as the elite? Or can I say that I am elite? To answer these questions, I should consider whether I am standing on the moral high ground to overlook the world through my research. I understand Guideline 10: “[s]ociologists, when they carry out research, enter into personal and moral relationships with those they study, be they individuals, households, social groups or corporate entities.” Therefore, from my view, I do not have authority or power to determine who are “the elite” and who are “the subaltern”. However, it is true that I have concluded that certain groups are subaltern and elite depending on different social/historical/political conditions and contexts. Sometimes, I doubt what I write, because I cannot get beyond my personal identity, experience, and understanding to look at each society, and there are no other eyes for me to observe the world from the back. However, returning to the positionality consideration of the relationship between film text and audience, I would like to say that my research thesis is also a text which offers an interpretation of earlier interpretations of the world. I interpret the “elite” and the “subaltern” in the postcolonial discourse, just as others interpret the “world” in their own chosen discourses. On the other hand, two languages have been used in the research process: Han

Chinese Mandarin and English. English is the research writing language. The main language used in field conversations in Mainland China was Mandarin Chinese, which is the standard and official language forced by the People's Republic of China. Regrettably, I was not able to speak in Tibetan during the field trip, because of my personal ability and Mainland China's social environment. I felt ashamed and guilty about this. This can again be linked back to my ethnic positionality within subaltern studies – when I spoke in Han Chinese with Tibetan directors, I always wondered does the Han Chinese language practise an emotional violence to Tibetans?

Conclusion

This chapter began epistemologically with my talking about postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism, and then moved to discussion of specific methods employed in the research. However, the main methods used in the thesis are structuralist. In other words, there is a slight mismatch between the methods used, which is broadly structuralist, and the orientations of the epistemologies for the research, as the whole frame of the thesis can be seen as poststructuralist. This is not to say that the methods are diametrically opposed to the epistemology. The method is set in this tension and conflict, which demonstrates that there is no objective structural narrative and no autonomous meaning. In this way, this thesis engages with repeated motifs through the data that may give a pattern which is identifiable, but which can be read differently depending on the analytical focus. Alternatively, this chapter is about framing and positioning the details of the methods in order to understand processes of understanding, meaning-making, story-telling, characterisations, representations, and so on. The communicative space/visual space is cinematic and its representation is always for grasping and hinting the highlights of the subjective nature of watching, viewing, interpreting, and reading in the filmic texts and social contexts. In other words, the methodology sets out not only to debate the meaning and signification of “reading”, “watching” and “interpreting” through structuralism, but also to read and make the film texts or cinematic/visual representations meaningful through poststructuralism, by which the thesis will (de)construct the meanings from an open-ended perspective.

Chapter Four: “Tibetan” Film Festivals and the Cultural Identities of New Tibetan Cinema

Introduction

The core research question of this thesis asks whether the “subaltern” can speak socially, culturally and historically through cinematic representations/aesthetics of Tibet, taking advantage of postcolonialism and subaltern studies. This central research question offers several insights into the postcolonial discourse of New Tibetan Cinema’s cultural identity struggle between Western and non-Western (Tibetan/Han Chinese in this case), between Tibetans and Han Chinese, and between elites and subalterns. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s discussion of new “Caribbean cinema” in the article “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation” (1996), and setting the issue of cultural identity into New Tibetan Cinema as well, then the research question can be expanded much more deeply: if the subaltern can speak, from where does it speak? Certainly, the practices of representations always indicate the positions from where we speak or write. As Hall (1996:704) has written, “though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never exactly in the same place”. Therefore, it can be thought that (cultural) identity underlining postcolonial conditions is not as clear or unproblematic as we have thought.

This chapter, then, will attempt to identify and contextualise the conception of New Tibetan Cinema in postcolonial discourses and understandings. In other words, it will be searching for the cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema and how Tibetan directors, for example Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal, establish/make their “Tibetan cinema”, drawing upon the function of social media and social discourse analysis, through the natures of “Tibetan” film festivals in the context of globalisation. The word “identity” concerns the conception of the “real me”, approaching who I am/who we are. In other words, “identity” refers to one’s sense of self, and one’s feelings and ideas about oneself and others. Therefore, this chapter aims to answer the following research questions: what is New Tibetan Cinema’s “self” identity? Can the subaltern (Tibetan?) speak through the new cinematic representations? From where do they speak and practise cultural, social, and historical representations? Cultural identity is in terms of sharing culture, and “a sort of collective ‘one true self’”, which “reflect[s] the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with

stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (Hall 1996:705).

This chapter will take advantage of the data analysis of three “Tibetan” film festivals at which Tibetan films made by Tibetans have been screened: the Tibet Film Festival (TFF, Zurich, Switzerland), the Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival (BFF, Beijing, China), and the Lhasa Film Festival (LSFF, Lhasa, Tibet, China), to possibly highlight the collective identity of New Tibetan Cinema and to explore its speech in various cultural and social discourses. We can begin by identifying “Tibetan” films, for example those made by Pema Tsenden, primarily by looking at three “Tibetan” film festivals. When his films are screened at the TFF, close attention is paid to how they represent “Tibetan independent nationalism” and “Tibetanness”; while at the BFF, his films are definitely seen within the discourse of “Chinese ethnic minorities’ films”; and at the LSFF, his films are read through the “Chinese (Tibetan) independent films” discourse. Therefore, it can be understood that the key issue for exploring the identity of New Tibetan Cinema is how and to what extent we can define New Tibetan Cinema as “Tibetan”.

Interestingly, it can be observed that simultaneously with my field trip to attend the 2016 Tibet Film Festival (16–18 September in Zurich), Pema Tsenden was attending the First Chinese Film Festival in Milan, Italy⁶⁵ (15–18 September 2016); meaning that he was appearing there as a “Chinese” director instead of at the Tibet Film Festival in Zurich as a “Tibetan” director. At the Milan Festival, his film *Tharlo*, representing the PRC and Chinese film, was given the award for the Best Screen Play. In other words, it can be considered that when (Mainland Chinese) Tibetan directors, led by Pema Tsenden, face the “international” discourse, the only available (national/cultural) identity for them and their films seems to be “Chinese”. However, “Tibetanness” is an identity which Tibetan cinema “must discover, excavate, bring to light and express through cinematic representation” (Hall 1996:705). Therefore, the question will be raised: When we talk about New “Tibetan” cinema representing in the (inter)national sphere, what do we mean? This reinforces the impotence of exploring the “self” and “collective” cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema in the divided discourses – “diasporic”/“Western”, “ethnic minority”/“Han Chinese” and “independent”/“Tibetan” – that will be presented consecutively in Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 of this chapter.

⁶⁵ The article “First Chinese Film Festival in Italy Kicks off in Milan” can be found at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2016-09/17/content_26810826.htm.

4.1 A Diasporic Film Festival within the Multicultural Metropolis – The Tibet Film Festival

Tibet-in-exile, seeking nation state recognition, uses film festivals as an important tool in international relations for representing a political/national imagination of “Tibetanness”. In other words, these film festivals bring together Tibetan film works “created in a variety of contexts and related to the identity-building process of nations without formalised statehood” (Jordanova 2010:261). I would like to take the “diasporic” conception herein to categorise these Tibetan film festivals in a postcolonial setting, as they have come about as a result of activism within the Tibetan diaspora. Most of the Tibetan diasporic festivals cater to the Tibetan diasporic audience; these film festivals are represented transnationally in the context of the multicultural metropolis and globalisation.

4.1.1 The Tibet Film Festival in Zurich

The Tibet Film Festival (TFF), one useful example of a Tibetan diasporic film festival, was set up in 2009 to provide a platform for politically-engaged Tibetan cinema, taking place simultaneously in Zurich, Switzerland and Dharamsala, India. It is run by two political organisations, “Filming for Tibet”⁶⁶ and the “Tibetan Youth Association in Europe”.⁶⁷ Usually the events at film festivals include screenings of some of the newest Tibetan features, and also a short film competition, alongside a number of rarely screened “Tibetan” films, the makers of which must be Tibetan, whether they are from Tibetan areas or are Tibetans-in-exile. The main purpose of the Tibet Film Festival’s existence has been stated as follows:

The TFF [Tibet Film Festival] is dedicated to Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen, who was detained shortly after completing filming on his documentary film *Leaving Fear Behind*.^[68] On

⁶⁶ Filming for Tibet “is incorporated as a non-profit organization in Switzerland. Its mission is to support the work of Tibetan filmmakers and the people of Tibet. *Leaving Fear Behind* is its first production. Filming for Tibet is supported and closely working together with the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe (TYAE)” (cited on its website: <http://www.filmingfortibet.org/about/>).

⁶⁷ The Tibetan Youth Association in Europe “has offered a platform for young Tibetans where they can engage politically. The TYAE seeks independent and youth-orientated answers to all questions related to Tibet. The desire to provide a service to the community has always been, and still is, in the foreground....The TYAE is the largest Tibetan youth organization in Europe. About half of the members are divided into sections according to interests and region. The rest of the members are involved as individual members. Based in Zurich, the TYAE has been worldwide active for over 40 years.” (cited on its website: <http://www.tibetanyouth.org/en/about-us/>).

⁶⁸ *Leaving Fear Behind* (2008) “was made by [Dhondup Wangchen], a thirty-five-year-old Tibetan from Hualong in Haidong prefecture, Qinghai, after he returned from a visit to Europe. He brought a DV camera and travelled around Qinghai in the spring of 2008, asking Tibetans to state, on camera, their views of the forthcoming Olympics in Beijing and government policy in general. He then smuggled the tapes via a visiting overseas Tibetan to a cousin in Switzerland, who edited them into the film. In December, [Dhondup Wangchen] received a six-year sentence for making the film” (Barnett 2015:126). The film can be watched at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibi_Jj5irFc.

December 28, 2009, in a Chinese court, Dhondup Wangchen was sentenced to six years in prison because of his filming activities. The production of *Leaving Fear Behind* was completed in Switzerland by “Filming for Tibet” and the film was shown all over the world. Dhondup Wangchen was released from prison on June 5, 2014. During last year’s [2014] TFF the campaign “Unchain the Truth” was initiated, which advocates a safe return for Dhondup Wangchen.

(2016, 27th September)⁶⁹

It can be read in this text that the fundamental and key reason for establishing the TFF was to dedicate it to Dhondup Wangchen and his “activist” and “political” Tibetan film. This clearly shows that the keynote of the film festival is reaching Tibetan-in-exile activists and protests for Tibetan human rights and political protection. In the same way, the majority of the Tibetan films screened at this film festival are short and very provocative and political video footages of violence and protests, made by Tibetans in Tibet or in exile, that “aimed to criticize the Chinese government and to document [cases of Tibetans] abused by the [Chinese authorities]” (Barnett 2015:124).



Figure 11. TFF booklet

On the other hand, the indicators of representing the Tibet-state are also displayed in the film festival booklet (see Figure 11). The flags that have been circled are called “*Xueshan Shizi Qi*” (雪山狮子旗 in simplified Chinese), literally The Flag of Snow Mountain and Lion. This is

⁶⁹ The text is from the website of the Tibet Film Festival: <http://tibetfilmfestival.org/about-us/>.

the “Tibetan National Flag” determined by the Tibetan government in exile/diaspora to be one of the representations of Tibetan national sovereignty, “free Tibet”, and the Tibetan independence movement. It can be also seen from this graphic that 1) the presented language is German which shows the film festival and its Tibetan films in the Western discourse; and 2) one of the supporting institutions is the International Campaign for Tibet, which “works to promote human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet”.⁷⁰ Therefore, the Tibet Film Festival in Zurich can be defined as a festival celebrating political, activist and experimental Tibetan filmmaking in the Western and Tibetan-in-exile/diasporic discourses. In other words, the TFF aims to be a part of the “Free Tibet” movement; concerns Tibetans being an independent nationality which should be separated from the notion of “Chinese”; and involves the discussion of aspects of Tibetan human rights in contemporary Mainland China. In other words, the TFF was “set up to promote certainly Tibetan identity agendas”, relies on “incorporation and funding opportunities available locally but also benefit[s] from financial support of internationally-positioned organisations that support the cause in question” (Jordanova 2010:261), and aims “to maintain Tibetans-in-diaspora trapped in the net of transitional and transnational identities [and to represent] a new cultural and political language” (Matta 2009:34).

4.1.2 The Tibetan Diaspora and New Tibetan Cinema as “Imagined Communities”

The contemporary notion of nation states as “imagined communities” is rooted in colonialism. While the nation state has been defined as an “imagined community” by Benedict Anderson, at the same time, it has been widely accepted for a long time. It can be read that:

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community...It is *imagined*, because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...It is imagined as a community, because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (Anderson 1991: 5–7)

In other words, each nation is imaginary and “national identity is understood not as something that is naturally given or pre-existing, but as something that is made” (Winter and Keegan-Phipps 2013:12). This also leads us to consider Said’s (1993) concept of an “imaginative geography, history and representations”. Karim (2004:91) has explained that notions of the nation state have concerned “the coalescence of ethnicity and territory to imply

⁷⁰ Official website: <http://www.savetibet.org/>

the existence of an ancestral homeland belonging to a particular *volk* or people who have kinship ties that are reflected in a common culture and language.” However, this idea has been regarded as problematic. “Pure ethnicities” have rarely existed in any territories, as migration under globalisation has a tendency to ensure diversity in a nation and its people. Though it is common sense that the inhabitants of a nation may have never met with each other, nevertheless they probably share a common identity and interests, and “maintain themselves with an adherence to a distinctive mythology, symbolism and culture associated with an ancient homeland” (Smith 1989, cited in Karim 2004:91). Once they have come to believe in these authenticities of culture and symbolism through education and mass media/communication, then an identity of “imagined community” will have been established. At the same time, it has been agreed that in this respect, like the nation state, diasporas are frequently described as “imagined communities” (DeSantis 2003, Tsaliki 2003 and Karim 2004:93).

Ross and Bürger have noted the important “use and impact of social media as tools of and for political communication” (2014:47). Considering the dissemination of the identity of an “imagined community” as political communication, “cyberspace provides the Tibetan diaspora with the constellation of community, ‘global citizenship’, and egalitarianism seemingly necessary to fuel any movement in a social environment shaped increasingly by the use of new media” (Santianni 2003:200). This echoes Anderson’s (1991) attention to the rise of nationalism through print media such as newspapers, in which people based in the same country or group read the same information, creating a common basis and coming together as a “nation”. The media, through sharing common interests and identities, repeatedly creates a space for people who come to think that they are all members of the same unit or entity, even though they may have never met or interacted with each other. For example, New Tibetan Cinema (as made by Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal and screened at the TFF), has definitely been involved in the Tibetan diasporic discourse and has made a symbolic dialogue with the diaspora, sharing a common basis and a sense of belonging (to Tibet) through imagination. In other words, New Tibetan Cinema creates an illusory space which reflects a common Tibetan culture and Tibetan language for Tibetans in the diaspora, who may have never met or communicated with each other but still see their cultural identity in the same unit. Tibetans in the diaspora then believe in this created space as a reflection of Tibetan culture, society and historical authenticities through the imaginary, where the

“imagined community” has been disseminated through the new Tibetan cinematic representations.

However, diasporic film festivals are different from other media (for instance, film). Film festivals are live events that are organised in one place and at one time, normally as yearly events. This suggests that the (Tibet) “imagined community” may be different at each film festival, depending on various conditions. At a festival, organisers and audiences must meet with each other in exactly the same place at exactly the same time. In this sense, the film festival has practically paused the facts of the “imagined community” and replaced it with a “real” one which is, however, “configured around the same axis of imagination that drives the ideas of nation and nationalism” (Jordanova 2010:13). At the same time, I share the view of Jordanova, who has argued that there are two layers of imagined process in diasporic film festivals:

There is a double-step process when transnationally-positioned film festivals are involved. On the one hand, audiences and programmers involved with the festival are invited to experience themselves, by an undisguised act of imagination, as an extension of a community that is “headquartered” somewhere else but to which they, by virtue of their very attendance at the festival, are now related to through a mental image of affinity and through the act of their very real togetherness. Yet, a secondary act of imagination is implied as well, linked to the need to experience a certain degree of identification with imaginary, fictional characters whose stories are told in the films projected at the festival (Jordanova 2010:13).

In other words, two layers of imagined process are employed in the diasporic film festival events which the film festival establishes in “somewhere” far away from the “homeland”. Firstly, organisers and audiences in attendance imagine that they have the same cultural identity or interests through a very real gathering together. Secondly, the imagined process is disseminated through illusory film space to link the “real” cultural experience. The imagined community can be expanded to be not only diasporic but also transnational through its figuring within transnationally positioned film festivals: the diasporic film festival’s set-up extends an invitation to engage in what is essentially a political act of imagined belonging and to continue the presupposed nation-building process, by extending it to the diaspora and beyond. Ultimately, then, film festivals also work toward extending the “imagined communities” by allocating their very different geography and temporality in mediating transnational identities (Jordanova 2010). It can be seen that, through the Tibet Film Festival, Tibetans-in-exile or Tibetan diasporas are invited in the same place at the same time to

practise in a space where they establish their Tibetan nationalism and Tibetan “imagined community” through face-to-face communication and watching Tibetan films. In this space, they share a common identity in a political act of Tibetan imagined belonging, and they believe in this “authentic” “imagined” nationalism and national identity.

Then, this Tibetan “imagined community” will also have been extended by mediating their transnational identities. In this case, the TFF seems to offer a space herein, linked in a way to the conception of the nation/diaspora as an imagined community in the case of Tibetan transnational stateless nationhood, where they share common interests and identify as part of the same Tibetan group. It can be seen from the available data that most of the film festival team members and Tibetan audience members are second- or third-generation Switzerland-born Tibetans, who have never been back to “Tibet”, though it has always been called their motherland and their “imagined” nation state. They identify themselves as Tibetan, but they do not know where Tibet is geographically and what Tibetan culture/food/religion is. German or English is their mother tongue rather than Tibetan. They hold Swiss passports, but continue to believe and imagine that they are Tibetan, and that their country or homeland is Tibet. This indicates that their national struggles have been fully driven into the transnational or supranational sphere, and postcolonial discourse. It can be considered that the Tibet Film Festival in Zurich is a remaining isolated space for the “pure” identity of the “Tibetan” diaspora, taking place in the context of a “global city” where hybridisation can and does take place. As Iordanova (2010:23) has mentioned,

[film] [f]estivals of...Tibetan and other stateless groups, with their respective national struggle causes, also foster various “narratives” of nationhood, while reconfiguring the supranational space by bridging the post-colonial nation and its transnational diaspora.

That is to say, this identity of “Tibetan” “imagined communities” has already fitted into the imagination of Western countries. In other words, “[w]hen Tibetans went into exile [or diasporas], they found out that ‘Tibet’ was already there in the Western imagination and, given their limited options, they had to conform to the image in order to gain support” for maintaining the vision of “Free Tibet” (Anand 2000:280). However, if our understanding of the nation state/nationalism departs from the platform of “imagined communities” and our social media (films and film festivals in this case) have been reconfiguring the supranational space for nationhood, I doubt the extent to which the significance and contribution of identifying Tibetan cinema and their directors’ national identity and belonging could be discussed within international/global discourses. As Stuart Hall (1996:708) has said, “[w]e do

not stand in the same relation of ‘otherness’ to the metropolitan centres. Each has negotiated its economic, political and cultural dependency differently. And this ‘difference’, whether we like it or not, is already inscribed in our cultural identities”.

It is worth noting that although the New Tibetan films made by Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal have been screened in the TFF, neither of them have ever attended this film festival to represent their “Tibetan” national identity in the international, Western, or diasporic discourses. As I have mentioned, for example in the introduction to this chapter, the dates of two film festivals have overlapped, so that Pema Tseden was attending the first Chinese Film Festival in Milan while the Tibet Film Festival was taking place in Zurich. This indicates that although their Tibetan films have taken advantage of their cultural identity to present or “speak” in the Western discourse a political “imagined community” of “Tibetanness”, in the international sphere they always represent their films as having a “Chinese-Tibetan” identity. It is also the case that their Tibetan films have been offered opportunities in the context of the generalist film markets taking place alongside large international festivals, such as Venice, Cannes, and Berlin. Specifically, Pema Tseden’s *Tharlo* represented the PRC in the Orizzonti section at the 72nd Venice Film Festival.⁷¹ Also, Sonthar Gyal’s *The River*, representing the PRC in the 65th Berlin Film Festival, was nominated by the new generation unit to compete for the Crystal Bear award.⁷² This also closely links to discussion of the “Chinese ethnic minority” discourse. Further discussion about this discourse will be presented in the next section.

4.2 The Film Festival as Tool of Cultural Policy – The Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival

As has been discussed in the literature review chapter, The PRC is “a multicultural and ethnically diverse nation state” (Gladney 2004:6) where there are altogether fifty-six official ethnic groups. The Han ethnic group makes up the majority of the population (accounting for 92% of the total population of the PRC), and the other fifty-five non-Han ethnic groups are customarily referred to as the “Chinese” ethnic minorities. For this reason, a special genre – “ethnic minority film” – has been positioned in Chinese film studies to sort out the landscape of “Chinese” ethnic minorities, involving the “main melody” films which promote dominant

⁷¹ The information can be found on the following websites: <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/archive/72nd-festival/line-up/off-sel/orizzonti/tharlo.html>, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2015-08-06/doc-ifxfsyiv7425377.shtml>.

⁷² The data can be found on the official website of Berlin International Film Festival: https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2015/02_programm_2015/02_Filmdatenblatt_2015_201511024.php#tab=video25, and also in this Chinese news report: <http://ent.people.com.cn/n/2015/0127/c392729-26458904.html>.

and state ideologies for safeguarding national harmony, promoting ethnic unity, and “exotic otherness” into “minority discourse”. At the same time, Chinese ethnic minority film festivals (whatever national or international) have been established as a tool relevant to the Chinese government in promoting its ethnic minorities cultural policy: for example, the Ethnic Minority Film Exhibition in the Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival⁷³ and the Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival, to express one “Chinese national style” and nationalist practice. Apparently, in the terminology of the PRC, native Tibetan filmmakers such as Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal have been labelled as “ethnic minority” directors in the context of the Han Chinese majority. Therefore, in this section, I would like to identify New Tibetan cinema through the discourse of the “Chinese ethnic minority”.

4.2.1 The Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival⁷⁴

Before beginning the analysis of New Tibetan Cinema in the discourse of Chinese “ethnic minority”, I would like to give some information about this selected film festival. The Beijing International Film Festival (BJFF), formerly known as the Beijing International Film Season, was founded in 2011 and is held annually. It is co-organised by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China (SAPPRFT)⁷⁵ and the Beijing Municipal Government, as a for-profit, international and government-sponsored film festival. It features a series of large-scale events: the latest film information, blockbuster film screening, and film awards. To take advantage of these conditions, the BJFF has set up an Ethnic Film Festival as an independent unit to promote Chinese “ethnic minority” film in the context of the international sphere responding to national/cultural policy.

[The] Ethnic Film Festival was established in 2010, as the most characteristic independent unit in the Beijing International Film Festival [Season], aiming to “**support Chinese ethnic minorities’ films and display Chinese cultural diversity**”⁷⁶. The festival reviewed fully the history and development of Chinese ethnic [minority] films, screening nearly 200 ethnic films. It has promoted several thematic

⁷³ See Footnote 47.

⁷⁴ The Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival, *Beijing Guoji Dianyingjie Minzu Yingxiangzhan* in Chinese Pinyin, is 北京国际电影节民族影像展 in simplified Chinese.

⁷⁵ “The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China (SAPPRFT, 国家广播电影电视总局 in simplified Chinese, *Guojia Guangbo Dianying Dianshi Zongju* in Chinese Pinyin) is an executive branch under the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. It directly controls state-owned enterprises at the national level such as China Central Television (CCTV), China National Radio, China Radio International, as well as other film and television studios and non-business organizations.” This citation is from the official English website of the SAPPRFT. The web link can be found here: http://english.gov.cn/state_council/2014/09/09/content_281474986284063.htm.

⁷⁶ Bold text is my own addition used throughout to draw the reader’s attention to key terms and phrases.

film panoramas: “The Retrospective Exhibition of Chinese Ethnic Films”, “Chinese Ethnic Minorities’ Mother Tongue Film Panorama”, and “Contemporary Chinese New Cultural Films”. At the same time, the film festival has run several social activities, such as the Ethnic Films High-End Forum, The Script Selection of Ethnic Minorities Films and TV Episodes, and Ethnic Films into the Campus. It is at present **the most influential organisation of ethnic Chinese film festivals**, supports the development of ethnic minorities’ films and undertakes the mission of preliminary exploration.

(2015, 17th April)⁷⁷

It can be read in this text that the main purpose of this film festival is “to support ethnic minorities’ films and display Chinese cultural diversity”. “Ethnic minority” is mentioned several times, presenting this film festival as “the most influential organisation of ethnic Chinese film festivals”.

Unsurprisingly, New Tibetan Cinema, made by Pema Tseden and other Tibetan directors, has been screened and promoted in this film festival. The Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival (BFF) is therefore a good example to use for exploring New Tibetan Cinema in the Han Chinese discourse, having been designed to support the Chinese ethnic minority filmmaking industry and the development of Chinese national/cultural policy. It thus completely fits into the Chinese “minority discourse” that is, in the words of Homi Bhabha (1990:1), “an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force”. Through film festival events, the identity of “ethnic minority films”, one role of which is to display “Chinese” cultural/national diversity, has been pushed into the conception of building Chinese nationalism/nationhood in the People’s Republic of China. Let us therefore return to the idea of “imagined communities” provided by Anderson (1991) to understand how “political/cultural representation in [PRC] reveals much about the state’s project of constructing, in often binary minority/majority terms, an ‘imagined’ [Chinese] national identity” (Gladney 2004:91).

4.2.2 The Internal Diaspora and New Tibetan Cinema in Chinese “Ethnic Minorities” Discourse

In this section, I am not going to explain repeatedly what Chinese “ethnic minority” film is or why “minority” discourse has been used. Instead, it will be presented how we understand the “minority” discourse inside Chinese society through New Tibetan Cinema in the framework

⁷⁷ The data from the website of the 5th Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival: http://dyz5th.minzofilm.com/index.php?option=com_content&module=31&sortid=0&artid=0&menuid=42. The material, which was originally in Chinese, was translated into English by myself.

of postcolonialism and the subaltern subject. Let us go back once again to the literature review chapter. One conceptualised statement has been discussed, in which ethnic minority films have participated in the conception of “internal colonialism” and “internal Orientalism”. In this sense, the “ethnic minority” discourse has created a space where the “ethnic minority” films in the PRC have been paralleled to the portrayals of the “East” by Western colonialists and Orientalists (Gladney 1994). This has played an effective role in “the establishment of the Han [Chinese] cultural hegemony” (Zhang 1997:81).

This makes me recall something that occurred during my fieldwork at the BFF. I watched Pema Tseden’s Tibetan film *The Sacred Arrow* with his fellow Tibetan director, Agang Yargyi. After the film screening, Tibetan members of the audience, including Agang Yargyi, said that they had watched this film several times before, but had come to watch again since they are Tibetan, and so should and must support Tibetan films at the box office and promote and celebrate “Tibetan Cinema” as part of their national pride. This has inspired me to think of the cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema in a broader ethnic/emotional significance in which New Tibetan Cinema links with Tibetan imagined nationalism in the diasporic discourse. In other words, in the context of postcolonialism, New Tibetan Cinema has been used as a tool of “imagined community” for Tibetans living in the PRC (who have been recognised as one of the “Chinese ethnic minorities”) as well as making a symbolic dialogue with Tibetan films and directors, sharing a common basis, interests and the sense of belonging through the imagination while watching Tibetan films. So, if we accept these dynamics of “internal colonialism” and “internal Orientalism”, it seems apt to recognise the position of New Tibetan Cinema and Tibetan filmmakers within the PRC as one of “internal diaspora”.

It is worth noting that the host city of this festival is Beijing (北京 in simplified Chinese), the capital of the PRC; the municipality and Chinese metropolis that represents the centre of Han Chinese culture and “contributes to political [also economic and cultural] capital” (Chen 2012:731). In this sense, Beijing has been publicly understood in the PRC as a “global”, “modern”, and “vanguard” city. This inspires us to look back at the discussion of the relationship between the Tibetan diaspora and New Tibetan Cinema in Zurich, another “global city”. There is yet another possible example: London, the old colonial capital, could help us to sort out the metaphor of Beijing in the framework of postcolonialism.

London is a city in which the geography of the colonial past is superimposed on the modern English capital, producing its postcolonial present. This London is a hybrid city where the local and the global co-exist uneasily, a locality saturated with contradictory meanings that escape easy appropriation and which as such may well serve to “produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power”. This London...global city – may serve as a metaphor for the power of transformation engendered by the population movements ultimately set in motion by colonialism. (Egerer 2001:16, cited in Karim 2004:103).

This London is a post-national global city, a hybrid city cohering with the local and the global producing its postcolonial present, where the transformative power of population movements is manifest in the contemporary condition of the city. Paralleling this sense to the city of Beijing, it can be considered that in Beijing too, space gathers hybridisation alongside the local, the national and the global, and also serves as a metaphor of the transformative power of population movements set in motion by Han cultural hegemony. In other words, Beijing is not only a local city for Han Chinese people, but is also a hybrid representing the PRC as a national “global city”. However, this “global city” has the full atmosphere of a Han Chinese economic, political, and cultural centre, and is shaped by the power of domestic population movements. In this sense, Beijing, the most powerful city in the PRC, has been shaped and emerged by Chinese internal population movements and by migration from other regions into a distinct form of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. This indicates what a postnational city (Beijing) may potentially look like, “if we understand the notion of the postnational as a condition characterized by the transcending of the national frame...for a model of multicultural coexistence, tolerance, and even celebration of diversity” (Cheng 2013:128).

It can be seen that the three Tibetan directors, Pema Tseden, Sonthar Gyal, and Agang Yargyi, were all educated at Han Chinese universities and now spend most of their time working and living in Beijing.⁷⁸ This is part of a wider population movement of Tibetan people from Tibetan areas to Han Chinese areas. In Beijing, a centre of Han Chinese culture in the PRC, rather than in Tibetan areas, they are making Tibetan films, speaking about Tibetan culture, landscape and religion. This kind of movement seems to parallel the conception of diaspora which I discussed in Section 4.1. I would like to use the term “internal diaspora” for the cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema in the context of postcolonialism and subaltern studies underpinning Chinese “ethnic minorities”. This is illustrated by the response of Pema

⁷⁸ Pema Tseden entered the Beijing Film Academy in 2002, the first Tibetan to do so.

Tseden to one interview question: *Do you have a sense of identity crisis in **Beijing**, which is fully involved in an atmosphere of Han culture as the majority?*⁷⁹

Sometimes I am also Tharlo,⁸⁰ but this is a little bit different probably. [If] you find yourself in this kind of environment [an atmosphere of Han culture], you may also reconsider your identity. Compared with Tharlo, I think there is a difference, which he never left, just in an environment of himself where he has an identity strengthened by others first, then [this identity] leads him to searching for his own identity, and in this process of searching he also has doubt, confusion and is lost in the end. In terms of myself, I left, like something **presenting** in this film, felt and then in this kind of environment which is different with previous, to reconsider the situation of myself, identity of myself, being a little bit different. Therefore, though I hope in this kind of environment, to strengthen my identity, this may be not important. However, just film, I think film has its own form and structure of itself, then taking this kind of form and structure of film to **reflect and present** [their own] culture, which is very important.

In this text, Pema Tseden has compared his process of searching for identity with the main character, Tharlo, who in his film suffered a good deal of risk in the face of “Tibetan” identity searching as an image of “internal diaspora” in the context of Han Chinese culture and social modernity. However, Pema Tseden did not identify this statement very transparently. Instead, he clearly mentioned that it may not important to strengthen his Tibetan identity, but that “presenting” the (Tibetan) culture through film is very important in the Han cultural environment. This kind of “presenting” is interpretive and is expressed relying on cultural, social and historical knowledge rather than a mechanical process, as Pema Tseden particularly explained at the Busan International Film Festival 2010:

Actually there are many movies on Tibet and Tibetan culture. But I think the main difference is in **expression and interpretation**. If you are Tibetan, you have **your own interpretation**...So in terms of **interpretation and expression**, between a Tibetan and someone else making a movie on Tibet, I think there will be a big difference. That is the main thing. (cited in Barnett 2015:158)

This conception echoes how “[e]thnographic works on the PRC have shown that [ethnic/cultural] identities are fluid rather than fixed, the outcome of [social and] historical processes rather than essential or inevitable consciousness” (Gladney 1996, cited in Cheng 2013:133). If Pema Tseden and other Tibetan filmmakers “presenting” Tibetan culture in their Tibetan films, can we think of them (Tibetans) as “speaking” through self-identification

⁷⁹ The interview with Pema Tseden can be read through Fenghuang.com: <http://i.ifeng.com/news/sharenews.f?id=103075454&from=timeline&isappinstalled=0>. The material, which was originally in the Chinese language, was translated by myself.

⁸⁰ Tharlo (塔洛 in simplified Chinese, *Taluo* in Chinese *Pinyin*), is the main character in *Tharlo* (2015), written and made by Pema Tseden.

as the members of a minority in the context of the Han Chinese majority? In terms of understanding, it can be seen that apart from the Chinese “ethnic minorities” discourse, the BFF also meets the “international” discourse; I discussed this at the end of Section 4.1. It has been mentioned that, when Tibetan directors represent their “Tibetan films” in the “international” discourse, the only identity left for them to adopt is “Chinese” or “Chinese-Tibetan”, often taking up a “minority” position for them as a cultural/ethnic identity. To put it another way, Chinese political and historical reasons may force New Tibetan Cinema into Han Chinese discourse. This shows that New Tibetan Cinema as a cultural production has been taken advantage of in terms of cultural identity, presenting in Han Chinese discourse as a national and social “imagined community” of “Chinese ethnic minorities”. This echoes what Bhabha (1990:3) has said:

For the nation, as a form of cultural *elaboration* (in the Gramscian sense), is an agency of *ambivalent* narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for “subordination, fracturing, diffusing, reproducing, as much as producing, creating, forcing, guiding.”

In this sense, definitely, New Tibetan Cinema and their directors have “spoken” as a national “ethnic minority”, by being forced into “a form of cultural elaboration” and interpretation in the name of “Chinese” nationality. In this respect, if New Tibetan Cinema has been exploited to “speak” for those two powerful discourses (Western and Han Chinese), can it speak for itself in Tibetan discourse? This links to the following discussion of the Lhasa Film Festival.

4.3 A Film Festival Involving an “Independent” Discourse – The Lhasa Film Festival

Basically, according to the Oxford Dictionary,⁸¹ the word “independent” has four meanings in English discourse: 1) free from outside control; not subject to another’s authority; 2) not depending on another for livelihood or subsistence; 3) capable of thinking or acting for oneself; 4) not connected with another or with each other; separate. In other words, it can be understood that, roughly speaking, the word “independent” means being free and separated from another’s control/power/authority/support, and at the same time able to become or act for “oneself” in the certain situation. For this reason, in the PRC, “Independent” (独立的 in simplified Chinese, *dulide* in Pinyin) has been recognised as a very provocative word in political and cultural discourses in terms of safeguarding “Chinese” national harmony and

⁸¹ The Online Oxford Dictionary has been used to search for the meaning of the word, “independent”. Here is the link: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/independent>. I should explain again that this does not mean that the dictionary explanation can be used in a good way in academic discussion and argument. However, as a first step, it at least offers a “common sense” approach to understanding the meanings of words and the cultures behind them.

promoting ethnic unity. In this case, regarding the understanding of Tibetan directors and their New Tibetan Cinema, they have been discussed and identified as “Tibetan”/“Chinese” “independent” filmmakers/films in the PRC’s surroundings for a long time; ever since the first Tibetan feature filmmaker, Pema Tsenden, emerged (Barnett 2015, Berry 2016, Grewal 2016, Lo 2016, Yau 2016 and Frangville 2016). Therefore, in this section, I am going to investigate the “independent” discourse, examining the cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema through one independent film festival: the Lhasa Film Festival in the PRC’s Tibetan areas.

4.3.1 Chinese Independent Films

To begin with, I would like to briefly introduce some basic background information for understanding the discussion of the notion of Chinese independent films, and the nature of Chinese independent film festivals in the context of contemporary Mainland China. It can be observed that Nakajima has offered a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the nature of independent films in the PRC:

“Independent films” here refer to relatively low-budget films, including both fiction and documentary, targeting a relatively small group of audiences whose members are particularly interested in the Chinese equivalent of “art-house” films. Especially with the increasing availability of portable digital video (DV) cameras, as well as personal computers and software to store and edit films, independent filmmaking in China has been on the rise since the late 1990s. Some films are explicitly banned by the state authority...while others are illegal simply because they skip the government censorship process...Most, if not all, of these films are denied distribution and exhibition through legal channels because they do not go through the government approval and censorship by the Chinese film bureaucracy. (2013: 387)

Reading this text, it can be concluded that there are four features of Chinese independent films (both fiction and documentary); they are 1) relatively low-budget, 2) “art-house”, non-commercial films targeting relatively small audiences, 3) on the rise since the late 1990s due to the increasing usability of DV cameras, personal computers and software to store and edit films, 4) importantly, they are seen as “illegal” or are “denied distribution and exhibition through legal channels”, because “they do not go through the government approval and censorship by the Chinese film bureaucracy”. Therefore, they attempt aesthetically to be independent and separated from the political/cultural power/control/authority of the Chinese government and bureaucracy.

It is worth noting that this conception of Chinese independent films is different from what is understood in Western discourse. For example, in America, as Pickowicz (2006) has argued, “independent” when applied to film means independent of “Hollywood”. In this case, the American “distinction between ‘independent’ and ‘Hollywood’ has little to do with the role of the state, since almost all American filmmaking takes place in the private sector” (Pickowicz 2006:3). In contrast, Chinese independent films can be understood as being controlled and made by the filmmakers themselves instead of being made within “the [state] system”; they are “not part of the approved internal annual production schedule of either a state-owned film studio or television station” (Berry 2006:111). In other words, in Mainland China, “independent” films are independent of “the state system” (体制 in simplified Chinese, *tizhi* in Chinese Pinyin, literally the-state-film-production system) and do not go through the process of government censorship by the Chinese film bureaucracy. This enables us to see why, on the one hand, Chinese independent films were also originally labelled as “underground”, and have also recently been recognised as “grassroots” or “folk” films when they have been defined in the context of contemporary Mainland Chinese film studies (Jason 2011, Nakajima 2010). However, in whatever way these independent films are distributed and exhibited in Mainland China, clearly, “these films cannot be distributed through commercial film theatres or as legal DVDs” in the PRC (Nakajima 2013:388).

Nakajima (2013: 384) has stated that Chinese independent films, both fiction and documentary, in addition to often raising representations of social issues, “differ from those presented by the government-controlled media”, in that “the watching of Chinese independent films produces discourse on the films, as well as discourses on social phenomena depicted by the films” (Ibid.). In other words, the watching of Chinese independent films plays an important role in terms of producing social/cultural discourses and phenomena. According to Pickowicz (2006:12) and Nakajima (2010, 2013), there are five ways to watch Chinese independent films:

1. Buying them in DVD stores: it is apparent that small groups then gather in homes to view these works (through “videotapes” and VCD/DVDs).
2. Independently organised film festivals: (independent) film festivals are sometimes scheduled on university campuses. Some of these events have been successfully staged, while others have been shut down by the police or school officials.

3. It is also possible for couples or small groups to rent private rooms for film viewing. Seating capacity is limited and enterprises of this sort open and close on an irregular basis.
4. Increasing numbers of “film clubs” provide additional venues for the viewing of independent titles. “Film clubs” can be seen as “underground” social organisations where people gather, watch, and discuss Chinese independent films.
5. The internet revolution in China, a dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon, also offers various ways for film fans to download and view independent Chinese titles available at home and abroad.

Except for ways two and four (independent film festivals and film clubs), the methods of watching Chinese independent films can be identified as private: watching at home or renting private rooms. In this sense, from my understanding, there are two layers of meaning in terms of “independent” film festivals and film clubs. Firstly, the wider significance of Chinese independent film festivals in Mainland China is at least to provide a kind of possible “public” space to screen Chinese independent films which did not get the permission (*longbiao*);⁸² that is, they did not go through the Chinese government approval and censorship. Secondly, it can be seen that independent film festivals and film clubs themselves are also “independent” from “the state system”. In fact, it can be found that for most Chinese independent film festivals (see Figure 12), the film scene is hatched in the café or university-based cine-clubs/film studies programme for those independent works which are separated from “the state system productions”. Therefore, it can be said that the Lhasa Film Festival is worthy of use as a good example of Chinese independent film festivals and film screenings based on film clubs in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, the PRC. Studying this festival will provide information for figuring out how the New Tibetan Cinema underpins the landscape of Chinese independent film festivals and “independent” discourse.

⁸² *Longbiao* (龙标 in simplified Chinese), the English translation of which is “dragon-mark”, represents the public screening licence for films that have gone through Chinese government censorship.

4.3.2 The Lhasa Film Festival⁸⁴ within Chinese Independent Film Festivals⁸⁵

Glancing quickly over the Lhasa Film Festival (LSFF), New Tibetan Cinema without doubt seems to be involved in the Chinese independent films scene. To give more details, the Lhasa Film Festival was established in 2011,⁸⁶ and is located in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Mainland China. The Chinese name of the LSFF is, literally, the Lhasa Folk Videos/Films Exhibition (*Lasa Minjian Yingxiangzhan*) which “means to have neither official government ties nor official government support” (Spires 2011:11). The English name of “Folk” (*minjian*, 民间 in simplified Chinese) Videos/Films Exhibition has been confirmed by two organisers, who insisted that Lhasa Film Festival is a correct translation of the festival’s name. Here I would like to explain a little about the names of Chinese independent film festivals. As Nakajima (2013:388-389) has written, in the PRC many film clubs have organised what are recognised in fact as “independent” “film festivals”. The film clubs, however, “often use less conspicuous terms such as ‘film exhibitions’ (*yingzhan*) or ‘film exchange weeks’ (*dianyingjiaoliuzhou*) to avoid being noticed by government authorities”. The word “festival” is usually only allowed for a government-sponsored event, like the Beijing International Film Festival or the Shanghai International Film Festival. In other words, when “independent” festivals organise, they use the term “film exhibition” (*yingzhan*) instead of “film festival” (*dianyingjie*) to avoid possible political troubles in the public sphere. Therefore, this is a clearly visible reason to explain why the name of LSFF has been translated discursively, rather than literally, into English.

In terms of further explanation of the nature of Lhasa Film Festival and the main purpose of holding the festival, one of the film festival organisers⁸⁷ in Beijing has answered that:

[The Lhasa Film Festival] is collecting the outstanding independent film works edited with Tibetan subtitles for **free screening and Q&A sessions** with directors in Lhasa, whether documentary films or fiction films, to provide a **screening platform** for independent filmmakers and young artists and create a possibility of dialogue between directors and audiences, and film space and social space. At the same time, the film festival also runs the **Lhasa Folk Film Forum on social/online network platforms**. We

⁸⁴ The Lhasa Film Festival, *Lasa Minjian Yingxiangzhan* in Chinese Pinyin, 拉萨民间影像展 in simplified Chinese; literally, Lhasa Folk Video Exhibition.

⁸⁵ Chinese independent film festivals, *Zhongguo duli dianyingjie* in Chinese Pinyin, are 中国独立电影展 in simplified Chinese; literally, Chinese independent film exhibition (*yingzhan*).

⁸⁶ The 1st Lhasa Film Festival lasted for a period of eight days (08/20/2011-- 08/28/2011), collecting outstanding independent film works edited with Tibetan subtitles for free screening and Q&A sessions with directors in Lhasa, both documentary films and fiction films. At the end of the film festival, the audiences voted for their most favourite film.

⁸⁷ Usually, the LSFF has two organisers, one of whom is settled in Lhasa, and the other is always in Beijing.

hope Lhasa Film Festival can **build a bridge between Tibetan areas and Inland**⁸⁸ (*Neidi*)’s independent films, and make a contribution to increasing Mainland Chinese independent films’ communication and development.

(2015, conversational comments by one of the film festival organisers, 22nd April)⁸⁹

It can be seen from this text that LSFF is a non-profit, Mainland Chinese independent film festival. The text mentions several times the theme and objectives of the festival: providing a free screening platform for “Chinese” independent films and filmmakers, creating a possibility of dialogue between directors and audiences, making connections between Tibetan areas and Inland, and becoming involved in the landscape of Mainland Chinese independent film festivals. This film festival was established based on the notion of film clubs which I discussed above. Apart from their regular single-film-per-event screenings and discussions, such clubs often organise film festivals showing and discussing a collection of Chinese independent films. In one respect, the Lhasa Festival can be seen as the only film festival taking place in Tibetan areas, and one that is not a large-scale event compared with Inland independent film festivals, such as the China Independent Film Festival in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, and the First International Film Festival in Xining,⁹⁰ Qinghai Province (see Figure 12). However, this film festival does not only focus on screening independent films, but also takes on the responsibility of inserting Tibetan independent filmmaking into the circle of Mainland Chinese independent filmmaking, and creates a social platform for communication between independent filmmakers in Tibetan areas and Inland.

It can be seen that in the present reality of “independent” films in the PRC, the living space of Chinese independent films in the domestic sphere is getting narrower and narrower, as Pema Tseden has explained:

⁸⁸ I would like to provide a short comment justifying the notion of Inland (*Neidi*) (内地 in simplified Chinese), which was mentioned several times in my data collection but is a very complicated and ambivalent term, in order to shape a clear and preliminary understanding in the different discourses. *Neidi* can be interpreted as “Mainland” (continent) or “Inland” in different conditions and discourses. On the one hand, it has been mentioned that Mainland China (中国内地/中国大陆 in simplified Chinese), the Chinese/China mainland, is the geographical areas under the direct jurisdiction/ domination of the People’s Republic of China, generally excluding Macao, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but including Hainan Province. On the other hand, the term *Neidi* has several meanings in Mainland China, but usually indicates the inland region of Mainland China. Generally speaking, people in the coastal and border provinces refer to non-coastal and non-border provinces as “Inland”. In this case, according to the bulletins of The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, ethnic minority frontier areas, for example Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region/Tibetan areas, call all other provinces/regions in Mainland China “Inland”. The term is also used in Hainan Province to refer to the other provinces of Mainland China.

⁸⁹ The data was collected during my field trip to Lhasa; the language used in the conversations was Mandarin Chinese, which has been translated by myself.

⁹⁰ *Xining* (西宁 in simplified Chinese), the capital of Qinghai Province, is located in the Han areas of “Inland”.

At present, I think, compared with the period of Jia Zhangke,⁹¹ there is a totally different living space for independent films. In [Jia's] period, [independent films] could receive a recognition through this kind of way of [independent] film festivals. There may be less and less opportunity for independent film to be screened in the domestic arena, and its spread channel, the space is getting smaller and smaller. In past, there were a lot of channels to screen, for example screening in some universities, screening in some independent films festivals, but now it is different. Then, for example, production cost, and the conditions of film-making and production have also been largely restricted.⁹²

In other words, nowadays, the process of releasing or screening independent films in the PRC is becoming stickier and more and more difficult. Although “with wide availability of DV cameras and personal computers to store and edit the films, virtually anyone can make films” in the “independent” discourse, for films to become a social reality and production they have to be distributed and exhibited through the medium of film festivals (Nakajima 2013: 398). It is true that, for example, the Beijing Independent Film Festival (in Beijing), the China Independent Film Festival (in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province), and the Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival (“Yunfest”, in Kunming, Yunnan Province) (see Figure 12) “have achieved their positions of prestige through their uncompromising commitments to independence” (Nornes 2011:102). However, some festivals have been shut down by the police or government officials several times in recent years. In fact it can be argued that with recent developments, Chinese independent film festivals have been shut down nationally and are now almost non-existent in Mainland China. LSFF and Yunfest are two of these cases. Due to local authority intervention and Chinese government censorship, there is no exact date for the LSFF as it is not only involved in Chinese “independent” film festival discourse, but also potentially in “Tibetan” “independent” discourse. In other words, independent film festivals in the PRC are “playing a cat-and-mouse game with the government”. This is especially true in Tibet, as this place has been labelled as having a more sensitive political meaning than other Mainland Chinese territories. Anything called a “film festival” in Mainland China “falls under the bureaucracy overseeing cinema – as in celluloid – and must ask authorities for permission to organise, and then submit to full censorship proceedings” (Nornes 2011:105).

However, it is worth noting a very important piece of information about the LSFF: both the organisers of the film festival are Han Chinese rather than Tibetan people. Also, one of the film festival organisers in Lhasa is the chief editor of “state system” magazine *Xizang*

⁹¹ *Jia Zhangke* (贾樟柯 in simplified Chinese), a screenwriter, is generally regarded as a leading figure among sixth-generation Chinese directors in Mainland China.

⁹² See Footnote 79.

Renwen Dili (Tibet Geographic in English).⁹³ It has been observed that the LSFF and many other film screening and relevant film festival activities in Lhasa, for example the Tibetan cinema panorama tour in Mainland China (2016) which I mentioned in the Introduction, were established based on the platform of this “state system” magazine to incorporate Inland (or Mainland) Chinese Tibetan independent films. In this case, the identity of the organisers (Han Chinese, and chief editor of a “state system” magazine) makes the LSFF seem not as “Tibetan”, or as “independent” from Mainland China’s state system. Therefore, through reading the material on the LSFF, in the next section I will consider the following questions: to what extent can the New Tibetan Cinema be understood as integral within the discourse of Chinese “independent” film? Can the Tibetan (or Tibetan directors) speak through New Tibetan Cinema in an “independent” discourse?

4.3.3 Independent Discourse and New Tibetan Cinema

Based on the above discussion, it can be considered that New Tibetan Cinema in Chinese independent films discourse encompasses three groups of power relationship across the PRC: between the state system filmmakers and independent filmmakers (the relationship between government and grassroots), between folk/alternative films and commercial/mainstream films, and between the dominant ethnic group (the Han Chinese authorities) and the subordinated ethnic groups (Tibetans). Through those three power relationships, how can we evaluate and examine Tibetan directors’ identity as “independent” filmmakers, and their New Tibetan Cinema as Chinese “independent” films? To help us answer these two questions, we may look at Pema Tseden’s (2015) response to an interview question: *Do you define yourself as an independent director?*

I think if you would like to define yourself as an independent director, it will depend on whether there is an “**independent expression**” in your films or in your productions. If there is, I think I am willing to define myself as an independent director.⁹⁴

He has mentioned one highlighted term – “independent expression” – that is part of the definition of an “independent” director. But what does Pema Tseden mean by “independent expression”? He has not answered this, but I would argue that an independent expression illustrates that the central theme and objectives of a film is about “individuals awakened to

⁹³ *Xizang Renwen Dili* (西藏人文地理 in simplified Chinese; literally, Tibetan cultural/human geography), is sponsored by the Tibet Autonomous Region Literature and Art League, and was founded in 1994 as a provincial bimonthly periodical. The official website can be found at: <http://www.tibet-g.com/>.

⁹⁴ See Footnote 79.

their own subjectivity”, and that this functionally promotes “independent thinking and individual autonomy”, which “have been suppressed in [Mainland] China for historical and political reasons, and are very much in need of cultivation” (Mo and Xiao 2006:151, Johnson 2006). In other words, “independent expression” cares about subjectivity to shift the voice upside down from the “other” and minoritisation to the self, looking, thinking and speaking with an adherence to an “independent” and non-repressive “I”/subjective.

To pause here, I would like to again draw upon the discussion of Fourth Cinema, which I fully set out in the Literature Review chapter, drawing upon the case analysis of New Tibetan Cinema (Tibetan indigenous films) through the postcolonial discourse. In this sense, reading New Tibetan Cinema through “independent” discourse is echoing the theory of Fourth Cinema, in which indigenous and ethnic minority people use film and video as cultural/social tools for internal and external communicating, “self”-determining, “self”-expressing, and “self”-representing in the face of resistance to outside or mainstream cultural domination (Ginsburg 1991). Some very important information on this topic has been provided by Pema Tseden (2015):

To define the conception of an “independent director”, it depends on how you understand. There may be a different explanation between abroad and at home (the People’s Republic of China) to understanding the independent director. In the past in China, many “**underground**” films are recognised as independent films by independent film directors, or independent authors. However, abroad, they do not understand independent films like that... In the past, many people understood the so-called independent films or independent directors as that **they did not get permission to screen their films in public** – they are released without *longbiao*.⁹⁵ However, this conception has also been expanded.

Through reading the above, it can be understood that independent film in Mainland China has been related to the “underground”, which simply means films that were not given permission (*longbiao*) from the state to be screened in public – they are/were released without a licence. To examine the word “underground” in its sociological meaning, let us also go back to the notion of subaltern studies. In this layer, “underground” can also be recognised as “invisible”, “less visible”, “underside” and “inaudible”, which fits completely into the consideration of the insights of subaltern studies – whether subaltern groups are able to speak and whether the voice of a subaltern group can be heard. In other words, “underground” in Chinese “independent” discourse suggests a “politically illicit, secret production that stands in

⁹⁵ See Footnote 82.

subversive opposition not only to state domination of the film industry, but more importantly to the state's and the party's domination of political [and cultural] life" (Pickowicz 2006:4).

But many Tibetan independent films in the PRC are not really made "underground", like the films that were made "independently" from "the state system". Instead they have gained permission to be screened in public; some of them have even set box office records. Some of Pema Tsenden's and Sonthar Gyal's Tibetan films come into this category. In other words, independent film in Mainland China concerned and involved an "underground" discourse at the initial stage of development, but now relates to "aboveground". That is to say, we can claim that "underground film" is "independent film"; however, we cannot stipulate that "independent film" must be "underground film" according to China's contemporary cinematic situation. Taking consideration of this, it would be effective to understand New Tibetan Cinema in the "independent" discourse. In other words, defining whether New Tibetan Cinema consists of independent films, or whether Tibetan directors are independent filmmakers in the PRC, is not important; but a deeper meaning of subjective/"self" and a stronger power of "self"-voice provided by this platform gives a great deal of significance to New Tibetan Cinema. Pema Tsenden has further explained:

[I]t is hard to define myself as "independent director" and "independent film". Sometimes it's the same with my films; in the past, there have been independent film festivals that have put my films in a certain unit, for example they might show a few good films with *longbiao*, films that have been approved by censors, showing my films at a festival like this makes it hard to define [if they can be classed as "independent"]. However, I do not really care about this title [of independent director].⁹⁶

Pema Tsenden has made in total five full-length feature films: the "Tibetan Trilogy" (*The Silent Holy Stones* (2006), *The Search* (2009), and *Old Dog* (2011)); *The Sacred Arrow* (2014); and *Tharlo* (2015).⁹⁷ Except for *Old Dog*, all of these "independent" films were approved by Mainland China's censors, released with *longbiao*, and have been shown in public, including in commercial cinemas and on Chinese TV movie channels. With regard to *Old Dog*, there are two editions – one released with *longbiao* and another one released without *longbiao*. The difference between them is that the film's final tragic sequence was cut out by Pema Tsenden because of Mainland China's government film censorship (as it contains a powerful metaphor and reflection for contemporary/current Tibetan

⁹⁶ See Footnote 79.

⁹⁷ *Tharlo* was released in public through commercial cinema on 9th December 2016. The information can be obtained from <http://bj.people.com.cn/BIG5/n2/2016/1021/c233082-29183993.html>.

ethnicity/culture/society), in order to get permission (*longbiao*) to screen this film in public.⁹⁸ However, audiences are most familiar with the version without *longbiao*, which has been screened at many film festivals abroad and at independent film festivals at home. In this respect, *Old Dog* can definitely be defined as an “underground” “independent” film from “the state system” production. On the other hand, in the case of his fourth feature, *The Sacred Arrow*, the film programme was formally approved by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China (SAPPRFT), and received funding support from Qinghai Province Jianzha County Government.⁹⁹ The aim of this film is promoting Amdo Tibet culture and tourism as a part of Chinese nationalism and Chinese ethnic minorities’ culture. In other words, this film is totally a “state system” film production, not at all “independent” from “the state system”. At the same time, *The Silent Holy Stones* was produced by the Youth Film Studio of Beijing Film Academy, which puts it partly inside the state film industry. Therefore, I agree with Pema Tsenden that it is hard to define Tibetan directors and their films as totally “independent”. It can also be seen that although Sonthar Gyal has so far made only two feature films – *The Sun Beaten Path* and *The River* – both were released with *longbiao* to be screened in public, whether commercial cinema or Chinese TV/online movie channels in the PRC.

Therefore, it looks like that we have entered a cul-de-sac in our discussion of New Tibetan Cinema within the definition of Chinese independent films, as the above discussion seems to have established that Tibetan directors and their New Tibetan Cinema in the PRC are not “independent” from “the state system”. This being so, I would like to draw upon the conception of Mo and Xiao (2006) to highlight how Chinese independent filmmakers have been categorised into four groups:

1. Those working inside the state film industry.
2. Those not associated with the state-operated studio system.
3. Those who move freely between the two worlds (inside/outside the state system).

⁹⁸ This information is taken from the conversation with Pema Tsenden conducted in May 2014.

⁹⁹ This can be found in Chinese news reports about the film, *The Sacred Arrow*. One of them is here, http://yue.ifeng.com/businessnews/detail_2013_11/20/31412973_0.shtml?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0

4. Those who are on the state studio payroll, but moonlight by taking on independent film projects.¹⁰⁰

This analysis is very useful for enabling us to think of Tibetan directors (in this case, Pema Tsenden, Sonthar Gyal, and Agang Yargyi) as “independent” Tibetan filmmakers. Through defining their films and their cultural identity, it can be easily seen that Pema Tsenden (the leading Tibetan director) and Sonthar Gyal are “Chinese” independent directors who move freely both inside and outside the state film industry. Therefore, in this sense, drawing upon postcolonial discourse and subaltern studies, they are definitely independent directors and their films are independent films, as they are producing an “independent expression” in their “Tibetan” films which rejects intentionally presenting Tibetan culture as exotic otherness, while their films look at the Tibetan homeland, listen to the Tibetan heart, and speak to Tibetan struggles in the context of globalisation and modernity, coming from a Tibetan’s own insight and voice. Therefore, for Tibetan filmmakers, to balance their double risks of ethnic/cultural identities (“Tibetan” and “independent”), switching effectively between two worlds (inside the state system and outside the state system) is a wise way to continue their “independent” expression/speaking and make a noticeable noise about Tibetan cultural/ethnic concerns and anxieties in Mainland China. As Pema Tsenden has stated in answer to another interview question: *Would you like to emphasise more strongly your identity as a “Tibetan” director?*¹⁰¹

Actually, I do not particularly emphasise this identity of Tibetan director; this is **emphasised by others**. I think **film is film**, and it is **not necessary** to **emphasise** this kind of **identity [of Tibetan director]**.

It can be seen that he has mentioned an important keynote notion of “others”. In other words, as I have asked in the literature review chapter through the theory of Fourth Cinema: will they (Tibetans) be a “subject” as “us” to speak to the “other” as “them” through new Tibetan cinematic representations? In this sense, does Pema Tsenden’s answer help us a little in identifying who the others are? Are they existing in Western discourse, identifying Tibetan people as a diasporic group, or in Han Chinese discourse recognising Tibetan people as an ethnic minority group? Let us go back to the discussion in Sections 4.1 and 4.2. On the one

¹⁰⁰ Han Xiaolei, “Guanyu xinyidai daoyan qun” [About the Newborn Generation of Film Directors], *Beijing dianying xueyuan xuebao* (北京电影学院学报 in simplified Chinese; literally, Journal of Beijing Film Academy) 1995, No1: 103-111.

¹⁰¹ The interview can be read through Fenghuang.com: <http://i.ifeng.com/news/sharenews.f?aid=103075454&from=timeline&isappinstalled=0>. The material, which was originally in the Chinese language, has been translated by myself. See also Footnote 79.

hand, within both of the “other” discourses (Western and Han Chinese), New Tibetan Cinema presenting/speaking in “Tibetan” discourse has been exploited and targeted by the different social/cultural “imagined communities”. Therefore, it seems necessary for Tibetan directors to downplay their “Tibetan” identities in order to have this possibility of “speaking” in an “independent” discourse that paradoxically may enable their “Tibetan” storytelling. This is because on the one hand, in the social space, I believe that Tibetan directors surely know that if their “sentiments of [Tibetan] nationalism/the struggle of searching [Tibetan culture presenting/speaking in the film space] go too far, the risks of political persecution” will be raised in the PRC (Baranovitch 2001:377). On the other hand, although Chinese independent films are not officially and legally released in the PRC, they are “legally released in other countries and contribute to redistributing this small location to different parts of the world” (Nakajima 2013:393). In other words, although, due to politics and state censorship, the speaking space of New Tibetan Cinema in “independent” discourse is very sensitive, narrow and relatively difficult, this simultaneously indicates that there is still a little room left for facilitating Tibetans (as a subaltern power group in the face of Westerners and Han Chinese) to speak/self-express through their own “Tibetan” cinema, and making them visible so that their voice can be heard.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to cope with the questions and issues raised about the cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema in the sociological discussion. The chapter has therefore explored three main questions, drawing upon the functions of social media and social discourse analysis through the natures of “Tibetan” film festivals in the context of globalisation and postcolonial/subaltern studies. These questions were: 1) What is the cultural identity of Tibetan cinema? 2) Can the subaltern (Tibetan) speak through the cinematic representations? 3) From where they can speak and practise cultural, social, and historical representations? We have seen that, firstly, the TFF led a diasporic discussion in the Western discourse, in which New Tibetan Cinema represents “Tibetan nationalism” and “Tibetanness” as an imagined community in the case of Tibetan transnational stateless nationhood. Secondly, the BFF has placed New Tibetan Cinema within the understanding of “Chinese ethnic minority” where it fits completely into Bhabha’s reference to “minority” discourse and plays the role of an internal diaspora underpinning the establishment of Han Chinese cultural hegemony. Last but not least, the LSFF drew New Tibetan Cinema into a “Chinese

independent films” discourse, to sort out whether and how the “Tibetan” speaks independently.

Although each section has attempted to examine whether New Tibetan Cinema is speaking in different discourses, it is necessary to emphasise that identifying New Tibetan Cinema is not searching the ontology of understanding the relationship between self and other, between the elite and the subaltern in the fixed social construction. Looking back to the literature review chapter, I have fully discussed the great macro-structural dominant/elitist groups in Tibetan issues, drawing upon Spivak’s (1988) question “can the subaltern speak?” In other words, the conception of “subaltern” is not fixed in my research; it is closer to a flowing relationship depending on cultural conditions compared through postcolonial insights and exploration of power. In this chapter, I have certainly concluded that New Tibetan Cinema has been taken advantage of in terms of its cultural identity to present and “speak” in the Western and Han Chinese discourses, and there is only a very small space left for Tibetans to speak/self-express independently. In other words, although Tibetans are a subaltern group in face of Western power and Han Chinese domination, the Tibetan (subaltern) can still speak through switching the space intelligently. This will reinforce several questions to explore in the next two chapters through film textual/contextual analysis; for example, can New Tibetan Cinema represent or speak for Tibetans living in the PRC? Are Tibetans speaking through the New Tibetan cinematic representations? In this way, I intend to answer the main question of how and in what way Tibetans (or Tibetan directors) speak and practise independently their society and culture in the new cinematic representations.

Chapter Five: Self-Representations of Tibetan Ethnicity and Culture within New Tibetan Cinema

Introduction

In Chapter Four, I discussed and explored the cultural identities of New Tibetan Cinema in the social space through three discourses (“diasporic” – “Western”, “ethnic minority” – “Han Chinese”, and “independent” – “Tibetan”). From this it has been concluded that although Tibetans as a subaltern/ethnic minority group are faced with Western and Han Chinese domination, Tibetans can still self-determine, self-express, and self-represent through the New Tibetan Cinema in light of the discussion of the postcolonial context and subaltern studies. As Spivak (1990:51) argues, “the individual and history, we want to see the individual consciousness as a crucial part of the effect of being a subject, which is itself a part of a much larger structure, one which is socio-political, politico-economic, psycho-sexual”. In this case, New Tibetan Cinema “is bearing witness to a [social/historical] change in Tibetan self-representation among representatives of the elite, since it is now able and willing to extol positive values” (Robin 2009:43). When Tibetans are “making their own films and videos, they speak for themselves” (Leigh 1988:88, cited in Ginsburg 1991:92). Alternatively, it can be seen that New Tibetan Cinema is also a collective Tibetan self-representation through each Tibetan filmmaker’s individual expression in the context of the interaction between Western powers and Han Chinese social, political, and historical conditions to emphasise Tibetan indigenous culture within Tibetan communities.

As has been mentioned in Chapters Three and Four, the Tibetan ethnic issue is still a sensitive issue in the PRC, and there are two risks in the ethnic/cultural identities of Tibetan directors – they are both “Tibetan” and “independent” – so that there is stricter government censorship for New Tibetan Cinema compared to other Chinese films. As a result, these Tibetan directors face limits in terms of what topics can be filmed and what content can be presented. It is therefore easy to understand why New Tibetan Cinema in the PRC generally looks at contemporary Tibetan life without apparent political orientation, searching for disappearing Tibetan culture, and celebrating Tibetan aesthetics, through traditional elements such as Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan Opera (*Prince Drime Kunden*¹⁰²) and Thangka¹⁰³ in order

¹⁰² The opera *Prince Drime Kunden*, one of the Eight Great Tibetan Operas, tells the story of a Buddhist legend about compassion and self-sacrifice.

to avoid political and dissident controversy in the public surroundings. Additionally, it has been noted in the Introduction that New Tibetan Cinema embodies the auteurist characteristics of films made in accordance with individual concerns yet echoing a collective theme both across individual filmographies and between the respective directors. In addition to the characteristics of New Tibetan Cinema that have already been introduced, such as Tibetan Amdo dialect, a cast of amateur Tibetan actors, and rejection of the exoticisation and objectification of Tibetan culture, Tibetan directors also provide a visible theme of exploration of the relationship and tension/conflict between tradition and modernity in the setting of Tibetan rural areas, rather than cities, in the context of contemporary PRC Tibetan society (Barnett 2015).

Taking this into account, this chapter, through film textual/contextual and discourse analysis, will be targeted at dealing with the research question of how the Tibetan (subaltern) can “speak”, who is speaking, and what has been “spoken” through self-representation of their ethnicity, culture and society in New Tibetan Cinema in these very limited social and cinematic spaces, in order to contribute to knowledge of the interaction of film space and social space, of postcolonialism and the field of subaltern studies. This chapter will also draw upon the auteurist approach to identify authorship through the elements of each director’s film style and structure, as well as exploring the directors’ individual voices, personal concerns and grasping the deeper social/collective meanings/significances represented by the New Tibetan Cinema. As such, the structure of this chapter will be epistemologically shaped by the discussion of the films of three Tibetan directors: Pema Tsenden, Sonthar Gyal, and Agang Yargyi respectively. This chapter has five sections. Each section will gather together one director’s films as a group to express and present the sub-themes and core of repeated motifs to hint at the highlights of the collective cinematic themes and social influence/significance of New Tibetan Cinema. More specifically, Section 5.1 briefly focuses on the film style and visual approach of Pema Tsenden’s Tibetan films. Section 5.2 will address his “Tibetan Trilogy” (*The Silent Holy Stone*, *The Search*, and *Old Dog*) and Section 5.3 will focus on his fourth feature, *The Sacred Arrow*. Following this, Section 5.4 will analyse Sonthar Gyal’s Tibetan films, before the chapter moves on to look at Agang Yargyi’s Tibetan short films in Section 5.5.

¹⁰³ Thangka (唐卡 in simplified Chinese, Tangka in Chinese Pinyin) variously also spelt as Tangka, Thanka or Tanka, is a traditional Tibetan Buddhist painting and scroll which presents a whole story in one picture, usually featuring a Tibetan Buddhist god, scene, or mandala. Please consult Appendix C to see an example of Thangka and to get a better sense of what it is.

5.1 Tibetan Films Made by Pema Tseden

This section will briefly address the film style and visual approach of four of Pema Tseden's cinematic works: the "Tibetan Trilogy" (*The Silent Holy Stone*, *The Search*, and *Old Dog*), and his fourth Tibetan feature *The Sacred Arrow*. In the next two sections, these four films will be explained through the auteurist approach as a philosophical process of his life course to experience the crisis of contemporary ethnicity and culture in different periods of his filmmaking. To echo what has been discussed in the previous chapter, Pema Tseden has mentioned that "Tibet has always been mythologized and worshipped, and made more remote", and "people's psychological expectations and experiences of Tibet are stuck in the past." (Lim 2009). Therefore, New Tibetan Cinema, especially Pema Tseden's appearance of introducing a new Tibet through his Tibetan films in Mainland China, has received much attention as a counterpoint to Han Chinese mainstream cinematic representations of Tibet which have established a tradition of exotic "otherness" and "main melody". Pema Tseden's films have also acted as a force against the orientalist and exotic Tibet constructed by Western film narratives. In general, his fiction films, on the one hand, are mostly classified in the documentary aesthetic style (Yu 2014, Grewal 2016). On the other hand, Thangka has also inspired Pema Tseden's film storytelling and visual approach. In other words, Pema Tseden does not often use close-up shots in the films, preferring to deliberately emphasise the film space environment by using long shot or extreme long shot, very slow and quiet cinematic shots, so that the pictures in the films are like a Thangka. This logic of film style has been defined as "Thangka visual style" or "Thangka film". That is to say, in one picture of film, it can be seen how storytelling is developing without any difficulty.

The conception of "Thangka visual style" or "Thangka film" could be seen as the typical aesthetic feature of New Tibetan Cinema created by the Tibetan filmmakers, Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal, since the term has also been applied to the same logic of film style in Sonthar Gyal's Tibetan films, of making a certain picture visible in one all-encompassing shot. As Sonthar Gyal has explained, "by the 'Thangka film', we [Sonthar Gyal and Pema Tseden] mean a way of expression through the cinematic lens which we attempted to use in filming *The Search*." In this sense, he has further elaborated on how traditional Tibetan Buddhist Thangka painting stresses the integrity of one picture, and at the same time the

picture presents a sense of flatness; that is to say, there is no sense of perspective.¹⁰⁴ Using a wide-angle lens, low-angle and long shot/extreme long shot highlights the repressed scenes of background and environment in the film space, meanwhile taking full advantage of expression of long takes for the film narrative to create a visual sense of continuity. This constitutes an attempt by the directors of New Tibetan Cinema to deliberately pursue the “integrity” of both frame and narrative in their film spaces. This kind of technique and approach of film shooting easily creates a powerful sense of a calm, yet oppressed environment and creates a description of details in one picture and sometimes one shot of storytelling in the filmic narrative. In this way, the film spaces will relatively easily establish and construct an oppressed environment/atmosphere to reflect and express the sense of search and anxiety for Tibet’s disappearing culture and identity.

5.2 The “Tibetan Trilogy”

The focus of this section is Pema Tsenden’s first three features, which have been called the “Tibetan Trilogy”: *The Silent Holy Stone*, *The Search*, and *Old Dog*. These were consciously made as a group of Tibetan films expressing his personal concern for Tibetan culture and society through a consistent set of stylish and thematic aesthetics. Several scholars have discussed various themes of Pema Tsenden’s “Tibetan Trilogy”; for example, Yu (2014) and Lo (2016) have both placed his films in the Buddhist motif and landscape, while Berry (2016) has read his films in the genre of Tibetan road movie instead of the category of “ethnic minority films” in the PRC. However, I would argue that, while each of the films of the “Tibetan Trilogy” is quite different, there are indeed some similarities between them. Each film of the trilogy has an individual sub-thematic expression but also connects to the others and echoes the collective theme of New Tibetan Cinema reflecting the tension and conflict between tradition and modernity. Alternatively, the relationship between tradition and modernity in a Tibetan (Amdo) rural setting can also be deconstructed in these films into a further two relationships to present social tension and conflict in the context of the PRC and globalisation. These are the relationships firstly between Tibetan indigenous culture and Han Chinese culture, and secondly between religion and secularism. In the first case, after the events of 1951, “the state began sending cadres and industrial workers of China’s ethnic

¹⁰⁴ The notions of “Thangka visual style” (唐卡影像风格 in simplified Chinese, *Tangka yingxiang fengge* in Chinese Pinyin) and “Thangka film” (唐卡电影 in simplified Chinese, *Tangka dianying* in Chinese Pinyin) come from Sonthar Gyal’s interview at the Lhasa Film Festival, *Dialogue: Ten Questions with Sonthar Gyal in Lhasa*. The information can be read at <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/NoDb1f4CAgRE07uPmc934g>. The material was originally in the Chinese language. See also Footnote 103.

majority Han to Tibet to aid its modernization” (Zhu and Qian 2015:145). In the second case, there is also something to be said about dealing with Tibetan ethnic issues, especially the relations between Tibetans and Han Chinese in the context of the contemporary PRC, which also marks an important dynamic between religion and secularism in the Tibetan context. Although Tibetan Buddhism “heavily influenced the Ming and Qing emperors’ outlook on diplomacy and governance and it is shaping Buddhism’s development among Han today” (Sautman 2005:105), Tibetan Buddhism is the “national religion” for all Tibetans while Han Chinese usually describe themselves as so-called secularists.

At the same time, Pema Tsenden’s films are male in their main storytelling response to the social conflicts in the context of Tibetan culture and ethnicity. As Berry (2016:97) has pointed out, “the protagonists undertaking the journeys in all of [Pema Tsenden’s films] are also male”. This has been called “Tibetan Masculinities on the Road” (Barnett 2015:143). This can be seen throughout his “Tibetan Trilogy”. The protagonist in *The Silent Holy Stones* is the monk, a representative of Tibetan Buddhism; in *The Search*, the leading character is Prince Drime Kunden, a disappearing Tibetan spiritual legendary figure, who does not exactly exist but is searched for in the film space by a director and his filmmaking crews; and in the space of *Old Dog*, the main portrayed narrative concerns an androcentric comparison and conflict between the attitudes of the old Tibetan herder, a Tibetan “father”, and his son to the Tibetan mastiff. In this way, the three films of the “Tibetan Trilogy” can be understood as a philosophical process of filmmaking with the androcentric centre represented respectively within the themes from “struggle” to “search” and then arrive at “spiritual suicide”, to set out the different periods of Pema Tsenden’s cinematic representation of Tibet, and display the life course of his personal visions and experiences in the crisis of contemporary Tibetan culture and ethnicity. In this sense, this section, on the other hand, is going to read the “Tibetan Trilogy” in the context of “struggle, search, spiritual suicide”, exploring Tibetan culture and ethnicity within the relationship between religion and secularism, between Tibetan indigenous culture and Han Chinese culture, and between tradition and modernity in the face of the economic boom in the PRC and globalisation. On the other hand, I will also position his films in the context of Han Chinese domination to explore social changes in the development of Tibetan civilisation.

5.2.1 *The Silent Holy Stones* – Struggle

At the beginning of Pema Tsenden’s “Tibetan Trilogy”, it can be found that “struggle” permeates the film in which Pema Tsenden started to think about what has happened and changed in Tibet. In *The Silent Holy Stones*, a little monk travels home from his monastery to spend the Tibetan New Year (*Losar*) with his family; the film looks at the social transformation of contemporary Tibet and explores the Tibetan struggle taking place among the younger generation. It can be seen that in the film, Pema Tsenden takes advantage of television (Figure 13A) as an important modern medium to connect the film narrative and explore the changes of Tibetan social life within and between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, and Tibetan indigenous culture and Han Chinese culture. In this case, the CCTV¹⁰⁵ news (in Chinese Mandarin), Tibetan traditional opera (*The Story of Prince Drime Kunden*), the Tibetan New Year Gala (provided by the Han Chinese government in Tibetan, but playing on CCTV), the Han Chinese comic-religious television series *Journey to the West*, and a Hong Kong action film were all playing through the TV (and/or VCD). In the film, TV can be seen as a symbol of modernity, secularism and outside culture (in this case, Han Chinese/Western culture), which obviously has brought a challenge to Tibetan traditional culture.



A. TV(VCD)

B. Traditional opera stage

Figure 13. *The Story of Prince Drime Kunden* shown in two different media

For example, firstly, television drama as a modern show is displacing the traditional Tibetan opera, as the little monk is more interested in the Han Chinese comic-religious television series *Journey to the West*,¹⁰⁶ so that the little monk even asks his father to bring the TV and

¹⁰⁵ CCTV: the People’s Republic of China’s official media station. Its full title is China Central Television.

¹⁰⁶ *Journey to the West* is a story of Tansen Lama, a famous Han Buddhist monk, learning and getting the Sutra from ancient India in order to develop Han Buddhism in the history of the Tang Dynasty.

VCD from home to the monastery, and he puts the mask of the Monkey King¹⁰⁷ into his pocket before going to pray. Obviously, those behaviours have led to a conflict with the Tibetan traditional, religious and indigenous culture. Secondly, there is a detail in the film space, that whether in the Han Chinese comic-religious television series *Journey to the West*, or a Hong Kong action film, the depiction of sex in secular culture has attacked the Tibetan religion culture through the eyes of the little monk. Thirdly, it can be seen in the film space (Figure 13), two different media present the Tibetan traditional opera, *The Story of Prince Drime Kunden*: a modern medium, TV (Figure 13A) and a traditional opera stage (Figure 13B). In this case, the film explores how the little monk and other children representing the Tibetan younger generation prefer to watch TV rather than sitting in the front of opera stage, which is shaping a contrast with the Tibetan older generation. Apart from the TV, Pema Tsenden also uses disco and jeans to represent the young generation in contrast to the old generation, which denies them. Tibetan traditional/indigenous culture has finally been impacted by imported culture from Western and Han Chinese; this is present-day Tibet, a Tibet characterised by conflict.



Figure 14. The child monk's brother reads aloud in Mandarin Chinese learned at school

There is a particular sequence involving the little monk and his brother (Figure 14) that expresses the Tibetan conflicts and struggles between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, and Tibetan indigenous culture and Han Chinese culture. The little monk represents Tibetan characteristics of religion, Tibetan indigenous culture, and tradition, in that he dresses in a red traditional Tibetan Buddhist frock, and is educated in a monastery. In Tibetan areas, there were once no schools and monasteries actually took on the functions of schools. In other words, in the past, Tibetans carried forward their cultural heritage from

¹⁰⁷ Monkey King (Chinese name SUN Wukong (孙悟空 in simplified Chinese)), is a main/leading character with supernatural powers in *Journey to the West*.

generation to generation through the monastery. However, compared with the little monk, his brother represents the features of secularism, Han Chinese culture, and modernity as a kind of Tibetan-Chinese identity. It can be seen in the sequence that he dresses in a modern white jacket (Figure 14B), the back of which has been decorated by English letters and a flag symbol; this style of clothing can be considered as a kind of force of modernity and secularism in contrast to the Tibetan traditional Buddhist frock. At the same time, he studies at the Han Chinese government school; not only learning Tibetan, but also Chinese Mandarin.

In this scene of the film, the little monk asks his brother why he is learning Chinese Mandarin in school. His brother replies that Chinese Mandarin can enable him in the future to go to the big city and buy a TV for the family. To be sure, in the PRC, the official language is Mandarin Chinese, which is regarded as the Han Chinese mother tongue. Unless “you” are educated in Mandarin, “you” cannot achieve “elite” status in PRC society, as seen in the case of Pema Tseden himself. It has been said that “[t]here [is] only one language the world understands and listens to and that language is violence” (Sautman 2005:98). However, Pema Tseden does not give us a clear attitude in response to all the conflicts and struggles that in his eyes make up the present situation of Tibet. These conflicts and struggles are not seen as the “simple opposition between the negative and the positive” (Berry 2016:99). The conflicted Tibet constructed in Pema Tseden’s films actually represents a struggle for and reflection on social change and disappearing Tibetan ethnicity and culture under the dominance of Han Chinese culture/politics, and the force of modernity (outside culture) bearing down on Tibetans. We can, therefore, see his journey of searching for Tibetan identity and culture, since the concern and anxiety rose in the next film of the “Tibetan Trilogy”.

5.2.2 *The Search* – Search

Experiencing the struggle, after starting to reflect on how the Tibetan ethnicity and culture have been changed in the contemporary Tibet in *The Silent Holy Stones*, Pema Tseden goes on in the next step of his Tibetan cinematic representational period to identify the marginalised and to search for disappearing Tibetan culture in the context of the PRC. In his second Tibetan film, *The Search*, a “Road Movie”, Pema Tseden begins a search for the lost Tibetan traditional culture that “takes the viewer straight into the heart of a changing

Tibet”.¹⁰⁸ This film tells a story of a Tibetan film director travelling from village looking for actors to star in a film based on a Tibetan opera, *The Story of Prince Drime Kunden*. In the film, the “search” not only means looking for an actor, but is also “a search for the soul of Tibetan civilization in...contemporary Tibet based on Pema Tseden’s observation of younger generations of Tibet who are losing touch with their ancient [Tibetan] tradition” (Yu 2014:135).



A

B

Figure 15. *The Search*

The Search has applied the same logic of painting and storytelling employed within the traditional Thangka. As can be seen in Figure 15, Pema Tseden uses an extreme long shot to create a calm visual style, through a depiction of basic Tibetan areas’ environment, which establishes a certain social space of contemporary Tibetan life visible in an all-encompassing picture to the audience. Pema Tseden has said that it is important for his films to focus on “the basic condition of people in Tibet, as well as their basic emotional life”.¹⁰⁹ In this process of searching, to search for an actor is very hard, as in the film space, from one village to another, one town to another, the young Tibetan generation begin to suspect the prince, Drime Kunden, who sacrifices everything, including his wife and children, and finally even his eyes, for the benefit of others. On his journey, the director comes face-to-face not only with the rapid changes occurring across the Tibetan areas but also with immutable aspects of Tibetan traditional culture, for example, that “compassion embodied is hard to find” (Robin 2009:41), which Pema Tseden has called “the fundamental principle of Buddhism in

¹⁰⁸ Asia Society (2010), *Film Series: Soul-Searching in Tibet*, <http://asiasociety.org/film-series-soul-searching-tibet>.

¹⁰⁹ Asia Society (2010), *Pema Tseden: Tibetan films for Tibetan People*, <http://asiasociety.org/arts/film/pema-tseden-tibetan-films-tibetan-people>.

Tibet”.¹¹⁰ In this case, Prince Drime Kunden seems to “have become a past tense of the present Tibet to the collective memory of Tibetans” (Yu 2014:135).

Therefore, in the film space, searching for an actor to play the role of Prince Drime Kunden in the Tibetan opera becomes very difficult. To be sure, as Pema Tseden has said, “that’s really how things are” in the current social space. Discussing the challenges of Tibetan opera, he added:

In some areas, villagers always used to perform the Tibetan operas, and everyone would go to watch. But people aren’t interested anymore, and it’s harder to see them performed. Some places still want to continue, but they’ve received many challenges. Tibetan opera is a symbol of Tibetan culture.

(2014, 27th Jun)¹¹¹

As the above comment suggests, it can be understood that, in the social space, Tibetan operas represent a form of Tibetan traditional culture that seems to belong to the past in present-day Tibet. It can be seen in the film space that the young Tibetan generations are interested in non-Tibetan (Western/Han Chinese) popular art performance, for example disco and modern dance, instead of Tibetan traditional opera. In this case, it can be argued that Tibetan culture is now marginalised and disappearing under pressure from outside cultures, namely the culture of the PRC’s “national modernity”. Tibetans in the PRC, like other ethnic minorities in Mainland China, are characterised using the trope of exotic customs; thus, “[t]heir ‘primitivity’ contrasts with supposed Han ‘modernity’” (Gladney 1994:102). In other words, “Han Chinese almost universally had looked upon Tibetan tradition as backward and feudal” (Karmel 1995–1996:486). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) usually takes advantage of a discourse of “liberation” to frame and explain their practices in Tibet. They suggest that since 1951, the CCP has attempted to build up “modernity” in the Tibetan areas – for example through road construction (as we can see in Figure 15B), through encouraging the use of the car instead of the horse, and through the promotion of government schooling instead of the monastery – to draw the Tibetan people from an assumed “primitivity” to “modernity”.

However, as has been discussed in the Literature Review, the fact cannot be ignored that both Han Chinese and Tibetans “are ‘prisoners of modernity’”, a modernity whose terms have been dictated by the West as a political actor as well as an ideational construct” (Anand

¹¹⁰ Trace Foundation (2010), *On the Road with Pema Tseden*, <http://www.trace.org/profile/road-pema-tseden>.

¹¹¹ The interview’s quotation comes from *Director Seeks to Capture Life in Modern Tibet* (Lim 2009). This can be accessed at <https://www.mprnews.org/story/npr/106089201>.

2006:285). In the postcolonial discourse, if we look at the framework of “dominant/elitist construction” of Tibetan issues,¹¹² usually the PRC can be seen as the political subaltern relative to Western countries (e.g. the USA) in international relations; and then Tibetans as the subaltern/ethnic minority controlled by the Han Chinese majority in the PRC. As a result, Tibetan traditional culture is disappearing through the intersections of Western and Han Chinese influences. As Pema Tsenden shows in the film space, pop music and disco can catch the young generation’s attention rather than Tibetan traditional opera, and Han Chinese Mandarin looks more useful than the Tibetan language. At the end of *The Search*, Pema Tsenden does not tell the audience whether the search for disappearing Tibetan disappearing culture was successful or not. However, two years later, in his third fiction film, *Old Dog*, Pema Tsenden attempted to express a dramatic and clear metaphorical message and attitude through the tragic death of an old Tibetan mastiff, to disclose the Tibetan powerlessness experienced in the face of Hancentrism and globalisation.

5.2.3 *Old Dog* – Spiritual Suicide

Compared with *The Silent Holy Stones* and *The Search*, at the end of *Old Dog* Pema Tsenden gives a clearer attitude to contemporary Tibetan culture and ethnicity. *Old Dog* is also more political and controversial, its narrative showing a sense of the frustration and pain of lost Tibetan culture under the pressures of contemporary Chinese society and economic globalisation through a series of tragic events and the death of a Tibetan mastiff. This breed of dog is used by Tibetan nomads and herders to guard their tents and farms as a part of their family, but has become an object of desire and vulgar display of wealth among Han Chinese people. This has created a lucrative trade market in Tibetan mastiffs, which has forced Tibetan families to sell their dogs before they are stolen. Therefore, a comparison regarding Tibetan manhood has been made in the film space, in which the son thinks that it is better to get money before the mastiff is stolen, while his father, an old Tibetan herder, draws on Tibetan tradition and rejects the idea of selling the Tibetan mastiff as a commodity. There also is a conflict between the old Tibetan herder and his son in the transportation they use (Figure 16). The son travels by motorcycle (Figure 16A) to sell the Tibetan mastiff, while the father rides a horse (Figure 16B) to redeem the dog. Through this depiction of the different

¹¹² This kind of framework of “dominant/elitist construction” of Tibetan issues has fully been discussed in the Literature Review. The framework updates Guha’s definition (1988) of social production in India and has been influenced by Spivak (1988). Although the limitation of “dominant/elitist construction” is that it has the character of mobility, which means it can change depending on different micro conditions, it provides a macro socio-political structure which makes us look at and consider Tibetan issues from different sides and conditions.

transportation used by the son and the father, Pema Tseden creates a conflicted space which shows the argument between the young generation and the old generation in the context of the social transformation in Tibetan civilisation caused by the PRC’s “national modernity”.



A. The Son

B. The Father (old Tibetan herder)

Figure 16. Different transportation used by son and father

TV appears again in this film space, with the playing of a vulgar commercial advertisement in Chinese Mandarin, which delivers an uncompromising reflection on the abrasion of old values by the economic promises posed by consumerist culture under the PRC’s national modernity. It can also be noted in the film space that the old Tibetan herder’s son is infertile, which can be understood as representing a symbolic castration of the Tibetan younger generation’s manhood, and a symbolic castration of Tibetan culture in modern PRC/international society. This all leads the film towards a more politically controversial discussion about the practice of “cultural genocide” by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) “that rapidly erodes traditional [Tibetan] lifestyle and values” (Lo 2016:158) than can be found in the previous two films, which also depict Tibetan culture’s past and future in the face of Han Chinese domination and globalisation. However, interestingly, Pema Tseden himself offered an ambiguous response on this subject, saying that “If you think it is political then perhaps it is political; it was not made deliberately as a Tibetan film involving a discourse of “Tibet–China” political criticism, and all I have done is to try to show life as it is in Tibet today.”¹¹³

Old *Dog*’s highly observant film space narrative reveals artistic insight into the current social challenges facing Tibetans, gently moving toward the final tragic sequence (Figure 17)¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Q&A responses at the China Independent Film Festival UK Celebration, Newcastle upon Tyne, 12th – 15th May 2014.

¹¹⁴ As I mentioned in Chapter Four, this final tragic sequence was cut out by Pema Tseden for political reasons (because of Mainland China’s government film censorship), in order to gain the release permit for *Old Dog* to

that epitomises the old herder's conflicted view of the future of Tibetan culture. This final sequence is very important to Pema Tsenden; he has said that it was because of the idea of this ending that the film was made. If we look at this sequence, it can be seen that there is a very limited amount of sky in the film space, as the film is intended to show repressed emotion and an oppressed environment. Through the low-angle and long or extreme long shot, the film emphasises the status of Tibetan humans within the film space environment and social space background, to show the relationship between Tibetans and the current situation. In Figure 17, at the climax of the film, the Tibetan mastiff is killed by being hung from a fence pole in the open grassland (Figure 17 B, C). The fence pole (Figure 17A) highlights the cinematic representation, as a symbolic object. The reason is that such fences in the Tibetan grasslands were erected by the state as a means of dividing and distributing the land, and in this way act as symbols of the PRC's "national modernity".



A



B



C



D

Figure 17. The Tibetan nomad mastiff is killed by the old herder in *Old Dog*

be shown in public cinemas in Mainland China. Therefore, there are two editions of *Old Dog*. But the edition with this final sequence is the one mainly analysed in this thesis, as it is the core version of the film, and the one that can be watched overseas or on DVD release.

Although the film's ending is cruel for the Tibetan mastiff, this cruel death will free the dog from the tragic destiny in which it becomes a commodity to sell among Han Chinese, or to be stolen by a dealer in order to be sold among Han Chinese. In other words, Tibetan culture is under a process of cultural commodification. Not only have Tibetan material and artistic production/artefacts responded to a growth of commodification (Anand 2000:279), but the Tibetan mastiff has also become involved as an expansion in the market for "ethnic/exotic" goods has occurred in Han Chinese circles. In this case, the Han Chinese can be considered to have inherited the values of Western consumerism due to the influences of globalization in the postcolonial discourse, which echoes the framework of "dominant/elitist construction" of Tibetan issues. Although Pema Tseden points out that he did not want to deliberately evoke a political discussion, for viewers, the Tibetan mastiff symbolises Tibetan culture and therefore the death of the dog is suggestive of the destruction of Tibetan culture and ethnicity in the contemporary PRC's national/international power/conditions. Therefore, Pema Tseden has offered up the phrase "spiritual suicide"¹¹⁵ to describe this metaphorical meaning of the Tibetan mastiff's "death", which appears philosophically to be the only way for Pema Tseden as a Tibetan intellectual to guard the dignity of Tibetan ethnicity and culture when "everything has changed"¹¹⁶ due to the forces of outsiders in Tibet.

5.3 Beyond the "Tibetan Trilogy"

This section will make a comparison between the "Tibetan Trilogy" and another Pema Tseden film, *The Sacred Arrow*, and will also add to the analysis of his philosophical process of filmmaking through the auteurist approach. Two years after the release of the last of the "Tibetan Trilogy", Pema Tseden brought out his fourth feature, *The Sacred Arrow* (the title literally means "Arrow of Five Colours" (五彩神箭 in simplified Chinese, *Wucai Shenjian* in Chinese Pinyin), to audiences. The film was made in Jianzha County, Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qianghai Province (Amdo, ethnographic Tibet), where there is a real place called "Arrow of Five Colours" – a famous name as "(the People's Republic of) China National Archery Sport Country" given by the Han Chinese authorities, and also a birthplace of Tibetan Buddhism during the "Back Period" (后弘期 in simplified Chinese, *Houhong Qi* in Chinese Pinyin). The film tells the story of the thousand-year-old Amdo Tibetan tradition of the archery competition, which is still a male setting in a Tibetan rural place, as with Pema

¹¹⁵ The reference can be found in *Spiritual Suicide in Pema Tseden's Contemporary Tibet* (Wei 2012): <http://aaww.org/spiritual-suicide-in-pema-tsedens-contemporary-tibet/>.

¹¹⁶ See Footnote 116.

Tseden's "Tibetan Trilogy". Though centred on the rivalry between two young master archers from neighbouring villages, it also represents the conflict, the friendships, love entanglements, ancient traditions and spiritual traditions. In a new and changing era, Tibetans carry forward their cultural heritage from generation to generation.¹¹⁷ In other words, the film returns again to Pema Tseden's homeland, looking for another profile of "new"/"modern" Tibet. The film narrative deals with the changes in Tibetan social life, in order to set out Pema Tseden's cinematic representation of Tibet permeating in the relationship between tradition and modernity in the context of exploring the challenges within the development of Tibetan civilisation.

5.3.1 *The Sacred Arrow* – Return

The film *The Sacred Arrow* presents a new generation of Tibetans embracing new archery technologies and disrespecting their old customs. It partly continues the themes of the "Tibetan Trilogy", in that it clearly has a number of critiques reflecting the search and anxiety for disappearing Tibetan disappearing culture, in respect to the relationship between tradition and modernity. However, there are there significant differences between *The Sacred Arrow* and the "Tibetan Trilogy". The first is that this is Pema Tseden's first Tibetan fiction film to feature a cast of non-amateur actors. The leading actors are all famous Tibetan film stars. In fact, they almost have a superior reputation in professional performance among Tibetan people in Mainland China and the international sphere. The list of the film cast has been called the "Tibetan Dream Team" in a Tibetan stardom discourse by Mainland Chinese public media transmitting to the audiences.¹¹⁸ Secondly, it is the first time that Pema Tseden has depicted a kind of "Romeo and Juliet romantic love story" and shown the conflict of men's friendships in a film narrative. Famous Tibetan film/TV stars, an "ethnic/exotic" romantic love story, and the conflict between two men; these three factors show that the film embraces the concept of the Chinese commercial film category and indicate that the film intends to attract a larger audience, is concerned with box office receipts and aims to spread its influences both among Tibetans and beyond the Tibetan setting in a national "Chinese" discourse.

¹¹⁷ This English film synopsis is translated from the Chinese language version presented at the 5th Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival, Beijing, China, 16th–23rd April 2015.

¹¹⁸ This can be found in Chinese news reports about the film, *The Sacred Arrow*. One example is here: http://yue.ifeng.com/businessnews/detail_2013_11/20/31412973_0.shtml?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0

The film has enjoyed a wider release and has made a broader impact than the previous three films, as it has undertaken a propaganda task/function through the medium of film in the PRC. Therefore, thirdly, like other Chinese “ethnic minority films”, the film has been involved in a discussion concerning the discourse of the “main melody”, in reference to the Chinese government’s minorities policy, in order to express one “national style” practised in the Chinese national cinema. Returning to the discussion in Section 4.3.3 (Independent Discourse and New Tibetan Cinema), this film can be seen as no longer involving a “Tibetan” “independent” film discourse; instead it could be defined as a “Chinese state system” production. The film programme was formally established by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China,¹¹⁹ and received funding support from the Qinghai Province Jiansha County Government¹²⁰. For this film, then, Pema Tsenden was in some sense working for the dominant Han Chinese authorities, and the aim of the film is to promote Amdo Tibet culture and tourism as a part of Chinese nationalism and Chinese ethnic minorities’ culture.

It can be thought that the “consumption” of Tibetan traditional archery sport culture as “ethnic/exotic otherness” is in line with the dominant and state ideologies for building Chinese nationhood and promoting ethnic unity as a critical practice by the notion of Chinese cinema. It appears to fit the “minority discourse” that has been applied in Chinese “ethnic minority film” studies, as I have discussed more fully in the Literature Review chapter and in Chapter Four when looking at New Tibetan Cinema in the Han Chinese discourse. In this case, it seems to raise a problematic issue concerning Chinese “Tibetan ethnic minority films” studies: have Pema Tsenden’s Tibetan films been placed within the frame of “main melody” discourse? As we saw in the Literature Review chapter, in the discussion of the Tibetan films made by Han Chinese directors, these films involved the themes of “main melody”, exotic otherness, and building Chinese nationhood. A complicated question will therefore be asked here: can we think that Pema Tsenden (as a Tibetan director) deliberately made a Tibetan film as “ethnic exotica” for (Han) Chinese audiences and the authorities, in order to achieve the goal of building Chinese nationhood and become involved in the “main melody” discussion in the practice of Chinese national cinema?

Through the “Tibetan Trilogy”, Pema Tsenden created a new system of culture representing Tibetans in New Tibetan Cinema, focusing a great deal of effort at demythologising Tibet,

¹¹⁹ See Footnote 75.

¹²⁰ See Footnote 119.

making Tibetans' own films in which Tibetans try to speak for themselves, without the exotic otherness in the Chinese national/Western film industry. That is to say, his appearance in the PRC has received much attention as a counterpoint to Han Chinese mainstream cinematic representations of Tibet, which have established a tradition of "exotic otherness" and "main melody". However, it should be noted that Pema Tseden is not only a Tibetan, but also a Tibetan-Chinese. In this sense, definitely, in his "Tibetan Trilogy", his representation of the Tibetan culture through the medium of film enters an internal-deep expression rather than a superficial exploration. But why did Pema Tseden make the Tibetan film *The Sacred Arrow* as a film task for the Han Chinese authorities? This will return us to the discussion in Chapter Four on the "independent" discourse. In other words, at least at the moment, his films cannot move beyond the Chinese identity, and building Chinese nationhood through his film promotions is necessary for his filmmaking career; echoing the statement of the Han Chinese authorities who emphasise to "the Chinese populace over and over again that China is a multi-ethnic and multinational state – a point that is critical to China's representation of itself to itself, and to the international sphere" (Gladney 1994:96).

5.3.2 "Return" through Tibetan Manhood

Now let us leave the social space for a while and enter the film space. As pleasant and beautiful in sound and vision as the film is, there is not much in the way of depth to the film story. Although there is a limitation to how far the film can be seen as being "independent", Pema Tseden has tried his best in a "limited space" to continue an important theme discussing the modernisation of Tibet. To be sure, this film is still standing at the androcentric centre to sketch out the tension and conflict between tradition and modernity, cohering with the crisis of Tibetan manhood in the film narrative (Berry 2016). In other words, it can be argued that Pema Tseden in the film space explores and describes the images of Tibetan manhood in the culture of sporting competition, and possibly leads a brief discussion on the structure of masculinity in Tibet, being a "real man" and "true man". The Amdo Tibetan archery competition is an ancient form of bringing boys into manhood and connects villages and villagers to their collective history. At the beginning of the film narrative, in the Tibetan region of Amdo, the neighbouring villages of Lhalong and Damo hold an annual archery competition. According to a thousand-year-old tradition, the winner will keep an arrow, a sacred relic, until the following year's archery competition.

Thanks to the shooting of Nyima (Figure 18A), this year the sacred arrow goes to the Damo team again. However, Lhalong's ace archer, Dradon (Figure 18B) dismisses the Nyima team's achievement and effort, and complains that Nyima's victory was assisted by God and was lucky. At the same time, Nyima is in love with Dradon's sister Dekyid. Therefore, after Dradon loses the legendary sacred arrow, he begins to be a "bad" man, and there occurs a crisis of his Tibetan manhood in a chain reaction of unfortunate behaviour, which includes setting up obstacles to the relationship between Nyima and Dekyid, inflicting a head wound on Nyima, and illegally using modern bows to win the next year's archery competition. In this case, the illegal use of modern bows is very important to the film narrative, as this is the only sequence to describe the conflict of the relationship between tradition and modernity in "modern" Tibetan culture and society. As can be seen in Figure 18, Nyima (Figure 18A) uses the traditional bows and arrows. In this discourse, Nyima is a "good" man, in that he is tolerant and willing to make peace with the "unfair" competition. By contrast, Dradon's character is the more interesting one of the "bad" man. As we can see from Figure 18B, he uses new (modern) bows and arrows, breaking the rules of the game, making the competition unfair, and resulting in the results of the competition being declared invalid.



A. Traditional bows and arrows (Nyima)



B. Modern bows and arrows (Dradon)

Figure 18. Tradition vs Modernity

Alternatively, Pema Tsenden presents the images of Tibetan manhood through Nyima embracing the Tibetan indigenous archery culture in which the ideal and traditional Tibetan man must display courage, self-confidence, and manly temperament. A "real Tibetan man" is disciplined and independent and he is never a complainer. Moreover, the film is also really about Dradon's rite of passage into a "true" manhood, being instructed to "act like a man" and "to be a man", which includes learning to be a graceful loser. This means that "[n]obody was born a man; you earned manhood provided you were good enough" (Mailer 1968:25,

cited in Gilmore 1990:19). That is to say, through the contrast between two images of Tibetan masculinity, Pema Tseden attempts to build the binary logic of Tibetan ethnicity/culture construction, which is an image of “original/true/positive” Tibetan manhood connecting with the Tibetan traditional/indigenous culture, and to shape a portrait of “adventive/lost/negative” Tibetan manhood linked to the context of modernisation. At the end of *The Sacred Arrow*, Dradon admits his defeat and approbates Nyima’s achievement. Then there takes place a “neutral” and “fair” archery competition between Nyima and Dradon in the city, with the final result declaring them equal, and all is forgiven and forgotten in a forced conflict resolution. In other words, this ending, on the one hand, conforms to the Han Chinese authorities’ “main melody” propaganda slogans of sporting competition: “Friendship First, Competition Second”. On the other hand, it indicates necessarily that Pema Tseden’s sentiments of Tibetan nationalism and Tibetan cultural/social concern cannot go too far in the context of Han Chinese cultural domination. Now let us think of a question: how can we position this film as a product made for Han Chinese authority in the philosophical process of Pema Tseden’s filmmaking; after the symbolic “death” in *Old Dog*, which was Pema Tseden’s Tibetan intellectual response to guard the dignity of Tibetan ethnicity and culture when “everything has changed” due to the forces of outsiders in Tibet? Some ideas about this can be discussed through analysis of a conversation between myself and Pema Tseden about *The Sacred Arrow*, which was conducted at the Central Minzu University of China, Beijing:

Yang Li: How should we understand your new film in relation to issues of tradition challenged by modernity? As according to my observation and reading through your other interviews, in your last film of the “Tibetan Trilogy”, *Old Dog*, you offered up two phrases: “spiritual suicide” and “everything has changed” to describe the meaning of the Tibetan mastiff’s “death”, suggesting that the Tibetan mastiff symbolises the Tibetan culture.

Pema Tseden: This may be a kind of return, a return concerned with rethinking Tibetan culture.

Yang Li: So, do you mean by “**return**” that the conflict between modernisation and Tibetan traditional culture is diminishing now?

Pema Tseden: It cannot be said that this is diminishing. This is more a rethinking of the position of Tibetan culture in the modern civilisation. It is a new difference and challenge which Tibetan culture may be faced with as part of the processes of social development and changing personal understandings.

(2015, 21th March)¹²¹

¹²¹ The data was collected during my field trip to Beijing; the language used in the conversations was Mandarin Chinese, which has been translated by myself.

From these comments, it can be seen that Pema Tseden uses the word “return” to point out that this film is a new start for reconsideration of Tibet/Tibetan culture in the modern context. However, this return is not an acknowledgement that the tension and conflict between tradition and modernity in the Tibetan context is diminishing. Rather, it stresses that it is the beginning of a rethinking of Tibetan culture in relation to modernity. This suggests that Pema Tseden’s Tibetan cinematic representations have entered into a new period, re-displaying the life course of his Tibetan filmmaking through the changes in social development and changes in his personal understanding and experiences of the crisis of contemporary Tibetan culture and ethnicity. Following this understanding of “the return” throughout this film, now let us think about a related question: What has been returned to or what will come back through this film? In this case, I would like to argue that, in this film, Pema Tseden represents the Tibetan culture “Returning” from “Spiritual Suicide” to begin a new form of “Struggle” about Tibetan ethnicity and culture in relation to modernisation and the Han Chinese, after the intense struggle and throes presented in the “Tibetan Trilogy”. Below I will sketch out the thematic structure of Pema Tseden’s filmmaking philosophical process (Figure 19), in which this film functions as a transitional production to pacify Han Chinese authority and is leading and drawing a new “struggle” to come back, which is set in in a new social context and film narrative.

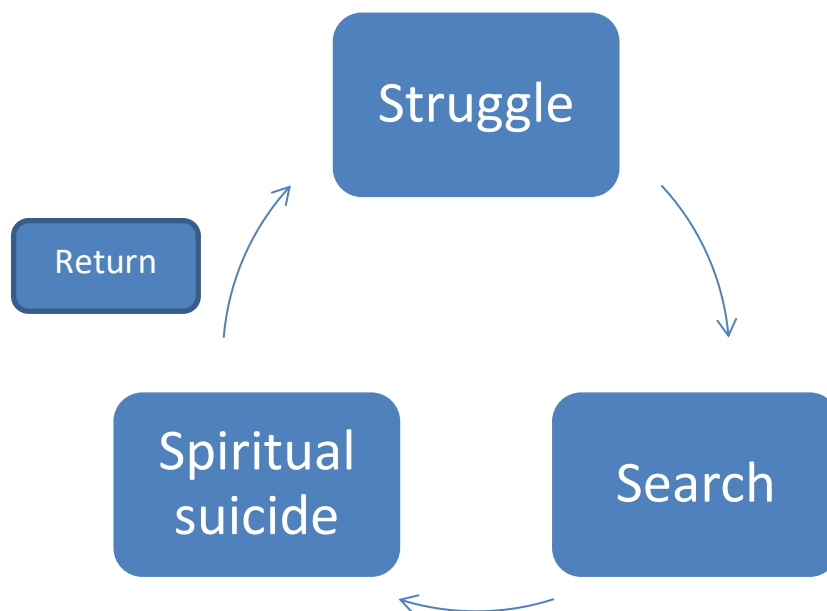


Figure 19. The thematic structure of Pema Tseden’s Tibetan films

It can be explained (see Figure 19) that the “Tibetan Trilogy” and *The Sacred Arrow* started a journey to understand the central theme of responding to Tibetan social tensions and conflicts in the different periods of Pema Tseden’s cinema. It began with “struggle” over what has been changed in Tibet, went through the “search” for the disappearing Tibetan culture and identity and finally resulted in “spiritual suicide” to guard the dignity of Tibetan culture and ethnicity. After going through “return” to re-think the social/cultural tensions and conflicts in the Tibetan context, a new “struggle” for contemporary Tibet has now come back and is presented in his latest film, *Tharlo*.¹²² In this case, Pema Tseden’s personal concerns and history of filmmaking for Tibetan ethnicity and culture – this philosophical process – moves in an ascending spiral, not in a straight line. Although this research does not deal with the new film *Tharlo*, it can be still mentioned briefly that the film concentrates, on the one hand, on representing the key figure (Tharlo), to construct a new form of struggle. He can speak Chinese, leads a secular life, and is lost in searching for his identity in the relations between tradition and modernity. The setting is no longer in a rural place, which reflects different considerations and personal concerns for Pema Tseden compared with his “struggle” in *The Silent Holy Stones* for Tibetan culture and identity. On the other hand, “*Tharlo* marks an interesting departure, because here, for the first time, the primary relationship is between a man and a woman....The space of the town is marked as both modern and female” (Berry 2016:98). From here woman seems to be taking on this “new” responsibility, responding to the social conflicts and tensions for Tibetan culture and ethnicity, rather than there being only males in Pema Tseden’s film narrative.

5.4 Tibetan Films Made by Sonthar Gyal

Sonthar Gyal’s Tibetan films, which comprise *The Sun Beaten Path* and *The River*, have also contributed to the New Tibetan Cinema through his personal voice and concern to reflect the social conflicts between tradition and modernity in contemporary Tibet. In terms of his two films, his debut feature *The Sun Beaten Path*,¹²³ a low-budget digital cinema production but a great success, is a “Road Movie” based on a true story which narrates a storyline of a deeply-conflicted and guilt-ridden young Tibetan man on his way back from a pilgrimage to Lhasa

¹²² See Footnote 27.

¹²³ In 2011, *The Sun Beaten Path* was the winner of the Vancouver International Film Festival’s prestigious Dragons & Tigers Award for Young Cinema. The news report: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/tibetan-road-movie-sun-beaten-245237>. It was also nominated for Best Film in the Asian New Talent Awards at the 14th Shanghai International Film Festival. In 2013, the film won the Best Director award in the 3rd Golden Koala International Chinese Film Festival.

after he caused his mother's death in a tragic motor accident. Three years on, in *The River*,¹²⁴ the director, through a young girl's perspective, draws the relationship between her father and grandfather to further explore familial relationships in Tibetan daily life. These two films have repeated the film aesthetic style and visual approach that was mainly used in Pema Tseden's Tibetan cinema: the documentary aesthetic style and Thangka visual style which reflects a deeper landscape and cultural sensibility of Tibet and implies the director's deep-seated concerns for Tibetan society. However, compared with the understanding of Pema Tseden's works as a philosophical process, Sonthar Gyal's two films can be read mainly as representing the humanistic theme of the philosophy of salvation – spiritual salvation – for Tibetan culture and ethnicity in relation to the motif of the tension and conflict between the modern and the traditional underpinning contemporary Tibetan society. This spiritual salvation focuses on Tibetan daily life, which is depicted and sketched out in three key ways: through Tibetan Buddhism, familial relationships and Tibetan manhood, to deepen the discussion of the relationship between tradition and modernity in the Tibetan context. These three aspects will now be discussed in turn.

5.4.1 Spiritual Salvation through Tibetan Buddhism



A

B

Figure 20. An atmospheric environment created by extreme long shots in *The Sun Beaten Path*

The protagonist is Nyima, who is walking along for a long time on the highway back to his home from a pilgrimage to Lhasa; near-silent, decadent alongside his guilt. He has exiled himself from his home for spiritual salvation after his mother's death in a tragic motor accident, revealed in flashbacks. The sun has burned his left cheek, which is a sign that he has

¹²⁴ In 2015, *The River* was nominated for the Crystal Bear Award in the New Generation unit of the 65th Berlin Film Festival. In the same year, it was also nominated for Best Film and Best Actor in the Asian New Talent Awards at the 18th Shanghai International Film Festival. In 2006, the film was given the award for Best New Performer at the 23rd Beijing College Student Film Festival.

spent several months on his pilgrimage with prostrating to Lhasa. Although this is not a religious film, Buddhism is the national religion for Tibetans; therefore, it “exemplifies the value of Tibetan culture, way of life and the essence of national identity” (Lo 2016:152), and is presented as such in the film. In this case, the film actually shows a journey of (self)-reflexivity through a typical perspective of Tibetan Buddhism. Lo (2016:154) has explained the Tibetan Buddhist mode of reflexivity:

[Tibetan] Buddhist reflectivity is a process of making oneself an object of one’s own observation, examining the situations that structure one’s own experience. As we are engaged in the process of examining how we are seen, we also begin to see the logic of the other, further breaking down the subject-object distance since these situations are generated through our interaction with others. Hence, subjects and objects are no longer seen to exist independently, and are neither seen as causes nor effects, realizing non-discriminating wisdom.

In other words, this “path” which has been beaten by the sun, “breaking down the subject-object distance”, reflects how, in searching for spiritual salvation by walking on the modern highway, Nyima is symbolically examining the consequences of modernity. If we understand the highway and motor as symbolic representations of modernity in Tibet, then he is looking for a way of redeeming these consequences, and searching for a hope for Tibetan culture, ethnicity and civilisation.

This Tibetan Buddhist mode of (self-)reflexivity also applies to *The River*, in which it is embodied by the young girl’s grandfather, although it too is not a religious film. The grandfather is as a hermit living isolated in a meditation cave, and separated from his family members. At the climax of the film, through the confession of the father to the family members, it reveals the reason for the conflict that occurred in the relationship between the father and the grandfather. The grandfather had been a monk since he was a child, but fate intervened so he had to go home. When the open policies started, he gave up/abandoned secular life and family trifles and became a monk again; he did not even come to say goodbye to his wife before she passed away. There is no clear indication in the film space of what kinds of fate intervened, or how the open policy happened to change his life, but these are easily associated with two important periods of social transformation in the PRC: the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)¹²⁵ and the Chinese Economic Reform (1978–present)¹²⁶. The former was a ten-year political movement in which religious culture (in this case, Tibetan Buddhism)

¹²⁵ The Cultural Revolution is 文化大革命 in simplified Chinese, *Wenhua Dageming* in Chinese Pinyin.

¹²⁶ The Chinese Economic Reform is 改革开放 in simplified Chinese, *Gaige Kaifang* in Chinese Pinyin.

was seriously destroyed, while the latter marked the beginning of large-scale economic development and modernisation in the PRC. If we say that Tibetans have to adapt to the requirements of modernity in the contemporary PRC, a metaphorical consideration can also be applied: that the Tibetan older generation (symbolised by the grandfather practising spiritual contemplation in the meditation cave) examine the oppressive policies and modernised Tibet, thinking deeply about the future of Tibet in contemporary society through (self)-reflexivity and their silent and isolated Buddhist practice of spiritual contemplation and salvation.

5.4.2 Spiritual Salvation through Familial Relationships



Figure 21. In *The Sun Beaten Path*, Nyima's mother dies in a tragic motor accident

Both of Sonthar Gyal's films involve the theme of Tibetan familial relationships, which actually symbolises the relationship between tradition and modernity in contemporary Tibet. In *The Sun Beaten Path*, Nyima's spiritual salvation begins with the death of his mother, so that the film has to deal with the familial relationship between the son and the mother. Therefore, if we adhere to the Tibetan Buddhist mode of reflexivity, we must ask the questions, who killed Nyima's mother? What kind of relationship did he have with his mother's death? His mother died in a tragic motor accident, which is shown at the climax of the film through a flashback (Figure 21). Unfortunately, he was the driver of the motor. In this sense, it can be understood that highways and motors act as symbols of modernity practice in Tibetan civilisation, so that Nyima driving the motor plays a symbolic role of Tibetan modern subjectivity. The mother symbolises the Tibetan motherland and tradition, so that the manner of her death could symbolise the loss of Tibetan homeland and traditional culture in terms of Tibetan suffering in the context of (national) modernity and forces of outside culture. Given that this echoes the concept I discussed with regard to Pema Tseden's

“Road Movie” *The Search*, this indicates a metaphorical message to disclose Tibetan (as subaltern) powerlessness through the conflicts of the relationship between tradition and modernity in the context of globalisation and interactions of Western and Han Chinese power. Put in another way, through the lens, a Tibetan version of self-agency, self-discovery and self-reflexivity for Tibetan ethnicity and culture has been made in *The Sun Beaten Path*, which represents a Tibetan intellectual effort to examine and measure the distance and relationship between modernity and tradition, and between subjectivity and objectivity. This is achieved through a Tibetan journey of spiritual salvation in penance for the mother’s death.

In *The River*, Sonthar Gyal continues to articulate Tibetan familial relationships and also focuses on drawing a picture of Tibetan family daily life, to discuss the relationship between tradition and modernity, echoing the theme of spiritual salvation. This film has been defined as belonging to the genre of children’s film, and was developed with the support of the Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) Children’s Film Fund. But it can be considered that the film is not aimed only at children, and the intended audience is actually adults, as it is about exploring the familial relationship among three generations in contemporary Tibetan society. In fact, the film deepens the discussion of spiritual thinking/salvation in the relationship between tradition and modernity through the perspective of a young girl (six-year-old Yanchan Lhamo), drawing the relationship between her father and grandfather. As Sonthar Gyal has said:

The love of the Eastern father is almost always quiet and reserved, and sometimes it is even difficult to perceive. I wanted to approach the expression of fatherly love among several generations from the perspective of a young girl, and touch those wounds which are caused by the lack of expression. These wounds can be historical, moral, and even cultural.

(2015, 10th July)¹²⁷

The film apparently deals with the tensions/conflicts between the protagonist (the father) and his father (the grandfather). In fact, the film sketches out the fundamental conflicts between tradition and modernity in contemporary Tibet through a series of images contrasting the two generations. For example, the father living in a modern housing development with a secular life and driving a motorbike symbolises a Tibetan modern subjectivity, while the grandfather as a Tibetan Buddhist hermit living in a meditation cave symbolises a Tibetan traditional

¹²⁷ The quote is from the 9th First International Film Festival, and can be read at this address: <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/pRkKKFZjuwr4S4ITqSW27Q>. The material was originally in Chinese, and has been translated by me.

subjectivity. However, it can also be understood that the young girl (Figure 22) sitting in the middle between the father and the grandfather (with red traditional Tibetan Buddhist frock), but closer to the grandfather, actually acts as a symbol of the family bond to connect and reconcile the relationship between two generations, and symbolically to link the old, traditional, religious Tibet and the new, modernised and secularistic Tibet. If Sonthar Gyal's *The Sun Beaten Path* is understood to show a Tibetan intellectual effort, through the theme of familial relationships, to rethink the distance and relationship between modernity and tradition, I would say that his second film, *The River*, attempts to reconcile and draw the distance between modernity and tradition, as well as displaying a hope, through a soft perspective, to heal the historical, moral and cultural wounds of Tibetan society caused by this distance.



Figure 22. Three generations in *The River*

5.4.3 Spiritual Salvation through Tibetan Manhood

As with Pema Tsenden's films, Sonthar Gyal's films also appear to maintain the tradition of mainly male protagonists responding to the social conflicts of contemporary Tibet, so that the "male survey of his patrimonial territory" (Berry 2016: 98) applies to his films as well. As we have seen, the protagonist of *The Sun Beaten Path* is a guilt-ridden young Tibetan man who is walking on the highway. Although *The River* is told from a young girl's perspective, the film focuses on the description of the familial relationship between the young Tibetan father and the grandfather, and the father is the protagonist leading the storyline of this relationship. In other words, these two films also present an androcentric centre to set out the theme of spiritual salvation for the crisis of Tibetan ethnicity and culture suffered in the modernised Tibet. At the same time, "[a]t the center of all these films is the crisis of Tibetan manhood in the modern context" (Barnett 2015: 146). That is to say, the crisis of Tibetan ethnicity and

culture is actually represented by the crisis of young Tibetan manhood in the tensions/conflicts with their familial relationships, so that the films have had to adopt a mainly modern and young male subjectivity (Nyima in *The Sun Beaten Path* and the father in *The River*) to take the responsibility for spiritual salvation.

As I have discussed before, Nyima driving the motor plays a symbolic role of Tibetan modern subjectivity in *The Sun Beaten Path*. His crisis of Tibetan manhood is raised by having caused his mother's death, so that he is exiled from his home and chooses to lose touch with his family because of guilt. Nyima is walking alone in near-silence on the highway, and the only other person to appear in the film space is a talkative and energetic old man who runs into Nyima's lonely salvation and provides a "positive" manhood in contrast to the "negative" and "repressed" image of the protagonist. This old man becomes a "father" figure to him on the road; looking after him, reconciling him through small acts of kindness, consoling and persuading him to go home, and actually helping to find an "exit" for Nyima's spiritual salvation. Through his friendship with the old man, Nyima starts to rethink his relationship with his family as shown in film flashbacks, and this finally leads him to go back home. If we agree that his mother symbolises the Tibetan motherland and Tibetan traditional culture, this also indicates an effort by the director to rethink and examine Tibetan (traditional) culture and civilisation at the centre of crisis in the modern context.



A. The modern housing



B. The meditation cave

Figure 23. Housing in *The River*

In the same sense, the crisis of Tibetan manhood is also presented in *The River*; firstly through the father, who is a liar to his family members and is unwilling to be reunited with his father (the grandfather). Secondly, I have mentioned above, the different images of Tibetan manhood are also shaped by the comparison and contrast between the father and the

grandfather. *The River* frames two spaces through Thangka visual style (Figure 23), using quiet cinematic shots to identify that they are living separately (the grandfather as a hermit isolated in a meditation cave, and the father in a modern rural housing development). In fact, this symbolises the psychological boundary between father (the young generation) and grandfather (the old generation). This boundary also acts as a metaphor for the relationship between tradition and modernity in contemporary Tibetan society. In other words, the grandfather is portrayed as a highly respected hermit/monk, peacefully accepting his fate/death and refusing to return to the hospital for life-saving treatment; this image coheres with the “positive” aspects of the religious and traditional Tibetan older generation. The image of the father, at the crisis centre of Tibetan manhood, is that of a heavy drinker and smoker who is always losing his temper with family members and fighting with others, and is thus linked to the “negative” influences of modernity on the Tibetan younger generation, putting Tibetan ethnicity and culture at the centre of the crisis in modern Tibet.

Particularly in the prologue of *The River*, the image of a drunken Tibetan manhood is depicted as the protagonist (the father) pours out his troubles and inner depression through heavy drinking and driving a motorbike. This indicates that Tibetan social problems, such as alcoholism, have already permeated the traditional world (Lo 2016). However, it should be added that young Tibetans suffering from alcoholism are not only portrayed in this film, but also in Pema Tsenden’s Tibetan films; for example, the son in *Old Dog* and Dradon in *The Sacred Arrow*. These images of male characters have been established as the “negative” Tibetan manhood that characterises the age of capitalist modernisation through the reification of Tibetan male alcoholism in cinematic representations. If we understand Tibetan Buddhism as the “national religion” for all Tibetans, we will know that drinking alcohol is forbidden by its religious doctrine. In this case, Lo (2016:158) has explained that the alcoholism which may have prevailed “in Tibet since the Western Development^[128] campaign of the 1990s, can be considered the minorities’ self-destructive response to the oppressive policy [of national modernity]”. In other words, it has been echoed by postcolonialism and subaltern studies through the previous discussion that not only Tibetan traditional culture but also the whole of Tibetan society (especially the young generation, represented by Tibetan men) has had to

¹²⁸ Western Development (西部大开发 in Simplified Chinese, *Xibu Dakaiifa* in Chinese Pinyin) is also known as China’s Western Development, Western China Development or the Great Western Development Strategy. Literally, it means “western region great development”. It is an economic development policy and strategy adopted for the western region of the PRC, a territory that “contains more than 70 percent of the nation’s area but whose economy lags far behind the eastern coastal regions” (Lo 2016:163).

adapt to the requirements of capitalist/(post)colonial development and modernity in the context of the contemporary PRC and globalisation.

5.5 Tibetan Films Made by Agang Yargyi

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Agang Yargyi is currently still a college student studying filmmaking, so that his two short films *Dream*¹²⁹ (around 20 minutes) and *Her Name is Sola*¹³⁰ (around 40 minutes) have been identified as “student productions”. In this sense, compared with the career filmmaking of the older directors Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal (born in the 1960s and 70s), his films up to now have hardly found a consistent theme to define his individual filmography. However, his filmmaking has also embodied the characteristics of the exploration of the relationship between tradition and modernity, setting Tibetan rural places in the context of contemporary Tibet. This echoes the collective theme of New Tibetan Cinema, although his films show a strong attitude of acceptance and tolerance towards outside culture, secularism and modernity. In the social space, without considering the technical and narrative limitations of his filmmaking, its social significance is that it can be seen as representative of the attitudes of the younger generation of Tibetan directors (those born in the 1980s and 90s), who have experienced national modernity while growing up, towards Tibetan traditional culture and outside culture. As a result, his Tibetan filmmaking has provided an alternative voice to New Tibetan Cinema in representing Tibetan ethnicity and culture. Robin (2009:42) has described Agang Yargi’s generation in this way:

Mostly [Tibetan] young men (and women to a lesser degree), either high school or college students, who share the same rejection of what is essentialised as “tradition”, and who support reformist groups in today’s intellectual circles, who are often critical of Tibetan traditions. Being young, lay and educated in today’s Tibetan society in China usually means that one vilifies – or has to vilify – what is labelled as “backwardness, “superstitious” and “non-scientific”.

This young Tibetan male attitude of “rejection of what is essentialised as “tradition” can be read through both of Agang Yargyi’s films. Along with this mainly male response to the rejection of tradition in the context of Tibetan ethnicity and culture, Thangka visual style has

¹²⁹ In 2015, *Dream* was selected for the 45th Tampere Film Festival CIFA Presents section, and it was nominated for the Golden Leaf Award in the Short Film section of the 2014 Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival. At the same time, the film was nominated for Best Short Film in the 11th Beijing Independent Film Festival and the 11th China Independent Film Festival. It also won the award for Favourite Short Film in the Golden Rooster Hundred Flowers Film Festival. The information can be found on the website: <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/12upN4DpEJO1UqfGZR8spA>.

¹³⁰ The film *Her Name is Sola* has been selected for the 22nd Beijing College Student Film Festival and the 16th College Student Original Film Competition.

also been used in the film spaces. We can see that in *Dream*, the protagonist is a little Buddha (male), and although *Her Name is Sola* tells a love story between a Tibetan young man (Dongzhou) and a Tibetan young woman (Sola), the leading protagonist is Dongzhou, who narrates their love story through his memories in the film space (by means of flashback).

To go into more detail, the story of *Dream* begins in a Tibetan rural area that has been impacted by modern culture, and looks at the collision between the nature of children, Tibetan nationality and national modernity through narrating a story of a nine-year-old little Buddha who escapes from his monastery to the secular school where he used to study. Although the film space unfolds elements of Tibetan culture, such as Tibetan Buddhism and mandala (Figure 24A), to represent the magnificence of Tibetan society, tradition and religion with that finishing touch, there is a particular sequence (Figure 24B) occurring in the little Buddha's dream during his escape, where he dreams of the secular life, playing basketball, jumping and running on grassland with his secular friends as a carefree child rather than a respectable Buddha. In other words, it cannot be ignored how this dream symbolises the aspirations of the Tibetan young generation, who are eager to experience and taste outside culture (secular and modernised culture), which constructs and embraces a “new/modern Tibet” and shocks Tibetan ethnicity and its traditional culture.



A. Representing Tibetan Buddhist culture – mandala



B. The Dream of the little Buddha

Figure 24. *Dream*

The theme of embracing “new/modern Tibet” can be also found in his second short film, *Her Name is Sola*. This tells a beautiful but heart-rending love story of a young Tibetan man and a young Tibetan woman in “new/modern” Amdo Tibet. This is another “exotic” and “romantic” Tibetan type of “Romeo and Juliet romantic love story”, made with a cast of non-amateur actors and with funding support from Sichuan Province Aba County Government and the

Aba County Tourism Bureau, with the aim of promoting Aba County (Amdo Tibet) culture and tourism,¹³¹ mirroring the aim and function of Pema Tsenden's *The Sacred Arrow*. The film has a pleasant and attractive visual style, and its story happens on the Tibetan traditional Kora's¹³² way, with Dongzhou travelling around the mountain looking for Sola. The film also features flashbacks from Dongzhou's perspective, as he tells the love story between him and Sola to a Tibetan pilgrim on the Kora's way. Although the film can be read as a simple story, it features a series of flashbacks and heart-rending sequences, for example Dongzhou and Sola's pledge to marry without parental permission (Figure 25) and Sola's experience of premarital pregnancy, showing how the traditions of Tibetan parents (or the old generation) interfere with the next generation's freedom of choice in marriage. In this sense, the film tends to express a powerful attitude of drawing upon Tibetan ethnic and cultural self-critiquing of the corrupt customs of traditional Tibetan culture, rejecting what the young generation has labelled as "backwardness" and "superstition" in the traditional constructed view of marriage and love in today's Tibetan society. It also displays the importance of reforming the Tibetan traditions of ethnicity and culture in the modern context.



Figure 25. Dongzhou and Sola in *Her Name is Sola*

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to address the question of how the Tibetan as the subaltern in the context of postcolonialism can "speak", and what has been "spoken" through self-representations of Tibetan ethnicity, culture and society in New Tibetan Cinema. The chapter

¹³¹ The data can be found in Chinese news reports about the film *Her Name is Sola*. One such report is here: <http://news.tibetcul.com/movie/201407/33499.html>.

¹³² Kora is a religious activity, popular in Tibetan areas. It is both a type of pilgrimage and a type of meditative practice in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

has drawn upon the auteurist approach; textual/contextual and discourse analysis shaped the main argument and structure of the chapter. The elements of each director's film style and structure were identified in order to explore the director's voice and personal concerns reflecting on the social conflicts in Tibet, and the collective significances represented by the New Tibetan Cinema. Although there are differences among and between each director's films, from the above analysis I would like to summarise five common features of the "speaking" of New Tibetan Cinema¹³³ which reflect a deeper discussion in the social space via subaltern studies. Firstly, the films show a basically slow and calm visual style and a quiet way of storytelling. In other words, it can be observed that compared to some films, which focus on telling the story through dialogue, words and oral language, New Tibetan Cinema usually uses fewer words and less dialogue. It is basically quiet and sometimes nearly silent, and is also more dependent on the use of lighting, shadows, framing and long shot or extreme long shot (the Thangka visual style and documentary aesthetic style of filmmaking within a fiction film) to tell the story and represent the oppressed environment/atmosphere, expressing a sense of anxiety for Tibetan ethnicity and culture.

Secondly, the protagonists of these films are male characters, usually quiet or near-silent, who appear to be leading an androcentric narrative of storyline in the film space, so that the term "male survey of his patrimonial territory" (Berry 2016: 98) has been applied to New Tibetan Cinema. In this case, it can be seen that most of the work of the New Tibetan Cinema expresses the image of contemporary Tibetan masculinity with "muted, almost tragic men who carry silent burdens of cultural destiny on their shoulders, with the only possible resolution to their condition being the task of reintegrating with the Tibetan community" (Barnett 2015:144). Put in another way, New Tibetan Cinema is at the centre of a discussion of the crisis of Tibetan manhood in the context of modernised Tibet and national/international social transformation, and aims to "speak" for the crisis of Tibetan ethnicity and culture in contemporary society. Thirdly, the film spaces are often set in rural places. This echoes what Barnett (2015:141) has argued: that the general avoidance of urban settings by most Tibetan directors is "a sign of the underlying tensions" between indigenous/traditional culture and outside/modern culture in Tibetan society, and this also makes their films more powerful for the Tibetan audience. Fourthly, it can be seen that the New Tibetan Cinema has mainly explored and discussed the social tension/conflict between tradition and modernity in the

¹³³ This analysis does not include Pema Tsenden's *Tharlo*.

context of “new/modern” Tibetan civilisation, the interaction of Western and Han Chinese powers and the narrative of the oppressed.

In a word, New Tibetan Cinema, through “the quiet/near-silent” image of Tibetan “manhood” in “the rural setting”, speaks to the crisis of “new/modern” Tibet suffering from social conflicts and oppression. However, if we return to the question of “can the subaltern speak”, there is a puzzle badly in need of solving. How can we deal with the relationship between “the speaking” and “the quiet/silent” in the consideration of the subaltern subject? Can we ask whether the quiet/near-silent image of the Tibetan man should be taken as signifying that he has no right to speak (for himself), both in the film space and in social reality? In this case, Tibetans are indeed depicted as having a quiet image in the film space, which indicates that they cannot speak as the subaltern subject in the context of the contemporary PRC and globalisation. This reflects the social reality of Tibetans’ status in both Western and Han Chinese discourses (also see Chapter Four). However, if the Tibetan is not speaking in these Tibetan cinematic representations, who is speaking in New Tibetan Cinema? Who is spoken for by New Tibetan Cinema? We will again draw upon the essential Spivakian considerations: How can we account for the subaltern? How can they speak? Certainly, the subaltern is by definition always epistemologically below the dominant culture. It can be considered that the notion of the subaltern is often related to the sign of oppression and exotic otherness in the context of postcolonialism, which “makes us know the ‘other’ and can place it in the context of the narrative of the oppressed” (Maggio 2007:420). That is to say, this oppression can be employed to denote the concept of silencing or being unable to speak, and the postcolonialist critique that the subaltern is always seen as an exotic “other”.

Through postcolonial analysis and subaltern studies, New Tibetan Cinema can be conceptualised in a representative explanation as a cultural set of actions and relations. Let us go back to the Literature Review chapter to look at the framework of “dominant/elitist construction” of Tibetan issues, drawing upon Spivakian conceptions, which I have used several times in this chapter. Both Tibetans and Han Chinese are “prisoners of modernity”, and modernity has actually been used as a political actor and an ideational construct in Western discourse to deal with Tibetan issues (Anand 2006:285). In other words, it can be concluded that modernisation in the PRC is actually Westernisation for both Tibetans and Han Chinese in the context of postcolonialism/globalisation and subaltern studies. Therefore, can we resolve the question of whether the Tibetan as the subaltern (always silent) in the context of Western and Han Chinese power can still speak through New Tibetan Cinema? On

the one hand, it cannot be ignored that “the between ‘self’/‘other’ distinction is tied up in the tension between ‘speaking’ and ‘being heard’” (Maggio 2007:430), as “speaking” always concentrates on the “voice” with an adherence to the subjective, and at the same time, “being heard” coheres the objective of the “voice”. This means that we cannot isolate the speaker and the listener in the context of the ability of communication, as speaking always connects to being heard. That is to say, “[t]here is always a conflict, an inherent tension, between the ‘speaking subject’ and the ‘hearing subject’” (Ibid.). This indicates that with regard to answering the question of whether the subaltern (Tibetan in this case) can speak, we should turn the consideration of the question upside down to the other side of the subject: can the subaltern be heard? In answering this, the notion of hybridity could be a possible solution and explanation:

Hybridity is a theory in communication studies that seeks a way “to theorize the conflicted and multiple affiliations of [internal] diasporic groups...Hybridity is configured at the conjunction of the local, global, social, political, and legal to name some dimensions”. (Shome and Hedge 266, cited in Maggio 2007:430)

In this case, when we seek to understand the silence of the subaltern, the central question is whether the subaltern can be heard rather than whether the subaltern can speak. That is to say, although silent Tibetans as the subaltern seem not to “speak” in film space, the “voice” of silent Tibetans has still “been heard” through New Tibetan Cinema, which makes the “silence” speak. However, as I discussed in the section on “Fourth Cinema” in the Literature Review chapter, and the section in this chapter titled “*The Sacred Arrow – Return*”, Tibetan directors cannot actually escape their elite role and position, their hybrid identity, as “Chinese” Tibetans. In this case, they are indeed Tibetans belonging to a subaltern/ethnic minority group in the PRC; however, they also take on the identity of “Chinese” Tibetan directors who actually stand in an elite position in the PRC’s social hierarchy. This means that once they accept their hybrid Chinese-Tibetan identity and elite role, they achieve dominant power; then they can speak themselves, or speak for another subaltern group (“other”) in the PRC. That is to say, Tibetan directors as a Chinese social elite group can speak, and are actually speaking about Tibetan ethnicity and culture; a subaltern subject that cannot speak in contemporary society. Tibetans, then, as a subaltern group cannot speak (they are quiet/near-silent) through these Tibetan cinematic representations. However, New Tibetan Cinema is actually speaking for Tibetans as a subaltern group living in the PRC and suffering the pain of modernisation, through the Tibetan directors’ individual voices (elite, self), which make

the silence of the subaltern (Tibetan, other) visible and audible. In this sense, New Tibetan Cinema is speaking; which means that we are listening to the voice of silence (subaltern) through the Tibetan directors' (as elite) individual power, and so we are seeing self-representations of the oppressed in contemporary Tibet.

Finally, to be sure, there is something to say about how New Tibetan Cinema has used women, children and animals as symbolically functional objects of socially and culturally patriarchal subjects in an androcentric and anthropocentric narrative of Tibetan resistance (Frangville 2015); and that this “constitute[s] national masculinized subjectivity” (Lo 2016:163) to represent Tibetan ethnicity and culture. Importantly, women “in the films may serve as objects of gaze and scrutiny for the hegemonic masculinized national subjectivity” (Ibid.). This, then, inspires a classic consideration for a gender-related discussion through the postcolonial feminist approach and subaltern studies. Therefore, in the next chapter I would like to return once again to the key research question, “Can the subaltern speak?”, this time by exploring gender issues through New Tibetan Cinema. More specifically, there are two questions to be resolved: Is woman the sexed/gendered subaltern subject in both Tibetan society and New Tibetan cinema? Can the subaltern (Tibetan woman) speak and be heard through the New Tibetan Cinema?

Chapter Six: The Silent Tibetan Women and Their Representations in New Tibetan Cinema

Introduction

In the last chapter, it was concluded that New Tibetan Cinema centres around a masculinised subjectivity and the crisis of Tibetan manhood in an androcentric narrative to speak and self-represent the crisis of Tibetan ethnicity, culture and society in the context of modernisation and oppression. This notion has opened a window to a discussion of how gender is represented in the New Tibetan Cinema. In discussing this issue, we could take into consideration Deleuze's notion of "minor film". This is "based on the 'absence of the people', the idea that people do not pre-exist their performance, because they no longer exist or 'are not yet'" (Frangville 2016:109). It can be argued that men, at times, serve as "images" used to represent Tibetan culture and identity, and the "invisibilisation" and "muteness" of Tibetan women figures can be found in most New Tibetan films. In particular, it can be noted that no woman character appears in the film space of Agang Yargyi's *Dream*, which is about the story of Tibetan Buddhist culture. In this sense, women in the New Tibetan Cinema can be considered as silent and sometimes are outside of the "image" and the play of "look". This leads us to question the permissible subjectivity of female characters in New Tibetan Cinema. How far does this concern problematise the gendered social construction in relation to Tibetan identity, culture and society? To answer this, let us ask: is some purpose served by this kind of "collective" action in filmmaking? Or do Tibetan directors simply ignore women characters in their films? These questions also force this thesis to take into consideration the subaltern subject in gendered areas. But who is the subaltern? Is woman the subaltern in the gendered discussion of New Tibetan Cinema? Can the subaltern speak through New Tibetan Cinema? If yes, from where can/do they speak? What can/do they say?

Nowadays, New Tibetan Cinema is famous in Tibetan areas of the PRC, and also at international film festivals. This is "not because Tibetan filmmaker[s] are a novelty, but because [their] films invite reflections and imaginations on the deeper landscape of Tibet" (He 2009:280). New Tibetan films "bear witness to a Tibetan way of life that is adopting an ever more practical mentality that is affecting the social structure of the region as well as its

belief system.”¹³⁴ In New Tibetan Cinema, as has been mentioned several times in the previous chapters, directors reject any objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan culture and landscape, while at the same time their Tibetan films explore not only the issues of the loss of social, ethnic and cultural identity but also the universal values of humanity. This raises the core question to be addressed in this chapter: can we think that the avoidance of the portrayed images of women and the muting of their voice in the New Tibetan Cinema is part of the rejection of the objectification and exoticisation of the Tibetan cultural landscape? To cover more of this issue, this chapter will attempt to answer two further questions: a) are the Tibetan women invisibilised and their voice muted by Tibetan directors in order to represent the oppressed/repressed Tibetan social/ethnic identity in the modern context? b) do “silent Tibetan women” speak through New Tibetan Cinema? These questions will echo and examine Spivak’s conception that “[t]here is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (Spivak 1988:307) and thus “[t]he subaltern as female cannot be heard or read” (Spivak 1988:308).

As has been seen in the analysis of Tibetan directors’ stylistic choices in Chapter Five, they are well known for their quiet way of telling stories through the documentary aesthetic style and Thangka visual style. Their films have a very slow narrative rhythm; they always use long shots or extreme long shots to create a calm visual style and the depiction of details in one picture. Audiences watching their films always can feel the strong emotion permeating in the quiet cinematic shots. Through their unique cinematic style, this chapter will explore the images and roles of Tibetan women, thereby articulating ethnic Tibetan identity in the New Tibetan Cinema. This will be completed through film textual and contextual analysis, which are respectively composed of detailed semiotic analysis and narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. More specifically, film textual analysis involves an unpacking of the elements of the auditory channel, for example sound and speech, and the visual dimensions such as the performance of characters, *mise en scène*, spatiality, shot movement, and so forth. Through textual analysis we will explore what is shown in the film text, while the notion of what is “spoken” by Tibetan women in both film space and social space will be examined through discourse analysis.

¹³⁴ This is from Pema Tseden’s interview with Lu Yangqiao (2016), *The Brooklyn Rail*. It can be accessed at: http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzAwMzkzNDk4OQ==&mid=2247483702&idx=1&sn=953a1b49932aae21acba4ef635906404&scene=5&srcid=05139ZVzOLcpn57ApmNDfJQW#rd.

This chapter will therefore concentrate mainly on the construction of silent Tibetan women characters in film texts, in order to examine the “speaking” of “silent Tibetan women” within the interactions of film space and social space through the postcolonial feminist approach and subaltern studies. Therefore, the structure of this chapter is shaped by the need firstly to contextualise Tibetan women as “silent” and “marginalised” in the Tibet/PRC social space relying on the specific ethnographic/sociological literatures; this will be done in Section 6.1. The chapter will then move on to the categorisation of the identity of Tibetan women characters in the film space. They will be classified respectively as “in the role of family member” in Section 6.2 and “in the role of cultural member” in Section 6.3. These two sections mainly focus on Pema Tsenden’s “Tibetan Trilogy” and Sonthar Gyal’s two Tibetan films. Following from this series of film textual/contextual analyses, Section 6.4 contributes to examining the interaction of film space and social space through asking whether the silent Tibetan women can speak. This section will explore Pema Tsenden’s *The Sacred Arrow* and Agang Yargyi’s *Her Name is Sola* as counter-instances, to discuss whether Tibetan women’s invisibilisation is the rejection of the objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan culture, ethnicity and landscape by New Tibetan Cinema in the postcolonial discourse and the field of subaltern studies.

6.1 The Silent Tibetan Women in Social Context

As has been mentioned in the Introduction, through the ethnographic discourse, Tibetan areas can be divided into three great regions: Central Tibet (Tibet Autonomous Region), Amdo, and Kham (Singer 2003, Liang 2016). These three Tibetan regions have different characteristics in the historical, cultural and political junctures to represent Tibetan society and culture. As can be seen from Figure 3 (Introduction), due to its geographical position, Amdo (spread cross most of Qinghai, part of Gansu, and part of Sichuan provinces), is historically defined by the cultural and political conditions at the edge of Tibetan settlement. To the east are the Han Chinese, and to the north-west are the Muslim Chinese. Amdo can therefore be considered as the “border” and “boundary” of Tibetan areas, and has always been marginalised by Central Tibet (the Tibet Autonomous Region). In other words, Amdo can be recognised by its geographical characteristics as being positioned at the cultural intersection of Han Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Muslim. At the same time, Amdo is also the cultural and scientific education centre of the Tibetan regions, linking with the inland Han Chinese dominion in the context of the contemporary PRC (Liang 2016). It has been

seen that the three directors who feature in this thesis all come from Amdo: Pema Tsenden and Sonthar Gyal from Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (see Figure 26), and Agang Yargyi from Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (see Figure 26). Amdo is also the location of their film spaces of New Tibetan Cinema. This being so, I would like to contextualise more narrowly the social space of New Tibetan Cinema in this chapter on the engendered nature of Tibetan identity and culture, moving from the notion of “Tibet” to “Amdo” of Tibet.

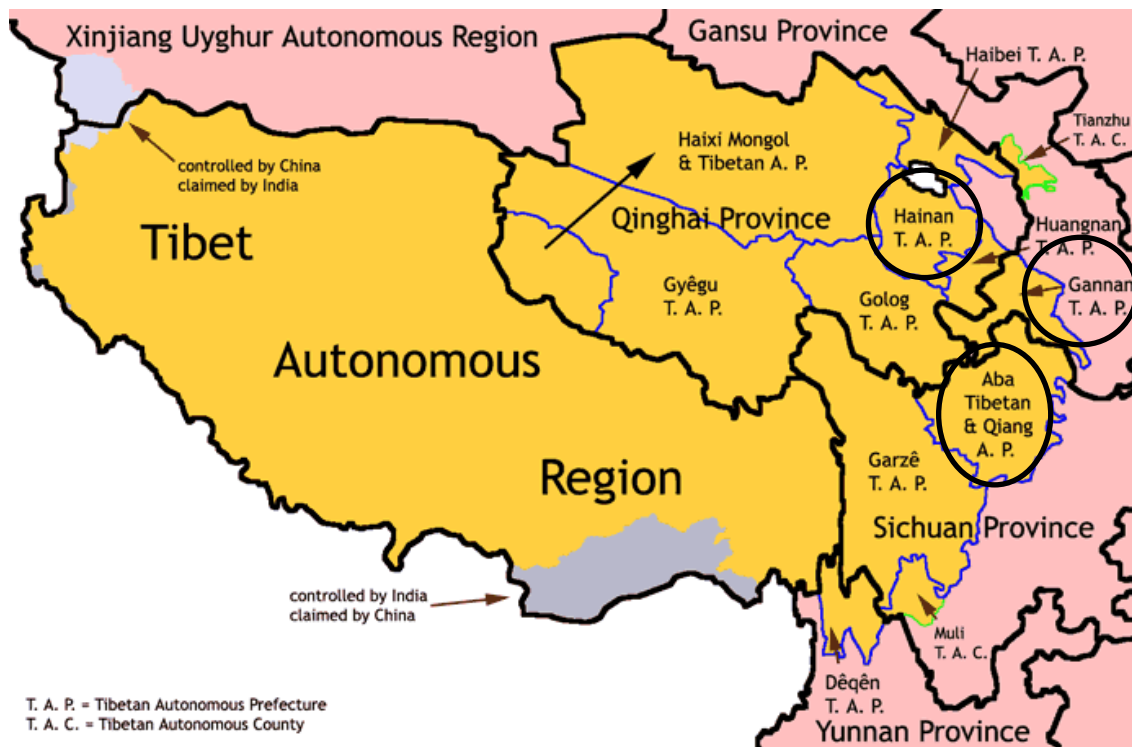


Figure 26. Tibetan areas¹³⁵

There is a burgeoning ethnographic/sociological literature on Amdo Tibet in the People’s Republic of China. Charlene E. Makley, a leading Tibetan-gender-studies scholar, has provided some very lengthy ethnographic studies of Amdo society; for example, the book *The Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China* (2007), and the articles “Gendered Boundaries in Motion: Space and Identity on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier” (2003), “On the Edge of Respectability: Sexual Politics in China’s Tibet” (2002), and “Sexuality and Identity in Post-Mao Amdo” (2002). All these take gender as their principal analytic tool. In 1995, Makley was the first foreign researcher to be granted

¹³⁵ The resource is from the website: <http://blog.snowliontours.com/2010/04/map-of-tibet/>.

permission to reside in Amdo Tibet (in the town of Labrang, Gansu Province, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture; see Figure 26) since the inauguration of reform. Her studies while based in Labrang examine Tibetan gendered cultural politics and hierarchies as key components of the articulation of Tibetan identity in the town (Gayley 2009). In most of her studies, she argues that “a monastic career was the ideal place for aspiring young men, whereas the ideal place for women was patrilocal marriage and a lay career of responsibility for most subsistence labor and child rearing in the husband’s natal household” (2003:601). In other words, in Tibetan society, there is a spatialised division of labour that associated women with affairs “inside” the household and men with prestigious ritual and political affairs “outside” the household. This was widely justified by appeals to a law of embodied karma:

Tibetans across the community (men and women) tended to argue that the male body was the result of greater stores of merit (Tib. *bsod nams*) from past lifetimes and that this underlay men’s ability to transcend bodily limitations and to succeed in pursuits of the mind. Meanwhile, the female body was considered to be lower rebirth (Tib. *skye dman*), more hampered than male bodies by physiological processes and thus suited to household labor. (Makely 2003:601)

That is to say, in terms of Tibetan society, men are usually positioned outside the household, the superior group who are able to speak out, while women are positioned inside the household, with the status of the inferior/subaltern who are “silent” and cannot speak out. As Makely (2003:601, 2007) has argued, “women whose public comportment was deemed too independently desirous or instrumental risked being associated with negative agencies by the community: bad mothers, unclean housekeepers, witches, gossips, and whores”. This forces all Tibetan women to work harder – in household labour and in protecting their bodies and reputations (Makely 2002). This Tibetan gender difference was actually “fundamental in the ongoing construction of certain boundaries Tibetans considered essential for the survival of a Tibetan ethnic identity under siege by a variety of intensifying assimilation pressures [of Han Chinese modernity and other ethnic culture]” (Makely 2003:597). In this sense, if we say that Tibetans are one of fifty-five Chinese ethnic minorities (the subaltern group) in the PRC’s ethnic-social-power structure, then Tibetan women may be considered as the minority (the subaltern) of the minority (the subaltern) in the double structure of social power and gendered hierarchy underpinning the contemporary PRC.

This “silent” and “marginalised” status of Tibetan women in the (Amdo) Tibet social space is also echoed and evidenced by the film space of New Tibetan Cinema. I will therefore use the

next two sections to analyse two aspects of how Tibetan women are “silent” in the film space: “the silent Tibetan women in the role of family member” and “the silent Tibetan women in the role of cultural member”.

6.2 The Silent Tibetan Women in the Role of Family Member

This section will concentrate on constructing the discussion of Tibetan women characters represented as family members in the New Tibetan Cinema, through film textual analysis of *The Silent Holy Stones*, *Old Dog*, *The Sun Beaten Path* and *The River*. Three key roles of women can be articulated and characterised in these films – family member as mother, family member as wife, and other female family members – to shape and deepen the discussion of the interactions of “silent” and “marginalised” Tibetan women in film space and social space.

6.2.1 The Family Member as Mother

Women characters as the mothers of the protagonists can be found in the films *The Silent Holy Stones* and *The Sun Beaten Path*. In Pema Tseden’s *The Silent Holy Stones*, the woman character, the mother of the little monk (Figure 27), can almost be identified and articulated in the film as being part of a group portrait with other male characters. That is to say, there is no close-up or individual image of the mother. In the experience of the audience, if you do not pay special attention to the woman character in the film space, you will invariably forget her existence. The woman character is naturalised, generally set in the background in contrast with the images of men, in the name of the mother who undertakes household labour and is always associated with the home. In Figure 27, I have chronologically depicted all the sequences of the mother’s activities. The mother appears in the film narrative partly when the little monk goes home to celebrate the Tibetan New Year with his family. In Figure 27, from A to I, the mother is seen as a labourer; her activities are always inside the household, and she is never positioned outside the domestic space. In other words, the mother is a quiet and traditional Tibetan woman, who is always displayed in the film space serving food, doing other housework and rearing children (Figure 27 A, C, D, E, F, G and H).



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I

Figure 27. The woman character represented as a mother in *The Silent Holy Stones*

It can be seen that in B, C, G, and H, the film space always frames the mother at the edge of the lens. The mother's image is placed at the left edge in Figure 27B, and she is marginalised by the male characters (the little monk, his father, and his younger brother), even though she is greeting and welcoming her child (the little monk) home. The mother is also placed at the right edge in Figure 27 C, G, and H. Furthermore, in these three stills, the lighting focus is on the left, which makes the depth of focus clearly show the males' activities. In other words, the face of the mother is totally submerged in the dark throughout these three sequences. It can be seen that in C, the visual focus is on the left of the picture, showing male characters (the little monk, his father, and his grandfather). In G and H, the visual focus is near to the left rear, where the same three male characters are sitting. The common characteristic of these three sequences (Figure 27 C, G, and H) is that they involve a "family-around-table-talk" discourse, which represents the family power and hierarchy. The three most important men are the little monk's grandfather (the oldest male in this family), the little monk's father and

the little monk, as can be seen from the order in which the buttered tea is offered to them by the mother (Figure 27C).

Although the grandfather is the oldest male and the most powerful man in the family, he respects his grandson as a monk. This is represented in Figure 27 G and H, where the grandfather allows the little monk to sit down at the table before him and eat first. This echoes how Tibetan male authority is established by the centrality of the monastery and the sacred authority of (Buddhist) lamas and monks (Makley 2003). The dynamics of the conversation around the table almost all occur among the three most powerful men in the family, while the topics of conversation consist of prestigious ritual and political affairs “outside” the household: Tibetan Buddhism, the little monk’s monastery, and Tibetan Mani (holy) Stones. At the same time, the mother is represented serving food and speaking a few lines associated with food service around the table. It can be considered that although the mother is a female image presented in Pema Tsenden’s film narrative, she is actually symbolically absent from the androcentric narrative/discourse represented both in the Tibetan social space and Pema Tsenden’s film space.

If a link to the social context is necessary to understand the representation of the mother in the film, it will be easy to see that the film concerns Tibetan Buddhism, which is a man’s society, and this echoes in the social space so that women can be seen as having a marginalised status in Tibetan Buddhism. In other words, being marginalised and silent is an important responsibility of the Tibetan woman both in the film space and social space, to protect and contrast with the masculinity and authority of her son/father/husband/brother (Hillman and Henfry 2006).

In the film space of Figure 27 A, D, E and F, Pema Tsenden also uses long shots of the mother character, which leave her somewhat unidentified and position the mother outside of, and symbolically absent from, the play of “image” and “look”. Therefore, it can be argued that Pema Tsenden, through his stylistic choices of framing and lighting, undoubtedly gives the woman character (the mother) a silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent status in the film space, reflecting the status of women as oppressed in Tibetan social reality. At the same time, this “silence” also echoes the title of *The Silent Holy Stones*, a metaphor to represent the theme of “struggle” for Tibetan masculinised subjectivity in the context of conflicts between tradition and modernity.



A



B



C



D

Figure 28. The woman character represented as a mother in *The Sun Beaten Path*

In Chapter Five, we have already seen that in *The Sun Beaten Path*, Sonthar Gyal sketched out a familial relationship between the son (Nyima, the protagonist) and the mother. Through flashbacks, we see the mother on the way back to home. The most important woman character (the mother) is presented in the film space when Nyima decides to drive his motor, accompanying his elder brother to pick up their mother. More specifically, Figure 28A uses an extreme long shot to emphasise the environment (a modern highway) rather than the figures: Nyima, his mother and his brother are actually unidentified. If we look at Figure 28B, the mother is sitting on the motorbike driven by the older brother. Although Sonthar Gyal shows the characters in close-up, the mother is totally blocked by the brother in front of her. However, from our partial view of the mother, it can be observed that she is turning her head, looking at Nyima who is driving the motor, which actually makes the visual focus of the picture switch to Nyima's activities. In Figure 28C, Sonthar Gyal again uses an extreme long shot to represent the mother from behind, which definitely leaves her unidentified. Then in

Figure 28D, as the film is reaching its climax in the mother's tragic motor accident, the film space only leaves a red scarf to show a metaphor of the identity of the woman character (the mother). In this way, through Sonthar Gyal's series of powerful and metaphorical sequences, the film clearly represents a silent, unidentified and symbolic absent status in the androcentric discourse and from the play of "image" and "look". In this case, this stimulates meaningful explanations; firstly reflecting the status of the Tibetan woman in social space as "silent" and inferior/subaltern in the context of Tibetan patriarchy, and secondly, echoing the notion I discussed in Chapter Five, of the absent mother symbolising the disappearing Tibetan motherland and traditional culture in the context of modernity.

6.2.2 The Family Member as Wife

"Silent" and "marginalised" women characters playing the role of wives in the Tibetan family can be found in Pema Tsenden's *Old Dog* and Sonthar Gyal's *The River*. The films both depict everyday Tibetan family life and Tibetan women's situation in sex-gendered systems in Tibetan male-dominant society and in the family power structure. In terms of *Old Dog*, in Figure 29 D, E, F and H it can be easily seen that the film space frames the woman character (the wife) at the right edge, marginalised by the male characters. After the Tibetan mastiff has been sold by the old Tibetan herder's son in the film space, Pema Tsenden devotes a lengthy sequence to narrating the infertility of the couple (the son and his wife) to symbolise the castration of Tibetan culture in contemporary society. As can be seen in Figure 29 A and B, although these are two close-up shots of the wife in traditional Tibetan dress, from the front and the back, Pema Tsenden has still made a stylistic choice of two quiet cinematic shots in which the wife is silent. She is waiting calmly and silently for her husband to take her to hospital for physical examination. To compare and contrast A and B, the wall of the house is a boundary which frames a contrast of brightness: the light in the front from the outside and the dark in the back from the inside. It would be meaningful to link this to the conception of a spatialised division of labour in the Tibetan social space that associates Tibetan women with affairs "inside" the household and Tibetan men with prestigious ritual and political affairs "outside" the household. In other words, the wife's affairs should be "inside" the household. It can be seen in the Figure 29B that although there is a road and a motorcycle in front of her, she still needs to wait for and rely on the husband to take her "outside" the "household". The boundary of the house wall creates a notion of "inside" and "outside" in spatial and metaphorical considerations. In other words, it can be concluded that "inside" associates

women with darkness, passivity, and inferiority, while at the same time, “outside” associates men with brightness, activity, and superiority.



A



B



C



D



甚至连黄金的五千元都不需要
This golden necklace does not even cost 5000 yuan!

E



F



G



H

Figure 29. The woman character represented as a wife in *Old Dog*

This contrast continues into Figure 29C, where it can be seen that the film space uses another wall to frame the different settings of the wife and the husband, each taking up nearly half the screen, making them look like contrast images of each other. More specifically, it can be seen from the analysis of visual aesthetics that on the left of the screen Pema Tseden creates a very bright environment through daytime sunshine, featuring a long shot of the wife squatting which leaves her character unidentified, and positions the wife symbolically absent from the play of “image” and “look”. On the right-hand side, the camera does not change but there is a medium shot immersed in darkness. This is the focus of visual narrative on the screen, responding to the dynamics of the (man’s) conversation between the son and the father. Through comparing and contrasting the shots in Figure 29C, it can be discovered that the wife represents a traditional Tibetan woman image bearing hardship quietly and uncomplainingly, and she is actually marginalised and symbolically absent from the Tibetan androcentric discourse in the film space.

In Figure 29G, we can see the old Tibetan herder ask his daughter-in-law about the result of her physical examination for pregnancy, but she just keeps silent with her head down. This sequence is framed with a medium shot through the window of the door that is the entrance to the back room. This stylistic approach compresses visual space to the upper half of the screen, showing repressed emotion and an oppressed environment. In the same way, in Figure 29D, when her husband asks about the result of her physical examination, the wife again keeps silent with her head down. She is like a child who has done something wrong, being placed on the right edge of the screen. Through a reflection in the glass of the restaurant door, we

can see a fuzzy image of her sister telling the result to her husband. Equally, it can be seen that in E and F, two sequences of watching TV, the wife always sits at the right visual edge, which in E is framed by a border of the window of the door, and in F is framed by a wall of the house. In both shots she is marginalised by androcentric characters (her husband and father-in-law) and is submerged in the dark, represented as an unidentified image. In this way, through Pema Tsenden's series of powerful sequences, the film *Old Dog* articulates a silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent Tibetan woman image (the wife).

The image of the Tibetan woman in the role of wife in *The River* is quite similar to its counterpart in Pema Tsenden's *Old Dog*. Through its stylistic choices, this film also narrates a social reflection of the Tibetan family power structure in relation to the status of Tibetan women. In this case, it can be found that the woman character in *The River* is silent, symbolically absent and marginalised from the androcentric narrative of oppression in the relationship between the father and the grandfather. At the same time, this also references the social construction of traditional Tibetan patriarchal society, referring to the literatures used in the discussion of the Tibetan social space, in which there is a conception of a spatialised division of labour in the Tibetan family power structure that associates women with affairs "inside" the household and men with affairs "outside" the household. The woman character is presented in the film space as "inside" the household in two different locations: the house (Figure 30) and the tent in the summer pastures (Figure 31). In other words, through these two places, the film spatially positions the woman character as inside the household and associated with passivity and inferior status, in contrast to the work of her male counterpart.



A



B



C



D



E



F

Figure 30. The woman character as wife in the house

More specifically, it can be seen from Figure 30 A to F that the wife never occurs in the film space beyond the “inside” of the house where she is being a household labourer, a good wife and a clean housekeeper, having to work hard quietly and without complaining. The first occurrence of the woman character is in the sequences of A and B, where she is squatting to cook for other family members. Here it can be seen that the woman is “inside” the household, with the view being of her back and her hands for cooking, leaving the woman character unidentified. Importantly, the fence in Figure 30A may symbolise the boundary framing the spatialised division labour of “inside” the household for her, while the little girl is calling her from “outside”. As I mentioned in Chapter Five, her husband (the young girl’s father) has been suffering from alcoholism and he fell off his motorbike after heavy drinking. Therefore, in C and D we see the husband lying in bed having sustained serious injuries. The wife is sitting on the edge of the bed with her head down silently crying over his injury, leaving her image unidentified. In C she is also placed at the right edge, marginalised by the male

character (her husband), being symbolically absent (unidentified status) from the play of “image” and “look” for both the male character and the audience.

In Figure 30E, Sonthar Gyal makes a contrast between the woman character (the wife) and the man (the husband) which can be seen as a reflection of the spatialised division of labour in Tibetan family power structure. Here there is a long shot to the wife as she is walking with, helping and taking care of an old lady. Without any change of camera, the film space also includes a medium shot to the man character, in which he is fixing his motorbike. It can be understood that the motorbike may symbolise the ability and power of going “outside” the household, but that this ability is actually held in the husband’s hands and the woman needs to rely on the husband to take her “outside” the household. This contrast also speaks to the notion of “inside” and “outside” in spatial and metaphorical considerations, in which the woman is associated with a passive, inside-household, and inferior status while the man is associated with an active, outside-household, and superior status.

Later, the wife complains to the husband, asking why they are moving to the summer pastures very early in the year when she is pregnant again. Unfortunately the husband then loses his temper with his wife. It can be seen that in Figure 30F, squeezing the visual focus on the screen by the edge of the wall creates repressed emotion and an oppressed environment in which the wife is keeping silent, sitting on the edge of the bed with a view of her profile and of the right side of her body, leaving her with a silent and unidentified status.



A



B



C



D

Figure 31. The woman character as wife in the tent of the summer pastures

After they move to the summer pastures, the tent in the summer pastures actually constructs a sense of household for this nuclear family. In this case, the image of the woman character is still associated with a good wife, hard-working household labourer and clean housekeeper inside of the tent (household) and less positioned outside the tent (household/domestic space). As can be seen from Figure 31 A, B, C and D, the woman character is a quiet and traditional Tibetan woman and always occurs in the film space doing housework such as cooking and serving food for other family members, and child rearing. Especially, two sequences are provided by Sonthar Gyal to depict contrasting images of the family power structure between the woman and the man (see Figure 31 B and D). In B, the woman is keeping silent in the face of the husband losing his temper with her after he, because his mind was wandering, dropped the cup of buttered tea that was offered by his wife. This sequence places the visual focus on the man's face, and gives an unidentified image to the woman character by blurring the lens. Similarly, in Figure 31D the husband is unfortunately once again losing his temper with his wife, only because the water overflowed on the stove after he lost his dzi. The wife comes quickly to manage it, but the visual focus is actually on the husband, the kettle and the hands of the wife, which leaves the woman character with an unidentified status once again. In other words, in *The River*, the woman character has been represented in the role of wife as "inside" the household and associated with a passive and inferior status. She is silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent from the "outside" household (active and superior status) and androcentric narrative (the relationship between his husband and his father-in-law in the film narrative). At the same time, the contrast between the image of the man character and the woman character also echoes the discussion in Chapter Five of the "negative" Tibetan

manhood which is linked to the “negative” influences of modernity on the Tibetan younger generation, leaving Tibetan ethnicity and culture at the centre of crisis in the modern context.

6.2.3 Other Women Family Members



A

B

Figure 32. The woman character represented as a fiancée in *The Sun Beaten Path*

In addition to the roles of mother and wife in the New Tibetan Cinema, Sonthar Gyal’s *The Sun Beaten Path* presents several other women family members around the protagonist. However, these women are still given silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent status. The evidence for this can be seen in a series of sequences. In this case, I have chronologically listed all the other women characters and their activities presented in the narrative of the film: Nyima’s (the protagonist) fiancée, sister-in-law, and sister respectively (Figures 32, 33, and 34). As shown in Figure 32 A and B, the woman character as a fiancée is depicted dating with Nyima. The film space uses a fence pole and barbed wire as boundaries framing the fiancée and Nyima, each taking up nearly half the screen. This shows that although the characters are in the same space and very close to each other, the boundaries between them actually place them in two different spatial and metaphorical positions; the physical distance indicates that the fiancée is absent from Nyima’s current life. Also, the fiancée is placed on the right of the lens, in long shot. In 32A, she is filmed in profile with the right side of her face showing, and a view of her back is given in 32B. Both sequences mean that her face cannot be seen completely and leave her as unidentified. Moreover, their conversation is about their marriage and wedding, but she is basically quiet and only sounds “En/Oh” at the end of the talk to accept everything that Nyima has said to her. In other words, through the analysis of the visual style, the woman character as a fiancée can be seen as silent, unidentified and

symbolically absent from both Nyima’s personal narrative and the play of “image” and “look” in the film narrative.



A

B



C

D

Figure 33. The woman character represented as a sister-in-law in *The Sun Beaten Path*

The marginalised and unidentified (symbolically absent) woman character of the sister-in-law of the protagonist (Nyima) can be also found in the film space. As can be seen from Figure 33 A, B, C, and D, the sequences show the sister-in-law either in profile or with a view of her back while working for the household. Use of long shot displays the woman character as having an unidentified status. The space is re-framed and squeezed by the edges of the entrance door, so that the depth of visual focus clearly extends to Nyima’s activities and the distant motor; the one which, later in the film narrative, causes his mother’s death in a tragic accident (see Figure 21 Chapter Five). When Nyima asks her whether his older brother has gone to pick up their mother, she answers with “I don’t know”. This clearly indicates that although the woman character as a sister-in-law is presented in Sonthar Gyal’s film space,

she is actually marginalised, unidentified and symbolically absent from the play of “image” and “look”, both in the androcentric (outside household) narrative or discourse and in the eyes of the audience.



A



B



C

Figure 34. The woman character represented as a sister in *The Sun Beaten Path*

The film also represents the woman character of Nyima’s sister as crying without dialogue after the death of the mother. We can quickly see from Figure 34 that the film, through the extreme long shots in A and C and the high angle in B, makes the woman character symbolically unidentified and absent from the play of “image” and “look”. Additionally, it is important to note that the Tibetan women figures as the family members of the protagonist in *The Sun Beaten Path*, including Nyima’s mother, only occur in Nyima’s memory and in the flashbacks of the film narrative. In other words, women characters as family members are actually in the past tense of the film narrative, and are totally “absent” from the present tense of the cinematic representation. In this film, it has been clearly shown that through the

stylistic choices in the framing of filmmaking, Sonthar Gyal gives women characters in the role of family members a silent, marginalised and symbolically absent status both in androcentric and cinematic narratives, and in the play of “image” and “look”.



A

B

Figure 35. A female attendant at a guest house in *The Sun Beaten Path*

However, interestingly, there is a woman character in *The Sun Beaten Path* (Figure 35A and B) who acts as a counterexample to the women characters who are family members inside the household. Sonthar Gyal gives a clear and identified close shot (Figure 35B) for this woman character in the present tense of the film narrative. She is an attendant at a guest house, which shows that she is working independently outside the household in the modern context. However, at the same time, she is flirting and trying to seduce Nyima, and has therefore been represented as a “negative” Tibetan female image. This echoes Makely’s argument (2003:601, 2007) that in the social space (traditional conception) “[Tibetan] women whose public comportment was deemed too independently desirous or instrumental risked being associated with negative agencies by the community”. This contrast of female images in the cinematic representation also forces the attention to return to the conflict between modernity and tradition, in which the woman is represented as the “negative” influence of modernity – independent and “outside household” – through a Tibetan masculinised subjectivity.

6.3 The Silent Tibetan Women in the Role of Cultural Member

Tibetan women characters as cultural members in the New Tibetan Cinema will be contextualised in this section through the film *The Search*. In terms of Pema Tsenden’s stylistic choice of depiction of female characters, *The Search* is different from the other two films of the “Tibetan Trilogy”, *The Silent Holy Stones* and *Old Dog*, as it can be considered

that here “is...the first [female] character in [Pema Tseden’s] works to have an autonomous narrative role in her own right” (Berry 2016:98). That is to say, there are several “close shots” of the woman’s image (the girl, Figure 36C) and the woman character also leads a line of narrative to the film theme of “search”, as a Tibetan cultural member outside the household instead of a family member. In the film space, the director selects a girl (as an actor) to play the role of the concubine of Prince Drime Kunden, though her face cannot be seen as she always veils it with a scarf. However, the girl promises that if the director can help her to find her ex-boyfriend, she will definitely star in the film without covering her face.

In spite of this nevertheless, I would still argue that *The Search* also creates a silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent image of women. The evidence can be found in a series of sequences. In Figure 36A, showing the girl casting for the role of a concubine of Prince Drime Kunden, Pema Tseden uses an extreme long shot with high angle. The girl and the (all-male) filmmaking team are divided by the wall of the yard, which leaves a very small space to represent the girl from behind (unidentified), while at the same time, the men’s activities are represented clearly. Also, it can be seen that in Figure 36D, the girl sits at the right edge of the screen with her head down, not conversing (silent) with others (all of them men), marginalised by the male characters.

However, in Figure 36C, the girl is framed with close-shot, the lens only just outside the car. The car is driving along the road and the woman is sitting in the car, looking out of the window in a daze, with her face veiled by a red scarf. The red scarf highlights her face, making the audience visually focus on it. Nevertheless, her face cannot be seen, as the scarf covers half of it. At the same time, Pema Tseden frames the woman’s picture, blurring and marring it by the light reflected on the glass window of the car and by the border of the window, leaving the girl unidentified. If we look at Figure 36B, we will know that there are in total four men in the car. The girl is also in the car, but she cannot be seen in this shot as she is blocked by the man sitting in front of her. However, if we look at the window of the car on the left side of the picture, her reflection can be seen in the glass of the window. She is silent on the way, always left out of the conversations among the men in the space of the car. Therefore, it can be considered that although the girl is a female image presented in the film’s narrative, she is actually symbolically absent from the androcentric discourse/conversation.



A



B



C



D



E

Figure 36. A woman character represented in *The Search*

In the last sequence (Figure 36E), it can be seen that the camera is now installed in the car and uses a long shot to frame the film space. The teacher holds the red scarf, which means that the woman has found her ex-boyfriend; but without any reason the woman has

disappeared from the film space. There only a photo can help to identify the girl. In this shot, Pema Tsenden opens a bystander's perspective in which we are all to bear witness to the journey of "searching" for Prince Drime Kunden and the moment of unveiling the mysteries of the woman. In other words, the woman character here is a symbol, like the result of whether "searching" for Tibetan disappearing culture is successful or not, that echoes the film theme of "search". However, unfortunately, there is no close-up to the photo, and the long shot creates a distance between the film characters and the audience, in which we are clearly far away from what is happening. That is to say, at the end of the sequence, the girl is not only absent from both the androcentric and filmic narratives, but also outside of, and symbolically absent from, the play of "image" and "look".

6.4 Can the Silent Tibetan Women Speak?

Through the above film textual analysis of cinematic representations of Tibetan women, it can be concluded that the women characters, whether they are represented as family members or cultural members, can be identified in most film spaces of New Tibetan Cinema as silent, marginalised and symbolically absent, echoing what has been explored in the social space – woman as sex-gendered subaltern in the Tibetan context. At this point, I would like to return the main question of the thesis: can the subaltern (silent Tibetan women) speak through the New Tibetan Cinema? If yes, from where can/do they speak? what can/do they say? To consider these questions, several layers of analytic reading should be drawn for the sake of argument. Again, to echo the discussion in Chapter Five – how should we examine "speaking" and "being heard" within the conception of "silence" through a masculinised national subjectivity? This should sprinkle some (postcolonial) feminist insights into the discussion. In this sense, to discuss the permissible subjectivity of female characters in New Tibetan Cinema, a traditional feminist empiricist indication can be made. The films of the New Tibetan Cinema are definitely not feminist productions, as they are neither made by feminists nor do they represent women's perspectives on political issues in the patriarchal discourse. Instead, the dynamics between Tibetan women and Tibetan men parallel the situation of sex-gendered systems in Tibetan male-dominated society, which have been discussed in the Tibetan social space.

We can now consider two questions which have been posed in the introduction of this paper – is some purpose being served by this kind of action of absent Tibetan women in the films? Or does Pema Tsenden simply ignore women characters in his Tibetan films? In this case, let us

read the data excerpt provided by Pema Tsenden, when questioned about gender issues in his Tibetan film representations, Pema Tsenden has said in answer:

In my films, the **narrative subject is mostly male**, so there are few lines for female characters. On the other hand, it is certainly the case that in society woman may be inferior to man, and **man may be able to speak out** in most cases.

(2016, 12th November)¹³⁶

Through the above the director's response, it can be read that their films more or less reflect a Tibetan social reality; they provided a possible explanation for gender inequality in Tibetan context, suggesting that Tibetan women "may be" considered inferior to Tibetan men and Tibetan men "may be" able to speak out in most cases. This highlights the established Tibetan patriarchal symbolic order. At the same time, combining these considerations with film textual analysis which I have already made in this paper, it can be understood that in "Tibetan Trilogy" Tibetan women continue to exist as subaltern, marginalised, silent, and repressed under the domination of Tibetan men, and are made to fit into the family power structure and the social position that is the inertia of Tibetan patriarchal society. This seems to echo Spivak's argument that "[t]here is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (1988:307) and "[t]he subaltern as female cannot be heard or read" (1988:308).

This "no space" in social space and the emblematic use of the "silenced Tibetan women" in the cinematic representations can also echo Khanna's (2008) notion of fourth (cinema) space that was discussed in the Literature Review, where women cannot simply speak through (postcolonial) patriarchal society. However, women may be able to create a space through the "silence", which is identified as a symbolic space of repressed and oppressed environment. Drawing upon the understanding of the conception of Fourth Cinema in the previous postcolonial feminist discussion, we can critique the postcolonial feminist conception stressing women's repression/struggle and representation of colonial/postcolonial discourse in the Third World space (Spivak 1988, 1990; Khanna 2008). It is echoed in postcolonialism/subaltern studies that women are a subaltern class in social reality, and that patriarchy is a system of gendered domination in the speaking of sexual/sex-gendered representations of Third World space. Generally speaking, postcolonial feminists traditionally

¹³⁶ Zhang Ling (张玲, 2016), 每月影评精选: 未尽的"拉伊" – 评电影《塔洛》. The article can be read at: http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzAwMzkzNDk4OQ==&mid=2247483882&idx=1&sn=d7a60d66d69ca3dc0dfacd20b71f6f7d&scene=5&srcid=0606qj4XpmlYXw9KFupoubf0#rd. The material is in Chinese, and the reference has been translated by myself.

use terms like “underground,” “invisible” or “less visible,” or “the underside” to echo what has been expressed by the conception of Fourth Cinema (Khanna 2008:128) to describe Third World women’s culture, history, and lives. However, it may also be considered that the “silence” could create a kind of “voice” for Third World women as a fourth space to represent their struggle being heard. In this case, the cinematic representations of silent Tibetan women in New Tibetan Cinema would enact a fourth space, which is a symbolic space characterised by silence and an oppressed environment to represent their status. Let us now go back to the hypothesis I posited in the conclusion section of Chapter Five. This was that the subaltern group (Tibetan women) cannot speak (is silent) through the New Tibetan Cinema. However, New Tibetan Cinema is speaking or creating a space for the subaltern (Tibetan ethnicity/culture), through the use of the “silent” Tibetan (women) as emblematic of the context of the oppressed, which allows the subaltern (Tibetan women) to be heard.

In order to understand of emblematic use of the “silent Tibetan women”, we can look back to the conclusion of Chapter Five, where I argued that in New Tibetan Cinema, women, children, and animals always serve symbolically as functional objects of socially and culturally Tibetan national masculinised subjectivity (Frangville 2015, Lo 2016). The idea that women have a metaphorical role has been echoed by Tibetan director, Pema Tseden, in a conversation with me about his “Tibetan Trilogy” at the Central Minzu University of China, Beijing:

Yang Li: From my perspective, the women characters are always quiet in your “Tibetan Trilogy”; for example, in *The Search*, the woman with her face covered by a scarf. Are they representing a kind of Tibetan social identity, a “real” Tibet?

Pema Tseden: In fact, Tibetan culture respects women very much. The reason for the woman covering her face with a scarf in *The Search*; first, this is because on the Tibetan plateau there is strong wind and intense sunlight, so Tibetan women normally cover their faces with a scarf. The second reason is that through this, the woman covered by a scarf establishes a **metaphor** for searching for Tibetan culture in the film.

(2015, 21th March)¹³⁷

It is clear that the unidentified (face covered by a scarf) Tibetan woman firstly reflects the social reality of the Tibetan plateau environment, and Pema Tseden seeks to normalise the

¹³⁷ The data was collected during my field trip to Beijing; the language used in the conversations was Mandarin Chinese, which has been translated by myself.

Tibetan women's face being covered. Secondly, the image establishes a metaphor for searching for Tibetan culture in the film space. In doing so, regarding the discussion of gendered/sexed representations in film space, women become effectively emblematic of Tibet's social-gendered hierarchy in order to express the ethnic group's social and cultural aspects and to explore the films' construction of a deeper and inner landscape of Tibetan society. Therefore, New Tibetan Cinema has established a certain fourth space of contemporary (repressed) Tibetan sex-gendered life and status, and has made the subaltern (Tibetan women) "visible" and "heard" in social space through the representation of her silence. As Ochs and Capps have said of "silencing":

Silencing is a product of internal and interactional forces in that a person may repress and suppress emotions and events, but these processes are linked to external circumstance, including others' expectations and evaluations. Silencing takes many forms, most of which do not lead to severe psychopathology. Silencing is part of the fabric of culture in that it is critical to socializing prevailing ideologies. (1996:33)

In other words, silencing is linked to the repression and suppression of emotions and external expectations and evaluations, so that the silence in New Tibetan Cinema symbolises the resistance of the oppressed subaltern. The cultural representation of New Tibetan Cinema "establishes a silencing of the subaltern. They can never speak because they are both being 'stood in for' and 'embodied' by others in the dominant discourse" (Maggio 2007:422). Importantly, this is embodied in the concept of the silent/invisible Tibetan woman as a metaphor for repression and the subaltern Tibetan-ethnic male society. This discussion is informed by feminist film theorists (Johnston 1973, Gledhill 1978, Lauretis 1984, Smelik 1993), who suggest that women characters do not have voices; they cannot speak, and neither can their images speak for women. In other words, "women as women" are negatively understood as silent, absent and passive objects in/from film text, in which the women characters have been signified as non-men, only represented in and serving as the meaning and ideology of men. For themselves, there is no signification in the patriarchal symbolic order: they are produced as the male's "other". In this sense, Smelik (1993:68–69) has echoed the conception of Johnston (1973) from a perspective of feminist film semiotics and psychoanalysis:

[T]he female character in cinema is a coded convention: a signifier. The signifier "women" only represents its ideological meaning for men. In cinema a woman signifies something in relation to men; in herself she signifies nothing(ness).

In other words, “within a sexist ideology and male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man” (Johnston 1973:459). The sex-gendered structures in the New Tibetan Cinema show and decode the fundamental characteristic assigned to women, which is that the silent women, as a signifier, shapes a repressed sex-gendered space and represents the ideological meanings for men, the meaning in relation to men. Though women do not speak out through New Tibetan Cinema, they serve to represent the repression to which they are subjected, representing the patriarchal/Tibetan ethnic minority’s oppression in the social space. That is to say, Tibetan directors individually, and New Tibetan Cinema collectively, take advantage of “the silent/invisible women” as a metaphorical element for speaking out against the status and the reality of Tibetan ethnicity, culture, and society. As such, the repressed woman image represents a symbol of oppressed (male) Tibetan culture and society. In other words, the representation of silent/invisible women characters is one of the codes of the film language that give New Tibetan Cinema a particular voice of quiet/near-silent but conspicuous resistance through the films’ androcentric narrative; the story of Tibetan cultural and social vicissitudes being accompanied by the impact of contemporary modern Tibetan society. Therefore, from the perspective of (feminist) postcolonialism and the field of subaltern studies, the silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent Tibetan women are suggestive of how the identity of Tibet/Tibetanness may be uncompleted and elusive in contemporary China.

Through the examination of the silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent images of the Tibetan woman in the role of the family member in *The Silent Holy Stones*, *Old Dog*, *The Sun Beaten Path* and *The River*, it can be concluded that the family is the origin of Tibetan women’s oppression and that Tibetan society is patriarchal. This provides a path to show us Tibetan women’s situation in the sex-gendered systems in Tibetan male-dominated society and in the family power structure, within which the “destiny of the female subject is to be given away in marriage and to attain motherhood” (Smelik 1993:74). Additionally, the status of Tibetan women characters represents and echoes the themes of New Tibetan Cinema in the aspects of ethnicity and culture, of which they are signifiers and serve to decode the ideological meaning for men (both Tibetan directors and male characters) in the film narrative. More specifically, the silent woman in *The Silent Holy Stones* can be considered to represent a metaphor of “silence” to echo the “struggle” for Tibetan identity and culture in the context of the contemporary PRC’s social hierarchy. Pema Tseden inserts a sense of infertility into the narrative of *Old Dog* to represent the fear and anxiety about the loss of

Tibetan culture's ability to reproduce under the pressures of contemporary Chinese society, which also echoes the theme of "spiritual suicide" in terms suggestive of the destruction of Tibetan culture and identity. The "absent" women family members in the "present tense" represented in *The Sun Beaten Path*, especially the image of the "absent" mother, symbolise the disappearance of the Tibetan motherland due to national modernity, and the loss of the possibility of reproducing and proliferating Tibetan traditional culture in the context of modernised Tibet. This hits the motif of "spiritual salvation" for Tibetans, rethinking and measuring the conflict and distance between modernity and tradition. Alternatively, the way women are "marginalised" from the androcentric narrative and discourse in *The River* is a reflection of Tibetan social reality, in which Tibetan women have been positioned inside the household, giving them the status of the inferior/subaltern who is "silent" in the Tibetan patriarchal family and symbolically absent from the "outside" androcentric narrative. This fits the director's aim of drawing a picture of daily Tibetan family life to present a "real" contemporary Tibet. Finally, in *The Search*, textual analysis of the shots shows that the woman character, as a cultural member, has been given a silent, marginalised and unidentified (symbolically absent) status, which links symbolically with the disappearing status of Tibetan traditional culture in contemporary Tibetan society.

However, Tibetan women's silence and invisibilisation in most of New Tibetan Cinema may also be analysed in relation to Laura Mulvey's argument concerning "woman as image, man as bearer of the look" to reconsider the meaning behind the objectification of women by both male characters and the audience in New Tibetan Cinema. New Tibetan Cinema directors always claim that their film space draws deliberate contrasts with the exoticising fiction features made by non-Tibetans. As such, New Tibetan Cinema rejects the intentional presentation and objectification of Tibetan culture as exotic otherness. In this sense, it is possible to suggest that women may be serving as signifiers: the silent women in New Tibetan cinema, through their silence, may signify the rejection of exotic otherness. To this end, I would like to argue for the possibility that Tibetan directors' positioning of women outside of the dichotomy of "image" and "bearer of the look" is an indication of their refusal to objectify and exoticise Tibetan women. If we agree that Tibetan directors are refusing to objectify and exoticise women in their cinematic representations, can we consider that this refusal actually symbolises the rejection of objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan ethnicity, culture and landscape?



A

B

Figure 37. Women characters represented in *The Sacred Arrow*

In this sense, I would like to cite some counter-instances from filmic data to give an alternative discussion of objectification of women in postcolonial discourse through New Tibetan Cinema. In contrast to the works of his “Tibetan Trilogy”, leading Tibetan director Pema Tsenden’s fourth film can be seen to engage in the objectification of Tibetan culture as exotic otherness represented by Tibetan women figures. As I mentioned in Chapters Four and Five, *The Sacred Arrow* is an “ethnic exotica” made for the Chinese “ethnic minority film” programme, which was established and supported by the Han Chinese government to promote Amdo Tibet culture and tourism as a part of Chinese nationalism. This film is involved in the discussion and discourses of Chinese “main melody” and “exotic otherness”. Therefore, it can be seen that in the film space, Tibetan women figures are represented and objectified as a central part of the film’s “ethnic exotica”, in that they are positioned inside of the dichotomy of “image” and “bearer of the look” by both the male characters in the film space and the audience in the social space. In this case, women in New Tibetan Cinema are no longer silent and symbolically invisible. We can see from Figure 37 that there are a series of sequences stressing Tibetan identity and the culture of objectification and exoticisation as represented by women figures. More specifically, in Figure 37A, the film depicts a feminine scene through drawing a group of Tibetan women made up and dressed up in traditional costumes at the gathering in Lhalong village. Though partly blurring the lens, the focus is placed in the middle part of the visual space, where there is a beautiful, ethnic and exotic Tibetan woman image (representing and objectifying a part of Tibetan culture). In Figure 37B, Dradon’s sister Dekyid and her friend can be seen singing and dancing in traditional Tibetan style; they are performing in front of other villagers and are in the visual focus of the

audience. It is worth noting that these villagers are men, so that the lens actually returns to the representation of “woman as image, and man as the bearer of the look”, and the women characters are objectified by both the men and the audience.



A

B

Figure 38. A woman character represented in *Her Name is Sola*

This kind of counter-instance can also be found in Agang Yargyi’s *Her Name is Sola* (Figure 38). As I mentioned in Chapter Five, this film was funded and supported by the Han Chinese government and the Aba County Tourism Bureau, in order to promote Aba and Amdo Tibetan culture and tourism. It can be seen as a counterpart of Pema Tseden’s *The Sacred Arrow*; both are involved in the “Chinese ethnic minorities” discourse through an “exotic” and “romantic” type of “Romeo and Juliet love story”. Conversely, the film can also be read as an exploration of the relationship between the invisibilisation of Tibetan women figures and the objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan culture. The film focuses on the description of the love relationship between Dongzhou and Sola, told through flashbacks. In Figure 38A, Dongzhou asks Sola go out dating with him. Through the use of Dongzhou’s perspective, Sola (woman character) is looked at by both the man (Dongzhou) and the audience simultaneously. Similarly, in Figure 38B, as Dongzhou looks at Sola wearing the necklace of red coral which he sent to her as a love token, the woman character is also looked at by the audience.

Through the above film textual analysis of these counterexamples, it can be concluded that the symbolic invisibilisation and silence of Tibetan women in most of the New Tibetan Cinema is one of the ways in which Tibetan filmmakers are refusing to objectify and exoticise Tibetan culture, landscape and society, which echoes the previous discussion of

how New Tibetan Cinema can “speak” independently. Undeniably, when Tibetan films need to comply with the Han Chinese authorities’ campaigns to promote state ideologies (“main melody”) for safeguarding national harmony and promoting ethnic unity, the films have to be made as “exotic otherness” in the Chinese ethnic minorities’ discourse. This is usually represented by women’s objectification and exoticisation in the film space. On this subject, Said (1978) has mentioned in his *Orientalism* that for the dominant cultural groups, exotic/ethnic otherness is usually represented by women figures. To parallel this notion and apply it to the PRC’s internal Orientalism, in terms of Tibetans as one of China’s ethnic minorities, Schein (1997:74) has also argued that “the figure of the ethnic Other in post-Mao China was for the most part represented by a female.” She has further explained that “[t]his was part of a recurrent constellation of features that merged femaleness with rural backwardness with relative youth (in the sense of lack of seniority) with non-Han cultures.” In this sense, I believe that “the silent women” in New Tibetan Cinema is one of Tibetan directors’ filmmaking stylistic strategies to create a calm visual style, which is both a part of their quiet way of telling stories, and a way to reject the objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan culture and landscape.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explore the questions raised concerning the discussion of Tibetan gender issues through cinematic representations. It can be concluded that New Tibetan Cinema has represented women characters through an androcentric narrative as having a silent, marginalised, and symbolically absent status in the context of oppression and modernity. On the one hand, the silence and invisibilisation of Tibetan women in New Tibetan Cinema are echoing how the “silent” and “marginalised” Tibetan women in fact exist in (Amdo) Tibet social space. On the other hand, the silence and invisibilisation of Tibetan women can be understood as one of the aesthetic paths used by Tibetan filmmakers to protest against the objectification and exoticisation of Tibetan culture, landscape and society, through refusing to objectify and exoticise Tibetan women and positioning them outside of the dichotomy of “image” and “bearer of the look”. In most Han Chinese and Western visual representations, Tibetans, labelled as one of China’s ethnic minority groups, are portrayed as “primitive”/ “exotic” in culture and “subaltern” in politics in contrast to the “norms” of the supposed Han/Western “modernity” and “elite” (Gladney 1994). In this discourse, it can be claimed that the position of Tibetan women in New Tibetan Cinema is of the minority of the

minority, and the subaltern of the subaltern, also leading to their representing critically the pain of the loss of Tibetan identity and culture in the modern context.

To echo the discussion in Chapter Five, it can be considered that Tibetan women's silence and symbolic absence in most of the New Tibetan Cinema represents the continued use of the trope of exploring the relationship and conflict between tradition and modernity in the context of the interactions of Western and Han Chinese powers and the subaltern status of the social construction. This metaphorical status of Tibetan women and their representations in New Tibetan Cinema serves to naturalise a whole set of ideas about Tibet, its anxiety and tension about disappearing Tibetan ethnic culture. Barnett (2015:153) has discussed how "[t]he role of women has yet to be explored by filmmakers in Tibet...but judging by their portrayal in [New Tibetan Cinema], they are sometimes seen as the carriers of the culture, if not the culture itself, as of greatest value and at greatest risk". If, then, we understand that women figures are emblematic of pregnancy and reproduction within most cultural representations, I would like to make a much wider guess about New Tibetan Cinema: if the mother character can symbolise the motherland in Tibetan cinematic representations, does this indicate that the "silent" and "absent" Tibetan women images in the androcentric narrative of the oppressed are metaphors of the risk of the loss of the motherland? Does this symbolise that there is actually no motherland any more for Tibetan ethnicity and culture in the present tense and even in the future tense?

Chapter Seven Conclusion: Seeing Tibet

Last but not least, I would like to use this final chapter to comprehensively conclude this thesis. More specifically, Section 7.1 attempts to provide a critical overview of the thesis. Thereafter the chapter moves on in Section 7.2 to cover the key contributions of this study. Following from this, the research acknowledges its limitations in Section 7.3. The chapter ends with Section 7.4, a discussion of suggestions for future/further research.

7.1 Critical Overview: A Question of “Tibetanness”

This research has explored the emergence of New Tibetan Cinema as a new “image” and “voice” of Tibetan self-representation for their culture, identity and society, re-making Tibet as visible and heard in the modern/contemporary context through analysis of three selected male Tibetan filmmakers and their Tibetan features. As I discussed in the Introduction, these three selected male Tibetan directors cannot represent the entirety of New Tibetan cinema, but their productions are the most publicly visible and researchable compared with other unofficial and independent Tibetan films that are less well-known; this is especially the case for women Tibetan directors, who are all but absent from Tibetan filmmaking. In this sense, women Tibetan directors can be seen to play the role of absence in the discourse of New Tibetan Cinema. From this, combined with the discussion in the data chapters, it can be concluded that New Tibetan Cinema centres on a masculinised subjectivity of the “new voice”, both in film space and social space.

Another characteristic of New Tibetan Cinema is that Pema Tsenden occupies the position of a leading figure who has been recognised as the first Tibetan feature film director and whose Tibetan features were the first to be given the title of New Tibetan Cinema (Yu 2014, Frangville 2016). Two other Tibetan directors, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi, have been heavily influenced by Pema Tsenden; this is evident in the ways in which their filmmaking embodies the auteurist characteristics of films made in accordance with individual concerns, yet echoing a collective theme. In this thesis, New Tibetan Cinema has been contextualised and identified as films made by Tibetans themselves, speaking for Tibet and Tibetan culture, using the Tibetan language, and taking advantage of deliberate contrasts with the exoticising and objectifying feature films made by non-Tibetans; whether documentary films or fiction films. This embraces the sentiment of Tibetans making their own films, no longer being represented as “minorities” and “exotic others” as in the non-Tibetan film industry. In this respect, this New Tibetan Cinema differentiates itself from the “old” Tibetan films mainly

made by Western and Han Chinese forces, which monopolised Tibetan cinematic representations for a long time and represented Tibet as an illusory-visual-political battlefield. It can be concluded that, on the one hand, Western powers and Tibetans-in-exile have taken advantage of Tibetan film as a political strategy to maintain the movement of the “Tibet Question” or “Free Tibet”. Tibet in Western cinematic representations is involved in a postcolonial critique; it is particularly represented in an Orientalist discourse and embedded with an “exotic otherness”. On the other hand, Tibetan films made by Han Chinese in the PRC are included within the genre of Chinese ethnic minority films and identify Tibet within the Chinese national cinematic landscape. The celebration of the notion of Tibetan films as “ethnic minority films” is usually concerned with the “main melody” and “exotic otherness”, as part of the Chinese government ideology of safeguarding national harmony and promoting ethnic unity.

In this way, the “real” and “authentic” Tibet and “Tibetanness” has been replaced by the Western and Han Chinese cinematic representations. In contrast to the former (Western and Han Chinese) Tibetan cinematic representations, the main theme and objective of New Tibetan Cinema is to express the love and humanity commonly existing in among human beings and to avoid intentionally presenting Tibetan landscapes and religion in an exoticised and objectified fashion. Tibetan directors through their filmmaking style are attempting to remove the “exotic” and “unreal” stereotype and recover a “real” situation of Tibet and Tibetan ethnicity/culture in contemporary society. However, Tibetan directors have so far done this by using a similar film aesthetic style through New Tibetan Cinema; will this collective filmmaking behaviour inevitably re-produce a “new” stereotypical inertia of recognising Tibet and Tibetan culture as an alternative cultural imagination? Now let us go back to a question I posed in the Introduction about Tibetan cinema representing “Tibetanness”: if we adopt the notion that the “old” Tibetan cinema, especially Tibetan diasporic (in-exile) cinema, has displayed an unreal/fractured Tibetan identity frame and an exercise of imagined “Tibetanness”, is New Tibetan Cinema (made by Tibetan directors in the PRC) without imagination? Is it representing, speaking, and negotiating an “authentic” and “pure” “Tibetanness”?

In other words, can we affirm that “Tibetanness” in the representations of New Tibetan Cinema is not fractured or dispersed, and that it is un-Hanified in the context of the PRC and un-Westernised in the context of globalisation? Needless to say, we cannot. Although “Tibetanness” is an identity which New Tibetan Cinema “must discover, excavate, bring to

light and express through cinematic representation” (Hall 1996:705), we know, through the discussion presented in the data chapters, that the “self” and “collective” cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema constantly changes because the identities of Tibetan directors constantly change; also, the circumstances and social discourses constantly change. In this sense, there is no exact answer to the question of whether New Tibetan Cinema can represent the “authentic” and “pure” “Tibetanness”. Rather, there are hundreds of answers. Just because something answers meaning to one discourse/circumstance does not mean it will answer meaning to another discourse/circumstance in the post-modern/post-structural context. Therefore, it needs to be repeated once again that the examination of the new “image” and “voice” of Tibetan cinematic representations in this research does not represent a search for the ontology of New Tibetan Cinema.

Instead, through the understanding of the films of New Tibetan Cinema as cultural/social productions/semiotics of Tibet, the thesis attempts epistemologically and constantly to ask a series of questions: “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 1988) If the subaltern can speak, who is the subaltern? Who is speaking? How can the subaltern speak? And from where do they speak? And so on. This is done to reveal the “speaking” and the “voice” in the deep inner relationships among social, cultural and gendered powers, approaching the case of New Tibetan Cinema through the postcolonial perspective and the field of subaltern studies.

To be honest, New Tibetan Cinema can be regarded as “still a marginal cultural practice, mostly for economic, educational, and technical reasons” (Robin 2009:37). Equally, we cannot easily deny that New Tibetan Cinema has inevitably been pulled into the identity of “ethnic minorities films” in the landscape of Chinese national cinema (Frangville 2016). Yu (2014) has used the term “transnational Tibetan cinema” to identify Pema Tsenden’s films; I would like to borrow this idea to aid the understanding of how New Tibetan Cinema is “‘transnational’ in the connection between [Tibetan areas] and Beijing, between Tibetans and [Han] Chinese and Western audiences, between Tibetans in and outside Tibet” (Frangville 2016:117).

This kind of (internal) “transnational” format could also indicate the characteristic of hybridity within Tibetan directors’ filmmaking, which has been fully presented and discussed in this research. As we have seen, the New Tibetan Cinema is able to speak for Tibetan ethnicity/culture and its voice can be heard because of the hybridity of Tibetan directors, as Tibetan-Chinese in the PRC. That is to say, Tibetans are an ethnic minority and subaltern

group in the context of Han Chinese majority, but the identity of “Chinese” Tibetan directors positions them and their films within the elite of the PRC’s social hierarchy. They have the aid of the dominant discourse/power (Han Chinese), so they can speak/have spoken. However, we may ask: if we accept the notion of hybridity in the transnational/post-national discourses for New Tibetan Cinema speaking “Tibetanness”, does this mean, as in “diasporic Tibet”, that Tibetan culture and identity in “the PRC’s Tibet” has already been fractured, dispersed, and lost? Does this actually signify that the subaltern (“real”/“pure” Tibetans) cannot speak? Again, there is no exact answer to this, as there is no automatic meaning within the poststructuralist frame. In this sense, if we understand text as the “reading of reading of reading of readings” (Steedman 2001) and as the “interpretations of others’ interpretations of earlier interpretations” for our culture, society and history, the thesis always constructs the meanings and simultaneously deconstructs the meanings from an open-ended perspective.

Now I am going to look back to the aims and objectives which were stated at the beginning of this thesis and determine the extent to which they have been met, through reflecting on the three research questions which I set out in the Introduction.

1. How far can Postcolonialism and Subaltern Studies provide the paradigms for discussing Tibetan social, cultural and historical issues as represented in New Tibetan Cinema?

As already stated in the Introduction, due to the social, political and historical particularity and complexity of Tibet and its relations with Mainland China’s government in the national and international contexts, this thesis has moved beyond the conception of colonialism into postcolonial discourse and subaltern studies, in order to evaluate and consider Tibetan culture, ethnicity, and gender issues through three empirical chapters analysing New Tibetan Cinema in the context of the intersections of film space and social space. This has meant exploring the social and cultural power relationships in the different discourses (Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan) to discover Tibetan social oppression within the framework of subaltern studies. In this sense, postcolonialism and subaltern studies offer a wider cultural epistemology concerning subaltern knowledge about issues of difference and inequality in the Tibetan context.

Furthermore, the thesis has mainly addressed the question of “speaking” through New Tibetan Cinema, which has been recognised as a new “image” and “voice” of Tibetan self-

representation. This “speaking” has been identified as existing in two spaces: filmic and social. This understanding has been informed by collecting and analysing both filmic data and extra-filmic data. In this sense, these two forms of “speaking” have been fully discussed in relation to Spivak’s (1988, 1990) central question of subaltern studies: “Can the subaltern speak?” As a result, through analysing the extra-filmic data – for example, interviews with Tibetan directors, field-conversations with Tibetan directors, and field-observational notes – it can be seen that in the Tibetan context, the conception of “the subaltern” is not fixed. Rather, the subaltern is closer to a flowing power relationship that depends on different cultural/social/political conditions/discourses. This understanding of “the subaltern” has been re-applied to the discussion of “speaking” in the analysis of the filmic data. In this way, by using postcolonialism and subaltern studies as paradigms to discuss the question of “speaking” in New Tibetan Cinema, the research has asked a series of questions in each data chapter: Can the subaltern speak in/through New Tibetan Cinema? If the subaltern (Tibetan?) can speak, who is the subaltern? Who is speaking? How can the subaltern speak? And from where do they speak? And so on. These questions have been asked in order to determine what Tibetan “voice” has been expressed concerning issues of cultural identity, ethnicity and gender and in order to explore the question of the relationship between “speaking” and “being heard” through the case of New Tibetan Cinema.

2. To what extent can the different views and discourses of Tibet – Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan – be used to explore aspects of the history, culture, and identity of Tibet by examining and identifying New Tibetan Cinema?

In dealing with the first research question, it can be seen that the thesis has explored issues of Tibetan social oppression and cultural identity by using subaltern studies as a framework to examine and identify New Tibetan Cinema in different discourses (Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan). Tibetan issues can be seen as shaped by the intersections of three discursive fields: 1) Western discourses that embody a history of imperialism; 2) Han Chinese discourses that are framed around issues of “ethnicity” and “ethnic majority/minority” status; and 3) the discourses produced by Tibetans themselves; these have historically been dominated by the previous two but are beginning to find representational space with the emergence of New Tibetan Cinema. In this sense, through collecting data from the observational field trips that involved attending/observing three selected “Tibetan” film festivals (the Tibet Film Festival in Zurich, Switzerland; the Beijing International Film

Festival Ethnic Film Festival in Beijing, China; and the Lhasa Film Festival in Lhasa, Tibet, China), this thesis has reinforced the importance of exploring the “self” and “collective” cultural identity of New Tibetan Cinema in the divided discourses – “Western”/“diasporic” “Han Chinese”/“ethnic minority” and “Tibetan”/“independent”.

Through exploring New Tibetan Cinema in different social/cultural discourses, drawing on the extra-filmic data analysis (e.g. the film festival booklet, interviews with Tibetan directors, and field-conversations with the organisers of film festivals), the thesis has discussed the hybridisation of Tibetan-Chinese cultural identity. Because of this characteristic of hybridisation, New Tibetan Cinema can be seen to “speak”. This conclusion also informs the response to research question one, as within the paradigms of postcolonialism and subaltern studies, hybridity is understood as “dynamic, mobile, less an achieved synthesis or prescribed formula than an unstable constellation of discourse”, and also as “power-laden and asymmetrical” (Shohat and Stam 1994:42–43). That is to say, New Tibetan Cinema takes on different meanings in different contexts. For example, in the context of the Tibet Film Festival in Zurich, which represents a Western/diasporic discourse, New Tibetan Cinema represents “Tibetan nationalism” and “Tibetanness” in the case of Tibetan transnational stateless nationhood. Then, at the Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival, New Tibetan Cinema has been framed around the understanding of Tibetans as one of the “Chinese ethnic minorities”; here Bhabha’s “minority” discourse is paralleled in the establishment of Han Chinese cultural hegemony. Finally, at the Lhasa Film Festival, New Tibetan Cinema has been drawn into the discourse of “independence”, concerned with the notion of cultural independence represented by independent cinema, in which discussion about whether and how “Tibetans” are speaking independently is allowed.

3. How can New Tibetan Cinema offer insights into the postcolonial discourse of struggle and relationship between Western and non-Western (Tibetan/Han Chinese), between Tibetans and Han Chinese, and between elites and subalterns?

I would like to conclude that through employing New Tibetan Cinema to discuss the struggle and relationship between Western and non-Western (Tibetan/Han Chinese), between Tibetans and Han Chinese, and between elites and subalterns in the discourse of postcolonialism, my research has contributed to the theory of postcolonialism and subaltern studies. The above research question offers this thesis an epistemological field for discussing a non-European (Tibetan/Han Chinese) cultural conflict. In this sense, this thesis has taken a theoretical

paradigm that was developed in the context of Western vs non-Western conflict and applied it to a context of unequal power relations that is not directly related to the West (Han Chinese vs Tibetan). From the discussion in the data chapters, using the data collected from film festivals for analysis of New Tibetan Cinema in different social/cultural discourses, it can be seen that Tibetans are “subaltern” in the modern context; in the context of the interaction of Western and Han Chinese powers and in the narrative of the oppressed, both in social space and in film space. This also positions the thesis within the discussion of both Tibetans and Han Chinese as “prisoners of modernity”. It can be seen that modernity has functioned as a political actor and an ideational construct in Western discourse to deal with Tibetan issues (Anand 2006:285); in which, for both Tibetans and Han Chinese, modernisation in the PRC is actually Westernisation in the context of postcolonialism/globalisation.

However, this thesis has also discussed the issues of “speaking” as expressed in the filmic data and extra-filmic data, which represent the film space and social space. Here it can be seen that Tibetans (as “subaltern” subjects) can still speak through New Tibetan Cinema in the social space, but this “speaking” takes the form of a “quiet/near-silent” voice in the film space. To return to Spivak’s notion of macro-structural “dominant/elitist groups”, two questions have been considered: How can we account for the subaltern? How can they speak? This has forced the thesis to explore the relationship between “the speaking” and “the quiet/silent” in the consideration of the subaltern subject: if the Tibetan is not speaking in the Tibetan film space, who is speaking in the New Tibetan Cinema? In this sense, the third research question also helps us to look back at the discussion of research questions one and two: because of this characteristic of hybridisation underpinning the paradigms of postcolonial understanding, New Tibetan Cinema can “speak”. In this case, although silent Tibetans, as the subaltern, seem not to “speak” in the film space, the “voice” of silent Tibetans has still “been heard” through New Tibetan Cinema, as Tibetan directors make the “silence” speak through their hybrid identity as “Chinese” Tibetans in the social space. This mode of “speaking” can be seen in the extra-filmic data, including interviews/field-conversations with Tibetan directors and film reviews/comments provided by Tibetan directors at national/international film festivals, as well as in their Tibetan films themselves. In other words, the New Tibetan Cinema provides a new case for postcolonialism and subaltern studies, in which, when we question whether the subaltern can speak or not, we may need to carefully consider our way of thinking, shifting from the subject of “speaking” to the subject of “being heard”. In which case, in further subaltern studies and postcolonial

research, we may need to ask, “Can the subaltern be heard?” rather than “Can the subaltern speak?” in order to open a broader horizon for the discussion of power relationships through cultural representations.

7.2 Key Contributions

The key contributions of this thesis, as set out in this section, can be separated into three parts: the empirical contribution (including disciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions), the theoretical contribution, and the implications for the cultural sector/film industries.

7.2.1 Empirical Contribution

The empirical contribution has disciplinary and interdisciplinary aspects, which must be dealt with together. To be sure, this is an interdisciplinary research project in which sociology and film studies speak to each other, as it aims to explore the interactions of social space and film space through New Tibetan Cinema. On the one hand, this is a study of Tibetan film and visual culture. On the other hand, the research serves a sociological purpose, aiming to evaluate and analyse the social/cultural/cinematic representations of Tibetan identity, ethnicity and gender issues. However, in a stricter sense, this research is not based on the ontology of film studies, but uses Tibetan film features to interpret and demonstrate the sociological questions and the concerns of (Tibetan) cultural studies. That is to say, these Tibetan film texts are one type of data in the research, to be analysed through semiotics, narrative, discourse analysis and the auteurist approach to help identify the questions of postcolonialism, subaltern status, and the power of elite/dominant groups in the Tibetan context.

Data have been collected from three types of “media”: “traditional media”, “new media” (“We Media”), and “film festivals”, in order to extend the approach of film discourse analysis. This also indicates methodologically/empirically the movement of discourse from film space (text) to social space (context). Through this movement, the film text has been finally put in the context of social relations: the relations of powers and the relations of conflicts captured by different social/cultural discourses/perspectives.

7.2.2 Theoretical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of this thesis is dedicated to postcolonial theory in conjunction with subaltern studies. Generally, the research has drawn support from postcolonialism to move beyond the conception of colonialism which has for a long time been commonly

applied to the cultural and representational cases/issues of Tibet. In this sense, the research has mainly addressed the questions of who the subaltern subjects are and whether the subaltern can speak, examining power relationships in the different socio-political and cultural discourses through the cultural case of New Tibetan Cinema. However, the Tibetan case/situation is a special one, being an example of non-European postcolonialism. The particular case of “Chinese imperialism” in a non-Western political community is related to a social construction of Western understanding, but is not written in western colonial history. Therefore, through the application of postcolonial theory and subaltern studies into this unique case, the research can be concluded to make key contributions to the theoretical framework in three specific areas.

Firstly, the research has paralleled traditional Western colonialism and Orientalism to the discussion of the PRC’s inner-ethnic relationships through the discussion of “ethnic minorities” cinematic/cultural representations. In this case, drawing upon Bhabha’s minority discourse, the Tibetan context has been placed in the conception of “internal colonialism”, “internal Orientalism” and “internal diaspora”, to reflect the establishment of Han Chinese cultural hegemony/dominance in the PRC. Secondly, and importantly, in discussing the cultural issues of Tibet, the research has also utilised global insights, so that Spivak’s concept of macro-structural dominant/elitist groups for subaltern studies has been re-made and re-applied to the case of Tibet. The framework of “dominant/elitist construction” of Tibetan issues provides a macro socio-political structure, but one with the feature of mobility, to help the research to identify and examine “the subaltern” from different sides and social discourses (Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan) in both social space and film space. Finally, conjoined with the understanding of Third Cinema and Fourth Cinema theory, postcolonial theory and subaltern studies have been advanced by providing a substantive and approachable exploration of (new) Tibetan (indigenous) cultural/cinematic representations in the context of Han Chinese dominance, modernity and globalisation.

7.2.3 Implications for the Cultural Sector/Film Industries

This research on the analysis of New Tibetan Cinema also has implications for the cultural sector/film industries, which can be considered as one of its key contributions. As I have mentioned before, cinema is not only a particular art form, but is also a ubiquitous principle for reading visual culture/aesthetics and social production in its general form. This resonates with Jacques Rancière’s notion that “[c]inema, in the double power of the conscious eye of

the director and the unconscious eye of cinema...[embodies] that the identity of conscious and unconscious is the very principle of art” (2006:9, cited in Lo 2016: 155). New Tibetan Cinema has been considered in this research as a new system of art/culture/medium and visual aesthetics of Tibet; representing Tibetan contemporary culture/identity, lifestyles, and wisdom, and also relating to social class, gender, history, social vicissitudes and development. With the emergence of a series of influential Tibetan directors, the understanding of “film-as-culture” is gradually being accepted by Tibetans, especially the Tibetan young generation, so that the study of filmmaking and film criticism has become “fashionable” and “popular” in Tibetan areas. In fact, as has been mentioned in the Introduction, the construction of the PRC’s largest film and television production base in Tibetan areas began in 2015. A new circuit of production of Tibetan film/cultural productions for circulation and consumption has therefore begun to take shape, in which the Tibetan film/culture industry has been recognised as contributing to prosperity in the PRC. However, we need to acknowledge that the prosperity of the Tibetan film industry will inevitably bring it into the orbit of the prosperity of the “Chinese” national/“ethnic minority” film industry and cultural sectors in the PRC.

At this point, I would like to make a clear claim for the originality of this thesis. This thesis is the first time that New Tibetan Cinema has been explored academically and systematically as a “new voice” of Tibetan culture. This has been done through gathering various perspectives from postcolonial theory and subaltern studies to see what conceptualisations and definitions of New Tibetan Cinema have been considered and discussed. In addition to the three Tibetan filmmakers’ films that were used for textual analysis, the thesis also collected news reports about Tibetan filmmaking in “traditional media”. I also collected several Tibetan directors’ interviews and film festival information from “new media” (especially from WeChat). I also conducted observational field trips, attending/observing three “Tibetan” film festivals, and had conversations with the three selected Tibetan filmmakers (Pema Tseden, Sonthar Gyal and Agang Yargyi) and two organisers of the Lhasa Film Festival. While attending these festivals, I also made field-observational notes and recorded field-conversations with Tibetan directors. I also collected booklets from “Tibetan” film festivals.

If this thesis had focused solely on filmic data, the representation of Tibet and Tibetan cultural identity manifest in New Tibetan Cinema could only have been understood in the context of the space and temporality produced by the narratives of the films themselves. By analysing non-filmic data, this thesis has been able to consider the ways in which the films take on different meanings in different social contexts; in this way, New Tibetan Cinema

becomes mobile and can contain many different narratives within different social spaces. Through this new empirical method, positioning New Tibetan Cinema in the different social discourses through data collected from the observational field trips, the primary objectives and aims of the thesis have been achieved. The aims were not to search for the ontology of New Tibetan Cinema; that is, what is New Tibetan Cinema? Or, what conceptions of New Tibetan Cinema have been established? Instead, the research concentrated on revealing the “speaking” represented in and through New Tibetan Cinema in the inner relationships among social and cultural powers and discourses (Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan), both in the film space and social space. In this case, New Tibetan Cinema can be seen to have various meanings in social space, rather than only reflecting meanings which are already given/framed in the film space. In other words, through exploring “speaking” within both filmic and extra-filmic data, the research has attempted to examine the power relationships between subalterns and elites. It has considered the question of whether the subaltern can speak in/through New Tibetan Cinema. This question has been explored in three ways. Firstly, in relation to the cultural identities of New Tibetan Cinema as constructed through discourses provided by “Tibetan” film festivals; secondly, in relation to self-representations of Tibetan ethnicity and culture in film texts; and thirdly, in relation to representations of women characters in New Tibetan Cinema.

7.3 Limitations of the Research

To discuss the limitations of the research, I would like to consider a question: does this research stand on the basis of postcolonialism/subaltern studies? In other words, the limitations of postcolonialism imply theoretically and practically the limitations of this research. Postcolonialism began by adopting a perspective of Other/marginalised/Eastern groups to politically and culturally criticise Eurocentrism and Western-centrism. The centre of postcolonial studies shows us how the “Third World” after the period of western colonialism gets rid of the ideology of imperialism in a new context of political and cultural domination. That is to say, the central understanding of postcolonialism/subaltern studies is de-centralisation, in which the movement from marginalisation to centralisation was/is shaped. However, it can be considered that in the process of development, postcolonialism/subaltern studies needed the aid of the dominant discourse/power to speak, determine and criticise the production of “objective knowledge”, as in Said’s *Orientalism*. The limitations of the research therefore arise from this. Is this research processed through a priori ideological

and cultural biases? Bluntly, has this research adopted the standpoint of Hancentrism (dominance-centrism)?

To answer this, let us return to the argument in the Methodology chapter about positioning the research in relation to the concern over my ethnicity. Postcolonialism and subaltern studies function the positionality of this research into three layers of cultural/ethnic discourses: Western, Han Chinese and Tibetan. Undeniably, my cultural/ethnic background/identity is (Han) Chinese. The identity of Han Chinese also indicates a macro “elite-subaltern” relation concealed in the conduct of this research. It can be explained that being Han Chinese represents marginalisation in Western discourse in the context of globalisation, but centralisation in Tibetan discourse in the PRC. For the study, I (Han Chinese, through this PhD thesis) have the aid of western discourse (English) to speak, and the voice of the Tibetan (through New Tibetan Cinema) is therefore getting the aid of Han Chinese discourse to be heard. In this sense, the thesis can be interpreted essentially as deconstructing centralisation in the relationship between East (other) and West (self, Eurocentrism) from a perspective of marginalisation (Han Chinese), while attempting to enable me (Han Chinese) to achieve the centralisation on the discussion of PRC issues. Therefore, does this movement of (de)centralisation in the research practise a cultural Hancentrism?

Indeed, I am not Tibetan, but I am speaking about Tibetans, making their “images” re-visible and their “voice” re-heard through this thesis. In other words, Tibetans are taking the “subject position” in their New Tibetan Cinema, but the “subject position” is not Tibetan in this research. Therefore, does this movement of (de)centralisation in the research strengthen the Tibetan’s (subaltern/other/marginalised) need to have the aid of the dominant discourse (Han Chinese) to speak through New Tibetan Cinema? If this is so, does the movement of (de)centralisation push the Tibet and Tibetan “new voice” to a more marginal/other position and subaltern status in the context of dominance? From the postcolonial perspective, the dissolution of the subject implies rejection of the central narrative, and de-centralisation can be considered as a process rather than a result. Therefore, it is impossible to take a fixed position, attitude and understanding in postcolonial study. That is to say, the argument of “can the subaltern speak” in the research is essentially attempting through the postcolonial framework to examine and deconstruct the existing relationships between the dominant/elite and the subordinated/subaltern. However, at the same time, the new relationships between the elite and the subaltern, between centralisation and marginalisation, and between the subject

(self) and the object (other), and so on, will be or have been (re)constructed inevitably through the behaviour of (de)centralisation.

7.4 Suggestions for Future/Further Research

Finally, I would like to give some possible suggestions for future/further research around New Tibetan Cinema. Although this research has depended on empirical methods to collect the relevant extra-filmic data in the methodological disciplinary of sociology, such as some steps of reception studies and some steps of observational fieldwork and field-conversations, this research has also largely relied on film textual analysis to support the central research questions and argument. Therefore, taking the methodological ground of sociology, three approaches could be considered for conducting further research on New Tibetan Cinema: study of the ecology of Tibetan filmmaking in the PRC, studies of Tibetan audience reception in the UK, in Beijing, or in any city/town in Tibetan areas, and also study of the circulation and consumption of Tibetan film festivals.

Additionally, this research has also used the (postcolonial) feminist approach to identify epistemologically the positionality of the thesis and Tibetan women characters in the film texts; but this has only taken up a relatively small space compared with the other approaches used. In other words, further study of New Tibetan Cinema from a feminist perspective could be produced in the future, in which the feminist approach not only focuses on the textual analysis of the representations of Tibetan women characters in the film space, but also takes into consideration the Tibetan films made by Tibetan women directors.

Moreover, this research has mainly concentrated on the fiction films of three selected Tibetan directors in its analysis of New Tibetan Cinema; but there are a wide range of documentary features made by Tibetan directors which could be considered valuable in the discipline of (Tibetan) film studies. Also, further study of Tibetan stardom would definitely contribute to the understanding of the Tibetan cultural sector and film industry.

Appendices

Appendix A: The Key Terms in the Thesis¹³⁸

Chinese Pinyin	Simplified Chinese	English
<i>Agang Yaerji</i>	阿岗·雅尔基	Agang Yargyi
<i>Anduo</i>	安多	Amdo
<i>Beijing Guoji Dianyingjie Minzu Yingxiangzhan</i>	北京国际电影节民族影像展	Beijing International Film Festival Ethnic Film Festival
<i>Dalu</i>	大陆	Mainland (China)
<i>Duli Diangying</i>	独立电影	Independent Film
<i>Fujiansheng</i>	福建省	Fujian Province
<i>Gaige Kaifang</i>	改革开放	The Chinese Economic Reform
<i>Guangdongsheng</i>	广东省	Guangdong Province
<i>Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu</i>	广西壮族自治区	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
<i>Guojia Guangbo Dianying Dianshi Zongju</i>	国家广播电影电视总局	The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China
<i>Hainansheng</i>	海南省	Hainan Province
<i>Hanzi wenhuaquan</i>	汉字文化圈	Han Chinese-characters-cultural circle
<i>Hanzu</i>	汉族	Han people/Han Chinese
<i>Houhong Qi</i>	后弘期	Back Period
<i>Jiangsusheng</i>	江苏省	Jiangsu Province
<i>Jinji Baihua Dianyingjie</i>	金鸡百花电影节	Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival
<i>Kangba</i>	康巴	Kham
<i>Lasa Minjian Yingxiang Zhan</i>	拉萨民间影像展	Lhasa Film Festival
<i>Longbiao</i>	龙标	Dragon-mark, representing the public screening licence of films in the PRC
<i>Minzu fengge</i>	民族风格	National style
<i>Minzu zhuyi</i>	民族主义	Nationalism
<i>Neidi</i>	内地	Inland
<i>Sanmin Zhuyi</i>	三民主义	Three Principles of the People
<i>Shanghai</i>	上海市	Shanghai Municipality
<i>Shaoshu minzu</i>	少数民族	Ethnic minority
<i>Shaoshu minzu dianying</i>	少数民族电影	Ethnic minority films
<i>Song Taijia</i>	松太加	Sonthar Gyal
<i>Tangka</i>	唐卡	Thangka, traditional Tibetan Buddhist painting
<i>Tizhi</i>	体制	The state system
<i>Wanma Caidan</i>	万玛才旦	Pema Tseden
<i>Weizang</i>	卫藏	Central Tibet/U-Tsang
<i>Wenhua Dageming</i>	文化大革命	The Cultural Revolution
<i>Wuzu gonghe</i>	五族共和	Five Peoples of China
<i>Xianggelila</i>	香格里拉	Shangri-La
<i>Xide Nima</i>	西德尼玛	Shide Nyima
<i>Xining</i>	西宁	Xining City
<i>Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu</i>	新疆维吾尔自治区	Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region
<i>Xizang</i>	西藏	Tibet
<i>Xizang Renwen Dili</i>	西藏人文地理	Tibet Geographic

¹³⁸ The alphabetical order is based on the Chinese *Pinyin*.

<i>Xizang zizhiqu</i>	西藏自治区	Tibet Autonomous Region
<i>Yiyu</i>	异域	Exotic
<i>Yunnansheng</i>	云南省	Yunnan Province
<i>Zangqu/Zangdi</i>	藏区/藏地	Tibetan area(s)
<i>Zangzu/Zangren</i>	藏族/藏人	Tibetan ethnicity
<i>Zangzu zizhixian</i>	藏族自治县	Tibetan Autonomous County
<i>Zangzu zizhizhou</i>	藏族自治州	Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
<i>Zhejiangsheng</i>	浙江省	Zhejiang Province
<i>Zhongguo duli dianyingjie</i>	中国独立电影节	Chinese independent film festivals
<i>Zhu xuanlv</i>	主旋律	Main Melody

Appendix B: The Table of Political Tibet and Ethnographic Tibet in the Division of Administrative Regions of the PRC

	Tibetan Autonomous area(s)	Province
Political Tibet	Tibet Autonomous Region 西藏自治区	Tibet Autonomous Region 西藏自治区
Ethnographic Tibet	Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 果洛藏族自治州	Qinghai Province 青海省
	Haixi Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 海西蒙古族藏族自治州	Qinghai Province 青海省
	Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 海南藏族自治州	Qinghai Province 青海省
	Haibei Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 海北藏族自治州	Qinghai Province 青海省
	Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 黄南藏族自治州	Qinghai Province 青海省
	Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 玉树藏族自治州	Qinghai Province 青海省
	Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County 天祝藏族自治县	Gansu Province 甘肃省
	Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 甘南藏族自治州	Gansu Province 甘肃省
	Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture 阿坝藏族羌族自治州	Sichuan Province 四川省
	Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 甘孜藏族自治州	Sichuan Province 四川省
	Muli Tibetan Autonomous County 木里藏族自治县	Sichuan Province 四川省
	Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 迪庆藏族自治州	Yunnan Province 云南省

Appendix C: An Example of Thangka



Traditional Hand-Painted Thangka of Shakyamuni Buddha ¹³⁹

¹³⁹ The picture has been sourced from the website: <http://www.buddhanet.net/thangkas.htm>.

Filmography

Dream (2013) Dir. Agang Yargyi

Her Name is Sola (2015) Dir. Agang Yargyi

Hidden (2005) Dir. Michael Haneke

Himalaya (1999) Dir. Eric Valli

Horse Thief (1985) Dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang

Kathok Puja (2007) Dir. Pema Tseden

Kundun (1997) Dir. Martin Scorsese

Little Buddha (1994) Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci

Lost Horizon (1973) Dir. Charles Jarrott

Lost Horizon (1937) Dir. Frank Capra

Old Dog (2011) Dir. Pema Tseden

Once Upon a Time in Tibet (2010) Dir. Dai Wei

Red River Valley (1996) Dir. Feng Xiaoning

Sacrificed Youth (1985) Dir. Zhang Nuanxin

Samye Monastery (2007) Dir. Pema Tseden

Serfs (1963) Dir. Lu Jun

Seven Years in Tibet (1997) Dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud

Tharlo (2015) Dir. Pema Tseden

The Coral Necklace (2006) Dir. Shide Nyima

The Grassland (2004) Dir. Pema Tseden

The Last Emperor (1987) Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci

The Last Weather-Shaman (2004) Dir. Pema Tseden

The Sacred Arrow (2014) Dir. Pema Tseden

The Search (2009) Dir. Pema Tseden

The Silent Holy Stones (2006) Dir. Pema Tseden

The Sun Beaten Path (2011) Dir. Sonthar Gyal

The Return (2015) Dir. Agang Yargyi

The River (2015) Dir. Sonthar Gyal

The Wolf Totem (2014) Dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud

Windhorse (1998) Dir. Paul Wagner

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