

**Connecting and Resisting through Mobile Phone Images:
The Dynamics of *Guanxi* in Baishizhou Art Projects**

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Introduction

Since the end of 2007, China owns the world's largest mobile phone market with more than 531 million users. As of June 2019, according to *The 44th China Statistical Report on Internet Development* issued by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of mobile phone netizens has reached 847 million.¹ The impressive growth of mobile devices and network service in China are closely linked with the country's ongoing acceleration of urbanization and industrialization. Along with the rapid pace of globalization, the booming of labor-intensive production makes China "The World's Factory". Here, the manufacturing and assembling of smartphone, in particular, are conspicuously surging. The famed Foxconn factory in Shenzhen, for instance, by now is the world's largest electronics manufacturers for companies such as Apple and Hewlett-Packard.

As the restructuring of economy facilitates the fundamental enlargement of mobile phone ownership in the country, it also leads to the proliferation of visual mobility in urbanized China. As a default feature on each smartphone, mobile cameras have become ubiquitous by now. What is also noteworthy is that, unlike the first decade of the 21st century, nowadays even the cheapest smartphones share almost the same platforms and wireless services as high-end smartphones. For example, a phone priced at 1,000 yuan (less than 150 euro) such as Redmi Note 8 Pro, also features a 64-megapixel high-resolution camera along with the fast and portable mobile network.² Also, most mainstream digital platforms are accessible to all the smartphone users no matter what type of devices they own. This means that the 847 million Chinese that own smartphones can now not only limitlessly produce photos and videos, but also can also immediately watch and share images online without fundamental differentiation.

Of all the mobile phone netizens, 648 million have participated in the emerging short video platforms, accounting for 75.8% of all users in China. The 2019 survey on the most frequently-used applications suggests that the use of video applications, such as short videos and live-streaming platforms accounts for 15.8% of the total consumption. The sensational expansion of short video platforms is uniquely distinctive, since many of impoverished consumers from the bottom-up also have become visual content producers, for instance, by hosting live-streaming performances. On popular apps such as Kwai, Tiktok and YY, contents of self-made visual digital are extremely diversified. Rural farmers, migrant construction workers, and food deliverers have transformed into

¹ http://www.cac.gov.cn/2019-08/30/c_1124938750.htm (accessed on 3rd July, 2020)

² According to the official site of Xiaomi: <https://www.mi.com/global/redmi-note-8-pro> (accessed on 3rd July, 2020)

internet celebrities, attracting millions of followers by shooting, uploading and editing everyday videos through their inexpensive mobile devices.

The remarkable process through which hundreds of millions of people from diverse social backgrounds, especially the poorer, share common visual-cultural practices brought about by the ubiquity of mobile digital camera's is politically pivotal for a further investigation. To comprehend the visual politics in the practice of mobile phone camera, my thesis focusses on two interrelated groups of people as practitioners, namely, artists and migrant workers. Both as crucial uprooted communities who have direct experience of the recent dramatic urbanization transition; they are also the very groups of people who have been deeply involved in the recent enlargement of mobile camera network. By analyzing three different art practices happening in Baishizhou, I hope to probe into divergent possibilities brought by the mobile phone camera while reacting to the dominant control from reality to cyberspace, and even challenging the current socio-political structure in general.

Urbanization, Migrant Workers and Baishizhou's Demolition

The floating population in China has reached 290.77 million in 2019, accounted for more than 20 percent of the total population and roughly 35 percent of the Chinese labor force.³ In the highly urbanized regions, the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province has drawn the majority of work force who left their rural homes to earn more. As one of the most prosperous cities located in South China, Shenzhen is the city where art projects discussed in my thesis mostly take place.

For most Chinese migrant workers, the foremost institutional barrier in the city life is the *hukou* 户口 system. Established in 1958, this housing register system divides citizens into either rural or urban *hukou*-holders concerning one's birthplace or current residency. The holders of rural *hukou* are institutionally excluded from the urban welfares and are also limited in terms of purchasing urban property etc.⁴ Despite the drastic urbanization process, Shenzhen are highly restrictive in assigning new urban *hukou* to its new residents, especially to low-income migrant workers. According to Shenzhen Statistical Yearbook 2019, the permanent non-registered population (not having Shenzhen *hukou*) of Shenzhen is 8.48 million, which makes for 67.7% of the entire city population, ranked the city a second place within the whole country. Furthermore, such

³ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/234578/share-of-migrant-workers-in-china-by-age/#statisticContainer> (accessed on 3rd, July 2020)

⁴ Wang, Fei-Ling. *Organizing Through Division and Exclusion: China's Hukou System*. 1 edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005.

system also constructs rural people as having low qualities, being backwards, and in general reducing them to secondary citizens,⁵ which forms a less visible but critical barrier, the xenophobia in the city. Confronted with the above twofold obstructions, most migrant workers choose to live in massive communities called urban villages, *chengzhongcun* 城中村 in Chinese, which literally means ‘village in the middle of the city’. As a “transition point between the rural and the urban,”⁶ urban villages are usually filled with dilapidated buildings where migrant workers can rent their cheap homes without restrictions of urban *hukou* and other city regulations. One of the biggest urban villages in Shenzhen was Baishizhou, situated centrally in the Nanshan District (Fig. 1). Under the shadow of the high-end residential area and business complex of the Overseas Chinese Town, the 0.6-square-kilometers urban village community was once the home for approximately 150,000 people, among which less than 20,000 native to the area with Shenzhen *hukou*.⁷ The saying that “One who has never lived in Baishizhou is not a true Shenzhen-ner” has widely spread among newcomers of this megacity, who consider it “the first and foremost stop of migration” of the city.

Following the economic and political incentives to ‘upgrade’ the city, however, Baishizhou has been planned to be completely demolished and subsequently renewed by Shenzhen municipality government. In July 2014, the city government slated the entire area for renewal.⁸ In June 2017, the first draft of the macroscopic plan was officially announced. Meanwhile, some tenants in Baishizhou received notice from their landlords for relocation. In 2019, the Shenzhen-based developer LVGEM put forward the project, aiming to build new lucrative residential and commercial complex similar to its gleaming neighbor, the Overseas Chinese Town.⁹ On December 28th, 2019, the overall plan for the Baishizhou renewal was been released. By the end of 2019, more than 50,000 residents had been forced to leave and relocate themselves outside this urban village. Unlike locals who own property rights and can receive abundant subsidies, for migrant workers as tenants, the renewal plan means the ultimate loss of affordable homes, jobs and also children’s education. In other words, the launched campaign has directly deprived them of their already limited access to public resources and services in Shenzhen, which leads to their departure from this megacity.

⁵ Greenhalgh, Susan. *Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

⁶ Joshua Bolchover. “Palimpsest Urbanism.” *E-Flux Architecture*, January 19, 2018. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/urban-village/169801/palimpsest-urbanism/>.

⁷ O’Donnell, Mary Ann. “The Handshake 302 Village Hack Residency: Chicago, Shenzhen, and the Experience of Assimilation.” In *The City in China: New Perspectives on Contemporary Urbanism*. University of Chicago Press, 2019, 119.

⁸ The first list of Shenzhen City Urban Renewal Plan in 2014: https://pnr.sz.gov.cn/ywzy/gxzb/gxzbjh/201405/t20140505_483176.html (accessed on 4th, July 2020)

⁹ <http://www.lvgem-china.com/en/news-en/2019/08/28/5882.html> (accessed on 4th, July 2020)

Urban Villages, Artists and *Minjian* in China

Confronted with such crisis, the chosen artworks in my thesis can be generally understood as three different artistic experiments that similarly intend to explore the resisting potentialities presented by mobile phone cameras in the urban village. However, the different positions and roles of three projects need clarifications in the first place.

In order to elucidate political potentialities particularly underlying in the latter two artistic interventions, this thesis introduces a Chinese term *minjian* 民间, which can be roughly translated as “among the people”: the literal meaning of *min* 民 means people or populace,¹⁰ and *jian* 间 equals to in-betweenness, midpoint, and space.¹¹

Compared to the noun *min*, what term *jian* explicitly denotes is an intriguing spatial dimension that interests me. In this thesis, the usage of *minjian* predominantly emphasizes the heterogeneous condition of urban villages, where the community of artists and migrant workers are sharing precarious spatial conditions without fundamental distinctions. Tracing the history of Shenzhen’s rapid urbanization from 1978, Jonathan Bach argues that Shenzhen’s emerging as a megacity, which should be considered as a hidden but vital “co-evolution of the village.”¹² From such perspective, a summary provided by the local slang for Baishizhou is in a way explicit: a “city that isn’t a city, [a] village that isn’t a village.” Formerly belonging to the part of the “Shahe Overseas Farm,” established in 1959, Baishizhou shares an intertwined history not only with its adjacent high-end glimmering residential complex, but also with the overall historical moments of the city’s further development. The surprisingly optimism of the Canadian journalist Doug Saunders in his *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History Is Reshaping Our World* (2010), is in a way accurate, as he describes the urban villages as: “the neighborhoods where the transition from poverty occurs, where the next middle class is forged, where the next generation’s dreams, movements, and governments are created.”¹³ Indeed, thriving urban villages like Baishizhou in the Pearl River Delta remain popular living spots not only among the low-skilled labors, but also for

¹⁰ <https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E6%B0%91>

¹¹ <https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E9%97%B4>

¹² Bach, Jonathan. ““They Come in Peasants and Leave Citizens’: Urban Villages and the Making of Shenzhen, China.” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (2010):140.

¹³ Saunders, Doug. *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History Is Reshaping Our World*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 2012, 3.

college graduates, small business entrepreneurs, young white-collar workers, as well as the community of artists.

With the comparable situation of placelessness and insecurity, many Chinese artists are also members of the unstable groups as “migrant workers.” After the 1989 Tiananmen incident, due to the tightening restrictions on freedom of expression and the opportunities provided by market reforms, many chose to move to big cities. Without the financial and political support, most of them live with and among other societal “outsiders”, including migrant workers.¹⁴ With its low rent and convenient geographical location, urban villages are on their list of affordable living spaces. Moreover, the Chinese phrase ‘doing art’ (*gao yishu* 搞艺术) often implies choosing a life of unconventionality and informality in contrast to norms, which partly means cutting oneself off from the mainstream dialogue and ending up in an incongruent position. With no affiliation with any official institutions, independent artists have received much hostility from the political and cultural authorities, treated as a potential threat to the social stability.¹⁵

The common reason behind such mode of migration turns out not too divergent either. While the politically radical opinions and practices of artists are often deemed troublesome for governance, the current spatial relationship between the Chinese authority and artists also remains somewhat ambiguous. Parallel to what evictees in Baishizhou have experienced through a series of sophisticated renewal plans and macroscopic regulations, the control over the fringe art community remains almost non-negotiable. Much research on the multiple evictions and demolitions of Chinese artistic community, particularly in Beijing – from Yuanmingyuan Artist Village in 1995 to the recent 798 art district and Songzhuang village – has unveiled the socio-economically marginalized position of the artistic community in China.¹⁶ In recent years, the sudden, forced evictions continue to take place in many famed art residencies, such as Caochangdi, Huantie and Luomahu on the outskirts of Beijing.¹⁷

However far from the political centre in the North, the circumstances of art communities in the Pearl River Delta area are not much better. As art critic Martina Köppel-Yang has suggested,

¹⁴ Eschenburg, Madeline. “Migrating Subjects: The Problem of the ‘Peasant’ In Contemporary Chinese Art.” ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2095837821/?pq-origsite=primo>.

¹⁵ Yang, Wei. *Li Shi de Hou Hua Yuan: Yuan Ming Yuan Hua Jia Cun Yi Shi = Back Garden of History: The Anecdote of Artists Village in Yuanmingyuan Garden*. Di 1 ban. Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei mei shu chu ban she, 2007.

¹⁶ Liu, Xin, Sun Sheng Han, and Kevin O’Connor. “Art Villages in Metropolitan Beijing: A Study of the Location Dynamics.” *Habitat International* 40 (October 1, 2013): 176–83.

Zielke, Philipp, and Michael Waibel. “Comparative Urban Governance of Developing Creative Spaces in China.” *Habitat International* 41 (January 1, 2014): 99–107.

¹⁷ <https://placesjournal.org/article/art-village-a-year-in-caochangdi/?cn-reloaded=1> (accessed on 3rd Aug, 2020)

nomadism appears to be one of crucial characteristics in the Pearl River Delta art scene.¹⁸ According to a survey conducted by the NGO Shenzhen Center for Design, without the state-sponsorship and policy support, the average life of art districts in Shenzhen is 3 to 5 years. In May 2013, with the expiration of housing contracts and the unexpected increase of rent, artists were forced to leave the once prosperous F518 'Idea Land' in Shenzhen Baoan district. On November 19th, 2019, the non-profit Redtory Museum of Contemporary Art (RMCA) in Guangzhou built on a former canned factory, abruptly shut down after receiving the evacuation notice from the local authority three days earlier. Confronted with uncertain and sudden allocations, the growing uneasiness of artists 'floating life are in a way comparable with the condition of migrant workers surrounded by the monotone high-rises.

Against the backdrop of globalization and neoliberalism, we have witnessed the state-led promotion and gentrification of art in China, leading to the growth of the construction of designated art-cultural clusters and the facilitation of the cultural and creative industries (CCI).¹⁹ For instance, the famed Dafen oil-painting village in Shenzhen, which served as the glorified narrative of national urban renewal in Shanghai Expo 2010, aims to transform the urban village and develop its cultural economy. Along with local villagers, migrant workers in Dafen are trained to become painter-workers producing copies of masterpieces with the annual production value reaching 420 million yuan, supplying more than 60% of the global painting market. The fusion between trade-artists and migrant laborers in urban villages like Dafen provides a unique lens to comprehend the restricted regulations of art in the current urban power configuration.²⁰ Apart from Dafen, other examples to promote the creative industry include Shenzhen's recent spatial arrangement of art zones: from the high-end expensive OCT – LOFT to the remote low-cost Wutong and Niuhu art village. The gentrification of art, which closely related to national soft-power agenda and the local real estate developer's taste, has a direct impact on the exploitative spatial distribution of artists.

What comes along with the selective support from the official is the dynamics between the spatial exclusion and the alternative living conditions. In Sebastian Veg's *Minjian: The Rise of China's Grassroots Intellectuals* (2019), *minjian* also connotes an unofficial social status that stands outside the established system. The less-regulated and marginalized urban village like Baishizhou, becomes an alternative choice for many artists, not only due to its cheaper rent, but also to the

¹⁸ Martina Köppel-Yang. "From the Heart of Canton." *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 3, no. 1 (March 2004): 7.

¹⁹ Chou, Tsu-Lung. "Creative Space, Cultural Industry Clusters, and Participation of the State in Beijing." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 53, no. 2 (2012): 197–215.

²⁰ Wang, J., and S. M. Li. "State Territorialization, Neoliberal Governmentality: The Remaking of Dafen Oil Painting Village, Shenzhen, China." *Urban Geography* 38, no. 5 (May 28, 2017): 708–28.

opportunity and choice to stand outside the above regulation, echoing one of the above connotative meanings of term *minjian*, namely, living with the ordinary people. Whereas the process of gentrification decorates art districts with polished appearance and unified spatial design, art studios in urban villages, often have no apparent difference with his neighborhood villagers' residential house. Moreover, the real living situations also produces spatially intimate connections. One of dominant features of urban villages in Pearl River Delta is the handshake architecture, so-called because you could literally shake your neighbor's hand simply by reaching out of your window, accentuating the possibilities of a shortened distance between nearby households. (Fig. 2) Besides its architecture, the dynamic connectivity of the villages also grows out of the chaotic pedestrian streets, overcrowded illegal buildings and daily retail activities. With a high density of bustling business, such as street vendors and everyday food stands, in Baishizhou, Johan Backholm argues, "the proximity and sense of community that the urban village offers contribute to a form of collective agency."²¹

The tangible living experience related to the urban life subsequently gives rise to the apparently keen artistic interests in reflecting on the urbanization issues and everyday life, particularly around the Pearl River Delta area. For instance, artists Ou Ning and Cao Fei's composed 40-minute long artistic documentary *San Yuan Li* (2003) offers a stylized digital symphony of Guangzhou's urban village Sanyuan. The daily life in Baishizhou has become an intriguing theme for many art practice. Screenwriter Juanfu Yang, for instance, has written a play Baishizhou for a local Cantonese theatre troupe Diandian Bus in 2015 based on his own experience of living in the urban village. Baishizhou is also one of the main backdrops in the film *Damp Season* (2018), with as its main character Long Liang, lead singer of the band Second Hand Rose, who for the occasion wrote a song called *The Dream of Baishizhou*.

Even though all of the above projects have attempted to establish certain relations with the specific social conditions in Baishizhou, it is hard to say that all of artists belong to the realm and dynamics of *minjian*, since their relationships with the authoritative systems cannot be generalized with diversified performances and outcomes. In my thesis, by illuminating different social positions of the three chosen art projects in each chapter, it is hoped that the pluralized spatialities of *minjian*'s with the established art discourse and privileged intellectual world can be delineated. The artwork *Singleton Lunch* that I am going to discuss in the first chapter, is organized by an art space called Handshake 302. Arguably still limited in the intellectual circle, the position of art

²¹ Backholm, Johan. "Urban Redevelopment in Shenzhen, China : Neoliberal Urbanism, Gentrification, and Everyday Life in Baishizhou Urban Village." KTH Royal Institute of Technology, 2019, 95. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:kth:diva-246188>

organization Handshake 302 in relation to *minjian* remains ambiguous for its constantly receiving institutional and governmental favors. The other two cases, *Village Reporters*, which is arranged by a loose artist group Xisan Film Studio in Guangzhou, and *Shenzhen Wawa*, which is conducted by a Shenzhen-based artist Nut Brother, have a more inextricable, day-to-day connections with the urban village. By analyzing their specific spatial situations respectively, I argue that opening up conversations with the uncertain scope of *minjian* helps to demonstrated complex difficulties and possibilities of collaborations with and mobilizations of local Baishizhou's residents.

Theoretical Frameworks: Network and *guanxi*

Against the backdrop of the aforementioned explosion of the mobile phones, I predominantly situate the above two practitioners, namely, artists and migrant workers, in theoretical frameworks of network. Based on microelectronics-based information technologies, the network in my thesis is particularly defined by the expansion of mobile phone cameras in China. Moreover, with the implications of *minjian* in mind, the connectivities in the network are not merely constituted by the aforementioned high-tech gadgets, but also multiple spatial conditions where complicated sets of cultural and political actors are engaged. If framed in this way, the theoretical dimensions of network are threefold in this thesis.

First of all, following sociologist Manuel Castells' observation, I position the expansion of mobile phone camera under the morphology of "network society", which is "a society whose social structure is made up of networks powered by micro-electronics-based information and communications technologies."²² More than that, what especially significant for me is Castells' emphasis (2000) on the structural logic of inclusion and exclusion in such a society, suggesting that the process of technological upgrading and renovation can easily transform into new steps of socio-political exclusion. Put it simply, people who have nothing to offer in the new network can be ruthlessly excluded. Following Castells' argument, Chinese sociologist Linchuan Qiu analyzes urban Chinese low-end networking (2009) particularly on such newly formulated inequality and exploitative control.²³ Through his in-depth ethnographic research in Shenzhen, Qiu's delineates a complex scene of persistence as well as resistance of the informational stratification in Chinese working-class community. On the one hand, he argues, the persisting distinction in the new technological condition serves as the predominant backdrop of the reinforcement of digital

²² Castells, Manuel. *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Pub, 2005, 3.

²³ Qiu, Jack Linchuan. *Working-Class Network Society*. The MIT Press, 2009.

inequality. On the other hand, the rise of new digital sphere prefigures a deconstruction of the rural-urban binarism, exemplified by the migrant workers community.

Secondly, I also attend to the Latourian version of heterogeneous networks, which are composed not only of human agencies, but also of non-human actants, such as machines, texts, animals and architecture, making actions durable through time and mobile across space.²⁴ Compared to Castells, Latourian perspective on the network distinctly refuses an a priori separation between technologies and their social dimensions, namely, the user agency. In our case, through the lens of actor-network theory, it tells more about the dissemination and mechanism of power and the assemblage of various actors, including the mobile phone camera, the camera users, the produced images, and both the virtual and living spaces around Baishizhou, etc. That is to say, it is through networking above actants that the outcome of such actions, namely, the exercise and flow of power relations can be portrayed. Coupled with Castells's network, I contend that doing with ANT in my thesis offers additional significant insights on the networking model with a further delineation of the mechanism of power, which I will further explicate in the following methodology section.

Thirdly, while the recent drastic technological invention has explicitly interwoven both the form and content of the interpersonal connectivities into the digital sphere, the term "network" and its political implications need further specification. In his *The Culture of Connectivity* (2013), José van Dijck distinguishes the automated connectivity constructed by online social media platform and the human connectedness. Compared to the latter which has existed long time ago, the former form of sociality, according to van Dijck, can be understood as "a coproduction of humans and machines."²⁵

One of the widely-accepted criticism of such new connectivity is the scholarly criticism of digital loneliness or autism, which derives from the paradox of the mechanism of digital connection and the experience of affective disconnection. In *Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2011), sociologist Sherry Turkle argues that, confronted with this digitalized age with the ever-increasing independence on the network, "we are connected as we've never been connected before, and we seem to have damaged ourselves in the process."²⁶ As a clinical category and a sociocultural phenomenon, analyzed by anthropologist Olga Solomon, autistics are widely presumed to live in affective remoteness, defensively withdrawn from the vibrancy and

²⁴ Murdoch, Jonathan. "The Spaces of Actor-Network Theory." *Geoforum* 29, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 357–74.

²⁵ Dijck, Jose van. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. 1 edition. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 33.

²⁶ Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. 1 edition. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2012, 293.

vulnerability of "authentic" bodily and intersubjective contact.²⁷ (428). That is to say, as we distribute ourselves in the virtual network, we may also dump the tangible emotional dimension of subjectivities. While the newly-invented technology allows people to carefully control, measure, and predetermine the scope of the interpersonal contact, it also makes people constantly experience anxieties of not having an actual conversation even after spending hours of connecting oneself online.

Since the engineered technological sociality has in way obstructed the tangible interpersonal connectedness in real life and its political potentialities, it is therefore politically relevant to ask, what might be an alternative scene offered by new engagement of mobile phone camera? To answer this, the third and most important conceptualization of network that I am going to employ is a Chinese term *guanxi* 关系. Inherent to both official discourse and grassroots circumstances in everyday Chinese life, I contend that a dialogue with *guanxi* feasibly allows more theoretical possibilities to continually re-define, re-shape and rewrite interpersonal connections and interactions of the visual politics in Baishizhou especially in the domain of mobile phone camera.

Since it is impossible to clearly define such a complex term, it would be more practical to look how the notion of *guanxi* has been utilized in recent research. Summarized by the anthropologist Yunxiang Yan, scholarly research adopts and frames *guanxi* mainly with two different perspectives in general: regarding *guanxi* as an element in a uniquely Chinese normative social order, or treating it as a practical means for advancing specific personal interests.²⁸ The dual separated concerns have been arguably united in Taiwanese anthropologist Mayfair Mei-hui Yang's seminal book *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: the Art of Social Relationships in China* (1994). Relying on the skillful mobilization of moral and cultural imperatives, the practice of *guanxi* both pursues diffuse social ends and calculated instrumental ends. What's more, for Yang, the notion of *guanxi* should not to be perceived as a timeless immutable feature in Chinese culture, but more as a dynamic personal exchange and circulation of gifts, favors, and banquets actively interacting with the political and institutional contexts across time and space.

However, what needs to re-emphasize is that *guanxi* is not only restricted to one-to-one dyadic relations, rather, it implies the intricate dynamics of pluralized connections, similar to the scope and expansion of the network. Parallel to the network theory and the ANT, I contend three

²⁷ Solomon, Olga. "Sense and the Senses: Anthropology and the Study of Autism." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (September 23, 2010): 428.

²⁸ Yan, Yunxiang. "The Culture of Guanxi in a North China Village." *The China Journal* 35 (January 1, 1996): 2.

distinctive aspects that unpacking the politics of *guanxi* helps to unravel and comprehend the mobile phone image in Baishizhou's art practice.

Firstly, different from the framework of a structured network, the distributive and chaotic practice around *guanxi* are extremely uncoordinated, which are full of unexpected circumstances or events that goes beyond the stable set of web-making and the stratified political network. By using the term "event", I consider it firstly being a punctual moment and discontinuous interpersonal encounter with diverse appearances and contents. Also, I attend to this term with Ariella Azoulay's ontological conceptualization of contemporary photography. In her seminal books *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) and *Civil Imagination* (2012), Azoulay uses the term "the event of photography" to refer to the generative nature of photography, which is based on its political ontology: "photography is an event," she writes, which is made up of infinite series of encounters, both in relation to the camera and in relation to the photograph. Diminishing the privilege of the final results produced by the camera, Azoulay holds that it is the presence or absence of camera, the position of photographer, as well as the spectatorship, together, construct an event. Compared to the previous forms of media, the degree of distribution has been large enhanced with the handheld mobile device as a moving portal, as everyone can travel into and out of the virtual with extreme fluidity. Also, co-evolving with its quotidian users' tactics, such habitual usage with the phone contributes to shaping people's everyday life, including how such mediated sociality becomes part of the societal institutional fabric. Therefore, I consider that the popularity of mobile phone as the primary visual media in today's digital life has in a way rewritten the mechanism of connectivity, echoing with the first layer expression of *guanxi*.

Secondly, *guanxi* delineates an affective dimension in interpersonal relations. The emotional attributes in *guanxi* often refers to *ganqing* 感情 in Chinese. Expanding on its direct translation as the quality of "emotional feeling", Yang proposes that *ganqing* also stands for the emotional commitment in long-standing and intimate social bonds,²⁹ which spontaneously implies the embedded institutions from which the network emerges, such as family, kinship, neighborhood.³⁰ The institutional aspect of *ganqing* complicates the expressions and dynamics of affectivity by introducing the interplay between the macro-level power and the redistribution of such in the micro-level institutions that especially matters to our discussion. Argued by Yang, "the art of *guanxi* redistributes what the state economy has already distributed, according to people's own

²⁹ Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Cornell University Press, 1994, 121.

³⁰ Yan, "The Culture of Guanxi in a North China Village.", 4.

interpretation of needs and the advantages of horizontal social relationships.”³¹ Such redistributions of power in *guanxi* constitute alternative and informal potentialities of resisting and reconfiguring the dominant discourse and the state bio-power.

It is noteworthy that the role of family ties has long been absent in most migrant workers' interpersonal relations. In their ethnographic study of South China migrant workers, Ma and Cheng (2005) observes that the position of inbetween-ness in their newfound urban living experience. Deterritorialized from the the institutional fetter and affiliated moral codes in rural life, migrant workers are metaphorically “naked in the megacities, caught between two discourses and embraced by neither.”³² Therefore, it is arguably much more difficult to establish tangible, intimate and sustainable *guanxi* when being such a liminal, exploited status in real life. Also, spending too much time on promoting communications directly equals to a reduction of their daily wage. Obviously, instead of reaching out for new *guanxi*, their choice would be to maximize the arrangement of time to earn more money faced with the exploitation. When getting off work, the mobile phone at hand becomes the most intimate companion of migrant workers, not only because their existing *guanxi* with rural family can be maintained by telecommunication, also because their desires and fantasies can be instantly satisfied and effortlessly realized. Therefore, they are arguably the most dynamic community testing out the alternative affectivities of *guanxi* in the Chinese digital era.

Indeed, not all personal relationships are imbued with deep sentiments, according to Yang, the third distinctive dimension for *guanxi* is *renqing* 人情,³³ which involves lesser degree of affections, but more accords to the rule of trust, reciprocity and indebtedness. Such dimension is especially explicit in the special occasions such as gift-giving and banquets, which can be understood as a form of favor, in order to tighten up the bonds between different parties. When one presents a physical gift, provides a service or throws a banquet, an exchange of *guanxi* subsequently takes place. From this perspective, it is not so much the rationality of the social interaction model suggested by Latour, but a sophisticated gift economy that involves the practice of morality, calculation as well as the ritualised conduct.³⁴ Further expanding on the dimension of *renqing*, *guanxi* thus holds a significant instrumental and pragmatic side, that is, one intends to mobilize *guanxi* relation to enlarge social network and gain own interests. In other words, developing one's *guanxi* through various means is aiming for accessing more threads of *guanxi*.³⁵ In

³¹ Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets*, 203.

³² Ma, Eric, and Hau Ling 'Helen' Cheng. “‘Naked’ Bodies: Experimenting with Intimate Relations among Migrant Workers in South China.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 311.

³³ Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets*, 20.

³⁴ Yan, “The Culture of Guanxi in a North China Village.”, 6.

³⁵ Lin, Nan. “Guanxi: A Conceptual Analysis.” *Contributions in Sociology* 133 (2001): 156.

sociologist Thomas B. Gold's view, *guanxi* is partly a form of social capital that is “accumulated with the intention of converting it into economic, political, or symbolic capital.”³⁶ From such a perspective, *guanxi* thus must be consciously reproduced, promoted and maintained.³⁷

The threefold salience of *guanxi* is in a way explicit by now: as unstable, fragmented and irreducible daily practice as events, as the connected relationship imbued with the long-standing affectivity, and also as the ongoing pragmatic mechanism of connection with instrumental ends. In particular, I consider a dialogue with such concept provokes the underrated theoretical and practical potentialities of network where social actors are able to negotiate and problematize the given hegemonic structure in the Chinese artistic and media landscape.

Methodologies and Research Question

To understand the complexities of art projects which I consider as cultural practices, this thesis uses a combination of interdisciplinary approaches mainly in the realm of cultural studies.

First of all, the employment of a selection artworks in Baishizhou for case studies allows me to investigate the politics of non-established Chinese artists' works in Baishizhou from a more comprehensive perspectives.

Second, the most important methodology I undertake is the conceptual elucidation. In her *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (2002), Mieke Bal proposes for another way of approaching concepts as methodological basis. Following Bal's observation, I also introduce Chinese terms *guanxi* as well as *minjian* as an unsettled driving factors that travels across transcultural disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and art. In his discussion on the 'civil society' in East Asian context, Taiwanese scholar Kuan-Hsing Chen underscores the ambiguity during the cross-cultural translation by modifying the proposal of Indian theorist Chatterjee Partha. According to Chen, the historical complex practice of *minjian* goes beyond the “western liberal analytic framework of state vs. civil society within modern nation-state.”³⁸ For Chen, employing the term itself becomes a method to diversify the Eurocentrism readings and frames of reference in the local-specific cultural studies. It is thus hoped that such exploration of artworks in this paper can spur various dialogues with the movements of concepts, which arguably opens up a specific “contact zone” argued by Mary Louise Pratt, where different disciplines “meet, clash and grapple

³⁶ Gold, Thomas, Thomas B. Gold, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank. *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, 7.

³⁷ Barbalet, Jack. “Guanxi, Tie Strength, and Network Attributes.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, April 13, 2015.

³⁸ Chen, Kuan-Hsing. “Civil Society and Min-Jian: On Political Society and Popular Democracy.” *Cultural Studies* 17, no. 6 (November 1, 2003): 888.

each other.”³⁹That is to say, not only the art cases are being examined in the paper, the very concepts also acquire new meanings interacting with the local circumstance of Baishizhou and the global scene of mobile digitalization.

What comes along with the traveling concepts is a close examination of specific socio-political conditions of Baishizhou. A thorough understanding of relevant institutional legacies and power structure is important to position such dynamic interrelations in a particularly critical localized situation, and to further comprehend the visual politics of China’s transitional urbanization and digitalization.

Fourth, I also use the aforementioned ANT as another major method, which aims to deconstruct the group of human and non-human entities in each of art practice in order to examine the specific dynamics of power and resistance. In particular, various engagements of camera, camera holders, and produced images in three art projects are being examined in relation to its position and performances in the network.

Also, by juxtaposing three different art projects in this paper, the embedded comparisons are intended to make explicit. Firstly, a comparison between the artwork remaining the art world (*Singleton Lunch*) and more inclusive cultural practices (*Village Reporters* and *Shenzhen Wawa*) beyond the realm of art institution helps to uncover the vigorous political potentialities of *minjian* communities. Secondly, it is also hoped that through several comparisons between the Chinese term and its counterparts in English academia, the cross-cultural translation and appropriation can be experimented. In order to verify certain details in their art practice, several one-to-one interviews with artists Zheng Hongbin from *Village Reporters* and Nut Brother from *Shenzhen Wawa* via the platform of Wechat have been conducted.

Following from this, my research question can be formulated as: in what ways can art projects in Baishizhou interact with and reinvent *guanxi* while resisting the authoritative regime power through mobile phone images? My thesis will be thus structured as: the first chapter will deal with a participatory art project organized by a non-official art space located in Baishizhou, with particular attention on the dissemination of images on social media platforms. By analyzing *minjian* and its political potentialities, the second chapter focuses on the making of one documentary that further demonstrates a closer engagement and collaboration between artists and urban villages through mobile phone cameras. In the third chapter, I will present another participatory artwork with its intense experience with and its counteract and circumvention against the censorship machine, which further extends the dynamics of resistance and diversifies the battlegrounds from Baishizhou to the mobilized cyberspaces.

³⁹ Pratt, Mary Louise. “Arts of the Contact Zone.” *Profession*, 1991, 34.

Chapter One: *Singleton Lunch* (2019)

Located on the third floor of Building 49, Block 2, Shangbaishi Road in Baishizhou, Shenzhen, Handshake 302 is a 12 square-meter art space and a non-profit organization founded in October 2013. Aiming for promoting the experimental art, ethnographic practice and public art education, the core team of Handshake 302 includes American anthropologist Mary Ann O'Donnell, artist Kaiqin Zhang, and designers Sheng Lei, Dan Wu, He Liu, etc. The name of the space, Handshake 302, holds a twofold meaning: first, it refers to the unique architecture⁴⁰ prevalent in the highly-condensed urban village like Baishizhou. (Fig. 3) Second, it expresses the team's intention to closely communicate with the residents living in Baishizhou in the form of public art. According to O'Donnell, three principles of the art practice in Handshake 302 can be summarized as affordable, fun, understandable. Since its inception, the space has hosted nearly a hundred events, including small-scale salons, "Village Hack" artist residence,⁴¹ collaborated art programs with the local community, public art education courses, and so on. During the execution of some of the projects, artists and participants also work or even live together in this tiny but completely-equipped room. On August 19, 2019, after receiving governmental announcement of the eviction, the art space is forced to move out of the Baishizhou to Xiasha.

In this chapter, I will look into one of their projects, *Singleton Lunch* (2019), in order to understand how art practice can interact with the dynamics of *guanxi* particularly in the context of mobile phone images in contemporary China. For the project, Handshake 302 invites guests to prepare a meal for 4 to 6 people (the average size of a household in China) via the open recruitment on its Wechat account. For each meal, Handshake 302 provides the chef five yuan⁴² per person to purchase cooking ingredients in the Baishizhou community. During the meal, the invited chef is obliged to lead a loose discussion with the participants on topics ranging from general issues such as urbanization and immigration, to everyday living problems such as the pressure of getting

⁴⁰ The name "handshake" is given because with a high density of buildings in urban village like Baishizhou, you could literally shake neighbor's hand simply by reaching out of the window, since there is extremely small distance between each building.

⁴¹ <https://villagehack.tumblr.com/> (Accessed on 20th, June 2020)

⁴² The team has explained the specific amount "five yuan" (0.6 Eruo) as follows in their article published on the Wechat platform: "Based on their survey of a 25,000 person sample, the average salary in Shenzhen is 5,199 yuan per month in 2019. However, when they place that figure in the socio context, they realized that 62.5% of the sample made 6,000 or less per month, while another 15% made between 6,000 to 8,000 per month. In other words, a significant majority of Shenzhen people are earning 8,000 or less per month." Five yuan per meal is thus a rough calculation by subtracting other necessary expenditure of the income Baishizhou residents, who arguably belongs the less-8,000-yuan group. <http://suo.im/6roFmF> (accessed on July 11th, 2020)

married, family issues and housing rent. Before moving out of Baishizhou, nine meals in total were held in Handshake 302, with 82 participants altogether.⁴³

More than Relational Aesthetics

In the review of its 7th Lunch on its Wechat account post, the team of Handshake 302 mainly refers to French curator Nicolas Bourriaud's theoretical observations to explain its own aesthetic motives and ambitions.⁴⁴ In his *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), Bourriaud foresaw the upcoming difficulties for maintaining relationships outside the trading areas in real life, where social bonds have gradually become "a standard artifact"⁴⁵ and no longer can be directly experienced in "the society of the spectacle"(Debord, 1967). He thus considers contemporary art practice in the 1990s undertaking a political mission for creating a social environment in which people came together to participate in a shared activity. For identifying such art, Bourriaud suggests that we ask the following questions under his "criteria of co-existence": "does this work permit me to enter into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?"⁴⁶ If so, the reparative human connections can possibly engender during such art practice. The project of Thai--Argentina artist Rirkrit Tiravanija is perhaps the best-known exemplar for Bourriaud's theorizations. At the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, the artist performed *Untitled 1990 (Pad Thai)* in which he converted the gallery space into a kitchen where he served Pad Thai and vegetable curry for free to visitors. For Bourriaud, not only criticizing the art institution, what Tiravanija's art has also managed to produce are so-called "hands-on utopias"⁴⁷ in which free and transparent interpersonal relations may be made possible, in responding to the increasingly spectaclized society at large.

Similar to Tiravanija's art, in *Singleton Lunch*, dining around the table allows for convivial, alternative relations between chefs and guests to develop, promoting the interpersonal involvement and connectivity between participants. In Bourriaud's words, such a form of art "is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination... a dot on line."⁴⁸ Moreover, parallel to the case of Handshake 302, what is especially significant is the Tiravanija's own critical reflections on the discourse of relationality practiced in his art against the backdrop of the Western theoretical world. In the interview with Raimar Stange, reflecting on the

⁴³ The number is calculated by author by adding up all the participants in each event that the team has posted online.

⁴⁴ <http://suo.im/5Mcjq6> (accessed on 10th, June 2020)

⁴⁵ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Les Presses Du Reel edition. Dijon: Les Presse Du Reel, Franc, 1998, 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 8.

Untitled 1990 (Pad Thai), Tiravanija has explained how he interprets an alternative formulation of interpersonal relations during his own art practice:

“When I started to cook and serve food... I quickly realised that viewers (readers, critics) were interpreting the work as performance in a Beuysian sense, as a staged situation, which meant that viewers had a certain distance to it. I felt that this distance represented the gap in Western thought between ‘subject ’and ‘object, ’which I needed to attack and dismantle – the ‘doubt ’about the author, or the ‘doubt ’about the subject’s position or positioning. So, in order to confuse the positions, I implicated the viewer.”⁴⁹

Navigating out of the subject/object dualism in Western theoretical backdrop, it is with Tiravanija’s statement in mind that I interpret the emerging relationalities in Baishizhou’s lunches with the Chinese term *guanxi*. Compared to Tiravanija’s famed Thai dinner party, I argue that the experiment of Handshake 302 even goes further in three aspects.

Firstly, in *Singleton Lunch*, the person who is in charge of cooking and serving is no longer a well-known artist. Instead, hosts and guests are both interchangeable and temporary roles, where a fixed identity or a leading role of an ‘artist’ is of little importance.

Secondly, the intricate condition of art, socio-space and media-technology in 2019 Baishizhou, China has been comparatively inadequately discussed than it has in Tiravanija’s space and time. Receiving much success in the global art scene, critiqued by James Meyer, Tiravanija’s performance does not lead to any revolutionary conditions of alterity, but rather encapsulates the “mechanisms of exchange of the global art market in which the artist operates.”⁵⁰ Contrast to Tiravanija’s established success on the international art market, the project of Handshake 302 is situated in a distinctively different socio-political context which largely concealed by the Eurocentric art scene of globalization.

From the outset, the two words in the title of the project, “singleton” and “lunch”, have in a way prompted me to seek for the dual important dimensions for analysis. Firstly, the term “singleton” summarizes the prevalence of isolated living situation in contemporary China, which sheds light on the complicated tensions between the expansive digital networking and the paradoxical interpersonal disconnectedness in reality. Secondly, having “lunch” with strangers performs an artistic experiment where the implications of *guanxi* can be critically re-appropriated, reconsidered and even challenged by means of food. Also, more than just on-site performance, its

⁴⁹ Raimar Stange. “Interview Rirkrit Tiravanija,” no. #31 Spring (2012).

<http://www.spikeartmagazine.com/articles/interview-rirkrit-tiravanija>. (accessed on 1st Aug, 2020)

⁵⁰ James Meyer. “Nomads: Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art.” In *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*. Black Dog Press, 2000, 19.

critical interactions with the mobile phone camera further complicate expressions of *guanxi* in the digitalized society.

To start with, the practice of eating-together has a fundamentally irreplaceable role in shaping Chinese cultural conventions. Using cultural theorist Xin Liu's words, as a social institution like language in Chinese culture, food is one kind of "collective contract that one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to survive in the community it dominates."⁵¹ In terms of its socio-political conventions, food exemplifies an ideal imagination of political community in the long-standing political traditions of social solidarity. In Confucianism political narrative, for instance, food evokes images of an ideal society with the ultimate harmony. In *The Work of Mencius* 孟子, the utopian world is envisioned as a place where "the grain will be more than can be eaten," and "the fishes and turtles will be more than can be consumed," so that "people may nourish their living and mourn for their dead, without any feeling against any."⁵²

In addition to the long-standing philosophical and political ideals, throwing a banquet in everyday life remains to be a vital tactic for Chinese to improve, enlarge and sustain *guanxi*.⁵³ That is to say, what is dynamically happening around dining table is not only an exchange of words, food, and liquor, but also an implicit exchange of favors, gifts, and subsequently the social bindings. Following the three dimensions of *guanxi* that have been discussed in the introduction, the practice of eating-together promotes interpersonal intimacies, but also possibly reinforce and reproduce social stratifications among the participants in some occasions.⁵⁴ What's more, it can also become a pragmatic way for accumulating socio-political capital. For instance, after entering the socialist period in 1949, the sense of commonality, sharing and equality have been actively practiced during collective eating. As observed by anthropologist Ellen Oxfeld, from Maoism period to the present, "*daguofan* 大锅饭, eating from one big pot became an ideological reconciliation in the proletarian community in China."⁵⁵

Thirdly and most importantly, for recruiting members and documenting each lunch, the team of Handshake 302 has posted various images and videos on its social media account on Wechat and Facebook. While it is a common practice for contemporary artists employing new media to publicize,

⁵¹ Liu, Xin. *In One's Own Shadow: An Ethnographic Account of the Condition of Post-Reform Rural China*. First Edition edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 82.

⁵² The original text is 不违农时，谷不可胜食也；数罟不入洿池，鱼鳖不可胜食也；斧斤以时入山林，材木不可胜用，是使民养生丧死无憾也。From *The Work of Mencius* 梁惠王上 Liang Hui Wang I, translated by James Legge (1861).

⁵³ Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets* and Yan, "The Culture of Guanxi in a North China Village".

⁵⁴ Tian, R G, K Tian, Z Dandan, and C H Wang. "Food Culture in China: From Social Political Perspectives." *Trames. Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 22, no. 4 (2018): 345.

⁵⁵ Oxfeld, Ellen. *Bitter and Sweet: Food, Meaning, and Modernity in Rural China*. Univ of California Press, 2017, 6.

the media significance of such practice with the mobile phone remain underexplored. The prominent presence of mobile phone which has deeply affected the dietary experience happening around the dining table: when eating alone, many people often take out their phones to watch videos, reply to messages, and scrolling down the social platforms; While dining around the table together, many people also habitually take out their phones, especially for capturing images of food before eating and then editing and sharing them afterwards. From such perspective, the making of mobile phone image around the Handshake 302's table can also be understood as a particular mobilized mediation of the collective dietary experience.

Reflecting on the micro-utopian intent of the practice of relational art, British critic Claire Bishop reminds us that the very *quality* of the relationships in Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" has never been carefully examined. What remained unanswered in his relational aesthetics include: "what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?"⁵⁶ Following her inquiries, I contend that a close theoretical engagement with an emphasis on the mobile phone image might be productive in order to further identify such *quality* while analyzing the social relations of *Singleton Lunch*. Departing from the rhetoric of relational aesthetics, the increasingly transformative relations in the realm of digital visibility, the precarious survival conditions in urban village life, as well as its spatial intimacy with the residents in handshake buildings, together call on an in-depth investigation that goes beyond the contextual scope in relational aesthetics and the spatial constrictions of institutional art laboratory.

In what way does such dynamics of everyday interlinkage with the mobile phone image on the dining table influence the very "quality" of connectivity in Handshake 302's project? In order to answer this, I intend to further employ the methods offered by the ANT, which the actants of both human and non-human can be equally examined and thus considered in a connective manner. To unravel the political potentialities in *Singleton Lunch*, I will discuss four agencies, or protagonists, the produced images, camera holders, mobile phone camera, and the spectatorship revolving around this particular lunch table in Baishizhou respectively, through which the political potentialities as well as difficulties experimented by *Singleton Lunch* can be comprehended in a relational way.

The Image: Food Porn and Poor Image

What has foremostly complicated the dynamics is one specific category in the mobile visual culture that *Singleton Lunch* has focused on, namely, is the image of food. The plain and modest

⁵⁶ Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." *October*, 2004, 65.

appearance of the cheap home-style dishes represented by unfiltered, low-resolution images, such as chicken and mushrooms, egg frittata, seafood porridge and handmade dumplings are not that appealing or attractive for the spectatorship (Fig. 4). In some photos, the photographed dishes are still being prepared on the stove in the kitchen; in other photos, with haphazardly placed cooking utensils, it is not even clear what exactly has been served (Fig.5). What's more, the photographic shooting is obviously below the amateur level, since the focus and exposure of many photos are not even rightly set up.

Indeed, producing professional-level images of food is by no means the focus of artworks. Yet Handshake 302's practice with mobile phone cameras holds the significance that can critically reflect on the vocabulary of digital culture, particularly one phenomenon called "food porn". Derived from human sexuality, the usage of term "porn" refers to the visual aesthetics that emphasizes the pleasurable and sensual dimension of food. Media scholar Yasmin Ibrahim defines the term in today's digital context as "the act of styling and capturing food on mobile gadgets, eliciting an invitation to gaze and vicariously consume, and to tag images of food through digital platforms."⁵⁷ With the intensified intervention of the mobile phone, the dining table nowadays has also become one of the places where the manufacture of digital spectacles ceaselessly take place. The idea of the image of food as a desirable object worthy of gazing engages the inherent possibilities of voyeurism afforded by the Internet.⁵⁸ If framed in this way, the visual representations of food are capable to transform any ordinary meal in everyday life into the mediation of spectacularized, mouth-watering and gaze-inviting imaginations. In the production of mobile phone food images, representing sensualized objects has partly replaced the complexities of *guanxi* in real eating experience. That is to say, what matters the most is not the taste of the cooked food and the subsequent interpersonal *guanxi* around the table, but a refined and flattened visual mediation mediated by the mobile screen.

While such seductive, high-resolution images of food constructing impressive illusions that can be easily fetishized and thus consumed becomes dominant on the mobile screen, images produced during the *Singleton Lunch* seems to be exceptionally disruptive and thus cannot be objectified as pleasurable, sensual "porn". In her *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009), cultural theoretician Hito Steyerl argues for alternative potentialities that exist in the practice of "poor image", which is the low-resolution, amateur images fiercely in production and widely in

⁵⁷ Ibrahim, Yasmin. "Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle." *International Journal of E-Politics (IJEP)* 6, no. 3 (2015): 2.

⁵⁸ McDonnell, Erin Metz. "Food Porn: The Conspicuous Consumption of Food in the Age of Digital Reproduction." In *Food, Media and Contemporary Culture: The Edible Image*, edited by Peri Bradley, 239–65. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016, 241.

circulation. Contrast to the omnipresent commodification in the digitalized visual culture, the dynamics of such snapshots have formulated a battleground where “the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction”⁵⁹ is actively presented. Following cinema theorist Dziga Vertov’s communist prediction, Steyerl argues that the speedy circulation of such poor images has arguably created “visual bonds”, which is a nonconformist circuit that holds the potential to resist and disrupt the hegemonic flow of images. Under the new mediations of mobile phone cameras, the affective dimension of such food image in *Singleton Lunch* is also explicitly important. An image of food seems to be still and silent, but it in fact sets in motion the very fresh moment when the food is being cooked, served and enjoyed. In Ibrahim’s word, it spontaneously records the dynamic moment of the users’ ephemeral food consumer experience.⁶⁰

Moreover, compared to the professional or meticulous shootings, the blurred, out-of-focus snapshots uploaded by Handshake 302 renders more possibilities in the *guanxi*-building especially with the intimate affective dimension, *ganqing* in *guanxi*. The snapshots of having-meal-together have not kept such an important aspect in food and *guanxi* out of sight, but distribute such intensity of affections in a more fast, uncoordinated way as Steyerl suggests. Indeed, the immediacy of the food-sharing atmosphere promotes a tangible sense of connectivity that goes beyond the utilitarian reciprocity in the banquet, and also disrupts the smooth flow of technological sociality. Besides the direct representation of food, the intimacy of the sharing space during the meal, such as the humble dining table, the cramped kitchen and the narrow room (Fig.6) are also being affectively communicated by snapshots.

The Authorship: the Art Space in Urban Village

The team Handshake 302, which is also another actant, namely, the camera holder, in the event of mobile phone image, plays another significant role in the above new *guanxi* formulation. Compared to Tiravanija’s spatial occupation of galleries, directly expelled from the art institution, a modest and narrow lunch table in the urban village becomes a more rebellious place for the emergence of a new form of political negotiation. Also, departing from Azoulay’s framework, which criticizes the prestige of image creator in the previous theoretical writings (2011, 2012). I intend to expand the discussion on the authorship of camera image particularly within the socio context of urban village that the art space has situated, which might not be directly visible in the produced image.

⁵⁹ Steyerl, Hito. “In Defense of the Poor Image.” *E-Flux Journal* 10, no. 11 (2009).

⁶⁰ Ibrahim, “Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle.”, 2.

Located inside Baishizhou, Handshake 302 team has consciously referred to its distinctive spatial situation and its significance, which has in a way assured its ongoing dynamic intertwinement with the socio-spatial fabric of urban village. Indeed, it is impractical for such a small-size team to preserve, or improve the general living situations in Baishizhou. From the standpoint of the Handshake 302, it is rather its involvement with Baishizhou that has in turn protected and educated the development of Handshake 302.⁶¹ Specifically speaking, the affordable house rent⁶² allows more flexibility in operating the art space; the convenient geographical location connects more people covering in wider areas in Shenzhen; the ongoing controversies of the urban village trigger larger public attention and discussions. Although most artistic projects happening in Handshake 302 do not directly aim for the opposition or resistance of the housing demolition, its spatial-specific location automatically formulates a close interrelation with the countdown of upcoming eviction, which concerns the livelihood of the entire local community, adding a significant layer of socio-political connotations to most of art practice happening in the space. In the case of *Singleton Lunch*, in each article for the recruitment of participation on Wechat, the introduction of each chef is by no means a professional resume about their previous achievements on career, but of their actually spatial living experience so far, from high school dormitories to various rental housing in different cities. What is more, the general topics of each meal are also mostly about the spatial living conditions in the city. For example, the discussion on December 23, 2018 was about participants' opinions on the governmental plan of urban renewal.⁶³ Other concerns around the meal table include: how should the marriage and family life be reconsidered when housing rent cannot be afforded parallel to the average income? Should young people choose to live with parents due to economic pressure? How has the unstoppable wave of consumerism and globalization affected the lives in urban villages? How does the state of solitary living alone shape daily life?

It is not difficult to see that the above chosen questions and topics for each lunch's discussion has its targeted group, which in a way exclude a direct participation of ordinary residents as actants for camera holders in the first place. Even living side by side with the community of Baishizhou migrant workers, the scope of *the Singleton Lunch*'s image producers remains restricted to well-educated young intellectuals, artists, and designers.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the motto of Handshake

⁶¹ O'Donnell, "The Handshake 302 Village Hack Residency: Chicago, Shenzhen, and the Experience of Assimilation.", 2019.

⁶² During its six-year operation in Baishizhou, the most expensive monthly rent for the art space is approximately 1400 yuan after the Spring Festival in 2019. <http://suo.im/6hig27> (accessed on 21st, June 2020)

⁶³ <http://suo.im/5Nw06h> (accessed on 16th June, 2020)

⁶⁴ For handshake 302, the ambiguous relations with the political regime have also in a way softened the resisting voice. In mid-2015, one of art projects produced by Handshake 302 won the Shenzhen Creative

302, "art belongs to everyone who contributes to our city"⁶⁵ has arguably indicated its intentions on building new *guanxi* within a larger community beyond the intellectual frame. In the next section, I will argue that it is through the constant encounter with the specific social circumstances that inclusive relations beyond the table can emerge during the making of image.

The Camera and the Spectatorship: the Perpetual Entrance for Participation

Raising up a camera phone on the lunch table is both a gesture of interruption and extension in the space. Argued by Azoulay, such "positioning itself carves up space between the person standing in front of the camera and the one standing behind it."⁶⁶ That is to say, merely just being there, the presence of camera during the meal already have potentialities of drawing certain happenings and been interwoven into the *guanxi* formulations.

In order to capture the images of food, the presence of mobile phone cameras partly replaces the smooth flow of verbal conversation across the dining table in everyday life. Since instead of verbally communication with the nearby people and appreciating the actual taste of food, what matters more becomes producing visual representation by wielding the camera. In place of closely sharing one space through the exchange of food, the wielding camera constructs a floating virtual space that shatters the collectivity by the intrusion of singular experiences. In *Singleton Lunch*, various pictures and videos are also being produced during the operation of entire project which implicates certain moments of presence of mobile camera. Even it might only take a few seconds to frame and press the shutter, following Azoulay's claim, the invisible yet omnipresent mobile phone camera already implies "the possibility of our being located with the range of 'vision' of a camera."⁶⁷

In other words, mobile phone on the dining table erects a temporary wall which undermines the interpersonal immediate encounters and communications on the meal table, which is ironically

Design Award sponsored by the local government. With a prize of up to 300,000 yuan, it directly helped the official registration of Handshake 302 as a non-governmental organization. In 2018, the main leader of the space, Mary Ann O'Donnell was selected by *Shenzhen Economic Daily* as one of Shenzhen's Ten Most Influential Creatives at the Cultural Industries Fair. In May 2019, one of their organized socio-cultural events, *Urban Flesh and Bones*, was executed under a collaboration between the committee of the Communist Youth League of Futian District, Shenzhen and the non-governmental charity fund One Foundation 壹基金. Besides continually receiving various forms of assistance from authorities, the team has also arguably entered into the local contemporary art scene, including its active participation in Shenzhen-Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism (UABB) and the close alliance with the Longheu Girls 'School P+V Gallery in Shenzhen.

⁶⁵ The principle and motto can be found in the description of Handshake 302's Wechat account.

⁶⁶ Ariella Azoulay. "Photography." *Maqte'akh*, no. 2e (Winter 2011): 71.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*,75.

what Tiravanija's art and relational art theory intends to criticize. Nevertheless, I consider the ambivalence of the mobile phone camera does not declare an ultimate loss of interpersonal relations. The presence of camera blurs the boundary between the virtual and physical worlds, which extends the transitory event into the continuous events of mobile images by the expansion of spectatorship on both spatial and temporal dimensions, setting in motion in a wider range of interpersonal distribution in terms of the spectatorship.

Located in a 12 square-meter room, with less than ten participants in each meal, the promotion of interpersonal *guanxi* seems to be restricted by such existing barriers. In mandarin language, an arranged meal happened in *Singleton Lunch* sometimes is called *fanju* 饭局. While the word *fan* 饭 means rice or meal, the original implication of *ju* 局 is similar to the meaning of constraint, which designates both spatial and temporal limitedness of each meal. For a breakthrough, the Handshake 302 team's endeavour on operating its online social media platform, mostly WeChat and Facebook, bears particular significance. For each lunch, the team published two posts on online, one for recruiting participants, another one for reviewing the events, where the average pageview has reached approximately 800 to 1000. Compared with the average number of eight people that actual have participated in each *fanju*, such increasement of accessibility of images gives rise to a profound expansion in terms of the scope of participation. In above posts, images such as various photographs about the meal and participants as well as some edited video clips have played a particularly prominent role. The enlargement of spectatorship corresponds to what Azoulay has written on the never-ending event of image, "with the assistance of the spectator, the point of view under consideration here permits the event of photography to be preserved as one bearing the potential for permanent renewal that undermines any attempt to terminate it or to proclaim that it has reached its end."⁶⁸

For anyone who has come across the images of on their mobile phones in *Singleton Lunch*, an unhindered entrance for re-opening the specidic *fanju* has already been provided, through which thousands of encounters continuously take place. In other words, the mobile phone images themselves can be considered as open "platforms,"⁶⁹ articulating the unfinished nature of the event of images. While the posted image make its way to mobile screens, the spatio-temporal constitution of *ju* has transformed into perpetual visual flux scattered and floating in time and space. It has not only argubaly prolonged the short-lived *fanju* and duplicated a single dining table thousands of times, but also renew the small scale of *guanxi*-making dynamics through the connected cyber network in the social media.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 79.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 76.

In short, first, the velocity, immediacy and affectivity transmitted by the images produce undetermined and inclusive encounters online, where the manufacture of spectacled porn on the dinner table have been provisionally suspended. Second, the special spatial condition of the art team has imbued certain degree of ambiguity to the authorship of camera during the actual culinary experience. Thirdly, the expanded spectatorship of *Singleton Lunch*'s image have emancipated new, enduring and open-ended events of mobile images that circulate, disperse and create "the reveal erratic and coincidental links."⁷⁰ The spatiotemporal-specific constitution of *fanju* has been transformed into perpetual, non-deterministic flux scattered and performing in time and space.

However, while receiving certain attentions online, for its real door-to-door neighborhood, migrant workers, it seems to be meaningless and even a waste of time to enjoy pictures of people sharing ordinary meal and talk with strangers. What they might be more interested in is to consume the exquisite food porn and experience the virtual connectivity with their intimate mobile phone. O'Donnell also expresses the view that the formation of guests in *Singleton Lunch* could be more inclusive, yet it remains an uneasy task for the team.⁷¹ Similar to Tiravanija's meal, by framing such art experiments as micro-utopia, it also indicates its limitation as an enclosed laboratory which seems to only tests out a flattened imagination of togetherness and equality.

Nevertheless, it does not deny the significance of the expansion of spectatorship on mobile screens in general. For the communities of migrant workers, the prospect and means for their sociality remain limited. Compared to others, online social platforms on the mobile phone are still the most practical and productive means for new political potentialities for *guanxi* to develop, mobilize and enact in the visual domain. Reflecting on the recent media criticisms on mediated relational deficits and the impoverishment of person-to-person intimacy, media scholar Anne Pasek (2015) argues that due to the fear of the disembodied technology, the nostalgic embodied human contact often goes unstated and unexamined but straightaway celebrated. Pasek reminds us that the capability to access the online post and have the time to bodily participate is also a form of cultural capital, which include physically-abled bodies, and social networks that enable some viewers comfortably to participate in diverse social interstices and experience rewarding interpersonal exchange.⁷² Pasek's analysis has shed light on the underestimated emancipatory potential of digital connectivity for understanding artworks such as *Singleton Lunch*. In other words, the suspension of embodied experience cues for a rearrangement of affective intensities and political possibilities in the virtual space. While authentic communication and bodily capacity become a challenge for

⁷⁰ Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image.", 2009.

⁷¹ <https://shenzhennoted.com/author/maryannodonnell/> (accessed on 10th Aug, 2020)

⁷² Pasek, Anne. "Errant Bodies: Relational Aesthetics, Digital Communication, and the Autistic Analogy." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (November 10, 2015).

participatory art like *Singleton Lunch*, new, shared, and alternative engagements in inter-personal contact are made possible through the very instrumentality of these failures.

Therefore, the two artworks that I am going to discuss in the next two chapters are not obsessed with the nostalgic meeting of corporeal bodies either. On the contrary, directly confronted with the most urgent crisis of housing demolition in Baishizhou and subsequent tyrannical acts, the artists intended to maximize the methodologies and productivities of mobile digital media while critically adopting the technological connectivity of social platforms. With a much closer cohabitation and collaboration with the ordinary residents in the urban village, the dynamics of *guanxi* can be further explored and delineated both in theoretical perspectives as well as in the uneasy lifeworlds in Baishizhou.

Chapter Two: *Villager Reporter* (2019)

The Xisan Film Studio, founded by Zheng Hongbin, Liu Sheng, Yu Xudong and other artists living in one of the urban villages in the Pearl River Delta, defines itself as a temporary collective practice, distinct from any permanent art institutions. “Xisan” is the name of a small-scale urban village with roughly two thousand people in Guangzhou Panyu. Originally, what they intended to organize was a small-scale film festival in this village. However, the rural renovation and reconstruction affiliated with the ideological intervention and consumerism in Chinese socio-political context, struck them as repulsive, and instead, they started to organize themselves as a provisional collective action, acting as a processing plant of the ongoing pressing problems happening in the urban village. Short of external funds, the primary and exclusive media that the Xisan Studio employs is the mobile phone camera. In their various social media accounts, both profile photo and posters show a human figure (a woman and a man) shooting with their phone (Fig.7). The image pays tribute to the poster of the documentary *This Is Not a Film* (2011) by the Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi (Fig.8), a film that is mostly based on the footage of an iPhone during his house detention. The political intensity of Panahi’s personal visual diary demonstrates the expansive potentialities evoked by the mobile camera, which Xisan Film Studio also aims to explore along with their fellow villagers.

One of the names of Xisan’s project is called *Production Associate*, a title that can also be understood as a brief summary of their more general mode of cooperation with the village’s residents, most of them migrant workers. In December 2017, the Xisan Film Studio organized 77 villagers from Xisan and 18 artists to Baishizhou for a special field trip to shoot videos with their own mobile phones of changed everyday life on the occasion of the Baishizhou’s villagers eviction, resulting in a 100-min documentary named *Villager Reporter* (2017) consisting out of more than 2,200 video clips. (Fig.9)

At the beginning of the documentary, Zheng and his fellows are booking two long-distance buses for the field trip. Located more than 120 kilometers apart, the Xisan villagers seem to be total strangers to the Baishizhou’s evictees. Waiting for the bus anxiously and excitedly, the image reminds us of a guided tour where one group of people is taken to another place for a bit of sightseeing. From the images, indeed, it is obvious that many Xisan villagers treat the trip as an exciting sightseeing to Shenzhen, where taking pictures and videos is not an additional requirement, but a pleasant thing to do during their tourism. Upon arrival, the whole group is divided into three, and is asked to casually film whatever they thought was interesting and relevant to include: from pedestrians and shopkeepers to the handshake buildings and coiled wires.

Much similar to Xisan with its shabby and chaotic appearance, Baishizhou at first instance seems to have nothing new to offer for Xisan residents. Yet, once the camera is raised there in the public sphere, we can observe that it draws, as Azoulay argues, “certain happenings to itself as if with a magnet or even bring them into being, while it can also distance events, disrupt them or prevent them from occurring.”⁷³ For instance, while Xisan people are purchasing pearl necklace and tea from local stalls, as the street vendor noticed the raised mobile camera, the everyday communication on bargaining immediately became a bit unusual and even tense. “Hold on, why are you filming me?” Such disruptive question has been constantly brought up throughout the documentary, which has immediately expanded the ephemeral conversation between strangers to a both politically-relevant and affective dialogue between two urban villages. While explaining the motive of shooting, topics of the upcoming housing demolition and their intimate shared feelings on urban village life have been naturally brought up and dynamically exchanged.

The above example has in a way shown the multiple roles, such as the mobile phone camera, the Xisan and Baishizhou villagers as the actants that have actively participated in formulating new form of *guanxi* during the making of *Villager Reporter*. I thus argue that the foremost crux that matters politically in this art project might not only be the actual content of this documentary ultimately has produced, but more importantly, the fabrication of *guanxi* when Xisan residents took their mobile phones out and started filming inside the Baishizhou. At its most extreme, even without the finished documentary, the collective practice of Xisan Film Studio arguably still holds a vigorous position with underrated political potentialities, or, in Azoulay’s terms: the event of the mobile image has already been unstoppably initiated across time and space.

Using *Villager Reporter* as my primary example, I intend to first take a closer examination of the *guanxi* of a set of tangled and overlapping roles, namely, the Xisan community carrying the camera, the Baishizhou people on the camera, the artist and intellectuals, the residents in their everyday habitat, those responsible for the eviction, the resister in housing demolition. Second, it is important to mention that, compared to *Singleton Lunch* organized by Handshake 302 in the chapter one, the much broadened scope of participants in *Villager Reporter* and a more inclusive role of Xisan Film Studio provoke another crucial question: who *can* start an event of mobile phone image that matter politically? By proposing such question, I hope to map and highlight the unequal political status of above different actants in the network, which composes another layer of *guanxi* in the power dynamics of art. Furthermore, my endeavour also intends to foreground new potentialities of connectivity in this era, of a community built mainly through the presence and practice around the mobile phone images. The emergence of new *guanxi* in *Villager Reporter*, I

⁷³ Azoulay. “Photography.” 72.

speculate, implies that alternative socio-political landscape of resistance across cyber-space and real-space that can be envisioned and realized.

Minjian and Citizen

Nowadays, to start a politically-relevant event of mobile image is by no means an easy task in the contemporary Chinese media landscape. Indeed, as a much-contested social phenomenon, the overall absence – besides Xisan studio - of *local* media during the gradual vanishment of Baishizhou is not that unexpected. Professional investigative journalism is currently under the serious threats of total extinction in China. Confronted with constant harassment, detention, and even long-term imprisonment, many journalists have silenced themselves under the pressure. According to the statistics provided by the Committee to Protect Journalists, in the year 2019 alone, 48 journalists have been arrested and jailed in China, along with two reported deaths and one missing person.⁷⁴ Such a number, both in term of geography and the time span, is staggering. Another recent example of the oppression of journalists includes the pestering of the Shanghai-based online media Q-Daily. With a focus on the in-depth coverage of the controversial social issues, it has been repeatedly shut down by the authorities from 2018 onward. In June 2019, according to its “long-term unauthorized engagement in Internet news information services”, Q Daily was forced to a comprehensive and thorough rectification in order to continue its operation.⁷⁵

A desperate exodus of high-end cameras and professional lens-based media leaves spaces not only for stricter hierarchical regulations, but also for unattended informational gaps and reversals. In several interviews of Zheng Hongbin, one of the founders of Xisan Film Studio, Zheng repeatedly emphasizes that he aims “doing art as the replacement of public media”⁷⁶ out of both frustration and motivation. Indeed, the making of the *Villager Reporter* partly resembles an in-depth investigation that should have been conducted by professional local media. Instead, in this peculiar film, Xisan villagers and neighborhood artists, play out multiple roles as frontline reporters, news directors and producers.

Evidently, using amateur images as media reportage were not invented with *Villager Reporter*. Following Zheng’s interpretation, this documentary can be considered as another locale-specific experiment of citizen/grassroots journalism. In contrast to the conventional media, Dan Gillmor in his book *We the Media* (2004) suggests, grassroots journalism is the media “by the

⁷⁴ <https://cpj.org/asia/china/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.whatsonweibo.com/chinese-online-news-outlet-q-daily-shut-down/>

⁷⁶ The interview with Zheng

people” and “for the people.”⁷⁷ But who, in the Chinese socio-political context, are the “people,” and who and what are the “citizens”? Imported from the West in the late 19th century, to define and discuss the term “citizens” (*gongmin* 公民 or *guomin* 国民) in a Chinese context bears loads of theoretical and historical obstacles and restrictions. In short, the recognition of “citizen” as a concept has been closely intertwined with the development of political modernity and China’s nation-state building,⁷⁸ which might not be entirely suitable for our case in Baishizhou.

In order to understand the political potentials and difficulties in *Villager Reporter*, parallel to ‘citizen’, I thus intend to unpack and engage with the very term *minjian* in order to enrich the normative notion of ‘citizen journalism’ in the local context, and to further map Xisan Studio’s experiment in the *guanxi* dynamics. Resembling the political implications of citizens and citizenship, on the one hand, the ‘*min*’ in *minjian*’s marginalized position denotes an unjustified social exclusion, along with never-ending struggles and difficulties, in the concrete situations during the housing demolition. Beyond the domain of citizen, on the other hand, the mixed status of *minjian* infuses the pluralized subjective dynamics for the urban village as well as the artists, where understanding associations between villagers and artists become exceptionally productive. Compared to the contentious ‘citizen’, I argue that *minjian* is able to open up a more intimate and spatialized dimension reading of *Villager Reporter*. Besides, I also argue that the interconnectedness of *minjian* in particular further portrays the political significance of Xisan Film Studio’s practice, where events of mobile phone image produce new forms of interpersonal connectivity that holds resisting potentialities.

From “Among the people” to “People to People”: the dynamics of *minjian*

In his discussions of Chinese intellectuals, particularly on the internationally famed artist Ai Weiwei, political scientist William A. Callahan defines them as ‘citizen intellectuals’, who distinguish themselves with prominent social responsibilities. According to Callahan, different from the liberal Western societies, it is the ‘small-scale work’ of individuals, many of whom can be considered as citizen intellectuals, that are fabricating civil society in the post-socialist China. What Callahan especially highlights is the internal contradiction of their practices: roaming around the

⁷⁷ Gillmor, Dan. *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. O’Reilly Media, Inc., 2006.

⁷⁸ Guo, Zhonghua. “The Emergence of the Citizen Concept in Modern China: 1899–1919.” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 349–64.

increased political control, these intellectuals sometimes seek official cooperation, and sometimes express their dissent in high profile.⁷⁹

Distinct from the western notion of intellectuals and artists, Callahan's nuanced view of the citizen intellectual is helpful yet not sufficient for understanding the artistic engagement in Xisan studio's practice. Similar to the Handshake 302, Xisan studio is also a small-scale artist group which consists of artists with advanced education in art academies and exceptional social responsibilities. Compared to the low-skilled workers who do not usually possess a university diploma and distinct expertise, the social position of artists is usually much more elevated. Their voices, or at least some of them, can at least be heard due to being admitted into the sophisticated institutions and the broad intellectual discourse. Nevertheless, compared to intellectual celebrities like Ai Weiwei and Handshake 302 which has received considerable governmental support, the Xisan artist-villager association is relatively disenfranchised, ignored and nameless. Typing "Xisan Film Studio" into the search engine, the system will automatically ask you if you mean "Xi'an Film Studio", which is a large state-owned film company in Shaanxi Province, China. As discussed in introduction section, similar to urban village residents, many Xisan artists often do not belong to the norms of the privileged urban residents either. It is thus a misconception to generalize contemporary Chinese artists as being in an elevated position, even elites, a conception that disregards the complexities of the concrete everyday living condition of especially the non-established Chinese art-workers. One of the Xisan artists Liu Sheng, for instance, born in Suixi County, Zhanjiang in the southwest of Guangdong, graduated from Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1994. Even after graduating from such prestigious art college, renting an art studio to be a freelance artist in big cities like Guangzhou or Shenzhen is not an easy task, especially as China youth unemployment rate has never dropped below 10% since 2012.⁸⁰ According to Liu's self-account, his first job was one of a graphic designer in an advertising company, which didn't take long for him to quit. After that, he worked at a fit-out company and then as a furniture designer in Nanhai, Guangdong. With two friends, Liu then set out to establish business ventures on his own, which soon became a failure one year after. The migration of Liu continues as he moved to Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang for a living in 2018. It is only recently, he says, that he moved to Xisan village to continue painting as his main career.⁸¹ The rough life-trajectory of Liu Sheng is by no means an exception. Sharing an unstable status with the migrant workers, the displacement and anxieties of Xisan artists are often not purely intellectual, but primarily an issue of grassroots survival. Indeed, I argue that Xisan

⁷⁹ Callahan, William A. "Citizen Ai: Warrior, Jester, and Middleman." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 2014, 899–920.

⁸⁰ <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/youth-unemployment-rate> (accessed on 8th August, 2020)

⁸¹ The public speech of Liu Sheng in Yixi: <https://www.bilibili.com/video/av44777669/>

artists are also members of the unstable community of ‘migrant workers’ with the comparable situation of placeless-ness. Therefore, the ambiguous nature of *minjian* in this context helps to grasp a different, and maybe more explicit picture of Xisan artists. In a word, they are also intimately *among* the ordinary Chinese people, especially the migrant workers living in urban villages.

While mapping the span of ‘*min*’ in the *minjian* in *Villager Reporter*, it is crucial to ask what kind of specific experience that “among” refers to, since *minjian* – as “among the people” - intuitively relates to is its inseparable dimension of spatiality of the urban villages. First, as I have discussed in the introduction, as the birthplace of Chinese new economic model, the Pearl River Delta has an unprecedented fluidity and complexities of population flow, which designates the heterogeneous co-living condition of urban community. Xisan village in Guangzhou, for instance, along with another 61 urban villages in the entire city, it takes up 16.54% of land in Panyu district up till now, which forms the inseparable part of Guangzhou city since a long time ago.⁸² While the prominent existence of urban villages largely defines the cityscape of the Delta, it also means that the ‘urbanites’ subjectivity, or *min* in city resists an essentialized definition in the spatial sense. It is especially true for Shenzhen city, where Baishizhou located, quite different from others inside the Delta that have been partly dominated by local Cantonese culture, the 41-year-old city has in a way exemplified such irreducibility, for it is mostly like a boiling melting pot in terms of its geographical-related cultural varieties. In other words, the irregularity of spatial-socio conditions act against any generalization of *minjian*, and instead emphasizes the dynamism of living experience in urban villages.

Second, such heterogeneous condition of *minjian* further gives birth to the development of interpersonal connections and interactions, which include not only the community of migrant workers, but also alternative artistic associations, like Xisan Film Studio, that live and grow ‘among the people’. The strict spatial regulation and exclusion towards artistic complex, makes the less-regulated urban village like Xisan and Baishizhou, becomes an alternative choice for many non-established *minjian* artists, not only due to the cheaper rent, but also to the opportunity and choice to stand outside the above regulation, echoing with another connotative meaning of term *minjian*, namely, the marginalized position in society. Whereas the process of gentrification decorates art districts with polished appearance and unified spatial design, the Handshake 302 and the art studio of Cai Suo in Xisan village (Fig. 10), in contrast, for instance, have no apparent difference with their neighborhood villagers’ residential houses. Compared to Handshake 302 which still functions as a public art space at most time, Cai’s studio and living space produces much more possibilities in terms of its spatially intimate connections with his neighborhood.

⁸² According to the Urban Renewal Plan (2018-2020) of Guangzhou Municipal Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau.

Thirdly, as a matter of fact, apart from a designation of a static spatial relation, the word “*jian*” also means an action of transmission in-between people. In other words, it is through the practice inside the network of mobile images that *minjian* goes from the static status of “among the people” to the active transmission of “people to people”. From the relational perspective, such transmission of affect can also be understood as the new expression of *guanxi*, particularly on inventing the interpersonal and intimate emotional ties.

When it comes to the making of *Villager Reporter*, sharing and communicating everyday experience in both individual and spatial sense with urban village allows Xisan artists to much more easily live with and enter into the intimate horizon of urban villages, where *ganqing*, namely, affective dimensions of *guanxi* can be generated both inside the Xisan village community and also during the encounter of two villages residents. At the very beginning of *Villager Reporter*, for instance, while waiting for the belated bus to Baishizhou together, one of the Xisan artists, Cai Lei takes out his guitar to play a Cantonese song about growing and selling vegetables composed by him. Many villagers soon recognize the playful everyday lyrics and melodies, and start to sing along with Cai’s verse (Fig. 11).

After arriving at Baishizhou, the intimate connectivity continues to develop based on the shared feelings prevailing among the people particularly with the presence of mobile phone camera. For instance, while one of the artists with a mobile phone camera attempting to talk to a random Baishizhou resident on the street in the documentary, what he has confronted at first is vigilance, hostility and even direct rejection. “I don’t want to be filmed”, one of the villagers says to the camera, using his hand to cover the mobile phone lens. Indeed, from the moment the camera has been raised, the actant has to deal with this upcoming tension, during which that a variety of interpersonal relationships become possible. After several words, they soon find out that they are coming from the same province, Hunan. The recognition that they share a similar course of migration in their youth has immediately eased the tension, since the homesickness is perhaps the most common ties of *ganqing* (emotions) among Chinese migrant workers. Complaining about the difficulties to find authentic Hunan local cuisine in Guangdong, talking about the recent changes of their hometowns, the two men at both ends of camera are being brought closer together. At the end of conversation, the interviewed Baishizhou villager takes out his own mobile phone, saying to the artist, “Let’s take a photo together to memorize our meeting.” Indeed, communicating through the interpersonal affectivity, the raised mobile camera removes the binarism between subject and the object in the event of image, further opening up new possibilities of building *guanxi* between two groups of people who are sharing a common living experience of migration.

Nevertheless, filming such daily conversation on local cuisine and rootlessness alone still seems to be insufficient for examining the living crisis that concerned by Xisan artists. Confronted

with the tyrannized demolition across cities, what both communities in Xisan and Baishizhou have to directly deal with is not only a forced spatial change in living experience, but also the overall socio-political, as well as media vulnerability of *minjian* that makes them especially hard to be discernible for resistance. From such perspective, in the next section, I will move on to closer examine the restless visual politics and to unsettle the *guanxi* dynamics in the lens of *minjian*, in order to further understand whether and how the dominant power relations can be possibly challenged in the event of *Villager Reporter*.

Can the *Minjian* Speak?

Situated in marginalized position, the notion *minjian* implicates its enforced or proactive constant dealings with the established official system throughout history. The expanded accessibilities of mobile camera, in this context, particularly raise a question of our mapping project in *Villager Reporter*. In this section, I would therefore like to unpack respectively how and in what ways, first, the tentacles of mobile phone image from *minjian* can reach out politically, second, such event during the making of *Villager Reporter* can contribute against the demolition campaign.

In order to do so, I will firstly draw on the notion ‘subaltern’ formulated and theorized by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to further reflect on the position of Xisan artist-villager association to enrich its role as political actants in *minjian*. In her influential essay *Can the subaltern Speak: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice* (1985), Spivak criticizes western academic political discourse of the Other, suggesting that minorities remain muted in the dominant white intellectual world. I follow Spivak’s deconstructionism to enhance our understanding of *minjian* because different from Qiu’s conception of the working class (2009), it no longer refers to an artificial and unified class to categorize a community, which opens up a space for reconsidering the peculiar media participation of contemporary artistic projects in China. Compared to the relative neutrality of *minjian* in Chinese context, the implications of ‘subaltern’ urge for bottom-up revolution and resistance.

While examining the violence and its possible resistance from subaltern, Spivak, in her essay, analyzes one example of the suicide of a young Bengali woman called Bhuvanewari Bhaduri in 1926 Calcutta., which she consider as interventionist practice that rewrote the given social text⁸³ by inserting female subjectivity into the established patriarchal order.⁸⁴ The persistence of regime violence in Spivak’s sense, in part resurfaces as the irresistible noise of the bulldozer engulfing individual’s homes and lives in China. Bloodshed conflicts for resisting housing

⁸³ Gayatri, Spivak. “Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice.” *Wedge*, no. 7/8 (1985): 120–30.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 103.

demolition in China are still common and frequent nowadays, where the act or attempt to commit self-immolation has also been frequently employed by the evicted as a last desperate strategy to defend their spatial rights. In *Villager Reporter*, the bodily vulnerability and suffering of Baishizhou's residents are also strikingly prominent. The aged father of one of the interviewee, Brother Mao, for instance, who used to run a clothing store in Baishizhou, was hospitalized for severe injury after a dispute on demolition with the local law enforcement agents. With little compensation from the government, his painstakingly bodily scarification, like most the evicted in China, has not generated inspiring political potentialities.

The reason, for Spivak, is that the subaltern who has been subjected to power is not only made subordinate in bodily sense, but rather, and more importantly, is unable to access and make their own the very discourse, structures and institutions that would allow grievances to be recognized and recognizable in the first place.⁸⁵ Therefore, to break the silence of subalternity is not to urge the invisible into the visible, to reintroduce and show themselves in the public with high risk, but rather, to deconstruct the established discourse that define the very frames of recognition and visibility.

Proliferated by the mobile images, in the contemporary Chinese media landscape, Spivak's modes of 'speaking' have indeed become more diversified while the battleground of media discourse has dramatically changed since the time of her writing: apart from textual or verbal utterance, mobile phone camera generates crucial new possibilities to tell stories and challenge boundaries from the bottom. Yet once situated in a state-dominated discursive network, such images produced and circulated in *minjian* can still be re-appropriated by the regime. The self-immolation of Tang Fuzhen, for instance, exemplifies the tension between the epistemic violence and *minjian*'s resistance in the new media context. On 13th November 2009, the 47-year-old Tang climbed to her three-story house's roof, poured gasoline over herself and lit herself on fire during the eviction that happened in Chengdu.⁸⁶ Apart from the foreign media coverage, a low-resolution mobile-phone on the spot has recorded Tang's self-immolation. It is by now rather hard to find online discussions about the original post, but it can be presumed that its media impact at that time was considerable. Since the very image has been soon employed and discussed through the state-media China Central Television (CCTV) program *News 1+1* under the title "The Death of Demolition."⁸⁷ Describing suicidal evictees Yang and others, the vocabularies of CCTV's program include terminology like the stubborn "nail householders," the impoverished people with unruly

⁸⁵ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "In Response: Looking Back, Looking Forward." In *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, 227–36. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 228.

⁸⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/017/2012/en/> (accessed on 7th, July 2020)

⁸⁷ <http://npc.people.com.cn/GB/14840/10499689.html> (accessed on 7th, July 2020)

disorders, the illiterate and obnoxious lawbreakers, creating an image of lunacy, absurdity, and short-sightedness that is then contrasted with virtues such as calmness, independence, and rationality that are usually self-attributed to the elites.

Such arbitrary framing of state media resonates with Judith Butler's theorization of "frame" in her *Precarious Life* (2004), where she opposes American's irresponsible binarism towards individuals in relation to the "war on terrorism" after the 9/11 attack. For Butler, the failure to conceive Muslim and Arab as grievable and recognizable lives in American society shows that the existence of the dominant frame in differentiating and excluding the precariousness of human lives by authorities. Along with Spivak, her articulation is particularly insightful for uncovering the stifled distinctions of Baishizhou's case. Much different from an indiscriminate inclusion of the user-generated content (UGC) or participatory journalism, the re-framing of vernacular images in Tang's case by CCTV demonstrates the epistemic violence in the context of mobile image. Such act not only means when the established media sophisticatedly re-appropriates the amateur's videotape as its broadcasting source, but more importantly, it implies the plural discourse in *minjian* has been violently deprived to arbitrarily differentiate people, since "to produce what will constitute the public sphere [...] it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see."⁸⁸

The same goes to the Baishizhou's demolition, among with the unified image represented in the hegemonic media, what especially significant is its deliberate concealment of the intimate affective dimension of Baishizhou's residents. If searching for the recent state media coverage of Baishizhou's demolition, what have been largely covered include Shenzhen authority's assertion to increase its residents capacity to identify with Shenzhen and develop a sense of belonging," the overnight great fortune of local households, demonstrating the generosity of government's compensation, as well as the blueprints of future Baishizhou district,⁸⁹ that represents the area as an ideal and new place in urban Shenzhen with safety, sanitation and coherence, leaving out the intensified affectivities such as pain, suffering, and struggles of the evicted residents outside the perceptible frame. In her first and second chapters of *Frames of War: When is Life Greivable?* (2010), Butler uses various visual representation in modern warfare as examples to elucidate how the authoritative frame can selectively restrict and transmit certain affects effectively and arbitrarily.

⁹⁰ Such normative representation of Baishizhou's demolition also arguably exists and is exercising

⁸⁸ Judith, Butler. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, London, 2004, xx.

⁸⁹ For instance, see <https://finance.sina.cn/china/gncj/2019-09-24/detail-iicezueu7940672.d.html>

⁹⁰ Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Reprint edition. London ; New York: Verso, 2010.

its power. In other words, what has been regulated is not only the way people can “see and hear”, but also what and how they can *feel* through the reframing of the image.

The production process of *Villager Reporter*, on the contrary, has arguably preserved distinctive and discursive frames from different videos produced by various authors, which can thus be considered as a tangible way for resistance. In the documentary, we can often recognize the existence of multiple unsettling frames, each of which, I argue, acts as a unique experimental attempt to relate and affect the people in contrast to the dominant norms by engaging and presenting complex pictures of *minjian*.

Indeed, the making of *Villager Reporter* is not that different from their daily media practice with mobile device for both Xisan residents and artists and Xisan villagers. Also, most Xisan artists are not trained photographers or pro video-makers: most of them, such as Zheng Hongbin, Liu Sheng and Xie Jianbo, all graduated from the traditional easel art discipline such as oil painting. Like the ordinary, artists are using moving cameras in the multiple contexts of their daily lives. Therefore, both of their acts of shooting remain casual, fragmented and impromptu. For instance, while the villagers are asked to shoot with the horizontal screen by the artists, which is convenient for later viewing and editing, during the field trip, they seem to have always forgotten the earlier instruction and act more like curious tourists uninhibitedly shooting with their mobile phone cameras upright. Also, often neglecting the entrustment of documenting, the villagers hang around in various stands, buying snacks, bargaining for earrings and herbal tea, visiting tattoo shops and clothing stores. taking out their phones from time to time (Fig.12). As a result, what have alternately appeared are horizontal and vertical frames. Also, in terms of content, there is no clear and consistent narrative throughout the film, but more as a succession of random encounters during their one-day wandering experience. In their different frames, what are visible include residents hanging out, playing cards, and dining on the street, as well as the furious evicted people shedding tears in front of the camera. Although confronted with the demolition, in the eyes of Xisan people, Baishizhou is still a vigorous neighborhood with complex vitalities.

To give another example, while interviewing a blind chiropractor, Lai, whose studio has recently been demolished, what in front of the eyes of audience is an intriguing scene of a few Xisan villagers and artists holding their own phones to record at the same spot and time (Fig.13): While the artist Zheng Hongbin invited one of Xisan villagers to enjoy Lai’s massage, Lai begins to talk about his suffering from demolition in an outspoken way in front of a dozen of unknown mobile phone cameras. Indeed, divergent frames simultaneously appear in front of us: the very frame of this particular scene, and also the framed frames in each villagers’ hand. It is noteworthy that the former does not hold any exclusive privileges, since it also belongs to the latter, as one of the raised mobile phone cameras on the spot. Following this particular villager’s unsettled

perspective, not only can the audience see the interviewed chiropractor located in the frame, but also how the camera holder perceives the surrounding space, implied by the constant shift of angles and shakiness of the footage that have not been edited afterwards. What matters most here is by no means the filming formal quality, but the very gesture of turning and diverting one's camera that forcibly breaks the single frame and the subject-object relations during the interview. As Butler states (2009), by bringing the once invisible scene to the table, images do not await external verbal interpretation; they are themselves already certain interpretations that can argue for the unrecognized grievability of life.⁹¹

What's more, no longer being an enclosed privilege of any hegemonic media, the possession of mobile phone camera has practically opened to all in *minjian*, not only including artists, villagers in Xisan, but also villagers in Baishizhou who have been filmed. In other words, while the Xisan collective is framing Baishizhou, the residents in Baishizhou are also able to take out their own mobile devices to shoot these outsiders: the position at both ends of camera can easily be challenged, occupied and swapped during the shooting. With anyone's holding hand and the raised arm, each active camera constitutes a distinctive dynamic node in the people-to-people, namely, the *minjian* networking. The proliferation of nodes in the network also means such connections can no longer be reduced to a single discourse alone. Instead, such new ways of connectivity have greatly multiplied the frames of telling different but interrelated stories without determined hierarchy. From this perspective, the final product of Xisan Studio, namely, *Villager Reporter*, is merely one of many frames that co-exist with others in each participant's mobile phone without fundamental differentiations.

To conclude, holding the potential to evade the established media discourse and counteract the epistemic violence, I thus argue that the Xisan Film Studio's artistic practice by and from *minjian* provides a possible answer to Spivak's inquiry at the beginning of this section. The absence of one unified frame in the making of *Villager Reporter* has opened up valuable spaces for artistic practice to generate new *guanxi* that can disrupt the given affective frames determined by the sovereign and then can bypass the hegemonic media utterance of the demolition. However, the regime violence of Baishizhou's demolition does not end with the media representation. In the next chapter, I will further look into the institutional oppression and a larger scope of counteract in another art practice that happens in both Baishizhou and the cyberspace.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Chapter Three: *Shenzhen Wawa* (2019)

On August 4th, 2019, the Shenzhen-based artist Nut Brother used a 29-ton hydraulic excavator to grab 400 dolls collected from Baishizhou's children in its iron claws, throwing all of them into a river outside the border of Shenzhen for eight hours. The title of this project is *Shenzhen Wawa* (2019). The dual meanings of 'wawa' in Chinese, dolls and children, denote a rather straightforward metaphor: similar to the miserable fate of the abandoned dolls being thrown away, the children of Baishizhou's family will also become dislocated and placeless since confronted with the upcoming demolition. With the help of kids, some dolls were written with the heartbroken text: "I don't want to drop out of school because of Baishizhou's demolition" (Fig. 14). Indeed, for children living and studying in the urban villages, what comes with the forced eviction is probably the ultimate loss of opportunities for receiving education in Shenzhen. While born in the city, children of rural-urban migrants still inherit rural *hukou* from their parents. For them, attending a public school in Shenzhen requires an unattainable *hukou*, while attending a private school is by no means affordable considering the economic conditions of their parents. The "migrant schools" in Baishizhou, which had been utilized to fill the above administratively-created gap, were going to be knocked down with the demolition. Little time before the start of the new semester in September, finding and transferring to another substituting migrant school outside Baishizhou is almost an impossible mission for most of the now homeless families.

The art project *Shenzhen Wawa* does not conclude in one day. In the meantime, Nut Brother and his team have started a longer-term online participatory program, calling on thousands of mobile phone users nationwide to rent one of their Wechat 'Friends Circle'⁹² posts for publicizing and exhibiting the performance of *Shenzhen Wawa* in their own accounts for three days. For each post, he paid 0.3 yuan (0.05 Euro) to the 1,300 participators in total, as the symbolic rental fee for this online exhibition. On September 2nd, 2019, I became a participator myself. In August 2019, I contacted the artist's assistant by way of a 'throwaway' WeChat account,⁹³ after which she invited me to join a 500-people group chat and asked me to sign a contract separately. By signing this contract, I agreed to post the content of the exhibition in my own Friends Circle, including: the official poster of the exhibition (Fig. 15); the signed agreement (in the format of pictures) (Fig.16); and a few photographs (Fig.17) as well as short videos of the *Shenzhen Wawa* on-site performance.

⁹² Friends Circle, or Moments 朋友圈, is a multimedia function of the Chinese smartphone app WeChat 微信, which can be used to share pictures with captions, textual statuses, GPS locations, as well as websites with Wechat contacts.

⁹³ It is a strategy which complicates the process for the authorities to track down to real account holder behind.

After completing the post, I was asked to provide a screenshot of the ‘exhibition’ in my Friends Circle to the assistant, who immediately transferred me 0.3 yuan as the participatory fee.

Throughout the execution of the entire project, *Shenzhen Wawa* has intensively experienced the state censorship ranging from various aspects and degrees, including the soft interrogation⁹⁴ imposed by the local police; the harassment from the real estate owners; the obstructions while finding the venue for exhibitions; the sudden removal of published online articles; and, as I have experienced based on my own participation, texts and images are being constantly censored in group-chats, reported and repressed. On the one hand, such multifaceted and overlapping restrictions exemplify the sophisticated mechanisms of censorship from the digital space to the real-life experience in China. On the other hand, as I will show in this chapter, it is through tactful interactions with this censorship that major socio-political significance of *Shenzhen Wawa* related to the *guanxi* of mobile phone image can be exceptionally uncovered and subsequently highlighted.

Unpacking the notion “censorship” in contemporary China is perhaps the first step for my analysis. Argued by Yubo Kou et.al, China’s censorship shares many properties of the conceptualization as well as the ‘infrastructure’ of censorship proposed by sociologists Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder.⁹⁵ It means that censorship is neither an instrumental tool or a stabilized substrate, but fundamentally a relational entity situated in the society. Instead of existing as a given transparent organization, the mechanism of censorship in China, Kou et.al similarly suggest, has “sunk into the inside of the Internet infrastructure”, emerging in the practice of everyday life and embedded into the configuration of other networks.⁹⁶ Compared to the common public infrastructure such as the water and transportation system, the highly repressive nature of China’s censorship parameters further complicates the dispersed web-making moves in such a special governmental operation⁹⁷. In her recent research *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall* (2019), political scientist Margaret E. Roberts proposes the government censorship in China as primarily a porous one. Since it is impossible to completely control the increasingly digitalized world, she suggests that the designed permeable barriers have become exceptionally useful and effective for this technocratic regime. The emphasis of relationality in infrastructure echoes with the my conceptualizations of *guanxi* in this thesis. Also, the chaotic and uncoordinated characteristics of *guanxi* are in a way consistent with the porous and penetrable

⁹⁴ The "soft interrogation" has a special name in Chinese: *hecha* 喝茶 or *bei hecha* 被喝茶, literally means drinking tea or being invited for tea, referring to a forced but (usually) non-violent appointment and interrogation by state security police officers.

⁹⁵ Star, Susan Leigh, and Karen Ruhleder. “Steps Toward an Ecology of Infrastructure: Design and Access for Large Information Spaces.” *Information Systems Research* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 111–34.

⁹⁶ Kou, Yubo, Yong Ming Kow, and Xinning Gui. “Resisting the Censorship Infrastructure in China.” *Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2017 (HICSS-50)*, January 4, 2017, 2333-2334.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

nature of censorship proposed by Roberts. Therefore, I argue that highlighting the relationalities expressed in the censorship in the practice of *Shenzhen Wawa* will help to understand the how such apparatuses works in the deeply stratified networked society, which can by no means be generalized as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ administrative solutions, but more as navigations inside the network where both affectivities and social capital of *guanxi* have been deeply involved.

According to Roberts, two social actions that have been limited in the execution of censorship are, first, the expression in the public sphere, and, second, the accessibility to information in China.⁹⁸In this chapter, using the artwork *Shenzhen Wawa* as my primary example, my articulations will also attempt to parallel and expand the dual confined categorizations in particular. But this entails an proviso. Continuing to draw on Azoulay’s analytic framework, this thesis propose to replace the term “information” with “event”, which is much more accurate when situated in the *guanxi* fabric of mobile phone images, since the notion ‘information’ is too restricted when considering the dynamic expressions and relational participation of mobile phone images. It is when framed in this way, I argue, that the above two hampered actions – expression and accessibility – can thus both be interpreted as twofold gestures of suspending events while encountering *guanxi* in our case. Specifically, what the act of suspension imposed on the ongoing event indicates can be a temporary delay, a forceful interruption, or an ambiguous top-town intervention. From the lens of *guanxi*, to suspend the event of mobile phone image means to manipulate and reproduce a dominant form of *guanxi* in a certain way. In this chapter, I will thus first try to understand in what way events happening in *Shenzhen Wawa* have been constantly suspended when confronted with the multiple forms of censorship. In her book, Roberts theorizes three most distinctive and overlapping mechanisms in the exercise of censorship in China, namely: flooding, fear and friction.⁹⁹Following Roberts’ framing, this chapter will thus secondly probe into the resilient engagement and resistance of *Shenzhen Wawa* in interacting with the above three related mechanisms as my main threads to understand the counteracts towards the suspension. The following analysis will reveal, first, the Chinese government has not perfected the information control, which leaves out certain gaps for developing new *guanxi* and restart the suspended event of mobile phone image. Second, with high flexibility and resilience, the resistance practiced in the *Shenzhen Wawa* online exhibition, demonstrates a constant leverage of connections with every mobile phone camera in *minjian*, which can by no means be ultimately stopped by the regime power.

⁹⁸ Roberts, Margaret E. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China’s Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press, 2018, 37.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 5-6.

Flooding

To start, I would like to first pose the question that has been left unanswered in the second chapter. What might have been concealed in the *Villager Reporter* is that most Xisan villagers' participation was in fact not voluntary. In my interview with Zheng, he told me that many villagers signed this field trip up simply because they could get a free lunch provided by the artists, and a chance to "travel" outside Guangzhou. In other words, the ubiquitous presence of camera phone in ordinary life does not necessarily and directly produce active political expressions, such as a collective backlash towards the housing demolition, nor can a participatory artwork itself automatically leads to an inclusive democratic practice, leaving alone a substantial and connective revolt against the authority in the urban village. Why is that?

To investigate the complicated obstacles for public political expressions, what primarily needs to be mentioned is the highly depoliticized politics in China from the 1990s onwards as the prominent socio-cultural backdrop.¹⁰⁰ The recent relegation of country's socialist legacy has sophisticatedly disguised the fact that workers and farmers are, at least nominally, the dominant class of this Communist Party of China (CPC). However, As media scholar Bingchun Meng observes in her *The Politics of Chinese Media: Consensus and Contestation* (2018), while the urban middle class becomes a new representative community for the image of contemporary China, the working class, migrant workers included, are now "the marginalized and underprivileged social group in need of compassion and charity," in need of the strict governance and regulation.¹⁰¹ Demonstrated by many policy documents, it is unquestionable that social stability is the paramount aim in the ruling of CPC, which partly also explains why in the promotion of economic development the need for the communist ideological control is prioritized.

While the recent expansion of mobile phone usage indeed increases the overall media literacy of the marginalized group, it also places the public sphere promoted by mobile phone network under much more severe regulation and scrutiny, exemplified by executing renewing forms of online propaganda for maintaining social stability, which leads us to the first type of censorship: flooding. Defined by Roberts, the mechanism of flooding is "the coordinated production of information by an authority with the intent of competing with or distracting from information the authority would rather consumers not access."¹⁰² In their research on the increasingly marketized Chinese media, Daniela Stockmann and Mary E. Gallagher (2011) convincingly show how a large-

¹⁰⁰ Wang, Hui, and Translated by Christopher Connery. "Depoliticized Politics, Multiple Components of Hegemony, and the Eclipse of the Sixties." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 683–700

¹⁰¹ Meng, Bingchun. *The Politics of Chinese Media: Consensus and Contestation*. Springer, 2018, 48.

¹⁰² Roberts, *Censored*, 2018, 80.

scale exposure to such propaganda, operated by the tactile flooding method, can influence citizens' political attitude, minimizing their aggrieved expressions in the public sphere.¹⁰³ While Stockmann and Gallagher's research focused on the traditional newspaper, and the prevalence of the mobile phone has significantly transformed the media landscape and renewed the methods of control, their observation still holds for today's situation.

Yet what makes flooding today distinctive is that it also includes large number of digitized images produced, circulated and enacted in the network. Different from textual information, the form of image is more susceptible to be re-interpreted and masked, which brings forth new types of *guanxi* manipulation that obscures certain unwanted content of the regime.

Moreover, the dynamics of censorship involves not only the authorities and the oppressed citizens, but also the vigorous participation of domestic internet conglomerates,¹⁰⁴ (Guo, 2339), particularly those operating the online platforms. As the report of the real-time active end-user index of Talking data shows, among the top ten mobile applications in today's China, half of them are social media platforms, namely, Wechat, QQ, Tiktok, Kuaishou and Weibo.¹⁰⁵ That is to say, the intricacies of the flooding do not only take place from the above as a purely top-down governance, but are also seamlessly interwoven with the everyday visual-dominated media platforms, which are inseparable with both the regime and users.

So what exactly are the relational expressions of such flooding in the digitalized propaganda of image? Cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg states that "the terrain of commercial popular culture is the primary space where affective relationships are articulated; and the consumer industries increasingly appeal not only to ideological consensus, but to the contemporary structures of affective needs and investments."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, what today's mass production of such images prominently provides is a readily accessible, costless entertaining space where satisfactions and desires can be easily fulfilled. Skimming through the prevailing images on such platforms, it won't take long for you to discover the produced images are in a sense all micro-spectacles¹⁰⁷ on the screen with the articulation of relational affectivities. Important for our purpose here, the

¹⁰³ Stockmann, Daniela, and Mary E. Gallagher. "Remote Control: How the Media Sustain Authoritarian Rule in China." *Comparative Political Studies* 44, no. 4 (April 1, 2011): 436–67.

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¹⁰⁵ <http://mi.talkingdata.com/app-rank.html> (accessed on 19th, May 2020)

¹⁰⁶ Grossberg, Lawrence. *We Gotta Get out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. Routledge, 1992, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Following Guy Debord's theorizations in his *The Society of the Spectacle* (1970), media scholar Guanju Wu further argues that contemporary China is becoming "a spectacular society" (Wu, 627) in the space of mobile phone. Indeed, the popularity of the so-called creed "Beauty is Justice" on the Internet designates an important and popular usage of the mobile phone camera, namely, the beautified and illusionary visual representation.

construction of sensual spectacles not only includes beautiful objectified feminine bodies,¹⁰⁸ glamorous *meokbang*,¹⁰⁹ ASMR performance¹¹⁰ and landscapes that aim to instantly satisfy various desires of the spectator, but it also entails well-concealed but affective propaganda, such as the video clips of the National Day Parade in 2019, promoting the grand and positive outlook on the CCP's governance which forcefully counters any sorts of criticism.¹¹¹ More implicitly, in order to attract more attention for economic value, many grassroots video makers upload images that can increase maximum followers and be instantly commodified into consumable visual-audio products for profits. That is to say, aiming for creating and disseminating spectacular mobile vision, the self-media¹¹² in *minjian* also consciously avoids the negative emotional expression and evades the political-related contents in the public sphere, including the debates on highly conflicted socio-political issues, such as the housing demolition.

Further, both the top-down regulations and spectacularizing consumerism are in a way parallel with the uneasy living environment and the expression of escapism of media experience in *minjian*, which magnifies the expected results of flooding. According to Roberts, “consumers avoid or resist information that creates cognitive dissonance, or conflicts with their long-held beliefs or experiences.”¹¹³ The operation of flooding-based censorship is thus particularly effective for the underprivileged group, who mainly interact with the mobile phone image as the way to attain affective prosaic needs outside their precarious daily life, not to reenact their uneasiness once again.

In our case of the Baishizhou demolition, the above three actants, namely, the regime, the platform operators and the mobile phone in *minjian* perform together to suspend the political discussions, particularly by manipulating certain type of affective dimension of *guanxi*.

In terms of the spatial hegemonic power and migrant workers, while the de facto that one's rental temporary space does not suffice long seems to be a piece of common knowledge, the role of their inseparable digital companion, their mobile phone, becomes rather critical to sustain affective relations. In his dissertation on Baishizhou, Backholm argues that the residents' transitory living

¹⁰⁸ See Dippner, Anett. “Social Media Celebrities and Neoliberal Body Politics in China.” KFG Working Paper Series, 2018. and Zhang, Ge, and Larissa Hjorth. “Live-Streaming, Games and Politics of Gender Performance: The Case of Nüzhubo in China.” *Convergence* 25, no. 5–6 (December 1, 2019): 807–25.

¹⁰⁹ See Donnar, Glen. “‘Food Porn’ or Intimate Sociality: Committed Celebrity and Cultural Performances of Overeating in Meokbang.” *Celebrity Studies*, January 17, 2017.

¹¹⁰ See Starr, Rebecca Lurie, Tianxiao Wang, and Christian Go. “Sexuality vs. Sensuality: The Multimodal Construction of Affective Stance in Chinese ASMR Performances.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics*.

¹¹¹ Although the content cannot directly and completely attributed to the governmental regulation, such platforms are all closely coordinated by cultural authorities, namely, the CCP Propaganda Department.

¹¹² Self-media, or independent media, is a term for independently operated media accounts on platforms of social media such as WeChat, Weibo.

¹¹³ Roberts, *Censored*, 2018, 28.

state has become “ a constant feature of life in the village.”¹¹⁴ In Backholm’s conversation with some evictees, it seems that in the perception of many, nothing can be done about the forthcoming demolition but to leave and find another affordable temporary stay.¹¹⁵ According to a conversation in *Villager Reporters*, this vision is shared by the majority of residents in Baishizhou. When asked about their feelings about the upcoming removal, many shared the view that, “ [the demolition] is up to the authority to decide. All we can do is to face reality and move away.”. For most mobile netizens in Baishizhou, while living with the constant frustration and with the transition upcoming, through the devotion of marketized mobile images in their leisure time, the harshness and uncertainties of livelihoods outside the screen can be temporarily escaped and forgotten.

With regard to the collaboration between regime and platforms, certain type of affectivities are being massively produced in order to conceal the instable negative feelings that might be dangerous. Articles related to the demolition that has the keyword ‘Baishizhou’ with the highest pageview hit¹¹⁶ on Wechat are not about the most critical survival issue, namely, the demolition, but various introductions of cheap and delicious street food stands that might be gone after the demolition made by a local culinary-related independently operated media.¹¹⁷ Accompanied with a number of good-looking photographs of food and cityscape applied with nostalgia filters, several paragraphs of short texts express the praise to locals and the remembrance to the loss. The same goes to other mobile platforms, where the attractive images of local cuisine in Baishizhou are widely produced, viewed and circulated.

Indeed, the motivation for political expression in the *minjian* cyberspace has been largely reduced by imperceivable and rather persuasive mechanisms of flooding. The above notwithstanding, it does not ultimately deny the possibilities for political expressions in the mobile media landscape and, as such, still holds the potential to challenge the dominant propaganda and oppression by inventing new ways to connect the local community.

During the practice of *Shenzhen Wawa*, certain methods engaging with relationalities have been experimented with the awareness of the risk brought by flooding. For instance, accompanied with the online exhibition, a chorus composed three Cantonese songs about the demolition with short music videos for the participants to exhibit: *Two Tigers (New Version)* 新两只老虎, *Cannot Move* 搬不走 and *Raise Your Hands* 举起手来. Founded by Cai Suo (vocal & guitar) and Liu Hao (drummer), Xisan Chorus is a branch of the Xisan Film Studio that has been discussed in Chapter One, who has a close relation with the artist Nut Brother. Contrary to the exquisite visual-audio

¹¹⁴ Backholm, “Urban Redevelopment in Shenzhen, China : Neoliberal Urbanism, Gentrification, and Everyday Life in Baishizhou Urban Village.” 2019, 87.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 91.

¹¹⁶ Statistics via the build-in search engine of WeChat platform (accessed on 1st, May, 2020)

¹¹⁷ <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/NpbgFIUGMkhhHpm28CYSuQ> (accessed on 1st, May, 2020)

products in today's flourishing pop music industry, the quality of Xisan's videos apparently is at the level of amateur. Simply shot with their own mobile phones cameras, its rough editing techniques and undecorated big-fonts subtitles that occupy almost half of the screen construct an identical appearance within the aforementioned mainstream video streams (Fig.18) . Posting such media-specific genres of music videos on the WeChat Friends Circle is coherent with the accustomed perception of migrant workers' grassroots media experience with the prevailing popular images on short video platforms like Tiktok and Kwai. The melody of Cantonese folk songs, the easy-to-follow textual lyrics, and the down-to-earth visual appearance, subtly construct an open-ended event that have not forgotten the expectations of the short video consumers. Though it can argued that such videos can still be easily overshadowed by the flooding of other more attractive content on the platforms, what needs to highlight is the way it generates and transmits affections, which stands right in-between the prevailing entertaining videos in flooding and the uneasy intimate expressions of sorrow and anger. Disseminating such images is a valuable attempt to redistribute and reconfigure the affective dimension in media landscape, which holds the potentialities to connect and mobilize the homeless urban village residents by the shared feelings.

Fear

Besides flooding which has been widely applied across the cyberspace, for a participatory art project like *Shenzhen Wawa*, another important method of censorship, namely, fear, has been more directly deployed to suspend this particularly loud expression. Defined by Roberts, “[c]ensorship through fear functions by dissuasion—by prohibiting the expression of or access to information and articulating its punishment so that citizens are discouraged from doing so.”¹¹⁸ Due to the awareness and expectation of the upcoming punishment, for example, events may be suspended beforehand. The focus of this section will be the imposed restriction on the artist's actions in particular, and on the question how and if, under the conditions of fear, resistance can take place during networking. This question becomes important, Roberts notes, as it is extremely expensive and insufficient to carry out such censorship when more and more citizens are involved in the same story.¹¹⁹ For this reason, key public leaders whose engagement in political issues is much more recognizable, such as journalists, social activists, lawyers, and academics are more likely to be directly tracked down and threatened by the fear-based methods.¹²⁰ This explains why, most measures regarding the intimidation in *Shenzhen Wawa* have been only executed on the artist and his direct associates.

¹¹⁸ Roberts, 45.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 54-56.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 116-118.

To be sure, the act of intimidation is not unique for the era of digital media. Indeed, the observable punishment of local authorities varies but has always included legal deterrence, intimidation and even imprisonment. In the abrupt social conflicts such as housing demolition, local government officials have always been quite fast to control the primary sources of information, namely, the evictees themselves. Usually sending out plain-clothes police, the personal freedom of the distressed and dissenting evictees is required to be temporarily restricted. Such fear-based governmental methods directly deter, and even prohibit the resident's interactions with the press, minimizing the chances for getting larger public exposure.¹²¹ Such violent act is not only aiming for limiting the corporeal freedom of individual, but more importantly, for cutting off possibilities of generating new *guanxi*. Usually full of sorrow and anger, such emotional-imbued relations of victims can be easily mobilized and used against regime.

Moreover, the flourishing of digitalized social media has deeply influenced the implementation of fear tactics in authoritarian regime. In *The Internet and Political Protest in Autocracies* (2015), political theorists Nils B. Weidmann and Espen Geelmuyden Rød illustrate in detail demonstrate how autocratic control of the population increasingly employs various tactics to oppress mobilized protests and ensure their dictatorships in the digital age.¹²² The recent growth of the internet further facilitates the speed and scope of such control. Established in 2014 by President Xi, Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) is a special agency in charge of cyberspace security and internet content regulation, particularly signifying the implement of fear tactics in the cyberspace in recent years.

In the oppressive control of *Shenzhen Wawa*, the employment of fear-based methods are highly visible, ranging from the real life to cyberspace. In an interview with the artist Nut Brother, it quickly became clear how severe the experience has been for him. While preparing dolls for collection from Baishizhou families, the artist set up a collection point in a 60-year-old tattoo artist Eagle's shop. One day, six policemen came to the tattoo artist's door, and forced him for a lengthy and intimidating interrogation in a local police office. The Nut Brother has also been sent for questioning three times by the local authorities. One night, a group of policemen even spent the entire night outside his residence, waiting for him to come outside. The next day, his door was almost forcibly unlocked. In the end, the artist decided to call the police himself, since if arrested, he would be able to keep an official record in the police as documented evidence. At the police station, he was told that the reason for interrogation was that the art project was suspected of

¹²¹ For instance, see McDonnell, Steven, "Yangtze Ferry Disaster: Chinese authorities start righting capsized ship; death toll rises to 75," *ABC*, June 4, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-06-04/bad-weather-interrupts-work-to-find-china-ferry-survivors/6522012>.

¹²² Rød, Espen Geelmuyden, and Nils B Weidmann. "Empowering Activists or Autocrats? The Internet in Authoritarian Regimes." *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 3 (May 1, 2015): 338–51.

"misleading the public" and "spreading the rumors."¹²³ He was also forced to meet representatives from the LVGEM Real Estate as well as the Education Bureau of Nanshan District. Collectively expressing their strong dissatisfactions, they accused him for destroying their "reputation" in the process of the Baizhizhou demolition.¹²⁴

While the artist's personal safety was directly threatened, the above contestation also becomes an intensified and valuable battleground for artistic practice itself. First of all, in order to maximize public exposure and minimize the risk for online exhibition, the artist's deliberate choice on the social media platform Wechat in preference to Weibo,¹²⁵ which both are the most active mainstream social media platforms on Chinese mobile phone, can be understood as the first strategy of disrupting *guanxi* closely monitored by the regime. Much similar to Twitter and Facebook, the content on Weibo is generally publicly available to any registered user on the platform. This means that a single post on Weibo can be technically limitlessly be re-shared. As stated by Roberts, a higher-profile social media microbloggers whose posts are more likely to be re-posted are often more likely to be targeted and closely monitored by the censorship machine.¹²⁶ For the semi-closed platform,¹²⁷ Wechat, on the contrary, the sharing scope was strictly limited, restricted to no more than 5,000 people per post. Also, compared to Weibo, every single post on Wechat of *Shenzhen Wawa* has been sent out separately by each participant in their own Friends Circle, which makes it much harder to track down to one single distributor, thus tremendously increasing the administrative cost of data-collection for authorities.

Secondly, the artist directly uses the conflicted situation to transform and renew the suspended event of image into a new event where the hegemonic manipulation of *guanxi* can be visually documented, which can be seen as another productive counter-censorship methods. When asked what does the experienced intimidation mean to him, Nut Brother answered, "As an artist, I actually prefer to present myself in a conflict zone. For the majority, such direct experience with violence is hard to encounter. Therefore, the accountability of the artist is to document and archive the hegemonic oppression in the form of art."¹²⁸ It is clear to see that apart from yielding the sense of retreat, parallel to Roberts' observation, the fear-based method instead triggers much curiosity and creativity on the restricted topics, and arise a much deeper reflections towards the observable

¹²³ Interview with the artist

¹²⁴ The above description is based on my interview with and the self-account of the artist.

¹²⁵ According to the real-time active end-user index of Talkingdata <http://mi.talkingdata.com/app-rank.html> (accessed on 19th, May 2020)

¹²⁶ Roberts, 118.

¹²⁷ I adopt the term semi-closed platform from Negro, Gianluigi. "The Development of Mobile Internet. Weixin (WeChat): A Killer Application for Sina Weibo?" In *The Internet in China: From Infrastructure to a Nascent Civil Society*, edited by Gianluigi Negro, 193–208. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

¹²⁸ my interview with the artist

control, since it acts more as “a signal to citizens”¹²⁹ as a prohibited topic. Moreover, while addressing and intervening in the highly-contested social dissensions, the agency of mobile phone camera becomes especially crucial in the oppositional struggle towards direct hegemonic violence. By virtue of its pocket-size and one-click shutter, artists can much more conveniently and relatively safely acquire the first-hand evidence, namely, photographs and videos, while suffering from the violent execution. For example, when being forced to the police station, Nut Brother and Eagle both secretly took out their mobile phones to take photos and videos as the vital visual document, which then become an integral part of the final rendering of the art project. In this, this project *Shenzhen Wawa* differs from *Villager Reporters* dealt with in the Chapter One. Here it is no longer a bodily gesture of raising and wielding the camera that generate and activate events, but firstly the potentialities of a dormant camera in motion. Stated by Azoulay, “the camera’s ability to create a commotion in an environment merely by being there—the camera can draw certain happenings to itself as if with a magnet or even bring them into being, while it can also distance events, disrupt them or prevent them from occurring.”¹³⁰ Indeed, the existence of a raised camera can possibly protect one's corporeal body against violence. But more importantly, the continuous functioning of the camera, or its resilient capacities of producing images bears in it the promise of an unstoppable event that might otherwise have been suspended or substituted. Also, the produced image transformed the on-site intimidation to a forceful statement targeted against the censorship. By presenting contradictions by the production of image rather than purifying them, such risky encounter with the censorship also facilitates the intensity of a renewed event matters politically. In short, renewing the suspended event of image is not to accentuate and repeat the confrontation, but to manufacture an unpredictable but potent weapon to record, disrupt and rewrite the imposed fear.

To conclude, the aforementioned tactics employed by artists are especially effective in the expanding network of the mobile phone, since the latter can more easily escape the fear-based methods by disrupting the imposed *guanxi* manipulation by the regime. However, the question it leaves unresolved is whether such awareness and strategies towards censorship are limited to the artist and his team, or that it can affect more through the networking of online exhibition. It is to this that I will turn my attention in the next section.

¹²⁹ Roberts, 53.

¹³⁰ Azoulay, 2011, 72.

Friction

As an artwork intended to arouse social engagement and expand the public awareness, the accessibility of the event of the images revolving around the online exhibition is exceptionally crucial for *Shenzhen Wawa*, which is another form of social action intervened by the censorship according to Roberts. Apart from the fear and flooding that mostly focus on limiting certain expressions in the public, I will thus shift to the another mechanism of censorship in this section, namely, the friction, which focuses more on the restriction of accessibility. Defined by Roberts, the friction in censorship means “increasing the costs, either in time or money, of access or spread of information— diverts citizens’ attention by imposing barriers to information access.”¹³¹ Compared to direct dissuasion in flooding and fear, friction is less observable but also much more inescapable, which means it might have a more overwhelmingly impact on impeding the networking moves of mobile netizens.

Perhaps the most famed friction-based censorship in China is the Great Firewall (GFW), which intricately and extensively blocks most foreign websites, including Google, Twitter, Facebook, as well as the majority of western media that have been deemed as objectionable by Chinese authorities. By installing the virtual private network (VPN), a quick evasion of the GFW is possible, but only a minority of citizens – that is: those who are interested enough in the sensitive information, and have the resources to pay costs of evasion - have the means and are motivated and equipped enough to circumvent the imposed censorship. The majority is less interested in politics and not willing to spend time or money becoming informed. Minor costs of access and governmental distractions can divert citizens to information that is less dangerous to the regime.

As Roberts points out, the method of friction functions more as “a continuous variable that indicates the degree of difficulty in finding a piece of information, not a dichotomous variable that indicates complete availability or total unavailability.”¹³² Today, the platforms for accessing most events of image undoubtedly belong to the mobile phone screen. Protected by the GFW, those Chinese Internet companies regulate the domestic online society for profit by adhering to the national policies in “a market that has unique authoritarian characteristics.”¹³³ State-led news agencies also participated to increase the effects of friction inside the GFW. The mobile social media accounts of the hegemonic official media – for instance, *People’s Daily*, CCTV News, as well as the major regional media in the Pearl River Delta, *Southern Metropolis Daily* – both have very few reports, let alone coverage of in-depth topics such as the difficulties of evicted children’s

¹³¹ Roberts, 6.

¹³² Roberts, 158.

¹³³ Peng, Yuzhu. “Affective Networks: How WeChat Enhances Tencent’s Digital Business Governance.” *Chinese Journal of Communication* 10, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 267.

education in Baishizhou discussed in Nut Brother's art. On the contrary, Many blocked foreign media, such as *Financial Times*, *South China Morning Post*, have conducted relatively detailed investigation reports on the demolition.¹³⁴ Important for our purpose here, when searching for keyword "Shenzhen Wawa" on my mobile phone using the search engines Baidu and Google, the results are telling (Fig. 19): While the first four results in Google are all the images from the art project, whereas in Baidu, the biggest domestic search engine in China, what you get are photographs of actual dolls manufactured in Shenzhen. Without the evasion of the GFW, the artwork seems almost invisible for most netizens in China. Such small attempt has already roughly demonstrated the existence of information barrier in the Great Firewall and how such porous censorship functions in detail in terms of friction.

While the members of the socio-economically advantaged populations, myself included, can relatively easily circumvent the GFW, make the above comparison and read blocked information in the banned social networks, low-incomes group, such as migrant workers in Baishizhou, despite their equally advanced mobile devices, are more likely to consuming mobile images in a way that they are already accustomed to, which further complicates the heterogeneity of the interdependent community *minjian*. For migrant workers living in urban villages, the word 'VPN' might never have appeared in their digital life. According to Zhang's research on the GFW's bypassers based on the dataset of China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), the majority of Chinese netizens who have Facebook accounts also hold at least a university degree and have the non-agricultural *hukou*. What is more, regarding the articulation and reception of political issues, Facebook account holders were estimated at least 10 times more likely to read and express critical political views online than those without a Facebook account.¹³⁵ Roberts' survey also demonstrates that those who evade the Firewall are more knowledgeable and active about domestic political issues than their counterpart,¹³⁶ which displays how the GFW has structurally separated highly contested social issues from Chinese public at large.

Besides the external digital divide, the limited related results in the domestic search engine lead us to a more sophisticated aspect in the mechanism of friction, namely, the stringent and flexible content-filtering tactics.¹³⁷ More than just the search engine, such mechanism is mostly visible in the content-based social media platforms, which *Shenzhen Wawa* unavoidably requires to post notices, create group chat, send messages to reach out to more residents, and update the

¹³⁴ For instance, see *The last days of Shenzhen's great urban village* : <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/2023255/last-days-shenzhens-great-urban-village> (accessed on 20th, May 2020) *Shenzhen's largest 'urban village' thrives despite demolition orders*: <https://www.ft.com/content/c44936ba-5f2b-11e8-9334-2218e7146b04> (accessed on 20th, May 2020)

¹³⁵ Zhang, Chong. "Who Bypasses the Great Firewall in China?" *First Monday*, March 22, 2020..

¹³⁶ Roberts, 170, 235.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 62.

progress of the project by publishing pictures and videos taken by mobile phone. By monitoring and selectively removing posts with sensitive contents on social media platforms, filtering prevents and reduces the spread of specific events that might be dangerous to the regime by limiting the possibilities of tangible *guanxi* to develop. Closely regulated by the CAC office, all content on the domestic social platforms must be ensured to be in line with governmental guidelines. The automated filter directly prevents individuals from posting anything with a specific sensitive term, even before such post has been reviewed by the applied censors. Additional filtering closely follows when objectionable posts and other dissent have been detected by the machine, which the platform is responsible for quick removal. Otherwise, the CAC can shut the entire platform down if necessary.

The flexibilities of filtering further complicates the process of monitoring. The term "demolition" or "housing demolition" itself does not fall into the absolute banned vocabulary: at least netizens can still send out the very word on various social platforms, according to my own experience. Yet according to the Canadian interdisciplinary research institute Citizen Lab in the University of Toronto, for mainland Wechat accounts, the large-scale keyword censorship over the content monitoring have not only been extensively applied, but are also dynamically changing, expanding or condensing according to the current situation on the public opinion.¹³⁸ Thus, the content related to *Shenzhen Wawa* may be subject to the actively-changing scrutiny, existing in the blacklisted topics both regionally and temporarily in certain circumstances.¹³⁹ Also, more than just the textual information, texts in the format of image can also be detected by the technology of optical character recognition (OCR), which filters any sensitive posted images or screenshots.

Not only just directly blocking the accessibility, the sophisticated operation of content-filtering, Roberts writes, "also can disaggregate accounts of an event, reducing the salience of the event and increasing uncertainty about what exactly occurred."¹⁴⁰ In other words, by disrupting the interpersonal communications on the filtered topics, it nearly wipes out the possibilities of developing the relevant *guanxi*. Such ramification is extremely detrimental for an art project like *Shenzhen Wawa* that aims to foster the social connectivity from cyberspace to real life. In the later process of distribution, as specified by Nut Brother, there were six pieces of coverage in total in the domestic media when he was doing the *Shenzhen Wawa*. Of these, only one piece of article in Sixth Tone, an English-language Shanghai-based media group, has survived after the mechanism of

¹³⁸ the database of Citizen Lab on the censored words in Wechat: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UTP9MU80r_N5WPhQ5-4AjM0ebW1eMxyDIRe_vaYy9IM/edit#gid=0 (accessed on 19th. May, 2020)

¹³⁹ For instance, during the Beijing Daxing eviction from November 2017 to 2018, the term "low-end population" (*diduan renkou* 低端人口) has been blocked temporarily, which straightforwardly disallows users from searching and posting content that contains such word on all the social media platforms.

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, 155.

filtering.¹⁴¹ In his own Wechat Official Account, *Things Are Somewhat Complicated*, four published articles on the project *Shenzhen Wawa* have all been deleted by the platform (Fig.20). The same fate also happens to his Weibo articles. During the online exhibition, based on my observation in the joined group chat, it did not take long before these pictures could no longer be sent out to the Friends Circle successfully. Regrettably receiving relatively very little domestic attention, most dropout Baishizhou children silently left Shenzhen with their parents. A famed Chinese slang has in a way perfectly summarized a quite awkward and unsettled position of *Shenzhen Wawa* partly due to the friction, 'flowers blooming inside but perfuming outside'.

Nevertheless, the eventual unsatisfactory outcome does not deny the diversified practices of circumventing friction during the entire execution of the art project, which gave birth to new forms of *guanxi* with its resilient attempt to restart the events suspended by the censorship.

First of all, instead of evading the GFW, the project *Shenzhen Wawa* took an alternative approach during its confrontation with the blockage, which preserves its public impact to a greatest extent with certain price. Despite their capability to access the blocked foreign websites, the artist Nut Brother still adopted the domestic mainstream Internet service platforms in order to avoid the impact caused by the digital divide, including WeChat and Weibo, and Shimo Documents, a Chinese cloud-based productivity suite comparable to the Google Drive. For the artist, while employing the platform inside the GFW largely increase their own risk of being censored, but it has in a way largely opened up the network of the event where establishing cyber connectivity with the Baishizhou migrant workers is much easier to promote, since most of whom rarely cross over the internet blockage.

Also, in a sense, many high-end art institutions also function as a porous GFW in real life for migrant workers, who, no matter in terms of time or economic cost, usually won't voluntarily cross that wall to access such high-brow event. From such perspective, obstacles that the Nut Brother has experienced in finding the exhibition venue in such institutions has also in turn reduced the friction to a certain degree. Compared to applying for a place for exhibition in an art institution, launching an online Wechat-based exhibition is much more affordable, also means much less procedures for acquiring approval from the authority. Besides, according to the 2019 China Mobile Social Industry Annual Research Report surveyed by Aurora Mobile, more than 20% of Wechat users have between 201-500 friends in their contacts, and even 10% accounts have more than 500 contacts.¹⁴² Roughly estimating, the number of people who have access to see the digital exhibition should not

¹⁴¹ <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1004392?from=singlemessage> (accessed on 19th May, 2020)

¹⁴² *The 2019 China Mobile Social Industry Annual Research Report* 2019 年社交网络行业研究报告 issued by Aurora Mobile Limited. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/OSYxRrbZEM7IL3OoepSzXA> (accessed on 19th May, 2020)

be less than 15,000. Though *Shenzhen Wawa* has basically cut itself off from the mainstream elitist art world discourse, the direct usage of Wechat platform directly enhances the vibrancies of *guanxi* in a more inclusive network with its the high popularity and dense penetration¹⁴³.

Secondly, for successfully sharing information and prolonging the existence of one post, multiple tactics are being continuously discussed and experimented with in the group chat organized by assistants. According to my experience dealing with the mechanism of filtering, general strategies that have been frequently applied include: substituting similar undetected homophones, filling texts with deliberate typos and random emojis, rewriting text backward, as well as transforming the format of texts into images, pdf, and Word documents. Such methods can be understood as explorations of “obfuscation” that has been extensively discussed in Helen Nissenbaum and Finn Brunton’s *Obfuscation: A Users Guide for Privacy and Protest* (2015), which is defined as “the deliberate addition of ambiguous, confusing, or misleading information to interfere with surveillance and data collection.”¹⁴⁴ For them, what the term “obfuscation” connotes are “obscurity, intelligibility and bewilderment”, that makes the original “signal”, which can be either text or image, that is harder to be exploited and surveilled.¹⁴⁵

In *Shenzhen Wawa*, the above-mentioned counteracts in obfuscation are mostly employed in the realm of images, and usually not employed independently, but more often intertwined together, which means multiple strategies can be flexibly mixed, mingled and hidden according to changing circumstances.

Instead of posting an article in textual format, choosing to post nine well-designed infographics (Fig. 21) is the first step to circumvent direct censorship. Not only can infographics with handwritten characters create predicaments for the OCR machine, adopting such format also means it can include much richer contents for informing viewers by the comics on the demolition and relating their intimate feelings through photographs. Moreover, the layout of each image also takes into consideration the common habit of browsing the Friends Circle. Due to the extra length of each infographic, the thumbnails of one post form an eye-catching title with nine characters: Four Thousand Dropped Out Schoolchildren in Baishizhou (白石洲四千学童困境) (Fig. 9). More than that, shortly after images, especially the one with the *Shenzhen Wawa* poster, have been detected and blacklisted. Various distortions of original images have then been applied and tested for evading the censorship. Sophisticated manipulation of the image like this needs a perfect incorporation of two paradoxical aspects: invisible for the censorship machine, yet visible to the

¹⁴³ According to the report of Hootsuite/We Are Social, the penetration rate of Wechat in January 2019 has reached 79% in China. <https://wearesocial.cn/digital-2019-china/> (accessed on 19th, May 2020)

¹⁴⁴ Brunton, Finn, and Helen Nissenbaum. *Obfuscation: A User’s Guide for Privacy and Protest*. Reprint edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts London: The MIT Press, 2016,1.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 46.

intended audience. Based on the visual archive provided by the artist, the attempted methods for encryption that have been include but are not limited to, the upside-down inversion, the partial misalignment, the discoloration (Fig.22, 23), etc. In addition, in order to hinder the algorithms from easily recognize the textual information on the image, participants have also attempted to partly edit the text with colored coverage, turning it into an unreadable message.

According to Brunton and Nissenbaum, understanding the practice of obfuscation should be situated in the unavoidable relations of power asymmetries, which in a way responds to the concept “weapons of the weak” proposed by James C. Scott,¹⁴⁶ also echoing with the conceptualization of *mijnjian* in my thesis, that concerns the marginalized and vulnerable community. For *Shenzhen Wawa*, when inventing another optimal system to resist the well-designed mechanism of friction is not possible, the above micro-scale tactics are arguably the most accessible weapons for generating new forms of *guanxi* that matters politically.

During such operation of censorship, the overlapping dynamics of three different methods, namely, flooding, fear and friction, as well as the media experience situated in *minjian* should not to be ignored either. Since it has further demonstrated the how regime manipulates and mediates *guanxi* both as relational affectivity and social capital in our case.

Firstly, as Roberts proposes, “friction and fear are not mutually exclusive and can overlap.”¹⁴⁷ For instance, the detainment of the Nut Brother and the tattoo artist who helped him was in all likelihood partly based on detecting certain keywords in their WeChat and Weibo accounts.¹⁴⁸ Second, flooding and friction can also be tightly paired as “authorities try to slow the spread of one type of information and promote another.”¹⁴⁹ Immersed with the flooding propaganda, motivations to become “tech-savvies” are largely reduced due to sophisticated operations of the friction. The manipulation is particularly effective for low-income, less-educated but e-literate groups such as migrant workers. When a more convenient, enjoyable and cheaper way to share and view images has been rendered and becomes the dominant means, it is difficult to step out the comfortable, as well as spectacularized zone to find costly information sources and to engage in politically relevant participation, even if such information may have a direct relationship with their own discontented living status. Thirdly, what is worse, the more spectacular the cyberspace appears to be, the more fragile people's sense of the ordinary life is.¹⁵⁰ Immersed in the supremacy of digital images, millions of netizens, including Baishizhou's residents, still have to deal with the tangible disputes

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 55-56.

¹⁴⁷ Roberts, 59.

¹⁴⁸ The accuracy of such identification is also largely based on recent requirement by CAC that users must provide official identification when they register for social media accounts.

¹⁴⁹ Roberts, 81.

¹⁵⁰ Zhou Zhiqiang. “From Entertainment to Giggle-About the Depoliticization on Chinese Popular Culture.” *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science)* 4 (2010): 36–43.

and predicaments of livelihoods the moment when they put their phone away. In “the unreal reality”¹⁵¹ constructed by the flooding of spectacularized mobile images, people will be easily infected by the dominant affective *guanxi* built by nationalism and hedonism, thus consciously or unconsciously crowding out alternative connectivity. While the perception of reality has been distorted, they are more questionable and even reluctant to building up new *guanxi* such as for resisting the forced demolition that even occurs within the radius of life just around the corner.

To conclude, the mechanism of censorship not only suspends the event of *Shenzhen Wawa*, but more importantly, it directly intervenes the dynamics of *guanxi* happening in *minjian*. The resisting tactics discussed in this chapter are thus not merely passive counteractions of state violence, but also act as active web-making moves offering hope for generating new forms of *guanxi* in the era of mobile image.

Adopting such perspective indicates that measuring whether the resistance succeed in the end is not that crucial, compared to identifying the relational possibilities during the disobedient practice. As Roberts argues, frequent encounters with the censorship will not let participants lose their motivations.¹⁵² quite to the contrary: it is more likely to motivate them to further navigate the system by the repeated trying, in order to test out the boundary of filtering and continuously invent new methods to counteract the dominant power. What’s more, it is precisely through the practice of the multilateral responses that new expressions of connectivity can be delineated. For instance, both the artist’s bodily encounter with the direct violence and the obfuscation of online exhibition against friction have been consciously archived by phone camera or screenshots. Playing with the mobile network have become the integral parts of the *Shenzhen Wawa* project itself. To put in another way, the censorship system in the digitalized China has arguably become an apparatus of translation, which converts any attempts for circumventing, successful or not, into an exclusive performance of art. Moreover, in the conclusion part, I will argue that in fact all kinds of resistance in the aforementioned three art projects have such potential to open up multiple interpretable spaces while consciously interacting with the regime, which offers us additional critical edges to unravel and discount the seemingly unconquerable power by reinventing *guanxi* in the age of mobile phone image.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidi*, 41.

¹⁵² *Roberts*, 123.

Conclusion

Perhaps it is now a good time to answer a question that lying implicitly in each chapter: what exactly are their practice resisting? Of course, the most immediate response might be the housing demolition in Baishizhou, which is the most influential spatial violence that has been experienced by the entire urban village community. Moreover, following Spivak and Butler, the process of marginalization is also happening in the institutional dimension and during the establishment of discourse. Echoing with the scope and dynamics of *minjian*, the dual aspects of exclusion has multiplied battlegrounds for each art project.

Also, situating my discussion mainly against the backdrop of the expansion of mobile phone camera, my thesis rejects the ideal political democratization and artistic envisioned utopia evoked by experiments in the cyberspace. For three chosen projects, interweaving directly with the immediate reality and the urgent living crisis in Baishizhou, I argue that another relevant topics for resistance are the critic and reflections on the inseparable technological connectivity in contemporary China's media landscape. As van Dijck observes, "connective media have almost become synonymous with sociality: you can check out any time you 'like,' but you can never leave."¹⁵³ Such enforcement is especially impactful but under-examined for the underprivileged social groups in Chinese *minjian*, who have even been partly dispossessed of the human connectedness in real life and excluded from the discourse of new network in the meantime. Therefore, it can be argued that three facets of difficulties, namely, the marginalization of living space and the exclusion in the network society, as well as the tension between the technological-constructed connectivity and human connectedness are the chief objectives for artistic resistance in my thesis.

It is by now also explicit that such multifaceted resistance interrelated with the network has already gone beyond any binary frameworks of domination and subordination, suppression and opposition. My discussions with *guanxi* dynamics can thus be understood as one of many ways to rethink the significance of thriving everyday experience with the engagement of mobile phone camera as an alternative form of resistance. It is here that the sociopolitical impact of their artworks should be mostly acknowledged.

Specifically speaking, parallel to the three dimensions of *guanxi* in the introduction, I consider the engagement and re-invention of *guanxi* in this thesis can be concluded in the following three aspects.

First, three projects can be understood as the production of uncoordinated events of mobile

¹⁵³ Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 2013, 175.

phone images that are especially hard to be categorized and defined. By underlying the in-betweenness and heterogeneity of *minjian* in my thesis, I consider that the chosen artworks reside resolutely not in the elite artistic circle, nor can they be simply labeled as grassroots socio-political movements. Especially illuminating the uncertainties and unsettlement in such projects, it is hoped that alternative connective possibilities can be revealed for building up and sustaining relationships based on irreducible encounters with the mobile phone camera. From such a perspective, compared to *Singleton Lunch* and *Villager Reporters*, the Nut Brother's online exhibition has in a way exemplified such dimension of *guanxi*.

In *Singleton Lunch*, though the temporal-spatial boundaries have been forcefully challenged, the publication and dissemination of food images via the social platforms are still subordinate to the actual nine meals that did take place in the Handshake 302. The online exhibition of *Shenzhen Wawa*, however, transgresses the official art system by a more inclusive gesture in terms of its distributive cyber network. That is to say, by generating numerous events of images, especially with the censorship machine, the online exhibition is equal to, or even much more important than the on-site performance, which can also be considered as countless ongoing art performances on each participant's mobile screen. While such scattered events become difficult to control from the top-down perspective and categorical framework, it also means that *minjian* interrelated connections, namely, *guanxi*, promoted during the practice of *Shenzhen Wawa* can be much more sustainable and politically productive.

For *Villager Reporter* in chapter two, with its vigorous heterogeneity, the preservation and regeneration of various distinctive frames of both villager-artist collective in Xisan and Baishizhou residents have intruded and challenged the dominant media representation. In *Shenzhen Wawa*, the diversified frames not only exist in each distributive mobile phone screen, but more importantly, during its constant confrontation with the censorship machine, where flexible strategies of obfuscation and other micro-scale tactics concerning images have disrupted the execution of censorship, and initiated countless unique events for resistance.

Second, three art projects have all touched upon the affective dimension, *ganqing* in *guanxi*, where new types of interpersonal intimacy among total strangers can be communicated and thus connected by their practice. Imbued with socio-cultural connotations on food and *guanxi*, the sharing a meal in Handshake 302 has already implicated the transmission of affect on the table. Moreover, the immediacy of food images posted via its Wechat post further connect, distribute and expand such transmission to fragmented cyberspaces. In chapter two, by sharing the precarious living experience in the realm and dynamics of *minjian*, the making of documentary has arguably built up emotional ties and subsequently a collective collaboration of urban villages from Xisan to Baishizhou. During the *Shenzhen Wawa* project, participants have also been intensively affected

and connected particularly through the frequent encounter with the censorship. Traveling between the tangible reality and virtual mobile phone screen, the promotion of micro-level interpersonal affective connections are reconfiguring the dominant discourse and social norms by including *minjian*'s participation of mobile phone images in the discussion.

Third, in terms of *renqing*, which designates *guanxi* as the social capital with instrumental ends, three art projects have provided their own responses. For Handshake 302, in order to raise public awareness of issues in the urban village, it has in a way optimized its ambiguous *guanxi* with the local intellectual circle as well as government officials. For Xisan Film Studio and Nut Brother, while it seems to be unlikely to directly take advantage of *guanxi* with the dominant power, *minjian* artists choose to document, reframe and recode their experience with the unjust old *guanxi* by means of mobile phone images. That is to say, the implicit complicity, the direct confrontation or negotiation with the power mechanisms in housing demolition reappropriate the old, and generate new *guanxi* that can mobilize and even subvert the established dichotomized relations imposed by the authoritarian regime, leading to real social changes.

Nevertheless, it does not mean such resistance can immediately bring large-scale social changes in a short period. In Baishizhou, the bulldozers still have arbitrarily and unstoppably conquered the land and evicted most residents. Dealing with the constant intervention of power while doing art in *minjian*, the everyday practice with *guanxi* becomes another rebellious utterance and even meaningful art performance of each project, which bears alternative distinct political significance and foster new imaginations of connection in the long run.

What has not been sufficiently discussed in my thesis is the complex role of online platforms operators, such as Wechat and Weibo in art practice. Having arguably dominated and exploited the media landscape in China, they are by no means neutral in the spatial violence as well as the constructed sociality. Also, as one of the actants with an active presence in the events of mobile images, their diverse engagement and the subsequently formulated *guanxi* expressions require further theoretical deliberations and critical inspection in the future.

To sum up, this research is an attempt to illuminate the underrated dynamics of the mobile media experience of Chinese marginalized community both in and outside academia. I hope it can also initiate multiple dialogues with *minjian* art projects that further encourage much more exciting artistic experiments across city maps as well as mobile phone screens.

Images

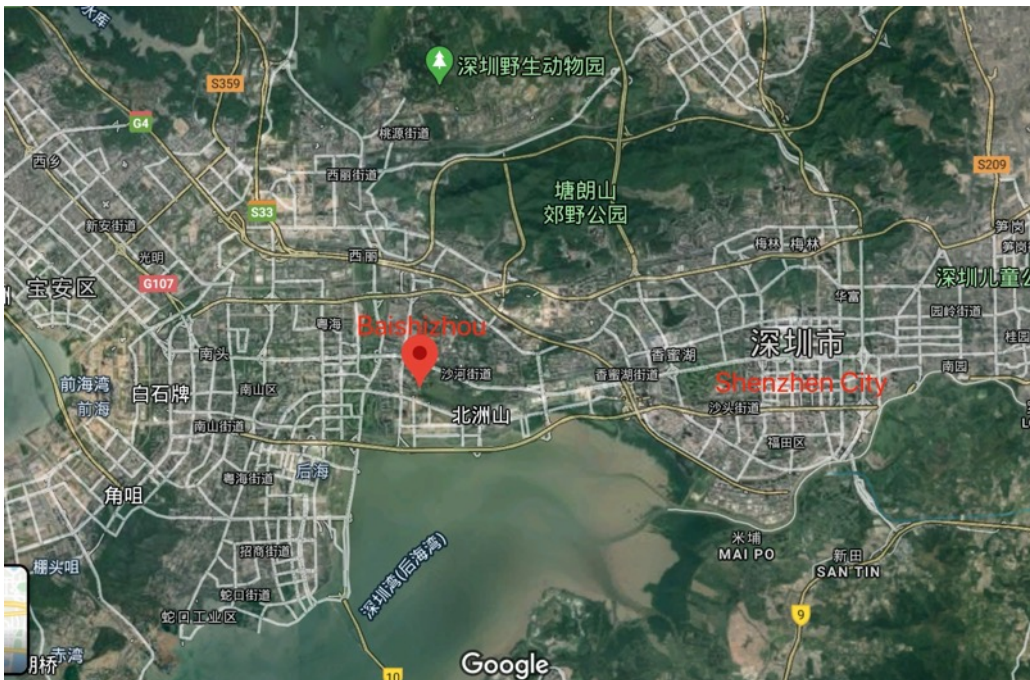


Figure 1 The Location of Baishizhou in Shenzhen.

Source of the image: Google Maps

Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 2 Handshake buildings in Baishizhou

Source of the image: <https://www.ft.com/content/c44936ba-5f2b-11e8-9334-2218e7146b04>

Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 3 The map of Handshake 302

Source of the image: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yHnoACCS03XxyShSqqTSBw>
 Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 4 A photo posted by Handshake 302 on its Singleton Lunch in June, 2019
 on its Wechat Account

Source of the image:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?biz=MjM5MjY1OTQwNw==&mid=2659429000&idx=1&sn=725bd975d2e758d89f87870979351ccb&chksm=bdd5e8288aa2613ec30cfc6ab405c9c2cac8571eb8ea5b88b70cb3d797bf899183d0ae80a8c5&scene=21#wechat_redirect

Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 5 A photo posted by Handshake 302 on its Singleton Lunch in January, 2019
on its Wechat Account

Source of the image:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?_biz=MjM5MjY1OTQwNw==&mid=2659428350&idx=1&sn=a9e4b5036fdc49aedde7c61505a8169f&chksm=bdd5e55e8aa26c48d44bd60f15acdd4e5878cffe49cff788a822ec64207fb83bb79c12a49d8e&scene=21#wechat_redirect

Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 6 A photo posted by Handshake 302 on its Singleton Lunch in January, 2019
on its Wechat Account

Source of the image:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?_biz=MjM5MjY1OTQwNw==&mid=2659428350&idx=1&sn=a9e4b5036fdc49aedde7c61505a8169f&chksm=bdd5e55e8aa26c48d44bd60f15acdd4e5878cffe49cff788a822ec64207fb83bb79c12a49d8e&scene=21#wechat_redirect

Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 7 A poster of the Xisan Film Studio
Courtesy of artist Zheng Hongbin

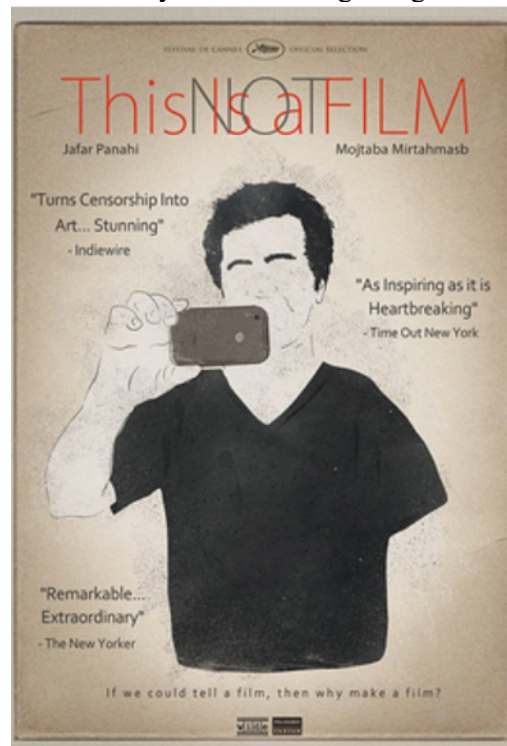


Figure 8 The poster of This Is Not a Film
Source of the image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Is_Not_a_Film
Accessed on 14th Aug, 2020.



Figure 9 The poster of *Villager Reporter*
Courtesy of artist Zheng Hongbin



Figure 10 Cai Suo's studio
Courtesy of artist Zheng Hongbin



Figure 11 A screenshot of *Villager Reporter*
Courtesy of artist Zheng Hongbin



Figure 12 A screenshot of *Villager Reporter*
Courtesy of artist Zheng Hongbin



Figure 13 A screenshot of Villager Reporter
Courtesy of artist Zheng Hongbin



Figure 14 Two kids Momo and Ting in Baishizhou holding dolls with the written text:
“I don’t want to drop out of school because of Baishizhou’s demolition.”
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



Figure 15 The poster with the QR code of the assistant
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother

(In this version of poster during the exhibition, the English name for the exhibition is Shenzhen Toys. But after talking to the artist, he now prefers to use the title Shenzhen Wawa, which allows more spaces for interpretation.)

深圳娃娃 朋友圈展览租赁协议书

现经甲乙双方协商，达成如下协议：

- 一、甲方租赁乙方朋友圈当作展厅，乙方朋友圈在租赁期间仅发布展览相关信息。
- 二、租赁时间：2019年9月始（连续3天）。
- 三、租金：3毛；甲方于2019年9月10日之前向乙方支付。
- 四、展览相关
 - 展览名称：深圳娃娃
 - 时间：9月始（连续3天）
 - 地点：朋友圈3日展厅
 - 参与者：10000个愿为白石洲孩子就学而出租朋友圈的人
 - 艺术家：坚果兄弟
 - 联合发起：100人

（本协议最终解释权归甲方所有）

甲方（承租方）：坚果兄弟

乙方（出租方）：

2019年9月1-10日

Figure 16 The rental agreement for exhibition (unsigned)
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



Figure 17 One photograph from the *Shenzhen Wawa* on-site performance
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



Figure 18 Screenshot of one of the music videos by Xisan Chorus: *Two Tigers*
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother

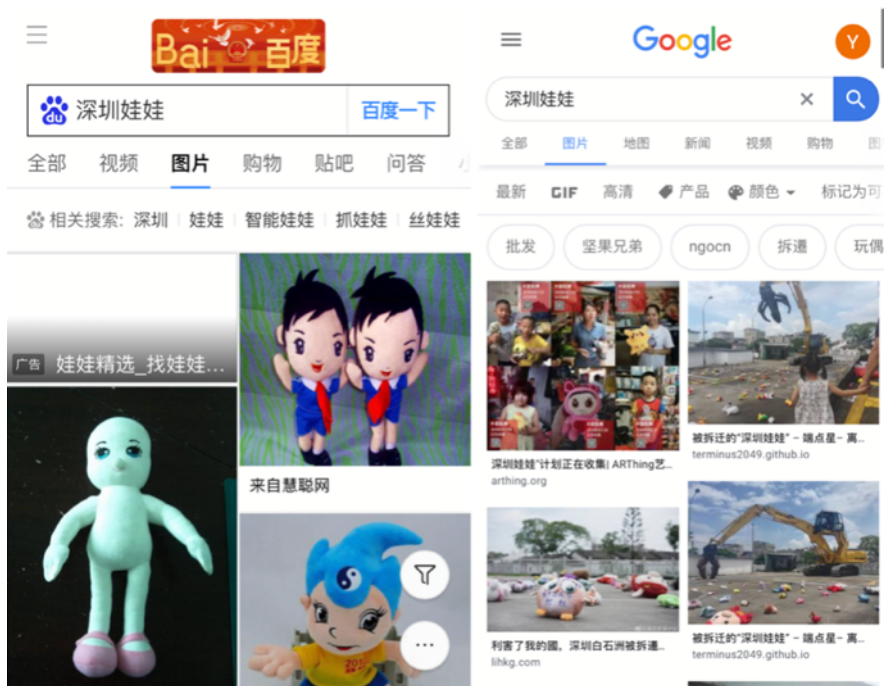




Figure 19 A comparison of the result of images in two search engines with the keyword “Shenzhen Wawa” on Baidu (left) and Google (right)

- 15:29
无法查看 -




「白鹅通讯社」召集！他们嘎嘎嘎清场，我们鹅鹅鹅回到白石洲

581 14 0
- 星期二 20:25
无法查看 -




他们或因拆迁成留守儿童，网民发起线上声援

2051 89 7
- 09月03日
无法查看 -




“深圳娃娃”：以艺术项目揭露流动儿童的教育不公

2733 67 3
- 09月02日
无法查看 -




你愿意为深圳城中村孩子出租朋友圈3天吗

10936 227 21
- 08月09日
无法查看 -



“深圳娃娃”：以艺术项目揭露流动儿童的教育不公|澎湃新闻报道

2384 35 6
- 08月08日
已删除 -



“深圳娃娃”：以艺术项目揭露流动儿童的教育不公|澎湃新闻报道

13 1 0

Figure 20 The deleted articles displayed on the backstage of the artist's account on the Wechat platform
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



白石洲



Figure 21 Three of nine infographics for the online exhibition, which include photographs, comics, texts
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



Figure 22 The nine thumbnails of the posted infographics from the artist's own Friend Circle Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



Figure 23 From left to right: the original poster, the discoloration of the poster and the poster with the coverage on the title *Shenzhen Wawa* in order to circumvent the filtering machine Courtesy of artist Nut Brother



Figure 24 One of the attempts to upside down the infographics along with the sophisticated coverage of textual characters
Courtesy of artist Nut Brother

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