

**Cultural Proximity, Diasporic Identities, and Popular Symbolic Capital:
Taiwan Cultural Worker Qiong Yao's Cultural Production in the Chinese
Media Market**

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Abstract: Using Taiwan cultural worker Qiong Yao's productions as a case study, this paper argues that cultural proximity is not the only critical element in making cultural works popular within regional media markets. The author argues that the whole process of cultural production is an articulation, and all these related elements—such as history, geopolitics, economy, mode of production, and popular symbolic capital—contribute to this articulation. Through the exploration of Qiong Yao's popular cultural productions in Chinese mediascape, this paper focuses on Qiong Yao's creative utilization of her complex diasporic identities and popular symbolic capital to support her successful career as a cultural worker. In terms of cultural proximity, this paper contends that it is a combination both of essentialist “being” and constructivist “becoming.” This paper grapples with the ambiguous nature of cultural proximity and discusses how to successfully employ it in globalized cultural production.

Key words: cultural proximity, diaspora, popular symbolic capital, Qiong Yao.

Among Chinese audiences, those who have never heard of “Qiong Yao” (瓊瑤) are few. Through reading her best-selling novels, watching the films and television dramas adapted from her romances, Qiong Yao has not only become a household name but also built a discursive kingdom of love within Chinese mediascape. “Qiong Yao,” these two words have been growing far beyond simply a pseudonym of a female romance writer; they gradually have been transformed into a specific vocabulary referring to romantic love in the Chinese world. Without disputation, Qiong Yao is definitely the “queen” of Chinese-language romance novels (Lang, 2003). However, with her popularity among the global Chinese communities, people usually forget that she is a cultural worker from Taiwan.

In 1989, Qiong Yao made critical changes in her career. She not only moved her

TV drama production to mainland China but also made a dramatic style change to her cultural productions accordingly. After 1989, Qiong Yao's creations transformed from contemporary romances to period dramas set in pre-modern China. Does her decision to change the aesthetics and production base merely result from a strategic calculation of how to make popular cultural products to cater to the populous mainland China market? To answer this question, one needs to explore the complicated relationship between media market regionalization and the cultural logic operating beneath it.

Cultural Proximity: Being or Becoming

In the study of media globalization, many scholars have found that regionalization of media markets serves as an important mediating phase between the "Global/Local" bipolar nexus. This is what Diana Crane (2002) called the "network model of cultural globalization" (p.7), which breaks the myth of America-as-the-center of cultural production. Using Mike Featherstone's words, this new model shows,

It is no longer possible to conceive global processes in terms of the dominance of a single center over the peripheries. Rather there are a number of competing centers which are bringing about shifts in the global balance of power between nation-states and blocs and forging new sets of interdependencies.(1995, pp. 12-13)

The "regionalization" of media markets, according to Straubhaar (2002), indicates a multicountry media market linked by geography, language and culture. From the empirical studies scholars found that cultural proximity, which includes cultural and linguistic similarities, is the most important factor in forming a regional media market. (Straubhaar, 1991, 1997, 2002; Sinclair, 1999) As delineated by Straubhaar (2003), in addition to language, cultural proximity is composed of such specific things like "humor, gender, images, dress, lifestyle, knowledge about other lifestyles, ethnic types, religion, and values." (pp.77-78) He argues that cultural

proximity can be seen as the cultural capital shared by the regional audiences.

However, in these studies there is a strong tendency to see cultural proximity as an essentialist being. When studying why Japanese trendy dramas (or *idol dramas*) enjoyed immense popularity in Taiwan during the 1990s, Iwabuchi (2002) argues that the “seeming naturalness” of cultural proximity in empirical studies needs to be interrogated. He contends that in the studies of the local consumption of media products:

[Cultural proximity] runs the risk of representing culture in an ahistorical and totalizing way. Such an approach tends to be based on the assumption that there are given cultural commonalities which spontaneously direct an audience’s interest toward media texts from culturally similar region, but it ignores the diverse historical contexts and internal differences which exist within cultural formations....It is the sense of historical contingency that tends to be suppressed in the notion of cultural proximity. (pp. 131-132)

This is why Iwabuchi argues that Japanese dramas are “becoming cultural proximity” in Taiwan, because cultural proximity, according to him, is not something “out there” or existing *a priori* but a historical and social articulation *a posteriori*. (2002, p. 134)

This “becoming” represents an anti-essentialist or constructivist approach to interpreting culture. In a similar vein, Stuart Hall (1999) explores two positions toward “cultural identity” in theory. Cultural proximity is not exactly cultural identity, however, the close relationship between these two cultural positions is indelible. Cultural proximity is initiated by cultural identity, which like proximity is hinged on a rooted identity. If there is no identity, then it will be impossible to acknowledge proximity. According to Hall, the first understanding of cultural identity refers to one shared culture that reflects “a common historical experience and the same cultural codes which are beyond historical vicissitudes.” (p. 223) However, Hall identifies himself with the second position, which indicates:

Cultural identity ...is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being.” It belongs to

the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. *Cultural identities come somewhere, have histories*. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to continuous “play” of history, culture and power...[cultural identity is] Not an essence but a positioning. (pp. 302-303, emphases added)

Hall argues that we should think of cultural identity as “a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” (p.222)

Yet in cultural proximity or cultural identity there is something denied to be deconstructed. From a viewpoint of constructivism, even though cultural proximity or cultural identity is a construction, but it should be constructed based on some essences. Just like Hall said, cultural identities come from somewhere. This “somewhere” is composed of language, ethnicity, and collective memories. These essences function like the essentialist being. So, both positions of seeing cultural proximity or identity is either “being” or “becoming” should be rejected. As Hall argues, cultural proximity or identity is “being” as well as “becoming.” It is a combination of both and functions like both.

Iwabuchi (2002) correctly points out that what is missing from the study of cultural proximity is audience reception research. No matter which term one uses, cultural proximity, cultural similarity, or cultural identity, an “imagined community”(Anderson, 1983) is always been referred to. Iwabuchi argues that this practice of “imagining” is mainly the product of the agency of the audience. When Straubhaar (2003) starts to emphasize that cultural proximity operates as cultural capital, a concept formulated by Bourdieu (1984), which indicates a series of disposition cultivated by positions in different social and economic classes, his emphasis is focused on the agency of the audience as well.

Yet, I argue that this practice of “imagining” is, at least, initiated by the producer

of media texts or cultural industries. As Sinclair and Cunningham (2000) point out, even if we accept the concept of an “active audience” who can subjectively construct the meanings of the media text, the fact cannot be ignored that the media also actively seek and construct their audiences, because “whatever collective audience preferences and desires there might be, they are still shaped commercially and ideologically as markets for certain forms and genres by media corporations” (p. 6). When we reject the presumption that audiences are “cultural dopes” (Fiske, 1987), there is no reason to assume that the cultural industries or media producers are “cultural/commercial dopes” either.

In the following analysis, this paper focuses on how Taiwan’s cultural worker Qiong Yao created a popular “imagined China” through her cultural production in the Chinese regional media market. Her success exemplified how to employ cultural proximity, which is Chineseness in this case, as a cultural strategy to produce popular cultural products. Yet her success also demonstrated that in addition to cultural proximity there are different factors---such as history, geography, economy, the state’s policies and the mode of production---also contributing to the creation of popular cultural products. Furthermore, I argue that Qiong Yao’s moving her cultural production base to mainland China is not simply a result of strategic calculation aiming for profit maximization but also reflects Qiong Yao’s complex diasporic identities to mainland China.

Taiwanese mainlanders: a unique diasporic community

With larger scale transnational immigration accompanying globalization, diaspora has become a hot issue in media studies (Hall, 1999; Cunningham and Sinclair, 2000; Karim, 2003), as it is in other multidisciplinary fields. But what is diaspora? According to Safran’s (1991) “ideal type” definitions of diaspora, it means the people who form “expatriate minority communities” with the following

characteristics:

1. They are dispersed from an original “center” to “peripheral” or foreign regions; 2. They maintain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland; 3. They feel partly alienated and marginalized from the host society because of the belief that they can never be fully accepted; 4. They see the ancestral homeland as their true and ideal home of eventual return; 5. They are committed to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland; and 6. Their consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by this continuing relationship with their homeland. (pp. 83-84)

In this sense, the mainland Chinese who came to Taiwan around 1949 is a *de facto* diasporic community. The so-called mainlanders (外省人, *waihengren*, namely the people from outside the province) are Han Chinese who moved from the mainland to Taiwan between 1945, when Japan returned Taiwan to the Republic of China (the Kuomintang, KMT, government) after 50 years of colonial rule, and 1949, when the KMT government retreated from the mainland to Taiwan after its defeat by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Chinese civil war. In the 4 year period, it was estimated that a half million mainlanders were displaced to Taiwan, and most of them were government officials, military forces and accompanying dependents. Currently, they account for 15 % of Taiwan’s 23 million population. (Williams, 2003; Ma, 2003)

Using Giddens’ (1990) concept, these Taiwanese mainlanders were “disembedded” from their original social, historical and spatial contexts, not by the force of modernity, but by historical and political contingency. As a diasporic community, the uniqueness of the Taiwanese mainlanders lies in that although they are a minority in Taiwan, they are identifying with the dominant ideology employed by the state apparatus both politically and culturally. Politically, mainlanders overwhelmingly identify themselves with the KMT government. Although it is a *de facto* exile government, the KMT regime kept competing with the CCP government on the mainland for the legitimate status representing China in the international

community. In the cultural perspective, mainlanders accept KMT's official ideology of "being Chinese" and undoubtedly endorse its cultural policies. These policies include: exalting traditional Confucianism and reinforcing the Chinese orthodoxy lineage through education, restraining media broadcast in Taiwanese vernacular, and stipulating Mandarin as the official language, *Guoyu*(國語), literally the language of the nation. In terms of mainland China, mainlanders only emotionally identify with it as their occupied homeland. With the 40 year blockage of any interaction across the Taiwan Strait, the mainlanders' collective memory toward their homeland had been transformed into a mythologized nostalgia.

Putting these cultural policies back to historical contexts, they signified how eagerly the KMT government tried to build an "imagined China" in Taiwan to justify its ruling legitimacy. When exploring Taiwan's history, one may find the term "Taiwanese" only starting to have a specific definition, meaning namely the people who originally live in Taiwan, after World War II when the KMT government retreated to the island. This reflected how marginal and peripheral Taiwan was in the post war bipolar geopolitics and international politics. It is no wonder why the Taiwanese people, after nearly three hundred years of Qing dynastic rule and Dutch and Japanese colonization, had such a diluted and confused national identity (Williams, 2003) Under this backdrop, the KMT government tried to "sinify" the Taiwanese and renovate their "Chineseness" through cultural policies and this can be seen as a strategy for nation re/building.

Yet, according to Ma (2003), the recent scholarly discussion about diaspora has undergone a remarkable redefinition, which now highlights the positive characteristics of the term:

In the process of this conceptual shift, the negative characteristic of classic diaspora such as the loss of homeland, a collective memory of oppression and the

gnawing desire for return have been suppressed, while the positive connotations of diasporas such as supermobility and flexible identities on the part of transmigrants as well as multiculturalism and transnational flows of capital have been elevated. (Ma, 2003, p. 6)

If we call these people who conform to the classic definition of diaspora as “the old diaspora,” then the new immigrant utilizing a flexible identity to do the capital accumulation in the era of globalization can be named “the new diaspora.” (Ong, 1997; 1999) The difference between the old and new diaspora lies in the relationship with their homeland. To the former, it is an emotional attachment of cultural identity; but to the latter, homeland is just a place where they can make profits easier with flexible citizenships. However, in many Taiwanese mainlanders one would usually find an overlapping of these two diasporic identities. Taiwan’s popular cultural worker Qiong Yao is exactly the combination of these two different Chinese diasporas.

Qiong Yao: An established authorship in Chinese popular culture

Qiong Yao is the pseudonym of Chen Zhe. As a first generation mainlander, Chen Zhe was born in Sichuan, a southeastern province of mainland China, in 1938, while her homeland is Hunan, another southeastern Chinese province. Before she left mainland China for Taiwan with her family, Chen Zhe traveled throughout mainland China in order to escape the spreading warfare resulting from the KMT regime fight against both the Japanese invasion and the Chinese Communists. According to her autobiography, *My Story* (1989a), Chen Zhe had an unhappy adolescence in Taiwan, partly because of the displacement, and partly because of the heavy pressure from Taiwan’s highly competitive educational system and her intellectual parents’ high expectation on her school performance. Before her first autobiographic novel, *Outside the Window* (窗外, *Chung wai*), which was published in 1963, Chen Zhe had been through a scandalous love affair with her senior high school teacher, two consecutive failures in Taiwan’s college united entrance exam, a failed suicide, and a miserable

marriage which produced a son. However, the instant success of *Outside the Window* changed her life. It gave birth to her career as “Qiong Yao,” the legendary romance writer/ film & TV drama producer/pop music lyricist. Until now, Qiong Yao has published 64 books, from which 50 films have been adapted and 16 of them she produced herself. She has also produced 22 TV drama serials and wrote the lyrics to over 200 pop songs.

Although Qiong Yao’s professional writing career started from the economic pressures of her first marriage,¹ being a lover of Chinese classic poetry and literature, the melancholy and sensitive female writer showed her talent in literature in a very young age. As a 9-year-old girl, her first short story was carried by *Da Gong Bao* (大公報), then the widest-circulated newspaper in Shanghai. In 1963, with the publication of her first novel, Qiong Yao met her second husband Ping Xin-tao, who was not only the editor of the literary page for *United Daily News*, one of the widest circulated newspapers in Taiwan, but also ran the literary magazine *Crown* (皇冠, *Huangquan*) and a publishing house of the same name. Thanks to *Crown* magazine’s overseas circulation in Southeast Asian and North American markets, Qiong Yao’s name had been brought to global Chinese communities since the beginning stage of her career. (Lang, 2003)

This first cooperation of publishing *Outside the Window* started the long-term romantic and career partnership between Qiong Yao and Ping Xing-tao. Since then, *Crown* has become the exclusive publisher of Qiong Yao’s popular romance novels, and she has become *Crown*’s brand name writer.² When *Crown* celebrated its 50th year anniversary, Ping (2004) admitted, “If there were no Qiong Yao, then there

¹ This sketch of Qiong Yao’s career is mainly based on her autobiography *My Story* (1989a) and her husband/partner Ping Xin-tao’s autobiography *Moving Against the Stream* (2004).

² *Crown*, established in 1954, is the most long-lived and popular literary magazine and publishing house in Taiwan. In addition to Qiong Yao, *Crown* has also been the exclusive publisher for preeminent female writers such as Ailing Zhang (張愛玲) and Sanmo (三毛).

would never have been a successful *Crown*.” According to Lin (1994), this kind of complementary cooperative relationship between Qiong Yao and Ping Xin-tao is “the entrepreneurial mode” of cultural production. This mode of partnership indicates that collaborations between the creator and a person who specializes in commercialization and administration, and this combination provides an advantageous position with the flexibility in the cultural production to create a successful authorship. On one hand, this partnership can cater to the market’s demands; on the other hand, it sustains understanding between the creator and his/her administrative partner while proffering the creative freedom to the creator. (p. 185) This partnership extended to Qiong Yao’s later filmmaking and TV drama production as well, which makes the biggest contribution to the establishment of the peculiar “Qiong Yao franchise” in contemporary Chinese popular culture.

Into Qiong Yao’s popularity: the employment of Chinese old and new diaspora

For such a prolific cultural worker like Qiong Yao who occupies plural positions in popular cultural production, the best way to analyze her oeuvre seems to be through periodization. According to the historical contextuality, Lin (2002) divides two critical epochs in Qiong Yao’s writing. From 1963 to 1985, Qiong Yao wrote 42 novels, while some of them grapple with the protagonist’s memories of mainland China, 39 are set in contemporary Taiwan. These latter 39 novels reflect the rapid social change and economic development taking place in Taiwan during that period. However, after she published the novel *Xue Ke* in 1990, all 21 new novels and 15 TV dramas are set in distant China—both in temporal and spatial terms. This interesting cultural atavism is triggered not only by her cultural identity but also by the mode of her later cultural production.

Ever since Qiong Yao had started to adapt her own novels into movies in 1976, her literary creations became the by-products of her filmmaking (Lin, 1994). This

means that her cultural production has become a formulaic process: first, her novels would be serialized by *Crown* magazine, then published as books, and then the records of the theme songs from the movies written by her (the lyrics) would hit the market, and finally her fictions were transformed into movies shown in theaters. The same production mode continues in her recent TV drama productions. And now TV dramas have become the final products of her cultural production process. According to Qiong Yao, currently she even sees herself as a TV drama scriptwriter instead of a novelist:

Owing to the flourishing of TV drama serials, I am involved in scriptwriting and become obsessed with it. What makes TV drama making so fascinating lies in the actors' incarnations of imaginary characters from words into fleshy people....and the transformation of emotions between words into lively tears and laughter.... Yet drama has the cruel destiny, especially for TV drama, that is the finale usually means the disappearance. (Ping) Xin-tao is a publisher, and he cannot stand this kind of "disappearance." Each time he always utilizes every possible means to let me rewrite the drama serial into a novel.... So, in recent years, I almost wrote the script first, then rewrote it into a novel. (Qiong, 1999, p. 5)

This kind of fixed formula of cultural production not only helps Qiong Yao to extract the marginal interests from her production, but it also guarantees that she would be the only one who can employ the creations of "Qiong Yao" as raw materials for other cultural production. In the end, the whole production process has become a "branding" tool. Because Qiong Yao has become the most authoritative and only interpreter of her cultural products, consumers can easily recognize what is a "Qiong Yao novel," "Qiong Yao pop music," "Qiong Yao movie" and "Qiong Yao TV drama" in the market of popular cultural products.

The reason that Qiong Yao's novels in the 1990s were all set in pre-modern China has a close connection to the mode of her cultural production. Constrained by moving her TV production to mainland China in 1989, Qiong Yao cannot create any

stories about contemporary Taiwan. At the same time, as a Chinese diaspora who lives in Taiwan, she also cannot create stories that take place in contemporary China. Why did she set herself in such a confined cultural production context? In the following analysis, we find that the decision to move her TV production base to the mainland reveals her complicated identity embodied in both the old and new Chinese diaspora.

The Chinese old diaspora: Homecoming as a pilgrimage

At the end of 1987, the KMT government announced lifting of a 40-year rule of Martial Law and ban on cross-strait interaction, and allowed the mainlanders to visit their relatives in China (探親, *tan qin*). This news instantly shocked Qiong Yao and then she was exalted by the opportunity that finally made her dream of homecoming come true. Qiong Yao not only joined thousands of mainlanders' in their homecoming in 1988 but also wrote a book entitled *The Unsevered Nostalgia* (1989b) as a memoir of this historical journey. After learning that one requirement for "visiting relatives in hometown" was that one must have "tertiary relatives"³ alive in the mainland, without having the understanding of what kind of kin belong to the "tertiary relatives," the agitated Qiong Yao spoke up to her husband and career partner, Ping Xin-tao: "The mountains of the motherland, the waters of the motherland and the earth of the motherland are which rank of relatives to us? The relatives we want to visit in the mainland are not only 'human beings!'" (Qiong, 1989b, p. 9) When trying to analyze her nostalgia toward mainland China, Qiong Yao wrote,

What I can feel is that my nostalgia like a huge net caught me tightly. Besides, when the date of visiting is getting closer, my nostalgia is getting thicker. I think I am different from others. One of my friends told me: "I also have left the mainland for 39 years. However, I don't feel any kind of nostalgia." Her words surprise me. I always believed that nostalgia to a person who traveled far away from his homeland, like any human basic instincts, is an inborn nature. Yet, for

³ According to the Taiwanese Civil Law, the primary relatives are composed of grandparents, parents, children and spouse; the secondary relatives include siblings, nieces and nephews; the tertiary relatives consists of cousins, aunts, and uncles.

some people this feeling is stronger, for some people it is weaker. I might belong to those who have strong feelings. So, even my “nostalgia” is much more intense than others. (Qiong, 1989b, p.9-10)

As a matter of fact, “visiting relatives in hometown” was not the main purpose of her homecoming journey. As mentioned earlier, Qiong Yao came to Taiwan as a child with her nuclear family members. According to Li (2002), the reason for most of the younger generation mainlanders’ homecoming was to accompany their parents to hold family reunions in their mainland hometowns. But Qiong Yao did not return to the mainland with her parents. In the schedule of her 1988 40-day homecoming trip, Qiong Yao and Ping Xin-tao did not even go back to their hometowns, Hunan and Shanghai, “because of the complicated and agonizing feelings toward our homelands.” (Qiong, 1989b, p. xxx) Instead, they went to the Great Wall, the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River and the Stone Forest in Quilin. These scenic resorts might be the most “Chinese” and the most popular sightseeing sites for any foreign tourist. In a sense, Qiong Yao’s homecoming was a pilgrimage to an imagined homeland, “China.” When she walked on the Great Wall, Qiong Yao wrote about her muse:

The Great Wall is the totem of China all the time, and now, when I am walking on this totem, I feel all the blood flowing in my vessels is Chinese blood. Thirty-nine year’s nostalgia has been on my mind, heavily and agonizingly. Now, every step I walk, I tread a small part of my threadlike nostalgia into Great Wall. But how much nostalgia can be accumulated during the thirty-nine years? How can this nostalgia be deleted by my footsteps on Great Wall? (Qiong, 1989b, p. 44)

Qiong Yao emphasized in the postscript of *The Unsevered Nostalgia* that this book is not a “travelogue” but “a personal passage.” (Qiong, 1989b:286) However, in addition to many colored pictures of the author herself located within those spectacular but highly familiar and symbolic Chinese landscapes, this book read just like a travelogue combining exoticism and scattered emotional muse of her “nostalgia” toward China.

In *The Unsevered Nostalgia*, Qiong Yao concluded in this way:

Chinese people are like this, no matter how they are separated by space and time, Chinese people always do the same things in the traditional festivals....Chinese love their own ancestors, love their own earth, love their own homelands, love their own families and homes....Chinese people are like this, no matter how they are separated by mountains, by the sea, or by the time, there are always the Yellow River and the Yangtze River flowing in their blood. (Qiong, 1989b, p. 286)

In addition to being a source of her imagined nostalgia, China served as a source of imagination for Qiong Yao's creation as well. This fact was best exemplified by her immensely popular TV drama serials *Huanzhu Gege* (還珠格格, *The Pearl Princess*, 1997-2003). According to Qiong Yao (1997), this period costume drama was initiated by a place called "The Princess's Tomb" (公主墳, *Gongzhu Fen*) in Beijing. After she came across this strange place name, Qiong Yao asked her friends in Beijing about the story behind *Gongzhu Fen*. Her friends told her an anecdote: Qianlong, the greatest emperor in the Qing Dynasty, had adopted a civil girl as his daughter. Yet this "civil princess" did not have real royal blood, so she could not be buried in the royal graveyard after she died. *Gongzhu Fen* is where this "civil princess" was buried. This anecdote triggered Qiong Yao's imagination, and her imagination gave birth to the *Huanzhu Gege* franchise which is composed of a 112-episode TV drama trilogy shot in 5 years, 11 novels, and numerous tie-ins..

The Chinese new diaspora: The author and capital making

In her first homecoming, Qiong Yao was surprised to find how popular she was in mainland China. There are many places in *The Unsevered Nostalgia* describing how Qiong Yao was surrounded by passionate readers and local media. From Qiong Yao's landing in the Beijing airport, wherever she was: no matter in Shichung, Wuhan, Guilin, Yunnan, or even on the sightseeing ship on the Yangtze River, from the north to the south, there always were numerous fans asking for autographs, taking pictures

with her, and numerous media hoping to interview her. This made Qiong Yao personally feel how hot the “Qiong Yao fever” was in mainland China. However, Qiong Yao’s books that circulated in mainland China were all illegal pirate copies. Worse than that, there were many books embezzling her name for marketing. This made her understand how important “copyright” is—both to a writer’s economic profits and popular symbolic capital.

As Qiong Yao wrote,

When I learned that each of my books sold 700,000 to 800,000 copies in mainland China, it was just like a “shock” to me. My joy covered up the problem of intellectual property, because I think the “reader” is the biggest comfort to the “writer.” This comfort makes me not take the problems of copyright and royalty as a serious issue. However, when one day a reader took a book entitled *The Fountain* which was not written by me and asking for an autograph, my mood began going down.... When another fake book entitled *The Snake Woman* was brought to me by another reader, the smile on my face was frozen. Because *The Snake Woman* which misappropriating my name was a dirty pornography...this is the first time I understand how important “copyright” is. How can the interest of a writer *From Taiwan* be protected in mainland China?...How can I tell my numerous readers that some books are not actually my works? (Qiong, 1989b, pp. 75-76, my emphasis)

This complaint is a result of what Raymond Williams calls the bourgeois individualist concept of authorship. (Williams, 1977) That is, the individual is thought to be the origin of the creation, the owner and protector of his/her own work within a capitalist market. However, Qiong Yao’s complaint reflected her anxiety beyond the material profits. Here what annoyed her most was that her popular symbolic capital might be eroded by these copyright infringements.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1993), cultural production is nothing but a field of positions and position-takings. In other words, this is a field of power struggle. For an established writer such as Qiong Yao, who is already the position taker in the field of cultural production, still has to struggle against the fear that her position might be

threatened by some vicious embezzlements. In this sense, her homecoming made her understand that mainland China is more than a mythic homeland to her, it is a market as well. She is not only a person with imagined nostalgia but also an author, and a *writer from Taiwan* whose interests have been ruthlessly exploited by mainland Chinese cultural industries.

Popular symbolic capital: The star writer and formatting

. Qiong Yao's romance novels and movies might be the earliest and the most influential Taiwanese popular culture known and consumed by mainland China's audiences since the 1978 economic reform.⁴ In a 1992 survey of 1,500 people in Beijing, Qiong Yao ranked first among eight authors with a name recognition rate of 85.8%. In the same survey, Qiong Yao also ranked in first place with works actually read by those respondents and ranked second place by preference. (Gold, 1995, p. 262-3 f) In 1999, a Taiwan official report about the cross-strait literature flows conducted by the Cultural Affairs Committee showed, the second most popular Taiwan and Hong Kong literature genre in mainland China was romance fiction, after the martial arts novels, and an estimated 18 million copies were published. Among them, Qiong Yao's works ranked first place. This report also pointed out, in the heyday of Taiwan and Hong Kong literature in Mainland China, the one printing of a Qiong Yao novel could reach 700,000 copies. (Chen, 1999)

In addition to her romance novels read by millions of Chinese audiences, the

⁴ It is not clear when the first time Qiong Yao's works were introduced into Mainland China. According to Du (2001), the first Qiong Yao's novel officially published in installments by Guangdong Province's *Yang Cheng Wan Bao* (羊城晚報, *Yang Cheng Evening News*) in 1980 was her *Between Togetherness and Separation* (聚散兩依依, *Ju San Liang Yi Yi*). (p.262) But according to Yu (1992), the first Qiong Yao novel to appear in mainland China was the 1982 installments of *I Am a Cloud* (我是一片雲, *Wo Shi Yi Pian Yun*) carried by Fujian Province's magazine *Hai Xia* (海峽, *The Straits*). (p. 25) However, in an article entitled "The implications of Qiong Yao Novel Fever" published by Hong Kong Pro-Beijing *Da Gong Bao* on July 31, 1988, the first Qiong Yao romance to appear in a mainland China publication was *Romance in the Rain* (煙雨濛濛 *Yan Yu Meng Meng*), which began in 1987 (as cited in Xiao, 1992, p.141). Yet, each writer agreed that ever since her romance fiction had been officially introduced to mainland China's audiences, there was a "Qiong Yao fever" everywhere in China.

TV dramas and movies based on Qiong Yao novels were also produced by mainland China's television station and film studio in the late 80s.⁵ In the meantime, with the mushrooming of video booths in the streets around mainland China, the romance movies produced by Qiong Yao were also watched by the whole generation of Chinese young people. Also, the repeated broadcast of pop songs from Qiong Yao's movies by radio stations and the rampant sales of pirated tapes also contribute to the formation of "Qiong Yao fever."⁶

There is no exaggeration when we call Qiong Yao a star. Stephen Hinerman (2001) argues that stardom of popular culture is formed by the interaction between production and consumption: "Stardom functions as part of the production process—it is vital to representation, narrative, and marketing. Once produced, stardom is then consumed by audiences, located in particular, but mobile, sites of time and space." (p. 205). In a similar vein, David Hesmondhalgh (2002:21) points out how important a role stardom played in formatting. Formatting is a popular way for cultural production to minimize the danger of commercial failure. The three main means of formatting are the star system, genre and the format of serial. The star could be a writer, a producer, a director or an actor. Once the star is associated with the media text, he or she could proffer an aura for the media text. Furthermore, the star has a close connection with the genre as well. Usually a star will link with a specific genre, such as a romance writer or a comedy actor. After this connection is established, the star and the genre will serve each other with mutual recognition. In other words, formatting is making a brand name for an authorship in cultural production. The establishment and operation

⁵ In 1986, two of Qiong Yao's novels were adapted into TV dramas by the Jiangsu TV Station. The first is her 1975 fiction, *On the Other Side of the River* (在水一方, *Zai Shai Yi Fang*), and the second is her 1976 romance *Hazy Birds, Hazy Moon* (月朦朧鳥朦朧, *Yue Meng Long, Niao Meng Long*). In 1988, the Shanghai Film Studio adapted Qiong Yao's 1969 novel *In the Garden* (庭院深深, *Ting Yuan Shen Shen*) into a movie (Qiong, 1989b; Xiao, 1992).

⁶ One should never underestimate the power of radio or tape recorder in the Deng Xiao-peng reform era. As Thomas Gold (1995) analyzed, one of the most powerful influences of *Gangtai* popular culture to China's society around the late 80s is its popular music. In the same vein, Rey Chow (1993) argued that the listening of "banal" popular music privately was a struggle against the official culture upheld by the state.

of “Qiong Yao industry” is a successful formatting. In contemporary Chinese popular culture, the equation of “Qiong Yao” and “romance” has been strengthened by the production, circulation and consumption of Qiong Yao’s works, no matter if it is a novel, a movie, a TV drama or even a pop song.

The recognition of “Qiong Yao” as “the romance author” has been transformed into Qiong Yao’s “popular symbolic capital.” According to Bourdieu (1984; 1993), symbolic capital indicates the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, and honour an artist accepts from the critical community in the field of cultural production, and the symbolic capital finally will transform into material interests. However, Bourdieu’s analysis of symbolic capital is limited to the elite and artistic-restricted cultural production, such as serious literature or classical music. The large-scale cultural production is another sub-field of cultural production, which refers to “mass” or “popular” culture, such as TV programming or popular romance literature. Bourdieu seems to only employ the maximization of economic capital as the criterion to analyze its operation. (Bourdieu, 1993)

Compared with Bourdieu’s sophisticated analysis of how the symbolic capital in “high art” cultural production transforms into economic capital, his analytical framework for the operation of popular cultural production is obviously too simple. I argue that even in the field of popular cultural production there is still an intermediary symbolic mechanism to articulate cultural production and economic profits. This mechanism can be called “popular symbolic capital.”

John Fiske (1987) has revised Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital into popular cultural capital, which is a kind of secularized cultural capital that “consists of the meanings and pleasures available to the subordinate to express and promote their interests.” (p. 314) To Fiske, the popular cultural capital serves as a kind of vehicle for the subordinate class to resist the bourgeoisie’s domination through culture. However,

in my usage of “popular symbolic capital,” it is a kind of intermediate mechanism to translate the mass cultural producer’s popularity into economic interests, like what symbolic capital serves the serious artists in the field of high culture production to change nonmaterial reputation into economic profits. Popular symbolic capital can make cultural products both satisfy the popular taste and economic consideration of cultural industries at the same time. The importance of popular symbolic capital in cultural production lies in the fact that it can provide the cultural producers with more resources, room for creativity and the power to control the process of cultural production. Popular symbolic capital is similar to David Harvey’s emphasis of image in the era of flexible accumulation. David Harvey (1989) contends that

The production and marketing of such images of permanence and power require considerable sophistication, because the continuity and stability of the image have to be retained while stressing the adaptability, flexibility, and dynamism of whoever or whatever is being imaged. Moreover, image becomes all-important in competition, not only through name-brand recognition but also because of various associations of ‘responsibility’, ‘quality’, ‘prestige’, ‘reliability’, and ‘innovation.’ (p. 288)

The “formatting” or “branding” in popular cultural production is a good example to illustrate how popular symbolic capital can help cultural production to attract mass audiences, that is, commercial success. As mentioned earlier, this popular symbolic capital serves as an important advantage for Qiong Yao’s cultural production making inroads to mainland China. Seen in this way, one explanation for Qiong Yao’s huge popularity in global Chinese communities is because of her successful employment of her popular symbolic capital. Popular symbolic capital can also make Qiong Yao ignorant of the literary community’s ridicule and contempt for her commercial popularity. Qiong Yao once said that she cares most about her audience’s reactions toward her works; on the other hand, what she cares the least about is the criticisms from the “experts.” (Ho, 2004)

However, sometimes the popular cultural capital is not always an advantage for the cultural worker, on the contrary, it might be burdensome against the cultural worker's creation. In Qiong Yao's case, it is understandable about her reluctance yet having no choice to develop her hit *Huanzhu Gege* into a trilogy. When defending herself from the accusation of being an opportunistic writer for big money, Qiong Yao explained why she finally decided to write *Huanzhu Gege*:

If I did not write [*Huanzhu Gege III*], other people will write it! There already have been many readers who are racing to write *Huanzhu Gege III* on various websites. In the mainland, there are even many versions of fake *Huanzhu Gege III* using my name to publish openly. This really makes me heartbroken. Every time when I think that my entire career is exploited by these outlaws, and they win the fame by cheating the public, I can feel the agony just like I have been dismembered. (Qiong, 2003, p. 1098)

The flexible accumulation and diaspora: Building *quan xi* across the straits

Basically, the economic activities of diaspora are a kind of flexible accumulation of capital. According to Harvey (1989), the flexible accumulation is a new mode of production in the late capitalism, which differs from the organized production with concentrated capital such as "Fordism." The difference between the flexible accumulation and "Fordism" lies in the former entertains a flexibility with the whole production process. The flexible accumulation is characterized by a new pattern of labor processes, marketing, consumption and financing which responds to the market with more mobility. The flexible accumulation not only opens up opportunities for small businesses, but this fragmented and high-risk capitalist production also makes the basic social institutions, such as family or kinship group, regain emphasis in the late capitalism. The nature of flexible accumulation is much more distinguished in the economic activities of the Chinese diaspora from Taiwan. Since the formal relationship across the Taiwan Strait still remains antagonistic, any Taiwanese businessman's investment in the mainland is less secure and much more speculative.

This is the reason why most of Taiwan's businessmen need to build *quan xi*, an interpersonal network with local officials or business partners, to protect their investment in mainland China. (Yang, 1994; Hsing, 1997)

Cultural production is the representative practice of flexible accumulation, especially the transnational cultural production. The success of such practice depends on the knowledge of different cultural tastes, cultural policies and market operations. So the *quan xi* is critical to any of Taiwan's cultural workers' business in the mainland. In Qiong Yao's case, this go-between is Ouyang Chang-lin. Ouyang, then a reporter at the Hunan TV station, appeared repeatedly in Qiong Yao's *The Unsevered Nostalgia*. However, this reporter later became Qiong Yao's TV drama co-production partner in mainland China for 15 years.⁷

The first time Qiong Yao met Ouyang was when she was going to start her journey to the Three Gorges. Ouyang tried to interview her but was turned down (as a matter of fact, Qiong Yao turned down all interviews during her first homecoming). Being a Hunanese, Ouyang felt that he had the privilege to interview his fellow countryman Qiong Yao, "the glory of Hunan" as he put it. When Qiong Yao told him she did not plan to go back to her hometown because she was "not ready," Ouyang sighed out his bewilderment: "[B]ut you still should return to your hometown, you know, Hunan is proud of you! If you love the scenery of the Yangtze River, you should love Hunan's landscape more!" (Qiong, 1989b, p.118)

Ouyang then followed Qiong Yao four thousand miles for an interview. Finally, Qiong Yao confessed to him that she decided not to return to Hunan because she was afraid of seeing her run-down old house and her grandfather's deserted graveyard.

⁷ Ouyang is the first TV station lead in mainland China whose assignment was not made by the party official's black box decision. In 1995, Ouyang defeated 76 competitors to be selected as the lead of the Hunan Economic TV Station, a new subsidiary channel of the Hunan TV Station. Because of his outstanding performance in running the Hunan Economic TV Station, Ouyang has been promoted to be the lead of the Hunan TV station and the deputy secretary of the Hunan Provincial Broadcast and Television Bureau in 2000 (Cao, 2003).

Ouyang not only immediately set a cameraman to shoot footage of her old house and her grandfather's graveyard but also sent the tape overnight to Qiong Yao. Touched by his indomitable "mule spirit,"⁸ Qiong Yao gave him an exclusive interview on the last night of her first trip to mainland China. (Qiong, 1989b) The repeated appearance of Ouyang in *The Unsevered Nostalgia* is understandable. Coming from her hometown, this man was, in a sense, the incarnation of the imaginary nostalgia which stalks Qiong Yao the entire way.

In 1989 when Qiong Yao finally returned to her hometown, Hunan, Ouyang gave her a grandiose welcome party. In the same year, Qiong Yao went to mainland China to produce her TV drama serial *Six Dreams*. Without surprise, her co-producer in mainland China is Hunan's Huaxia Movie & TV Transmission Company (華夏影視公司), an institution led by Ouyang and established especially for the co-production project with Qiong Yao.

This partnership between Qiong Yao and Ouyang is a network based on geographic factors (地緣, *diyuan*) and extended consanguineous feelings (血緣, *xueyuan*). A Chinese idiom reflects well such a relationship between hometown and interpersonal closeness: "Even though we do not come from the same family, however, we come from the same place." (人不親土親, *ren bu qin tu qin*) This means that for people who do not have a kinship with each other, the fact that they have the same hometown will nourish a quasi-consanguineous relationship between them. This place-based relationship has been widely utilized by Chinese new diaspora to develop an interpersonal network. In other case studies of how Taiwanese investors operating their businesses in the mainland (Yang, 1994; Hsing, 1997), cultivating interpersonal networks with local Chinese officials is seen as a way to bypass bureaucratic

⁸ In China, the Hunanese is famous for the unyielding will and perseverance. So, "Hunan mule" is a nickname for the indomitable Hunanese.

regulations and maintain the flexibility in production and marketing. Qiong Yao did not like other Taiwanese investors who had to intentionally build their *quan xi* through giving gifts and banquet. In Qiong Yao's case, this place-based interpersonal network only served as the main reason for her to choose the cooperative partner in mainland China. Like those Taiwanese investors, Qiong Yao had capital, technological know-how,⁹ but what advantage Qiong Yao had and other Taiwanese investors lacked is the popular symbolic capital. And this popular symbolic capital made it pretty easy for Qiong Yao to move her TV production to the mainland.

Chineseness and the central marginality: The cultural logic of popularity

Qiong Yao's cultural products are not only popular in Taiwan and mainland China but also in overseas Chinese, particularly Southeast Asia, communities. In Taiwan, Qiong Yao's popularity was mainly interpreted by the institutionalization of mass cultural consumption (Lin, 1994). Yet, how can one explain Qiong Yao's popularity among both mainland Chinese and overseas Chinese?

The central marginality: the peripheral attraction toward the center

Qiong Yao's popularity in mainland China might lie in the fact that these stories are written by a writer from *Taiwan* and set in modernized contemporary *Taiwan*. According to Thomas Gold (1995), the popularity of *Gangtai* (港台, Hong Kong and Taiwan) popular culture in the post-economic reform mainland China is mainly because of its novelty, ideologically-free emotional individualism, cultural proximity (the language in particular) that provides accessibility, and its escapism. In terms of Qiong Yao's fiction, Gold argues that it offers individualist emotional expression and release, and at the same time it offers an escape from the harsh socialist reality:

⁹ In 1989, capital and technological know-how were definitely advantages owned by Qiong Yao's TV drama production in mainland China. However, nowadays mainland China's TV industry has developed rapidly into a highly professional business with abundant capital and cutting-edge technology (Donald, Keane and Yin, 2002; Keane, 2002).

“Qiong Yao’s stories, soap operas and ubiquitous advertisements bespeak a middle-class world of passion and indulgence far removed from that of most Chinese. It provides an escape.”(Gold, 1995, p. 263)

In other words, *Gangtai* popular culture such as Qiong Yao’s fiction provides the Chinese an imagined world with economic prosperity, individual freedom and without ideological surveillance, that is, a world of *modernity*.

In Qiong Yao’s case, the identity of *Taiwanese* and the spatiality of *Taiwan* are equally important to support that imagination. According to the official ideology of the CCP government, that Taiwan is a renegade province of China, and in this sense, the Taiwanese are still compatriot Chinese to China proper. This consanguineous connection and cultural similarity between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese provide mainland Chinese a plausible hope that *someday* they can emulate Taiwan’s modernity. The spatial separateness between Taiwan and the mainland provides the physical foundation to support that kind of imagination: Taiwan is the other place outside the mainland. This unique position occupied by Taiwan in such an imagining process is quite similar to Hong Kong’s “marginal centrality” towards mainland China. According to Michael Curtin (2003), the “marginal centrality” of Hong Kong means

Hong Kong is very Chinese *and* remarkably Western, and *yet* it’s not really either, nor can we say that it’s both. It exists at the center of flows among Chinese communities, yet it’s also on the periphery of both China and the West. (Curtin, 2003: 220, the original emphasis)

However, Curtin (2003) also contends that this advantageous position is fluid and can be either won or lost. Understandably, with mainland China’s economy gaining rapid growth and the whole society steadily moving toward modernity, the “marginal centrality” enjoyed before by Taiwan and Hong Kong has been gradually eroded. Yet in the early 1990s, the in-betweenness entertained by Taiwan and Hong Kong had been fully utilized by their popular cultural workers. Seen in this way, this

cultural and spatial ambiguity of Taiwan and Hong Kong provides a good chance for Taiwan and Hong Kong cultural workers to manipulate the vantage point of both being the Chinese old diaspora and new diaspora. While the new diaspora identity provides them the flexible citizenship to sell or co-produce the cultural products in mainland China, the old diaspora owns the cultural proximity and emotional sameness to produce cultural products mainland Chinese can identify with.

Chineseness: the interpellation of the audience as Chinese

Qiong Yao's popularity is a very cultural-specific phenomenon.¹⁰ One main reason that kept Qiong Yao from being known to non-Chinese audiences is the Chineseness of her cultural works. Lin (1992; 1994) delineates three different kinds of "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1977) in Qiong Yao's fiction. The first is melodramatic imagination; secondly, romantic fantasy; thirdly, and most importantly one, affective familialism. Without an exception, all Qiong Yao's fiction is focused on the tensions and conflicts between parents and children which are triggered by the latter's love affairs. Lin argues this motif is a representation of the Chineseness in Qiong Yao's fiction:

It is very easy to criticize Qiong Yao's fiction as only fantastic imagination, but most of us ignore the following point: *this dreamy world touches one of the most quintessential parts of Chinese cultural collective consciousness, that is, the relationship between individuals and their families.* (1994, p.151, the original emphasis)

In addition to its subject matter entertaining the universal concern of traditional Chinese culture, the linkage between Qiong Yao's narrative and Chinese traditional literature cannot be ignored either. Qiong Yao often cites bountiful Chinese classical poetry in her writing as central images and symbols or employed by her

¹⁰ Until now, the only two foreign language translations of Qiong Yao's fiction are Vietnamese and Japanese versions. According to Ping (2004), the reason that most of Qiong Yao's fiction remains untranslated is because Qiong Yao is too "Chinese" to be interpreted by other cultures.

heroes/heroines as a way to express their feelings. According to Gu Xiao-ming (1992), a professor of history at Shanghai Fudan University, besides Qiong Yao's dexterously employing traditional Chinese narrative skills in her story-telling, the main attraction of Qiong Yao's fiction to Chinese audiences is that:

Qiong Yao's fiction creates a popular narrative with Chinese characteristic among the world's popular fiction. In terms of the thoughts and connotations, her works highlight a modernized Chinese lifestyle and traditional ethics. Especially in such fields like love and family lives, Qiong Yao not only unearths different and varied perspectives but also exalts the unique quality and character of Chinese women. (1992, p.113)

In other words, Qiong Yao's fiction is full of "Chineseness," and this makes every Chinese easily identify with her stories, even though most of them are set in contemporary Taiwan, a periphery to China proper. Here, employing "Chineseness" becomes a handy cultural strategy to attract Chinese audiences by the popular media text.

"Chineseness" is used by Tu Wei-ming (1994) as a central criterion to define the "cultural China." According to Tu, "cultural China" is a symbolic universe "that both encompasses and transcends the ethnic, territorial, linguistic, and religious boundaries that normally define Chineseness." (1994, p.v) In the project of "cultural China," which serves as an antithesis to "political China," Tu tries to deconstruct the cultural authority of geopolitical China. Contrasting with the monolithic and hegemonic essentialist national China discourse in "political China," Tu emphasizes that the periphery--the Chinese diaspora--can form a new cultural center of Chineseness. Simply put, the "cultural China" tries to deconstruct the cultural authority entertained by the political center, mainland China, and to proffer the ability to the political periphery, the Chinese diaspora, to enrich the Chinese culture. Tu uses "the living tree" as a metaphor to indicate the meaning of "cultural China": the Chinese diaspora is sprouting the most vigorous new cultural branches and leaves

from the root China.

From a more radical stance, Ien Ang argues that the “cultural China” project is “an overwhelming desire...to somehow maintain, redeem, and revitalize the notion of Chineseness as a marker of common culture and identity in a rapidly postmodernizing world.” (2001:43) Ang criticizes that the organic metaphor, “the living tree,” exactly illuminates the illusion of decentering an essentialist China implied by the “cultural China” project. She contends,

Without roots, there would be no life, no new leaves. The metaphor of living tree dramatically imparts the ultimate existential dependence of the periphery on the center, the diaspora on the homeland. Furthermore, what this metaphor emphasizes is continuity over discontinuity: In the end, it all flows back to the roots. (Ang, 2001: 44)

But even in a rapidly postmodernizing and globalizing world, Chineseness still represents such ambiguous and deep-rooted feelings toward the imagined homeland among Chinese, which indicates an “obsession with China.” (Chow, 1991) Rey Chow (1993, p. 24) calls it the “myth of consanguinity,” which has very real effects on the self-conception of diasporic subjects, as it provides them with a magical solution to the sense of dislocation and rootlessness. Chineseness, like Aihwa Ong said, is “[a]n essentializing notion...because the Chinese past, nation, singular history, or some “cultural core” is taken to be the main and unchanging determinant of Chinese identity.” (1999, p.134-135)

Following these arguments, one can see the close and intertwining connection between Chineseness and Chinese national identity or Chinese subjectivity. In China proper, mainland China, the Chineseness is much more functioned as an essentialist being. However, from the constructivist view, no matter how complicated or even mythicized, Chineseness is still a historical construction. The different narrative forms of mass media have become one of the most prominent vehicles to construct one’s

national identity. As Stuart Hall (1999) states, the narratives of mass media are those “representations” through which the cultural identity is being constructed. It is not surprising that historical dramas have become such a popular genre in recent mainland China’s TV programming because these dramas represent all kinds of national narratives that recount Chineseness and create China as an imagined community in the torrent of globalization. With the historical period costumes, mannerisms, subject matters and setting in past China, the Chineseness makes these dramas easily recognizable to be “Chinese.”

Seeing it this way, Qiong Yao’s period costume drama produced in the mainland and set in ancient China is creating a specific national narrative. Through this national narrative, Qiong Yao uses the most distinguished “Chineseness” to interpellate individual audiences as the Chinese subjects and to build an “imagined China.” Contrary to the “cultural China” project, the periphery not only does not deconstruct the cultural authority entertained by the center but also uses the mythic Chineseness as a cultural strategy to attract the audiences.

Conclusion: Imagination as a cultural practice

There is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today....One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others.

---- Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 53)

Qiong Yao once said, “From my childhood, I am a person who survives through ‘imagination’” (2003, p. 1096). For a writer, imagining is not a special talent. On the contrary, imagining is a common ability for every individual and the consumption of cultural production is basically a practice of imagination. Appadurai (1996) has pointed out how important imagination is in the formation of global cultural order because through imagination one can live the vicarious experiences from different

societies. But imagination is a two-way practice. From the cultural production perspective, it can afford progressively to develop what Appadurai specified as global culture. At the same time, it can also conservatively appeal to some most primitive feelings to seek the maximization of audiences.

Qiong Yao's period costume dramas produced in China in the 1990s can serve as a good example for the latter cultural strategy. These dramas exploit the Chineseness to invoke every one of Chinese descent, no matter if he or she is Chinese proper or overseas Chinese, to identify with the Chinese subjectivity temporarily. This identification would be harmless. Because through consumption and imagination, what these audiences with Chinese descent only identify with a distant interpellation, Chineseness. These dramas set in ancient China decrease the possibility of conflicting with contemporary politics, and therefore these imaginations will not interfere with the loyalty of the Chinese diasporas to their host societies. However, they do not exclude the critiques toward the contemporary Chinese political development either.

As mentioned earlier, Qiong Yao is a Chinese diaspora cultural worker. Diaspora has usually been connected with a passive cultural position. However, in Qiong Yao's case one can see how a cultural worker transforms diasporic identities into cultural strategies to attract audiences. Being a Chinese old diaspora, Qiong Yao utilizes the cultural capital or cultural proximity to produce popular cultural products among the Chinese communities. But being a Chinese new diaspora, it allows Qiong Yao to make inroads into the biggest media market in the world, find her cultural franchise more audience, and accumulate more material capital and popular symbolic capital.

An unexpected consequence of Qiong Yao's cultural strategy is globalization. Although her works were not broadcasted by transnational media conglomerates, Qiong Yao's cultural works reached numerous overseas Chinese through selling the overseas copyright, narrowcasting on ethnic TV channels, and selling or renting of

videotapes, VCD and DVD in local video parlors. Here I want to borrow the couplet concept, “globalization from above” and “globalization from below,” from Brecher et al. (Clifford, 1994, p. 327) If globalization from above indicates that globalized media texts flow through transnational media conglomerates or the state’s export policy, then globalization from below represents how media products flow through different channels and are actively sought and consumed by specific audiences. Qiong Yao’s popularity in global Chinese communities represents exactly a successful operation of globalization from below.

Finally, coming back to the problematic “cultural proximity.” As seen in the case of Chineseness, one has to admit that in media production and consumption “cultural proximity” or “cultural identity” functions *like* an essentialist being. Can we deconstruct cultural proximity or cultural identity and disenchant ourselves of these mythic feelings? Probably not. However, we can take a position of “strategic essentialism.” (Ang, 2001, p.36) In the context of cultural production and consumption, “strategic” means a way to intentionally utilize something for our own good. To cultural producers, this indicates the employment of cultural proximity to attract the audience; to the consumer of cultural products, “strategic” represents a fluid and flexible identification with some specific cultural identity for one’s own pleasure and emotional fulfillment.

After examining Qiong Yao’s success in contemporary Chinese popular culture, one can find that cultural proximity cannot provide a satisfactory explanation. As a matter of fact, any successful cultural production is an articulation of different elements, such as history, geopolitics, geography, economy and the mode of production. The way of how these elements are being articulated into a cultural product can be seen as a process of imagining. This imagination is initiated by the creations of cultural workers and completed by the consumptions of the audiences. As

Appadurai said, some imaginations enter our lives more successfully and among them the popular cultural production is the representative one. Even through some careful exploration, some parts of the popularity of a successful cultural product still remain unexplained. However, one thing we can make sure, that is, in the complicated process of imagining, the cultural proximity is one important but definitely not the only critical element.

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