Reconstructing cultural memory through landscape photography in China, 2000–2010

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**NANYANG
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UNIVERSITY**

SINGAPORE

**RECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL MEMORY
THROUGH LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN CHINA,
2000-2010**

**LIU YAJING
SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN, AND
MEDIA**

2019

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SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN, AND MEDIA

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2019

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Statement of Originality

I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

23 January 2019

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Date

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Liu Yajing

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Associate Prof. Oh Soonhwa

Authorship Attribution Statement

This thesis contains material from two articles published in the following journals and magazines where I was the first author and from six interviews and reviews in the following publications. In addition, the practical component of this research has been reviewed and exhibited in the following journals, websites, exhibitions, and awards from 2015 onwards.

Articles:

- Park, Y. C., & Park, H. (2018). 전통이 머금은 색 [Color of the past]. *Monthly Photography*, 611(12), 46-53.
- Liu, Y. J. (2017). 手工图绘海草房记忆的颜色-褪去的颜色和冲突的现实: 海草房拍摄手记 [Hand painted colors of seaweed houses in the memory – faded color and conflict reality: the photographic field note of seaweed-house project]. *Popular Photography*, 614(12), 68-75.
- Liu, Y. J. (2019). Now you seaweed, now you don't: photographing Rongcheng's disappearing seaweed houses. *Social Space*, 12, 24-27.

Published Photo-book:

- Kensett, A. (2018). *Some Recent Findings*. Pontiac: Detroit Center for Contemporary Photography.

Interviews:

- OURS Magazine. (interviewer) & Liu. Y. J. (interviewee). (2018). Honoree article for Identity exhibition: *Liu Yajing – Speaking the Unspeakable*. Available online: <https://www.oursphotomag.com/blog/yajing-liu-identity-honoree>
- FotoFilmic Festival. (interviewer) & Liu. Y. J. (interviewee). (2017). Winner interview: *Liu Yajing*. Available online: <https://fotofilmic.com/portfolio/yajing-liu-singapore/>
- Cabos, M. (interviewer) & Liu. Y. J. (interviewee). (2017). *Female photographer Yajing Liu discusses her practice-based research*. Retrieved from Photography of China website: <http://photographyofchina.com/blog/guest-post/liu-yajing>

He, J. H., & Xiao, R. Y. (interviewer) & Liu. Y. J. (interviewee). (2015, April 27). 海草房：那层回忆色彩中的无奈 [Seaweed-house project: the layer of helplessness in the memory of seaweed houses]. *Information Times*, p. C13.

Rutigliano, D. & Hilborn, M. C. (interviewer) & Liu. Y. J. (interviewee). (2015). *An interview with Yajing Liu. ART Habens Contemporary Art Review*, 8, 74-95.

Exhibitions:

- *Speaking the Unspeakable – A Story of Seaweed House*, 18th China Pingyao International Photography Festival, September 19-September 25, 2018, Pingyao Cotton Gallery, China. Information available online: <http://www.pip919.com/30/xin-jia-po-liu-ya-jing-nan-yi-yan-shuo-zhi-yan-hai-zao-wu-de-gu-shiYajing-LiuSpeaking-the-Unspeakable-A-Story-of-Seaweed-Houses.html>
- *Speaking the Unspeakable, Visualizing the City – 5th International Visual Methods Conference Art Exhibition*, August 16-August 18, 2017, Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore.
- *Seaweed House, FotoFilmic 17 Winter Shortlist Show*, March 31-April 28, 2017, Pulp Gallery, Canada. Information available online: <https://fotofilmic.com/fotofilmic17-winter-shortlist-show/>
- *Identification Card*, 14th Dong Gang International Photo Festival, July 25-October 4, 2015, DongGang Museum of Photography Exhibition Hall 4, Korea.
- *Seaweed House, Photo Speaks 2015 – the 7th International Festival for Photography and Video*, February 5-February 28, 2015, Busan, Korea.
- *Seaweed House, Lishui International Photography Festival*, November 6-November 10, 2015, Lishui, China.

Others:

- The section “Chen Nong: History and Memory” of Chapter 4 is published in the artist Chen Nong’s first solo exhibition in France. The exhibition is opened from 23 January 2019 to 17 February 2019 at the Raibaudi Wang Gallery.
- This doctoral research is shortlisted (top 3) in the 2015 Linz Photography Theory Scholarship, China. The research proposal is published as 从风景解构到摄影重构：文化记忆在中国当代摄影中的新探索 [From the destruction of landscape to

the reconstruction of photography: the exploration of cultural memory in contemporary Chinese photography]. Information available online: <http://linci.photo.artron.net/index.php?/index/default/30>. The research proposal has been reissued by various news media and websites in art and photography in China, such as Artron.

- Introduced seaweed house project at the opening event of Singapore Social Impact Festival, September 11, 2017, Lien Centre for Social Innovation, SMU, Singapore. Invited guests of honor and speaker also include: Heng Chee How, Senior Minister of State (PMO), Her Excellency Dorte Bech Vizard, Ambassador of Denmark to Singapore, Her Excellency Nancy Lynn McDonald, High Commissioner of Canada in Singapore. Information available online: <https://www.smu.edu.sg/news/2017/09/20/inspiring-future-changemakers-collaborate-social-impact>
- *Identification Card* is shortlisted at the 2016 Athens Photo Festival.
- *Seaweed House* win the Honourable Mention award in the 2016 Moscow International Foto Awards, Moscow, Russia.
- *Seaweed House* project win the Third Price of the 4th Literature and Art Award of Weihai for its achievement in protecting and promoting seaweed house worldwide, issued by the Publicity Department of Weihai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2015.

23 January 2019

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Date

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Liu Yajing

ENCLOSURE

The USB flash drive contains a digital version of the practical components of this study, including two bodies of works, *Identification Card* and *Speaking the Unspeakable*. For a comprehensive understanding of the artworks, also enclosed are photos for the Seaweed House installation and a six-minute video, “When Memory Speaks—A Story of Seaweed House.” The enclosure explains the background of seaweed houses, as well as the work processes, including field trips to the region, interviews with residents, and the hand-coloring process. Video is preferable to be viewed using QuickTime Player.

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ABSTRACT

The sociocultural climate in the first decade of 21st-century China has allowed for the emergent popularity of documentary and memorial art projects. Many Chinese photographers have created artworks addressing a social reality and questioning its problems. Some have examined issues of individual and collective memory, while others have conducted autobiographical explorations and reflected on historical sites. However, when considering the problems raised in contemporary society, such as the crisis of tradition and the development of new media, memory would be better understood within the overarching context of cultural memory, which I challenge in this dissertation.

In this dissertation, the central research question is how cultural memory has been shaped by the transformation of landscapes during China's rapid development and then reconstructed through the lens of contemporary photography from 2000 and 2010. I questioned different aspects of cultural memory in photography and investigated artistic approaches designed to create a space for the interplay of past, present, and future. To do so, I analyzed the works of Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong in parallel to my own work. The artists were selected following a set of criteria, most importantly, based on the concept, characteristics, and narrative forms of cultural memory that borrow from pioneer studies such as those done by Jan Assmann. After in-person interviews with each artist and collection of written and visual documents, I investigated their similarities and differences in the understanding of cultural memory and artistic methods within the sociocultural context of works, thoughts, experiences of places, and photographic methods.

The research outcome of this study is supplemented by my art projects 身份证明, *Identification Card* (2015) and 无言处, *Speaking the Unspeakable* (2017), in which I examined research questions of this study through my investigation of seaweed houses in China. My art practice played a key role in conducting and achieving this research due to two reasons: 1) scholars often have limited or no access to the creative processes involved in producing artworks; 2) the strategy of incorporating the concept of cultural memory to guide photographic creation had not been studied in earlier works. In the practical component, I reflected on the theories of cultural memory that have been overlooked by current artists. Most importantly, the experimentation in and development of this practical investigation resulted in a promising method that sheds light on spatial experience and the alternative hand-coloring process, where practice informs theory, and vice versa.

By reflecting across the works of the four photographers, including my own, this study revealed that the photographic narration of cultural memory should be regarded as a mnemonic performance relating individuals to others, and to a larger cultural framework in the past, and to the present in ways that question the crisis of culture, history, belief, and power. Regarding the artistic approaches in the reconstruction of memory, this dissertation demonstrated that spatial experience matters in disclosing social realities, and the hand-coloring of photography produces an effect that helps to activate memory. Therefore, this study re-examines landscape and/or memory themed photographic works in China between 2000-2010, recalibrates our understanding of the term *cultural memory* in photography, and expands creative forms, topics, and themes of memory in the context of China.

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CHAPTER I

Background to the Problem

China has undergone rapid changes in both rural and urban landscapes since 2000, offering an interesting case for the study of memory in literature, sociology, and art (Wu & Phillips, 2004; Lu & Mi, 2009; B. Wang, 2004). Ancient villages, roads, and houses have been demolished in order to make way for urbanization and industrialization. Such environmental transformation became both the context and the content of many photographic works in China since 2000 (Baecker, Wang, Ambrozy, & Woos, 2008; Gu, 2010). Art critics and scholars, such as Wu Hung (2008) and Jiang Jiehong (2015), have argued that in these photographic works, collective or individual memories have been embedded in the artists' exploration and reflection of the historical sites or hometowns.

However, the discourse of memory in the 21st century has undergone a "cultural turn" (Burke, 1997). Scholars have since recognized the problems of individual remembrance, the crisis of cultural tradition, and the development of new media that has occurred in contemporary society (A. Assmann, 2011; J. Assmann, 2011b; Annette Kuhn & McAllister, 2006; B. Wang, 2004). Thus, the concept of cultural memory has been developed to examine changes in society and to encompass individual and collective memories (J. Assmann, 2011b). The discourse of cultural memory deals with historical matters, traditions, objects, media, our understanding of the past, and influences on the present. This raises the question of how cultural memory generated by changes in the landscape can be reconstructed through the lens of contemporary photography.

Photography has risen to the challenge in the study of cultural memory. Photography has always been regarded as a “mnemonic device” that could construct and represent a historical past (Bate, 2010; Kuhn & McAllister, 2006). Scholars were able to examine trauma, holocausts and colonial histories through the analysis of historical photographs, war photographs, documentary and archival photographs (Kuhn, 2002; Ruchatz, 2008). As artists and scholars began to show an interest in the artistic value of photography, memory representation became subject to increasing experimentation via multiple media and languages in contemporary photography. Scholars such as Martha Langford (2007) stated that memory could be expressed not only through documentary photographs but also through other modes of photographic works, such as photo-based installations, self-portraits, and imagery images. From the 21st century, scholars have gradually paid more attention to the narrative strategy and the symbols of cultural memory in art and photography (Dijck, 2007; Kuhn, 2007; Plate & Smelik, 2013; B. Wang, 2004). However, the existing studies about cultural memory and photography, as mentioned above, have overlooked cultural memory in the field of contemporary photography in China, even though cultural memory has been present in artists’ works and practices.

The circumstances of changing landscapes in China, where centuries-old houses are being pulled down every day and traditional landscapes have been transformed into modern commercial centers, offer a rich context for the study of cultural memory. Through a preliminary survey of landscape- and/or memory- themed photographs in China in the past two decades (see Appendix H), I have identified two key trends, helping outline the gap that this study aims to fill.

Firstly, current artistic practices devoted to the inquiry of memory from a cultural perspective are limited. Typically, when artists make reference to memory, they

mean individual memory, including personal emotions, imagination, and childhood experience that are specific to time and space. Plus, the few artists who have referred to cultural memory, as opposed to individual memory, have taken into account the considerations of the historical and sociocultural issues in landscapes that have been caused by China's rapid socioeconomic development, but have generally overlooked in-depth investigations of the subjects. Their works have either taken a topographical approach in photographic form or have been expressions of individual performance and meditation. This shows that artists have not proceeded to an in-depth inquiry on memory from a cultural perspective and thus have limited their modes of expression on the subject. Only a few Chinese artists' works have addressed aspects of cultural memory by questioning culture, politics, and history, such as those of Qu Yan and Yao Lu. It highlights a need for the examination of cultural memory and its meaning in photography.

Secondly, I have observed that an increasing number of artists have begun to experiment with alternative photographic processes to show a relationship between the past and the present. Among these alternative photographic processes, hand-coloring is the most used alternative process to contemporary photography. The hand-coloring of photographs is a process by which color is manually applied to monochromatic photographs. This hand-coloring technique has been carried out since the earliest daguerreotypes through the 20th century (Naoyuki, 2003). Contemporary artists such as Chen Nong not only revive the traditional process of adding colors but also reconsidered the purpose and aesthetic value of hand-coloring in the contemporary environment. Artists have taken advantage of the historical and material nature of hand-painted photographs to create a sentiment of nostalgia in audiences.

The sociocultural climate of China since the 2000s and the above observation of the Chinese contemporary photography sprang my passion to undertake this research and led to an exploration into how I as an artist could create photographic work to reconstruct cultural memory of a community. Indeed, my practical experiences of 海草房¹ (*hǎi cǎo fáng*; seaweed house) in China inspired the development of this research. Over the years, I have developed a strong interest in cultural memory issues while documenting seaweed houses in China. Since 2007, I have been photographing these dwellings of fishermen that are so typical of, yet peculiar to, the 胶东半岛² (*jiāo dōng bàn dǎo*; Jiaodong Peninsula) of China. These houses are so named for their roofs, which are made of 大叶藻 (*dà yè zǎo*; *Zostera*, commonly called eelgrass)³ grown on the seabed. The history of these houses can be traced back to the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368).

¹ Local residents call these dwellings 海苔房 (*hǎi tái fáng*), but 海草房 (*hǎi cǎo fáng*; seaweed house) is the term that has been formally used in theses, articles, books, essays, and government documents. See, for example, Li Wenfu's 威海民居海草房历史文化研究, *Study on the History and Culture of the Seaweed House in Weihai* (2004) and the first comprehensive book about Weihai's culture and history, 山东区域文化统览—威海文化统览, *Overview of Shandong Regional Culture—Weihai Culture* (2012), edited by Wang Zhimin, Liu Yudang, and Zhang Jianguo, which was organized by the Shandong Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

² Jiaodong Peninsula comprises three cities, Qingdao, Yantai and Weihai, and forms part of Shandong Province in eastern China, between the Bo Hai to the north and the Yellow Sea to the south.

³ 大叶藻 (*dà yè zǎo*), instead of 海草 (*hǎi cǎo*), is the term used when describing the plant in the marine fisheries study. The standardization of the name can be found in Zheng Fengying's 中国海草的多样性、分布及保护, *Diversity, distribution and conservation of seagrass species in China* (2013), for example.

In spite of their high architectural and cultural value, a large number of these seaweed houses was demolished in mass urbanization sweeps at the end of the 20th century.⁴

Not only aesthetic considerations (i.e., the beauty of the seaweed houses) but also their important sociocultural meanings, especially in the face of the crisis of culture and memory during rapid environmental changes, constitute the factors that have motivated me to photograph the seaweed houses for more than a decade. Since the winter of 2007, I decided to document the remaining seaweed houses and their residents' living conditions before they become irretrievable once these houses meet the wrecking ball (see Figure 1). In 2011, I added color to my monochromatic photographs, with the aim of producing a "romanticizing" effect, in an effort to revive the beauty of the seaweed houses, jolt personal memory and imagination, and mark the opposition between the old landscape and the urbanized society (see Figure 2). I became acquainted with the belief systems, histories, and traditions (e.g., rituals, festivals, customs, myths, tales) that were about to disappear with the demolition of seaweed houses and villages. And I experimented with various methods of expression in photography.

The different trends I identified above, past (e.g., emphasis on individual memory instead of cultural memory) and current (e.g., recent trends in the use of alternative processes to explore cultural memory), highlight the need to perform an in-depth study of cultural memory in Chinese contemporary photography and to explore the conceptual approaches, methods, and theories driving photographic works. Although the embodiment of cultural memory in landscape photography could be revealed in current photographic practices, there is a lack of photographic work being

⁴ A detailed description of seaweed houses, such as their history, tradition, architectural value, and current situation, is provided under the sections entitled "Practical Component" and "Personal Justification" in this chapter, as well as throughout the description and analysis of my artistic practice in Chapter V.

created based on the principle of *cultural memory*. Thus, it is essential to develop photographic practices that are practically and methodologically different from existing practices by other artists.

Main Research Questions

The central question of this study is about how artists can reconstruct a cultural memory of a landscape through the lens of contemporary photography. Moving beyond photographs that simply document nature, two main research questions are formulated in order to identify the narrative strategies employed to create an allegoric photographic project that echoes the intrinsic culture which has now disappeared.

1. How are different aspects of cultural memory embedded in photography?
2. Which artistic approaches do artists employ to create a space for the interplay of past, present, and future?

Theoretical Framework

To fill in the gap and answer the research questions mentioned above, this dissertation focuses on three exemplary artists: Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong. Within the wide range of photographic works in the field of landscape transformation and memory, I choose the artists according to a set of criteria and processes, which will be described in Chapter III. Beyond the three case studies, this dissertation embraces a practical component, offering first-hand data and experience in reconstructing cultural memory through the lens of photography by adopting characteristics and concepts of cultural memory from other disciplines.

The selected artists and their works, alongside my own, share common features. They have drawn inspiration from diverse rapid landscape changes, such as urban space transformations, ruined traditional villages, and the conservation of cultural heritage. They are aware of the loss of culture and history caused by landscape changes in China since the early 2000s. They have photographed landscapes to question the conflict between the past and the present. Their considerations of memory and landscape are closely related to their long-term investigation of and interest in landscape and/or history or culture. Most importantly, they all have experimented with different mediums and perspectives to explore memory.

In this dissertation, I address the most fundamental theories comprising the triumvirate of landscape, memory, and photography. In analyzing and examining the artists' works, I cite the references that are the most relevant to the contexts and subjects of the artists' works. The theories proposed by the scholars mentioned below offer diverse ways of identifying what cultural memory consists of in the selected artists' practices and of analyzing their photographic approaches. In combining essential theories and my own works, I am able to construct a more inclusive understanding of cultural memory and narrative strategy.

Landscape

Landscape is a key component in the examination of cultural memory since memory is essentially site-specific (Meusbürger, Heffernan, & Wunder, 2011; Taylor, 2008). Landscape is considered “a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted” (Taylor, 2008, p. 2; Mitchell, 1994; Schama, 1995). This perspective highlights landscape as a medium for cultural memory containing symbolic meanings (Schama, 1995), which has enabled me to understand

how changes in landscapes (e.g., construction sites and villages) reveal information regarding problems of society, history, custom, myth, and tradition in China, as well as emotions such as nostalgia, melancholy, and hope. Thus, landscape is not a two-dimensional image but is entwined with the perception of inside and out and the realm of representation and symbolism, which is reflected in the two circumstances.

Firstly, as a landscape holds physical evidence of how humans transformed the environment to meet their needs, a landscape's "outside" (e.g., landform and materiality of architecture) discloses the "inside" (e.g., culture and social structure). This is exemplified by the seaweed houses. The design, construction, and completion of a seaweed house involve the resident and/or builder's intentions, wishes, emotions, and beliefs, which embody the traditional customs and culture of the local fishermen. While the first circumstance starts from the examination of landscape's physical appearance, the second is grounded in the investigation of what happened in landscape. As various myths, incidents, and histories have occurred in a landscape from ancient times to the present, the interpretation of the "inside" of a story/myth/incident/history (e.g., time, place, characters, and plots) is systematically connected to what occurs "outside" (e.g., sociocultural concerns). For example, during my field trips, I collected narratives about a Han dynasty tumulus. These historical narratives were shared by three residents, who each described different stories related to the tumulus from the imperial period to the 2000s. Each narrative portrays features of landscape at a unique point in time. These narratives of historical landscape reveal the ways China developed land resources on the basis of economics and the intimate relationship with neighbors in China's rural society.

The two circumstances reveal the relationship between landscape and memory and that to read a landscape is to understand a wider influence. When photographing

landscapes, artists are not just taking scenic photographs, but also photographing the culture and memory embedded in the landscape as well. In this study, landscape is a medium for all matters that can be understood and interpreted from different perspectives in the effort to gain comprehensive knowledge about the world we live in.

As landscape is dynamic, with metaphorical features, landscape photography should be regarded as an approach for understanding and investigating a place and a society through its lens rather than for reproducing a scenery. Thus, in contemporary landscape photography in China, landscape can be the subject of a photograph such as Qu Yan's 权力空间 *Power Space*, can serve as the background against which a story is staged such as Chen Nong's 黄河 *Yellow River*, can be a computer-generated landscape based on reality such as Yao Lu's 中国景观 *Chinese Landscape*, and a research object to discover history such as the practical component of this study 无言处 *Speaking the Unspeakable*.

In this study, when examining the artists' works and their understanding of the sites, landscape must be considered a cultural construct within the Chinese context. As Wu Hung has suggested, contemporary Chinese landscape photography "can be properly understood only when we associate them with China's current transformation, the ongoing process of globalization, and the artists' visions for themselves in a changing world" (2004, p. 26). Within the context of China, landscape is a morally- and aesthetically-centered concept that highlights the human-nature relationship (Han, 2008; Nelson & Callicott, 2008). Landscape is characterized by 山水 (*shān shuǐ*; *shan shui*), referring to beautiful, peaceful nature closely associated with culture, human emotion, and spirituality (Han, 2008). Thus, when Western scholars placed the word *cultural* in front of the word *landscape*, Chinese scholars and artists were confused by the perceived

separate relationship between nature and culture. In spite of this, contemporary Chinese artists have combined traditional Chinese thoughts of landscape with those of the West to create landscape-related photographs. This context has reminded me that, Chinese artists have regarded landscape as a cultural and social construct and have concerned on traditional Chinese thought of landscape to uncover issues such as history, culture, heritage, jurisdiction of places, and heterogeneous society.

Cultural Memory

In this dissertation, I focus on fundamental theories of cultural memory, will be reviewed in Chapter III, which observe the embodiment of cultural memory in photographic works and discuss representational approaches in the creation of contemporary landscape photography. In China, cultural memory as an emerging concept was introduced in the 2000s and soon became a principal research topic in the fields of literature, history, sociology, communication, and anthropology, but not photography. The 2000s is a period in which China has been undergoing rapid social change, providing a principal context for the examination of cultural memory. A large number of Chinese scholars, such as Wang Xiaobing (2007), Tao Dongfeng (2011), and Zhao Jingrong (2013) have examined writings, films, traditional rituals, and films, using Jan Assmann's theory of cultural memory, aiming to discover issues surrounding cultural heritage, minority regions, urban spaces, and villages. However, current Chinese scholarly research on cultural memory is still developing, and its use of the term *cultural memory* is often mixed up with words such as collective memory (Liu & Yao, 2017). Although I carefully considered Chinese scholarly writings when conducting this dissertation, the fundamental theories of cultural memory borrowed

from the West enabled me to have a stronger understanding of cultural memory, including its definition, figures, features, carriers, and forms.

In this research, memory is addressed as a collective concept, a vector of social, historical, and individual consciousness. In other words, the memory I am interested in is what I would call *cultural memory*. Memory has come to be regarded as a cultural and collective issue in addition to an individual one in the late 20th century (Connerton, 2009; Meusburger et al., 2011). As Paul Connerton (2009) noted, cultural memory has become a “culture industry in its own right” (p. 1). Individual memory is a personal interpretation of one’s own life. However, each person is influenced by society and culture as a whole, and individuals share experiences with each other to form a collective memory (Brandon, 2010). Thus, collective memory provides the common values, sentiments, and identities (Halbwachs, 1992).

Cultural memory as a concept was introduced by Jan Assmann (2013) in the late twentieth century and extended by other scholars such as Astrid Erll (2008), and is suggested to contain individual, cultural, and social components affected by societal changes and issues, such as urbanization, conservation, and the emergence of new media. It embraces the concepts of individual memory and collective memory and enhances cultural functions, forms, and social factors (e.g., power and politics). It aims to emphasize historical matters, objects, new media, our understanding of the past, and influences on the present (J. Assmann, 2008; B. Wang, 2004).

Photography

The relationship between photography and memory provides inspiration for artists to recall and recollect memory of past events (Kuhn, 2007; Langford, 2007; Raiford, 2009). For example, Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister stated that a

“photograph can disturb the present moment and the contemporary landscape with troubling or nostalgic memories” (2006, p. 1). Other scholars such as David Bate (2010) and Derrick Price and Liz Wells (2000) emphasized the archival value of photographs that could serve to record material accuracy, as well as to restore the memory of events. In this research, the relationship between photography and memory brings home that photographers narrate the past by performing recollection, imagination, and sociohistorical consciousness. This enables contemporary photography to re-represent the past and continue to reflect it in the present, which I refer to as the “reconstruction of cultural memory” in this study. In the artists’ appropriation of cultural symbols and context, the fragmented narrative has replaced the traditional time axes to amplify personal consciousness, such as nostalgia. Thus, photography is a bridge that can connect culture with social context, history, personal experiences, and communication.

Practical Component

The images are indeed a key component of the demonstration in my dissertation. As I mentioned in the research background and gap of this study, it was essential for me to create my own artworks, which are methodologically different from those of the selected artists. To do so, I created artworks that were guided by the conception and characteristics of cultural memory learnt from pioneer studies. The practical component served to provide first-hand data that the selected artists did not cover, to disclose processes, approaches, and ideas that literature cannot offer and that art practitioners often failed to mention on a theoretical level, and to offer insights into cultural memory based on my experiences and experimentations. By creating original artworks, I was able to understand and examine 1) the conception and embodiment of cultural memory in photography, 2) the photographer’s explorations of sociocultural issues by

investigating and feeling landscapes, and 3) the hand-coloring technique as an artistic method for memory representation. Thus, in this dissertation, the theoretical component and practical component are interwoven to answer the research questions established for this study.

Over 10 years of photo shoots, I came to realize that the origin and history of seaweed houses would be lost with the passing of the elderly inhabitants and the demolition of the houses, given the lack of comprehensive research on the cultural implications. While on my photo shoots, I carried out research on the origin of the seaweed houses by continually consulting with cultural scholars, folk specialists, local authorities, and residents. I observed that people knew little about these houses, especially their culture and history, even as the seaweed houses faded away before their eyes. Faced with this situation and problems of seaweed houses, I wondered, after the disappearance of these seaweed house villages, how much we would know and remember about these villages and their traditional fishing culture and how these houses and their stories would be remembered, recalled, and passed down to the future? Attracted by the rural-urban transformation and the seaweed houses' value in terms of embodying the culture, custom, and tradition of their region, I investigated their history, unrecorded stories, and forgotten memories via photographic art.

The seaweed house is a microcosm of environmental changes in China, including the disappearance of old landscapes and lifestyles, the amnesia of traditional cultures, the rise of new urban spaces and new rural communities, and the displacement of residents. Working on the seaweed houses provided an example and a reminder, for the theoretical component, that photography incorporates various perspectives including history, meditation, remembering, misremembering, forgetting, and imagination via the interpretation of artists and the artistic approaches they employ. The works derived from

the practical component provided the idea that contemporary photographs break with the official discourse of cultural memory because the past is at once too personal and ignored by government-run museums.

Overview of the Study

This study takes Chinese landscape photography as a research domain but also addresses the broader questions of the reconstruction of the past for the present from the perspectives of sociology, history, and cultural studies. Contemporary Chinese society is struggling with problems of memory; discussions of the past and the present, tradition and nostalgia, remembrance and amnesia, power and identity have been especially acute in the wake of the rapid rural and urban transformation. Dealing with memory can be problematic and complex because meanings of memory can be interpreted and understood from different perspectives. Cultural memory, a concept that has been well examined in film and literature studies, has received little attention in contemporary Chinese photography.

This study is a qualitative research that contains both theoretical and practical components with mutual influence. For the theoretical component, this study seeks to show how Qu Yan, Yao Lu, Chen Nong, and I reconstructed Chinese history, past, and/or belief in China through art. For the practical component, the theory of cultural memory and methods of memory representation that are obtained from the analysis of literature and other artists' works were applied to the production and rationale of my seaweed-house works. In this dissertation, the theoretical component and practical component are interwoven to answer the research questions established for this study.

By means of exploration of the four artists' works and their different strategies, this study highlights the importance of context and the understanding of landscape

memory. This dissertation argues that the perceptions of power displacement, cultural crisis, and spatial sentiment in cultural memory, as explored and conveyed by art, provide valuable information for further studies in art and culture. The artists' works offer a rich reference point for Chinese artists and scholars who explore environmental changes to research and portray landscape memory from a cultural perspective.

The four artists of this study create knowledge and understanding when responding to today's sociocultural issues. Describing and analyzing the approaches by which the four photographers have experienced landscape changes and explored embedded memory in their art, encourages artists and scholars to pay attention to the relationships between sociocultural context, photographers' perceptions, and art-making processes. In particular, photographers, scholars, artists, and students of art should recognize the role of the artist as a social researcher rather than as an unthinking or idealistic image-maker. They are invited to use the camera to investigate sociocultural issues, question social reality, explore the role of the individual in a society, and communicate outward to a public.

In addition, this study strives to shed light on the innovative perception of alternative photographic techniques in contemporary photography. Since 2010, an increasing number of workshops set out to educate audiences on alternative photographic processes in China. One example is the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication's workshop titled "摄影传统手工制作工艺 (Traditional Photographic Processes)," ⁵ which suggests a revival of traditions in Chinese contemporary

⁵ Supported by the China National Arts Fund, the workshop was held from October 10 to November 10, 2017. Thirty students, artists, and photographers attended the program and studied silver gelatin print, cyanotype, albumen print, platinotype, and wet plate processing. The participants' works were exhibited at the 2017 Lishui International Photography Festival, November 15-19, 2017.

photography. 无言处, *Speaking the Unspeakable* (2017) is among the few works that are examples of the use of alternative photographic techniques, in which I added color to black-and-white photographs. I consider the hand-coloring method to be a mnemonic performance for expressing a sense of nostalgia. In addition, the exploration of hand-coloring in this study holds great significance for understanding why photographers need traditional processes in the digital age and which new possibilities can be introduced to contemporary photography.

Personal Justification

My research interest in memory simultaneously inspired and informed my artistic practice and stems from my education and experience. During my undergraduate studies in photojournalism and multimedia in China, I documented traditional villages, laying the foundation of my interest in their architecture, the everyday life of their residents, and their traditions. My graduate studies at London College of Communication gave me a completely different experience that led to my appreciation for photography with multiple mediums, materials, and interdisciplinary approaches. It also provided me with the opportunity to study landscapes from a memory perspective by becoming acquainted with the works of Candida Hofer (b. 1944), Jem Southam (b. 1950), Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948), Zarina Bhimji (b. 1963), and many others. All of these experiences have enhanced my interest in both artistic expressions of photography and the study of memory.

My art practice on seaweed houses in China played a significant role in this investigation. Seaweed houses have a rich history and are representative of Jiaodong peninsular contributions to architecture, traditional beliefs, legends, festivals, and customs in China. The oldest preserved seaweed house is about 400 years old, which

would date it to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Unfortunately, with recent economic development, only a few hundred seaweed houses still exist in present-day China. As a photographer, I have witnessed and documented these vicissitudes through my camera since 2007.

In order to feature seaweed houses and depict the changes, my photographic project incorporated documentary, topological and hand-coloring methods. I interviewed and worked with professors, scholars, photographers, journalists, residents, and builders of the seaweed houses, such as Dr. Zhang Peidong of the Ocean University of China and Yu Yingyu of the Rongcheng Office of Cultural Affairs, to understand their structure and basic history, local customs and situations, and the use of seaweed. In 2010, armed with a map of Rongcheng, in the Shandong Province, I set out to photograph the county's last seaweed houses every year, regardless of their scattered distribution. By proceeding this way, I succeeded in identifying the location of traditional seaweed dwellings and allowing me to document them in detail, such as their doors, windows, alleys, portraits of Mao, and 照壁 (zhào bì; screen wall or spirit wall, referring to a wall that is used to shield an entrance gate in traditional Chinese architecture) (see Figure 3). My photographs recorded pre-demolition scenes, provided evidence of destruction, and created valuable references for scholars and members of the public in general interested in knowing about the fishermen's living and cultural conditions peculiar to the Shandong Province. Many of the seaweed houses I photographed have since been demolished and are unlikely to ever be recovered.

In 2011, I produced a series of hand-colored photographs to explore landscape memory through personal imagination (see Figure 4). During my exploration of the seaweed houses, I began to recall images of my own memory and imagination when I encountered a collapsed house on a street. It triggered thoughts about how I could

represent the memory of seaweed houses and which kinds of considerations and processes I could use. I explored these ideas in my hand-coloring series. I studied the technique of hand-coloring with the 83-year-old master Xu Cuilan (1936), who worked at a photographic studio and was familiar with all kinds of traditional photographic techniques, such as hand-coloring and negative retouching. My hand-colored photographs aim at displaying the conflict between the ancient and the modern, reality and fiction. Such conflicts can create a retrospective space for personal reflection and encourage one to ask about the changes that have been brought to traditional houses under rapid social development.

After the exploration of individual memory and imagination in the hand-colored photographs, my increased knowledge about seaweed houses spurred me on to examine memory from a cultural perspective because of the sociocultural impact of these dwellings and the regret over the loss. During my photo shoots, residents shared with me countless interesting histories, legends, customs, and objects, and I gradually recorded them for reference. Indeed, these are the carriers of memory as a collective matter of cultural implication, which could disappear with the passing of each generation and the destruction of each seaweed house. Such interaction with seaweed houses encouraged me to conduct an investigation of memory in contemporary photography that deals with individual emotions, historical carriers, and a sociocultural context that is defined as cultural memory in this study.

Figure 1. Liu Yajing (2012). Untitled. Silver gelatin print.

Figure 2. Liu Yajing. (2012). 起重机, Cranes from 这里曾经, Once There Was. Silver gelatin print (FB paper) with hand-coloring.

Figure 3. Liu Yajing. (2009). Untitled. Silver gelatin print.

Figure 4. Liu Yajing. (2012). 东楮岛海岸线, *Coastline of Dong'chu'dao Region* from 这里·曾经, *Once There Was*. Silver gelatin print (FB paper) with hand-coloring.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Geographical delimitation. This study regards China as a unique site for cultural memory, since China is undergoing rapid development and sharp changes within a short period of time, remarkably transforming landscapes since the 1990s (Lu & Mi, 2009; Wu, Xu, & Yeh, 2006). Policies such as 社会主义新农村建设 (the New Socialist Countryside Construction) have been implemented to improve standards of living in urban and rural areas. Old villages and traditional architectures have been replaced by modern communities, high-rise buildings, and shopping malls. Such landscape changes, consequently, evoke nostalgia and the sense of death or hope, which affect our cultural memory (Wu, 2012). Within this time period, artists in China have reflected on such situations of landscapes to produce various themes, including remembrance, nostalgia, and mourning. The abovementioned context has allowed me to use China as a starting point and a sample to explore cultural memory in landscapes. In particular, this study focuses on landscapes in China that have disappeared or are on the verge of disappearing as a result of human intervention.

For this study, within China, I chose the seaweed-house region as a site for exploring the reconstruction of cultural memory in landscape photography (see Figure 5; high-resolution map available in Appendix G). The inspiration of this study finds its source in a historical Chinese landscape located in the Shandong Province. Seaweed houses represent the unique building style, culture, tradition, and customs of the fishermen of the east coast, widely considered as one of the most typical folkloric dwellings in China. However, due to economic development and urban construction policy, more than 80 percent of the seaweed houses have been destroyed over the past two decades (Li, 2004). With the demolition of the seaweed houses, their residents have

moved into high-rise buildings and to cities. As a result, the many cultural patterns and memories of the region are exposed to the risk of disappearing or getting lost, including their traditions, customs, and legends. As an artist who has witnessed these changes during the past decade, I applied my exploration of the seaweed houses to this study, which offered me a convenient path into the field of this study.

Figure 5. Liu Yajing. (2017). Map of Rongcheng illustrating the villages I have photographed.

Image-based contemporary art photography. The field of this research is neither documentary photography nor photojournalism but *image-based contemporary art photography*. In this research, photography is considered beyond being a result of technological innovation and a technique of absolute accuracy, but as an approach for discovering, understanding, criticizing, and expressing our society, ideas, imagination,

and identity. Such an understanding of photography embraces two aspects, that of contemporary photography and of the photograph as art.

The term *contemporary* in Chinese photography and art does not have a standardized definition; rather, it is “the most convenient term for art being produced in this present age, but [does] not have specific attitude of mind or philosophy” (Smith, 2012, p. 64). Rather than defining the concept of contemporary photography, I have opted to start with photographic works and contextualize them within the regional culture, history, and geography. When I use the term *contemporary* in this dissertation, I refer to the standards of periodization, context, and photographic form that delineated in *The And: An Expanded Questionnaire on the Contemporary* (2012). According to the impact of Beijing Olympic Games of summer 2008 and the subsequent growing rise of international biennials and festivals that promote artists’ communication and migration of contemporary art, contemporary photography refers to the works created from 2000s and afterwards (Okeke-Agulu, 2009). In this period, artistic works demonstrate that “being contemporary [for art works] is in fact one’s attitude to the present, a perception of darkness” (Hsu & Wong, 2012, p. 7). Periodization serves as a tool with which to consider a photograph within its social formation and social context.

Regarding the photographic form, contemporary photography demonstrates two predominant characteristics. The first is experimentation with different mediums, methods, and ways of thinking to investigate new possibilities in art (Kwon, 2009). For example, Qu Yan applied the concept of spectacle from Marxist theory, while Yao Lu used digital technology to create photographs. The general use of alternative techniques is the other main feature of being contemporary. Traditional practices, like hand-coloring, can “connect the contemporary with the past” (Araeen, 2012, p. 13). I also aim to show that traditional practices could offer new possibilities and aesthetics in the

contemporary environment. Thus, depending on the intention of the artist, alternative techniques enable introspection into the past, respond to changes in the present, and arouse nostalgic sentiments.

Contemporary photography in China is taking an artistic turn in that the majority of Chinese photographers now claim to be creating fine art photographs. Some photographs are indeed examples of fine art and masterpieces in terms of aesthetic qualities—sharp focus, impeccable composition and lighting, and exquisite colors. Some photographs question societal issues and realities by staging objects or straightforwardly capturing landscapes. Central to the 21st century debate about photography in China is the question of what kind of photographs can be considered to be fine art. Critics, such as Liz Wells (2004), have stated that photograph as art is related to *Arts establishment*, that is 1) if photographs can be showed in galleries or museums, 2) if photographs can be collected by private or institutional collectors, and 3) if photographs can be sent to art auctions like paintings.

In addition, I would like to point out that photograph as art, is also related to the understanding of photography and the makers' personal artistic ideas and intentions. Regarding photograph as art, photography is understood as a way for conveying ideas, actions, or performances, instead of a mechanical record of what happened. Artists like Qu Yan used photography to represent subjects and offer new ways of seeing by showing precise details of image. While photographers like Yao Lu have taken advantage of technology to expand the artistic form in digital imaging. Photographers like Chen Nong have arranged and created images like a filmmaker or painter. Others, like myself, have employed multiple mediums, approaches, and strategies to investigate and question people's life and social settings that shape their behavior from different perspectives. In summary, photograph can be a result born out of a performance or

action, part of a larger art project, or an image for its own sake. In this study, I address these image-makers as *artists* rather than photographers because the image-makers consider themselves artists.

The photograph as art also brings up the debate about the “photograph as document,” which appears in two circumstances. The first refers to documentary photography and photojournalism. In the conventional sense, documentary photography and photojournalism emphasize the fact that what is captured in the photograph is an accurate and authentic piece of information. Such authenticity requires an objective attitude when pressing the shutter and prohibits any alteration and/or arrangement by the photographer. However, the authenticity of the documentary practice has been questioned and reexamined, as photographers began to pursue an aesthetic status, discover new perspectives, and embed the act of self-expression. The second circumstance is the power of photography as a documentary medium that is reflected in some of the artists’ works selected for this study. Artists regard the documentary as an approach and method to record, explore, and extend the changes and sociopolitical issues of a given setting and their related consequences. In this regard, artists appreciate the accurate representations of objects, people, places, or events and assert that the photograph is a witness of the world. For example, both Qu Yan and I believe our photographs will be evidence to study and understand a period of history and society. In respect to photographic practice as documentary, artists are not the recorders of the decisive moment but rather narrators who offer a different way of questioning the subjects or situations to understand the society in which we live.

Photography and ethnography. The purpose of the two bodies of work I created for this dissertation was not to conduct research on the sociology, anthropology, or visual ethnography of the seaweed-house community. However, the methods used in

the practical component (e.g., written field notes and interviewing residents) may lead to a debate about photography and ethnography. Although the discussion of the interwoven relationship between photography and ethnography is beyond the research scope of this study, it is necessary to clarify the role of ethnography in the practical component of this research.

For socialists or anthropologists, photography has been seen as an objective tool for recording realistic facts, presenting social research, or offering data for the observation and understanding of social practices, communities, and behaviors (Pink, 2007; Schwartz, 1989; Edwards, 2015). Photography, along with other artistic media, can be used as a research method to study a subject from a scientific point of view. For artists, photography is an art that embodies knowledge, affect, and aesthetic concerns. In artistic practices, artists have begun to regard ethnography as a method for discovering problems, experiencing the field, and creating artworks (Desai, 2002). In creating the practical component of this study, I applied ethnographical methods such as fieldwork, collection of objects, and interviews. The use of ethnographical methods enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of my subject, to disclose sources for image making, to provide anthropological knowledge from a subjective and aesthetic point of view, and to build an intimate relationship with the seaweed-house community. In reading and understanding the practical component of this dissertation, the focus should be on the field of photography rather than the study of social science.

Dialect and subtle meanings. For this study, I conducted interviews in Chinese with selected artists and seaweed-house residents and wrote field notes on my photo-shoot trips, also in Chinese. These notes were transcribed from the spoken word into written text for further study. The data were recorded in either Mandarin or the local Rongcheng dialect, which presents subtle issues for translation. Given that the meanings

of phrases or verbose descriptions are not transparent, transcription is considered as “processed data” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 110; Wengraf, 2001, p. 7). As I am fluent in both Mandarin and the Rongcheng dialect, I was able to understand the connotations and meanings of both languages. Once all the interviews and field notes in Chinese were transcribed, I had about 90 pages of notes to read. From all the transcripts, I selected only the significant and useful parts for translation into English. A translation is an interpretive step because the translator is “an interpreter” who processes the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the words in the cultural context of the source language then “conceptualizes” and “reconstructs the meaning in a new cultural context for the target language” (Esposito, 2001, p. 570).

In this study, there are two specific issues associated with translation. First, the interviews and field notes involved many historical terms, myths, and spoken dialects that the translator may not have understood. Second, some meaning may be lost in the translation process if the translator does not comprehend the cultural context. Therefore, I translated the transcripts myself, because 1) I come from the city of Weihai in the seaweed-house region and therefore understand Rongcheng’s sociocultural context and 2) I speak both Mandarin and Rongcheng dialect fluently. I included some phrases and words in Chinese to remind people that these words have evocative meanings with no direct translation into English.

Summary of the Chapters

In Chapter I, I have presented the background, give an overview of the study, and introduce the issues revolving around the study of cultural memory in contemporary Chinese landscape photography of the 2000s. To examine the embodiment of cultural memory in contemporary photography and investigate artistic methods, I have proposed

a theoretical framework based on three elements: landscape, cultural memory, and photography. This chapter has also detailed the practical component created by me for this study and explained the need for this practice. Research questions, personal justification, delimitations, and limitations have been addressed to describe the scope and boundaries of this study.

Chapter II offers an overview of the relevant literature that provided an interdisciplinary context and theoretical framework for understanding, analyzing, and making memory artworks. This chapter is organized according to the three elements of this study—landscape, memory, and photography—and their intricate relationships. In addition, this chapter summarizes related photographic works and general artistic approaches, addressing landscape photography in China, the emergence of cultural memory in Chinese photography, current modes for representing memory in photography, and the historical background of the hand-coloring technique.

Chapter III describes the methodology used in this study and the design of this study, as well as explaining my role as artist and researcher. Next, the criteria for the selection of artists and designing my artistic practices for this study are explained, including a brief biography of the four selected artists and the process of my two bodies of works. Information about data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations are addressed in considerable detail.

Chapter IV presents the results of the data collection for three of the case studies: Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong. Each case is independently presented, and the artists' works are portrayed thematically. After presentation of each case's data, I analyze the embodiment of cultural memory in their works and the photographic approaches used.

Chapter V introduces and examines the practical component of this study: 身份证明, *Identification Card* and 无言处, *Speaking the Unspeakable*. I examine cultural

memory through the aspect of site and carrier and describe the intentions, artistic approach, and production procedures of my practical works. My practical works are grounded on the conception of *cultural memory* in sociology and art, which offer critical data, first-hand experience, and insights that literature and previous Chinese artists could not.

Chapter VI is a discussion of the results of the study. I first offer a cross-case analysis of the four selected artists to answer the first research question about the embodiment of cultural memory in contemporary photography. Then, I present two methods for the reconstruction of cultural memory through the lens of photography: the method of spatial experience and hand-coloring, thereby responding to the second research question of this study.

Chapter VII reiterates the findings of this study and concludes the investigation with implications for further research in photography and the study of memory.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.

—Pierre Nora (1989, p. 7)

The past does not just emerge of its own accord;
it is the result of a cultural process of construction and representation.

—Jan Assmann (2011b, p. 71)

This chapter provides an in-depth inquiry into the intricate and triangular relationship between landscape, memory, and photography. This is achieved via investigation into three specific questions: 1) What does cultural memory consist of? 2) How can cultural memory be embodied in landscape-related contemporary photographs? and 3) How do artists work with memory to convey their reflexivity of landscape changes and to picture their memories of China's rapid urbanization?

The first part of this chapter defines the central idea of landscape and its relation to memory. The second part examines the concept of cultural memory and its conceptions in the study of art. The third part studies the relationship between photography and memory and maps memory-related landscape photographs in China since the turn of the century. The final part of this chapter summarizes the general approaches, including three modes of the representation of memory in or through landscape photographs and the early artistic value of the hand-coloring of photographs.

Landscape as a Site of Memory

Defining Landscape

This study asserts that landscape is apprehended in such a way as to include physical origins, cultural elements, and psychological layers, a statement based principally on the works of scholars W. J. T. Mitchell, Joël Bonnemaison, Simon Schama, and Liz Wells. The term *landscape* commonly refers to natural phenomena, such as arresting sceneries, mountains, parks, and cityscapes. However, in this study, landscape is regarded as a consequence of human intervention that incorporates history, emotion, experience, myth, and memory.

The word *landscape* originates from the Dutch word *landschap* (land-ship). Its first use in England in an artistic context came from a Dutch painting dating to 1598 which marked the landscape genre (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010). In old English, *land* meant something to which people belong, such as the home of a person (Olwig, 2005); the Dutch suffix corresponds to the Middle English *-ship*, from which eventually emerged the common modern English suffix *-scape*. Furthermore, these suffixes are etymologically linked and related to the verb *shape*, giving greater perspective to *landscape* as a verb. So, while the noun refers to natural scenery and rural scenery, usually an inland natural formation, such as rivers, mountains, and lakes, the verb has gained meaning as “to improve,” “to represent,” or “to embellish” and includes aesthetics, methods, areas of land, buildings, gardens, cityscapes, and so on. The term plays a significant role in the studies of geography, history, and art, highlighting factors of human action, subjectivity, and representation.

W. J. T. Mitchell (1994) presented two particular ways of understanding and examining a landscape. Firstly, Mitchell relied on landscape paintings and conventional theories such as that of Kenneth Clark (1994) to question landscape in the discourse on

imperialism and nationalism. From the analysis of Chinese landscape to New Zealand, Mitchell implied the relationship between power, landscape, and memory. Secondly, Mitchell argued that landscape is a medium of representation as well as a social symbol. He stated:

Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package. (1994, p.5)

Mitchell's view of landscape is rooted in that of *cultural landscape*, widely used in geography and other disciplines since the end of 20th century. In the 1990s, David Jacques reappraised the concepts of countryside values and suggested "the rise of cultural landscape" (1995, p. 1). The notion of cultural landscape had become closely related to heritage and history since its adoption by the 1992 World Heritage Convention of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Jacques, 1995; Taylor, 2008). However, landscape as heritage is just one of the aspects of its cultural construct. Geographers such as Joël Bonnemaïson have stated that a landscape is "the concrete, spatial translation of an ecosystem," and its modalities are personal environment (part of one's personality), heritage (belonging to a society's collective memory), resource (for commercialization), and identity (situating oneself with a given culture and society) (Bonnemaïson, 2005, p. 51). All the above-mentioned scholars' works have clearly defined landscape as a cultural and social medium that embodies social changes, cultural values, personal interpretation, and even national politics and identity.

Landscape and Memory

In this study, landscape includes memory because it is a cultural product involving human experience and ideologies. In 2002, a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was carried out by cultural geographers to comprehend the characteristics and aesthetics of landscape. The LCA serves to heighten awareness in decision-making and activities regarding land management, design, site-specific information, topography, and so on, as well as inform the representation of cultural associations and perceptual factors, such as myths, legends, festivals, memory, and sense of nostalgia and emptiness. In this study, the LCA provides a guide for understanding and discovering landscape as the chart (see Figure 6) reveals the complex interpenetrations of nature and culture in landscape and the perceptual mode of memory, sensation, and emotion.

Figure 6. Visual representation of the elements involved in a Landscape Character Assessment. Retrieved from The Heritage Council Website LCA Guidance on 12 November 2014.

Artists and scholars have also addressed the same perceptual and aesthetic factors of landscape as included in the LCA. In *Landscape and Memory* (1995), Simon Schama argued that landscape represents the trajectory of human culture, revealing human sociality and the existence and value of nature. Through the examination of myths, stories, paintings, and gardens from antiquity to the present, he stated that human intervention has existed everywhere in landscape, as encoded in stone, water, sky, wood, and so on. Regarding the existence of memory in landscape, he wrote:

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the sense, landscape is the work of mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. (1995, p. 7)

From Schama's main point emerge two aspects of memory in landscape. First, landscape embodies memory. Based on biographical experience, he regards landscape as an autobiographical memory that contains emotional and spiritual experience, myths, imagination, absence, reality, and modern concerns. Second, memory can be altered and transmitted from the past to the present and future, which is reflected in moving time, challenging history, and the changing landscape. To emphasize the variations of landscape memory in time and space, Schama pointed out that "landscape myths and memories share two common characteristics: their surprising endurance through the centuries and their power to shape institutions that we still live with" (1995, p. 15).

Previously, in *Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory* (1975), David Lowenthal had examined the discourse of nostalgia in landscape memory. For him, the relationship between landscape and memory includes both sensation and perception in

a process by which the past was embodied in the landscapes human created. Lowenthal indicated that nostalgia connects time with place and nostalgia makes the past powerful. Lowenthal also pointed out that the formation of landscape is under the control of illusory histories, public or private tastes, and experience. This interpretation serves as a useful reminder that landscape memories are formed by the conversion from geographical space into aesthetic experience. Such a process involves the transfer of the “physiological mechanisms of sight” to “moods, emotions, and meanings” (Collinson, 1992, p. 111). Therefore, the key point to understanding landscape memory is to be aware of the transformation from the physical to the mental.

Since memory exists in landscape through physical symbols, such as buildings, textures of land, and ruins, a memory of a landscape can be activated by personal thoughts and feelings. The relationship between landscape and memory is the transformation of emotion and experience. Especially in the face of rapid landscape changes in China, landscape itself is a storage of memory that allow people to read, identify, and interpret the factors of past, culture, nature, society, personality, and perception. As Ken Taylor said, “landscape is a cultural construct, a mirror of our memories and myths encoded with meanings which can be read and interpreted” (2008, p. 2). In this context, this research regards landscape as a site of memory.

Place and Space

Place and space have traditionally informed the study of landscapes in geography and other disciplines (Agnew, 2011; Hirsch & Hanlon, 1995; Hunziker, Buchecker, & Hartig, 2007; Tuan, 1974). As stated by Yi-Fu Tuan, “space and place together define the nature of geography. Spatial analysis or the explanation of spatial organization is at the forefront of geographical research” (1974, p. 387). Eric Hirsch

also expressed that the examination of landscape cannot be isolated from the concepts of “place and space, inside and outside, image and representation” (1995, p. 4).

However, in photography, *place* and *space* have generally been considered synonyms by photographers: “in some situations one would apply one rather than the other” (Gelder & Westgeest, 2011, p. 113). Only a few scholars have defined the terms and their relationship clearly in the discussion of landscape photography. For example, Liz Wells (2011) has stated that space is rendered in place through photographic representation. Exploring this theoretical approach, Wells has discussed the expression of memory in landscape photography through the concern of time and space.

In order to enhance the understanding of landscape in photography and to interpret the spatial experiences of the artists, it is necessary to review the terms of *place* and *space*. In this study, three primary meanings of *place* and *space* are concerned. The simplest meaning of *place* and *space* refers to a location, the second refers to the experience of human subjects at that location, and the third involves the emotional and mental connection to that location. The terms of *place* and *space* and their relationship will be used to examine considerations involved in the artists’ practices. In examining the aspects of place and space, this study comes to the conclusion that the examination of memory representation in landscape photography benefits from the interaction between place and space.

In the first sense, place is a concrete and geographical location; space is abstract and made up of places (Agnew, 2011). The first sense of place and space implies that place and space are interlaced. As Tuan (1974) pointed out in the analysis of location, place is subsumed under the concept and analysis of space. In the use of the two terms, place often refers to the past and, therefore, nostalgia; space relates to the present and future and, therefore, is progressive (Agnew, 2011; Lowenthal, 1975).

The second sense of space and place highlights social, economic, and moral relations. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974), for example, wrote that place “may be public symbols or fields of care” (p. 389) and space “provides cues for our behavior, [and] varies with the individual and cultural group” (p. 421). Henri Lefebvre (1991), meanwhile, indicated that space is a social product from everyday life, from human experience, from urban scale, and from capital. In describing people’s movement and settlement in East Java, Konstantinos Retsikas (2007) viewed place as a geographical location; importantly, it is also a context for social processes. Retsikas stated: “place is a tool of sociality... place is not where social relations simply take place, but an inherent ingredient of their modalities of actualization” (2007, pp. 971-972). All the above-mentioned scholars defined *place* and *space* in humanistic terms and reminded me that, place is a social process that is fundamental to understanding human, social experience, and knowledge of/in space.

Extending from the social aspect of space and place, the third sense refers to human emotions to space and place. In Tuan’s definition of space and place from the humanistic perspective, human emotions are shown differently in space and place. Tuan defined space as a study of “people’s spatial feelings” and ideas of experience “through sensation (feeling), perception, and conception” (1974, p. 388). Therefore, the sense of space comes from the combination of visual perception, touch, movement, and thought (Tuan, 1974). According to E. S. Casey (1997), space can be regarded as place when people “phenomenologically [link] places to selves” (p. 337). However, whereas Casey did not address the emotional component of place, Tuan noted: “places are locations in which people have long memories ... The sense of place comes from people’s moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations, through the senses of hearing, smell,

taste, and touch” (1974, p. 421). Thus, the human emotions of place refer to the sense of belonging, care, memory, and feelings.

Landscape Photography

The cultural construct of landscape and its relationship with memory help us to regard landscape as a way of seeing and thinking, thus enabling us to examine the implicit meaning of landscape-themed genres and media. Landscape photographs, in other words, often illuminate profound messages, such as a forgotten past, a special kind of culture, a history, and an identity. For example, Chapter IV’s presentation and analysis of three photographers’ works reveal their regard for landscape as a marker of human intervention, involving issues of power, culture, spirit, and history.

In *Landscape and Memory* (1995), Schama used Anselm Kiefer’s and Ansel Adams’ photographs to examine the implications of cultural landscape through the lens of photography, although most of his examples are about paintings. Furthermore, photographs regularly play a role in showing physical evidence for Schama’s arguments, such as past sceneries and portraits of painters. Schama also cited Adams’ statements on landscape and photography to support the idea that the emotional and spiritual experience of landscape is the result of human occupation. In the case of one series of Kiefer photographs, Schama asserted that Kiefer’s images were referencing Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings to express ideas about the acceptable/unacceptable German heroic and mythic tradition through the landscape. By analyzing a few examples of photographs, Schama proves the relationship between cultural landscape, memory, and photography. As he put it, the camera can “re-emerge the old culture-creatures and trail the memories of generations behind them” (1995, p. 12).

The same can be found in photography critic Wells' investigation. In the book *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (2011), Wells examined issues, representations, and idealization in landscape photography according to the concept of cultural landscape and its relationship with memory. Her arguments suggest that contemporary photographers in the West engage in the concept of cultural landscape in their practices, offering a valuable model for the study of the four artists in this dissertation. Specifically, in the chapter "Sense of Location: Topography, Journey, Memory," she explored how memory is reflected through two modes of landscape practice concerned with site and place: One is seemingly objective, such as topographic photography; the other is explicitly subjective, coming from imagination and psychological and personal issues. In addition to the memory character of landscape, Wells' debates mainly address the inseparable relationship between photography and memory, which is the stereotyped circle that this study aims to break. Instead, this study is concerned with issues of culture and the past that the four artists (Qu Yan, Yao Lu, Chen Nong, and myself) addressed in their photographs, such as preoccupations with power, cultural crisis, and nostalgia.

Yet, the concept of landscape from a cultural perspective and its character of memory is Western-centered and thus problematic in a Chinese context, especially in terms of its scientific and dispassionate attitude (Han, 2004). Scholar Feng Han has identified eight characteristics of the traditional Chinese view of landscape as distinct from the Western view and noted: "landscape is traditionally moral- and aesthetic-centered in China" (2004, p. 2). Sheldon H. Lu, summarizing the dominant tradition of the human-nature relation, said: "ancient Chinese cosmology and ethics are largely centered on the notions of 天人合一 (the unity of Heaven and humanity), and 天人感应 (spiritual correspondence between Heaven and humanity)" (2009, p. 3). Both of them

have argued that landscape as a cultural construction is deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese views of nature, and landscape embraces spirituality, tradition, and emotion.

The Chinese views of the human-nature relationship remind me that the deficient understanding of the cultural dimension of landscape in Chinese photography may be derived, at least partly, from Chinese photographers' inadequate considerations of the Western term *cultural landscape*, which conflicts with their interest in traditional Chinese views of the landscape. Hence, when landscape is a subject in photographic art specifically, the difference between the Western concept and the Chinese concept is more apparent, as demonstrated by the different meanings and aesthetics of the term *landscape photography* in China. When examining the etymology of the English word *landscape* in conjunction with Chinese dictionaries, the Chinese covers three descriptive terms: 风光 (*fēng guāng*; fengguang), 风景 (*fēng jǐng*; fengjing), and 景观 (*jǐng guān*; jingguan).⁶ For me, each of these descriptions is aligned with one of the aesthetics of landscape photography: the naturalistic landscape, the imagery of landscape, and the critique of landscape.

As early as the 19th century, the objective of the genre of 风光摄影 (*fēng guāng shè yǐng*; fengguang photography) was to produce a picture that realistically highlights the naturalness of the image and therefore required eye-catching scenery (Stillfried, 1884). Photographs of this genre contain all the elements of natural and rural scenery, such as mountains, rivers, flowers, trees, buildings, and natural phenomena (rain and snow). This style can be widely found in the early photographic market, such as the 19th-century photographs of the Tung Hing Studio (see Figure 7). In general, the

⁶ The Chinese definition of *landscape* may be found in dictionaries such as the *New Chinese Dictionary* (Commercial Press) and the *Oxford English Chinese Dictionary* (Oxford University Press).

compositions are simple and formal, with few or no human figures, as well as fine light and shadow; and the prints are sharply focused.

Because of the physical reality of fengguang photographs and because the landscapes they depicted have since been transformed, these photographic records have become important material in learning about and studying 19th-century China. When China was forced to open its doors in the 1830s, groups of foreigners arrived and began taking photographs in their spare time with varied motivations (e.g., travel, commercial needs, military needs, geographical exploration). These Westerners trained the first generation of Chinese photographers, who began to photograph landscapes and export them to other countries to the profit of their commercial photographic studios. Both Western and Chinese photographers recorded the geographic appearance and cultural characteristics of China and the life and traditional occupations of Chinese people. The circulated foreigners' photographs often provide more information than those of Chinese photographers who overlooked their too-familiar natural environment and everyday life. All these geographic images of land produced by foreigners and Chinese play an important role in the study of the imperial or colonial history in China by historians, sociologists, humanists, and artists, which may also contribute to the discourse of cultural memory. However, this research does not include landscape photographs of the 19th century as its focus is on contemporary photography.

Fengguang photography of the 20th century to the present has appeared in major photography competitions and festivals as a category, prompting creative enthusiasm for amateurs, beginners, and professionals alike. Fengguang photographs of this era emphasize basic principles of photography, such as mastery of light, advanced composition, sharp contrast, and explicit details. Photographers create fengguang photographs to appreciate the geographical conditions, the magnificence of nature, and

the modernization of cities but do not discover issues or head to questions behind the surface topography. Thus, these naturalistic photographs are not in the interest of this research because of their quality of mechanical record.

Figure 7. Tien-chu-feng. (1860-1870s). Untitled image from *Album of Bohea or Wu-e Photographic Views*, Tung Hing Studio (Chinese, active 1860-1880s), albumen silver print. Retrieved from the Getty Research Institute, 2003, R.23.39.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the genre of 风景摄影 (*fēng jǐng shè yǐng*; fengjing photography) emerged in China. Having adapted and transformed ideas of landscape studies and landscape painting, Chinese landscape photographers began to respond to the relationship between landscape and human and to integrate personal emotion into scenes. Literally, the term 风景 (*fēng jǐng*) contains simultaneously the connotations of objective scene (e.g., mountains, monuments, and buildings), subjective sense (e.g., sight, hearing, smell, taste, and imagination), and condition (e.g., culture, economy, and technology). Combining all these elements, photographers of this genre

pay attention to artistic and personal expression, aiming to arouse people's appreciation of the scene under certain conditions of the landscape. Chinese photographers represent landscape in photography while imitating the themes and thoughts of traditional Chinese painting, such as the concepts of 如画 (*rú huà*; picture-like), 境 (*jìng*; iconic view), 文人学士 (*wén rén xué shì*; literati taste), and the subjects of “听涛图” (*tīng tāo tú*; listen to the waves) and “观瀑图” (*guān pù tú*; view the waterfall) (Zhao, 2013).

In the field of fengjing photography, Lang Jingshan is the most renowned Chinese photographer. He produced painting-like landscape photographs that referenced Xie He's 六法, *Six Canons of Chinese Painting* (see Figure 8).⁷ Based on his memory, imagination, and personal interpretation, Lang combined various parts of different negatives by printing them together on the same sheet of photographic paper (Jingshan, 1942; Lai, 2000). In the 1930s, Lang's landscape photographs came to be termed as pictorial photography or 集锦摄影 (*jǐ jīn shè yǐng*; composite photography) and served as inspiration for future photographers. Photographs of this genre express beautiful and natural scenery but no interest in ruins, sites of destruction, or the sociocultural implications of landscapes.

Contemporary photographers such as Yao Lu have continued along Lang's path, further combining the elements of Chinese ink painting and Chinese philosophy to

⁷ The six canons as set out by Xie He are 经营位置, *jīngyíng weizhi* (premeditated design and composition of the painting), 传移摹写, *chuānmó yíxiě* (modeling on classical patterns by clever translation), 应物象形, *yīngwù xiàngxíng* (accurate conformation in shape with the objects depicted), 气韵生动 *qìyùn shēngdòng* (rhythmic vitalization of the painted subject matter), 骨法用笔, *gūfǎ yǔnbǐ* (use of the brush to form anatomical structure), and 随类赋彩, *suílei fùcǎi* (glazing of the objects to show their appropriate colors).

express metaphor and personal feelings (Wu, 2011). They aim to increase the painting-like effect and enhance the subjectivity via unique photographic rules. Yet, unlike early-20th-century photographers, they question societal problems through their landscape photographs.

Figure 8. Lang Jingshan. (1956). 仙山楼阁, *Fairyland*. Retrieved from Long Chin-Shan Art & Culture Association.

Since the 21st century, 景观摄影 (*jǐng guān shè yǐng*; jingguan photography) has rapidly emerged as the most significant and prevalent photographic genre and has appeared in major exhibitions on current landscapes in China. Jingguan photography, also known as spectacle photography, regards manufactured landscapes as subjects (e.g., urban or rural transformation, ruins, and industrial buildings) and examines political and power issues in society (Meng, 2010; Rong, 2011). First introduced by curator Cai Meng

in 2007, spectacle photography combines part of Guy Debord's concept of a "society of the spectacle" with the photographic approaches of German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher. Photographs of this genre follow the method of being objective and deadpan, insisting on the aesthetics of stillness and neutrality and applying a unified composition and light. Examples of such landscape works in China include Zeng Li's *Photographs of Beijing* (1997-2008), Mu Chen and Shao Yinong's *Assembly Halls* (2003), Luo Yongjin's *Fort Houses* (2005), Qu Yan's *Space Series* (2005-2008), Wang Guofeng's *Ideality* (2007), Zeng Han's *Hyperreality China* (2005-ongoing), and Ao Guoxing's *Ode of Happiness* (2012).

Regarding the subjects of ruins, urbanization and modernization in China, photographers follow the dogmatic methodology of spectacle photography, which is problematic and uncritical. Nevertheless, the concept of spectacle photography indeed brings the notion of sociocultural landscape from the West into Chinese photography. Among the above photographers, Qu Yan is one of the first artists to criticize issues of power and culture in spaces, making his work stand out and therefore meriting discussion in this research (see Figure 9).

In this study, the cultural dimension of landscape provides a theoretical framework for understanding the photographers' works. In their photographs, landscape is a process through which the social is formed. In other words, landscape is regarded as a means to represent land, culture, history, and emotion in photography. Since human activities are the main concern of the theory, memory inevitably exists with landscape. When the landscape is destroyed, humans lose living memories and culture; as a result, a new memory is created through photography and visual media. Expanding on the above explanations of landscape, it can be argued that landscape photography offers a

way to ritualize and memorialize landscapes. Landscape photography is also best understood as a medium and a representation of meanings and values in its own right.

Figure 9. Qu Yan. (2008). 江苏省徐州市云龙区翠萍乡乔家湖村教堂, *Church in Qiaojiahu Village, Town of Cuiping, Yunlong District, Xuzhou City, Jiangsu Province*, from the *Space* project. Retrieved from The World.

Cultural Memory and Its Performance in Art

Cultural Memory

This research is premised on a general understanding of cultural memory as “the interplay of present and past in sociocultural contexts” (Erll, Nünning, & Young, 2008); from there, it examines the theoretical bases of the writings of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann and other relevant literature in order to analyze the selected artists’ works and to guide the investigations of my two bodies of works created for this study. The discourse of memory emerged as soon as people realized that the historical past was disappearing in developing contemporary environments (Nora, 1989; Santos, 2001). As a result, various studies have begun to discuss past, history, nostalgia, imagination, and

commemoration, and since the late 20th century, a booming research on the relationship between culture and memory in different disciplines has produced rich and multifarious discussions on cultural memory. The reason is that cultural memory is a field “to which many disciplines contribute, using their specific methodologies and perspectives” (Erll, 2008a, p. 3).

Why is memory cultural? Memory is cultural because “it can only be realized institutionally and artificially ... in relation to social communication it functions in the same way as individual memory does in relation to consciousness” (J. Assmann, 2011b, p. 9). Adopting the concept of collective memory from the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, Assmann has expanded into the realm of a theory of culture beyond the group. Halbwachs’ theory of memory is fundamental for developing and understanding cultural memory and argues that memory is social because no memory is purely individual but inherently within “frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (1992, p. 43). This means that a person’s life, emotion, and memory form themselves in a group context of communicative processes and social activities. Drawing upon Halbwachs’ collective memory, Assmann (2008) has stated that memory can be transmitted from generations, transferred from situations, or reminded by symbols (e.g., myths, writings, photographs).

Assmann defines cultural memory as follows: “a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (1995, p. 126). Based on this definition, Assmann addressed six characteristics of cultural memory: 1) Cultural memory is a group consciousness that has a common “identificatory determination” in both the positive and negative; 2) cultural memory can be reconstructed by knowledge and the contemporary situation; 3) multiple media, such

as writings, pictorial images, and ceremonials, can form the objectivation of cultural memory; 4) cultural memory can be organized through institutional communication and specialized practice; 5) cultural memory requires formative and normative knowledge to preserve and form a clear system of values; and 6) cultural memory is able to reflect in practice, to explain by itself, and to reproduce the self-image of the group.

Thus, Assmann's assertions support the view of this study that the cultural framework of memory is a collective concept under the structure of a society. What people wish to remember depends on the sociocultural context and what has been transmitted through generations, rather than physiological and psychological issues. It is fixed and organized based on objective symbols of material and cultural carriers, such as texts, images, monuments, and ceremonies (J. Assmann, 2011b) and therefore, cannot be changed with the passage of time and everyday communication. Hence, it is different from individual memory's or collective memory's characteristics, which are daily, verbal, fluid, and transient.

Based on the definitions proposed by Halbwachs and Assmann, Astrid Erll (2008a) established a framework for understanding and utilizing cultural memory from the aspects of dimensions, levels, and modes. Firstly, she presented cultural memory as an umbrella term comprising social memory (e.g., institutions, social relations, and people), material or medial memory (e.g., artifacts and media), and mental or cognitive memory (individual emotions and consciousness). Erll indicated that scholars conduct studies with the interplay of any two dimensions. Secondly, the intersection of culture and memory reflects on two levels, where memory is used as a metonymy on the one hand and a metaphor on the other. Lastly, Erll stated that there are different modes of remembering, such as myth, political history, family remembrance, and generational memory.

In the study of cultural memory, one cannot avoid discussion of the relationship between memory and history. Halbwachs insisted on a one-way sequence from memory to history, which Assmann paraphrased as follows: “the moment at which the past is no longer remembered, that is, lived, is the moment at which history begins” (J. Assmann, 2011b, p. 30; Halbwachs, 1985, p. 100). Unlike Halbwachs’ insight about the antagonistic relationship, Pierre Nora, aware of the blurring boundary between the two at present, proposed a new interpretation of memory and history in his pioneer work “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*” (1989), in direct opposition to Halbwachs:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name ... history, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. (p. 8)

From there, Nora proceeded to state that “memory has been promoted to the center of history” (1989, p. 24). In this sense, history cannot be represented due to the vague expression of memory. Nora thus presented his concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) to understand the over-determination and interaction of memory and history. For Nora, there are sites of memory in contemporary society, referring to materialized traces, recordings, archives, and images. To become such a site of memory, a material site needs imagination to form a “symbolic aura” (1989, p. 19). Materialized memory is also symbolic because events or experiences are shared with a broader community by a small minority. Therefore, memory is transformational and representational, which implies “a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the

individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to remembrance” (1989, p. 15).

The abovementioned sociological theories teach us that memory is a cultural phenomenon “subject to the vast range of historically conditioned changes” (J. Assmann, 2011b, p. 10). Cultural memory is mediated in various kinds of carriers from the past, such as myths, traditional rituals, and festivals. These symbolic and formalized memory carriers form new meanings with the changes of sociocultural context. For example, for this study, I photographed a 娘娘庙 (*niáng niáng miào*; ma zu temple) to metaphorize traditional rituals and beliefs during the 谷雨 (*gǔ yǔ*; grain rain).⁸ With a sacrifice at sea at the heart of this lunisolar festivity, grain rain is the most important and largest of the celebrations dedicated to local fishermen, dating back thousands of years. To ensure community participation, foment culture and protect the traditions of fishing villages in Shandong Province, the traditional sacrificial ceremony has been instituted as 荣成国际渔民节 (the Rongcheng International Fishermen’s Festival, formerly called 谷雨节, the Grain Rain Sea Festival), which is organized by villagers or local enterprises every three years. Rooted in the past, the festival is a symbol of memory that shows historical

⁸ Among 24 solar terms, 谷雨 (*gǔ yǔ*; grain rain) is the sixth point in the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar. Representing the final solar term in spring, grain rain begins when the Sun reaches the celestial longitude of 30°, which usually begins around the end of April. There is an old saying that “雨生百谷” (*yǔ shēng bǎi gǔ*; rain brings up the growth of hundreds of grains), which means the grain rain signals the end of cold weather and brings the rainfall essential for the growth of crops. In the coastal areas of northern China, such as in the Rongcheng area I photographed, another saying, “谷雨百鱼上岸” (*gǔ yǔ bǎi yú shàng àn*; hundreds of fishes wash up on shore during grain rain), marks the start of the local fishermen’s first voyage of the year.

ritual process and promotes tourism. It is cultural because it forms contemporary consequences through the specialized activities and organizations.

Conception of Cultural Memory in Art

Early sociological views on cultural memory were mainly based on groups, formative institutions, normative archives, history, and traditions to overcome the limits of “an individual-centered focus on remembering” (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 76). Conversely, contemporary scholars and artists are reconsidering the role of the individual, because the individual and the cultural can never be separated. For instance, both Michael Rothberg (2010) and James Young (1993) have pointed out that cultural memory “require[s] the active agency of individuals and publics” (Rothberg, 2010, p. 8). José van Dijck (2007) has undertaken specifically to examine personally-owned photos, diaries, letters, and so on in the digital age, leading him to define cultural memory as “the acts and products of remembering in which individuals engage to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and place” (p. 6).

Van Dijck’s definition of cultural memory attests to the interweaving of individual and collective remembering, reminding us that cultural memory can also be examined through experience and personal objects and not only through formative and normative carriers, as defined by Jan Assmann. Art historian Mieke Bal’s study complements Van Dijk’s definition. In 1999, Bal stated, in her introduction to *Acts of Memory*, that cultural recall is a performance and is active and therefore can connect the past to the present and the future. The abovementioned scholars have thus contributed to an understanding of memory as performative in the study of cultural memory in the contemporary and in art.

Regarding memory as a “performative act” in art, scholars Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik examined narrative forms in which art objects and artistic practices perform the past in the present, in *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (2013). Through analyses of film, photojournalism, literature, dance, and painting, the editors staged cultural memory through different narrative strategies, styles, and references, including considerations of memories of wars and the Holocaust as collective, traumatic, and embodied memories. The studied works demonstrated that narration plays a central role in cultural memory because memory “comprises not only knowledge and practical experience but also moral and aesthetic values” (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 27) and is colored with emotions, moods, and artistic reflections (Bal, 1985; Bal, Crewe, & Spitzer, 1999). In other words, a narrative is not simply about telling a story but also about understanding events, which enables humans to transmit the past, myth, and ritual to film, art, and everyday conversation and think about current lives historically (J. Assmann, 2011b; Carrithers, 1992).

In a similar vein, Jens Brockmeier stated, in the discourse of cultural memory, that narrative practices are powerful because “they combine various cultural symbol systems, integrating them within one symbolic space” (2002, p. 38) and are “a form of life evolved and culturally differentiated in intimate interweavement with human actions, emotions, and intentions” (2015, p. 14). Brockmeier distinguished three orders of narration—linguistic, semiotic, and discursive or performative—which are further discussed in the description and examination of the art-making process and works in Chapters IV and V. Brockmeier’s cultural symbol system reinforces that cultural memory is embedded in the artists’ and audiences’ interpretation because memory cannot be told by itself.

For the artists, the narrative practices of cultural memory are mainly reflected in two aspects: imagination and nostalgia. The relationship between memory and imagination has been illustrated by many scholars, such as Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering. In addressing the process of personal experience and the function of imagining, Keightley and Pickering raised the concept of mnemonic imagination:

Imagination and imaginative engagement help us integrate memories into a relatively coherent pattern of meaning that informs our sense of a life as we have lived it [and] creatively transform memory into a resource for thinking about the transactions between past, present, and future. (2012, p. 1)

Imagination is a form of narration, which is necessary in thinking about the past. Imagination has the “capacity to move from one perspective to another, to alternate between individual and collective forms of experience and aspects of social and historical life into relationship with each other” (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 2). The analysis of the selected artists’ works discloses that the artists evoked imagination when understanding and portraying past events or historical landscapes. Especially in my own body of work, I required imagination to connect a past with an individual experience in the present, which enabled me to understand the history and culture of the seaweed houses.

The concern of nostalgia is particularly central to this study because of the sociocultural context of this study and the artists’ works. Nostalgia has become one of the most important cultural realities of contemporary China since the 2000s under the prevalence of Western culture, the construction of urban spaces, and the development of mass media (Jinhua, 1997; Wang, 2004). Art both shapes and draws from nostalgia (Davis, 1979). Nostalgia is a form of remembering, which is a “necessary spiritual space

for imagining and for consolation” (Jinhua, 1997, p. 147). Nostalgia is a combination of remembrance, experience, past, and present reflected in three discrete meanings. The first is linked to homesickness; the second refers to a sense of loss and a longing for the past; and the third becomes a reflective process (Jinhua, 1997; Keightley & Pickering, 2012; Legg, 2004). Within all these meanings, nostalgia requires “a sense of estrangement; the object of the quest must be anachronistic” (Lowenthal, 1975, p. 4).

To conclude, in this dissertation, cultural memory is addressed as a pattern of individual recollection, collective consciousness, sociocultural context, and materialized evidence to understand the past and changes and to reflect on the situation of urbanization (demolition and displacement of the landscape). It is not only a past experience or personal feeling but also an active process that can be reconstructed in contemporary situations by different organizational and artistic practices, including monuments, heritage sites, and even photography. By associating this pattern with photographic practices, this study suggests that the representation of cultural memory in photography requires artists’ in-depth investigation of society, examination of changing landscapes, and interpretation of the past.

Embodiment of Cultural Memory in Landscape Photography

Photography and Memory

Photography has always been regarded as a device of visual memory. As early as 1859, the philosopher O. W. Holmes called photography “a new technology as a mirror with a memory” (p. 2). Art historian Jacques Le Goff also regarded photography as the most important technological invention for industrializing visual memory in his book *History and Memory* (1992). The memory of photography has been discussed mainly through two perspectives: historical representation and mental reflection.

Historical representation means that photography can record the past and becomes evidence for the future. On this matter, David Bate (2010) began with psychologist Sigmund Freud's concept of natural memory and artificial memory and pointed out that photography is a technological transformation of the psyche. Through analysis and comparison of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Le Goff, Bate examined the idea of forgetting, remembering, and the ideology of memory in photography. He concluded:

With photographs, memory is both fixed and fluid: social and personal. There is nothing neutral here. As sites of memory, photographic images offer not a view on history but, as mnemonic devices, are perceptual phenomena upon which a historical representation may be constructed ... in terms of history and memory, photographs demand analysis rather than hypnotic reverie. (2010, p. 255)

Bate's statement shows that the photograph itself is a tool and process to arouse memory but cannot narrate and save memory by itself. In this regard, sociocultural histories lying under the surface of photographs can be interpreted, just as Annette Kuhn mapped the historical and memorial function of photography under the social and cultural environment. In "Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration" (2007), through the analysis of one Chinese family photograph from the 1980s, Kuhn carried out the four procedures to examine memory embedded in photographs, including human subjects, the context of production (where, when, and why), the context of image (technologies and aesthetics), and the photograph's currency. Her research supported the belief that photographs could make memories tangible via the figures in the photographs, the stories in the archives, and the faded surface of the

photographs. Hence, to the contrary, memory can be systematically investigated via the researcher's attitude and practitioner's insight.

Martha Langford, instead, focused on the mental reflection perspective in the contextualization of photographs, because "memory can only be felt as a mode of consciousness vying with the merely visible for mental ascendance, for attention" (2007, p. 9). Langford studied how various modes of memory translated into photographic images. Langford emphasized that photography did not constitute memory, but rather photographers conveyed memories through their artworks:

Photographs bring visions of the past into the present. In that respect, they are felt to be like memories, though no sane person would think they were the same. Memories are neither recorded nor preserved by photographic technology. They are, however, expressed and activated by photographic works of art. (2007, p. 3)

For Langford, memory work is autobiographical in photography, which is the limitation this study intends to explore. In the representation of cultural memory via photography, this study believes that the memory of photography contains both objective and subjective consciousness; that is, photographs are the reflexivity of social reality evidenced in a certain context.

Cultural Memory in Photography

The above literature review seeks to examine how photographers utilize images as a way to represent memory. Furthermore, photographers' and art critics' exploration of memory participates within the growing interest in cultural memory since the late 20th century. Most of the photographs that are discussed in relation to cultural memory are historical ones.

Art historian Aby Warburg regarded images as “cultural objectifications, as carriers of memory” (as cited in Ginzburg, 1983, p. 115). He considered images as iconic memory that regarded “the approach to the reception of history as a form of cultural memory” (Meusburger, Heffernan, & Wunder, 2011, p. 24). Scholars Annette Kuhn and Kirsten McAllister applied cultural memory to film and photography in *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* (2006). The coeditors questioned the analysis of cultural memory in photographs in the following words:

In seeming to capture times and places lost in the past, the photograph can disturb the present moment and the contemporary landscape with troubling or nostalgic memories and with forgotten, or all too vividly remembered, histories. (2006, p. 1)

The authors explored various issues around memory and photography, including forgetting, identity, the postcolonial, history, post-memory, and dreams. Some of the essays, such as Andrea Walsh’s “Re-placing History” and Elizabeth Edwards’ “Photography, ‘Englishness’ and Collective Memory,” explored the issues of photography, memory and social landscape. The featured photographs are documentary and postcolonial and thus contain a strong historical value. Meanwhile, essays like Kirsten McAllister’s “A Story of Escape” and Martha Langford’s “Speaking the Album” were based on study of archive photographs and family photo albums to discover collective memory and their relation to the contemporary public sphere. “Talking Through,” by Jerry Zaslove and Glen Lowry, was the only one in the compilation to focus on the contemporary photography of Canadian artist Jeff Wall as a mean to explore memory and photography. Their contributions drew upon Wall’s modernism and the relationship between the spectator’s life and representation. The book explored

the representation of cultural memory in photography and the visual arts; however, cultural memory was discussed mainly through the analysis of historical photographs, war photographs, documentary photographs, and archives and thus lacked exploration in contemporary photography.

The analysis of historical photographs helps extend and deepen our understanding of past events and sociocultural backgrounds. Yet, such an approach limits the way we understand cultural memory in the present or the future, especially in the age of photography as a form of art. Current approaches also do not appear to include the characteristics of cultural memory that attract photographers' attention and can be reconstructed in contemporary photographic art.

Furthermore, they overlook the apparently growing interest in the studies of memory or cultural memory not only in academia but also in artistic creation, including photography. The latter is suggested by several significant photography festivals, international exhibitions, and competitions that have been organized under the theme of memory, such as *Reframing Memory* at the 2015 Athens Photo Festival⁹ and *Exchange: Women, Migration and Memory* at the 2015 Liverpool International Photography Festival.¹⁰ Such events heighten the value of this research in re-examining the notion of cultural memory and its representations in contemporary photography. This increased interest is inspired by changes in the social environment, the economic market, and the

⁹ Founded in 1987, the Athens Photo Festival is an international festival of photography held in Athens, Greece. From June to July 2015, the festival selected 76 artists to explore memory, time, and identity in photography, multimedia projects, and photo books.

¹⁰ The Liverpool International Photography Festival is a biennial festival founded in 2013 in Liverpool, England. From May 15 to 31, 2015, the festival examined three subjects in photography: women, migration, and memory.

political system since the 20th century. As a result, memory, in general, is regarded as a way to understand the past, shape identities, navigate the present, and establish new meanings.

The Emergence of Cultural Memory in Chinese Contemporary Photography

There is a popular saying in China that asserts that contemporary China is a society without memory. It stems from the massive construction of new societies and demolition of the old happening across the country. As Sheldon Lu put it, “*Chai-na* is indeed the proper name for contemporary China” (2007, p. 137). *Chai-na* translated from the Chinese phonics of its name in English means “tearing down.” In other words, it now literally encapsulates the circumstances of landscape changes in China, where old houses are pulled down every day and traditional landscapes are transformed into modern commercial centers. Because memory is site-specific, the disappearance of old landscapes has therefore caused the loss of memory. These situations offer an opportunity for Chinese photographers to question realities, record changes, portray stories, and express feelings.

Increasingly, photographers are creating works based on landscape changes due to rapid economic growth. Some of the works criticize the negative consequences, such as Jiang Pengyi’s *All Back to Dust* (2006), Yao Lu’s *New Landscapes* (2006), and Yang Yongliang’s *Phantom Landscape* (2006-2007). Some of the works express the homogenization of new structures, such as Qiu Zhijie’s *The Dream* (2007). Others focus on demolished places to express nostalgia, childhood/individual memory, and identity. These demolished sites range from the photographers’ hometowns to significant social projects and villages, with some examples including Mu Chen and Shao Yinong’s *Assembly Hall* (2003), Wei Bi’s *Meng Xi* (2008-2010), Zhang Kechun’s *Yellow River*

(2010-2013), and Hu Jieming's *Son* (2008). Photographic studies like Zhang Xiao's *Shan Xi* (2007–present) and my *Seaweed House Project* (2007–present) document threatened traditional cultures and heritage landscapes in China. Photographs such as those from Qu Yan's *Space* series question issues of power and crisis under the development of society. Other photographers reconstruct demolished sites, past events, or the landscape changes via staged photographs or moving images, such as Chen Nong's *Three Gorges* (2006), Wang Qingsong's *Dream of Migrants* (2005), Jiang Pengyi's *Unregistered City* (2008), Zhang Peili's *A Gust of Wind* (2008), and Chen Qiulin's *The Garden* (2006-2008). These photographic projects provide a general illustration of Chinese photography in this new century focusing on destruction and construction and making it increasingly evident that China's transformation is becoming a central theme in Chinese photographic arts to represent memory.

Since 2000, exhibitions, books, and competitions have begun to provide forums for photographic projects on the theme of transformation and memory. Significantly, shortly after China's Olympics, Mark H. C. Bessire and Raechell Smith curated the exhibition *Stairway to Heaven: From Chinese Streets to Monuments and Skyscrapers* (2009) in Kansas, which aimed to explore the unprecedented transformation of Chinese cities through the works of 18 Chinese artists, such as Gu Zheng, Xu Ying, and Luo Yongjin. The exhibition addressed issues of urbanization, history, and memory. Published in 2015, Jiang Jiehong's book *An Era Without Memories: Chinese Contemporary Photography on Urban Transformation* summarized Chinese photographers with works from the late 20th century into the 21st and explored demolition and construction in Chinese urban development. Although Jiang mentioned the notion of memory in the last chapter, he seemed to focus on individual memory

instead of memory from a cultural perspective, as he had proposed in the introduction of the book.

Gu Zheng (2009) and Chen Jianzhong (2013) also addressed the theme of memory in Chinese photography, however in short essays. Both discussed memory from the perspective of time and space, the disappearance of tradition, and personal recollections. Nevertheless, they did not consider cultural memory. Art historian Wu Hung first addressed cultural memory in his book *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (2012), where he considered Chinese ruins as vehicles for cultural memory in Chinese art and visual culture, including photography. According to Wu, *ruins* corresponds to 废墟 (*fèi xū*) and 遗迹 (*yí jì*), which “define a site of memory from opposite directions” (2012, p. 63). Therefore, ruins not only represent negative histories but also signify hope, rebirth, and the memory of yesterday. His ideas on the aesthetic of ruins and their representation in visual arts remind us that when photographing destroyed buildings, discarded objects, and transformed sites like the seaweed houses, there is an interaction that emerges between the photographer and the landscape, between destruction and construction, and between historical experience and current conditions.

In general, memory is becoming a major topic in contemporary landscape photography under the influence of China’s contemporary social changes, yet when combining a changed landscape with memory, Chinese photographers and scholars have not made in-depth explorations into cultural memory and its implication in contemporary photography. Despite this idea of cultural memory going unexpressed, I would argue that their works may be regarded as representations of cultural memory owing to their specific subjects, objects, and contexts. Cultural memory is a problematic construct that contains both the factors of individual and collective memory and the

sociocultural phenomenon. Therefore, dealing with issues of cultural memory can produce various meanings and reflections.

Diversity of Approaches, Styles, and Methods

Three Modes of Memory Representation

Current modes of memory-related landscape photographs suggest some ways to work with the challenges of reconstructing cultural memory encountered in my practice. This study considers photographs to be part of the shared history, experience, imagination, and personal observation that are created by photographers to communicate and negotiate with others. Based on the relationship between landscape, memory, and photography analyzed above, the representation of memory in current landscape photographs may be classified into three modes: 1) the tracking of time and space, 2) topographical intimacy, and 3) the personal expression of emotion.

Photographs belonging to the first mode remind viewers of what happened to the landscape and the differences between the past and the present. Artists may document topographical changes at the same place at different times as the tracking of time and space, such as Thaddeus Holownia's *Rockland Bridge (1981-2000)*. My early works of the *Seaweed House Project (2007–present)* are examples of this first mode as well. Figure 10, for example, consists of two images, one shot in 2007 and the other in 2013, when I returned to the same place to record changes in the landscape. But, instead of showing all the photographs taken of the same spot between 2007 and 2013, I chose two photographs that show obvious changes during these years. As a result, this and other landscape photographs of mine can be regarded as witnesses to landscape transformation. These altered symbolic marks, details, and characteristics of the landscape trigger the viewers' consciousness of the passage of time, imagination,

recollection, and conscious and unconscious repetition of the photographers' landscape memories. As artist Lyle Gomes, who dealt with the memory connection in the exhibition *Imaging Eden: Connecting Landscape*, has said, "These are landscapes that have been shaped by others in the past but that await our presence in the future. These sites were created for reflection, contemplation and renewal" (2007, p. 1). At this point, the photographs of the topographical changes of landscape "carr[y] us backward in time; spatial and temporal distances are thus metaphorically combined" (Langford, 2007, p. 150).

Figure 10. Liu Yajing. (2008-2012). Untitled. Silver gelatin print.

The second mode, referred to as topographical intimacy, addresses the context of location, experience, and history. The concept of topographical intimacy comes from Lucy Lippard's "senses of place" (1997), meaning the layering of experience that "occurs when one lives in a place for a long time and becomes intimate with it through long usage and passage" (Allnutt, 2009, p. 4). Within this mode, artworks are created based on the relationship between photographer and landscape. Susann Allnutt (2009) identified two aspects: One is an autobiographical expression involving nostalgia and

personal connections to the place and the other is a geographical exploration of unfamiliar public spaces.

Wang Bo's 异质景观, *Heteroscapes* (2010) is an example of this approach, created based on the photographer's intimate relationship with place. *Heteroscapes* portrays the landscapes of his hometown, Chongqing, in a period of transition (see Figure 11). The *Heteroscapes* is a reflection and reexamination of his memory of growing up—not only about individual memory but also collective and socio-cultural memory (Wang, 2016). Wang left Chongqing for university in 2000. In 2009, he returned from the United States and was surprised by the contemporary urban changes of his hometown. He felt strange when he failed to find places from his childhood memory, such as the playground he used to go to. Therefore, he decided to explore Chongqing and photograph the traces of urban transformation and the hidden changes of society. While wandering in the city taking photographs, Wang recalled his individual memory and imagination in order to examine the past of the place (Wang, personal communication, November 20, 2016). Some of these photographs are full of conflict and show the contrast between ruined sites and modern constructions and between traditional rural culture and modern urban civilization. Others are picturesque, a reminder that the scenery in the photographs is artificially constructed. Still others show old-style living sites that seem nostalgic and sad. Wang's images represent a conjunction that is embodied in the conflict and distance between what he remembers and what he sees. As a result, these images display a complicated reality and chaos that exist in urban spaces of modern-day China.

Figure 11. Wang Bo. (2010). 异质景观, *Heteroscapes*. Retrieved from <http://www.bowang.net/heterostm.html>.

The third mode involves personal reflection and meditation in landscape photographs, which is similar to the art theorist Jill Bennett's concept of sense-memory (2003). In this mode, artists can empathize with landscapes and nonlinguistic forms of knowing and feeling to evoke imagination, empathy and impression. The perceptual emotion and imagination of the viewer may be stimulated by an uncertain atmosphere and feeling. As a result, artists tend to create the illusion of a fairy-tale space. Photographs in this mode share mysterious stories or merely personal emotions. To understand the photographs, viewers must immerse themselves in the photographs to feel and experience the past, or even to guess the story, culture, or history of the landscape.

Liu Xiaofang's 我记得II, *I Remember II* creates a mysterious and poetic atmosphere that allows viewers' meditation on past (see Figure 12). In *I Remember II*, Liu aimed to convey the "infinite beauty, 天地有大美而不言 (nature has its own great

beauty, yet does not speak of it)", one of the earliest and greatest traditional Chinese aesthetic thoughts raised by philosopher Zhuang Zi (Liu, 2012, p. 78). To express the conception of beauty, Liu arranged a large area of sky, ground, and sea in photographs to create a feeling of emptiness, resembling the 留白 (*liú bái*; empty space) in Chinese paintings. However, the traditional harmony between human and nature has been replaced by the industrial civilization, as represented by the weapon and aero plane in the images. When noticing the conflict between traditional Chinese culture and rapidly developing society, audiences are able to arouse a sentimental feeling brought by old traditions passed away and new things has come.

Besides, each image of the series features a little girl wearing a red scarf. The red scarf is a memory belonging to the generation born in the 1980s (and later) in mainland China when the neck accessory was instituted as part of the daily primary school uniform. Every member of the so-called post-80s group, invariably used the red scarf every school day. The post-80s group is also inevitable associated with the reformist era under China underwent rapid economic and social development. When viewing Liu's images, audiences are able to recall the past and meditate on surrealistic scenes in a poetic way by imagining themselves in the lyrical and false space surrounded by sea, sky, and cloud.

Figure 12. Liu Xiaofang. (2012). *我记得 II, I Remember II*. Retrieved from 798 Gallery, Beijing.

Hand-Coloring of Photography in China

In terms of memory performance, this research examines hand-coloring as a viable way to recall the past and reflect on personal attitudes or feelings after the photo shoot. Previous studies have explored hand-coloring, referring to adding colors to monochromatic photographs, as a technique. However, with the revival of cross-media creation in contemporary photography, I believe hand-coloring has emerged as an artistic method that offers distinctive visual effects. In order to examine contemporary hand-colored photographs, it is essential to review the history and traditional styles of hand-coloring in photography.

History of hand-coloring in China. When the invention of photography was announced in France in 1839, the daguerreotype process produced only black-and-white photographs. Indeed, owing to their lack of color, the daguerreotype images

disappointed the public (Edwards, 2003; Newhall, 1961). In order to remedy this perceived shortcoming, experiments with different techniques of hand-coloring followed soon after the advent of the daguerreotype process. Various photographers, painters, and scientists tried their hand; for instance, Swiss painter Johann Baptist Isenring mixed pigments with gum arabic to apply to the plate, and British photographer Robert Hunt colored images with silver nitrate, while fellow colleague and countryman Richard Beard recommended silk and satin colors (Claudet, 2008; Hannavy, 2008; Hunt, 1841).

In China, the development of photography is inseparable from the social environment. Hand-coloring of photography in China similarly must be examined in the context of history. With China's doors being forced open after the First Opium War (1839-1842), a growing number of foreign government officials, merchants, painters, and amateur photographers arrived in China, including Felice Beato, William Saunders, and Milton Miller. In their spare time, they produced daguerreotype plates, opened photographic studios, hired Chinese artists, and trained the first generation of Chinese commercial photographers (T. Bennett, 2009; Lai, 2011). The earliest evidence of a photographic studio with hand-coloring services in China dates to the 1840s, found in an advertisement stating "Hong Kong and China's color and black-white photos for sale" (Yunzeng, Shen, Zhichuan, Zhangbiao, & Yongxiang, 1987, p. 28).

The boom for photographic studios owned by Chinese photographers began in the early 1860s. Many of them were originally artists and painters who made export watercolors for visitors and residents but showed great interest in the photographic techniques (T. Bennett, 2013; Lai, 2011). They learned photography with foreign photographers or worked as assistants in the Western studios, then went on to offer photography services in their own studios, including hand-coloring (T. Bennett, 2013).

They expanded their businesses to the treaty ports in China by providing services for hand-coloring on ivory, canvas, or other materials (T. Bennett, 2013; Roberts, 2013). They also established assembly-line production, involving a number of painters simultaneously working in the process of hand-coloring images (Thomson, 1875).

Early hand-coloring destroyed and covered the photographic virtues of plates due to limitations of the methods employed (Ruggles, 1985), as evidenced in the case of the first recognizably Chinese hand-colored daguerreotype image, *Portrait of Senggelingqin (also called Portrait of General Ko-Lin)* (1853, 6.4 × 4.6cm) (see Figure 13), taken by photographer Lai Chong, in which the color added to the image was rough and bright. The texture of the brushes and pigments used can easily be recognized as obscuring the original details of the photographic surface. Despite imperfect color expression, hand-colored portrait photographs were regarded as a status symbol before the 1860s due to its high cost (Johnston, 2004). When photographers began to draw lessons from paintings, the popular success of hand-coloring was sealed.

Figure 13. Lai Chong. (1853). *Portrait of General Ko-Lin*. 1853. Daguerreotype, hand-colored, 6.4 x 4.6cm. From the Multimedia Learning Center, Northwestern University.

Despite having learned their craft from and applying the same methods of hand-coloring as Westerners, Chinese photographers, their images and the artistic value of Chinese photography received negligible recognition within the Occidental community (T. Bennett, 2009; Griffith, 1875). Until the 1870s, Chinese photographer Liang Shitai (also known as See-Tay) was favored by the Qing court and foreign officials for his aesthetic of traditional Oriental ideas and the careful arrangement of objects in his studio. His best-known hand-colored albumen print was the *Portrait of Li Hongzhang* (1878-1879) (see Figure 14), in which the color applied was detailed, rich, and natural. Shitai used transparent watercolors in order to retain the details of the original print and produce a realistic image. The bright watercolors were diluted with the black surface so that the image produced a gray tone, as well as a thin and light color effect, as in a painting. The only imperfection of this portrait is the color used for the chair and table: The orange-red of the chair and the table is too heavy, obscuring details and losing the three-dimensional effect. This technical defect aside, Shitai's style was popular among both Chinese and Western officials, who wanted their portraits to be taken by him (Roberts, 2013).

Unfortunately, few hand-colored photographs produced by Chinese photographers remain preserved owing to war, so little is known about the photographers, colorists, pigments, and training methods. Indeed, because of the difficulty of gathering evidence, hand-colored photography was largely ignored and eventually lost its value in the art of photography. Hand-coloring and hand-colored photographs were given only cursory mention in the history of Chinese photography.

Figure 14. Liang Shitai. (1878-1879). *Portrait of Li Hongzhang*. From Open Content Program, J. Paul Getty Museum.

Early artistic value of hand-coloring of photography. In early photography, the camera recorded the truthfulness of the subject due to its mechanical value except in one significant way: the color. Therefore, the critical concern of hand-coloring of photography in early times was strictly a matter of color, desiring no alterations to the hues. In order to truthfully describe subject with colors truthfully, professional colorists established a set of hand-coloring guidelines, as in *A Manual of Artistic Coloring as Applied to Photographs: A Practical Guide*, for colorists, students, and artists who wished to try “photographic painting as a recreation and accomplishment” (Ayres, 1883, p. viii). This was still the case when I studied hand-coloring with the Chinese master colorist Xu Cuilan. I followed her instructions to achieve a good result in hand-coloring regarding the preparation of the cotton, the first application of paper, and the choice of paper, palette, and brushes. Moreover, I was counseled in general coloring techniques.

For example, a blue sky should be painted in horizontal directions, blue should be used as the base color, violet or viridian should be added near the horizon (to mix with subject colors near the horizon), and bright blue should be mixed in-between.

Thus, photographers and colorists created realistic hand-colored photographs in the late 19th century (Ruggles, 1985). The realism of hand-colored photography was achieved in two ways. Firstly, the original surface of images and the objects in the picture were kept visible by applying transparent colors, as Ann-Sophie Lehmann points out: “the authenticity of color resided in the transparency of the aniline dyes that allowed for the objects in the picture to remain visible underneath the film of colorant” (2015, p. 91). To distinguish hand-colored photographs from paintings, the transparency of watercolors, oil pigments, and dyes was essential for the hand-coloring of photographs.

Secondly, colors were added according to the natural characteristic of the subjects and the knowledge of painting rules. In the 19th century, colorists would have been required to attend the photo shoot to observe the subject’s characteristics, for example, eye color, details of jewelry, colors of skirt buttons or a bow tie, and so on. Otherwise, if unable to attend, colorists would get the necessary information about the subject from the photographer and client (Henisch & Henisch, 1996; Ruggles, 1985). Or, as Chinese master colorist Xu Cuilan recalls, colorists would paint images purely according to personal taste of beauty and knowledge of art.

In general, the perfection of hand-coloring of photography lay “in its correct likeness” (Ayres, 1883, p.22). As Cromwell said, according to Ayres, “Paint me as I am: warts, wrinkles, and all!” (1883, p. 24). The peak years for the hand-coloring of photographs, between 1915 and 1925, are linked to the maturity of the hand-coloring skills and the reduction of the costs associated with the hand-coloring process (Ivankovich & Ivankovich, 2005). Despite its popularity, hand-colored photographs

have never been recognized as works of art, and the “genre itself has not been noticeably honored in the history of photography” (Henisch & Henisch, 1996, p. 211).

Until the late 19th century, painted photographs were refused by art exhibitions and photography exhibitions. Alfred H. Wall pointed out with regret that “colored photographs occupy an undeservedly questionable situation: the artist curls his lip at them, because, as he says, they are not paintings; and the photographer sneers at them, because, as he says, they are not photographs” (1861, p. 3). For Wall, artistically-painted photographs combined the truthfulness of photography and the great artistic value of painting. He apparently was not alone in his appreciation; an anonymous letter published in the *Photographic and Fine Art Journal* also proposed that colored photographs might be exhibited in art exhibitions (1856, p. 209). In the history of photography, however, hand-colored photography has been relegated to only a photographic technique and an effective tool to replicate natural colors on monochrome photographs.

Whereas previous studies have reported that the popularity of color photography led to the death of hand-coloring photography by the mid-20th century (Claudet, 2008; Crawford, 2005), I would argue, rather, that the hand-coloring of photography has transformed into an art form for its own sake. The 20th century has witnessed a revival in the use of hand-coloring by photographers such as Edward J. Steichen. Even more inventive, and more pertinent to the study at hand, in the 21st century, hand-coloring has been applied as a method for the expression of nostalgia and emotion by photographers such as Chen Nong, thereby redefining the purpose and the aesthetic value of hand-colored photographs in the contemporary environment. I myself have followed this path.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study incorporates the identification and examination of cultural memory in Chinese landscape photography from 2000 to the present by investigating the embodiment of cultural memory and the narrative strategy of reconstructing memory attached to a landscape in photography. To disclose the main concerns in landscape photography and the aspects of memory embedded therein, an analysis of the selected artists' works and their artistic processes was carried out. This required the utilization of various data collection methods and examination from multiple perspectives. I focused on three artists, Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong, alongside my own photographic practice. The purpose of looking into four cases, with myself included, was to gain an in-depth understanding of the conception and embodiment of cultural memory in photography, as well as to uncover artistic methods. The works, the thoughts behind them, and the processes of each of the artists were documented, analyzed, and interpreted. Based on the collected data and subsequent analysis, this study was able to compare the data obtained from the three other artists with my own photographic practice. At the same time, my practice allowed me to experiment, verify, and confirm the collected data and conclusions drawn from the collected data as well as explore further questions I encountered during the art-making process. Chapter III, thus, describes in detail the research methodology and processes as well as the ethical concerns I have addressed within the framework of this research.

Research Questions

This study intended to examine to what extent the selected artists relate to and reflect on cultural memory in China during its rapid urbanization between 2000s and the present day. It aimed to find out how the artists capture what has happened and what has been forgotten and/or lost in changing landscapes through the photographic lens. The study examined and analyzed various ways of reconstructing the cultural memory embodied in a landscape through photography.

To this end, the study addressed the following peripheral questions, which helped answer the main research questions listed in Chapter I.

1. How are different aspects of cultural memory embedded in photography?
 - 1.1 What are the underlying concerns of contemporary landscape photographic works in China?
 - 1.2 What aspects of memory do artists express through these sociocultural problems found in landscapes?
2. Which artistic approaches do artists employ to create a space for the interplay of past, present, and future?
 - 2.1 What thoughts were involved in the investigation of landscape memory through photography?
 - 2.2 After determining an embodied memory in a landscape, which method could be designed to convey a sense of memory?

Design of the Study

Assuming that *cultural memory* is an umbrella term encompassing a wide assortment of different concepts and ideas, Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, and Sara Young (2008) have argued that cultural memory should be examined by cross-disciplinary study. For example, in history and sociology, the term *cultural memory* refers to a dimensional social framework used to understand issues in social relations, institutions, power, and democratic conditions (Langenohl, 2008; Meyer, 2008). In psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience, cultural memory includes the use of mental, cognitive, procedural, or episodic memory to address the matter of experience, narrative, trauma, remembering, and self-reflexivity (Kansteiner & Weilnböck, 2008; Markowitsch, 2008; Middleton & Brown, 2008; Straub, 2008). In literary and media studies, cultural memory is regarded as a material memory textured by monuments, historiography, ritual, films, and photographs (Erll, 2008b; Ruchatz, 2008; Zierold, 2008). In this study, cultural memory is treated as a combination of cultural, social, and individual phenomena in order to understand the past and changes in landscape and to reflect on the present situations.

The study at hand employed a qualitative method to examine cultural memory in contemporary Chinese photography, thereby enabling me to gain an in-depth understanding of its use in the works of four artists: Qu Yan, Yao Lu, Chen Nong, and me. By applying a multilayered investigation of their works and artistic processes, I was able to uncover the artistic methods used in the reconstruction of memory in landscape photographs. The artists were selected based on their diverse photographic approaches to the rapid development of China since the turn of the century. Literature and artwork-related documents for the three artists were collected, and interviews were conducted in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their works, their artistic practices,

and their views of landscape and memory. Descriptions, observations, and analyses of their artistic works and processes provided information about how the artists perceived, experienced, and revealed the memory embodied in landscapes.

Then, a comparison was drawn of the data obtained from the artists and those from my own photographic practices. The purpose of studying my own practice was 1) to gain a deeper understanding of cultural memory in landscape photography, 2) to further explore the performative act of cultural memory that was barely addressed by the three artists, 3) to discuss the processes of exploring cultural memory of a landscape, and 4) to identify the creative method of hand-coloring in memory-related photographic works. The practical component developed for this study consists of 10 black-and-white photographs and eight hand-colored images. These photographs as well as my artistic process served as critical research data to corroborate the findings and raise further questions. By combining my artistic process with those of other artists, this study was able to reveal emerging issues of memory caused by landscape changes, address the impact of artists' experience of landscape on the creation of memory projects, and propose hand-coloring as a viable method for representing memory in contemporary photography.

This study was premised on the assumption that cultural memory is embedded in photographs, particularly when the artists, through their artistic practices, question sociocultural issues caused by changes in landscapes. Indeed, upon working with arresting changes in both rural and urban landscapes in China, all of the artists recalled patterns from the past (e.g., structures of villages, histories, icons, rituals) as well as reflected on contemporary issues. A supporting reason for this may lie in that landscape is a medium for cultural memory (Assmann, 2011b). Scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs (1992), Jan Assmann (2011b), and Simon Schama (1995) have pointed out

that memory can be altered and transmitted through a composite of past and present, which is reflected in changing landscapes. Such memory is cultural rather than individual because it is formed and examined within a particular era and environment in order to reconstruct a shared past and knowledge. Therefore, to demonstrate the embodiment of cultural memory in the selected artists' works, it was necessary to uncover the sociocultural background of the works and the artists' perceptions of the settings of their photographic works. The data collection was designed so as to gain an understanding of the problems involved with changing landscapes, the artists' sentiments deriving from these problems, and the artists' experiences during the photo shoots. This information allowed for an examination of the perceptions of memory expressed in their landscape photographs and an investigation into the importance of the experience of landscape in the creation of memory-related works.

Furthermore, this study held that cultural memory could be revived and given new meaning through the lens of photography within the contemporary context based on the definition of cultural memory as the "interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Erll, 2008a, p. 2). Such a definition regards memory, not as something frozen in time, but rather as something that maintains its continuity through interpretation (Assmann, 2011b; Meyer, 2008). So, when artists work with the past, memory acts as a performance, and the narration they present is different from the stories that came before (Plate & Smelik, 2013; Tilmans, Vree, & Winter, 2010). This assumption highlights the fact that memory-related artworks are dependent on the artists' thoughts, sentiments, and processes and thus require a thorough and detailed description of the artists' works, analyzing the artists' thoughts on memory and landscape, intentions, emotions, mediums, and methods. The data collection was designed to tease out each of the artists' methods for and beliefs around shaping their photographic

narration in relation to memory-related concerns, including power, spirit, history, nostalgia, and imagination.

Researcher's Roles and Perspectives

I entered the field of this study both as art practitioner and researcher. As an artist, my photographic practice granted me credibility to examine artistic practices and processes through personal experimentation. My experiences with seaweed-house communities through my art practices and my perceptions about the loss of tradition and the past being forgotten were the starting point of this study. My own field experience led me to question and examine how contemporary photographers can use a sociocultural framework and artistic practices to reconstruct past experiences and evoke remembrance. Thus, my practices provided critical data and first-hand experience for this study. As a researcher, my photographic practices contributed to examining theories of cultural memory from literature and ideas from other artists. Below, I explain my different roles and perspectives in this study.

Researcher's Roles

Art practitioner as researcher. Art practitioners often fail to mention the artistic practices and creative processes behind artworks on a theoretical or experimental level (Schatzki, 2012; Sullivan, 2010; Zembylas, 2014). To avoid this shortcoming, employment of research with practice allows an artist to work as a researcher in order to display the “tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied in specific artworks and artistic processes” from the perspective of the artist (Borgdorff, 2006, p. 18). Regarding the doctoral research in art and design, one common debate is the role and use of practice in research and its contribution to knowledge, which extends to various issues in the

matter of methodology, the use of terminology, writing style, and structure. Different institutions give varying guidelines. First applied in the 1970s, practice-based research¹¹ has become increasingly used as an effective methodological framework for dissertation writing in the realm of art doctorates (Burgess, 1997; Candy, 2006; Macleod & Holdridge, 2006; Sullivan, 2010).

This dissertation is composed of theoretical state of the field and practical component as an integral part. The design of this dissertation is based on two respects. Firstly, although cultural memory is increasingly recognized as an important topic in Chinese photography, it has not yet been studied. The objective of this research is to demonstrate the embodiment of cultural memory and its artistic representation in contemporary Chinese photography since 2000. This required me to describe and interpret essentials that support the making of art, such as contexts of the artworks, processes, and artists' perceptions, as well as to examine how art works can be understood from a theoretical study of cultural memory.

Secondly, considering the artists' ambiguous use of cultural memory and the researcher's limited access to their creative processes behind their works of art, a first-hand experience and example is compulsory in exploring the notion of cultural memory and uncovering artist's strategies on the creation of memory projects, leading to the

¹¹ Researcher Linda Candy's definition provided a relatively comprehensive definition of practice-based research: "Practice-based research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and outcomes of that practice. Claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes, which may include artefacts such as images, music, designs, models, digital media, or other outcomes such as performances and exhibition. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to those outcomes ... If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based" (2006, p. 3).

questioning and examination of how artists create artworks to reconstruct past experiences and evoke remembrance. As my experiences with seaweed-house communities inspired me to this research, I created practical works designed to reflect what I had learned from the literatures of cultural memory. My own practice served as crucial data to carry out methods for reconstructing cultural memory of a landscape through the photographic lens.

Thus, research with a practical component allowed me to include my own artistic practice as well as those of the three Chinese contemporary photographers selected for this study, aiming to best define the artistic process of a memory practice, including experiences, ways of thinking, concerns, techniques, and sociocultural contexts. The combination of a theoretical study and a practical component also helped to reflect upon the theory of cultural memory to investigate findings from a practitioner's point of view. This dissertation cannot be structured and considered in the conventional sense.

As art practitioner and researcher in this study, I had the advantage of being able to study artworks and interpret the processes, products, proclivities, and contexts from an insider's viewpoint. Yet, there is also an inherent challenge to being both an insider, as an artist who has created a memory project, and an outsider, as a researcher. In the case at hand, the insider point of view rests in that I am an artist personally involved in the representation of cultural memory through the lens of photography by creating, describing, and analyzing my own artworks and practices. Being an insider allows me to obtain detailed information only visible to art-makers, thus enhancing the depth of understanding.

Meanwhile, as a researcher, I must observe and examine three artists' works and their artistic processes to expand the breadth of research features and activities. Hence, I must adopt an outsider point of view to examine research questions that contribute to

discovering different aspects of memory embodiment and representation in a broader context of Chinese photography. For this, I used relevant theories to examine and critique the ways cultural memory is embodied in the selected artists' photographs. I compared their practices with my own experiences of artistic processes in order to find shared dimensions in exploring problems of landscape and its embedded memory. I self-examined my own artistic methods and referenced the three selected artists' and others' works to indicate the forms of memory representation used in landscape photography. This immersion and reflexivity process for the examination of and reflection on my own works and those of others enabled me to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions set for this study by combining theory and artistic experience.

Participant observer. In participant observation, “a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p. 1). It requires the researcher to immerse in a culture both as an insider and as an outsider and observe meanings of day-to-day activities and situations (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1980). Participant observation occurs in various aspects of this study.

In regard to the theoretical component, my professional practice as a photographer granted a convenient path as a participant observer into the landscape-memory-photography group. As the thesis involved an investigation into the making of memory art, each photo project offered different subjective points of view, diverse methods, and experiences different from others. A nuanced understanding of memory-related artworks can best come from personal experience, which meant it only made sense that I examine and observe the artistic process through my own visual experimentations.

In regard to the practical component, I was able to immerse myself in the seaweed-house community to discover the history and culture of the region, to understand the customs and spirits of the local fishermen, and to reflect on the issues observed through the reviews of the related theories. Because of my past activities in the area of seaweed houses, I had already earned the trust and acceptance of the residents. As relationships with participants grew, so did my understanding and reconstruction of a cultural memory of the seaweed-house community through observation.

Besides a general approach of inquiry, participant observation in this study included a data-collecting method overlapping with traditional ethnographic research (Jorgensen, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Various types of data were collected, such as documents, interviews, photographs, and field notes, which are introduced in the following section. Through the organization, description, and analysis of the collected data, participant observation enabled me to understand the creative process and gain an in-depth understanding of the emerging issues under urbanization in China and their relationship with memory.

Outsider's Perspective: Selection Criteria and Process

The artists were selected using the following criteria. Firstly, as the main goal of this research is to demonstrate the embodiment of cultural memory in contemporary photographs of sociocultural landscapes and to investigate artistic approaches, attention had to be fixed on *cultural memory* itself. For this, the concept, characteristics, and narrative forms of cultural memory were borrowed from the pioneer studies reviewed in Chapter II, such as the work of Jan Assmann in sociology, Aleida Assmann in cultural anthropology, and José van Dijck in media studies. Based on the pioneer studies of cultural memory, it was essential that photographic works embody the aspects of power,

history, culture, and tradition, and that artistic approaches reflect the narrative forms of imagination and nostalgia. Secondly, as the incredible landscape changes in 21st-century China provided significant context, inspiration, and content for this research and for plenty of Chinese landscape and/or memory-related photographic works, the target focused on landscapes in China that have disappeared or are on the verge of disappearing as a result of human intervention. The reason for this was grounded in the belief that landscape is a medium for cultural memory. Considering that landscape is a cultural product containing human activities and mentalities, in this study, cultural memory is formed and activated when facing the physical changes of landscape and recognizing the differences of shared beliefs, ways of life, art, and customs between the past and the present.

Thirdly, due to the ambiguous use of the term *cultural memory* and the emerging concept of 景观 (jǐng guān; cultural landscape) in China, artists had to represent a clear rationale not only about their own works and approaches, but one that also contributed to the understanding of cultural memory and landscape in photography. Fourthly, the spectrum had to be fixed on photographic works produced in the 2000s by Chinese artists. Fifthly, as one of the research objectives is to examine artistic approaches in the reconstruction of cultural memory in photography, the selected artists' works had to exemplify different artistic methods, as categorized in Appendix H, and to exhibit an influence on other artists and the field. Finally, artists who were born in the mid-twentieth century were mainly considered since they are at the forefront of a generation of photographers interested in questioning historical and sociocultural issues caused by landscape changes.

Based on the above mentioned criteria, the artists and their inventive artworks were selected following the processes described below. Firstly, I conducted a search for

Chinese artists' works in the period from 2000 up to the present (2018). At this early stage, the search included any artworks inspired by landscape transformation and dealing with issues related to urbanization, demolition, and reconstruction. From the preselected artists, I looked through current published materials related to the artists and their artworks (e.g., artists' statements, interviews, articles), aiming to identify which ones had mentioned 记忆 (*jì yì*; *memory*) either explicitly or implicitly and/or had expressed a collective concept under the structure of a society. This process involved a screening of artworks to discern which ones indicate cultural memory or imply generalized artist understandings and forms of memory (e.g., history, individual recollection, tradition, collective consciousness). Among this group of artists' works, I categorized their works according to the photographic method. The classification of method helped determine common and significant artistic approaches of current photographic practices, including those that worked with memory and landscape. Following this step, I selected the artists whose ideas, concepts, inspirations, or subjects reflected aspects and narrative forms of cultural memory.

The selection process also revealed other artists whose works are strong in the field and apply the same or a similar approach in their photographic practice but were conclusively excluded as possible case studies in this research due to various reasons. Exclusion of these artists may reflect a lack of 1) understanding of the concepts and theories in art and/or photography, 2) clear reasoning in the choice of photographic method, or 3) exploring and/or researching the photographed places and/or embedded culture. The excluded artists and their works, nonetheless, could be considered in future works of mine in regard to the discussions such as different roles of photographers in representing memory and/or landscape.

Based on the above criteria and the selection process, three artists were selected to conduct an in-depth case study. They are Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong. All three examine sociocultural problems occurring in relation to China's rapid development. Indeed, they demonstrate concern about inherent Chinese culture by questioning the costs of urbanization: control of power, and the loss of tradition and history. They use the medium of photography, and all the artworks discussed for the study were created from 2000 onward. They have garnered acclaim in the art world as they show a consistent preoccupation with the impact of environmental destruction and urban demolition on social culture. Moreover, they exemplify different methods and thoughts present in Chinese landscape photography today because their works and insights have influenced other artists in contemporary Chinese photography. The selected artists discussed in my dissertation are not meant to constitute a unique landscape-memory-photography group, but should rather be seen as significant examples drawn from the diverse, ever-changing medley of photographers in China.

While the artists were selected based on the above-mentioned criteria and share common features, each of them and their works were designated by specific reasoning, described below.

Case 1. Qu Yan's 空间, *Space* (2005-present) series of photographs was selected for this study, as it provided me with the opportunity to examine the aspect of power and cultural crisis in cultural memory and to identify photography as a tool for leaving retrospective evidence. Far from a set of works created from an intuitive idea, the *Space* photographic project is grounded firmly in the artist's reasoning, as Qu has a strong knowledge of the theories of art and photography, including an understanding of landscape, the use of photography, and the sociocultural concerns caused by landscape changes. His artistic methodology reflected in the *Space* series has had a significant

impact on Chinese photographers who examine the subject of developing or demolished landscapes since the dawn of the 2000s. As researcher, I was convinced that his artistic methodology could shed light on how artists reveal issues of landscape in the Chinese context and how these issues could be further expanded in the investigation of memory.

Qu Yan is an internationally known avant-garde artist from China, who works in a wide range of media and artistic disciplines, from painting, installation, performance, architecture, and project of art intervention to photography. Born in 1955 in the ancient city of Xuzhou, he earned his bachelor's degree in oil painting from the Academy of Fine Arts of Shanxi University in 1985. After participating in the so-called 85 新潮 ('85 New Wave)—one of the most important avant-garde art movement in the history of Chinese art—Qu moved to Europe in 1991 to work at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague as a professor of Oriental art and Chinese calligraphy. He returned to China in 1997 and currently lives and works in Beijing. He is a program director at the Institution of Urban and Rural Art Construction of Guangdong University of Technology, a visiting professor at the Academy of Fine Arts of Shanxi University, and founder of the Xu Cun Art Commune.

Case 2. Yao Lu's 中国风景, *Chinese Landscape* (2006-2014) project was included in this study because its unique style enabled me to discover the aspect of nostalgia in the creation of memory-related landscape photographs and to identify the imitation of traditional Chinese painting (e.g., styles, symbols, forms) as a way to express a sense of memory. Yao Lu is well known for his photographic project *Chinese Landscape*, through which he earned an international reputation. In *Chinese Landscape*, Yao collaged images he shot to create new landscape photographs via the digital software Photoshop, which is a trend in today's Chinese photography. The form of these

photographs resembles the feeling and style of traditional Chinese landscape painting in ancient times.

Yao Lu was born in 1967 and grew up in Beijing. He studied printmaking at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, then earned his MFA in photography in China. He is currently a professor in the photography department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. His works have been shown in numerous photography festivals and galleries, such as the FotoFest International, based in Houston, United States, Daegu Photo Biennale in Korea, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art in Turkey, the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, United States, and Today Art Museum in China.

Case 3. Chen Nong is an artist who has created staged and hand-colored photographs, shooting with a large-format camera, producing black-and-white prints in his darkroom, and then adding color. For this study, I chose to analyze his best-known project, *黄河*, *Yellow River* (2007-2008), and his newest project, *丝绸之路*, *The Silk Road* (2015-present). The rationale behind the selection of these two projects was based on their purpose, which was to explore history and culture through long-term trips to the sites. As such, Chen Nong's projects offered a concern with history in the reconstruction of memory and his artistic practice allowed me to examine the importance of going and feeling places of memory and to suggest hand-coloring as a method for memory representation.

Born in 1966 in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, Chen Nong studied painting on his own to prepare for the entrance examination of art academies but was not accepted. Thereafter, he worked for a few years in a TV production factory and then worked as a sculptor in his hometown. Between 1996 and 2000, Chen established a photographic studio for commercial portraits to pursue his passion in photography. He moved to

Beijing in 2000, and now lives and works in Zhan Zi Hutong.¹² His photographs have entered the collections of such prestigious artistic institutions as the International Center of Photography in New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He is represented by numerous international galleries, including the Schneider Gallery in Chicago, the Galerie Alex Daniels–Reflex Amsterdam in Holland, and the Marlborough Gallery in New York.

Insider's Perspective: Artistic Practices for the Study

Parallel to the selected artists' works, I created my own works (*身份证明*, *Identification Card* and *无言处*, *Speaking the Unspeakable*) in which I discovered the history of the area, questioned sociocultural issues of urbanization and industrialization, revealed the transformations of these houses, and indicated the role of seaweed houses in the Chinese cultural context. My art practice is a key component role in conducting and achieving this research for two reasons.

On one hand, as mentioned earlier, scholars often have limited or no access to the creative processes involved in producing artworks. For this reason, it was essential to develop my own art practice to examine the research questions of this study and, as a result, become one of the participants of this study. This insider perspective allowed me to uncover in detail the artistic process for reconstructing the memory of a landscape through my own experiments and experiences, and to expand knowledge and understanding of cultural memory in contemporary photography through my own observations.

¹² The *hutong* is a traditional residential neighborhood in northern China characterized by its alleyways and courtyards. Zhan Zi Hutong, hundreds of years old, is among the capital city's most famous, close to many historic places and mansions, such as Shichahai and Prince Kung's Mansion.

On the other hand, as *cultural memory* is an embryonic concept that lacks comprehensive understanding and theoretical research in contemporary Chinese photography, I needed to draw lessons from other disciplines create artworks based on the characteristics of cultural memory. The strategy of incorporating the concept of cultural memory to guide photographic creation had not been studied in earlier works. Thus, these new, more complete photographic projects of mine helped to improve the field. Below, I will describe the two bodies of works created for this study.

Seaweed Houses I: 身份证明 *Identification Card*. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the seaweed house, I conducted a preliminary study with two specific objectives: 1) to look for information on seaweed houses, such as archives, old photographs, research papers, and any declaration of intangible cultural heritage and 2) to follow up on residents who had participated in my earlier projects. On a single trip to the Rongcheng region in the winter of 2014, I traveled for two weeks to more than 20 villages (see Appendix G). The significant sites for this study were the villages of 镆铘岛 (*mò yé dǎo*; Mo Ye Dao), 东褚岛 (*dōng zhú dǎo*, or *dōng chǔ dǎo*; Dong Chu Dao), 后疃 (*hòu tuǎn*, pronounce as *hòu tǎn [ər]*; Hou Tan), 巍巍 (*wēi wēi*; Wei Wei), and 大庄许家 (*dà zhuāng xǔ jiā*; Da Zhuang Xu Jia). During the trip, I also visited two museums, 威海博物馆 (Weihai Museum) and 荣成博物馆 (Rongcheng Museum), that both had permanent exhibitions on seaweed houses. These exhibitions were informative as they described the origin of the seaweed houses and the traditions (e.g., rituals, festivals, beliefs) of the seaweed houses in this region (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Permanent exhibition titled “海草房” (Seaweed House) in Rongcheng Museum. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

I selected a few villages with numerous seaweed houses, including some villages that were listed by national and provincial cultural heritage boards (e.g., State Administration of Cultural Heritage) as protected cultural sites. All the selected villages were particularly important and intriguing to this study as they held the hope of offering rich historical archives and stories (see Figure 16). I also searched through archives and documents at the Archives Bureau of Weihai and the Cultural Affairs Office of Weihai, in order to collect more data about seaweed houses, including their history and the traditions and beliefs of their inhabitants. With thorough and constant note-taking during the preliminary study, I was able to generate field notes, digital photographs, videos, and audio recordings. I had maintained communication with the local residents of the villages since I had first photographed seaweed houses, and some of them eventually became my friends. They helped me get in touch with others, which facilitated my collecting of numerous oral stories, archives, and old objects.

Figure 16. This image shows an exhibition about Gu Mu. Gu was born in seaweed house in 东墩村 (*dōng dūn*; Dong Dun village) and was the vice-premier of the People's Republic of China between 1975 and 1982. The exhibition is held in the seaweed house where Gu was born. Dong Dun village is listed in the third edition of the *Catalog of Traditional Chinese Villages* in 2014. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

The findings of this preliminary study resulted in a photo series entitled 身份证 *Identification Card* that explored the history of seaweed houses through materialized carriers of cultural memory. I photographed not only seaweed houses but also the objects that I found in those houses (see Figure 17). Such objects included family photographs, deeds of the houses, and posters from the Cultural Revolution period. They were pieces of symbolic evidence that told the stories of the families and of the houses. These photographs of the houses and their objects were displayed as diptych pieces. *Identification Card* was exhibited as a body of work at the 14th Dong Gang International Photo Festival, in Korea, and was short-listed at the 2016 Athens Photo Festival. It was published in *Art Habens: Contemporary Art Review* magazine in 2015.

Figure 17. A resident shows a house transfer document dating from the Qing dynasty. Photographed by Liu Xiangcheng.

Seaweed Houses II: 无言处 *Speaking the Unspeakable*. My preliminary study, *身份证明 Identification Card*, informed about the necessity to compile narrative stories to gain historical knowledge and become familiar with the traditions of the seaweed-house region that were still unrecorded by means of written and/or visual documents since, probably, they would soon be forgotten by people. I decided to prepare a photo-shoot plan and return to the Rongcheng region in China in summer 2016. In preparation for this second trip, I planned the travel routes, researched the sociocultural contexts and situations of villages, and examined visual studies for this new photographic series. Once there, I was able to conduct on-site in-person interviews with residents of seaweed houses in the Rongcheng region and folklore specialists on seaweed houses (see Figure 18). I began informal interviews with open-ended questions, such as “How long have you lived here?” or “Do you remember any historical stories that took place in the village?” Then, depending on the interviewee’s responses, I moved forward with questions pertinent to my research. Employing a more freestyle form of interview put

interviewees at ease and allowed residents and folklorists to depict life stories comfortably, enabling me to better comprehend both the subjective experience and the sociocultural context of seaweed houses (Jorgensen, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My trips to seaweed-houses villages and communications with residents enabled me to perceive the sentiments of memory owing to the loss of tradition and culture in the seaweed-house region, such as the emotional synthesis of loss and longing in remembrance of the past.

Figure 18. Interview with the folklore specialist Yu Yingyu. Yu is the first director of the Rongcheng Museum and the chief editor of 荣成卷, the Rongcheng volume of the book 山东文化统览, *Overview of Shandong Province Culture*.

During the photo shoots and trips, I wrote field notes to record findings, such as stories told by residents of seaweed houses, old objects found during the trip, and the histories of the villages (see Appendix F, for example). They also contained details of my daily whereabouts, feelings, ideas, and the participants' reactions. I wrote 22 sets of field notes and recorded audios during my photo shots. Then I transcribed audio

recordings from the Rongcheng dialect into written text in Mandarin. From this, the significant and useful parts were translated into English. The information recorded in the sets of field notes provided detailed context of my practice, which served as useful data for the description of my project and artistic process.

The outcome of this second photographic exploration, entitled 无言处, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, included eight hand-colored photographs and one seaweed-house installation. Shot with a medium-format film camera, I developed black-and-white film in a darkroom and filed photographs in digital format. Then, I experimented with 13 kinds of photographic inkjet papers as well as fine art inkjet papers, such as the Chinese Xuan paper, Chinese silk, and mulberry paper (see Figure 19). After much trial and error, I obtained the desired outcome by printing monochromatic photographs on traditional Chinese rice paper and adding dull colors with Chinese pigments to create a nostalgic and melancholic mood. The installation aimed to represent the original shape and building structure of a seaweed house (see Figure 20). The installation was made of stones and seaweed collected from destroyed seaweed houses. This body of work was shown at the International Visual Methods Conference in 2017 and China Pingyao International Photography Festival in 2018, published by the Detroit Center for Contemporary Photography, reviewed and introduced by photography magazines and journals such as Korea Monthly Photography and OURS. As a supplement, I edited a six-minute video to document my work process.

Figure 19. One photograph printed on different kinds of paper. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

Figure 20. Front view of the installation. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

Through my photographic series 无言处, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, I strove to show that Chinese rural landscape served as a medium for memory through the audio

and visual recordings of the residents describing their experiences and their personal memories of the places before urban housing development. During the process, I observed through reflections offered in interviews and during the photo shoots in the villages that many people were filled with nostalgia and other sentiments relating to the urbanization of rural landscapes. Hence, I was able to examine the research questions of this study and present my findings.

Data Collection

Documents

This research involved two types of documentation: artwork-related documentation and literature. The documentation related to specific artworks was used to describe and analyze the shared methods or techniques of the selected artists' works. These included visual and written documents, such as artworks, artists' statements, artists' publications, exhibition catalogues, talks given by artists, online information, and reviews. The variety of artwork-related documentation provided a broad understanding of the photographers' practices and works. The description and analysis of the artworks were conducted within the contexts provided by the assorted opinions of scholars and the artists themselves. The contextual analysis of the artworks served to distill the methods used in the artists' creative constructions.

The literature documentation was collected to explore the selected photographers' artworks and to reflect on my own artistic experimentation. Such documentation included books, theses, articles, journals, and online sources that provided social background and cultural context regarding the artists, their works, and the subjects photographed by the artists. The collection and review of such documents played an important role in fulfilling the following objectives: 1) to describe and discuss

the artworks within the contexts gleaned through the literature, 2) to observe the concerns of cultural memory in the Chinese context explored by the photographers, 3) to address their shared method in the investigation of landscape memory, and 4) to offer critical analysis on spatiality, nostalgia, and history to support the methods of photographic narratives.

Interviews

This study incorporates informal interviews conducted with the selected artists and personal narrative interviews with residents of seaweed houses where I carried out my photographic works. Prior to the in-person interviews with the artists and residents, I was granted approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and complied with all necessary ethical requirements set by the Research Integrity and Ethics Office of Nanyang Technological University (NTU). All the artists and local residents from 20 villages in the Rongcheng region in China were supportive and gave their consent to be audio- or video- taped during the interviews. I prepared some interview protocols for guidance (see Appendix E). When I realized that the format of the interviews was too formal and, as a result, dissuading an artist or resident from engaging, I would let the person talk freely, providing him or her more room to engage in the conversation and express him- or herself.

Participating artists. My careful documentation research about the selected artists produced few related and informative items pertaining to this research topic, which required me to conduct informal interviews with the selected artists, Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong (see Figure 21). Through in-person interviews, I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of their approaches and their considerations of aesthetics and methodology. The three photographers had been selected based on 1) their focus on

cities or rural sites significantly affected by urbanization or modernization, 2) the originality of their approaches in 21st-century Chinese photography, and 3) the recognition of their artworks.

Informal interviews took the form of conversations guided by open-ended questions to explore specific interests (Jorgensen, 1989). Interviews were conducted after document collection in order to explore further details and issues that were raised during the document-collection process. The interviews were designed to explore the following points: the sociocultural issues in the landscape where the artists photographed, the artists' attitudes toward these issues, the artists' understandings of landscape and memory, and influences on the artistic processes. The interviews enabled me to address the artists' experiences, intentions, methods, mediums, and sociocultural contexts, which were important for the analysis of the artworks and the creative processes.

Before this study was approved by the NTU IRB, I contacted the artists through e-mail to introduce the study and held a preliminary conversation with each of the artists when they agreed to participate. Only after I obtained the IRB approval did I conduct the semi-informal interviews with the artists for this study. In the summer of 2016, I interviewed Qu Yan and Yao Lu. In January 2018, I interviewed Chen Nong. All interviews took place at the artists' studios. This enabled me to look at the artists' works in person and to view their working mediums and conditions. Sometimes, I noticed supplementary information in their studios that the artists did not mention. When follow-up details were needed, I e-mailed them or messaged them via the WeChat software.

Figure 21. Interview with Qu Yan in the artist's studio. Photographed by Wang Zhao.

Residents. Personal narrative interviews are characterized as unstructured tools taking the form of life stories that allow comprehension of both the subjective experience and the sociocultural context (Jorgensen, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My photographic works developed for this research aimed at investigating the history of seaweed houses by discovering stories and myths that have not been recorded in writing or visually and by documenting rituals and historical places that were about to disappear with the economic development of the region. I interviewed 36 residents, which allowed me to learn various stories, rituals, and even myths in relation to the disappearing seaweed houses (see Figure 22). The residents even provided me with the locations where things had happened. Interviews were designed to put the residents at ease, starting with open-ended questions, such as “How long have you lived here?” or “When was your seaweed house built?” Then, depending on the interviewee’s responses, I moved forward with questions more pertinent to a certain history, ritual, or issue about seaweed houses. Such an unstructured tool allowed the residents and folklorists to depict

their life stories at ease. The residents' interview data were used to describe my artistic process and analyze how artists discover memory embedded in a landscape.

Figure 22. On-site in-person interview with the resident Mr. Sun in 宫格庄 (*gōng gé zhuāng*; Gong Gezhuang village). Photographed by Liu Xiangcheng.

Data Analysis

The data were organized and displayed by using a narrative mode of analysis. Narrative analysis was particularly effective for this research because it involved illustrating a coherent story to understand the actions, events, and happenings as a whole by using interviews, documents, or observations (Polkinghorne, 1995). Below, I explain how this method was used to answer the research questions.

Analysis of the Documents

The analysis of the documents began with the summary of collected artwork-related documents (see Appendix A). Artwork-related documents included artists'

statements and publications, exhibition catalogues, online information, blogs, and reviews. These documents provided information for the description of the artworks and analysis of the shared methods or techniques. I numbered these documents and summarized content and theme by cases. This enabled me to clarify my contributions to the study of the selected artists, to raise questions that needed to be examined in the analysis of artworks, and to discover concerns of landscape and/or memory for further analysis of works. Meanwhile, I reviewed documents such as books, journals, and articles that provided background information on the selected works and artists' other works, as well as historical information about the places photographed by the artists. By analyzing these documents in a narrative way, I was able to understand the artists' philosophy, provide a coherent story of the artists' works, and find their methods of memory representation. Moreover, I used data drawn from artwork-related and literature documents to contextualize the data collected during the in-person interviews.

Analysis of the Interviews and Artists' Practices

Narrative analysis of the artists' works was conducted to comprehensively describe their works and art-making processes, including contexts, mediums, perceptions, and problems. The purpose was to show and understand the approaches the artists took to address issues of landscape change, their thinking processes, and how the artists apprehended memory issues in their projects. The interviews with the artists were conducted in their respective studio in China. I made audio recordings of the entirety of my conversation with each artist, and upon returning to Singapore, I translated them. The original conversation was recorded in the language with which the participating artists were most familiar (Mandarin). After their initial transcription, I translated them from Mandarin into English. After completing both the transcription and translation of

the interviews, I imported them into the data analysis software NVIVO¹³ to create a coherent framework organized according to content and question. With this software, I coded the artists' responses (with the "codes" function in NVIVO) and gathered related ideas by relevant theme (with the "nodes" function in NVIVO). In the end, I identified four categories with seven questions and 12 nodes (see Figure 23).

The four categories were 1) Artists' study/life backgrounds; 2) Works (backgrounds, inspirations, intentions, processes, etc.); 3) Views on (cultural) landscape and memory, and 4) Others (their views on others' works). The first category, focusing on the artists' study and life backgrounds as well as their experiences in photography, illuminated the artists' philosophies and provided contexts for the understanding of their works. The second category, on their works, highlighted the sociocultural backgrounds of the works, inspirations, intentions, processes, methods, and mediums involved in the artworks. Here, artists' practices (i.e., how the artists started their projects and how they developed their ideas) were revealed. The third category, the artists' views on cultural landscape and memory, addressed the individual artists' understandings of landscape and memory. The fourth category, incorporating other relevant issues, revealed how the selected artists perceived their works to be different from those of others. Both the third and fourth categories disclosed the artists' views on cultural landscape (景观, or *jingguan*, in Mandarin) and the relationship between memory, landscape, and photography in their projects and those of others. The description of each artist's view of other artists' works as possible influences was important because it provided an in-depth understanding of memory and landscape issues that have emerged in

¹³ NVIVO is a computer software for storing, managing and organizing data produced by QSR International. It is designed for qualitative researchers working with diverse forms of information, such as text and video.

contemporary photography and how photographers see and solve these problems by offering original photographic methods. In the description and analysis of the interview, I interpreted how and why things happened the way they did (Kim, 2016).

In combing these interviews, my artistic practices, and other documents I had collected, I was able to identify key themes under three categories: artists' attitudes toward or understanding of (cultural) memory, their photographic methods, and their views on landscape memory. At this point, the basic interpretive structure of the thesis emerged. I structured the description and analysis of the individual artists' works in Chapters IV and V and the cross-case analysis in Chapter VI according to the three categories shown in Appendix B. The description and analysis of the three categories provided clues to identify 1) different concerns of memory in photographic narration, 2) two modes of landscape perception in the making of memory works, and 3) the creation of pictorial space for the memory performance by applying the hand-coloring method.

Categories	Questions	Nodes
Artists' study/life backgrounds	1. What are artists' backgrounds and experiences in photography?	Artist and their works Artists' background and influence Artists' understanding of Jing Guan (景观) Artists' methods Artists' view of landscape Context and research problem Human figures in photographs Memory Landscape in traditional Chinese art Social-cultural landscape Methodology Rural landscape and village
Works (backgrounds, inspirations, intentions, processes, etc.)	2. How did artists start project?	
Views on (cultural) landscape and memory	3. How would artists see landscape in their project?	
	4. What are artists' understandings of social/cultural landscape or Jing Guan in Chinese?	
	5. How do artists see memory problem in their projects or contemporary photography?	
	6. What are the meanings of human figures appeared on their photographs?	
Others	7. Who influenced artists' works?	
	How do artists see their works are different that of other artists?	

Figure 23. NVIVO Categories, Questions, and Nodes Extracted from the Database of Interviews with the Artists. Exported from the NVIVO software and reproduced by Yajing Liu.

Analysis of My Own Photographic Practices

The narrative mode of analysis was also applied to describe and present the practical component of this study. The analysis and interpretation of my practice was important in answering the practical question of how photographers transform past and recollection into images from the very first stage to the very last. The questions asked in the analytical process were: 1) What does cultural memory consist of in seaweed houses? 2) How could such a memory be revealed by a photographer? and 3) In which

ways does a photographer create works that help with memory reconstruction? The analysis involved identifying patterns, experiences, and methods and providing answers to the research questions.

The artistic component analysis began with the transcription and translation of the field notes and ended with the interpretation of the practices. A total of 57 pages of field notes were transcribed in Chinese, including 18 pages of notes from the pilot trip and 22 notes from the narrative interviews. A total of 36 consent forms were provided to and returned from the participants. Although conversations were held in Mandarin, the field notes included many historical terms and dialectical usages requiring careful transcription. After transcription, I reviewed them and chose the significant parts to translate into English.

Artistic processes were described within the contexts provided by the analysis of the artworks, field notes, narrative interviews, and collected documents. I began with the description of the history and current situation of seaweed houses in China to provide the background, sociocultural context, problems, and goals of the practice. Then, I described the experiences to identify how I, as a photographer, worked as a social researcher to understand and observe the memory of seaweed-house communities. For instance, I described how I turned to residents to find the remains of 虎础寺 (*hǔ chǔ sì*, pronounced as *hǔ zhúo sì*; Hu Zhuo Temple), as well as what the residents had to share and say about the relic and history. Such descriptions of my field trips intended to 1) portray the memory of the seaweed-house communities through the voices of the residents and 2) identify cultural memory as an active process that was revived by personal recollection, experience, materialized evidence, and sociocultural context.

I then described and interpreted the production of artworks, such as intentions, methods, and techniques. I explained the methods I used, the problems I encountered,

and how I solved these problems. The analysis of my artworks aimed to 1) examine the theories and ideas that were conceptualized and carried out in the literature review and the analysis of other photographers and 2) reveal a methodological framework for memory representation in contemporary photography to adequately answer the questions posed in this study.

Ethical Considerations

The key ethical issue in this research concerns the research subjects, including the people who appeared in photographs or shared stories with me and the artists who granted interviews and provided facts about the landscape and social and cultural conditions. For this, I followed the Institutional Review Board/Independent Ethics Committee rules and obtained an approval letter to effectively protect the rights of human subjects. The approval is referenced under the number IRB-2016-04-018 (see Appendix C). With these permissions and guidelines, I took the necessary precautions to protect the rights, anonymity, and confidentiality of my research subjects.

I made every effort to ensure that all participants fully understood the purpose of the survey before they gave their consent to take part in the research. As part of this process, I wrote a simple and straightforward consent form and letter of invitation to participate that was presented to all potential participants at the initial stage. Before the interviews and photo shoots, I translated and explained my research in the participant's mother tongue to help him or her fully understand the purpose of the research, the implications of the participation in the research, and other related issues. I am confident that my language abilities in Mandarin and the local Rongcheng dialect of the participants are adequate to convey accurate, smooth and effective communication with the participants.

During the interviews and photo shoots, I made my intentions clear about the use of the interviews and photographs for not only a professional artistic practice but also as a non-political academic practice. In other words, I explained that the research did not aim to criticize any political view. I clarified that I was from the area and had previously studied the subject matter in a master's thesis and various projects. I was well versed in the places, the people, and the subject matter of the research. As a result, I had a good understanding of the potential risks of perception, of what may or may not be considered as political in the surroundings, and so on. However, that being said, never did I direct participants' viewpoints or tell participants what to say in the interviews.

For ethical reasons, any identifiable information regarding the participating artists and residents, such as contact numbers and specific addresses, was excluded from this dissertation writing. Full names of the participants are included in the thesis only when I obtained permission from the participants. To maintain confidentiality, the collected data, including the information of the subjects, found objects, oral stories, interview videos, audio recordings, and old images, were encrypted with a strong passphrase and stored on my hard disk drive. The data files were coded numerically rather than by subjects' information (e.g., interviewed participant "Zhang X" in "Y village" was coded as 001). A separate document linking the study code and the subjects' identifying information was stored apart from the data files. This distinct document with identifiable information was also encrypted with a strong passphrase. In summary, I have taken precautions to obfuscate and secure the personal information stored in that record.

Chapter IV

Three Chinese Photographers and Their Works

This chapter presents the narrative analysis of the artistic practices of Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong, and artworks produced by the three artists during China's rapid urbanization from 2000 to the present. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the selected artworks and their artistic processes, I collected written and visual documents and conducted informal in-person interviews with each artist. I followed up details through e-mail and the messaging software WeChat. By means of data collection, I was able to detail their artistic practices, the sociocultural context of their works, their attitudes toward landscapes and/or memory, and their photographic methods. The three artists' works were analyzed first on their own and then thematically, based on how they approached the memory concept from a cultural perspective in their art and how they resolved issues opposing past and present. The overlapping dimensions of the three case studies showed different perceptions and methods in the reconstruction of cultural memory in Chinese landscape photography.

Case 1. Qu Yan: Power and Cultural Crisis

Born in 1955 and a representative of China's first wave of avant-garde artists, Qu Yan works with a wide range of media and artistic disciplines, from painting, installation, architecture, and art intervention to photography. For this study, I examined specifically Qu Yan's photographic series *空间*, *Space* (2005–present) to answer the following research questions: What are the issues does the artist find in the landscape? How do these issues reflect memory? How are the concerns of cultural memory embedded in the project? What approach does the artist use to resolve these problems?

Qu's *Space* project has been presented to the public, often in reputable sociocultural landscape-themed exhibitions in China. In particular, Qu's *Space* photographs have significantly influenced other Chinese photographers who work on 21st-century urbanization themes. In the *Space* series, Qu appeared to commit to documenting his subjects truthfully and directly without any adjustments or enhancements at a time when most Chinese photographers (e.g., Rong Rong and Weng Fen) focused on producing 观念 (*guān niàn*; conceptual) photographs of staged or artificially constructed scenes (N. Wang, 2008; Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016).

In the sections that follow, I describe Qu's project and present the necessary data to answer my research questions, which are based on three themes—landscape, memory, and photographic methods—as described in Chapter III. I first describe *Space*, which consists of four parts: *权力空间*, *Power Space*, *信仰空间*, *Religion Space*, *生命空间*, *Life Space*, and *造神空间*, *Immortalization Space*. I then analyze the *Space* series as whole to explore memory as a phenomenon and to present an objective approach of photography in memory reconstruction.

The *Space* Project

The photography project *Space* comprises four interrelated parts—*Power Space*, *Religion Space*, *Life Space*, and *Immortalization Space*—and they are interwoven to present the problem of power and to critique the social contradictions that have emerged in contemporary China. Qu’s emphasis on the theme of power appears to be a product of his having grown up and worked in an environment led by China’s 体制 (*tǐ zhì*; political system). In his monograph, the artist noted that his experiences within the system allowed him to notice that although the space of power “looks peaceful and harmonious ... it is filled with unrest and danger” (Qu, 2008, p. 13). Qu Yan’s statement implied that the theme of power is the artist’s main concern in his projects, and his experience enabled him to question the invisible power structure rooted in the society, as demonstrated in his installation artwork 寄生报告, *Report of Parasitism* (2005). In this installation, thousands of parasites made from electronic components crawl over a computer. Borrowing the concept of parasites from biology, Qu depicted computer viruses stealing information and causing economic or social damage, encouraging the viewer to reflect on the notion of parasitism in terms of power in social relationships. Through this installation, Qu implied that the problem of power is a sensitive and critical phenomenon in Chinese society (Qu, 2008), using computer viruses as a metaphor to critique the power structure of Chinese society. The four parts of *Space* are also influenced by China’s political milieu, as well as the aforementioned installation artwork.

In order to address the underlying concerns of contemporary landscape photographic works in China, I examined *Space* thematically. In regard to *Power Space*, my interview data indicated that Qu tried to represent the manifestation of power

relationships in different social classes by photographing offices in a range of villages, towns, and cities. Between 2005 and 2007, he focused his lens on the offices of heads of villages. These offices at the grassroots level were indigenized and decorated with multiple items—such as antique tables and chairs, the national or party flag, village honors, portraits of state leaders, and the party’s principles and policies. Some of these offices were situated within the homes of the individuals in charge. In addition, Qu documented either the workplaces of company chairmen or the offices of company directors. These offices were spacious, luxurious, and decorated with art objects or comfortable furniture. In this subset of photographs within the greater project, it appeared that Qu was specifically dealing with the issues of power and that the decorations of the spaces conveyed the sense of power, authority, and wealth. While describing the concerns of power examined in these offices, he stated that “in China, the biggest problem is the power—unconstrained power, the space created by the power, the politics and poetics of the space, and the scene within the power” (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). In this comment, the artist conveyed that spaces such as those shown in his photographs constitute an instrument of power.

During his photo shoots of village offices, especially those in the remote countryside, Qu found that the power of governments at the grassroots level was gradually weakening and eroding the community’s role of social management. Qu provided the example of a village head who had moved to work and live in the city. His departure resulted in not only a lack of care for vulnerable groups in the village but also a decrease in power at the grassroots level. In addition, Qu described that young adults were moving away to earn money in cities, highlighting the widening gap between urban and rural areas in the context of economic and living standards. Children, disabled people, and elderly residents are left behind in villages, where they continue to live in

poor conditions. By describing the ineffective power that exists in villages, the artist expressed that the problem of power is acute in villages.

In later parts of *Space*, Qu addressed issues caused by the problem of power in villages, including the issues related to belief, as portrayed in *Religion Space* and *Immortalization Space*, as well as the concerns of the health-care situation, as depicted in *Life Space*. In addition, Qu implied that the problem of power is at the root of China's acute social issues. For *Religion Space*, Qu Yan captured images of both authorized and underground churches in rural sites from 2007. The churches, permitted by the local government, are often built magnificently and are ornamented with sculptures of Jesus, wooden Communion tables, chairs, paintings of Jesus' stories, and colorful tiles. Conversely, the semiprivate or underground churches are hidden in discarded buildings or small rooms and are sparsely adorned with just a few chairs, images of the cross, and posters. On the one hand, these photographs show that people who stay in villages and live in poor conditions place their hopes in God and gain a sense of well-being by participating in Christian activities. On the other hand, the decorations of churches imply a complex relationship between power and religion.

For *Life Space*, which Qu began in 2008, he photographed various hospitals, medical centers, privately owned clinics, and even small drugstores in remote villages. Qu explained the nature of the power in these spaces, said "power conducts us to disregard lives" (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). Here, the artist was referring to the poor health-care situation in rural areas and how the inadequate medical facilities, caused by power, threaten people's lives. Yet, his concern for people's lives encouraged him to show human figures in the photographs of *Life Space* to represent not only the helplessness of people but also the disregard for subpar medical facilities. *Immortalization Space*, meanwhile, reveals a folk-based religious tradition in China that

he discovered during his photo shoots for *Religion Space*, claiming that in some villages, people often worship revolutionary leaders and heroes (e.g., Mao Zedong) as 神 (*shén*; gods), because of “the lower classes’ discontent with the economic inequality after the Chinese economic reform” (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). These people built temples and arranged sculptures of figures that are similar to the artifacts in Buddhist or Taoist temples. *Immortalization Space* thus seems to depict the relationship between power and memory because temple spaces were built to express people’s nostalgia for the past and to maintain their enthusiasm for the revolution.

After learning from him about the social contradictions caused by power, I asked Qu about his view of landscape, aiming to understand the connection between power and landscape. He replied with the following:

China has a very sophisticated cultural background including the background of traditional Eastern culture, the background of the Marxist-Leninist revolution, the background of the Cultural Revolution, and the background of Western influence. Besides, the reality of Chinese society is absurd and ridiculous because many problems in China are caused by globalization and modernization.

After I saw this picture of reality, I realized that this is what Guy Debord called “spectacle.” This spectacle is the product of modern capitalism and a totalitarian society that plays a crucial role in paralyzing reality, society, and people. This includes questions of how this spectacle turns into a consumption symbol, how we create a political space, and how this space produces a hierarchical order and power order. (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016)

Qu further explained the idea of space in his photographs in an interview conducted by Wei Shen in 2009 and published in the photography forum 色影无忌 (Seyingwuji),

Space is never isolated and static ... Even though my previous images [*Power Space* and *Religion Space*] did not photograph people, we can feel the existence of human beings through information and marks shown in these special spatial locales. Indeed, these photographs offer a space for imagination. In other words, audiences can transit to an unbounded subjective space from a limited objective space. (Wei & Qu, 2009)

Qu Yan's view on landscape, including the idea of power and space, implied that one should examine the symbols shown in Qu's photographs in order to understand the problem of power rooted in the spectacular landscape. For Qu, the concept of space, spectacle, and cultural landscape cannot be separated from the study of Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault; each concept can be investigated under the post-structuralism methodological framework, like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes' semiotics (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). In addition, Qu's answer clearly demonstrated the sociocultural meaning of landscape as defined in this study. On the one hand, Qu regarded landscape mainly as a spectacle, one based on a concept developed by the theorist Guy Debord. On the other hand, he mentioned space, an abstract concept closely related to landscape and social relationships, as reviewed in Chapter II.

To gain a deeper understanding of his views on the village as a spectacular landscape, I invited Qu to talk about his 许村 (*xǔ cūn*; Xu Cun) project, an international

art commune that aims to effect changes in an ancient village of China through art. The Xu Cun art project embodies Qu's artistic philosophy, including his attitude toward the concepts of village, space, society, and spectacle. In the interview, Qu explained:

The rural problem is the root cause for these challenges. The village contains all of China's ethics and faith. When villages are demolished by urbanization and the country people migrate to cities, the divergence crisis emerges.

Over the past hundred years, our revolution has resulted in people abandoning villages to build cities. We intended to make the city a paradise. However, today . . . we choose to run away from cities. You see, supreme leaders are talking about the *nostalgia* of villages because they know that the revolution kills tradition. Why? For any nation to be modernized, the prosperity must be based on the sacrifice of national culture and faith. We believed the traditional is feudal. Right? But we did not establish a new tradition when we gave up the old ones. (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016)

By examining the Xu Cun project, I came to understand Qu's crucial artistic philosophy in *Space*. His fixed observation of power seemed in part to stem from his concern for Chinese cultural traditions rooted in villages, and his work clearly showed that villages hold Chinese culture, beliefs, and soil. That Qu conveyed such a significant role of the village in Chinese society explains why the artist believed the problem of power is critical in villages and why he decided to shoot only the spaces of villages in his later photographs.

Regarding the aspects of memory that the artist expressed through these problems found in landscapes, I asked Qu if the *Space* photographs took into consideration the point of view of memory. Qu quickly answered: "What you mentioned

[issues of memory and urbanization] are just phenomena. We [Qu and the researchers of Xu Cun Art Commune] are studying why things are. We are discussing the historical logic and cultural logic behind it, including the memory you mentioned” (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). His reply suggested that memory was embedded in all of the problems he examined in this project, though he did not directly question memory-related concerns. Hence, the Chinese cultural tradition shown in his photographs had to be examined so see if a sense of memory might emerge.

In exploration of the artistic approaches employed by artists to create a space for the interplay of past, present, and future, I invited Qu to introduce his photographic method and his reasons for choosing photography over painting or installation, two mediums in which he is well informed. His answer implied that an artist uses the photography medium to generate archival materials. He pointed to a photograph from *Power Space* hanging on a wall of his studio:

Look at that picture over there. These kinds of offices were demolished after my photoshoots. The new offices will be equipped according to the government’s requirements of cadres at all levels. These things [new offices] show no differentiation and contain no traces of history and life. In a few years, my photographs will be the most valuable reference for people who study the rural politics of this age ... Therefore, I decided to record these spaces through photography ... I intended to document the actual space directly and objectively.

The most important value of using photography is its realism, its critical values, and its ability to promote the development of the society ... I did not aim for a breakthrough in the language of photography. I simply use photography as a medium and tool to express my ideology. (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016)

According to Qu, photography's chief value lay in its documentary nature. He believed that the mechanical function of photography enabled him to obtain realistic images of the diverse spaces in different villages and regions. In addition, he mentioned that he applied the method of the German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher to archive the richness and objectivity of spaces, and this goal determined his choice of cameras and ways of presenting the photographs. Qu Yan shot the *Space* photographs with a Chinese-brand large-format Chamonix camera and color film. The camera's large size and the type of film ensured that the details in the photographs would be well defined. In addition, Qu titled the photographs with detailed information that included the names of the sites, villages, towns, provinces, and years. Qu's photographs and the titles of his images made clear that the spaces (offices, churches, etc.) differ from city to village, from village to village, from north to south, from senior leader to junior official, and from time to time, revealing the users' political role, cultural level, economic situation, and geographical characteristics.

In addition to the photographic methods of the Bechers and their topographic documentation, Qu's spatial experience is fundamental in examining issues embedded in landscapes. My interview data shows that Qu's experiences in villages encouraged the development of the four parts of the project. When he traveled to villages to create one part, he found problems that led to a later part. And, the troubles he encountered during the photo shoots only enhanced his interpretation of power in spaces. In other words, the four parts of the *Space* series were continuously inspired by the problems and situations Qu observed during his photo shoots. Within Qu Yan's experiences in villages on photo shoots lie the answers to how artists investigate landscape memory.

The Embodiment of Memory

Qu's responses during the interview provided clues as to how I should examine the embodiment of memory in the *Space* photographs. In the below sections, I question the relationship between power and memory by following Qu's idea of the spectacle. I then analyze the photographs in light of his concern for the Chinese cultural tradition. Both methods provide insight into memory as a phenomenon related to the examination of contemporary issues without being limited to the inspection of the past.

Power and memory. As previously mentioned, the crucial idea to understanding the *Space* photographs is the concept of spectacle, which Qu borrowed from the theorist Guy Debord to examine issues caused by power in society. In the book *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord portrayed a society produced by the capitalist commodity economy, stating, "the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (1967, p. 5). The reason lay in the control of power. As Debord defined the term, spectacle is the "self-portrait of power in the age of power's totalitarian rule over the conditions of existence" (1967, p. 8).

While Qu consciously focused on the problem of power, I discovered the relationship between power and memory that Debord had examined in spectacular landscapes. According to Debord, memory becomes paralyzed when it is controlled and organized by power. Debord disclosed the matters of memory through the examination of history. For example, in China, each dynasty had historical books that were written by ministers. These ministers would also revise the historical books of the earlier dynasties for political purposes. Consequently, Debord's theory reminds us that historical archives as a carrier of memory are not always true. Indeed, history is formed

of impersonal memories that were “the memories of the administration of society” (Debord, 1967, p. 64). For Debord, it is power that determines our history and then memory. The relationship between power and memory is particularly evident in Qu’s *Immortalization Space* photographs because of their subjects. In *Immortalization Space*, Qu examined the problem of belief when it involved people’s worship of revolutionary leaders or heroes as gods in villages. According to Qu, “民间信仰” (*mín jiān xìn yǎng*; popular belief) refers to any belief influenced by human beings or rulers, which has existed throughout much of China’s history yet has been opposed and even forbidden by Chinese governments (Gaenssbauer, 2015). As Qu has recorded, when these temples of rulers or heroes disturbed to the government, they were demolished by the police or the authorities, only to be rebuilt by the people. Some governmental officials allowed the existence of these temples into the 21st century.

In the photograph of the temple 怀英阁 (*huái yīng gé*; In Memory of the Hero), shot at a village in Shanxi Province (see Figure 24), sculptures of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Peng Dehuai are situated on a stage above eye level. Behind the sculptures, beautiful scenes of mountains and farmland have been painted on the wall, signifying people’s longing for the past. When the viewer looks at the sculptures from front center, the red sun of the painting sits exactly atop Mao’s head, symbolizing Mao Zedong’s successful guidance. The walls on the right and left sides are painted with significant events from the time of Mao, such as the founding ceremony of the nation in 1949, and the paintings express people’s enthusiasm for the revolution. The temple of rulers or heroes was built as a site of longing.

Figure 24. Qu Yan. (2008). 造神空间—陕西省榆林市横山县横山镇古水村怀英阁 *Immortalization Space—the Mao Zedong Temple in the Ancient-Water Village of Shanxi Province*. Retrieved from the artist.

The image implies the immortality of the individual, as outlined in Jan Assmann's concept of cultural memory. Assmann believed that "one strong incentive for memory is power" (2011b, p. 53). To him, myth, origin, and nebulous past need power to form a collective historical consciousness. In this order, the immortality of the individual is the most important element that represents the memory of the group (J. Assmann, 2011b). In Qu's image, the rulers, such as Mao Zedong, are not only elevated to gods in this village but also revered as political symbols of the era. Here, Mao's figure represents a celebration of Chinese revolutionary history and reflects the way in which rulers control a state's social memory. In other words, they "usurp not only the past but also the future because they want to be remembered, and to commemorate their own deeds by monuments, ensuring that their glory will be narrated, sung, immortalized or, at the very least, recorded in archives" (J. Assmann, 2011b, p. 54).

By applying Debord's concept of the spectacle, we can see that memory is false and paralyzed—that is, embedded in the discourse of power. In the context of Assmann's concept of cultural memory and power, the representation of memory can be understood through the immortality of the individual. In the context of both Debord's and Assmann's concepts, Qu's photographs of temples not only show the issue of belief in the countryside but also reveal memory through the effect of power.

Cultural crises and nostalgia. When Qu said, "We are discussing the historical logic and cultural logic behind it, including the memory," he suggested that the comprehensive understanding of his works should be examined in the context of the Chinese cultural tradition. This required that I not only examine *Space* by uncovering the sociocultural meaning of the spaces where Qu Yan took his photographs but also read the symbols shown in the photographs within the Chinese culture. By doing so, I uncovered the nostalgia inspired by cultural crises.

Qu's photographs expressed that a crisis is brought on by the changes in villages. As the foundation of Chinese society, the village forms the culture of China by combining the lived experience of rural areas and individual memories, as well as contains China's ethics and faith (Fei, 1992; Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). As the villages are being demolished, culture is becoming problematic and the divergence crisis emerges (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). According to Qu's idea of the society of the spectacle, the village is a heterogeneous social foundation, resulting in people's departure from traditional culture, faith, morality, and ritual. In a time of political upheaval and social transformation, the village consists of a paralyzed history and the abandonment of culture. People who stay in villages are forced to accept new knowledge, to forget the past, and to ignore respect for tradition. As a result, cultural crises may appear as conflicts of thoughts, experiences, and emotions of

individuals or may cause the “disintegration, destruction, or suspension of some basic elements of sociocultural life” (Bidney, 1946, p. 534).

Based on the concerns of power, belief, and life in villages that Qu portrayed, the *Space* photographs reflected two kinds of cultural crises. The first cultural crisis is that of power, which is the foundation of other crises and issues. China is a society ruled by rituals and people, not by law (Fei, 1992). Such a society is maintained by traditions that accumulate over generations, rather than by an exterior force. So, as Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong argued (1992), a society ruled by rituals must be one in which tradition can effectively solve the problems of life. However, in a rapidly changing society, people cannot apply old ways to deal with new problems in a new environment, which is what Qu conveyed during the interview (June 18, 2016) when he said: “For any nation to be modernized, prosperity must be based on the sacrifice of national culture and faith. But we have not established a new tradition when we give up old ones.” For this, power is needed to control people to solve new problems.

People’s hope for power on different levels is apparent by analyzing details presented in Qu’s photographs. For example, in the image of the office of the director of the Tobacco Monopoly Bureau in Xuzhou city (see Figure 25), the office is spacious with a simple design. Yet if viewers look closely, they can see costly decorations, such as the modern ceiling design, leather chairs, and fashionable tables and shelves. In addition, a few delicate art objects are situated in inconspicuous corners of the office, such as a stone sculpture and a pair of porcelain vases. Compared with this simple and elegant office, the office of the chairman of Jinfeng Fangsheng Building Material Group in Beijing is luxurious (see Figure 26). The office is decorated in traditional Chinese style and includes much carved wooden furniture. The walls are covered with calligraphy and paintings. A Chinese painting of tigers hangs in the center, symbolizing

power and majesty. Many craft pieces, such as the 弥勒菩萨 (*mí lè pú sà*; Maitreya) and the 貔貅 (*pí xiū*; Pixiu), are placed on the table, aiming to bring money and fortune and ward off negative forces. The chairman of the factory designed the office for the power of business and the will of success. In addition to these offices photographed in cities, most of the offices in the *Power Space* series are in villages. The rural offices are decorated simply and with various government symbols, such as national flags and posters, which reflect the officials' obedience to the higher authority.

Figure 25. Qu Yan. (2007). 权力空间—江苏省徐州市烟草专卖局局长办公室 *Power Space—the Office of the Tobacco Monopoly Bureau in Xu Zhou City*. Retrieved from *The World*.

Figure 26. Qu Yan. (2007). 权力空间—北京市某建材集团董事长办公室 *Power Space—the Office of the Chairman of Jinfeng Fangsheng Building Material Group in Beijing*. Retrieved from *The World*.

From the arrangement of objects and the design of the offices, the viewer can infer individuals' desire for power and the power of different social classes. Throughout China's history, power and the rights of people are not protected by law, but they are protected by "official relatives' private interests" (Fei, 1983). The sense of the encroachment of power found in Fei's phrasing echoes Qu's comment that the people who hold on to privileges are afraid of revolutions. The subjects in the photographs decorated their offices with personal interests, making their offices sites of personalized and political power.

The second cultural crisis is that of belief, which is reflected in the official and underground churches and the popular belief temples. The word 信仰 (*xìn yǎng*; belief) in Chinese refers not only to a religious system but also to spiritual or philosophical traditions, many of which are different from those of the West. In China, these belief systems vary from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism to rituals of clan relationship (Lagerwey, 2004; Weller, 1987). In the history of China's rural society, each village had

a lineage temple dedicated to its ancestors. The lineage temple was used for collective rituals and festivals, such as weddings and funerals. Such spiritual traditions were abolished as 迷信 (*mí xìn*; superstition) in China during Mao's rule (Dorfman, 1996).

Qu Yan's *Religion Space* conveyed that the abovementioned Chinese spiritual or philosophical traditions have been discarded and that Christianity has been promoted in China. Christianity was not traditionally accepted by the Chinese because its belief system was antagonistic to Chinese spiritual traditions. For example, Christianity forbids idolatry, whereas Chinese lineage culture worships ancestors. To be assimilated in China, Christianity has adopted traditional aspects of China's culture and background to meet the religious yearning and needs of the Chinese people (Fällman, 2008). This so-called *sinicization* of Christianity can be found in the arrangement of the objects in Chinese Christian churches (Liang, 1999). For example, in the image of the church in the village of Yuezhuang, Jiangsu Province (see Figure 27), from *Religion Space*, on either side of the red cross are two wooden plaques that bear rhyming religious slogans. This kind of plaque was an integral part of a traditional building in China, and it was aimed at propagating ethical concepts and moral values or at reminding younger generations of important historical events or people. Bible scripts and anthems are written on a small blackboard and a roll of paper and then hung on the wall. As Qu noted, the anthems are related to Chinese ethics and family matters, not to eulogizing God.

Figure 27. Qu Yan. (2008). 信仰空间—江苏省徐州市铜山县徐庄镇某村教堂 *Religion Space—the Church in Yuezhuang Village of Jiangsu Province*. Retrieved from *The World*.

The nostalgic reflection may occur when viewers uncover the difference between past traditions and present conditions. When regarding Qu's photographs, the viewer may realize that the rapid integration of a new lifestyle deepens the sense of crisis and produces dramatic scenes. For example, in the photographs of churches, the symbols of Chinese culture (e.g., the wooden plaques) and Western ideology (Christianity) are shown in one locale, indicating a heterogeneous belief system in the village.

Indeed, Qu was aware of the connection between crisis and nostalgia when he shared his thoughts on the elimination of villages. 怀旧热/怀乡热 (*huái jiù rè/huái xiāng rè*; the fever of nostalgia) that Qu mentioned was echoed by the president of China, Xi Jinping, who proposed a “human-centered urbanization” so that the Chinese could “have rural nostalgia in mind” (Qiong, 2013, paragraph 13). According to Qu, the sentiment of nostalgia emerges with the conflict between rural traditions and present-day people's rights, Western discourse, and social conditions. In today's context,

nostalgia has become a relationship between the past and present, and it occurs with a “sharp contrast that the experience casts on present circumstances and conditions”, not referring to a “painful yearning to return home” (Davis, 1979, p. 15). In China, nostalgia has been one of the most important “cultural realities” since the 1990s, when large-scale urbanization and commercialization began (Jinhua, 1997). Nostalgic fever came about because of the effects of contemporary Chinese culture: one particular symptom is the weariness and toil of modern progress. Another is the right of the individual in the progress of society, which causes a crisis of identity and belief, as shown in *Power Space*, *Religion Space*, *Life Space*, and *Immortalization Space*.

Typological Method

In regard to the methods that are used for the representation of cultural memory, I discuss the typological method employed by Qu Yan using his photographs as examples. For *Space*, in which Qu strived to display various offices, churches, temples, and clinics in different villages throughout China, Qu had traveled to at least five provinces in China and driven tens of thousands of kilometers since beginning the project in 2005. Because Qu was faced with such a diversity of sites, he appreciated the documentary value of photography, and its mechanical nature had enabled him to document heterogeneous sites precisely and to express China’s acute social conditions realistically.

Qu’s approach reopens questions about topographic photography and objectivity that date back to the 19th century. Photography was used as a tool for topographic documentation for activities such as government surveys, geographic investigations, and travelogues, as well as for scholarship related to ethnography and archaeology (Wells, 2011). Beginning in the late 20th century in the West, the topographic function

of photography turned into a style—topographic photography—which was embraced by conceptual artists in the 1960s and 1970s (Lange, 2007). Topographic photographs show well-defined details of objects and usually do not include people. They encourage dispassionate observation, aiming to reach the “allegations of coolness, distance, banality, and even anti-photography” (Adams, 1981, p. 3). The German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher were known for their objective views of photography, typological studies, and topological documentation. In general, the Bechers used three unified forms of composition that showed the entirety of a space, close-up details, and parallel vertical lines, and they applied two typological methods to classify and compare the photographs of an individual object or a sequence of objects.¹⁴ All of their images were shot on cloudy days to avoid the sharp light, shadows, and high contrast. With large-format cameras and 13 x 18 cm, low-sensitivity black-and-white film, the Bechers captured crisp details in their images. The Bechers’ composition style, typological methods, and technical concerns are believed to have set the rules for the many photographers and artists in China who are attempting to explore landscape-related photography, such as Qu Yan.

The typological method of Qu’s photographs is not as systematic as the Bechers’; however, this has not affected his intentions. In a photograph of a meeting room in the village of Xiping, in the province of Shanxi (see Figure 28), the meeting table is located in the middle of the frame. This composition highlights various certificates and policies of the village hanging on the wall. In the image of the head office of Shaquan village, also in Shanxi Province (see Figure 29), the table is placed on the left side of the frame to include the awards of the village on the right side and an old heater in the middle of

¹⁴ For more details on Bernd and Hilla Becher’s life and work, systematic analysis and classification, please see Susanne Lange’s *Bernd and Hilla Becher: Life and Work* (2007).

the room. Rather than using the fixed compositions that the Bechers insisted on, Qu tried to fully represent the characteristics of the space, introducing the functions and appearances.

Figure 28. Qu Yan. (2006). 权力空间—山西省大同县坝里乡西坪村村委会会议室 *Power Space—the Meeting Room of Xiping Village in Shanxi Province*. Retrieved from *The World*.

Figure 29. Qu Yan. (2006). 权力空间—山西省广灵县南村镇沙泉村村长办公室 *Power Space—the Head Office of Shaquan Village in Shanxi Province*. Retrieved from *The World*.

In general, topographic photographs show no people, only landscapes, such as those in *Power Space*, *Religion Space*, and *Immortalization Space*, even though viewers know that there are officials, believers, or villagers around. However, in *Life Space*, Qu's photographs included people in the form of patients in the clinics. For instance, in the photograph of Yuanmin Clinic in Shanxi Province (see Figure 30), there are two women and one man looking at the camera. Each woman is holding a baby in her arms. The babies are ill and being given intravenous injections. The man is sitting on the side of the hospital bed, with his hands in his pockets. The three people are slouching and frowning; they may be worrying about the health of the babies or the qualifications of the doctor. On the wall is a testimonial for the doctor, claiming that the doctor is the owner of the clinic and promises a high level of medical care at a very low cost. Perhaps the three people in the photograph are indifferent to the simple non-government-authorized clinic because of their poor economic conditions. They are not interacting, and their stillness makes them look like sculptures and creates a depressing ambience. With the inclusion of human figures, this photograph highlights the unequal treatment of the lower classes in China and conveys people's attitude toward life.

Figure 30. Qu Yan. (2008). 生命空间—山西省原平市青年街原民诊所 *Life Space—the Yuanmin*

Clinic in Shanxi Province. Retrieved from *The World*.

There was a strong subjective view involved in the choice of the sites and in the critical attitude to the subjects. The documented offices, churches, and hospitals were chosen to match Qu's "understanding of the aesthetic construction, power development, and space poetics" and to ensure the remarkable and realistic result (Qu, personal communication, June 18, 2016). Qu's artistic method and rationale disclosed that the objectivity of photography refers to the attention given to the observation of the sites while avoiding the personal emotions and other landscape or art aesthetics. In other words, objectivity is conveyed in respect for the objects themselves that require photographers to record and document the facts, truth, and details. As a result, Qu's photographs provide evidence and documentation for future generations during a period of rapid rural construction in China.

Qu's photographs are not meant to invent something new but to discover new things. This new thing may refer to memory that already exists in the objects but can only be found during analysis of the images. As Qu said in his artist statement on *Power Space*, "I don't wish to be overly passionate; nor do I wish to be led into the trap of being attached to the silence of the neglected but objective memories, so even if these scenes were to exist before I write about them, their meaning is but a refraction of their true meaning" (2014, p. 47). In Qu Yan's photographs, memory is first embedded in his subject of power. Power promotes and controls the construction of memory in a way that transfers fragmented personal experience to a historical collective consciousness. Moreover, memory is rooted in the cultural crisis caused by the development of society, showing the conflicts between traditional Chinese culture, communist ideology, and Western values. When viewers comprehend the conflicts, the photographs will raise the sentiment of nostalgia by stirring up unrecoverable beliefs, experiences, and life.

Case 2. Yao Lu: Persistence of Tradition as Memory

Artist Yao Lu was born in 1967 and grew up in Beijing, China. He studied printmaking at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and was exposed to photography as an undergraduate student. He is currently a professor in the photography department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Yao is well known for his digitally manipulated photo series 中国景观, *Chinese Landscape* (2006-2014). I selected Yao's *Chinese Landscape* to analyze in this study because the form of traditional Chinese 山水 (*shān shuǐ*; shan shui) painting used in these photographs permitted discovery of the perception of nostalgia in the creation of memory-related landscape photographs.

This case study is based on interviews and collected documents, including books, exhibition catalogues, reviews, and information online. I held an in-person interview with the artist to probe Yao's attitude toward urbanization, his view of memory in photography, and the emotions he conveys through the works. The case study describes the project by presenting Yao's responses to queries relating to the three themes of this study—landscape, memory, and photographic methods—as well as other scholars' reviews. Next, I examine Yao's works to demonstrate that 1) the performance of cultural memory in his photographs is that of spiritual need and the concerns of culture and 2) his imitation of traditional Chinese landscape painting is a strategy for the representation of cultural memory in contemporary landscape photography.

The Chinese Landscape Project

In addressing the main objective of this study, that is, to discover to what extent the artists relate and reflect cultural memory of China during its rapid urbanization since

2000, I first invited Yao Lu to give an overview of his *Chinese Landscape* project. Collected data appeared to indicate that the artist's inspiration, intention, and method for the *Chinese Landscape* project were shaped naturally by his observation of landscape changes in Beijing and his art history knowledge. Yao drew inspiration from the typical appearance of Beijing in the early 2000s that he saw every day near his home and workplace. Many new buildings were under construction and old houses and streets were being destroyed in preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. At that time, the accumulation of large amounts of construction waste, such as bricks, mud, and household garbage, could be seen everywhere on the streets and roadsides of Beijing.

The construction waste was piled up like hills, and the mounds were covered by green or black dust nets to prevent the garbage from being blown away by the wind. For Yao, these mounds of construction waste resembled images of Chinese landscape paintings from the Song dynasty. As he explained, "Whoever passes by the big mounds of construction waste covered by dustproof nets will connect them with ancient Chinese mountain and water painting" (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016). Yao applied these features (construction waste covered by dust nets) to imitate traditional Chinese landscape painting, producing "good-looking" and painting-like landscape photographs (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016).

In order to explore the underlying concerns of contemporary landscape photographic works in China, I asked Yao which problems he had questioned in the *Chinese Landscape* project. The artist's response expressed his concern with social realities in China. To be specific, he regarded construction waste and dust nets as references for the measurement of a city's development, saying: "The quantity of these objects [mounds of dirt, construction waste, etc.] indicates the speed and changes of city construction and resettlement, which are some of my longtime concerns" (Yao, personal

communication, December 1, 2016). Once he had discovered the problems hidden by the construction waste, Yao indicated that the *Chinese Landscape* project became a mean to express his memory of the past and to illuminate the loss of traditional Chinese culture through the images of landscape.

In further exploring this question in parallel with the aspects of memory that the artist expresses through the problems found in landscapes, I invited Yao to elaborate on the issues he found in the changing landscape and how these issues influenced his ideas and moods in the establishment of these photographs. Collected data clearly indicated that Yao's *Chinese Landscape* expressed a nostalgic feeling, so I asked Yao, "In your previous interviews, you mentioned that the pathetic emotions came along slowly. Could you please elaborate on this?" and "How do you see the problem of memory?" Yao clarified:

Lots of historical things were being demolished by forklifts and replaced by modern buildings and wide roads ... Conversely, those things that can evoke people's remembrances of history and the past were becoming scarcer and scarcer. Those lost things can be retained in people's memories for a period of time. After a generation, what has been left for future generations are just fickle and ordinary buildings with no special characteristics or humanity ... All of these issues constituted the heavy mood during the creation, including oppressiveness and sadness ...

... We are at the modernization stage of development. However, the cost of the modernization inevitably includes replacing many things of the past, including culture ... In fact, this raises a question: Do modern life and living standards have to exclude past things as their cost? More and more traditional and essential Chinese things (e.g., architecture, festivals, landscape) have been

moved away from our lives. These things cannot be recovered once they have disappeared. The cost of modernization is too high. However, materialistic modernization will never replace spiritual things. (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016)

On the one hand, by questioning the cost of China's development, Yao Lu expressed that his sentiment of nostalgia, including sadness and helplessness, developed gradually and consciously. While he gave himself the joy of mimicking traditional Chinese landscape painting, he reflected on his personal experiences of living in Beijing to question problems caused by landscape changes, including the problem of memory, environmental challenges, crisis of identity, and the loss of traditional architecture, customs, and religion. On the other hand, Yao's response conveyed the relationship between landscape and memory as reviewed in Chapter II. When he stated in the interview that "historical things can evoke people's remembrances of history and past" and "traditional Chinese things cannot be recovered once they have disappeared," the artist indicated that memory exists in the landscape that humans have created. He also said that the changes of his birthplace made him feel "a longing for the disappearing" and "a sense of loss" (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016), which suggested that memory occurs in the conflict between a materialistic society and people's spiritual needs.

After hearing his concerns about urbanization and loss of tradition and his emotions driven by changes in landscape, I moved on to artistic approaches used to create a space for the interplay of past, present, and future. I asked Yao how he saw the theme of memory emerging in contemporary photography, to which he replied: "the decisive moment is the most essential language for photography" (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016). By this, he meant that the camera shows the reality

of society by recording the appearance of the current landscape via an impartial process. The realistic nature of photography determines a sense of satire when the artist conveys the forms of Chinese painting in photographs. As Yao put it, “the otherworldly and ethereal aesthetic of Song dynasty landscape painting forms a contrast and irony with the current scenery. In other words, the more beautiful the picture is, the stronger the contrast and irony” (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016).

Yao’s photographic method was to mimic the form of traditional Chinese landscape painting in his photographs. He photographed the construction waste and green and black dust nets near his home or during his daily walks. When he got back to his studio, he used the digital software Photoshop to cut and merge a number of photographs into one image. While collaging numerous photographs into one *shan shui* “painting,” he also used different tools in Photoshop to add the traditional elements of a Chinese painting, such as boats, poems, seals, calligraphy, and pagodas. In order to follow the principles and elements of traditional Chinese painting to create painting-like photographs, he studied the paintings of old masters, such as Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, Tang Yin, and Wen Zhengming.

For an in-depth understanding of Yao’s method in imitating traditional Chinese painting, I challenged the artist’s view on the relationship between the spirituality of painting and the reality of photography. While Yao claimed that the use of traditional landscape painting and photography happened naturally, I asked the artist to elaborate: “[Since] Chinese painting expresses the artist’s spirit, and photography records the truth, how do you reconcile the combination of the two media?” Yao responded:

Nowadays, we see things through the means of physical form. We have the lens, the telescope. However, in ancient times, people saw things through their minds, in a kind of psychological form ... For Chinese painters, they visited mountains

and remembered scenery in order to paint it on paper afterwards. In other words, what they expressed on paper was the landscape in their minds. In recent times, we have recorded and documented landscape ...

Actually, there is an interesting point in that the concept of time is different between the past and the present, and that certainly influences many things. In ancient times, if people said, “I’m going to visit you,” it meant that he/she might ride over to see you after one week. During this week, people might create poems to express their feelings. However, nowadays I can go to a conference by plane within half a day ... This process does not produce any information or experience [like poetry] ... Nowadays, we find it difficult to appreciate the spirit of the ancients. Therefore, the combination of technology and art cannot simply focus on the form but should explore the roots of culture. (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016)

Yao’s answer exposed one of the main concerns in creating the *Chinese Landscape* project, which was to look for an artistic method and language within the Chinese traditional culture. He indicated different ways of seeing a landscape in the past and present, as well as in painting and photography. He raised the problems of time and space by highlighting the spiritual experience in the landscape. By this, he meant that when applying traditional Chinese painting to photography or other art media, the artist should comprehend the Chinese aesthetics in the practice of art, such as spirituality and emptiness, rather than merely imitate appearances and borrow symbols.

My collected data exposed the artist’s two interpretations of landscape within the photographic project, which may influence the viewer’s understanding of Yao Lu’s photographs and the embedded memory. Indeed, this photographic series has had two titles: Aside from the title of *Chinese Landscape*, these photographs carried the alternate

title of 新山水, *New Shan Shui* in some exhibitions, such as when they were shown at the Istanbul Modern Photography Gallery. The title *New Shan Shui* aims to underscore the expressive style of his works. Under this title, landscape implies environmental beauty, as characterized by the harmony between humankind and nature shown in traditional Chinese landscape painting. In regard to this, curator Engin Ozendes has commented that Yao Lu reflected “his soul in his work” by considering the meaning of mountains and water and the mythical elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth in Chinese tradition (2005, p. 7). For Ozendes, Yao’s works portray a landscape in the artist’s mind and signify a return of Chinese culture by conveying the spirit of the landscape.

Another of his ideas toward landscape refers to a cultural concept that involves human experience and ideologies. As Yao said, “Landscape is a broader and heavier concept that involves [various elements, such as] the human environment, human participation, human traces, sociality, and the relationship between natural and non-natural” (Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016). It would appear that when the artist uses the title *Chinese Landscape*, emphasis is being placed on how these photographs critique society and issues caused by China’s rapid urbanization. Sinology scholar Harro von Senger (2005) and Chinese critic Gu Zheng (2010a) have commented on the concerns of reality shown in Yao’s photographs and observed that Yao’s photographs can be interpreted as a constructive critique of the economy-centered policy of China. From the perspective of culture, Yao’s photographs disclose the problems of society in a metaphorical way.

Memory as a Spiritual Practice

Yao's response to the research question of the embodiment of cultural memory in landscape photography demonstrated in which ways memory is embedded in a landscape. Moreover, his answer made clear that his photographs expressed the sentiment of nostalgia caused by spiritual emptiness, the loss of Chinese tradition and culture, and other problems existing in a materialistic society. This enabled me to delve into representation of cultural memory by examining the concern of nostalgia exposed through Yao Lu's photographs.

When looking at Yao's *Chinese Landscape* photographs, even viewers without an in-depth knowledge of art history will likely be reminded of traditional Chinese landscape painting. Viewers will first see a poetical landscape: The majestic mountains and flowing water seem to recede into mist and clouds; pavilions, pagodas, boats, and people appear amid the mountains and water. However, when viewed more closely, the picturesque landscape is actually revealed to be a pile of construction rubbish covered by netting; workers wearing safety helmets walk on piles of bricks and mounds of dirt. Yao has stated that construction waste and dust nets have come to be seen as new symbols of China, and a city with many protective green dust nets and mounds of garbage at construction sites is perceived to be more developed than cities that have fewer of these construction-related features (Gu, 2010; Yao, personal communication, December 1, 2016). But, the dust nets are an attempt to hide facts, which prompted Yao to deliberate on what lay below the beautiful surface and what led to this situation.

In the face of dramatic and unprecedented changes taking place in Beijing, Yao raised the question of if the cost of modern life and its development must necessarily be the exclusion of past things. As a person who was born in Beijing and continues to live and work there, Yao has a strong interest in and love for the city's history, beliefs,

architecture, customs, and rituals, as well as all kinds of Chinese traditional behaviors and art. His negative answer to his own question conveyed two aspects of understanding memory embedded in a landscape.

On the one hand, by saying that “historical [and by extension, traditional] things can evoke people’s remembrances of the past”, Yao showed that memory is placement. Both Jan Assmann’s memory landscape and Pierre Nora’s sites of memory regard landscape as a medium for cultural memory. In the context of Beijing, 胡同 (*hú tòng*; hutong) is one example of this “memory landscape.” As a living space, the *hutong* has housed residents, their daily lives, and assorted festivals for generations. First constructed during the 13th-century Yuan dynasty, the *hutong* is a kind of construction formed by alleys opening onto courtyards peculiar to Beijing and features in the traditional architecture of northern China, neighborhood relations, beliefs, and customs.¹⁵ However, a large number of *hutongs* have been razed to give way to high-rise buildings, shopping malls, tourist sites, and new communities. The newly constructed buildings or streets that have replaced *hutongs* lack any trace of past activities and passed-down traditions, presenting living spaces to people in an unfamiliar way.

On the other hand, by saying that “the materialistic modernization will never replace the spiritual things,” Yao expressed that old landscapes, such as Beijing *hutongs*, refer not only to the cultural and social perspectives of land use and human intervention but also encompass mental perceptions, such as imagination, memory, and spiritual

¹⁵ The history of the Beijing *hutong* and its current situation can be found in various books. See, for example, Wang Jun’s *Beijing Record: A Physical and Political History of Planning Modern Beijing* (2011) and Michael Meyer’s *The Last Days of Old Beijing: Life in the Vanishing Backstreets of a City Transformed* (2009).

immersion. His response highlighted the spirituality of landscape. According to scholars J. D. Dewsbury and Paul Cloke, the spiritual landscape is a “co-constituting set of relations between bodily existence, felt practice, and faith in things that are immanent, but not yet manifest” (2009, p. 696). When people visit old landscapes such as Beijing *hutongs*, they believe these places can “be affective of some sense of spiritual evocation” (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009, p. 696). Thus, the demolition of historic and traditional dwellings, alleys, or buildings may cause dissatisfaction and an emptiness of the spirit. As Yao described, a feeling of nostalgia, loss, sadness, and helplessness occurs with the newly constructed skyscrapers and communities that have emerged during China’s rapid development.

Yao Lu’s practices demonstrated two forms of nostalgia that involve different feelings about changes in the landscape. In a 2008 interview, Yao stated that nostalgia became a characteristic of his practice when he realized the loss of the past caused by the rapid construction and demolition; he aimed to express his memory of the past by restoring the beauty and poetic sense to the landscape (Feng & Yao, 2008). Yao’s idea underscored the perception that nostalgia is a form of remembering, which is a “necessary spiritual space for imagining and for consolation” (Jinhua, 1997, p. 147). Nostalgia firmly connects the past with present circumstances and conditions (Davis, 1979; Lowenthal, 1975). Especially in the context of urbanization and industrialization, nostalgia is “expressive of how we feel about movement and change, about what has been lost or what continues to exert a strong emotional tug on our hearts and minds” (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 117). The meanings and manifestations of nostalgia have changed from homesickness to a yearning for the past and a longing to return to a specific place or time (Davis, 1979; Keightley & Pickering, 2012).

The first form of nostalgia is a longing for the beautiful scenery of the past. For example, in Yao Lu's 松岩观瀑图, *View of Waterfall with Rocks and Pines*, 2007 (see Figure 31), two people who look like tourists stand under a pine tree. They are visiting the waterfall and taking photographs. However, what they see is not really a spectacular cascade but mounds of construction sand and stone covered by green dustproof nets. This photograph expresses that the construction waste and dust nets are ugly but have replaced what should have been the poetic landscape of the past. Landscape was once a symbol for the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang and centered on the notion of the “天人合一” (unity of heaven and humanity), which depicted the harmonious relationship between humankind and nature. However, this relationship began to change starting with Mao Zedong's rule, through slogans such as “人定胜天” (humanity's determined triumph over nature). Landscape has since turned into a sign of rapid development and hegemony with sociocultural meaning, even though a new slogan “保住青山绿水” (keep green mountains and water), has been proposed by Xi Jinping in the 21st century. Mountains and water are now considered elements found only in certain types of places, such as the countryside, isolated regions, and tourist attractions, an attitude that inadvertently expresses remorse for losing nature in urbanized spaces and a hope for returning to attractive scenes of mountains and water in untouched areas.

Figure 31. Yao Lu. (2007). 松岩观瀑图, *View of Waterfall with Rocks and Pines*. Retrieved from the artist.

The second form of nostalgia involves mourning for the lost home and familiar surroundings. In *中山烟云图*, *Mount Zhon in the Mist*, 2006 (see Figure 32), people wearing safety helmets walk through ruins that represent the activity of construction and demolition. These workers are razing the homes of people where they had carried out daily activities, festivals, customs, and rituals for generations. Equally, these workers' homes may also have been torn down by others. In China, these construction workers are mostly people who had to move elsewhere because their houses or villages were torn down according to government plans or are people who chose to leave their hometowns to seek better opportunities in well-developed places driven by economic development. With the demolition and the abandonment of homes, what Pierre Nora called "real

environments of memory” (1989, p. 7) no longer exist. While old patterns of the Chinese community have disintegrated, a homogenized society has been shaped by the construction of new high-rise buildings, shopping malls, and apartments. Ironically, people express “a yearning to escape the trappings of the modern and commoditized world” (Qian, 2017, p. 4,427). The reason for this is that, as Yao portrayed in his photographs, the current landscape lacks spirituality and life experience, thus leading to a longing for home and spiritual sustenance.

Figure 32. Yao Lu. (2006). 中山烟云图, *Mount Zhong in the Mist*. Retrieved from the artist.

Yao Lu’s practice proves that memory emerges with the spiritual emptiness and the loss of culture caused by the massive destruction of old landscapes in China. Yao expressed that during his creation of the traditional Chinese painting-like photographs

that are filled with garbage, he experienced a longing for the disappeared. By this, he meant a feeling of nostalgia that synthesizes loss, lack, and longing. Motivated by the changes of social environment from the past to the present, Yao discovered a dearth of Chinese tradition and culture in the current homogenized society, leading to a sense of loss and a longing for the past in the form of customs, festivals, lifestyle, and spirit.

Looking to Tradition as a Method

Regarding an artistic method for the performance of cultural memory in photography, Yao expressed a strategy in which contemporary artists use the forms and symbols of traditional Chinese painting in photography to criticize the problems of contemporary society. In the following, I categorize Yao's photographs according to theme and form of traditional Chinese painting and analyze his works in detail. This enables me to examine how traditional Chinese painting can be used in photography as a form to express the interplay of past and present.

Yao Lu reproduced the beauty and poetic sensibility of traditional Chinese landscapes by imitating, rearranging, and piecing together hundreds of photographs of garbage and dust nets in Photoshop. He mainly mimicked three forms of traditional Chinese painting to connect tradition with current reality. In his photographs, each form represents a unique theme and purpose.

Some of Yao's photographs reference traditional 青绿山水 (blue-green landscape painting, also called *shan shui* painting), in which the colors blue, green, and brown predominate. In 富春山居图, *Dwelling in the Mount Fuchun*, 2008 (see Figure 33), Yao employed the form of the long horizontal scroll to highlight the majestic mountain scenery surrounded by cloud and mist. In the image, mountains are formed by massive piles of green and blue dustproof netting covering mounds of brown dirt and

stone, while gray-green water flows between mountains, thereby reconstructing the vastness and depth of a Chinese landscape painting. Small pavilions, pine trees, and pagodas are shown in the image much as the old masters did. According to the common symbolism of Chinese landscape painting, features such as mountains, water, pagodas, and trees are used to represent the beauty of nature and the resonance of noble spirit. However, Yao broke with the original meaning by filling the photograph with modern features. High-rise buildings and factory chimneys are hidden in the mountain, and an airplane flies in the sky to interrupt viewers' imagination of a traditional painting. A red sign stands on top of a hill announcing that the mountain is too dangerous for people to stand near. These details highlight the changes of landscape and the consequences of urbanization in contemporary China.

Figure 33. Yao Lu. (2008). 富春山居图, *Dwelling in the Mount Fuchun*. Retrieved from the artist.

Other photographs by Yao in the *Chinese Landscape* series resemble the style of 文人画 (literati paintings), which tend to feature light colors. Unlike the grand scale of landscape found in blue-green *shan shui* painting, in these Yao narrated scenes of people's lives and emphasized his mood, his artistic philosophy of traditional Chinese painting, and his understanding of society by combining painting with poem, calligraphy,

and seals. In the long, vertical scroll-like photograph of 浅渚垂钓图, *Angling on Low Island*, 2009 (see Figure 34), green dustproof nets have been reduced in color saturation and are only shown in a small part of the image to match the tonality of literati painting. At the far end of the picture, a small pavilion sits on top of the mountain. A pavilion traditionally served as a place for people to sit and immerse themselves in the beautiful scenery and should be nestled amid the mountain and water. However, in this photograph, the pavilion sits aside waste pipes and garbage and stands out from the mountain, easily visible. At the bottom of the picture, four people chat and fish in a contaminated pool; another man stands quietly with his fishing rods atop the rubbish hill. While the people fish beside the river, the opposite side of the river conceals a waste pipe behind the mountain that is discharging sewage into the river, prompting viewers' doubts as to whether the fishermen will have any luck in such an environment. Poetry, as an essential element of literati painting, is included in the upper right of the photograph. However, the poem bearing Yao Lu's signature was written by the famous Qing dynasty poet Zheng Banqiao. The original poem, “蝶恋花·晚景” (“Butterflies in Love with Flowers—Sunset”), expresses a quiet pastoral scene during sunset. The use of phrasing such as “残雨” (intermittent rain), “断烟” (wisps of smoke), and “高楼” (pavilion in the distance) reveals Zheng Banqiao's inner desolation and loneliness. As Yao's photograph does not depict a landscape at sunset, the artist is borrowing Zheng Banqiao's poem, rather, to express the feeling of helplessness and sadness that arises when a pastoral and poetic landscape has been replaced by an abandoned and lifeless scene.

Figure 34. Yao Lu. (2009). 浅渚垂钓图, *Angling on Low Island*. Retrieved from the artist.

In addition to the subject of landscape and the regular form of a hanging or hand scroll, Yao's later works in the series cover animals in fan form. Traditional animal painting emerged from the close, long-term interaction between humans and animals, whereby artists showed their admiration of and respect for animals and endowed animals with different characteristics and symbolic meanings. By mimicking traditional animal painting, Yao, however, criticize contemporary environmental issues. The symbolic meanings of the animals also reflect Yao's ideology and spirit. In 云隐长啸

图, *Roaring Tigers in the Mist*, 2010 (see Figure 35), two tigers are featured under a pine tree on a narrow space of a mountaintop; a white sign that reads “高价回收虎骨” (buying tiger bones with high price) in red ink appears nearby, displaying the animals’ poor and degraded living environment. Through the mist, a city with high-rise buildings and scaffolding is visible at the foot of another mountain in the distance, implying that the animals’ environment is under threat. In the past, the choice of depicting a tiger among rocks, pine trees, and distant mountains might have represented the painter’s self-definition of his personality, as tigers were related with courage, vigor, and dignity. Such a characterization was written in poetic form by Yao at the top left of the image: “Tigers stay in the forest surrounded by massive fog, as extensive wind and rain approach. Although I am getting old, I still use my brush to keep up my enthusiasm and persistence.” By using the tiger in this photograph to symbolize himself, Yao represents the status and problems of humans’ living conditions in contemporary society. And, the poetry expresses his loyalty to tradition, even though the landscape has changed radically.

Figure 35. Yao Lu. (2010). 云隐长啸图, *Roaring Tigers in the Mist*. Retrieved from the artist.

All the photographs of *Chinese Landscape* feature different kinds of Chinese seals, specially designed and stamped in red ink and placed either near the poem or at the image's outer boundaries, or even scattered liberally around the image area. As an art form, Chinese seals and the skills require to cut them represent various meanings related to a painter's philosophical beliefs, viewpoint, and choice of content, composition, and poetry to improve the morals and value of the painting. This tradition can be traced back as early as 544 BCE in China. There are mainly two kinds of seal in Yao's photographs. One shows Yao Lu's name set in a square, round, or irregular shape. The other type is a collector's seal that Yao has copied from famous examples in the history of Chinese art. For instance, 乾隆御览之宝 (A treasure appreciated by Qianlong), and 石渠宝笈 (The collection of ancient calligraphy and painting) are two seals that Yao frequently uses and originally belonged to the emperor Qianlong of the Qing dynasty. These seals were stamped on precious paintings and calligraphic works collected by Qianlong for the palace. By imitating Qianlong's collector's seal, Yao's photographs resemble valuable pieces from ancient times, forcing the viewer to consider artwork's continuing impact on later generations and imagine the beauty of landscape in past times.

The imitation of subject, format, composition, calligraphy, poems, and seals from times past accentuate the resemblance between Yao's photographs and traditional Chinese paintings. Indeed, copying the paintings of the old masters is the most important and basic stage for painters who learn to create Chinese ink painting. As early as the fifth century, during the Southern Qi dynasty, Chinese art historian and critic Xie He has stated that painting should transmit and convey earlier models through copying and

transcribing.¹⁶ Today, as back then, it is believed that by copying old masters' paintings, artists will learn and comprehend traditional techniques and skill (e.g., movement of the brush, use of color, choice of paper, and proportion) and aesthetic ideas (e.g., spiritual resonance), as well as improve their skills and knowledge of the art tradition and the creation of their own works. In the same way, Yao learned traditional aesthetic ideas by copying the conventional traditions of Chinese paintings. This enabled Yao to create painting-like photographs as a critical action for irony and introspection on contemporary issues. By using Chinese symbols of the old masters' paintings to question the relationship between humankind and current society, Yao conducted a dialogue between the past and the present.

In summary, Yao Lu's practice expresses an implicit lament for tradition. In reflecting on what has been lost in a rapidly changing China through his *Chinese Landscape* project, Yao questioned the absence of Chinese tradition and culture. He felt and expressed nostalgia as a longing for the past landscape, a yearning for the past way of life, and a criticism of urbanization. He used traditional Chinese landscape painting as "a site of memory" because it is firmly rooted in traditional culture that reflects a Chinese spirit, aesthetic, and philosophy and "holds precise views of cosmology, of human destiny, and of the relationship between the human being and the universe" (Cheng, 1994, p. 1). Although in reality he photographed garbage, rubble, and dust nets,

¹⁶ Xie He proposed six elements essential for appreciating and creating Chinese ink painting. His theory has come to be regarded as one of the most important in traditional Chinese painting. For an English version of Xie He's theory, the early Chinese critic's writings on painting, the styles of Chinese painting, and the ancient Chinese philosophy and poetry discussed in this chapter, see, for example, Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih's *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (2012), William Watson's *Style in the Arts of China* (1974), and David Hinton's *Existence: A Story* (2016).

he presented them in the manner of a poetic, beautiful, traditional Chinese painting. Indeed, the destroyed scenery and human activities shown in the photographs conflict with the impression of Chinese painting, highlighting the difference between past and present and evoking a collective consciousness about the long history of Chinese painting and its embedded spirit. When viewers of Yao's photographs combine collective consciousness about ancient China and art with their personal experience of what they see every day and what they cherish, viewers too may experience regret about the loss of culture and spirit. Yao Lu's photographic method, thus, sheds light on how artists apply tradition to reflect on current problems.

Case 3. Chen Nong: History and Memory

Chinese photographer Chen Nong is known in the West for his grandiose staged and hand-colored photographs. Born in 1966 in Fuzhou of Fujian Province, Chen taught himself painting and photography from books and manuals. Chen's practice was chosen for this research because of the history-related subjects, cinematic narrative style, and labor-intensive photographic approach he employs, setting him apart in Chinese photography since the turn of the century. Two of his works, 黄河, *Yellow River* (2007–2008) and 丝绸之路, *Silk Road* (2015–present), were selected for description and analysis in order to reveal the perception of history in memory-related photographs and the artistic methods used to narrate events.

I first contacted Chen via one of the art galleries representing him in 2017. When he returned to Beijing from his photo shoots for his *Silk Road* project in January 2018, I interviewed him in his studio in order to understand his ideas and observe his photographic methods. In the following section, I describe Chen Nong's artistic practice based on interviews and collected documents (e.g., exhibition catalogues, artist's statements, online information, and reviews). This case study reveals that the performance of cultural memory in Chen's photographs is a combination of history and imagination, and the technique of hand-coloring is an effective method for reimagining the past.

The Projects

Regarding the embodiment of cultural memory in the artist's works, my interview data indicated that Chen Nong showed concern for history in all of his works, including *Yellow River* and *Silk Road*. During our in-person interview, he added: "Our

entire history is false. Our history does not show what the past looks like, which also becomes part of history” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). Chen’s response expressed the artistic philosophy that underlines his works, helping me to understand the contents of his works. Though Chen never mentioned memory per se during our interview, his descriptions of projects and his answers to my questions seemed to imply the discussion of history in cultural memory.

Rather than following my interview protocol set for this study, in this case, I allowed Chen to explain his two bodies of works, *Yellow River* and *Silk Road*, freely. Then, I applied his thoughts to the research questions of this study by describing his projects individually. Chen’s responses provided a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of history in each project and illustrated his artistic process.

Yellow River comprises eight images produced in 2007 and 2008. The project portrayed the most important peasant revolts in the history of China between 209 BCE and the late 20th century. The collected data indicated two aspects of history in this project. First is the symbolic meaning of the Yellow River in the history of China, which Chen explained further in our interview: “It is known as the mother river of China, giving birth to the Chinese civilization and carrying the spiritual home of the Chinese from the age of the Yellow Emperor.” From this he arrived at the second: “The history of the Yellow River is the entire history of China, which changed with violence and blood. I gradually thought about peasant revolts, which are an important part of Chinese history” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). In other words, Chen regarded peasant revolts as a symbol for the Yellow River and the history of China, because revolutions promoted the progress of human civilization and represented the “balance and origin of primitive desires that most of us share” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018).

Therefore, in terms of the underlying concerns of contemporary landscape photographic works in China, Chen's responses revealed that in *Yellow River*, he did not aim to investigate societal problems caused by changes of landscape. Rather, Chen strove to express his understanding of the past, including the essence of a nation's history and human civilization, embedded in landscapes. Yet, it appeared that Chen was aware of the role of symbols in the expression of historical consciousness and memory, allowing me to examine the relationship between history and cultural memory as an expression of the artist in landscapes.

After clarifying his interests and insights about history and civilization, Chen described his artistic process for the *Yellow River* project. He visited the Yellow River several times in different seasons and frequently discussed his ideas with friends. In the end, facing the challenge of the total 5,464-kilometer length of the river, Chen decided instead to shoot specifically at 壶口瀑布 (Hukou Waterfall) of the Yellow River. He explained: "In our childhood, the song '黄河大绝唱' (Yellow River Cantata) that we used to hear has Hukou Waterfall as the background in its music video."¹⁷ He added: "My first plan was to capture the moment of the waterfalls freezing. After taking a field trip to the waterfalls in the winter, I gave up my first plan because the frozen water is flat, instead of the dynamic scene that I imagined" (Chen, personal communication,

¹⁷ Written in 1939 by the Chinese composer 冼星海 (Xian Xinghai), "Yellow River Cantata" is a well-known song from the Second Sino-Japanese War inspired by the Yellow River and especially the Hukou Waterfall. The song praises the long history of the Chinese nation, accuses the aggressors of brutality, and expresses the indomitable spirit of the Chinese people. The history and significance of the Yellow River, the Hukou Waterfall, and "Yellow River Cantata" are explored in many books, journals, and newspapers, mainly in Chinese. See, for example, 黄河大绝唱, *The Yellow River Cantata* (2000) by Guang Weiran and 黄河, *The Yellow River* (2000) by Zhang Zonggu.

January 18, 2018). According to Chen's description, the idea of presenting peasant revolts to represent the Yellow River emerged slowly but consciously after he visited the landscapes. This indicates that Chen's trips to the sites he intended to photograph were a journey of self-reflection, which ultimately promoted the development of the *Yellow River* project. Herein lies his method for investigating landscape memory.

Chen Nong's latest work, *Silk Road*, started in 2015, comprises three parts, two of which are still ongoing.¹⁸ In this study, I selected the finished first part, which consists of 16 images. These images show eight pairs of imaginary stories that are based on the history of Xinjiang,¹⁹ such as business conduct, the disappearance of villages, marriages, and weddings. Chen found inspiration for the project from his insight of Xinjiang, the Silk Road and the famed trip of the Chinese Buddhist monk 玄奘 (Xuanzang) to India in the seventh century. When I asked Chen to describe the intention and theme of the project, his answer expressed that he was intrinsically motivated to create either from personal interest or from his imagination: "I decided to shoot in Xinjiang. But, then I need a carrier [to present my imagination/thoughts]. For me, the westward trip of Xuanzang represents the history of Xinjiang. Of course, such an inspiration was based on my imagination" (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). Chen's response seemed to address the role of imagination and its relationship with memory, which sheds light on aspects in which cultural memory can be reconstructed.

¹⁸ The ongoing parts are specifically the second and third, which aim to reveal people's lives and spirit in Xinjiang and are planned to show more concrete aspects of domestic family life in independent stories.

¹⁹ Located in the northwest of China and bordering several countries, such as Mongolia, Afghanistan, and India, Xinjiang is well known for its gorgeous landscapes (e.g., mountain systems, deserts, and lakes), art (e.g., the paintings at the Mogao and Kizil Caves), economy (mainly thanks to the Silk Road), and mystical stories and histories (e.g., the westward trip of Xuanzang).

In addition, my collected data indicated that Chen's artistic process revealed the methods he employed to explore the landscape and its embedded memory. To begin the project, Chen traveled to Xinjiang in the spring of 2012 and followed the route of Xuanzang west. Chen took a train from 西安 (*xī ān*; Xi'an) to 嘉峪关 (*jiā yù guān*; Jiayuguan), via 瓜州 (*guā zhōu*; Guazhou), 锁阳城 (*suǒ yáng chéng*; Suoyangcheng), and all the way to 敦煌 (*dūn huáng*; Dunhuang). On the way, he was attracted by and stopped to see the frescoes at 莫高窟 (*mò gāo kū*; Mogao Caves). There, he said: "My body entered another time and space. It was even possible to see the scene that the ancients were painting in the caves with oil lamps" (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). Over the next two years, Chen went to Dunhuang twice and stayed there for half a year to copy the paintings of the Mogao Caves. While immersing himself in copying the Dunhuang murals, Chen realized that the history of Xinjiang involves trade, survival, and spirit. He explained:

After drawing the frescoes, I found that the history of Xinjiang is connected to commerce and survival, as represented by the Silk Road. Ancient people walked over mountains for survival under such tough conditions, while Xuanzang went west out of spiritual beliefs, which encouraged me to add this content. The shining man in the photographs [of *Silk Road*] is a representation of a spirit. Every photo should have a shining subject that highlights the existence of spiritual beliefs in human beings' rationality, besides the materiality. (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018)

Chen's description expressed that his field trips in Xinjiang were crucial in the creation of the *Silk Road* project. When he walked in the landscapes, he was able to compare his imagination of Xuanzang's mythic trip with the reality of Xinjiang and the

Silk Road. This enabled him to expose that the physical and spiritual nature of civilization is a “fusion and reincarnation.” As Chen stated, “everything will return to its original state, and the light of spirit will eventually be retained” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). After arriving at a fundamental understanding of the materiality and spirituality of Xinjiang, Chen decided to visit other ancient cities, towns, villages, and frescoes along the route of the early merchants of the Silk Road, such as 交河 (*jiāo hé*; Jiaohe), 塔城 (*tǎ chéng*; Tacheng), 高昌 (*gāo chāng*; Gaochang), 石头城遗址 (*shí tóu chéng yí zhǐ*; the remains of Stone City), 戈壁滩 (*gē bì*; Gobi Desert), and 魔鬼城 (*mó guǐ chéng*; City of Evil). On this trip, his goal was to perceive the spirit of the Silk Road. Chen, for example, said that he dreamed an image of the City of Evil when he walked in the deserts of Xinjiang and even had a feeling that he lived and walked in a prehistoric age. This would support my collected data, which revealed that the artist aimed to express personal feelings and imaginations that the landscapes evoked during his trips, rather than representing the past of a region.

After three years of visiting and exploring Xinjiang, Chen finally decided to shoot at 高昌故城 (*gāo chāng gù chéng*; Gaochang ruins, also called Karakhoja), and 交河故城 (*jiāo hé gù chéng*; Jiaohe ruins).²⁰ I asked Chen the reasons for choosing

²⁰ 高昌故城, Gaochang ruins is the site of the remains of an ancient city on the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert in present-day Xinjiang, China. Built in the first century BCE, Gaochang was a key transportation hub in western China and an important site along the Silk Road. From the mid-fifth century until the mid-seventh century, four independent regalities existed here, chronologically controlled by the Kan clan, Zhang clan, Ma clan, and Qu clan. In 2014, the Gaochang ruins were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Meanwhile, 交河故城, Jiaohe ruins are of a site founded in the 亚尔孜沟 (*yà ěr zī gōu*; Yarnaz Valley), located at present-day west of 吐鲁番市 (*tǔ lǔ fān shì*; Turpan city), Xinjiang province.

certain places and the conditions of the selected sites. His responses exposed two criteria. On the one hand, Chen selected places that match his personal interests and imagination: “My works start with finding places that I am particularly interested in. I find or imagine special stories about a place. When I see the place, I find a common point with my imagined stories” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). On the other hand, Chen was interested in those places because their original form was well protected. In noting that “the landscape and culture there are very different, some places have been well preserved, so it’s easier for people to see the history there” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018), Chen seemed to disclose that landscape is the medium that holds history and memory.

Regarding the artistic method used for the interplay of past, present, and future, Chen Nong’s practice revealed a labor-intensive approach to put the realistic nature of photography in doubt. He explained:

Photography is too realistic. Reality in photography is the benefit as well as the drawback. If one uses photography as a form of representation, again, photographs are just the true record of the scene. Actually, what is recorded by photographs is a false and faint impression, because what you present is just an instantaneous scene and can only represent what you see at that instant.

Since these images portray imagined space, the imaginary space needs to be combined with our [my] imagination, including color, people’s faces, etc. The photographer [i.e., Chen Nong] needs to think about what kind of space it is, and it certainly should not be too real, especially in terms of color. You can

The Jiaohe ruins have been protected by the government since 1961 and became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014.

give it a new color, such as day and night, and your emotions. The preparation of props reflects a general intention. If I made it like a real-world scene, or like a movie, the price would be too high. The last step of hand-coloring is to match and convey my imagination. (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018)

The goal of expressing personal imagination about history and space demanded that Chen take a cinematic narrative approach and painstakingly apply the technique of hand-coloring. Both of Chen's projects took years to research, plan, sketch, shoot, and complete post-production. Starting with an original idea in mind, Chen searched the Internet for stories, histories, and relevant places. From there, he planned and drafted paintings for photo shoots based on his imagination (see Figure 28). With these sketches, he visited places for investigation and inspiration, as well as to see how the draft images could be made and where to shoot. Upon returning to Beijing, he improved his sketches in order to come closer to his thoughts, imagination, feelings, and experiences of the landscape. Afterward, he made props with the help of friends. For *Yellow River*, he spent two to three years drafting paintings and more than half a year making models, such as the crane bird and the dragon shown in the images, flowers held in people's hands, and the clothes and scarves that people wear. *Silk Road* was planned in about three years, with draft paintings created over two years and three versions tried out. When the sketches and models were ready for the shooting stage, Chen went to the sites, hired local residents for a small fee, dressed them with the prepared clothing and props, and directed them in the landscape according to his preparatory sketches (see Figure 36).

Because of the thorough preparation for the photo shoots, the actual photographing stage for both projects was completed in about two weeks each. Also for both projects, all the photographs were taken on 8 x 10 black-and-white film with a handmade large-format camera. Chen developed the film himself after his return to

Beijing. In the darkroom, he coated light-sensitive emulsion onto watercolor paper, then enlarged the film on it. He said that he consciously made the hand-painted details visible and sometimes intended to make the images look old; thus, “each image is unique because the paper base and emulsion are different” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). Lastly, he manually added color to these black-and-white photographs.

Figure 36. Chen Nong. (2015). A set of drawings by Chen Nong for *Silk Road I* (divided into frames whose order is from left to right, row by row). Retrieved from the artist.

Figure 37. Two color negatives on the window of Chen Nong's studio that were shot during the photo shoots of the *Yellow River* project. Both show how Chen arranged props and actors on-site.

Photographed by Liu Yajing.

Because of the complex nature of Chen's practice, the studio visit and interview were valuable, impressive, and crucial in enabling me to discover and understand the artist's photographic methods in detail. While Chen talked about his projects and answered my questions, I was free to look around the studio. The table at the entrance of the studio where Chen paints his photographs was covered in photographs, brushes, color plates, and photo dyes. His drawings that he had copied from the Mogao Caves

were pasted on the walls and ceiling, aiming to cover the whole studio, and showed his respect and love for the culture of Xinjiang and the paintings of caves. The bookshelf was filled with books and magazines, including a collection of *National Geographic* magazines from roughly the 1980s to the 2010s; Xuanzang's narrative, 大唐西域记校注 (*Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*); and chronicles of China. Aside from reading material that reflected Chen's interests in history, geography, politics, and sociology were piles of negatives, black-and-white photographs, and newspapers. Next to the bookshelf was a sewing machine that had been used to make the clothes for the photo shoots. At the moment, it was covered in cameras, lenses, and other photographic accessories. A variety of the clothing, animal heads, and flowers that he had displayed in *Yellow River* and *Silk Road* were packed in bags under tables or placed randomly around the studio. The studio included a darkroom where Chen developed his films and photographs, as well as storing most of his finished hand-colored photographs, draft paintings, papers, and photographic liquids. In the darkroom, Chen explained how he developed and edited his images and showed me an image before enlargement and after.

History as Cultural Memory

As described above, in the discovery of the aspects of cultural memory, Chen Nong's *Yellow River* and *Silk Road* projects address the concern with history and imply the role of imagination. When Chen said "my works are related to history," it reminded me of the problematic and complex relationship between history and memory in the study of cultural memory, a debate that one cannot overlook. In the 20th century, Maurice Halbwachs (1992) and Pierre Nora (1989) both asserted that history and memory are in opposition. For them, there are many different memories because memory is "collective, plural, and yet individual," while history is authoritative because

it “belongs to everyone and to no one” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 9; Nora, 1989). However, Peter Burke (1997) and Marek Tamm (2008) challenged the opposing relationship between history and memory, stating instead that history equates with memory. For the latter two scholars and others, such as Aleida Assmann, Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, history should be regarded “as a mode of remembering,” “as a mnemonic practice,” and “as a particular form of cultural memory” (Tamm, 2008, p. 500; Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 134). Following the above scholars, but relying on the artistic practice of Chen Nong, I would argue that history is a form of cultural memory in art.

In Chen’s *Yellow River*, “history” refers to events that happened in the past and have been recorded in written form. Chen spent two to three years researching China’s history by reading books and consulting Websites. Among many events in China’s long history, he selected six significant violent peasant rebellions, according to the historical documentation. From the second to the seventh image of *Yellow River*, the historical events portrayed are 赤眉军 (*chì méi jūn*; the Red Eyebrows) in 18 CE; 黄巾军起义 (*huáng jīn jūn qǐ yì*; the Yellow Turban Rebellion) between 184 and 192 CE; the first large-scale uprising in Chinese history, the Uprising of Chen Sheng and Wu Guang, in 209 BCE; the uprising of Li Zicheng in 1628; 义和团运动 (*yì hé tuán yùn dòng*; the Yihetuan movement, also called the Boxers); and the Siege of the International Legations between 1898 and 1900. Jan Assmann has called such historical occurrences “fateful events of the past,” or the “fixed point” of cultural memory that “does not change with the passing of time” (1995, p. 129). These events contribute to construction of the cultural memory of a society because they have been documented in books and archives to record past experience. Thus, in terms of cultural memory, history and its writings—like the written records Chen Nong used in his research for *Yellow River*—

are a cultural form and one of many media of cultural memory (Bodrogi & Tarczali, 2001).

In order to recall history and reenact its special events, these fixed points in the past have turned into symbolic figures (J. Assmann, 2011b). In *Yellow River*, Chen presented prominent symbols of an event and a period that he chose from historical writings. Because of Chen's detailed arrangement of images and direct reference to history, one can easily identify these events and recall the past. For example, when depicting the Yellow Turban Rebellion in the third image (see Figure 38), Chen costumed the men in yellow cloth, in reference to the color of the cloth that the rebels wore on their heads and from which the rebellions name derives. The rebellion was related to a secret Taoist society called 太平道 (tài píng dào; the Way of Supreme Peace), that was opposed to the control of the Eastern Han dynasty. Thus, the yellow flags raised by the peasants in Chen's image carry the rebellion's slogan: "The Azure Sky is already dead; the Yellow Sky will soon rise." Other details in the image, such as 司南 (sī nán; the magnetic compass), paper, and the weapons, symbolize the sociocultural background of the rebellion. For example, the magnetic compass and paper were both invented under the Eastern Han dynasty, the period when the Yellow Turban Rebellion occurred. Yet, the central Han government was internally weak, so making reference to the context of the broader Han dynasty also signifies the conflict between the peasants' needs and the power of authority. The actors who played rebels in the photo shoot were residents from around the Hukou Waterfall area. They are holding old-fashioned weapons that were used in ancient warfare, such as spears and bows. Chen hired them, dressed them with the prepared clothing and props, and directed them according to his sketched plans. When the actors were immersed in their roles and empathized with the

past events, they almost became the carriers of memory that transmitted the past to the present.

Figure 38. Chen Nong. (2007–2008). 黄河—黄巾军起义, *Yellow River—Yellow Turban Rebellion*.

Retrieved from the artist.

Besides the direct references to the written history of the peasant rebellions, Chen Nong also expressed his own understanding and interpretation of history in the *Yellow River* project. As Pierre Nora noted, history “calls for analysis and criticism” (1989, p. 9). Among the eight images comprising *Yellow River*, two depict fictional events. The opening image of the series, *龙之死*, *The Death of the Dragon*, portrays people killing a dragon and eating its meat. It epitomizes the death of imperial authority and predicts the beginning of revolutions, as the dragon was the symbol of the emperors in China. Meanwhile, the final image of the series, named *涅槃*, *Nirvana*, depicts people with blood on their bodies, holding flowers in their hands with their eyes closed. This represents the stillness of the peasant mind after the long history of feudal regimes has

finally been extinguished. In the two images in the middle of the long scroll, people fight one another, symbolizing the culmination of the people's movement against authority. Reading through the sequence from the first image to the last, one may recognize the process of the demise of the feudal system in China and the spirit involved in this. The two fictional images with metaphorical stories act as bookends to the six images of historical events, converting the eight images into one fluid history of China rather than displaying the rebellions as fragmented or unrelated occurrences.

The criticism of history is more evident in the *Silk Road* project. Although Chen has stated that he intended to photograph Xinjiang and its history, the final result of *Silk Road* is a reflection on the development of human civilization. For Chen, the Silk Road represents the history of Xinjiang and Xuanzang's pilgrimage route, all of which demonstrates the cycle of the physical and spiritual world of humankind. The Silk Road was the most important trade route linking Asia, Europe, and Africa via land and sea and can be traced back as early as the Han dynasty.²¹ Although silk was the major trade item at the time, the Silk Road also transmitted and exchanged art, culture, religion, and philosophy between the East and West along its network. Therefore, the Silk Road is a representation of commodity but has also been regarded as a symbol of spirituality. By searching information online, reading books, and traveling along the Silk Road, Chen shaped his own understanding of civilization based on the past of Xinjiang, which helped him arrive at the following conclusion: "Conflicts such as the massacre between humankind and the destruction of civilization will decline as time goes on. Everything will return to its original state, and the spirit's light will eventually be retained" (Chen,

²¹ For a comprehensive art survey and history of the Silk Road, see, for example, Valerie Hansen's *The Silk Road: A New History* (2012) and *Cave Temples of Dunhuang: Buddhist Art on China's Silk Road* (2016), edited by Neville Agnew, Marcia Reed, and Tevvy Ball.

personal communication, January 18, 2018). Such a cycle of materiality and spirituality was portrayed in the *Silk Road* images. The first part of the series, and the only completed study of the three, consists of 16 images that form eight pairs of stories depicting, in order, the death of civilization, the origin of life, the birth of the state, the emergence of power and war, the development of culture, the growth of the economy, the flourishing of society, and closing with death (see Figure 39).

Figure 39. Chen Nong. (2015). *丝绸之路 I, Silk Road I* (divided into frames whose order is from left to right, row by row). Retrieved from the artist.

Based in Chen's reimagination of Xuanzang's seventh-century trip and the Xinjiang region, the *Silk Road* photographs are images of "imagined space," according

to the artist. In the first pair of photos, ordinary and spiritualized people and animals are sitting in Noah's Ark waiting to leave Earth. The second and third duos show images of prehistoric culture in which life begins to appear on Earth and a nation is about to be born. Such an illusion occurred to Chen while he walked through the desert and the ancient cities of Xinjiang. The fourth pair of photographs depicts scenes of wars, criticizing the violence that occurred with the development of civilization. Historical events based in fact appear in the fifth, sixth, and seventh pairs of photos, including 焚书坑儒 (fén shū kēng rú; the burning of books and burying of scholars alive) in 210 BCE, the marriage of Princess Wencheng in the Tang dynasty, Qin's campaign against the Yue tribes in 113 BCE, and Zhang Qian's trip to the world beyond China during the time of the Han dynasty. Some of these events did not occur in Xinjiang; for example, Qin's campaign against the Yue tribes was conducted in modern-day Guangdong and Guangxi in southern China and in what is now northern Vietnam. These events, nonetheless, are regarded as milestones in the development of Chinese civilization and in the improvement of both the overland and maritime Silk Road routes. Chen Nong dislocated the historical events by combining history with his imagination to represent the growth of the economy and culture of a nation. Thus, the events referenced in *Silk Road* cannot be easily identified by viewers, unlike the realistic scenes illustrated in the *Yellow River* photographs. In the last pair of *Silk Road* images, people gather under a pagoda to sacrifice animals, giving form to Chen's belief in the reincarnation of materiality and spirituality.

Silk Road represents the origin, development, and destruction of a civilization. Chen fictionalized a history of Xinjiang by organizing recorded historical events through the workings of a "constructive imagination," rather than from a remembered experience (Cubitt, 2007, p. 34; Collingwood, 1999, p. 136). Imagination has the ability

to “make the reader [or viewer] sees the historian [or artist] sees, the real characters of men ...which, allowing for human weaknesses and for the pressure of adverse circumstances ... opened wide the gates for thought [and] liberated souls” (Hart, 1910, p. 250). Thus, through his artistic imagination, Chen Nong was able to construct an ideal past, drawn from written historical records. Such a past is a combination of reality, the artist’s historical thought, and his concerns about society’s issues.

The Approach

In regards to the artist’s method for expressing a sense of memory through photography, Chen’s works presented three artistic techniques in the use of symbol, form, and hand-coloring.

Historical and cultural symbols. When Chen Nong introduced me to the projects during our interview, he explained the symbolic meanings of objects displayed in the images, which helped me to better understand his practice and photographs. For instance, he pointed out that the “lights and bright things in the photographs are a representation of a spirit,” “the dragon represents the Yellow River that runs like the shape of dragon,” “flags symbolize the disruption of peaceful life,” and “red-crowned cranes are dead and represent a bloody death” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). Chen’s descriptions expressed that iconography was one of the approaches that he used to reactivate the past. By uncovering the meaning of the objects shown in the photographs, viewers are able to establish a historical consciousness, comprehend the subjects of Chen Nong’s works, and criticize history in light of their own experience and understanding.

The iconography in Chen’s works contains both historical and cultural symbols. The historical symbols are those objects that appeared in past events and emerged from

a particular period. As Chen noted, “revolutions in different regimes and dynasties are represented by one or two signs in the photographs” (Chen, personal communication, January 18, 2018). By showing historical symbols, the events of *Yellow River* are identifiable by viewers, and the images appear to be realistic scenes that occurred in the past. As mentioned earlier, Chen searched the written record about the circumstances and the development of specific past events from books and sources on the Internet and then selected historical objects connected to the events to signify the uprisings and their social background. For example, the seventh image of *Yellow River* portrays the Boxer Rebellion and the Siege of the International Legations between 1898 and 1900 (see Figure 40). In the image, the traditional Chinese character for “义和团” (Yihetuan) written on the yellow banner identifies the movement. The animals symbolize the aggressors from foreign nations, a specific reference to the political cartoon 时局图 (*shí jú tú*; Situation in the Far East), made by the Chinese artist Xie Zantai following the Sino-Japanese War (see Figure 41). In different versions of this cartoon, animals are painted on the map of China, aiming to show the eight countries’ control of China. For instance, the bear representing Russia intrudes from the north of China, while the tiger represents Britain.

Figure 40. Chen Nong. (2007–2008). 黄河—义和团运动与鸦片战争, *Yellow River—the Boxer Rebellion and the Siege of the International Legations*. Retrieved from the artist.

Figure 41. Xie Zantai. (1900–1904). 时局图, *Situation in the Far East*. Retrieved from the National Archives and Records Administration, NAID 5634178.

In *Silk Road*, cultural symbols refer to objects that signify the traditions of Xinjiang and the ideology of Chinese society, such as people's costumes, hairstyles, and animals. Cultural symbols disclose the beliefs, spirits, and traditions of Chinese history and society, which prompt the viewers to understand and construct meanings of Chen's imagery using their experience. In *Silk Road*, Chen narrated stories with cultural symbols instead of directly depicting historical figures. As exemplified in the first image of *Silk Road*, people and animals are sitting on the boat and trying to leave Earth in a white space rocket (see Figure 34). The monk featured with a halo above his head represents Xuanzang, who is well known in China for his trip to India via Xinjiang during the Tang dynasty. The animals shown in the image are those with spiritual implications in Chinese culture. For example, the cranes and the deer represent good luck, wealth, and longevity in Chinese literature and art. They are also used to imply respect and blessings for death, as people say when someone passes away that they are “驾鹤西去” (jià hè xī qù; riding a crane and gone to the west). These animals are displayed with the monk and ordinary people, reminding viewers of the existence of spiritual beliefs in human beings' rationality, besides materiality.

Figure 42. Chen Nong. (2015). 丝绸之路—末日, *The Silk Road—the Last Day*. Retrieved from the artist.

Time and space. Like a storybook, each of Chen's projects shows historical events and stories in a long horizontal layout. Such an extended horizontal configuration embodies the sense of time and space that promotes narration of a complete story. Unlike a single image showing actions in a frozen moment, the meters-long series of images are chronologically arranged from left to right, showing the origin, development, climax, and end of peasant revolts in *Yellow River* and of civilization in *Silk Road*. When viewing Chen's photographs, audiences travel between the plots and settings in an immersive experience of moving through time and space.

The format of Chen's photographs resembles the form of a long scroll in Chinese painting. As "an articulate representation of spatial continuity and temporal progression" (Chen, 1995, p. 265), horizontal long scroll paintings, which can extend to meters, are used to depict grand landscapes and rich stories, such as *千里江山图*, *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains* by Wang Ximeng and *清明上河图*, *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* by Zhang Zeduan, both created during the Song dynasty.²² The representation of time and space in Chinese long scroll paintings has been examined from different aspects and has influenced other art forms, such as film and photography.²³ Contemporary Chinese scholars such as Wang Anzhong (2007) have

²² Extensive scholarly research has explored the spatial and temporal representation of traditional Chinese long scroll painting. See, for example, Jiang Xun's *A Contemplation on Chinese Art* (2014), Chun-chieh Huang and Erik Zürcher's *Time & Space in Chinese Culture* (1995), and Luo Shumin's *Focusing on Chinese Painting: Six Ways of Understanding Chinese Painting* (2010).

²³ In fact, Chinese scholars and painters, such as Zhang Songlin (2016) and Luo Shiping (2013), have claimed that the ways of creating, presenting, seeing, and studying a contemporary Chinese scroll painting have been transformed since the 20th century in China and have influenced contemporary Chinese

examined the format itself and suggested that long scroll painting is similar to the artistic expression of film. Wang collected the aspect ratios of the commonly used size of Chinese paintings and of the well-known Chinese long scroll paintings and then compared them with film's screen ratio. Wang claimed that "the long format and the narrow ratio improves the linear structure, which makes the format of the long scroll easier to express the linear mobility of time" (2007, p. 40).

Taking Chen Nong's work as an example, photographs created and/or displayed in the long format help break the limitations of space and time to construct an immersive and interpretive narrative, which can be seen in two manners. Firstly, through the settings of characters and landscape in a single frame as well as through multiple frames, long-format photographs offer different narrative structures to expand a storyline, such as the chronological narration in a lateral layout as shown in *Silk Road*. Chen depicts a narrative of an important historical moment in China, when China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society comes to an end, from the collapse of the feudal system through the

painters' ideas and creative processes. The challenges and problems of the transformation of contemporary Chinese long scroll paintings have been discussed widely in conferences and symposiums in China, such as the "长卷视野, Vision of the Long Scroll" symposium of the Second Chinese Painting Biennale in 2012. Two major challenges have been raised. Firstly, the modern form of display is in opposition to the traditional, in which only a small group of people (normally friends, scholars, or literati) enjoyed a painting at the same time in privacy and close physical contact with a painting. In contemporary times, a scroll painting is unfolded entirely in an exhibition space. Secondly, a modern long scroll painting can be read from right to left, or from left to right, or from the middle to the margin. For a theoretical and academic examination of the modern-day transformation of Chinese long scroll paintings, see, for example, Zhang Songlin's 当长卷被完全展开之后—长卷的创作与观看方式的转变, *When Scroll Paintings Become Unrolled—Discussing Long Scroll Paintings' Transformation in Its Creation and Viewing* (2016).

Chinese peasants' rebellions to the foreigners' invasions. The temporal progression is indicated by the characters' activities in front of different or same backgrounds. While each long-format photograph and painting is made up of multiple images, each image tells a single story, yet the continuous lateral layout depicts a much more extensive tale.

Secondly, the long format allows Chen to change the audience's way of appreciating images by arranging figures and displaying photographs. In *Yellow River*, reaching 4 meters long and 4.8 meters wide, most of the characters in the pictures are facing to the right from the viewer's perspective, which plays a role in reading Chen's photographs (see Figure 43). While viewers notice the right-faced characters, their eyes move aesthetically from left to right, in parallel to the arrangement of the plots. When audiences look at the photographs from left to right, guided by the settings of characters and actions, they immerse themselves in the events of the photographs and come to understand the history of Chinese peasant movements. In addition, Chen displayed his photographs in an exhibition space with all the information exposed to a large audience. In this case, audiences lose the close, contained view while gaining distance from the photograph, which allow selection of the parts to be viewed first, the eye perhaps attracted by visual features such as physical format and color. Audiences may consider the connection between images, all of which break with the simplex reading order by single image.

Figure 43. Chen Nong. (2007–2008). 黄河, Yellow River (divided into frames whose order is from left to right, row by row), Retrieved from the artist.

Post-production: hand-coloring. Besides reflecting his interest in history, Chen Nong has stated that his works are based on his imagination. By drawing sketches, preparing costumes and settings, and directing residents on location, Chen did his best to represent his imagination of a past. When some of the scenes in his sketches proved impossible to shoot on-site, he finished these images in the darkroom. For example, 末
日, *Last Day of Silk Road* shows a mushroom cloud in the sky. This mushroom cloud was painted on paper, photographed with a film camera, and then added to the image during the enlargement phase. The boat and the huge waves in the image *Beach* were created in the same way (see Figure 44).

Figure 44. Three of Chen Nong's black-and-white photographs printed on watercolor paper, as displayed in the artist's studio. The clouds, boat, and spaceship were added to the photographs in the darkroom. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

After producing the monochromatic photographs with all the needed objects, Chen added bold and unrealistic colors by hand using photo ink. The hand-coloring of

photographs, a technique invented in the 19th century, involves applying colors to black-and-white photographs. Chen regarded such a technique as a method to create an imaginary space because it breaks the reality of a photograph and expresses the artist's inherent emotions and personal imagination. For example, in *Yellow River*, Chen colored the river red, and added red and yellow flames to a scene of fierce struggle, mirroring the intensity of the rebellions. The colors were added in large areas without controlling the details; for example, the color of the characters' clothing is mixed with the colors of the ground and the props.

For Chen, the mechanical nature of photography produces realistic images, which can be a disadvantage in the reconstruction of the past, especially a past that is constructed by the artist's understanding of history and his or her imagination. So, rather than taking photographs, Chen Nong *makes* photographs to express his understanding of culture, history, society, and spirit. Some of the photographs make obvious references to recorded events in China's history that are already part of the historical and cultural consciousness; others are based on Chen's imagination, feelings, and understanding of history. Chen's practice can be referred to as the "staged" approach, the "fabricated-to-be-photographed approach," or the "directorial mode" (Marien, 2014), which highlights the photographer's investigation into visual and verbal signs, medium, and self-perception. His time-consuming process also seems to return to 19th-century Pictorialism photography, when photographers rejected the mechanical form of recording reality and emphasized the beauty of the subject and its inherent emotion to produce images that resembled paintings (Warren, 2006; Wells, 2009). Like Pictorialism photographers, Chen embraces labor-intensive processes to explore emotional intent: "I must follow my heart; that's a priority for art" (Chen as cited in Sun, 2016). All in all, Chen's practice, as examined here, shows how photographs can be

choreographed for the viewer so that he or she can recognize that a past story is being narrated.

In Chen Nong's practice, history has been considered as a form of cultural memory, exactly like those of texts, images, and monuments, all of which contribute to the construction of cultural memory (J. Assmann, 2011b; Tamm, 2013). History is also a symbolic form "through which knowledge of the past is handed down in a culture" (Bodrogi & Tarczali, 2001, p. 463). Through imagination, history can be reconstructed and memory can be activated in works of art. Based on research into past events and contexts, Chen invoked his imagination to construct a story of ourselves and to envision the future of humankind in a novel way rather than representing a truthful history. Chen Nong's practice proves that imagination as a mode of narrative is necessary in making coherent sense of the past and connecting it to the present and the future.

CHAPTER V

Practical Component:

Reconstructing Cultural Memory of the Seaweed-House Community

For this study, I created two bodies of works, *身份证明*, *Identification Card* and *无言处*, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, to comprehend the concept of cultural memory and experiment with artistic approaches. While both projects expressed the anxiety of losing traditional culture and forgetting the past in the contemporary era, each of my projects had different purposes. *Identification Card* explored the past of seaweed houses by photographing old objects found in these dwellings. This body of work mainly served to provide insight into the crises of culture brought with the demolition of seaweed houses. *Speaking the Unspeakable* discovered and displayed the history and culture of seaweed houses, such as rituals, myths, past events, and relics, all of which have been lost or would be forgotten. This second body of work was created to examine the artistic approach in the reconstruction of cultural memory, showing memory as active and performative in art. Both projects provided different insights into the memory carriers, demonstrating that cultural memory is embedded in photographs.

My two bodies of works were created based on the theory of cultural memory drawn from the theoretical research of scholarly works by Jan Assmann, Maurice Halbwachs, and Pierre Nora, to name a few. Under the umbrella of the main research question, I queried other points during my artistic practice: Which sociocultural issues existed in the landscapes I photographed? How did these issues influence my feelings and my art? How could I use the camera to represent the past and culture, reconstructing

what has been told and forgotten by people? All of these considerations and inquiries guided my practice and helped answer the research questions of this study.

In this chapter, I present my artistic process and explore the research questions of this study, including the consideration of landscape and memory, examination of the problems of seaweed-house society, identification of memory carriers, reflection of field trips, and description of techniques. By illustrating my artistic process, I indicate that the concept of cultural memory itself could be used for artistic creation. Regarding the artistic approach, I employ the artistic methods of spatial experience and hand-coloring to show the interplay of past, present, and future.

Cultural Memory of the Seaweed-Houses Community

My practical components revealed the embodiment of cultural memory in photography through two aspects. The first was grounded in the concern that landscape is a medium for cultural memory and functions metaphorically in photography, which was the basis for both bodies of works. The second referred to the discovery and the representation of carriers of cultural memory, such as objects shot in *Identification Card* and specialized groups of people and places of historical events, rituals, and myths photographed in *Speaking the Unspeakable*. Below, I elaborate on both aspects by describing my artistic practice.

Background: the seaweed house. As briefly mentioned in Chapter I, 海草房, *seaweed house*, is the designation given to a type of traditional dwelling from the Jiaodong Peninsula in China. This kind of house is named for its characteristic roof made from 250 to 500 kilograms of *Zostera*, a genus of seagrass that grows on sandy substrates of the seabed or in estuaries, partially floating at a depth of about 5 to 10 meters. The roof has an inverted fishing boat shape: high and steep on the sides, then

low in the middle. The walls of seaweed houses consist of rough stones, granite, bricks, and yellow mud, all of which was available from the mountains and seaside nearby. The stones of the walls are varicolored, especially in houses located in the 俚岛 (*lǐ dǎo*; Li Dao) and 马道 (*mǎ dào*; Ma Dao) regions, as they were formed approximately 560 million years ago when ejected from submarine volcanoes. The materials of the roof and walls keep the house cool in summer and warm in winter, creating an ideal abode for local fishermen's families.

The seaweed-house communities investigated in this study belong to the Rongcheng region of Weihai city, the only area left with a concentration of seaweed houses. In the past, seaweed houses abounded along the seashore from 鸭绿江 (*yā lù jiāng*; the Yalu River) estuary, in the north to the city of 连云港 (*lián yún gǎng*; Lianyungang), in the Jiangsu Province in the south, covering four to five modern-day provinces (Yu, 2016). Several scholars including Li Wenfu and Yu Yingyu attributed the origins of the seaweed houses to developments in the Neolithic age and asserted that the seaweed-house communities of the Rongcheng region date back to the Yuan dynasty, that is, about 600 years. The seaweed-house region, as it is generally called, is where 秦始皇 (*qín shǐ huáng*; Qin Shi Huang) and 汉武帝 (*hàn wǔ dì*; Emperor Wu of Han) ended their historic trips to the Shandong Province in their effort to develop the local economy and military affairs; and where 明洪武时期 (*míng hóng wǔ shí qī*; Hongwu, founding emperor of the Ming dynasty) set up two of the most important militaries—成山 (*chéng shān*; Chengshan) and 靖海 (*jìng hǎi*; Jinghai)—to establish a coastal defense system of China known as 卫所制 (*wèi suǒ zhì*; the wei-suo system, also called guard and battalion system), to name just a few historic events.

The settlement of seaweed-house villages formed fishing culture and traditions of the Jiaodong Peninsula that are represented in the architecture, customs, traditional beliefs, history, and festivals.²⁴ For example, the location of a seaweed house was chosen by an expert who applied the system of Feng Shui and the philosophy of 八卦 (*bā guà*; eight symbols) to harmonize the residents with their houses and surrounding environment. Such a traditional practice has been called 择地基 (*zé dì jī*; a traditional practice for choosing the location of a seaweed house), expressing residents' wishes for good health, wealth, prosperity, and safety. Residents who lived in seaweed houses followed the strict seniority and organizational hierarchy at the dining table, called 八仙桌 (*bā xiān zhuō*; traditional square table for eight people).

Despite their historical and cultural value, the seaweed houses have given way to urbanization and industrialization under the recent intense social and economic development. Based on the Rongcheng government's investigation conducted in 2004, more than 80 percent of seaweed houses have disappeared over the past two decades (Li, 2004). Scholars and artists like myself have realized that the disappearance of the seaweed house has caused much harmful impact on the marine culture and history of the Rongcheng region and Weihai city, and even in northern China in general. For me, I constructed *Identification Card* and *Speaking the Unspeakable* in an attempt to portray the history and culture of the seaweed-house region through the memories and voices of its residents.

²⁴ More information about the traditions, customs, ethics, and rituals of seaweed houses can be found in Li Wenfu's 威海民居海草房历史文化研究, *Study of the History and Culture of the Seaweed House in Wei Hai* (2004) and Liu Zhigang's 探访中国稀世民居海草房, *Exploring the Typical Dwelling in China—Seaweed House* (2007).

Site of memory. Cultural memory is a placement that is deeply rooted in landscapes (J. Assmann, 2011b; Nora, 1989). With this fundamental idea in mind, I regarded seaweed houses as sites of memory. Like other physical landscapes, such as monuments, beaches, villages, and temples, also featured in my photographs, they involve a “contact” with the past and induce the recall of memories by decoding material reminders and tracing landscape changes. Thus, the reconstruction of cultural memory of a given community requires a comprehensive understanding and detailed examination of the landscape. The preparatory work for my two bodies of works about cultural memory of the seaweed-house communities, therefore, began with exhaustive research on seaweed houses and their region, including the historical background, cultural implications, and problems in the present social context.

My findings revealed that the seaweed house is far more than a shelter; it is a mnemonic system that represents the region’s history, sociocultural practices, and emotional connections. Owing to its unique architectural style and more than 600 years’ history, the seaweed house has come to be considered one of the most typical dwellings in China. Moreover, its building technique has received recognition as a provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, and eight seaweed-house villages have been listed in the provincial or national *中国传统村落名录*, *Chinese Traditional Villages Catalog* for conservation and protection since 2012 (Center, 2012-2014; Yu, 2013).

To understand the sociocultural implications of the seaweed house and the significance of losing it, before my photo shoots, I interviewed Yu Yingyu, an expert in marine culture and the folklore of Jiaodong Peninsula in eastern China. Yu asserted: “We can emphatically say that Rongcheng’s most distinctive fishing culture is born in these hundreds of thousands of seaweed houses. Once the seaweed dwelling disappears, so will the culture, history, folk customs and the fishermen’s spirits in the Weihai region”

(Yu, personal communication, August 12, 2016). Yu's description presented the seaweed house as a carrier of culture, representing the traditions, architecture, beliefs, spirit, legends, festivals, and customs of Rongcheng County, Weihai city, and Jiaodong Peninsula.

Most of the rituals, beliefs, and traditions that Yu mentioned in our interviews have already disappeared due to changes in way of life driven by economic interests. With urban construction and under 社会主义新农村建设 (the New Socialist Countryside Construction policy), in China, many seaweed houses have been torn down or abandoned, while many factories or modern high-rise buildings have been built in villages. As traditional houses have been demolished, the younger generations have moved to cities in search of good jobs and have been encouraged to embrace advanced technology and Western culture rather than age-old traditions. Meanwhile, the elderly people who stay in the countryside no longer share past events, myths, legends, and traditional culture under the belief that "if younger generations do not care about traditions, then who should I tell?"²⁵ With the demolition of seaweed houses, the transmission of memory through generations becomes difficult as the carriers and forms of memory, such as houses, village chroniclers, festivals, rituals, and various kinds of objects, are exposed to the risk of disappearing. It is evident that during the process of urbanization, both the old seaweed houses have crumbled and the region's memory has eroded.

²⁵ This is cited from my interviews with participating residents. As mentioned in Chapter III, all interviews conducted in the village were carried out with the participating residents' consent and signature. In this research, I keep them anonymous unless they have given express permission to be mentioned by name.

During my investigation of seaweed houses and the underlying problems of memory, the participants and I expressed a feeling of nostalgia. One aspect of this nostalgia was dissatisfaction with reality; consciousness of a sense of history was another. For example, during our interview, Yu Yingyu conveyed regret for the loss of the seaweed house as caused by social development. Nowadays, seaweed houses and their villages have turned into a symbol of poverty in lieu of a metaphor of beauty and poetic space; at the same time, residents' individual experiences seem to be irrelevant to society. Some of the residents were enthusiastic to share the past with me, believing "these [historical places or events] should be recorded and protected." When residents compared their current living experience with that of the past, some of them expressed a desire to live in a traditional seaweed house. Overall, the participants showed the basic instincts "to preserve, remember and narrate events and forms of the past" (J. Assmann, 2011b, p. 50). And, regardless of what residents recalled or the authenticity of a remembrance, they expressed a longing for the traditional villages, a yearning for the harmonious rural society, and a regret for the loss of tradition.

My field trips and investigations of seaweed houses demonstrated that cultural memory has been condensed into symbolic figures of landscape that enabled landscape photography to consciously provide evidences for arguments and serve as a medium for remembrance of the past. While the mechanism of photography allowed me to record physical details of these memory sites, the photographs presented indicators for which particular traditions, past, and culture are disappearing in the present. It was only after I regarded the seaweed house as a site of memory and a carrier of culture that I was able to discover metaphorical meanings of the physical places, empathize with the feelings of nostalgia, and then take photographs of landscapes. For instance, the image of a temple along the coast captured the most important religious ceremony of local

fishermen. In the seaweed house region, fishermen traditionally carried out large-scale rituals on the day of 谷雨 (*gǔ yǔ*; grain rain) every year to worship the goddess of the sea and the dragon king. But, with the obliteration of seaweed houses and the migration of residents, the importance and extent of rituals are diminishing. Such a ritual was the primary method for people to “participate in the cultural memory,” according to Jan Assmann (2011b, p. 42).

Carriers of cultural memory. To address the main research inquiry of this study into the reconstruction of cultural memory through the photographic lens, I questioned the forms in which cultural memory could be embodied in our society and, of these, which could be mediated in photographs. This reflection enabled me to uncover and photograph special carriers of cultural memory, such as old objects, texts, rituals, historical places, archives, and village chroniclers. According to Assmann (1995, 2011b), cultural memory is transmitted in institutional carriers such as texts, archives, museums, and festivals, and always has its specialists in both oral and literate societies, such as poets and others. Astrid Erll (2008a) and José van Dijck (2007) have extended Assmann’s definition of institutional carriers of cultural memory to include biological and personal ones that account for an interweaving of individual and collective remembering. For the latter two, carriers of cultural memory can be personally owned photos, letters, myths, and oral history, allowing for kinds and forms that vary from written to oral, from institutional to individual, and from mediatized to fictional. In other words, cultural memory can be conveyed by those forms that represent and symbolize a past, tradition, and culture.

In *Identification Card*, I discovered the “personality” of the seaweed houses by showing objects that belonged to these abodes. The objects were obtained from the owner of the seaweed house or found by myself, such as family albums, posters of Mao,

and deeds of land ownership. When I found objects that I wanted to feature, I photographed them in front of a clear background to create archival-like images. The final result of this project is the juxtaposition of images of seaweed houses and images of old objects displayed side by side, as in *巍巍村和房契*, *No. Wei Wei and the Title Deed of the House*, which features an abandoned seaweed house and its respective deed (see Figure 45). The deed chronicled that this house was sold to the original owner's cousin in 1880, during the Qing dynasty. This object was shared with me by the current owner of this house, who had also kept a tax document for the sale and purchase of the house issued in 1920 and two other deeds dated 1894 and 1919. Although these documents had suffered damage and in some parts were difficult to read, it was still possible to recognize the dates of the construction and business deals related to the seaweed house. With these objects, the owner recalled old housing policies in the seaweed house region, explained the relations between individuals and groups in the village, and then revealed cultural patterns of the village in the past. These remembrances clearly disclosed that the objects found in this and, by extension, other seaweed houses are carriers of memory, conveying individual stories, histories, traditions, shared past experiences, and sociocultural circumstances.

Identification Card highlighted the way in which photography is an important tool to archive physical evidence, implying a reality of past. The photographed objects belong to individuals; however, they function in the history and culture of the seaweed house region and have evolved into a collective memory through the interpretation of individuals over generations. During my photo shoots, most of the residents told me that they had thrown away old belongings when they moved out of their seaweed houses or that they had burned items such as photographs, books, tools, and clothes during the Cultural Revolution. Yet, oftentimes, when one resident found an object and shared it

with me, other residents would join in, adding details that they felt were interesting and/or important. The scene demonstrated that objects are important for the continuity of memory and that when seeing evidence of the past, people are able to evoke collective awareness and interpret what happened. Thus, photographs of these objects in the *Identification Card* project serve as media for recalling the past based on the viewers' personal experience and interpretation.

Figure 45. Liu Yajing. (2015). 巍巍村和房契, No. *Wei Wei and the Title Deed of the House* from the series *Identification Card*, exhibited at the 14th Donggang International Photo Festival, Korea, and shortlisted for the 2016 Athens Photo Festival.

The final body of work created for this study, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, showed diverse carriers of cultural memory, aiming to reveal the history and culture held and shaped by seaweed houses. The photographs portrayed landscapes of overlooked pasts and disappearing traditions, such as wars, myths, historical events, and rituals. All of these neglected pasts and traditions were found during my photo shoots and were collected based on my comprehensive investigation of archives, books, documents, and papers. As I mentioned in Chapter I, my ten years of experience in

photographing seaweed houses allowed me to uncover the vital problem caused by the massive destruction that took place in the area: In the absence of adequate records, texts, and archives, the history of seaweed houses and the underlying traditions risk being lost with the passing away of the older generations and the demolition of the traditional houses.

To discover what exactly has been recorded and what has not, I reviewed written and visual materials related to seaweed houses and the Rongcheng region. For written materials, I found four theses that studied the architectural value of the seaweed houses in order to explore ways to protect these traditional dwellings and develop tourism.²⁶ In addition, Chinese photographer Liu Zhigang included some history of the seaweed houses in his book *探访中国稀世民居海草房, Exploring the Typical Dwelling in China—Seaweed House* (2007). However, all of these sources represent several inaccurate and/or incomplete studies of a past or a tradition. The authors described a past or a tradition of the seaweed houses region based on the review of the existing documents and/or their limited participation in the community. The most influential studies, which have been widely mentioned by scholars, are those conducted by the Weihai and Rongcheng Museums and the earliest records are contained in government chronicles.²⁷ For visual materials, the leading studies are the Dutch filmmaker Joris

²⁶ The four theses are Wu Tianyi's *威海海草房民居研究, Study of the Seaweed House in Weihai* (2008), Yu Xiang's *山东省荣成市民俗特色建筑的研究—海草房古民居探讨, Study of the Folk Architecture in Rongcheng—a Discussion of the Seaweed House* (2012), Wang Mei's *胶东民居—海草房景观形态调查报告, Survey Report of Seaweed Houses* (2011), and Wu Yan's *胶东民居海草房生态策略研究, Study on the Ecological Strategies for the Seaweed House in Eastern Shandong Province* (2012).

²⁷ The Weihai and Rongcheng Museums sponsored one book about seaweed houses and one research paper on the subject, respectively: Li Wenfu's *威海民居海草房历史文化研究, Study on the History and*

Ivens' documentary film *Fishing village*, shot at Da Yu Dao seaweed-house village in 1976 and German photographer Hedda Morrison's album *Wei Hai Wei* about life, architecture, and work in seaweed-house villages in 1937. As writings and images are media of cultural memory that display *fixed points* in the past, these became carriers of cultural memory when I interpreted information to gain knowledge about and meaning from the seaweed houses. With these examples of written and visual evidence, I was able to imagine a past and faded traditions as I experienced the loss of culture and history in seaweed-house villages.

My two bodies of works demonstrated that the artist becomes a special carrier of cultural memory at the moment when history and memory begin to fade. In an attempt to rouse residents' memories, I marked out legends, myths, tales, poems, memorials, and mystical places from the collected media. I went to seaweed houses and asked residents what they could remember about them. Although I invariably found only one or two residents who knew a particular story and would share it with me, the other residents sat with us and emphasized the truth of the narrator's description, why the narrator remembers it, and/or why they themselves forgot. For the residents, there is a special group of people whose task is to remember, preserve, and narrate history, such as Liu Yuqi, the inheritor of the seaweed-house building technique; Yu Yingyu, the expert in marine culture and folklore; and Su Jianguo, a member of the elite of the village. This select group of people is what Jan Assmann has called special carriers of

Culture of the Seaweed House in Wei Hai (2004) and Yu Yingyu's "古老的东方海洋生态民居—荣成海草房," "The Marine Ecological Dwelling in the East—the Seaweed House in Rongcheng" (2013). The collected government chronicles and archives include *荣成县志*, *Rongcheng County Annals*, compiled by Li Tianzhi in the 20th year of the Qing dynasty (1840), and *荣成市志*, *Rongcheng City Annals*, edited by the Chorography Committee of Rongcheng in 1999.

cultural memory, which include narrators, inheritors, scholars, and storytellers. These specialists shared with me more stories, historical events, and myths than any ever recorded in a document, archive, or research study. When I wrote down this information in my field notes, recorded their voice with my audio recorder, and photographed places where events happened, I, too, gradually became one of the special carriers of the cultural memory of seaweed houses. The reason for this was that I was consciously collecting the past and culture, not only from the institutional media (e.g., government archives and books) but also from a recorded individual and fictional memory (e.g., myths and oral story), aiming to offer a detailed image of seaweed houses.

The Approach

In response to the second research question about the artistic approach employed by artists to create a space for the interplay of past, present, and future, my practice applied two methods: spatial experience and hand-coloring. Through the former, I expressed that history and memory must be experienced in situ in order to reconnect with its meaning, such as going to a monument or visiting ruins. Through the latter, I represented images of the past by adding colors to photographs based on what I imagined and felt about the places of memory.

Spatial experience: a case. In the investigation of landscape memory, my practice demonstrated that the artist's experience in landscapes is crucial to understanding cultural memory and creating artworks. The reason for this lay in the fact that participation in cultural memory is not self-propagating because cultural memory is separated from everyday communication, knowledge, and experience (J. Assmann, 2011b). I therefore invited residents and special carriers (e.g., storytellers, inheritors, and elites) to participate in cultural memory by showing me archival documents and

objects, conducting informal narrative interviews with me, and visiting historical sites with me. During this process, participants were able to recall past experiences, reflect on the current situation, and then convey their concerns about the future. Such an interplay between past, present, and future is called “cultural memory” in this study. Through observation of the participants’ words, faces, actions, and emotions during our interactions, I was able to perceive, for example, their fear of a certain period of history or their worship of a myth. I was deeply touched by the participating residents’ desire to revive traditions and preserve seaweed houses. Their reactions to the past and present influenced my mood and impression of the places where things happened. I became increasingly aware that the goal of researching history, tradition, and/or memory is not to gain knowledge of what happened in the past but to comprehend the impact of the past on how people see today.

To expound on spatial experience and how it influenced my method of hand-coloring, I can use the example of my journey to find and photograph the ruins of one of the biggest temples in the seaweed house region (see Figure 46). The temple, named 虎础寺 (*hǔ chǔ sì*, pronounced as *hǔ zhuó sì*; Hu Zhuo Temple), is mentioned in a poem titled “游虎础寺遇雨” (Visit to Hu Zhuo Temple in the Rain) written by Yuan Shihong in the 1800s, that I found in the *Rongcheng County Annals* of the Qing dynasty (see Figure 47). Although the temple no longer exists, I had learned of it after having chanced upon a former residence of Zhang Jinglin in a seaweed-house village. The exploit of Zhang Jinglin was the only documentation I could find on the temple’s information and location, mentioning that the temple was located ambiguously on the southern side of the Da Heng Mountain in the Rongcheng Wei De range and gave its history as 600 years

older than that of the city of Beijing.²⁸ Other than this, there are no detailed records on the history and disappearance of this temple and its relationship with seaweed houses. In other words, the temple was exactly what interested me in the *Speaking the Unspeakable* project: a rich but little-known history and place.

Figure 46. Liu Yajing. (2017). 虎础寺遗址, *Relic of Hu Zhuo Temple* from the series *Speaking the Unspeakable*.

²⁸ The life and death of Zhang Jinglin has been documented in an online publication, “Memorial of the Martyr of Rongcheng” (<http://www.rcsylvw.com/content/?13663.html>), based on eyewitness testimonials gathered by Lin Zhimin, Wang Kepeng, and Song Xigang.

Figure 47. A photocopy, made by Yajing Liu, of the poem “游虎砮寺遇雨” (Visit to Hu Zhuo Temple in the Rain) from the *Rongcheng County Annals* compiled by Li Tianzhi in 1840.

With the clue of the southern side of Da Heng Mountain, I drove to Huang Jia Zhuang village, aiming to discover what happened to the temple and shoot photographs. There, I asked residents, “Where is the Hu Zhuo Temple?” One of them, Huang Jinzhu, was very responsive to my question, while others knew nothing about the temple. Huang claimed he had seen the ruins of the Hu Zhuo Temple and heard lots of stories about it from elderly people when he did farm work on the mountain in the 1970s. After a short conversation, we began our journey of discovering the past.

Any outsider without specialized guidance like Huang’s would never be able to find the way into the mountains and the ruins of the temple. At first glance, the serrated mountains in the distance seemed to be ordinary. Yet, they were densely covered with foliage, such as pine and juniper. The thick leaves and branches shielded the road and limited our view. Huang began to worry about whether we would be able to see the walls and foundations of the temple. Midway up the mountain, the slope became increasingly difficult to climb because of fragmented small stones. Huang explained:

“This is because people were blasting rocks and cutting down trees from the mountain. They were selling rocks and trees to the construction companies.” He pointed in the direction of the quarry with his finger and added: “There was a cave, and a thick snake lived in there throughout the year except during winter. In this season, the snake never hibernated. And this special feature resulted in its being regarded as immortal by the locals. After the quarry was built there, the snake suddenly disappeared” (Huang, personal communication, June 29, 2016). When the path became wider, Huang stopped and announced that we had arrived at Hu Zhuo Temple. The most prominent marker was a faded prayer flag tied to the tree. When we pushed aside the weeds, however, the anterior wall and stone base were faintly visible in the ground and the woods. Standing on the edge of the temple’s wall, Huang recounted the myths and history of the temple.

In this case, Huang Jinzhu is the carrier of the memory of Hu Zhuo Temple and transmitted the memory to me when I asked him. The story of Hu Zhuo Temple is long but in order to provide a basic understanding of the insight I gained into its history and my photograph, can be summed up as follows. During the early Tang dynasty, in the year of war with 高麗 (*gāo lì*; Goryeo, a Korean kingdom established in 918), the emperor Li Shimin killed a tiger here and asked the soldiers to bury the tiger. A few years later, Li commanded the natives to build a temple on top of the tiger’s grave, to appease the tiger and prevent its harming the local people or putting a spell on them. The temple attracted an endless stream of pilgrims, who came to worship the gods and pray. There were two extremely high walls around the temple, and at their widest, a horse could fit. The temple was renovated in 1773. In the 1940s, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, due to the geographic location of the temple, Japanese troops wished to establish a stronghold at the temple against Communist forces. To prevent this, a 15-year-old girl named Zhang Jinglin led the villagers from nearby to destroy the

temple overnight. The next day, she was killed by the Japanese. In the past, the shape of the temple was still clearly visible, including a main temple, eastern and western side houses, and a drama stage, but up until the 1990s, area residents took these stones to build their houses. When we moved carefully to the edge of the wall and tried to find more ruins and details, Huang expressed regret over losing the temple. He said, the death of Zhang Jinglin and the decline of surrounding villages were caused by the villagers' bad deeds, which contributed to bad karma and future suffering: "This is a precious place with good feng shui ... Whether you believe it or not, the temple cannot be destroyed" (Huang, personal communication, June 29, 2016).

Observing the beautiful landscapes and learning the stories of the temple and its related myths and religious beliefs, I could comprehend Huang's feeling and began to imagine the temple's past scenery. Based on my fragmented understanding of the history, I also imagined a picture of destroying the temple during the Second Sino-Japanese War. As a photographer, my final step was to produce a photograph to express the beauty of the ruins and meditate on the past. In this case, the role of photography is to transfer psychological and metaphorical aspects to the physical and representational ones.

Hand-coloring process. All the photographs were shot with 6 x 6-inch black-and-white film with a middle-format camera to ensure the details of the photographs and to extend my thinking time during photo shoots because of the way the camera operates. After developing the film in the darkroom, I printed monochromatic photographs on traditional Chinese rice paper and painted colors with Chinese pigments and brushes (see Figure 48). There were two reasons for applying such a labor-intensive procedure.

Firstly, both learnt from the theoretical studies by scholars such as Jan Assmann and from my trip in collecting stories, interviewing residents, and shooting photographs,

I comprehended that cultural memory does not spread on its own spontaneously but rather requires participation. Such a participation can be encouraged by imagination and feeling of nostalgia as both are central in thinking about the transactions between past, present, and future. While the subjects shown in my photographs and the embedded matters (i.e., actual historical events, valuable traditions, and places where events happened) have a great archival value, I realized that accurate photographs only enable viewers to accept historical fact, especially for the ones who do not experience the specific period of time. The precise color or black-and-white photographs answer the basic question of what happened, but limit viewer's interpretation and contemplation.

Based on the above considerations, the use of hand-coloring in *Speaking the Unspeakable* aimed to create a space of imagination and a sense of history, which hand-colored photographs encourage viewers to interpret images and meditate on the past, present, and future. In this way, creating a photographic memory was akin to creating a Chinese landscape painting, which aimed to sketch ideas or describe moods rather than to produce accurate images. I painted colors and regarded hand-coloring as an expressive method and a reflective practice for performing and interpreting remembrance, imagination, nostalgic sentiment, and meditation. By this, I meant that images were created that grounded on what I imagined and felt about the myths, traditions, and historical events that happened in the landscapes I captured. The final photographs presented a mysterious landscape—one that embedded an imagination of the past, an apprehension about losing the evidence of history, and a longing for times we never experienced.

Secondly, the creation of this project was premised on my belief that the physical features of a photograph can contribute to the content of an image, and vice versa. Considering that the objective of this project was to explore the traditions and past of a

unique place in China, I chose Chinese rice paper and Chinese pigments to perform the materiality of traditional Chinese culture. The physical properties of the selected materials also required me to paint colors onto printed photographs by hand and to follow the steps for creating traditional Chinese painting. The results mimic the same visual effects and colors as Chinese painting.

Figure 48. My hand-coloring process. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

In my painting-like hand-colored photographs, four considerations enabled me to imitate and pursue traditional styles and form of Chinese painting to match the subject of cultural tradition with the materiality of the photographs. The first addressed the aesthetics of traditional Chinese painting. For the hand-coloring process, I turned to the Chinese landscape paintings of the masters to learn how painters controlled color and texture for meditation.²⁹ In Chinese paintings, painters believe that the inner principle would connect to landscape painting if the painter transmitted the spirit into the shape

²⁹ I looked at Chinese landscape paintings of both old and modern masters. The most influential painters are, for example, Fu Baoshi, Zong Qixiang, Wu Guanzhong, Dong Yuan, Jin Hao, Ma Yuan.

of the landscape; in this way, the viewer would see and feel the same as the painter.³⁰ Among them, Xie He proposed six elements for Chinese painting, stating that a good landscape painting considered the consonance of spirit, the use of brush and color, formal likeness, composition, and reference to earlier masters. Although I had not intended to follow Xie He's principles to paint my photographs, as they were beyond the objectives of this photo project, the six elements nonetheless reinforced the importance of technique and medium in the expression of emotional experience.

The second was to use Xuan paper to imitate classical Chinese painting in the choice of material. All the photographs were printed on Xuan paper (also called Chinese rice paper) for two reasons. On the one hand, Xuan paper is a sign of traditional Chinese culture and is the most important material in Chinese art (e.g., painting and calligraphy); it is also used at present for printing important materials and replicating ancient art. On the other hand, Xuan paper features unique abilities in absorbing water, which results in rich layers of changes in ink and pigment. Xuan paper is soft and has great tensile strength, allowing artists to create distinctive effects by kneading or tearing the paper. Among the many kinds of Xuan paper, I tried 15 different types (see Figure 49), including handmade 生宣 (*shēng xuān*; raw paper), 熟宣 (*shú xuān*; ripe paper), 半熟宣 (*bàn shú xuān*; half-ripe paper), machine-made Xuan paper; mulberry rice paper, Kozo rice paper, and inkjet rice paper. After repeated experiments, I decided to use handmade 矾宣 (*fán xuān*; alum Xuan paper), which was produced in Jing County in

³⁰ Examples include Zong Bing's 画山水序, *Introduction to Painting Landscape* and Wang Wei's 叙画, *Discussion of Painting*. English versions and basic introductions to the theories of early Chinese painting can be found in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih's *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (2012) and Bush's *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)* (2012).

China.³¹ Alum Xuan paper was made of straw, the bark of *Pteroceltis tatarinowii*, and stream water from Jing County, and was produced manually using 18 processes. After the paper was dried, it was coated with 矾水 (*fǎn shuǐ*; alum water) to reduce its ability to absorb water and ink. This kind of rice paper kept good details of images for inkjet printing and allowed me to add colors softly with subtle changes. Its labor-intensive production process ensured that each paper was different and thus produced unduplicated prints. Printing on traditional handmade Xuan paper is a technological innovation in both inkjet printing and hand-coloring. The specific technical requirements and results of tests are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Figure 49. My experiments on some types of Xuan paper, including the effects of printing and coloring. Photographed by Liu Yajing.

³¹ The definition and production of Xuan paper were specified by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China in 2008 under record no. GB/T 18739-2008. The complete information can be found online at <http://www.gb688.cn/bzgk/gb/newGbInfo?hcno=2DE6E1700FFC8E4009345BB93C400A8F>.

A desire for the permanence of tradition was also reflected in my third consideration about the choice of pigment. I used 12 basic colors in traditional Chinese pigments, including natural plant and mineral pigments. The plant pigments are transparent colors that can be applied over the ink of photographs without destroying the photographic surface or details. Mostly, transparent colors were used to control the hue of the images by adding multiple layers. Mineral pigments are made from precious stones to which 明胶 (*míng jiāo*; glue) is added before use. The colors of mineral pigments are elegant but may cover over the surface of photographs if used improperly. To retain the surface of the photographs and approach the perfection of exquisiteness and deep colors, I added washes of color layer by layer, like the process of adding colors in 工笔画 (*gōng bǐ huà*; Chinese gongbi paintings). A photograph may be painted over more than 10 times to achieve the final result.

As mentioned above, colors were added to convey a personal imagination and emotion. For instance, the image 水雷爆炸事件, *Naval Mines Exploded on the Beach* (see Figure 50) pictured the beach of a seaweed-house village where naval mines from World War II exploded in the 1940s. The old man in the image recalled in an interview that about a hundred villagers were killed on the beach and at sea. Based on his memory and my imagination, I painted the photograph in the colors of the sunset, turning the ground, beach, and sea into red, like the blood of those who were killed.

Figure 50. Liu Yajing. (2017). 水雷爆炸事件, *Naval Mines Exploded on the Beach*, from the series *Speaking the Unspeakable*.

The fourth and final consideration concerned the use of brush for expressing spiritual resonance and temporality in photographs. Although the use of Chinese painting brushes was an obvious choice given the use of Chinese rice paper and pigments, my focus was on how to convey a sense of melancholy, mystery, or reminiscence while I painted photographs. I considered that brush stroke can create special visual effects to enhance the atmosphere of the photographs, as well as to reflect my feelings and imagination on site. Indeed, each layer of color and brush stroke gives different meanings to the images.

For example, in the 明朝烟墩, *Watchtower of the Ming Dynasty* (see Figure 51), I used a broad brush to paint the sky in rows and layers, aiming to highlight the tragic mood of the ruins of war. The 娘娘庙祭海, *Sacrifice to the Sea at Mazu Temple* (see

Figure 52) described a tradition where residents of seaweed houses make sacrifices and worship the sea to ensure safe fishing and a good harvest. The photograph was taken at night when the residents had left and the incense was gradually dispersing. By controlling the power of the brush and paper, I added warm-toned colors to the sky to symbolize the prosperous scene of the sacrifice and created a mottled texture to convey a feeling of mystery. While the smoke and glow of the burning of sacrificial offerings were still faintly visible, signifying a sacrifice was going on but is about to come to an end in today's China.

Figure 51. Liu Yajing. (2017). 明朝烟墩, *Watchtower of the Ming Dynasty*, from the series *Speaking the Unspeakable*.

Figure 52. Liu Yajing. (2017). 娘娘庙祭海, *Sacrifice to the Sea at Mazu Temple*, from the series *Speaking the Unspeakable*.

In sum, my artistic practice considered the relationship between landscape and memory and examined the carriers of cultural memory for photographic expression. I discovered that cultural memory is symbolic and represented by landscapes. Landscape is a medium of memory and culture. Landscape is not simply what we see but contains various meanings, values, and spatial metaphors depending on how we interpret it. Events that have occurred in a certain place cannot be reproduced but are semiotized as a site of memory. Thus, photographs of landscapes cannot represent memory but can be used to reconstruct memory based on personal reflections of what artists and viewers know and feel in the present.

I investigated cultural memory by discovering and showing special carriers because memory is mediated in archives, museums, rituals, poets, storytellers, and so forth. One kind of carrier of cultural memory refers to all kinds and forms of symbols,

such as the personal objects featured in *Identification Card* and the rituals, historical events, relics, or village chroniclers as shown in *Speaking the Unspeakable*. I also argued that the artist becomes a special carrier of cultural memory after coming to understand what happened in the past and obtaining material and oral records of stories, traditions, myths, and so forth. Based on the artist's knowledge, he or she contributes to transit the past to the present and future in a creative process, demonstrating that cultural memory is not to give accurate and truthful testimony of a historical past but to ensure cultural continuity by evoking and examining the past in the present. This was evident when I studied the history and culture of seaweed houses and interviewed residents on my field trips. Residents only happened to participate in cultural memory when I asked them to recall a particular past event and to show me the place where things happened. Some of the shared stories have never been recorded in any documents. For those stories that can be found in writings, residents' narratives provided more details or different versions, reminding me that personal interpretation and imagination help us to preserve and remember a past that is separated from everyday life and experience.

Regarding the artistic method for the reconstruction of cultural memory, my artistic process disclosed the value of walking and hand-coloring. On the one hand, I showed the importance of discovering the cultural memory of a region and feeling the past in actual places. By walking in the landscapes, I established a unique relationship with the place by consciously engaging myself as a member of the community. This spatial experience allowed me to understand the collective consciousness of the society by relating the past to present and future situations. The journeys, which include the stories I collected, people I met, problems I encountered, and remains/monuments I found, influenced my knowledge and emotions attached to a tradition and past under threat of being lost or forgotten forever. On the other hand, rather than simply imitating

natural colors as the 19th-century colorists did, I regarded hand coloring as a way to convey spirituality, temporality, and imagination in images by choosing materials, adding colors, and controlling visual effects. In the body of work *Speaking the Unspeakable*, the process created a poetic and emotional space for viewer immersion and interpretation. Both in terms of the image content as well as the technical and physical choices in making the photographs, my case study expressed a return to tradition.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In Chapter IV and V, I described and analyzed the four case studies about artists Qu Yan, Yao Lu, Chen Nong, and myself. Chapter VI follows with a discussion of the results investigated in Chapter IV and V. The following research questions have been explored throughout the study, which will be answered and interpreted in this chapter. What are the underlying concerns of contemporary landscape photographic works in China? What aspects of memory do artists such as Qu, Yao, Chen, and myself, express through these sociocultural problems found in landscapes? How do artists investigate landscape memory? Which method could be designed to convey a sense of memory?

Chapter VI shows that photographs embody cultural memory, especially at a time when the historical past and traditional cultures are eroded by the urbanization. I argue that cultural memory can be adopted in photography by investigating and presenting the aspects of culture, history, and power. In their works, the featured artists used the camera to evoke personal experiences that related themselves to others and to a larger cultural framework in the past and present. Such artistic practices demonstrate that cultural memory is an active process and offers a dynamic artistic approach to understanding and creating artworks. The practices of the artists in my four case studies reveal the following: 1) spatial practice as the most effective method to experience the past, present and future of a landscape and 2) the method of hand-coloring offers pictorial space and freedom for imagination and recollection.

Embodying Cultural Memory in Photography

Cultural Concerns

This study indicates that cultural memory is active, in that it connects individual remembrance, past, culture, and society to each other. In the term “cultural memory”, the word “cultural” implies that memory is closely related to a shared tradition, history, experience, custom, a collective consciousness, a distant past, and a pattern of a society, all of which belong to the concept of *culture*. Thus, the study of cultural memory requires an understanding, examination, and interpretation of a group’s activities, experiences, common behaviour or thoughts, and any collective aspects. As a collective concept, the reconstruction of cultural memory in photography questions issues in society by examining and reflecting on individual experiences within sociocultural context.

By examining different themes of photographic works of art, I came to understand that cultural memory in art is performed by the investigation of and concern about *memory crisis* in the twenty-first century. Memory crisis suggests that artists experienced a loss of traditional cultures and inheritance during China’s cultural integration, and that memory has been isolated from the past. Chinese artists realized that the historical past began to disappear and cultural tradition was coming to an end in the contemporary environment. Thus, artists began to examine cultural problems and consider their influence on people’s memory.

Indeed, the concern with investigating memory as it relates to traditional Chinese culture is grounded in the foundation of Chinese society. Scholar Fei Xiaotong’s (1992) and Huang Wenshan’s (1938) definitions of culture in the Chinese context highlighted the need for memory when learning culture and living in groups. Both of their concepts remind us that, culture is a product of individual memories and collective social

experiences, and that culture is characterized by activities, ideas, and creations according to a certain physical environment. Thus, when villages and the countryside have been turned into cities and traditional cultural patterns have been replaced by the new lifestyles, cultural issues occur in contemporary society and people's lives. Huang Wenshan identified the emergence of cultural issues in China as early as 1938, stating that a cultural crisis occurred during the transition from an idealistic system (e.g., knowledge, belief, morality, and custom) to a materialistic system (e.g., all things created by labor) (W. Huang, 1938; Y. Huang, 2016).

The four artists in this study are aware of these changes in cultural patterns. Their photographs of landscapes were intended not to record naturalistic scenery or manufactured spaces, but to criticize problems in society. The problems uncovered in the artists' works were based on their investigation, self-reflection, and interpretation of the past cultural patterns within a contemporary context. By comparing the present society to the traditional Chinese culture, they showed their awareness of the conflicts between past and present. Although the four artists explored different themes in their works, they used their personal knowledge about the past to explore the status of contemporary society. Consequently, the artists expressed anxiety about the future.

Faced with changes in the landscapes, Chinese artists consciously recall the traditional Chinese conception of nature, which centers on humans, morals, and spirituality. In the Chinese context, the landscape has symbolic, metaphorical, spiritual, and memorial meanings, as characterized by the idea of *shan shui*. Landscape was a site for artists and literati to express personality, observe culture, feel the spirit of nature, and perceive time and space. Thus, early Chinese artworks related to landscape embodied artists' memories of certain landscapes, such as in landscape painting and photography (*fengjing sheying* as reviewed in Chapter II). Due to economic and social

development, the current landscape has been considered a product of commodity and hegemony, losing the feelings and belief of a society and traditional aesthetic values. While most Chinese people appreciated the improved standards of living driven by the transformation of such landscapes, artists such as Yao Lu observed the negative consequences of this transformation on identity and memory.

Yao Lu's *Chinese Landscape* photographs expressed the crises of spirit and memory that has accompanied the rapid economic development. Yao created Chinese painting-like photographs with landscapes of piles of rubble. On the one hand, the massive heaps of rubbish showed in Yao's photographs signified that people had lost a place for spiritual introspection. The quickly-disappearing *hutongs* and other works of architectural heritages in Beijing from the Ming and Qing dynasties carry Chinese beliefs, behaviors, and rituals that have been passed down for generations. The destruction of these traditional landscapes means that one could not recall or understand previous lives, experiences, histories, or traditions. On the other hand, Yao conveyed his moral value, spirit of *shan shui*, and memory of past lifestyles in the forms of traditional Chinese landscape painting (e.g., blue-green landscape painting, literati painting, and animal painting) and cultural symbols (e.g. poem, seal, and pavilion). The photographic style of Yao's works represented a pictorial image of the Chinese concept of landscape. However, the dramatic subjects and stories presented in the photographs reminded viewers that critical problems had emerged with the integration of the new and old cultures, such as identity, ethnic, spiritual, and environmental issues.

Further, artists associated the current social structure with the traditional principles of Chinese society to investigate problems of tradition, power, belief, spirit, history in social reality. Artists took into account that the village has a significant impact on the construction of Chinese society and formation of cultural memory. According to

Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong (1992), the village is “the foundation of Chinese society” (p. 37). The village was a symbol of a harmonious society that represented that society’s belief, rituals, networks of a group, moralities, and traditions. Chinese people are loyal to their villages. In fact, people who live in cities would like to return to their villages. This act of rural return has enabled Chinese people to understand the origin of their society and identity, as well as to express their desire for the poetic and pastoral lifestyle of the past. However, artists’ works portrayed a completely different picture of the village. In the artists’ photographs, such as my works and Qu Yan’s *Space* project, the village had lost its sociocultural value for Chinese society and become a site of forgetfulness.

My own artistic projects, *Identification Card* and *Speaking the Unspeakable*, expressed that urbanization had undermined the villages’ traditional cultures (e.g., traditions, rituals, myths, and religious customs) and historical pasts. Using seaweed-house village as an example, I represented a national phenomenon cross China where rural people had abandoned traditions and forgotten or struggled to recall the histories of their villages. As the seaweed houses were being torn down to give way to urbanization, the residents had moved out of their traditional dwellings and into high rise buildings. In the process, they lost their farmland and spaces where they had held traditional rituals and celebrated festivals. They avoided any mentions of the past, habitual activities, myths, and religions in an effort to follow a modernized lifestyle. Consequently, the residents lost their shared spirit of and belief in the rural traditions that they had inherited from past generations. After discovering the situation in the countryside, I strove to maintain the continuity of memory by evoking people’s memories of the past and their culture. Each image was created based on a comprehensive investigation of archives, interview with residents, and discovery of

historical sites. Thus, the histories, myths, and traditions mediated in photographs were carriers of cultural memory, helping to create a sense of the past and recall viewers' personal experiences in the face of cultural loss.

In addition to the cultural value of villages as examined in my projects, the village also represents Chinese social patterns. These patterns differ from Western ones. In particular, Chinese society is founded on "interlocking social networks," "Confucian logic of social relationships and situational morality," and the structure of elders' power (Fei, 1992; Hamilton & Zheng, 1992, p.33). Such a traditional network-based pattern stands opposed to China's current class-based society. As a result, the crises of power, belief, survival, and values have occurred in villages, as showed in Qu Yan's *Space* photographs. Qu's photographs observed the unbalanced development of social classes in China, demonstrating that a crisis happens "when a society develops so unevenly as to produce a grave cultural disequilibrium" (Rader, 1947, p. 266). In his answers to the interviews, he expressed that the crises have occurred and even intensified because of the conflicts between the traditional foundations of Chinese society and current socioeconomic development. In the process of urbanization and modernization, traditional culture, national logic, and belief were abandoned before the new system of culture had been fully formed.

Rather than the examining traditional cultural patterns in landscapes, Chen expressed a sense of crisis hidden in his doubts about the reality of history and the essence of human civilization. Chen regarded history as a desire for power and politics. He examined human civilization as a space of materiality and spirituality. In *Yellow River* and *Silk Road*, he implied a crisis of power between nations and the crisis of the class struggle between rich and poor by portraying Chinese peasant uprisings and the development of a mythological human civilization. He also represented the crisis of

spirit in materialized society by featuring slogans of the uprisings and by shining a light on a Buddhist monk and other individuals.

Whether viewed from the perspective of environmental change, socioeconomic development, or cultural discard, the artists conveyed the same phenomenon—that physical changes of space express cultural imbalances among social groups and involve various crises falling under the range of culture. On the one hand, the artists' works showed that a crisis had arisen from the disproportionate development of economy and social classes. On the other hand, the artists' photographs exposed a crisis in memory caused by the cultural disintegration and the development of new cultural values.

As has been noted, the artists addressed cultural concerns about memory in contemporary landscape photographs, as demonstrated by the scholars such as Patrick H. Hutton. Hutton pointed out that contemporary culture reflects the breakdown of traditions, and thus, people “no longer have a strong sense of the places of memory” (1993, p. 166). However, the artists tried to represent a sense of memory through the lens of photography. They created photographs to question problems with remembrance, forgetting, spirit, history, and power, all of which were caused by the transition from an old culture and way of life to a new one.

Aspects of Cultural Memory

The discourse of cultural memory is embedded in Chinese landscape photographic works; and is especially evident in artworks that look to the past to examine the problems caused by changes in landscapes (e.g., urbanization, modernization, immigration). As analyzed in Chapter IV and V, the four case studies exposed different aspects of cultural memory by investigating various problems of contemporary society embodied in landscapes. In this section, the cross-case analysis of

the four cases expresses cultural memory from the perspective of power, culture, and history, as well as presenting narrative practices shown in the four artists' works.

Power is the first aspect of cultural memory as disclosed in the works of Qu Yan as well as my own work. In the study of cultural memory, early sociologists' discussions were mainly based on organized, formal, and institutional forms, such as archives, histories, rituals, festivals, and traditions (A. Assmann, 2011; J. Assmann, 2011b; Erll, Nünning, & Young, 2008). This implies the political aspect of cultural memory on the premise that everything is determined by power, including our memories. As expressed in Qu Yan's *Space* photographs, the relationship between power and memory is embedded in the heterogeneous spaces of villages. For example, from the paintings shown in the photographs of leaders' temples, one can see the results of rulers' control about what is to be narrated and recorded for the future. From the decoration of village offices, such as posters and certificates displayed in the images, one can understand the status of power among different social classes and observe what needs to be remembered in order to control people at the grassroots level.

In contrast to the normative forms of cultural memory, my seaweed-house project showed the role of individuals in the construction of memory. Early discussions of cultural memory led by Jan Assmann ignored the practices of individuals. It is only since the 21st century that sociologists, historians, and artists have begun to underline that cultural memory can be examined through personal experiences and objects, such as photographs, letters, and oral stories (Dijck, 2007; Kuhn, 2007; Rothberg, 2010). The rationale behind this approach was based on the view that the individual forms a collective consciousness and culture (Rothberg, 2010; J. Young, 1993). As the history, memory, and culture of seaweed houses have not been adequately recorded in archives, documents, and other writing and visual records, the motivation behind the

Identification Card and *Speaking the Unspeakable series* was to express the valuable and unnoted information of the past and knowledge about these houses that individuals carry. In my photographs, all the carriers of memory came from the residents of seaweed-house villages, such as myths, historical events, and traditions. With the passing of the older generations, I, as an artist, will be a *special carrier*, helping to transition the individual level of memory to a cultural perspective by producing, organizing, and showing my photographs.

The second aspect of memory underlines the spirituality of a culture, as shown in Yao Lu's *Chinese Landscape* and my projects. Literally, the term *cultural memory* considers memory in relation to our culture. Western scholars such as Jan Assmann (1995) and Astrid Erll (2008a) presented the concept of cultural memory to examine individual and collective consciousness within a cultural sphere. Although they mentioned the mental aspect in the formation of cultural memory, they did not elaborate on the meaning of culture and its impact on society. In the Chinese context, culture is "perpetuated by a symbolic system and individual memories" (Fei, 1992, p. 55), allowing that culture embodies a particular value for people's lives and metaphorical meaning for memories, as expressed by the artist Yao Lu and me. Yao's response showed that memory and culture is rooted in and transmitted by traditional landscapes. For him, when people demolish old landscapes and build high-rise buildings, traditional Chinese culture is gradually lost, which that leads to spiritual emptiness. Consequently, people are unable to recall the past. By creating Chinese-painting like photographs with images of rubbish heaps, Yao aimed to express the personal spirit and represent a desire to return to the idealistic landscape from the past. A similar approach can be found in my practices. Based on my investigation, seaweed houses embody a specific culture of a region and the philosophy of a group of people. I was deeply touched by the value of

seaweed houses when I walked in the villages, found historical places, and talked to residents. I understood that the demolishment of seaweed houses signifies the loss of a culture (e.g., belief, spirit, and myth). Thus, I learned from traditional Chinese painting to create the photographs of *Speaking the Unspeakable*, aiming to represent my spatial experiences of seaweed houses. Both artists shared a desire to treasure the idealistic culture in a materialized society.

As the content of cultural memory refers to mythical histories or events in the past, the third aspect of cultural memory, history, has been examined in the practical component of this study as well as through the works of Chen Nong. Debates surrounding history in memory dated back to the beginning of the 20th century, with many arguing that history is not memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1989). However, contemporary artists such as Chen Nong regarded history as a form of cultural memory in art. Chen directly referenced written history and expressed his understanding of it. The images shown in *Yellow River* and *Silk Road* are of famous events in the history of China, such as peasant rebellions and the marriage of Princess Wencheng. All the historical events have been institutionally recorded and studied and have contributed to the construction of a national memory. By showing some symbols of these histories in the photographs, such as the slogan of the rebellion and the costumes of people, viewers can easily identify the events and create a sense of the past and memory.

In the context of writing or photographing seaweed houses into the regional or national archives, the cultural memory of seaweed houses will begin to take shape. As the history of seaweed houses has not been researched and recorded by authorities, one cannot understand the rooted values and spirits of these houses, cannot learn the past of the region, and cannot interpret these later on. This highlighted the need to study the history of seaweed houses in order to construct a cultural memory of the region. Each

image of the *Identification Card* and *Speaking the Unspeakable* series symbolized a rich historical event, a traditional belief, or a myth, found in the residents' remembrances and my research of visual and written records. These photographs were not meant to present the facts of the past. Rather, these photographs invited viewers to construct their own meanings of the past and history by "framing them within a cultural memory" (Zamponi, 1998, p. 423).

The cross-case analysis of the four artists' works showed that cultural memory is not a set form of the past or a fixed impression. Cultural memory is an active practice of examining and reconstructing the past by giving new meanings and perspectives within the contemporary context. In extending Jan Assmann's definition of cultural memory, scholars such as Mariusz Czepczynski and Michal Czepczynski (1995) have pointed out that "memory is a phenomenon that is directly related to the present; our perception of the past is always influenced by the present, which means that it is always changing" (p. 133).

Thus, photography is not just an archival reference or a subsidiary tool for reading and constructing the past. In fact, photography can be regarded as an active process for creating a sense of past, present, and future through the control and practice of making artworks. This is the case of José van Dijck's theory of *mediated memory*, which refutes the one-way relationship between memory and media (e.g., family album and digital photography), stating instead that "media and memory transform each other." (2007, p. 21) This interpretation reminds us of the importance of media technologies in presenting the dynamic nature of remembering and projecting individual experiences to a large collective and cultural context. Such an energetic relationship between self and culture, between individual and collective, between past and future, has been exposed in the four artists' works and especially in the practical component of this study.

Approaches for Reconstructing Photographic Memory

The review of the different aspects of cultural memory embedded in photography reveals that a dynamic narrative practice is required in working with memory. A narrative practice does not imply that an artist displays the fact of the past, but rather that he or she create a “symbolic space” to “combine and integrate various cultural symbol systems within one” (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 15). By reflecting on my own artistic practices created for this study and conducting a cross-case analysis of the four artists’ practices, I was able to discern the photographic approaches of narrative practice used in the reconstruction of cultural memory. This central research objective generated two sub-questions. The first requires a discussion of the shared dimension in the investigation of landscape memory in the four artists’ practices. The second addresses the hand-coloring process as an effective means for memory representation, as evidenced in my own practice.

Artist’s Experiences of Landscape

Critical spatial practice. In the understanding and reconstruction of cultural memory, the examination of landscape is crucial before taking a photograph. Landscape is a medium for cultural memory and thus provides signs for remembering and describing the past. The reason for this was that “all mnemotechnics is placement” (J. Assmann, 2011b, p. 44). For example, a temple-like sculpture carved on the wall of the seaweed houses in Ningjin village divulges that the owner of the house was a general appointed by a Qing dynasty emperor. Based on my collected stories, the temple pattern may represent village residents’ belief in Buddhism or their worship of the general. Meanwhile, the thousand-year-old tree in Dong Sujia village symbolizes the myth of 狐

三兄弟 (*hú sān xiōng dì*; the three wolf-brothers). Such stories, myths, and historical events would not be apparent without my journeys, observations, and investigations on-site, because “the given cannot be known in itself” (Tuan, 1977, p. 9).

The investigation of landscape and its embedded memory requires a critical spatial practice, aiming to link artists to experience the society and events, regardless of if the artists belong to them or not. Notwithstanding differences between the themes and strategies of the four artists, one element they all share is the intense observation and examination of the landscapes that are their focus. Each of the artists spent years travelling to and from sites to fully capture the status, cultural meanings, and values of the landscape. Qu Yan and Yao Lu regarded landscape as a cultural locale to explore problems of the society. Chen Nong immersed himself in the desert, city ruins, and caves of Xinjiang to feel the spirit of the nation. As for me, I regarded seaweed houses as a mnemonic system that represents the region’s history, sociocultural practices, and emotional connections. All of us went to landscapes to investigate history, to discover issues, to understand local life, and/or to perceive people’s mental state and their engagement with nature. By uncovering layers of history and cultural implications, the artists were able to uncover problems of memory and issues of social reality represented by the landscapes.

A spatial practice refers to the artistic processes of finding, observing, and experiencing a site of memory. Walking is the most effective way to experience landscape, although it is examined in different ways by the four artists. Firstly, walking is a daily and inescapable activity of people’s daily lives. Everyday walking is often overlooked by people because it “belongs to a set of routines and thus forms part of the mundane in our everyday life” (Wunderlich, 2008, p. 128). People normally give no attention and reflection to everyday walking (Seamon, 2000; Wunderlich, 2008).

However, it was during his daily walks between home and the Central Academy of Fine Arts that Yao Lu noticed the similarity between the dust nets and the form of traditional Chinese landscape painting, which inspired *Chinese Landscape*. In this case, walking not only was a behavioral and mechanical habit but helped with thinking, connecting his experiences with the environment.

In fact, walking is a critical spatial practice (Careri, 2002; Rendell, 2006; Wunderlich, 2008). Through movement in rural and city spaces, walking enables us to experience and learn about places and develop thoughts and questions about them. When Qu Yan walked in villages and photographed underground churches, villagers objected to his taking pictures because they suspected him of being from the police, come to close their churches. When he photographed the offices of government officials or entrepreneurs, the subjects became concerned about the photos' potential exposure of administrative and individual power. In other words, when displayed publicly, these photographs of offices may bare to viewers the owners' power of politics, finance, or business. Thus, Qu could immediately feel people's sense of loss and risk, as well as their conscious self-protection. All of these experiences developed Qu's understanding of space in *Space* project, in which space is no longer abstract or neutral but a product of social relations embodying class hierarchy and power politics.

While Qu Yan's walking is purposive, searching for different kinds of offices, churches, clinics, and temples in villages, Chen Nong consciously wandered along the Silk Road rather than choose specific destinations. Chen explored the environment and culture of the region to understand the past of the western regions in China. He crossed the desert to feel the desolation of the prehistoric world, lived in the ancient towns to know the local lifestyle, and admired paintings in the caves to learn the splendor of the Silk Road. Aesthetically speaking, Chen immersed his spirituality in time and space to

touch and feel the places. His walking, therefore, is more like a pilgrimage, and in this way, the process of walking and the scenery along the road are more important than the destination or a single place. The act of walking is to see and feel with the artist's own eyes, body, and mind, which is a memorial experience of imagined scenes in respect to the physical remains. Here, walking is an aesthetic practice to sense our bodies and to interpret and remake meaning of our world from our impressions (Smith, 2010; Wunderlich, 2008).

Similar to Chen Nong, my own walking was initially discursive. In the early years of the project, I walked in the villages spontaneously to learn and observe everything around the seaweed houses, such as the structure of the houses, the characteristics of the villages, and people's activities. My walking was relaxed, lacking sharp questions and critique. Such walking is beneficial to establishing communication with residents and deepening familiarity with the environment. The sights and stories seen and heard along the way influenced my perception of the place.

In the creation of the practical component of this study, I combined various clues to find historical sites and overlooked places. So, although the intention became purposive, the walking to find locations continued to be discursive, reflexive, and recollective. In most cases, participating residents either doubted the existence of a site or were unable to remember the exact location of it so that they had to find the place by recalling their fragmented memories. Walking thus became a process through which residents slowly added more details to the story or we simply kept silent to feel the landscape through pace and rhythm. When we arrived at the much-anticipated place and stood on the physical site, such as the temple that had been destroyed during the Second Sino-Japanese War or the beach where nearly a hundred-people died from exploding naval mines as described in Chapter V, I had the sensation that what had happened could

not really have taken place. Depression and anxiety set in, as Carol Becker described: “when consciousness splits and cannot accept the reality of what has occurred, this can lead to a sense of living in a bad dream from which one soon will awaken” (2014, p. 57). Once awake, I shot photographs to incorporate the feelings of melancholy.

When investigating and feeling landscapes through walking, the four artists become like the *flâneur* who wanders in the city or village because of the physical changes of landscape brought by the development of economy and society. The term *flâneur* was first proposed by the French writer Charles Baudelaire in 1863 as a type of “stroller” who made social and aesthetic observations during long walks through Paris. The term was later explored and developed by Walter Benjamin (1969) and other scholars, such as Christopher Butler (1994), Chris Jenks (1995), Kirsten Seale (2005), and Susan Sontag (2001), who define the *flâneur* as a spectator and depicter of modern life, a metaphor, way of seeing, and way of expressing the poetic in history in order to understand the present and future. As *flâneurs*, the four artists discern details that have been habitually ignored in the landscape. They walk as a spatial practice to observe what is happening at present and to learn what has existed in the past. By touching the environment with the body and perceiving the space with thoughts, the artists gain a deep understanding of the landscape and are able to express emotions, feelings, and thoughts in the making of art. As Yi-Fu Tuan has pointed out, kinesthesia, sight, and touch “enable human beings to have their strong feeling for space and for spatial qualities,” and they embody thoughts in “tangible materials,” such as painting and photography (1977, pp. 12, 17).

The perspective of place and space. By walking in villages, wandering among ruins, or traveling around places, artists were able to construct the intimacy of place and feel the sensation of space. In the study of geography, anthropology, and other

disciplines, place and space are two inseparable concepts of landscape that entail a relationship between the foreground and background of social life (Hirsch & Hanlon, 1995). In this case, *foreground* means “place,” what is in view and actually here, and *background* refers to “space,” the horizon and potentiality beyond the everyday experience and context. Place and space together help artists understand, investigate, and feel landscapes, as well as affect their methods for reconstructing cultural memory in photography. This is evident in my photographic practice and the artistic processes of Yao Lu, Chen Nong, and Qu Yan.

The practices of Chen Nong, and Yao Lu as well as my own practice showed that place is locale and is identified with social life and emotion. When constructing a cultural memory of a landscape, the artists first constructed a sense of place. To have a sense of place, the artists went to the landscapes in order to keep a “close contact and long association with the environment” (Tuan, 1974, p. 410) or link sites to themselves (Agnew, 2011). With a sense of place, the artists were able to reflect on the sociocultural condition of the past and present, as well as to elaborate personal interpretations and emotions.

In the creation of the *Identification Card* and *Speaking the Unspeakable*, I started with the construction of an intimate relationship with the place, which enabled me to understand the history, value, and meaning of seaweed houses from the point of view of residents. During my numerous visits to seaweed-house villages since 2007, I walked through seaweed houses and discussed with residents to build trust and friendship with them. Building up a personal relationship allowed me to return as I would to my own hometown. For me, this unique sense of belonging was clear as we sent greeted one another, gossiped about the past and changes in the village, and took part in festival activities. Once I consciously linked myself to the site as a member of the seaweed-

house community, a sense of memory gradually deepened with time. By walking in the villages, talking to the residents, and collecting information on historical events, I realized the disintegration of the traditional pattern of a village. And, when faced with familiar villages and photographed houses torn down, I understood the nostalgic emotions shared by the elderly and felt the anxiety of the loss of identity, belief, and the past. The long-term contact with seaweed-house communities turned the unfamiliar location into a place with a lived experience.

Similar to my practice of having a close relationship with the landscape, Chen Nong immersed himself in the landscapes (e.g., deserts, ancient cities, the superb caves paintings of the Mogao Grottoes) to feel the ancient myths, national characteristics of the western regions, prosperity represented by the Silk Road, and Buddhist culture and spirit of the region. The achievement required three years of travel from Jiayuguan to Xinjiang on three occasions, feeling ancient sites, deserts, and cities along the route of the Silk Road. During the trips, Chen was able to active personal imagination of Xinjiang to enhance his understanding of the history and places. Chen's insights to places and culture enabled him to perceive that the western region is not only a legendary and spiritual symbol, but also a society closely related to economy and civilization. Yao Lu's relationship with place, however, is different from mine and Chen Nong's, because the landscape Yao photographed is his hometown. Thus, a sense of place and the intimate relationship was naturally rooted in his photographs. Yao's project was based on his memory of his birthplace, Beijing, and his intuitive feelings about traditional Chinese art. In preparation for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Yao daily witnessed the demolition of familiar places and the construction of new structures. Facing the new skyscrapers, luxury shopping malls, and unattractive tall buildings, Yao

recalled the poetic landscapes of the past and evoked the feeling of helplessness and loss as well as melancholy and sorrow.

In the photographic representation, artists would regard places (e.g., remains, environments, and villages) as representational and ideological spaces. Indeed, the photographs disclosed artists' sense of space based on what he or she saw, felt, and thought on the sites. On the one hand, artists aimed to break boundaries of geographical location. When putting places into one space, artists, such as Qu Yan, questioned problems of a larger community in the present, not the mere collection of images of the past. On the other hand, artists, like Yao Lu, Chen Nong, and me, constructed a metaphorical space for imagination and personal interpretation of the past, present, and future. After all, space is a result of people's thinking and representation, showing the relationship between self, environment, and sensation. As Tuan has stated,

Our awareness of the spatial relations of objects is never limited to the perceptions of the objects themselves; present awareness itself is imbued with past experiences of movement and time, with memories of past expenditures of energy, and it is drawn towards the future by the perceptual objects' call to action. (1974, p. 399)

Qu Yan's *Space* photographs were created based on his cognition of space. From 2005 to the present, Qu has visited more than five provinces to find and document a large number of places, such as offices, churches, clinics, and illegal temples. Based on his sociocultural interpretation of landscape and the concept of the spectacle, Qu regarded these places as spaces. His views expressed that place has been converted into space because of the control of power under a capitalism and totalitarian society. Thus, a space is social and political and embedded with human behavior and consciousness.

Taking the *Power Space* as an example, the spatial turn is manifested in two aspects. Firstly, the offices featured in the photographs embodied an ironic meaning, aiming to criticize placelessness under the control of power in China. From a geographical point of view, each office refers to a particular place with a typical feature in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Each office represents a local economic and political situation and regional customs of that particular village or city. As a public space as well as private ones, offices are decorated by the subjects according to individual appreciation. However, these offices will be decorated based upon governmental requirements for cadres at each level. Consequently, offices will lose traditional components and become depersonalized. Secondly, because of the delocalization of the places, Qu's photographs questioned a broad range of offices in China as a whole, not limited to the photographed ones. Qu's practice of putting photographs of various offices together demonstrates that a place is assimilated into a space because of the development of society, including modernization and urbanization. Therefore, in photography, a place as a space represents the broad examination of physical, social, or economic processes by transcending the past and the fixed location.

Unlike Qu's social construction of space and his archival photographs, the practices of Yao Lu and Chen Nong as well as my own practice showed that space can also be used metaphorically and expressively. Both place and space contain emotional feelings at different levels. Place is emotionally charged that given by people; space refers to spatial feelings and experiences that people obtain through places (Tuan, 1974). When putting place into space, the artists highlighted spatiality, spirituality, and the role of emotions in cultural memory. Yao Lu created a picturesque junk space to question the loss of traditional Chinese culture and spirit in materialistic modernization. The photographs of *Chinese Landscape* were made up of hundreds of images of garbage,

buildings, and people shot near his home or on his way to the workplace. Through Photoshop, the geographical features of places have been cut and spliced into a new space in the form of a Chinese painting. By showing the conflict between the poetic sense of landscape in the past and the artificially constructed sites in the present, Yao expressed a sense of nostalgia and a hope for returning to the past. In the photographs of *Silk Road* and *Yellow River*, Chen Nong reconstructed a history and culture of Xinjiang and Chinese peasant uprisings, respectively. Based on his trips to sites and the feelings he felt, Chen dreamed present-day places as prehistoric and mythological spaces, which enabled him to make the past active for the present interpretation. Thus, similar to Yao Lu's practices, Chen did not photograph realistic photographs but created filmic images by mixing up historical events with personal imagination, drawing storyboards, staging actors, and adding colors and vantage effects to black-and-white photographs. Chen thus integrated the past of different periods and places into a coherent space of a single long-scroll image, showing, for example, the origin, development, and extinction of human civilization in *Silk Road*. In juxtaposition to Yao Lu's and Chen Nong's constructed and idealistic images, my final body of work *Speaking the Unspeakable*, lied in between the realistic and imaginative. Each image recorded the remains of the historical structures and sites where traditional rituals and myths occurred. The stories of these places are encapsulated in the title of each image, relating a past that has been forgotten. The final images were hand-painted to create a space for imagination, since, as previously described, cultural memory requires imagination for the viewer to be able to understand the past and participate in the reminiscence.

To summarize, spatial experience is fundamental in the reconstruction of a cultural memory through landscape photography, since: 1) landscape consists of

memory, and memory is mediated by space; and 2) cultural memory cannot be represented but rather is reconstructed by individual knowledge, experience, sensation, and understanding. In the artistic practices defined above, the artists formed a sense of place by walking in the sites, enabling them to gain a comprehensive understanding of historical past and discover problems of society caused by the loss of traditional Chinese cultural patterns. During their journeys to actual sites of memory, the artists shaped their thoughts, visual perception, and mental awareness, which together generate a sense of space. Such spatial experience allowed artists to relate themselves to others and make the conversion from individual interpretation to collective consciousness. In this way, their photographs are the expression of retrospect, embodying the contemplation of the past and leading to reflection of the present and future.

Hand-coloring as an Artistic Method

Regarding creative methods for the artistic expression of a sense of memory, this study shows that hand-coloring presents an imaginative and pictorial space for the reenactment of the past. The technique of hand-coloring was experimented soon after the advent of the daguerreotype process, as early as 1839, aiming to apply natural color to black-and-white photographs to remit the public's disappointment with the lack of color in photographs (Newhall, 1961; S. Edwards, 2003; Henisch & Henisch, 1996). Hand-coloring as a service to customers became ubiquitous in photographic studios for portraits from the 19th century well into the 20th both in China and other countries. Yet, the demand for hand-colored photographs gradually declined with the development of color films and their popularization due to their lower costs (Claudet, 2008; Crawford, 2005). In the age of digital photography, the hand-coloring technique has lost the

attention of photographers and the public as a traditional and alternative photographic process.

In contemporary art practices about memory, hand-coloring has the potential to become an aesthetic choice for certain artists, like Chen Nong and me in this study. Inspired by the traditional methods and materials for applying colors to monochromatic photographs, artists can consider contemporary ways of thinking that include cultural continuity and technological change and create photographs in pursue of a reflection of the visual and emotional conflict between past and present in contemporary photography. Hand-coloring as an artistic and innovative method in contemporary photography has enabled new forms and aesthetics to emerge, all of which contribute to the expression of mediated imagination, nostalgia, and remembering.

Respect for the past. In fact, the idea of using hand-coloring as a process of reviving past events is attributable to early practices of retouching and overpainting. One purpose was basically to “fix” the fading part of the image; another was to embellish the image after restoration by adding colors. The public accepted the power of retouching or overpainting in restoring information and repairing the ravages of time. Xu Cuilan³² once recounted to me a story that exemplifies the power of the technique. A woman came to Xu Cuilan with an old, faded image of her beloved husband and asked Xu whether the facsimile could be restored to make him more handsome. Xu Cuilan replied that a skillful retoucher could produce natural likenesses even from faded and damaged photographs. When the woman saw the retouched image of her husband, she complimented Xu’s masterly skill and praised retouching as a magical, beautiful art.

³² As mentioned in Chapter I, Xu Cuilan is an octogenarian professional colorist in China, who taught me the technique of hand-coloring.

A damaged and faded photograph not only represents a fixed event in the past but also shows the passage of time since the photograph was taken. Nonetheless, unclear facial features can be redrawn and reinforced by pencil, charcoal, or crayon. Colors can be (re)added according to the retoucher's imagination and taste or the recollection of the photograph's owner. After all these processes, the damaged old photograph is in mint condition, as if "new." It is known that the event depicted in the photograph occurred in the past and the event will never happen again, yet the retouched "new" photograph looks like one that has just been taken. Such an illusion of time and space enhances a sense of memory when re-creating an old photograph and seeing a "new" one.

Such a perceptual relationship between retouching/overpainting and reminiscence can also be found in contemporary times, as in the works of Sanna Dullaway, in response to a growing concern in knowing and thinking about history and the past. Dullaway, for example, retouched a wide range of well-known historic black-and-white photographs, such as *Saigon Execution* by Eddie Adams, thereby creating *General Nguyen Ngoc Loan Shooting Viet Cong Nguyen Van Lem in the head in the 1960s* (see Figure 53). Using Photoshop, Dullaway removed spots, dust, and scratches from archival black-and-white photos, then added colors to the images, offering a new perspective when looking at and thinking about those historical events. As Dullaway explained, "colorizing does not intend to replace the original black and white photo, only ... to help people of today com[e] closer to the past ... [and] how your grandparents and great-grandparents used to see the world" (2012). Old hand-colored photographs of Xu Cuilan and the contemporary works of Dullaway demonstrate that adding colors to black-and-white photographs is a process of constructing a sense of memory that flows through time and space in the past and present.

Figure 53. Juxtaposition of a famous original photograph and the result of Sanna Dullaway's retouching and colorizing technique: (left) Eddie Adams. (1968). *Saigon Execution*; (right) Sanna Dullaway. (2012). *General Nguyen Ngoc Loan Shooting Viet Cong Nguyen Van Lem in the head in the 1960s*. Retrieved in 2012 from <http://time.com/author/sanna-dullaway/>

In addition to retouching an old photograph to reproduce what the subject looked like in the past, contemporary use of hand-coloring can reflect an artist's admiration of or respect for analog photographic technology in the history of photography, calling for a return to tradition in terms of cultural continuity. In the series of hand-colored photographs titled *Peonia* (2015), for example, the artist Margrieta Jeltema disclosed that her choice to use hand-coloring was her paying homage to the history of photography and to those who created the photographic language we use today (Jeltema, personal communication, May 31, 2017). Jeltema took flowers on glass plate negatives ranging from 4 x 5 inches to 6.5 x 8.5 inches in size, produced black-and-white photographs on Japanese fine art paper, and lastly, added color with watercolors (see Figure 54). In the image below, flowers were placed in front of a dark background, illuminated by soft light. Colors were muted with dark tones dominating, such as dark green on leaves and ivory white on petals, aiming to resemble flower paintings from the Dutch Golden Age. Details, such as the wings of butterflies, were carefully painted. Jeltema's colorized photographs achieve verisimilitude in realism.

Figure 54. Margrieta Jeltema. (2015). *Untitled*, from *Peonia*. Retrieved from the artist.

Unlike Jeltema's interest in investigating the beauty of traditional hand-colored photographs, Chinese artist Wang Tong applied hand-coloring to reflect on history. Wang's 遗迹, *Mao on the Wall* project (1990s-2000s) featured Mao Zedong's portraits, slogans, and propaganda in villages as symbol of the significant history of the people's cult of Mao in China (see Figure 55). In the middle of the 20th century, innumerable posters, slogans, and sketches of the leader Mao were omnipresent throughout China, such as in homes, on public walls, and in shops. Most of these images of Mao have disappeared with the demolition and reconstruction of places in China, especially after the 2000s when China began to undergo vast development. To retain evidence of that particular era, Wang began his journey in the 1990s to find the remaining images of Mao and shoot them in black-and-white film. Then, Wang added colors to some of

these monochromatic photographs, aiming to simulate the propaganda posters of the mid-20th century. Wang's hand-colored images have a strong emotional sense of nostalgia due to the low contrast, warm tones, and unrealistic colors. In Wang's case, the use of hand-coloring embodies the artist's respect for the history of the Mao decades.

Figure 55. Wang Tong. (2000-2002). 遗迹, *Mao on the Wall*—Shangcai County, Henan. Retrieved from FQ Projects Platform.

My first hand-colored series of photographs, 这里, 曾经, *Once There Was* (2011) is representative of the artist's striving for new artistic expression through the hand-coloring of photography while showing appreciation for the technique and results inherited from the 19th and 20th centuries. The idea of using hand-coloring as a mean for memory representation came from a visit to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. While I studied a collection of 19th-century colorized photographs, I was drawn into the accurate fact recorded by the photographs and their attractive and imaginative colors that evoked my knowledge for a period or a place of the past and sentimental feelings in me toward time gone by.

This impactful experience with 19th-century hand-colored photographs reminded me that compared to color photographs, hand-colored images give expression to an attractive vintage charm and feeling of wonder. The foundation of each image was a black-and-white photograph that captured a moment in the past, as a conventional photograph does. However, a mystique of image was created by adding colors to the black-and-white photographic base, giving viewers an impression that history is vivid and much closer to us. This kind of illusion of time and space is peculiar to hand-colored images, which challenge the reality of a photograph and the traditional photography experience by allowing photographers and viewers to create and read an image with their own imagination and knowledge.

In *Once There Was*, I followed historical hand-coloring processes with oil pigments to create photos that resembled old colorized photographs of the 19th century. The images were shot on medium format black-and-white films and enlarged on fiber-based photo paper in the darkroom. Using transparent oil pigments, I added colors according to my painting experience, my memory of the seaweed houses, and my imagination of past sceneries. While I added colors to details, I left all references to modernization and urbanization in black and white. The idea was to present a spiritual space for imagination and contemplation, much like the function of the blank drawing in traditional Chinese painting. For instance, in 峨石, *Eshi Region* (see Figure 56), I painted the seaweed roofs in gray-yellow, and the stone walls were decorated with rich colors, such as brown, red, dark blue, and yellow. Even the Chinese New Year couplets hanging by the doorway were tinted with light red. In my images for the series, transparent oil pigments were absorbed into the monochromatic base of photographs to generate mid-tone colors, which made these colorized versions look lifelike, picturesque, and typical of 19th-century photographs. However, when audiences moved their eyes

from foreground to the background of the image, they would notice the high-rise residential buildings in the distance remained in black and white. The blank-space effect of the image brings the audience's attention back to reality from the impression of the 19th century. In so doing, I aimed to recall the beauty of the past by taking advantage of the conflict between past and present, time and space, imagination and personal remembrance.

Figure 56. Liu Yajing. (2011). 峨石, Eshi Region, from *Once There Was*.

While artists who utilize hand-coloring recapture the essential aesthetic of a photograph from long ago, they are inevitably aware of the paradoxical existence of the traditional photographic process in the age of digital photography and new media. However, in this case, the artists regard such a contradiction as an entry point to address nostalgia, question cultural loss, and echo personal memories. By manually adding

colors to monochromatic photographs, artists are able to archive unique artifacts and evoke nostalgic feelings toward time gone by, while the base of the photograph still records the reality of the moment. As Marnin Young (2006) has noted, when photographers of the contemporary digital age turn back to the earliest photographic techniques that ensure irreproducibility and originality, their works fall into nostalgia. A sense of memory occurs when viewers involve themselves deeply in the photographic style of the past centuries and reflect on today's experience.

Pictorialism and the materiality of hand-coloring. In contemporary practice, hand-coloring should be understood as a process for artistic expression rather than a technique. While showing respect for the past photographic traditions, my photographs of 无言处, *Speaking the Unspeakable* and Chen Nong's works broke with the original definition and meaning of 19th-century hand-coloring in reproducing the beauty of the nature as a remedial technique. We aimed to link the past with the present by evoking imagination and personal experiences. In *Speaking the Unspeakable*, I did not paint the subjects' natural colors but rather colored the images as a painter to express my emotions and meditations on the past. Similar to my approach, Chen Nong colored photographs to depict his imagined spectacles. For us, the process of hand-coloring remedied a defect of the mechanical nature of the camera: its lack of imagination and fiction.

These ideas on hand-coloring as an artistic method and overriding the mechanical nature of photography overlap with the aesthetic of pictorialism. From the late 19th century onward, photography began to be considered as an art. Photographers rejected the mechanical form of recording reality and instead emphasized the beauty of the subject and its inherent emotion to produce images that "resembled paintings" (L. Wells, 2009, p. 14; Warren, 2006). Pictorialist photographers explored the medium's artistic possibilities and declared themselves craftsmen (Hostetler, 2004). They

embraced “labor-intensive processes,” such as the gum bichromate process or platinum printing, to explore emotional intent.

Among the pictorialist photographers, Edward J. Steichen (1879-1973) applied hand-coloring as an art form. A 20th-century pioneer of the movement, Steichen experimented with various alternative photographic processes to establish color and explore sentiment, such as gum bichromate, toning, hand-coloring, and autochrome.³³ *Road into the Valley—Moonrise* (1904-1906) is an example of the combination of hand-toning and hand-coloring made by Steichen (see Figure 57). The image, shot in 1904, pictures a curving road in the countryside. Like other pictorialist photographs, the image is out of focus. The elements of mountain, embankment, and trees are faintly visible and obscured, thereby shifting emphasis to the bright moonlight hidden behind the mountain. The 16.5 x 20.5 cm print was reproduced in 1906 with the process of photogravure. The image was hand-toned in blue-green color, and some yellow was added minimally to the moon, sky, and road. Steichen thus created a stark feeling of ruthlessness, gloom, and mystery.

³³ Edward J. Steichen studied painting in Paris and began to focus on photography in the late 1890s. In his career, he demonstrated a passion for color and print, and worked with pigments or toners to paint images. For more details on Steichen’s life and work, please see, for example, Todd Brandow and William A. Ewing’s *Edward Steichen: Lives in Photography* (2007).

Figure 57. Edward Steichen. (1904, negative; 1906, print). *Road into the Valley—Moonrise*. Retrieved from the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Steichen's use of hand-coloring discloses two circumstances involved in the artistic expression of hand-coloring. The first is to convey artists' emotions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the process of drawing photographs. In order to address this objective, artists can find inspiration in painting to discover expressive styles. For example, Steichen learned the expression of sentiments from painting, not from the skill of copying colors. Before the creation of the abovementioned hand-toned moonrise photograph, Steichen created few atmospheric moonlight paintings such as *Moonlit Pond*, *Mamaroneck* (1905) and *Shrouded Figure in Moonlight* (1905). Whether photographing or painting under moonlight, Steichen "made realistic notes of the actual night colors on the spot" and then expressed the colors through the "mixture of pigments to be used in the painting" (Gedrim, 2007, p. 93). When portraying colors in prints, Steichen immersed himself in the emotions of the moment that he felt in the landscapes.

The artist's self-expression is particularly evident in contemporary use of hand-coloring. The Chinese artist Guo Peng is fond of the process of hand-coloring, which enables him to create various visual effects of photographs like a painter. All of Guo's projects were manually produced in a traditional darkroom and then painted colors onto photo paper. Some of Guo's photographs showed blurred subjects with subtle colors to express an imagined space in his mind, such as those in the project *风景线*, *Landscape* (2003); in others, he applied garish and unrealistic colors to create an illusion of past happiness, such as those in the project *翠湖*, *Cui Lake* (2006). His later works, such as *同在*, *Together* (2011), conveyed poetic and melancholy feelings by using low saturation and dark colors (see Figure 58).

Figure 58. Guo Peng. (2011). *同在*, *Together*. Retrieved from the Jia Li Gallery.

Artists like Hong Lei realize that individual consciousness can be conveyed spontaneously by changing colors of the photographs. In Hong's *中国风景*, *Chinese Landscape* (1998) series, the artist took black and white photographs, toned image in brown, and last, painted photographs with watercolor and/or oil pigments. His intention was to remove the rich and vibrant colors of the original environment and create an image of an ancient Chinese garden in his understanding. While facing the elegant and

the most famous Chinese gardens in Suzhou, the artist observed a historical space that full of politics, tragedy, and intrigue. Thus, he displayed these gardens in a bloody manner: Rather than eulogizing the beauty, poetry, mystery, romance, and harmony of Chinese gardens in his images (see Figure 59), the garden was covered with red, from stones and pillars to water and the clouds, representing all the disasters that had taken place in these gardens.

Figure 59. Hong Lei. (1998). 中国风景—苏州拙政园, *Chinese Landscape—Zhuozheng Garden in Suzhou*. Retrieved from Artnet.

The second aspect concerning the artistic value of hand-coloring is the control of medium. Artists, like Edward J. Steichen, Chen Nong, and me, manipulate the medium to their will; in other words, they explore different possibilities of the medium to express unique emotions. According to photographers' intentions, the tone, contrast,

and color of the image can be managed by choosing chemicals and papers, altering pigments, and controlling temperature of photographic production. For instance, in Edward J. Steichen's image *The Pond—Moonrise* (1904), the artist coated paper with hand-mixed emulsions, placed the negative directly in contact with the paper, and then exposed it to light (see Figure 60). By controlling the amount of platinum to palladium in emulsions, Steichen produced a warm black image. Next, Steichen softly added Prussian blue and calcium white to the twilight sky and the reflections on the pond (Roberts, 2007). After toning and hand-coloring, the color of the image with a half-realized vision created a feeling of mystery and suggestiveness. Such a time-consuming and complex process ensured that the artist created unique prints and soft colors to suit his taste and emotions.

Figure 60. Edward Steichen. (1904). *The Pond—Moonrise*. Retrieved from the Artists Rights Society, New York.

The abilities to control colors on monochrome images and to investigate the aesthetic potentials of photographic medium permit a free space for artists. As Heinz and Bridget Henisch observed, painting colors “can also be a way to free the picture, to help it become a fantasy world in itself, a self-contained vision with its own exhilarating laws and logic” (1996, p. 233). For these qualities, hand-coloring can be “accepted by the art world on its own terms, and guided by its own aesthetic star” (Henisch & Henisch, 1996, p. 233). In its simplest form, artists may make any color or tone they please. Indeed, artists are able to express subjectivity, creativity, and sentiment by processing prints and adding colors. In a hand-colored image, the application of pigments, arrangement of colors, brushwork, and texture of surface all address the aesthetic quality and value of the image. Hand-coloring can therefore be seen as an artistic method for the expression of an artist’s consciousness, rather than as mechanical daubing.

The use of the hand-coloring method for artistic creation is one of materiality, which concerns the technical and physical choices in making images. Similar to Steichen’s hand-coloring process, Chen coated emulsions on watercolor paper and enlarged black-and-white prints in the darkroom. He intentionally kept marks of brushes, emulsions, and water, aiming to highlight the hand-crafted process in a time of commercial production. He painted a galaxy in the image, colored the desert red, or added a colorful cloud in the sky, all to represent the dramatic image in his mind. As a result, the tone, texture, color, and contrast of an image determine uniqueness as defined by the artist’s emotions, tastes, and intentions.

My understanding on the materiality of hand-coloring is that content influences material, and vice versa. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (2004) argued a one-way relationship from material to content. They stated that the physical attributes of the photograph influence content and visual information. By considering photographs as

objects and analyzing the materials of photographs, Edwards and Hart examined the role of materials in defining photographs and declared “materiality as a formative element in the understanding of photographs as social images” (2004, p. 14).

In contrast, my hand-colored images of *Speaking the Unspeakable* rested in the mutual connection *between* the content of a photograph and the material. In this series, I aimed to highlight the uniqueness of the historical events I photographed and express my desire to safeguard the Chinese traditional culture of the seaweed house region. This intention has been achieved in two manners. On the one hand, the labor-intensive process ensured that each paper is unique and thus produced unduplicated prints. I made Xuan paper manually using 18 processes and coated the paper with alum powder to reduce its ability to absorb water and ink. After this process, I was able to print with traditional Chinese hand-made Xuan paper and color images. On the other hand, I expressed my respect for the great Chinese tradition of choice of material. I printed images with handmade Chinese Xuan paper and painted colors with Chinese pigments. Owing to the typical quality of Xuan paper, the natural fiber gave my images a soft texture. Furthermore, the features of the natural plant and Chinese mineral pigments enabled me to imitate the color tones of a traditional Chinese painting. The materials of Xuan paper and Chinese pigments together served as a symbol, reminding viewers to understand and interpret the subjects of my photographs from the perspective of Chinese culture.

The process of adding colors to photographs in contemporary offers great potential to create effects that could stimulate the recalling of the past, evoking sentiments of the present, and leaving illusion for the future. This aesthetic value has been demonstrated in my artistic strategy of hand-coloring. A primary objective of *Speaking the Unspeakable* was to discover the disappearing or forgotten past, traditions,

and beliefs caused by the demolition of seaweed houses. In this series, I photographed landscapes where historical events had occurred, such as the ruins of a temple from the Tang dynasty, a destroyed wall of the Ming dynasty, and an abandoned Ming dynasty tower. These places and the histories embodied there have not been recorded officially. I also photographed landscapes that represent a loss. For example, I photographed a Ma Zu temple just after the fishermen had celebrated the Grain Rain Festival. The Ma Zu faith is the most important belief system of the seaweed house region, yet it is threatened with being lost as residents move to new communities in towns or cities. In this project, each landscape and its hidden history or meaning is unique and little known by people.

As the subjects of my photographs happened in the distant past without any visual archives, I imagined an image of the history or story based on the residents' accounts, their facial expressions, and the historical sites found in the seaweed house region. During my photo shoots, a feeling of melancholy for the loss, sadness for the war, or desire for the superb rituals in the past was revived. Face to face with the black-and-white prints, I recalled what I heard, what I saw, and what I felt in the landscapes. I toned prints and chose colors to match my feelings. By painting photographs, I aimed to reenact the imagined images of the past that were based both on the remembrance of a special group of residents and on my own imagination. Through the brush painting movement, I transmitted personal spirit. The results of the hand-colored photographs recorded the fact of an event in the landscape but also deluded audiences into thinking, imagining, and interpreting. The optical function of camera can record the physical appearance of historical sites but is incapable of expressing the idealistic image of the past. Thus, hand-coloring process enables artists like me to perform the past and convey collective consciousness into the personal representation.

Analog or digital: the simulation of hand-coloring. With the exception of Sanna Dullaway's works, all the previously mentioned artists' hand-colored works are produced in analog photographic process. For artists who still pursue a traditional and handcrafted process, the magic of hand-coloring begins when the light interacts with the chemicals in the film and photo paper, and happens when the pigments integrate into the photographic surface. The artists shoot images with film or plate cameras, produce photographs in the darkroom, and then choose pigments to paint colors by hand. However, these analog artists face problems of visual communication of photographs in the digital age.

Although artists cherish that analog photographs are physical unreproducible objects that should be best appreciated in person, they still would like to see their photographs be known and spread worldwide within the contemporary communication network (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, online exhibitions, emails). Artists digitize their physical photographs to be stored, communicated, viewed, and used by different people (e.g., curators, critics, historians, researchers, art students) for numerous purposes (e.g., research, exhibition, education, training). To create digital files of traditional photographs, artists like Chen Nong and me scan or rephotograph their photos, depending on their budgets, material, and size of the photos. Because the process of pixel encoding and optical technologies of digital devices influence the result of digital output, after scanning or rephotographing, artists must edit the digital photographs in computer software to make sure the digital files include all the colors and details of the original photographs. The use of digital technology enables analog photographers to disseminate and share their chemical photographs in the same way digital photographers do.

As digital imaging has developed into a major industry of photography over the decades, few contemporary artists, who consider the technique of hand-coloring, have turned to digital technology and benefited from the digital simulation and synthesis of the computer. For the earlier mentioned artist Sanna Dullaway (see Figure 53 on page 237), she scanned old black-and-white photographs to convert them into digital files. With computer software such as Photoshop, Dullaway chose different filters and tools to add colors, and the results can be viewed right away.

Mu Chen and Shao Yinong's *童年留影*, *Childhood Memory* (2002) was the result of digital synthesis that combined photos of landscapes with portraits of children (see Figure 61). The artists used digital software to place naked children in front of significant historical landmarks in China. In the image, children hold a paper parasol and sport a traditional haircut, both of which are rarely seen in today's China and represent an "Oriental" taste. The contrast between the figure of innocent children, which often signifies the future, and the political monuments that carry China's history reminds viewers of the relationship between the individual and the nation. However, the two boys standing in the middle of the photograph seem to be incompatible with the surrounding environment due to the unnatural colors of their bodies. In other parts, bright colors were added harshly and covered the photographic surface and the details of the objects—such as the slogans on the building and the people behind the two boys in Figure 61. Although the artists have not clarified the reason for adding colors, the images express a sense of nostalgia that recall our memory to the hand-colored photographs so common before the popularization of color film.

Figure 61. Mu Chen and Shao Yinong. (2002). 童年留影, *Childhood Memory*. Retrieved from <http://www.jgsinc.org/detailpopup.php?a=847&i=101856>.

Fan Shunzan's 现实给了梦想多少时间, *How Much Time Does Reality Give to Dream* (2011) portrayed the difference between people's daily life and their aspirations (see Figure 62). The top half of the photograph showed people's ideal job, imagined houses, or dream life, while the bottom half disclosed the reality. There is a sense of irony and humor that reminds audiences to question themselves about how distant the dream is and what efforts we are making to fulfill our dreams. Figures stood in front of a backdrop designed and printed by the artist. When Fan found the right environment and model, he took the backdrops to the site, arranged the settings of the foreground, and finally, shot photographs with his digital camera. Then he imported raw digital photographs into computer for post-production. Due to his personal interest in traditional photographic techniques, Fan turned these digital photographs into the look of hand-colored photographs that could be found in 20th-century photo studios. In Fan's photographs, figures' cheeks were always painted in peach red, the lips were colored in

brown-red, and the saturation of the photographs was low—all features that represented the principles of portrait photographs painted by 20th-century colorists.

Figure 62. Fan Shunzan. (2011). 现实给了梦想多少时间, *How Much Time Does Reality Give to Dream*.

Retrieved from Stanley Street Gallery.

In contemporary, although the artists try their best to mimic or overstate the visual appearance of traditional hand-colored photographs produced by 19th- and 20th-century photographic studios, digitally colored photographs are over-realistic due to their lack of materiality. Their digital images are comprised of millions of pixels, which appear less noisy, with precise details, and rich colors. Artists can simply add filters and change parameters to imitate the colors of old hand-colored photographs. In contrast, photographs produced by hand and following traditional processes often display

chemical grain and physical marks from a material surface, such as the brush marks in my photographs, water drops in Chen Nong's works, and ink rubbed into lines in Hong Lei's images. While the artists immerse themselves in experimenting with various kinds of materials and mediums, these unique and unexpected physical and chemical marks are representations of the artists' consciousness and aesthetic qualities. Artists who use computers to paint images have not considered the materiality of hand-coloring and the physicality of picture-taking. In other words, artists have not paid attention to the relationship between medium and subject, or between physical print and artistic expression, in digital imaging. The above-mentioned different features of image and working procedures show that digitally colored photographs often lack the layers of meaning that hand-colored photographs have.

Hand-coloring techniques related to the contemporary use of digital software raise questions, such as: If the artists regard hand-coloring as a method for artistic expression, why do they choose to use a computer instead of adding colors by hand? Considering that their photographs are digital and therefore in color, what does "hand-coloring" mean in their digital photographs? Do digitally colored photographs offer the same aesthetics as photographs produced by hand? At the time of writing this dissertation, artists who paint monochromatic photographs by hand often state a clear reason initiatively; artists, who use digital technology to take advantage of the creative space offered by the process of adding colors to monochromatic photographs, have not mentioned the artistic rationale behind their colored photographs, including the explanation of the creative practice and their choice of technique and medium. This is a possible study area in the future.

Digital simulation is a mean to maintain cultural continuity that preserves the analog photographic techniques we have practiced for the past centuries and transmit

the embedded historical and cultural values to the age of digital imaging. For artists, the operability and usability of digital technology allow them to achieve a similar visual effect as the old masters did but without their having to master a traditional photographic technique and experience its painstaking procedures by hand. Painting colors to a photograph once involved complex procedures and diligent efforts, such as the use of cotton, wooden skewers, and brush, the mix of blended oils, and the order of colors. One mistake could send the colorist back to square one. Today, however, the artist can simply add filters and choose tools, such as the channel mixer, selective color, and properties panel in Photoshop, and can easily change, delete, or repeat a step of coloring. For artists, the imitation of hand-coloring photographs with digital technology stems from their curiosity and admiration for analog photographic techniques or a longing for the photographic form that they used to be familiar with.

For audiences, the appearance of these photographs reminds them of the time they cherished a hand-colored photograph before the emergence of color film. In the 19th century, only upper-class people such as government officials and educated businessmen were able to afford hand-colored photographs in the studio. In the late 20th century in China, a hand-colored photograph cost a month's salary of a middle-class person. Thus, it was a luxury for the general public to go to a photo studio to order a hand-colored photograph. In contemporary times, seeing a photograph that imitates old hand-colored photographs recalls a particular culture of the past.

Owing to digital technology, various photo applications (e.g., Instagram, VSCO, Snapseed, and Meitu) are available on mobile phones, allowing the public to modify digital photographs and to enjoy the charm of analog photographic techniques in their daily routines. Due to the limited settings and functions offered by mobile phone applications, the visual appearance of traditional hand-coloring technique cannot be

fully achieved. Users can simulate the color, look, and texture of traditional toned photographs by changing the saturation of digital photographs, adding a split tone, trying preset filters (e.g., “Faded Glow” in Snapseed or “Memory” in Meitu), or using automated tools (e.g., Grain, Tone, or Vignette in Instagram, VSCO, Snapseed, or Meitu). A toned photograph has less colors than a hand-colored photograph, which aims to enhance or change the mood of an image with the color of sepia, blue-black, or red-browns. Users of digital devices do not seek the accurately imitation of analog photographs, but to follow the retro hype. Indeed, users are pursuit of the vintage styling by adding distinctiveness and feeling to original photographs (Caoduro, 2014).

There are many reasons for the public to edit their digital images to have the appearance of old photographs and analog photographic techniques with the emergence and popularization of photo applications and digital media. For some users, the edited photographs have a perceived sense of loss and nostalgia. Some users state that the photographs are being mastered when transferring digital images to analog-like photographs. Some users claim a concept of ritual and totem; that is, there is a special connection between users and a particular period of time or object that they respect. Whatever the reason, automated features on digital devices enable the public to transmit tradition unconsciously when appreciating the combination of digital technology and analog photographic techniques.

To conclude, this study proposed that the use of an alternative photographic process is a strategy in reconstructing cultural memory. On the one hand, through colors applied to photographs, artists can highlight the performative nature of cultural memory beyond objectivity and reality. Thus, for artists, memory is aesthetic and spiritual and reflects on the sociocultural context of the past and present, as well as personal understanding and experiences. Whereas the camera has the ability to record the truth,

adding colors enables artists to take advantage of the illusion of time and space to create a space for meditation, remembrance, and even introspection. On the other hand, because of the history of photography and the materiality of art, using a 19th-century technique in the contemporary age is inherently nostalgic. Photographers treasure the value of handcrafted work in a time of commercial production. They also share a respect for the past both in terms of the content and the medium. Hand-colored photographs show a real fact and a mythical image in the same space, providing an interpretive space that invites audiences to meditate and create.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this research, the rationale behind the examination of memory from a broader cultural perspective was grounded in observation that the rapid development of society has eroded our past, tradition, and culture. As society changed, the carriers of memory, such as the places, objects, and traditions, either are transformed or disappeared. Thus, nowadays, everything is considered to have cultural impact for fear of its being forgotten and lost. Indeed, culture memory approaches are quite recent. It is only in the late 20th century that scholars Jan and Aleida Assmann formed the concept of cultural memory. Other scholars such as Astrid Erll and José van Dijck have further developed the notion, aiming to provide a comprehensive examination of the past to better understand the present. In China, cultural memory has been studied only for the past two decades. However, study of cultural memory specifically in Chinese art or photography remains scarce. Although an increasing number of Chinese photographers have created memory-related works as mentioned in Chapter I and II, their works and practices have not been examined, criticized, and theorized, justifying the need for the research at hand.

Considering that the research objective of this study is to investigate the concept, embodiment, and artistic expression of cultural memory in Chinese landscape photography since 2000, this study required the examination of existing photographic works subject to landscape changes and/or memory. In this study, I examined the artistic practices of Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong. The selected artists and their works were not meant to constitute a unique landscape-memory group, but rather were intended to

serve as significant examples drawn from heterogeneous photographic group in China. As mentioned in Chapter III and shown in Chapter IV, the selected photo projects incorporate a variety of subjects, themes, ideas, and methods, and represent works about changes in landscape and memory since 2000. I conducted interviews with each artist, which provided me first-hand knowledge about their works and their art-making processes and approaches. Based on their responses and close investigation of the selected works, I described and analyzed their views on power, culture, and history, all of which construct cultural memory and emerge in transitional landscapes. This study, therefore, is among the first scholarly works to study these Chinese artists and their works from the perspective of cultural memory.

Although I demonstrated the embodiment of cultural memory in the selected artists' works, the methodologies of their artistic practices have not deliberated on *cultural memory* itself. Thus, I created my own artistic works based on the characteristics of cultural memory gleaned from theoretical research. I examined cultural memory as a collective concept that embraces collective consciousness, individual experience, and cultural concerns. Reflected in my own journey of investigating the history and culture of the seaweed-house community described and analyzed in Chapter V, this study sheds light on how artists preserve the past and/or reconstruct cultural memory.

The analysis of my practice indicated the role of artists as special carriers of cultural memory, which fills the gap left by Jan Assmann. In the theory of cultural memory, Jan Assmann (2011b) included artists in the group of special carriers of cultural memory; however, he did not provide any further clarification. In the practice of my seaweed-house project, I observed that residents neglected to mention the past when they have moved to urban and modernized communities after the demolition

of the traditional seaweed houses. Moreover, the authorities have not made enough effort to preserve the existence or to record history of the seaweed-house communities, such as their origins, beliefs, traditions, myths, wars, and rituals. Upon discerning the loss of the community's past and culture, I undertook to collect all written records about the seaweed houses, including archives, books, government documents, theses, visual materials, and online information. This data collection allowed me to achieve an elementary background on the seaweed-house villages and gave me the foundations for opening up conversation with residents. I then went to villages, talked with people, and conducted informal interviews with participants. This fieldwork allowed me to observe and record stories, histories, myths, and traditions, many of which have been overlooked and are facing oblivion. My field notes recording the information shared by these individuals are thus the only written records, which could help transfer individual memories to a cultural level. This means that, when investigating the past in various ways, I unconsciously became the carrier and communicator of the cultural memory of the seaweed houses. As an artist and a special carrier of cultural memory, my photographs of sites where events took place contributed to reminding people of what happened in the past and encouraging viewers to interpret the past, present, and future. This study,

By reflecting on the works of four different artists, including my own, the findings of this study revealed that cultural memory is a phenomenon that can be disclosed through the creation of photographic works. As mentioned in Chapter VI and V, this phenomenon arises when artists realize in their work the crises of culture and the conflict between past and present. The four selected artists in this study created works with different themes to disclose societal problems embodied in transitional landscapes and communities. However, the artists all share a conviction about the value of

traditional Chinese culture, which can be seen from Qu Yan's criticism of power and Yao Lu's investigation of urbanization and modernization to Chen Nong's examination of history and civilization and my own exploration of a region's past. These artists' works and/or processes questioned the loss of ideology in modern-day China, including belief, identity, and spirituality. This deduction was drawn from their observations of the conflicts between past and present, and between the individual experience and social reality, as well as their anxieties about the loss of connection with traditional cultural patterns.

Based on the four artists' works and artistic practices, it appears that memory can be engaged as an active and creative process in a cultural dimension, the working definition of *cultural memory* in this study. We have shown in this study that working with memory in a cultural context is a dynamic process that interweaves and mediates individual and collective culture, objective and mental processes, and past and present. The four artists' works expressed the aspects of power, culture, and history in the understanding and examination of cultural memory in contemporary photography. Each aspect offers an entry point for the artistic performance of cultural memory in the future.

After recognizing the aspects of cultural memory and its embodiment through the lens of photography, I was able to identify and propose interdisciplinary approaches to the creation of memory-related artworks. On the one hand, artists should observe people's lives and examine social realities much like sociologists do. This process enabled artists to understand cultural patterns of society. On the other hand, as addressed in the design of this study in Chapters I through III, the study of cultural memory is interdisciplinary in nature. Cultural memory is textured and mediated by materials (e.g., photographs, objects, and archives) and other forms of media (e.g., landscapes, rituals,

myths, and history). All of these carriers of cultural memory should be examined within the sociocultural dimension in order to uncover and understand issues of society.

Two methods were proposed to investigate landscape memory and to represent past experience and individual remembrance. As introduced in Chapter I and explored in Chapter IV and V, China's rapidly changing landscape produces rich *site of memory*, because landscape represents what we do and what we think and carries our knowledge, patrimony, identity, beliefs, religions, and so forth. The embedded, landscape-bound memory embedded therein, however, does not occur on its own. Thus, artists or scholars who intend to explore memory must disclose the symbolic metaphors present in landscapes by immersing themselves in time, place, and space. My study showed that while travel to landscapes such as historical places, sites of wars, hometowns, or heritage dwellings, the artists consciously investigated what happened at those sites, associated the past patterns with present conditions, and expressed concerns about the future impact. This constitutes the first method, which has been designated as a "spatial experience." A spatial experience calls on facts, reflections, emotions, and sometimes even on imagination. It also lays the groundwork for hand-coloring, which is the second method. Prevalent in the 19th century, the hand-coloring of images has become an artistic method in today's photography environment for the expression of sentiments and the representation of memory. While the camera mechanically replicates the reality, artists who paint colors on monochromatic photographs emphasize their impressions of the past that occurred in the landscapes. In both methods, artists examine the past by relating individual experience with traditional cultural patterns and social reality, which help to uncover a collective consciousness of society.

This study strives to make a contribution to the field of Chinese photography in memory-related topics by examining four artists' practices based on the perspective of

cultural memory. This dissertation was not intended to be a comprehensive or exhaustive piece of research on landscape photography in China between 2000 and 2010. Indeed, this dissertation has raised more questions than it has answered. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to address four major recommendations for future research. Scholars in the future may continue this path to fill in the gaps left by this dissertation.

Firstly, this dissertation leads to the deliberation and re-examination of current landscape and/or memory related photographic works at a higher level. In this study, the three selected artists, Qu Yan, Yao Lu, and Chen Nong, were born in the age of socialist transformation under Mao Zedong, before the 1970s, and have experienced Chinese economic reform during their lifetime. All three have garnered acclaim in the art world. As for me, I belong to the “八零后 (*bā líng hòu*; post-80s)” group,³⁴ the first generation to grow up in the reformist era and to receive art training abroad. I, therefore, represent the younger generation of Chinese artists. The two generations of artists involved in this dissertation lead to questions such as: what are the different attitudes toward tradition, culture, power, history, and memory from artists born in different generations? and what influences did the era they were born in have on their artworks and their artistic philosophies? Additionally, as there is an increase in the attention paid to women artists in China, what characteristics and insights can be gleaned from female artists’ works in the field? To answer these questions, scholars in the future may need to examine other Chinese artists in the field, such as Mu Chen and Shao Yinong, Zhu Lanqing, Zhang Jin, Yan Ming, Wen Fen, and Ta Ke. Studies of artists require more detailed interviews and

³⁴ 八零后 (*bā líng hòu*; post-80s) is a colloquial term that refers to the generation born between 1980 and 1989 in mainland China, after implementation of the one-child policy.

evaluations to discover rich artistic ecosystems of their own and to enhance our understanding of cultural memory in photography from different perspectives.

Secondly, the design and structure of this dissertation provides substantiation that the construction of a research with a practical component in art and design could be to start with the research problems and objectives. In this research, I engaged in a close and detailed examination of the three artists' works, which helped me to uncover various perspectives, approaches, and shared dimensions in exploring and expressing cultural memory. While describing, understanding, and analyzing the three artists' works, my role as an artist in general enabled me to engage with the thoughts and feelings of the artists participating in the group. When they shared their thoughts with me, I understood the layers of their artistic processes. This allowed me to revise my research questions in order to unearth as much information as possible, according to the circumstances of each artist. In addition, my role as a participating artist allowed me to create a new body of works specifically for this study. This personal experience helped me gain a deeper understanding about cultural memory, explore different methods in photography, and offer critical and first-hand data for analysis that the existing literature and artists' works could not. Such an integrated role of artist and researcher enabled me to observe and demonstrate research questions by examining my own practice along with the other artists' works in a self-reflective way. The integrated role of artist and researcher will become increasingly central and valuable, since the environment of contemporary photography in China lacks systematic and theoretical research in artistic practices.

The third suggestion applies to two groups, artists and scholars. For artists, it would be useful to examine the challenges of various photographic methods and techniques in the representation of memory. For scholars, it would be interesting to consider how different kinds of media influence our ways of remembering and affect

our cultural memory. In this study, I examined alternative photographic processes such as hand-coloring as a notable method for the representation of memory. My arguments were based on the role of hand-coloring in the 19th century and its dilemma in the digital age. I claimed that in contemporary society everything is digital, immediate, and reproducible, and the use of traditional photographic technique is thus a form of reminiscing and a celebration of the past for its own sake. When we consider the digital age, various kinds of new media have been produced, such as digital cameras, camera phones, virtual reality, and the 360-degree camera. All of these media have been used by artists to create image-based projects, such as photography, animation, installation, and video. Looking at these artworks, artists, scholars, and viewers may realize that new media have different impacts on the narrative structure and change the way people look at and appreciate an image. Thus, new media and the method applied in the practice offer innovative opportunities for the documentation of the present and the reenactment of the past, which may be of interest to both artists and scholars in the future.

Finally, I would like to note that *sites of memory* in China is political charged, providing potential for distinctive themes and topics of cultural memory in art and other disciplines. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China is undergoing an unprecedented campaign of cultural revival. In 2017, a project entitled “Opinions on the Implementation of the Development of Outstanding Traditional Chinese Culture” was launched, with the aims of reviving traditional Chinese culture for the sake of the nation’s development and strengthening China’s 软实力 (*ruǎn shí lì*; soft power), in promoting the politics in the world (Xinhua, 2017). One of the objectives of this project is about the protection and restoration of cultural heritage including what we call “intangible cultural heritage”, such as traditional dwellings, ancient villages, historical architecture, and former residences of famous people. For example, many replicas of

traditional seaweed houses have been built for the purpose of tourism, some seaweed-house villages have built museums to display their community's past, and some villages have constructed ancestral temples to recall family origins. These are *sites of memory* that reveal some concerns about how heritage, monuments, and museums are used to articulate Chinese politics and how these spaces influence our cultural memory in the present and future. In parallel to the phenomenon of the revival of traditional Chinese culture and the construction of memory sites, a large number of memory- or heritage-themed festivals, competitions, conferences, and projects have been organized in photography and the arts. Artists and art enthusiasts are stimulated to document traditional buildings, villages, streets, and festivals, even though some of these memory sites are reproductions or newly created sites. A more extensive scholarly research and artistic projects are necessary to explore this emerging facet of cultural memory further. As revealed in this study, cultural memory and its performance in art practice goes beyond merely investigating personal feelings. Instead, the foundation of the society and the complex sociocultural issues need to be considered that help to understand the past and examine the impact of cultural loss for the present and future.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Summary of Documents Collected by Yajing Liu about the Three Selected Artists

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APPENDIX C: Nanyang Technological University Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

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E-1: Interview Protocols for Photographers

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F-1: “Seaweed House Photo Project” Field Notes Form

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APPENDIX G: Map of Liu Yajing’s Route in the Seaweed-House Region

APPENDIX H: Preliminary Survey of Artists

APPENDIX A: Summary of Documents Collected by Yajing Liu about the Three Selected Artists

Artist	Data no.	Related Content, Document, and Interviews	Contribution/Use of Data/Findings
Qu Yan	1	In-person interview. Content includes his work process, problems he faced, his experiences in Europe and their influence on his artwork, his views about landscape and memory, and his methodology of landscape photography.	His methodology involves theories from Guy Debord to Bernd and Hilla Becher.
	2	An interview that covers Qu's biography, his artistic philosophy, why he chooses photography as a way to express ideas, and his Xu Cun project.	His views on the village contribute to the description of landscape experience in the thesis, answering the research questions about the effects of landscape change on memory and problems of memory that the artist has encountered.
	3-6	An interview about the <i>Power Space</i> project. The interview addresses the choice of site, his views on the village, the meaning of "space," and difficulties of photo shooting.	
	7	An interview about the Xu Cun project. Questions explore when and why he became interested in the countryside; how such interest affected his photo project and art intervention project; if his project was influenced by the "space turn" of the 20th century in the West; what the current situation of the village is; what the role of the artist is in art intervention; and why he decided to rebuild family temples in the village.	
	8	Photo book of <i>Religion Space</i> that includes a conversation between Qu and four other artists. Qu talks about his interests in religion in China and the West, the differences between the rural churches in China and the ones he has visited in the West, the situation of religion in China, and how he visualizes religion in China's countryside in an artistic way.	His idea of cultural crisis answers the research question about what cultural memory consists of in contemporary society.
	9-10	A conversation between Qu and two curators, with a few comments about Qu's works.	
	11	His artist's statement for the <i>Space</i> photo project.	
	12	Book entitled <i>The Sight of Arts: Qu Yan's Cultural Stance and Social Expression</i> , which discusses all his artwork and ideas, including paintings, installations, etc.	The brief overview of all of Qu's artwork helped me understand his artistic philosophy and how it influences the way he regards cultural memory.
	13	Photo book of the <i>Space</i> series of photographs. It includes Wang Nanming's review of his exhibition and works.	Qu's photographs were accepted by the Chinese photography because of this article.
Yao Lu	1	In-person interview. Content includes his art experience, his work process, his views about landscape transformation and memory, his understanding of Chinese landscape, why he chooses the form of traditional landscape painting, and the combination of painting and photography.	Some of the questions in my interview were original, including his view on memory, his explanation of landscape in Chinese culture and Western culture, and the relationship between time and space.
	2	Jiang Jiehong's analysis of Yao's works.	
	3	Exhibition review.	
	4	Gu Zheng's review "Concealment Is the Essence of Reality." In it, he asserts that Yao's "postmodern drawing" "activates tradition, attaches tradition with new possible openings, and presents a personal evaluation of the present."	His view on memory and landscape provides that cultural memory can be represented by the expression of emotion.
	5	An interview about an exhibition that Yao curated.	

	8	A short article in a Chinese photography periodical.	His photographs and photographic technique provides that the revival of tradition is the way to connect past with present, answering the research question about artistic methods used by photographers in the visualization of cultural memory.
	9	Exhibition catalog. On pages 111 and 118-119, the writer mentions that Yao's photographs have a feeling of sadness and helplessness and convey a conflict between poetic scenery and destroyed memory.	
	10	Photo book entitled <i>Yao Lu—A Catalogue of Chinese Contemporary Photography</i> .	
	6, 11	Exhibition review and book entitled <i>Yao Lu's New Landscapes</i> . The latter includes essays by curator Engin Ozendes, Dr. Harro von Senger, and Gu Zheng. Also, a conversation between Feng Boyi and Yao covers a range of topics, including his motivations for creation and Chinese painting forms.	Articles and interviews of this book offers additional information about Yao's artistic method, ways of experiencing landscape.
	7	A review talks about the nostalgic feeling in Yao's photographs. Author unknown.	This blog article shows that the public has felt the emotion of nostalgia and losing in his photos.
Chen Nong	1	In-person interview. Discussion of <i>Yellow River</i> and <i>Silk Road</i> projects. Content includes his method of hand-coloring, his field trips, his intentions, and the themes of projects.	Through my conversation with the artist, I realized that his photographs are based on personal imagination. His views on history show that his imagination is based in actual history and current social conditions.
	2	<i>Silk Road</i> solo exhibition press release. The project has two sequences of thought: material and spiritual.	
	3	Exhibition catalog, including an introduction written by Robert Simons. Chen's work process is introduced. Simons regards Chen's exhibit as the curtain-raiser to great future projects: "with his fascinating pictures, he is opening up the contradictory and often conflicting worlds of ancient as well as contemporary China."	
	4	Exhibition review of <i>Silk Road</i> . It remarks: "Chen Nong's work is permeated with a breath of absurdity. Irrelative elements are forcibly drawn together by him, which seems inharmonious yet somehow shows a solemn power and a desire to get away."	His description of the light in <i>Silk Road</i> shows his concern about the loss of spirit. He doesn't mention the word <i>memory</i> directly. Here, my analysis may need to address the relationship between history, memory, and imagination.
	5	Exhibition review of <i>Silk Road</i> .	
	6	Exhibition review of <i>Silk Road</i> . The author describes Chen and his works in a sentimental way: "It's a chronicle of life that visualizes symbols of man's struggle with nature, history, culture, commerce, willpower, and violence. It is a grand narrative exploring the essence of life and death, spirit and faith, past and future, and hope in desperate times. Metaphoric symbols frozen in independent still frames echo one another and merge as one."	Hand-coloring is a way to represent his feelings of past and imagination, and his coloring process shows exploration of the medium's artistic possibilities and labor-intensive processes, like pictorialist photographers of the 20th century.
	7	A catalog of Chen's works.	

	8-9	An article written by Carol Carter. It describes Chen's projects including <i>Yellow River</i> , <i>Three Gorges</i> , <i>Ancient Town</i> , and <i>Dragon Bridge</i> : "He uses history and tradition to remind the present of what is being lost; the mood is one of grave nostalgia."	The misplaced figures in the images represent the artist's satire on history and social reality.
	10	A short introduction to the artist.	His photographs have been widely collected by well-known art institutions. However, his photographs have not received equal reputation in China.
	11	Exhibition review of <i>Silk Road</i> .	
	12	An online article of Chen's early works. Author unknown.	This article shows that the public has begun to accept his representational method.
	13	Group exhibition review that includes a brief description of Chen's <i>Yellow River</i> .	
	14	A short interview with Chen.	Materiality of photography.
	15	Artist's statement on <i>Three Gorges</i> project and <i>Climbing to Moon</i> project.	
	16	A review of Daegu Photo Biennale written by Dou Haijun. It includes a review of Chen's work. The author denies the merit of Chen's <i>Yellow River</i> and states the color of the images is "dirty." 脏	A negative review of the artist's works.
	17	A short article that talks about Chen's photographs in the context of art auctions.	

APPENDIX B: Key Themes According to NVIVO Nodes during Data Analysis

Artist	Artist's Attitude/Understanding of (Cultural) Memory	Methods	About Space/Landscape/Memory	Findings	
				Memory	Methods
Qu Yan (b, 1955)	Memory is a phenomenon. Historical and cultural logic. Issues of power, politics, belief, and life in space—cultural crisis. Nostalgia	Finding issues and social reality through trips. Archival value of photography—critics of culture and the sharpness of reality. Bernd & Hilla Becher.	The value of the village in China—nostalgia, longing for the past. All concepts are borrowed from Guy-Ernest Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci. The methodology comes from post-structuralism, like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes's semiotics.	Memory is a phenomenon that comes from cultural crisis and leads to a nostalgia for the past. Cultural memory can be discovered through the examination of contemporary problems.	Trips in villages. The photograph as an archive for future research.
Yao Lu (b, 1967)	Memory happens in the conflict between materialistic modernization and spiritual needs. Cultural logic of Chinese society. A sense of melancholy and nostalgia.	Finding issues through everyday walking. Oriental cultural symbol of Chinese painting. Use of the aesthetic of Song dynasty landscape painting creates a contrast and irony with current scenery.	Time and space in traditional Chinese culture. Mountain and water (<i>shan shui</i>)—spirit, people wondering in the landscape. Landscape—human participant— <i>jingguan</i> (Guy-Ernest Debord).	The emergence of memory is because of the spiritual emptiness and the disappearance of culture. Memory and nostalgia.	Everyday walking. Classical Chinese landscape painting. The revival of tradition is the way to connect past with present (as insisted in definition of cultural memory).
Chen Nong (b, 1966)	The sense of history. The criticism and understanding of culture. Loss of spirit	Long stay at sites. Reality in photography is the benefit as well as the drawback. Hand-coloring on watercolor paper—imagination and material matters.	Find a landscape to match his imagination. Follow a historical route.	Memory and history. Memory and imagination.	Landscape experiences are vital. Iconography. Colored photographs with personal imagination and emotions.
Liu Yajing (b, 1987)	Memory is collective and cultural, including individual consciousness, emotions, social relations, contexts, artifacts. The transmission of history and culture—brings in personal experience and imagination. A sense of memory—nostalgia.	Walking is crucial. Hand-coloring on Chinese rice paper—match the content with the material. Learned from classical Chinese painting.	Landscape as a site of memory Build emotional intimacy—yearning and longing for traditional rural society.	Memory is active and performative in art. Carriers of cultural memory.	Landscape experience—walking. Look to the past for the present both in terms of medium and thought—hand coloring.

APPENDIX C: Nanyang Technological University Institutional Review Board

Approval Letter

Research Support Office

Reg. No. 200604393R

IRB-2016-04-018

03 November 2016

Associate Professor Oh Soon-Hwa
School of Art, Design and Media

NTU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Project Title: Visualizing Cultural Memory Through Photography in China, 1990-2010

I refer to your application for ethics approval with respect to the above project.

The Board has considered your application and noted from your application that your research involves collecting behavioral data from participants through interviews.

You have also confirmed that informed consent will be obtained from the participants and you have guaranteed the confidentiality of your participants' biodata obtained from them.

The documents reviewed are:

- a) NTU IRB application form dated **24 May 2016**
- b) Participant information sheet and consent form: version 2 dated **25 October 2016**
- c) Data collection form: version 1 dated **24 May 2016**

The Board is therefore satisfied with the bioethical consideration for the project and approves the ethics application under **Expedited** review. The approval period is from **03 November 2016** to **02 November 2017**. The NTU IRB reference number for this study is **IRB-2016-04-018**. Please use this reference number for all future correspondence.

The following protocol and compliances are to be observed upon NTU IRB approval

1. All research involving procedures greater than minimal risk on minors (individuals who are less than the legal age of 21 years old) requires IRB approved written Parental Consent and assent from the participant to be obtained before any research protocols can be administered. Minimal risk refers to an anticipated level of harm and discomfort that is no greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life, or during the performance of routine educational, physical, or psychological examination.
2. Only the approved Participants Information Sheet and Consent Form should be used. It must be signed by each subject prior to initiation of any protocol procedures. In addition, each subject should be given a copy of the signed consent form.
3. Consent forms are important documents therefore they should be stored in the strictest arrangement. Loss of consent form would result in disciplinary action.

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Tel : +65 6791 9857, Fax: 6793 2019
www.ntu.edu.sg

Research Support Office

4. No deviation from, or changes of, the protocol should be initiated without prior written NTU IRB approval of an appropriate amendment.
5. The Principal Investigator should report promptly to NTU IRB regarding:
 - a. Deviation from, or changes to the protocol.
 - b. Changes increasing the risk to the subjects and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the trial
 - c. All serious adverse events (SAEs) which are both serious and unexpected.
 - d. New information that may affect adversely the safety of the subjects of the conduct of the trial.
 - e. Completion of the study.
6. Continuing Review Request/ Notice of Study completion form should be submitted to NTU IRB for the following:
 - a. Annual review: Status of the study should be reported to the NTU IRB at least annually using the Continuing Review Request/ Notice of Study completion form.
 - b. Study completion or termination: Continuing Review Request/ Notice of Study completion form is to be submitted within 4 to 6 weeks of study completion or termination.
7. All Principal Investigators should comply with existing legislation that would have an impact on the domain of their research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lionel'.

Professor Lionel Lee
Chair, NTU Institutional Review Board
encl.

cc Members, NTU Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX D: Consent Forms

D-1: Invitation Letter and Consent Form for Photographers

School of Art, Design and Media

Reg. No. 200604393R

Letter Of Invitation To Participate In A Research Project On Photography

Dear _____,

My name is LIU Yajing and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Art Design, and Media at the Nanyang Technological University. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

This research explores the visualization of cultural memory in photography in China from the 1990s to the 2010s. This study aims to examine the forms and meanings of cultural memory in photography and investigate the ways photography reframes cultural memory through the artistic approaches. This research will offer a new theoretical lens on cultural memory to re-examine significant contemporary photographs on the subjects of demolition, construction, and urbanization in China since the 1990s.

As a well-known artist, you are in ideal position to give me valuable information for this research. I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in this research.

If you decide to participate, an informal interview would be arranged at a time of your convenience. The interview will ideally take place in your studio. The interview will last about 1 hour. During this interview, I will ask you questions about your works, including your personal background, intentions, methods, contexts, and your understanding of relationship between memory, landscape, and photography. In order to fully understand the creative process and ideas behind your works, I would also ask you to show relevant materials, such as films, archives, and sketchbooks. After the interview, when needed, I may contact you by email to clarify certain points or if I have any further questions regarding to your works.

With your permission, I will audiotape/video/photograph and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide. The collected data will be kept private and confidential. All the information will be used for this research only. This is a research for academic purposes and is not connected with government or commercial purpose.

I have attached the participant information form and consent form for your information. If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me by email YLIU038@e.ntu.edu.sg.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Review Board at Nanyang Technological University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Yours sincerely,

LIU Yajing
Co-Principal Investigator, PhD Candidate
Nanyang Technological University

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Tel: +65 6316 8764, Fax: +65 6795 3140
www.ntu.edu.sg

A School of the College of Humanities, Arts,
& Social Sciences

For Photographers**Project title:**

Visualizing Cultural Memory Through Photography in China, 1990-2010

I hereby acknowledge that:

1. My signature is my acknowledgement that I have agreed to take part in the above research.
2. I have received a copy of this information sheet that explains the use of my information in this research. I understand its contents and agree to donate my information for the use of this research.
3. I can withdraw from the research at any point of time by informing the Principal Investigator and all my information will be discarded.
4. I will not have any financial benefits that result from the commercial development of this research.
5. I have noticed the possible disadvantages and/or risks, and possible benefits to me and to others.
6. I understand and acknowledge that my interviewed data will be published in conferences, journals, and publications worldwide.
7. I agree to the photograph/ audiotape /video.
8. I understand that the principal investigator will protect my privacy and the confidentiality of my research records. Research data used in publication will be kept for a minimum of 10 years before being discarded.
9. I have noticed that there is no compensation for injury for my participation in this research.
10. I agree to be re-contacted if the principal investigator has further questions regarding to my works.
11. I agree for the following personal identifiers to be disclosed in any publication or presentation relating to this research, if any.

☐ Surname ☐ First name ☐ Full Name
☐ Others (I wish to remain anonymous and only agree to be known as _____).

** This research has been explained to me in _____ (state language), which I understand, by _____ (name of translator) on _____ (date).

Name and Signature (Participant)_____
Date_____
Name and Signature (Consent Taker)_____
Date_____
Name and Signature (Translator)_____
Date

D-2: Invitation Letter and Consent Form for Residents

School of Art, Design and Media

Reg. No. 000004303R

Letter Of Invitation To Participate In A Research Project On Photography

Dear residents,

My name is LIU Yajing and I am a PhD candidate in the School of Art Design, and Media at the Nanyang Technological University. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

I am conducting a photograph project of seaweed houses in your village, which is a part of a research on the visualization of cultural memory in photography. This study aims to examine the forms and meanings of cultural memory in photography and investigate the ways photography reframes cultural memory through the artistic approaches.

You are a very important person to this research. You currently live in/had lived in a seaweed house, and I would like to know about your stories with seaweed houses and your opinions on the situation of seaweed houses. I would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in this research.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to share the history of your seaweed houses or your village, memories of historic events and meaningful personal stories, and provide discarded objects. It is a very informal conversation. I will visit your house at your convenient time. It should last about 1 hour.

With your permission, I will audiotape/video/photograph and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide. The collected data will be kept private and confidential. All the information will be used for this research only. Identifiable information will not be used in a publication or presentation.

I have attached the participant information form and consent form for your information. If you have any further questions about the research, please feel free to contact me by email YLIU038@e.ntu.edu.sg.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Review Board at Nanyang Technological University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Yours sincerely,

LIU Yajing
Co-Principal Investigator, PhD Candidate
Nanyang Technological University

For Residents**Project title:**

Visualizing Cultural Memory Through Photography in China, 1990-2010

I hereby acknowledge that:

1. My signature is my acknowledgement that I have agreed to take part in the above research.
2. I have received a copy of this information sheet that explains the use of my information in this research. I understand its contents and agree to contribute my information, personal stories, images, and objects for the use of this research.
3. I can withdraw from the research at any point of time by informing the Principal Investigator and all my information will be discarded.
4. I will not have any financial benefits that result from the commercial development of this research.
5. I have noticed the possible disadvantages and/or risks, and possible benefits to me and to others.
6. I understand and acknowledge that in the event that my information is used for artistic photo project, this will be published and displayed in exhibitions, festivals, conferences, journals, and publications worldwide.
7. I agree to the photograph/ audiotape /video.
8. I understand that the principal investigator will protect my privacy and the confidentiality of my research records. Research data used in this research will be kept for a minimum of 10 years before being discarded.
9. I have noticed that there is no compensation for injury for my participation in this research.
10. I agree to be re-contacted if the principal investigator has any further questions regarding to my shared information.
11. I agree for the following personal identifiers to be disclosed in any publication or presentation relating to this research, if any.

☐ Surname ☐ First name ☐ Full Name
☐ Others (I wish to remain anonymous and only agree to be known as _____).

** This research has been explained to me in _____ (state language), which I understand, by _____ (name of translator) on _____ (date).

Name and Signature (Participant)

Date

Name and Signature (Consent Taker)

Date

Name and Signature (Translator)

Date

APPENDIX E: Interview Protocols

E-1: Interview Protocols for Photographers

Interviewee _____ Date/Time _____
 Location _____

Thank you very much for accepting my invitation. It is truly a pleasure to be here. This interview intends to be a conversation; please feel free to share your thoughts and information.

Background:

Can you please tell me about your experience in art and/or photography? When and why did you decide to use photography as a medium to express your ideas?

What was your experience in art study?

How has it influenced your artistic creation?

Artwork:

Would you let me take a closer look at your works?

Please tell me about the background of this body of work: intention, motivation, and sociocultural context.

What do you want to convey in this body of work? Were you making a political statement, or do you seek to maintain a neutral approach?

How would you distinguish your works from that of other photographers?

Method and Experience:

Please tell me about your shooting method.

What challenges/problems did you face in the art process and/or photo shoots?

Can you tell me about things that happened during your photo shoots at _____?

Why were you interested in that particular place? Please tell me more about the landscape in your works.

How did you feel when you faced destruction, demolitions, and/or ruins?

Views on Landscape, Memory, and Photography:

Nowadays, more and more photo works focus on the situation of landscape transformation and urbanization in China. Although they apply different methods, media, and aspects, there is a common point, in my view. These photographers, like you, document and reflect fact and situation of an era, so their works express the memory of that society for the future. Have you considered these issues from a memory perspective?

How do you consider the problem of memory in contemporary photography?

How do you see landscape/space/*shan shui*?

Finally, I would like to thank you again for sharing your ideas and supporting this research.

E-2: Interview Protocols for Residents in the “Seaweed House Photo Project”

Interviewee _____
Location/Village _____

Date/Time _____

Thank you very much for participating in this photo project. My interest is in understanding more about what is happening in the seaweed villages and your opinions on the situation of the seaweed villages. There is no right or wrong answer, so please feel free to share your thoughts and stories.

Can you please tell me your name and age?

Which village do you live in?

What kind of seaweed house do you live in?

Do you know when your seaweed house was built?

How long have you lived there?

What about your living conditions here?

Do you still live in a seaweed house?

When did you move out of the seaweed house?

Can you please tell me about your new house?

How do you feel about living in this new house?

If you still live in a seaweed house, will you move out of the seaweed house?

When and why?

Where will you live after you move out?

What will happen to your old seaweed house after you move out?

Do (or will) you miss your old seaweed house?

What is the most memorable thing about having lived in your seaweed house?

Have you heard any historical stories/legends about the village from your predecessors?

Would you like to show me the sites of the stories?

What was your seaweed house village like in the past, and how does it differ from when you were growing up?

Given a choice between a modern house and a seaweed house, which one would you prefer to live in? Why?

Are you willing to continue living in a seaweed house? Why?

APPENDIX F: Examples of Data Collected On-Site

F-1: “Seaweed House Photo Project” Field Notes Form

Form Number:

Date		Weather		Village	
Main Content & Objective					
About Informant					
Name		Age		Detailed Location	
Contact Number		Family Information			
Benefits	(How the informants would like to receive their images/videos)				
Seaweed House’s Information					
Age of the House		Number of Rooms		Inhabited or Abandoned	
Current Condition of the Seaweed House		Seaweed House Specifications			
Use of the Seaweed House					
Current/Future Situation					
Seaweed House Image	(Attach images of house here)				
Stories, Histories, and Objects					
History of the Village					
Shared Stories					
Shared Objects	(Attach images of objects here)				
	(Story of the objects & their relation with the house)				
Photo/Video Status					
Photo/Audio Record Number	(File numbers)				
Photograph Status of Objects	(Objects are photographed, or not; whether they will be loaned)				
Video Documentation	(If the informant permits video documentation, place video number here)				
	(Briefly describe the content)				
Informant’s Portrait	(Attach images of informant here)				
Remarks					

F-2: Reproduction of Field Notes

Form No.	Collected Stories, Myths, Historical Events, Legends
3	The village was called Changyang City. In Han Dynasty, a long battle took place here. The woman general of the battle was buried in the tomb. There were three tombs and only one tomb was true for the sake of tomb robbery. In the last century, people, who guarded the tomb, could get wages of over one yuan per day. Later, militias were sent to be on duty and a merit could be recorded. Three tombs were all robbed. The tomb robber from Zaozhuang was arrested here in 2001. Pits dug by tomb robbers were vertically downward from the top. Mr. Dai said that during land preparation from the 1970s to the 1980s, tomb robbers could usually dig bricks, copper swords and bronze mirrors of Warring States or Han Dynasty. Once a villager dug up a copper sword and sold it for 3 yuan. With this money, the villager brought sugars and shared with his family.
8	Dayu Island, 大渔岛, has a history about three hundred years. Many foreigners came here to take photos and shoot films in the 1960s. There was one slogan during the Cultural Revolution highlighted the importance of the village in China, said: “learn from Dazhai in agriculture, learn from Daqing in industry and learn from Dayu Island in fishery” 农业学大寨, 工业学大庆, 渔业学大鱼岛. The village had assets of over one billion and was a famous wealthy village throughout the country. In 2000, original secretary embezzled money of the village. Nowadays, the village is poor. There are only 3 seaweed houses left in the village. Sands on the beach were sold.
9	The village has a history of over 600 years. It was established during the regime of Dazhi of Yuan Dynasty. People surnamed Gong established the village. There was a family temple in the village and genealogy was burned up during the period of “breaking the four olds” of Cultural Revolution. There was a stela of ancestor with 5-6 Chi high in the village, but was also destroyed. There were many stone tombs of ancestors surrounded the village, but all were destroyed during land clearance in the 20th century. Stones of the tombs were used to build houses. Limited by the traditional thought, all villagers were unwilling to use them and they are now abandoned. Now there is only one stone tomb. It was previously sharp in the top and thick in the bottom, which is the typical tumulus complex of Yuan Dynasty.
10	Ancestors were moved from Dengzhou, presently Penglai. People who lived in the village are surnamed Liu. According to the stories shared by the residents, there are three groups of people surnamed Liu in the village. The first is from Dengzhou, being officials. The second is moved from on village in the city. The third is moved from Buliu across East Sea (manual laborers). Later in Qing Dynasty, people surnamed Feng came here to be officials. One person was called Feng Yunxi, the final garrison of the navy battalion. There is a tombstone at the entrance of the village. Feng Yunxi, born in Gusu (Suzhou), the last garrison of the navy battalion in Rongcheng at the end of Qing Dynasty was appointed in the 6 th year during the regime of Xianfeng of Qing Dynasty (1856) and died in the 5 th year during the regime of Tongzhi of Qing Dynasty (1866).
12	The history of Dianjiangbo, Qincun, Lijiashan, and Longchuang village is related to the legend of Emperor Qin Shihuang. Emperor Qin appointed generals in Dianzibo village, so the village was originally called Dianjiangbo. Emperor Qin watered the horse in Yin Village, so the village was originally called Yinmacao; finally, they were mountaineering in Lijiashanna Village; there is a village in the west of Yaxi, called Longchuang Village because the dragon bed was placed there.
13	There are only 2 seaweed houses left in the village. The village was originally located in the existing reservoir, and later it was moved up to its current location as the reservoir was renovated in 1958. This village was built during the Hongwu period of Ming Dynasty. It is said that a tiger died on the rocks and was buried here. There was also a stone shed in the area. Now it is flooded in the reservoir, so this village is named Hutai Village. There is also a tiger platform in the reservoir, which is the Tiger Tomb. The tiger platform is very tall, about 80-90cm in height. The villagers used to stand there and jumped into the reservoir to swim. The water in the reservoir was drained to see the tiger platform.

15	<p>During the Qing dynasty of Jia Qing era, 嘉庆 (1795-1820), people with the Gao surname built family temple, 庵 and settle down here. The village was near peach trees, so called Peach Blossom Place, 桃花地. Later, according to the surname, the village was renamed Gao Jia An. Hu Zhuo Temple was built in Tang dynasty, which is 600 years before Beijing city was built in Yuan dynasty. According to the elderly people, Hu Zhuo Temple was built to suppress the tiger. In the early Tang dynasty, Li Shi Min led a troop of soldiers heading east to the south of Wei De mountain in order to fight against Korea, 高丽. Suddenly, a tiger rushed up out of mountains and irritated Li Shi Min. Yu Chi Gong, 尉迟恭, a general of Li, ride the horse to chase the tiger and killed it on the spot. Li Shi Min commanded the soldiers to bury the tiger here. Later, Li commanded natives to build a temple on the top of the tiger's grave, which meant to suppress tiger to prevent harm to people and put a spell on demons and evils. There was a stone stele in the village. The text of the stele indicated Hu Zhuo Temple was renovated in 38 years of Qian Long era (about 1773). However, the stele was lost. The 1940s was the period that China was invaded by the Japanese. The Japanese troops intended to set up a stronghold at Hu Zhuo Temple to destroy the Communist forces. Hu Zhuo Temple was located in a crucial military position for both parties, was hidden from sights, and was the linkage between Rong Cheng towns and Wei Hai city. After the Communist received the news, they immediately arranged nearby masses to demolish Hu Zhuo Temple. There was a girl, only 15 years old, called Zhang Jing Lin. She led nearby villagers to destroy the temple within one night.</p>
17	<p>The middle part of the pattern on the wall of Ningjinsuo, like a temple, was knocked out during the elimination of "four olds", smashed, and blocked with stones. It is a Buddha statue in the middle. People originally offered incense here. There are 4 watchtowers in the village as military camps were stationed here in the past. Watchtowers were on sentry duty from the former lighting stand and used to report their enemies to other troops. There is a section of city wall in the west of Martyr Tower in the village, which was originally the city wall of the Ming Dynasty. The bricks were all removed to build houses, so the wall was removed and only the mud left. Crop fields are nearby. There was also a city gate, but it was demolished because big crane did not enter the village around the 1960s. It is said that the city walls were very wide, on which the horses could be ridden.</p>
18	<p>According to a legend there were three deities, whom are triplets and known as the Three Wolf Brothers. The brothers serve under the divine general Tian Peng. However, the brothers have an affinity to the mundane world and were often seen in the earthly plane. When this was discovered by the supreme Jade Emperor, he was furious. The Jade Emperor told the brothers that if they do not adhere to heavenly rules, there is no reason for them to continue staying in the divine realm. With a simple hand gesture, the Jade Emperor banished them to the mundane world and forbade them to ever return to the divine realm. The three brothers fell onto Earth. The brothers were turned into (Celtic Sinensis) trees. The eldest brother ended up atop of a rock on the western side of Dong Su Jia village. The second brother ended in the middle of the same village and the youngest brother was located in the eastern side. The trees (Celtic Sinensis) embodiments of the brothers were located closely to each other in a single straight line across the village.</p>
19	<p>The village was built in Yuan Dynasty, but these tombs had already been there before that. As introduced, it is a rule of a dynasty that people reaching 60 will be left alone in a tomb under which there is a small hole for people to send meals; such tombs are mainly used for the aged to wait for death. Under each tomb, there is a tablet, which is now buried in the earth. The tablets contain historical records, including dates of birth and death of people buried here. This village chronicle was compiled on the basis of the tumulus here which were built by local granite. According to village chronicle, there were thirty to forty tombs. They were damaged between 1950s and 1960s and now there are only 7 graves well preserved. Its shape is of high value.</p>
20	<p>There are lots of seaweed houses remained in Moye Island. Moye Island has 9 natural villages in total with more than 2,000 households. There were 18 villages originally. In general, seaweed houses in the west are more than that in the east. Most seaweed houses have saddle-shaped roofs. Shapes of trees on the island are strange and diversified. The island used to be an intermittent peninsula. It is an isolated island at the time of flood tide. There is a road linking to the main land after fall of tide, thus people can visit the island through the road. Sand at the bottom of sea is solid. Vehicles of a troop can enter and leave the island. In order to facilitate building defense works (trenches), the government</p>

	<p>convened hundred people from nearby villages to jointly mend a concrete road to the island in 1969. Mr. Wang recalls that all people just ate and slept there to mend the road. It took them just half a month to repair the road. The Interviewee Mr. Wang lives in the Xizhuang Village on the island, which has more than 600 households in total. The village was set up in Qing Dynasty, which is the largest village on Moye Island. The village used to be called Lutaiquan, which was named according to the story of Mu Guiying. It was renamed Xizhuang in 1980s. (Story of Mu Guiying is not clear, which needs to be implemented.) There was a torpedo explosion event in Moye Island in 1940s (which happened in 1944 according to investigation of Ma Weidu on line). Villagers found a torpedo when they were fishing in the sea. They did not know what it was at that time, thus they dragged it ashore. Most villagers came there to see what it was. They beat the torpedo around it, resulting in explosion of the torpedo, which led to casualties of about hundred people (which was more than 70 people according to investigation of Ma Weidu). Mr. Wang recalls that people were burnt into small meat balls at that time, which incandined the beach and seawater. The village is a strategic area. 2 naval vessels landed on the island on June 2, 1964 when the Kuomintang counterattacked the main land. There were 15 people in total going ashore, leading to one death and one injury. A search vessel landed on May 31, 1965.</p>
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F-3: Interview with Yu Yingyu (on 12 August 2016)

1. Can you please introduce the history of seaweed houses?

Seaweed houses of Rong Cheng area are the splendid vernacular dwellings in the history of the world's folk architecture. According to the scholars' research, there are about 10 million seaweed houses and 30 thousand households exist in Rong Cheng now. Among the existing seaweed houses, the oldest seaweed houses are about 400 years old; 2000 of seaweed houses have a history of 100-300 years; and a vast majority of seaweed houses are 50-100 years old. Seaweed houses probably originated in the Qin and Han Dynasties, dating back about two thousand years; formed in the Tang and Song Dynasties, dating back about one thousand years; and popularized in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, dating back about five hundred or six hundred years. In the recent sixty or seventy years, seaweed houses have begun to vanish gradually because of the development of society and technology. Nowadays, seaweed houses have ornamental value and began to develop tourism resources.

2. What is the difference between seaweed dwellings and the houses we now live in, such as the tile-roofed houses and the modern buildings?

The most important feature of the seaweed house - a mysterious oriental dwelling, is their long history. The second feature lies in their local building materials that have oceanic characteristic. The last two features are ecological and comfort. Firstly, the seaweed house has a history of more than 2000 years. According to our research, as an old ecological residence in eastern coastal areas, the seaweed house originally ranges from the Yalu river estuary in the north to the Lian Yun Gang city in Jiang Su province in the south, covering 4 to 5 provinces. With the changing times and the regional development, only in Rong Cheng's thousand-mile beach where a large amount of seaweed houses is reserved now.

Secondly, the seaweed house is made of Four Piles, which are a pile of seaweed, a pile of stone, a pile of clay and a pile of wood. Our ancestors can access these indigenous materials in coastal areas. They collected stones on the beach, chopped down woods from pines and locusts, mixed yellow mud and gained seaweed in the shallow sea. After a half-year's preparation, a characteristic seaweed house was ready to be built. Thirdly, they are eco-friendly due to the building materials are all collected from sea or mountains. Just like what I have said, they do not contain any artificial synthetic materials nor chemical materials nor those with odors nor hazardous materials. Fourthly, they are comfortable to live in, being warm in winter and cool in summer. The thickness of the seaweed roof can be up to 1.5 to 2 meters making it hard to hear the noise of rain, thunder, hail nor wind. The outer layer of the stone wall is yellow mud with a thickness of at least 60 cm, preventing rain and snow.

Thus, the summer's heat and winter's freezing cold cannot enter to the interior. It forms a relatively enclosed space with steady temperature and humidity and the isolation of sound. Nowadays the old aged over 60 have spent most of their life live in seaweed houses. The elderly people are still happy to live in these low seaweed houses, although they can choose to live in high buildings with air conditioning. They are not willing to move because of the advantages of the seaweed house.

3. When taking photos, unlike other areas, we found that the color of the seaweed house's stones in Li Dao region and Ma Dao region are extremely abundant, such as black, red, green, etc. Does this mean something special?

A significant feature of the seaweed house's wall is their use of colorful natural stones from seaside, making them especially beautiful during rainy days and attracting lots of artists. In the bay of the Li Dao and Ma Dao region, there exists the biggest spotted stone (Hua Ban Cai Shi, 花斑彩石, the gemstone with spectacular color property) in the world, and we call it The Strangest Sea Stone in China.

The spotted stone is a creation of Marine erosion. Based on my study, in geological oceanography, the spotted stone is formed by tuff about 560 million years ago due to the Submarine volcano eruptions. In high-temperature, magma erupts and blends metallic elements together, such as iron, magnesium, sodium and copper. When the magma falls, the abrasion phenomenon occurs the moment the seawater cools magma down. There are only 3 places exist abrasion phenomenon in the Orient, the other two are the east coast of Taiwan and the Weizhou island lies to the five hundred kilometers from the southeast of Hainan island. Varieties of metallic elements of spotted stones form a grain of colorful circles like the rainbow in the sky. The spotted stone in Rong Cheng region has no rival till today.

The stones of the seaweed dwelling in Li Dao and Ma Dao areas are collected from surrounding beaches, and the volcanic stones can stretch to tens of kilometers along the coast. In the past, these stones are common in the region of Li Dao and Ma Dao. And now, within 1-2 kilometers away from the tourist attraction of the spotted stone, people can still take photos of a large number of colorful stones.

4. As the saying goes, the unique features of a local environment and landscape always give special characteristics to its inhabitants, custom and culture (一方水土养一方人, 一方山水有一方风情). Would you please introduce the customs and the most influential person of the area?

In the recent 70 to 80 years, seaweed house can be found in more than 1000 natural villages (Zi Ran Cun, 自然村), including less than 400 fishing villages, forming an extraordinary and prominent Marine culture in the north of Yangzi River. We can vividly say that Rong Cheng's most distinctive fishing culture is born in these hundreds of thousands seaweed houses.

Firstly, the area of the seaweed house forms fishing customs, for example fishermen's funerals and weddings, friends' gatherings, and sacrifices to ancestors in Chinese Lunar New Year. The area also forms the well-known wine culture of Wei Hai area, including drinking and eating in big bowls and the strict class of service at the old-fashioned square table for eight people (Ba Xian Zhuo, 八仙桌). Secondly, the area of the seaweed house forms the fishermen's spirits. Fishermen are brave, hardworking, acting bravely for a just cause, broad minded, inclusive and positive. In the past, a small fishing boat was like a leaf floating on the sea. Once boat encountered big waves, the boat got turned over easily. Whenever fishermen saw those boats damaged by waves, fishermen would help without hesitation, which is the most important feature of the fisherman. This kind of courage, tolerance, justice, selfless spirit nurtures a preeminent group – the soldier.

From the Battle of the Yalu River (Jia Wu Hai Zhan, 甲午海战, also known as Huang Hai Hai Zhan, 黄海海战) to Xinhai Revolution (Xin Hai Ge Ming, 辛亥革命), Rong Cheng and Wei Hai appeared a large number of revolutionary soldiers as the 3600 heroes are recorded in Beiyang Monument in

Liugong Island. 70% of these revolutionary soldiers grow in seaweed houses. Since the Xinhai Revolution, especially after the May Fourth Movement, 五四运动, the seaweed houses have nurtured more than 170 generals, more than 50 provincial or national leaders, more than 6000 revolutionary martyrs, and more than 1000 national famous heroes. There are also many scientists, for example the renowned Mr. Guo Yonghuai who made great contributions to atomic and hydrogen bombs and man-made satellites. He was also the only scientist in the world who has made remarkable contributions to the three fields of missiles, nuclear bombs and satellites. We are building a Guo Yonghuai Memorial Hall. There are also many cultural scholars, such as the well-known Mr. Zhang Zhenglang, an expert in ancient Chinese history. So to speak, without the more than two thousand years' history and a hundred thousand seaweed dwellings, there could not exist the unique fishing culture and so did the above groups of people.

5. What is the quantity, distribution and protection situation of the seaweed house in Rong Cheng region?

Seaweed house distributes mainly in three major communities among the nearly 400 fishing villages in Rong Cheng coastal area. The three major communities of the seaweed house are the area of Cheng Shan town in the north, Li Dao town and Xun Shan town in the middle, and Jing Hai town and Ning Jin town in the south. The three communities contain more than 88% of the total number of the seaweed house. For the last ten years, we have established a batch of key protection towns and villages for seaweed house, which are the town of Cheng Shan in the north, Li Dao and Xun Shan in the middle, and Jing Hai and Ning Jin in the south, 5 towns in total. We have set more than 80 protection villages in the rest 7 to 8 coastal towns.

With the tourism development of Jiao Dong Peninsula, the seaweed house is disappearing quickly. 10 years ago, I drafted *The Conservation Regulation for Seaweed House in Rong Cheng* that regulates four terms of protection. The first regulation is based on the proportion of the seaweed house in a natural village. Level-one protective village, also regarded as key protecting village, contains more than 80% of seaweed house in the village. If the ratio of the seaweed house in the village is over 60%, then the village is classified to be the second-level protecting village, which is the intermediate protecting level. And if the ratio of the seaweed house in the village is around 40%, then the village is the third-class protecting village. The classification of the protecting villages determines rules of the conservation and funds given to the villages.

The second protecting regulation is according to the history of the seaweed house, that is, the age of the houses. Seaweed houses with more than 300 years of history are regarded as the first priority. In other words, these seaweed houses get absolute protection without moving a single brick or a tile. Seaweed houses built in the late Qing Dynasty around 150 to 300 years ago are under the second-class protection level. The demolition and transformation of second-level protecting houses must be investigated by experts and approved by the department of municipal cultural relics protection. Those with 100 to 200 years of history are third-class protecting houses.

The third factor is the architectural feature of the seaweed house. According to the architectural aesthetics, seaweed houses with unique structures are especially protected. For example, well-preserved courtyard seaweed houses, seaweed houses with Jiang Jun Mao, 将军帽, this kind of houses with round roof used to place crops or livestock), and those with good stratum of stones.

The forth factor is the culture and humanity of the seaweed house. All seaweed houses where celebrities lived are key protecting sites. An example is the Dong Chudao village in Nin Jing town where has been protected for more than 10 years. Recently, Dong Chudao village received about thirty million Chinese Yuan from national and provincial departments. Nowadays, Dong Chudao village has been named as the Famous Historical and Cultural Village in China, being a well-known tourist site. Others, like Da Zhuang Xu Jia village in Li Dao town and Wei Wei village in Jiang Xi town, are well protected as the provincial-level protecting site. Wei Wei village exists a group of seaweed houses aged 300 to 400 years old. In the name of the construction technology of the seaweed house and the inheritor Liu Yuqi from the Wei Wei village, the seaweed house is listed as the intangible cultural heritage in Shan Dong province.

For the last 4 years, we declare 3-5 villages and 3-5 coastal towns annually to the protecting list of provincial intangible cultural heritage. In the April 2016, 3 villages and 2 towns were successfully listed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Shan Dong Province. Additionally, we declare 20 to 30 villages every year to Rong Cheng's intangible cultural heritage to gain funding for these villages. However, the money provided by Rong Cheng is only a few millions, which is not enough. We are trying to increase investments from various ways, including those from the state relics administration, provincial and municipal departments, towns, villages and house's owners.

Nevertheless, the number of the seaweed house is reducing annually. The protections of the government and cultural heritage authorities delay the disappearance speed of the seaweed house in recent twenty years. However, it is inevitable that the seaweed house will die off. In June 2016, we modified *The Conservation Regulation for Seaweed House in Rong Cheng*, and raised the annual protection funding from hundreds of thousands of Yuan to millions of Yuan. In addition, we are seeking helps from the Ministry of Culture, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, and the Culture Department of Shan Dong Province. We are hoping to list the seaweed house as a state-level cultural protection treasure, including the Historical and Cultural Village in China, the Ancient Village in China, Intangible Cultural Heritage of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Intangible Heritage Project of Shan Dong Province, Wei Hai City and Rong Cheng City. We ensure that the seaweed house can be fully protected in layers. Over the past decade, we have raised tens of millions of Yuan for the conservation and research of the seaweed house in the state and provincial level, which has paid off very well.

6. At present, what are the main problems facing the protection?

Despite the seaweed house has gained the attention of the United Nations, the state, and the municipality levels of governments, the protection of the seaweed house still need a large amount of money and endeavor due to the remote geographical location and the great scale of the distribution. Although we have made the above achievements, inevitably, we still have a sense of loss and pity.

The primary problem is the lack of protection fund. In recent 10 years, we have invested about a hundred million Yuan in total. Still, we cannot prevent these hundreds-year-old seaweed houses from being dilapidated and collapsed. The protection funds of the state and local governments are limited. At present, the young people in the village are moving to cities when they get married. The young people think the seaweed houses are low and shabby. Most of those who live in the seaweed houses are the old

people over the age of 50. The elderly is the aging group in our society and have no spare money to maintain the seaweed houses.

Secondly, the seaweed house is mainly distributed in ancient coastal villages. The economic development of the villages is unique that can be divided to two modes. The first is that, some villages rough out the plan of the new socialist countryside construction due to the well-developed fishery industry. As a result, seaweed houses in these villages are going to be destroyed on the plan. The second is under the policy of Land Exchange for Land (Yi Di Huan Di, 以地还地), a large number of seaweed houses in remote villages have been demolished. This is quite threatening. What we can protect are those that have not been listed in the urban planning. This reveals that a new social group appears along with the society development. And the new social group is going to destroy the old one eventually, which is incompatible. On all accounts, in constructing a new socialist countryside, the decline of the seaweed house is uncontrolled by the cultural heritage departments.

The third problem is the property right of the seaweed house. The seaweed house is owned by individual. If a village is to demolish or a house owner wants to reconstruct a seaweed house, the department of cultural relics cannot interfere with them from a legal standpoint, but can only negotiate with village or house owner. For example, there are lots of house owners intend to move to the town or city, and their houses are in the cultural relics protection scope. What we can do is to negotiate and subsidize house owners. Therefore, there is a conflict between the property right of the seaweed house and the protection of the cultural relics.

The forth problem is the conflicts between the departments of urban construction, urban planning, and environmental protection, and the departments of cultural relics. The former departments only focus on the development of the new socialist countryside construction, increasing new high buildings and new sceneries. From their point of view, the number of the seaweed house is enough. However, the cultural relics department does their best to preserve more seaweed houses. That is, the conflict between the macro-urban constructions concerned by other functional departments and the protection beliefs of our cultural relics department.

7. The reducing of seaweed raises the cost of repairing and construction of seaweed houses. Therefore, the disappearing of seaweed is one of the reasons of the disappearance of seaweed houses. what do you think about this matter?

In recent twenty years, we have been focusing on the protection of seaweed, including doctors and post-doctors from the Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences. One famous academician of Yellow Sea Fisheries Research Institute leads a team of doctors to conduct a state level sea protection project in the waters of Dong Chu Dao village, which aims to build 2000 units of seaweed to research the values of *zostera marina*.

Nowadays, there are a small amount of seaweed existed in the waters of Rong Cheng. However, the quantity and quality of seaweed is inferior to that of the 70s. The growth of seaweed is obstructed by seafood farming, such as kelp and scallop. In addition, seaweed used in seaweed houses is also the food of swan and many other seabirds. It is therefore relating to the protection of swan in Rong Cheng.

However, Rong Cheng is the biggest city in China in the field of marine fisheries and aquaculture. It is impossible to eliminate the aquaculture. We can only find some waters to protect. During

these two years, pilot protections have been carried out in some main bays. The recovery of seaweed is getting better. But it is far from enough. We intend to conduct protection experiments in villages, such as Dong Chu Dao and Da Zhuang Xu Jia village, with the help from marine protection departments, doctors, and post-doctors.

8. What effects do you think the disappearing of seaweed houses will cause to the cultural identity and cultural memory of our society?

I have spent more than four months to write the chapter of seaweed house in the book *Review of Shan Dong Cultures*, 中国文化统览. In the Shan Dong Marine Culture seminar, my paper on seaweed house won much recognition. The decay of seaweed houses will cause much impact on the marine culture and history of Wei Hai and Rong Cheng, even on the architecture of Northern China.

First of all, the decrease, disappearing, or extinction of seaweed houses will definitely cause damage to the history of folk architecture in the world. Like the bamboo house in the south (Zhu Lou, 竹楼), the hanging dwelling in Fu Jing province (Diao Jiao Lou, 吊脚楼), the cave dwelling in northern Shan Xi province (Yao Dong, 窑洞), and the residential compound in Shan Xi province (Da Yuan, 大院), I define the seaweed dwelling as the typical folk architecture with Chinese characteristics. It is an indelible part of Chinese marine culture and also an important invention of ancestor in coastal buildings. Secondly, it is a significant carrier of northern Chinese marine cultures and fishery customs. Once it disappears, so does the wine customs, the folk customs and the human spirits in Rong Cheng and Wei Hai area. Many of the famous figures born in fishing families and have the sentiments for seaweed houses, including generals and leaders of our country. Thirdly, it has formed a unique scenery within thousands of years' history and became a special theme in art. In the memoir of Wu Guanzhong, he regards the seaweed house in Rong Cheng forms the aesthetics of the oriental architecture, and is a rare subject for artists. Last but not least, as to living, visiting, touching, and feeling seaweed houses has become an important option for self-drive tour and farmhouse entertainment. If the seaweed house disappears, the agritainment in northern fishing families would be dull.

In past two hundred to three hundred years, seaweed houses are common in Jiao Dong Peninsula. In the times when it is physically and spiritually poor, no one regarded seaweed bungalows as an art and tourism resource. In recent forty years, with the development of Jiao Dong Peninsula, the region of seaweed house forms an extremely unique tourism and art resource, generating cultural, art, tourism and social values. So far as I know, in the 70s, Mr. Wu Guanzhong lived in Rong Cheng about a half year to take refuge. He successively created 5 to 6 giant oil paintings in Shi Dao and Long Xv areas. This is the beginning when people start to pursuit the value of seaweed house in fine arts. In recent thirty to forty years, the number of the art amateurs coming to Rong Cheng for artistic creation is around a hundred thousand, including those from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Academy of Arts and Design of Tsinghua University, etc. Nowadays, the mania for the Rong Cheng seaweed house has shaped.

9. At present, some villages with seaweed houses have begun to repair and rebuild ancestral temples and genealogies, which aims to revitalize folk traditions and cultures. What is the purpose of such a program?

There is an old Chinese saying: “People only update their genealogies during times of peace”, 太平盛世修家谱. In recent years, I guided the compilation of genealogy in more than ten villages in Rong Cheng, the act of which suggested people’s recognition of social stability and sense of belonging and prosperity. People do not have the mind to write genealogy during wartime and times of turbulence. Thus, in a political sense, writing genealogy represents people’s appreciation of social stability and prosperity.

Furthermore, compiling genealogy allows people to understand who they are, where they come from, and where they will head. The five thousand years of Chinese culture emphasizes the clan culture and the origin of people. Tracing back the origins of a thousand villages can make people re-discover and carrying on the blood of the outstanding Chinese culture, the excellent family traditions, parental instructions, and the essence of the studies of ancient Chinese civilization (Guo Xue, 国学).

Nowadays, we follow the form of nostalgia to build ancestral temples and museums of the seaweed house. These essence (of the family traditions, parental instructions, ancestral idea, etc.) is much superior to that of the Western culture. It is what we have lost for over four decades since the Chinese economic reform. Rong Cheng, with the advantage of the seaweed house, looks for the roots of China’s marine culture, fishing culture, excellent traditional culture, National studies, and the spirits of people in Wei Hai and Rong Cheng. It also reveals the Core Socialist Values, 社会主义核心价值观, which are patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship, and so on.

10. What is your envisaged plan for the protection of the seaweed house and the development of ancient villages?

The Conservation Regulation for Seaweed House in Rong Cheng that I have mentioned earlier was further revised in June 2016, based on our ten-year experience. However, I believe there is still room for improvement. First of all, all governments must protect the seaweed house based on local laws and regulations. I hope that Wei Hai city, Shan Dong Province, and even the Ministry of Culture and the National Administration of Culture should all formulate specific regulations on the protection of the seaweed house. In a legal society, if the laws that protect the seaweed house are insufficient, then the force and effect of such protection would be compromised. Secondly, different departments should exert strict regulations. For instance, construction department may invest funds from the perspective of building high-quality projects; cultural relics department may protect the seaweed house according to the cultural status of thousand years of history; publicity department may promote the seaweed house via television shows, websites, and photographs. Only multi-dimensional protection and coordination from different functional departments can reinforce the implementation of government regulations. Thirdly, intelligent people, such as successful enterprises, photographers, and artists, should be called on to protect the seaweed house with their expertise and specialties. The beauty, aesthetic value, cultural value and architectural value of the seaweed house should be presented from different angles to the public.

The last but not the least, the value of the seaweed house should be promoted among the general public. It is important to make the general public, especially the owners of seaweed houses and leaders of villages and towns, realize that seaweed houses are treasures left by our ancestors. Currently, many owners of seaweed houses and village cadres fail to appreciate the value of seaweed houses. Because those owners and leaders have lived in seaweed houses for many years, they regard seaweed houses as

common houses, which have got aesthetically bored of such houses. Actually, we have introduced the value of the seaweed house since years ago. We used televisions programs to repeatedly highlight the aesthetic, architectural, and tourism value of the seaweed house and publicized the history of seaweed houses where many renowned generals and celebrities once resided. For example, the renowned collector Ma Weidu was born in Ning Jin. Among over 170 generals in Rong Cheng, 60% of them were born in seaweed houses. We make efforts to promote and protect the seaweed house from the perspective of the Changes of Zhou, 周易, healthcare, and education.

Yu Yingyu, 于迎雨, was founder and first director of the Rong Cheng Museum, and a folklorist and expert on marine culture and folklore of Jiao Dong Peninsula. Born in 1952, he joined the army in 1970 and engaged in propaganda, cultural activities, journalism, and cultural relics career for 45 years. He served on numerous governmental positions, including director of the Rong Cheng Civilization Office, deputy director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau, and director of the Press and Publication Management Office. He also directed and curated a number of major political and cultural festivals and activities, such as the International Fishermen's Festival in Rong Cheng, China-South Korea Economic and Trade Fair in Wei Hai, and the National Borderland Digital Cultural Corridor Program, and so on. He was also the main editor of the *Rong Cheng Sub-volume* in the *Overall View of Shan Dong Province Culture*.

APPENDIX G: Map of Liu Yajing's Route in the Seaweed-House Region

APPENDIX H: Preliminary Survey of Artists

Name of Artist	Example Work(s)/Year	Main Theme (L/M)	Photographic Method
Ao Guoxing	The Ode of Happiness, 2012	L-Demolition	Typological documentation
Chen Nong	Yellow River, 2007-2008	M-History	Hand-coloring with photo-dye
Chen Qiulin	The Garden, 2006-2008	L-Demolition	Staged photographs
Fan Shunzan	Reality and Dream, 2011	M-Personal memory	Hand-coloring with Photoshop
Guo Peng	Green Lack, 2006	M	Hand-coloring with watercolor
Han Lei	Fictional Landscape, 2008	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Hua Weicheng	End of Ashes, 2011	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Hong Lei	China Landscapes, 1998	M-Chinese tradition, history	Hand-coloring with multi-material
Hu Jieming	Son, 2008	L-Urbanization	Conceptual documentation
Huang Xiaoliang	Jungle Diary, 2009	M-Childhood memory	Conceptual documentation
Jiang Pengyi	All Back to Dust, 2006	L-Demolition	Staged photographs
Li Yong	Daily Life, 2012	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Li Ming	Silk Road, 2012	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Liu Xiaofang	I Remember II, 2012	M-Childhood memory	Staged photographs
Lu Yanpeng	Memory of Stones, 2006	M-Personal imagination	Alternative process
Luo Yongjin	Fort Houses, 2005	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Miao Xiaochun	New Urban Reality, 2004-2008	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Mu Chen & Shao Yinong	Assembly Hall, 2003	L-Urbanization & M	Typological documentation
Qu Yan	Space, 2005-present	L-Social reality	Typological documentation
Rong Rong	Ruin Series, 1996-1999	L-Demolition	Staged photographs
Shao Wenhuan	And All the Sounds Are Still	LM-Spiritual exploration	Hand-coloring with multi-material
Sun Yanchu	Ficciones, 2017	M	Hand-coloring with multi-material
Ta Ke	诗山河考, 2009-2012	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation & Alternative photographic process
Wang Bo	Heteroscapes, 2010	L-Urbanization & M	Typological documentation
Wang Guofeng	Ideality, 2007	L-Public Monuments	Typological documentation
Wang Qian	Pure Western Qing Tombs, 2011	M-History	Documentation
Wang Qingsong	Home, 2005	L-Demolition	Staged photographs
Wang Tong	Mao on the Wall, 2000-2002	M	Hand-coloring with watercolor

Wang Yan	Mother River, 2010-2014	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Wang Youshen	Washing: the mass grave at Datong in 1941, 1995	M-History	Experiment with old photographs
Wei Bi	Meng Xi, 2008-2010	M	Documentation & Alternative process
Weng Fen	Sitting on the Wall, 2001-2010	L-Urbanization	Staged photographs
Xu Yong	Portraits of Hutong, 1989	L-Demolition	Documentation
Yang Yongliang	Artificial Wonderland, 2010-2014	L-Urbanization	Photoshop – Chinese painting-like photos
Yan Ming	Country of Ambition, 2010	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Yao Lu	Chinese Landscape, 2006-2014	LM	Photoshop – Chinese painting-like photos
Zeng Li	An Epoch of Yu Gong, 2006	L-Demolition	Documentation
Zeng Han	Hyperreality China, 2004-2016	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Zhang Xiao	Coastline, 2009-2011	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Zhang Bing	Forbidden City, 2013	L-Urbanization	Photoshop landscapes
Zhang Kechun	The Yellow River, 2010-2013	L-Urbanization	Typological documentation
Zhang Dali	Dialogue and Demolition, 1995-1998	L-Demolition	Conceptual Documentation
Zhao Sheila	The East Was Red, 2017	M-History	Old monochromic photographs
Zhen Shi	Kwei Yih, 2012	M-Childhood memory	Old photographs
Zhou Jun	Beijing Forbidden City-Jin Luan Dian No. 2, 2007	L-Urbanization	Photoshop landscapes

*Table classified in alphabetical order per name of artists.

*Table was made at the early stage of this study, helping to organize and select the artists to be analyzed in the thesis. There are other artists that were creating exciting works related to landscape memory that may be missing as the list requires constant updates.

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