Summer 8-6-2017

My Name is Jing

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My Name is Jing

by

Jing Wang

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts, Integrated Media Arts, Hunter College
The City University of New York

2017

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My Name is Jing

A journey to reconnect with my lost father, and an exploration of the role of memory in contemporary Chinese society

Jing Wang

August 5, 2017

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,

Hunter College of the City University of New York.
Abstract

*My Name is Jing* is an essay film about my family and a commentary on the rapid changes that have taken place in Chinese society over the past five decades. The film explores personal and national memories. It shows the impact of large-scale economic and social changes on an ordinary Chinese family. It begins with my father’s death, which happened while I was chasing my artistic dream in New York City. Like many Chinese people, I had tried to forget my memories of family conflicts so I could achieve success. When my father died, I decided to look back at the difficult relationship we had. Throughout the film, I study my father and his era in order to understand where I came from and who I am. By the film’s end, I am able to set a new direction for myself, having carved out an identity and my own set of family values for my Chinese-American children.

Background and Context

*My Name is Jing* is a documentary essay film that follows my journey to reconnect with my father, who passed away in China while I was pursuing my artistic dream in New York City. This sudden family event made me ask, “What happened to us? What made us disconnect from one another? Where are my roots, and what is my identity? What shaped me and the world I left behind?” I decided to unearth memories of events from my father’s generation, and my generation, in order to understand the reasons for our deeply troubled relationship. Hemingway's
"iceberg theory" posits that "we write best from an overabundance of material." To understand what happened to my father and me, I needed to understand the very different Chinese societies we each lived in. I needed to research and process a lot of material about Chinese society and our memories. Personal and family struggles are not entirely isolated. My film is a commentary on the social problems that contribute to individual and family struggles.

My father belonged to a generation called “Born on the same day as the New China.” He was born in the early 1950s and grew up during the era of Mao Zedong. According to my father, he needed to draw a clear “revolutionary demarcation line” between himself and his father, who was considered a “class-enemy” during “The Anti-Rightist Movement” in 1959. My grandfather was critical of Mao’s Chinese government. He appeared to favor capitalism and was against collectivization. When he was sent to prison for his ideological beliefs, my family lost most of their wealth. My father then became the main supporter of the family and defended them from attacks and criticism. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, he became one of Mao's "Red Guards" and attacked families who shared the same ideology as his parents.

In 1978, the Chinese government established the “Open and Reform Policy”, a program of reforms to the economic, judicial and political systems. It has changed Chinese society rapidly over the past 30 years. In the 1980s, Chairman Deng Xiaoping modified Mao’s socialist ideology into a form of reform socialism. In Mao’s socialist ideology, “property ownership rests with the

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1 See Scanlan and Harris for further description and discussion of the writing style of Old Man and The Sea, P178 Harris.
2 See Rawski, for further description of “Open and Reform Policy”.
state, the economy is planned and centrally directed, and wealth is to be equally distributed” (Kwong 249).

The Deng government converted publicly owned resources to private ownership. It was the opposite of Chairman Mao’s socialism, which sanctioned public ownership. Julia Kwong writes that, “The political leaders did not attempt to do so on philosophical grounds. They ignored the contradictions. Instead they emphasized the pragmatic benefits and called themselves socialists” (249). The Open and Reform Policy concentrated wealth in the hands of a few powerful people who were well-connected in society. The economic disparity intensified and many people, including my father, were marginalized.

My father’s generation abandoned Mao’s socialist ideology. They were taught as children to embrace individualism and materialism with alacrity. They experienced a conflict between the Deng government-endorsed ideology and the materialistic “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” According Seung-Wook Baek’s book, “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” should be called “Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics”(67). Baek states that, “This is reflected in the fact that many private enterprises are registered as collectives while many small and medium state-owned enterprises have been transformed into private enterprises” (67). For example, my traditional family house in Beijing was confiscated for expressing communist ideas in my grandfather’s time. In my father’s time it was privatized for the new rich who claimed to believe in “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics”. The split between these belief systems became one of the main roots of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests, commonly

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3 See Baek for further description and discussion of the “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.”
known as the “Tiananmen Massacre.” This event left many Chinese young people heartbroken and disillusioned with their government. They felt hopeless about ever having a democratic political system in China and stopped believing that they could change the country through activism. The government managed this ideological crisis by channeling people's energy and attention into a frantic pursuit of materialism. Growing up in the 1990s, I saw many “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” slogans on national media, like “make money and become rich,” “material civilization,” “profit and efficiency,” and “material stimulation.” The use of this language represented a shift in China’s traditional values and away from Mao’s socialist values. I heard my family members greet each other by saying, “Wishing you riches and wealth” and “Wishing you a life filled with money.” Money became their god, and other values such as family, morality, and social responsibility were pushed aside.

When my father was middle-aged, he was laid off from a supposedly lifelong secure job in a government-owned factory. To keep up with society and give me a better life, he joined many other people in his generation and started a “Xia Hai” journey. Xia Hai means “jumping into the sea of commerce,” or “going entrepreneurial.” It was a term that referred to the wave of people who quit their stable jobs to start their own businesses. My father migrated to Shenzhen, which was designated as China’s first Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Shenzhen was one of the fastest-growing cities in the world, due to millions of migrant workers that flooded the city from all over China. The government endorsed and promoted the “Xia Hai” movement. Many people like my father were brainwashed into pursuing material gains as a primary goal of life.

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4 See Lionel, for further description and discussion of the “Xia Hai.”
5 See Ilaria, for further description and discussion of the “Shen Zhen.”
Cultural values guide and control the behavior of people in society. In China, the traditional values of hierarchical family relationships lasted for thousands of years, but significant changes transpired between my father’s generation and my generation. Under traditional Chinese family values, children were expected to fulfill their role of “Xiao Zi,” which means “filial piety.” It required children to make unconditional sacrifices for their parents. Children were described as “having ears but no mouth,” and Chinese parents had the power to decide their children's future. However, in my generation, the increasing sense of individualism and materialism challenged these more traditional values. I believed that many dramatic social changes, such as the Cultural Revolution and economic reforms, had distorted the values of my father’s generation. My parents’ dilemmas made me believe that their values were outdated and that their life experience couldn’t guide me in this new era.

Based on data from a website called “China Whisper,” my name, Wang Jing, was the thirteenth most popular name in China in 2014. There are 231,914 girls named Wang Jing, like me. Many of them live silent unassuming lives, like their name, Jing, which means “quiet” in Chinese.

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6 See Kwong, 254-255, for further description on how this traditional value and official ideology conflicts in contemporary Chinese society.
My generation was called the “80 hou generation”. 7 80 hou is slang in China for people born during the 1980s in Mainland China. 80 hous are also the first generation born during the enforcement of China’s one-child policy. The 80 hou is a generation of more than 200 million only children. The traditional Chinese virtue is to have a “filial piety (xiao zi)” son and develop family “xiang huo,” which means to extend the family name. The one-child policy conflicts with “xiang huo.” Also, since only boys can inherit the family name, girls were considered useless. My birth meant the death of my family name. I grew up listening to my father complain that if he had had a son, his life would have been much better. The one-child policy was the seed of our troubled relationship.

My Name is Jing tells a story about contemporary China from an 80 hou’s point of view. This film is not a sad story about losing my father. It is a story about growing up, accepting conflicts, and finding my identity. 80 hous grew up in a society that had social values and lifestyles dramatically changed by consumer culture. We grew up knowing more about American pop culture than Chinese traditional culture and the society we lived in. Like many 80 hous, I was rebellious, cool, and materialistic. We define ourselves through our opposition to our

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7 See Zimmerman for further description and discussion of the 80 hou generation.
parents’ generation. They were stuck in poverty and traumatic memories, and had boring and outdated lifestyles. I did not have a chance to question this identity until I moved to the other side of the globe, to New York City, and became a parent myself. My son’s birth in New York, followed by my father’s death in China, changed my point of view from that of a rebelling artist to that of an immigrant mother and a lost daughter looking for my roots.

Project Description

*My Name is Jing* starts with a black screen and me singing a folk song. An image of a ring of flowers in flames appears. My feet walk on snow, as I narrate, “My name is Jing. It means ‘quiet’ and it was one of the most popular names for girls born in the 1980s...” A montage of my free spirited New York life begins. Diary style iphone footage is used to express youthful, unformed energy. The montage is interrupted by the birth of my son in America and the death of my father in China.

I set out on a journey to go back to China to perform a proper burial for my father. It is also a journey to reconnect with my roots and visit sites from our past, to find answers about my troubled relationship with my father. I travel to the historical Jing-Zhang railway stations and to my family’s old house. Along the way, I also review family memories of historical events and draw a connection between personal and national memories. At the end of the story, I finally am able to organize family members to perform a burial ceremony for my father. For the first time, I am able to understand and connect peacefully with my father.
The ceremony marked not only the conclusion of our failed relationship, but also the beginning of a new perspective about the eras in which our stories occurred. At the end of the film, I am ready to face future challenges with my American children.

Thesis Production Process

My journey of reconnecting with my father is told through several symbols. My family’s old house in Beijing symbolizes my family story. The ruins of it tell the story of what my family went through over the past 60 years. After 6 years of studying in America, I went back to take care of my father who was ill. One morning, on the way to the hospital, I passed by my family’s old house, which was in the process of being demolished. It was surrounded by buildings and construction sites. It stands there forgotten, in the process of vanishing silently. It is a symbol of my family and of contemporary Chinese society. New buildings take over the landscape in the same way that new ideologies have taken over Chinese society over the past 60 years.

I went back to film the ruined neighborhood in 2016. I tried to find remaining structural details, which were like fractured memories of my family’s story. I wandered around looking for time prints, on walls and roofs. I also did a sound walk, capturing birds chirping, which was frequently interrupted by construction and traffic sounds in the distance. I also recorded a monologue on the trip of segments that floated into my mind and memory. Many of these segments later became my narration in the film. I also interacted with many people I met there. They saw me as a total outsider, a lost tourist. I tried to chat with a woman whose family was the last remaining resident in this neighborhood of ruins. When she spoke about the history of her
house, her face lit up. When I asked her what would happen to them next, she nervously walked away. This scene in my film is full of hidden meanings. There are many ways to interpret this scene, especially if you consider the social and urban development issues in Beijing.

![Image of three photos]

The above left photo, is my family’s old house. I took this photo in 2006, before I left for New York. The photo in the middle is the house I found in the ruins of my old neighborhood. The photo on the right was taken in the same location as my family’s old house in 2016.

The historical Jing-Zhang railway is an another important symbol. In the film I say, “I went back to the Jing-Zhang railway, where the story of my father and me began, and where it started to diverge… The same train took us in such different directions.” When I was a child, this railway transferred me between my parents, who were divorced. My mother lived in the departure station, Zhangjiakou City, while my father lived in the terminal station, Beijing. My father took this train when he left my mother and me to start his “Xia Hai” journey. Then he drowned in a sea of materialism.

I left my family and my homeland too. I started my journey of study overseas to pursue my artistic dream in New York. When I revisited the abandoned train stations along the Jing-Zhang railway, I realized we were all so busy and focused on reaching our destinations that we never stopped in those little train stations to appreciate the beautiful views along the train.
tracks. Similarly, in our one-dimensional life, we never paused to think independently. Making this film is my pause. I get off on a little train station full of memory treasures. The objects I filmed are my collection.

Jing-Zhang railway was the first railroad designed and built by Chinese citizens, in 1905. The train ran between Beijing and Zhangjiakou for more than 100 years until 2014, when it was abandoned to develop a high speed railway to connect the 2022 winter Olympic cities of Beijing and Zhangjiakou. My father passed away in 2013. When this railway was abandoned, I realized how many memories it carried for us. This lost train is a metaphor for the lost relationship between my father and me. Now, both the old trains and my father are gone. The old Zhangjiakou station has become a quiet, abandoned, deteriorated space. The train that transferred me between my divorced parents is still parked there. In *My Name is Jing*, my story evokes this vibrant past. A scene from my first film, which I made in my last year of high school, shows a teenage version of me getting on a train to run away from my family. It fades to footage of me on the train in 2011, which was my first trip back to China after six years of living in America. In between, there are segments that imply what happened to us. The train station is surrounded by skyscrapers and new buildings under construction. The train station is like an old man who has become smaller every time I visit. The old wall, which has “Time never gets old, we will never depart” written on it, can’t block out the sounds of cars and the smells of downtown, which permeate the space. The soul of the Jing-Zhang railroad has vanished with my father, like his generation fading out into history.
The two photos on the left side are from the National Library of China. They are photographs of the Jing-Zhang Railway construction in 1909. The photo on the right side is a photo I took in 2016 when I revisit the abandoned Zhangjiakou train station.

I filmed along the railway. I wanted to visit every train station I remembered. In the old times, the train would stop at almost all the little train stations. Local farmers would sell their fresh farm fruits and homemade food for passengers. Many of the old train stations are now abandoned or have been transformed into tourist attractions. Qing Long Xia station, one of the original stations, was built in the shape of “人,” a Chinese character that means “human.” For trains to move forward, they had to move backward first, taking a pause at the station. All trains that come here take a pause. People look at us, when we look at them. I realized it is a kind of symbolism: To move forward with life, I needed to go backwards, so I could set my memories in a resting place.

I describe my life in America as “Liu Lang,” which means “self-exile and unrestrained wandering.” During my time here, I have created works where I look back onto Chinese society from the perspective of an outsider, and criticize American society through the eyes of an immigrant. In this film, I continue this attempt through the more personal story of my difficult relationship with my father. Making this film became my language to express my emotional
struggles and journey of finding an identity. When my father passed away, I was surprisingly
grief-stricken. I began to view my life experience from a new perspective. I realized there are
huge gaps in my memory—I couldn’t remember a lot of things that happened during my
childhood in China. I realized that I had repressed the negative memories, so I could move
forward and chase my dream.

My New York life was like a kite; all I thought of was flying as high and as far as I could.
The thin string connecting me with where I came from could barely be seen in the background.
After losing my father, I became obsessed with finding archival footage of China, and gathering
memories about China. I was in Professor Anderson’s editing class during that time, and she
encouraged me to follow my heart and produce a piece with which I felt a strong connection.
Professor Tami Gold filmed an interview with me, and I started to view myself as a character. I
then began making a personal film about my father.

I started a journey to revisit my father’s paths in life by talking to many people from his
generation. I also researched books, novels, and movies on similar topics to understand our
personal stories in social and historical context. I realized that we were not suffering alone. I
found a link between national shifts and changes in my family structure. As members of society,
ordinary families pay the price of social change.

I have struggled to identify the truth behind stories. Memory can lie, and history can lie
too. The research process made me realize I can only document the journey of seeking my own
truth through memory. The past can be remembered two ways—history and people’s memory.
History is written by Orthodoxy in which, “Orthodoxy means not thinking--not needing to think.
Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (Orwell 53). Memory is an individual point of view about the past. To stop memories from vanishing, people create art, and write stories.

When I collected and read articles about China, I was surprised that I was able to compile so many negative stories about China, and that I was not able to see them in China. The American mainstream media criticism of Chinese society is especially harsh. For example, when all of China was cheering because Beijing became the host city of the 2022 Winter Olympics, The New York Times magazine announced the news with an article that opened with, “The final choice...was uninspiring...delegates that its famously bad air--not to mention lack of natural snow…” (Beech). I began to realize that the American mainstream media participates in another kind of “brainwashing propaganda."

Originally, when I started my undergraduate studies in the Film and Media Studies department at Hunter College, I wanted to follow my dream of becoming a fiction filmmaker, but I was drawn to nonfiction because, as an immigrant, I felt so many conflicts in my American life. In making this film, I realized my decision was right. I can offer an interesting point of view on the topic of China. My 10 years of education in America not only allowed me to explore education in English, but also gave me the privilege to experience American democracy firsthand. In the meantime, deep in my roots, I am still a Chinese citizen.

Form and Structure

This is an essay film with an experimental approach. I enjoyed connecting the “beats” of my memory to create a whole story. The structure of My Name is Jing follows a story arc as well
as an emotional arc. My story arc is similar to a traditional fairy tale, such as “Alice in Wonderland”. My Name is Jing opens with my American life, as I enjoy the freedom of finally pursuing my filmmaking dream and starting a new family. When my father suddenly passed away in China, I realize I have to face my past, because I won’t know what to tell my children when they ask me about their background. I go on a physical journey back to China to bury my father’s ashes and revisit places where family conflicts and other significant events occurred. I also journey back in time, visiting my family stories and the ways our experiences were shaped by the “rabbit hole” of Chinese history over the past 50 years. At the end of the film I come back to New York, but like Alice, my vision of the world I came from is forever changed.

At the beginning, I wanted to focus on telling a story through other people’s memories, because their stories echoed my story. I identified “guides” that would lead me through this journey, and interviewed them. Halfway through editing, though, I realized that including my voice in the piece was more important. Using first-person narration was the most powerful way to connect the personal stories with the broader research and to express my reflections on this journey.

Voice-over is an important creative element in my film. It sets tone, creates space, and builds character. It took many tries to craft my narration. “Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers’ Guide” helped me craft my personal voice-over. I was able to have a conversation with myself at different times, which creates tension. For example, this book includes an article written by Phillip Lopate called, “The Personal Essay and the First-Person Character.” It mentions that “The process of turning oneself into a character is not self-absorbed navel gazing
but a potential release from narcissism: You have achieved sufficient distance to begin to see yourself from outside” (Kramer 81). It was very helpful for me in crafting my voice-over, and it influenced my performance as well.

“Turning yourself into a character in your writing requires the understanding that you can never project your whole self. You must be able to pick yourself apart” (Kramer 78). My Name Is Jing features four versions of me: I am a rebellious daughter trying to heal the pain of a lost father-daughter relationship; I am a defector who rejected her roots and culture and is attempting to reconnect with my past; I am an immigrant mother who has to find a new identity to pass on to her American-born children. Finally, I am an immigrant artist who is finding her voice through the creation of this film. These different roles give me different roles to play in the story. I am a subject in the story, but I am also an outsider who observes my past.

My story is told mainly in English instead of in my mother tongue, Mandarin. Mandarin is a standardized language in which people lost the ability to express their individual thoughts and feelings. In Mandarin, it is difficult to separate personal feelings from the standard government-sanctioned reports of national events.8 In this film, Chinese words occur in the parts where the philosophical and social meanings embedded in Mandarin can best express my complex feelings.

English is a language I gradually learned after I separated from my family and from China. It is the language that allows me to express my independent thoughts, which developed

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8 See Chen for further description and discussion of modern Chinese sociolinguistics.
during my years of study in America. When I speak English, I don’t need worry about my family’s judgment. It also allows me to look back at my past from a new perspective.

The film’s style combines poetic observational footage and archival footage. When I filmed in China, I intentionally kept a physical distance from my subjects, “peeking” into their lives. There are many styles of cinematography to choose from, and I picked the most “unstable” one. My camera is always in the process of discovery, instead of making a coherent statement within a perfect frame. For example, toward the end of the film, a man walks in the abandoned Zhangjiakou train station. The image is blurry and he is at a distance. The shot fades into another shot of a Beijing neighborhood in ruins, peering into a new building through a broken wall, also with people walking in a blurry background. Then I walk into the front of the frame and gaze into the lens at the audience, which creates an awakening moment for the audience. These two shots are collected from different times and spaces. Both shots are from when I explored these spaces and suddenly had emotional connections between them and the story I wanted to tell. It is a moment of climax in the film that came from nature, and I am part of the story.

Stills from My Name is Jing, 2017, by Jing Wang.

Jia ZhangKe’s documentary I Wish I Knew inspired me, because of the way it transitioned between characters and spaces. I also love the color choices in that film. For
example, Shanghai, the main character's hometown, is represented through green and gray tones, indicating that people are isolated and live within their memories of the city. Many interviewees are facing a mirror which creates a reflection on their face as they remember their youth. It makes me think about the color of memory and how to differentiate and isolate memory from the present. When making *My Name is Jing*, I decided that New York should be bold, colorful, and full of unsettled energy. The color of China should be restricted to strong contrasting greens and reds. I also realized that red has been a very important color in Chinese society. It is the color of the revolutionary and the color of marriage. Red is also the color for death ceremonies, because a piece of red can protect you from being haunted by a bad spirit. Almost every shot of China in the film has something red in it. The red objects emphasize the conflict between the propaganda messages and people’s real life experience.

I also used symbolic objects to represents my strong internal conflicts. Fire is one of the symbolic elements in my story, especially when I think about the scenes of my father fighting with me. He used fire to burn my writings, so I would stop dreaming about being an artist. Later in life, fireworks became a symbol of the happiness that was missing in my family. Fire is also used when we burn ghost money and luxury goods in my father's ceremony. It became an element to communicate with the afterlife in order to send wealth to him. I also felt that I was finally able to know him, and to communicate with his spirit through burning. This is the intention behind the images of a fire burning, which start my film and end it.

In a society where people learned to be silent, singing at Karaoke bars gives people the opportunity to express their feelings with “safe” music and words. Popular songs became the
language my generation used to remember their youth. There are many popular songs in the soundtrack of My *Name is Jing*. Conversely, Peking opera is a kind of artform I grew up with, as my grandfather used to play his old cassette tapes every day, and he treated his music collection as his treasure. Now I realize that those Peking operas represented good memories of when he was still with my grandmother. I used to hate Peking opera because I felt it was old, boring, and too slow for our 80 hou generation. I wasn’t able to appreciate this artform until I started making this film.

It was my great pleasure to have Professor Kelly Anderson as my thesis adviser. When my father passed away, I was taking a Documentary Editing class with Professor Anderson. She encouraged me to move forward by “following my heart.” I made “Koi Fish” in her class, which was the beginning of making this essay film. I did another section of this film in Professor Shanti Thakur’s Hybrid Documentary class. I explored experimental and ethnographic filmmaking in Professor Michael Gitlin’s Microcultural Incidents class and improved my sound design skills in his Sound class. All of these experiences were invaluable as I worked on my thesis.

Making this film also challenged my vision about filmmaking. I used to think that a documentary could be completed in a short amount of time. After I spent four years on this film, I noticed that documentary films need time to grow.

Most of footage in *My Name is Jing* was collected during my trips to China. I filmed family members and gathered visual material. In my most recent trip, I brought a videographer friend to China with me to film the burial ceremony for my father. Through her lens, as a foreign
videographer, she helped provide another kind of gaze upon Chinese society, from a western eye. I hope this approach can help me communicate with western audiences.

Ernest Hemingway’s “Iceberg Theory” states that “the deeper meaning of a story should not be evident on the surface, but should shine through implicitly.” This theory inspired me to make my story using symbolic elements. I hope this film can be a platform, so people in China and outside of China can see it and come to their own understanding.

Finding my voice and my point of view for this film were the hardest things for me to do. I needed to go on a journey - physically, emotionally, and philosophically. First, I needed to study contemporary society, history, and Chinese philosophy. I also needed to figure out how to write and speak with my own voice. It’s especially challenging for someone who comes from another country and who doesn’t know much about writing or acting. It was like trying to write a great novel without a good pen.

Audience and Exhibition

In distributing My Name Is Jing, I will first reach out to the overseas Chinese community and audiences around the world who are interested in Chinese urban social topics. I will apply to film festivals that accept domestic, international, human rights, and other film topics.

I hope this documentary will give worldwide audiences an inside view of Chinese society. Most of mainstream media outside of China, especially American media, are accustomed to viewing Chinese society through a strongly critical lens. I hope this film can break

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9 See Scanlan, for further description and discussion of the writing style of Iceberg Theory.
this narrative by showing the point of view from someone who loves their country, China, dearly. It’s also a point of view from someone who doesn’t want to emulate western media but has to criticize Chinese society to make it better.

I am sure many Chinese audiences would feel a “deja vu” when watching and hearing my story, because family is the cell of society, and family memories are often connected to national events. I believe the primary audience for My Name is Jing are people from Mainland China whose families went through similar changes in contemporary Chinese society. They need a documentary, like mine, to activate their memories and think about their existence. I hope this documentary can be reflective for them as well. My biggest challenge in reaching out to Chinese audiences is the strong censorship of independent filmmaking by the Chinese government. In my film I have commented on several sensitive topics such as the Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, and criticism of the “Open and Reform Policy.” Even though my criticism is from a loving and caring perspective, my film and I may still be blacklisted. I may need to make another cut for Chinese audiences, which while not ideal will be better than nothing.

Since I spent my last year in the IMA program exploring new media and computer-based interactive art, I would also love to create an online version of my thesis project for Chinese audiences. It’s an important format because many of my potential audiences are young Chinese people who use social media. In China, a film has to have government approval to be shown in public. Even though there is a “Great Firewall” to block “inappropriate” websites, the Internet is
still considered the most democratic space for Chinese people to consume independent films. Short films and blogs are booming on the Internet, so I will create an online version of this documentary as the second version. In this online version, I will cut this film into five-minute short videos and write behind-the-scenes stories. Besides releasing them on my film’s website, I will also self-publish them in magazine format on WeChat. I will also post the segments one-by-one on both Chinese and American social media platforms.

In my film, I used some archival footage from other documentaries which were available in public archives. I used many popular songs sung by my family and me. I also used music I found on YouTube such as the Mongolian song, “Story of the Weeping Camel.” I felt I had to use this music because this song is sung to camels when a camel colt is rejected by its mother. In the song, a musician is needed to help the mother change her mind. I feel a strong connection with this song, because my film is about reconnecting with my lost father and family. I am contacting the artist for authorization to use this song in my work. I also would like to consult with an entertainment lawyer for advice on copyright issues.

Making this documentary, for me, has truly been a journey of finding my own voice to express my existence as an independent-minded Chinese woman, an immigrant mother, and a New York artist. My relationship with China changed over the course of making this film. I may appear to be critical of Chinese society, but the more I study and write about China, the more I realize it is a complicated love-hate relationship, like the one I had with my father. I need to study the issue more in order to understand it. I have to express my hate and write out these

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10 See Jiang, for more information about How the Internet influence Chinese (Un)Civil Society.
stories to find love again. Sharing what I have learned will allow other 80 houses to look at themselves and rethink the society they live in. Filmmaking is not a one-woman job, I appreciate my advisers, my professors, and my friends in the IMA community, who offered me unconditional help and gave me great suggestions in many key moments during this creating process.


