Chapter 1

Introduction: Nostalgia, Heritage and Class

I stood in the main building of the art district. It was a vast industrial space with a long, wide hall and a high, slanted ceiling supported by exposed beams. Natural light streamed in through a row of windows lining one side of the building, filling the interior with a bright and airy atmosphere. Located in a textile town on the eastern suburb of Xi'an — a city renowned as the ancient gateway to the Silk Road and the resting place of the Terracotta Army — this art district has been transformed from the ruins of a bankrupt Printing & Dyeing Factory in 2007. Like this factory, four other factories in the textile town were closed in 2008. Since then, the original sites have seen the rise of cultural projects and real estate developments.

Xu, a former textile worker, accompanied me. She had been a team leader on the preparation shop floor. After the factory's closure and the subsequent layoffs, she found work as a sales assistant in a supermarket. Although the art district was only a fifteen-minute walk from Xu's home, this was her first visit back to the site.

It was a very hot summer day, but when we entered the main hall, we felt pleasantly cool even though there was no air conditioning, as the building was well-ventilated. Xu seemed excited to return. Her large eyes blinked with curiosity, and her warm smile brightened her face as she spoke. She constantly compared the details of her past working days with the current situation before us: the two sides of the long hall were divided into a tea house, art gallery, coffee room, photographic studio, and various workshops where classes were held. But when we walked along the hall, we noticed that some spaces, which could be rented for commercial use, were vacant, with advertisements for leasing them posted on the windows. The contrast between the prosperity of the heyday, when thousands of workers labored together on the various shop floors, and the depression of the sparsely populated art district made Xu emotional. As we walked through the long hall, we saw three textile machines. She slowed down, moving closer to the machines, intending to show me how they operated, but a sign reading "Please do not touch" prevented her from doing so. Xu sighed, and complained that there was no opportunity to show me how the machines worked.

We could not find anything else related to the textile shop floor except for the building's inner structure and the three obsolete textile machines. Yet, this only seemed to deepen Xu's sense of

nostalgia. She began recalling details about how they worked on typical days and during the tough night shifts. Xu missed the simple, pure relationships she had with her follow workers, whom she called sisters. She expressed her frustration and pain about the factory's economic decline, which eventually led to the layoffs. Although she spoke in a calm tone, her teary eyes and deep sighs conveyed her strong attachment to this place. In the end, Xu mentioned that she needed to visit more often, even though it was no longer the place she once knew. Before I completed my year of fieldwork, however, this was the only time she revisited the site.

Xu was one of the thousands of workers laid off in the textile town a decade ago. Though no longer employed at the factories, they still reside in the nearby residential area, just a short walk away. Yet, like Xu, most of my other interlocutors rarely return to the places where they once worked. The pain of revisiting those memories is too overwhelming. It is as if an invisible boundary has formed between the factory grounds and their homes, a boundary making the apparent disconnect between their past and present. Yet, when they do cross that line and return to their former workplace, the nostalgia deepens their struggles with the experiences that have shaped most of their lives. The place they return to is now labeled as "industrial heritage," but only the physical structure remains. The tradition and legacy of the working class that once brought this space to life are nowhere to be found. Where are the workers who gave this place its soul? How can it be called industrial heritage if there is no working class here?

This study is about how working class people like Xu navigate their ruptures and connections between their past industrial experiences and their current engagements with heritage. I aim to establish a more specific connection between "class" and "heritage" and to explore how far the concept of heritage works for understanding class solidarity. I particularly ask whether "heritage" is useful for exploring class identities in a nominally socialist state. The story of an industrial community and its workers, who have lived through the social and cultural transformations, provides us with an effective way to reflect on this relationship.

Despite the closure of factories and the resulting disruptions in the transmission of heritage between past and present, workers demonstrate resilience and adaptability. They have the capacity to preserve their heritage and inherit working-class legacy in their daily lives. Nevertheless, the connection between workers and their former workplaces is multifaceted, involving a complex sense of nostalgia intertwined with pride and loss when reflecting on their heritage. By employing the concept of nostalgia, I examine how it connects industrial heritage with the working class. This analysis helps us understand questions such as: What does this nostalgia reveal about the nature of class? How do shifts in class status create nostalgia that might diverge from the actual experiences of work during that period? This nostalgic complexity challenges oversimplified narratives of class struggle and underscores the multifaceted nature of how the use of heritage reflects class complexity.

I further question unilineal models of "progress" and explore how "progress" and "heritage" serve to relate class identity to ideologies of social and cultural change. By exploring the relationship between workers and their factory community, my aim is to demonstrate that heritage involves not only preserving the past but also actively negotiating the present. These dynamics are evident in the

enduring disconnections between official narratives of "progress" and the lived realities of dislocation. To provide a clear structure for my study, I outline two main aspects of research questions:

- *Heritage*. What do the symbolic significance and value of industrial heritage mean for working-class people and authorities in the present, respectively? How has the socialist legacy influenced nostalgia and conflicts in contemporary China? What forms of heritage, beyond material conservation, can be integrated into daily lives and passed down?
- *Class*. Does class still matter? What does it mean to be socialist workers amidst the shifting dynamics of gender, identity, and class across generations? How does China's ongoing shifting class structure reflect changes in the political economy and politics, particularly within the context of the socialist factory's history, and subsequently influence the complex utilization of working class heritage?

I adopt an ethnographic perspective and delve into the daily lives of workers before and after the closure of a state-owned textile factory in the textile town. The stories in the textile town are able to demonstrate the diversity of heritage and the influence of class and power in determining which ones are recognized. This strengthens our understanding of "Critical Heritage Studies" (Harrison 2012), which critically examines how heritage is constructed, managed, and represented, questioning dominant narratives and power structure. What happened at the textile factory will illuminate these questions at the grassroots level, thus constituting a significant anthropological contribution to broader discussions on heritage politics and class dynamics. To delve into these dynamics, I aim to navigate through relevant literature and theories concerning heritage and class. This exploration will serve as a guiding framework for my research.

Nostalgia and Heritage

Upon entering the reconstructed traditional buildings, the old furniture and decorations transport us back in time. They have been carefully placed there to evoke a bygone era and an old way of life. This experience can evoke a sense of nostalgia within us, and we may find ourselves yearning for a simpler time. Nevertheless, this longing can be ironic to the local people, as the reconstructed heritage may represent an imagined, idealized, and distorted past. The reality is that even within this inner community, there are variations in how the past is remembered and interpreted. This raises a question: if we no longer see that it is the community that shares one single memory, then what is the intellectual significance of a variety of different memories and different kinds of nostalgia? To address this question, I divide it into two sub-questions: First, what do people remember, and how do they represent their lived experience when they feel nostalgic for the past? Second, how do people comprehend the past through heritage, viewing it as a form of cultural memory that both represents and reconstructs the past within a larger societal framework? These two concepts, nostalgia and heritage, are interwoven throughout the dissertation.

The term nostalgia is Greek in origin, and it consists of two words: *nostos* and *algia*. *Nostos* means returning home, and *algia* means pain. In an introduction to thoughtful research on nostalgia, Boym

stated that "nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (2001: xiii). In her study of the Soviet Union, Boym traced the emergence of nostalgia and showed the presence of a longing to return to a communist utopia that never existed. Nostalgia is neither a lament of loss nor a dissatisfaction with the present, nor is it a simple return to the better past, for as Boym argued, "one is nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past perfect that one strives to realize in the future" (2001: 351).

The emergence of nostalgia as a practice in people's everyday lives has become a common phenomenon the world over. Nostalgia is present in films, music, literature, social media, restaurants, and other nostalgic commercial products. As Lowenthal pointed out, "nostalgia is today's favored mode of looking back" (2015: 31). The German term Ostalgie, for example, combined *die Osten* (the East) and nostalgia, which emerged after the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Berdahl's (2010) observation, Ostalgie products, such as game cards, disco music, and GDR food brands, have become a major source of longing for aspects of life that existed in communist East Germany. The commercial dimension to Ostalgie products has successfully evoked people's shared memory, connected the past and the present, and combined personal experience and social production in various forms to thus generate "feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction — often within the same individuals (2010: 203)". These Ostalgie products underwent a shift "in value and demand," which means that nostalgia is a reflection of the present more than of the past. Thus, nostalgia provides us with an opportunity to rethink the relationship between the past and present, and it prompts us to delve into the interaction between personal identity and official history. This provides a way of resisting and struggling over dominant modes of knowledge production and power.

Nostalgia is not always present, but certain scenes do evoke it. Spatial arrangements can evoke nostalgic sentiment. The industrial museum, for example, establishes a connection that helps former workers recall their experience working on a shop floor, and it offers an effective way of making nostalgia come alive in a productive and emotional way. Smith and Campbell (2017) conducted interviews on industrial heritage with people from three countries. They found that when working-class people visited such industrial places, the visit helped these people to trace the history of the factory and the process of industrialization, and they recalled their memories of being part of the working class. These people were not just visitors to the industrial museum, rather, they became masters and storytellers of working-class history, and they even constructed their own history from this memorialization. Nostalgia can thus be seen as a force for radical and progressive change. Smith and Campbell further verified the positive effect that nostalgia can have. They argued that there is a distinction between "reactionary nostalgia" and "progressive nostalgia," and they suggested that progressive nostalgia is an effective and emotional way for working-class people to express themselves in order to "contextualize the achievements and gains of present day living and working conditions and to set a politically progressive agenda for the future" (2017: 613). In my study, textile workers expressed similar emotions when reminiscing about their past experiences working and living in the factory community. I will demonstrate how their nostalgia plays a productive role in evoking hopes for

social equality, a sense of self-esteem with dignity, and fostering class solidarity for the future.

Nevertheless, nostalgia can be used as a tool by a bureaucracy to distort and tamper with social and collective memory. In official narratives of recalling the past, nostalgia is always presented as an innocent and romantic emotion in order to invite people to forget the painful aspects of the past. Rosaldo (1989) argued that when mourning the loss of traditional societies, we must realize how complicit we are with imperialism. He introduced the term "imperialistic nostalgia" to describe this sentimental discourse: "the anthropological trope and the colonial official's curious longing for what he or she has destroyed" (1989: 120). Specifically, the colonial powers did not want the old cultural values to prevail; they dismantled past rituals and reified their remnants as museum objects, relegating them to an unrecoverable past. Building on Rosaldo's idea, Herzfeld (2021) proposed the concept of "bureaucratic nostalgia" to illustrate how the official state wants to destroy all traces of the old lifestyle, replacing them with a sanitized version that those whose lifestyle is affected would not even recognize as their own. An example of this is seen in the authorities' actions at Pom Mahakan in Bangkok, where commemorative signage was set up to acknowledge traditional activities that once took place but have since disappeared. Herzfeld used findings to criticize the political logic of eviction during urbanization, and he gave a further explanation wherein:

> ... bureaucratic nostalgia is a forced eviction from the present, which evacuates the community from historical time just as the authorities have banished it from space ... The bureaucrats' nostalgia is a weapon of structural violence; they use the mockery of those monumentalizing little notices about vanished streets to exorcise any trace of the lived reality and to deny it any hope of return. (2021: 154)

Indeed, when people talk about nostalgia, they always focus on *nostos* (home), but neglect *algia* (pain). Nostalgia relates to something really painful for people, but what the official state generally does is to conceal the painful side, only showing the beautiful surface and evoking a nostalgic imagination. The state asks people to forget the pain in order to build a positive image that will attract people with a connection to this romantic nostalgia, which it does to avoid people harboring resentment toward them. Thus, forgetting becomes a frequent occurrence during urbanization, and it only leaves a memory that has been distorted. Therefore, in my dissertation, I analyze how working-class people reclaim the aspect of "pain" in nostalgia, which is often neglected by officials who promote the labor spirit of the working class for socialist construction.

Nostalgia shares its territory with heritage all the time. Heritage is able to provide a theater in which memory could perform (Samuel 1994), and it can recall people's nostalgia vividly. The question that heritage brings up is similar to what nostalgia always causes: it simplifies a tension and contradiction between local people and official heritage discourse during the simple and selective process of heritage-making. Nostalgia can be used during a heritagization process. When local people experience nostalgia because they are dissatisfied with the present, local officials or business investors may use such sentiment to reconstruct architecture to bring about the past — the beautified and imagined past. This result, however, may enhance more nostalgic emotions. This can occur because

heritagization processes, as Herzfeld argued, "are not strictly nostalgic. They are, rather, products of nostalgia, stimuli for its production, or mere imitations. They usually only trigger nostalgic reactions when observers lament that they are 'not the real thing' — a bow to the rhetoric of authenticity and the sense of loss" (2021: 13–14). Therefore, in my study, it is crucial to ask: What are people nostalgic for? Do local residents genuinely care about heritage? And to whom does heritage belong?

Berliner (2012) explored the connection between nostalgia and heritage and analyzed how nostalgia works as a critical driving force in heritage-making when Luang Prabang became a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site in 1995. He found multiple nostalgic attachments engaged in heritage-making. These were all rooted in personal experiences, and they intersected with specific stances or postures toward time, history, heritage, development, and culture. The local elite and experts felt a sense of loss when UNESCO arrived, because few local participants were involved in the heritage-making decision, and they therefore feared they would lose the Luang Prabang spirit (2012: 776). Berliner asserted that people experience nostalgia even if it does not come from a firsthand nostalgic memory, and he viewed nostalgia "as a specific posture vis-à-vis the past seen as irreversible, a set of publicly displayed discourses, practices, and emotions where the ancient is somehow glorified" (2012: 770).

Understanding heritage politics requires ethnographic detail in order to uncover such powerful inequality. Herzfeld's (1991) analysis of the politics of heritage in Greece considered the political logic and cultural contradictions between history and modernity, occident and orient, and official ideology and social practice. The concepts of "social time" and "monumental time" help us understand the conflict between public memorization and official ideology. His critical discussion of heritage shows how it can be used, from various perspectives, as part of struggles with cultural identity in social practice. This is visible in Thailand too, where the residents in Pom Mahakan, one small community in Bangkok, also use history and heritage to struggle with Thai politics in order to protect their homes from gentrification and themselves from eviction (Herzfeld 2016a). These thought-provoking ethnographies encourage me to pay attention to local practice, listen to voices from the grassroots, observe conflict and resistance, and uncover political and social inequality. My study of the relationship between industrial heritage and the working class in the textile town is a profound example that demonstrates such inequality. The narratives unfolding within the textile town provide a view of the disjuncture between official models of "progress" and the on-the-ground experience of dislocation. I will use local cultural projects to highlight this discrepancy.

Nostalgia represents various forms of sentimental longing. In my study, the critical question is: who is nostalgic? And why? Nostalgia has multilayered meanings for different places, communities and people, and we should therefore understand what nostalgia means in local discourses. Analyzing nostalgia is an important way of understanding the relationship between the past and present, and it also offers the possibility of longing for the future. To understanding various forms of nostalgia and nostalgic practice, in my dissertation, I use ethnographic details when searching through the different layers of nostalgic longings to analyze the nostalgia's contradictions and conflicts. I will show the potential problem of expressing simple nostalgia in order to avoid a power imbalance and the social inequality inherent in sentimentalizing the past (Strangleman 2013).

Heritage provides a space for nostalgia to interact with class tradition and identity. Understanding whose heritage and nostalgia are involved, and how they all interact is critical to comprehending how people experience the past, present, and their longing for the future in a particular place. Therefore, identifying the relationship between nostalgia and heritage through people's everyday lives is an effective way of grasping their attachment to a place and their relationship to time.

Industrial Heritage and Working Class

The smokestack was a defining feature of many factories, and it stood for the prosperous industrial period. But how did the smokestack change after the factory closures? When exploring an industrial site that has been reused as an art district or other commercial space, the enduring presence of smokestacks never fails to evoke a sense of nostalgia. Despite the transformations it has undergone, the sight of these towering structures stands as a reminder of the glories of the past that workers have made. It shifted from being a material entity to becoming a visual symbol evidencing the inevitable trend of deindustrialization the world over, and it is remembered through the idea of "smokestack nostalgia" (Cowie and Heathcott 2003: 15). This, however, is not the simple memorization of the past; we should be aware of the smokestack's historical importance and the cultural meanings of the smokestack and other surrounding objects for contemporary society (Cowie and Heathcott 2003; Dudley 1997; Strangleman 2013), and then we need to delve into the impact of deindustrialization.

Deindustrialization is not just a phenomenon that happens in a particular place at a specific time, like in the Rust Belt, a steelmaking region of the US, in the 1980s (Bluestone and Harrison 1982). Thus, deindustrialization cannot just be understood as a factory shutdown or job losses. Cowie and Heathcott (2003) summarized the meaning of the deindustrialization process in the US, and they claimed that it is important to analyze "fundamental long-term historical trends" through a discussion of "spatial relations, cultural politics, labor organization, key transformations in the urban landscape, the political and social burdens that plague former industrial communities, the environmental legacy, and changes in social identity" (2003: 14). Thus, deindustrialization has a broader meaning of conveying a social and economic transformation that has complicated and crucial influences on places and people all over the world.

The phenomenon of deindustrialization has spurred efforts to safeguard industrial heritage, which has been increasingly recognized as vital for preserving the cultural identity and historical memory of communities affected by economic shifts. Since the signing of The Nizhny Tagil Charter by The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) in 2003, the practice of protecting industrial heritage has proliferated worldwide. Subsequently, The Dublin Principles were adopted in 2011, providing a framework for the conservation of industrial heritage sites, structures, areas, and landscapes (Douet 2013). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, industrial heritage sites are underrepresented on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites compared to other cultural heritage sites. Additionally, the sites listed tend to be concentrated in Western countries rather than other regions of the world. This illustrates the selection process for industrial heritage in the

West, as defined by Smith (2006) as an Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD). From policymaking and selection procedure to protective implementation, cultural heritage is consistently legalized and regulated through an AHD. This discourse holds persuasive power across international organizations and domestic bureaucracies. Nevertheless, to avoid the overly broad application of AHD, we must first consider who holds the authority to authorize it. Smith argued that what is chosen as heritage follows "western elite cultural values as being universally applicable" and neglects the people and places that do not match the aesthetic logic of the cultural and economic elite, which therefore "undermines alternative and subaltern ideas about heritage" (2006: 11). She mentioned two consequences of the AHD: one is the formation of "legitimate spokespersons for the past," and the other is that of treating the idea of heritage as innately valuable, wherein everything "good and important about the past has contributed to the development of the cultural character of the present" (2006: 29). Meskell (2013) criticized the artificial separation of material heritage and local people's experience, especially in UNESCO, for example, and argued that this represents a dynamic political complexity that links to the interests of nation states and various agencies. As he said, "The creation of heritage is also the creation of heritage conflict." Therefore, UNESCO has become a platform on which different stakeholders position their interests.

Industrial heritage does not only include factory buildings, machinery equipment, and monuments; it is also concerned with working-class life and communities, such as ways of using machines, festivals or events, oral history, pictures, songs, and literature (Smith, Shackel, and Campbell 2011). Working-class people who work, live, and experience everything in their industrial workplace and community have a capacity for self-expression that draws on their past, which they can use to remake the present and future (Dicks 2000; Keşküla 2013; Loveday 2014; Muehlebach 2017; Smith, Shackel, and Campbell 2011). Local practices offer us some alternative ways of understanding the relationship between class and heritage. For example, in the Durham mining communities, workers have begun rebuilding their community solidarity by revaluing the 1984/85 strike and reassessing the impact of deindustrialization (Benyon and Austin 1994). This process of "emotional regeneration" (Stephenson and Wray 2005) demonstrates that working-class residents possess the capacity to reinterpret and reclaim the meanings of their past.

What deindustrialization brings about is not only the physical destruction and ruins of the industrial landscape, but also a profound sense of nostalgia that permeates the community. Nostalgia offers an effective form of longing and hope because it has a "disruptive and unsettling force" (Bonnett 2015), and it has a future-oriented power that emerges from the memorization of working-class people (Smith and Campbell 2017). In recent years, industrial museums have emerged, and artist zones have been established in former industrial sites, signaling a shift in heritage politics. This phenomenon raises several questions: Why has this shift occurred? How can we interpret these new conceptions of heritage in relation to the values and meanings of industrial heritage? What are the effects of this shift on the reuse and reconstruction of industrial ruins? And when these ruins are repurposed to promote heritage tourism, how does industrial heritage tourism differ from traditional cultural heritage tourism? In this dissertation, I will show the different perspectives on such cultural processes that are

involved in the performance and negotiations of cultural and economic values, nostalgia, narratives, and memorization in the industrial community.

Establishing a more specific connection between "class" and "heritage" is very important. Critical Heritage Studies underscores the importance of acknowledging the diversity of heritages and the influence of class and power in determining which ones are recognized as such. Nevertheless, industrial heritage and the working class are always viewed separately. Lots of stories about industrial history, labor, and inspirational working-class people speak of the importance of this class and its history. Meanwhile, the preservation of industrial heritage, such as Iron Bridge in the UK and the Ruhr in Germany, provides positive examples for the textile town on how to preserve the industrial landscape and keep the industrial past vivid. Yet approaches to the phenomenon of industrial heritage that do not recognize its working-class origins — approaches often linked to gentrification — can disrupt the lives of working-class people (Morell 2012).

Industrial heritage is, by definition, passed on. In this study, I do not describe how to preserve industrial remains but rather examine how working-class people inherit their traditions and maintain their collective memory, even though their practices may vary from generation to generation, and this group may no longer exist. I will explore how they inherit industrial heritage and how they deal with breaks in this inheritance, which may be caused by official government approaches to heritage and by breaks in the memory chain connecting one generation to the next. There are three generations living in the textile town. Each generation laments that the present time lacks the purity, mutual understanding, and spiritual essence of their own era. A break in the affective relations also entails a break in the transmission of knowledge. Therefore, I aim to investigate the differences and similarities in yearning over the generations, and how their interactions and conflicts arise when they evoke the idealized past and the present reality.

We need to examine the transformation of working-class life and community if we wish to understand people's feelings of loss and hope, their hidden nostalgia, and their ambiguous attitudes toward industrial heritage. Other working-class communities have faced a similar fate amid social and cultural transformation. Caoyang New Village, for example — the first workers' community built in Shanghai and the earliest of its kind in China after 1949 — stands as a model for the development of working-class neighborhoods. Once celebrated as a "model community" and a symbol of social status and pride, the village has declined amid urban transformation and social change. Now recognized as part of the 20th-Century Chinese Architectural Heritage, it faces the pressing challenge, as Yang (2019) notes, of balancing heritage conservation with the need to improve residents' living conditions — a dilemma also encountered by textile towns. On one hand, the local government is eager to renew the buildings, which hold symbolic value in embodying socialist ideals and the spirit of solidarity. On the other hand, such renewal risks erasing the memories cherished by older generations and deepening class divisions, complicating efforts to foster an inclusive and meaningful heritage revival.

By exploring the intersection of working-class experiences and industrial heritage, I create a critical and empirical space, using the concept of nostalgia to analyze the symbolic meaning and value of industrial heritage. This raises important questions about the impact of industrial heritage

conservation, highlighting how it can inadvertently marginalize the very people it aims to celebrate. Nevertheless, such marginalization is often inadvertent but functions as deliberate symbolic violence, akin to bureaucratic and imperial nostalgia. To analyze how local officials use heritage to establish symbolic boundaries between working-class people and industrial heritage, I will employ a dynamic historical approach. This approach will examine changes in working-class everyday life and identity both before and after factory closures.

Class in China

What occurred in the textile town and the life stories of its workers raise the series of questions: How has the working class, once considered the master of the socialist country, seemingly disappeared? What new classes have emerged, and how have individuals transitioned into this new class structure? Why has this transformation occurred with minimal friction or upheaval? Additionally, how has the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) retooled the traditional socialist culture of class and work to suit its contemporary governance agenda? Lastly, what is the relationship between class and heritage in China's context, particularly given the evolving landscape of the country's class structure? To gain insight into the working class and industrial heritage in China, I will delve into the contextual background of China's political and economic landscape in the following sections.

Danwei and the Working Class in China

The fate of China's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) fluctuated alongside China's political and economic transformation. From the period of the planned economy to the market economy, state-owned factories have played a significant role in China's industrial development. In this period, the trajectory of the state-owned factories has been marked by a rise, development, and then a decline. The formation and reform of the state-enterprise system, which people in China always call the danwei (work unit) system, is commonly viewed as being subject to China's political and institutional system, and completed on behalf of it. The elements of state-owned enterprises include "a bureaucratic governance structure, distinctive management and incentive mechanisms, and the provision of social services and welfare" (Bian 2005: 1).

When and how the danwei system emerged and formed in China's history is the first important question to discuss. After the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), China's industrial and agricultural production was particularly low, and the country had a weak industrial base. By 1949, the pervasive poverty and the lack of industrial production had caused serious problems in social life. The kind of path that China should choose was the priority question for the Chinese Communist Party. Mao Zedong published an article entitled "The Present Situation and Our Tasks" in 1947, in which he proposed that the economic structure of New China consist of:

- the state-owned economy, which is the leading sector;
- the agricultural economy, developing step by step from individual to collective; and

- the economy of small independent craftsmen and traders and the economy of small and middle private capital.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with China. Two months after the foundation of the People's Republic of China, on December 6, 1949, Mao visited the Soviet Union for the first time. The main purpose of his visit was to ask the Soviet Union for help with the economic recovery and development. Since then, a series of economic policies came into force, and the top priority project was the construction of heavy and light industrial enterprises. Mass state-owned factories came into being.

Some scholars have asserted that China's economic approach during the 1950s was almost a duplicate of Russia's Stalinist model in the 1930s, and China adopted a Soviet-style system until the late 1970s (Cheng 1971; Dernberger 1999; Perkins 1991). Except for this external Soviet influence, what were the deep-rooted reasons that stimulated and mediated this approach to the Chinese economy as suiting China's situation? The formation and development of the danwei system offer a distinctive answer. Some scholars traced the original roots of the danwei system back to before 1949. In her analysis of labor policy and the communist labor movement, Perry (1997) argued that some skilled workers from Shanghai's communist labor movement from the 1920s to the 1940s then became the Party's leaders and formulated policies that turned the state enterprises into institutions that offered lifetime benefits in the 1950s. Lü (1997), meanwhile, suggested that the free supply system (*gongjizhi*) and the Communist Party's self-reliant economic role took shape in wartime and also gave rise to the structure of the earliest danwei system. Bian (2005) discussed the endogenous and exogenous origins of the danwei system and offered a thought-provoking analysis, describing how the crisis triggered by war motivated the formation of state-owned enterprises. He focused on the history of how heavy industry, such as weapons production, developed during the Sino-Japanese War, and how the strategy of "path dependence" strengthened the management of the state-owned enterprises.

The textile town in Xi'an is a typical example of the state-owned textile factories that were originally built from the early 1950s. In this dissertation, I trace the history of constructing the textile town from the level of national policy to local practices. The purpose of returning to history is to answer a series of questions: why did the New China require the expansion of light industry like the textile industry? Why and how did it choose the eastern suburb of Xi'an as a place in which to build textile factories? What was the construction process for the six factories in the textile town during the first five-year plan (1953–1958)? What role did the Soviet Union play during this period? And how did ordinary people overcome difficult conditions when building factories? Did this historical process affect their identity as socialist workers?

To understand the character of the danwei system, we should view it as a dynamic process and not only focus on its formation but also observe what kinds of interaction it promoted between the government, managers, and workers. In the socialist period, danwei divided urban space up into self-sufficient units with a clear boundary. Danwei was not only a place of work; it also provided other social facilities including housing, medical care, and education that benefited various generations. Bray's (2005) analysis of how the danwei system was organized as the predominant sociospatial form

and self-sufficient unit provides us with a productive way of thinking about the political and social logic of the danwei system. As he said, "Political and economic strategies of government in China have impinged upon the everyday lives of the urban population" (2005: 1). Bray combined a Foucauldian genealogical methodology and Henri Lefebvre's theory of space to analyze the reformation and reform of the danwei system. He traced the traditional Chinese "wall" concept back to Confucian cosmology in order to discuss the political and cultural function of the "wall" in the spatial organization of the danwei.

I agree with Bray's argument that the danwei system was not the simple extension of state or Party-centered control in a negative way, rather, it entailed "positive technologies productive of particular relations of spatial practice" (2005: 20). In my study, the positive elements come from the dynamic labor process on the shop floor. I focus on daily routines and activities on the shop floor, and on how workers produced knowledge and formed a habitus from danwei. I argue that the social practice of workers both working and living in danwei formed a productive way of interacting with other workers and family members, and it enhanced their sense of belonging and collective sense of honor when working in a socialist state-owned factory.

Danwei is not an isolated island surrounded by a wall, and it is not a self-sufficient utopia. Rather, its rise and fall has closely followed China's economic and social changes, and workers' fates have been deeply affected by the policy of reform. The economic reforms began in the 1980s, and they introduced a socialist market economy. The opening up of the Chinese economy for foreign direct investment, a free market, a commodity economy, and private enterprises was part of significant reforms made to the Chinese economy during the 1980s, and these reforms decentralized and privatized the political and economic structure. The 1990s was the main period of the SOEs' institutional reform. This included the transformation of enterprise operating mechanisms, the establishment of modern enterprise systems and the reorganization of state-owned enterprises. The *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Major Issues Concerning the Reform and Development of State-Owned Enterprises*, adopted by the 15th CPC Central Committee on September 22, 1999, was the cornerstone of the SOE reform. It strengthened the reform process and had a profound influence on workers all over the country, which then led to more than sixty million job losses between 1993 and 2006 (Hurst 2009: 1).

Working-class people, who were one of the most influential groups, have been significantly reshaped by policies and practices under the influence of economic reform in late socialist China. China's economic reform has brought tremendous social, economic, and political changes to industrial structures and working-class society. Workers who devoted most of their life to the socialist construction, however, have been neglected and excluded by the rapid urbanization. The term for laid-off workers in China, *xiagang*, was pervasive over the last two decades. Mass layoffs were widespread and caused crucial social problems. Despite some efforts to ease the unemployment situation, finding a satisfactory solution was difficult. Scholars presented a description of the painful and miserable experiences of laid-off workers. To hear the voice of *xiagang*, for instance, Hung and Chiu presented how ordinary workers comprehended their private troubles, with their wrath over "their betrayal by the

state" (2009: 113).

I trace the reform of state-owned textile factories in the textile town not only in terms of the historical background and policy analysis but also in terms of individual workers' responses to the reforms. After the SOEs' reform and the bankruptcy policy, workers in the textile town did not escape the reality of being laid off. They suffered a great deal during this period; they felt angry, disappointed, sad, and even felt betrayed. But life has to move on; what happened to the workers and how did they deal with such difficulties? Workers' remembrance, forgetting and commemoration, and the everyday practice of struggle, resilience, conflict, silence, and concessions provide us with important details about this tough period. I describe the complex nostalgia linked to having been a textile worker, now caught between a sense of pride and loss. On the one hand, they were very proud that they were socialist workers, and they recognized themselves as the masters of the socialist country. This pride was rooted in a sense of security and dignity. On the other hand, what they were proud of, in turn, led them to now feel a sense of loss and precarity.

The workers with whom I talked had already experienced the SOE bankruptcy process over ten years ago. Therefore, my study differs from the other literature on laid-off workers in that I focus on their changing perspective on this dynamic process. Ten years of experience since being laid off has affected their attitude toward danwei, and it has led to changes in the working class's identity, which has shifted from a collective class consciousness to individual neoliberal ideas. This also relates to the production of industrial heritage. The workers' attachment to their danwei and the later break in that connection has resulted in complexity and contradictions vis-à-vis official practices of industrial heritage. The workers' sense of pride and loss are certainly part of this heritage, as these emotions demonstrate how workers reinterpret and reflect on their traditions and experiences, and then inherit them in different ways in their daily lives.

China's Shifting Class Structure

The history of danwei and the working class people are part of a larger story behind the changes in the political economy and politics associated with China's ongoing shift in class structure.

During the Mao era, the urban class structure in China adhered to a hierarchical framework. The "state cadres" (guojia ganbu) comprised only 5% of the total workforce and approximately 20% of the urban labor force, holding esteemed administrative, managerial, and professional roles, and enjoying above-average privileges (Bian 1994; Walder 1995). Despite the urban working class being enshrined as the "leading class" and fundamental to the socialist regime, there existed a substantial disparity between them and the state cadres, both in terms of authority and economic standing. After the reforms in 1978, increased marketization led to a more fragmented and less clearly hierarchical structure, fundamentally reshaping the societal order. The question of whether state cadres still enjoy privileges compared to emerging occupations such as entrepreneurs and intellectuals has garnered significant attention from scholars (Oi 1992; So 2003; Walder 1994). Despite a series of reform policies and practices, it is evident that state cadres continue to leverage their political and social capital, ranging

from high-ranking officials to local government representatives (Duckett 2001; Nee 1992).

Since the economic reforms of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in China by 1998, marketization and housing privatization have profoundly altered the landscape of lifetime employment and collective benefits (Davis 2000), while also fostered dynamics of social stratification focused on disparities in market status (Davis 1995). Unlike the pre-reform era, where cadres held top positions of authority, the emerging "market socialist" economy significantly undermined the foundational structures of the previous hierarchical system (Bian 2002). Subsequently, social change has diversified significantly, witnessing the emergence of numerous new occupations and social demands. Chinese working class structure is experiencing profound change. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBSC) in 2023 reveals that state-owned enterprises employed merely 56.12 million individuals, constituting only 7.3% of the total employed population for that year (NBSC 2023).

This prompts the question: who else comprises the working class? China's integration into the global economy and the labor market's diversity unveils various forms of employment. For instance, there has been a noticeable surge in the number of "hired workers" in the private sector, fostering the expansion of the emerging social class during the urbanization. It has also resulted in an increased presence of "migrant workers" — a newly emerging and increasingly influential demographic within the Chinese labor force — migrating to urban areas, facilitated by the more flexible hukou policy. A significant portion of migrant workers are involved in manual labor, such as construction work, signaling an increase in "informal employment" within the industry (Swider 2016). Migrant workers play a crucial role in urban development, yet their relationship with local residents and government officials is often complex, characterized by both cooperation and conflict. They face the constant risk of eviction, which further compounds their already precarious and fragile situation (Liu 2015; Shi 2008; Xiang 2004; Zhang 2001). As a result, many individuals previously employed in state sectors faced layoffs, alongside migrant workers, leading to the emergence of a new urban poverty stratum.

Defining the working class is not straightforward; we must also examine it in light of other class transitions, such as the emergence of the middle class. Unlike the middle class that emerged in 19th-century Europe, China's middle class carries a more nuanced meaning, and determining whether the newly emerging class belongs to it requires examination. For instance, Goodman (2010) suggested that as China underwent significant changes after 1978, the rise of a new wealthy class did not mirror the emergence of the bourgeoisie during the industrialization of 19th-century Europe. In contrast to historical Europe, China's affluent newcomers often maintain strong ties to the existing political system, suggesting they may become central figures of the future ruling class. The lifestyle of the middle class has increasingly become a symbol of identity, reflecting both socio-economic status and consumption habits. For example, where one lives or the type of property one owns can symbolize their social standing. The privatization of real estate has notably heightened class distinctions, as the spatial organization of urban areas reflects and reinforces class differences. This process is driven by the evolving dynamics of urban governance. Housing privatization has dismantled the previous system of welfare housing provided by danwei, leading to the emergence of a new middle class and its associated lifestyle (Zhang 2012). In addition, intellectuals have emerged as the most innovative

segment, with science and technology playing a dominant role in production. While intellectuals played a significant role as part of the working class in Chinese history during the Mao era, New Class theories propose that in post-capitalist societies, it is the intelligentsia rather than the proletariat that is moving toward positions of power (Gouldner 1979; King and Szelényi 2004).

China's political and economic reforms have led to significant inequalities, which the government has not sought to eliminate but rather to manage through various modes of governance. For instance, the term "class" is no longer prevalent in popular discourse; instead, "social strata" is used to emphasize cultural distinctions, helping to manage a society that has become more stratified. As argued by Anagnost (2013), the middle class is actively constructed through a new model of citizenship that positions it as a source of value production. This governance strategy separates the new social class based on consumption patterns, encouraging the majority of the population to aspire to a "dream image" of the middle class. This approach not only stimulates further economic growth during the reform era, but also masks the social inequalities by reinforcing cultural differences in a hierarchy of national belonging.

This is why I want to delve back into the forgotten communities of the working class, seeking to understand this shift in the discourse on class. Class has not disappeared but persists in subtler, more concealed and contradictory forms. While class discourse still remains among older generations of workers, among their descendants, the aspiration for a middle-class lifestyle has led to a greater disconnection from the traditional inheritance of the working class. The emergence of industrial heritage discourse appears, on the surface, to revive the past of the working class. Yet, it actually serves as an attraction for the consumption of middle class or those aspiring to be middle class. This dynamic represents a mode of social governance that not only fails to safeguard the working class's heritage but once again marginalizes the working-class people who still living in the old industrial communities by discarding the notion of class and its attendant values.

The emergence of new social classes over the past two decades reflects China's transition in economic and political contexts, reshaping the relationship between the state and the public. State governance is more than just top-down policy implementation; it is a form of governmentality (Foucault 1991) that interacts with people's daily lives. Zhang's concept of "late-socialism" encompasses various forces, including marketization, privatization, globalization, and the enduring influence of the socialist system (Zhang 2001). These forces not only impact changes in class relations but also shape the lives of individuals today. The three generations of textile workers I focus on are influenced by these multifaceted forces. Nevertheless, they are not passive actors manipulated by external forces; instead, life difficulties have compelled them to exercise agency in navigating social change. While the pride of their past as a significant working class remains with them, it is also the root of conflict and pain. I aim to portray the past and present of these textile workers, discussing their transformation as a working class. I argue that the working class has not vanished; rather, with increasing class diversity, it has integrated into other social categories of laborers. Importantly, the working class is not merely a status symbol for them but a way of life that can be passed on as industrial heritage. Therefore, I will detail their productive labor process on the socialist factory floor and how they have adapted to

working in new state-owned factories and private enterprises under late-socialism. This exploration aims to understand how, amidst the process of class change, they have incorporated their socialist-era working-class tradition and experience into their new work and life.

Neoliberalism in China

Neoliberalism has become a popular but controversial term for scholars interested in discussing the social and cultural transformations that capitalism and globalization have brought with them. As Ganti (2014) and Kipnis (2007) noted, neoliberalism has grown to become a term ubiquitous in anthropological journals; it seems to be crucial to understanding recent changes in everyday life. The principal elements of neoliberalism include privatization, competition, responsibility, self-management, and self-improvement, and it is a structural force or ideology of governance embedded in policymaking and individuals' daily lives. Anthropologists' ethnographies have demonstrated practices linked to neoliberalism throughout the world. For example, Molé (2010) analyzed how the effects and implications of neoliberalism affect labor exclusion and work conflicts in Italy, and her work has also indicated that neoliberalism has given rise to a growing sense of apprehension and fear among Italian workers. Tran (2015) focused on how neoliberal reforms have had implications for new models and discourses on the emotions among the middle-class residents of Ho Chi Minh City. Matza (2012) discussed how psychological education has affected people in post-Soviet Russia through a governmentality perspective, and he suggested that attending to both subjectivation as an ethical practice and social history can help to understand the capitalist present effectively. According to Ganti (2014), anthropologists have adopted a critical understanding of neoliberalism on various topics, and they understand it in three ways. First, as a structured force, neoliberal policies and politics affect people's lives, such as through fiscal policy and collaboration (Riles 2013) and neoliberal welfare-state reform (Molé 2010; Muehlebach 2013b; Yazici 2012). Second, neoliberalism as an ideology of governance shapes subjectivities; this understanding focuses on the technologies and knowledge through which neoliberalism governs people in order to bring about the self-regulation and self-management of subjectivities (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002; Craven 2007; Matza 2012). The sites and agents of neoliberal practice are a third way in which neoliberal ideology and policies are engaged. The growth of NGOs, for instance, intersects with the policy and ideology of neoliberal practice as an agent that seeks to decentralize and privatize the political and economic landscape (Ganti 2014: 97).

Anthropologists who explore topics related to neoliberalism expand our understanding of how this economic and political ideology affects both the state and individuals. Nevertheless, the ongoing debate over the appropriateness of the term "neoliberalism" serves as a reminder of our tendency to overuse and misinterpret concepts in contemporary society. It often seems that every phenomenon, regardless of its location around the world, can be explained and justified by applying the modes and patterns of neoliberalism. But the critical question we should ask ourselves is whether we truly comprehend the history, significance, and ramifications of the concept of neoliberalism. Is neoliberalism a universal phenomenon, or is it a specific practice within local knowledge? And does the term hinder our

understanding of cultural and social transformation? The 2012 meeting of the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT) provided critical insights into the use of this term (Ganti 2014). Supporters argued that the term provides a framework for understanding the relationship between the state, organizations, and individuals in a changing world, while opponents feared that it may obscure deeper and more complex issues within specific localities.

The debate over the use of the term "neoliberalism" in ethnographic research reminds us of the importance of adopting and using the term carefully in specific local contexts. It is essential to acknowledge the structural forces and ideologies that underlie neoliberalism's practice and its impact on people's thinking, behavior, and freedom of choice. The widespread use of the term, however, can obscure real problems if we attribute all problems solely to neoliberalism. For instance, as Ferguson (2006) asserted, Africans in various social and geographical contexts seek to assert their membership within a global community, which calls for new understandings of the global and neoliberal world orders. Therefore, as anthropologists, it is our responsibility to avoid applying the term too indiscriminately in different situations and to be mindful of our interlocutors' perspectives. In my study, I attempt to use the term critically to analyze the local knowledge and practices that emerged in late socialist China.

The literature on neoliberalism in China is also very rich and insightful. We should not neglect the historical context when we talk about neoliberalism in any place. This is equally true in China, where the critical questions include the following: how do neoliberal policy and ideology occur? And how do they affect people's lives and change the relationship between capitalism, governance, and subjectivity? Since the economic reform in 1978, a series of government decisions have been implemented to modify the previous political significance of the Cultural Revolution. Under the slogans of market "reform" (*gaige*) and "opening up" (*kaifang*), China has shifted focus from political campaigns to economic development. Throughout the 1980s, China established special economic zones (SEZs) in coastal areas, formulated fiscal and monetary policies to stimulate economic recovery, and gradually loosened its management of rural-urban migration. It has brought about rapid economic benefits, partly solved poverty-related problems, and changed peoples' living conditions. But at the same time, this has resulted in social inequality. During the 1990s, more policies and practices were introduced. The reform of welfare and state-owned enterprise has deeply affected most people's daily life. The main question is whether such reforms are led by neoliberalism, and, if so, how those neoliberal policies affect individuals' lives.

There are two common approaches to neoliberalism in China, and they relate to the discussion above on anthropological approaches to neoliberalism the world over. The first derives from a Marxist paradigm that regards neoliberalism as the effects of structural reform. It talks mainly about the economic reforms since the late 1970s, and how the reforms have resulted in a social and cultural transformation and have affected everyone's daily life. The second concept draws on Foucault's notion of governmentality (1991), which examines how knowledge and technology are used to manage subjectivity through everyday practices. It particularly focuses on how individuals are made docile by being led to police themselves. These two approaches always intertwine. The main focus on

neoliberalism concerns whether China has become a neoliberal country, and how China engages with the process of neoliberalism. In terms of how the state mediates market reform, Liew (2005) analyzed China's engagement with neoliberalism in relation to three factors: path dependency, industry policies in geography, and Party self-reinvention. The growth in a discussion about neoliberalism provides an opportunity for microlevel analysis in anthropology. Some scholars think there are several major characteristics that show that China is undergoing a neoliberal process of restructuring and a shift to neoliberal capitalism (Anagnost 2004; Rofel 2007; Yan 2003). In her deep description of "desire" as a key cultural practice that both the government and citizens pursue in postsocialist China, for example, Rofel (2007) examined how neoliberalism can be linked to a reconfiguration of the relationship between subjectivity and postsocialist transformation. In contrast with Rofel, however, Nonini (2008) asserted that China is neither becoming a neoliberal country nor is it undergoing a neoliberalization process. Rather, China's logic of rule, which the Communist Party of China's (CPC) leaders call "market socialism", is entirely different from Anglo-American neoliberalism, as the Anglo-American neoliberalism is challenged by disenfranchised classes.

The problem of applying a neoliberal paradigm to China, like the debate on neoliberalism I mentioned before, is an overarching trope. Nevertheless, how does neoliberalism impact Chinese society, and how is it manifested within the Chinese context? Some ethnographies provide insights into how neoliberalism is implemented in China. In his comprehensive study of Chinese party schools, Pieke (2009) introduces the term "neo-socialist" to analyze how neoliberal ideas cooperate with Chinese market principles, Leninist party organization, modernizing reforms, and party priorities within Chinese party education. This blend leads to the emergence of a distinct neo-socialist governmental discourse, which can be identified as one of the key factors contributing to twenty-five years of economic growth and social stability (2009: 6). In a subsequent article, Pieke (2012) specifically examines the transformation of neoliberal ideas of public management into the concept of "social management", which has increasingly become a prominent aspect of the Party's neo-socialist project. Kipnis (2007) provided two case studies that criticized the use of neoliberalism in China. In his discussion on China's concept of *suzhi* (quality) education, Kipnis unraveled how suzhi is used in myriad ways by actors ranging from the state to individuals. He demonstrated that the spread of suzhi, driven by the promotion of authoritarianism, may have a stronger governmentality effect. Additionally, the concept of suzhi is influenced by Chinese nationalism and is rooted in both Confucian and Marxist traditions (Kipnis 2007). Therefore, he asserted that the reified use of neoliberalism needs to be analyzed to avoid the holistic tropes that cover the differential representation of neoliberalism. Kipnis (2008) then followed this approach to discuss audit culture in China. In Western academia, audit cultures in schools are frequently criticized for their association with neoliberal ideologies (Shore and Wright 1999). When Kipnis explored the complexities of audit culture in China, he discovered that performance audits are characterized both as "socialist" and as a form of "neoliberal governmentality." He traced the idea of self-discipline and self-cultivation that originated in the historical context with, for example, classical philosophers in ancient China. Then he described how the new social effects came from the audit culture, which is heterogeneous in the sense of "governing from a distance". Anthropological

theory and ethnographic comparisons play a crucial role in analyzing the form of neoliberalism present in a given context. It is true that, for example, if we ignore "the interrelations among written plans, official pronouncements, off-the-record comments, and observed social practice" (Kipnis 2008: 285), then it is hard to grasp the contradictions and tensions occurring in a particular place when we face neoliberalism.

I find the discussion of neoliberalism useful when looking at China, neither because China has become a neoliberal country, nor because China perhaps simply borrows neoliberal ideological strategies when dealing with domestic and international issues. Rather, it is a productive way of understanding the dynamic process of social and cultural transformation through the changing interrelations between the state and individuals. My research is about workers' everyday lives before and after the factory closed down, which were deeply affected by economic reform policies. If we are to ask whether a series of economic reforms implemented by state-owned enterprises (SOEs) has been affected by neoliberalism, then we need to analyze the shift and the consequences that such policies bring with them, and we need to pay special attention to how such policies affect the lives of working-class people.

Therefore, in my dissertation, I analyze not only the political and economic background of the reform and the details of the shift in regulations, but I also concentrate more on how individuals experienced such changes. I describe historical images of workers' everyday routines on the shop floor and their social life in the welfare housing that forms their home. I then present details about the SOE reform and how the reform policy affected those workers and their families, with an emphasis on their complex sentiments: their disappointment, anger, struggle, and their survival strategies. Next, I consider their resistance, adaption, negotiation, and reciprocity in order to show how their subjectivities are changing ten years after the factory closure. This is not a set of independent phenomena combined to show the changes, rather, it is a historical and dynamic process that individuals have experienced and that covers their adjustments when dealing with the changes. In this process, how neoliberal policies such as the bankruptcy policy, the retrenchment of social welfare, and the privatization of state-owned factories and public goods affect workers' ways of living and working offers a window into local practices linked to discussions of neoliberalism.

Despite some similarities between appearances and the form of neoliberalism in this dynamic process, I challenge the patterns of "neoliberal governmentality" approach that describes a way of understanding individuals' subjectivity. I do this by analyzing how habitus and *guanxi* (a network of relationships) formed in the factory still affect their working and social life. Specifically, I criticize the idea of "neoliberal governmentality" from two aspects. First, workers needed to find new jobs to get by after being laid off, but because of their limited knowledge and the deskilling trend, it was difficult for them to find satisfying jobs. In this situation, neoliberal policies were manifest through an agency that offered various training classes and certificates, (for which the government had handed over responsibility to the agency) that claimed to provide useful techniques and skills to help workers gain fresh employment. At last, however, such practices became marked by formalism, inefficiency, and even complicity (Steinmüller 2013). In contrast, the workers' reemployment relied on their own

guanxi and reciprocity with their friends from the factory or relatives. Thus, we need to unravel the contradiction between neoliberal policy and social relations like guanxi in local practices.

Second, when the laid-off workers found new jobs, their punctuality, strong work ethic, sense of responsibility, and easygoing characteristics was positively evaluated and led to their receiving compliments. Did such advantages come from the neoliberal governmentality that workers learned during the reemployment training? Or was it their self-discipline gradually cultivated in the new workplace? I use the ethnographic method to uncover what has hidden behind these performances, and I use Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (1984) to demonstrate some levels of adaptability among the workers while they maintained a sense of continuity with their historical practices. I discuss how the previous habitus formed from their experience working on the shop floor affected them and helped them to adapt to the new working environment.

In addition, the practice of industrial heritage can be discussed as logic of neoliberal policy useful for understanding the relationship between spatial arrangements and subjectivity. The cultural policy of protecting industrial heritage has been implemented in old industrial places around the country recently. Specifically, in the textile town, one textile factory became the art district, and the local government also created a Soviet-style street. I observe these two heritage projects in order to investigate heritage politics as a form of neoliberalism. My study elicits more narratives on previous textile workers' views on industrial heritage. As I described before, workers seemed to care little about how the factory turned out, but they then felt very emotional and nostalgic when they sat on the shop floor. I believe these contradictions indicate their complex relations with the spatial changes, and I analyze why workers' voices are neglected by heritage policy in practice.

Doing Fieldwork in the Textile Town in Xi'an

Xi'an is my hometown. I grew up in southeast Xi'an, went to university in the city's east, and worked in south Xi'an up until I went to the UK for my second master's degree and then to pursue a PhD in the Netherlands. My return to Xi'an to complete fieldwork was actually a challenging task, not only because the fieldwork was conducted in a community that I had never visited before, but also because that city is my hometown, and so I needed to rethink my position in relation to the fieldwork, and I had to consider how to balance anthropological "others" with myself — as a person familiar with the city but unfamiliar with this community that forms part of the city. Although an increasing number of anthropologists return to their own country, city, or community to do research, often called "anthropology at home" (Jackson 1987), I also needed to pay attention to the limitations of such an approach. I am willing to explain what I consider "others" to be in this research, and my interest in what makes people "others" is partly what motivated me to pick this topic.

One thing I have learned from anthropologists is how I can turn my gaze inward and see myself reflected through other people's everyday life. I understand "others" as not only a group of people you do not know but also as the distance present in the relationship between the researcher and their informants. This distance is not only a physical one; it also links with other essential factors. This

distance is a dynamic process. It has already narrowed down at the beginning when an anthropologist chooses one place over another and selects one group of people over others. When the anthropologist goes to this place and talks with others, lives with others, and experiences everyday life with others, the distance, both physical and cosmological, ever decreases up until you leave. Chinese researchers doing fieldwork in urban China may to experience less difficulty than those conducing fieldwork in Thailand or Estonia and speaking Thai or Estonian. Nevertheless, this assumption is flawed. It is often harder to conduct fieldwork "at home" because phenomena that an outsider might find interesting seem "too obvious." Additionally, one's relatives and friends may try to interfere in unhelpful ways, which can pose more challenges in dealing with complex *renqing* and *guanxi* (Yan 1996), making it difficult to grasp the "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2014) through verbal, gestural, and other forms of interaction with others.

I had never been to the textile town's community before. The residents and workers who live there were total strangers to me. But some aspects of my positionality did positively affect or also limit my practice in the field. First, I used the same language (Mandarin) with my interlocutors, and I even speak the Shaanxi dialect, although not very fluently; this sometimes helped me to reduce the distance between myself and my informants. Second, although I was a newcomer to the textile community, this did not mean that I was totally unfamiliar with workers' life and the state-owned factory. In the 1980s, state-owned enterprises were still the main economic force in urban China, and most of the urban people worked and live in a *danwei* (work unit). During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, for roughly six years of my childhood, I lived with my parents in the workers' community of a state-owned watch factory in a southern suburb of Xi'an. I still remember snapshots of my childhood, such as running through the buildings of the work unit's housing, playing with friends whose parents were work colleagues of my parents, visiting the shop floor where my parents worked, and going to public baths with my mother, or the primary school just ten minutes' walk away from my home. After this short but very happy six years, our family moved to central Xi'an, and everything changed for me then. Therefore, while I cannot remember a lot about my childhood, I still have some feelings or connections with the factories and workers. This is why I was so excited when I decided to study workers and industrial heritage in a textile town in Xi'an.

During the fieldwork, I took my parents to visit the textile town several times. These visits always sparked their memories of having worked and lived in another state-owned factory — the watch factory community — although they left this community in 1995. When they walked under the tall sycamore tree and saw the dilapidated Soviet-style buildings that stood neatly by the roadside, nostalgia overwhelmed them, and they recalled many stories that happened in their *danwei*. The work unit (danwei) existed as a semi-isolated community that functioned as a 'small society' (xiaoshehui). It transcended the traditional boundaries of a workplace by managing the total social needs of its members, offering lifelong and intergenerational access to housing, medical services, and schools. The fate of danwei has fluctuated along with China's political and economic transformation. From the period of a planned economy to that of a market economy, danwei have played a significant role in China's industrial development and social stability.

My plan is to preserve the memories that I fear losing, and document the stories that I fear forgetting, as a way of continuing the legacies of the factory and its workers that have been taken away from my own life but that continue in the lives of others. Additionally, I feel that it is my mission to write a story about my parent's generation, depicting their struggles with the shift in social and cultural norms during late socialist China. This motivation explains why I chose this topic and conducted the fieldwork in a workers' community. During my first month in the textile town, the socialist housing, Soviet-style architecture, boulevard with sycamore trees, and the huge shop floor in the art district always brought me back to the imagined past of the 1980s and the 1990s. My parents also had similar feelings when I took them to the textile town. It felt as if we had fallen into an "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) and ignored reality. But after I had stayed in the textile town for longer and spoken with more people, I realized that my motivation at the beginning was a kind of "simple nostalgia" akin to that of the middle-class "urban explorers" (High and Lewis 2007) whose activities resonate with Romanticism. I may have experienced the "denial of coevalness" (Fabian 2014). I neglected this coevalness: the textile town was not in the 1990s and was not an imagined past because workers had been living in the factory community and had experienced real life, and real social and cultural change. I therefore then paid more attention to "intersubjectivity" (Fabian 2014) and focused on their own history and current everyday life.

But my imagination before the fieldwork period was very useful. It helped me to rethink how I anticipated, or failed to anticipate, my actual experiences in the field. Under these circumstances, my whole fieldwork changed form. During the fieldwork, forty-six people acted as my interlocutors. If we also include their family members then I talked with around one hundred people in total. I conducted fieldwork with ten informants in their current workplaces too. In sum, the fieldwork consists of three sections. The first part began in November 2017, and it continued up to March 2018. During this period, I accessed the field, met and talked with former textile workers and their family members, and observed their everyday life. In the workers' community, people knew each other. Although the factory had closed down ten years ago, most workers still lived in the same community. It was easier for me to form connections with more and more residents. They knew one another, and they recommended other workers to me very enthusiastically. This helped me to find similarities in working class families and also differences between individuals. In this period, retired workers were the main group that I focused on. This was because they had more time to talk with me and welcomed me into their homes. We cooked together, watched television, or completed outdoor activities like morning exercises or going to the outdoor market. In this period, I collected data mainly about workers' labor and social life in the factory through oral history, and with help from materials like pictures or memoirs, the past became more vivid. I completed informal interviews frequently too. I listed my questions before I talked with someone, but I found that my following their rhythm was more appropriate. It is easy to list interview questions in chronological order for a researcher, but for workers, the past exists in their memories, and their narratives about the past do not mean they are standing in that past moment; rather, they are standing in this present moment and are looking back at the past. Consequently, they always compared the past with the present. At times, individuals would share emotional narratives

about their experiences, while at other times, they calmly and objectively recounted events from the past. It is important to understand the context in which these stories were told, and how they differed across various situations.

The details I collected about workers' past days in the factory are not the whole story of their lives. After the factory was closed down ten years ago, most of them found other jobs and have since been working elsewhere, but they still live in the textile town. Thus, except for the retired workers who described their work after being laid off, I paid more attention to the former textile workers who were now employed elsewhere. It was impossible for me to observe how they worked in the factory in the past, but I could compare their current work with their narratives about the factory work in order to understand the dynamic labor process, their work and life habitus, and their everyday practice. Therefore, the second section of fieldwork was conducted from June 2018 to November 2018, and it concentrated mainly on those workers who had been laid off ten years ago but who had then found other jobs elsewhere. During this period, I followed them from the textile town in which they still live to their various new workplaces, such as supermarkets, shopping malls, restaurants, schools, shops, and other companies. Also, there is a new textile factory which is a combination of the previous five textile factories, and many former textile workers are employed in the new factory. This therefore provided me with another opportunity to gain a further understanding of the labor process in the textile industry, and to delve into the inner tensions present on the current shop floors. This fieldwork, which included my moving across sites, offered insights into how spatial changes affect workers' current work and life. It also provided me with more opportunities to dig into the relationship between the past and the present, and it helped me to understand how my interlocutors employed specific strategies to reproduce the social space.

My initial interest in this project stems from my first visit to the art district, which is a site at which one textile factory has been reconstructed and repurposed. But when I asked the factory workers how they felt about the art district, they displayed indifferent attitudes: most had not even been there, although it was just a ten-minute walk from their homes. This initial interest prompted me to figure out the relationship between industrial heritage and the working class; why did these workers seem uninterested in the art district, when it was in their former workplace? A simple walk around the art district was not an effective way of answering this question. Only when I understood the working class's past and present daily life could I understand what industrial heritage means to them. This is why the first and second sections of my fieldwork focus on workers' everyday life.

What industrial heritage means to working-class people is a central theme running throughout my entire dissertation. This is why I took walks with my interlocutors to the art district and observed their complex sentiments. During the last section of my fieldwork, from May to July 2019, I revisited industrial heritage sites, such as the art district, and focused on ongoing cultural projects in the textile town. This included a Soviet-style street, which was the local government's attempt to revive the area. Through this fieldwork period, I gained a deeper understanding of the contradictions between industrial heritage and the working class. I finally understood that industrial heritage is not just limited to physical places like the art district; it is also manifest in workers' everyday lives, and in how they

draw on the past and interpret the present. All in all, I demonstrate in this dissertation that the working class still matters.

Dissertation Structure

In this dissertation, I present my findings on the working class and industrial heritage, drawn from a thirteen-month fieldwork in a textile town in Xi'an, China. Apart from the introduction, the dissertation comprises three main parts. In **Part One** I focus mainly on the historical details about the textile workers in the textile town. Specifically, **Chapter 2** opens with a description of how the textile town was constructed as an industrial project in one of the oldest cities in China during the First Five-Year Plan (1953–1957). I describe how workers from diverse dialects and backgrounds settled in the textile town. They worked tirelessly to build the factories and endured harsh conditions to contribute to the construction of socialist China. Nevertheless, their efforts were ultimately met with bankruptcy and layoffs. While individuals may have limited power to determine their fate, I also demonstrate how they, as agents, actively resisted, adapted to, and negotiated changing circumstances. **Chapter 3** provides shop floor ethnography, delving into the labor process and workers' subjectivity in both the old and new factories. I offer a comparative analysis to understand what workers memorialize and why they feel nostalgic. By examining the daily routines and activities on the shop floor, I aim to demonstrate that nostalgia is a complex emotion that cannot be reduced to a mere longing for a simpler or better past. Instead, it arises from the intricacies of the labor process and its various cultural, social, and emotional dimensions. This analysis sets the stage for a deeper exploration of their everyday lives after the factory closed down, a topic discussed in Part Two.

Part Two shows what happened to the textile workers following the factory closure and their layoffs. In **Chapter 4**, I uncover how workers struggled with precarity when they worked in other places. I describe their commute, their working tasks, and what strategies they used in the new workplace. Even though they had left the state-owned factory many years ago, their resilience and strategies intertwined with the guanxi and habitus that had formed during their previous experiences in the factory; nevertheless, in their new workplaces, their guanxi and habitus were reified in various new ways. In this chapter, I present a new perspective on how habitus and guanxi can be viewed as forms of industrial heritage that working-class individuals can inherit to deal with life difficulties when their life situation changes from one of security to one of precarity. In **Chapter 5**, I explore the strategies textile workers use to navigate these changes. By employing the term "strategies of adjustment," I aim to shed light on their paths of resilience, compromises, and negotiations as they navigate shifting circumstances amid social changes. Their life experiences vividly demonstrate how individuals can adapt to crises, ruptures, and contradictions, while also navigating intergenerational relationships, gender dynamics, and friendships. I aim to demonstrate the essential role of the working class identity, as it shapes people's memories of the past and thus influences their attitudes towards the ongoing changes in the present.

Part Three focuses on industrial heritage as a method for revitalizing old industrial places amid

social change. In particular, in **Chapter 6**, I focus on how and why the heritage discourse, the reuse of industrial ruins, and the renewal of the factory community do not speak to working-class people effectively in this textile town. To examine the impact of the renovation of the industrial ruins and the factory community, and to address questions of “whose heritage?” and “whose nostalgia?”, I focus on two projects in the textile town: the art district and the Soviet-style Street. I use these examples to demonstrate the complexity and contradictions of different actors engaged in the heritage discourse. Furthermore, these cases shed light on distinct layers of nostalgia — bureaucratic nostalgia and social nostalgia — offering profound insights into the social and cultural dynamics that underlie industrial heritage. In **Chapter 7**, I argue that understanding collective and individual memory in such nostalgia is an effective way of learning what industrial heritage means for working-class people. In the ethnographic part, I show how the government and working-class people share a sense of nostalgia, but even though their presentation of how they remember the past is similar, especially in relation to the glorious heyday, the meanings attached to their respective nostalgia are not the same. **Chapter 8** serves as the conclusion, where I present my ethnographic findings. I revisit the central themes of heritage and class, aiming to draw out some of the broader implications of the study.