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The warp and weft of life: heritage and working-class nostalgia in a Chinese textile town

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Chapter 8

Another Kind of Restitution: Back to the Working Class

In the context of industrial heritage, the evident absence of the working class emerges as a recurring phenomenon, casting a shadow over the official historical narrative. This raises a thought-provoking question: how can industrial heritage conservation — ironically, rather than paradoxically — lead to the marginalization of the very people it supposedly to celebrate? The stories that happened in the textile town offer a critical view of the disjuncture between official models of “progress” and the lived experience of dislocation. The individuals in the textile town seem to be excluded from the social history narratives we commonly encounter. They do not fit the conventional profile of migrant workers contributing to urban development, nor do they resemble the emerging middle class enjoying relatively stable social status. Why has their experience been overlooked or neglected?

In recent years, the last group of SOE workers in the textile town, including those who were laid off and reemployed, has reached retirement age. They appear to have been overlooked by the urban development and are gradually fading from the stage of history. Nevertheless, with the growing recognition of industrial heritage and the state’s strong advocacy for its protection and reuse, urban renewal has initiated the reproduction of the industrial remains. Despite this resurgence, the former SOE workers remain the forgotten component of industrial heritage. The stories happened in the textile town challenge the conventional narrative, emphasizing the importance of concentrating on working-class people and their cultural traditions within the discourse of industrial heritage. In this conclusion, I aim to reveal why we need to concentrate on working class people and their cultural traditions when it comes to industrial heritage.

Class Still Matters

Just as my fieldwork came to an end, the Chinese government introduced top-down policy guidance and implementation measures for the protection of industrial heritage. In November 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered a speech during his visit to Binjiang, Yangpu district in Shanghai,

proposing an urban development goal: transforming “industrial rust belts (gongye xiu dai)” into “livable beauty belts (shenghuo xiu dai).” It is worth noting that both terms contain the word “xiu.” Although they share the same pronunciation, their meanings differ. The first “xiu” means “rust,” and refers to the oxide of metal surfaces, implying rustiness. The second “xiu” has two meanings: one denotes beauty and elegance, while the other is an internet buzzword derived from the English word “show,” meaning to show off or perform. By comparison, “industrial rust belts” symbolize outdated, underdeveloped industrial areas, whereas “livable beauty belts” represent urban spaces in transition, beautified through improvements in living standards and the environment. Shortly thereafter, in early 2020, the National Development and Reform Commission, together with four other national departments, jointly issued the “Implementation Plan for Promoting the Protection and Utilization of Industrial Heritage in Old Industrial Cities.”¹ This national-level regulation aims to implement industrial heritage protection and utilization through a top-down approach.

Subsequently, according to the national policy guidance, many local authorities formulated their local work plans. Almost every document title used the term “livable beauty belts.” For example, in the city where the textile town is located, the Xi’an municipal government issued a work plan to promote the protection and utilization of industrial heritage.² This document outlines an implementation plan for creating a heritage list, conducting heritage identification, and strengthening the protection and utilization of industrial heritage. In the section on protection and utilization, the document specifically mentions the preservation of industrial heritage in the textile town:

... the concentrated area of industrial heritage in the textile town centers on the state-led relocation and transformation of old industrial zones. This initiative aims to deeply explore the cultural significance of the textile industry, accelerate the revitalization of old streets, factory areas, and buildings, and promote the development of cultural and creative industries. Additionally, it seeks to enhance homestay experiences, sightseeing tourism, and leisure and wellness industries, ultimately creating a textile industrial cultural and creative commerce hub alongside a livable production area.

At the same time, the textile town is also an example of a key project implementation. The document states: “Relying on the Xi’an textile old industrial base railway dedicated line, Xibei Yiyin, and the No.3 factory areas, etc., a series of scientific, demonstrative, and stimulating industrial heritage protection projects will be implemented.” The goal is to “promote the integration of industrial heritage protection with the enhancement of Xi’an’s urban image, creating a model area for industrial heritage and a tourist destination.” An attachment to the work plan clearly outlines the division of responsibilities among the involved departments. The plan includes a total of 22 tasks, each assigned a leading department along with several cooperating units.

¹Details of the implementation plan can be found at <https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfb/tz/202006/P020200609555028859020.pdf>. Available access on 26th March 2023.

²Details of the work plan can be found at <https://files.parkworld.net/files/8d9921eff0380eb/download>. Available access on 26th March 2023.

In addition to reviewing policy documents from Xi'an, I also examined documents from various other municipal governments. I found that their main contents are largely similar, all centering on the formulation of local policies based on national guidelines. As a country with a long industrial history, China has many cities with old industrial bases and districts, and the industrial heritage listed in local documents often reflects distinct regional characteristics. Nevertheless, what I would like to emphasize here is how little attention is paid to working-class people. They are either excluded from the policy-making process or have only limited participation in preservation efforts. The top-down policy shows how to build "livable beauty belts," but livable for whom? Whose needs and interests are being prioritized in the name of development process? The policy masks the deeper social implications of the tension between neoliberal process and the displacement of working-class communities. Herzfeld (2017) argued that the concept of "beautification" as a form of urban development is a product of global modernity, which imposes a middle-class aesthetic in the crypto-colonial dynamics in Thailand. This approach poses a threat to existing ways of life and often ignores the social needs of poorer residents. Similarly, Ghertner (2015) explored how a particular world-class aesthetic emerged in Delhi. He illustrated how urban governance, shaped by aesthetic norms, led to the marginalization and displacement of communities. Similarly, in China, the policy of reusing and rebuilding industrial space reveals neoliberal economic demands that prioritize class-based urban purity over the needs of local communities, perpetuating the same process of beautification.

Although policymakers present the transformation of the old industrial districts from a "rust belt" of the past to modern "livable beauty belts" as significant urban planning, it is crucial to recognize that this characterization — framing the transformation as a simplistic dichotomy between past and present, backwardness and advancement — oversimplifies the complex and multifaceted processes that have unfolded in these areas. This narrative highlights the disjuncture between social time and monumental time, revealing the state's aspiration to create something of historical permanence. By focusing on monumental time, however, the everyday experiences of ordinary people seem to vanish.

Contrary to the state's portrayal of nostalgia as a picturesque and delightful reminiscence, it is, in reality, a poignant and complex experience for local residents. The state's attempt to diminish the pain and present a selective, beautiful narrative is a form of bureaucratic nostalgia — an effort to manipulate perceptions. This operates by acknowledging the existence of a community that once thrived, now gone, while overlooking the enduring presence and effort of those who continue to inhabit and shape the community. Despite the imposition of monument time and bureaucratic nostalgia, people are pushing back. They resist through their memories and ongoing experiences, challenging the narrative dictated by monumental time. Therefore, my research aims to spotlight stories of those excluded by monumental time and bureaucratic nostalgia, providing an alternative perspective to social memory and nostalgia based on their lived experiences.

In fact, both heritage policy and its implementation emphasize the reproduction of physical space, often preserving the structure of factory buildings while changing their functions to create new attractions that can better meet economic demands. Therefore, we need to understand whose symbolic attributions are being placed on industrial heritage and how heritage policies are enacted through the

repurposing of industrial heritage sites to generate cultural and economic value. Specifically, industrial heritage policy focuses on protection measures that leverage old industrial districts to develop the tourism industry, establish innovative cultural hubs, and facilitate the establishment of various cultural industries within the framework of industrial heritage. Ultimately, this approach reproduces cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) by emphasizing the economic value of industrial heritage as a tourist attraction and match for middle-class aesthetic. Indeed, industrial heritage has symbolic significance because it represents the collective and social memory of an industrial past and its transformation over time. But the heritage politics use such “collective memory” and romantic nostalgia to legitimize the neoliberal process of urban beautification. This shift prioritizes the aesthetic and commercial value of heritage over its social and historical significance, ultimately leading to the commodification and gentrification of industrial neighborhoods.

Therefore, the symbolic significance of industrial heritage should be understood in a critical and nuanced way, taking into account its complex dynamics and the potential social problems it may generate. We should not only focus on how old industrial communities are transformed into heritage spaces, but more importantly, we must understand why heritage politics often fail to prioritize the participation and empowerment of local communities, especially working-class people who have lived in these communities for several generations. We should also consider the need to protect not just physical spaces, but the ways of life and the knowledge embedded in working-class traditions. Class still matters. We need to analyze why and how working-class communities and their way of living have been excluded. When introducing the concept of class into the discussion of industrial heritage and other social topics, we can expand our horizon to reflect the significant role that class plays in shaping historical industrial traditions, labor dynamics and cultural practices.

The concept of heritage is not limited to physical objects or locations but encompasses a dynamic cultural process that involves the expression and interpretation of cultural values, stories, memories, and significance (Smith 2006). In my research, I delve into the complexities of working-class heritage, examining how working-class communities negotiate and perform their cultural identity in the present, as well as how they remember and forget their past. I aim to provide a new perspective on critical heritage studies (Harrison 2012) by exploring the nostalgia of working-class communities and their contradictions with the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Smith 2006). When using AHD, we need to identify the source of authority. In other words, who is making the decisions? This helps us better understand the dynamics of heritage politics and the power imbalances between local people and authorities. This exploration intends to bring attention to the cultural heritage of working-class communities, which is often neglected or marginalized by dominant heritage politics. The goal is to demonstrate that working-class communities have their own voices, but they lack platforms to express them, often being overlooked in official historical narratives and urban development processes.

Secondly, the importance of class remains relevant, as it offers deeper insight into the relationship between individuals and place. Topophilia, as described by Tuan Yi-Fu, is the affective bond between people and their place or setting (1974: 4). He also stresses the crucial role of experience in shaping this bond, and further elaborates on how our perspective of experience can affect our relationship with

a place (Tuan 1977). It is true that, by incorporating the concepts of experience and affective into the concept of class, we can better understand the specific locations where individuals are placed and the relationships between them. As Perry (1996) highlighted, labor politics in China is largely shaped by the politics of place. I have also shown how the establishment of factories and workshop culture provided workers from various regions with a sense of place, fostering meaningful relationships during the labor process. These relationships created a community of shared rights and responsibilities that persisted through new forms of *guanxi* and reciprocity, even as the community began to disintegrate due to factory closures, layoffs, and reemployment. This connection between people and place is a deep attachment, as seen in the enduring bond between generations of the textile workers and the textile town.

Furthermore, class still matters, which allows us to gain a better understanding of the political logic behind various neoliberal policies. In China's neoliberal process, for example, the classification of class has been weakened, and individuals have been simply grouped together as an "imagined community." This approach aims to minimize class conflicts by prioritizing social stability and projecting a harmonious social atmosphere, aligning with the official assertion that China remains a socialist state. Nevertheless, this approach may lead to the disregard of the needs of the poor, potentially aggravating social issues. The emphasis on "beautification" in urban development projects can conceal underlying social contradictions and the persistent existence of structural violence. In this context, the working class is situated in a controversial situation, influenced by neoliberalism and gradually losing its agency. Nevertheless, self-representation by the working class can play a crucial role in rebuilding a class identity with significant social meaning. Their past experiences can become a powerful force in the fight against social inequality, enabling them to reclaim control over historical narratives and heritage discourse.

My research on working-class individuals has revealed how their class consciousness has evolved over time and how they utilize their class traditions and history to negotiate with the past and employ strategies in the present. The concept of "class" is not static; it undergoes dynamic changes within the global labor market. As Massey (1995) argues, the influence of global economic forces on local labor markets has led to the emergence of new spatial divisions of labor characterized by disparities and uneven development. By examining the process of changing class identity and memory through class self-representation, we can gain insight into the power dynamics that underlie the disregard of "class."

The Future of Nostalgia

I have chosen to draw inspiration from Svetlana Boym's (2001) insightful book, "The Future of Nostalgia," as the title for this session. Boym discussed the diverse manifestations of nostalgia, revealing how they intricately intersect with a wide range of ideologies, cultural traditions, and the intricate dynamics between society and individuals. She introduces the idea of two distinct types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia. The former aims to rebuild and romanticize a vanished past, driven by a longing to revisit a bygone era or construct an idyllic version of history,

while the latter entails a more thoughtful and introspective approach to the past, recognizing its intricacies and paradoxes. In an argument somewhat similar to Boym's, Smith and Campbell's (2017) thoughtfully distinguish between "reactionary nostalgia" and "progressive nostalgia," and emphasized that using the past can shape sentiments and foster emotional dedication to the social justice causes that the Left greatly desires. These researchers offer a comprehensive understanding of the origins of nostalgia and its potential future trajectory within the context of a rapid transforming society. In my research, I also delve into the profound complexity inherent in nostalgia. Here, I would like to reflect critically upon some fundamental inquiries.

The first question is whether nostalgia is primarily a psychological or a social phenomenon. As an anthropologist, I treat nostalgia as a social construct rather than merely an individual psychological phenomenon. Nostalgia emerges from individual experiences, but also affected by collective and social memories. By studying nostalgia, I strive to comprehend its significance within social and cultural contexts, and its influence on memory and social practices. The second question involves exploring the social aspects of nostalgia, particularly by considering the models of nostalgia that are invoked. A convergence of models from different sources has here allowed us go further details on the process of nostalgia and its influence on social phenomenon. What models of nostalgia we are invoking also connect to the larger question of how to deal with sentiment and emotion in research that is primarily social. While addressing this question, it is valuable to engage with works on the anthropology of emotion, as it provides insights into different approaches and frameworks. But it is crucial to distinguish between the mere expression of emotion and the emotion itself. The affect theory offers us a perspective to understand how everyday life is embodied within complex political, economic, and cultural transformations, particularly since the emergence of the "affective turn" (Clough and Halley 2008) in the 1990s. As anthropologists, our focus lies more on the representations of emotions rather than the emotions themselves. As Navaro-Yashin posed the question, "What resonates as affect in the different geographies that we study as anthropologists?" (2017: 210), we are prompted to explore diverse forms of representations, such as attachments, intimacy, empathy, hospitality, reciprocity, and more. It is important to recognize that these forms often overlap and contribute to the complexity of the phenomenon. Hence, we must approach the forms of affect as social phenomena, allowing us to delve into the intricacies of affection and emotions.

The study of nostalgia could potentially expand affect studies. Nostalgia could be seen as a form of affect, which is also the representation of a social phenomenon. The complexity of nostalgia is further reflected in the different traditions and modernization processes of various countries. Simple models of nostalgia cannot fully encompass the working-class nostalgia towards their industrial past. Just as in the field, I constantly feel that the expressions of nostalgia among the workers are a contradictory sentiment: they are both nostalgic and aware that it is not worth nostalgia; they both yearn for home and fear returning home.

Nostalgia could provide us a possibility to seek out the commonalities in the representations of shared emotions. Nostalgia, a sentiment experienced not only by individuals but also by states and the broader public, does not always conform to a simplistic dichotomy of positive or negative.

Instead, it possesses the potential for convergence, offering a platform for shared experiences and a sense of collective identity. I refer to this phenomenon as social nostalgia, encompassing the collective yearning for moments, places, and experiences that evoke a sentimental longing within us. Underneath the surface of shared nostalgia, it is important to recognize the inherent contradiction between bureaucratic nostalgia and the individual's intricate longing for the past. This yearning for bygone times is intertwined with the fundamental values of dignity, empathy, respect, pride, and security, representing the essence of cultural preservation when confronted with an industrial past. Additionally, industrial nostalgia possesses the potential to serve as a social force, empowering workers to shape narratives and even assert their legitimacy. By tracing back to the origins of nostalgia, both individuals and authorities have the opportunity to deepen connections and foster a collective sense of belonging. It is essential to ensure that all these possibilities are rooted in the respect for workers' rights to express their experiences and the way of life in the industrial past and present.

Socialist nostalgia in China offers a fresh lens through which to examine the complexities of modernity and the neoliberal way of life. Given China's rapid economic and cultural transformations, the nostalgia for its socialist past has become increasingly intertwined with people's everyday experiences. In her insightful book on China's modernity, Rofel delves into the narratives of women workers who recount the "bitterness" of their socialist working past (1999: 137–148). Rofel highlights how these older female workers challenge the prevailing narrative of the past by reclaiming their identities as socialist heroes through the practice of "speaking bitterness" (1999: 129). My own conversations with textile workers also proved this phenomenon that they often emphasized the hardships they endured during their working years and the immense bitterness they "ate." But what I find particularly captivating is the nuanced divergence that exists within the community and across generations when it comes to nostalgia. Specifically, among the first-generation members in the textile town, there is a resonance with Rofel's depiction, as they perceive themselves to hold a special social status as the pioneers of the factories. Despite the hardships endured in the 1950s and the challenging material conditions, they maintain a deep sense of pride and optimism from that period. Their nostalgia serves not only as a way to retrace the factory's history but also as a means of reaffirming their identity, as they believe they are the most qualified to speak about the textile town's past.

The second generation, often referred to as the "lost generation," experiences a more complex range of emotions when looking back at the past. But individuals' lived experiences should not be reduced to a stereotype like "lost." They still have a deep attachment to the textile town and feel nostalgic for a time when the factories were more efficient and had better benefits. Despite this, having sacrificed a significant portion of their lives to the factories, they often ridiculed themselves for their low status as working-class individuals and strongly opposed their children following the same path as workers. With the dissolution of the work unit (*danwei*), there was a break in the transmission of working-class culture and tradition, further intensifying the divergence in how nostalgia is expressed. Some workers who secured better jobs after being laid off view their past factory experience as valuable training that helped them adapt to new workplaces. Conversely, those who faced ongoing precarious employment after the layoffs often lament their unfortunate fate, feeling abandoned by the state.

Therefore, in addition to the current literature's focus on nostalgia, my findings suggest that nostalgia cannot be oversimplified as a mere longing for a simpler or better past expressed through emotions or consumer behaviors. Instead, nostalgia emerges from the intricate dynamics of workers' changing identities, profoundly influenced by the shifting landscape of generations' experiences — from socialist workers to precarious workers. Within this context, the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of nostalgia intertwine, shaping their perceptions and memories.

Let us revisit the title, "The future of nostalgia." The future is shaped by time, space, and the elements inherited from the past and present. The case of the textile town offers a perspective that nostalgia is complex and constantly changing, influenced by individuals' past and current experiences, as well as by generational differences. The future of nostalgia lies in how knowledge, tradition, and heritage are transmitted from one generation to the next. This transmission can be disrupted, severing the chain of memories that connects one generation to another. Such disruptions in affective relationships also hinder the continuity of knowledge and tradition, influencing how nostalgia will be experienced and expressed in the future.

Industrial Heritage or Working-Class Heritage?

In this research, I mainly focus on two aspects of the textile town: the textile workers who have experienced three generations of living and working in the textile town, and the projects and exhibitions related to the textile town's industrial heritage. My original intention was to combine the description of workers' cultural history and tradition with the recent urban renewal centered on industrial heritage, to show the contradictions, conflicts, and possibilities for integration between the working class and industrial heritage. In terms of integration in practice, for example, Keşküla's (2013) ethnography on coal mining heritage provides a possibility, that is, all the staff members working at the mine museum are connected to the former mine, especially the guides who used to work in the mine. Indeed, I have visited some industrial heritage museums in the UK, Europe and Australia, including train, ship, and airplane museums. Retired or former workers often take on roles as guides or staff members work in various industrial museums. An illustrative instance is the Workshops Rail Museum in Queensland, where some retired employees share vibrant stories with visitors, drawing upon their experiences as a railway driver or bus driver. Similar phenomenon I described in chapter seven, is that when former textile workers visited the photography exhibition launched by the local government, they have more vivid stories that happened at shop floors to share rather than just listening to the guides' superficial explanation. After all, the workers believe that as witnesses to the real history, they are better equipped to share their first-hand experiences, as opposed to relying solely on younger guides who have been trained by the local government. Because, as the previous chapters have shown, the labor process and shop floor traditions, as well as their daily life and interaction with family and friends in the workers' community, demonstrate that the former workers have the capacity to act as the main force in the transmission of knowledge related to class heritage and to exert their subjective initiative.

My research delves into the lived experiences of workers spanning three generations within a

textile town in China, focusing on their complex attachment to the factory community. I place their stories within the framework of critical heritage studies, and the findings show that industrial heritage and working-class heritage should not be separated. For example, when we visit a place that was once a factory, we are not only attracted to the structures of the building, which may evoke a sense of the industrial past. What we are more interested in is what happened in this place. When we narrow down the question, we focus on what happened to the workers who worked and lived in this factory community. The industrial past is workers' past, and industrial heritage is deeply intertwined with workers' tradition and heritage. Similarly, when we talk about working-class heritage, we may encounter songs, articles, poems, pictures, and other documents. If we are fortunate, we can sit with former workers and listen to their stories about the past. Regardless of the forms of heritage, we all feel the connection and attachment between the workers and the factory. For example, the workers have complex emotions with machines, as they always express that they were "bound with machines." If an industrial museum only exhibits machines without discussing the relationships with workers, the industrial heritage loses its essential roots. Therefore, I argue that the term "industrial heritage" essentially includes the inequality of power relations, which exclude the life trajectories of the working class. It solely focuses on using selected elements of the industrial past to construct an imagined heritage in order to add value for economic and political purposes.

Even though industrial heritage includes working-class heritage, the working-class stories presented when we visit industrial heritage museums are those chosen as heritage. My findings reveal the contradictions and irony that former workers encounter when reflecting on their past at the factory community or during industrial historical exhibition. The authorities perceive heritage as a static or simplistic concept, viewing workers as an objective group. The lived experiences of workers, however, provide an alternative vision of the industrial past. Being lifelong witness, they are able to express reflective emotions that reveal the meaning of the past. Therefore, in order to understand industrial heritage, we need to examine the dynamic process of interaction between the working class and the industrial space they worked and lived, considering the social and cultural transformation that took place.

What I contribute to critical heritage studies is a different perspective on industrial heritage. Rather than viewing it solely as the collections of industrial artifacts from the past, I emphasize that industrial heritage can be inherited and embodied by workers in their everyday lives. I demonstrate two forms of heritage that former workers inherit from their previous labor process on the shop floors and living communities, which are then carried forward and verified in their new workplace. First, I use Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" (1984) to categorize workers' experiences based on the heritage they inherit from their former working experience. I introduce the notion that punctuality, being hardworking and responsibility are three aspects of habitus that cultivate from the socialist factory. I argue that habitus is not a fixed entity and can change over time, offering a valuable perspective on how individuals can cultivate adaptive and flexible capacities. Second, I explore the concept of *guanxi*, a specifically Chinese term, as a unique form of industrial heritage that workers inherit from the past. I illustrate how the strategic use of *guanxi* serves as the way to maintain working class heritage and

traditions. In this context, *guanxi* can be regarded not only as a social strategy but also as a form of heritage itself. It holds significance in both preserving industrial traditions and fostering enduring social connections within the working class. By highlighting the ways in which workers inherit and carry forward aspects of their industrial experiences, I provide a nuanced understanding of industrial heritage as a living and adaptable way of life for working-class individuals. When we realize that industrial heritage can be inherited and embodied by workers in their everyday experience, we then can understand their deepest connection with the socialist collective and the way of reaching back into the past.

Although they have encountered the changes in generations, family, and friends, the identity of the working class is essential to the shift, as it structures people's memories of the past and therefore structures attitudes to the changes taking place in the present. The strategies of adjustment they adopted reflect the textile workers' capacity not only to adapt to these changes but also to establish equilibrium in their relationships among generations, couples, former colleagues, and friends. What working-class people see is not only the past; they see the changes spanning from the past to the present. Industrial heritage should reflect the experience that those working-class people have. This should include not only the past of working and living in the industrial community, but also what they have inherited from the industrial past. Their experiences of everyday life and of the present-day period of deindustrialization are an important part of this.

Future Prospects

At the end, I would like to reflect on my connection to the textile town after the fieldwork. Despite the physical distance imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, my bond with the textile town remains unbroken. While I have been in contact with my interlocutors online, another avenue through which I keep a close eye on the textile town is the online platform called "I Love the Textile Town." "I Love the Textile Town" is a WeChat public account, also referred to as an "official account." WeChat, known as "weixin" in Chinese, is the most popular online social network in China, enabling users to exchange messages, images, audio and videos with others. Within the WeChat platform, both individuals and organizations can create public accounts to share news, articles, videos and other information with subscribers.

In 2013, Xing, the third-generation resident of the textile town, established this public account. Since 2015, the account has featured more original articles and photos, written by Xing and other authors who contribute their own works. The majority of these articles revolve around commemorating the past, including stories about places, people, and objects. Additionally, followers can access helpful information such as restaurant and shop recommendations, occasional advertisements, and updates on textile town-related matters like housing prices, recent construction projects, and local government announcements. During the pandemic, for instance, the account regularly shared updates on vaccine availability, Covid-19 testing locations, and the number of infected individuals. As of February 20, 2022, the account had published 772 original articles. When I inquired about the number of subscribers

at the beginning of 2022, Xing informed me that there were approximately 27 000 followers.

As a member of the third generation living in the textile town, Xing utilizes his technological skills to facilitate the collective community in preserving their shared memories of the past and exchanging present-day information. When asked about his motivation for creating this online platform, he provided the following reasons:

Growing up in the textile town has instilled a genuine love for this place within me. I want to share the positive aspects of the textile town with everyone. Through my efforts, I aim to bring about even the slightest change in the Textile Town. Perhaps what you need is precisely what the rest of us in the Textile Town can offer and provide. That alone is enough!

This online platform offers an interactive space for authors and followers to engage with each other. When an article posted, comments quickly follow below. Some individuals express their resonance with the past, while others make comparisons between the past and the present. For instance, when reading posts related to the past, second-generation members recall their repetitive shift work and the close friendship forged on the shop floors, while the third generation is captivated by their carefree childhood memories. In contrast, when reading posts about policies or ongoing projects, many residents leave dissatisfied comments, expressing their complaints about “face projects” that the government conduct. These residents do not trust the local government because of a history of disappointment. Although leaving comments may not have a significant impact on maintaining residents’ rights, some individuals still express their emotions, even though officials often disregard their voices. The complex emotions expressed online shed light on the central tension explored in my dissertation: the conflict between a sense of pride in the socialist experiment and a lingering resentment over feeling abandoned by the state.

The reason I describe this online platform is to provide a window through which we can observe the current situation in an old industrial district and its residents, as well as rethink future prospects. Although my main focus is on the second generation and their lived experience in the factory community, I also discuss the third generation, many members of which left the textile town after they went for work, but eventually returned as third-generation residents. This highlights a potential way of inheriting industrial heritage between generations. Unlike the second generation who inherited their habitus from their past experiences in the factory community, the third generation seems to inherit a more symbolic representation of the industrial history. The memories of their upbringing in the factory community evoke a profound sense of familiarity and emotional connections with the community. This connection was absent when they lived and worked outside of the community. As a result, their return to the community feels like a journey back to the past, even though the community no longer resembles the one etched in their childhood memories.

The members of the third generation are the key generation responsible for shaping the future of the community. Although they do not inherit the skills and knowledge of the preceding generations regarding the labor process in factories, which could disrupt the chain of memories and traditions

connecting one generation to another, they have developed innovative ways to connect with the past. For instance, online platforms have become a stage for preserving collective memory and voicing the current situation. Nevertheless, the challenge remains in transmitting industrial heritage from one generation to the next during times of social transformation. The state's overarching narrative recalls the industrial successes of socialist experiments but often overlooks the lived experiences of ordinary individuals. When the state's historical narrative neglects the everyday lives of people, forgetting occurs at a rapid pace. Therefore, it becomes crucial to preserve records and amplify the perspectives of these individuals to resist this process of forgetting. This responsibility lies in fostering a more cohesive and inclusive future for old industrial communities, ensuring their voices and histories are not lost.