Chinese Images in Western Movies- Analyzing the movie *The Last Emperor* and comparing with the autobiography *The First Half of My Life*

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I . Introduction

1. Motivation

In recent decades, Chinese cultural images, which could be Chinese people, buildings or communities, have appeared in many Western movies. For example, in the Hollywood movie, *Freaky Friday*, the mother changed the body with her daughter because of the magic power hidden in fortune cookies, which they received from a Chinese restaurant. And “Chinese restaurant” is also a cultural image of China, probably with some historical reasons.

There’s also a controversial line in *The Da Vinci Code*. The bank manager claimed that the watch on his wrist was a fake one, bought from a Taiwanese. Thus, “Fake products are made in Taiwan” may be a stereotype of Taiwan.

With the change of time, Westerners’ stereotypes of Asia are dwindling, but we still can see some obvious cultural images in Western movies. And this was the main motivation of our research.

While choosing the target, we found an article with the following description: “As to *The Last Emperor*, it showed that Chinese were unable to know and save themselves. The Westerners reached a helping hand to the Chinese when they were in danger. They put the Westerners on a place which is comparatively elevated and superior, and it showed the Chinese’ attitude of blindly worshipping everything foreign at times.” (朱耀傑, 2006)

Therefore we chose *The Last Emperor* as our target, which was a blockbuster in 1987, winning 9 Academy Awards including animated feature film, directing, adapted screenplay writing, original score, film editing, cinematography, costume design, visual effects. Above all, *The Last Emperor* is not only regarded as the beginning of ‘Sinomania’ but also a modern Chinese history in Western view.

In this research, we try to discover how Westerners view modern Chinese history and represent in the movie; in addition, try to sort some Chinese cultural images appearing in the movie.

Ⅱ. Thesis

1. Methods

This research is primarily analyzing the scenes, the lines, characteristics, and styling of the characters in the movie in order to discover the Westerner’s impression and imagination of “Chinese”. Then we further compare the difference between *The First Half of My Life*, the
autobiography of the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty and the movie The Last Emperor which is based on The First Half of My Life. The First Half of My Life is the story of the emperor Puyi which happened from the end of the Qing Dynasty till the People's Republic of China’s early period. The Last Emperor is based on The First Half of My Life, but the scenarist has added, deleted and polished some scenes in the book. Thus, the autobiography and the movie are not exactly the same, and we expect to see some differences so that we can explore the Western view added by the director.

2. Literature Retrospection

2.1. Literature Review- Chinese Cultural Images

“‘China’as an image, it doesn’t have fixed meaning. It’s an ‘imaginary signifier,’ depending on how the one who use it establishes its identity and the relationship between it and himself or herself.”
(陳儒修，1995)

In this chapter, we reviewed some research and articles to sort the change of Chinese images in Hollywood movies, which are one of the mainstreams of Western movies. The films made by the Hollywood directors are a way to observe the meaning of “China” during the time that the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China hold the reins of government. For example, the documentary film named Chung Kuo – China, which was made by the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni in 1970s, irritated Chinese because the impression of China it gave to the Westerners was that “Chinese people were benighted, wearing a sad face, lackadaisical, without sanitation, muddleheaded, always eating and drinking.” Another example of the movies that Joris Ivens made is totally different. In opposition to the realistic China in Chung Kuo - China, the movies by Ivens showed a Utopian China which was beautified by the government of the People’s Republic of China. Other images that Hollywood movies brought to the Westerners were like “fortune cookies” and “Chinese Kong Fu” caused the Sinomania of the Western. Thus, we can know that the Westerners have made a variety of interpretations, but they all put their own, subjective imaginations.

2.2. Chinese images in Hollywood movies

Since the extant silent film, Broken Blossoms¹, was released 80 years ago, American movies have been setting up the Chinese images. (張英進，2007)

2.2.1. A cryptical race

The Chinese have never seriously threatened the Western except for the Yuan Dynasty which was

¹ Broken Blossoms, directed by D.W.Griffith, 1919
established by the Mongolian. The geographical environment also divided the East from the West. Therefore, the Chinese characters in Western movies are usually mysterious and difficult to understand. (史文鴻, 1993)

2.2.2. Spirit of Buddha, people who practice virtue

In the movie, Broken Blossoms, the leading actor went into a Chinese temple, praying for peace, but as soon as he came out from the temple, the scene outside was some Western seamen, rioting on the street. The movie made a strong comparison between the peacefulness of the East and the violence of the West.

2.2.3. The insult to Chinese and the “demonized” China

The Opium War was a turning point of the Chinese images set up by the Western media. Since the defeat of China, the Western media took this opportunity to expose the corruptness and fecklessness of the Chinese government, and put emphasis on uglifying the history of the Qing Dynasty. China kept losing in other wars and the corruption of the economic system made many agriculturists voluntarily left their hometown to North America for work. The first immigrants were employed to build railway. After the construction finished, the labor-market was filled up with the low-paid laborers from China, and it really made the native and other immigrants from Europe discontented. (史文鴻, 1993) Then a variety of anti-Chinese novels and movies appeared. The first anti-Chinese movie, Broken Blossoms, was about a Chinese immigrant who conducted himself virtuously and took opioaphagy as his only hobby. This Chinese was starred by Richard Barthelmess, a Hollywood actor. Wearing a hat, acting cringingly, having a long queue and narrow, asquint eyes came to be a typical image of the Chinese incomers.

After Broken Blossoms performed well at the box office, many stories using Chinatown as their background were shot in Hollywood in1920s like Shame and Old San Francisco, but the images were still about opium, crime, poverty and fogyism.

Two Chinese contrary figures appeared in the Western movies in 1930s. One was the Chinese detector Charlie Chan and the other was the ambitious Chinese scientist Fu Manchu. Dozens of movie series of Charlie Chan were shot in 1930, 1940s. The America born Chinese detector, Charlie Chan, showed the philosophy of “silence” of the ancient Chinese while detecting cases. Setting up a clever, just Chinese image in the movie industry which was full of villains, Charlie Chan attracted many audiences at that time.

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2 Shame, directed by Emmett J. Flynn, 1921
3 Old San Francisco, directed by Alan Crosland, 1927
Opposing the justice that Charlie Chan showed, the evil doctor Fu Manchu seemed to be the most vicious Chinese around the world. Fu Manchu first appeared in the movie adapted from the novel *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu*⁴ in 1929.

“He has the personality of cruelty and craftiness, but also wisdom.”⁵ With a Chinese gown and long nails, Fu Manchu became not only the model of evil Chinese characters in American civil culture but also an example of demonizing China.

2.2.4. From “anti-Japanese” to “anti-Communist Party”

Japan became a new enemy of Western producers after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. From 1942 to 1950s, films related to Chinese had translated their focus from crimes in Chinatown to the cooperation of American and Chinese, in order to fight against Japanese, for instance, *Bombs Over Burma*⁶ and *Dragon Seed*⁷.

People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, and the relationship between China and America turned worse. As a result, Chinese appearing in 1950s films were usually Communists.

2.2.5. The convertibility between Chinese and Japanese

American culture had great effects on America-born Chinese in 1960s. For example, in *Alice's Restaurant*⁸, even the Chinese girls lived in a hippie lifestyle with local Americans. In 1961, the film version of the stage play *Flower Drum Song*⁹ set the background in the Chinatown in San Francisco. The Chinatown in 1961 was already affected obviously by American culture, and the movie also showed the achievements of newer generation of immigrant from China. The Chinese characters were mostly played by Japanese actors, which proved the Hollywood theory of the convertibility between Chinese and Japanese.

2.2.6. Bruce Lee and the martial-art fever

During 1970s, the better relation between China and America created more chances for Chinese martial arts to express to America, in addition, Hong-Kong martial arts movie appeared in the international movie market. The previous facts made a martial-art fever in 1970. Of the time, Bruce

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⁴ *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu*, directed by A.E. Coleby, 1929  
⁵ According to the author of the Fu Manchu novels, Sax Rohmer  
⁶ *Bombs Over Burma*, directed by Joseph H. Lewis, 1943  
⁷ *Dragon Seed*, directed by Harold S. Bucquet and Jack Conway, 1944  
⁸ *Alice's Restaurant*, directed by Arthur Penn, 1969  
⁹ *Flower Drum Song*, directed by Henry Koster, 1961
Lee’s success in American mass media had rebuilt the just image of Chinese.

3. Introductions of the movie and the autobiography

3.1. Introduction of The Last Emperor

The Last Emperor is a 1987 biographical film that tells the life story of Aisin-Gioro Puyi, the last emperor of China. It was written by Mark Peploe and Bernardo Bertolucci, directed by Bertolucci, and starred John Lone and Peter O'Toole.

The film opened in 1950 with Puyi’s re-entry into the reeducation camp in the People’s Republic of China as a war criminal. He attempted suicide, but it only made him unconscious. Then the scene changed into the Forbidden City, flashing back his childhood. There he grew up and met Johnston, his tutor, then got married with Wan Jung and Wen Hsiu. Years later, Puyi and his family moved out of the Forbidden City because the Republic of China’s revolution succeeded and abolished the “Articles of Favourable Treatment of the Emperor of the Great Qing after his Abdication (清帝退位優待條件).” He became the emperor of Manchukuo. After World War II, Puyi was first arrested by the Soviet then the government of People’s Republic of China. After being “re-educated” by the government of People’s Republic of China, Puyi learned how to work and live on his own, changed from an emperor into a normal person.

3.2. Introduction of The First Half of My Life(我的前半生)

Puyi started to write The First Half of My Life(我的前半生) since he was in reeducation camp of the government of the People’s Republic of China in Harbin. In this book, Puyi introduced his family and background first and then his story. It ends up with the latter part of his lifetime, after he was released from the reeducation camp. He indicated that the time he started to become a real person. (Aisin-Gioro Puyi, 1987)

The first chapter of this book introduces the late Qing Dynasty and Puyi’s family background. Puyi began to narrate his story from the second chapter. He was crowned when he was three years old and abdicated three years later with the end of the Qing Dynasty. In 1917, when the warlords were fighting for the power of being the president of the Republic of China, Puyi became an emperor again but was abdicated very soon. During the time in the Forbidden City, Puyi’s Scottish tutor, Reginald Fleming Johnston, had a big influence on him. Years later, Puyi got married with Wan Jung as the empress and Wen Hsiu as the secondary consort. They lived in the Forbidden City until they were expelled by the government of the Republic of China. Due to the wish of returning the Forbidden City, they started to make contact with the Japanese while living in Tien-tsin and the

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10 The official name which was given to the prison camps. It was first used by the government of Vietnam.
North East of China. The government was known as Manchukuo, which the Japanese and Puyi had. The lifetime in Manchukuo was the third time and the last time that Puyi held the authority as an emperor, and he was just a puppet leader. Japanese were defeated in World War II and Puyi was arrested by the Soviet as a war prisoner and was soon sent back to China. At that time, it was the government of People’s Republic of China that held the reins. Puyi started to learn the basic living ability like how to tie his own shoelaces and tried to live on himself in the reeducation camp. Finally he became a gardener and started his new life after acquiring an amnesty from the government.

4. Movie Analysis

4.1. Analysis of the title and the characters in the movie The Last Emperor:

As the first image for the audience, the title should introduce the background and the storyline of the whole movie. As a result, observing the title can give us the basic idea of the movie.

According to L'Analyse des Films by Jacques Aumont & Michel Marie, the title had a couple of advantages as a sample of movie analysis. First, the title of the movie is usually a compact-structured and completed part. Second, the title can decide the how fictitious the movie is and how much the audiences plunge into the movie.

“What is Exposition? An Essay in Temporal Delimitation, by Meir Sternberg, claimed that the title need to describe the background where the story took place, including time and space, the historical and cultural characteristic of the worlds in movies, in addition, the characters’ behavior and lifestyle.

In movies with deep depiction of China, to bring the audience to the fictitious “Chinese world”, symbols of “Chineseness” should be represented in the title—although most of them could be the reflection of Westerner’s imagination. Therefore in these kinds of movies, titles usually have strong representatives, leading audiences to the “mysterious Chinese world”. (陳儒修，2000)

4.2. Chinese images presented by the title of The Last Emperor

4.2.1. “The emperor Puyi’s appreciation”

Stamps with the term meaning “the emperor Puyi’s appreciation” frequently appeared in the title, in addition the DVD’s cover. The red stamp first appeared while showing the producer and the director’s names (Pic.4-2-1), then lasted in different types, like using the traditional Chinese embroidery to replace the red color (Pic.4-2-2), after that, the original stamp showed again on the
The stamps have appeared frequently in the title, which could be used to show the status of the main character, Puyi. In addition, “stamp” is not as common in Western culture, so it may be a symbol of Chinese culture. Besides, the term is usually stamped on art works. By “stamping” it in the title, the director probably wanted to express the movie’s historical and art achievements.

4.2.2. The Forbidden City

Right after the stamp showed second symbol of China, the Forbidden City (Pic.4-2-4, Pic.4-2-5). It followed the tones of red, which is regard as one of the “Chinese” colors. But soon the red image was turned to a darker scene, hinted the tragedy in movie. (Pic.4-2-6)

4.2.3. The calligraphy

The third symbol of Chinese culture could be the Chinese title of the movie, written in Chinese calligraphy style. (Pic.4-2-7) At first it was showed behind a window which was also designed in traditional style, then it remained the single word (Pic.4-2-8), then the scene turned back to the Forbidden City. (Pic.4-2-9)
4.3. Feature analysis

The Last Emperor was shot in China, and most characters in the movie are also Chinese. Therefore, analyzing the movie characters with their actions, appearances and personalities is probably a way to generalize the image of Chinese in The Last Emperor, the Western movie.

4.3.1. Puyi and the empire of China

Puyi, as the main character and the last emperor, was enthroned at the age of three (Pic.4-3-1) and then abdicated at the age of six. At the night when he was sent to the Forbidden City, he kept asking, “Are we going home?”, to which the answer was always “Not yet.” Young Puyi wasn’t able to do political decisions; therefore the power was mainly held by the ministers and the eunuchs. Puyi was not the only child emperor in Chinese history, while we rarely see kings of Western kingdoms at such a young age.

Just look at the huge splendid buildings in the Forbidden City, we can image the power of emperor. Most of the frames in the palace were filled with “China red” and “royal gold”, which built a concept of “the color of China”.

To represent the position of Chinese emperor, the movie used a scene which thousands of people “kowtowed” to Puyi. (Pic.4-3-2) The director used wild-angle lens to describe the enormity of the Forbidden City and the Chinese empire. (Pic.4-3-3)
After Republic of China was established, his dominion remained was the Forbidden City. However, his deluxe life in the Forbidden City represented the power of the empire of China despite the fact that he was not the dynast anymore – in other words, there was no more dynast in China. Then Pu Chieh, Puyi’s brother raised outside the palace and a contrast to Puyi, visited the Forbidden City. He shared his life with friends and challenged the position of Puyi by saying to him that he wasn’t the emperor anymore, as a result, Puyi began to show his power. First he asked the eunuch to drink up the ink. (Pic. 4-3-4) Next, he invited Pu Chieh to a game that he usually played with the eunuchs. They jumped off the sedan chair and made a huge line of eunuchs and maid chase after them. (Pic. 4-3-5, Pic.4-3-6)

4.3.2. Johnston and the cultural conflict

Although Puyi had lived in the self-contained Forbidden City since the age of three, he was very interested in Western culture. The arrival of his tutor, Johnston from Scotland (Pic.4-3-7), has not only widened his view and thoughts intensely but also symbolized the cultural conflict between China and the West.

Johnston was a tall, middle-aged man. The abundant knowledge (from the Western world) he possessed was opposite to the Chinese image in late Qing dynasty - backward but proud. For example, he brought a bicycle to the Forbidden City and asked Puyi whether he wanted to ride.

“My doctor said bicycles are bad for you.” said Puyi. This reply enraged Johnston, “Nonsense!” he criticized. The young Puyi had always wanted to go out of the Forbidden City, especially after meeting his younger brother and knowing that his mom had passed away a few days ago. As a result, he soon got the hang of riding his new bicycle and tried to exit by the palace gate. (Pic.4-3-8) Before long, he was caught.

Another example used to prove traditional Chinese’s underdevelopment was about a pair of spectacles. Johnston found that Puyi was nearsighted, so he asked the minister of Household Department to take Puyi to the doctor and get the right lenses for his spectacles. At first, the “elders” in the palace, such as the High Consorts and the ministers refused his application immediately; however, after Johnston threatened the High Consorts with the possibility that the
emperor would be blind, they finally agreed and got Puyi a pair of spectacles. (Pic.4-3-9)

Johnston believed that “an emperor” is still a symbol of great importance, so he tried his best teaching Puyi and giving proper advice, but in the palace, his role wasn’t just a teacher. Johnston is the one who pointed out the consumption and corruptibility behind the dynasty; also, we can see the backward, proud, even stubborn Chinese through his eyes, which could be some kinds of cultural image in this movie.

4.3.3. The images of women in two generations

In the Forbidden City, there were a couple types of women. Primarily we can divide them into two generations, one is the elder generation, including Cixi and the High Consorts, showing Chinese images of backward, proud etc.; the other is the modern generation, including the young empress and the Secondary Consort.

The old Buddha, Cixi, as the former dynast of Qing dynasty, represented the image of women in relatively elder generation. (Pic.4-3-10) In the movie, the director used many methods to show her power though she died in the first half hour of the movie. For example, the chamber of Cixi was filled with eunuchs and maid, and the major color inside was bright yellow and red. The dress and jewelry she wore also showed her enormous power.

The others who reflected the features of elder generation were the three High Consorts. (Pic.4-3-11) They reject Johnston’s application of buying spectacles for Puyi and claimed that emperors were not allowed to wear spectacles. They also expelled A-Mo, Puyi’s nursemaid, from the Forbidden City because they thought that the emperor didn’t need her anymore. However, growing up with A-Mo, Puyi couldn’t accept the leaving of her at all due to the fact that A-Mo was almost like his mother. The scene that Puyi suckled A-Mo’s breast showed his dependence upon his nursemaid and the rebellion against growing up. (Pic.4-3-12)
Wan Jung is Puyi’s empress and Wen Hsiu is his Secondary Consort. Due to the fact that they both had been educated in Western way and had been trying hard to live in a “modern” style, they can be examples to discuss the image of modern Chinese woman.

Wan Jung (Pic.4-3-13), older than Puyi, was chosen by the High Consorts. At their wedding night, she said to Puyi, “If Your Majesty thinks it is old-fashioned to make the rain and the wind (to have sex) with a stranger, we can be like a modern couple to begin with.” Then they shook hands and Puyi left peacefully.

The word “old-fashioned” pointed out that there was a new generation born in China, modern and occidentalized. (At that time, the two words were synonyms.)

On the other hand, Wen Hsiu (Pic.4-3-14), as the Secondary Consort, seemed not to be as important as Wan Jung. After the royal house was dislodged from the Forbidden City by the army of Republic of China, Wen Hsiu couldn’t stand the position as “the second wife” anymore. Therefore she divorced with Puyi and returned to her own life.

While Puyi was governing Manchukuo, Wan Jung was addicted to opium, which made her sicker and sicker, so Puyi gradually tensed her. (Pic.4-3-15) Opiophagy prevailed among Chinese in the early 1900s, which gave a pathic and weak image of Chinese.

The movie didn’t tell the audience where have these two women gone in the end, but their “modernism” set up a new type of Chinese woman in this movie-smart, well-educated, independent
and strong-minded.

5. Scene Analysis

In this section, we chose a three-minute scene in *The Last Emperor* to do further analysis, which was the twelfth scene in the DVD, about the Emperor’s new spectacles. By analyzing the lines, backgrounds, music, sound effects, angles and other skills in *The Last Emperor*, we can further sort the Chinese images and Western views in this movie.

In the beginning of this scene, the eunuchs rushed out of a door and gathered. (Pic.5-1, Pic.5-2) The background music was the mono tone of xylophone, mixed with the eunuchs’ conversation, symbolizing their worry.

On the other side, Johnston stepped into the yard with a serious face (Pic.5-4), and the zoom-in of Johnston had stressed the nervous atmosphere (Pic.5-5), and a higher tone was added into the mono tone. As he was approaching, there was a voice shouting “Troublemaker.”, “Devil.”, and “Meddler.” (Pic.5-6)

“Trouble. Nothing but trouble.” An old eunuch appeared on the corner, whipping the bicycle. (Pic.5-7) “Look where you lead him.” (Pic.5-8) Then Johnston angrily grabbed the stick away, shouting “And you are an old, cruel, ignorant man!” (Pic.5-9)

The behavior of hitting the bicycle was ridiculous in Johnston’s view, and his brief dialogue
obviously pointed out the worst personality of Chinese—old, cruel and ignorant.

“The boy’s mother is dead and he’s not even allowed to see her!” Johnston yelled. The scene became silence, and the eunuchs were still gathering. (Pic.5-11) Through the eunuchs’ lines of sight, we can see a little figure on the roof - that was Puyi, shouting “I want to go out!”

Then the lens turned to Puyi, crying "I want to go out!". (Pic.5-13) In this part, Bertolucci used “Alternating Syntagma”, the skill of cross cutting, to show the simultaneity among Puyi’s escaping, eunuchs’ confusion and Johnston’s anxiety.

“Stop it. Stay where you are.” Johnston shouted. In this frame, we can see the clear contrast between little Puyi and the crowd of eunuch, showing not only the Emperor’s position, but also the freedom that Puyi craved and the forbidding power of royalty. (Pic.5-14, Pic.5-15)

“Stop it!” Johnston got into the crowd of eunuchs and shouted. His tall figure clearly stood out above the eunuchs. (Pic.5-16) Though Johnston was trying to stop Puyi’s dangerous behavior, Puyi
was still crying “I want to go out!”

“You fool!” Johnston yelled madly. (Pic.5-17) At the same moment Puyi tripped and fell on the roof. (Pic.5-18)

In this part of the scene, Bertolucci used a high angle to represent Puyi’s view. In movie theory, high angles usually emphasize the environment and reduce the importance of the main character, as a result, the characters under camera would be more insignificant and harmless.

“Chang.” Johnston called an eunuch to save Puyi with him, and Chang asked other two eunuchs, Hunchback and Big Foot to follow him, while other eunuchs were still looking. (Pic.5-19, Pic.5-20) This scene was probably an implication that Chinese tend to be onlookers rather than giving a hand. After a few eunuchs left the crowd, the scene turned to Puyi, blinking his eye hard. (Pic.5-21)

From the subjective shot of Puyi, we can see that his view gradually became blurred. (Pic.5-22) The indistinct scene clearly pointed out that there are some problems with Puyi’s eyes.

The eunuchs, led by Johnston, held hands and made a line to reach Puyi. (Pic.5-23) “Sir.” Johnston said. (Pic.5-24)
Lying on the roof, Puyi tried to reach Johnston but failed. (Pic.5-26) Then Johnston asked again, “Give me your hand, sir.” By using selective focusing, Bertolucci made the audiences’ eyes concentrate on Johnston’s facial expression. (Pic.5-26) However, Puyi even had a difficulty focusing on the hand of Johnston. (Pic.5-27) In this scene, Bertolucci used a dim sunset as the background, reflecting Puyi’s innocent eyes.

“Can you not see?” Johnston asked worriedly. (Pic.5-28) Then he eventually got Puyi’s hand and grabbed him. (Pic.5-29, Pic.5-30) During the saving, the background was mainly the blue sky, which could infer that an opportunity is coming. Most of all, it was the moment when Johnston found that Puyi had got nearsighted.

Then the scene turned indoor, where the foreign doctor was examining Puyi’s eyes. “Look at my left ear please, sir. (Pic.5-31) Thank you. (Pic.5-32) And now my right. Would you follow my finger please, sir?” (Pic.5-33)

It may be Johnston’s idea to hire a foreign doctor rather than a Chinese one, and it also inferred that
Western medical treatment of eyes was better at that time.

During the examination, the camera turned to Johnston several times. Bertolucci may want to put emphasis on Johnston’s presence for the sake of connecting the “spectacle incident”. (Pic.5-34)

After the doctor had checked Puyi’s eyes, there were three close shots of Puyi (Pic.5-35), the doctor (Pic.5-36) and then Johnston, all of them seemed pretty calm. It can be inferred that not only the Westerners but also Puyi, from the “new generation”, didn’t regard a pair of spectacles as a strange thing.

“Well, it’s perfectly simple Johnston. The Emperor needs spectacles.” said the doctor. (Pic.5-37, Pic.5-38) Then Puyi turned his face to Johnston enthusiastically, “Like Harold Lloyd.” (Pic.5-39) Harold Lloyd was a famous silent film star. From Puyi’s reaction, it seemed that Puyi was quite familiar with Western pop culture and appreciated the image of Harold Lloyd with spectacles instead of rejecting the doctor’s advice.
Johnston gave Puyi a smile, which could be viewed as approval and praise. (Pic.5-40), but then the voices of the High Consorts interrupted him. “Impossible.” they said. (Pic.5-41) Bertolucci took a close shot of Johnston, and his facial expression seemed as saying “Oh, it’s you again.” (Pic.5-42)

“An Emperor does not wear spectacles. That cannot be allowed.” said the High Consorts, who were the head of conservative power in the Forbidden City. (Pic.5-43, Pic.5-44) While the High Consorts were talking, Bertolucci used cross cutting to show the contrast between the conservative High Consorts and the “modern” Westerners.

"Times have changed, Your Highnesses" said the High Tutor, who seemed to be more open to the spectacles. (Pic.5-46) In this frame, the image of the minister was obviously brighter, while the High Consorts seemed to be bordered by the wooden frame. Another implication in this scene is that the High Consorts usually appeared behind the frame, which symbolized their backward-looking. Bertolucci showed the comparison with size and further put emphasis on the modern power. (Pic.5-47) Then the High Consorts went out, murmuring with indistinct voice. (Pic.5-48) Different from the silent conversation, as the High Consorts walking out, Bertolucci used a part of music combined with multiple instruments to describe this situation.
After the High Consorts left, the doctor seriously said, “If His Majesty doesn't get spectacles, Johnston, he could lose his sight.” (Pic.5-49) Then the camera turned to the High Tutor, looking worried. (Pic.5-50) Johnston beckoned the eunuchs to see the doctor off. In this frame, Bertolucci put three characters in triangular position, which symbolized the close but uncertain relationship among these people. (Pic.5-51)

On the other hand, there was a man hidden behind the frame but had heard the whole conversation—the minister of the Household Department. Bertolucci used backlighting to represent this conspiratorial officer’s underside. (Pic.5-52) Then Puyi bowed to Johnston and left. In this frame, Bertolucci used a dark tone to emphasize the awkward situation. (Pic.5-53) The camera followed Puyi’s figure and moved to a long corridor. At the end of the corridor, there was the emperor’s throne. The scene was again filled with China red, which implied the tradition and the responsibility of the emperor. In addition, we can see that Puyi was shorter than his ministers and the eunuchs. Those tall, mature men not only made the frame oppressive but put a lot of stress on the young emperor. (Pic.5-54)
The following scene was a conversation between Johnston and the minister of Household Department. This minister had been listening till Johnston mentioned and turned to him. Johnston sat down at the other side of the wooden frame. The foregrounds were three white flowers, in comparison of the yellow one in front of the minister. Chinese saying had that yellow flowers are symbols of old fashion, so it can be inferred that Bertolucci used this allusion to represent the conflict between old and new. (Pic.5-55) “If the Emperor does not get spectacles, I will resign.” said Johnston. (Pic.5-56) A wooden sculpture of a tower separated the minister and Johnston, which also separated the decayed power in the palace and the innovative Western thoughts. (Pic.5-57)

“Unfortunately, our decision is final...” said the minister. He took off his cap and slowly put it on the desk. (Pic.5-58) “And unfortunately what I have to say will be published in every newspaper in China.” replied Johnston. The minister, who was stroking his cap, suddenly stopped and showed a complicated face. (Pic.5-59) Then he stood up, passed the wooden frame and entered Johnston’s side. “What do you have to say, Mr. Johnston?” (Pic.5-60)

“The Emperor has been a prisoner in his own Forbidden City since the day that he was crowned, and has remained a prisoner since he abdicated. But, now he's growing up, he may wonder why he's the only person in China who may not walk out of his own front door. I think the Emperor is the loneliest boy on earth. It would be conveniently sad if he becomes blind” Johnston finished these sentences almost in one breath. (Pic.5-61~Pic.5-65) While he was talking, the minister walked forward and passed through Johnston, then the camera followed him as Johnston was speaking. (Pic.5-66) “Blind, Mr. Johnston?” The minister asked.
“To the expense, Your Excellency.” As this line came out, Johnston stepped behind the minister, (Pic.5-67) “To the cost of maintaining one thousand two hundred Eunuchs, three hundred and fifty ladies-in-waiting, and one hundred and eighty-five cooks to buy one hundred and twenty sable furs a month, and three thousand chickens a week. To the fact that eight hundred and forty Guards and employees of the Household Department, plus one Lord Chamberlain, care only about one thing-filling their own rice bowls.” (Pic.5-68) The frame turned lighter and cleared the smile of the minister. (Pic.5-69)

The smile looked complicated, as this facial expression included self-confidence, blackness and irony. (Pic.5-70) “You are very good at accounts, Mr. Johnston. The Emperor may have abdicated, but he is still a symbol of great importance to many people.” said the minister. (Pic.5-71, Pic.5-72)
“If I did not agree with that, I would not be here,” said Johnston, surely. (Pic.5-73) Then the minister’s conspiracy eventually came onto the stage. “And some of us believe that one day soon he may be more than a symbol. The spectacles are a detail. What do you really want, Mr. Johnston?” (Pic.5-75)

“Just the spectacles.” said Johnston.

In the three-minute scene, Bertolucci clearly showed the stains in the Forbidden City, the Qing Dynasty, even the whole Chinese culture. The behavior of the High Consorts and the minister had emphasized the negative images of Chinese—arrogant, laggard, ignorant and disable to be aware of their drawbacks. Also, as a “bystander” of the palace, Johnston was exactly who pointed out the consumption and corruptibility behind the dynasty.

6. Text Comparison

After analyzing the movie, we turn to the autobiography and make the comparison of some points that we’re interested in between the movie and the book. Then we focus on the differences we found and try to infer what China was like in Bertolucci’s thought.

6.1. The comparison between the autobiography and the revised actions

Although The Last Emperor is the revised movie version of The First Half of My Life, there are still many differences between them. By comparing the movie and the book, we hoped to explore more
materials that the director, with a Western view, added into or revised in the movie, and furthermore, to conclude the Chinese images in *The Last Emperor*.

6.1.1. In the beginning of the movie, Puyi attempted but failed to suicide in the reeducation camp, this part of the story is not found in *The First Half of My Life*. This part in the movie can be real or not, but it can be inferred that Bertolucci might try to tell the audiences that Puyi faced a big challenge in life that made him want to suicide, or that he was timid and didn’t have the courage to face what had happened on him.

6.1.2. The questions that Puyi asked Johnston when they first met in the movie revealed that Puyi knew nothing at all outside the Forbidden City. It wasn’t recorded in *The First Half of My Life*. In Johnston’s book, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, he said that even though Puyi didn’t have any knowledge of foreign languages, he yearned for learning. Johnston indicated that Puyi actually had a wide knowledge of geography and he knew some events which had happened in Europe. He was also interested in physics, astronomy, and politics.

6.1.3. At the time the imperial family of the Manchu Dynasty was expelled from Forbidden City by the government of the Republic of China, Johnston shouldn’t have been in the Forbidden City because the Forbidden City was sealed off by the government. Johnston mentioned it in his book, too. However, in the movie, he was there and even promised to ask the British Embassy for help.

6.1.4. In *The Last Emperor*, Johnston discovered the corruption of the eunuchs and the courtiers. It seemed that Puyi lived in the Forbidden City, but he didn’t know what was happening around him at all. In *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, Johnston said that Puyi knew that the eunuchs were rotten and were always trying to fawn on him.

6.1.5. In *The First Half of My Life*, while Puyi was being interrogated by the Chinese Communist Party, the ones who swore accusations against him were his courtiers. There was nothing about the book Johnston wrote named *Twilight in the Forbidden City*. Johnston had met Puyi in Manchukuo and he didn’t oppose that Puyi became the emperor of Manchukuo.

6.1.6. Puyi finally trusted and accepted the reeducation of the Chinese Communist Party. He was deeply appreciative of the Chinese Communist party. There wasn’t an event that Puyi had a dispute with the Red Guards in the book.

6.1.7. The movie kept pointing out that Puyi worshipped everything foreign; for instance, he wanted to go abroad to study, wanted to buy cars and professed in the reeducation camp that he himself liked to buy foreign things even though they were not needed at all. He thought that everything foreign was good. Puyi did said that he liked foreign things in his autobiography, but it wasn’t
emphasized as much as the movie did.

6.2. The Western view in *The Last Emperor*

*The Last Emperor* was released in 1980s, most of the parts were real descriptions in the original, but interpreted in a Western view. The director and the scenarist put their own imagination of “China” into the film. Thus, it showed many different meanings and brought an impression of “China” to the Westerners in the movie.

6.2.1. Puyi’s speech and manners always showed the haughtiness of the “emperor.” The conversation between Johnston and Puyi when they first met divulged Puyi’s ignorance. Therefore, we can infer that in the Western’s imagination, “China” is laggard, uncivilized and ignorant in the aspect of politics, technology, and rules.

The following is the conversation in the movie:

*Puyi:* Where are your ancestors buried?

*Johnston:* In Scotland, Your Majesty

*Puyi:* But then where’s your skirt? In your country men wear short skirts, do they not?

*Johnston:* No, Your Majesty, Scotsmen do not wear skirts... they wear kilts.

*Puyi:* Kilts?

... 

*Puyi:* Who is this George Washington?

*Johnston:* A famous American, Your Majesty. A revolutionary General, the first American President.

*Puyi:* Ah, like Mr. Lenin in Russia?

6.2.2. In the movie, when the family of the imperial family of the Manchu Dynasty was expelled from the Forbidden City by the government of the Republic of China, Johnston was there, being Puyi’s referee of their tennis game. He said that he would ask the British Embassy for help for them and asked the driver to drive Puyi with his own car. It seems that the Chinese were helpless and the West saved the Chinese. It was the West that built themselves as heroes.

*Puyi:* Do you think they will kill me?

*Johnston:* You must do as they say, Your Majesty... while I try to reach the British Embassy.

6.2.3. While Puyi was interrogated by the Chinese Communist Party, they brought up the book Johnston wrote to swear accusations against him. In fact, there was nothing about Johnston. We can say that it’s the Westerner’s declaration of opposition to Manchukuo. It can also be explained as the evidence that the Westerner beautified Johnston to a person who was impartial, selfless and just.
“...Mr. Johnston writes...the endeavor to make out that the Emperor had been kidnapped by the Japanese...is wholly untrue. He left Tientsin...he went to Manchuria of his own free will...”

6.2.4. In the end of *The First Half of My Life*, Puyi was glad to be reeducated by the Chinese Communist Party and was thankful for their help that changed him a lot, but it wasn’t mentioned in *The Last Emperor*. It might be that the Westerner was against the Communist Party and socialism at that time.

“My motherland had made me into a man.” (Aisin-Gioro Puyi, 1987)

*Red Guard: Confess your crimes.*

*Puyi: Wait. He is a teacher. He is a good teacher. You cannot do this to him.*

There would be other details that show the image of “China” in the movie. Although we only list a few scenes above, they can still show the differences between Bertolucci’s thought and Puyi’s description.

III. Conclusion

Having read the related literature, analyzed the movie *The Last Emperor* and compared the movie with the autobiography, we found out that telling a story which had taken place in China, the movie used a couple of images to portray China. Many of them were just like what the media regarded China, for example, the emperor’s power had been emphasized, but most details in the movie showed the imagination of the late Qing Dynasty—laggard, ignorant, anachronistic, eyeless and disable to be aware of their drawbacks.

Since the last years of the Qing Dynasty, Chinese have made contact with the Westerners. The Chinese characters’ reactions to the cultural conflicts strengthened the anachronistic and ignorant image of them, also made a comparison between the democratic, developed Western and the autocratic, laggard China. Johnston pointed out the corruption of the eunuchs and the courtiers. It showed that Chinese people in late Qing Dynasty were not able to be aware of their corruption, and they didn’t have the ability to make self-examination. Puyi’s attitude that “everything foreign is good” was also stressed. Even Puyi’s empress and Secondary Consort, two models of “modern” women in the movie, were educated and lived in a Western way; maybe that’s why they were regarded “modern”.

This research has sorted out some Chinese images in *The Last Emperor*, yet there are still a couple of limitations. Due to the limited time the researchers have, we chose only *The Last Emperor* and the autobiography, *The First Half of My Life*, as the subject of our research in order to discuss and
analyze the information in further details. It creates some limitation in the research. First of all, the point of view and the analysis might be partial because we chose only one movie in this research, and this movie is much more about the Chinese royalty than common people; therefore, the research conclusion may not be able to show the image of Chinese as a whole. Secondly, the movie, *The Last Emperor*, with English pronunciation and subtitles, might made us misunderstood the real meaning which the director and the scenarist wanted to express. Also, we might use our view to comprehend the messages given in the movie and the novel; therefore, the conclusion may not be entirely objective. As to the autobiography, we decided to use the original Chinese title *The First Half of My Life*. However, in order to avoid the problem of translating on our own, we used the English version, *From Emperor to Citizen*, while quoting the book. Besides, *The First Half of My Life* was published in 1988, the first year after the president in Taiwan relieved the Martial Law. Most of the texts were re-edited with “□” by the editors because of the communist thoughts in the autobiography. The movie *The Last Emperor* had been edited, too. Consequently, we might not know what the original version was like, which was the main limitation of our research.

In this research, though we discovered quite a lot of negative images of China, many of these images no longer exist now. In conclusion, the movie *The Last Emperor* had represented the Western view of China, and most important of all, whenever the images of Chinese culture appear in Western movies, we can always regard those images as our own reflections and use them to improve ourselves.
IV. Appendix

1. The arrangement of the chapters of the book in the movie

The following table is to compare the movie and the autobiography. The left-hand column is a list of chapters in the book; we put checks in the right-hand column if the chapters match the scenes in the movie. We found that most of the scenes are described in the book except the beginning one.

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<th>&quot;The First Half of My Life&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;The Last Emperor&quot;</th>
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<td>Chapter 2 Childhood</td>
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<td>The conversation between Puyi and the guard’s son in the Forbidden City</td>
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