Modernity in Context: Looking at Visual Representations of Modernity in Hangzhou

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2014

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This dissertation titled

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Abstract

BAIRD, TIMOTHY L., Ph.D., December 2014, Communication Studies

Modernity in Context: Looking at Visual Representations of Modernity in Hangzhou

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This project engages with how visual modes of communication interact, are shaped by, and help to shape what it means to be modern in a given cultural context. Moving away from definitions of modernity put forward by Modernism, this study uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogue found in meaning-making processes to explore how Fredric Jameson’s claim that modernity functions as a type of rhetorical trope is put into practice in the specific cultural context of Hangzhou, China. The fieldwork was carried out in three steps. Initial interviews led to the identification of key concepts. Photographs as key visual markers of modernity indicated in the initial interviews were a part of the field record. Lastly, a round of interviews that used the photos to further unpack the visual representations of modernity. This project also engages with the relationship between global and local forces within the cultural contexts found in Hangzhou. Building off the work of Arjun Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, and Yi-Fu Tuan, the role of the space, and the shared nature of constructing and reconstructing a culture are explored through the visuals accessed in conversations with participants in their spaces of living, work, and areas where they grew up in the city of Hangzhou.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

With a fresh cup of coffee in hand, I walk through the park looking for a place to sit and wait for the space to come alive. The drip coffee, which I have come to covet in China, is hard to find outside of the American coffee chain that I just exited. The large cup of the brown liquid costs more than I usually spend on lunch. It is late February in Hangzhou and the morning fog is still thick enough that looking out onto the lake feels like watching the ocean. With visibility of less than 100 feet, it looks like the water might just go on forever (Fig.1). Sipping the coffee as I make my way down the walkway, I search for a space to review my notes from the last month, and try to set goals for today’s interactions. The sound of Erhu music reminds me that even though my morning ritual would be similar in any location, this place is foreign, or, rather, I am foreign in this place. I find the young female Erhu player sitting on one of the many benches looking out

Figure 1: Boats Coming Through the Fog on West Lake
over the fog covered lake and take a seat at the next bench down. She plays the instrument, whose closest comparison is a two-stringed violin, while an older man watches her form and corrects her unnoticeable mistakes. The sound from the strings helps to set the scene of this place. I have never heard this music before, but I instantly associate it with traditional Chinese folk music or at least my preconception of such music.

The backdrop of the beautiful West Lake, the atmosphere created by the fog, and the sound of the folk music wafting through the air makes me chuckle that I am here hoping to explore visual representations of modernity. If I could create a complete snapshot of this moment in time, I imagine many of the smaller details would go unnoticed and the whole scene would be romanticized as a truly traditional experience. But the past month has shown me that this is not the case. The lake, which is one of the most famous features of Hangzhou, has been recommended as the place to visit if I want to talk with people about this city. The other side of the lake has many traditional features. Multiple famous Buddhist temples, scenic hills, a lack of tall architecture, and an abundance of trees all leave the west shore of the lake looking untouched by recent development. Of course this is not the case. There are lots of new things on the west side of the lake. But this first impression of a tranquil traditional space corresponds with the advertising I see throughout this city. This advertising is targeted to encourage tourism and build a reputation for the city around the beauty and tradition found in West Lake. The eastern side of the lake, where I tend to buy my coffee in the morning, is lined with high fashion shops like Prada or Zara, fancy restaurants, and in one spot, there is a large “dancing” fountain that is set to music at regular intervals. This space, along the eastern
side of the lake, fluctuates wildly between experiences that could be interpreted as modern and those that are purposefully traditional.

Exploring the concept of modernity in this context, or in any context, sounds like it could be accomplished with a camera, a large set of books and articles, and time to write. But then the end document would be a dry exploration of pictures using interpretations from people who learned what it means to be modern outside of this specific space and time. Instead, I have tried to embrace my inability to prescribe meaning in this context, and in doing so have focused my project outwards. I cannot assume that I understand, so I need to ask. It is in the conversations with people who were raised in Hangzhou or who have in some way come to call this place home that I can see how people are interpreting their city and how modernity is manifested in this space (in their words).

***

I got off the plane a little over a month ago and I am still in the first phase of fieldwork for this project. The city of Hangzhou is as complex a topic as the idea of modernity. In her essay, “The City,” Saskia Sassen notes, “much of what we experience as the local is also global because the local is actually a transformed condition, a localization of global processes.”¹ The relationship between local and global can be seen in the architecture, advertising, and even the fast food that fills up this space. The give and take of the localization process as illustrated by Sassen also means that labeling something as either local or global is a much more difficult task than it appears on the surface. Looking at Hangzhou as a field site will not be enough for this project. I will need to interrogate the context of Hangzhou, to see how this space and the people within

¹
it are working together to display the visually mediated messages that will form the basis of my study. Unlike Beijing or Shanghai, Hangzhou has never hosted the Olympics or the World Expo, meaning that while there have been smaller scale attempts to encourage tourism and international investment, there has not been any recent massive national government organized effort to make the city easily accessible to foreigners. Instead, what Hangzhou represents is a city that, in the words of its municipal government’s web page, has one of the leading economic environments in China. Its governmental website reinforces this status in the statement, “The World Bank named Hangzhou No. 1 among the Best Investment Environment Cities of China five successive years; Forbes magazine cited it as the No. 1 Forbes Best Cities for Business on the Chinese Mainland five years in a row.” Hangzhou has already experienced accelerated economic development that places it among the best cities for business in China.

Hangzhou also had a long-standing role in Chinese history. It served as a capital to several kingdoms and dynasties through the past 2000 years. Sun Quan founded the Wu kingdom in this city in the 3rd century. The name of this Kingdom may not be instantly recognizable to everyone outside of China. But within the context of Chinese culture the story that unfolds concerning the war between Wu, Shu, and Wei Kingdoms is literally a legend. The Three Kingdoms is a story based on real battles and its popularity has made it an important reference in Chinese culture. Inspiring idiomatic phrases, television shows, movies, and a plethora of video games: the Kingdom of Wu is far from a forgotten line in a Chinese history book.

Hangzhou’s connection to the rest of China took a great leap in the seventh century when Emperor Yangdi of the Sui Dynasty connected Hangzhou to Beijing by
means of the Grand Canal (大运河). This placed Hangzhou as the southernmost stop on one of the largest avenues for trade in eastern China. Apart from being an economic and cultural center in early China, Hangzhou once again served as the capital to the five rulers of the Wu-Yue dynasty before being surrendered to the Song dynasty in 978, 71 years after the dynasty was founded. Seventy-one years seems like a short amount of time for a city to be a capital but the Wu-Yue dynasty did not exist during peaceful times. The period between the final Tang emperor’s murder in 907 to the establishment of the Song in 960 was a time of political disarray and violence. Hangzhou would go on to serve as a capital for the Southern Song dynasty as well as a cultural center during the Yuan dynasty that followed. The historian Mote notes that during the Yuan dynasty “the ‘foreign monks’ flocked especially to Hangzhou, the former Southern Song capital city noted for its scenic beauty and cultural refinement, with its many large Buddhist temple complexes.” Many of these complexes remain as working Buddhist temples and tourist attractions to this day.

Hangzhou’s role on the national stage does not end with Imperial China. Many of the famous figures from China’s Communist revolution have also had connections to Hangzhou. Jiang Jieshi (more commonly written as Chiang Kai Shek in the United States) took control of the city from a warlord in February of 1927. The city would remain under the control of Jiang Jieshi’s Guo Min Dang or the Invading forces of the Japanese until after the Second World War when, in 1949, the People’s Liberation Army and Mao Zedong would take the city. Jiang’s villa, a physical reminder of his stay in Hangzhou, is one of the buildings that sits directly on the shore of West Lake. From all of
these events, it is clear that Hangzhou is a city that is both well seated as a significant place in the history of China and a significant city in China’s future development.

Hangzhou as a site is, therefore, a unique context with both strong historical ties to China as a whole and unique possibilities for the ways this space and the people who move in and out of it are poised to develop its future. Hangzhou has served as a capital in the past, but is not currently one. This means that the influence of not only the Chinese Government’s desire to welcome foreign representatives but also the cultural interaction brought about by representatives of various nation-states is minimal. Instead the globalizing forces at work in Hangzhou are more economic in nature. Many of the top 500 international companies have opened branches and research and development centers in the city. The city is also home to many state-owned enterprises as well as 73 of the top 500 private enterprises in Mainland China. With this level of representation of both domestic and international business interests, Hangzhou is made up of many different cultures. But here, unlike a capital city, the foreigners and transplants within this context are not there to represent a nation-state; instead they are looking to conduct business or experience the city as a tourist.

The city of Hangzhou, where reminders of national identity are less salient, allows my project to engage with the discourse of nationalism in a much more meaningful way. In his influential book, *The Location of Culture*, transnational scholar Homi Bhabha notes that the term *nationalism* has a “historical certainty and settled nature” that needs to be problematized.

Just as in America, applying some concept of a universalizing culture that draws many of its meanings from the nation-state to a specific city can lead to a homogenous
and insular understanding of that space. Bhabha notes, “In proposing this cultural
construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation, I do not wish to deny
these categories their specific histories and particular meanings within different political
languages.” In other words, the idea of a national identity, though important, is only one
of the multiple ways individuals come to create a cultural identity.

Since my fieldwork was carried out in Hangzhou, the activation of each
individual’s national identity, although still present, seemed lessened due to a diminished
influence of the national government in this context. If, for instance, this fieldwork were
being done in Beijing, there would be an abundance of nationalistic spaces and imagery
that would remind a person of China’s Communist government. Any space in Beijing, be
it the mausoleum where the founder of the government Mao Zedong’s body is on display
or the Forbidden City, would inspire nationalistic sentiments that are shape by the
Communist Party in a much more direct fashion. The reminders of a national identity,
and more specifically the government’s view of that national identity, often surround
people in a nation’s capital. The city of Hangzhou, through its history and economic
development, definitely has a voice in the dialogue that is shaping China as a whole, but
the focus on government or politics of any kind is noticeably lessened in this space. If
national identity were privileged in this study, it would promote Hangzhou as
interchangeable with the whole of China. Doing so would create a potentially endless
string of problems. The same would be true if I tried to claim the culture found in my
hometown in Appalachia was representative of the United States of America as a whole. I
am sure there are people from New York City, Miami, or Santa Fe that would see some
big problems in such a claim.
The melody streaming out of the young woman’s Erhu washes over me, encouraging me to take stock of myself in this space. Taking up an entire bench, drinking coffee, wearing a hoodie with my university’s logo printed across the chest, everyone knows that I am not originally from Hangzhou through not only my race. Having been to China before, this “outsider” feeling is nothing new to me, but this time I am not here to study language in a classroom or even teach my American accented English to high school students and business men. This time I am here for research. My American accent, which is taught in high schools all across China, is no longer the advantage it was when I was teaching English. When speaking Chinese, I just sound foreign. In my experience this won’t stop a conversation from happening in this city; it will just slow it down a little. During every visit to China, including this one, many of the best experiences I have had are not planned interactions, but rather, occur with people who stop and talk with me in the parks where a large part of public life takes place. No matter if the conversation starts with someone saying “hello” to me in the sing-song fashion that I have yet to understand, or the people who approach me to practice their English, which they have assumed I can speak, the interactions often start with a recognition of exactly how obviously foreign I am, and a series of questions about why I have traveled so far.

The answer that I try to work into most of these casual interactions is, “我在杭州做我的博士论文的研究.” Or, when speaking English, “I am in Hangzhou to do my doctoral dissertation research.” I have found, over the last month or so that this is the point where they are “on the hook.” This is no longer just a casual chat with a foreigner they saw in a public space. If I can get past the first few sentences without making any
major grammatical errors in Chinese, the act of saying “hello” often turns into a conversation. Having spent a large portion of the last decade learning Chinese I can attest from personal experience, that these first few sentences are the most difficult. Like any language, Chinese has a multitude of dialects and accents. But what I think isn’t clear to most people outside of China is that the term “Chinese” isn’t exactly the same as when we say “English.”

Yip Po-Ching and Don Rimmington illustrate this point in the first sentence of the introduction to their book *Chinese: An Essential Grammar*, where they explain, “The Chinese Language, or group of related Languages, is spoken by the Hans, who constitute 94 percent of China’s population.” The reference is subtle in this first line, but Chinese is more a group of languages than a singular language. At this time, when I say “English,” that includes several different groups (American, English, Scottish, Irish, Australian, etc.) but these groups are still frequently mutually intelligible, or different accents on a singular language. Yip and Rimmington continue to explain, “The Chinese Language is divided into eight major dialects (with their numerous sub-dialects).” So far, every place I have been in China has had its own accent, and some places have their own languages that are not necessarily mutually intelligible when speaking. This means that those first few sentences of a conversation with someone can really test even the best Mandarin speaker’s linguistic ability.

Over the last few years, I have come to dread the question “Can you speak Chinese?” Because the answer is harder than simply saying “yes” or “no.” I can speak and understand a very standard form of Beijing accented Mandarin or 普通话 (common speech), which is important because even the term for Mandarin can change if you go to
Taiwan, where it is called 国语 (national language) and sounds very different even though the grammar and words are the same. In Hangzhou a majority of non-transplanted locals speak two different forms of Chinese: Mandarin and a version of the Wu dialect that everyone calls 杭州话 (Hangzhou speech).

The difference between these two dialects was demonstrated just last week to me while attending a Spring Festival celebration with one of my friends and his family. My friend, Zhen, who was also my first contact in Hangzhou, picked me up for dinner and drove me to the restaurant where we were meeting his family. This was fortunate not only because I was getting to spend the new year’s celebration out, but also because this holiday is a time when everyone in China, and I mean everyone, is expected to go home and be with their parents. This means that every shop around me, even the fast food chains and supermarkets, had been shut down for the better part of a week, and it was going to be nice to see some people and speak some Chinese. My friend’s accent, even though he is not from Beijing, was very easy to understand and without thinking about it I assumed his family would speak in a very similar way.

Of course, it was a pleasure to meet his uncles, aunts, and cousins. It was also immensely educational because we had a long conversation about how cousins are often introduced as brothers and sisters because of the Chinese Government’s one child policy. It wasn’t until dinner that I realized that unless someone was speaking directly to me, I couldn’t understand a word of what was happening. My friend occasionally would reword what was happening in Mandarin, or even translate single words into English for me. Both the meal and the hospitality were impeccable, but my inability to understand a large part of the conversation felt strange. It sounded like they were speaking Chinese
(which they definitely were, if Chinese is a group of languages). It wasn’t until the drive home that my friend asked me how much of the dinner’s conversation I actually understood. I confessed to him that I understood only what was directed to me. He laughed and let me in on the fact that they were all speaking Hangzhou speech (杭州话).

My relief was instant, it sounded so much like Mandarin that I couldn’t pinpoint the difference, I just knew I couldn’t understand it. Still laughing, he informed me that if you are born in a different city, or your parents don’t speak Hangzhou speech, chances are that even a native Chinese speaker from a different place or dialect couldn’t understand the conversation at dinner.

The effects of the language barrier that foreigners face in this city are visible. For a lot of people in Hangzhou the look on their face when I start to speak in Chinese is one of surprise. One woman, who works in the building where I live, even let me know that I am the first foreigner she had ever actually spoken with. This is an odd realization for me and demonstrates one of the major ethical implications of relying on my foreignness to gain access to conversations. Her questions about my life at home in the United States are basic, but I am just as interested to hear her assumptions about my life as she is to hear my answers. While I am doing my research in Hangzhou, I am leaving behind a string of interactions that will shape the ways foreigners are perceived. I am in a rare position with the combination of my obvious foreignness and my ability to communicate in Chinese. Though an increasing number of Americans are studying Chinese, it is clear that not too many people in this city have ever met a foreigner who has the ability to get past “hello” and “thank you” in a conversation. So when I make the turn and start telling them that I
am conducting research in their city, my role shifts to that of an “interlocutor” in a conversation about my dissertation research, or what life in China is like for a foreigner.

The next, often easier step in shifting these chance conversations into interviews is explaining that I am trying to understand what modernity means in Hangzhou, often phrased in Chinese as “what modern means in Hangzhou.” I have decided to leave out the visual component of my project during this preliminary explanation because of trial and error in my early attempts at getting interviews. If I can reach the point where I reveal my research topic, almost everyone, even if they are confused by what exactly I mean by modern, has an opinion on whether or not Hangzhou is modern, and how they came to that conclusion. The few times that I try to reveal that I think modernity is not just communicated through language but also via what we see, my statement is met with blank stares, a quick interaction, and a lack of permission to interview anyone. Trial and error teaches me that the visual component of my research can be explored and explained much more effectively through the interview process.

My focus on the interplay between what we see in the environment and what we learn from other modes of communication leaves me with a tricky labeling issue. In trying to label what a person can see, I have found a long list of terms that all focus on different parts of the objects, images, and environments that we see in our day-to-day lives. The terms “visual representation,” “visual display,” “visual experience,” “visual culture,” all point at what I want to understand but highlight the peculiarity of trying to discuss something that has so many different and interrelated aspects. Starting with the widest term “visual culture”, which highlights the connections between the visual experience and the culture that influenced its creation, comes with a historical focus on
the image. Matthew Rampley argues to widen this definition in the book *Exploring Visual Culture: Definitions, Concepts, Contexts*, when he states,

> Not only does art consist of practices other than the making of images—one should mention sculpture and, more recently, installation or text-based conceptual art—but also material artifacts play a crucial part in the visual articulation of cultural values and identity.\(^{18}\)

Rampley’s argument that, much like art, visual culture is manifest in a variety of material artifacts broadens the definition but still does not provide me with the terminology that I need. The term he uses, “material artifact,” highlights the materiality of an object, which can come with its own set of problems. Often, in created environments how an object looks and what an object is can be two dramatically different experiences. The focus on the word material also shows the overlap between material cultural studies and studies of visual culture. As Michael David Kirchhoff explains “The research goal of material culture studies is simple and straightforward: to investigate the relationship between people and things irrespective of space and time.”\(^{19}\) While this very easily could be a productive theoretical lens for looking at modernity, I feel as though a focus on the object instead of the visual component of an object leads to an overemphasis on the physicality of that object. In emphasizing the physicality of an object there is a danger to remove that object from its context in both space and time.

With all of this in mind, I feel compelled to use the adjective “visual” as a noun to describe what I am looking to understand. I am not the first to use the word “visual” as a noun. Lucien Taylor in the book, *Visualizing Theory*, explains this usage of the term by saying,
It engages with their reciprocities—the visual-sensual in the theoretical no less than the theoretical in the visual—after which, in short, the configuration of vision either as constitutive and corporeal or else as a reflective “mirror” of nature ceases to be a simple dichotomy.20

Using the adjective as a noun encourages an engagement (which I prefer) between the visual component of an object, image, or environment and the person looking at and interpreting the visuality of the object. In this way the term “visual” could be defined as the visual component of an object, image, or environment. An object that cannot be viewed is not “a visual,” and a person who cannot see is unable to experience “the visual,” of any given object (even though they may be able to engage/experience the object through several other senses). In constructing the “visual” in this way I do not mean to conflate the image that happens in the mind’s eye of the person looking at an object with the visual component of that object, instead I hope to highlight that the visual, though inextricably intertwined with all the other components of an object, has its own unique characteristics that impact an individual’s interpretation of whatever he/she is looking at.

For example, my favorite meal in Hangzhou is soup noodles. My favorite noodle shop is less than a block away from my apartment and is one of the smallest storefronts on the street. When I receive my bowl full of noodles there are several different components that shape my interpretation of that object, the smell, the taste, the visual, the feel/haptics, and sometimes even the sound. The visual is just one of many characteristics of an object that highlight the interplay between an object and the senses of the person interacting with that object, image, or environment.
As I sit in the park reading through my notes, I realize that a group of older women has gathered behind me, and they are quietly trying to gauge what I am doing. I hold up a page of my notes about West Lake and ask, “你们看得懂吗?” (Can you understand?). They laugh, the one closest to me responds in Chinese, “Of course not, it is in English.” The tension of my foreignness is present every time I go outside in Hangzhou. Whether it is sitting on this bench drinking coffee, buying fruit at a shop next to my apartment, or even having a conversation with other foreigners, it is a persisting feeling. There is no way to remove my foreignness from my project, because in this space there is no way for me to become any “less foreign.” No matter what I wear, how much cultural knowledge I have, or how fluently I speak, the first interaction is always a six and a half foot tall white man saying “你好” (hello). Whether I like it or not, it is going to be an integral part in understanding every interview or interaction in this fieldwork, but in many ways it is what makes the fieldwork possible. As Kathryn Sorrells and Gordon Nakagawa point out in their essay “Intercultural Communication Praxis and the Struggle for Social Responsibility and Social Justice,” the intersecting hierarchies that construct my heterogeneous position suggest, “that the operations of meaning and power in any given interaction are highly complex.” However they continue to point out that

To the extent that our interactions with those who are most different from ourselves requires careful and thoughtful reflection upon our own positionality and standpoint, the most profound learning and insights become possible, providing alternative ways to live fully and respectfully as human beings. Being foreign in China is an excellent reason for almost anyone to come up to you and start a conversation. In the last month of sitting in public spaces, with the exception of
bad weather, I have never walked away without some sort of interaction. Strangers invite me to lunch in the middle of the afternoon, sit and talk with me for half an hour, and genuinely want to help me understand the city where they live. I don’t think the same would be true, or at least as common, without my foreignness to break the ice in that first interaction.

While my foreignness has become an aide to my research, it also poses some serious complications. The most important hindrance is my ability to understand culturally bound information and interpretations. But this outsider position should not be considered a deficit. Instead, I access Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the “excess of seeing,” articulated in his book *Art and Answerability*, which helps to position me in this project. Speaking to representational and positional dilemmas, Bakhtin notes that when we “contemplate a whole human being . . . regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself.” Or, in other words, there is always something about yourself that another person is able see/understand in a different way than you because of his or her position outside of you. This does not mean that the other person can understand all of you, but that he or she can observe things you cannot and can interpret them in a way you cannot due to your position inside yourself. It can, however, suggest that a person who is unfamiliar and not native to your city, your culture, or even your language, can observe those processes from a different vantage point than those people who were raised in the same context, culture, and language as you.
This idea is of course a two-way street. Those people who stop and speak with me can see/understand parts of me and my research that I might not be able to. For this reason, I ask the following two questions at the end of each interview:

- If you were interviewing people about this topic, what questions would you ask?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Both of these are simple questions, but the answers they generate are more than valuable. People’s responses range from suggesting that I study the immigrant laborers that come to Hangzhou from the surrounding countryside to sharing my own life story with a group of people in the park. Allowing for the two-way interaction, and looking for those moments or spaces where the “excess of seeing” impacts interactions, and allows for dramatically more open conversations. Often, after cultivating an open dialogue, I was provided with more information about their lives and their city.

The goal of this project is not to completely understand modernity in Hangzhou from January of 2013 to May of 2013. To set such a goal would be foolish because, as I will explore later, modernity is a moving target, always out of reach. However to claim that it cannot be understood in any capacity, or especially by an outsider is also to fault on the side of skeptic caution. Dwight Conquergood in his essay “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance” labels this refusal to engage in another cultural reality out of a fear of offending as the “Skeptic’s Cop-Out,” which he describes as “an easy bail-out into the no man’s land of paralyzing skepticism.” With all the complexities and potential pitfalls that doing research in the city of Hangzhou entails, I can understand how skepticism could be an easy initial
response. Difficulties with language, cultural references, issues of gaining access, and the role of subjectivity have all shaped the way I have engaged with this topic.

But, as Conquergood explains, the skeptic “shuts down the very idea of entering into conversation with the other before the attempt, however problematic, begins.”\textsuperscript{26} The result of which, Conquergood claims, leaves the skeptic “detached and estranged, with no sense of the other . . . alone in an echo-chamber of his own making, with only the sound of his own scoffing laughter ringing in his ears.”\textsuperscript{27} While I think that his grim depiction of the skeptic is a little extreme, I agree with his key idea. Trying to engage with people, even if there are going to be mistakes, is better than preempting the possibility of any interaction. There has to be a realization that I, as an outsider in this space, have a unique approach to the context of Hangzhou. I am not Chinese, I did not set foot in China until I was almost 20 years old, but a decade later while sitting on this bench I am in a position to engage in a dialogue about how modernity works.

Looking at my notes, the “excess of seeing” was present in my interviews early on. It was even spelled out in my fourth interview in the exchange:

Tim: Where do you feel is the most traditional place in Hangzhou?
Xia: Most traditional . . . Hangzhou’s most traditional place . . . should . . . I am not clear (certain).
Tim: Why are you not clear?
Xia: Because a lot of places feel [traditional], they give that feeling. I am from Hangzhou, that feeling here is, in general, uniform (identical). There is not any especially traditional place to speak of.\textsuperscript{28}
In my questions I use the word “觉得” which means “to feel,” to encourage the expression of personal opinions. This man latched on to the “feel” connotation of the verb and expressed the idea that growing up in this city he is surrounded by the feeling that this space gives off. Being saturated with this feeling, the spaces all start to seem identical and therefore, to him, there is “nothing especially traditional” to speak of. This is not the case for me, as a foreigner in this space. I might not be able to understand the shifts in feelings without asking questions, but the shift is recognizable because everything is new/novel. I pay attention to these shifts in visuals and the feelings that spaces emanate because I have not yet learned what is considered mundane here. The differences in rooftops, plants, and even signage around the city are new to me, and as such receive equal attention, whereas back home, I pass the buildings, signs, and other elements that make up my hometown without thought. The red brick buildings that line the red brick streets are nothing special to me, because, in my experience, they have always been there and are taken for granted.

On one side, I do not know how to define what modernity is, or how it looks, in this space. In order to gain insight I will need to question the people who are currently participating in the creation of modernity in this cultural context. But on the other side, in asking my questions and framing my photos, I am asking those people to explain something that, in many of my interactions so far, is taken for granted. If I were to ask the same questions as a person born and raised in this space, the conversation would undoubtedly be remarkably different.

My coffee is almost done, and I realize that the woman playing the Erhu is packing up. The morning ritual of drinking coffee, watching the small wooden boats in
search of tourists slowly appear out of the fog, and reflecting on my project all make me think that I should have recorded this moment, not just in writing as I am doing here, but with the audio recorder that has been my companion every single time I have left my apartment, no matter how short the outing might be. This context, the visual of the tree shaded benches, one with the woman and her instrument the other with a seemingly out of place foreigner, overlooking a cultural landmark has everything to do with my project. But I realize that this moment would not have been as productive, or as reflexive had I been focused on capturing instead of experiencing it.

The cultural anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his recent book, *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*, reminds us that there is an inherent betrayal in the collection of stories that occurs with the “translation of the story into a fact, or what is called ‘data.’” He claims that once this “rapid-fire and unconscious” process takes place that “the philosophical character of the knowing is changed.” It is with this effect in mind that I have to remain vigilant that the act of recording experiences in my notebook and to some extent turning on my little audio recorder encourage me to edit, organize and structure the experience as a set of information that will be used to explain my ideas later. If I focus in the moment on the information gained from a specific experience, instead of the wider potential of the experience itself, it will cause me to overlook some elements of that context. I take a moment to let the feeling of foreignness wash over me as I look at my notes and plot my day. This is why this project needs an ethnographic ethos, to bring into focus the process that informs the understandings that I am hoping to share.
My approach to this project and its presentation is a balancing act between the necessity for an ethnographic orientation, in the form of interviews, and the images I gathered. The images are better understood through the interviews and the interviews were shaped and enriched by the images. In order to accomplish this I took a three-pronged approach to gathering discourses and visuals. The first was an informal interview. I asked people where to look for visual representations of modernity or tradition, what to look for while I was there, and what the term *modernity* meant to them. Second, I visited the identified spaces and photographed those spaces and the elements highlighted in the first section. And, finally, in the third stage, I had conversations with several groups of people from Hangzhou, conversations that were driven by the photos, which were framed during the second stage. The blend of ethnography and visual critique helped to resolve the positional quandary of “who” names modernity, by making the process more dialogic.

In order to deal with both cultural and ethical concerns throughout this process, the methodology that I chose is both reflexive and flexible. By this I mean the methodology was subject to change if the themes and meanings that emerged suggested a better or alternative possibility. This reflexivity is important to point out because, as Appadurai notes, “Globalization is certainly a source of anxiety in the U.S. academic world.” As an American researcher, I am not immune to this anxiety while doing research in a rapidly globalizing space. This anxiety is also evident in Shome and Hedge’s observation that “The multiple points of connection between media networks, media representations, and immigrant lives have serious implications for communication scholarship.” With the ever-present complexities of the globalized context, research
becomes a daunting task. The importance of realizing that my research will be one among many studies in the conversation concerning globalization and modernity is what ultimately makes this process manageable. Shome and Hegde address ways to approach this anxiety by stating that

methodological purity is not what we should strive for; rather we need to broaden our theoretical scope in order to unravel the nexus of practices that condition and regulate everyday lives under conditions of globality."^33

I have taken this suggestion to heart. The complexity of both the physical and theoretical contexts that this project engages with demands that the methodology be fluid enough to adapt when faced with the challenges that are a large part of this process.

Another important part of this methodology is the incorporation of visual representations as a means of communicating what it means to be modern. Krzysztof Konecki in his development of a visual grounded theory points out, “Visual data has been quietly but consistently neglected both as a potential primary and potential auxiliary source for generating/constructing [Grounded Theory].”^34 While, I am not entirely comfortable with the term “visual data” I think that his claim is telling. Trying to explain this project in English, or more specifically, the idea that visuals play an important role in the way we create/communicate what it means to be modern, is often met with confusion. Konecki claims that this might be due to the heavy dependence on textual and statistical methods of analysis.^35 This reliance on more traditional or well-marked routes of analysis complicates the process of understanding visually mediated messages.

Engaging rhetorical methods and strategies with visually mediated messages helps to fill the methodological gap of interpreting an image or any other visual. This
allows the created nature of the visual artifacts that will be the focus of my project to be foregrounded and explored. Mieke Bal reminds us, “The act of looking is profoundly ‘impure’.” She elaborates upon this statement by noting, “looking is inherently framed, framing, interpreting, affect-laden, cognitive and intellectual.” This implies that the interpretation of visual objects, although not random, is neither a given nor a measurable process. It is instead a situational process that is embedded within a cultural system that frames the meaning of the visuals.

The integration of rhetorical analysis and informal interviews is designed to reflect the impurity that is inherent in both the globalized context and the “act of looking”. My research practices engage Mieke Bal’s idea that “This impure quality is also likely to be applicable to other sense-based activities: listening, reading, tasting, smelling. This impurity makes such activities mutually permeable, so that listening and reading can also have visuality to them.” The mutually permeable worlds of looking, hearing, and talking shape the informal interviews and interpretations of the visually mediated messages that I encountered in Hangzhou. The images informed the ways in which people chose to explain them to me, and the cultural context and the language addressed the ways in which images were viewed, created, and positioned. Meaning in this project, thus, is an amalgamation of linguistic and visual means of communication. Both of which are interrelated and mutually permeable.

In forming a methodology for this project I took very seriously Appadurai’s suggestion that “the principle challenge that faces the study of regions and areas is that actors in different regions now have elaborate interests and capabilities in constructing world pictures whose very interaction affects global processes.” By identifying visually
mediated messages that visualize concepts of modernity, and then asking people who live in this context to help me understand and interpret those visuals, I was hoping to better understand how the images produced in this location are both influenced by and influencing the ways in which modernity is conceived.

The usage of the term “modernity” in this project is a tricky rhetorical act. Based on Fredric Jameson’s critique of modernity found in modernism, in this text, I begin with the idea that modernity is, in practice, a rhetorical trope,41 or a specific type of story that concerns the future. This means that a majority of my project is either looking at how stories concerning our future manifest, or sharing my own stories of how I gained an understanding of those future-oriented stories in the context of Hangzhou. With this in mind, I rely on the ideas of Bakhtin in unpacking both the usage/creation of these stories, and the impact of these stories on the words, actions, and things people use to manifest them.

I am aware that this is a step outside of Bakhtin’s later essays which focused on the novel, but in using the ideas from several of his translated works,42 I hope to hold true to one of his own depictions of incorporating an other’s words in to our own creative imagination. In his essay “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin explains the essence of the “internally persuasive discourse” which he juxtaposes with an “externally authoritative” discourse. He explains that internally persuasive discourse is half-ours and half-someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition.44
It is in this way that I view my incorporation of Bakhtin. Reading his writings gave me many of the words and arguments I will need to communicate the ways I see the stories and their visual manifestations that make up this project. I am not dealing with the written text of the novel, but my goal was to consider Bakhtin’s ideas in a way that he viewed as productive by assuming:

We have not yet learned from it all it might tell us; we can take it into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it in a new situation in order to wrest from it, new insights into its meaning, and even wrest from it new words of its own (since another’s discourse, if productive, gives birth to a new word from us in response).45

These words from Bakhtin are where I find my reasoning to apply his concepts to a context outside of the novel. I am purposefully applying his ideas to a new context because I firmly believe that they can provide us with new insights and meaning when looking at the communicative processes that create modernity.

Bakhtin’s focus on the novel in his own work should not be used to justify confining his ideas to analyzing the novel or literature alone. In doing this, I believe that we are turning a blind eye towards the new insights and meanings that we might “wrest” from his writings. I am also in no way the first person to make this argument for applying his ideas to new situations. Deborah Haynes’s book Bakthin and the Visual Arts applies Bakhtin’s concepts of answerability, un/finalizability, and authorship to the world of aesthetics and Art Theory.46 John Murphy’s article “Mikhail Bakhtin and the Rhetorical Tradition” directly confronts Bakhtin’s absorption into the canon of Rhetoric even though he himself seemed to look down on rhetoric in favor of the novel.47 And Fred Evan’s
article “Bakhtin, Communication, and the Politics of Multiculturalism” uses Bakhtin’s concept of dialogized heteroglossia to explore the relationship between communication and the creation of a multicultural linguistic community. These three examples are just a few among an ever-widening array of academic writing that is utilizing Bakhtin’s ideas to new contexts and materials.

This document is full of accounts of my experiences that have made up my fieldwork, but it is a story, and its focus is “modernity.” An engagement with Bakhtin’s ideas, which focus on aesthetic creation, language, and even the connections between subject, object, and language, directly influences the ways I have come to understand modernity and the way in which I have chosen to share those understandings. Throughout this project I focus his ideas on new materials in an effort to help explain my understanding of the ways in which stories, actions, and objects all work together to both gain and create meaning.
Figure 2: Water Calligraphy

Figure 3: Marital Arts Practice Station
I close my hardback reporter’s notebook. My coffee is now gone but that doesn’t stop me from trying one last time to get a final drop from the bottom of the large paper cup. The din of a crowd has replaced the Erhu music as the walkway along the side of the lake has come alive. In the hour or so that I have been sitting here taking stock of my project and preparing for the day to come, the area around me has transformed from a peaceful, quiet space to one filled with groups of people all engaging in their morning routines. The larger footpaths are full of retirees practicing calligraphy (Fig. 2), dancing, martial arts (Fig. 3), or a variety of other early morning activities. The visual of walking through a park in the morning and a group of sword-wielding senior citizens is something that I have seen every time I have come to China and is one of my favorite groups to watch every morning in Hangzhou. I think I will walk to the other side of the lake today and see Su Di (苏堤). It is one of the many man-made features that decorate the west side of the lake. The first person I interviewed in Hangzhou told me that Su Di is where I would be much more likely to find locals. While I have managed to meet quite a few locals on the eastern side of the lake, I think it is worth going and checking out. The advice I received in that first interview has been very useful in this first month and is often confirmed in the words and actions of the other people who stop to talk.

I have a little less than five months ahead of me, during which time I will need to collect more interviews, gather photos, and organize the final meetings with those individuals that will help to interpret those images. Chasing down visual representations of modernity in Hangzhou is a difficult task for which to develop a time line, but I think with the help of the people in this city I will be able to gather the stories, images, and
understandings that I will need before I get back on a plane. My camera and notebook are all safely in my messenger bag, while my audio recorder is turned on and in my pocket, ready for the chance interactions that have come to be the source of many of my best interviews. I have learned to keep the recorder on and quickly retrievable because digging through my bag looking for the recorder has led a few people to say they would rather not have me record our conversation, a feeling that I completely understand, but I know that upon returning home I will be able to trace back through the hours of audio that I have already recorded, double checking understandings, and translations. Those recordings are my safety net and without them the conversations are much more stressful.

After each interview without my recorder I understand the meaning of the expression “winged words” better than before. Walter Ong explained Homer’s phrase saying it “suggests evanescence, power, and freedom: words are constantly moving, but by flight, which is a powerful form of movement, and one lifting the flier free of the ordinary, gross heavy, ‘objective’ world.”50 But, if I have my recorder in hand, a single button push away from recording, asking if I can record this conversation becomes a side thought, usually green-lighted, then forgotten about. But the power of those words and my ability as a researcher to understand and recall them lessens their evanescence and preserves them so that I can do my best to use them in a way faithful to the context in which they appeared. Having the recorder ready to go allows the conversation and not the technology to be the focus after those first few lines of introduction and explanation of my project have taken place.

Today’s weather is warmer, and I think my goal of getting two interviews to make up for the recent bout of bad weather will be reasonable, as I walk through the crowds
looking at the map on my phone, trying to decide the best place in Su Di to focus on today.

1 Sassen, “The City,” 73.
2 “Hangzhou English Portal —杭州英文门户网站.”
3 Chen, Hangzhou, 1.
4 Luo, Three Kingdoms.
5 Chen, Hangzhou, 1.
6 Mote, Imperial China 900-1800, 15.
7 Mote, Imperial China 900-1800, 7.
8 Mote, Imperial China 900-1800, 197.
11 Gao, The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou, 37.
12 “Hangzhou English Portal —杭州英文门户网站.”
13 “Hangzhou English Portal —杭州英文门户网站.”
14 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 200.
15 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 201.
16 Yip and Rimmington, Chinese, 1.
17 Yip and Rimmington, Chinese, 1.
18 Rampley, Exploring Visual Culture, 2.
20 Taylor, “Forward,” xii.
23 Bakhtin, Art and Answerability, 22–23.
24 Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act.”
26 Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act,” 8.
28 Interview number 4 in Appendix A
29 Taussig, I Swear I Saw This, 145.
30 Taussig, I Swear I Saw This, 145.
41 Jameson, A Singular Modernity.
42 Bakhtin, Art and Answerability; Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination; Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays; Bakhtin, Toward a Philosophy of the Act.
43 Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 345.
44 Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 345.
46 Haynes, Bakhtin and the Visual Arts.
47 Murphy, “Mikhail Bakhtin and the Rhetorical Tradition.”
48 Evans, “Bakhtin, Communication, and the Politics of Multiculturalism.”
49 Interview number 1 in Appendix A
50 Ong, Orality and Literacy, 76.
Chapter 2: Modernity

I had only been in Hangzhou for a week or so when I met with Professor Yi. It was still early January and the snow from the blizzard that had welcomed me to Hangzhou was still covering the ground. This was my first meeting with someone in Hangzhou and even though I had spoken with Professor Yi before, I was still nervous. The taxi dropped me off in the general area of the university where I was to meet him, but I was very early. I didn’t want to arrive even a minute late, so instead I showed up thirty minutes early. This gave me time to run through the questions I wanted to cover in my head in both Chinese and English before the meeting began. His English is much better than my Chinese, but I wanted to be prepared to speak in Chinese as a show of preparation and, hopefully, respect.

I was staring at my fieldnotes where I had copied down all of my questions in Chinese, thinking that if I mess up a word, or forget the questions entirely, I could always reference that notebook. I think I was nervous because my project has a pretty big question mark in the middle of at least half of my questions, the word modern and more specifically modernity. The root word is always easily identifiable, but hard to define. Sitting in a restaurant reading my questions, I realize that I will need to be prepared to deal with the question of “what is modernity?” or “what do you mean by modern?” Not wanting to bias any answers more than asking the questions necessitates, I do not want to give an answer to these sorts of definitional questions. This same scenario played out time after time in my preparation. When telling people back home that I was going to research visual representations of modernity in a Chinese city, the next question would almost always be: “What do you mean by modernity?” The question was often followed
by a list of examples from different artistic, literary, or architectural movements in an
effort to double check that individual’s understanding of modernity. And, while none of
the examples was inappropriate, they need to be viewed in the context of their creation to
evoke the more precise meaning of modernity that I want to explore. The confusion that
is caused between the words modern, modernity, and Modernism, is something that needs
to be considered and clarified.

The two words easiest to deal with are the root word “modern” and the artistic
and philosophical movement of Modernism. Modernism, which is a specific artistic and
intellectual movement, is included here only to point out that it is not what I am
interested in exploring. With that in mind, it would be useful to have a working definition
of what exactly Modernism is so that we can separate it from the other two words.
However, this is easier said than done. Borrowing a phrase from Peter Gay’s book
Modernism: The Lure of Heresy. “it is not that defining Modernism has been tried and
found wanting, but that it has been found difficult and not tried.” Gay outlines a way of
thinking about “Modernists” as a group, even as he notes,

The one thing that all Modernists had indisputably in common was the conviction
that the untried is markedly superior to the familiar, the rare to the ordinary, the
experimental to the routine. In attempting to define Modernism as a whole, Gay reveals the complexities of trying to
define a movement that defines itself as being new, experimental, and in many ways
unpredictable.

Michael Levenson takes a different approach while trying to define Modernism in
his book Modernism. But before he gets started Levenson gives the same caveats as any
one else trying to track down the origins of Modernism. On the first page of his introduction he states that to ask the question “Was there a first Modernist? . . . is to hear the sound of folly.” Later in the same paragraph he points out the problem:

Any distinguishing mark of Modernism, any sign or signature, such as discontinuity, collage, literary self-consciousness, irony, the use of myth, can be traced back to the furthest temporal horizon. To try to identify an elusive beginning or to propose clinching definitions is to play a game with changing rules.

However, Levenson powers through this uncertainty and comes up with several working definitions for Modernism. One stated that “The agon of [M]odernism was not a collision between novelty and tradition but a contest of novelties, a struggle to define the trajectory of the new.” In developing another definition, Levenson works through the contributions of quite a few philosophers, scientist, and artist (e.g. Nietzsche, Freud, Wagner, Baudelaire, Whitman, Ibsen, Marx, etc.) to arrive at the understanding that what we need is “more acknowledgment of a ‘philosophic’ modernity that challenged the self understandings of the greater public.” The acknowledgement of the decentered and self aware subject in the Modernist movement leads him to solidify, even if only slightly, two of the major catalyst in the destabilization of the greater public’s understanding of itself and a decentering of subjectivity. The first was Nicolaus Copernicus’s heliocentric model of the universe, and the second was the biology of Darwin. Copernicus’s discoveries literally decentered us in the universe and placed us on a tiny object in a less than important position in our own universe. Darwin’s observations showed us that we did not even sit above the animals that inhabit that tiny object in any significant way. Even
though the thinkers, artist, and authors that Levenson uses to construct Modernism’s destabilizing and decentering effect on the greater European and American publics’ understanding of themselves, spans several hundred years there is a culmination in the 1800’s, and an even more specific focus on what Levenson labels as the “crucial decade of the 1880’s.” So, with a little anxiety still remaining about trying to identify a starting point for the Modernist movement in Europe and America, I think a practical way to think about Modernism is—even though the first modernist may never be identified—the movement as a whole gained traction amongst thinkers, artist, authors, and the general public in the last half of the 1800’s.

It is important to remember that Modernism is one of many modernities that has been argued for through time. I am not suggesting that modernity and Modernism are completely separate, but rather that the artistic and intellectual movement labeled “Modernism” does not have a monopoly on defining either the word “modernity” or the word “modern.” It is, instead, an excellent example of a modernity that was specific to a group of people in a specific culture during a (slightly less) specific time. Or, as Michael Levenson points out in his book Modernism, “There was no Modernism without individually audacious artifacts, but equally there was no Modernism without relationships among artist, their works, and the institutions and audiences that encircled them.” It is not that Modernism is not representative of a modernity, but rather that it is not representative of all modernities. In fact, the artifacts and thoughts that were produced by Modernists such as Piet Mondrian’s paintings, the performances of Oscar Wilde, or the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald, continue to have a lasting impact on some
cultural contexts, and in doing so, still impact the images and meanings that are conjured up in the word “modern” within those contexts.

The word *modern* is where the complexity begins. It is an adjective that, for reasons that will eventually become clear, I will begin here and leave with a simple and seemingly circular definition. The word *modern* is used when whatever the person is describing fits the characteristics of a specific modernity. I can hear the grumbles of my imagined audience: “You more or less used the word in its own definition.” To which I can only answer that I do so with good reason. If I am going to create the argument that each cultural context can (or does) work to create its own concept of modernity, then any unique qualifications I give to the word *modern* are reflective of a preconceived concept of a modernity. I cannot, for example, tell you that “modern means a simplification of design to create a better user experience,” because within that qualification of the adjective modern, I have imposed several assumptions about who should benefit from a process of modernization, and the design principal that simpler equals easier to use. Therefore the word that holds the most significance in this context is the word *modernity*.

To construct the meaning of this word I would like to begin with the idea that just like most words, *modernity* does not possess a fixed definition. Instead, the word and the concept of modernity are both dependent upon their past usages, as well as the ways in which the people in their current context interpret previous understandings. Modernity is dependent on what the literary critic Bakhtin would describe as the *heteroglossia* that is working to define it. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin describes heteroglossia as “the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object.” These languages are full of different voices that are all working in some way to define what an
object, and the words that are used to describe that object, mean. By starting with the heteroglot nature of modernity, I am hoping to distinguish this discussion from the ways in which modernity has been studied in the past. Anthony Giddens provides an excellent example of these past conceptions of modernity in his Book *The Consequences of Modernity*, when he offers his “first approximation” saying “Modernity refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less world wide in their influence.”61 This is a conflation of Modernism’s idea of modernity with modernity in general, but this is not Giddens’s last word on the subject. In fact, he even points out that this definition “leaves [modernity’s] major characteristics safely stowed away in a black box.”62 But it is in this initial approximation that we can see many of the assumptions that placing the concept of modernity into a heteroglot context can help to expand.

There is an assumption that modernity has sprung out of Europe and has moved to other parts of the globe. Charles Taylor, in his essay “Two Theories of Modernity,” labels this as an “acultural theory of modernity” and explains that it is theorized as “the change from earlier centuries to today as involving something like ‘development’—as the demise of a traditional society and the rise of the modern.”63 Through Taylor’s critique of the acultural theory of modernity we can see how modernity has become linked with many of the acts of imperialism where “development” is held up as the end goal of modernizing a specific location’s culture. These assumptions support the idea that the modern replaces the traditional, where both modernity and tradition are fixed and achievable goals. Dilip Gaonkar summarizes Taylor’s critique of the acultural theory of modernity by distilling its two major errors, “first, it fails to see that Western Modernity itself is a ‘culture’.”64
And, “Second, it imposes a false uniformity on the diverse and multiple encounters of non-Western cultures with the allegedly culture neutral forms and processes (science and technology, industrialization, secularization, bureaucratization, and so on) characteristics of societal modernization.” And it is with these two errors that an acultural theory of modernity becomes “a theory of convergence” with the result being that “the inexorable march of modernity will end up making all cultures look alike.” The support of this critique of an acultural theory of modernity is all around us. If this were the case we could conclude that all of the former British colonies, including the United States, having been exposed to modernity, would continue to modernize in a uniform fashion until we all became exactly like England (who presumably would also be on this same acultural, modern, trajectory as a culture). But as I think many people in the United States, Hong Kong, India, an the United Kingdom would agree these places are all quite different, and though the legacy of England is not hard to find in these contexts, the contemporary manifestations of these places are also increasingly divergent from each other.

Approached from a Bakhtinian heteroglot perspective, acultural theories of modernity become threads in an increasingly complex context to create meaning. They can be seen as arising from a specific time and a specific cultural context. This does not, however, strip the European threads of meaning of their authority on what it means to be modern, but rather shifts us to what Charles Taylor would label as a “cultural theory” of modernity. One of the major differences between these two theories is that a cultural theory of modernity “supposes the point of view in which we see our own culture as one among others.” By placing our own cultures within the dialogue and not, as an acultural theory would place it, above it we open up an unimaginable number of possibilities and
prospects that a unilinear, acultural theory would suppress. The role played by Europe, and later the United States, in influencing the meaning of the word modern is illustrated well by Bakhtin in his book *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, where he states, “there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone—artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed.”\(^7^0\) Or, when applied to the concept of modernity, just because conceptions of modernity from Europe and the United States have been widely cited in other cultures (sometimes by force) does not make these entrenched definitions of modernity as fixed as they sometimes appear to be. Modernity, in a sense, has always been a flexible idea.

It is in this multilayered heteroglot context that we can then begin to see how each attempt to define modernity, and how each action or object labeled modern takes on the role of Bakhtin’s concept of “the living utterance” which,

Having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance.\(^7^1\)

The different living threads that impact modernity’s meaning are made up by the different usages and manifestations that are available in a cultural context at a given space and time. Therefore, in each application of the label “modern” there is a network of dialogic threads spreading out, pulling meaning from, or sometimes purposefully forgetting how that label was applied within that context in the past.

By both refusing to claim a fixed definition and illustrating that it is in a multi-faceted heteroglot context that a conception of modernity can take shape, this
conversation seems to be headed down a nihilistic downward spiral. Compounded by the idea that our shared world is made up of constantly changing, disappearing, and emergent cultural contexts, the struggle to understand what it means to be modern can seem insurmountable. But it is in this complexity that we can see the necessity for a different approach to understanding modernity. The complexity emerges because the focus of the acultural and entrenched understandings of the concept are often too narrow. This is demonstrated in our day-to-day usage of the term modern. We talk about modern health care, modern kitchens, or modern educations, and in each of these usages we take for granted that our culturally bound conception of modernity is shared by the other people participating in that conversation. In a really simplistic way, we want the definition of modernity that our cultural context has created to be universally understood as modern (acultural). It is by exposing that there is a taken-for-granted and culturally influenced meaning behind each application of the word modern, or its manifestations in objects and actions, that we can start to see that modernity is not any one of the smaller contextually bound meanings that have been created.

Fredric Jameson’s deconstruction of modernity is a good starting point to begin to think meaningfully about modernity. In his book, A Singular Modernity, Jameson writes, that modernity acts as “a unique kind of rhetorical effect, or, if you prefer, a trope.” It is with this view of modernity as a rhetorical trope, a pattern that can be applied in different conversations and contexts as long as the correct elements are available, that we can begin to understand how multiple cultural contexts can produce multiple yet interconnected concepts of what it means to be modern. Viewing modernity as a rhetorical trope allows each cultural context to apply it to its unique situation without
being completely dependent on a single, universalizing acultural meaning of what it means to be modern.

Before exploring how modernity works as a rhetorical trope Jameson rightly notes that when we try to define modernity, “What we have tried to isolate is a dialectic of the break and the period, which is itself a moment of some wider dialectic of continuity and rupture (or, in other words, of Identity and Difference).” In this light, labeling something as modern is a way of showing its difference from its contemporary context. The manifestation of difference is only possible because that change is put into juxtaposition with the past or, as Jameson frames it, the continuity in that narrative that was working to create an identity. Modernity is therefore dependent on a rupture, in the form of a change that occurs in an already occurring cultural narrative. This change can be anything. These sorts of ruptures have been going on for as long as people have been adapting to our environments. The discovery of stone tools, the invention of the telephone, or the consumer availability of incredibly powerful computers could all be labeled as ruptures in their correlating cultural narratives. After a rupture occurs, the rhetorical trope of modernity can be applied. Using the trope of modernity to highlight the changes in the retellings of that moment is a way to argue for a continuation of those changes that, at least for this new narrative, started with that point of rupture.

However, any juxtaposition with the past or with the contemporary moment leaves little difference between the concept of modernity and the definition of something that is new. One might say that this is too inclusive a way to think about modernity. Another instructive frame from which to consider Jameson’s rupture in a cultural narrative is Arjun Appadurai’s discussion of the “modern moment” in Modernity at
Large. While he agrees that the modern moment “by its appearance creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present,”74 Appadurai proposes that it is “reincarnated as the break between tradition and modernity and typologized as the difference between ostensibly traditional and modern societies.”75 In fact, I would lend this more specificity and state that modernity is (always) juxtaposed with tradition. As Appadurai explains, the modern moment draws into focus the difference between past and present, but it is in its reincarnation or repeated retelling that it comes to be in juxtaposition with tradition. It is in this process that we can create room for the application of a rhetorical trope. The application of the trope of modernity to each presentation of the story or effect of the rupture helps to shift the cultural narrative that follows the modern moment. When the rupture is first seen it can simply be something new that could easily be worked into an already flowing cultural narrative. But it is because people chose to see that moment as a rupture, and label it as modern, that a concept of modernity begins to take shape.

Choosing to juxtapose modernity with tradition acknowledges the difference between the actions, practices, and objects that form our past and also those actions, practices, and objects that are labeled as traditional. The difference between the idea of the past and tradition is a function of their relationship to time. Tradition is asynchronic, or stands outside of time. This can be demonstrated by the actions of any contemporary traditional groups. Orthodox religions strive to be traditional not just in the past but also in the future. This means that tradition is not only an effort to preserve ideas, practices, and objects from the past but is a way of arguing for their continued importance in the future. Much in the same way modernity can be seen as a rhetorical trope about what
happens after the modern moment, tradition is also an argument about what happens next. The difference is that while modernity often argues for change, tradition argues for preservation. This in combination with Jameson’s observation would lead modernity away from being juxtaposed with any and all events that occurred in the past to a more focused juxtaposition with an asynchronic concept of tradition.

In setting up this discussion based on Jameson’s notion of modernity as a rhetorical trope, we may have arrived at a metaphorical minefield. Jameson was not attempting to explain modernity; rather he was working to disassemble a modernity that was put forward by Modernism. In an effort to differentiate my discussion here in which I am making an attempt at understanding modernity by differentiating it from Jameson, I need to discuss his “Four Maxims of Modernity.” The simplest to engage for our purposes is the first maxim that bluntly proclaims, “we cannot periodize.” By viewing each usage or attempt to apply the term modern as a living utterance in a heteroglot context, this maxim has already been addressed. Also, by leaving behind the acultural theory of modernity, this discussion is free in many ways from working in a fixed period of time or within a single culture. If we view each thread of meaning that surrounds the concept of modernity as stretching backwards through all of its past usages in different times and context, then the idea of demarcating a fixed period that is finished becomes tricky. In his book *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin uses a different metaphor to illustrate this point when he says “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.” The idea that we could remove sections of the chain seems to make sense, but it would be at the cost of losing all of the different meanings and usages that worked to form that section of chain. Charles Taylor has a
similar view when he says, “the starting point will leave its impress on the end product.”79 Trying to deny the past, or make the claim that a modernity has fundamentally and totally changed a culture is a return to an acultural theory of modernity that doesn’t allow for all of the residual differences that result from each culture’s past and present when the trope of modernity is applied.

The second, and more important for this discussion, is that “Modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category.”80 I think the word concept here is a little restrictive because a concept of modernity is necessary to any narrative of modernity that a culture is working to create. Instead, the second maxim is trying to separate our modernity from an acultural conception that is seemingly fixed within a cultural context. This can be seen in Jameson’s observation that modernity “is always in one way or another a rewriting, a powerful displacement of previous narrative paradigms.”81 If modernity is built from a rupture in a cultural narrative, it is of course in some way trying to displace a preexisting idea. The reason I voice my concern over the statement “modernity is not a concept”82 is I view it as a multitude of concepts.

The nature of modernity as a narrative or rhetorical trope, and its corresponding ability to rewrite or displace a cultural narrative, can be highly confrontational and politically charged or can be seen in the most mundane of examples, like my new modern “smart phone.” This conversation will be dated in a year, but currently I have a smart-phone that is continually being advertised, talked about, and demonstrated to be a rupture in the way we think about our telephones. I personally have bought into this rhetorical effect wholesale. My phone shaped the process of getting to the university, so that I could meet with Professor Yi. I can hardly remember how I survived without GPS directions,
foreign language dictionaries, and email on my phone. Without the assurance of having it in my pocket I would have been lost. In my cultural context, the creation of the modern telephone has very little to do with phone calls. It is a rupture in the narrative of what a telephone is and what it should (maybe I should say “must”) be capable of doing. The rotary phone of my youth, with its single use, large handset, and cord anchoring it to the wall is the tradition that in my cultural context has been displaced by the “smart phone.”

The example of the “smart phone” builds on of several different modernities that have work to shape the modern phone in the past. It uses cellular technology instead of a land line, it has a touch screen instead of the numeric buttons or a rotary dial, it is small enough to fit in a pocket instead of being incased in a bag or physically attached to a car. Each of these examples encapsulates not only the changes that have been made to make my phone comply with a new modernity, but some of them even show modernities that have been left behind as outdated, or are reshaped in each retelling to demonstrate how the modern phone has taken steps to reach the modernity that is being argued for in the present.

An effect that Jameson’s second maxim argues for is that the application of the trope of modernity “bears a libidinal charge.”83 Jameson views this as a dangerous feature because for him, this excitement “seems to concentrate a promise within a present of time and to offer a way of possessing the future more immediately within that present itself.”84 His claim shows how this type of modernity sets up “an ideological distortion of the Utopian perspective”85 and in so doing “constitutes something of a spurious promise intended in the long run to displace and replace the Utopian one.”86 I agree with Jameson that the trope of modernity is often attached or applied to different phenomenon
throughout history “to generate a kind of electrical charge.” However, I feel that any attempt to show the treachery involved in creating possible futures within a culture assumes a level of understanding of the motives at play in a cultural context that cannot be universalized across all of modernity’s applications. Instead, I would picture this first part as excitement concerning something different within the cultural narrative.

The electrical charges of possible futures that are created around this rupture are bound to take on utopian elements, depending on the type of change that is being argued for. Assuming, as Jameson does, this in someway necessitates that these possible futures are spurious or false also implies that the people involved in the application of the trope of modernity know that they are purposefully displacing some form of “not-false” possible future. This attribution of purposefully tampering with the future is too complex, and seemingly pessimistic of the people arguing for that change, for me to be comfortable with perpetuating this idea.

Understanding modernity in this manner runs into some major obstructions. There is a split in meaning between modernity as a trope and modernity as a projected future, which is somehow accessible today. Modernity as a time or a period just barely out of reach, without the recognition of the trope, becomes a paradox. Jameson alludes to this split saying that modernity is “a sign of its own existence, a signifier that indicates itself, and whose form is its very content.” But it is in Anthony Giddens’s critique of this self-referential paradox in his book The Consequences of Modernity, that we can begin to see how the process of signification works. He states, “Modernity is inherently future oriented, such that the ‘future’ has the status of counterfactual modeling.” Without the recognition that the trope of modernity is being put to work, modernity as a period gains
a realism that it will never be able to live up to. Giddens elaborates, “Anticipations of the future become part of the present, thereby rebounding upon how the future actually develops.” While Giddens was functioning without a heteroglot conception of our cultural contexts, or the idea of modernity as a rhetorical trope, his thinking at this juncture engages the meaning of both those two concepts. Or, to reword Giddens’s observation, to incorporate the idea of modernity as a rhetorical trope, by creating a story about what the future will be like, we become motivated to manifest those ideas into our lived experiences through art, design, technology, or by a change in our everyday practices. By changing the context, we often change the narrative, and in doing so, insure that the modernity inspired by the initial rupture will never be fully realized. By viewing modernity as a rhetorical trope that is applied to a cultural narrative that arises in a cultural context, we alleviate the self-referential paradox. Modernity as a time is either directly described, or is implied in the retelling of the narrative that started with the rupture. With each retelling, the story is adapted to fit new circumstances, and either include or discredit competing voices within the cultural context. This leaves modernity as a possible future, which people are working to manifest in the present, as a constantly moving and narrative-dependent target.

Modernity as a time just out of reach becomes a goal or a possible future that is used to motivate a group to embrace the changes being argued for in the narrative that is employing the trope of modernity. These two meanings can be very easily seen in the environmental movements that are happening within some cultural contexts. The rupture, or the recognition of human-produced pollution’s impact on the planet Earth, has inspired some people to argue for change. The application of the trope of modernity has created an
imaginary conception of modernity as a specific time where energy is free, but only after you buy the correct commodities to harness it, or that the sky is clear and blue, but only after you get rid of your current fossil fuel dependent vehicle. This trope propels the idea that in an energy-ethical climate, life continues with very few differences (except for those things that have changed for the better). This imagined modernity has encouraged me to search out and purchase different light bulbs, think about the amount of CO₂ I produce, and to think about the amount of waste I produce needlessly. While I have bought into this application of the trope of modernity and its seemingly utopian promises about the future, I know that the ways in which the future is depicted in the present will never be realized.

The difference between the ideal amount of CO₂ production and the amount that I see as reasonable was made clear to me as I walked up the steps in the university on my way to meet Professor Yi. Although there is snow on the ground outside, I realize that the heat is not on in this building. This is done to conserve resources. You only heat the rooms that have people in them. This is a logical idea, but the cold stairwell catches me off guard nonetheless. I expect large, unused spaces in public buildings to be heated just in case I need to walk through them. This incapacity to realize the environmentally ethical future is partially due to the fact that I still drive a fossil fuel powered vehicle, and there are large cultural contexts full of people who are fiscally unable or simply unwilling to change. So even though I have gone through the effort of buying new light bulbs and I am painfully aware of the impact of CO₂ gases, I still accidentally leave lights on all over my house, and assume that an entire building will be heated just incase I need to walk through it. By assuming that this possible future was anything more or less than a best-
case scenario, fueled by the excitement that resulted from a rupture in a cultural narrative, we are working to prescribe motives to people and in doing so we assume too much.

The electrical charge that surrounds modernity is an important effect, but such excitement has just as much potential to produce favorable conditions as negative ones. Saying that these possible futures are spurious or false gives them a realism that would make their inability to be realized treacherous. But viewing a narrative of modernity as a goal that motivates (or as the best-case scenario) recognizes both the energy that a well-constructed modernity can generate without labeling it as spurious or deceitful. One group’s goal might be another group’s worst-case scenario, which would lead them to actively impede progress toward that modernity.

Jameson’s third maxim of modernity, one that is quite troubling to this discussion, is that “the one way not to narrate it is via subjectivity (thesis: subjectivity is unrepresentable). Only situations of modernity can be narrated.”91 The idea that only situations of modernity can be narrated seems to be a purposeful straw dog. In many ways, this makes sense in the common sense logic of an acultural theory of modernity in which there is a fixed achievable idea of a situation that might be considered modern. However, if we take the second maxim to heart, then modernity does not always manifest itself in the situation, but rather it is manifest in the narratives. And by using this third maxim to argue against Modernism, I think that it becomes less of a maxim concerning modernity and more of a critique of Modernism’s narrative of modernity. In laying out his support for this third maxim, Jameson notes that some of the “conceptions of Modernism and its subjectivity do seem to remain fairly fixed in place.”92 In singling some of these conceptions out he seems to be critiquing the acultural theory of
Modernism, saying, “that the notion that modernity is at one with some unique type of western freedom is still very much with us.”

This seems like an attempt to irrevocably tie modernity and Modernism’s narrative of modernity together. He continues to intertwine Modernism’s modernity with modernity in general with the critique of the idea that “modern people are individuals, and what is unfree about the others is then obviously enough their lack of individuality.” The idea that individualism and therefore freedom are defining characteristics in modernity is once again reflective of a modernity and not all modernities. But this third maxim is once again a critique of a modernity put forward by Modernism and not modernity as a rhetorical trope. He seems to imply that since Modernism placed an emphasis on the individual, and the individual’s experience is by its nature completely subjective, then we cannot communicate about modernity in any other way than narrating the manifestations of modernity that have already occurred.

While I agree that manifestations in specific contexts might be one of the better methods of seeing how a narrative is embodied and supported by the people in that context, the assumption that the narrative and/or conception that is shaping the modernity lies within an individual is highly problematic and assumes that Modernism’s rhetoric of individualism is in some way representative of all modernities. But in my questioning of this statement there is an implication that modernity and the cultural narrative exist someplace outside of the individual. This too is a sort of straw dog argument dependent upon assumptions based in a cultural narrative. However, there is an important middle path in Arjun Appadurai’s “work of the imagination,” which he claims “is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern.”
Appadurai creates an important distinction between fantasy, which “carries with it the inescapable connotation of thought divorced from projects and actions, and it also has a private, even individualistic sound about it” and the imagination that “has a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude to some sort of expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise.” This distinction places the imagination into our lived worlds and not, like fantasy, separated from it. The imagination is also not necessarily a private place. Its ability to work collectively is where culture and the cultural contexts that inform our ideas of modernity are developed.

Appadurai expands on his conception of the imagination, saying, “It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects.” It is in the collective imagination that the blend of the classic influencing factors of ethnicity, nationality, gender, family ties, location, previous narratives, etc. are combined in ways that create a cultural identity for the individual and cultural narratives of the people that contribute to that specific collective imagination. The collective imagination is also where threads of meaning from outside the cultural context are annexed, tested out, and appropriated within the new cultural context. In the collective imagination of a group, the location of a narrative of modernity becomes less crucial to our understanding and in turn becomes another feature of a narrative that is culturally produced. The imagination of groups, and of the individuals that make up each group, is precisely where our cultural contexts and our cultural narratives are created. The subjectivity of an individual is important because it is one voice within a heteroglot collective imagination that is being put to work in order to apply the trope of modernity to a rupture that has been labeled
within the community as modern. Being unable to represent an individual’s subjectivity is not a point that stops us from representing a modernity, but is rather a recognition that modernity happens in a collective imagination and is manifest in various ways through different cultural contexts.

Because of this I would update Jameson’s third maxim in a way that does not tie all modernities to Modernism’s focus on the importance of the subjectivity of the individual and thereby frees it from the trap of trying to represent the subjectivity of the individual. Instead, we can turn to examples found in the artifacts and corresponding narratives that are manifest in our lived worlds. In exploring the narratives, some of which are implied and others directly associated with the lived experiences of a context, we can gain a better way of engaging with a different group’s modernity concerning a rupture in their cultural narrative.

The fourth and final maxim Jameson puts forward is that, “No ‘theory’ of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern.”¹⁰⁰ In this statement I think we can see what Jameson constructed as the final blow to Modernism’s narrative of modernity, but in the construction of his argument, and especially in the second maxim, he has shown the answer to this statement. Both Modernism and Postmodernism are narratives arguing for what is to come next. Consequently, if we view modernity as a rhetorical trope or a narrative category, postmodernism, in many of its forms, creates competing narratives concerning a rupture that occurred in Modernism. As some groups realized that the acultural theory of modernity put forward by Modernism is less than universally applicable, a rupture in the narrative of Modernism was created. Postmodernism, pulling
on and appropriating many of the threads of meaning of Modernism, incorporated numerous other strings in creating possible futures. While this was being done, it started to impact the collective imagination of those people both inside and outside the postmodern groups leading to changes in the way art, design, social practices, etc. are interpreted. This leaves postmodernism as an application of the trope of modernity in and of its self. Therefore, the claim that any “theory” of modernity that fails to incorporate the hypothesis of a postmodern break with reality is a rhetorical move that encourages more and more individuals to function within the narrative of modernity that Postmodernism, and in this specific case Jameson, is looking to promote.

Unfortunately for this discussion, this clean application of the trope of modernity to a cultural narrative, and the one-to-one juxtaposition of traditional and modern is rare, if it occurs at all. The usage of modernity as a rhetorical trope does not exist in isolation. It is always subject to the heteroglot context that it is being applied to (or from which it arises), and often in those contexts there are numerous and sometimes-competing meanings brought from other, interconnected, contexts and usages. The clear-cut juxtaposition of one modernity with one tradition, though ideal to demonstrate the concept, is not how these rhetorical arguments get applied in our lived experiences. The heteroglot nature of the contexts that create cultural narratives might have several different modernities trying to spring from a single rupture, or several voices fighting for authority within each narrative of modernity. Each of these competing voices acts as a living dialogic thread, which influences the way people in those contexts understand all the other ways modernity is being applied to that single rupture.
I hope that through this the reader is able to gauge the distinction between Modernism, modern, and modernity. Modernism is a specific modernity from the past and, in some cultural contexts, the present. This can be a little contentious because this would imply the same is true of postmodernism as well. Modern, in this discussion becomes a contextually bound adjective that expresses an object, idea, or social practice’s compliance with a specific narrative that has made use of the trope of modernity. This usually means that the changes that a specific modernity is arguing for, have manifest in some way within the object, idea, or practice. I hope that this fuller conception of the word will allow the reader to see why the earlier seemingly circular definition was a necessary evil to provide an introduction.

Modernity therefore should not be defined without consideration for the cultural context to which it is being applied to/arises from. By looking at modernity as being produced by the heteroglossia inherent in any interconnected cultural context that makes up our world we can begin to see how modernity as a trope can allow a wider conception of the word modernity than an acultural concept that sprung to being in Europe and slowly spread out through the world in the guise of colonization, development, or progress. Instead, what I am hoping to promote is an understanding that while that concept that rose out of Europe and was used as a justification to colonize large parts of the planet was (and in many places still is) an authoritative voice, it is not the only voice participating in creating the narrative of the future in many cultural contexts around the world. With the rapid change that contemporary globalization has brought, and many of the new communication technologies and business practices that have resulted from it, our world is full of ruptures in different cultural narratives. And, as many groups choose
to argue for change within their cultural context, the trope of modernity that has been dominant is being changed, adapted, and sometimes just plain left behind.

This leaves that old European thread of modernity in a very perilous space. As Bakhtin points out in *The Dialogic Imagination*, “—In this mirror of constantly evolving heteroglossia—any direct word and especially that of the dominant discourse is reflected as something more or less bounded, typical and characteristic of a particular era, aging, dying, ripe for change and renewal.”  

The more well defined a modernity the more likely it will be left behind after it fails to be useful at dealing with a rupture within a cultural narrative. In stating this, I am not suggesting that this old thread of meaning is no longer useful, or that it is no longer an authoritative voice, but what I am pointing out is that this authoritative thread of meaning is no longer cited, appropriated, and forced on people in the same way. And therefore, there is potential for understanding in observing how cultural contexts and the groups of people that comprise them apply the trope of modernity to ruptures in their own narratives.

To understand modernity is to try to understand the competing voices that are making arguments about the future of that group and also how the individuals within that group are imagining their futures. Understanding how different cultural contexts appropriate, cite, or just plan change what it means to be modern can also be a path to gain insight into the connections between different groups. If a group is putting forward modernities that are showing integration and appropriation of another group’s modernity, it means, in some way, there is an argument that sees these two groups exchanging ideas and maintaining a connection in the future.
It is with this conception of the heteroglot cultural context that I have shaped this project, and this following interview was the first informal test (for lack of a better word) of this conception outside of my own mind, and in a cultural context outside of my own. As I arrived in Professor Yi’s hallway, I found him finishing up a meeting with some of his students. He led me to his office, which was much warmer than the hallway, and offered me some tea. I quickly set up my audio recorder and took out my notebook. After asking for his permission to record our conversation, I turned the recorder on and started asking questions. This was not just my first interview for this project, but it was the first of many interactions that form the body of my fieldwork. After all the planning, arranging flights, accommodations, and making contacts through email, my fieldwork was finally underway.

60 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 278.
63 Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” 172.
68 Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity.”
69 Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” 177.
70 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 88.
74 Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 3.
75 Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 3.
78 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 69.
79 Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” 181.
101 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 60.
102 Interview number 1 in Appendix A
Chapter 3: Initial Conversations

Trying to pick out just a few of the conversations from my six months in Hangzhou is not an easy task. In our initial conversations, the local people of Hangzhou performed in ways that allowed me to gain my bearings not only in the city, but within the confluence of cultures that is the city. Out of the 33 initial conversations that I had throughout the city, I have chosen three to share in this chapter. I chose them with the notion that each exists in connection with other conversations during the initial phase of fieldwork in Hangzhou. Fieldwork, ethnographers repeatedly remind us, demands choices on the part of the ethnographer and is rarely a complete account. As anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran points out in her book, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, “Ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretense to present a self contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points.”103 Visweswaran’s idea that the ethnography can never share the entirety of a situation, or of a context, is supported by James Clifford’s influential work, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, where he notes, that, “Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies of truth. Power and history work through them in ways their authors cannot fully control.”104 This line of thought leads Clifford to the claim that “Ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial—committed and incomplete.”105 In other words, no matter how well I construct my stories and no matter how hard I work to be faithful to the actuality of an event, I am subject to the forces (political, cultural, linguistic, etc.) that shape that context. There is no feasible way for me to present the whole of my experience. Neither Visweswaran nor Clifford claim to provide ethnographers with permission to purposefully manipulate their work.
Instead they highlight one of the factors of ethnographic research. By understanding the idea that I can never share the entirety of my experience, I have chosen three stories to share because they were significant in terms of their impact on the images I would gather in the second section of this research process. These three interactions do not give a pathway to understand the whole of my experience. Instead they give a glimpse at the part of my experience that worked to shape this project. In a sense, these are the stories that directed some of the choices I made in fieldwork, and shaped the rest of my time in Hangzhou.

Behind each of these stories are others that shape my interpretations of them. Like the man from a neighboring province who didn’t want to be recorded, but tracked me down a few minutes later in a crowded park because he thought of a better way to phrase his answer. Or the old men who recounted for me what it was like to live under rationing, telling me how much easier life is now that you can buy what you can afford instead of needing to obtain a ration ticket as well as the money necessary to make a purchase. Even though you do not see these stories written out here, they were crucial in the evolution of this project.

With each interview and especially with each failed attempt at an interview, my approach adapted to better facilitate these conversations. My vocabulary and word choice changed to use more frequently used expressions, more precise words, or deal with a rough point in my own accent. The way I introduced myself also changed, and was simplified to ensure an understanding of who I was and what I was doing before I switched on my recorder.

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It is the end of January and the air in Hangzhou is still cold. For some reason I didn’t think I would be dealing with this type of cold while doing the fieldwork for my project. Before my arrival here, I talked to many people about this city. Everyone spoke of its beauty, but no one mentioned the possibility of snowstorms. I should have predicted this considering that one of the most famous scenes of West Lake is “Lingering Snow on Broken Bridge” (断桥残雪). But in fairness to myself, the story that made that bridge and its lingering snow famous includes snakes that take human form, an immortal man, and an evil monk that imprisons one of those snakes underneath Lei Feng Ta (雷锋塔), another landmark of West Lake.108 So, based upon the stories I had heard and the fact that Hangzhou is a southern Chinese city, I wrongly assumed that snow would make a rare appearance. It is easy to see the impact of the cold temperatures on my research. I had never encountered weather in China that kept everyone inside. Unsurprisingly, cold temperatures make people much less likely to stop and chat with a stranger in the outdoors.

Walking south down the east shore of West Lake, I make eye contact with an older man sitting on a bench. As a foreigner here, I am unaware of what is considered normal when it comes to eye contact, but I do know that a majority of my interviews would not exist without it. Sitting or walking around public spaces for the last 20 days or so has demonstrated to me that approaching people is off putting and will, in most cases, not end in an interview. However, sitting on a bench drinking a cup of coffee or a bottle of water, looking at the scenery or being a spectator to some activity that is happening in that space, is more productive at gaining access to people than asking for interviews ever would be. I often make eye contact with someone passing by, thereby inviting an
interaction, and within a few exchanges I have permission to interview them. This is, of course, an exploitation of my own foreignness in this space, but it provides a much more comfortable interaction for everyone. I don’t have to deal with the constant rejection of asking for interviews and those people who choose to start a conversation with me came to the situation by their own choice. Eye contact merely acts as the invitation to talk.

As I get closer to the old man sitting on the bench he continues to occasionally catch my gaze, and eventually calls me over. I was not intentionally making eye contact with him, but this is one of my behaviors left over from growing up in a small town. Eye contact is a form of respect, and even with a stranger passing by on the street you often make eye contact and say “hello.” Once I am close enough to speak to him I say hello “你好.” With the lack of people in the park today, it only seemed polite to acknowledge each other, but after his “你好？”in response he asked “Did you want to ask me a question?” This was my constant fear; I must have made an inappropriate amount of eye contact. This is not the first time that this has happened. Other times people have asked me “are you lost?” or the even worse “do you need help?” The old man’s question wasn’t far off base. I was mulling over a few questions of my own. Wondering who I could interview today must have given my face a worried expression.

Caught a little off guard I said, “yes, if you have some time could I ask you some questions?” After the man agreed, I explained who I was, what my project was about, and asked if I could use my audio recorder. Sitting next to him on the bench, I couldn’t help but think of my grandfather, and it wasn’t too far into the conversation before I found out that he was only a few years younger than my grandfather the last time I saw
him. In his 90s, Wang spoke softly out loud while he was thinking, and had the same posture as my own grandfather did in his 90’s.

I barely got the recorder on fast enough to catch Wang’s initial thoughts on my project. After hearing I was in Hangzhou to explore what modernity means in this space, he took off talking, “This, modern or traditional, is a comparative thing, it is a comparison of time, it is a comparison of feelings.” This statement was an exciting way for him to start this interview. I hadn’t asked him a single question yet, and already he is engaged with the topic and separated the temporal aspect of the word and the experience of modernity. He continued, “Modern or the past, this comparison, this boundary is very blurred . . . about this thing, modernity or the past, Chinese people are definitely different than (you) Americans, English, or French.” Without a single question asked he had located modernity as a culturally dependent concept.

I smiled at the promise of this conversation and asked him, “where is the most modern place in Hangzhou?” After asking for a little clarification, he started to think out loud: “assume it is buildings, West Lake doesn’t have any modernity (modern feeling).” This statement surprised me. Contrary to my initial assumptions, several other interviews had said West Lake was modern, and especially modern on the side of the lake where the two of us are currently sitting. Now, this man, who seemed very in tune with the line of thought I am pursuing in my project was saying that West Lake had nothing that feels modern. I followed up his claim, “It doesn’t?” I think this threw off his train of thought a little, but he quickly answered, “It doesn’t, because it is reserved . . . So when you see Hangzhou, when you look around West Lake, there aren’t any buildings higher than eight stories tall.”
This is a common statement explaining why West Lake feels traditional. According to several people, the local government has made sure that buildings around West Lake are not tall enough to hinder the scenery. This creates a very pretty, green, view from the eastern shore of the lake and a very striking city skyline from the western shore. When you stand on the top terrace of Lei Feng Ta (雷峰塔) on the western shore, you can see a spectacular division between West Lake and the skyscrapers to the east. The hills and the lake seem to meet a perfectly straight line of tall towers and sky cranes (Fig. 4).

![Figure 4: View From the Top of Lei Feng Ta](image)

In Wang’s statement there is also the issue of height. Even though it seems simple enough that tall buildings equate to modern buildings, it is not something that I expected to be so clear-cut. The opposite is also assumed to be true that traditional buildings are shorter. This makes more sense in the explanations. Most of the people associate the shorter height of the older structures with access to building materials and techniques. Hand-built wooden structures have both a safety and a cost issue associated with their construction. Therefore height becomes one of many elements of a juxtaposition between the taller, newer buildings and the older, shorter buildings. The actions taken by the local government in an effort to preserve the scenic nature of West Lake solidifies this
connection between height and modernity. The tall modern buildings that exist outside of West Lake are different from the shorter traditional wooden buildings with their white walls and dark tiled roofs, common within the West Lake district.

Moving forward in the conversation, I refocus our discussion on where he thinks the most modern space in the city is, if not at West Lake. Thinking for a moment, he responds, “Now it is . . . Hangzhou . . . that new . . . Binjiang (滨江), That is a modern city, but our life at West Lake is still good.” Probing this question further I realize that he has not ever actually gone to Binjiang; and this seems to be a pattern. Another woman, who also thought of Binjiang as the most modern space in Hangzhou, hadn’t been there either.110

Figure 5: View of Binjiang

Binjiang is a new section of town on the southern side of the river (Fig. 5), and it is billed as the “high technology district.” When I ask about it, many people respond by
observing that ten years ago the south side of the river was still all farmland. My apartment in Hangzhou is in this district and the rapid construction of this space is obvious with just a quick look out the window. From one side of my building you can see the brand new apartment buildings and street front shops. Within the area there are fireworks at least a few times a week marking a newly wed couple moving into their new apartment or the grand opening of a shop or restaurant. But on the other side of my building is a line of sky cranes towering over half finished buildings, and behind these is the farmland that once covered the entire district. Binjiang is a very clear symbol of the expansion and development of Hangzhou. It looks to foster both a high tech business sector and provide people with newer and larger apartments.

The last part of Wang’s statement is also quite an important glimpse of the comparative nature of modernity: “but our life at West Lake is still good.” The modern is dependent upon a comparison with the traditional. As an argument concerning why the traditional should be replaced with the modern, it often comes with value judgments built into the very base of the word. There have been several points throughout my conversations with Hangzhou residents that illuminate this underlying qualitative judgment. Feeling the need to point out that life at West Lake is “still good” even though he would not label it as modern brings this into clear focus. Modern is promoted as better, and it is often not until we step back and deconstruct what is being billed as better that we can see the inherent value statement that is present when we use this label of “modern.” Only a few people questioned whether modernity was good or bad. Some people even wanted to use it as a system for ranking progress between cities or countries. The
evaluative nature of the word always has the potential of insulting or putting down an older, more traditional space or way of thinking.

Wang’s softly spoken thoughts before he named Binjiang also reveal one of the more problematic associations of modernity, the word “new.” A majority of my interviewees have used this word as part of their descriptions of what it means to be modern, but new and modern are not the same thing, although that which is modern is almost certainly new. I can’t help but think of the phrase one of my geometry teachers use to repeat, “a square is a rectangle, but a rectangle is not always a square.” Newness is confirmed, time after time, to be a element of modernity. But what is often lacking from these discussions, and what I did not have the presence of mind to probe in this conversation, is the difference between new and modern.

If modernity is a juxtaposition with traditional, but both are an argument for the future, then we are constantly surrounded by new traditional things. Eventually traditional clothes wear out and are replaced, traditional buildings are renovated or rebuilt, and the commerce that surrounds traditional holidays happens every year. The word “new” also pops up over and over again as a reflection of what Arjun Appadurai’s labels as the “modern moment,” which he explains as creating “a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present.”\textsuperscript{111} It is this break in the continuity of ideas or ways of thought where the word new finds meaning in the context of modernity. Anything on our side of the break created by the modern moment is “new,” and anything on the other (in the past) is “old”. Therefore the newness of the buildings in Binjiang is two fold. Not only have they been recently constructed, but the use of new building materials, techniques, and designs creates a visual break with the short wooden structures
of the past and in this more abstract way reflect a type of newness indicative of modernity.

With the juxtaposition between traditional and modern in mind, I continue to move through my list of questions and ask Wang where he thinks the most traditional space in Hangzhou is. His response is West Lake. This is an extremely common, but also an extremely vague answer. Since the early 2000’s, the entire district around West Lake has been both developed and preserved. This district of town reaches out into the hills on the west side of the lake toward the terraced tea fields of the Dragon’s Well (龙井), covers the temple complex around Ling Yin (灵隐寺) Buddhist temple, as well as the lake itself and the various historical landmarks that sit on its shores. So each time someone gives the answer of West Lake, I have to ask “West Lake is rather big, is there a specific part?” “The islands on West Lake,” he continues “they retain West Lake’s style (personality).” The little islands which dot the western side of the lake’s water are a place that I have not yet visited. Even though I have a fairly congenial relationship with the men who row the boats for hire, I cannot convince them to take me out by myself and not as part of a tour. The tours stay at a distance from the islands that would not be conducive for me to frame a photo with any detail. I even went as far as taking a picture of the sign where the boat prices are listed as a means to start a conversation about how much money I would need to pay to hire a boat. Unfortunately even that conversation ended with the clear recognition that they are interested in making a profit and taking four people out at a time was going to be better for their income than taking one odd foreigner out who doesn’t want the typical tour, but instead wants to go look at the islands up close.
To illustrate his explanation of traditional, Wang points to the boats getting ready for the tourists on the water in front of us. They are larger boats that look like someone has put one of the small traditional buildings afloat on the lake. “It is like those boats,” he says:

Suppose they still had the four arts of Chinese scholars (琴棋书画),\textsuperscript{113} and beautiful women . . . assume that they could all foster these things, then it would be beautiful. More reflective [of the past]. Now, a lot of things are changed by modernity.

The boats (Fig. 6), which sit in a row along the shore, are clearly aimed at tourists. The large ubiquitous signs along the walkway point out the various stands where you can buy a ticket to go see the landmarks of the lake from these obviously new, but externally traditional boats. The staff on each boat do not look like they are ready to play chess or
dance, but resemble an airline steward or ushers at a theater. Each day from a distance I watch them welcoming people to the boat and getting everyone seated before the boat starts its noisy motor and backs away from the shore.

Thinking of the change that this man is pointing out is a curious way to claim that the islands within the lake are the most traditional while at the same time pointing out that even those things looking to preserve a sense of tradition have changed. In the middle of the south side of the lake is the Imperial Dock, where the emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty would set out on to the lake with his boat. The difference, as this man points out, is not just that now most middle class tourist visiting Hangzhou can afford a ticket, but rather that the goal and presentation of this activity has been adapted to fit the new context that surrounds the lake. The details that used to go into a day on the lake have adapted to fit the shorter timeframe of a boat tour. There are no more professional dancers on the boat, and you do not take the time to play a game of chess, listen to music, or paint a landscape. But the visual of the boat works to evoke these thoughts.

He points out the tension between the traditional spaces and changes that have occurred in the face of modernity, and this becomes the focus of our discussion. While working through this problem he says, “suppose we are able to completely explain this city, furthermore we were able to preserve Hangzhou’s local color, and possess a feeling of modernity, this is rather hard . . . to both want to return to the past and want the modern, these two are a contradiction.” The tension in this “contradiction” surrounds many of my interviews. The initial response that something is either modern or traditional is followed up by the recognition that some elements in that space contradict, or at least do not support the original claim.
In light of my first interview with Professor Yi, who suggested that I may want to speak with some people who move to the city from the countryside in order to find work, I was excited when a waitress at a neighborhood restaurant near my apartment in Binjiang (滨江) started a conversation with me. I was a regular customer during my stay in Hangzhou, because they made pizza from scratch and it was the closest place to my apartment to grab a cup of coffee or food that wasn’t a bowl of noodles. It is now January 22nd and at least once or twice a week since I arrived in Hangzhou I would sit at their restaurant order a cup of coffee and read a comic book. I often thought of this visual. This place was full of foreigners, due to the international school across the street, but I didn’t see anyone else pull out a dictionary and comic book and work as though translating legal documents. My first time in the shop was the middle of the afternoon, and there was no one else there. I assumed, as I always do in any first interaction in China, that speaking English was not an option. This doesn’t mean that I judge those foreigners who can’t speak Chinese, but I have seen the faces of the people with whom they are trying to communicate, and it is not a look of comfort. It wasn’t until a few weeks later when I saw another foreigner order a sandwich that I realized that everyone who worked there spoke English fluently. But now that the norms of our relationships were set up, it would be awkward to switch to English.

The waitress, Yang, who I was about to interview, was usually the only other person working out front alongside the manager. She would often stop and talk with me, eventually getting me to explain slang some of the other patrons used or ask about what high school was like in the United States. Today is a slow day and she finally got
around to asking me about the topic of my dissertation. Both Yang and the manager knew I was a student doing my dissertation research, but that was often where the conversation would jump to a more immediate or simple topic. But today was slow, I had been coming in to read my comic book for few weeks, and I am pretty sure she was bored. After explaining the whole project, she wanted to know what types of questions I would ask to better understand modernity. It was at this point that I asked if she would be willing to let me interview her for my project. She had a modest response. Sometimes the people who I thought would be some of the most interesting to speak with would voice a concern that their opinions might not be good enough to include in this sort of a research project. One other man that I interviewed even kept trying to defer his own opinions to mine because I was working on my Ph.D.. It always caught me off guard, and I would try to probe the statements to understand if this was a polite way of saying they would rather not be recorded.

A fear of being recorded was never the case, and in this instance Yang was worried because she just finished high school and moved to Hangzhou. In her mind she was neither able to speak about living in Hangzhou, or speak to what modernity means. These were easy concerns to put to rest. I told her that regardless of what she knew, she knew more about living in Hangzhou than I did. And as for modernity, I told her that it was her opinion, how she thought about it, and that there were no right or wrong answers. At that point she was on board and I started my recorder.
Yang had moved to Hangzhou just a few years ago and was going to turn 19 years old that year. When asked why she would leave her home in a neighboring province and come to Hangzhou she responded, “Hangzhou is a city of culture. Its activity and its culture make it very unique.” When I asked about the most modern space in Hangzhou, she responded with one of the more common answers, “West Lake.” I tried to get her to narrow it down, but for her the feeling of modernity wasn’t a single place but was found in “looking at the water, then seeing the willow trees growing along the side of the lake . . . it’s very beautiful” (Fig 7). Pressing the issue a little further I asked if modernity and beauty are related. She confirmed that they are, and when asked to explain she took an unexpected turn.

“Do you know the story of White Snake?” Not seeing the connection, I said I did. It is hard to live in this city for a few weeks and not hear the story at least a few times. If you visit the famous sites around the lake, it would be even harder to not come in contact
with the characters and the story. Lei Feng Ta (雷峰塔) makes use of the White Snake
story in its advertising, asking the question, “The pagoda fell down, is Miss White
[White Snake] still there?” –followed by the call to action, “enter Lei Feng Ta and search
the ancient pagoda for traces.” Lei Feng Ta, and West Lake in general were constantly
advertised throughout the city, so I am curious how she will connect the beauty of West
Lake, the folk tales, and modernity.

She continued, “there are still many more [stories] . . . but stories such as this one
can allow us to make many connections, because they are being handed down through the
ages.” At this point I felt like I might be missing something. I asked, “these are all rather
old stories, correct?” To which, she responded, “correct.” I followed up, “Then what is
their connection to modernity?” I thought she is either telling me why she is intrigued by
West Lake or she is making an elegant point about the past’s role in forming the future,
but I cannot be sure at this point. After a moment of thought, she laughed and said, “I
can’t say.”

Sensing in her expression that it was time to move on in the conversation I left
that point ambiguous. Yang didn’t respond, “I don’t know.” She responded with “I can’t
say” (说不出来). The translation of “I can’t say” doesn’t fully explain the phrase, which
implies that she was not able to produce the words to explain her meaning. That is a
feeling that I know all too well in the formulation of this project. One of the hardest
aspects of these interviews is the recognition that I am not asking questions that people
ask on a day-to-day basis. Before I started this research, if asked to pick the most modern
place in a city or even to explain what I meant by the term “modernity,” I would have
needed a second to think as well. Yang had already voiced concerns over the academic
nature of my project, and I didn’t want to put her “on the spot” any more than she already was. In an effort to move the conversation along I asked her where she thought the most traditional place in Hangzhou was.

Fortunately for me and my project, the connection between the past and modernity came up again. After taking a break so Yang could take a phone call, we began to discuss the most traditional places in Hangzhou. While she had not been to many of them, she obviously had a list of things she was looking forward to in the city. The final one of these was a place called Song City (宋城). This is a predictable shortening to two characters from the four character name for Song Dynasty City (宋朝城市). She was not the first person to mention it to me, but she was the first to explain to me what it was, “It is a theater . . . that puts on a show every night . . . furthermore it was a lot from the Song Dynasty being handed down.” Then, after telling me that I should go see it for myself she continued the line of thought from earlier, “on the whole, I think this [Song City] could also be considered modern. Because if we say that it isn’t modern, then how could it have been handed down to now?” Now I understood, she had been caught up in the tension between tradition as something from the past, and modernity as something in the present/near future. At the heart of her statement was the question—If it wasn’t being modernized, then how did these stories, and the performances continue to be culturally relevant?

Yang’s answers were seemingly right down the middle. It appeared from her answers that almost anything that survived in our contemporary time frame could be considered modern. But upon reflection, her answers were tapping into several of the advertising campaigns that I have seen around Binjiang. There are at least two billboards
in this district that I have seen with the slogan “Beautiful Hangzhou, Harmonious Binjiang.” Both of these have a comfortable place to sit in the foreground overlooking water with tall buildings in the background on the other side of the water (Fig. 8).

Another in the same series of advertisements claims that Hangzhou is “The capital of eastern [oriental] luxury, city of quality life.” The depiction is almost the same, only this time a cup of coffee is in the foreground (Fig. 9). The water and the buildings in the distance remain the same.

Figure 8: "Beautiful Hangzhou, Harmonious Binjiang Billboards
The connection Yang was creating among the beautiful scenery, traditional stories, and modernity was becoming clearer. West Lake, according to several of my interviews and some informational signs posted at the entrances, was opened up to the public in the early 2000’s. Hangzhou’s municipal government along with the Municipal Party Committee undertook the “Unified Preservation Project of the West Lake.” West Lake, as it exists today, is something that has been constructed within the last ten years. While that means that it is new, it does not directly get us to the idea that it is modern. Modernity in this narrative is much more subtle.

The advertisements, and even Yang’s description connecting beauty with modernity, all tap into a concept of design put forward by Juliette MacDonald in her book *Design and Modern Culture*. MacDonald notes that design “may be a value-free expression to describe all products, or it can convey luxury, exclusivity and elitism.”116 West Lake and the surrounding natural and traditional sites are being set up as a sign of the luxury found in Hangzhou. The billboards advertising this line of thought show a nice secluded place to sit in the foreground, tranquil waters, and then the tall buildings, which are a focal point in people’s descriptions of modern places, off in the distance. In the
images, there is usually not a single person in sight. This can be compared to the actuality of living in the city where personal space is often hard to come by, and many of the scenic areas are shared with other onlookers. The depiction of tranquil, empty space starts to look exclusive, and as such becomes a luxury.

The luxury that Hangzhou offers in these depictions has become an important part of how the waitress envisions a modern Hangzhou. Signs promoting tourism are all over the city. The Management Committee of Hangzhou West Lake Scenic Area and the Hangzhou Administration of Landscape and Cultural Relics erected a statue to commemorate UNESCO naming the West Lake as a World Heritage site along the edge of the lake (Fig. 10). This large medallion statue reflects the impact of the restorations and rehabilitation of the area that occurred just a decade before. But it also
commemorates a modern moment, and a break with the past. Turning Hangzhou’s beauty, and the folktales that go along with it, into a commodity in the form of tourism has led to an argument for change. The commerce and consumerism that have grown around it are just as much a part of the revitalization that has taken place as the renovations and preservation of those cultural landmarks.

With luxury brands like Prada, Aston Martin, and many others across the street from the various entry points to the lake combined with the international showing of restaurants, it becomes clear that this narrative of Hangzhou as an international tourist destination is something that is both very new and very modern. Globalization, as represented by the stores and the fashions that those stores are selling, is visible from the Willow tree shaded walk that surrounds the eastern shore of the lake. In this context luxury takes on two forms, the tranquility of the lake, and the exclusivity of the commerce.

In this modernity, the juxtaposition is intentionally downplaying the tension that is created with the past and instead pushing how traditional spaces can be used to facilitate change. Because the truth of the matter is that the luxuries now found in West Lake were only recently reopened to people, and have only recently been focused on the people willing to pay for those luxuries. Some of my interviewees referenced this change with disappointment. An interviewee who had left for several years to work abroad expressed regret that when he returned the older sections of the city that surrounded the lake were gone, replaced with shopping that most people living in the city cannot afford.117
The concept of luxury found within commodities was confirmed in Yang’s answer to the final question in the interview. “What does modern mean to you?” This was almost always one of the hardest questions to get an answer for, and her initial answer was no different. “I don’t have any particular notion” she said. To which I repeated, “according to you.” The fear of answering for everyone in China was always more present on the more abstract questions, but she quickly followed up with, “Modernity is developing transportation, having a car, it is things becoming better than before.” It was consumerism and transportation, both of which are huge parts of Hangzhou’s contemporary plans for development. With the first of eight planned subway lines opening in the city, a high speed rail linking Hangzhou and Shanghai, and more luxury cars than I have seen in my life, the impact of transportation, and the commerce that such infrastructure brings, is clear with in this city.

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I received a phone call from Zhen, my friend, on January 26th just before noon while I was out looking for people to interview.118 I always imagine how frustrating it must be to talk with me on the phone in Chinese, because without the body language to support the conversation I go from a capable communicator to some sort of comedy routine. I understand the entire conversation except a single simple word I have never come across before. But the word I don’t understand is, of course, the keystone of the conversation. In this case it was the word “auction.” I learned this word only after I had jumped in his car. But over the 20-minute drive back to Binjiang it became clear that we were going to a charity auction. The auction (Fig. 11) was organized by Zhen and a local radio personality. They are auctioning off different items, most of which were paintings
done by children. It was an effort to raise money for a group of kids who are all injured or sick.

These children, because of complications with their residency cards called a Hu Kou (户口), are not able to access the socialized medicine available to Chinese citizens with a Hu Kou, and therefore accumulate huge hospital bills. The closest analogy in the American context would be illegal immigrants who do not have a social security number. The only difference is that these children were all born in China to Chinese parents.

I sat listening to a presentation about the five children who would benefit from this auction. As bidding started, I realized how wealthy and generous the audience was. Auctions in China are different than the auctions I had seen in America. Once you win an object with the highest bid, no matter how large that bid, you walk that money to the front of the crowd, drop it in a box and collect your prize. Later, while I was helping to break down the stage and pack up the paintings that were not sold, I asked if that was the format of most auctions in China. Almost everyone answered yes, except for the really high end ones. People like to be seen while giving to a good cause. After the van was packed with the leftover paintings, and the stage was loaded into the truck, Zhen and I headed off to dinner.
Eating with other people in China is always an adventure of some sort. I try to let the other person order, especially if they invited me to eat with them. In my experience of China, whoever gives the invitation to dinner also pays the bill. But depending upon the group involved in the dinner, there may or may not be a fight, filled with kind words, about who gets to pay. Zhen doesn’t let me pay because early on in our relationship I made a joke about being a poor doctoral student, which he took quite literally. Only once while having dinner with him have I paid, and it was only because I paid without discussion and before he could reach his wallet. He was not happy, but I explained that I invited him, and therefore I should pay the bill.

Unfortunately we have already eaten out several times before this evening, and he no longer just orders what he thinks we should eat, but asks for my input. He also no longer accepts a simple, “I trust you, get what you want” as a dodge to the question, so I
pick out several dishes, most of which are obviously boring choices. I pick them more because I know what they are instead of having any strong affinity for them. You never realize how hard reading a menu is until you do it in a foreign language. For example, I never realized how nonsensical ordering “sunny side up eggs” was until I saw a reference to “1000-year-old egg and cucumber soup” on a menu.

The meal finally arrived. We ordered cabbage, celery and tofu, pigskin, and a soup that contains coagulated pig’s blood, octopus parts, and tripe (a cow’s stomach lining). I have started a policy of not allowing people in China to describe a dish to me until I have had a few bites and formed an opinion. This method has allowed me to eat jellyfish, bacon fat fried tofu skin, and dried fish without batting an eye. In the case of this soup, I appreciated my newly adopted approach to these sort of culinary adventures. The soup wasn’t bad, and I didn’t know if he ordered it as a means of facilitating a conversation, but it eventually became a symbol of economic development. His phrase was “you eat tripe if you can’t afford steak.” This is a good point. If all you can afford is pig’s blood, octopus trimmings, and stomach lining, then why not make a soup?

I started my recorder and moved down my standard list of questions, which must have seemed a little odd to him because we talked several times before this day and I already knew some of his answers. He was born and raised in Hangzhou and unlike some other people who can say the same thing his whole family is from Hangzhou and can speak the Hangzhou dialect of Chinese. This means that generations of his family have lived in this city, and most of his family still does. I point this out because the group of people that I have interviewed for this project is a mixed bag. Some people just moved to Hangzhou themselves, others were first generation in the city and could not speak the
Hangzhou dialect, and a few people belonged to families that had been in the city for generations.

He gave me many of the answers that I had come to expect. Money River New City (钱江新城) is the most modern place in Hangzhou (Fig. 12). The visual elements in that space led him to this conclusion. Many associate “modern” with tall buildings made of glass and steel with elevators inside. He was more precise in his descriptions and listed the color scheme as one of the telling factors. The gray or cooler color palette of these locations was something that had not been pointed out before, but does stand in contrast with many of the colors found in traditional spaces. For example, at Ling Yin Si (灵隐寺) Buddhist complex the walls are brightly colored yellow at the main temple. Or as you walk around the lake the colors of the landmarks are usually red or white, but not the cool colors of grey or the bluish grey that glass gives off from a distance.

This specificity is one of the reasons I made sure to record one of our conversations. Zhen is an environmental designer. He does jobs ranging from interior design to designing landscapes for gardens or parks. I even saw some drawings of an umbrella he is designing for the charity he helps run. Of course he was going to be more specific about some of these details, it is his job to notice the impact of color and design
in any given environment. He even went so far as to try to link the architecture in the Money River New City to a German architect, but he couldn’t remember his name, and I was unable to find him online.

Moving further into my questions, I asked him where he thought the most traditional space in Hangzhou was. He answered Gong Cheng Bridge (拱城桥), a place that I had not heard referenced before. This place is in the northeast part of the city next to the Grand Canal that connects Beijing to Hangzhou. Listing everything from the wood construction of buildings that do not go over two or three stories, to the shape of the rooftops, to even the way people lived their life, this place, for him, was both “traditional” and “local,” (Fig. 13).
There was an excitement in his tone as he listed off the features. His description ended with an invitation to go there with him followed by the almost ever-present statement, “There is a lot of good food.” Almost every conversation about a part of the city, a different city, or even a different country will have a review of the food. I have lost count how many times I have discussed the pros and cons of hamburgers with someone who has visited the United States.

“So, to you, what is modernity?” I asked, trying to take advantage of the momentum created in his description of Gong Cheng Bridge. “Our city is developing . . . it is progressing [improving],” he answered. A quick translation in my head and I realized that the word “进步” which is most often translated as progress, but can also mean “improvement” or “advancement” could be seen as a loaded term if I left the translation as “progress.” Many people have suffered or been steamrolled in the name of progress, so in an effort to clear up his meaning I followed up with, “to you, what is progress?” He answered, “As far as I am concerned, it’s giving me work, giving me a lot of opportunities . . . progress is to become more developed [flourishing].” Never quite sure where my Chinese comprehension breaks down, he paused and asked, “do you understand?” The pause that caused him to question my understanding was not a reflection of an inability to grasp the meaning of the words, but rather a recognition of how this directly influences his own life. Starting his own business, working on 10 or more projects, helping to run a charity, and still taking time to meet me for dinner. This isn’t some abstract concept that impacts his life in some taken for granted way, this is a description of his own professional development. “I understand,” I replied.
To answer my next question, “To you, what does traditional mean?” he replied, “Tradition is one kind of record, one kind of memory…everything eventually will become a memory.” “What connection do you think modernity and traditional have?” I asked. “It’s like two people” he said. “Two people?” I followed up with a surprised tone in my voice. “Two people,” he repeated calmly.

At this point I was unsure where this was going but in light of the thoughtfulness of his other answers, I was guessing he was building to a point. “It is like a father and son,” he continued. “the son gets older and older, then he is an adult. One day he will become a father and have a son. So, this moment, what you see now, really modern things after many years will become traditional . . . its cyclical.” My trust in his building to a point was not misplaced. In his statement I could see a reflection of the modernity as a culturally bound concept. His usage of the “father and son” metaphor is also a representation of this connection.

The relationship between father and son (filial piety) shows up throughout Chinese Philosophy. Confucius (孔子), Mencius (孟子), Laozi (老子), are just a small sample of the main figures in Chinese philosophy who use filial piety as a metaphor for how people should behave in hierarchical social relationships. In using this traditional metaphor Zhen illuminates tradition as a dominate discourse that will nurture and shape the ideas that will eventually come to represent modernity, and then eventually become the dominate discourse, and as such be labeled as traditional by the modernity which will eventually take its place. Creating a separation from the idea of modernity driven by ideas that arose from modernism, where tradition should be abandoned in favor of the radical or experimental, his answers encapsulated both the connection and the division
between traditional and modern that I think is an important part of a dialogic approach to understanding modernity.

The father and son metaphor, apart from showing connection to a string of Chinese philosophers, is also an extremely useful way to conceptualize the changes that take place in the creation of a modernity. The traditional, at one time in the past wasn’t traditional, it was either contemporary or in some way modern. Then, after being exposed to that tradition, new ideas come of age and try to break out on their own. However, after a while even these new modern ideas become old, and are the springboard for other new ideas that will eventually try to break out on their own. While this is not a perfect model for a dialogic process of building a modernity, it isn’t a bad way to create a starting point for a conversation.

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After having conversations with 33 people and looking over my notes and the 27 recordings that I collected, I was able to discern some thematic patterns in both the visual elements which were selected and described, and the explanations I was given concerning what it means to be modern. Although I received a wide variety of answers, and even seemingly contradictory answers concerning the modernity or traditional nature of West Lake, each conversation that I had was enriching in some way (even if only to complicate the understandings that I was forming). The most common answers pointed to West Lake as traditional, modern, or sometimes both. Thinking that this may be a consequence of sitting in West Lake for some of the interviews, I double-checked notes and recordings and realized that it was a popular answer no matter where the interview took place. Money River New City was also a frequently repeated answer as the most modern place
in the city. Followed by Binjiang, which only was mentioned a few times by people who had not gone to Binjiang themselves.

The visual elements of modernity that were described to me were repeated so often that they seemed almost rehearsed. The description consisted of tall buildings made of glass and steel with a cool color scheme, with the idea of commerce or at least some idea of economic development just underneath the surface. The other side of the juxtaposition was a little more abstract but usually focused on wooden structures, under three stories, with white walls, and black roofs. “White walls, black roofs” was actually an easily recognized phrase to most of the people I spoke with. The black-tiled roofs and white-walled buildings that are found throughout the city seem to be one of the easiest visual elements of a traditional space to identify.

One of the final visual elements that was described to me on multiple occasions was a little bit of a surprise. The ways in which people use the space came up over and over as a way to visually identify if a place was traditional or modern. One woman, during a conversation in West Lake, pointed out that people are practicing Latin and Ballroom dancing, things that would not have been common in China just a generation ago. The foreign dances reflected the openness and the globalization that has occurred in this space. A similar effect was also used to describe the impact of people’s actions in places like Ling Yin Si (Fig. 14) or some other traditional space in the city. Praying to the Buddha, or having monks around leads people to assume that the place is traditional.
These conversations have not given me a complete picture of modernity within this city. But that incompleteness is not something that concerns me. The ideas that I hope to understand will always be somewhat incomplete. Instead the concept of modernity possesses a quality, which Bakhtin explains in his discussion of the “internally persuasive word” in *The Dialogic Imagination*. He explains that the internally persuasive word possesses a “semantic openness to us,” a “capacity for further creative life in the context of our ideological consciousness”, and an “unfishedness and inexhaustibility of our further dialogic interaction with it.”¹²¹ Instead of a complete picture of modernity, I have been given a glimpse of how the abstract concepts of modernity and traditional are being engaged with, furthered, and manifested within the City of Hangzhou. These people, who gave up anywhere from five minutes to an entire evening to help me explore these ideas, allowed me to gain a foothold in the cultural context of this space. And, on top of all that, they gave me a set of suggestions of where I could go see these processes and visualizations of modernity first hand.

¹⁰⁴ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, 7.
¹⁰⁵ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*, 7.
¹⁰⁶ Interview number 11 in Appendix A
The Story of White Snake, or 白蛇传, is very well known in Hangzhou, and has recently been made into a movie starring Jet li as the “evil” monk.

I never made it out to the islands, I couldn’t hire a boat no matter when or what I tried. The normal tour did not get close enough to the features in the lake for me to actually photograph them with the equipment I had available.

The four arts of the Chinese scholar were music, chess, calligraphy, and painting.
Chapter 4: Visuality

It is now the middle of March and I am playing around with my camera as I walk toward the skyscrapers along the river in a part of Hangzhou labeled 钱江新城 (Qianjiang New City). The name of the district is a play on the name of the river that marks one side of the newly developing area. The river’s name is the Qiantang Jiang (钱塘江). Literally translated, it means money (钱) pool or embankment(塘) river (江). But, as it frequently happens in Chinese, some of the characters are dropped, leaving a two-character name “Money River,” which is easier to both say and remember. Using the abbreviated name for the body of water, the district is named “Money River New City,” which sounds much more fluid in Chinese than it does in this literal English translation.

I have traveled here because several of my participants during the last two and a half months have suggested that the New City district of Hangzhou is the most modern space in the city. As I approach the skyscrapers, I begin to understand why. New City is a short walk from the newly opened subway, which was yet another one of the spaces labeled “modern” in my initial interviews. The district touts a set of the newest, tallest, and most architecturally adventurous buildings in Hangzhou (Fig. 15). These buildings, and the small empty parks between them, have a completely different presentation than the more traditional spaces within the city. This district is indeed different. The map shows convention centers, amphitheaters, shopping malls, and higher end restaurants, all of which are surrounded by massive office buildings. The label of “Money River New City” is an apt moniker given the actuality of buildings and commerce that this space is designed to generate.
In trying to plan out what pictures I want to collect that day, I realize just how small my camera is. I have been taking photos around some of the other districts for the last few months, but it has been a while since I first unpacked this camera and noticed how neatly it fits in the palm of my hand. I researched for months before buying this
make and model. It’s not as fancy as a professional camera; I decided against bringing a camera with interchangeable lenses for aesthetic and practical reasons. I knew that I would already stick out because of my foreignness in this space, and adding a bulky, professional looking camera with lenses that I would need to fumble around with would probably be counter to my desire to be less conspicuous. Instead, I opted for a tiny little “point and shoot”. When I bought it, the image quality, lens, and color reproduction were all at the top of what was being offered in consumer electronics, but most importantly, it would make me appear to be a tourist, and in doing so would not hinder my access.

I tried my best to arrive early to this location to take advantage of the clean air that follows the morning’s rain. Hangzhou does not have the pollution problems like some other Chinese cities, but any city that is home to a big population has good and bad days when it comes to air quality. The clean air is important today because I am focusing on some rather massive subjects, and I don’t want the top of them to be in a fog. This goal is only partially realized, because even though the air is almost as clean as I have ever seen it, there is still a light morning fog that popped up after the rain.

This fog makes the buildings look as though they are literally touching the sky and as I make my way to the middle of the district, I realize that my tiny camera will be pushed to its technical limits. It will be tricky trying to encompass such large buildings in a frame without distorting the nice straight lines that are created as the buildings rise up from the sidewalk. This is one of my first major moments of doubt, and the relationship between these leviathans and the camera, which is smaller than my hand, becomes a symbol for the task of trying to faithfully represent a city or a cultural context using
photographs. Trying to photograph any city in the world, even the smallest, comes with a whole host of rhetorically significant choices and limitations.

The photograph is a complex object when looked at rhetorically. John Berger explores the photograph’s unique rhetorical properties in his book *Another Way of Telling*, where he writes, “It is because photography has no language of its own, because it quotes rather than translates, that it is said that the camera cannot lie. And so, this makes the lie *appear* more truthful.”¹²² Berger is drawn to a linguistic metaphor for the image, and yet his comparison is particularly useful. The image is commonly likened to a quotation, and comes with many of the same problems as using the words of another, without the convenience of a system of citation. A photograph is, in this case, viewed as quoting what is seen in reality. However, as Berger continues, the connection between the quote and what is quoted is brought into question. The “lie,” as Berger frames it, only appears more truthful. It is at this point that the metaphor hits its peak. A photograph, just like all the quotes I have used in my writing, are at the mercy of the individual who plucks them out of their context and places them into a new, alien context.

The photographer (or author) tries hard to frame the usage of each quotation, but in isolating that small chunk of the whole an interpretation, an emphasis, and meaning are all shaped in the process of the selection of that small chunk. The person who frames the photograph literally frames that moment for the audience so that the message is more likely to be interpreted in the desired fashion. So therefore, just as words can be taken out of context, and used for purposes other than their original intention, the photograph is a moment taken out of context.
Berger’s statement, published in 1995, rings even more true in today’s world of photography. The omnipresence of digital photographs paired with programs like Adobe’s *Photoshop* and many others flooding the market have made the ability to manipulate a photograph an increasingly common skill. Manipulating the color of an image, removing imperfections, or even changing the shape of someone’s body, are all common practices when using digital photographs. Because of these practices and the skills of contemporary photographers, who can make manipulated images appear real, the relationship between the photo and the moment that it is looking to represent becomes even more obscure. It is for these reasons that I have to pay attention to the details while framing each photo. In an effort to use photographs responsibly I have decided to limit my photo manipulation to the two basic functions of color corrections and cropping. These two manipulations should help me produce images that are representative of what I saw while in that location, while not changing the content or the backgrounds.

Within the context of this project, the photograph has multiple layers of importance. I am working to frame and gather photos while at the same time looking at how photos and other forms of imagery produced within this context are utilized within Hangzhou. For me, this locally produced imagery is most visible in advertisements. In most major cities, and especially in commercial shopping districts, photos surround us. Advertisements depicting the newest line of a product, ice cream shops showing people with content faces eating their ice cream, or a single image that shows me what I can expect from a theater’s newest release are just a few ways that images are used in public spaces. In his book *Culture and Consumption: New approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, Grant McCracken explores how meaning is
transferred from the world we live in to consumer goods through advertising when he notes, “It is chiefly the visual aspect of the advertisement that conjoins the world and object between which a transfer of meaning is sought.” Although many different forms of visualization can be used in advertisements, the photo is a striking example of this process. The happiness that is represented in the faces of those people enjoying ice cream is meant to be transfer to the act of eating a specific type of ice cream.

A photo (or image) used in advertisement is a strategic choice, and therefore is a rhetorically significant representation of the surrounding culture. McCracken notes that the people who create these images “must decide just how the culturally constituted world is to be portrayed in the advertisement.” For each of these decisions concerning how best to represent the world, a series of visually mediated messages are created. These images draw on their cultural context but look to manipulate it in order to better convey the advertiser’s message. David Blakesley takes this argument one step further in his essay, “Defining Film Rhetorics” when he says, “The visual composition of the frame, for example, conveys meaningful relationships among components in the frame, and these relationships also transmit or create ideology.” It is in this act, of putting things together in an image, that value judgments, relationships, and emotional content can all be created without the use of a single word. Blakesly continues:

*Visual composition* functions rhetorically to the extent that the visual material represented is the expression of value, a choice among alternative means of representation or among the myriad objects that might be represented in the first place.
Therefore, as I try to photograph this space, each frame I produce will be a choice of what is of value to this discussion at the expense of every other possible photo of this space. Every frame is an edit of the world, and each time I trip the shutter in my camera I need to be aware of the process that went into framing each photo.

So now, here I am, standing amongst city blocks full of seemingly brand new skyscrapers, construction, and meticulously planned public parks holding a tiny camera trying to decide what to include in each frame. In this moment I am grateful for the initial interviews I gathered. I don’t have to decide what to look for. I have been guided to these images. All of the initial interviews, and not just the ones that recommended this space, have a list of visual elements that help people identify a space as modern. Combing backwards through my notes, the visual elements that were most frequently repeated are tall, glass buildings, development, and how people interact with the environment. Tall and/or glass buildings are definitely easy to find (Fig. 16) in this section of town, but the other two, development and the ways in which people interact with the environment, are not quite so easy. Development, at its most basic, can be easily seen in the construction that surrounds the recently finished skyscrapers, and the advertisements on the walls blocking the view of the construction from the street.

It is on one set of these walls that I found one of the most striking visualizations of a strategically placed visual element. Around one construction site, a brightly colored advertising campaign had been painted on a set of white walls, which is normally a sign of a traditional space. The campaign was emphasizing the impact of the individual on the collective character of the city. With slogans like 诚实守信 (be true to your word), 助人为乐 (find pleasure in helping others), 保护环貌 (protect the appearance of your
surroundings / environment) (Fig. 17) and even 文明礼貌 (civilized manners), among a few others. Each character occupied its own brightly colored hexagon and the four character phrases lead into the phrase 我是可爱杭州人 printed in a font reminiscent of an 8-bit video game, which was translated for the reader as “I’m lovely Hangzhouese” (Fig. 18). If there was enough space on the section of wall, then there would also be a cartoon illustrating the point.
Figure 17: "I'm Lovely Hangzhouese" Advertisement

Figure 18: Detail of "I'm Lovely Hangzhouese" Font and Branding
The placement of the words and images is a reflection of Roland Barthes’s concept of “anchorage,” which is explained in his statement, “the text is indeed the creator’s (and hence society’s) right of inspection over the image; anchorage is a control, bearing responsibility—in the face of the projective power of pictures—for the use of the message.” In this conception, Barthes claims that the text has a “repressive value” in relationship to the ways in which the elements of an image can be interpreted. In the cartoon image of a boy vacuuming next to the planet earth while “I ♥ Earth” appears over his head, the words next to it lead us to the conclusion that good citizens of Hangzhou will help to keep their surroundings clean and presentable (Fig. 19). In a related vein, McCracken explains the relationship between images and words when he writes, “Verbal material serves chiefly as a kind of prompt which instructs the viewer/reader in the salient properties that are supposed to be expressed by the visual part of the advertisement.” He elaborates, “text, and especially headlines, make explicit
what is already implicit in the image.\textsuperscript{130} This idea can build on Barthes’s concept of anchorage. The text helps an individual to draw out a specific message from a visual. While Barthes and McCracken both seem to paint a one-way relationship between the linguistic presentation of information and the image, I would like to further complicate the relationship.

Using the idea of explicit and implicit messages that can be created with both words and images, the concept of anchorage can become a two-way street. While text can make messages in images more explicit, the image creates the context for the words and in doing so can shape their meaning and interpretation. The relationship of which part—linguistic or visual—works to specify meaning is ultimately dependent on what is privileged in any given space. Neither should be seen as the default mode of communicating the intended message, but, rather, they should be seen as interrelated parts of the whole.

The relationship between these two modes of communication—linguistic and visual—becomes even more complex because their interpretations are often conflated. When writing about images it is easy to artificially substitute the terminology of linguistically conveyed messages into the discussion concerning a visually mediated message. The ideas of reading an image, isolating symbols within the image, and even isolating a grammar of an image are all things that have been attempted before.\textsuperscript{131} Donis Dondis’s book \textit{A Primer of Visual Literacy} emphasizes this point and works to show the importance of being able to recognize the unique elements and syntax of visuals.\textsuperscript{132} The comparison to language-based communication provides many useful tools when breaking down a single image in a textual or otherwise linguistic presentation. But the addiction to
the idea that visually mediated information can be translated into a linguistic presentation strips the image of some of its unique abilities.

On the other side, the created visual object can become mythologized, and as such, never understood with words. In his opening line to *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger makes the point that “seeing comes before words.”133 This claim is two-fold. First, for those of us born with our sight, we can see long before we learn to decipher words. Second, as Berger phrases it, “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it.”134 The tension that is formed between understanding by seeing and trying to explain those understandings with words will never be fully overcome, just as my translations from Chinese to English (or English to Chinese) can never truly be a perfect (re)presentation and translation of what was said. However if we strip the creative process of the usage of linguistic means of organization, we also strip it of its ability to be interpreted and explained. Between these two options is where I think the visually mediated message should be theoretically placed. In his book *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong points out “a picture is worth a thousand words only under special conditions—which commonly include a context of words in which the picture is set.”135 The intertwined nature of visually mediated communication and linguistically conveyed explanations should not be separated or forced into an artificial one-way relationship.

The one to one, implicit to explicit, level of connection between word and image is only the beginning of how anchorage can help to understand this space. Much like subjects in a photo, these murals promoting a set of behaviors are purposefully placed in this section of town and in front of the construction that has come to represent
development. Their relationship in the space can be seen as creating connections in the mind of the people that occupy this place, whether that is passing through in their car, or walking along the side walks looking up. The “I’m lovely Hangzhouese” murals are connected to the development behind them just by their positioning, and in this way they are working to influence the ways in which people interpret their behavior in this space. The campaign pushing a moral approach to everything from business to littering becomes connected to this rapidly changing space and as such becomes a competing voice in the story of modernity in this context. The meaning that is being transferred by the anchorage that connects these words to the visuals that they inhabit is a two-way street and is working to influence both the way the passer-by interprets the buildings, and the way those messages presented in front of those buildings are worked in to the story of what it means to be modern in this district known as the New City.

Anchorage, or the relationship between visuals and words, is not the only way visuals are being used to influence the interpretation of this space. There are also direct attempts to use images to link the development, or modernization of the New City district with the traditional spaces of Hangzhou, specifically the historical sites that surround West Lake.
Underneath my feet there are paver stones that have been carved to look like traditional engravings of different landscapes around Hangzhou. Art historian Elinor Pearlstein notes in her essay entitled “Pictorial Stones from Chinese Tombs” pictorial stone carvings were both technically and stylistically developed during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). Accessing a tradition with 2,200 years of cultural history is accomplished with a stylistic choice. On top of that, many of the places depicted are traditional landscapes that are easily recognizable after my time interviewing people around West Lake. Lei Feng Ta (Fig. 20), various bridges, and images of the lake are carved into the sidewalk.

With these two elements—style and content—it would be easy enough to claim that these engraved paver stones were using culturally significant visual elements to
connect the modernity being created in the New City to a wider conception of Hangzhou as a whole. However, it was not only traditional scenes represented in this way. The large golden orb of the Intercontinental Conference Center (Fig. 21, 22), the amphitheater, and many of the larger and more unique skyscrapers were also depicted in the paver stones in a traditional artistic style. The positioning of these carved tiles in the sidewalk of this cityscape, with its mixture of the most recognizable traditional spaces of Hangzhou and the depictions of the most recognizable new buildings from New City, is clearly an attempt to participate in the story of this city. The only text that can be found on many of these carvings is the name of what is depicted, and even that small amount of text is often absent. Instead, each image, and the style that was chosen for its presentation, is being used much as text is on the billboards. They are creating a very forceful (although implicit) message that the visuals present in this context are not only part of Hangzhou, and should be interpreted in relationship to the traditional spaces, but that the new “modern” buildings that inhabit the surrounding space are just as noteworthy a representation of this city as any traditional landscape or structure.
The paver stones demonstrate the differences that are present in New City, which include many of the features that I was given as elements representing modernity, and the connection to the city as a whole. The argument for the modern status of New City is embodied in these carvings. In one interpretation, the spaces are linked with the other more traditional scenes, and in doing so, they are integrated into the same discussion/narrative of how Hangzhou should be envisioned. On the other hand, the
stones draw into focus exactly how different those new buildings are from the traditional spaces, a juxtaposition which creates a point of rupture between traditional and modern architecture within this city. The ways in which people use the space is the hardest visual element of modernity to find in the New City because, unlike in West Lake, in New City the early morning exercise and activity groups are nowhere to be found. Instead, I see the traffic that is ubiquitous at this time in the city, and a small amount of pedestrians. The pedestrians do not have the equipment that usually accompanies people to their activities in the parks. Instead, it seems that everyone in this space has some place to be, or a task that is about to get started. The occasional businessperson or construction worker would pass me on the street as I gazed skyward trying to determine how I should frame each example that I want to photograph. Overall, it was an empty section of town at a little before 9:00 am, but there was evidence that this space is bustling at times. At an amphitheater (Fig. 23) in the “Bolang Cultural City” (波浪文化城) next to the Hangzhou International Conference Center, a huge red banner promoting a performance of Hangzhou’s unique culture was set up in the center of the stage. There were no dates on the banner, which must be the backdrop for the performance, so I have no idea if the show happened last night or was slated for the future.
Figure 23: Amphitheater at Bolang Cultural City
The underground mall was obviously not open for business yet as I strolled around looking at the locked up stores. Arriving so early that nothing is open yet is a rare occurrence for me in China. During the first section of my research project I struggled to make it to the parks, tea fields, and other locations where I was told that I would be most likely to find people before the large crowds made having a conversation difficult. But, arriving in this space a little after 8:00 a.m., I feel a little like I have entered a ghost town. There were obviously people around, evidenced by the parked cars, opened coffee shops, and the occasional sighting, but this space’s purpose was obviously different at this early time. The social interaction and relaxation that dominates the activities I found in the parks throughout the other districts of Hangzhou has been replaced with a sense of focus and business.

After getting a few decent frames with my camera I start to relax about trying to faithfully represent this space. Looking back and forth between my camera and the actuality of the cityscape that spreads out before me, I think that I have gotten some good visuals to help me explain the modernity that is being argued for within this space. My thoughts now turn to the ways in which I will use these photos during the final stage of my time in Hangzhou and during my writing process. As I try to reflect on what I am seeing in this moment and how to best capture it so that it can inform these later conversations, I am reminded of Mieke Bal’s argument concerning the impurity of looking, and the cognitive and intellectual processes that inform the act of looking.  

The selection of the point that draws my focus, the things I am choosing to frame, not just in my photos, but in the gaze of my observation, are all drawing on an intellectual
process. This reframes today’s activities into an application of the interpretations that I was given by others through the filter of my own active process of looking.

Visual essentialism would have us—the people looking at objects—believe that there is some level of truth present in the material (and therefore visible) object. Instead, Bal advocates for a research practice that “is simultaneously a moment of visual literacy education, [and] a training in receptiveness to the object without positivistic veneration for its inherent ‘truth.’”138 The relationship between the material object and its inherent ability to convey a message is difficult to separate out. But, in trying to understand the workings of modernity through the usage of visuals, I can sidestep this tricky separation of object and the “inherent truth” given to it through interpretation. Instead, it is the effect on the collective interpretations of the visuals as a representation of modernity that is my focus.

With Bal, McCracken, Barthes, and Berger, we can begin to see how each purposefully created or displayed object has a human behind it; a human whose life is saturated in linguistic means of labeling and organizing the world. But the relationship does not end at a connection between linguistic and visual. Instead, as Bal points out all of our senses are mutually permeable.139 Therefore, each visual is saturated in the culture of the context where it was created, with all of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc. as possible influences that shape its final form. Berger joins in on this train of thought when he claims, “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.”140 This means that while the object has no inherent truth, it does have a long chain of cultural knowledge and dialogic meaning-making processes that impact the choices that went into its creation. And even though Bakhtin’s metaphorical chain of utterances deals
with language both oral and written, widening the meaning of this term to communicative acts in general both—linguistic and visual—should be a small jump to make if Bal’s conception of the mutually permeable worlds of the senses is taken seriously. Therefore the information that is created in these visually mediated messages is a link in a complexly organized chain made up of a whole set of culturally bound information.

Knowledge (not truth) is not produced only through our linguistic skills; we learn through the use of all our senses. But it is often organized or ordered by the words and linguistic structures that are available to us. When we think of knowledge in this way we can see Ong’s claim that “knowledge is ultimately not a fractioning but a unifying phenomenon, a striving for harmony.” The concept of knowledge as a unifying phenomenon is a very useful way to think about the relationship between that which we as humans can sense and that which we can express.

In the New City district of Hangzhou, the unifying power of creating cultural knowledge through the usage of visuals is fairly obvious to me in this moment, and to the people who have described this space to me. The tall, glass, buildings with their adventurous architectural design were clearly not cheap to build. The complexity of some of the buildings such as the Citizen’s Center, which is six tall, curved, glass towers that are joined at the top by a large ring of skywalks forming a circle, impacts the interpretation of this space. The long name of Money River New City seems fitting when thinking how much just one of these buildings must have cost to construct. All of these messages, visual and linguistic, are unified into the understanding of this section of town as a modern space. Development is seen not just in the construction of the buildings, but
also in the visual displays of money that can be linked to economic development. This is happening while painted murals, paver stones, and even some public art installations are all drawing the focus of the passer-by back to New City’s connection to the wider conception of Hangzhou as a city with unique characteristics and culture.

Figure 24: Money River New City's Citizens Center

Staring up, running across the street to find a better angle, and over all struggling to frame the Hangzhou Money River New City Citizens’ Center (杭州钱江新城市民中心) (Fig. 24) in a single photograph emphasizes the importance of non-photograph or imagery based visuals. This building as an object has no faces, no clear depiction of a landscape, but it is participating in the creation of the modernity of this space and this city all the same. Its grandeur leads me to an interpretation of expense. The building’s shape, the techniques and materials used in its construction, and the noticeable construction in the surrounding area all leads me to an interpretation that it is new. It is these characteristics of design that surfaced in the initial interviews while describing the differences between traditional and modern spaces. The tall glass buildings, with their
elegant design and often-subdued color palate were described to me as examples of how the interviewee knew New City was a modern place.

To meaningfully engage with visually mediated messages I feel the need to create the concept of a spectrum between imagery and design. Objects dominated by imagery such as photos, carvings, paintings and so on, all gravitate to one end of this spectrum. Objects dominated by design such as architecture, info graphics, park layout and so on, all gravitate to the other end. In choosing a spectrum to illustrate this relationship, I hope it remains clear that no purposefully created visually mediated message is completely void of either design or imagery, rather it is the balance between these two sides.

On the other side of the spectrum where visually mediated messages are dominated by design, items that can be included as the object of interpretation open up dramatically. Design is found in every object we use or produce. Whether it is the rug on the floor, the toothbrush next to the sink, or the multimillion-dollar building towering up in front of me in the New City district, design is omnipresent in our consumer goods and aesthetic productions. In their essay “Design principles for Visual Communication,” Agrawala, Li, and Berthouzoz explore the relationship between design and the visualization that is the end product of design. In this article they claim “skilled visual designers manipulate the perception, cognition, and communicative intent of visualizations by carefully applying principles of good design.” A problematic phrase in this statement is, “good design.” They try to explain principles of “good design” when they tell us, “These principles explain how visual techniques can be used to either emphasize important information or de-emphasize irrelevant details.” The example they use to illustrate this point is a subway map. The actual geographic path of the
subway line is not important to riders on the subway. Instead, the important information is the order in which the stops occur and at which stops they can transfer to another line.\textsuperscript{145} This leaves the viewer with a systematic visualization that represents the complex series of subway tracks as a clear set of different color lines with circles where the subway will stop and overlapping circles where the riders can transfer to a different line.

The problematic and abstract nature of talking about “good design” is caught up in the ambiguity of the word itself. Recalling Juliette MacDonald’s observation that this term is “not merely concerned with the surface appearance of things, it may be a value-free expression to describe all products, or it can convey luxury, exclusivity and elitism.”\textsuperscript{146} At this point, and especially in the context of Hangzhou, I think it is necessary to leave both concepts of design open. The first, as Agrawala et al. and MacDonald highlight, is the strategic use of the visual in order to present the intended message/information in the easiest way for the audience to interpret. The second concept of design is as a visual symbol of division, whether that is elitism, expense, or some other form of exclusivity. MacDonald notes “design owes much of its ubiquity to the fact that western society is a liberal, capitalist one where consumerism relies on design to fuel ever greater consumption.”\textsuperscript{147} This connection between design and its role in fueling consumption is something that, as an American, I can see in not only my own behaviors but also in the behavior of almost every person around me. Conversations concerning design often move from the product that was purchased to the packaging that encased the consumer good. The connection between this secondary conception of design and the ways in which concepts of modernity are formed is extremely interesting outside of the cultural contexts of the United States where I am native. Many of the elements that were
described to me that represent modernity in Hangzhou are also the same design choices that will represent their newness. When pressed on the difference between the meaning of new and modern, there was often an underlying issue of design. Further questioning revealed that people often recognized that the word new could be equally applied to traditional things as well as modern.

One of the best examples of this is a temple that I visited in northern Hangzhou near the Grand Canal. According to the man working at the entrance, Xiang Ji temple (香积寺) (Fig. 25) was rebuilt within the last ten years, but the temple had existed in this space for many years before that.

The place was obviously new, and to the people walking around inside, obviously traditional at the same time. I had a conversation with a retired woman who volunteers at this temple several days a week about how the space had recently been rebuilt. I asked her, “How do you know this space is traditional?” She gave me a funny look and said “传统就是传统” (traditional is traditional). 148 Within the context of our conversation her point was that the newness of the buildings didn’t matter, the design is what leads her to the interpretation of this newly built temple as traditional.
With these two main conceptions of design—function and exclusivity—it would be beneficial to recognize MacDonald’s point that, “‘design’ has multiple meanings, which can shift depending upon the identity of the user and the context of use.”\textsuperscript{149} This speaks to the culturally constructed meanings and values put to work in design. MacDonald also points out “the word itself is derived from the Latin \textit{designare} which meant to draw, but had connotations of planning, composing and producing.”\textsuperscript{150} Although the word has been adapted and is entwined with consumerism in America, many similar connotations can be seen in the multiple ways that the word is used. The emphasis on
planning a presentation of information, composing it for a specific set of users in a specific context, and the production of the object being designed (mass or otherwise) can still work to shape what is meant by design in the most general sense.

Specifically within the context of Hangzhou many of the discussions I have had turn to the elements of architectural design found within the city. According to Sigurd Bergmann in the book *Theology in Built Environments: Exploring Religion, Architecture, and Design*, “urban architectural design embodies visions of life and contributes to our constructions of reality.” The architecture that shapes a city interacts directly with how people interpret different parts of a city, and how the reality of that city is shaped for both the collective and the individual.

If the architecture shapes the world that we live in, and our interpretations of it, then it will also shape what it means to be modern within a specific context. Ideas of traditional and modern are often visualized in architecture. However, when speaking about modernity and architecture, it is important to remember that the words modernity, modernism, and modern are distinct yet linguistically related terms. As Hilde Heynen, in her essay “Architecture Between Modernity and Dwelling: Reflections on Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory,” explains, “the modern project in architecture has a very clear form: the modern movement is understood almost univocally, even by its opponents, as the privileged architectural expression of the pursuit of a liberated society.” In this definition of the “modern project,” we can see much of the political and colonizing past that is present in the word modern and the legacy of Modernism in our understanding of the term modernity. However, what we can also see is that when envisioning what it means to be modern, architecture is a way that a society can express what it means to be
modern in a specific space. In Europe and America the modern project sought to express a liberated society, but this definition of modern is just as culturally bound as the buildings are contextually bound.

The usage of architecture to express visions of modernity in Hangzhou does not necessarily follow this same pattern. One example, just north of Wulin Square (武林广场), depicts another aspect that architecture can promote in a cityscape. Across the Grand Canal from Wulin Square, which is a high-end shopping district, is the West Lake Cultural Square. Within both the architectural design and the imagery presented in this space, there is no focus on the pursuit of a liberated society, but rather a focus on the continuity of Hangzhou’s culture through the generations. On the bridge over the Grand Canal there is a center divider with a map of the Grand Canal filled with traditional depictions of the cities in-between Beijing and Hangzhou. Across the bridge from Wulin Square, and behind the large art installation, sits the Worldwide Center (环球中心) (Fig 26). A tall glass building with interesting architectural choices, it shares many of the same elements that lead people to interpret the buildings found in Money River New City district as modern. But, the worldwide center is different. Its shape is mimicking a pagoda. Similar in outline to the famous Lei Feng pagoda (雷峰塔) on the shore of West Lake, the building is not a copy of the traditional style but rather an update/ or modern interpretation of the form. Looking around the square this space is a blend of traditional and modern architectural design. This usage of architecture to emphasize the importance of remembering a city’s past while showing possibilities for its future puts forward a very different modernity than Heynen sees as the modern project in architecture.
Heynen continues her exploration of modernity by stating “modernity, paradoxically, links a strong orientation toward the future with a certain melancholy, a pursuit of progress with a feeling for the ephemeral and the transitory.” This thought leads to her claim that “modernity is therefore experienced in a fundamentally ambivalent way.” Heynen’s isolation of ambivalence as a quality that works to define modernity is important insofar as she isolates a culturally created experience that is working to shape what it means to be modern. Therefore when we look at her claim that “investigating the relation between modernity and architecture involves the query of how this ambivalent experience of modernity is expressed in architectural practice and form,” in a different cultural context, the specific quality of ambivalence is no longer important. Instead, to understand the connection between modernity and architecture we must look for how a culturally significant experience of modernity, in the form of ambivalence, pride in one’s own culture, or any other manufactured experience, is being expressed through both practice and form. In the West Lake Cultural Square (Fig. 27) there are several indications of a focus on globalization and business. Examples include an international business center, a bookstore filled with domestic literature, foreign novels, and translated works, and an IMAX movie theater playing both domestic and foreign films. But this focus is balanced out with an emphasis on connecting this space to the history and culture of the city of Hangzhou and the wider area of Zhejiang Province with several museums showcasing both the cultural and natural history of the Province. This architecture does not lead to interpretations focusing on ambivalence but rather of a double sided engagement, on one side drawing from the history and tradition of this city and the
surrounding province, while on the other side working with global economic and cultural forces in a productive way.

Figure 26: Worldwide Center (1)
The spectrum between imagery and design is not one with distinct or well-defined categories, many of the objects that I am interacting with are somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. And even though I present it here as though images are on one side and design on the other, these categories are fluid with room to rebalance the relationship between design and imagery. Illustrations are often imagery-heavy, but when looking at the world of informational graphics, like those we find in subway maps, or in a children’s science book, the illustration may start to be considered much more on the design side of the spectrum. Take for instance reliefs carved in the wall of a temple that display the stories found in that religion. The wall is an object where design and imagery are balanced in the middle of the spectrum. Because imagery is never without design and design is never without some sort of imagery, it has not been my goal to place each and every object in a precise place along this spectrum, but instead to use this spectrum to conceptualize the interpretations of the objects that I have observed.

Figure 27: View of the West Lake Cultural Square from Across the Grand Canal
It is almost noon now and the light of the midday sun has become too harsh for me to continue photographing this space. This is unfortunate because that same harsh sunlight that makes it hard to photograph the mostly glass and steel environment is also burning off the fog that obscured the subject in some of my earlier photos. I head back to the subway. I had planned on photographing the metro system that had been suggested by multiple people as one of Hangzhou’s most modern spaces, but after a quick conversation with a woman in uniform, I realized that it was not an option to photograph the inside of the metro line. I am content with this morning’s work, so I decide to go find some lunch. Collecting images is a process that I will repeat in each space suggested to me by more than one person during my initial interviews. I believe that I have acquired some good examples from Money River New City today, and hope that I can return to this process again tomorrow in Binjiang (滨江).

122 Berger, Another Way of Telling, 96–97.
123 McCracken, Culture and Consumption, 79.
124 McCracken, Culture and Consumption, 78–79.
127 Barthes, Image Music Text, 40.
128 Barthes, Image Music Text, 40.
129 McCracken, Culture and Consumption, 79.
130 McCracken, Culture and Consumption, 79.
131 Barthes, Image Music Text; Berger, Another Way of Telling; Berger, Ways of Seeing; Dondis, A Primer of Visual Literacy; Defining Visual Rhetorics.
132 Dondis, A Primer of Visual Literacy.
133 Berger, Ways of Seeing, 7.
134 Berger, Ways of Seeing, 7.
135 Ong, Orality and Literacy, 7.
140 Berger, Ways of Seeing, 8.
141 Bakhtin, Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, 60.
142 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 71.
146 MacDonald, “Design and Modern Culture,” 50.
147 MacDonald, “Design and Modern Culture,” 53.
148 Interview number 28 in Appendix A
149 MacDonald, “Design and Modern Culture,” 51.
150 MacDonald, “Design and Modern Culture,” 51.
151 Bergmann, *Theology in Built Environments*, 18.
152 Heynen, “Architecture between Modernity and Dwelling,” 79.
Chapter 5: Dinner with Strangers

The very polite email started with: “Sorry for the delayed reply. I asked several professors, but most of them are not familiar with your area.” The ironic part was that I felt bad that the administrative assistant at the university had been put in this position. The third section of my research practices fell apart with these two sentences, and she had to be the one to inform me. It was all just a matter of bad timing. The professor with whom I had originally made contact in Hangzhou had received a promotion and now was working out of a different city. He travels back to Hangzhou from time to time, but the demands of his new job did not leave him with much spare time to assist with my project. Knowing that his new job would be more demanding, he introduced me to an administrative assistant who had agreed to help me arrange the rest of the meetings with university faculty. She was efficient and lined up several interviews for me during the initial stages of my research plan, but I always knew that the final focus groups with local academics was going to be difficult to arrange.

After the initial two sentences she offered me several other proposals for support, but all of them required my project to be written up and ready for feedback. Unfortunately, it was too early in fieldwork for anything meaningful to have been written. It is the middle of March and I am still working to photograph the spaces that have been described to me in the initial interviews. So I could not take her up on her kind offer. The goal of the focus group with local scholars was to dive into the examples that I had gathered, and the initial interviews before I started to write about those interactions. The harsh realization was that with a little less than a month and a half left in Hangzhou I now had to rework this third and final stage of my research practices.
I was racked. I had planned my research to have a flow. This flow was based on a critical conception of hermeneutics. I prefer Clifford Geertz’s description of hermeneutics in his book *Local Knowledge*, where he explains it as “the understanding of understandings.” I have been exploring a two-fold understanding with my project. First, I am trying to understand how modernity is visually represented in Hangzhou. Secondly, through those visuals I want to talk about how other people understand modernity.

While shaping my own understandings in the first two stages of my fieldwork there was no way to avoid what refers to as “aesthetic empathizing” in his book *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. This is described as “not pure empathizing in which one loses oneself, but empathizing that objectifies.” However this objectification does not carry many of the more negative connotations commonly discussed. I am not objectifying people any more than is necessary to write about them. Instead, throughout this project I have been working to understand the objectification/visualization of the concept of modernity present in Hangzhou. The third part of my research is an effort to move one step beyond aesthetic empathizing and attempt to approach an understanding of the interrelationship between the objects and visuals that work to shape modernity in this space. Or, as Bakhtin explains, “to understand an object is to understand my ought in relation to it (the attitude or position I ought to take in relation to it).” Double checking understandings, and trying to explore how I ought to position myself to the visuals that I have collected was the purpose of the now seemingly impossible to organize focus group with local academics.
The void left in my research practices set my brain racing. Without this last set of conversations, it was going to be harder to link the visuals I had collected to a conception of modernity. Several days passed. I was starting to formulate a plan to get several people together in an effort to create a focus group when Mr. Xu called. He was one of the people I met in the park during the initial stages of my research. I never got a chance to interview him, but he invited me to an English class he was taking. After making sure that he had asked his teacher’s permission to have me there, I agreed to show up and talk with the class. In hindsight, it turned out to be a very illuminating experience. The entire class was made up of people who worked for the city government. That being said there were all sorts of jobs represented in that class, from tourism and newspapers, to police and city planning.

I never thought anything would come from the English classes. Unless I willfully forced an interview the opportunities rarely came up. These classes were their time to practice English, and for a majority of the students I was the first native English speaker they had ever had an opportunity to interact with. I didn’t want to waste their time in that learning space. I went several times to an English corner held in West Lake on Sunday mornings, and also went several times to Mr. Xu’s class. While only a few interviews ever came out of the English Corner, my relationship with Mr. Xu serendipitously turned out to be one of the more enriching aspects of my stay in Hangzhou.

On that day Mr. Xu was calling to invite me back to his English class. Without knowing I even had a problem, Mr. Xu was providing me with the solution. During the phone call he mentioned that several of his classmates wanted to invite me to dinner. I
didn’t think anything of this because this is, in my experience, a really common way to get to know someone in China.

It was April by the time I returned to Mr. Xu’s class. It was funny that day. The vocabulary for that session focused on ordering food in a restaurant. After the teacher finished covering the vocabulary and grammar patterns, she told a story about her time as an undergraduate student in the United States. Her point was if you go to the U.S. you should be prepared because the Chinese food is not always real Chinese food. I totally agree with this statement, but I never want to be that person that talks about “real Chinese food” in comparison to what is labeled as Chinese food in the United States. The final slide in her power point was of a Panda Express restaurant someplace in Nevada.

After the lecture all of the students broke into groups and the teacher and I pretended to be waiters taking orders in a restaurant. Questions about restaurants, food, and American culture often derailed the role-play before it started. I would walk in between groups asking if they were ready to order. They would consult vocabulary lists in a race to put together an answer to my question. Almost everyone in the class ordered steak and salad. I think those two must have been the highest on the vocabulary list, but I never checked to make sure. After this initial exchange the conversation would break down. I would try to continue taking an order by asking what they wanted to drink, but the students would often ask questions concerning who pays at a restaurant, how much food costs, and one lady even jumped to a discussion of cosmetics that caught me a little off guard. She wanted to know the word for “anti-aging” or “anti-wrinkle” cream, but I thought she was asking me about food. The class seemed to end quickly. Being a pretend-
waiter in an English class full of adults in Hangzhou was more fun than I would have imagined.

It wasn’t until after class that Mr. Xu introduced me to Chen Mei, a newspaper editor, who promptly made plans with me for dinner the following weekend. Before I had even thought of it myself, Mr. Xu, who always seemed to be looking out for my project, interjected with the idea that I could interview her and her family for my research. She seemed excited. His quick interjection into our conversation made me wonder, with a great deal of gratitude, if Mr. Xu had arranged this meeting with my project in mind.

It was the first Sunday in May when I caught a cab and was dropped off at the gate of what appeared to be a gated community. The houses and duplexes were different than other living arrangements that I saw during my different visits to China. It actually seemed like an American suburb except for some of the details. When I arrived at Chen Mei’s house she informed me that her husband, Chen Jun, was still cooking dinner so we could sit outside, have some tea, and eat some fruit while he finished up. One of the best things about going to different hemispheres is the exposure to different fruits. She handed me what I would later find out was a Mangosteen (Fig. 28)—a name and a fruit that I had never seen or eaten before. She must have recognized that I had no idea what it was, because after a brief pause she told me to peel it and eat the sweet, white bits on the inside of the hard purple exterior. The sweetness of the Mangosteen was an excellent match to the unsweetened Long Jing green tea that we were drinking.
Chen Jun, her husband, had prepared a fantastic meal. There was bamboo, cucumbers, Chinese cabbage, green peppers and fish, pork loin, pig fat from pigs raised at high altitudes, potatoes, blue corn, and of course, rice. He was particularly proud of the high altitude pig fat dish. He pointed out that raising pigs at high altitudes gives their fat a different flavor, and I have to admit that it was delicious with an almost sweet flavor to it.

After dinner the conversations started to move past the usual topics of food and they began asking me what I thought of their city. We worked our way through some questions about politics, and a conversation about questions that average Americans would find rude, but which are typical questions asked in China, (i.e. your salary, weight, age, whether you have a boyfriend/girlfriend, etc.). We eventually reached the topic of my dissertation. I quickly scrambled and got my recorder and my tablet full of pictures out of my bag and returned to the dinner table.\textsuperscript{160} I realized my good luck. I was sitting down with two people who worked in city government (Mr. Xu a city building manager and Chen Jun who works with cultural exchange), Chen Mei an editor at a local news
paper, and their daughter Chen Meng Yao who is a design student who grew up in Hangzhou but is currently studying design at a very respectable university in Shanghai. I started my recorder and placed it on the table.

I was encouraged to speak with Chen Jun because his work with the local government deals with culture. The first image was the corner of a pagoda’s roof (Fig. 29) I found at Sudi (苏堤), on the west side of West Lake. I framed the image in a way so that very specific details of the roof were visible while the wider context of Sudi were not. I thought by focusing the conversation on some of the specific design elements that had been listed as modern/traditional it would keep the group more tightly focused on the visuals. After showing him the picture I asked if he thought this space was modern, traditional, or neither? The answer was clear-cut—traditional. With a few sentences the
group sitting around the table had isolated and listed the elements in the image that had led me to believe it was traditional. The roof or eaves-tile (瓦当), the uplifted corner (飞角, literally flying corner), and the “cow leg” (牛腿) bracket connecting the pillar to the roof all made the list. Then, Chen Jun explained that “these come from a genuine [concept of] traditional.” The word that I translate as genuine has multiple possible translations, the other that I find significant here being “orthodox.” Wanting to double check and see if anyone knew where this image was taken, I encouraged the table to guess the location represented in that photo. The first and only guess was the countryside (农村 literally farming village). The response assured me that the image was a good representation of a traditional space. Much like in the United States, the people I have met in China often think of the farming communities as more traditional while the cities are considered to be more modern.

Satisfied, I move on to the second image of a white wall (Fig. 30) on Dadou road (大兜街) near the Grand Canal. This image received a little different description. After my initial question is this place modern, traditional, or neither? Chen Jun answered, “This encompassing wall (the white wall) was built with the intention of being traditional.” He then pointed to what he referred to as a “flower lattice” in the window that let him know that this space was trying to be traditional. Sensing a hesitation to call this wall traditional, I switched the image to a close up of a white wall with a wooden pillar sitting on a concrete footstone (Fig. 31). He knew immediately where this isolated element of the pillar would be in the construction of this building asking me if it was next to a doorway. Then, the concrete footer at the bottom of the wooden pillar was the focus of our conversation. He explained that “all of these are called fake antiques.”
I was happy that the hesitation I felt in the answer concerning the white wall came to the surface. I asked “are fake antiques still traditional? If they seem traditional but are really new, is that traditional?” He thought for a moment, then responded, “That is right. It can appear to return to the past . . . it can appear to return to the past but all of the skill and technology that built it are not from the past.”

The separation between new and traditional was causing us to pause and think, but in the end, there was a recognition that “fake antiques” similar to the architectural elements I found along Dadou Road by the Grand Canal could still be traditional, even though they may have been constructed fairly recently. The visual or the design of the object calls to a narrative of the past, which in turn places it in the realm of the traditional. However, the updated means of production, such as the concrete used in the production of this stone, allowed the people around this table to recognize it as a “fake antique.”
Figure 30: White Wall at Da Dou Road

Figure 31: Wooden Pillar on A Concrete Footstone in a White Wall
Feeling the flow of the conversation drifting into a comparison of elements that distinguish traditional from modern, I select one more image from Dadou Road. The wall this time was all old beat up wood, with a matching wood pillar and a concrete footstone (Fig. 32). I wanted to see if the increased amount of apparently old wood in this image would lead to a different conclusion. After the initial question, Is this modern, traditional, or neither? Chen Jun immediately made a connection to the “fake antique” conversations. He explained that, “This is what we just discussed, it is modern and traditional, it is a combination.” However, Chen Mei, the editor, disagreed saying, “It’s traditional.” She explained that it was the stone at the base of the pillar. Her husband defended his label of “fake antique” pointing out that “the others are all new, including the wood, this is all old lumber . . . it could have been purchased, it could have been rebuilt.”
Feeling the energy in the discussion building, I chose what I thought would be a much more difficult image to discuss. The high-end shopping mall on the eastern side of West Lake had always interested me vis-à-vis my project. The image I chose was framed to highlight the place where I thought the assimilation of an older building style overlapped with the large glass structure that was the main walkway through the mall. If you could get a bird’s eye view (which I unfortunately could not) you would see two rows of gray buildings with the alleyway in between them completely glassed over. This glass joined the two sets of grey buildings to create one large, but still short (only two stories tall) shopping mall (Fig. 33).

I started with the same question, “so do you think that this place is modern, traditional, or neither?” The response from Chen Jun was fast, “It seems fake, you can understand this from its style, it probably assimilated a lot of elements.” Which elements?
I asked. “This line” running his finger along the glass in the photo “this type of line is completely modern.” After thinking for a moment, he continued “It is modern but this type of corner,” pointing at the corner of the grey building “this type of tile (referring to the grey bricks) are the same as before, the way things were made in the past, so it is all mixed up.”

Thinking that we had hit the grey area between modern and traditional I moved on to the next photo. The West Lake Cultural Center was one of the other interesting places that I was led to by the participants in my initial interviews. This place was tall, made of glass, but also assimilated a lot of what I thought of as traditional design elements. I started with an image of the tower, also know as the Worldwide Center (Fig. 34), which is a very distinct part of Hangzhou’s skyline. Repeating the same question, Is this modern, traditional, or neither was this time met with a unanimous “modern” from everyone around the table. “How do you know?” I asked. Chen Jun said “From its style.” While his daughter, Chen Meng Yao, who had been edging in on the last few answers, interjected that “it’s modern architecture, moreover it is the geometry, it is rather simple.” Supporting this statement, Chen Mei added, “It has a northern European feel.” After I double-checked some of the vocabulary she was using, Chen Meng Yao continued to explain, “The geometry is rather concise, but traditional [architecture] is rather complicated, rather meticulous, there are a lot of small details.” Chen Mei reinforced this, “Fine (or delicate).” After a few short trailing thoughts, she praised her daughter “She summed it up rather well,” and I had to agree. Even though Chen Meng Yao wasn’t very talkative, when she did share her opinion it was thoughtful and seemed to be respected by her parents.
The conversation started confirming and re-confirming many of the physical characteristics of traditional spaces such as the buildings are short, have flying corners, and even though traditional buildings are shorter they are more complex in appearance.
(ornamentation). At the end of this list I ask, are there any other elements? Instead of answering my question the conversation instead jumped to the modern side of this juxtaposition. “Modern architecture probably pays more attention to the function; that [its function] is probably more complex than traditional buildings.” This is the first time that a conversation has turned to the function of a building impacting its design. Chen Jun continued, “From the exterior it is succinct, rather simple . . . but the stress is put on the interior.” The editor clarifies her husband’s statements, “the use of the interior space.” This was a new juxtaposition between traditional and modern. While traditional was described as more complex in its exterior appearance, the implication of the second set of concepts is that it is often more simplistic on the inside, and built without as much of a focus on a single usage. On the other hand, modern is simple on the exterior, but takes special attention of the function it is being built to accommodate. The focus on the function of the space reflects answers that I received in the initial interviews that suggested I should focus on how people use space.

Chen Jun’s comparison of the function of Modern space draws into focus one of Yi-Fu Tuan’s observations from his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. In it, he states:

Modern life tends to be compartmentalized. Space in our contemporary world may be designed and ordered so as to draw one's attention to the social hierarchy, but the order has no religious significance and may not even correspond closely to wealth. One effect is the dilution of spatial meaning. In modern society spatial organization is not able, nor was it ever intended, to exemplify a total worldview.161
Chen Jun’s comment highlighting that modern architecture pays more attention to the function of the space is a reflection of this compartmentalization. A law firm or business office will have a much different design than a space designed for commerce, or entertainment. Tuan contrasts the tendency to compartmentalize with the traditional, when he points out that:

In nonliterate and traditional communities the social, economic, and religious forms of life are often well integrated. Space and location that rank high socially are also likely to have religious significance. An economic activity may be deemed profane, but "profane" is itself a religious concept.\textsuperscript{162}

The multiple usages and meanings that the Chen family attributes to more traditional spaces is not unfounded and the juxtaposition with the more compartmentalized design of modern spaces in the city reflects this separation. Whereas Buddhist and Daoist temples are built to reflect a specific concept of the universe, with specific meanings given to directions, symmetry and space. Most business offices do not look to reflect anything more that the professionalism and stature of the people who work there. There is of course one huge caveat to Tuan’s observation in China, the continued popularity of Fengshui (Chinese geomancy) in some contexts. Ole Bruun, in his book \textit{Fengshui in China: Geomantic Divination Between State Orthodoxy and Popular Religion} describes Fengshui, saying:

[Fengshui] makes use of the Chinese classics and includes both ancestor worship, ritual, and moral interpretation, which constitute common values that allow any Chinese to recognize familiar principles despite endless local variation. But more
importantly Fengshui conveys an alternative vision of human existence pertaining to a specific context. ¹⁶³

Bruun continues to elaborate that Fengshui has faced challenges, and was even at one time being suppressed by the nationalistic and communist governments in China. ¹⁶⁴ However, the tradition (or set of traditions) carries through to contemporary China. Some people and scholars are even using Fengshui as the basis of environmental movements¹⁶⁵ and as a way to think about sustainable building practices.¹⁶⁶ Though Fengshui was never foregrounded in my fieldwork its impact was present in a few of the conversations I had. The traditional system of geomancy was still working to shape the way people thought about space.

Figure 35: West Lake Cultural Center "Updated Flying Corner"
Drawing the focus back to the picture of the West Lake Cultural Center I ask, “do you think this building is a sinicized (中国化) modernity” The word I used 中国化, which in a dictionary is translated to “sinicize,” or the process of making something Chinese, is a word that no longer has a commonly used translation in English. Chen Jun answered, “This doesn’t exist . . . this is commonly said to be a foreign concept. Chinese tradition will not take this form.” This was a problem that I had anticipated, and this is where Bakhtin’s concept of the excess of seeing comes directly into focus in my project. Chen Jun was looking at a space that was filled with architectural elements, which from everything I have gathered so far, would leave it right in the middle: it has a lot of traditional elements, a lot of elements that are adaptations of traditional elements, and almost all of the characteristics that have been listed as modern through out my interviews. Looking to probe this question further I pull up the picture of the corner of the roof. This corner with its pillars and up turned corner resembles the flying corners in the first image we looked at together. I isolated these elements because it is all built with steal and glass, but it takes the form of a traditional space. This is not trying to be a “fake antique.” It is not made of wood, the pillars do not have the “cow’s leg” bracket attaching them to the roof, and there are no tiles on the roof, any of which would lead a person to see it as traditional.

I ask if there are any Chinese elements in this image. Both of the parents say no, but the daughter, Chen Meng Yao disputes this interpretation: “really? I think there are.” Her mother asks my probing question for me “where?” She answered, “It is not sinicized, but it is integrated with the modern.” “Explain a little,” I encouraged. Chen Meng Yao continued:
For example the eaves [this is a reference to the corners that resemble the flying corners], and also the pillars. I feel it is this way, I also don’t know if it is like that abroad . . . But I think it has a little bit of China and also is very modern.

There was a disconnect between the word *sinicized* and the concept of modernity. The two older people who answered the question almost instantly dismissed the idea of modernity being sinicized, and even told me that modernity comes from abroad. While the youngest person at the table thought it was obvious that there was Chinese influence on the design of the architectural elements being represented in the photo. Even went so far as to challenge her parents’ answers by starting her response with “really?” She did not immediately dismiss the ability of modernity to be sinicized, and did not seemingly over look, or take for granted the elements of this building that were strikingly Chinese.

This has happened several times throughout my time in Hangzhou; younger people are
often quicker to link concepts of globalization, Chinese culture, and modernity. Older generations tend to create/maintain a divide between global and local forces.

The conversation had gone on for a while now, and I felt that my time was coming to a close, so I shifted gears a little and pulled up a picture showing a row of apartment buildings in Binjiang (滨江) (Fig. 36). I explained that I was told to go to a lot of distinct places around the city, and then asked if they thought this place is modern or not. Chen Mei answered, “definitely modern;” her husband echoed with, “this is obviously modern.” Chen Mei explained her answer, “they are modern, but they don’t have any distinguishing features, but if you walked into them they would all [be modern].” Chen Jun joined in pointing out that, “they are all more or less the same.” Following up, I asked, “does modernity have a connection to distinguishing features? Should it be interesting?” To which he responded:

When talking about a place to live my view is that you want it to look like this, our district [gated community], it has hills . . . According to Chinese tradition, [you want to] have hills and water, you want to stress Fengshui. Our little district doesn’t have anything special.

This was a curious statement for me. While I had no support for the feeling, and I could not find anything other than personal experience to support my suspicions, I felt that the district that they lived in was very special. It would have been high-end in any city in China or in the United States. But I think his point was that a lot of the houses looked the same and the reason it felt so nice was because the layout of the community integrated nature in a purposeful way. It was a calm space in which nothing stood out.
The conversation then turned to their house as an example. Pointing to the living room he remarked, “look at that floor, it is the same as this floor; they don’t have a feeling of modernity because there aren’t any distinguishing characteristics.” Chen Mei added, “there isn’t a sense of beauty.” Chen Jun disagreed, but couldn’t voice his opinion fast enough before his wife moved on. Pointing out that the difference between these two conversations is that those buildings with distinguishing features were commercial buildings and reflected the commercialization of that architecture. However, a shift happens when we moved the conversation to places where people live. There is a different model of modernity (a model which is definitely capable of creating a feeling of modernity).

At this point the conversation had more or less left my control. It started to take many quick turns, and I have to admit, I was struggling to keep up. During some of the more complex answers I even noticed myself double-checking my recorder to make sure that I could go back and check the meaning of a word or the grammar of a sentence later. I understood the ideas being expressed, but the energy that they were all bringing to the conversation was causing good thoughts to be expressed and challenged so quickly it was hard for me to do anything but listen and get excited with how engaged they all were with my topic.

Eventually, Chen Meng Yao slowed down the conversation by saying, “but I always feel that when you say modernity, it should have a type of art, a type of future fashion trend called modernity.” Her mother once again was very quick to agree, “I think she is right, he [me] is talking about a type of connotation (内涵essential properties implied or reflected by a notion) . . . she [her daughter] is talking about a way of life.
What you are speaking about is a type of architecture [the places people live]. I think this type of architecture doesn’t represent the future.” At this point the husband jumped in, “It could represent one type of trend.” To which his daughter quickly replied “this house no longer represents a trend.”

The whole exchange arrived at the idea that even within the city of Hangzhou there are different standards, different conceptualizations of what modernity looks like depending on the context. If you are standing in a commercial district there is a whole different concept of what modern looks like than if you were standing in a block of apartment buildings, or a gated community. This separation of space into commercial and domestic is nothing new as Yi Fu Tuan observes when discussing the “front and back” of cities when he says “In the traditional Chinese city, front and back were clearly distinguished: there can be no mistaking the front and south with its broad ceremonial avenue, for the back and north, which was reserved (at least in planning theory) for profane commercial use.”168 The idea that the business or commercial sector is judged by a different standard than the domestic areas is nothing new in China. However, the concept of the commercial business sector as profane has changed dramatically since the implementation of Deng Xiaoping’s (邓小平) Four Modernizations. The goal of Deng’s Four Modernizations was to update China’s agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology.169 The policies and accompanying shifts in thought led to a switch in how the once “profane” commercial area of a city is viewed. Now, the business sector is often showcased. In Hangzhou Money River New City is promoted in advertising easily found throughout the city. Deng Xiaoping’s dictum, “To get rich is glorious,”170 has, by all appearances, been taken to heart and put into practice. But within this conversation
separating out the ways in which domestic and commercial spaces are interpreted there is a unifying expectation that a future oriented trend will be represented.

At this point I knew it was getting late, but the energy of the conversation was so good and productive that I was almost saddened to ask my final question. “How would you explain modernity?” In light of the twist and turns of the last conversation, they all wanted me to confine the definition of modernity to a single context, “For people, for buildings, for actions?” I said that I didn’t want to answer that question, I just wanted to hear what they thought.

The mother responded that “this is a problem because it is a very dispersed way of thinking [i.e. it has many offshoots].” But the father took up the challenge and answered in a poetic explanation about culture working in harmony with time, and how this vigor and culture are ultimately what it means to be modern in Hangzhou. His answer seemed like the other side of Gaston Bachelard’s observation in his book *The Poetics of Space* when he comments on the ability of a house to retain memories:

> We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them in their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.171

But instead of looking at the preservative nature of a place labeled as a home, and the memories that are contained within it, Chen Jun focused his observations on the ever-changing nature of the outside world. And, while he did not speak to a rupture in a
culture, the relationship between vigor and culture was a clear way to depict a concept of modernization that does not abandon its tradition.

I thought Chen Jun’s answer was very well stated, and it took me a second to process what was actually said. However, I had only paused for a second before the daughter, who had been helping me to understand/translate some of the harder vocabulary from the evening’s conversation burst out, “there is no way he [me] understood that, your speech was too long, what was the essence?” The father, a little broadsided but entertained, smiled and answered, “he [me] wanted to speak about Hangzhou’s modernity, it [his answer] was Hangzhou’s modernity.” The daughter was not satisfied with that answer. “But your speech was like a politician [leader]. What you said were all empty things.” The father started to defend his poetic answer, but I rushed to cut him off, hopefully without seeming rude, to ask a probing question. “Why are they empty?” The father, trying to break back in to the conversation, repeated that his answers were not empty. The daughter replied, “it’s not that . . . everything he said was fine, but he didn’t say what Hangzhou’s modernity is, how it is embodied.” I asked “How would you answer that question?” She laughed, “I feel like a judge.”

It was late by this point and so I didn’t press the issue. She asked if she could think about it, and maybe send me an email with an answer later. It was dark outside, and we had all been sitting around the table for hours. After a quick show of the father’s paintings, Mr. Xu, who had sat almost silently through the whole evening, gave me a ride back into town where I could more easily find a cab. I never got the email from the daughter with her answer, but the whole night was a better conversation than I could have
ever arranged on my own. I was re-energized in the last leg of my project, and I had Mr. Xu to thank for it.

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That first dinner must have gone well because just four days later I was meeting another associate of Mr. Xu’s for tea. Liu was around my age and worked as a community organizer. This translation of her job is not the same as people in the United States would think about this title. It does not have the same sort of political edge to it. Or, if it does, it was downplayed during our interaction. She helps to organize spaces and activities for the citizens of the West Lake District in Hangzhou. She quite literally organizes activities and cultural events for the community. After Mr. Xu had connected us through text, I received an invitation to meet her at a teahouse on the northern side of the city. I have not yet talked much about the northern side of Hangzhou because other than a few dinners with Mr. Xu and his family, no one has pointed me in this direction. This area is mostly residential and even has a Wal-Mart, which I was not expecting.

I showed up a little early, as I am prone to do. Liu arrived a few minutes later and introduced me to a man, Zhang, who she referred to as her friend. He was going to act as a translator for our conversation. I had never had a translator facilitate a conversation, and I wasn’t really sure that I needed one, but I was not about to turn down some help, even if it was only in understanding some of the more complex or obscure vocabulary that we might run into.

We entered the Tea House, which was set back off the line of store and restaurant fronts that lined the street. It was more or less what I expected and would facilitate our discussion quite nicely. Each table surrounded by chairs was in a wooden cubical with
curtains separating your table from other people who have also come to drink tea. Liu, who invited me, was actually friends with the owner who came to our table and asked some general questions about how her friend was and what she was doing with a foreigner (me). After the pleasantries concluded the owner suggested several teas that were from her private stock, and not available to other patrons. After selecting several teas for us to drink the woman who invited me started to prepare the first round.

The conversation began with a focus on tea and then slowly moved to my project. Knowing that Liu worked somewhere in the West Lake Cultural Square, I started with an image of the Worldwide Center (the tower at the square) (Fig. 37). I asked my initial questions “do you think this place is traditional, modern, or neither?” To which she quickly responded, “This is definitely a modern building.” Her confidence in her answer was clear so I asked, “Why?” She responded, “Because, no matter if you are speaking about this type of design, or if you are coming at it from a visual point of view, I think it is all very modern.” Without further questioning she then started to juxtapose this modern building with traditional spaces saying that “because in Hangzhou a lot of buildings are that type, before they gave people feelings, but the symbolic buildings that represent Hangzhou are all white walls with black tile, it is that type of classical [style] from south of the Yangzi river.”
Refocusing the comparison on the picture in front of her, Liu noted, “this building, in the Hangzhou City Center district is a symbolic building. It’s just very, the center of the main city is very small, therefore this is a cultural landmark.” Zhang, the
translator, was not keeping up with the conversation and I think there was a realization on the part of the Liu that she could just speak with me. Her friend, the translator, was already several turns in the conversation behind us, but he was not going to give up. After a non sequitur from Zhang, the conversation got focused on the square in front of the Worldwide Center. Liu explained:

We Chinese people especially like this type of open space to conduct activities, performances. In addition, in the evenings, ordinary people (老百姓) will meet there in large groups for dancing.

She may have been biased because she worked there but she claimed that the activities included martial arts, calligraphy, and even meeting up at the movies or the Tea House inside the building.

I asked about the teahouse inside the building because I hadn’t seen it when I was there. I found the coffee shop, of course, but the space was so large that it would not surprise me if there were a lot of hidden stores and activities in that space. She said it might not have opened yet, but she told me that the plan was to have a space to take in guests (like a hotel). She refocused on the square outside the building:

But, the activities on the square are spontaneous . . . Therefore this is, I feel when this building was made, with the square and the building, it was a type of good interaction.

Not completely understanding what the word “interaction” referred to I asked a follow up question, “It has modernity but also has Chinese culture?” “Correct,” she replied, “because we have, China has, a type of culture called mass-culture, this is similar to my
work.” She continued to explain that “this place reflects the integration of elegant art and mass culture.”

I changed the picture to a tighter frame of the corner of the roof at the West Lake Cultural Square, I asked if she thought there was any reflection of Chinese culture in this example. “This curve” pointing at the image (same image as Fig. 35). After explaining how common this curve was, in reference to the flying corner (飞角). She continued to explain, “Hangzhou was the capital city of the Southern Song dynasty, the Southern Song, then they Yuan, The Ming, and the Qing, all had this type of rising curve.” At this point I started to feel bad for the translator, he was three and sometimes four exchanges behind us, but was still trying to translate. However, around this time I realized that in an effort to catch up he was simplifying or in some cases completely changing her answers.

Moving on to a picture of the Pagoda as Sudi (same image as Fig. 29), Liu answered before I even finished asking my initial question, “Do you think this is traditional . . . ” she quickly jumped in, “correct.” Taken off guard, for some reason I continued to finish asking the question “. . . modern, or neither?” Realizing now that the conversation had moved on without me, I moved on to probing further, “Traditional?” She kept with the flow of the conversation and responded “this is traditional feeling, but it is built of concrete.” Almost struggling with her first opinion, she listed off a few of the features that led her to believe it is traditional, the cow leg bracket (牛腿) connecting the pillar to the roof, the usage of wood. Finally confirming her first response she said, “I think this is a very strong match as traditional.” After a few more exchanges she even knew exactly where in Sudi (苏堤) she could find this pagoda. I ask her to explain a little more why she knew it was traditional. She pointed to the dragon and said “you see in
here there is a dragon.” At this point Zhang, the translator, who had been quiet for several minutes now decided to jump back in and tell me, in English, that, “she says the dragon will surrender this pagoda. Yeah, dragon will surrender it.” A little confused, because I understood every word of the last few sentences and there was no mention of surrender. I asked, “as in surround?” He quickly agreed, but there was still no mention of a dragon surrounding anything in her answer. I started to become curious about Zhang’s ability to speak English and his goal in this interaction. But having studied a foreign language myself, I know some days are harder than others when it comes to producing the correct vocabulary, so I decided to gloss over my suspicions and focus on continuing the conversation.

I didn’t think we were being too loud, but at this point a woman came over and asked if we could be a little bit quieter. In the aftermath of being scolded, we dropped our volume and we moved quite quickly through a few of the images depicting traditional spaces. Almost all of the information supported ideas that were explained to me in my initial interviews and several answers even closely resembled responses from the first dinner I had with the newspaper editor and her family.

It wasn’t until I showed a picture of the apartment towers in Binjiang (滨江) (same image as Fig. 36) that the conversation took on a new tone. I asked the same initial question, but her response this time was different. She answered:

This is a very typical type of modern building. This is a building under construction or for sale (楼盘). But this type of building is very important . . . If it design is bad looking, then it is obvious, it will make this city become very messy [chaotic].
Pressing for details about how she knew it was modern she listed the usual elements and then added, “I don’t have any real feeling about these types of buildings. I especially dislike tall buildings. I am a person who dislikes tall buildings.” Understanding this feeling better than I admitted at the time, I asked “Really? Why?” She answered: “I feel constrained. For example, its like Money River New City, or Shanghai, or Hong Kong! . . . [they] make my head hurt.” The translator jumped back in, having obviously given up translating what she was saying and finally offering up his own opinion. “It’s totally different from Hangzhou. Hangzhou is very relaxing . . . but Hong Kong is full of the hurry to work, the hurry to make money.” She summarized the conversation with “looking at this there is nothing to feel.” This line of thought had been forming under the surface of a lot of my interviews. It was not that people told me that the residential districts of Hangzhou were modern or traditional, it was that as a whole they seemed to be left out of the conversation. During the first dinner, everyone seemed to be on the same page, that while the exterior was very boring, the interiors were probably very modern. But in this conversation there was a recognition of these buildings as modern, but in some way aesthetically undesirable. The example of how Hong Kong is rushed, cramped, and a little chaotic showed a real concern for the character of Hangzhou. Throughout our conversation Hangzhou was highlighted as a green city, a former capital of the Southern Song, and a relaxing city. The tension that was created between the idealized version of Hangzhou and this clearly residential area was thick. I felt the need to explain my thought process before asking the next question.
Explaining the context of my next question, I pointed out that most of my initial interviews sent me to unique spaces. No matter if it was the traditional architecture of Ling Yin Buddhist Temple (Fig. 38), or the modern buildings found in the Money River New City, all of the places I was told to go look at were singular. They could not be mistaken for any other space in the city. She listed off the pictures that I had showed her up to this current image of Binjiang, as a way of confirming this idea. After this I felt I could go ahead and ask if there has to be some special element for a place to be considered modern. I was not asking if modern spaces need to have certain elements worked into them, this was confirmed in almost every conversation, but rather could a place with all the right elements be stripped of its modernity because of its lack of any unique elements or design choices? Does modern mean unique? After Liu acknowledged that many of the areas where I was sent have very unique characteristics,
she continued to point out that the construction of many of these unique spaces depend on creating places for people to live. Through the next several exchanges she worked to separate out that different types of spaces have different types of modernity, because they all function with distinct patterns.

The different criteria by which different spaces within Hangzhou are judged to be either modern or traditional was a thread of thought that has only popped up in the final section of my research practices. Because I view modernity and tradition as rhetorical tropes being applied to narratives within a culture I have assumed that they would be dialogic in the ways they interact with one another. In these two conversations—with the Chen family and Liu—those suspicions have come to the surface in the distinction between commercial, residential, public, and tourist spaces. In each instance the purpose of the space seems to shape the narrative, and that narrative reshapes the standards by which that space is judged. A residential space is not judged by the same standards as a commercial district because the differences in their purposes necessitate differences in the stories concerning their future. They are distinct yet connected cultural contexts within the city and their manifestations of modernity reflect those differences.

Building on the more general conversation that the images of Binjiang inspired, she said:

Every time, every period, for example every ten or twenty years, every city needs some elements of modernization to push forward that city’s development, you need regional development. Then if you integrate [merge] these types of modern elements it will let this city become more international.

Me: So is modernity a goal?
Liu: You can’t say it is a goal, [it’s] a method . . . Modernity should serve the city, instead of . . .

Zhang the translator (interrupted with an unrelated comment): The modern style must be based on the traditional style. That [is what] she means.

This made me wonder whether we were listening to the same conversation. I wondered if this was his opinion or if he was just trying to speak for her. Or was it that this was the closest thing to a translation that he could produce for what she had said. Whatever his motivation, and regardless of whose idea it actually was, he made an interesting point. To him, or at least in his comment, modern ideas are built from a traditional base.

Not knowing exactly how to deal with the translator, I took the pause that his interjection caused as a segue to move ahead to a picture of the high end shopping mall on the eastern side of West Lake (same as image as Fig. 33). At first Liu didn’t recognize the place, but after a few moments she figured out that it was an image of Ying Tai shopping mall. While trying to decide whether she would label this space as modern or traditional she landed on the idea that it was “a perfect combination” of the two. In her view, the building possesses both elements of West Lake and elements that she considers to be modern. She pointed out that West Lake is the core (核心 nucleus) of Hangzhou. She then listed several other prominent water features that shape the city, west creek (西溪), and Qian Tang Jiang River (钱塘江, also referred to as Money River). She continued to build on this point that “these three scenic spots are three very important scenic spots in Hangzhou . . . as a matter of fact, you could call this a tourist city.” After the translator jumped in to translate the single word “tourist,” she observed, “you
definitely want to research our buildings, this is one type of culture, but this type of
culture is also linked with these several large scenic spots.”

Liu was right. I was often told to go visit a location beside West Lake, or the
Money River New City that is on the northern bank of the Qian Tang River. The
advertising campaigns encouraging tourism are easy to find throughout Hangzhou and
make use of the scenic nature of the city. This cultural narrative, of Hangzhou’s tradition
and natural beauty, had come up in my initial interviews a few times as a gray space
between the labels of traditional and modern. The tension was often reconciled with
tourism. The commodification of the scenic spaces through tourism often created the cash
flow that allowed the more modern elements to be built in the areas that surrounded the
preserved traditional or natural spaces. To support her claim she brought up the building
regulations that prevent people from building tall buildings in the vicinity of West Lake,
“West Lake is surrounded on threes sides by mountains. It’s very beautiful. But on one
side it has modern architecture.” In her explanation of how these regulations helped to
develop the area and encourage the integration of traditional elements into the
architecture surrounding West Lake, she pointed out “if the traditional elements weren’t
added in it would be very crude (土) . . .for example let’s say you foreigners would come
and feel, ‘oh how is it this crude.’” Returning to the picture of the shopping area, she
listed the elements that make her think of it as modern, one of which was that “it is put up
with steel, it is like a transformer.” Then, the translator repeated in English, “like a
transformer.” For the first time in a while his translation was actually on target.

The conversation wandered on for a few more minutes until I decided it was time
to start wrapping things up. As a transition, I asked them if they had any questions for
me. The question was the one I expected, “Why did you choose this topic?” I did my best to explain that I think that modernity is connected to culture, economic development, and history, and because of these connections I think understanding a different culture’s modernity can make it easier to develop connections. After I checked to make sure that I answered that question to their satisfaction the conversation moved on to what I thought about Hangzhou’s modernity. After trying my typical dodge, of explaining it is not my culture or my city so I am not really able to tell, she probed the issue. I knew she really wanted to hear, and we were quickly approaching the end of our conversation so I explained that from what I have heard so far Hangzhou’s modernity is very complex. On one hand there is a movement to preserve the traditional spaces in the city in an effort to facilitate tourism, and on the other hand there is a desire to develop. Upon hearing this she agreed saying that tourism is “Hangzhou’s biggest window to make money.” This led me to find out that the translator actually worked at the National Tea Museum that is on the southeast side of the lake. After I politely asked about his English, he let me know that being an interpreter is only part-time work. After hearing him say “part-time work” I could not help but wonder if (and how much) he was getting paid for this evening’s interaction. Maybe this is what caused him to power through some of those translations that made no sense in the context of our conversation. Maybe he just needed to speak enough English to seem worth his fee.

My more in-depth answer was obviously much more satisfactory than the dodge that I tried at first. It sparked more conversation than I had expected, but now we were finally at a point where I could ask Liu my final question—what modernity meant to her. She told a story to explain her point:
I remember the year when the Olympics and the World Expo were happening; at that time Hangzhou made a television commercial. At first it was very busy and very fast, but then, suddenly it was at a teahouse beside West Lake. Then, it was beside the Grand Canal painting pictures. [I think] it is this type of city, So I think that Hangzhou’s modernity and its cultural history will never be separated . . . they are definitely integrated.

The conversation bounced from how much the average American knows about China, which led to the fact that most Americans know of China as a large exporter of the goods they buy. Using my cell phone as an example I showed the “Made in China” printed on the back of it, and explained that a lot of goods in America have this written on it. This then led to a conversation about how China has already over taken Japan’s economy and America’s is next. These types of statements, although funny for me to hear, are always a good sign that the people I am speaking with are comfortable with me. It also makes me aware of how the rest of the world feels when someone from back home screams “we’re #1” or a related outburst implying that the United States is the only worthwhile place to live on the planet. Finally, we ended on the rise of luxury in China itself. This entire portion of the conversation although long and meandering was extremely fruitful in my understanding of the conversation as a whole. Talking about how luxury cars are actually cheaper in China, the expectation that the average American knows more about China than Kung Fu movies and the little stamp on the back of the goods they buy, and even the idea that as China adds industry, it will one day overtake America’s role as the world’s largest economy, all demonstrate an orientation toward the future.
The future orientation that has helped to define modernity for both Liu and the Chen family has been one of the features of the rhetorical trope of modernity that surfaces the quickest. Recalling Jameson’s point that the excitement that surrounds modernity seems to concentrate a promise within a present of time and to offer a way of possessing the future more immediately within that present itself. It is in this sense something of a Utopian figure, insofar as it includes and envelops a dimension of the future temporality.\textsuperscript{173}

Jameson was arguing that this Utopia was in fact a manipulation of the enthusiasm that surrounds a successful application of the rhetorical trope of modernity. While I do not want to agree with his conspiratorial tone concerning the utopian nature of modernity, the idea that the excitement projects ideas and concepts concerning modernity into the future has been easy to see throughout my research. The narrative expressed by Liu, that China’s economy will one day overtake the United States as the world’s largest was delivered with an optimistic tone. And, if you look at the indicators put forward in our conversation of the plausibility of that possible future, luxury cars, increased recognition on the global stage, and the continued growth of the manufacturing sector, it would be hard to argue with her line of thought. However, economics are tricky, and predicting the future is even trickier. So the idea of being able to label this projected dominance of the Chinese economy as anything more than one of many possibilities seems optimistic. But, this future oriented narrative, and its impact on contemporary Hangzhou can easily be seen in the commerce, architecture, fashion, and advertising that fill the city.
I turned off my recorder, Liu settled the bill with her friend, the owner of this teahouse, and we all went on our way. During the cab ride home I was pleasantly shocked at how fruitful the conversation was. Moving through all the topics from visual markers of modernity, to tourism, concepts of luxury, and even the idea that the function of a space will impact the way in which the term modernity is applied.

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After the second conversation I was really excited about the way the final leg of my research practices was playing out. I was so excited that the next time I saw Mr. Xu, I thanked him for helping me to arrange those two dinners. It was about a week later when I received a phone call from an unknown person looking to arrange yet another dinner with me. After discovering that they were friends of Mr. Xu, I quickly agreed to a nine o’clock meeting on May 18th. This was the first time that I had arranged a meeting entirely over the phone, as in no email, no texting, and therefore no security blanket. It wasn’t until the day of the meeting, when I started to receive odd text messages at 8:30 AM and eventually a text at 9:00AM asking if I was lost, that I realized this was not a dinner, in saying 9:00 we had never clarified morning or evening. I felt so bad. I hate showing up a minute late for anything, the idea of being this late, almost half an hour by the time I got a cab and arrived at the tea house, was staggering.
I arrived at the tea house in Longjing Village (龙井村) (Fig. 39) as quickly as I possibly could have after recognizing my mistake. Longjing village is a small community that is nestled in the hills to the west of West Lake. Even though it is referred to as its own village it is still considered a part of Hangzhou and is dependent upon the tourism that is brought in by West Lake. Even before we reached my destination people were standing in the street flagging down my taxi trying to sell me fresh tealeaves. Upon arriving, I repeated how embarrassed and sorry I was about the miscommunication until I was quite sure that they had heard enough. The woman, Dong Yu, who had arranged this meeting was yet another person whose worked concerned culture in Hangzhou and her husband, Dong Hua was a professor at a local college. They took me out through the back door of the teahouse and up a flight of stairs to a table on top of the building. The hills that surround this village, where none of the houses are over three or four stories high, are all terraced with rows of tea bushes striping the hillsides. The was a mist or light rain falling, but luckily the roof top table was shielded by a canopy. After sitting for a few minutes and talking about Hangzhou’s famous Longjing tea and taking in the beauty of the setting, we moved on to the discussion of my research.
Starting with the traditional buildings this time, the list of elements and what they represented was once again confirmed, everything from materials, technology, and geometry of the building were pointed out as giving the spaces in the images a traditional feeling. The conversation seemed routine until the professor, Dong Hua, began to discuss building in the background (Fig. 40) of the image of a white wall with a black tile roof from Da Dou road (大兜路) (same image as Fig. 30). He observed:
If American culture represents international communication of modernization, then this is modern . . . but with regards to technology this actually is not modern. However when compared to our traditional, this is foreign culture. This thought, although a side comment at the time, shows a distinction between what is modern, what is traditional, and what is a result of globalization.

Dong Hua refocused on the white wall in the foreground of the image and confirmed that the color, roof tiles, window, materials, and inferred technological processes used to erect the wall were all traditional. Wanting to build upon his previous statement, where he had directly separated modern from foreign, I pointed to the building in the background (Fig. 40) and asked which elements of that building led him to call it modern. He quickly corrected me saying that “it is completely different from traditional.” Then he offered up an analogy to explain his point:

This is like clothes, Americans are like suits, and Chinese people are like Traditional Tang dynasty garments. The two cultures are not alike . . . but you want to say this is modern, but you cannot. To an American this is also traditional. Right?

I told him that I had not seen that type of building in the United States before. He pointed to the flat roof saying, “we think that all American houses are like this, with that flat roof.” Catching on, I quickly said, “not necessarily, some places have [that type of roof] and others do not.” He moved on, pointing out that “now a lot [of roofs] are built this way (flat), because if they are built flat there is a lot more usable space inside the house.” This called back to the first conversation, with the Chen family, where modern spaces often focused on the use of the interior even if the exterior was more simplistic in appearance.
But he was maintaining a strong connection to the idea that this building was foreign and therefore did not fit neatly into a juxtaposition between traditional and modern. Dong Hua’s statements left that building labeled as “not traditional” and then pointed out that this foreign style was becoming increasingly common. After continuing to another picture this distinction came up again when discussing the difference between stone and cement. Noticing the usage of cement in a space that he labeled as traditional he felt the need to clarify that using cement is modern “because in ancient China they didn’t have cement (this type of material) . . . cement is foreign, it is a technology introduced from overseas (abroad).”

Moving to an image of the Hangzhou Money River New City Citizen’s Center (杭州钱江新城市民中心) (Fig. 41), Dong Yu, who arranged this meeting, spoke up “this is where my office is.” This seemed like a fortunate coincidence. After they both agreed it was modern based on the materials and technology that must have been used to build it, she continued to explain that “The plan for this building is 20 years old, at that time it was thought that this idea of local government was modern, we wanted to move toward this type of modern idea.” Confirming the label of modern, the materials, technology and even the shape were once again presented as the elements that work to let them know that this place is modern. In an earlier interview someone had mentioned that this building was designed with Fengshui in mind.175 So, I pressed her interpretation of the shape of the building. “So, [do] you think its shape is modern or traditional?” She replied “It has tradition integrated from the mold (model) up.” Explaining further, she pointed out that this building “uses a set of rules, it is symmetrical.” She ended her thought by noting, “We still hope it is a symbol of modernity.” She repeated that the building was designed
20 years ago, but then, through the course of the conversation it was brought to light that the building wasn’t really open for use until 4 or 5 years ago.

Figure 41: Money River New City's Citizens' Center (Alternate View)

Changing the image to the West Lake Cultural Square (same image as Fig. 37), Dong Yu once again pointed out “This plan is from 15 years ago . . . at that time it was selected from a lot of different plans, there was Japanese, Italian, French and domestic, the final choice was a design [from] a certain domestic design institute.” The conversation confirmed that this space is traditional in shape but modern in building material and technology. The process of a Chinese design being pick from several plans submitted from international design firms was an interesting addition to the multitude of comments that I was hearing about this space. It was interesting to know that there were bids from international companies but the domestic plan was chosen. The design, in a way, was competing in a globalized space.
Feeling like the conversation concerning the integration of modern and traditional was starting to gain some steam, I pulled up an image of Ying Tai shopping center by West Lake on my tablet (same image as Fig. 33). Dong Hua told me it was modern, but when I asked why, he responded:

This is hard to say because there is a lot of foreign stuff, foreign technology and culture, it is all novel. We are inclined to think of it as leaning toward a classification of modern. Then, traditional, it’s fundamentally handed down from our own history.

Stuck in this tension he asked “How do you define what is modern?” But this rhetorical question was only a transition to his explanation, “I think I have identified your point of view: the first is that it is foreign, or the second is that it is some very new technology, ideas, or opinions, this could be modernity.” Thinking back through my comments in this conversation I am unclear whether or not I had implied that modernity was/is necessarily something from abroad, but I realized that this distinction was something that he had brought up several times throughout our conversation, starting from the very first image. His comments unveiled another complication: modern is often conflated with new, and foreign is seen as new. There is a complex nexus between something that is novel, due to its foreignness, and the intersection that is often voiced between new/novel and modern.
But before I could think up a question to probe his distinction between modernity and foreignness, he continued his commentary about the Ying Tai shopping mall:

It’s very modern because this touches on marketing. It’s just the concept of selling this stuff: it is to put the most expensive stuff in the most flourishing [can also be translated as pompous or extravagant] space…this is one type of marketing, one type of idea, it is modern. Traditional people do not think like this.

The connection between commercialization, globalization, and foreignness in the construction of modernity in this conversation was nothing less than intriguing to me. But I felt pressure to be very careful with my words. I did not want to push his thought process one way or another. It seemed to be teetering on a line where, on one side, globalization played a role in his conception of modernity, and on the other side, it was an outside force, which had influence, but was ultimately in its own category. This point, quite predictably, was never fully addressed. I didn’t know how to ask for an explanation of how globalization or foreign influence was incorporated into his concept of what it means to be modern in Hangzhou without leading him to an answer one way or another. But the tension that was present in his own exploration of the topic was extremely representative of my fieldwork.
We moved onto a picture of an apartment building in Bin Jiang (same as Fig. 36), and without much of a prompt Dong Hua explained:

Traditional people, their living conditions should be like where we are now (in the tea field) (Fig. 39), the buildings are rather short, like this. Now (referring to Fig. 36) it is because our population is too large . . . so there is not enough, land is limited, so we can only go up . . . this is fundamental to the modernization of the style of where people live.

Pressing into the details of the space, Dong Yu noted “It’s just modernization, we like that type of tall apartment building.” To this, her husband jokingly replied:

It is not that we like it, but rather there is no other way. There are too many people. If you have the money, of course, you would live in a house with a
courtyard. I can’t afford a house with a courtyard, I have to live in a tall building.

It is like that. Therefore this dwelling, this is modern.

His wife retorted, “You can’t say that.”

The discussion of Binjiang once again led this conversation through similar topics as before. Their answers confirmed the opinions I heard in other discussions. Feeling that the energy in this conversation was taking a dip I decided to integrate a few different images. This helped to keep the conversation lively, but other than a few observations about the different colors of traditional walls (yellow is Buddhist, red is the aristocracy) nothing new was added, but a lot of things were confirmed.

Our tea had gone cold and the rain clouds had passed revealing the sun by the time we went back downstairs and into the building to have lunch. The rest of our interaction was much more mundane and was centered more around the son asking me questions about American culture and learning to speak a foreign language. While on the topic of food and culture I asked him about the flavor of the eyeballs he was eating out of the fish. The professor (his father) jumped in and explained to me that the reason his son is eating the eyeballs out of the fish was related to Chinese medicine. His son has some small problems with his eyes from studying so much. He explained that the eyes from a fish and our eyes are made up of similar things, so by eating the eyes of the fish, his son is providing his body and his eyes with the proper materials to keep his eyes healthy. It made sense, and the son laughed at me for being so curious, and even offered to let me eat the last one. Not wanting to get in the way of his eye health, I politely declined. After lunch we all took a walk through the tea fields (Fig. 43) before they dropped me back at my building in Binjiang.
With less than a week left in Hangzhou I was thrilled that the third part of my research had bounced back from the lack of a focus group with local academics. Instead of a group of academics I managed to speak with a newspaper editor, a community organizer, a design student, a professor, and two people who worked for the Hangzhou city government. I decided to have one last dinner with my friend Zhen, the architect/designer, who had been helping me out even before I arrived in Hangzhou. We met at a western style restaurant. The label “western” is something that I have always found interesting in China. It takes on a meaning of European or American, but this is such a large grouping that, in my interpretation, it comes to mean something generically foreign. I appreciated this offer of meeting me at a “not Chinese food” restaurant. He had eaten with me at a Mexican restaurant run by an American expat a few weeks ago and I knew that he did not really like the differences in eating habits. He explained that personal plates, instead of the family style ordering, create a lack of variety for each person at the table and the focus on foods that are denser in calories lead to smaller portions. He didn’t believe that after eating a few tacos that I could possibly be satisfied. So I understood that him choosing to meet me at a Western coffee house for dinner was not his first choice.

After we had eaten our food, he once again was unconvinced that the meal that I ordered could have even come close to being satisfying. But without too much discussion we moved onto my research, and the images that I had taken. Having talked him as part of the initial interviews I was curious to see how he would interpret the images that I had framed throughout the city. I started with the image of the corner of the pagoda at Sudi
(same image as Fig. 29), and my usual question. “Do you think this place is modern or traditional?” I had accidently forgotten to say “or neither,” this time, but I was more comfortable with him and knew that he would not hold back his opinion. He had been interested in my project since picking me up at the airport. He also always seemed to understand what I was saying through my accent. Five months ago, I was expressing a lot of my ideas with simpler grammar and the occasional broken sentence, but now, I felt like our conversations had a faster flow to them. I would only occasionally stop him to ask what a word meant or to clarify the place or building he was referring to.

Zhen answered my first question concerning the pagoda at Sudi with a definitive “Traditional.” I quickly asked, “Why?” The pagoda, according to him, was “Very classical” and he said that I would probably not know the architectural terminology for each of the elements that mark this structure as traditional. It wasn’t a bad assumption on his part, but at that point the list of elements had already been presented to me. The flying corners (he chose the word 飞檐 which is flying eaves), cow leg brackets (牛腿), and the roof tiles (瓦当) were the vocabulary that he thought necessary to cover. After explaining how the roof tiles work with the flying corners to protect the pillars from the rain, he pointed out that the environment looks very traditional. As I have mentioned earlier, I framed this photo to isolate that corner, but the background of this photo was green and directly under the flying eaves was another green tree or shrub. He explained the environment is traditional “because it has trees, its green.” The association of the scenery and natural landscapes with tradition in China is nothing shocking. As Yi-Fu Tuan points out in his discussion of spaciousness and crowding:
Poetry of the Han period, for example, described the wildernesses of the South with awe; there, uprooted officials from the North encountered a vast and seemingly primordial world of mist-wrapped mountains and lakes. It was in South China that nature poetry and landscape painting reached their highest development.177

The association of the natural landscape with traditional art from dynastic China has come up several times before. One of the earliest, and most distinct of which was when Wang, a man in his 90’s, pointed out that the boat rides around West Lake no longer included the “four arts of the Chinese scholars.” The association of nature with traditional art has a direct impact on the ways in which the green spaces in Hangzhou are interpreted.

Moving on to the image of Da Dou road (大兜路) (same image as Fig. 30), he didn’t even wait for me to ask a question. Upon seeing the image he commented, “This is traditional, this is a section of old wall, but look at this (pointing to the structure in the background), to me, [if you asked] if this photo was old or new, I would tell you, in my opinion, it is a new photo.” He was referencing the much more rectangular building in the background of this image (same image as Fig. 40), whose flat roof had also caught the eye of Dong Hua at Longjing Tea Village. Following up, on the distinction between the wall being old/traditional and the photo being new, I simply asked “Why?” He reiterated “the wall is probably old,” but continued to explain that the building in the background was “a type of new shape (could also be translated as “form”).” Working through the different elements found in the photo, I changed the focus back to the traditional wall. Explaining the label of “traditional” he pointed out the “flower lattice window,” white
color, and the stones that pave the street in front of the wall. I suspected that paver stones were traditional because of their placement in many of the traditional spaces and the way other people had discussed concrete as a foreign technology. When I probed Zhen’s description, he confirmed this suspicion and even juxtaposed the paver stones with the more modern alternative of concrete.

Moving through the images on my tablet, the discussion followed a fairly similar pattern to the three other conversations but his answers were always a little more in-depth. After asking why he thought a particular building was modern he pointed out that
the proportions were different than a traditional space. I handed him my notebook out and flipped to a fresh page and he quickly drew out two rectangles, one he labeled as three units wide and one unit tall, while the other he labeled as one unit wide and seven units tall (Fig 44). He explained that three by one is modern and one by seven is traditional (he labeled it as old on the diagram). Skeptical of how simple this explanation was, he just broke down the difference between modern and traditional to proportion ratios, I almost instantaneously asked, “Really?” He calmly told me to “Look.” Turning my attention back to the photo, I realized that he was right. Then looking around the western coffee shop I could see that the ratio was used in almost every aspect of its design, from the booths to the geometric shapes that frame the windows looking out on to the street the three to one ratio shaped this space. I was so taken back by just how simple this explanation was that I felt the need to say, in English, “This place has windows that fit this pattern” into my recorder just in case I forgot this moment later.

Moving to the next image of the West Lake Cultural Center (same image as Fig. 35), I asked my usual question, “Do you think this place is traditional or modern?” To which he answered, “This is modern, but it has traditional elements.” I encouraged him to explain. He pointed to the tower in the middle of the structure, and said “this tower.” And then, almost as if he were changing the subject he asked, “Have you ever been to Six Harmonies Pagoda (Fig. 45)?” Instead of answering his question, I followed up “You think this building looks like a pagoda? Why?” He responded “First look at its proportions.” It was, of course, very close to the 7 to 1 ratio. He then continued to point out that the geometry at the top of the building was two squares layered so that if you looked down from the top they would create a eight point star (he drew this on the same
sheet as the ratios, near the bottom right hand corner). The implication was that this geometry, though not the same as the multiple, layered eaves that make up the Six Harmonies Pagoda, definitely was working to visually reference that shape.

Figure 45: Six Harmonies Pagoda
Moving to a picture showing the square in front of the cultural center (Fig. 46), the conversation shifted. After looking at the picture he said “Public squares are modern.” This echoed the woman’s opinion at the teahouse, but because of my own cultural bias I was slower to see this idea. I thought of the town square as a fairly traditional thing, and the biggest public square I have ever been to is in Beijing in front of the Forbidden City, I was prone to associate the idea of a public square with a more traditional space in China. I think Zhen could feel my hesitancy to this idea because he continued:

Before, China didn’t have public squares . . . In the West you have public squares. You have been to Beijing, right? Have you seen Wu Men (午门)? In front of Wu Men there is a public square [this is more commonly known in the United States as Tian An Men (天安门)], but it is only at the emperor’s . . . normal, common people don't have squares.”

Not quite able to accept this, I pressed the idea, “I thought every city had a square.” To which he answered, “Traditionally there weren’t squares, it is only in modern times that [each city] has [a square].” It was at this point that I realized my bias and pointed it out to him. He thought it was funny.
Figure 46: Public Square at West Lake Cultural Center
This led to a bit of a tangent where we discussed how my bias slowed me down. After I explained that this must be a little bit of culture left over from European roots, he pointed out that “because if you have a public square then [people] can communicate, without a square there is no way [to communicate].” This had now become a trickier conversation. The flow of information that happens in a public park is something that I had never thought of. But, looking back over the last few months, this is exactly what happens in these public spaces, whether it is a park, a square, or even a teahouse. People sit, drink tea, and discuss whatever is on their minds. My project depended on this culture of public discussion during my initial interviews. If a foreigner sat in a public park in my hometown or even in a larger city in the United States, they would not receive nearly as much attention and cooperation as I have received in Hangzhou. It was also this, apparently quite new, culture of discussion that complicated my initial interviews. Any discussion that occurs in public in China seems to turn into a group activity, and people would often join the conversation in those initial interviews to express their own opinions on my questions, or even just interrupt to say hello.

It was at this point that I asked, “So do you believe that these spaces have changed Chinese culture?” Zhen answered “Correct.” He continued to explain that “Before people, and specifically old people, did not have these types of opportunities to go exercise, practice with a sword (a reference to martial arts), or go to the square and speak with other people.” I was curious, “Then where did they go?” He said that people would of course talk with their neighbors, or women would of course have opportunities to chat with one another while doing laundry at the well or at the water. It was in this
explanation that I realized that the way people use parks and squares are a direct reflection of the ability to retire and the concept of the weekend.

I had a Chinese teacher during graduate school who joked that Deng Xiaoping (邓小平), the communist party leader who followed Mao Zedong (毛泽东), was the first Chinese person to ever retire. This joke referenced the ten-year term limit he first imposed on the role he inherited from Mao and then adhered to, stepping down himself in 1989, ten years after he had taken office. The subject of whether or not he was the first person in China to ever actually retire is quite a messy subject. Melanie Manion in her article “Policy Implementation in China,” points out that “since the 1950s, there were regulations on cadre retirement, and constitutions stipulated fixed terms of office for many elective positions.” This point is then quickly followed up by the caveat that, “cadre retirement was not enforced or widely practiced, and constitutions did not include restrictions on successive terms.” This left the main reasons for leaving office as “natural death, political error, or consolidation of personal power at the top.” The political leaders who came before Deng often served lifelong terms until either their death or a politically fueled purge removed them from office. It wasn’t until Deng Xiaoping made retirement for officials mandatory that this pattern changed.

The concept of stepping down, or a normal person being able to retire, is something that is only about three decades old in this space. The public squares and parks, and more specifically the ways in which people use them, are a direct reflection of that shift in culture, and as such are a visual representation of a modernity. Pulling once again on Juliette MacDonald’s observation that design can take be used as either a value free discussion of form, or can be used to convey luxury and exclusivity, the public
park, square, or even the tea house can be seen as visual markers of the luxury found in contemporary life in Hangzhou. This is a manifestation in the present of a future oriented narrative concerning Chinese culture and the work life balance that should be allotted to senior citizens in this space. Free time is a luxury, especially prior to Deng Xiaoping, but now because of changes in policy older people in China get to retire, take up hobbies, and spend time with friends and family.

Moving to a close-up of the roof at the West Lake Cultural Center (same image as Fig. 35), I was met with an unexpected response. Before I asked my question, Zhen said in English “OK,” returning to Chinese, “you are crafty [sly]; this is a type of simplified flying eave. This is traditional, but the building as a whole is modern.” Continuing to try to isolate the elements of this space, I asked about the pillars. He thought they were modern, but not for the usual reasons of materials. He pointed out that this type of structure used to have meaning. Higher number of pillars represented a higher status for the person living in that space. Using the example of Confucius, whose hometown temple is thirteen pillars wide, he explained that normal people use to live in houses that were two pillars wide. The fact that this space has such an abundance of pillars, which was a disconnect from how pillars should be used traditionally, led him to believe that the pillars themselves are not a traditional element. I did not know quite how to interpret his explanation. It is because the pillar itself is not being used in the traditional way that they are not seen as traditional. I took it to mean that the pillar itself is a neutral architectural element in his interpretation. The conversation about the usage of pillars led us to focus on construction in general (Fig. 47). There were very few places in the city where construction or renovation was not a part of the scenery. Even around West Lake, a small
pagoda was being repainted, there was construction in front of Lei Feng Pagoda, and
paver stone walkways were being repaired. Trying to compose a more general question
about the meaning held up in that construction, I stumbled and rambled. Luckily my
friend was able to interpret my rambling and rephrase it for me, “You are asking if it [the
construction throughout the city] has any large significance [meaning] . . . if it will
influence me?” After I confirmed that he had summed up my question accurately he
answered, “It influences me, it makes our lives more convenient. To say that it has no
influence is impossible.” Trying to probe the link between construction and development,
I asked if there was a connection to the city’s economy. He confirmed that there was and
provided several examples of places nearby where we could go shopping or find office
buildings.
Figure 47: Example of Construction in Hangzhou
Still torn, I admitted that I did not know how to write about this in my project. I explained that I believe that these buildings have come to show the economic development of the city, so of course they have a connection to the day-to-day life of the people who live here. But thinking of Binjiang, where I can see the boundary of the city creeping further and further into farmland, I said, “People used to live here, and now they cannot. So this [development] could have a good or a bad meaning.” There was only one person so far during my time in Hangzhou who asked the qualitative question of whether modernization is good or bad. Everyone else tried to figure out if I meant domestic or foreign, but there were no interviews where people told me that modernity or the different initiatives to modernize have been bad and it always left me curious. He answered “it has both . . . this is rather complex.” Twisting in and out of how the city’s development forces the people out of their houses and the different ways that even the concept of a city has changed from traditional to contemporary times, we spent some time on this subject. He even went into the etymology of the word 城市 (the two characters are literally wall 城 and market 市, but put together you have city 城市). But ultimately, his initial answer “it has both,” was the best way to sum up whether modernity is seen as good or bad.
During this more general conversation concerning development, we eventually landed on a few pictures of Binjiang (same image as Fig 36, and Fig. 48). I was still double checking what had been the general theme that each type of space will have its own sense of modernity, so I asked about the repetition of the buildings and the lack of any distinguishing features. He focused in on my concern with the repetition, saying, “this type of repetition was originally a type of modernity . . . mechanical reproduction.” This is the same line of modernity that Walter Benjamin critiques in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility.” Benjamin is quick to associate mechanical reproduction with Marx’s critique of the “basic conditions of capitalist production.” He puts forward the concern that the ability to mechanically reproduce works of art, regardless of genre, leaves “one thing lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular space.” In other words, in Benjamin’s
view the work lacks authenticity. Benjamin emphasizes the idea that “the whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction.” In Benjamin’s critique of the effects of the basic means of capitalist production he creates a structure where authenticity equals authority, and with that authority a reproduction can be labeled a forgery.

Theodor Adorno moves this concern from the work of art to a wider conception of culture in his book *The Culture Industry*. In his critique of mass culture he claims that “The commercial character of culture causes the difference between culture and practical life to disappear.” This leads him to the rather alarming claim that:

Mass culture expressly claims to be close to reality only to betray this claim immediately by redirecting it to conflicts in the sphere of consumption where all psychology belongs today from the social point of view. The conflict, which was misfortune, is its own consolation. In its mirror mass culture is always the fairest in all the land.

Both Adorno and Benjamin’s concern about the modernity brought about by the industrial revolution in Europe focus on the new advantages that capitalism gained with the ability of mechanical reproduction. The consumerism that capitalism encouraged through the mechanical reproduction of art and design seemed, to these Marxists, to rob those goods and the cultures that swirled around them of authenticity. For Adorno the ability to understand reality itself was being hijacked by the capitalists’ ability to redirect the discussion to deal with the conflicts their mass culture was producing.

However, for Zhen, the tension represented in mass culture between consumerism and authenticity was not a point of concern. Moving away from the image he asked if I
thought of a computer as modern. To this I admitted that I thought of computers as modern, but also that they were becoming increasingly mundane. He explained that the buildings in the photo are a lot like computers, copy after copy, all the same, but all still seen as modern. Then he even pointed out that computers, and their mechanical reproduction are the modern way to write. Handwriting something is traditional.

The rupture created in writing with the implementation of mechanical means of reproduction is something that was pointed out by Walter Ong in his book *Orality and Literacy*, when he observed the impact of the transition from handwriting to moveable type saying, “writing had reconstituted the originally oral, spoken word in visual space. Print embedded the word in space more definitively.”\(^{190}\) This rupture in the narrative of placing words onto paper led to a modernity. Ong claims that this change in technology “can be seen in such developments as lists, especially alphabetical indexes, in the use of words (instead of iconographic signs) for labels in the use of printed drawings of all sorts to convey information and the use of abstract typographic space to interact geometrically with printed words.”\(^{191}\) In this light, even the act of handwriting visualizes changes brought about by the mechanical reproduction/standardization of text.

Though the conversation was in the form of a metaphor, the idea was that building, making something, or writing something by hand produced unique outcomes that were associated with traditional (whereas using a computer to type, machines to build, or any other form of mechanical reproduction to produce standardized objects was associated with modernity). The juxtaposition between mechanical reproducibility and the tendency of traditional to be hand made, and as such unique, once again taps into Adorno’s discussion of “the culture industry” when he states:
The concept of technique in the culture industry is only in name identical with technique in works of art. In the latter, technique is concerned with the internal organization of the object itself, with its inner logic. In contrast, the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object. The culture industry finds ideological support precisely in so far as it carefully shields itself from the full potential of the techniques contained in its products. It lives parasitically from the extra-artistic technique of the material production of goods, without regard for the obligation to the internal artistic whole implied by its functionality [Sachlichkeit], but also without concern for the laws of form demanded by aesthetic autonomy.192

But even though Zhen’s point taps into many of these, largely European, concerns, his focus was on the ability to standardize and reproduce an object. This ability is, in itself, a reflection of the technology that allows reproduction to take place and as such was a representation of a certain type of modernity.

Our conversation then devolved into a discussion of shopping culture that, though very interesting to me, was ultimately a little wandering and only worked to confirm that the culture of shopping for goods, and therefore consumerism, has also recently shifted. Moving from the more traditional markets where price is negotiable to the higher end expensive malls where prices are fixed.

I turned off my recorder, and we continued to talk about how he was trying to decide about getting a new car, and I was excited to go home after almost six months in Hangzhou. Then all of a sudden he mentioned that he wanted to take me to a different
restaurant but was unsure if I could handle really spicy food. This is a very dangerous question to answer in China. Spicy is a vaguer term than we often give it credit for, in the United States I often think “spicy” just means more salt, but in China it means chilies and, depending on what type of Chinese cuisine he was talking about, it could bring a little sweat to my brow while eating, or leave the inside of my mouth and digestive track in serious pain. Taking a calculated risk, I told him that I eat spicy food and asked when he would like to go to this other restaurant. He looked at his watch, said it only opens up at night, and it might still be a little early, but that we could go now. I laughed, knowing that for him the food in the coffee shop was just a snack and the next restaurant would be his dinner. It was only a few minutes before we were sitting at a new table, in a new restaurant, in a different part of town with a table covered in crawfish, vegetables, and a few beers eating our second dinner of the night.

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In the end, I felt that having the third part of my research practices fall through was fortuitous. Had I been able to arrange a meeting with local academics, I would have had a single, segmented, and high stress chance to discuss many of the issues that I was trying to understand. By having several meetings with people from a wider swathe of the population, in lower stress settings, I was able to hash out the ideas several times, and hear several different in-depth view points before I began my writing process.

As part of these four conversations many of the more abstract concepts surrounding modernity were confirmed. The future orientation of the modernity, came through most clearly in the conversations with the Chen family and Liu, but I think that it was still present, even if only as background, in the conversations with the Dong Family
and Zhen. With Zhen I think this future orientation comes through in his interpretation of the seemingly omnipresent construction that shapes Hangzhou. When asked, he told me that construction makes life more convenient. However it is clearly not the case that construction, which is in progress, makes his life more convenient. It is the result of the construction that he is referring to. The sidewalks and streets that are shut down, revitalizing the cities, buildings and infrastructure create noticeable and very real inconveniences for everyone trying to move through this city. In fact one of the best examples of this inconvenience occurred in my last month in Hangzhou. The streets that surrounded my apartment building were completely ripped up to replace the utilities (sewer, electric, etc.) that laid beneath them. Living across the street from two schools, one for international kids and the other for Chinese children, the inconvenience of the construction was visible every morning and afternoon in the chaos that surrounded dropping kids off and then picking them up from school. The river of cars, and the waves of sound caused by the honking horns were impressive. Most days it would seem that the concept of two lanes of traffic moving in opposite directions had been completely abandoned, with cars moving in any direction the driver thought would help them escape their current situation. However, Zhen’s quick response, linking construction and renovation to a increase convenience in the future demonstrates the future orientation of the narrative surrounding the construction (and the visual of the construction).

There was also a noticeable divide in age groups that was confirmed in these conversations. I was told multiple times in my initial interviews that I should ask younger people about modernity and older people about tradition. One man, who was 26 years old himself, told me that I should question people between 30 and 40 years old because they
could remember both sides of the question (traditional and modern). This age range seemed really narrow at the time, when I was conducting my initial interviews, but now I realize that this age range seems to directly reference Deng Xiaoping’s implementation of the Four Modernizations. Zhen (who is in his 30’s), Liu (also around 30 years old), and Chen Meng Yao (who was in her 20’s), definitely interpreted modernity differently than those people only one generation above them. Chen Mei, Chen Jun, Dong Hua, and Dong Yu, whose ages ranged from their mid 40’s to early 60’s, constructed the relationship between globalization, modernization, and domestic influence in a distinctly different way than the, in some cases, only slightly younger people who participated in this set of conversations. The ability of Chinese culture to produce a modernity was not something that surfaced easily in the older generations, while, for the younger generation, it was voiced as a possibility. The incorporation of traditional, or updated traditional, architectural elements did not go unnoticed amongst the younger people. This means, that if modernity is a rhetorical trope applied to a future oriented narrative, that this group sees the possibility and the physical manifestations of a distinctly Chinese modernity. This stands in contrast to the imported sense of modernity that many people above the age of 40 voiced in both these in depth conversations as well as my initial interviews.

Overall, I did not even expect my initial plan of holding a single conversation, with a focus group comprised of local scholars and professors to produce such useful insights. The fear I had of conducting that conversation with scholars was not even an issue in the smaller, and much more casual, conversations that shaped the third part of my research practices. These four meals gave me access to talk through many of my concerns and initial understandings with a much more diverse group of people from Hangzhou
than I ever could have expected from a group of professors. The role of each person’s viewpoint in relation to their age, gender, and occupational expertise in helping me to understand the concepts wrapped up in Hangzhou’s modernity pales only in comparison in their willingness to engage with my topic. Points of style, influence of foreign technology, and the relationship between traditional and modern were all talked through with sincere interest, and sometimes even debated in order to flush out a more nuanced understanding, or ensure that I was not left with any “empty” answers.

156 Geertz, Local Knowledge, 5.
157 Bakhtin, Toward a Philosophy of the Act, 17.
158 Bakhtin, Toward a Philosophy of the Act, 17.
159 Bakhtin, Toward a Philosophy of the Act, 18.
160 Interview number 35 in Appendix A
161 Tuan, Space and Place, 112–113.
162 Tuan, Space and Place, 112.
163 Bruun, Fengshui in China, 2.
164 Bruun, Fengshui in China, 77.
165 Bruun, Fengshui in China.
166 Yifeng Wen, “Natural Philosophy and Fengshui.”
167 Bakhtin, Art and Answerability, 22–23.
168 Tuan, Space and Place, 41.
171 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 6.
172 Interview number 36 in Appendix A
174 Interview number 37 in Appendix A
175 Liu from Interview number 36 in Appendix A
176 Interview number 38 in Appendix A
177 Tuan, Space and Place, 57.
182 MacDonald, “Design and Modern Culture,” 50.
183 Interview number 31 in Appendix A
184 Benjamin et al., The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media, 19.
Benjamin et al., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, 21.

Benjamin et al., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, 21.

Benjamin et al., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*.


Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 121.

Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 121.


Interview number 6 in Appendix A
Chapter 6: Conclusion

It is the very end of May and my second to last day in Hangzhou, and the situation in which I find myself is unique. Mr. X and his English class are throwing an end of the semester party and have invited me to come along. This time it is not at the university where all the rest of the classes have taken place, but rather in the Buddhist College nestled in the hills that lie west of West Lake (Fig. 49). We are silently waiting on lunch in the dining hall. Everyone, including a group of monks and novices, has already filed in and sat down at the long tables. No one is sitting across from anyone else at the tables; instead we are all facing the middle of the room. A few of the people from the English class don’t quite understand that the silence is a rule and not a suggestion until they are silently given a cue from a monk to stop whispering. In three rounds, different young novices come out of the kitchen and provide me with a bowl of broth to drink, noodles, and a vegetarian topping for the noodles. Feeling like a child who is trying his best to be
respectful and mind his manners I watch the monks and novices eating with us for cues before I do anything.

The idea that I have spent almost half of a year in this city does not seem possible. I have spoken with so many people, and done so many things that I would have never expected when I was stepping on the plane in January. Just this morning I walked through Ling Yin Buddhist Temple, and through the tea fields between the temple and the college where I am currently eating lunch with a room full of monks and government employees. At the heart of this, even if you strip away all of their chosen professions, I am still having lunch in complete silence with about 50 people in a dining hall that is not open to the public, on basically the opposite side of the planet from my home town. The situation is surreal.

After a novice politely gestures at me to lift my bowl off the table while I am eating, I start to lose my focus on the moment and start to slide into a view of this as one of my last meals in Hangzhou. In the light of my project, the Buddhist College is a curious space to have what will probably be my last outing in this city. I do have one more day, but I will spend it packing, cancelling my cellphone service, and double-checking to make sure my landlord realizes exactly how early I am going to need to drop off the key to my apartment. So, this silent lunch and my time in the Buddhist College is one of the last things I will do in the city.

Having spent the last six months searching out visual representations of modernity and questioning people about them, I quickly try to break down how I would interpret the visuals that make up this college and this lunch in regards to my project. While I think that almost anyone from the city of Hangzhou would label this college as a
traditional space, I do think there would be a clear argument that this space, where I unfortunately cannot take photos, is a representation of a modernity. The large glass wall that makes up part of the front of the main building, concrete, and technology that are all clearly visible once you make it into the college make a clear argument about the modernity present in this space. While, on the other hand, the usage of traditional architectural elements, maintenance of a landscape in the courtyard that is clearly not for tourist (they aren’t allowed in), and the omnipresence of Buddhist symbols and iconography all make a clear argument about the tradition of this space.

Thinking of modernity as a rhetorical trope that is dialogically created in a heteroglot collective imagination of a cultural context has been dramatically helpful as a lens to understanding both what my participants in Hangzhou noted about modernity and as a way of integrating the visuals that I collected. Building on Fredric Jameson’s idea of modernity as a rhetorical trope,194 each story, and each visual, is allowed to agree or compete with the other narratives and visuals that are also occurring in that space. The competition (or collaboration) between cultural narratives about the future can occur because the application of a trope—modernity or tradition—is not dependent on anything that is verifiable in the present moment. Instead each artifact and each story is a representation of a possible future just out of reach, which is being argued for in the present. It is in each manifestation and each retelling of that possible future that a person can begin to see the role of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogic interaction as a driving force in the evolution of meaning-making processes195 that occur in the future-oriented narratives that are shaping what it means to be modern. As Bakhtin points out:
The work, like the rejoinder in dialogue, is oriented toward the response of the other (others), toward his active responsive understanding, which can assume various forms: educational influence on the readers, persuasion of them, critical responses, influence on followers and successors, and so on. The specific nature of “the work” in this case is open. The communicative act, which is a turn in a dialogue, is created and positioned in anticipation of a response. The multitude of possible responses, of which Bakhtin only lists a few, are the possible outcomes of each turn in a dialogue. When applied to the trope of modernity these range from rejection through acceptance and sometimes ideas are even quarantined as “unrealistic” or as fiction. But, most importantly, regardless of what type of response it receives, each communicative act stands both as a response to some other communicative act and in anticipation of a response to itself. If I paint a picture depicting my culture’s future, drawing on themes found in the news, literature, and other art, I am participating in the dialogue that is creating a shared future just as much as the people who will critique my painting.

The Buddhist College where I am eating lunch acts in much the same way as my imaginary painting of the future. In its construction the college has made efforts to modernize the process of becoming a monk in current day Hangzhou. The classrooms here have up-to-date computer systems and video projectors hanging from the ceiling; they are different from classrooms I have seen at other, more traditional, monasteries in China. The large glass wall that overlooks a beautiful outdoor sitting area complete with a small pond full of lotuses contains many of the architectural design elements that have been listed as modern during my time in Hangzhou (e.g. steel, glass, etc.), but the scene
the window is framing for the person looking through the glass is full of traditional Buddhist symbols (e.g. a pond full of lotus flowers).

The people who designed this college did not leave out the yellow walls found at Ling Yin Temple, but neither did they avoid applying different elements of modernity to their construction of this space. The monks who live and learn in this school are not similar to other monks that I have met in more traditional settings. Some of the monasteries I have previously visited in different parts of China did not have electricity. And in these, Buddhism was taught consistent with the methods used a few hundred years ago. With little effort, a juxtaposition can be created between the modern Buddhist College where I now sit—with its high tech tools and modern architecture—and a traditional Buddhist monastery—with its lack of electricity and hundreds of years old buildings. Within the cultural narrative of Buddhist Colleges, this space and many of the choices that have been made in the construction of this space are all clearly visible as a rupture in the specific cultural narrative of the Buddhist educational process. Each choice to change or preserve something is a response, and is positioned in the anticipation of a response. Using a computer to study Buddhism is in no way in contradiction to any of the fundamental teachings of the historical Buddha, but in placing a computer in the classroom the college has made a statement about how “modern” Buddhism will be taught in response to how it has been taught in the past.

The cultural narratives that appeared time after time in the interviews in which I participated at both the start of my time in Hangzhou and the dinners that have shaped the end of my time here demonstrate many of the ways that “a” modernity can be visually communicated. Almost everyone I spoke with could identify, in a picture or from
memory, a modern place. But it was in probing their suggestions and initial interpretations that I started to see the patterns that shaped the way meanings are connected to the visuals.

All of these interviews have shaped the ways in which I have come to understand what a visual representation of modernity will or might look like in this space. There were, of course a few that stuck with me throughout the process, shaping how I would engage the topic. I recall the older man, who suggested that “modern or traditional, is a comparative thing: it is a comparison of time, it is a comparison of feelings.”\(^{198}\) Also, Zhen, who used the father and son relationship, which is common in traditional Chinese philosophy,\(^ {199}\) to demonstrate the interconnected nature of traditional and modern, and later when he pointed out that the public square is a visual representation of free time, and as such, is a visual representation of modernity. Or any of the other interviews that took me by surprise pointing out ballroom dancing, concrete, or even nature as possible visual representations of a modernity within the context of Hangzhou. However it was not just the conversations I shared with the people, but the context and the experience of each of those conversations that have worked to shape my understanding. Stephen Tyler in his essay “Post Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document” points out that “experience is no more an object independent of the ethnography than all the others-behavior, meanings, texts, and so on.”\(^ {200}\) The experience of the conversation, the context, the shifts in body language, and the give and take between those who choose to speak with me and myself all work to enrich and complicate my understanding of their points.
In hindsight, I believe that one of the best illustrations of Tyler’s ideas concerning experience occurred during my first month in Hangzhou in an interaction with a young man who lived a little outside the city in the neighboring An Hui (安徽) province. He had said “hello” to me, and judging by his reaction when I replied, he was not expecting a response in Chinese. He agreed to answer my questions, but did not want to be recorded. Most of his answers were very similar to those of other people I had spoken with but it was while he was trying to explain the relationship between modernity and tradition that a word slipped his mind. He was trying to use West Lake, where the interview took place, as a metaphor for the relationship, but could not come up with the right word. It was obviously on the tip of his tongue, but I did not want to make him uncomfortable so I told him not to worry about it, and moved on to the next question.

Three minutes or so after our conversation had ended, and we had walked away from each other in different directions, he emerged out of the crowd, saying “渗透”: to permeate or infiltrate, also the term in biology for osmosis. He explained to me using a hand motion with interlocking fingers that tradition and modernity permeate one another, so trying to separate out the uniquely modern from the uniquely traditional was a difficult task. Of course I regretted not having my recorder turned on, but I raced to fill in the notes I had already jotted down from our earlier conversation where he told me that “tradition is easier to speak of” and that “you know a place isn’t modern by looking at it.” But it was this second interaction that worked to confirm my suspicion that traditional and modern are intertwined, related parts of a whole. That confirmation really stuck with me. This man, put his day on hold to track me down and more clearly explain his conception of the relationship between tradition and modernity. All of the details, the
context, apparent lack of exposure to foreigners, hand gestures, the fact that he was from a smaller neighboring town, word choice, etc., give a fuller picture of this interaction.

But it was not just experiencing each of the individual conversations that was intriguing to me. There were several points, especially in my initial conversations that stuck out to me because of their repeated and almost rehearsed presentation performed by multiple people. “White walls, black roof” (Fig. 50) was a phrase repeated by multiple people with a rhythm, which suggested that it was a set phrase. The short white buildings with the dark tiled roofs act as a symbol in this city of the past, and of a tradition. This style of building is replicated, in both very new and very old examples all around the shores of West Lake. Almost every person noted “White walls, black roofs” when asked to describe traditional. In fact, a few of them, emulated the rhythm with which other people (whom they did not know) had already spoken that phrase. And even though there was no fixed phrasing with a corresponding rhythm, the same was true of the tall glass buildings that came to represent modernity. Conversations focusing on building materials, height, and the ways in which those spaces are put to use by the people that inhabit them created easy to follow patterns that helped to show me how to frame the photos in the second part of my research practices.
It is in framing the photos that I have held up as examples of modern spaces where my project gets much more intricate. My understanding of how visuals work in a dialogic meaning-making process looks to expand Grant McCracken’s statement that “it is chiefly the visual aspect of the advertisement that conjoins the world and the object between which a transfer of meaning is sought,” beyond his usage in understanding the role of visuals in advertising. During my time in Hangzhou, the ability of visuals to participate in shaping what it means to be modern has been very apparent. Whether it is a person using a visual metaphor to explain a point or someone just telling me that “traditional is traditional,” the taken for granted impact of visuals on the construction of
future oriented cultural narratives was not hard to bring to the surface. Bakhtin once again points out that all discourse has a dialogic orientation when he states:

The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse. It is the natural orientation of any living discourse. On all its various routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in a living tension-filled interaction.203

From Bakhtin’s statement we can discern two distinct ideas. First, it is clear that when talking about the dialogic orientation of discourse that Bakhtin, as usual, favors linguistic means of communication. However, secondly, in this passage he does not limit the routes this discourse will take, nor the modes of communication that are able to participate in this discourse. The ability of a visual to participate in the swirling heteroglossia that surrounds any object is not limited, it is merely that the word is favored by Bakhtin.

Combined with McCracken’s observation that visuals are able to be, in some contexts, the chief means of intertwining a meaning with an object, the role of the visual in the heteroglot of communicative acts that construct any dialogic discourse is made clear. My argument throughout this project is not that visuals are the only, or even the primary way that we communicate what it means to be modern. The importance of the visual, just like the linguistic, fluctuates to fill a need within the given context. My argument is that visuals are an important, maybe even increasingly important, mode of participating in an already occurring dialogue. Asking someone upfront, without any attention given to the visuality of the subject, “what does modern mean to you?” is a hard, almost unfair, question.
The rhetorical trope of modernity is integrated into our collective imaginations in a range of subtle or blunt ways. Advertisers, within the American context that I am familiar with, tend to use modern as means to connect whatever commodity they are looking to sell with a specific narrative of the future. This allows consumers, if they have the necessary cash, to purchase a small chunk of that possible future in the present. However, this is not the only way this rhetorical trope is put to work. Politicians often make use of modernity as a stepping-stone to serve their political needs. On the liberal leaning side of the American political spectrum President Obama’s 2008 campaign slogan of “Yes we can” which was the center point of his proposed changes to health care, transparency in government, and a narrative that focused on how he would make the United States a better country (if you shared his ideals). On the other hand, on the conservative side of the American spectrum we see numerous appeals to tradition. Often this is done with visuals of a candidate walking through a farm, coal mine, or other location that is rhetorically significant to their constituents. The image of the candidate walking through a rhetorically significant space is then often accompanied by that candidate shooting, or casually carrying a gun. In either case—liberal or conservative—the rhetorical trope of modernity or the rhetorical trope of tradition is being put to work through the usage of various modes and means of communication to further an argument about which of the United States of America’s possible futures should be pursued.

Modernity as a rhetorical trope is also put into day-to-day practice in our lived environments. Arjun Appadurai suggest that the “imagination has become a collective, social fact.” As such, what we experience in our day-to-day lives shapes the ways in which we all (provided “we” have some form of connection to one another) imagine our
futures and employ the trope of modernity in the construction of those shared futures. The visuals that inhabit our lives, and the lives of those around us impact what can occur in our collective imagination. Whether it is the computer I stand in front of each day or the environments that I have lived in, the small visuals and the meanings that the people around me prescribe to those visuals, all intertwine in a much more subtle and taken for granted way, to shape the stories of our futures. For example, where I come from, in the foothills of Appalachia, the forest (or as I would normally say, “the woods”) are seen as a marker of tradition. Stories concerning the pioneers who first came over the hills, the conflicts and alliances with the Native Americans who were already here and the small towns that dot those wooded hills are all present in the visual elements that can be seen in the environment. Burial mounds from Native Americans dot my hometown. The small, rundown town where my great-grandfather once ran the general store, and the national forest that has helped to preserve large chunks of “the woods” are all visual markers of tradition. But, in Hangzhou, the natural beauty was not just a marker of a tradition, it was also a window to a specific type of modernization that relied on tourism. These two, seemingly similar, visuals of natural landscapes serve two different purposes in two different collective imaginations. Hangzhou’s natural landscapes are representations of the city’s cultural legacy, but to some of the people with whom I spoke in Hangzhou, these scenic views also represent a possible modernized future.

Both a community organizer and a waitress clearly connected modernity in Hangzhou to the scenic nature of the city. The waitress, in a much more immediate personal way, attached the scenery to a concept of luxury. This message was reinforced by multiple advertising campaigns found throughout the city. The idea that you could get
away from the busy, hectic city, sit beside any of the water features found in Hangzhou, stare off into the trees, have a cup of coffee, and relax was cultivated and depicted on a multitude of billboards. The waitress was, in many ways, a member of the collective imagination creating the narrative, which connects nature with luxury. This narrative was supported by advertising campaigns, and the community organizer. However, the community organizer was tapping into the same narrative but on a wider scale when she acknowledged the importance of Hangzhou’s natural beauty to the development of the city’s economy through tourism. She did not speak of the commodification of nature as Theodor Adorno does in his book *Aesthetic Theory*, when he says:

> The essence of the experience of nature is deformed. There is hardly anything left of it in organized tourism. To feel nature, and most of all its silence, has become a rare privilege and has in turn become commercially exploitable.\(^ {206}\)

Instead the community organizer saw how the efforts to preserve the scenery that has made West Lake, the wetlands, or even the Qian Tang River famous are an important part of drawing tourists, money, and eventually other forms of commerce and business to her city. This narrative, where Hangzhou’s natural beauty is a force in developing the economy, does not reject the traditional, but instead builds upon it. Neither the waitress nor the community organizer voiced Adorno’s concern for the commodification of the natural scenery. Instead they draw connections between this possible future and the traditions that surround the natural scenery. By connecting tourism to tradition they are connecting the preservation efforts and the resulting increase in tourism to both Hangzhou’s culture and its future economic development.
I never set out to give a complete picture of modernity in Hangzhou. Even if I confined that depiction to the time I spent in Hangzhou, it would still be a fool’s errand. In saying this I don’t want to encourage a nihilistic approach to understanding how both visual and linguistic means of communication work in shaping the ways people (or more importantly groups of people) think about their futures. It is at this point that I would like to borrow an analogy that appears throughout Chinese philosophy and suggest that the future-oriented stories that are created by the people in a cultural context are like a stream. Laozi, in the 32nd chapter of his fundamental book on Daoism, the 道德经 (Dao De Jing), says that “Analogically, [D]ao in the world (where everything is embraced by it), may be compared to rivers and streams running into the sea.” Confucius is also recorded as commenting, rather enigmatically, on the flow of a stream in section 9:16 of the most famous collection of his teachings, 论语 (The Analects), which says “Confucius, standing by a stream, said, ‘it passes on like this, never ceasing day or night!’” In these two examples from two of the most influential figures in traditional Chinese philosophy, I think the significance of the stream metaphor can help to understand the importance of modernity as a rhetorical trope.

As Laozi and Confucius both point out, streams and rivers are apt representations of a force that shapes our world. Communicative acts, linguistic or otherwise, resemble Laozi’s depiction of the rivers and streams hugging the world. Our collective imaginations are shaped by the communicative acts that flow through our cultural contexts. The relentless flow of the river, that Confucius points to, seems to be a good metaphor to depict the flow of a cultural narrative through time in a heteroglot context. Instead of envisioning heteroglossia as Bakhtin describes it as “the Tower-of-Babel
mixing of languages that goes on around any object," I would suggest that the water in a stream represents what Bakhtin would label as a “living dialogic thread,” and each drop of water that constitutes that stream is the representation of a communicative act from a distinct voice. The most rushing river is made up of a lot of little drops of water from a lot of different sources and as such can visualize a conception of heteroglossia. And, much like a living dialogic thread the flow of the river cannot be reversed. Or to repeat Confucius “it passes on like this, never ceasing day or night!” But this does not mean that the relentless nature of the river’s course is fated, or even really ever permanently fixed, instead it is decided, changed, or manipulated by each new tributary that joins it along it’s path.

The future-oriented narratives where we can see the application of the trope of modernity are a lot like a stream. The larger the collective imagination, the more prolific the people who share that collective imagination’s cultural context will be at producing artifacts, texts, and experiences that argue for the possible future that they have created. And each time a new challenge is met, in the form of a rupture in the cultural narrative or a competing narrative, the river will redirect, become a tributary of another river, or collect up and stagnate. In attempting to understand this process, we cannot fully explore each individual drop of water, what we must explore is the flow of the stream, the way it interacts with the landscape/context, and the ways in which it impacts and is impacted by the other streams that it will inevitably come in contact with. The same mentality is true of understanding a modernity and its connections to the cultural contexts and collective imaginations that feed it. If I were to try to understand every voice in a cultural context it would be like trying to trace the history of every drop of water in a stream. By the time I
traced the history of the first drop the meaning of that drop and the stream as a whole will have moved on. Instead, widening the theoretical view to see how the rhetorical tropes of modernity and tradition are applied to an already in motion set of cultural narratives is a much more feasible task, and provides an example of how these stories work inside any cultural context.

The role of visuals in the application of the trope of modernity to the dialogically created narratives is what I set out to explore. Separating the role of visuals and examining them as a separate unique group apart from the linguistic communicative acts that shape what it means to be modern in Hangzhou would rob those visuals of much of their meaning. An important reason for this is found in recalling Mieke Bal’s observation that the senses are mutually permeable and as such the act of looking is inherently impure. If I were to separate the visuals from the dialogue that surrounds them, I would be separating them from at least part of the context that creates their meaning.

An example of the intertwined nature of linguistic and visual modes of communication can be seen in what a picture of a fish can communicate. A picture of a fish in China has a whole host of meanings that are created in the rushing rapids of the heteroglossia that is shaping the narrative of tradition in that context. Anyone who has seen a Spring Festival in China has seen the banners hung around a door where the word fish (鱼, pronounced yú) and the word for abundance (余, pronounce yú) are shown as rhyming in the numerous variations of the phrase 新年有鱼年年有余 (having fish at new years [ensures] year after year there will be an abundance/enough). So the image of
the fish is informed by hearing the word fish (鱼, yú) which sounds like the word for abundance (余, also yú). This of course spills over into other communicative/cultural practices, such as eating. Whole fish were some of the most common things that people ordered at restaurants while I was eating with them for the first time. In Hangzhou there was one dish, with whole fish from West Lake, spicy mustard greens, and hot chilies, that was ordered several times because, as it was explained to me during different interactions, it was a traditional local dish. The way the visuals participate in the dialogic construction of modernity was demonstrated time after time in this way. The tall buildings made of steel, glass, and concrete were a representation of a modernity where globalization and economic development were the focus. And the fairly recent preservation projects that were tasked to restore and preserve the cultural landmarks surrounding the West Lake were a symbol of a different, yet related modernity where Hangzhou’s economy was developed by the commerce driven by the commodification of the city’s unique cultural past and scenic landscapes through tourism.

One thing that surprised me about many of the visuals (to which I was led) was the interplay between traditional and modern. Distinct from the Modernist aspirations in Europe and the United States that are best summed up in Ezra Pound’s slogan “Make it New!” Modernity in Hangzhou, through the visuals, seemed to incorporate a distinct cultural identity into a process of modernization. The West Lake Cultural Square incorporated flying corners, pillars, and even what I would label as minimalist representation of a Pagoda into the architecture of a building that was interpreted time after time as modern. In fact, the interpretations of this building highlighted a generational gap. People around 35 years old and younger saw this building as reflecting
Chinese design, while people age 45 and above saw this place as reflecting European design. I found this timeline interesting because I think it is a direct reflection of Deng Xiaoping’s Four Modernizations that were announced in 1978. R. Keith Schoppa, in his book *The Columbia Guide to Modern Chinese History*, summarizes the Four Modernizations saying, “These goals aimed to modernize agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. The modernizations were the rationale for the economic reforms of the last two decades.”\(^{214}\) Schoppa’s claim, published in 2000, could be updated to say that these reforms, focusing on economic development have not only shaped the last *three* decades in China, but have likely also shifted the way that other parts of the world, especially the United States, think about their futures. For the people who did not overlook the distinctly Chinese influence on the design of this modern architecture, the Four Modernizations as well as the resulting economic shifts are all that they have known. The younger people who spoke with me did not live through Dynastic China, the revolution, or Mao’s push for self-reliance. Instead, due to their age, they have only known a world after Deng Xiaoping created a rupture in a cultural narrative, shifting the focus from the self-reliant world of Maoist Communism to economic development. Deng Xiaoping laid down new guidelines in 1978 as to how China should modernize and his influence is still quite visible in both the way spaces are built, and the ways in which people helped me to unpack what those spaces mean.
Schoppa also points out that the Four Modernizations depended “on policy changes that promoted a decade of ‘opening’ in politics, economics, and culture in both international and domestic arenas.” My ability to come to China, and talk with basically anyone I want, is also a direct (and very visible) effect of Deng Xiaoping’s reforms. Money River New City in Hangzhou is also, in many ways, a direct reflection of Deng Xiaoping’s statement “To get rich is glorious.” The large golden globe of the Intercontinental, the other massive buildings with the names of some of China’s largest companies at the top, and even the Money River New City’s Citizen Center are all straightforward demonstrations of wealth. Economic development was at the heart of the modernity that Deng advocated for in the 1970’s and the resulting visual displays of wealth and economic development in contemporary Hangzhou are not hard to find (Fig. 51).

Mieke Bal’s concepts of the impurity of looking and the mutual permeability of the senses also leads to another important conceptual point. It fills in the ways that we can understand the “lie” that John Berger claims is present in the photograph when he notes, “It is because photography has no language of its own, because it quotes rather
than translates, that it is said that the camera cannot lie. And so, this makes the lie appear more truthful.\textsuperscript{217} The act of framing the photos that facilitated the discussions I had in the third part of my research practices turned into a much more serious endeavor because of my concern over the “lie” that is present in each frame. But the actuality of the processes is that the photograph only makes up one part of the act of interpretation. This can once again be seen in recalling Bal’s statement that “looking is inherently framed, framing, interpreting, affect-laden, cognitive and intellectual.”\textsuperscript{218} In worrying about my impact on each frame, there was an oversight. Each person who looked at, and then explained the photos would bring their own “impurities” to the act of unpacking the modernity or tradition visualized in each frame. A lot of the people who made up the third section of my research lived and worked in the city for years, if not their entire lives. They knew a lot of the spaces/visuals that I was presenting to them. For a few of them the buildings were close to or were the place where they went to work on a daily basis. The photos are then, therefore, subject to an intellectual process drawing on a lifetime of experience that I as an outsider and a photographer have no possible way of anticipating. And as such the “lie,” as Berger frames it, is interpreted against a backdrop of preexisting understandings, visuals, experiences, and voices that all participate in the meaning of the moment/place represented in that image.

The visual, which is participating in a dialogic meaning-making process is no more pure or impure than Bakhtin’s conception of the inter-orientation of the word. Bakhtin explains this concept by saying “Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs
in the object.” It is in the same way, that our memories, our experiences, and our lives populate our understanding of a visual with the heteroglot of voices/images all arguing to define what we are looking at.

In short, this project would not have been able to dive as deep into the meaning and expressions of modernity in Hangzhou if it were not for the visuals. Talking with people about their city while using visuals in the form of memories, pictures, or actual spaces, allowed for a lot of otherwise taken-for-granted symbols of cultural identity, foreign influence, and shared goals to be brought to the foreground. The visuals, in most cases, did not require a linguistic code to be interpreted, but necessitated a certain amount of cultural knowledge to understand their impact in the context where they were found. The act of asking what I should be looking at, and then asking people to explain what I have framed led me into conversations about the importance of design, function, politics, and globalization. Talking about the visual elements found throughout Hangzhou in the form of pagodas, skyscrapers, apartment buildings, and parks granted me access to much more intricate conversations concerning the future-oriented narratives that are swirling around Hangzhou and shaping this city's possible futures.

I snap back to the moment as I finish my bowl of noodles in the dining hall at the Buddhist College. Everyone around me has finished as well and we are all given minimal clues as to what we should do next. It strikes me as funny how smoothly this ritualistically silent meal has gone. There is obviously a complex set of rules governing the meal, and without words each person in the dining hall has learned how to behave in this space with only visual cues to guide them. I can’t help but wonder how long it has been since someone received instruction on how to behave. Without being able to ask
anyone, I concede that it is probably part of orientation to the college, and then imagine something similar to my first year orientation at my university in the United States, but instead of the hoodie and sweat pants clad eighteen-year-olds filling an auditorium, I see silent Buddhist novices of the same age, wearing robes, yet going through a similar initiation process. Whether or not that is the case, from the point of view of a visitor to this dining hall, it just seems like everyone knows his or her role without saying a single word. Continuing without words, everyone stands up, dishes in hand, and walks to the front of the dining hall where there is an alter. I follow the example given and slip a donation into the box as a sign of gratitude for the meal. We then silently walk into a separate room where two of the four walls are lined with sinks, dishrags, and soap. Each of us waits for an open faucet, wash our own bowls, and place them neatly in a stack before returning to the outside world. The impact of sitting with that many people and eating lunch without saying a single word is clear. Observing the process, and the role that visual communication played in its smooth execution leads me to draw a parallel with my time in Hangzhou as a whole. In many ways this meal sums up my project in a clean and tidy way. While I have not been silent during the last 6 months, I have been vigilant in looking for the visual cues for understanding this cultural context. The visual cues allowed me to dive into the more abstract parts of my project with a greater understanding, and ability to participate. Now, with only one day left in Hangzhou, I feel as though I am washing my bowl and preparing to speak again.

Having the initial conversations with people, and the dinners that replaced the third phase of my research practices all worked in conjunction with the visuals I collected to clarify the construction of a future-oriented narrative about the culture(s) of Hangzhou.
It has become clear that unlike the modernity put forward by Modernism, which looked to abandon the traditional, in this space modernity and tradition are not cleanly separated, or even necessarily competing, concepts. In the context of Hangzhou, the future-oriented narratives that applied the rhetorical tropes of modernity and tradition might not always share the same goals, or if they have the same goals it might not be for the same reasons. But they are always in conversation, and not necessarily on combating sides as the Modernist thinkers and artist from Europe and the United States would have argued. This city relies on its tradition in building its modernity. Arguments for preservation (tradition) and the arguments for change (modernity) are often put forward in the same space and depend on one another.

195 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination.*
196 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* 75–76.
197 I am referring to two monasteries I visited the county of Xiahe夏河 in Gansu 甘肃 Province in the summer of 2011.
198 Interview number 10 in Appendix A
201 Interview number 11 in Appendix A
202 McCracken, *Culture and Consumption,* 79.
203 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* 279.
204 Appadurai, *Modernity At Large,* 5.
205 I use a standing desk, I thought about making some comment on the “tradition” of the chair/desk combination. But instead I included this note so that the reader wouldn’t think the word “stand” in this sentence is a mistake.
209 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* 278.
Bibliography


Appendix A: List of Interviews

Initial Interviews

1. Professor Yi, 1/9/2013
2. No pseudonym, 1/15/2013
3. No pseudonym, did not want to be recorded, 1/19/2013
4. No pseudonym, 1/20/2013
5. Couple, male and female, No pseudonyms, 1/20/2013
6. No pseudonym, two male classmates, 1/20/2013
7. No pseudonym, dramatic fail at an interview, 1/20/2013
8. The calligraphy club at West Lake, between 5-10 people depending on question but the president of the club answered most of the questions. 1/20/2013
9. Yang, waitress in Bin Jiang, 1/22/2013
10. Wang, man in his 90’s 1/24/2013
11. Man from An Hui, didn’t want to be recorded but later tracked me down to clarify his point. 1/24/2013
12. No pseudonym, failed interview, rushed off by his friend 1/24/2013
13. No pseudonym, 1/26/2013
14. No pseudonym, 1/26/2013
15. Zhen, first recorded interview, occurred after the charity auction 1/26/2013
16. No pseudonym, 1/30/2013
17. No pseudonym, 2/3/2013
18. Meet with person from interview #17 to continue conversation at his request on 2/6/2013
19. No pseudonym, 2/16/2013
20. Woman at English Corner, 2/17/2013
21. No pseudonym, 2/23/2013
22. Two men in their 50’s, discussed rationing in the early days of the communist government, 2/23/2013
23. No pseudonym, 2/23/2013
24. Man who moved away for several years and recently returned to Hangzhou to find the area around West Lake renovated 2/23/2013
25. No pseudonym, 3/3/2013
27. No pseudonym, 3/3/2013
28. Woman at Xiang Ji Temple who said “Traditional is traditional,” no recording, 3/5/2013
29. No pseudonym, Local University, 3/6/2013
30. No pseudonym, Local University, 3/6/2013
31. No pseudonym, Local University, 3/6/2013
32. No pseudonym, Local University, 3/6/2013
33. No pseudonym, Local University, 3/6/2013
34. No pseudonym, Local University, 3/6/2013

Dinners that replaced my focus group
35. Chen Family 5/5/2013
36. Tea with Liu and Her Translator 5/9/2013
37. Dong Family 5/18/2013
38. Zhen 5/23/2013
Appendix B: IRB Approval

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2. research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: Seeing Chinese Modernities

Primary Investigator: Timothy Lee Baird

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Devika Chawla

Department: Communication Studies

Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

Date: Sept. 19, 2012
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