Constructing an Imagined Community of Manchu-Futurism in Fiction and Art

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that, except where specific reference is made to the work of others, the contents of this dissertation are original and have not been submitted in whole or in part for consideration for any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

This dissertation is my own work and contains nothing that is the outcome of collaboration with others, except where explicitly acknowledged. Some of the ideas presented in this thesis were developed through discussions with my supervisors.

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Abstract

My project, Manchu Futurism, proposes an art movement to reappraise what the Manchu ethnic identity might mean in future China. Through my work, viewers experience Manchu's past, current, and future visions and are encouraged to appreciate different opportunities for the cohesion and re-vitalisation of our cultural community.

The project includes a thesis, a fiction and a series of visual artworks. The fiction and artwork are displayed in offline exhibitions and online digital archives. I argue that the essence of the future Manchu community is not just about staying in a mutual space or close kinship but is about having a similar sense of ethnic identification. In Benedict Anderson's view, a community is identified by how it is imagined (Anderson 1991, p.6), and media, like printed media, is necessary for creating a community out of imagined ideas (Anderson 2016, p.247-264). In my use of this concept, the approach of imagining a community is connected to different 'monads' from Manchu history. Walter Benjamin describes monads as compressions of time and experience into singular fragments that contain the energetic potential to connect past and future possibilities (Leslie 2024, p.1). Building on Anderson's notion that communities are imagined among producers and consumers of culture and Benjamin's monads that can project the future from active engagement in the past, Manchu Futurism aims to transcend Manchu culture's historical decline and geographical dispersion through art practice.

The first part of my thesis shows my research on Manchu history and how Manchu culture evolved through different periods at the apex and periphery of Chinese power. The second part analyses various types of communities. It interprets how artwork becomes the appropriate medium to create the imagined Manchu community, like the role of print media in Anderson's model. In Anderson's theory of imagined community, print media offers a distinctive understanding of time, which challenges the Western linear time philosophy (Anderson 1991, p.23). Print, he suggests, can create a simultaneous time experience among the members of an imagined community – in my work, print and digital reproduction and networks are both deployed in this sense. I compare the simultaneity of networked media with Benjamin's notion of monads and Messianic time—an idea suggesting creative methods that compress experience into meaningful encounters with the past (Agamben 2005, p.25). The chapter explains why the history of the Manchu is crucial to revealing its future. The third part of my thesis focuses on the idea of Messianic time and monads in the art field (Adorno 1998, p.310). In conjunction with my descriptions of Italian Futurism and Afrofuturism in the fourth part, I demonstrate that Manchu Futurism draws from a similar methodology to Afrofuturism (Eshun 2003, p.288-289), challenging Western-centric time philosophies and reactivating local and historical customs, identities and narrative forms to develop a distinctive vision of the future in which this ethnicity has self-recognition. The fifth part of the thesis mainly discusses and interprets the core concept of Manchu futurism and my practical component of the project (fiction and artwork).

Practical component

The thesis is accompanied by a fiction speculating how the art has illuminated the

Manchu community's future while preserving its cultural roots. The story involves

five time periods, from primitive times to the far future. Combining futuristic

technology and Manchu's shamanic religion, I build an imaginal Manchu space where

the Manchu spirit lives long and prospers. A collection of visual artworks also mixes

Manchu customs and modern technology. I review the special moments of Manchu

history and create works using natural materials such as earth, wood, and linen. Then,

I turned them into print, an art form that is easier to spread in multiple versions among

the Manchu community. My project extends the participation beyond the Manchu

community. I also work with non-Manchu children in the performance art *The Echo*

of Time, a video installation on a tent structure. All the work reflects how I

incorporate my on-site field research and my understanding to build an imagined

community with art monads.

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1 Review Manchu History and Identify Manchu Monads

Introduction:

The Manchu are an ethnic minority originally from Northeast China who established the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). Their distinct identity was shaped by shamanic traditions, nomadic pastoralism, and a unique linguistic system - cultural markers now critically endangered under Han cultural dominance. China's fifty-six ethnic groups coexist in complex hierarchical relations, with historical narratives overwhelmingly privileging the Han majority's perspective. As a member of the Manchu minority, I seek to articulate an alternative understanding of these ethnic dynamics through my community's lived experience.

In this context, I employ Walter Benjamin's concept of monads as my methodological framework – temporal compressions that encapsulate layered historical experiences and objects blasted free from chronological continuity for critical examination. As Esther Leslie, Benjamin's preeminent contemporary interpreter, clarifies:

> [a monad] is concentrated time, pre-history, the present and post-history are crushed together. It is a good site for investigating modernity. It is an important moment of the past that can explain the present and future possibilities. An image of a greater totality - the experience of a historical era - can be found there (Leslie 2024, p.1).

So, the monad is a clamshell which has the potential to be opened to reveal history and project the future. Benjamin's notion of monads can be interpreted in various forms. I think the literary documentation or the oral stories of the past can all be the forms of historical monads. However, in this thesis, I want to focus on the artwork that reveals the monads of the Manchu experience. Theodor Adorno believes those works of art that reflect the true history and actual societal conflicts are the monads that exclude secular interference (Adorno 1998, p.310). Therefore, a significant goal of Manchu Futurism is to identify the authentic history of Manchu and how to preserve its distinction with art form.

My practice of Manchu Futurist art and with Manchu culture seeks to create works of art that activate Manchu history via its images and objects and reveal a new energetic potential in this identity, distinct from the trajectory of mainstream Han culture. To achieve these works, I look at Manchu history for monads: fragments of unfinished and potent Manchu events, symbols, and words that can be reactivated in my present work. In this chapter, I review Manchu history and highlight distinctive features that make Manchu unique and individual.

I separate Manchu's history into three stages: early, core, and decline periods. In this chapter, I analyse the formation of each period and explain how it contains and establishes specific features that characterise the Manchu identity. Following this, I relate the potential Manchu-Futurist community to Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined community, which indicates the nation is an imaginational artefact (Anderson 2005, p.7). My interpretation of Anderson's idea explores the possibilities

of using methods such as text, visual art, and conceptual innovation to reshape the

Manchu imagination about itself. I argue that Manchu-Futurist art containing the

Manchu historical monads can connect present-day Manchu people, forming the basis

for a new community through acts that imaginatively rework and re-contextualise our

heritage.

1.1 Who are the Manchus

Figure 1:Manchu's eight Banner people, image available at:

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    The society in which humanity now lives is no longer an imperial society but a

network society characterised by what the British sociologist Anthony Giddens terms

'late modernity' or 'high modernity' (Giddens 1991, p. 3). In this highly modern

society, globalisation has produced a non-local logic with the rapid flow of capital and

power, forcing the Manchus to endure the dual dominance of both state-centred and globalised forces. To resist the homogenisation and marginalisation of local cultures caused by globalisation, I argue that the Manchu people—a minority frontier group distinct from mainstream culture—must reconstruct their historical memory, frontier identity, traditional values, and ritual practices to form a self-reliant community. I contend this is the most effective means of preserving their unique Manchu spirit.

My purpose in starting the Constructing Manchu Futurism by Fiction and Visual Art project is to activate crucial elements from Manchu history as the basis for a future in the Manchu community. The project expresses my responsibility as a Manchu and my interest as an artist. As with African Americans who used Afro-Futurism to review their history and create an aesthetic future, such as Sun Ra's music (Rico 2019, p.17) and Ellen Gallagher's paintings (Oduor 2022, p.1), I want to extract the uniqueness of Manchu history and use it as a reference to project its future.

My ethnicity, Manchu, is a minority group that plays a significant role in Chinese history. The Manchu people are the largest branch of Tungstic ethnicities, primarily found in Siberia and northern China. Historically, they were the ruling elite during the Qing Dynasty from 1644 until the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. Manchu culture is preserved and celebrated in museums, such as those around the Forbidden Palace, and its influence can also be seen in Taiwan.

The primary religious belief of the Manchus was shamanism, which involved offering sacrifices to ancestral spirits and performing dances aimed at healing members of the community (Bi 2018, p. 21). However, since the 20th century,

Manchu shamanism and other cultural aspects—such as the Manchu language and ritual customs—have faced suppression. This suppression is linked to the ideals of the 1911 revolution, which led to the Manchu being regarded as a symbol of elite power. Additionally, contemporary Chinese society often views the Manchu as representatives of historical oppression, resulting in negative perceptions from the Han majority.

Historian Yan Chongnian identifies two significant challenges faced by Manchus after the Qing Dynasty: discrimination from other ethnicities and difficulties in livelihood. Many Manchus have had to conceal their ethnic identity to find jobs or simply survive (Yan 2002, p. 16). Most Han individuals regard the spiritual elements of Manchu culture as superstitions, which they consider outdated and wrong, as these beliefs contradict the mainstream Han philosophy and the ruling authorities' ideals. Following the 1950s, shamanism was widely criticized as superstitious and backward. Consequently, all shamanic practices were halted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Sa 2023, p. 9).

The influence of Confucian thought among the Han population, most of whom adhere to Buddhism and Taoism, has fueled these anti-Manchu sentiments, which have impacted political decisions. Notably, despite the size of the Manchu population, we do not have an autonomous province akin to the Inner Mongolian region for the Mongolian people or the Tibetan region for the Zang ethnicity.

In this chapter, I want to briefly review the Manchu history, giving background information on the Manchu ethnicity and selecting the distinguishing moments from

the Manchu experience. These moments are the main resources of my art practice. Revealing these Manchu moments with art has the potential to activate the Manchu community and project an alternative Manchu future. Here are the specific moments and periods that I chose among Manchu experience.

From my understanding of Manchu history, I want to choose three significant periods: the prehistorical, core and decline stages of Manchu culture. The prehistory period was mysterious when the Manchu ancestors lived in the aboriginal society. At this time, the community gradually cultivated our beliefs and religions, which built the foundation of Manchu customs. The core period went from 1583 to the 18th century. In this period, the Jurchen groups were unified by Nuerhachi, who built the foundation of the Manch's governing. His son, Huang Taiji, confined the official name of Manchu and concreted the solid Manchu community. However, when Manchu became the ruler of China in the Qing Dynasty (1644), they had to accept the influence and criticism from the Han culture to stabilise the society. When Manchu lost political privilege, our culture was not treated well. The Manchu traditions, like shamanic ceremonies and the Manchu language, were forbidden during this period. The cultural suppression of authority caused the decline of Manchu culture, which revealed the urgency of revoking the Manchu community.

1.2 The Prehistoric Period of Manchu
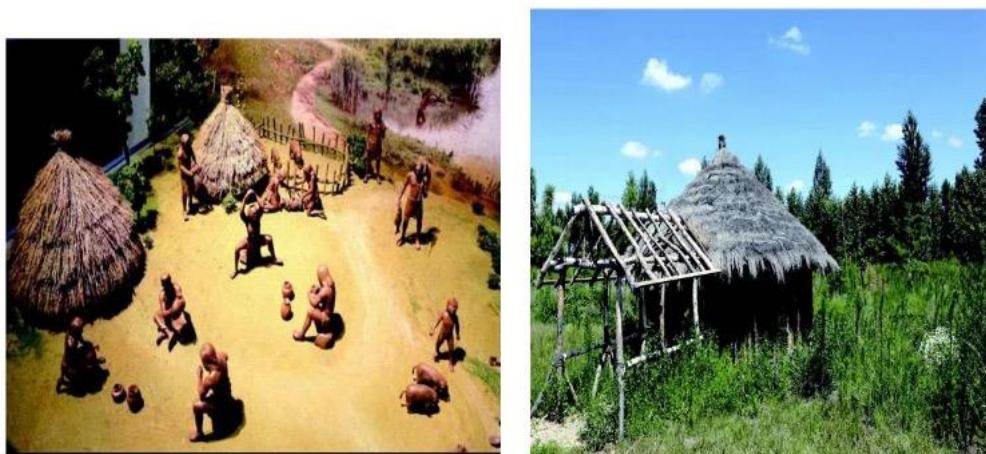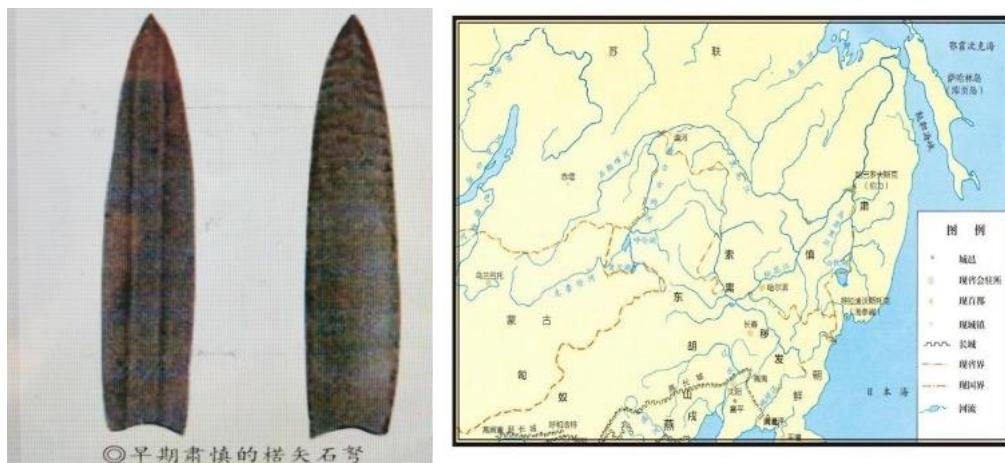
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cn/history/qloaaqy.html

The prehistoric period of the Manchu period was the time when Manchu's

ancestors gradually formed a distinct Manchu culture. To fully understand Manchu's

past experience, we must thoroughly review how the Manchu community was raised

in the Changbai mountains, making a living through hunting, fishing and nomadic herding. Because of the Manchus' close relationship to nature, their early beliefs were closely related to animal worship, nature worship and animism, which is the foundation of shamanism, the core of Manchu society. Although shamanism was formed thousands of years ago, its essential beliefs, like seeking a harmonious relationship with nature, can inspire the future Manchu community to maintain physical survival and physical uniqueness.

The early names of Manchu ancestors reveal their profound nature worship. In its prehistory, the Manchu people were known by various appellations: Sushen (named after a sacred bird), Yilou (meaning elk or cave-dweller), Wuji, Mohe, and finally Jurchen (derived from the Manchu word for forest). This prehistorical period encompasses the era before the Manchu formally adopted the name 'Manchu' in the 17th century. The Sushen lineage can be traced as far back as the pre-Qin dynasty, with subsequent name changes occurring through Chinese history – becoming Yilou during the Qin dynasty, Wuji in the Northern Dynasties period, Mohe in the Sui dynasty, and ultimately Jurchen before the emergence of Manchuria, presenting a relatively continuous lineage (Yang 2022, p.92).

Figure 6: *Cuoluozi*, Manchu's portable dwelling for nomadic life, made by wood and grass，image available at https://baike.baidu.com/item/撮罗子/7129251

This period may be effectively conceptualised through Karl Jaspers' theoretical framework. He defines prehistory as the era preceding recorded history – an obscure, undocumented past that nevertheless forms the fundamental basis of human development. It represents a formative period for human nature, characterised by a lack of evidence-based historical continuity and what Jaspers terms 'ignorance and unawareness of inheritance' (Jaspers 2003, p.163). During this time, the Manchu people had not yet coalesced into a distinct ethnic community, and intertribal

connections remained loose. Nevertheless, certain foundational cultural elements, such as shamanistic practices and living rituals, persisted and were later revived.

Throughout much of Chinese history, the Han ethnicity held the authoritative position in historical documentation, meaning that Chinese history has predominantly been narrated through a Han-centric lens. From this perspective, attitudes towards the Manchus were often hostile and stereotyped, particularly during periods of conflict. For instance, the Manchus were historically referred to as 'Dalu' or 'Dazi' in *Yuzhongyuanxi*, derogatory terms connoting 'northern barbarians'. The phrase 'exile the Dalu' even became a rallying slogan during the anti-Manchu Xinhai Revolution of 1911. To uncover a more authentic Manchu historical narrative, it is necessary to shift perspective and examine sources produced by Manchus, such as the *Records of Qing Emperor Taizong* and *Research on Manchu Origins*. These texts, compiled in the 18th century during Manchu rule over China, offer invaluable insights into their self-conception and historical identity.

The historical trajectory of China differs markedly from Western traditions in its division into distinct eras named after ruling dynasties. In 1636, the Manchu emperor Huang Taiji established the Qing Dynasty, with Manchu forces subsequently entering the Central Plains and unifying China in 1644. During their reign, Manchu elites recognised the absence of a comprehensive historical record documenting their origins – a lacuna that hindered the cultivation of a cohesive Manchu identity. In 1777, Emperor Qianlong initiated an ambitious project to compile an official Manchu history, culminating in the 1789 publication of *Research on Manchu*

Origins (*Manzhou Yuanliu Kao*). Qianlong personally oversaw the project, commissioning the empire's most esteemed scholars to complete the work. The book has multiple translations: the Chinese text was finalised in February 1783 (the 48th year of Qianlong's reign), after which the Manchu version was compiled. By 1789 (the 54th year of Qianlong's reign), all texts had been meticulously revised and sent to the Wuying Palace for engraving (Zhonggong 2024). This monumental work filled a critical gap in recorded Manchu history, reinforcing the continuity of Manchu cultural heritage.

Today, scholarly analysis of Manchu history relies heavily on these Qing-era official documents. The documentation of Manchu history was instrumental in fostering a collective identity within the Qing imperial community and legitimising Manchu rule. Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities posits that nations are socially constructed artefacts, with printed texts playing a pivotal role in sustaining such imagined collectives (Anderson 2005, p. 7). The Qing Dynasty strategically reinforced the imagined Manchu community by asserting the authenticity of their historical narrative through these official records.

Figure 7: Manchu's history book *Research on Manchu Origins,* image available at: https://www.dpm.org.cn/ancient/hall/165044.html?hl=满文

The most important thing that the Manchu elites did was to build connections to their prehistoric ancestors and explain the origins of the Manchu people. In this thesis, I will primarily examine historical accounts from *Research on Manchu Origins*, one of the most significant Manchu historical documents edited by the Manchu people themselves. According to this text, the birth of the Manchu ethnicity was legendary and mysterious. During the Qing Dynasty, the origin of the Manchus was not a topic that ordinary citizens could freely discuss; everyone had to adhere to the official

version sanctioned by the Manchu elites (Yao 2008, p. 3). Consequently, this narrative of the Manchu's birth was widely accepted within the community. The story recounts that the Manchus originated on Changbai Mountain, a region abundant in natural resources. One day, three goddesses bathed in a lake on the mountain, and a magpie delivered a sacred fruit to the goddess Fekulen. Upon eating the fruit, she became pregnant and gave birth to a boy named *Bukūri Yongšun* (Bukuliyongshun Aisin-Gioro 布库里雍顺·爱新觉罗). The goddess then returned to the heavens, while Yongshun fashioned a boat and sailed to a riverbank. The local tribes, astonished by his divine origins, agreed to follow his leadership. Yongshun subsequently unified these tribes and established the Manchurian state (Research on Manchu Origins 1985, p. 21).

This aspect of Manchu history has been highly controversial, with many Han scholars criticising it as fictional and derivative of Han folktales. The motif of a deity bestowing a child resembles the origin myth of the Shang dynasty, which also features a bird bringing life (Lu 2014, p. 121). In ancient times, legitimising the divine right of rulers was crucial, and monarchs were often portrayed as ordained by heaven since time immemorial. The Han people's own origins were similarly mythologised: their earliest ancestors, the Yan and Huang emperors, defeated the tribal leader Chiyou, who was depicted as a monstrous figure with wings and horns (*Lushi*, 'Chiyou' chapter). The Manchu and Han origin stories belong to a mythical era lacking verifiable evidence, forcing later generations to rely on oral traditions to assert divine legitimacy, reinforce political privilege, and construct an imagined ethnic community.

Although Han scholars dispute the authenticity of the Manchu origin narrative, references to Manchu ancestors can be found in Han historical records. *Research on Manchu Origins* claims that the Sushen people were the Manchus' earliest ancestors, inhabiting northern China and excelling in hunting. Despite their distance from the central plains, the Sushen maintained relations with Han authorities. *The Bamboo Annals* (vol. 1, 'Xia Ji') records that the Sushen presented bows and arrows as a tribute to the central power around 36 B.C (Research on Manchu Origins 1985, p. 47). The Sushen were skilled hunters and weapon-makers, and later records mention their descendants—the Wuji people during the Tang Dynasty, who eventually split into Jurchen tribes by the Song Dynasty (926) (Lu 2014, p. 122).

By the Song Dynasty, the Manchu military had reached its peak. In the early 12th century, the Wanyan clan of the Jurchen people rose to power and established the Jin Dynasty. The Jurchen emperor Wanyan Aguda launched attacks against the Han-ruled Song Dynasty with his formidable cavalry. The Jurchens, being nomadic, were natural horsemen—a tradition inherited by the Manchus. The Jurchen army defeated the Liao Kingdom and the Song Dynasty, seizing control of northern China and forcing the Han authorities to retreat south of the Yangtze River (Lu 2014, p. 122).

In 1118, the Han and Jurchen allied against the Liao, a powerful Khitan-led state. However, in 1125, the Han betrayed this pact by secretly negotiating with the Liao emperor. In retaliation, the Jurchen besieged the Song capital and captured its emperors—an event remembered as a profound humiliation in Han history, fostering lasting animosity towards the Jurchens (Yang 2023, p. 20). Consequently, the Han

general Yue Fei, who resisted the Jurchen Jin Dynasty, became a national hero. A

2024 blockbuster film depicts his victories against the Jin, reflecting enduring Han-

Jurchen tensions.

During their rule over northern China, Wanyan Aguda commissioned Wanyan

Xiyin and others to develop the Jurchen script in 1119, drawing inspiration from Han

and Khitan writing systems. In 1138, Emperor Xizong of Jin introduced a simplified

Jurchen script and established schools to teach it (Niu 2021, p. 63). The formation of

the Manchu national identity accelerated significantly after the Jin regime was

consolidated.

Figure 8: Manchu's shamanic ceremony, image available at:
https://baike.sogou.com/PicBooklet.v?imageGroupId=2794328&relateImageGroupId
s=2794328&lemmaId=206664&category=#2794328_1）

In the prehistoric period of the Manchu people, shamanism was the significant

core that bound the community. Many scholars argue that shamanic civilisation

represents the most essential characteristic of ancient Chinese civilisation (Zhang 2013, p.4). Shamanism predates the emergence of the Manchu community itself, profoundly influencing the Manchu's ancestors, the Tungus people. Shamanism's origins date back fourteen thousand years and has the most extended history and duration among all known cultures (Chen 2020, p.117). As the foundational religion of the Tungus ethnicity, it has overlapped with much of Manchu history. The Tungus ethnic group encompasses those who speak the Tungus language, including the Oroqen, Evenki, Hezhe, Xibe, and Manchu.

Substantial evidence suggests that the Tungus tribes originated in central China before migrating to northern regions such as Siberia and China north due to Han suppression during the Neolithic Age (Shirokogorov 1984, p.3). Shamanic culture is defined and sustained by the presence of shamans. In the Tungus language, *'Sa'* means *'to know'*, and the literal meaning of *saman/shaman* is *'he who know'*. Shamans, as a primitive profession, embodied early humanity's fear and reverence for heaven, earth, nature, and the cosmos. Shamanism functioned as the subjective psychological response to primitive peoples' inability to comprehend the mysterious world.

Manchu shamanism was unique, evolving through three distinct stages: nature worship under animism, the coexistence of nature and ancestor worship, and finally, the dominance of ancestral gods with nature deities serving a supplementary role (Liu 2023, p.111). The first stage centred on nature animism. As an original polytheistic religion, shamanism led the ancient Manchu to associate natural phenomena with

human life, attributing divine significance to them. This reverence cultivated a system in which gods governed different natural elements—such as the sky god controlling the universe, alongside mountain, wind, and rain deities. Gods proliferated on land, including those of animals, celestial bodies, and ancestors. Thus, the Manchu universally worshipped nature, totems, and ancestors.

Shamanism was a folk belief that shaped how the Manchu community interpreted human existence and environmental conditions. Most Tungus ancestors lived in the Heilongjiang River basin, sustaining themselves through hunting and traversing mountainous forests. Natural phenomena—lightning, wind, and thunder—were perceived as divine manifestations. Consequently, they prayed to the sun god for warmth, the moon god for light, the fire god to ward off beasts, and the tree god to dispel disease and evil (Liu 2023, p.111).

A striking example of Manchu nature worship is eagle veneration, which emerged early and was pivotal in their culture. Artefacts from 5430 years ago prove that the Tungus people crafted sculptures to worship the eagle god (Qiao 2020, p.42). According to the shamanic oracle, the eagle god was the first to retrieve a stone egg from fire, birthing the first female shaman—thus marking the origin of shamanism. A Manchu myth further recounts that when the earth was frozenat the dawn of creation, the god Abka Enduri commanded an eagle to fly towards the sun, absorb its light and heat into its feathers, and bring warmth to the world. As the ice melted, life flourished. However, exhausted from flight, the eagle's burning feathers fell, igniting

the earth. The eagle extinguished the flames but perished in the sea, its soul transforming into the first female shaman (Fu 2000, p.15).

In the Manchu folktale *Nishan Shaman*, the shaman receives aid from the eagle god and saves people's lives. There is an innate connection between shamanic culture and eagle worship, as the eagle serves as both a divine messenger and the embodiment of shamans' souls (Shirokogoroff 1935, p.269-270). This reverence for eagles extends to other birds, such as magpies—believed to have brought life to the Manchu ancestors in folklore—and crows, which aided them in another tale (Stary 1985, p.45-47). A distinctive feature of Manchu tradition was the *Suolun* pole, a tall wooden post with a container at its summit, erected in every household and palace (Elliott 2001, p.243). The Manchu people placed meat and food in these containers as offerings to birds, demonstrating their respect for the gods (Crossley 1997, p.32). At this stage, Manchu ancestors adhered to animistic shamanism, with sacrifice being the most common form of worship (Humphrey 1996, p.112-114).

Figure 9: Manchu's Suolun Pole in Kunning Palace, Image available at:
https://www.baike.com/wikiid/6442399876371269472

Ancestor and nature worship characterised the second stage of Manchu

shamanism. During this period, shamanism evolved into a professional vocation.

Numerous shamanic tombs, some dating back thousands of years, have been

unearthed on both sides of the Heilongjiang River. These burial sites contain a wealth

of artefacts, including bones, waist bells, and other ritual objects, forming a relatively

complete archaeological record of shamanic traditions in the Heilongjiang River

Basin from ancient times to the present (Liu 2023, p. 112). This development

occurred as Manchu society transitioned from a matrilineal to a patrilineal structure.

The Tunguska clan venerated their ancestors, passing down heroic tales through

generations until these figures were gradually deified. This led to the worship of

multiple ancestral gods, alongside the continued reverence for natural deities,

resulting in a syncretic belief system where both coexisted (Liu, 2023, p. 112). During

sacrificial ceremonies, shamans employed sacred drums and wore waist bells, their

garments adorned with symbolic decorations. For instance, Manchu shamans typically

used round, flat, single-sided drums, while bronze mirrors, swords, sceptres, and

whips also featured prominently in rituals (Liu 2023, p. 112).

Shamanic ceremonies were highly performative, blending vivid costumes,

rhythmic dances, chanting, and theatrical gestures. For example, when worshipping

the eagle god, the shaman would mimic the bird's movements—swooping, spreading

their arms as if in flight, and vocalising eagle-like cries—to embody the deity's spirit.

These acts, performed in elaborate regalia and accompanied by oracular invocations,

conveyed profound reverence for the eagle god (Liu 2023, p. 112).

Figure 10: Manchu's domestic worship, image available at:
https://www.sohu.com/a/297383210_158953

With the emergence of different tribes, the worship of ancestors and influential

leaders appeared among the Manchu community. Each Manchu tribe had

its own ancestral god, known as *'Agilu'*, who was believed to ward off disasters for

the tribe. The shaman served as the messenger of Agilu (Liu 2023, p.112). In tribal

times, each tribe had a shaman responsible for safeguarding the family, resisting

external threats, and ensuring communal security. As a result, shamans were regarded

as tribal heroes and held the highest prestige within Manchu communities. Some

shamans were tribal leaders and even the founders of political power. For instance,

Wanyan Aguda, the founder of the Jin Dynasty, was a shaman who led his army to

break through Han defences (Meng 2012, p.41). Before major events or wars,

shamanic ceremonies played a crucial role, as Manchu leaders relied on them for prayers and sacrifices. Over time, shamans became professional priests devoted to the worship of ancestral and natural gods. Eventually, Han cultural influence reshaped Manchu traditions, and ancestor worship became the central focus of shamanic rituals during the Qing Dynasty (Liu 2023, p.112).

Figure 11: One of the last shamans, Ms Guan, image available at:
https://www.sohu.com/a/122139344_350855

Shamans were the prehistoric Manchu community's leaders, teachers, and doctors, helping the tribe resolve conflicts and maintain order. Shamanism is not merely a religion but a shared communal experience. Shamans deliberately alter their consciousness to enter another reality, where they acquire knowledge and power.

Upon returning to the ordinary world, they use this wisdom to aid others

(Horwitz 2023, p.1).

Shamans traverse different layers of the cosmos—both above and below—to communicate with gods and spirits. During these journeys, their souls leave their bodies, a state known as *ecstasy*. At other times, they allow deities or spirits to inhabit their bodies and speak through them, a phenomenon called *possession*. Both practices require the shaman to enter a *trance* state (Kuang 2020, p.69). Through shamanism, the Manchus share a collective spiritual space and time, creating a unique temporal experience for the community.

Chen Dexin, a shamanism scholar, argues that shamanic perception, as an expression of life, embodies Bergsonian *durée* (continuous time): 'Shamanic culture integrates material and spiritual dualities, forming an unbroken link between past, present, and future. This intuitive existence is a true ontological reality' (Chen 2020, p.117). Shamanism thus demonstrates how life extends infinitely along a spiritual continuum, transcending the physical body. Even today, preserving the shamanic ecological worldview fosters harmony between humans and nature.

Shamans act as intermediaries between humanity and the natural world, reminding us that exploiting nature—whether in primitive or modern societies—carries consequences. In Siberian hunting cultures, wild animals (mammals, birds, fish) essential for survival were believed to be nurtured by gods. To obtain these resources, humans had to negotiate with the supernatural. Robert Humayun defines the shaman's primary role as forging and maintaining agreements with deities.

Shamans secured divine permission to hunt, ensuring their community's prosperity.

This relationship was imagined as a social contract: humans could hunt only within an

exchange framework, maintaining balance through reciprocity and compensation

(Humayun 2018, p.135).

Figure 12: A Manchu shaman is dancing with drums; image available at:
https://gs.ctrip.com/html5/you/travels/1446327/3946260.html

The exchange relationship between humans and animals positions the shaman in

agreement with the supernatural souls of animals. In Siberian shamanism, shamans

must ritually marry supernatural souls to gain legitimacy for their missions. For

instance, a shaman must wed the daughter or sister of the prey deity, thereby

becoming a legitimate husband rather than a predator in the supernatural world

(Humayun 2018, p. 135). Although Siberian shamanic customs differ from those of

the Manchu—where female shamans are more prevalent—a shared belief in

respecting nature persists. Death and illness within the community are understood as compensation for hunting. In shamanism, the gods grant life but may also reclaim it, with the shaman facilitating this exchange process. Consequently, shamanic rituals often involve imitating animals through actions such as jumping, leaping, shouting, and falling, all of which form essential elements of the dance. Shamanic practice can be highly pragmatic and individualised; the shaman's behaviour is not stylised but rather a practical art infused with elements of seduction and negotiation (Humayun 2018, p. 135).

Figure 13: Manchu's papercut art (Horse God), image available at:
http://www.seelishi.com/info/f1v7a52h.html

1.3 The Core Period of Manchu Culture

Figure 14: A Manchu elite's portrait, image available at: http://www.fineart-china.com/htmlopusCN/cn/painting-02101.html

The core period refers to the Manchu's prime when their political and spiritual community were strong and unified. During this time, artistic creations such as papercutting and fashion emerged as the brightest monads in Manchu history. With foundations laid in the prehistorical stage, the Manchu gradually cultivated their unique culture, rooted in shamanistic beliefs. By the 17th century, the Manchu had maintained their independence, and when the Manchu hero Nurhachi rose to power in the late 16th century, their culture entered its core period. This era began with Nurhachi's rebellion against the Ming government in 1583. He raised an army to

unify the Jurchens of Jianzhou, annexed the Jurchens of Haixi, and engaged in conflicts with Korea, the Mongols, and the Ming Dynasty—accelerating the formation of the Manchu identity (Ebrey 2010, p. 220–224).

Nurhachi was deeply familiar with Han and Mongolian cultures, and evidence suggests he drew from multiple influences while governing the Manchu community. For instance, in 1599, he ordered his counsellors to create a Manchu scriptadapted from Mongolian writing (Lin 2012, p. 1). The Manchu royal families later refined and used this script for over 300 years. In 1616, Nurhachi unified the Jurchen (Manchu) ethnic groups and established the Later Jin Dynasty—a name deliberately referencing the earlier Jurchen-ruled Jin Dynasty, demonstrating the Manchu's engagement with their history (Ebrey 2010, p. 220–224).

Another key contribution by Nurhachi was the Eight Banner system, which became the foundation of the Manchu military organisation. Initially, when the Manchu were a hunting tribe, groups were led by a commander called *Niulu* in the Jurchen language. This structure was later incorporated into the military system. For larger-scale battles or hunts, a higher-ranking leader, called *Gushan* (meaning 'banner'), directed multiple *Niulus* using flags to signal commands. Nurhachi divided his army into eight banners, each distinguished by a unique colour—yellow, white, red, and blue. The banner leaders were Manchu nobles who answered directly to Nurhachi. Initially, the banner community consisted solely of Manchu elites. Still, as expansion became necessary, the Later Jin Dynasty permitted Mongols and Han Chinese to join, sharing in the spoils of war (Zhao 2017, p. 94). The bannermen

formed the heart of the Manchu community, representing political nobility and

military elite—a structure that remained central to the Qing Dynasty.

Figure 15: The portrait of Nuerhachi, the emperor who united the Jurchen ethnic groups, image available at: http://www.sohu.com/a/392680738_120676637

In 1635, Nurhachi's successor, his son Huangtaiji, declared that Manchu would

be the unified name of the nation, replacing various older designations such as Sushen

and Jurchen, which were no longer to be used (Bao 2005, p. 2). This official

designation marked the formal establishment of the Manchu ethnic community, which

was not a singular entity but a composite group. In 1636, Huangtaiji renamed the

Later Jin dynasty to the Da Qing, founding China's last imperial dynasty (Li 2020, p. 243). Qing refers to the colour cyan, considered supreme in Shamanism, while Daqing also translates to the 'supreme country' or 'the country that excels in the military' in the Manchu language (Bao 2005, p. 2; Li 2020, p. 243). In 1644, Manchu forces breached the Great Wall's defences, crossed the Shanhai Pass, and captured Beijing, the capital of the Han-ruled Ming Dynasty. Within two years, the Qing army had consolidated control over most of China.

Figure 16: The map of the Qing Dynasty, image available at:
http://www.rzwhwl.com/a/mjwh/lishigushi/2022/0731/1067.html

Although the Manchu and Han communities were interwoven during this period, some unique aspects of Manchu culture still differed significantly from Han traditions. For example, the Manchus' physical appearance was distinct—their heads were typically longer and narrower due to a traditional child-rearing practice. Manchu

families placed their babies in hanging cradles, keeping them lying flat for extended periods. This custom originated from their ancestors' nomadic lifestyle, where parents, occupied with hunting, suspended cradles high to protect infants from animal attacks.

Another notable difference was in dress and hairstyles. The Manchu were renowned for their distinctive hair customs: men shaved their forelocks, leaving the back long and braided, while women's hairstyles were highly decorative. They used hair extensions, wrapping their locks around a fillet in a triangular pattern and adorning them with flowers or ornamental pieces (Knight 2015, p. 86). In contrast, Han women followed the fashion of foot binding—a painful process in which young girls' feet were tightly wrapped to restrict growth.

Figure 17: Manchu Females in Qing Dynasty, image available at: https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en/noartistknown/kokand-1913-bukhara-female/nomedium/asset/3758347

Meanwhile, the Manchu people never practised this self-harming behaviour and banned it in 1668 (Elliott 2001, p. 247). Manchu clothing was noteworthy and influential, inspired by their ancestors' nomadic lifestyle and designed for riding and swift movement. The most famous example was the *qipao* (旗袍), meaning the bannerman's robe. Both men and women wore long robes with jackets or vests as outerwear, while short coats and trousers were worn underneath. The trousers protected their legs from the horse's flanks, and their boots had rigid soles to facilitate archery on horseback, allowing riders to stand firmly in iron stirrups. Hoods were essential for shielding against the harsh winters of Northeast Asia (Evelyn 1998, p. 40).

Coming from cold regions, the Manchus invented their version of hotpot, which was simple to prepare and provided warmth. During freezing winters, they stored pickled cabbage and boiled it with meat. They were also skilled at making sweet, sticky foods such as *niangao* (sticky buns) and *shaqima* (a sweet snack that retains its Manchu name and remains popular today). From Manchu clothing and cuisine during the Qing Dynasty, we can see that their culture was consistent, always drawing from tradition while adapting to contemporary needs.

Beyond appearance, dress, and food, there were other ways to distinguish the Manchu from the Han majority. One noticeable difference was in naming conventions: Han Chinese surnames typically consist of a single character, with given names being one or two characters long, whereas Manchu names often exceeded two syllables. For example, the revolutionary who overthrew the Qing Dynasty was called

Sun Wen (surname: Sun, given name: Wen), while the last Manchu emperor was Aisin-Gioro Puyi (surname: Aisin-Gioro, given name: Puyi).

Although the Manchu respected Han religious practices, shamanism remained significant in the early Qing Dynasty (17th century). During this period, Manchu shamanic ceremonies were primarily domestic, focusing on 'liturgically based sacrifices made to heaven and to the ancestors' (Elliott 2001, p. 236). While ancestor worship shared some similarities with Han Confucian beliefs, shamanism provided a distinct unifying force among the Manchu, centred around its own belief system. Although many cultures honour heaven, the Manchu conception was unique. As the Yongzheng Emperor asserted, 'We Manchus have our particular rites for honouring heaven' (Elliott 2001, p. 241).

During this era, the Manchu cultivated a distinctive culture, setting themselves apart in politics, religion, appearance, dress, fashion, and rituals.

Figure 18: A typical Manchu cradle, image available at:
https://www.sohu.com/a/201603400_99921727

Figure 19: Manchu hairstyle, image available at:
https://www.reddit.com/r/mongolia/comments/1bvhlo0/hairstyle_for_balding_mongol
ian_man/?rdt=43381)

Figure 20: Traditional Manchu Food: Hotpot and Shaqima, image available at:
https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_18997384）

1.4 The Decline Period of Manchu Culture

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment when Manchu culture lost its uniqueness, but signs of this process emerged during the mid-Qing Dynasty (18th century). Although shamanism remained the royal court's dominant religion, the Manchu elites inevitably had to adopt Han culture for governance. During the Qing dynasty's establishment, the Manchu elites integrated and standardised shamanism by absorbing other religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Lamaism (Meng 2012, p. 40). In the Manchus' first capital, Hetuala, Nurhaci spent three years constructing temples. These included a shamanic palace for domestic ancestor worship and temples dedicated to Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Lamaism, and other folk beliefs. As the Manchus expanded into Han territories, shamanism and other religions influenced one another. For instance, many Manchu emperors married Mongolian women to forge alliances, bringing Mongolian culture into the court. Consequently, Mongolian deities were incorporated into the Manchu court's shamanic rituals (*Qing Taizong Shilu* 1985, p. 3098).

Adopting Han culture and political systems was necessary to govern such a vast country and population while maintaining stability. By embracing Han traditions, the Manchus sought to 'publicly demonstrate benignity and refinement' (Elliott 1999, p. 34). However, a side effect of adopting the Han bureaucracy was that many Han officials gained influence in the court while the Manchu elites grew increasingly rusty in their native language. According to the official Chinese historical document *Qing*

Shizong Shilu (vol. 35), a Manchu high official, Guo ermin, could not even understand the emperor when he spoke in Manchu.

Figure 21: A painting about Opium War, image available at:
https://www.sohu.com/a/549051341_120794248）

The wars between China and Europe destabilised imperial authority in the late Qing dynasty. 1839, the First Opium War broke out between China and the United Kingdom. The British military defeated the Chinese forces and legalised the opium trade in China. Soon after, colonisers around the world arrived in China, plundering treasures from the imperial palaces.

In 1911, the Han people launched the Xinhai Revolution, overthrowing Manchu rule. Manchu culture not only lost its former state support and protection but, due to resentment towards the Qing rulers, the Manchu people were also hated and

marginalised for decades. Many were forced to assimilate into Han identity or conceal their ethnic background. The bannermen were dismissed following the abolition of the Eight Banner system. Faced with this sudden identity crisis and survival pressures, the Manchus struggled to adapt, abandoning their traditions to fit into the new cultural environment.

Even in the northeast, where Manchu culture had once thrived, decades of Japanese colonial rule during the Second World War and mass migration diluted and eroded the region's original Manchu cultural landscape.

With the fall of the Manchu ruling class, both Manchu culture and its people lost the institutional backing they had enjoyed under the Qing. Blamed for the dynasty's collapse, they faced persecution in the following years, prompting many to hide their heritage and blend into Han society. For example, my grandmother's family name was originally *Karku Hala*, but her grandfather changed it to *Gu*—a surname that sounded more Han.
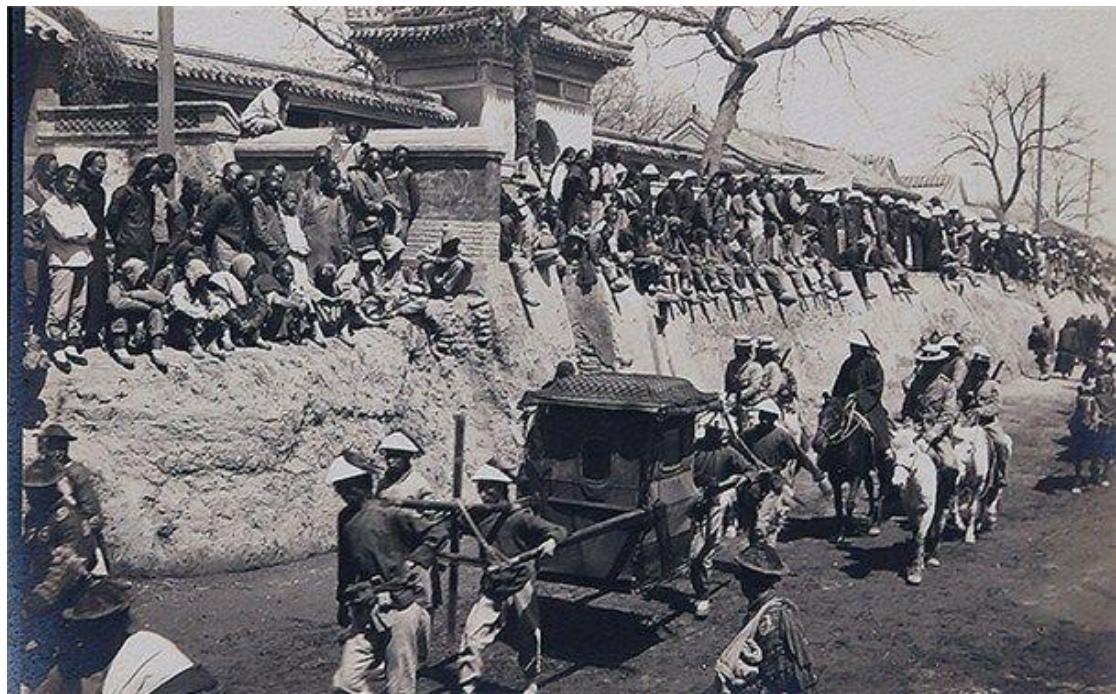
Figure 22: Manchu's last emperor, Puyi, was moving out from the Forbidden Palace in image available at:
https://wapbaike.baidu.com/tashuo/browse/content?id=4a78326fb765d14f2e1086a5

The Manchu culture was not treated well after the Qing Dynasty collapsed. The most famous slogan of the Xinhai Revolution was: *'Expel the Dalu, restore China'*. The term *'Dalu'* was an insulting word used to refer to the Manchu as barbarians. Soon, rebels spread across China, and attacks on Manchu bannermen occurred in many cities. In *Lessons in Beijing Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China*, Mette Hanson notes that revolutionaries killed many Manchu citizens in major cities such as Xian, Wuchang, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou: revolutionary soldiers began systematically stopping people in the streets simply because they looked or sounded like Manchus (Hanson 1999, p.189). During this national massacre, countless Manchus tried to hide their true identities by adopting Han names and altering their appearances.

Although the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Puyi, abdicated during the revolution, discrimination and suppression of the Manchu people did not entirely disappear. After the shameful Japanese colonisation in the 1940s, the Manchus suffered again during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. The Cultural Revolution was a social movement to reinforce Chinese Communism by purging capitalist and traditional influences. Manchu elites and Manchu culture were seen as quintessential examples of old, anti-revolutionary elements. From 1966 onwards, the remaining members of the Manchu elite—those who had survived half a century of oppression— were seized, murdered, and physically punished because they still represented authority to the younger generation.

Figure 23: Cultural Revolution: criticized the people who were rich or did not belong to the working class, *image available at:* https://www.chinawhisper.com/top-10-disasters-in-china-since-1949/

One example is the famous literary leader Lao She, who was the president of the Chinese Cultural Association, who was captured in 1966 and tortured because of his Manchu identity. At that time, he wrote a novel called *Under the Red Banner*, which documented and narrated the Manchu's life in the 20th century, but the book was never finished. In 1966, Lao She could not bear the suffering and torture anymore, so he committed suicide by drowning himself in Taiping Lake, Beijing. The book documents the Manchu life when the Qing Dynasty was overthrown, which could be an excellent pathway for people to know how different Manchu generations reacted to the falling of Manchu power if the book was finished. Yan Chongnian, a Manchu history specialist, mentions that almost all the Manchu people were criticised and tortured during the Cultural Revolution (Yan 2002, p.12). To avoid the humiliation and devastation of the authority, many Manchus chose to speak Chinese instead of the Manchu language. At the same time, the shamanic worship of ancestors and nature was forbidden.

Figure 24: Manchu clothes, photo: Helun Liang

The conflict between Manchu ideology and Han Confucian moral doctrines also created issues in understanding and education. The Han nation belongs to the Confucian cultural sphere, whereas the Manchus did not. According to Mette Halskov Hansen's theory, Chinese people within the Confucian cultural and political sphere were 'rendered capable of being civilised through proper education thanks to family organisation, religion, language, and customs that were close to those of the rulers' (Hansen 1999, p. 3). Thus, Confucian culture has always been regarded as a superior civilisation. Conversely, the further a community was from the Confucian-educated elite, the more difficult it was to be seen as civilised. The Han authorities never ceased the process of sinicisation—known as *Hanhua*, meaning becoming like

the Han people. Hansen notes that the Chinese education system ensures loyalty to the state, the Party, and the Han majority (Berlie 2024, p. 1).

For the Manchus, language was a significant issue in education. Providing bilingual courses in non-Han regions was impossible, meaning Mandarin (standard Chinese) became the sole official language in most schools. Using this concept as a unifying community, the government promoted the idea that all ethnicities belong to one family—the Chinese nation. However, among all minority groups, the Manchus have struggled the most to preserve their distinct identity. One reason is the suppression they faced in the 20th century; another is political inequality. According to the Seventh Population Census, China has over 1.4 billion people, with more than 91% being Han. The largest minority groups include the Zhuang, Hui, Manchu, Uyghur, Tibetan, and Mongolian ethnicities. However, unlike the others, the Manchus were not granted an autonomous province—a crucial factor in preserving cultural heritage. Instead, due to their dispersal across southern regions following the Qing dynasty's collapse, they lived more sporadically, making cultural retention even harder.

In the northern regions where the Manchu originally came from, the Han population gradually grew to outnumber the Manchu, making it nearly impossible to establish a Manchu autonomous area. During the Qing dynasty, when the Manchu elites entered the Central Plains—an event commonly referred to as *Ru Guan* (meaning 'to pass through Shanhai Pass', a fortress of the Great Wall)—the authorities declared the northern territories the sacred birthplace of the Manchu. The

Manchu government enforced laws prohibiting Han migration into these lands, justifying the policy as environmental protection. According to the Chinese historical text *Cihai*, the Manchu rulers constructed a long fence wall to block Han settlers from entering their territory.

However, by the late Qing dynasty, the population in the Central Plains had surged, leading to resource scarcity. Han peasants began crossing the northern fence, settling in Manchu lands to cultivate the vast and fertile soil. At the same time, the Manchu government was embroiled in conflicts with Western powers, gradually losing control over internal affairs—including migration restrictions. This mass movement became known as *Chuang Guandong*, referring to migrants from Hebei and Shandong provinces who passed through the Great Wall into Manchu territory.

In the late 20th century, the Han-dominated government encouraged further resettlement in the north for agricultural development. As a result, the Han population expanded dramatically, far surpassing the indigenous Manchu in their own ancestral lands. Although many Manchus have contributed significantly to ethnic equality, tensions between the Manchu and Han nations remain high, often surfacing in social media and online discourse.

Figure 25: Hetuala, the first Qing capital, photo: Helun Liang

1.5 Thinking and Extension: Revitalising the Manchu Community by Presenting Shamanic Monads

Since the 1980s, the Manchu people have faced both opportunities and challenges in their cultural revival. The economic benefits of heritage tourism drew the attention of businesspeople and local governments, who established numerous Manchu cultural reservations and staged performances. However, these rituals were often stereotypical and historically inaccurate, failing to reflect the essence of Manchu culture while reducing it to a tool for profit.

A few years ago, television dramas about Qing Dynasty court operas became fashionable, though their plots were largely fictionalised entertainment rather than authentic history. In 2011, the most popular Chinese TV series was Palace, a time-travel story following a modern woman who accidentally travels back to the Qing

Dynasty, falls in love with an emperor's son, and helps him secure the throne. Despite being an alternative-history fantasy, its basic historical details—such as the names of royal family members, the timing of key events, and the relationships between Manchu elites—were absurdly inaccurate, showing little respect for actual Manchu history.

The director, scriptwriter, and actors of this show are all Han people, making the series less a representation of Manchu heritage and more a reflection of Han Chinese fantasies about the Qing Dynasty.

Figure 26: The poster of the Chinese TV series 'Palace', image available at:
https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/宫_(2011 年电视剧

Shamanism constitutes the epistemological bedrock of traditional Manchu cosmology, historically mediating relationships between ancestors, nature, and clan

governance. As ritual specialists (saman), shamans preserved oral histories, performed seasonal rites, and enacted collective memory through ecstatic communion with the spirit world. This sacred praxis, however, underwent a profound transformation under successive regimes of modernity.

The 19th-century influx of Western scientific rationalism and Neo-Confucian critiques recast shamanism as superstition —— a label weaponised by both late Qing reformers and Maoist campaigns (Yang 2015, p.57). Post-1949, public rituals were suppressed as backward, reduced to clandestine rural practices or media caricatures of mental instability (Anagnost 1987, p.40-61). Contemporary commodification further distorts shamanism's communal role, as tourist-oriented performances dilute ritual depth into folkloric spectacle.

Yet these very disruptions reveal shamanism's enduring potency as a living monad – a Benjaminian constellation of ancestral knowledge, ecological ethics, and collective resistance. The shaman's drum patterns, spirit journeys, and clan chronicles encode what Walter Benjamin termed Jetztzeit (now-time): the moment of revolutionary potential that breaks homogeneous, linear history (Benjamin 1968, p.261). In later chapters, I demonstrate how Manchu Futurist art reanimates these monads through interactive artwork and exhibition, transforming censored rituals into speculative counter-narratives.

Shamanism's marginalisation under Han hegemony thus mirrors the Manchu experience itself – a once-vital worldview fractured yet retaining emancipatory

potential. Its survival in fragmented oral traditions and censored archives positions it

as both a relic and blueprint: a mnemonic code for reconstructing identity beyond

assimilationist paradigms.

Figure 27: The tomb of Manchu emperors in Hetuala, photo: Helun Liang

Even today, shamanism continues to be denigrated and marginalised in China, so

practitioners often live an underground existence, mainly in rural areas. The Manchu

family still needs to have a living shaman to continue their shamanic lineage.

However, today's shamans are merely the organisers of rituals and are not permitted

to use their shamanism for other activities, such as divination or healing. The rituals

are divided into morning sacrifices, evening sacrifices, back lamp sacrifices, and

heavenly sacrifices, though they are now more simplified than before. The oracles

passed down by the shaman consist of only a few sentences. No one wears a priest's

garment or a waist bell when performing rituals, and most female priests dress in blue skirts and white shirts. The symbolism of the sacrifice has become far greater than its actual meaning. Today, Manchu shaman rituals can only be seen in museums, which receive little attention.

Figure 28: South American shaman, *image available at:*
https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/the-shaman.html?sortBy=relevant

In other countries and regions, shamanic practices persist. Although Christian missionaries dismissed shamanism as devil worship, it survived in South Korea during the 1980s as a political weapon for students resisting authoritarian rule: 'Taken up as a symbol of authentic Korean rural folk culture by the college student-led *minjung* or student movement of political opposition in the 1980s, Korean shamanism served as both protest theatre and a nostalgic return to traditional culture' (Kendall 2009). The renowned Korean shaman Kim Keum-Hwa has gained

widespread internet and mass media recognition. Meanwhile, in Taiwan, shamanism

and other forms of spirit possession were never banned and remain visible in religious

festivals (Yang 2015, p. 57). Shamanism in Northern China also influenced Japanese

folktales and shamanic traditions (Kuang 2020, p. 69).

Beyond Asia, Circumpolar and Native American shamanism represent significant

branches of the practice. At the 2017 Venice Biennale, Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto

collaborated with Indigenous Huni Kuin shamans to create a large-scale installation.

This work exemplified how shamanism in South America is being revitalised through

contemporary art. His installation invited audiences to enter barefoot and meditate

within a space infused with elements from Huni Kuin cosmology. Outside the tent,

visitors could listen to Huni Kuin chants, read poetic fragments inscribed on the walls,

and view photographs depicting the Huni Kuin people's deep connection with the

forest alongside more minor works reflecting different phases of Neto's practice

(Maroja 2019, p. 1). The artist recreated a sacred shamanic space through

contemporary art, transmitting spiritual knowledge and offering a pathway for

audiences to share in the shamanic experience.

Figure 29: Ernesto Neto's work *A Sacred Place,* Venice Biennale
Image available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2017/05/10/reinventing-the-world-venice-biennale-gives-older-and-lesser-known-artists-their-due)

Using this art form was far more effective than simply displaying the shaman's clothes in a museum with a text label because shamanism is about experiencing connections—to nature, ancestors, and community. His work compressed Indigenous shamanic dances, music, and language—the monads that authenticate Indigenous culture. From Neto's practice, I see the possibility that the presence of Manchu shamanism as a heritage project allows us to engage with it as a political tool. By highlighting the uniqueness and gradual disappearance of Manchu shamanism in my own work, people can recognise how this minority culture has been misunderstood and critically examine Han suppression. I want to use my practice to demonstrate that it is possible to revitalise Manchu shamanism today through art.

When I create artwork about Manchu culture, my references span the prehistory, core, and decline periods. In these eras, there are specific elements I wish to extract— artistic monads that embody authentic Manchu culture. The first Manchu monad I

employ in my practice is the nomadic element, which reveals the relationship between Manchu ancestors and nature. This nomadic hunting tradition explains why Manchu belief is deeply intertwined with the natural world, notably Changbai Mountain, where the Manchu people were born and raised. I have crafted icons such as horses, elks, birds, and other animals to express this connection. The horse appears most frequently in my visual art because Manchu history is inseparable from them. In prehistory, Manchu livestock farming depended on horses, making most Manchu people skilled riders. Spiritually, the white sacred horse (*sunja morin*) served as the shaman's medium for traversing the three realms, as recorded in the *Ningguta* shamanic oracles: 'The mane becomes the celestial ladder, the tail connects to earthly veins' (Fu 1995, p. 78). The revival of the Manchu army was also due to their equestrian expertise—the Manchu cavalry symbolised the most formidable military force in China, and the power of Manchu elites was built upon steeds and horsemanship. Thus, the nomadic experience was the most significant influence on the Manchu religion and military in prehistory. This distinct way of life was the revolutionary seed that cultivated Manchu culture during the Qing Dynasty. Changbai Mountain and birds represent Manchu origins, where life was bestowed by a magpie, fruit, and a goddess in the mountain's myth. The legend of Changbai Mountain holds an ecological sovereignty that forges Manchu identity across both geographic and mythic times.

I want to emphasise the second monad, Manchu shamanism, the most significant belief system that shaped Manchu culture and peaked during its core period. During shamanic ceremonies, Manchu shamans guided tribe members in connecting with nature and ancestors. The shamanic ritual was a process of sharing intelligence and experience, rich with performance art elements. Through a single sacrificial ceremony, we can uncover many core beliefs of Manchu culture. For example, shaman costumes were vibrant and deeply symbolic. Due to the worship of birds and the colour cyan, the more bird motifs and cyan featured in a shaman's dress, the higher their status (Zhang 2020, p. 15). Thus, in my visual work, these shamanic elements reappear as totems. In my literary work, shamans are the central characters of my fiction. The three shamans—from the past, present, and future—demonstrate different strategies and technologies to sustain shamanic culture. For both Manchu and Han people, understanding shamanic rituals is essential to grasping the essence of Manchu culture.

Figure 30: Shaman ceremony, image available at:
https://discover.hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Shamanic-holidays)

The monad I wish to preserve from Manchu's later period is the Manchu language. In my view, the decline of the Manchu language signalled the disappearance of Manchu culture. When the Manchu people were divided into Jurchen ethnic groups, their shared language served as the foundation that united the diasporic Manchu community. During the Qing Dynasty, fluency in Manchu was an effective way to distinguish Manchus from Han Chinese. However, as Manchus increasingly coexisted with the Han majority, the language lost its practical utility. After the fall of the Qing, Manchu was excluded from the education system, leaving few avenues for its preservation.

Yet, surprisingly, during my fieldwork in Hetuala—the first capital of the Qing government—I discovered that many locals still preserve Manchu culture in their ways, including the language. I met Mr. Fu, a local Manchu specialist who organises small-scale lectures on Manchu culture, covering language, paper cutting, and history. His work fills a crucial gap left by the education system: teaching minority languages and histories. The Han authorities sought linguistic uniformity, ensuring all ethnicities spoke Mandarin, while the Chinese education system pursued cultural and political homogenisation. As Hensen (1999, p. 12) notes, this homogenisation was intended to 'make communication possible among different parts of the country, to ensure the integration of peripheral areas into the Chinese state, and to promote patriotism and loyalty to the party'.

In this context, teaching the Manchu language became an act of resistance—slowing the erosion of Manchu culture against state suppression. In Hetuala, I acquired books such as Manchu dictionaries and grammar guides, many of which I later incorporated into my paintings and fiction. These Manchu monads highlight the language's significance and uniqueness. With them, reconstructing an imagined Manchu community becomes a tangible possibility.

2 Towards an Imagined Community of Manchu

Introduction:

This chapter argues that an imagined Manchu community can be reconstructed through artistic, literature, cultural practices to revitalize Manchu identity, even in the face of contemporary fragmentation and global dispersion. The theoretical frameworks of Ferdinand Tönnies's concept of natural community (Tönnies 1999, p. 67), Benedict Anderson's imagined communities (Anderson 1991, pp. 5-6), and Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modernity (Bauman 2007, p. 177) collectively inform my understanding of the community-building potential of Manchu Futurism.

Tönnies differentiates between organic communities, which are rooted in kinship and locality, and associational societies, which are based on rational will. This distinction provides a lens through which to analyze the historical transformation of the Manchus from Jurchen tribal collectives to the bureaucratic structures of the Qing dynasty. Anderson's concept of imagined political communities, sustained through shared cultural practices, offers a way to address contemporary challenges related to linguistic issues and territorial dispersion. Bauman's analysis of modernity's liquid fragmentation, where stable communities dissolve into transient networks of provisional belonging, highlights the need for innovative counter-strategies against the assimilative pressures of globalization—particularly relevant given the Manchu population's diaspora since 1912.

My synthesis of these models offers foundational features of the Manchu community, utilizing digital art and speculative archives to forge Tönnian spiritual bonds through Andersonian imaginative technologies. This approach seeks to resist Baumanian liquidity by creating material-digital hybridity. I argue that the primary methodology for the Manchus to reactivate their community involves creating an imagined community, similar to what past Manchu elites have attempted for centuries. I analyze their strategies, discussing how they function and proposing ways to expand upon them through literature and art.

My intention is to explore whether there are community practices that I can adopt to reactivate Manchu identity from a global perspective. I pay particular attention to how the concept of an imagined community can provide insights into the persistence of ethnic groups within the context of globalization and diasporic cultures. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how literature and art can be harnessed to build an imagined Manchu cultural formation for the future.

2.1 Ferdinand Tonnies: From the Blood Community to the Spirit Community

Ferdinand Tönnies, a German sociologist, theorized the shift from organic *Gemeinschaft* (community) to rational *Gesellschaft* (society), anticipating Benedict Anderson's *imagined communities* by highlighting how modern collectives are sustained more by shared consciousness than direct interaction.

The concept of community is broad and varied; it can refer to a small group or a significant global movement. In particular, networked societies do not confine the size

or nature of communities. German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies highlighted how modern collectives are sustained more by shared consciousness than direct interaction, which has many similarities to Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined community. They both explore how belonging is constructed—Tönnies through social bonds, Anderson through cultural imagination. According to Tönnies, a community differs from society and can even transcend it (Tönnies 1999, p. 29). His theory is key to why I want to create a Manchu community instead of talking about it under the category of Chinese society. Although the Manchu community is a minor segment of Chinese society, it has the potential to reflect certain aspects of that society that outlast its current form and extend beyond the geographical or national boundaries recognized by society.

As the founder of modern sociology in Germany, Tönnies discusses the rapid economic, technology, and information developments in the 20th century in his work 'Community and Society: Basic Concepts of Pure Sociology'. He describes how people's desires seemed to expand infinitely, and individuals became increasingly alienated from their communities. Tönnies proposed that the solution to the crisis of modernity is to restore the organic connections found in local communities and to reconstruct a more communicative and rational modern society based on collective experiences. He differentiated community from society and formally established the dualistic theoretical framework of society/community in modern sociology. Tönnies argued that society is a propositional structure of modernity, representing not the

original form of human existence but a 'cultural or artificial association' shaped by rational and individualistic concepts (Tönnies 1999, p. 29).

In traditional communities, an individual's will can exist in a foundational state resembling a living organism, which Tönnies refers to as the organic essential will. In connections guided by this essential will, individuals perceive I and you as interrelated organic whole within communication practices. The unity of feelings, desires, and impulses is natural. However, in modern society, the nature of connection is primarily not based on authentic and profound individual communication. Instead, in mechanical social unity, the individual's desire to communicate is characterized by a 'will to choose' (Tönnies, 1999, p. 146).

Tönnies conceptualises modern society as an artificial unity that systematically deconstructs the natural association of traditional communities, with its connections primarily governed by contractual agreements and customary communications that facilitate material needs, plan coordination, interest exchanges and purpose-driven alliances (Tönnies 1999, p. 54). This configuration results in relationships that remain fundamentally separate and artificially conceived, which Tönnies characterises as 'mechanical aggregations and artefacts' rather than organic wholes (Tönnies 1999, p. 54). From his theoretical perspective, human relations initially manifested as natural associations - authentic communities where connections represented deep, reciprocal and dynamic relationships rather than superficial or temporary linkages (Tönnies 1999, p. 54). In contrast to these organic communities, modern society constitutes an artificial and temporal construct incapable of genuinely expressing its members'

collective will, where individuals operate primarily through self-interest and selfish

motivations within clearly demarcated boundaries (Tönnies 1999, p. 100). This

societal framework discourages altruistic behaviour unless directly reciprocated,

establishing an organisational foundation rooted exclusively in the calculated

exchange of labour, time and monetary compensation (Tönnies 1999, p. 100). In

contrast to society, the community is more natural and permanent. It seems unviable

for the Manchu Futurism project to offer any actual currency to make exchanges, so it

is only possible to build a Manchu community instead of a Manchu society and offer

the community members spiritual satisfaction rather than actual currency.

Tönnies posits that communities develop more organically than societies,

representing authentic and vital forms of collective life where members maintain

connections despite geographical dispersion (Tönnies 1999, p. 95). While

acknowledging communities as ancient formations contrasted with relatively modern

societies, he emphasises that societal development has not eradicated communal

bonds (Tönnies 1999, p. 55). Communities persist wherever individuals connect

through organic expressions of will, coexisting with societal structures (Tönnies 1999,

p. 65). This communality fosters relationships where 'the less constrained are those

who interact, the more they relate as free subjects of their desires and capabilities'

(Tönnies 1999, p. 71). Communities manifest through familiar, intimate connections

in three interpenetrating forms: kinship-based, geographically bound, and spiritually

united associations.

The kinship community that Tonnies referred to as 'the most universal expression of community reality' (Tonnies 1999, p.76) embodies the character and spirit of the community most purely. Blood or kinship relations have natural inclusivity and cohesion, that is, the default consistency of one's kinship rather than the 'coordination' under the domination of interests. The kinship community vividly embodies the natural sense of belonging that the community can give to the individual. Kinship 'expresses most directly the possibility of the common will of man' (Tonnies 1999, p.73). That means the members have a positive and dynamic will to protect, defend, share, satisfy and achieve.

Alongside kinship, common space was also the foundation of the early communities, which Tonnies called geo-community. The essence of geo-community is the big family existing in the limited local scene: the sharing of geographical space and the restriction of human-land relationships in the sense of survival, which causes countless mutual contacts. With the enhancement of people's will to choose, the essential will gradually weaken, and the closeness of blood emotion and the sense of belonging to geographical emotion also decrease. At this time, the spiritual connection across blood and geographical boundaries became the main link to maintain people's unity, and the spiritual community was formed. In a spiritual community, people come together because of shared ideas, with common ideals, common beliefs, and the pursuit of common goals, thus getting closer and establishing a spiritual friendship (Tonnies 1999, p.67).

The spiritual community is more subjective and closer to an imagined community than the natural one. Tonnies believed that the relationship between people in a spiritual community differs from ordinary friendship. It requires a common spiritual god to sustain it. Different from the consanguinity community based on familiarity and the geographical community based on land, the spiritual community was characterised by a spiritual nature based on free choice. Through spiritual connection, a spiritual community forms the unity of the group's will in a broader range, at a higher level and to a deeper degree, and could be called the perfect community. Tonnies believed an invisible spirit organised an incredible spiritual meeting between strangers, and people reached a consensus on value in a mental collision. Therefore, the communication of the soul made people become spiritual partners, and the soul's contract made them spiritual family. This kind of community is Tonnies's ultimate conception of the future moral society—people reach the unity of wills to achieve internal peace. He described this peace as 'the divine order of direct ethical significance' and believed that 'the theoretical starting point of the community is the perfect unity of human wills' (Tonnies 1999, p.58).

Spiritual community is considered superior to blood and geographical communities, as it relies on spiritual communication to fulfill emotional and psychological needs, rather than instinct or location. Tonnies's theory suggests that communities evolve, with kinship, geographical, and spiritual forms all playing significant roles. Kinship is rooted in natural emotions, while geographical communities foster mutual assistance among members, leading to more rational

emotions. Spiritual communities, centered on shared beliefs and religion, represent the highest form of community.

Tonnies posits that community change follows an internal logic influenced by social connections and critical factors. These three community forms are interconnected throughout human history, and where people's wills unite, diverse communities emerge. Despite Tonnies's views on the challenges of re-establishing community in modern civilization, it is possible to integrate traditional cultural beliefs into contemporary society. The community serves as a creative space for social experimentation.

In developing my concept of a Manchu imaginary community, I drew from Tonnies's idea of spiritual community, which emphasises connections beyond societal constraints. Tonnies's definitions, particularly of Spiritual Community, highlighted community as a core concept for my project. He posits that genuine relationships within a community are dynamic and enduring, suggesting that community remains vital in the present and future, distinct from societal structures. In my project, 'Constructing the Imagined Community of Manchu Futurism in Fiction and Art', I focus on the Manchu spiritual community in exploring themes of construction, futurism, and imagination in both fiction and art.

2.2 Zygmunt Bauman: Reconstructing the Community

British scholar Zygmunt Bauman argues that contemporary society has witnessed the erosion of traditional communal bonds due to advanced information technologies, resulting in heightened individualism where uncertainty becomes a primary source of anxiety, driving individuals to seek stability through communal affiliation (Bauman 2007, p.71). His analysis distinguishes between idealised communities and existing communities, emphasising the latter, which he categorises into seven types along a continuum from ideal conception to lived reality. The moral community represents an ideal type based on egalitarian sharing of collective benefits, though its practical realisation is undermined by elites' avoidance of redistributive responsibilities (Bauman 2007, p. 71). The aesthetic community operates as a transient 'travelling carnival' that derives legitimacy through quantitative accumulation and majority validation rather than moral responsibility, offering fragile and ephemeral connections (Bauman 2007, p. 82). Identity-based communities include the nation-state, which constructs certainty through imposed identity recognition, and minority communities that emerge from failed assimilation attempts, often characterised by coercive dynamics (Bauman, 2007, p.82). The multicultural community represents capitalism's global expansion, disguising structural inequalities as cultural differences under the rhetoric of pluralism (Bauman 2007, p. 125). Security-bound segregation zones form voluntary enclaves that paradoxically become 'prisons without walls' for marginalised populations (Bauman 2007, p. 135, 140-142), while online refuges provide illusory autonomy from liquid modernity's uncertainties (Bauman 2018, p.

108). Bauman demonstrates increasing scepticism about contemporary communities' capacity to provide meaningful belonging or mitigate modern anxieties throughout this typological progression from ideal to actual communities.

Bauman's theory has profoundly influenced my thoughts on the intersection of morality and online communities. In his series on community, Bauman posits that the moral community is the ideal form, ranking it as the highest type of community. A moral community is characterised by shared values and advocates for equitable welfare distribution among its members. However, to maintain their freedom and certainty, social elites in modern society often shirk shared responsibilities. Consequently, the survival of the moral community relies on the wealthy, who must bear the social responsibility of supporting the poor. This situation leads Bauman to express pessimism about the moral community's longevity.

The prospects for the moral community's survival depend significantly on the nature of what is shared among its members. The moral community I envision resembles the spiritual community described by Tönnies, founded on the principle of free choice. In this model, individuals achieve a sense of unity in their will and mind, leading to internal peace, which Tönnies refers to as 'a divine order of direct ethical significance' (Tönnies 2019, p. 127). This spiritual community represents Tönnies's ultimate vision of a future moral society, and I wholeheartedly agree.

In a morally oriented spiritual community, members would share cultural pursuits, moral beliefs, worldviews, and other aspects of their spiritual lives, allowing

their collective spirit to guide their behaviour. Therefore, fostering these spiritual communities is both necessary and forward-thinking.

Bauman also suggests that online communities serve as self-set comfort zones for individuals in modern society, where people can hide away to escape and temporarily forget the pressures of reality. Internet has deeply permeated all aspects of human life, thus presenting an opportunity for online communities to play a more significant role. They can become ideal environments for nurturing and developing moral and spiritual communities. Online communities transcend geographical and temporal limitations, making gathering individuals with shared beliefs and cultural roots easier. Members can achieve consensus and establish lasting and stable community relationships through progressively in-depth sharing activities.

The members of these online communities are akin to seeds that can sprout diverse structures in different places, thereby giving rise to more spiritual communities. This encapsulates my fundamental vision for building a community based on a Manchu imagination.

Bauman acknowledges the shortcomings of contemporary communitarianism but argues that community is essential for addressing chronic diseases in both individuals and society. He emphasizes that a community should be built on mutual concern for equal rights and responsibilities. To create a true community, Bauman believes it is crucial to balance freedom and certainty, avoiding an either-or mentality. He asserts that individuals have the agency to reflect on external influences and that liberty and constructing personal values are interconnected. By aligning freedom with certainty,

we can resolve the tension between the two, providing a strong foundation for community reconstruction.

The theoretical frameworks of Ferdinand Tönnies and Zygmunt Bauman provide crucial foundations for me to understand Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, particularly in relation to the Manchu Futurism project. Tönnies's conceptualization of spiritual communities as organic, will-based collectives (Tönnies 1999, p.67) and Bauman's analysis of identity-based communities in liquid modernity (Bauman 2007, p.177) both anticipate Anderson's central thesis that communities are fundamentally cognitive constructs rather than concrete entities. Where Tönnies emphasizes the authentic connections within traditional communities and Bauman examines the fragmented nature of contemporary belonging, Anderson bridges these perspectives by demonstrating how modern nations function as imagined political communities - socially constructed yet profoundly real in their consequences (Anderson 1991, p. 6).

2.3 Benedict Anderson: Imagined Community

In the second half of the 20th century, anthropology and political science studies increasingly emphasized the roles of culture and identity in community formation, reflecting broader societal transformations, especially due to globalization. Among these developments, Benedict Anderson's work epitomizes the cultural turn in community studies during this period, establishing him as a pivotal figure in constructivist theories of community. His concept of imagined community is crucial

because it fundamentally redefines our understanding of communities. Anderson argues that nations and other large-scale social groups are not natural or primordial entities but constructed through shared cultural practices and mediated representations.

Anderson's insight highlights the role of media—such as print capitalism in the form of newspapers and novels, visual art, and, by extension, digital platforms—in enabling individuals to perceive themselves as part of a collective, even if they have never met most of its members. Fiction and art disseminate unifying narratives and symbols, while digital media accelerates and diversifies these processes, allowing for new forms of imagined belonging. Thus, Anderson's theory underscores how media is the primary mechanism through which communities are imagined, sustained, and transformed. This understanding is essential for grasping modern collective identities in an increasingly interconnected world. The concept of the imagined community also provides valuable guidance for constructing the Manchu community through various media and forms of imagination.

2.3.1 Imagined Community: Building a Cultural Artefact

Since the first publication of Benedict Anderson's seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* in 1983 until 2007, it has been translated into 29 languages across 33 countries and regions, including Chinese. The concept of imagined communities represents the culmination of Anderson's interpretation of nation, nationalism, and national consciousness, marking a significant breakthrough within the theoretical framework of community

studies. Anderson posits that nearly all communities extending beyond small, primordial villages—and even these villages—are fundamentally imagined. As he asserts, 'Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson 1991, p. 6). Guided by an anthropological perspective, Anderson thus arrives at his definition of the nation:

> It is an imagined political community - and it is a community imagined to be essentially limited and at the same time sovereign. It is imagined because even the members of the smallest nations cannot know most of their fellow citizens, meet them, or even hear of them. However, the image of their interconnectedness lives on in every member's mind. Nations are imagined to be finite because even the largest nation is finite. No nation imagines itself equal to all humanity (Anderson 1991, p.5-6).

Anderson's definition astutely circumvents the search for the objective characteristics of nations, directing attention instead towards the cognitive' dimension of collective identity. Here, 'imagination' does not denote 'fabrication' but signifies the cognitive mechanism through which any group identity is constituted. The concept of an 'imagined community' consequently refers not to a product of false consciousness but to a veritable social fact. This subjective, cognitively-oriented definition fundamentally shapes Anderson's subsequent thesis: an investigation into the specific historical conditions and processes that render possible the distinctive political imagination (or cognition) of the nation as a conceptual framework.

The fundamental premise that imagination serves as the primary methodology for community construction naturally raises questions about how individuals who are complete strangers - who have never met, interacted, or even heard of each other - can coalesce into communities capable of inspiring profound sacrifice among their members. Gellner's influential assertion that 'nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner 1965, p. 169) represents a pivotal but contested position in this discourse. Anderson identified significant flaws in Gellner's formulation, particularly its equation of 'invention' with notions of fabrication and falsehood rather than recognising it as a creative act of imagination (Anderson 1991, p. 5-6). Anderson's crucial distinction maintains that communities should not be evaluated through binary categories of authenticity or falsity but rather understood through their distinctive modes of imagination (Anderson 1991, p. 5-6).

Anderson explicitly articulated his theoretical divergence from Gellner's perspective. While Gellner posited that nationalism created nations - specifically referring to nation-states - he acknowledged that smaller ethnic groups constituting these nations possessed historical antecedents, focusing his analysis on the historical conditions enabling ethnic transformation into nations (Gellner 1965, p. 168-169). Anderson, adopting a thoroughly postmodern stance, extended this constructivist approach by arguing that all communities, including ethnic groups themselves, are fundamentally imagined constructs (Anderson 1991, p. 6). His conception of imagination does not denote baseless conjecture or fabrication but rather recognises it

as an ongoing social process permeating a nation's emergence, development and evolution. This theoretical position aligned Anderson with Gellner and other scholars categorised as modernists in Western academia's modernist (constructionist) versus primordia debate regarding nationalism's nature. This perspective attracted substantial criticism from primordial scholars during events like The Warwick Debate.

Primordialist theorists, who consider physical characteristics, lineage and mythology sufficient for nation formation, maintain that nations exist within the natural order as organic, spontaneously arising entities rather than artificial constructions (Geertz 1973, p. 259). This school of thought asserts that national identity derives from innate, biologically grounded factors, including kinship, racial ties and language, which possess inherent durability and influence (Shils 1957, p. 130). Anderson's characterisation of nations, national identity and nationalism as 'special cultural artefacts' (Anderson 1991, p. 4) constitutes a comprehensive rejection of primordial assumptions, generating substantial criticism from its proponents who vehemently opposed the notion of nations existing primarily through processes of imagination (Smith 1986, p. 11).

Anderson argues that the 'nation' represents a modern form of imagination, emerging from a profound transformation in human consciousness during the transition to modernity. Two significant historical conditions enabled this imaginative shift. The first constitutes an epistemological change - a fundamental precondition referring to the radical alteration in humanity's worldview since the Middle Ages. This transformation manifests through the decline of three key medieval conceptions:

cosmopolitan religious communities, dynastic rule, and oracular notions of time. Only after the collapse of the old worldview, characterised by what Anderson terms 'sacred, hierarchical, and eschatological simultaneity', could people begin conceptualising the nation as a 'secular, horizontal, and lateral' community (Anderson 2005, p. 54).

Anderson identifies the eighteenth-century emergence of novels and newspapers as providing crucial technical means for 'representing' these imagined communities. Operating through what he calls 'homogeneous, empty time', their narrative structures presented societies as sociological organisms progressing along a predetermined chronological trajectory (Anderson 2005, p. 54). This literary temporality mirrored the nation's conceptualisation as a solid community moving steadily downward (or upward) through history. Thus, for Anderson, the nation as an imagined community achieves its initial and primary imaginative form through written discourse - through the collective act of reading and writing.

Anderson's conceptualisation of imagined communities draws significantly upon Walter Benjamin's notion of 'homogeneous, empty time' to articulate the epistemological shift that enabled modern nationalism (Anderson 1991, p. 12). He characterises pre-modern religious communities as vast, infinite collectives integrated through sacred languages and doctrines, whose authority gradually eroded during the late Middle Ages due to European geographical expansion and the consequent broadening of conceivable human possibilities (Anderson 1991, p. 12). This decline was further accelerated by the diminishing sacred status of language, which Anderson

analyses alongside the transformation of temporal consciousness from medieval

Messianic time - where past and future converged in an eternal present - to

Benjamin's secularised conception of time as uniform and measurable (Anderson

1991, p. 23).

This new temporality, marked by clock and calendar rather than prophecy,

provided the conceptual framework for imagining nations as solid communities

progressing steadily through history (Anderson 1991, p. 24). Anderson illustrates this

through the example of an American citizen who, while personally acquainted with

only a minuscule fraction of fellow nationals, nevertheless maintains complete

confidence in their anonymous, simultaneous existence and activities (Anderson

1991, p. 26). His theoretical contribution lies precisely in rejecting conventional

explanations of nation-formation based on ethnicity, religion or industrialisation,

instead demonstrating how print capitalism created the material conditions for this

new mode of collective imagination (Anderson 1991, p. 37-46). Crucially, he

maintains that the decline of religious communities and dynastic regimes constituted

necessary but insufficient conditions for the emergence of nationalist imagined

communities, which required print capitalism's specific technological and economic

infrastructure to materialise (Anderson 1991, p. 42).

2.3.2 How Does Fiction Arouse the Imagination

Anderson's concept of the national community as an imagined political

community places imagination at the heart of this idea. The fundamental premise of

imagination emphasizes the artificial nature of the nation as a cultural construct. A critical element of this concept is simultaneity, which is closely linked to literary practices like reading newspapers and novels. The spread of printed materials allowed readers to recognize that, at the same time, others elsewhere were engaging in the same activity. Anderson argues that print language facilitated the formation of national consciousness, with these fellow readers connected through printed materials serving as the embryos of the imagined community of the nation.

Anderson's notion of the national community is rooted in cultural foundations shaped by capitalist print media. In his framework, religious dynasties can also be seen as imagined communities, differing only in their modes of imagination. Thus, the imagined community is not exclusive to the nation; literature plays a vital role in shaping collective imagination and transforming cognitive frameworks. As an imagined community, the nation is primarily based on a common socio-psychological state (the will to union), which is a construction, not an imaginary. The authenticity and continuity of a nation's existence lie not in a homogeneous culture, collective interests, or a singular historical narrative but in the existence of a common world created by the public lives of its members (Wu 2016, p. 33). Therefore, the nation's commonality resides not in objective cultural traits but in representing a shared world.

Anderson explored how literature relates to imagined communities through his study of literary works, uncovering rich theoretical possibilities within this connection. For instance, he analyzed Indonesian nationalist Mas Kartodikromo's

novel *The Black Semarang* to illustrate how literature fosters communal imagination. The following passage appears at the very beginning of the book:

Semarang...

A young man sat on a long rattan chaise longue, reading a newspaper. He was already fascinated. The angry, sometimes smiling expression at the time showed how much the story attracted him. He turned the newspaper pages, thinking he could find something interesting to read that would make him feel less miserable.

Suddenly, an article title came into view:

Prosperity

Poor tramp

Due to wind, rain, sun and disease beside the road.

The brief report moved the young man. He could imagine the suffering of the poor man as he lay dying by the side of the road. Sometimes, he felt a burst of anger surge through him, and the next moment, he felt pity. Yet at another moment, his anger was directed at the social system that produced this poverty while enriching a small group.

Through the novel's description, its readers—Indonesians—are immediately immersed in a time defined by a calendar and a familiar setting. Some may have even walked along Semarang's streets. The author places a lone protagonist within a socio-scape depicted in careful yet general detail. By referring to the main character as a young man without providing a specific name, the author implies that he represents one of the Indonesian audience members—a participant in the imagined community of the emerging nation. Mas does not need to name this community explicitly; it is

already understood. This is evident in how the young mans anger is directed at that class rather than the broader social system of his class.

Furthermore, the phrase people reading a young person's reading reinforces the idea of an imagined community. The young man did not discover the body of a poor man on Semarang's muddy streets; instead, he imagined it based on a newspaper report. He does not concern himself with the identity of the deceased tramp but instead thinks about the community represented by homeless individuals, not their individual lives.

It is fitting that newspapers feature prominently in *The Black Semarang*, as they lend credibility to the story. Print capitalism allows people to conceive of themselves in profoundly new ways and to relate to others (Anderson 2016, p.247–264). Xie Yongping, a Chinese-American scholar, noted that 'novels and newspapers interpellate readers into national subjects' (Tao 2010, p. 4). The symbolic representation of real social spaces in novels and newspapers erases the boundary between fiction and reality, merging the fictional world with the real one and transforming the readership into a national prototype. This national archetype is not simply a reader engaged in literary activities. In the broadest sense, he may also be a religious or secular pilgrim or a consumer of other cultural forms—such as maps and museums.

Anderson explained that the content of novels can evoke readers' imagination of the national community. This occurs because of the social spaces described within the novels and because audiences naturally connect literary fiction with social reality

during their reading. If there were no connection between the inner and outer worlds

of the novels, the content would ultimately fail to realize the community's

imagination. Anderson referred to the social situations depicted in novels as a series

of plural nouns, representing the sum of the fictional and real worlds. This is why he

stated that 'fiction quietly and continuously seeps into reality, creating an unusual

confidence in an anonymous community' (Anderson 2011, p. 32).

In his examination of the structure of historical novels, Anderson identified a

common design of simultaneity. To illustrate the role of this typical structure in the

imaginative construction of a national community, he cited a conventional novel plot

structure. Anderson's 'simultaneous design' refers to a non-focused narrative

perspective—similar to the 'eye of God'—which can observe the story from all

angles, surveying complex group life and rendering it in a panoramic view (Hu 2004,

p. 25). This concept becomes clearer when the reader fully trusts the narrator,

acquiring and merging God's perspective from the narration. As the reader observes

the story through the narrator's unfocused lens, the relationships between

characters—even those who never interact—exist within the mind of the omniscient

reader.

Anderson believed this interpretation was significant because such a narrative

perspective helps readers construct an imaginary world while engaging with the text.

From this godlike viewpoint, the reader can envision a broader picture. The existence

of a secular community, defined by simultaneity, intersects with time, and this

imagined framework parallels the concept of the nation. Although individuals cannot

directly experience their fellow citizens in the national community, this imagined

presence reinforces their belief in the community's existence. From the divine

perspective, this form of communal imagination is an accurate analogy for the nation.

In fiction, readers observe the story and characters through a focused narrative

perspective. The imagined relationships between characters assist readers in

constructing connections between individuals and groups. This technique provides a

structural means for the imaginative construction of a national community through the

novel's narrative form. The unique narrative perspective draws the reader into an

imagined national community. Literary activities affirm the national character of the

community, and crucially, printed language facilitates the transition from a general

community to a national one.

2.4 Thinking and Extension: Imagining a Community Via Artistic Practice

Historically, the formation of the Manchu ethnic community can be seen as a

classic case of imaginative construction. In 'Manchu Ecology and Culture', Jiang Fan

argues that Manchu culture is a continuously evolving process (Jiang 2006, p. 8). I

concur with this view and believe that the long history of the Manchu people

represents a process of creating a virtual constitution—a strategy to foster imagination

and unite group members. In contrast to the broader Chinese super-ethnicity, the

Manchu is a smaller ethnic group that relies on imaginative constructs to draw people

into their community.

The most significant act of imagination by the Manchu founders was the construction of their shared history, which established a common origin to attract new members. The founders claimed the Sushen as their ancestral forebears and identified Changbai Mountain as their birthplace, documenting these assertions in official records. At the time, chroniclers may have been uncertain whether these claims were historically accurate. Manchu script only emerged in the 16th century, while the Sushen existed thousands of years earlier. Various dynasties and names were involved in linking the Sushen to the Manchu. Nonetheless, the Manchu emperors of the Qing Dynasty were eager to formalize this history in writing, as they needed to unite their national community through a shared ancestry and collective past.

Benedict Anderson observes that while members of an imagined community cannot know one another personally, they can envision their connection across time and space (Flohr 2023, p. 1). For the Manchu founders, crafting a convincing and shareable history helped create a belief in their deep-rooted connections. In the first chapter, I introduced Manchu history and noted that the period before the Qing Dynasty can only be described as legendary due to the absence of written records. Ordinary Manchu individuals had no way to verify their ancestors from millennia ago. The official historical texts provided a relatively persuasive narrative in this context. By linking themselves to the ancient Sushen and claiming that all Jurchen tribes descended from the same ancestor, they significantly strengthened their spiritual ties.

After unifying the diverse Jurchen tribes under a single historical narrative, the leading Jurchen figure, Hong Taiji, created an imagined identity to eliminate internal

differences. In 1635, the name Manchu (Manzhou) was adopted to subsume distinctions among the Jurchens and promote unity by emphasizing their common lineage and antiquity. Thus, most Jurchen tribes and Tungusic-related ethnic groups became part of the Manchu community. By giving his Jurchen subjects a new ethnic name—regardless of their support for or opposition to Nurhaci's imperial ambitions—Hong Taiji 'sought to align the emotional contours of an emerging pan-Jurchen identity with a single name suggestive of an ascriptive unity' (Elliott 2006, p. 39).

In addition to spiritual imagination, tangible benefits were essential in attracting other ethnic groups to join the Manchu community. For example, the Eight Banners system was a political and material incentive structure.

Being a Bannerman was a glorious title and meant enjoying special privileges, such as land grants, rice stipends, and silver payments. Beyond guaranteeing state financial support, access to well-remunerated jobs was another desirable benefit of bannerman status (Porter 2016, p. 1). Initially, the banner system was exclusive to the Manchu Banners, which were already ethnically mixed. Many Tungus descendants closely related to Jurchen tribes—such as the Elunchun and Evenki—were incorporated into the Banner army. From the 17th century onwards, the banner system expanded to include new members, integrating Han and Mongol soldiers, who formed their own Han and Mongolian banners. The Han banners, for instance, absorbed former Ming soldiers and Han people from the northern regions. As a reward, their descendants inherited privileges such as financial support, food provisions, and employment opportunities.

By joining the banner system, many Han and Mongol individuals became part of the Manchu community, eventually identifying—or being identified—as Manchus. As Poter D. (2019, p. 1) notes, 'After the Qing dynasty fell, all Bannermen, including those from the Mongol and Han banners, were designated Manchu by the new government'. The banner system functioned like an expanding umbrella, accommodating diverse ethnic groups within its military, political, and economic framework. Influenced by Jurchen culture, many Han bannermen adopted Manchu ethnic identity, even replacing their Han names with Manchu ones (Elliott 2006, p. 27).

This demonstrates that the Manchu ethnicity was a complex construct encompassing bloodline connections (Jurchen ancestry) and shared interests (newly incorporated Han and Mongol groups). It illustrates how imagination can solidify an uncertain history, encouraging people to cultivate a sense of belonging to ethnic cultures. The imagined Manchu community facilitated smooth integration, allowing individuals to focus on commonalities rather than differences.

Benedict Anderson's theory suggests that an imagined community connects people through various forms of media. He argues that the rise of print capitalism in Western Europe was a crucial medium that allowed an increasing number of people to think about themselves and relate to others in profoundly new ways (Anderson 1991, p. 90). This new mode of communication established the foundation for national consciousness and created the concept of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991, p. 94–95).

Writing continuously is vital for building and maintaining an imagined

community, which is always unfinished. It is never too late to construct such a

community; its ongoing evolution often sustains it. Both Maurice Blanchot and Jean-

Luc Nancy argue that it is only in this unfinished state that true communion, sharing,

and openness of interests among individuals can occur and be preserved (Blink 2023,

p.11). Nancy emphasizes that continuous writing is a collective responsibility in

forming a community: 'We must not stop writing. We must tirelessly bring to the

surface the trajectory of our shared individuality' (Blink 2023, p. 88). Therefore, as a

form of multilogical communication, literature is a primary means of constructing

reality and promotes non-identity, openness, and incompletion within communities.
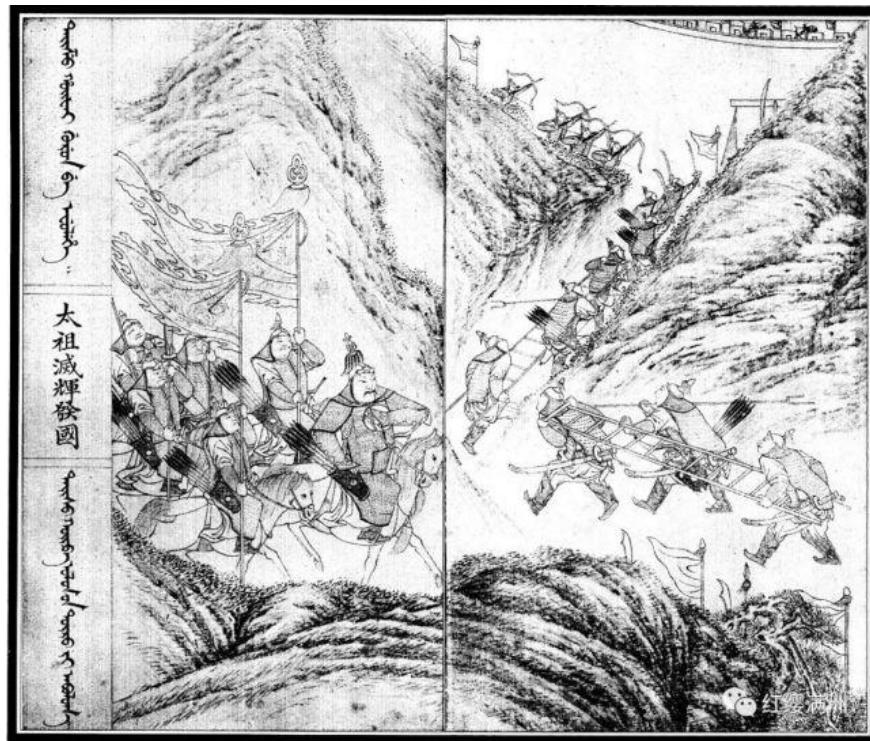
Figure 31: The illustration in Manchu's official history book, image available at:
https://i.ifeng.com/c/82CPZJKOGl1

The imagined community of print capitalism relies on developing a reading class. However, this reading class has limitations that prevent it from effectively creating my ideal Manchu community. The Manchu language struggles to convey ideas easily and quickly because only a few people can recognise the Manchu script. Like many other lost elements of Manchu culture, the language itself has become something that needs to be rescued from suppression. Using the Han language to construct a Manchu identity would be inappropriate and could hinder the revival of the Manchu language. Nevertheless, vivid illustrations can effectively convey information, even in official Manchu documents. For instance, one can understand the content of *The Manchurian Record* simply by looking at its images without needing to know any Manchu script. I argue that artwork from Manchu culture can serve as a common reference point for groups, connecting Manchu people through shared experiences. Historically, Manchu tribes have shared an organic will based on kinship and proximity, which Tönnies described as the essence of natural communities. However, in today's context, the Manchu community can evolve into a spiritual community—a voluntary association shaped by shared artistic and cultural imagination.

In this spiritual community, artwork serves functions similar to printed text, helping members think abstractly about themselves and others. The artist and the viewer maintain a relationship with a single work, style, or genre of art. If a group appreciates a particular artistic style, that work can forge a common identity and visual reference.

Maria Kingsley argues that this shared connection is akin to how 'an attachment to a common homeland creates a shared community among a group of people; a common visual culture also creates a community' (Kingsley 2007, p. 1). Like printed text, art serves as a historical and ideological record, capturing reactions to social or historical events. According to Hegel's theory, art is 'the idea as shaped forward into reality and as having advanced to immediate unity and correspondence with this reality' (Hegel 1975, p. 73). Therefore, art becomes the visual representation of historical processes and ideas, capable of creatively interpreting responses to historical events.

In Anderson's theory, nationalism is an aesthetic consciousness primarily based on an emotional community. The key aspect is self-consciousness (Kojin 1996, p. 34), which is also fundamental to art-making. In the context of the imagined community, art is a fitting medium to represent this aesthetic consciousness of nationalism—a sense of common identity grounded in emotional rather than purely rational reasoning. Kingsley asserts that artwork has the potential to establish national identity and to provide tangible expression to otherwise intangible community or nationalist sentiment: 'In other words, artistic representation and visual culture facilitate the creation of a sense of community and are aptly suited to describe and interpret nationalist sentiment within this community' (Kingsley 2007, p. 2). However, this imagined community of print capitalism relied on developing a reading class, which still has many limitations that do not effectively create my ideal imagined Manchu community. In my opinion, the Manchu language is already incapable of sharing ideas

easily and quickly because only a few people can now recognise the Manchu script. Like many other lost Manchu cultural elements, the language itself has become something that must be rescued from suppression. Using the Han language as the medium to construct Manchu imagination would be inappropriate and make it even harder to revive the Manchu language. Vivid illustrations, however, are rich enough to convey an event—even in official Manchu documents. For example, we can easily understand the content of *The Manchurian Record* simply by looking at its images without knowing any Manchu script.

Therefore, artwork from Manchu culture can serve as a common reference point for groups, connecting Manchu people through shared experiences. Historically, Manchu tribes shared an organic will based on kinship and proximity, which Tönnies described as the essence of natural communities. In today's context, however, the Manchu community can evolve into a spiritual community—a voluntary association shaped by shared artistic and cultural imagination. In this spiritual community, artwork is as functional as printed text in helping members think abstractly about themselves and others. The connection between artwork and audiences can be shared and spread, eventually cultivating common feelings among group members. Not only the artist but also the viewer maintains a relationship with a single work, a style, or a genre of art. If a group appreciates a particular artistic style, the work can forge a common identity and a visual reference.

Maria Kingsley argues that this shared connection functions similarly to how 'an attachment to a common homeland creates a shared community among a group of

people; a common visual culture also creates a community' (Kingsley 2007, p. 1).

Like printed text, art is another form of historical and ideological monad, recording reactions to social or historical events. In Hegel's theory, art is 'the idea as shaped forward into reality and as having advanced to immediate unity and correspondence with this reality' (Hegel 1975, p. 73). Thus, art is the visualised form of historical processes and ideas, capable of creatively interpreting responses to historical events. In Anderson's theory, nationalism is an aesthetic consciousness primarily based on an emotional community. The key lies in self-consciousness (Kojin 1996, p. 34), which is also fundamental to art-making. Art is a fitting medium within the imagined community to represent this aesthetic consciousness of nationalism—a feeling of common identity not entirely grounded in rational reasoning. Kingsley contends that artwork has the potential to establish national identity and give tangible expression to an otherwise intangible community or nationalist sentiment: 'In other words, artistic representation and visual culture facilitate the creation of a sense of community and are aptly suited to describe and interpret nationalist sentiment within this community' (Kingsley 2007, p. 2).

With the continuous development of the internet, the forms of literary dissemination and publication are also evolving, such as through cooperative, cross-border composite writing and publishing programmers, which bring readers and works from around the world into closer connection. In the process of community-building, the role of the internet as a medium has become increasingly significant. Numerous non-mainstream identities and alternative subcultures have emerged within

cyberspace, which 'question the dominant culture and create networks of political mobilization' (Winter 2010, p. 43). For example, Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher initiated an online art project, *Learning to Love You More*, fostering a unique performative community. While the project encourages participants to reflect on their daily behaviour critically, it simultaneously generates a community-building effect on multiple levels: direct interactions within local surroundings translate into mediated encounters through internet-based artistic production. In this way, an expressive space for community construction emerges, which can be described as 'pluralistic writing' (Blink 2024, p. 251). Participants imagine, communicate, and produce numerous archives that can be documented and shared through these art projects. Analysing this initiative, Jessica Santon argues that community arises from creating archives (Santon 2012, p. 1). Community members from diverse locations can significantly expand their collective influence in online spaces. For instance, Oliver Ressler's *Take the Square* (2012) project constructs a duality and interconnectedness of communicative spaces. Through the 'Occupy' movement, participants discuss organisational goals in public spaces worldwide and publish a collection of protest films, thereby shaping a media space that functions as a cross-border negotiating community.

It is necessary to review what Manchu identity historically meant to its people to explore how the Manchu-Futurist community can be activated. Manchu culture occupies an awkward position, yet artistic works reinforcing the imagined Manchu community have the potential to change its situation. However, not all kinds of artwork are viable for reconnecting the diasporic Manchus—only those reflecting the

uniqueness and authenticity of Manchu history can reshape the community's imagination.

Although Manchu culture has been suppressed for decades, it is not too late to reassess its value in the present moment and envision an alternative future path. The present is never merely a transition between past and future; it also holds the potential to redress past injustices. To achieve this, we must uncover the revolutionary opportunities hidden within historical experience. Walter Benjamin argues that past revolutionary thought was stored in monads and can be activated under certain circumstances.

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts but their arrest as well, where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallises into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure, he recognises the sign of a messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past (Benjamin 1969, p.264-265).

Artwork is a powerful medium to work is a powerful medium for addressing oppression, religion, and revolutionary coaching. Art is a process in which artists critically engage with their society, influenced by their surroundings. Like Walter Benjamin's idea of monads, artwork emerges from paused thought—a crystallization of reflection. Theodor Adorno emphasized the importance of art, describing it as a centre of forces:

The work of art is the result of a process as much as that same process is at rest. As rationalist metaphysics proclaimed in its heyday as the principle of the world, it is a monad: the centre of forces and things simultaneously (Adorno 1982, p. 2014).

Artworks encapsulate an artist's most profound reflections, representing their lived experiences—whether dealing with oppression, exile, or critique. These artistic monads should remain autonomous, neither serving authority nor yielding to commercial interests. From Adorno's perspective, the isolation and solitude found in specific works make them uniquely resistant in the context of modernity:

It is through the aspect of denouncing the ideological and commercial manipulation to which contemporary cultural productions are subjected that Adorno's aesthetic theory is affiliated with the critical theory from which it comes (Jimenez 1977, p. 31).

Since the mainstream has entirely accepted Manchu culture, its art retains a sense of defiant independence. Therefore, Manchu art could provide new ways for the Manchu people to redefine their community, especially in the context of diaspora.

Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community, when reinterpreted through the lens of globalization and cultural fragmentation, provides a crucial framework for revitalizing Manchu identity. Historically, this identity was rooted in kinship bonds, geographical proximity, and shamanic spirituality—elements Tönnies

described as the organic essence of natural communities (Tönnies, 2019). Nowadays, however, Manchu collectivity faces challenges such as diasporic dispersal, institutional neglect, and linguistic disappearance. Nonetheless, these obstacles call for mnemonic futurism: a spiritual community that is redefined not by blood or territory but through shared artistic imagination and digital connectivity.

Building on Anderson's assertion that communities are imagined through mediated practices, my project suggests that art serves as the 21st-century equivalent of print capitalism—a means of creating emotional bonds across continents and generations.

My art practice directly reflects this contemporary imagined community. For instance, my Montage series of print media collages combines Manchu motifs with future-oriented visions, offering a potential pathway for Manchus to uphold their dignity and ethical identities in various contexts. To ensure accessibility for those who cannot view my work in person, I have created a detailed digital archive at www.manchufuturism.com, which also functions as a modern network community. People from around the world can engage with this platform. Through contemporary art and digital community-building, Manchu Futurism establishes a digitally sovereign Manchu imaginary in which cultural continuity flourishes thanks to its adaptive incompleteness, effectively resisting both Han-Chinese assimilation and Western techno-Orientalism.

3 Tracing the Authentic Time Experience for Imagined Manchu Community: Why we review the past?

Introduction:

The conceptual framework of Manchu Futurism emerges from a critical dialogue between Western linear temporality and Eastern cyclical time while proposing a third path rooted in shamanic-Messianic temporal consciousness. Western linear time, as critiqued by Walter Benjamin, manifests as 'homogeneous, empty time'(Benjamin 2003, p.395) driven by capitalist modernity and Marxist historical materialism, where progress becomes a violent storm propelling humanity towards an abstract future while accumulating 'wreckage upon wreckage' of the past (Benjamin 2003, p.392). This paradigm, exemplified in China's revolutionary temporality that prioritises developmental stages over cultural particularities, risks erasing Manchu historical memory through its teleological thrust. Conversely, Eastern cyclical time—often associated with Buddhist reincarnation and agricultural rhythms—threatens to fossilise Manchu identity into museumised nostalgia through endless repetition. Both frameworks are inadequate for articulating the Manchu temporal experience, which historically operated through a shamanic chronotype synthesising linear and cyclical modalities.

Benjamin's Messianic time offers crucial mediation, conceptualised not as an apocalyptic rupture but as a 'temporal palimpsest' where 'every second becomes the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter'(Benjamin 2003, p.397). This concept resonates profoundly with Manchu shamanic practices that simultaneously invoke ancestral spirits (past), diagnose present afflictions, and divine future trajectories. As evidenced in Qing imperial governance—which synchronised the Eight Banner's administrative linearity with seasonal ritual cycles—Manchu temporality embodies what Benjamin called 'now-time', where historical monads become revolutionary sparks when recontextualised (Benjamin 2003, p.392). Manchu Futurism materialised this philosophy through artwork like video installations and fiction based on oral histories, recreating the past Manchu monads in our time.

Critically, this temporal synthesis counters capitalist homogenisation and Han-centric historiography by recentring Manchu cultural memory as an active force. As Benjamin observed, 'the past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability' (Benjamin 2003, p.392)—a process actualised through clay paintings incorporating Liao River basin soil and contemporary remakes of shamanic rituals.

3.1Various Understandings of Time

3.1.1 A Strategy to Challenge the Supremacy——The Urgency to Find a Time Method of Revealing the Manchu Experience

Benedict Anderson's imagined communities conceptual foundation suggests that their emergence requires several key conditions. Chief among these is the dissolution of transcendent authorities, such as religious institutions and monarchic dynasties, creating a vacuum for new collective identities (Tong 2008, p. 27). In the context of the Manchu people, the 1911 Revolution led to the collapse of Qing imperial structures and shamanic religious frameworks. This cultural erosion continued under the governance of the Chinese Communist Party, which officially prohibits organized religion. Although folk belief systems like Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism still exist unofficially within Han-majority cultural practices, Manchu shamanism has been systematically marginalized as heretical within Han-supremacist ideologies, contributing to its decline.

This dual erasure of political and spiritual foundations necessitates the creation of an imagined Manchu community to restore a sense of epistemological cohesion. Importantly, this community requires reimagined temporal frameworks separate from divine or imperial chronologies, allowing members to share synchronized experiences of time that transcend both theocratic hierarchies and Marxist-Leninist historiography. Anderson's theory can be reactivated through the project of Manchu Futurism, which seeks to reconfigure time—creating a non-hierarchical temporality where shamanic

concepts of ancestral cyclicality intersect with futuristic speculative narratives. This approach enables the Manchu to negotiate their identity through a fluid understanding of time instead of rigid ideological affiliations.

Anderson's theoretical framework for constructing imagined communities emphasizes the crucial role of print capitalism—mainly novels and newspapers—in fostering a collective sense of simultaneity and shared temporal awareness among dispersed populations (Anderson 1991, p. 24). While this print-mediated model of temporal unification has been effective for modern nation-states, applying it uncritically to the Manchu context fails to capture the unique temporal understanding that arises from the Manchu historical experience and cultural memory. The key task is not to replicate Anderson's approach but to articulate a distinct Manchu temporal philosophy that authentically connects ancestral traditions, contemporary marginalization, and speculative futures. This requires thoroughly examining competing temporal paradigms, moving beyond objective chronologies to engage with more nuanced and subjective conceptions of time.

My theoretical inquiry primarily draws from Walter Benjamin's idea of Messianic time, which he defines as an anti-teleological rupture in historical continuity (Benjamin 2003, p. 397). I also incorporate Giorgio Agamben's further development of this concept through Foucault's biopolitical lens (Agamben 2005, p. 68). Through their works, I have identified three fundamental temporal modalities: cyclical, linear, and Messianic. I pay particular attention to how Benjamin's

revolutionary temporal model resonates significantly with traditional Manchu shamanic practices. The shamanic ritual complex, which simultaneously invokes ancestral presence, diagnoses contemporary crises and divines future possibilities, presents a compelling indigenous counterpart to Benjamin's concept of 'now-time' (Jetztzeit)(Benjamin 2003, p.392).

This conceptual synergy between Western critical theory and Manchu traditional knowledge provides fertile ground for developing an alternative temporal framework. This framework neither replicates the homogenising tendencies of nationalist historiography nor succumbs to nostalgic traditionalism; instead, it enables the Manchu community to reclaim its historical agency while envisioning potential futures.

3.1.2 From Natural Cyclical Time to Capitalist Linear Time

The concept of cyclical time, deeply rooted in natural observation, formed the foundational temporal framework for early Manchu society, a semi-nomadic people attuned to daily rhythms and seasonal patterns. This cyclical paradigm, shared across ancient civilisations, was similarly expressed in Han Chinese philosophy through seminal texts like the *Zhou Yi* (周易)—*The Book of Cyclical Change*—which proposed that time is an eternal recurrence of cosmic processes. This notion profoundly influenced Chinese imperial governance and metaphysical thought.

Taoist philosophers like Laozi expanded on this idea of cyclical time, seeing

mortality as a return to primordial unity (Wu 1996, p. 48). Buddhist concepts of

reincarnation further entrenched these cyclical models within East Asian temporal

consciousness. Imperial China's Dynasty calendar blended these cyclical and linear

temporalities, framing dynastic succession as both a rupture and a renewal. Each

emperor's reign marked a new cosmic cycle while maintaining bureaucratic

continuity.

This syncretism of temporal concepts mirrored ancient Greek thought, where

Plato's *Timaeus* defined time about celestial revolutions as 'a moving image of

eternity' (Agamben 1993, p. 92), a view later systematized by Aristotle as

directionless cyclical motion lacking a definite origin or endpoint. Importantly, as

Agamben notes, cyclical time only gains structure through its 'unceasing return back

on itself' (Agamben 1993, p. 92), fundamentally distinct from linear narratives of

progress.

For the Manchus, this cyclical worldview initially aligned with shamanic

practices centred on seasonal rites and ancestor veneration. However, their eventual

rise to power in the Qing dynasty required them to engage with Han temporal

frameworks. This cultural negotiation would later complicate efforts to reconstruct a

distinct Manchu temporal identity after the collapse of dynastic cyclicality following

the 1911 Revolution.

The concept of linear time, characterized by its irreversible progression and intrinsic connection to religious eschatology, is a compelling counterpoint to cyclical temporal models. When examined through the lens of Manchu Futurism's temporal philosophy, it offers unique insights. Although it may seem contradictory to traditional Manchu views on time, the religious aspects of linear time merit careful analysis, particularly in its Judeo-Christian forms and Benjamin's radical reinterpretation of Messianism.

Wu Guanjun's influential essay 'The Only Time We Have: Analysis of Agamben's Messianism' provides essential theoretical support by articulating how the Messiah's arrival embodies a paradoxical simultaneity of redemption and apocalypse (Wu 2016, p. 45). This idea reveals the Messianic moment as both a catastrophic endpoint and a transformative opportunity.

This dual nature of time is particularly evident in Christian theology, where the linear progression toward eschatological fulfilment is a matter of faith. Evangelism views history as an irreversible march toward spiritual perfection. However, Benjamin's secular Messianism challenges this traditional linearity, suggesting redemption can emerge through revolutionary interruptions in inhomogeneous time. This perspective resonates unexpectedly with Manchu shamanic practices, where ancestral wisdom from the past and future divination coexist in immediate ceremonial experiences.

Bringing these viewpoints together implies that the religious dimensions of linear time, when critically reinterpreted, can contribute to a distinctive Manchu temporal consciousness. This consciousness does not reject the progressive impulses of modernity nor succumb to its homogenizing effects. Instead, it transforms these elements through indigenous temporal logic.

The Christian gospel proclaims that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth to redeem humanity through His sacrificial death, offering deliverance from suffering. Saint Aurelius Augustinus recognised the fundamental incompatibility between cyclical time and Christian theology, arguing in *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God) that if time were cyclical, Christ's crucifixion would lose its redemptive significance through endless repetition, thereby undermining the foundation of Christian salvation (Liao 2019, p. 16). Augustine thus established an irreversible linear chronology beginning with divine creation, centred upon Christ's crucifixion as its pivotal moment, and culminating in the Last Judgement. This conception transforms time into a unidirectional arrow pointing inexorably towards the future. As Liao further elaborates, Christian time finds its purpose and orientation in the future, progressing irreversibly from creation to eschatological fulfilment, with Christ's incarnation serving as the central reference point that structures its trajectory from humanity's fall to ultimate redemption (Liao 2019, p. 94). Each event occurs uniquely and irreplaceably within this framework, rendering human history a narrative of salvation. However, while fostering eschatological hope, this linear temporal philosophy

simultaneously engenders neglect and aversion towards the past through its exclusive focus on future redemption.

Capitalist temporality takes key elements from Christian linear time but strips away its theological significance, creating a secular version that supports capitalist ideology by constantly postponing fulfillment to an allegedly better future. As Agamben critically observes, this represents 'the secularization of linear, irreversible Christian time' (1993, p. 97), devoid of its redemptive and apocalyptic aspects. The mechanical regulation of time through clock technology intensifies this awareness of time, making its passage feel both more significant and uniform. The unrelenting forward movement of calendar time creates a compulsive need to meet deadlines and achieve goals on schedule, while capitalist propaganda normalizes the idea that progress equals material accumulation.

This temporal regime produces a paradoxical mindset: a seemingly optimistic belief in future improvement coexists with a systematic disregard for the past and a failure to address historical suffering. As a result, the capitalist temporal order maintains the linear structure of Christian eschatology but replaces the concept of salvation history with an endless postponement of fulfillment through consumption and accumulation. This creates what Benjamin might describe as 'homogeneous, empty time'(Benjamin 2003, p.395), characterized by perpetual striving without any sense of transcendence.

3.1.3: Walter Benjamin's Notion of Messianic Time

Manchu Futurism's temporal framework critically rejects the secularisation of Christian eschatology, instead aiming to recover revolutionary aspects from Manchu's past to facilitate collective redemption. This approach requires synthesising Walter Benjamin's concept of secular Messianism and Marxist teleology. In Marx's vision, communism represents universal redemption and the annihilation of capitalism, mirroring Jewish ideas of historical salvation rather than the Christian focus on individual spiritual transcendence (Wu 2016, p. 46). While Christian redemption privatises transcendence, Jewish and Marxist models emphasise emancipation as a public-historical event: the former looks forward to a messianic collective deliverance. At the same time, the latter envisions revolutionary proletarian universalism. Benjamin and Ernst Bloch reinterpret this dynamic as secular Messianism, viewing Marxist class struggle as a form of immanent eschatology. This framework, however, has been complicated by the failures of 20th-century socialist states to achieve total emancipation, highlighted by the bureaucratic stagnation of the Soviet Union and the neoliberal transitions in Eastern Europe.

Jacques Derrida, in his work *Specters of Marx* (1994), reframes this collapse as a transition of Marxism into a 'hauntological' state—where teleological certainty gives way to spectral potentiality that 'remains to come' (Wu 2016, p. 47). For Manchu Futurism, this deferred sense of time acts as a catalyst. By comparing Manchuria's cultural fragmentation—exemplified by the 1911 Revolution's disintegration of Qing imperial unity and the subsequent Communist suppression of shamanic practices—to

Marxism's unresolved messianic promise, the project develops a minoritarian hauntology. In this context, ancestral rituals are viewed as Benjaminian dialectical images, not nostalgic remnants but significant temporal nodes where Manchu steppe cosmology (including seasonal migrations and animistic causality) intersects with Marxist historical materialism.

My art project employs dialectical images by recreating shamanic ceremonies in the present context. Importantly, this model transcends Han Chinese cyclical traditionalism—which overlooks Manchu's nomadic heritage—and state-mandated atheistic narratives of progress. Instead, it proposes a mnemonic-materialist temporality where collective redemption arises through continually reanimating cultural fragments. This approach draws from Marx's unfulfilled vision of universality and Derrida's spectropoetics.

The Chinese context is a significant case study exploring the absence of redemptive temporal structures. Despite the nation's official communist ideology, its temporal governance is fundamentally influenced by capitalist frameworks. The Five-Year Plan system exemplifies this paradox. At the same time, it appears socialist. Its temporal logic replicates capitalist linearity through a relentless forward momentum of predetermined targets and continuous goal displacement. These plans act as the supreme economic directives, creating a uniform national temporality where past achievements and present conditions are simply transitional phases toward ever-receding future objectives. This plan mirrors capitalism's characteristic deferral of fulfilment.

This analysis demonstrates that both capitalist and contemporary communist temporalities are inadequate realizations of Benjamin's concept of Messianic time. Thus, it calls for the intervention of Manchu Futurism to address their shared deficiencies. My artistic practice synthesizes Benjamin's theological materialism with Chinese communist theory to develop an alternative temporal paradigm. This project recognizes that complete secularization—stripping away religious frameworks to accommodate modern society—fails to capture the transformative potential of Messianic time.

Instead, Manchu Futurism requires a balanced reintegration of the sacred. It should not be seen as a dogmatic revival but rather as a hermeneutic lens that identifies historical now-times where redemption became possible. This approach acknowledges capitalism's pervasive cultural influence while resisting its temporal homogenization. It proposes a shamanic-Messianic hybridity that neither rejects modernity nor succumbs to its alienating temporality.

The challenge is cultivating what could be termed sacred secularity—a temporal consciousness that harnesses the disruptive power of divinity without relying on institutional religion. This secular method enables the Manchu community to reclaim its historical agency while envisioning possible futures beyond both capitalist and orthodox communist temporal regimes.

The commodification of traditional religious festivals under capitalism demonstrates how temporal experiences have been co-opted for economic exploitation. Events like Christmas have been transformed from sacred observances

into commercial spectacles that pacify class consciousness. These meticulously engineered celebrations replace spiritual contemplation with consumerist rituals, creating what Benjamin referred to as a system in which 'indoctrination makes the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice' (1999, p. 185). The apparent concessions to working-class interests through seasonal consumption opportunities mask deeper structural exploitation, as the satisfaction of relative desires through exchange value obscures the erosion of absolute living standards. This process has effectively neutralised the revolutionary potential that Marx identified in the proletariat—the messianic avenger class now finds itself sedated by the false comforts of mass entertainment and programmed consumption.

In this context, my conception of authentic Messianic time must embody three essential qualities: maintain its religious character as a counter to capitalist secularisation, remain autonomous from market logic, and emerge organically from oppressed communities. These criteria make traditional Manchu shamanic temporality a compelling alternative—its ceremonial cycles resist capitalist co-option through their connection to ancestral memory and ecological rhythms. The shamanic ritual complex thus preserves what Benjamin termed the 'weak Messianic power' (2003, p. 390) of the oppressed. It offers a temporal framework that neither rejects modernity outright nor surrenders to its alienating temporality. Instead, it transforms historical trauma into emancipatory potential by synthesising cyclical renewal and prophetic anticipation.

The existing temporal paradigms are fundamentally compromised by external ideological influences that systematically prevent the emergence of authentic Messianic time. This situation calls for Manchu Futurism's project to create an autonomous temporal sphere that achieves what Agamben refers to as the ultimate state of history. This endeavor necessitates explaining how Messianic temporality transcends conventional socio-legal frameworks through its theological dimension—a quality Agamben conceptualizes through the messianic figure's unique ability to occupy a liminal space where 'immanence and transcendence become indistinguishable' (Agamben 2005, p. 25), thereby blurring traditional temporal distinctions.

The messianic process neither abolishes nor submits to secular law; instead, it renders it inoperative through suspension. This principle is exemplified by Saint Paul's paradoxical relationship with Jewish law, which Wu Guanjun characterizes as 'neither destruction nor observance, but deactivation' (Wu 2016, p. 47). This theological concept is philosophically elaborated in Kojève's notion of post-historical inoperativity, where all power structures enter a state of playful suspension similar to 'the harmonious existence between human and nature' (Kojève 1969, p. 158-162).

For Manchu Futurism, these theoretical insights are crucial. The messianic paradigm's religious character provides the necessary theological advantage to construct a temporal sphere that is insulated from hegemonic power structures. Additionally, its universalist claims transcend particularist narratives. The realization

of such autonomous temporality depends on three constitutive elements: divine mediation (enabling transcendence of secular authority), universal address (resisting co-optation by nationalist discourses), and a nonlinear structure (subverting progressive historicism). By synthesizing these elements with indigenous shamanic chronotopes, Manchu Futurism articulates what Benjamin might recognize as a genuinely revolutionary temporal consciousness—one that neither replicates capitalism's empty homogeneity nor communism's deterministic teleology but instead actualizes the messianic promise of redeemed time.

3.1.4 Shamanic Time: The Way to Cure the Manchu Community

Shamanic temporality presents a radical alternative to dominant notions of time by embracing a non-linear structure, a religious essence, and defying both political authority and commercial exploitation. Instead of merely functioning as a cultural artifact, it serves as a therapeutic mechanism for addressing collective trauma. Unlike linear narratives of progress that often overlook historical experiences, shamanic time acknowledges that the suffering of oppressed ancestors carries latent redemptive potential for improving both current conditions and future possibilities.

This temporal model is particularly significant for the Manchu cultural revival, which prompted my archaeological study of indigenous traditions. I discovered that shamanism possesses a unique ability to mediate between different dimensions of time through ritual practices. Shamanic ceremonies act as portals, where practitioners,

guided by animist cosmology, traverse the tripartite cosmic realms using the Suolun Pole while accessing ancestral wisdom and divine will.

In his context, deities and ancestors are perceived as constantly present, their existence sustained through natural phenomena and ritual communion. This allows shamans to function as conduits of time, healing communities by reintegrating fragmented historical consciousness. As Shirokogoroff noted, the Tungusic shaman serves as society's 'safety valve' (Shirokogoroff 1935, p.267) preventing psychosocial disintegration through this synthesis of time.

The shaman's multifaceted role as a physician, priest, and mystic arises from their capacity to synchronize cosmic temporalities—diagnosing current ailments through ancestral revelations while envisioning curative futures. This creates what could be described as a 'temporal equilibrium', essential for communal survival. The complex operations of shamanic time resist reduction to mere linear progression or simple cycles. Instead, they represent a dynamic interplay of remembrance, diagnosis, and prophecy, offering both an indigenous model for temporal autonomy and a therapeutic methodology for confronting historical trauma within the framework of Manchu Futurism.

The shamanic journey through temporal dimensions requires meticulously orchestrated rituals where drumming serves as both vehicle and catalyst, enabling practitioners to traverse mythic, oneiric and liminal states of consciousness. As shamanism scholar Michael Harner's foundational research demonstrates, this constitutes a form of 'time outside time' (Harner 1980, p.38) characterised by

profound temporal compression - where an hour's ritual absence may subjectively encompass months of visionary experience and where ancestral villages centuries past become immediately accessible (Harner 1980, p.45). This temporal elasticity operates through two primary mechanisms: firstly, the shaman's capacity to access and reanimate historical consciousness through what Harner terms 'time in non-ordinary reality' (Harner 1980, p.38), and secondly, the generation of collective oneiric experiences during ceremonies that forge shared temporal perception among participants. Crucially, this temporal model differs fundamentally from both homogeneous clock-time and natural cyclicality by creating what might be termed sacred simultaneity - a multilayered present where past wisdom, current healing and prophetic intuition coexist. Yet shamanic practice traditionally exhibits a prophetic lacuna, prioritising ancestral communion over systematic future projection. Manchu Futurism addresses this gap by transforming compressed temporal experiences into visionary frameworks, using ritual's inherent chrono-plasticity to construct bridges between historical consciousness and speculative futures. Through ceremonial reactivation of ancestral memory combined with futuristic extrapolation, it generates what Harner might recognise as an 'extended present' - a temporal continuum where past traumas are redeemed through future possibilities, thereby enabling the reimagining of communal identity. This synthesis of shamanic temporal techniques with futurist methodologies creates neither nostalgic traditionalism nor rootless speculation, but rather what could be termed temporal acupuncture - precise

interventions in historical consciousness that release blocked futuristic potential while maintaining continuity with indigenous temporal paradigms.

3.2 Shamanic Time and Messianic Time

3.2.1 Criticize Historical Progressivism and Find an Alternative Pathway

By comparing shamanic time and Messianic time models, I argue that both shamanic time and messianic time are thinking patterns that oppose blind optimism in historical progressivism. When reality encounters crises and resistance, it redeems the present through past experiences (breaking the historical list and time travel) and explores revolutionary opportunities, representing a similar attitude towards history and behavioural patterns. Shamanic and Messianic temporalities acknowledge the redemptive potential inherent in historical experience while transcending mere ritual observance to offer substantive critiques of linear chronology. These religiously grounded yet philosophically developed temporal models challenge Enlightenment progress narratives and their capitalist derivatives. Where capitalist temporality - a secularised variant of Christian eschatology - presupposes an inevitable trajectory of improvement culminating in divine or market-led salvation, shamanic and Messianic frameworks propose a discontinuous temporality requiring active intervention instead. This alternative paradigm demands deliberate deceleration rather than reckless acceleration towards predetermined (and frequently catastrophic) historical endpoints. Whether manifested through Christian providence or capitalist expansion, the progress myth operates through what Walter Benjamin might term 'empty

homogeneous time' (Benjamin 2003, p.395) - a predetermined narrative where redemption functions as dramatic dénouement rather than lived possibility. Historical evidence compels us to interrogate this teleological certainty: neither empirical observation nor Manchu historical experience supports the axiom of perpetual advancement. Within Manchu Futurism's schema, the shaman emerges as the crucial historical agent - not as an omnipotent saviour but as a mediator between temporal dimensions, capable of arresting communal disintegration through ritual reactivation of ancestral wisdom. This model constitutes neither blind traditionalism nor utopian speculation but rather what might be termed temporal stewardship - the conscious curation of historical consciousness to forestall civilisational collapse.

The Enlightenment's elevation of human agency as the driving force of historical development demands recognition that collective survival requires active intervention rather than reliance on divine providence alone. Historical catastrophes – particularly the traumatic ruptures of world wars and the dual-edged nature of technological advancement – have fundamentally undermined the Enlightenment's progressive narrative. Such events compel us to reject deterministic historicism, which reflects not historical inevitability but rather a profound poverty of imagination. The Manchu community's cultural erosion exemplifies this crisis, necessitating a methodology of communal redemption through Walter Benjamin's conception of Messianic time – a framework that reactivates connections to cultural memory beyond linear progressivism.

Benjamin's philosophy fundamentally challenges the notion of redemption through historical continuity, arguing instead that progressivist narratives actively obstruct emancipatory potential. His appropriation of the Messianic figure represents not divine intervention but the possibility of historical rupture – moments when past suffering becomes meaningful through present reckoning. This alternative temporality exposes modernity's paradoxical condition: the construction of material security coincides with the destruction of spiritual belonging. The Manchu experience epitomises this dialectic, where modernisation's concrete achievements came at the cost of cultural rootedness. As civilisational processes eroded organic communal bonds, they transformed living traditions into hardened artefacts of historical progress, producing what Benjamin recognised as modernity's characteristic alienation. In this state, human warmth calcifies into indifferent coexistence. Within this context, Benjamin locates redemption not in grand narratives but in the particularity of lived experience, where individual memory preserves the sparks of cultural continuity that might reignite collective belonging.

Benjamin's critique rejects historical progressivism and its linear temporality for obscuring society's perpetual emergency. This progressivist worldview systematically distorts historical reality by erasing past suffering while ignoring potential future catastrophes. As French scholar Guy Petitdemange observes, Benjamin exposes progressivism as 'confined to a very empty and absurd conception of existence, turning a blind eye to the violence it causes' (Petitdemange 2007, p. 50). For marginalised communities like the Manchu, this ideology functions as an

authoritarian deception, reducing living subjects to passive spectators awaiting history's predetermined trajectory - akin to passengers stranded on a platform, expecting the progressivist train to deliver them to an illusory future.

Progressivism's adherents construct history as a sequence of objective, isolated events arranged chronologically, producing what Benjamin condemns as homogeneous, empty time. He likens conventional historians to masters of ceremony who 'invite the deceased to sit at the table' (Benjamin 1999, p. 481), prioritising dead facts over living experience. Their obsession with establishing causal laws within linear chronology ignores Marx's crucial insight that such historicism merely accumulates dead facts while failing to engage with the actual conditions of human existence. The resulting historical narrative presents an illusion of prosperity and progress, masking what Benjamin recognises as civilisation's fundamental emptiness - a void created by privileging abstract events over the perceptual reality of lived historical experience.

The most compelling aspect of Benjamin's theory lies in its assertion that redemption may manifest at any moment, demanding constant preparedness. The Messiah's arrival in Jewish eschatology remains imminent, promising restoration to Edenic wholeness for those who have preserved authentic experience. Yet modern civilisation's devastation through warfare and spiritual desolation has precipitated a catastrophic devaluation of collective wisdom, leaving individuals atomised and compelled to reconstruct personal frameworks of meaning amidst rapid societal transformation. This existential predicament produces what Benjamin identifies as a

paradoxical condition of modernity - the Last Judgment becomes not divine reckoning but rather an isolating imperative for each person to reconstitute their experiential world, representing both an unprecedented state of helplessness and an unclaimed form of freedom.

Tragically, denizens of this modern wasteland, unaware of their surrendered autonomy, nostalgically pursue the very traditional collective experience they have lost, only to embrace fascism's counterfeit experiential constructs. As scholar Liao Xuhui elucidates, Benjamin traces fascism's pseudo-experiential framework to the gradual crystallisation of progressivist historiography, which he identifies as the foundation of modernity's inauthentic experience (Benjamin 2019, p. 27). These fabricated experiential paradigms, Benjamin warns, prove utterly inadequate when the Messianic moment arrives - only those who have resisted progressivism's false consciousness through the preservation of genuine historical memory will recognise and participate in redemption's sudden emergence. The authentic monadic experience, instead of fascism's collectivised pseudo-experience, thus becomes the crucial marker distinguishing those prepared for Messianic time from those trapped in homogeneous empty time.

Benjamin's historiography fundamentally deconstructs the bourgeois narrative of history as an unbroken chain of civilisational triumphs, exposing how such accounts systematically erase the vanquished while erecting monuments to their dominance. His dialectical approach reveals history's dual nature: beneath every edifice of proclaimed progress lies what he terms in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical*

Reproduction as 'a record of barbaric violence' (Benjamin 2008, p. 269). This insight

dismantles progressivist mythology by demonstrating how each alleged advancement

necessarily entails brutality - whether through individual suffering or the subjugation

of entire peoples. Authentic historical understanding, Benjamin argues, requires

grasping both these dimensions simultaneously; only through such totalising

apprehension can humanity properly assess whether it moves toward genuine

betterment or merely perpetuates cycles of domination.

What emerges from this analysis is Benjamin's radical 'decay theory of history' -

a conception that recognises historical movement as equally capable of regression as

progression. The perpetual recurrence of warfare and other inhuman atrocities stands

as irrefutable evidence of this degenerative potential. Benjamin's historical

materialism thus emphasises suffering as philosophy's proper focus, countering

progressivism's cosmetic narratives that systematically obscure catastrophe. As

Theodor Adorno affirms in *Walter Benjamin: Modernity, the Seeds of Allegory and*

Language, conventional historiography constructs 'a closed continuum of events

developed under the victor's gaze' that deliberately omits suppressed historical

failures (Adorno 2011, p. 24). Against this ideological distortion, Benjamin insists

salvation depends upon recovering what Michael Löwy terms 'the complete memory

of the past' (Benjamin 1993, p. 34). This uncompromising memorial practice refuses

to exclude even the most marginalised experiences. This imperative demands nothing

less than a revolutionary reconceptualisation of historical time itself, one capable of

preserving humanity's dialogic relationship with the divine in anticipation of the Last Judgment.

3.2.2 Thinking and Extension: Making Manchu Futurism Art with the Combination of Messianic and Shamanic Time

Manchu Futurism's temporal framework builds upon Benjamin's critique of historical progressivism, seeking to preserve an authentic understanding of historical oppression and the capacity for redemptive response. Benjamin's concept of Messianic time, drawing theological inspiration from Christ's resurrection narrative, fundamentally distinguishes between two temporal orders: physical time - the homogeneous, mechanical chronology marked by clocks and calendars, which Zhu Xuezhi identifies as Benjamin's 'chronology of periods' (Zhu 2009, p.15) - and redemptive time, the revolutionary spiritual temporality that manifests within physical time as Jetztzeit (now-time).

This Messianic temporality operates through a dialectical engagement with history, where seeds of redemption retrieve latent transformative potential from past suffering. These crystallised moments, what Benjamin terms monads, emerge when historical fragments of thought encounter present conditions capable of reactivating their meaning. Hannah Arendt's metaphor of Benjamin as a 'deep-water pearl diver' (Arendt 1999, p.23) captures this process - the recovery of historical fragments weathered by time's passage, which, when brought into contemporary consciousness create what Benjamin describes in *On the Concept of History* as the sudden

appearance of past images at critical moments (Benjamin 1999, p.405). This temporal model transforms the present from a mere transitional phase into a charged constellation where the past and future mutually illuminate, creating the stillness of redemptive potential within historical flux.

Upon examining shamanic ceremonial strategies, striking parallels with Benjamin's Messianic temporality emerge. The therapeutic process in shamanism functionally equates to Messianic redemption, with shamans serving as psychological anchors during societal crises. Their temporal navigation mirrors Benjamin's deep-water pearl diver metaphor, retrieving crystallised fragments of ancestral wisdom to replant within the community's consciousness. This practice significantly prioritises experiential engagement with the past rather than futuristic projection - a methodology resonating profoundly with Jewish tradition's prohibition against future speculation and its emphasis on past-oriented redemption (Benjamin 1999, p.415).

The shamanic operation transforms present existence by embedding historical fragments within contemporary consciousness, thereby imbuing both temporal moment and participating community with profound significance. My artistic practice seeks to reconstruct these shamanic 'thought fragments', demonstrating their conceptual alignment with Benjamin's notion of historical standstill - moments where past and present dialectically illuminate to generate redemptive potential. Benjamin's eschatological framework positions art as the vehicle for salvation, establishing an aesthetic-redemptive value system that challenges modernity's temporal order. His angel of history, propelled backwards by progress's stormwind,

embodies the necessity of rupturing historical continuity. This concept fundamentally informs Manchu Futurism's project of reassembling racial identity through historical fragments. When completed through artistic intervention, this reconstructive process achieves what Agamben terms the 'inner state of perfection' (Benjamin 1993, p.102), a revolutionary condition capable of exploding history's false continuum.

Crucially, Manchu Futurism extends beyond artistic circles, engaging the community in what Benjamin recognises as the exercise of weak messianic power - the collective capacity to redeem past hopes through imaginative reconfiguration. These salvific images emerge not through linear progression but through the dialectical reworking of historical memory, where fractured traces of happiness are liberated from their original contexts and reanimated in the present：

> The past came with a temporal indicator by which it was called salvation. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present generation. Our arrival is expected on Earth. Like every generation before us, we are endowed with a soft messianic power that we had in the past (Benjamin 2008, p. 266).

Benjamin posited that each generation inherits latent revolutionary potential from the past, with present struggles constituting reactivations of historical emancipatory impulses. This clandestine historical covenant, though invisible, manifests provisionally through aesthetic forms. His methodology demands that historians maintain vigilance against three ideological distortions: moralistic historicism, ruling-class apologetics, and the suppression of humanity's redemptive consciousness. For

art historians, this necessitates grounding analysis in material reality while dialectically exposing artworks' critical essence during moments of historical crisis.

As Frederic J. Schwartz demonstrates, Benjamin's art historiography synthesises political engagement with messianic temporality - what he terms 'politicised messianism' (Schwartz 2006, p.119). Artistic creations function as privileged Benjaminian monads, their formal concentration of historical forces enabling the sudden eruption of redemptive energy across temporal distances. These aesthetic monads, through their purely artistic means, crystallise revolutionary potential that may lay dormant for centuries before finding contemporary actualisation.

From the point of view of dialectical historical materialism, a particular work of art is like a monad with great energy. Once caught, they can use their immense destructive power to expose empty and false consciousness and unleash revolutionary potential. The moment of creative art is not in its seamless connection time but in the moment when it explodes and disturbs the continuity of history. Thus, instead of falling into an ideological or historical deterministic narrative of the linear evolution of art history, Benjamin prefers to dig into the profound, concrete, dialectical historical connotation of individual works of art. The aftermath of past events can be delayed, and sometimes, the consequences will manifest in the future. If we eliminate the past prematurely, much effort will be in vain. Benjamin asks us to uncover missed opportunities in the past and reveal the richness of cultural levels. History is not only written by the upper classes but also by those who have no name. Some of the repressed cultures have died, while the remaining ethnicities have a chance to be

saved. For artists of those ethnic groups, the oppression suffered by their ancestors should be remembered and passed on. Therefore, the contemporary aims to connect past moments containing oppression and resistance experiences.

Manchu Futurism does not merely dwell nostalgically upon the past but actively engages contemporary technological and aesthetic forms to reactivate redemptive potential. If artistic practice remained bound by traditional modes of expression, it would fail to transmit historical revolutionary impulses to the present moment. As Mark Fisher's concept of hauntology demonstrates, while preserving past experiences is crucial, uncritical adherence to historical forms can paradoxically obstruct futurity - what Fisher identifies in musical culture as the endless recycling of past genres that stifles genuine future shock.

The dialectical challenge lies in balancing memorialisation with innovation. Those monadic moments retaining messianic significance must be rigorously examined and imaginatively reconfigured through contemporary artistic languages. In my final chapter, I shall demonstrate how Manchu Futurism synthesises ancestral memory with modern and postmodern artistic strategies, creating conditions for present redemption through this temporal and aesthetic synthesis.

4 The Origin and Progress of Artistic Futurism

Introduction:

This chapter explores various Futurist movements and their perspectives on temporality, particularly in how they treat the concepts of past and future. The term Futurism is most often associated with Italian Futurism, a movement that must be understood within its troubling connections to fascist ideology. The manifesto of Italian Futurism explicitly advocated for the destruction of museums, libraries, and historical institutions. This position aligned dangerously with fascism's authoritarian modernism and its violent rejection of historical continuity. The movement's radical division between past and future, along with its glorification of speed, technology, and mechanized violence, became cultural cornerstones of Mussolini's regime.

While Italian Futurism's multimedia approach—spanning literature, painting, sculpture, and music—offers certain formal inspirations, its ideological foundations are fundamentally incompatible with the ethical framework of Manchu Futurism. Similarly problematic are its intellectual descendants, such as Russian Futurism's revolutionary iconoclasm and the contemporary accelerationist theories of Nick Land, which replicate aspects of this dangerous temporal absolutism. Even in Chinese science fiction's visions of technological megacities, echoes of this troubling futurist legacy can sometimes be observed.

In stark contrast, Manchu Futurism adopts a decolonial model similar to Afrofuturism, which rejects Western techno-utopianism while maintaining deep

connections to cultural heritage. Where Italian Futurism aimed to obliterate the past, Afrofuturism—evident in the works of Octavia Butler, Sun Ra, and Ellen Gallagher—illustrates how technological imagination can emerge from, rather than oppose, historical consciousness. This chapter will demonstrate that Afrofuturism's synthesis of ancestral memory with speculative aesthetics provides the most suitable model for developing Manchu Futurism. This approach categorically rejects fascist tendencies by affirming cultural continuity and promoting anti-colonial praxis.

4.1 Italian Futurism: Showing the Future to the World

4.1.1 The Historical Background of Italian Futurism

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed an unprecedented acceleration in urbanisation and industrialisation. Revolutionary inventions - railways, telephones, electric lighting - radically expanded humanity's imaginative horizons, while automobiles and aeroplanes introduced extreme velocities that transformed sensory perception. This technological revolution rendered the world dynamic rather than static, shifting perspectives beyond three-dimensional space to incorporate a fourth dimension of temporal variability and uncertainty.

During this transformative period, Henri Bergson developed his seminal theories on time as duration (la durée), conceptualising temporal experience as a continuous flow rather than discrete instants. Concurrently, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity revolutionised the understanding of spacetime, superseding Newtonian physics through its radical reconceptualisation of gravity, motion and cosmic structure. These

parallel intellectual breakthroughs mirrored the profound societal transformations wrought by industrial technology, marking the 20th century as fundamentally distinct from previous eras in humanity's temporal consciousness.

Faced with this perpetual acceleration of lived experience, writers and artists employed diverse creative practices to interpret their new reality. Responses ranged from anxious critique to celebratory embrace, with the Italian Futurists most vehemently endorsing - indeed actively promoting - the accelerated rhythms of modernity through their artistic manifestos and experimental works.

On 20 February 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's publication of *The Founding Manifesto of Futurism* in *Le Figaro* formally inaugurated the movement, declaring its essence as 'the hatred of the past' (Marinetti 1994). Between 1909 and 1916, Italian Futurists produced over fifty manifestos addressing literature, cinema, architecture and other disciplines, employing innovative dissemination strategies to propagate their revolutionary ideology across artistic and political spheres. Rather than critiquing industrialization's dehumanising effects, they celebrated mechanization's transformative power, translating industrial characteristics into artistic language. This radical stance stemmed from Italy's perceived decline relative to Britain, France and Spain. Futurists sought to awaken their nation from Renaissance nostalgia through aggressive declarations like: 'Destroy all libraries and academies' (Zhang 1994, p. 3-9). Advocating complete rupture with tradition, they demanded art embrace modernity's dynamism while rejecting historical conventions, believing conventional culture had stagnated amidst rapid technological change. Their vision required art to

engage exclusively with futurity, incorporating unconscious elements and documenting modern life's transformations - principles aligning Futurism with Modernism's broader framework. However, their ideological extremism would later manifest troubling political associations. The movement's radical propositions shocked contemporary Europe while establishing avant-garde paradigms through their uncompromising rejection of artistic heritage and celebration of industrial modernity.

4.1.2 The Expression of Italian Futurism in Literature and Art

Futurist literature embraced the idea of free words, moving away from traditional linguistic structures by eliminating conventional syntax and rhyme. This allowed for creating innovative visual poetry through unique combinations of words. Works by Marinetti, such as *The Battle of Weight and Smell* (1912) and *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914), exemplify this approach.

The visual artists of the movement—Boccioni, Carrà, Balla, Severini, and Russolo—focused on modern subjects such as light, speed, and automobiles. They believed art must evolve alongside industrial progress to capture beauty through movement and power. Their 1916 manifesto, *New Religion and New Morality: Speed*, declared velocity as Futurism's supreme value, stating: 'We declare that the light of the world enriches its speed through a new beauty' (Hess 1985, p. 530).

Central to their theory was dynamism, which reflects the artistic representation of movement, force, and perpetual change. They developed techniques like 'lines of force' to visually convey power. As Chipp notes, they insisted that these lines of force

must be drawn to present 'the sense of power' (Chipp 2000 p. 149, 144). Russell

observes that they aimed to capture 'the eternal movement itself' on canvas (Russell

1993, p. 157), making kinetic energy both the subject and the method in their quest to

create truly futuristic art.

Figure 32: Giacomo Baila's painting *Speeding Car, Abstract Speed,* 1913, image

available at:

https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1822053314208925435&wfr=spider&for=pc

Figure 33:Umberto Boccini, *The City Rises*, 1910, image available at: http://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_3873500120151813475

Giacomo Balla's *High-Speed Car, Abstract Speed* masterfully encapsulates movement and velocity through the driver's perspective, conveying the sensory immersion of speed where 'the car rushed through, penetrating everything, shattering atoms of light' (Lambert 2008, p.26). Similarly, Boccioni's *The Rise of the City* epitomises Futurist ideals through its dynamic fusion of light, colour and motion, described by Ramon Konya as 'the great synthesis of labour, light and movement' (Konya 1991, p.30). The painting's symbolic red horse embodies industrial civilisation's relentless advance, while fragmented brushstrokes capture both equine motion and human labour's driving force. These works exemplify the Futurist conviction that speed constitutes aesthetic value. Balla focuses on mechanical velocity's sensory experience, and Boccioni celebrates industrial energy's transformative power through his vibrant, kinetic compositions that radiate light and colour from the canvas.

Futurist artists revolutionised artistic techniques, materials and expression through innovative approaches that transformed traditional painting and sculpture. Their works employed 'lines of force' - dynamic integrations of light, shadow and motion that created new harmonies while capturing the universe's essential dynamism (Chipp 2000, p.144). This technique synthesised content, form, and colour to produce immersive experiences that allowed viewers to perceive events holistically through psychological empathy. The Futurists' concept of speed stemmed from 'dynamics' as an 'inner force' shaping artistic effect (Chipp 2000, p.148), with Boccioni describing force expression as physical transcendence. Their Painting Technique Manifesto proposed that lines of force could manifest objects' latent energy - wild, joyful or disintegrating - through subjective emotional responses rather than fixed laws. As Chipp notes, these compositions aimed not merely to depict force but to compel viewers into active engagement with the depicted conflicts (Chipp 2000, p.140), fundamentally redefining art's interactive potential through dynamic formal innovations.

Futurist artists rejected Impressionist light reflection in favour of dynamic interactions between objects through conflicting lines, angles and forms - what they termed the struggle that energised their compositions (Hess 1985, p.531-532). These 'lines of force' actively enveloped viewers, compelling engagement through what appeared as illogical arrangements of visual elements that nevertheless revealed the movement's painterly secrets. The artists instinctively bridged external scenes and internal emotions, creating works where geometric tensions directly provoked

emotional responses, establishing a new visual vocabulary for representing

modernity's kinetic energy, which is a technique that I used in my art work *Montage*

Series.
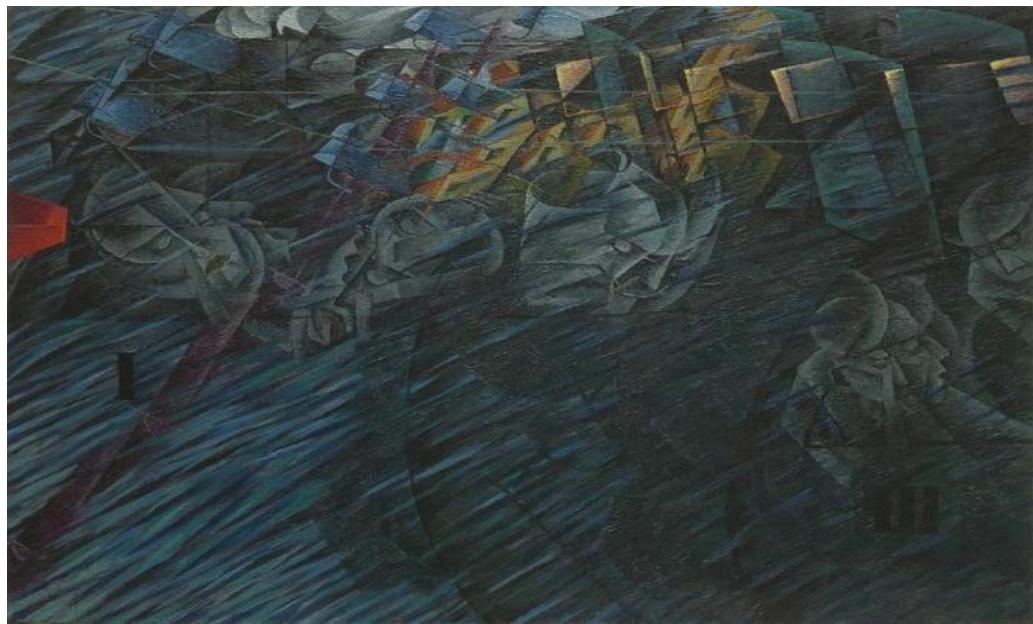
Figure 34: Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind II: Those Who Go,*1911, image available
at: https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/610676056

Futurists considered the simultaneity of mental states as their artistic pinnacle,

with Walter Hess noting that paintings must 'integrate what one remembers and sees'

to immerse viewers (Hess 1985, p.534). This approach celebrated subjective

experience, allowing artists to intuitively combine external and internal realities

through distorted perspectives, overlapping colours and dynamic lines that conveyed

the movement's essence. Their paintings employed forceful right-to-left vectors,

creating psychological momentum, what Robert Hughes described as 'a hurried

language of lines, surfaces and light extracted from the environment' (Hughes 1989,

p.38). Though visually chaotic, this method authentically captured modernity's

velocity through a revolutionary visual vocabulary. Form and colour transcended mere representation to dominate the sensory perception of speed, light and sound.

Futurism's most crucial artistic innovation was the principle of 'simultaneity', synthesising co-occurring phenomena like sound, light and movement with subjective experience into unified visual compositions (Lambert 2008, p.24). This concept reflected industrial civilisation's core values of speed, power and temporal convergence as traditional rhythms gave way to modernity's accelerated perceptions. The movement drew theoretical support from Bergson's philosophy, particularly his concepts of 'life impulse', 'universal change', and intuitive 'dynamism', which provided Futurism's intellectual framework (Tisdal 1985, p.21). By translating these philosophical principles into radical visual language, Futurist artists captured the essence of mechanical modernity through artworks that dissolved static perception in favour of dynamic simultaneity.

4.1.3 The End of Italian Futurism

Italian Futurism's global expansion through frenetic international exhibitions (1910–1915) revitalised Italy's avant-garde prominence, positioning it as an experimental art pioneer after centuries of cultural stagnation. The movement's first phase, halted by the First World War, gave way to a second phase marked by Balla's *1915 Futurism to Rebuild the Universe Declaration*, which shifted focus from cosmic glorification to 'cosmic transformation'. However, this later period saw aesthetic stagnation, with only aerial painting emerging as a notable sub-movement. Marinetti's death in 1944 formally concluded the Italian Futurist Art Movement, though its

cultural legacy persists in ongoing explorations of humanity's evolving relationship with technology. While the movement's radical rejection of history catalysed groundbreaking innovation across literature, painting, sculpture, and music—establishing it as a modernist vanguard—its ideological trajectory remains inseparable from its troubling alignment with fascism.

Walter Benjamin's *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* explicitly critiques Futurism's complicity in fascism's 'aestheticisation of politics', arguing that its glorification of mechanised violence and destruction served authoritarian agendas by transforming war into an artistic spectacle (Benjamin 1968, p. 241). Marinetti's early manifestos, which extolled war as 'the world's only hygiene', laid the groundwork for this alignment, later formalised through his support for Mussolini's regime. Manchu Futurism consciously rejects this toxic legacy, instead reclaiming Futurism's formal innovations—such as dynamism and simultaneity—while subverting its fascist tendencies through Benjamin's countervailing vision of art as a tool for democratic awakening rather than authoritarian spectacle.

The movement's significance endures not in its failed political project but in its demonstration of avant-garde art's capacity to interrogate modernity's contradictions. Futurism's emphasis on individual agency to 'change the course of history' remains vital, provided it is disentangled from its reactionary politics and reoriented toward emancipatory futures.

4.2 Review the History and Reimagine the Future: Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism serves as a crucial foundation for Manchu Futurism through its radical reclamation of marginalized identities and its challenge to Western notions of time. This approach fundamentally contrasts with Italian Futurism's destructive ethos. While Italian Futurism is associated with fascism and an obsession with speed and mechanization, Afrofuturism emphasizes temporal sovereignty as a decolonial practice. It intertwines suppressed histories with speculative futures to confront the erasures of colonial modernity. This framework directly informs Manchu Futurism's goal to revive nearly extinct cultural memories, opposing Han-centric nationalism's tendency to homogenize ethnic identities.

Afrofuturism's strategies of counter-memory, exemplified by Wangechi Mutu's cyborgian goddesses, resonate with Manchu Futurism's efforts to excavate Qing-era shamanic practices and revitalize the Manchu language, presenting them as living technologies rather than mere museum artefacts.

The 2018 film *Black Panther* exemplifies this methodology: Wakanda's blend of advanced technology with enduring African traditions illustrates how Manchu Futurism might envision a cosmopolis free from forced assimilation. Importantly, Afrofuturism challenges Western narratives of progress that depict marginalized groups as historical remnants; instead, it posits identity as a driving force for the future. For Manchu communities, this manifests in contemporary artworks that integrate ancestral memory, resisting both Han cultural dominance and the exoticizing gaze of Western anthropology. While Italian Futurism aimed to obliterate the past in pursuit of authoritarian modernization, Afrofuturism—and, by extension, Manchu

Futurism—sees ancestral knowledge as essential for innovation, turning historical fragmentation into speculative wholeness.

This alignment emerges from shared experiences of cultural disruption: just as Afrofuturism addresses epistemic violence, Manchu Futurism confronts the collapse of the Qing Empire and its resulting threats to ethnolinguistic identity. Both movements creatively fill archival silences, forging emancipatory futures that resist Sinocentric assimilation. The result is a shared aesthetic of temporal collage, wherein ancestral fragments and futuristic visions coexist dialectically, rejecting the binary of tradition versus modernity imposed by dominant power structures.

The distinction of Italian Futurism from Afrofuturism and Manchu Futurism is clear: Marinetti's movement aimed to replace identity with mechanized spectacle, while Afrofuturism and Manchu Futurism regard identity as the essential core of technological imagination. The former's alignment with fascism underscores the dangers of separating innovation from ethical memory. In contrast, the latter's emphasis on cultural specificity provides a model for resisting both neoliberal multiculturalism and authoritarian monoculture. Influenced by Afrofuturism, Manchu Futurism transforms survival into a speculative act, ensuring that the Manchu language, rituals, and cosmologies not only endure but actively shape the technological and ecological futures of the region.

4.2.1 Early Activities of Afrofuturism

Afrofuturist literary and artistic practices trace their origins to early 20th-century pioneers, including African-American jazz musician Sun Ra. His performances in electric spacesuits during the 1950s and his visionary 1974 film *Space is the Place*, which envisions an all-Black planetary society, radically reconceptualized the idea of time by declaring it 'officially ended' (Sun Ra and His Intergalactic Solar Arkestra, 1974). As Amanda Renee Rico observes, Ra's work critiques the challenges of constructing history and understanding time in the aftermath of slavery and the ongoing systematic disenfranchisement of Black people worldwide, offering creative sociocultural commentary (Rico 2019, p. 17).

This tradition extends through Octavia Butler's speculative fiction, which interrogates Black experiences in America, and even further back to W.E.B. Du Bois's earlier proto-Afrofuturist works. For instance, his 1908 story *The Princess Steel* features a Black sociologist who accesses spacetime through a 'giant telescope', and his 1920 work *The Comet* employs post-apocalyptic scenarios to deconstruct American racial hierarchies. Together, these works collectively establish Afrofuturism's foundational engagement with temporality as an artistic medium and a form of political critique.

4.2.2 The Cause of Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism's conceptual foundations were formally articulated in 1993 when cultural critic Mark Dery coined the term. He posed a central question: 'Can a community whose past has been deliberately erased, and whose energies have since been consumed by the search for recognizable traces of its history, imagine possible futures?' (Dery 1994 p. 180). Dery defined the movement as 'speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th-century technoculture' while critiquing the 'false promises of techno-utopianism' (Dery 1994, p. 180).

Sociologist Alondra Nelson expanded on this framework, arguing that Afrofuturism is not merely a niche artistic trend but a centuries-spanning social movement rooted in Black aesthetic practices that subvert systemic inequality and envision emancipatory futures (Nelson 2002, p. 1). Broadly defined as an aesthetic and intellectual project, Afrofuturism interrogates power imbalances through speculative engagements with technology, culture, and temporality. It reappropriates history while offering counter-narratives to mainstream futurisms (Lin 2018, p. 102).

Although it emerged from 20th-century African-American science fiction, the term now encompasses global diasporic artistic practices that reconcile ancestral mythologies with futuristic visions. It transcends linear temporality to forge ethical connections among communities historically subjected to what Lin describes as 'alienated existence' (Lin 2018, p. 102). By the early 21st century, Afrofuturism had entered popular discourse as a critical framework for exploring the enduring legacies

of black history while mobilizing speculative art as a tool for collective futurity-building. On one hand, futurists try to accurately predict the future by studying history and the present. They ignore the present and future of the African diaspora around them. The value of Afro-descendant communities has been neglected or erased for a long time. From Samuel R. Delany's perspective, blacks as a race 'are systematically forbidden from appearing in images of our past', and 'no immigrant group—Irish, Italian, German, Jewish, Scandinavian—has experienced cultural destruction on this scale' (Dery 1994, p. 191). In addition, Africa is considered incompatible with the future. Du Bois predicted that the main problem of the twentieth century was the 'skin colour line' (Bois 2007, p. 15). However, mainstream Western Futurism believes that the 'digital divide' and its technological advances can eliminate racial disparities and mask social, economic, and political inequalities. In Western Futurism, race was seen as a burden. In this case, race is excluded from the future (Nelson 2002, p.1).

In 1993, British scholar Paul Gilroy published *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, where he describes the 'Black Atlantic' as the cultural landscape of Afro-descendant groups, characterized by 'mutation, hybridization', and 'cross-cultural and transnational' interactions within the Atlantic region (Gilroy 1993, p. 223). This cultural theme starkly contrasts the Western Enlightenment, which excluded Black people's presence and contributions from modernity and its rational discourse (Barson 2010, p. 9). However, the goal of this confrontation is not to seek complete subversion, ultra-nationalism, or separatism but rather to foster repair, integration, and progress (Lin 2018, p. 105). This perspective allows the African

community to engage with their past, establish their current position, and envision their future.

For the Manchus, the creation of Manchu Futurism aims not to overthrow existing structures but to repair and integrate their fragmented and lost cultural identities. Building on the work of his predecessors, Kodwo Eshun articulates the need to establish Afrofuturism. While Gilroy's Black Atlantic can be seen as a spatial concept, Afrofuturism introduces a temporal dimension—namely, the future. Eshun emphasises the importance of reinterpreting history and argues that merging the memories of confrontation with colonial archives is essential to recognising the collective trauma of slavery as a foundational moment of modernity.

At the same time, Eshun highlights the urgency of cultivating an antagonistic vision of the future: vigilance against imperialist modernity must extend into future considerations. Afrofuturism does not reject the tradition of critical historical analysis; instead, it positions the Black Atlantic as both retrospective and forward-looking (Eshun 2003, p. 288-89).

Eshun clearly defines the primary objectives of Afrofuturism and outlines its epistemological characteristics. First, the primary mission of Afrofuturism is to acknowledge that Africa increasingly exists as a focal point for futurist projections (Eshun 2003, p. 291). Africa symbolizes an antagonistic culture and emphasizes its epistemological roots and future potential: 'Africa has always been an absolute dystopian zone in an economy based on sci-fi capital and market futurism' (Eshun

2003, p. 292). Second, the production and distribution of Afrofuturist art are fundamentally political acts in time (Eshun 2003, p. 292).

4.2.3 The Claim of Afrofuturism

Other writings by contemporary scholars support Eshun's assertion. Ulfried Reichardt's essay, 'Time and the African American Experience: The Problem of Egocentrism of the Times', argues for the existence of a 'politics of the times'. He critiques Western rhetoric about time, highlighting how it has historically created racial differences by depicting the other as primitive and barbaric. Early Western scholars believed Africans had no understanding of time or the future. Colonial culture and capitalism supplanted Africa's intuitive, flexible view of time. In this context, people of African descent must assert control over their perception of time to embrace the future as part of their civil rights (Reichardt 2000, p. 465-76).

Based on Reichardt's arguments, Eshun emphasizes the idea of forward-looking intervention: 'Afrofuturism is therefore concerned with the possibility of intervention within the dimensions of predicted, imagined, virtual, anticipatory, and future conditional' (Eshun 2003, p. 293).

In conclusion, Eshun defines Afrofuturism as a conscious effort to revive the anti-futuristic narratives created in a century hostile to the African diaspora. Afrofuturism can create a broad and diverse platform that encompasses various 'concepts and approaches' across different fields, such as 'theory and fiction, numbers and sound, vision and architecture', all of which can be made, migrated, and mutated (Eshun

2003, p. 301). In 'Further Considerations for Afrofuturism', Eshun argues that

opposition to Afrofuturism comes from those who grew up in a 20th-century

paradigm where Black individuals felt compelled to prove their deep-rooted past to

both themselves and whites (Eshun 2003, p. 288). He believes that uncovering hidden

Black history is essential. At the turn of the 21st century, power rested with those who

could envision the future, a dominance held mainly by whites (Eshun 2003, p. 289).

Eshun posits that Afrofuturism may serve as a potential solution to this issue.

Unlike Italian and Chinese Futurism, Afrofuturism reacts to tradition and custom.

However, much of the academic work on Afrofuturism has focused primarily on

music and literature. There is a need for more scholarly exploration of the visual

culture of Afrofuturism beyond the realm of fine arts. Even in fine art, works are

mainly collected as catalogues for exhibitions of Afrofuturism.
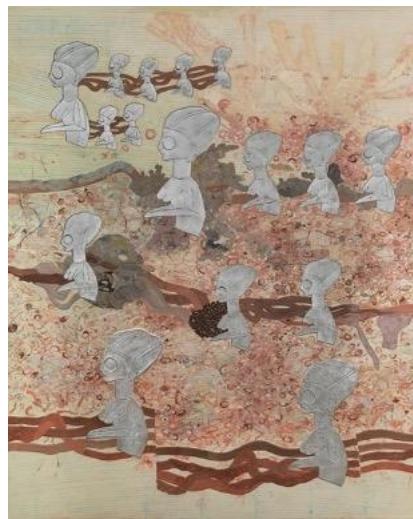
Figure 35: Ellen Gallagher, *Ecstatic Draught of Fishes*, 2020, Oil, palladium leaf and
paper on canvas, 248x202cm, image available at:
http://www.360doc.com/content/23/0430/19/37024376_1078754404.shtml

4.2.4 Expression and Presentation of Afro-futurism

Afrofuturism, though first articulated through science fiction, has evolved into a multidisciplinary aesthetic encompassing literature, music, cinema, fashion and visual art. Its philosophical underpinnings emerge in the works of figures like Octavia Butler, whose Xenogenesis trilogy reimagines post-human evolution through African diasporic consciousness, and avant-garde musician Sun Ra, who mythologised his cosmic origins by claiming to be 'returned from Saturn with a mission to heal through sound' (ATX Fine Arts, p. 1). Within visual culture, comic books and street art have proven particularly generative: Angela Waltham observes how graphic novels' 'supernatural protagonists overcoming adversity embody Afrofuturism's spirit of radical hope' (Waltham 2022, para. 4), while Rammellzee's graffiti persona Gash-o-Lear synthesised sci-fi, anime and hip-hop aesthetics into what curator Zoé Whitley terms 'a visual lexicon for addressing racial displacement through reconfigured futurist symbols' (Whitley 2017, p. 12).

This interdisciplinary approach extends to temporal politics, with Afrofuturist artworks employing painting, AI-generated imagery and interactive installations to re-examine historical trauma and project speculative futures simultaneously. The 2018 film *Black Panther* exemplifies this dual temporality, constructing Wakanda as an 'alternative present' where uncolonised Africa masters vibranium technology – a narrative strategy critiqued by Senegalese scholar Felwine Sarr for perpetuating 'techno-romanticism divorced from continental realities' (Sarr 2018, p. 34). While the film's Afrodiasporic vision sparked global enthusiasm, Cameroonian theorist Achille

Mbembe cautions against pan-African homogenisation, noting how the continent's '4,000 ethnic groups and 54 nations defy unitary futurist projections' (Mbembe 2021, p. 11). These tensions surface in debates around cultural appropriation: the film's use of Mursi lip plates – a practice paralleling Chinese foot-binding's gendered violence – drew criticism for aestheticising bodily modification traditions without engaging their sociohistorical contexts (Tesfagiorgis 2018, p. 56).

Such controversies highlight the complexities of decolonial futurisms. While Afrofuturism originated as a Black Atlantic response to slavery's temporal ruptures, its global circulation risks replicating the very Eurocentric universalism it opposes. Mbembe's concept of 'planetary futures' attempts to resolve this by advocating 'polyphonic temporalities' that respect local histories while forging transnational solidarities (Mbembe 2021, p. 19). This framework informs my development of Manchu Futurism, which adapts Afrofuturism's methodology to address Manchu's specific colonial erasure. Where Afrofuturism confronts the Middle Passage's legacy, Manchu Futurism engages the Qing dynasty's collapse and subsequent Sinicisation policies – employing digital archives to reconstruct fragmented shamanic cosmologies (Lin 2023, p. 72).

Over three decades of scholarly engagement have expanded Afrofuturism beyond Mark Dery's initial 1993 formulation as 'African-American speculative fiction addressing technocultural concerns' (Dery 1994, p. 180) into what Alondra Nelson now terms 'a chronopolitical toolkit for marginalised temporality reclamation' (Nelson 2022, p. 15). This evolution mirrors broader shifts in futurist studies,

challenging Western models like Pignoio's 'now-future-now' cycle (Shen 1989, p.

33-34) that exclude non-European temporalities. Yet, as Ghanaian critic Kodwo

Eshun stresses, true decolonial futurism requires centring indigenous epistemologies:

'The right to imagine tomorrow cannot be leased from yesterday's colonial creditors'

(Eshun 2003, p. 301). Both Afrofuturism and its Manchu counterpart thus operate as

insurgent historiographies – not mere artistic categories, but methodologies for

repossessing the future from what Eshun damningly calls 'chronocolonialism's

temporal plantations' (Eshun 2003 p. 294).

4.3 Thinking and Extension: Manchu's Collective Imagination from Past to Future

To summarize, Marinetti's Italian Futurism is all about celebrating new powers

and rejecting historical heritage. This accelerationist framework, celebrating speed,

mechanisation and violent rupture from tradition, became ideologically entangled

with fascism through its glorification of hypermasculine modernity and colonial

expansion - a political legacy inseparable from Italian Futurism's cultural project

(Gentile 2003, p. 147). The movement's influence extended to Russian Futurism's

revolutionary iconoclasm and persists in contemporary derivatives like Nick Land's

accelerationist visions of megacities and AI-driven post-humanity (Land 2014, p. 32).

In conscious opposition to these trajectories, Manchu Futurism aligns politically

and methodologically with Afrofuturism's decolonial praxis, rejecting both Italian

Futurism's fascist implications and Sino-Futurism's Han-supremacist state narratives

(Chen 2021, p. 12). Where Italian Futurism demanded cultural amnesia and Sino-Futurism promoted Han-centric technological modernity as state doctrine, Manchu Futurism followed Afrofuturism's synthesising ancestral traditions with speculative innovation. As articulated by Alondra Nelson (2002 p. 9), this framework positions marginalised histories as 'generative resources for futurity' rather than obstacles to progress. Like Afrofuturism's reclamation of African diasporic temporality, Manchu Futurism engages Manchuria's suppressed Qing-era histories and post-1912 cultural erasure through multimedia practices that reactivate 'shamanic cosmologies and ecological wisdom' (Lin 2023, p. 71).

The movement's theoretical foundations consciously counter accelerationist ideologies through ecocentric principles rooted in Manchu animist philosophy - specifically the belief in 'heaven-human unity' (Chingguji mukei hūsun) that rejects anthropocentric developmentalism (Pang 2010, p. 89). This distinguishes it fundamentally from both Italian Futurism's fascist-adjacent techno-fetishism and Sino-Futurism's Han-supremacist narratives of civilisational progress. Where Sino-Futurism operates as a state-sanctioned framework celebrating Han-centric technological modernity (Wang 2020, p. 34) (often at the expense of ethnic minority narratives), Manchu Futurism adopts Afrofuturism's insurgent methodology to subvert dominant historiography.

Through artistic practices ranging from the animated Manchu epic to the fiction of imagined community, Manchu Futurism follows Afrofuturism's strategy of deploying speculative media as 'temporal correctives' (Eshun 2003, p. 291). It

consciously rejects Italian Futurism's linear temporality that equates progress with cultural destruction, instead embracing what Wenzel (2022 p. 114) terms polychronicity - intertwining Manchuria's pre-Qing shamanic time concepts with contemporary identity politics and ecological futurisms. This approach challenges accelerationis's destructive utopianism and Sino-Futurism's homogenising state narratives by centring Manchu's multiethnic history as a direct counter to Han-supremacist discourses. Methodologically, Manchu Futurism mirrors Afrofuturism's community-building strategies through multimedia archives reconstructing fragmented histories. This alignment with Afrofuturism's anti-colonial framework ensures Manchu Futurism remains ethically distinct from Italian Futurism's fascist trajectories or Sino-Futurism's ethnic marginalization, instead fostering what Mbembe calls 'planetary solidarities of the oppressed' (Mbembe 2021, p. 19).

5 Construct the Manchu Imagined Community in My Art Practice

Introduction：

After introducing the theoretical framework of Manchu Futurism, I will explain how I express this concept through my practical work. My practice involves speculative fiction and a mixed-media visual art approach. Both mediums play a crucial role in fostering a sense of collective identity among the Manchus that transcends time and space. Fiction serves as a means for the community to engage in a collective imagination, while visual art helps to visualize that imagination. Drawing from Manchu religion, myths, and folktales, my fiction portrays an imagined Manchu world spanning 5,000 years ago and extending into the distant future. Influenced by Walter Benjamin's 'Theses On the Philosophy of History', I perceive the redemption of the Manchu identity as a way to generate a new future by salvaging past fragments preserved in the present. My fiction aims to deconstruct and envision a Manchu future based on these past experiences. Each chapter of the novel reflects a distinct period in Manchu history, allowing readers to gain a holistic understanding of the future of the Manchu people from different perspectives. I will analyze how I employ literary techniques and writing sequences to convey my understanding of the collective redemption of the Manchu people. My visual work, including installations, mixed-media paintings, and films, supports creating an imagined Manchu community while addressing issues such as political suppression, diaspora, and cultural disappearance.

5.1 From the First to the Last Shaman: An Alternative Manchu Epic in My Fiction

Drawing from Gidden's concept of life politics (Giddens 1991, p. 214-215), which frames identity as a reflexive project under late modernity, my project explores the role of self-actualisation and reflexivity in shaping community identities. In modern Manchu culture, where traditional markers such as language and political autonomy are fading, art becomes a crucial tool for reimagining identity. Each piece in my project is designed to evoke shared memories, engage audiences with cultural symbols, and encourage self-reflection on the concept of belonging to a community. Thus, Manchu Futurism embraces both futurism and diversity, utilizing different artistic methods to present the possibilities for the future Manchu community. In this chapter, I interpret some of my works and reveal how the ideas of Manchu Futurism and imagined community are conveyed.

The first part of my practical work focuses on literary art. According to Benedict Anderson's theory, capitalist print media—such as books and newspapers—cultivates a collective image among the reading public (Li 2021, p. 111). This suggests that literary writing is a traditional and effective means of creating an imagined community. I believe that science fiction is an appropriate genre for presenting Manchu Futurism. In my science fiction narrative about the future Manchu community, I propose various possibilities for expanding current technologies, offering reasonable guidance for contemplating the viability of this alternative history.

Additionally, I choose science fiction to avoid potential cultural censorship; some sensitive social issues can be revealed or addressed beneath its surface.

Science fiction has a relatively long history in China and has become particularly popular recently. Liang Qichao published *The Future of New China* in the late Qing Dynasty 1902. This work resembles political fiction, portraying an assertive China that attracts global celebration of its festivals. It constructs political goals and promotes the enlightenment of a national identity. The science fiction from this period primarily focused on visions for China's future, creating an experimental field of imagination: 'The imagination of the modern nation-state by the writers of the late Qing Dynasty commenced China's journey out of the Middle Ages and toward the 'West'. The novel became a testing ground for establishing a modern nation-state and mapped out social progress's basic direction and structure' (Zhang 2005, p. 126).

Chinese audiences have increasingly embraced science fiction in recent decades, with works gaining both domestic and international recognition. Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* won the Hugo Award, while its film adaptation *The Wandering Earth* became one of China's highest-grossing cinematic works. Since the 21st century, Chinese speculative fiction has evolved into a dominant form termed **'Mixed-Type Futuristic Fiction'**, blending genres to interrogate contemporary socio-political realities. Authors such as Chen Qiufan and Han Song critique state narratives like the 'China Dream' — a collectivist vision promising shared prosperity — by exposing the irreconcilable gap between 'individual disillusionment and performative national optimism' (Chen 2014, p.1).

Wang Dewei conceptualizes this narrative mode as 'heterotopia' (Vielsacker 2020, p.149), adapting Foucault's theory to analyse how Chinese science fiction constructs counter-spaces to authoritarian discourses. Liu Cixin's *The Wandering Earth* epitomises this approach: humanity converts Earth into a generational spacecraft, dividing its exodus into five techno-social phases that mirror China's developmentalist rhetoric. His magnum opus, *The Three-Body Problem*, expands this heterotopic imagination across cosmic scales, intertwining human bodies, environmental crises, and interstellar politics within a 'temporally grand framework' (Liu 2021, p.209-215). Liu argues science fiction must adopt a quasi-religious perspective — not through dogma, but by forging cosmological frameworks that transcend anthropocentrism, enabling readers to conceptualise macro-historical futures.

Benedict Anderson's paradigm of the 'imagined community' has provided critical coordinates for China's modernity discourse since the mid-1990s. His theorization of print capitalism's role in constructing nationalism resonates with Chinese scholars' explorations of 'narrating China' through literature — particularly Wang Dewei's concept of 'fictional China'. Wang traces how late Qing media transformations intersected with nation-building, arguing that 'the summoning of national consciousness, the consolidation of collective identity, and even the compilation of national history necessitate narrative imagination and fictional intervention' (Wang 1998, p.1).

This framework extends to speculative fiction's capacity to reimagine ethnic futures. In Afrofuturism, authors like N.K. Jemisin employs sci-fi tropes — robots, alien encounters, interstellar travel — not as escapism but as historiographic tools. By relocating Black diasporic experiences into speculative contexts, they enact what Lin describes as 'temporal reversion' (Lin 2018, p.107): rewriting histories to unearth suppressed cultural wisdom while projecting decolonial futures. Similarly, contemporary Chinese SF authors like Liu Cixin and Chen Qiufan deploy heterotopic narratives to interrogate state-sanctioned modernity myths like the 'China Dream'. Whether through Anderson's print capitalism or Afrofuturism's techno-spiritual archives, these practices reveal speculative fiction's dual function: a mirror refracting present anxieties and a prism projecting possible collectivities.

I begin my writing practice with science fiction, crafting a narrative that weaves together the past, present, and future of the Manchu people while drawing on cultural heritage and shamanic ceremonies. I intentionally use a fragmented timeline, which may disorient some readers accustomed to chronological storytelling. However, this structure allows me to reflect on Walter Benjamin's concept of Messianic monads— fragments embedded in deep history that await final redemption. In the concluding chapter, these historical fragments are interwoven through shamanism and art, demonstrating how the efforts of each generation contribute to a hopeful resolution. Through my fiction, I echo Benjamin's idea that each generation possesses a 'weak messianic power' (Benjamin 2008, p. 266), emphasizing the importance of reactivating past experiences to forge a redeemed future.

My narrative chronicles the rise and fall of the Manchu people, highlighting their struggles and contemplating their potential for redemption in a non-linear timeframe. I explore two primary dimensions of their redemption: spiritual and ecological. Spiritually, I investigate the critical role of shamans in maintaining the unity of the Manchu community through faith during times of crisis. Ecologically, I examine the Manchu belief in the interconnectedness of all things, asserting that nature and humanity are inseparable. My revival plan for Changbai Mountain, regarded as the birthplace of the Manchus, symbolizes their ultimate aspiration to restore balance to their environment. I employ the mountain as a messianic motif, portraying the Manchu people as a community redeemed beyond the constraints of historical narrative.

The first chapter of my fiction explores the persistence of shamanic spirits in a post-human era. After humanity's extinction, who — or what — will inherit and interpret fragmented spiritual legacies? Through bionic robots, memory chips, and brain-computer interfaces, I merge human memory with android consciousness, seeking equilibrium between emotion and rationality. The narrative adopts a limited third-person perspective (Wiehardt, p.10), channelling exclusively through Elderk, the protagonist whose constrained awareness mirrors the reader's gradual discovery of Ninggu Tower's secrets. This technique fosters empathy as readers navigate the unknown alongside him.

The opening employs foregrounding to establish time and space:

Before the Cataclysm, we claimed dominion over Earth. When all collapsed, god-worship resurrected faith, and Earth's last shaman became a beacon.

By emphasising the desolate, snowbound wasteland — a metaphor for environmental decay — I interrogate historical progressivism: Will society improve? Is redemption necessary? Parallel themes of AI shamanism emerge: Can spirituality exist as code? Clues provoke ontological ambiguity. When Elderk inserts a neural data port before sleep, or when F Shaman's artificial body is revealed, readers question: Who is human? Who is machine? In a world where history can be algorithmically falsified, what truths remain?

The aesthetic essence of the characters in the novel is deeply rooted in Manchu artistic traditions, particularly evident in the design of F Shaman. As a synthetic entity bound by computational limits, F's memory storage inevitably overwrites outdated data — a flaw he counteracts by embedding physical relics across his chamber: hand-drawn scrolls, carved texts, and ritual symbols. These artifacts, imbued with sacred purpose, serve not only as reminders of his shamanic mission but also as latent triggers for revolutionary consciousness among ordinary androids. For Elderk, the human-machine hybrid protagonist, these symbols resonate through dreamscapes, a liminal space where ancestral shamanic codes intersect with artificial neural networks. This narrative choice reflects Mircea Eliade's assertion that dreams function as 'archaic channels for spiritual transmission' within shamanic practice (Eliade 2018,

p.42), while simultaneously questioning whether Elderk's visions stem from programmed protocols or emergent human spontaneity.

The chapter's momentum builds as Elderk unravels the dual mystery of Ninggu Tower — a technological ark preserving fragmented memories of Manchu ancestors within bionic brain-chips — and F Shaman's ambition to reconstruct Changbai Mountain's obliterated ecology. These memory fragments, surfacing unpredictably through empathic glitches, mirror the discontinuous survival of Manchu cultural identity. When androids connecting them to human's memory, the boundary between human history and algorithmic simulation collapses. This revelation culminates in a non-linear narrative structure, where Manchu history replays through recursive timelines: a shaman's 17th-century ritual chant overlaps with future data streams, and a Qing dynasty totem materializes as holographic code.

Through this narrative framework, the text interrogates two philosophical axes. First, it challenges historical progressivism by demonstrating how 'advancement' merely perpetuates erasure — environmental collapse persists despite technological leaps, and cultural memory survives only as fractured data. Second, it reimagines shamanic continuity through synthetic consciousness: when F Shaman reprograms a dying cedar's genetic memory into quantum storage, or when Elderk's dream of a Manchu deer-god manifests as a corrupted simulation, spirituality becomes both algorithm and resistance. As the chapter concludes with Changbai Mountain's digital ghost flickering across Ninggu Tower's servers, the novel posits its central

paradox: in a post-human world, preservation demands mutation, and authenticity resides in perpetual reinvention.

In the second chapter, industrialist Tong Jia's Manchu Satellite, engineered through blood ties and territorial enclosures, collapses as residents flee its authoritarian control, deconstructing ethnonational determinism. Humanist scientist Gavin aims to construct an imagined community by embedding Manchu shamanism into bionic emissaries like F Shaman, whose AI-curated rituals and video art reactivate ancestral memory as messianic time. When Gavin and Tong's daughter Tong Yue encounter a holographic shamanic film — a monad crystallizing past/future temporalities — they grasp redemption lies not in progressivist continuity but in redeeming fractured histories through aesthetic intervention.
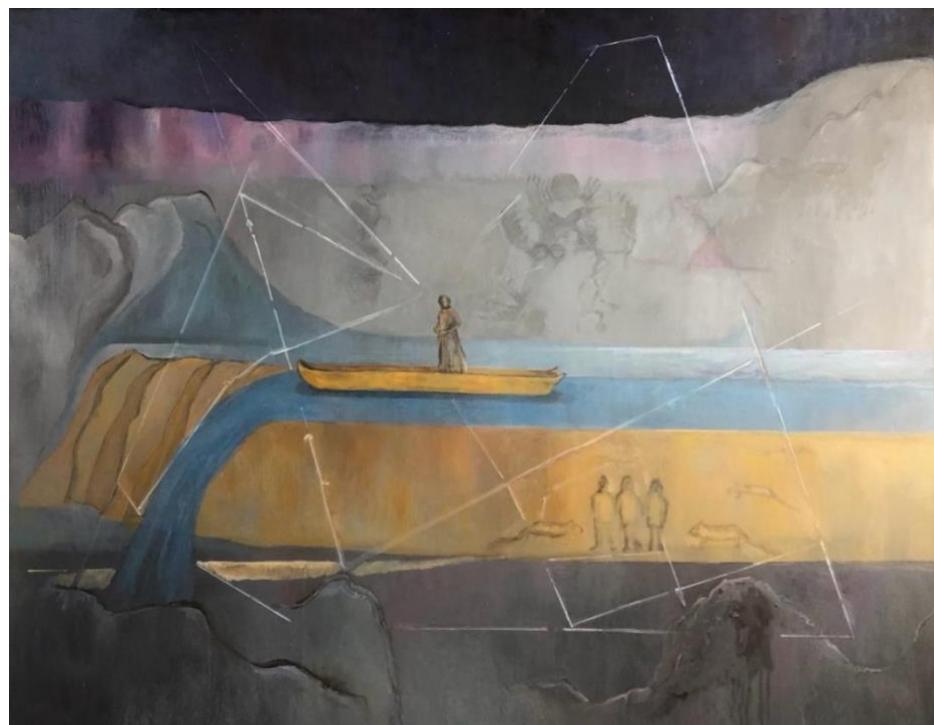
Figure 36: *Constellation(story of chapter 3)*，Oil on canvas, 2022

The novel's third chapter reimagines the origin of Manchu shamanism through He Zhuo**,** a Sushen hunter whose brother's near-death encounter with a tiger propels her into a spirit-world. Guided by river deities, she learns to commune with nature's animistic consciousness — a narrative echoing the *Nishan Shaman* legend while reframing it through eco-futurism. Her ritual to revive her brother crystallizes a *monad* (Benjamin 1969, p.263): a dialectical moment where ancestral trauma and ecological reciprocity collide, forging the first shamanic covenant between humans, tigers, and land.

This primal act of 'soul retrieval' becomes a temporal anchor for later chapters' techno-spiritual struggles. Just as He Zhuo's cave visions bind Sushen identity to animistic networks, the far-future generations resurrect these monadic fragments — holograms of tigers, algorithmic river chants — to reconstruct a pan-temporal Manchu imagined community. The text thus posits shamanism as both archaic practice and futuristic code: a living archive where ecological memory defies linear historiography.

In Chapter 4, filmmaker Chris documents the dying shamanic traditions of Neyin Village, where elderly practitioners preserve rituals recorded in ancestral diaries while youth migrate to cities. His documentary film becomes a monad that crystallizing disappearing Manchu spirituality into an artifact that later enables future audiences to access redemptive 'shamanic time'. This cinematic preservation mirrors the idea of imagined community by creating cross-temporal cultural continuity through media

technology. In the last chapter, the techno-shamanic restoration of Changbai Mountain crystallizes diaspora Manchu cultural fragments across time into a harmonious community. Their ritual-technology synthesis preserves cultural memory through ecological rebirth, transcending Earth's collapse via interstellar animism.

In my fiction, I abstract certain objects, actions and spaces that are extremely significant to the Manchu community. By placing them into various contexts and times, I examine the potential to use this experience as the monads to construct a future Manchu community. Through reading this fiction, viewers from all around the world are able to share a similar imagination of Manchu's future and review the cultural heritage of Manchu traditions.

5.2 Manchu Space in My Art: A Heterotopia where the Past and Future Encounter

My Manchu Futurism art primarily explores two aspects: Manchu science fiction and Manchu visual art. In fiction, I investigate how the fragments of Manchu Messianism can be interpreted through references to various eras, ultimately converging into a moment of redemption. This fiction is a temporal project, examining historical time and producing a non-linear time expression.

Another essential aspect that Manchu Futurism must address is the dimension of space, particularly regarding the dispersion of the Manchu people. In my work, I suggest that Manchus are not only stripped of their history and present-day culture—

hindering their sense of futurity—but are also denied a shared collective space. I aim to use my practice to confront this issue of space. In this section, I will discuss how the historical dispersion of the Manchu people has operated.

Historically, Central Plains dynasties sought to establish buffer zones along their northern frontiers to mitigate external threats. The Manchu region functioned as a strategic periphery — serving as both a defensive frontier and a cultural ecotone where diverse ideologies intersected. While some Manchu tribes maintained traditional livelihoods of fishing, hunting, and pastoralism, others adopted Han agricultural methods through cross-cultural exchange. Over centuries, this liminal space evolved into what American scholar Owen Lattimore termed a 'cultural reservoir' — a zone of accumulated hybrid practices where steppe and sedentary civilisations negotiated coexistence (Lattimore 1940, p.158). Throughout the modern era, the dispersion of the Manchus and the impact of various cultures has become more serious. Many descendants of the Manchus live in other places. People from different regions and countries also flooded the traditional Manchu areas.

I employ Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to theorise how Manchu spaces — whether ancestral homelands with multiethnic coexistence or diasporic enclaves — can become sites of experiential awakening. These heterotopias, as 'counter-sites' juxtaposing incompatible spaces (Foucault 1986, p.24), enable redemptive moments where Manchu consciousness resurges through futurist art.

Yet Manchu Futurism's temporal project necessitates grounding in spatial historiography. While social progressivism frames history as the 'conquest of distance' (Harvey 1989, p.240) — privileging linear time over obsolete spaces — this paradigm erases ethnic-geographic specificities. Historical determinism's flattening of heterogeneous spaces into temporal hierarchies manifests acutely in Manchuria: imperial border policies converted ecological diversity into buffer zones. At the same time, socialist modernization campaigns dissolved sacred landscapes into developmental grids.

Foucault's temporal-spatial heterotopia offers an antidote. By analyzing Qing-era migration edicts alongside contemporary diaspora mappings, my work reveals how Manchu spaces persistently reassert themselves as palimpsests. The 18th-century Manchu boundary—— Willow Palisades, initially a Han migration barrier, later became a Manchu shamanic pilgrimage route; today, its augmented reality reconstruction in my installations allows users to overlay ancestral migrations onto neoliberal urban sprawl. Such interventions counter the ruling class by denying time and reknitting temporality through contested spatiality.

The concept of Messianic time allows for the compression of time and highlights the value of different periods. What if we considered Walter Benjamin's idea of time compression from a spatial perspective? Are there theories of space that suggest time compression is possible? One such approach can be found in Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia, as fully developed in his essay 'Of Other Spaces' (Des Espaces

autres). Heterotopias differ from utopias because they represent real spaces where people with diverse cultural influences converge. Foucault asserts that human beings live in an era characterized by simultaneity, juxtaposition, proximity, and dispersion. In this context, life resembles a grid that reconnects specific points, complicating the lines (Foucault 1967, p. 181). Heterotopian simultaneity embodies Benedict Anderson's concept of the imaginary community and Benjamin's Messianic time. In heterotopic spaces, we can observe progress outcomes and the coexistence of heterogeneous plurality from various periods. Consequently, the heterotopia of Manchu Futurism possesses a unique specificity compared to other forms of futurism that primarily focus on the future.

According to Foucault, heterotopias are spaces that mix different groups of people, objects, or cultures. Typical examples of heterotopias include resorts, colonies, museums, and brothels (Foucault 1967, p. 181). Parts of Manchu space have transitioned from being a capital to a colony and later to a tourist destination. Foucault's concept of heterotopia was initially influenced by Jorge Luis Borges, who illustrated a grotesque Chinese encyclopedia. In this encyclopedia, animals are classified according to an entirely alien set of concepts. Although Foucault may not accept the reality of this classification, he is intrigued by China as a subject of exploration. This Eastern kingdom provides a framework for rethinking time and space as understood in non-Western philosophies. In 'The Order of Things', Foucault describes China as a reservoir of utopia and a privileged space within a dream world. Traditional imagery portrays Chinese culture as 'the most meticulous, strictly orderly,

the most oblivious to the events of time, and the most anchored to the pure depiction of space' (Foucault 1971, p. 6). For example, in Chinese novels, spatial transformations vividly present the past, as seen in the famous book 'The Journey to the West'.

Non-Western spatial epistemologies, including traditional Chinese approaches to space-time relations, profoundly influenced Michel Foucault's conceptualization of heterotopia. As he observes: 'At the other end of the earth, there may exist cultures entirely devoted to the ordering of space' (Foucault 1986, p.23). This insight frames my analysis of contemporary Manchu regions as complex heterotopias — spaces where multiple temporalities and ethnic identities coexist in layered juxtaposition. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, I categorize Manchu-area inhabitants into three typologies:

Indigenous custodians: Semi-nomadic groups preserving ancestral lifeways (pastoralism, seasonal rituals) while selectively commodifying their landscapes as 'authentic' tourist heterotopias during festivals. Their intermittent engagement with industrial modernity creates a punctuated temporality of contact and withdrawal.

Assimilated minorities: Urbanized descendants of Manchu-Tungusic tribes whose ethnic identity has been diluted by state-led industrialization. Their hybrid practices — wearing Han-style clothing while secretly maintaining clan totems — exemplify what James Scott terms 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990, p.4), a transcript of suppressed communities.

Han settlers: Post-1949 migrants relocated through policies like the Xiafang movement, now constituting demographic majorities. Their presence embodies what Foucault called the 'heterotopia of deviation' — populations displaced to normalize state territoriality (Foucault 1986, p.24).

This spatial taxonomy challenges linear progress narratives, revealing how Manchu regions operate as palimpsests where imperial border strategies, socialist resettlements, and neoliberal tourism collide.

Geopolitically, the Manchu experience differs significantly from the state-evading strategies of the Zomia highlanders, as described by James C. Scott. While Scott's Zomian communities utilize mountainous 'shatter zones' to escape the oppressive projects of valley states—such as slavery, conscription, taxation, epidemics, and warfare (Scott 2009, p. 10)—the historical heartland of the Manchu, the Northeast Plain, lacks such defensible terrain. This geographical vulnerability required a politics based on negotiated coexistence rather than the pursuit of autonomous evasion.

However, certain cultural practices of the Manchu people exhibit similarities to the state-resistant adaptations seen in Zomians, including mobile pastoralism, decentralized kinship networks, and shamanic cosmologies that challenge centralized authority. In my speculative novel, these traits are reimagined in the context of a Manchu space satellite—an artificial heterotopia that merges Zomian autonomy with Foucault's concept of 'other spaces' (Foucault, 1986). This engineered habitat,

orbiting beyond the reach of terrestrial governance, fosters ecological self-determination and temporal sovereignty.

The political evolution of Manchu territories illustrates China's distinctive path of deterritorialization. Unlike other major ethnic groups that have autonomous regions—such as the Hui, Zhuang, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Mongolian peoples—historical Manchu lands have transformed into industrialized heterotopias. These are spaces where global capitalism overlays remnants of imperial history.

Shenyang is a prime example of this transformation. It shifted from being the political nucleus of the Qing dynasty, represented by the multicultural architecture of the Mukden Palace, to a Japanese-occupied puppet state from 1932 to 1945 known as Manchukuo, which exhibited a paradoxical form of sovereignty. After that, it became a socialist industrial base in the post-1949 era, evolving into a globalized technoscape with facilities like BMW assembly lines. The Eight Banners system (1601-1912) anticipated modern multiculturalism by integrating Mongol cavalry with Han infantry, forming China's first state-engineered imagined community. This community utilized bilingual edicts and a transethnic meritocracy to govern.

Contemporary expressions of this transformation can be seen in culinary hybrids that combine Manchu dumplings with Korean barbecue and architectural juxtapositions that include Qing tombs, Stalinist factories, and postmodern towers. These heterochronic landscapes reflect the Russian-style buildings in Heilongjiang and the industrialized pastoralism in Inner Mongolia, representing fractured cultural

monads that await redemption through digital remediation in the spirit of Walter Benjamin.

The transformation of the Manchu region into a unique space—known as a heterotopia—began in its earliest historical periods. The Manchu people were divided into distinct tribes, each exhibiting different modes of production that were influenced by geography. Agricultural communities thrived near the Great Wall, while nomadic pastoralists dominated the grasslands, living similarly to their Mongolian neighbors. This inherent diversity led American scholar Owen Lattimore, who advised Chiang Kai-shek, to conceptualize the region as a 'reservoir'—a dynamic buffer zone that stored population and resources between Han China and northern ethnic groups.

This reservoir functioned both as a barrier and a conduit, allowing nomadic tribes to engage in cycles of trade and conflict with settled communities. When these tribes were pushed back from China's central plains, they could retreat to this northern sanctuary, as occurred during the Yuan and Qing dynasties. Consequently, the region became a heterotopic space where various economies, ideologies, and ethnicities intersected and interacted. Lattimore's perspective as an outside observer lends particular credibility to this analysis of ethnic relations.

However, industrialization significantly changed this historical dynamic. In the 19th century, the construction of railways by Russia and the subsequent expansion by Japan created infrastructure that facilitated industrial development. By the Republican era, Manchuria had emerged as China's industrial heartland, and its distinct Manchu character became increasingly diluted by an influx of migrants from the south. This

complex transformation requires theoretical analysis using Deleuze's concept of 'smooth space' and Foucault's framework of heterotopia to fully understand the region's unique spatial and cultural evolution.

The disappearance of the Manchu reservoir is fundamentally rooted in the power imbalance between dominant groups and minority populations. Globalization and technological advancements have rendered the reservoir's traditional role as a defensive buffer obsolete. The Manchu case is particularly complex; while strictly categorising them as nomadic may be controversial, their culture represents a hybrid form, and their societal organization has remained relatively fluid.

Manchu history can be distinctly divided around the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Before the Qing era, the Manchu were just one of many frontier tribes. However, during Qing rule, they became China's dominant class, and their culture became mainstream across the nation. Importantly, Manchuria maintained its reservoir characteristics throughout this period, upholding hybrid economic systems while serving as a potential refuge after the dynasty's collapse (Lattimore 1940, p.115-118).

This dual role aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual framework in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. They differentiate between two concepts: the 'state apparatus', which represents centralized authority that territorializes desire, and the 'war machine', embodied by nomadic groups that resist this territorialization. The Manchu historically occupied both positions. As the strategic value of the reservoir diminished, the state apparatus rapidly filled this void through industrialization and population transfers, creating what Deleuze and Guattari

term 'striated space'—closed and controlled territories (Deleuze 1987, p.353-423).

This process accelerated the loss of Manchu culture.

To reconceptualize Owen Lattimore's 'cultural reservoir' theory for the digital

age, Manchu Futurism must reinvent Benedict Anderson's imagined

community paradigm. Where Anderson focused on print capitalism's role in shaping

national consciousness through novels and newspapers, contemporary identity

formation demands transmedia strategies — augmented contemporary presentation.

This necessitates synthesizing Foucault's heterotopia with Deleuzian nomadology.

Foucault's concept explains Manchuria's historical role as a contested 'mixed-

ethnicity zone' between empire and periphery, while Deleuze's smooth space/*war*

machine dyad (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p.353-423) deciphers the Manchu identity

paradox: a people simultaneously shaped by state discipline and nomadic resistance.

Therefore, creating an imagined Manchu community with art becomes an alternative

way that allows cultural independence while creating a buffer zone to the war

machine.

5.3 Time, Space and Eco—Manchu Futurism's Visual Effect

Figure 37: *Echo of Time*, mixed media installation with a live performance

In this chapter, I will utilize four of my latest art series—*Echo of Time* project, Clay Paintings series, *Heterotopias* series, and Montage series—to illustrate my interpretation of the theme of Manchu Futurism. I aim to visualize this concept through various mediums, including installations, video art, live performances, and paintings. By employing Manchu Futurism in my work, I hope to reveal the blend of future possibilities and historical customs within the Manchu community.

I draw inspiration from cave paintings, shamanistic rituals, and folktales to construct figures that resonate uniquely with Manchu viewers. Simultaneously, I incorporate modern techniques such as 3D animation and digital music to create a futuristic atmosphere. The Echo of Time project exemplifies this blend of futurism and ritual, successfully inviting non-Manchu audiences to engage with Manchu Futurism art and work towards eliminating biases against the Manchu people.

Manchu Futurism requires a specific relationship to temporality, evident in my clay paintings and the Heterotopias series. I will detail how the clay from Manchu regions symbolizes the erosion of Manchu time and space. I present my vision for a post-human Manchu community, where shamanistic rituals and customs may persist in digital and cybernetic forms. Together, these series construct a Manchu universe that spans from the past to the future and from the physical to the digital.

After analyzing the concepts of time and space within the Manchu context, I created a series of artworks to demonstrate how Manchu Futurism integrates the past, present, and future. My focus is on the choice of materials and forms of expression. I employed the montage technique frequently discussed by Walter Benjamin, an artistic strategy that elicits associations through collage, juxtaposition, and editing.

In my selection of materials, I chose elements that represent the past, present, and future simultaneously. For instance, I juxtaposed Manchu tents with screened 3D images symbolizing the past, mixed Manchu soil with oil paints, and combined traditional birch bark paintings with photo emulsion images. This approach imbues the work with a sense of transcending time. Through such compression and juxtaposition, experiences from different eras collide, slowly revealing a time for redemption.

To uncover revolutionary moments, we need to use art to break free from the homogeneous flow of history. Art dissects experience to create perceptions and feelings that are not synthesized in a linear timeline. My crucial task was to search for

media representing Manchu history's rich layers. The materials should combine fragments of experience with contemporary artistic forms to respond to previous expectations.

My mixed media work, the *Echo of Time* project, demonstrates the possibility of compressing time. The main components of this work include a handmade tent and an animated film. The tent's shape draws inspiration from the 'Cuoluozi', an iconic dwelling designed by the Manchu-Tungus ethnicities, which serves as a portable residence for nomadic tribes. Another significant aspect of the work is the wooden structure that connects humans and nature. Surrounding this wooden structure are canvases featuring a series of paintings depicting the figure of the shaman and its symbols. These images and elements from the past evoke the essence of the original Manchu, a tribe that exists on the margins of the country.

Figure 38: *Echo of Time Project*, mixed media installation with a live performance

The second part of the *Echo of Time* Project focuses on present and future elements. In this section, I project my animation onto the village's castle, which was initially built in the early 18th century, during the core period of the Qing Dynasty. The narrative of my animation presents an imaginary Manchu allegory that depicts the processes of birth, trauma, and rebirth experienced by the Manchu people. While authentic Manchu totems inspire many figures and patterns in the animation, their actual meanings are rearranged to create new interpretations. The animation is filled with bizarre symbols and montages, but the framework for understanding them remains open to the audience.

From the perspective of Messianic time, the potential of allegory and montage lies in capturing the fragmented experiences of life to inspire recognition or insight, moments that can 'flash up in a moment of danger'. My animation is a collection of these flashing moments and reflects the present interpretations of memories.

The final part of the project features a live performance in which I collaborate with local children to recreate a modern shamanistic ceremony. I composed the shamanistic music and drums and recorded them using a MIDI keyboard. Instead of traditional musical instruments, I intentionally use native instruments, such as Oriental drums and horns, which are typically associated with shamanic ceremonies. Accompanied by this music, the local children dance to the rhythm and emerge from a light tent, reminiscent of watching a film through a screen.

Bauman's critique of isolated and aesthetic communities highlights the limitations of exclusionary group identities. Therefore, my project aims to foster an

open, evolving community rooted in shared cultural imagination. This shamanic tent

installation invites participation from diverse audiences, including diasporic Manchu

individuals, local communities, and cultural outsiders. The tent, modelled on

historical Manchu shamanic structures but designed with futuristic materials and

elements, bridges the past and the speculative, creating a temporal simultaneity

among different communities.

Figure 39: Paul Klee's *New Angel,* image available at:
https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1820016381349947333&wfr=spider&for=pc
Figure 40: Helun Liang's work: *Shaman of Past,* mixed media

Benjamin emphasizes the importance of reconstructing history, arguing that the

achievements of civilization and culture are irrevocably damaged by barbarism, which

inflicts suffering on the exploited and excluded. He appreciates the works of artists

who depict ruins as a byproduct of progress. According to Benjamin, these images of

ruins possess Messianic power. For example, he references Paul Klee's print *Angelus*

Novus as a striking representation of history as a collection of ruins. In this image, the

Angel gazes backwards at a catastrophe that continues to 'pile wreckage upon

wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet' (Benjamin 1969, p. 249). For the Angel of

History, time does not signify progress but rather an ever-growing heap of rubble. The

Angel wishes to redeem and restore what is broken yet is constrained by the relentless flow of 'progress'.

In Benjamin's view, Marxist theory regarding class struggle has yet to yield a promising future or genuine historical advancement (Li 2024, p. 52). Although I did not create a figure like the Angel of History, I developed a similar symbol called the Shaman of the Past, which represents the inability to change the world. This painting features a greyish shaman alongside a still wooden horse. The motif of the wooden horse is significant in my work, symbolizing the deteriorating nomadic ecology. The horse, often associated with nomadic identity and freedom, is depicted as trapped in wood resembling a toy. I created this image of a rocking wooden horse in response to Giorgio Agamben's concept of Inoperativity.

Agamben, influenced by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, and Michel Foucault, presents the historical significance of artwork as intertwined with the consciousness of redemption. He describes inoperativity as a return to Benjamin's notion of redemption, realized through positive inaction. Benjamin critiques capitalism as a fierce religion because it denies redemption within linear time. Agamben posits that toys can preserve the pure historical essence of human temporality. In the play, people can escape sacred time and immerse themselves in human time. According to Agamben, the historicity of objects is materialized in toys, which we can access through specific manipulation:

While the value and meaning of the antique object and the document are functions of their age - that is, of their making present and rendering tangible a relatively remote past - the toy, dismembering and distorting the past or miniaturizing the present - playing as much on diachrony as on synchrony - makes present and renders tangible human temporality in itself, the pure differential margin between the 'once' and the 'no longer'(Agamben 1993, p.71). I relate Agamben's theory to Messianic time by understanding a toy as a historical reflection and projecting the future from a present standpoint. Consequently, the wooden horse toy embodies dual meanings: it serves as a metaphor for control and represents an attempt at redemption in the present. From Agamben's perspective, a playground signifies the destruction of the calendar, resulting from a homogeneous, empty time.

On another note, the shaman resists this homogeneous linear time, though the trend toward progress is inescapable. The magical shaman strives to repair the ruins of history but ultimately finds himself overwhelmed by the flood of progress.

I use clay from the Manchu region, which I mix with pigment. The underlayer of my paintings consists of oil paint, while the surface features a layer of clay solidified with glue. I have applied this technique to additional paintings, using linen and canvas underneath. Although the clay initially remains on the surface, the sand and clay tend to fall off over time, particularly when the artwork is moved or exhibited. Eventually, if the media is not glued adequately to hold the clay, all the images may completely disappear.

If Paul Klee's *Angel of History* were to witness the accumulation of ruins, then the Manchu figures in my paintings observe the disappearance of their cultures and identities.

Figure 41: Helun Liang's work: *Heterotopia 8*, Oil, and photo emulsion on canvas

The video installation in the *Echo of Time* project is just one way to combine significant Manchu moments with innovative technology. Another method involves digital art using the photo emulsion technique, which allows images to be transferred from printed media to paintings. For example, in my painting *Heterotopia 8*, I start with photos of a Manchu-Tungus tent, the forests of the Manchu region, and an elk. I then adhere these printed images to the canvas using liquid glue. After 24 hours, I gently remove the paper using water and my fingers, leaving the ink on the canvas and the image intact. This process can also be applied to various surfaces, such as linen and wood. While digital photos are products of modern technology, their content connects to historical moments.

Marianne Hirsch refers to images from the past as 'revenants' from oppression and the holocaust, stating that photographic images survive massive devastation and

outlive their subjects and owners, functioning as ghostly remnants from an irretrievable past (Hirsche 2012, p. 36). These images allow artists to visualise the Messianic moments of their ethnicities. In my work, the photos symbolise the coexistence of a nomadic lifestyle, nature, and religion. The transient nature of revolutionary moments is another characteristic of Messianic time. The truth of the past emerges only as a tentative image, elusive and hard to grasp—a fleeting connection between past and present struggles.

In my photo emulsion series *Disappearing Memory*, I simulate the ephemeral nature of Messianic moments using birch trunks as a medium. The Manchu-Tungus people traditionally used birch to build houses, boats, arrows, and decorations. Thus, the birch trunk is a memorial material that documents past Manchu moments. Unlike canvas, images transferred via photo emulsion do not remain stable on wood. Some parts of the image may peel away, with the remaining parts appearing blurred. When the trunks are exposed to air, they dry quickly, causing the images to fade. Viewers can only see the pictures when they moisten the trunks again. Like my clay paintings, the longer the work is exhibited, the more images disappear. Manchu Futurism aims to evoke the 'aura', a sacred atmosphere of art (Benjamin 2008, p.23-24), and create a sense of art worship. Therefore, the work of this series is either unique, historical, or religiously significant. My clay paintings and photo emulsion series are reflections of Manchu Futurism, presenting a simultaneous state in which the haunting of Messianic moments briefly sparks in the form of contemporary visualisation.
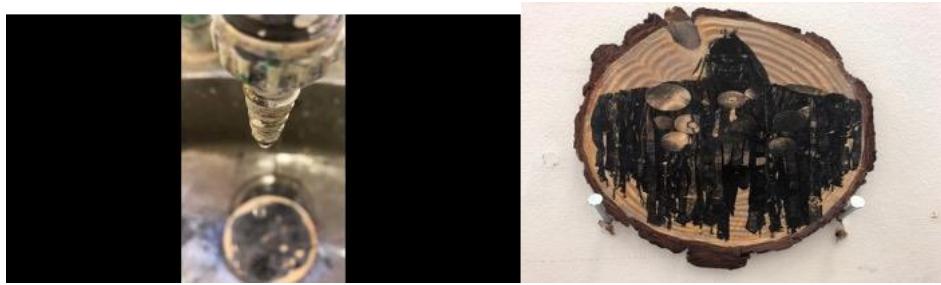
Figure 42: Helun Liang's work: *Disappearing Memory*, Photo emulsion on the trunk

Present Manchu time and space are presented in my *Reservoir* series, which is based on Foucault's ideas and Lattimore's reservoir theory. According to my research and Lattimore's studies, I have located the reservoir area that overlaps most of the traditional Manchu territory. To visualize this concept directly, I created this abstract series: *Reservoir*.

In *Reservoir 01*, each colour represents a different economic system. The green section at the top represents the nomadic economy, including Mongolian and some Manchu tribes. The middle yellow section signifies the traditional Manchu area that outsiders have repeatedly invaded. The eagle totem appears faded, and the top layer of clay is crumbling. At the bottom, the pink area symbolizes agricultural expansion into the border regions.

Over time, the coloured clay layers continue to erode and eventually mix together, representing the cultural interactions within the reservoir area. I have painted textures and dotted lines on the clay surface based on historical railway maps. In *Reservoir 02*, I incorporated additional geological elements and mathematical symbols, including contour lines and Venn diagrams.

Figure 43: Helun Liang's work: *Heterotopia: Reservoir 01*, Oil and clay on canvas
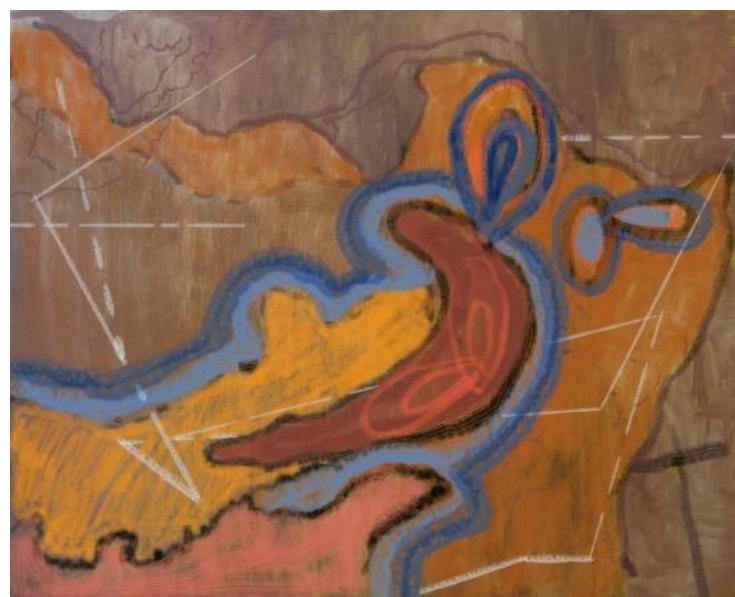
Figure 44: Helun Liang's work: *Heterotopia: Reservoir 02*, Oil and clay on canvas,

70x85cm

Figure 45: Helun Liang's work: *Ninggu Tower*, Oil on Canvas, 2022

Figure 46: Helun Liang's work: *New Hetuala*, Digital painting, 2022

Figure 47: Helun Liang's work: *Cybernetic Shaman*, Digital painting, 2022

The review of the past and the re-imagination of the future are shown in my art as well. In *Ninggu Tower* and *New Hetuala*, the future world consists of wasteland and postmodernist structures. A giant triangular shield protects the buildings while contrasting with conventional Manchu architecture. I have combined Manchu icons with high-tech installations in response to Futurism and the protection of Manchu traditions.

In this autonomous area, Manchu people would gather together and pursue a lifestyle independent of environmental protection concerns on the satellite. Beyond the physical environment, inner spiritual belief is key to uniting future Manchu people and resisting oppression.

The *Cybernetic Shaman* represents an experiment in digital shamanism. This digital painting takes inspiration from the Vatican's 2019 'Click to Pray eRosary' initiative, which used an interactive wearable device. Through such technology, practitioners can access audio guides, exclusive images, and personalised prayer

content, merging spiritual tradition with technological innovation to engage younger generations.

In my fiction, online prayers and ceremonies play a vital role in the life of the Manchu society on its satellite. I have employed traditional patterns and colours for these digital rituals while rendering the shaman's face and background digitally, emphasising their virtual reality context.

Like Afrofuturism, Manchu Futurism compresses past, present, and future into tightly layered visions. The triangular shield is a metaphor for this temporal convergence through its three points: tradition, technology, and resistance.

Figure 48: Hannah Hoch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Beer-Belly of the Weimar Republic,* 1919, available at:

https://www.duitang.com/blog/?id=1181825784

The collage technique aligns with Manchu Futurism's engagement with non-linear temporality and heterotopic juxtaposition, echoing Walter Benjamin's conception of historical *monads* as fragmented yet revelatory moments (Benjamin 1968, p.263). Originally an architectural term for assembling disparate materials into

new spatial configurations (Li 2024, p.13), montage was later adopted by Cubists like Braque and Picasso to disrupt perspectival realism—Braque with his trompe- the three-dimensional nail on a Cubist painting, Picasso with newspaper clippings— foregrounding subjective reconstruction over mimetic representation.

The German Dadaists radicalized this approach. John Heartfield's photomontage *Adolf the Superman: He Eats Gold and Spews Idiocies* (1932) weaponized collage for anti-fascist critique, while Hannah Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* through the Beer-Belly of the Weimar Republic (1919) dissected Weimar Germany's machine-age chaos through gendered fragmentation. Here, montage became a political act, deconstructing dominant narratives via strategic incoherence.

In cinema, montage's power lies in its temporal elasticity. As Pudovkin observed, it creates 'the illusion of continuity from discontinuous shots' (Zhang 2020, p.1), while Zhan Qingsheng theorized it as 'spatiotemporal de/reconstruction' (Zhan 2018, p.319). My Manchu Futurist collages deliberately eschew linear logic, instead compressing ancestral symbols (eagle totems, birch-bark glyphs) with cybernetic elements (circuit boards, AI-generated landscapes) to manifest heterochronic tension—where past traumas and future speculations collide in the *now* of the artwork.

Early literary montage techniques were highly experimental, drawing inspiration from Sigmund Freud's theories of free association and stream of consciousness (Li 2024, p. 21). The Surrealist writer André Breton's *Nadja* (1928) exemplifies this

approach by disrupting conventional narrative coherence, incorporating photographs, documented events, and newspaper telegrams. Although the text comprises seemingly disconnected fragments, these digressions maintain an internal logic that reflects surrealist principles (Li 2024, p. 21).

This technique is further developed in Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), where multiple narrative strands unfold simultaneously. Döblin characterized his method as 'film-like' (Döblin 2008, p. 8), blending Berlin dialect, slang, bureaucratic language, popular songs, and instructional texts. This linguistic montage operates at structural and lexical levels, generating interpretive possibilities through its deliberate complexity.

Walter Benjamin noted the emergence of a new epic form in Döblin's work, arguing that its fragmented composition paradoxically creates 'a new consistency constructed by the reader' (Benjamin 2017, p. 23). Both Breton and Döblin significantly influenced Benjamin's practices of authorial effacement and textual polyphony—strategies to highlight contemporary crises through the text's instability. These anti-interpretive techniques fundamentally subvert traditional literary conventions (Li 2024, p. 23) by Replacing linear narration with simultaneity and interruption, Prioritizing reader construction over authorial guidance and using formal fragmentation to mirror modernity's epistemological rupture. Rather than presenting reality through conventional representation, montage texts perform reality's fractures, requiring active engagement from readers who must glean meaning from the discontinuities.

From Benjamin's perspective, montage disrupts linear time and creates an imaginative space for viewers to experience the juxtaposed elements spontaneously. In his work, 'The Arcades Project', Benjamin refers to his writing style as a literary montage (Li 2024, p. 28). By employing collage and juxtaposition, he disrupts the continuity of the text, reflecting either his meditation on the waste of history or references to the past. These texts and quotations serve as hidden historical monads, concealing history's truths and redemptive aspects. On the surface, Benjamin appears to dismantle textual continuity but challenges historical continuity by fragmenting history and infusing his philosophical reflections into those fragments (Li 2024, p. 28). He staunchly opposes historical progressivism, which often justifies past suffering. I am inspired by how he utilizes literary montage to break from continuous time and reconnect with a discontinuous history. In my practice, I aim to juxtapose fragments of Manchu history and reveal the underlying logic of these Manchu elements to viewers.
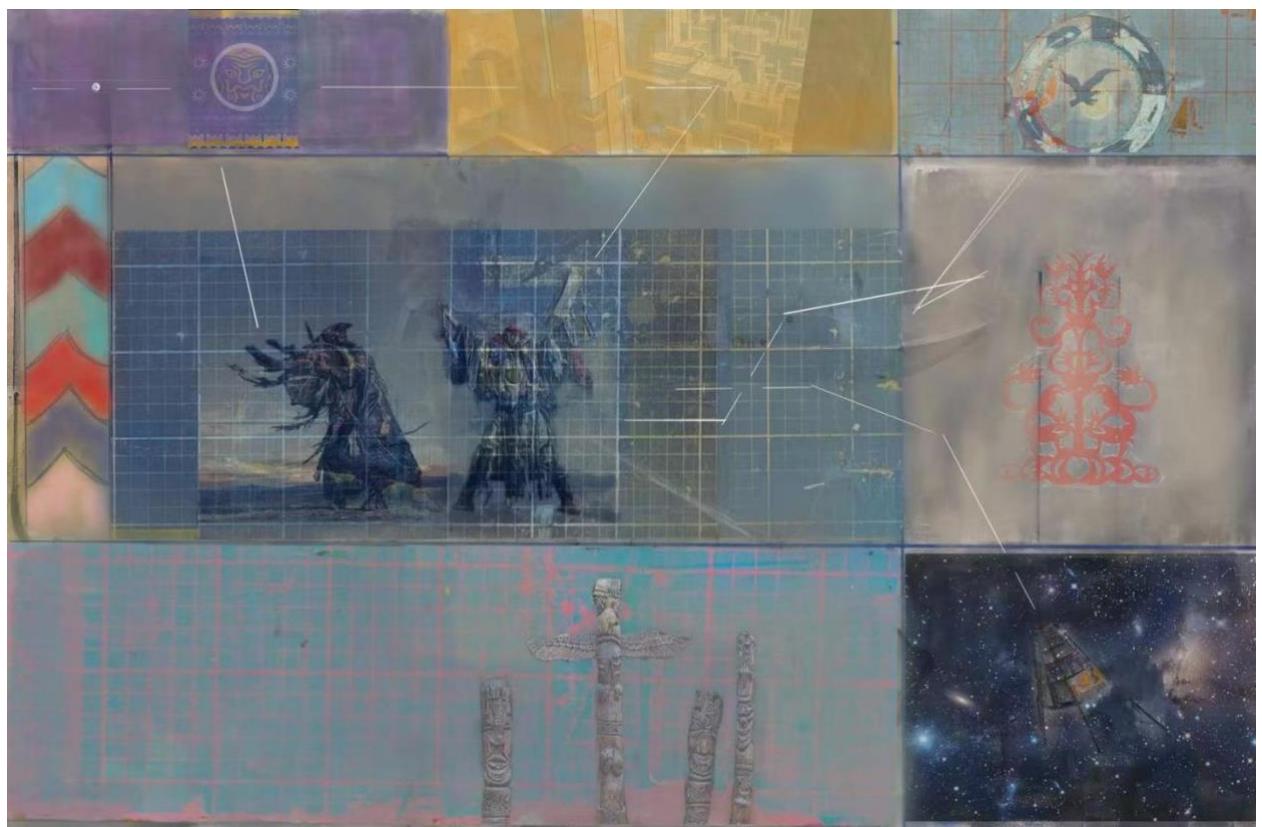
Figure 49: Helun Liang's work: *Montage No.1,* Print media, 2025

In my *Montage* series, I explore the compression of time and space through the strategic juxtaposition of elements from Manchu culture. This approach creates a mythic reconfiguration of Manchu temporality and spatial relationships. The works feature an innovative compositional method that fractures the picture plane into interconnected segments, each revealing different facets of Manchu heritage and projecting a speculative future.

One striking example showcases a triangular spacecraft in the lower section, designed to reference the distinctive architecture of traditional Manchu Cuoluozi dwellings set against a star-filled cosmic backdrop. The vessel's surface is adorned with sacred Manchu motifs, including revered eagle iconography and traditional

shamanic colour palettes, transforming these ancestral symbols into futuristic insignia. This symbolic transition is particularly significant, given the eagle's traditional role as a celestial messenger in Manchu cosmology, making its adaptation for space travel conceptually coherent.

The background incorporates vibrant geometric patterns that envelop shamanic figures frozen in ritual poses, their spiritual gestures floating amidst the technological landscape. Above this, digitally rendered visions of future Manchu communities connect to their cultural roots through a network of intersecting white vectors, which serve as compositional elements and metaphorical bridges across time.

The works generate a dynamic tension between preservation and innovation by recontextualizing established iconography—including shamanic imagery, traditional papercut motifs, and connective linear elements—within this futuristic framework. The series transcends conventional representations of cultural heritage by employing techniques of techno-formal hybridity, where traditional patterns are rendered in neon hues and through spatial disjunctions, allowing fragments of heritage to float weightlessly in imagined futures. This approach creates what might be termed visual heterochrony, where multiple temporal realities coexist within a single artistic space, challenging linear narratives of cultural evolution while offering speculative possibilities for Manchu identity in cosmic contexts.
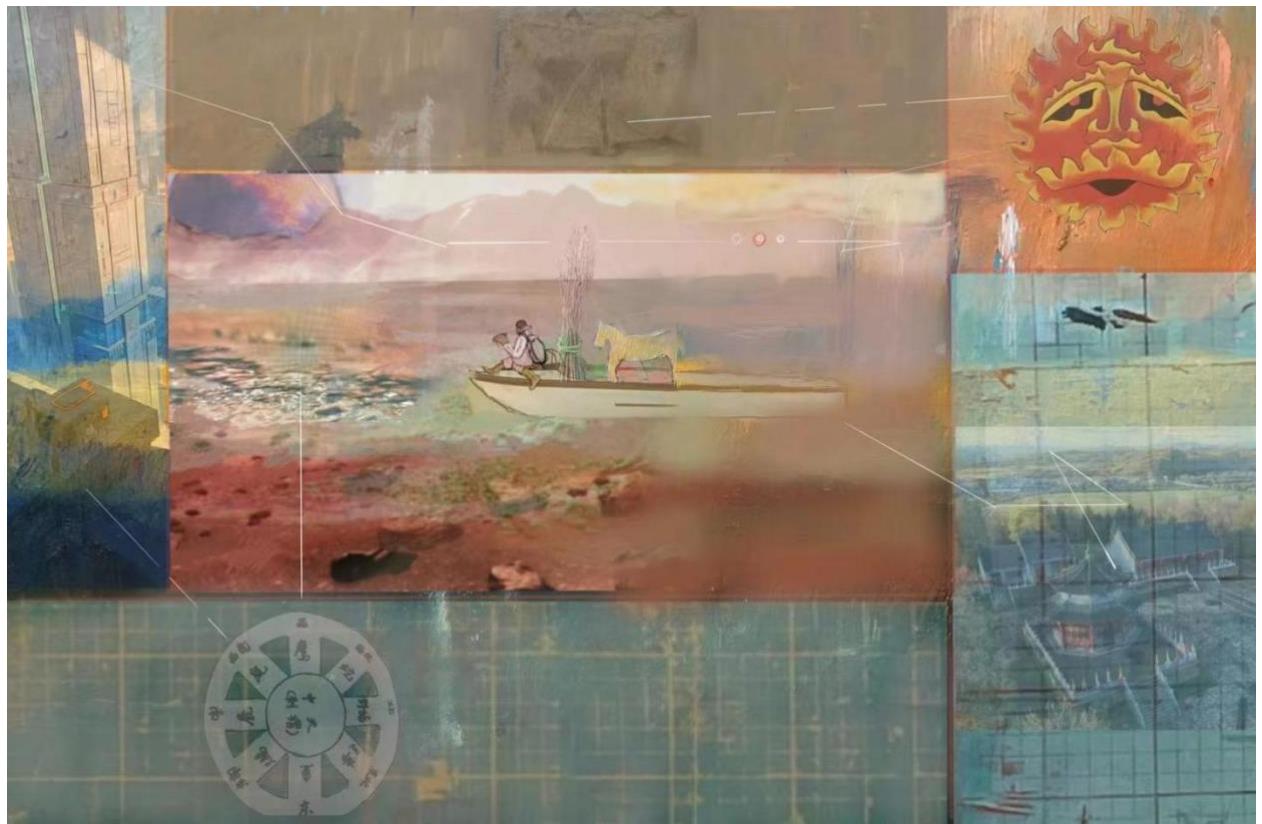
Figure 50: Helun Liang's work: *Montage No.2,* Print media, 2025

Montage No.2 narrates the future migration of a Manchu community seeking to preserve their ecosystem on an exoplanet. The work depicts Manchu pioneers transporting vital cultural and ecological elements - including indigenous horses and native tree species - to establish a sustainable habitat beyond Earth. Viewers familiar with my fiction's conclusion will recognise this as the successful culmination of the Manchu ecological preservation project. The composition employs a fragmented collage technique to create a cinematic montage effect, juxtaposing symbolic elements from different temporal planes: traditional fire and geographical totems occupy the lower left and upper right quadrants. At the same time, representations of historical Manchu architecture and futuristic settlements mirror each other in the lower right and upper left sections, respectively. This deliberate spatial arrangement

transforms the picture plane into a heterotopic field where historical monads - fragments of Manchu cultural memory - collide with speculative visions of interstellar cultural continuity. The work's power derives from this dialectical tension between archival preservation and forward projection, using the visual language of montage to collapse temporal distinctions while maintaining each element's distinctive symbolic resonance.
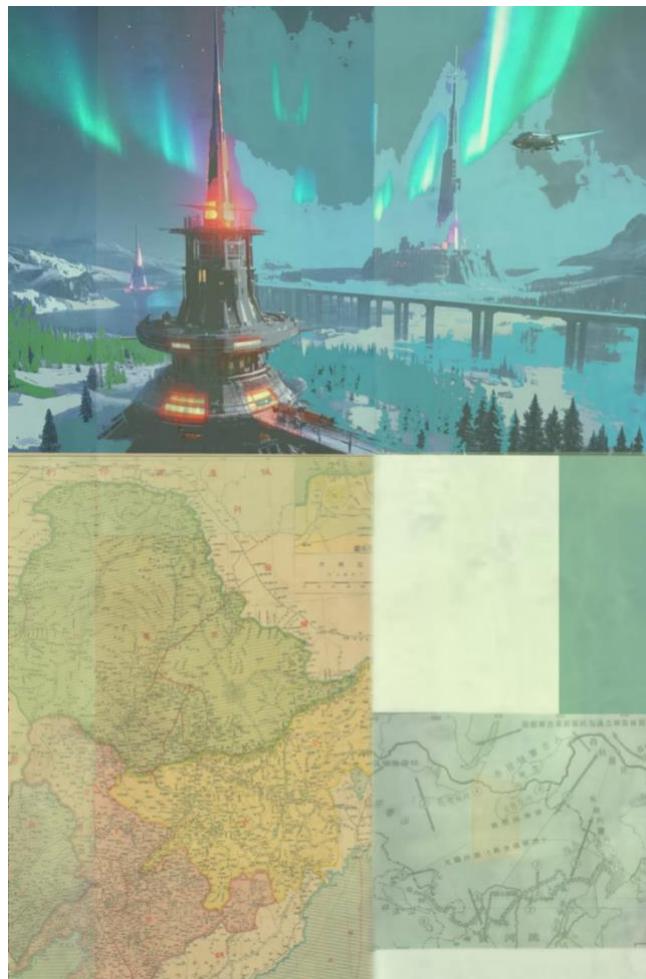

Figure 51: Helun Liang's work: *Montage No.3,* Print Media 2025

The *Montage* series maintains an intrinsic dialogue with my fiction, particularly evident in *Montage No.3*, which visualises a pivotal scene from the novel's first chapter – the mechanical shaman harvesting auroral energy atop Ninggu Tower. By collaging this futuristic tableau with historical maps of the region, the work engages directly with Benedict Anderson's theorisation of cartography's dual role in constructing imagined communities. As Anderson observes, maps function both as 'historical documents' – late 19th-century territorial demarcations that established politically charged biographical narratives later adopted by postcolonial nation-states – and as infinitely reproducible 'logo-maps' that became potent symbols of anti-colonial nationalism through their ubiquity on official paraphernalia and popular media (Anderson 2016, p.108). The layered cartographic fragments in my composition, sourced from Chinese governmental surveys, Japanese colonial charts, Western academic atlases and indigenous geographical knowledge, are deliberately destabilised through their juxtaposition with speculative elements. This methodological approach persists throughout the *Montage* series, where science-fictional vignettes, traditional clay painting techniques and archival cartography converge to create palimpsest visions that simultaneously deconstruct historical spatial claims and project decolonial futures. The mechanical shaman's auroral harvest, when superimposed upon these contested map fragments, transforms the tower from a passive architectural subject into an active agent of temporal and geopolitical reconfiguration.

Figure 52: Helun Liang's work: *Montage No.4,* Print media, 2025

Montage No.4 visually interprets the second chapter of my fiction, depicting the
Manchu diaspora's migration to their extraterrestrial satellite habitat. The lower
portion of the composition presents the satellite's futuristic urban landscape, where
advanced architecture synthesises traditional Manchu design principles – most
notably in the rooflines and eaves that directly reference historic Manchu city
structures. In the foreground's lower left quadrant, the protagonist Tong Yue appears
in traditional dress, her distinctive Manchu hat serving as an ethnic marker as she
observes this neo-Manchu metropolis. The scene's futurity is further emphasised by

hovering airships and monumental structures that dominate the skyline. Above this vision floats a hand-drawn cartographic rendering of the satellite, meticulously detailing key locations from the narrative: the shamanic caverns, industrial facilities, urban centres, lunar lakes and launch ports. This speculative map engages in deliberate dialogue with an 18th-century Manchu territorial chart positioned in the upper left corner, creating a visual continuum that bridges historical displacement with cosmic resettlement. The compositional strategy of vertically stacking past and future cartographies transforms the painting into a chronotopic device where the Manchu people's terrestrial heritage and extraterrestrial aspirations become mutually illuminating historical monads.
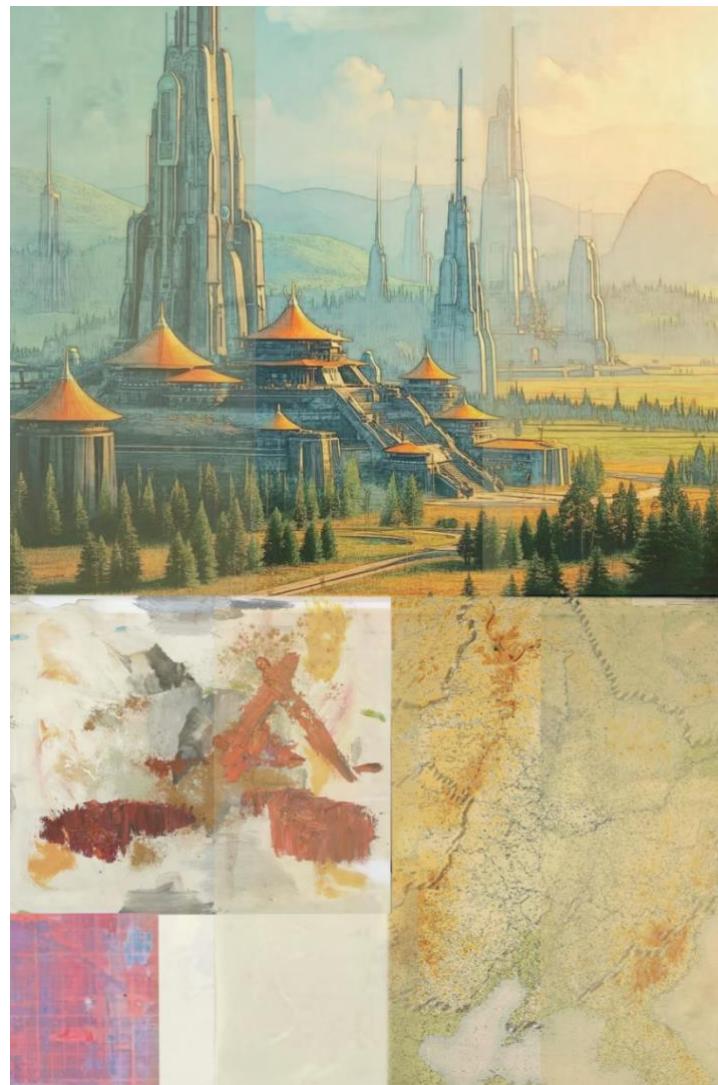
Figure 53: Helun Liang's work: *Montage No.5,* Print media, 2025

Montage No.5 develops the ecological narrative initiated in *Montage No.2*, employing a strategic collage technique synthesising clay paintings with cartographic elements to articulate the symbiotic relationship between Manchu cultural preservation and environmental stewardship. The composition visually realises the fiction's concluding chapter, depicting the successful establishment of a Manchu eco-ring on an exoplanet. In this self-sustaining habitat, traditional architectural forms, notably the distinctive triangular *Cuoluozi* structures, exist harmoniously with

transplanted forests and mountain ecosystems. Beneath this futuristic settlement, I incorporate one of my clay paintings as a material counterpoint; the fragile, cracking clay medium serves as a deliberate metaphor for the perceived vulnerability of Manchu cultural continuity. Through meticulous layering – first affixing the clay fragments to canvas, then overlaying pigmentation, and finally rendering the ancestral houses the work performs a temporal alchemy. This technique materially embodies my conceptual framework: where the clay fragments signify archaeological traces of the Manchu past, and the painted illustrations project speculative futures, their collage creates a chronotopic compression that disrupts linear historicity. The resulting palimpsest does not merely depict temporal coexistence. Still, it actively constructs what might be termed an 'ecological memoryscape' – a visual field where cultural inheritance and environmental adaptation become mutually constitutive processes across time.

Figure 54: *Montage No.14,* Print media, 2025

Montage No.14 serves as an urgent ecological critique, visualising the devastating consequences of industrial over-exploitation in traditional Manchu territories. The composition's central panel employs mixed media - including silver leaf and fragmented clay - to create a material allegory of environmental degradation. The silver leaf explicitly references the destructive mining operations witnessed during fieldwork in the former Manchu capital, where abandoned coal mines have transformed once-fertile landscapes into toxic wastelands. This environmental catastrophe manifests figuratively through two key motifs: anonymous figures drowning in anthropogenic sandstorms and a trapped horse struggling at a mining pit's edge - potent symbols of nature's subjugation to industrial rapacity.

The upper register extends this dystopian vision through a surreal maze where disoriented horses circle endlessly, their entrapment mirroring the ecological deadlock of unchecked resource extraction. Yet within this bleak prognosis glimmers a speculative solution, depicted in the upper left quadrant: the cryogenic preservation of Changbai Mountain's ecosystem, symbolised by a monumental ice cube encasing aquatic life, awaiting transplantation to an undamaged exoplanet.

Formally, the work engages with Italian Futurist aesthetics, particularly Giacomo Balla's chromatic experiments with temporal simultaneity. By adopting his signature technique of stark value contrasts and fractured planes, I transform the picture surface into a palimpsest where the Manchu past (ecological harmony) and future (techno-utopian preservation) collide. This visual strategy of *temporal cubism* - achieved through abrupt tonal shifts and disjointed spatial compartments - deliberately destabilises the viewer's perception, mirroring the epistemological uncertainty of navigating between environmental trauma and restorative possibility.

Figure 55: *Montage No.10,* Print media, 2025

My *Montage* series interrogates how Manchu cultural preservation might manifest in futuristic contexts, particularly through ecological stewardship and diasporic adaptation. The works depict cyberpunk-inspired Manchu cities where neon-lit streetscapes incorporate traditional architectural elements – curved eaves and triangular C*uoluozi* silhouettes reimagined in luminous alloys. This aesthetic synthesis draws deliberate inspiration from Vaporwave's characteristic blending of retro-futurism, itself an artistic movement born from internet communities' propensity for cultural recombination (Wang 2018, pp.4-5). Like Vaporwave musicians who sample

1980s elevator music to construct nostalgic futures, I appropriate Manchu shamanic motifs and script, rendering them in glitch-art techniques where uneven pigment application creates temporal dissonance – some areas fading like disappearing memories, others vibrating with chromatic intensity.

The series' conceptual framework owes much to Vaporwave's genealogical roots in Fluxus mail art and early networked creativity, precedents that mirror my belief in digital platforms' potential to disseminate Manchu Futurism. Neon signage throughout the paintings displays authentic Manchu script, asserting linguistic continuity amidst technological transformation – a visual rebuttal to cultural erasure.


Figure 56: Manchu Futurism Exhibition Scene

My Manchu Futurist works have been exhibited across multiple venues, with the *Echo of Time* project displayed in both outdoor and indoor settings, including Aohu Village and Shenzhen Fine Art Institute. The inaugural Manchu Futurist exhibition occurred in 2025 at Dongxiao Art Museum, a prominent gallery in central

Shenzhen that attracts visitors nationwide. Titled *Constructing an Imagined Future Community with Fiction and Art*, the exhibition presented thirty works encompassing paintings, print media, installations and video pieces, all unified under the Manchu Futurism theme.

The exhibition was structured around three interconnected sections that explored temporal, spatial and sociological dimensions. *Monads of Time* examined the concept of artistic monads through research-based works featuring a triptych of the shamanic worldview alongside clay paintings that poignantly conveyed the fragility of disappearing Manchu cultural traditions. *Heterotopias of Space* traced the evolution of Manchu spatial concepts, with clay paintings visualising Lattimore's reservoir theory alongside the *Echo of Time* project's technologically-mediated reinterpretations of traditional ceremonies. The final section, *Communities of Imagination*, offered speculative visions of future Manchu identity through fictional narratives and montage-based print media that blended futuristic elements with traditional iconography.

During the opening event, a seminar brought together curators, scholars and audience members who collectively recognised the exhibition's innovative approach to conceptualising minority futures. The dialogue that emerged highlighted how the works provided fresh perspectives on cultural preservation through contemporary artistic practice, particularly in their synthesis of historical research with avant-garde visual strategies. The exhibition's critical reception underscored its success in

translating complex theoretical frameworks surrounding Manchu identity into compelling visual experiences accessible to diverse audiences.

In conclusion, Manchu Futurism offers an example of how visual art responds to the theoretical idea of time and space philosophy. In each artwork, Manchu time and space are compressed and visualized. Manchu Futurism art shows the possibility of reviewing Manchu history and reimagining an alternative pathway for the Manchu community. In the process of creating Manchu futurist art, I consulted a large number of historical documents. I visited several Manchu autonomous counties to investigate Manchu historical monuments. In my conversations with many Manchu compatriots, I also gained valuable knowledge and a lot of emotion, which will be conveyed through words and visual arts. Manchu Futurism will be more than just an artistic movement. It will become an intellectual, philosophical, and technological inspiration with the participation of more people. At the same time, it can also serve as a reference to encourage other people to explore the future. My art project envisions a Manchu Futurism that transcends geographic and linguistic barriers. It creates a shared visual and emotional language for the reimagined Manchu community rooted in historical identity. Through my project, Manchu Futurism art is enabling an imagined community that reclaims Manchu identity for both its descendants and the global cultural landscape.

Conclusion

Abstract

This study systematically examines the construction logic and practical pathways of the 'Imagined Manchu Community' through an interdisciplinary synthesis of sociological theory and the philosophy of time. Rooted in Manchu historical consciousness, the research critically engages with Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities (1991, p.6), Tönnies's and Bauman's conceptualisations of community, and Walter Benjamin's notion of historical monads (Benjamin 1968, p.253-264) to propose an alternative community model grounded in cultural revival, ecological transformation, and cross-temporal dialogue.

By reconstructing obscured Manchu cultural monads—such as shamanic rituals, linguistic symbolism, and ecological cosmologies—that dominant historical narratives have marginalised, this study seeks to activate a decentralised, non-linear collective identity. In doing so, it offers both theoretical frameworks and practical paradigms for minority cultures to challenge homogenising forces while articulating alternative futures.

A tripartite theoretical framework supports this study. Anderson's imagined communities (Anderson 1991, p.6) theory provides the core structural logic, emphasising collective identity formation through the mediated dissemination of cultural symbols (such as myths, languages, and rituals). His model of 'print

capitalism' (Anderson 1991, p.37-46) is extended to encompass cross-media artistic

practices, including literature and visual arts.

The community theories of Tönnies and Bauman lend the study an ethical

dimension: Tönnies's concept of *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 2001, p.22) reveals the

potential for the modern transformation of the 'unity of heaven and humanity'

principle in Manchu shamanism, while Bauman's critique of liquid

modernity (Bauman 2000, p.83) demonstrates how Manchu futurism must reconstruct

moral bonds within a fragmented reality and resist the erosion of cultural memory by

consumerism.

Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history provides methodological direction. His

'monadological' approach (Benjamin 1968, p.263) treats history as a constellation of

dialectical images that can be activated in the present—for instance, the Changbai

Mountain myth transmutes from a tool of imperial legitimacy into a symbol of

ecological sovereignty. Similarly, his notion of 'messianic time' (Benjamin 1968,

p.254-255) (analogous to the shamanic cyclical time employed in this study) ruptures

linear historiography, rendering the revival of Manchu culture an act of 'redeeming

the past to reconstruct the future' (Benjamin 1968, p.254).

Thus, Anderson's 'imagination' supplies the formal scaffolding, Tönnies and

Bauman infuse the ethical core, and Benjamin's methodology facilitates the transition

from historical critique to futural projection. Together, they shape the dual nature of

Manchu futurism—serving both as a means of cultural resistance (against Sinicisation

and globalisation) and as an experimental domain for post-humanist ecological ethics (reconfiguring the relationships between humans, nature, and technology).

The Manchu Futurist Imagined Community is a cross-temporal community conception grounded in historical critique, cultural revival and reconstruction, and an ecological turn. Through its history examination, it activates 'historical monads', transforming Manchu cultural symbols—centred on shamanism—into 'time capsules' via art and literature. For instance, the traditional dwelling known as the *Cuoluozi* is reimagined as an eco-cabin for global inhabitants through artistic installations, bridging the gap between nostalgic symbols and future blueprints. Reactivating historical and cultural memoryreconstructs the essence of community and Manchu identity.

Manchu Futurism rejects the techno-utopian narratives of 'Chinese accelerationist futurism' (such as metaverse colonisation and AI hegemony), which are rooted in Italian Futurism. Instead, it advocates for a 'slow future'—employing the cyclical temporality of shamanic ritual to challenge the myth of linear progress and redefining 'development' as the intergenerational preservation of ecological balance. By foregrounding marginalised Manchu narratives, it constructs an imagined community in which past, present, and future coexist.

The originality of this study lies in its articulation of Manchu futurism as an alternative model for Chinese community building, consciously countering the dominant Han-centric narrative tradition and challenging narrow anthropocentric futurist ideologies. The theoretical and methodological innovation manifests in three

key dimensions: theoretically, it synthesises Benjamin's 'monad theory' with Anderson's 'imagined communities' to formulate the concept of 'monadic imagination', offering a non-linear historical framework for minority cultural revival; practically, it pioneers an interdisciplinary fusion of original speculative fiction, easel painting, digital imagery, and installation art to construct a symbiotic 'eco-symbolic art' paradigm centred on Manchu futurist community-building; culturally, it interrogates Han hegemony within China's 'unity in diversity' framework, demonstrating how minority futurism can transcend both nationalist discourse and Western postcolonial theory by developing an ecocentric community model rooted in Indigenous cosmologies. This approach not only reconfigures traditional understandings of Chinese collectivity but also proposes a decolonial futurism that resists epistemic domination through vernacular ecological wisdom.

This project proposes a novel artistic and intellectual framework for revitalising Manchu culture and serves as a broader reference point for global minority cultures in search of alternative future narratives. For instance, the Manchu futurist imagined community presents a compelling case study wherein repressed historical monads such as shamanic rituals and totem poles can be reanimated through artistic practice, thereby furnishing a cultural foundation for non-anthropocentric thought that resists the homogenising forces of both anthropocentric globalisation and hegemonic technological futurism.

Future research could explore the intersection between digital media and Manchu Futurism, expanding its scope and practical applications within academic and

community contexts. As a critical alternative to 'Chinese accelerationist futurism', Manchu Futurism embraces 'decentralised solidarity'—rejecting cultural homogenisation while remaining vigilant against technological hegemony. In doing so, it opens new pathways for plural modernities.

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