

On “Dongbei Renaissance”

March 2020 by Tian Jin and Yutian Yang

Abstract

Northeast China, as a region with distinct cultural features and memories of imperial and industrial history, has remarkably re-emerged in the public view in recent years through various new media forms. This culture revival, known as the “Dongbei Renaissance” (Dongbei Wenyi Fuxin /东北文艺复兴) sparks vigorous discussion among the young, digital-savvy generation. This research aims to explore a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural phenomenon by analyzing related factors in terms of aesthetics, economic ramification, and cultural politics, etc. In particular, this project examines this comparison to the Western Renaissance, but to further contextualize within the culture and history of the overall region of Northeast China while tracing its recent developments.

Research Question and Significance

Speaking of Northeast China, there has been a regional culture with distinct features and characteristics since the Qing Dynasty, when people massively moved to that area for opportunities/adventures? (“闯关东”). The region’s rich tradition of folk arts, such as Errenzhuan, sketch comedy, and the catchy local dialect made a deep impression across the whole country among generation by generation through the annual Chinese Spring Festival Gala, popular TV series, etc. However, in recent years, especially the year of 2019 when Gem Dong released his song “野狼Disco”, Dongbei culture has remarkably re-appeared in the public view in new forms of media but still embodies the traditional Dongbei elements. Combined with the current trend of short videos becoming gradually popular on different platforms, Dongbei culture has also become much more prevalent, among which one specific video maker called 老四 has attracted numerous fans and audiences. Gem, 老四 and 班宇 who wrote the book “冬泳” about Dongbei have been compared to three “Renaissance heroes”, and the term “Dongbei Renaissance” has been heatedly discussed since it was first raised by Gem publically last year.

In this research, we would like to mainly focus on the term “Dongbei Renaissance”. Since this term was first raised by a pop singer, we decided to start with the subculture aspect, such as the popularity of short video and internet pop music. Specifically, we will focus on “野狼Disco” for the beginning. Then we will expand our research to a broader area which is not just limited to subculture. By analyzing related factors in different fields including politics, economy, history, Dongbei dialect, etc, and by comparing it with the Renaissance that happened since the 14th century, we are trying to give a more comprehensive definition of the term and thus relate it to the whole region of Northeast China to discuss cultural development throughout times.

Though the term has been heatedly discussed and has frequently emerged on various platforms, especially using the word “renaissance” to arouse much public attention, there’s almost no clear definition of it. Is it really a renaissance? What’s its relationship with the Western Renaissance? What does it revive? In a broader sense, as a region with distinct features while without a long history, it is also worth researching to analyze its development throughout history, therefore we will be able to come to conclusions that might help its long-term development.

Project Design and Feasibility

Methods:

- Archival research (historical documents in regional newspapers/city archives);
- Textual & discourse analysis of relevant media materials;
- Ethnography (field-trips);
- Selective usage of interviews (if possible, and must be approved by mentor beforehand).

Timetable:

- 6.10 - 6.20: Searching for relevant literature through academic and popular databases
- 6.21 - 7.1: Making field trip schedule based on materials we find
- 7.2 - 7.20: Field trip (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning)
- 7.21 - 8.2: Further revision and proofreading
- 8.2 - 8.31: Finishing the report and a presentation video (if needed)

Group Partnership Plan

Working as a group, we can always hear different ideas and get more resources; let alone we are doing cultural-related research, and we share different backgrounds and cultural differences (one is from Shanghai and another is from Shandong). Besides, by working together, we can motivate each other during the whole research process and meanwhile learn how to collaborate, which will surely make our work more effective and organized, and practice our team spirit.

Because we just have two people, we will share the same responsibilities synchronously while following a scheduled timetable. We won't separate the work completely into different parts for each one to finish, rather, we may have subtly different focuses (such as writing and planning) based on the shared information and knowledge. Though we might be located in different places in summer, it is quite convenient for us to communicate with each other online. Any social platform as well as google docs can help exchange ideas and motivate each other timely.

Background

As first-year students, we've both taken the course Global Perspective on Society in the first semester. It has equipped us with developed and diverse perspectives when considering one certain issue or cultural phenomenon. We've also learned some thinking modes and research methods in this course. Besides, this semester, we are both taking the course History of Modern China, in which we learn the knowledge about the demographic changes, development policies and related history of Northeast China. It strongly interests and inspires us to go deeper into the history factor when doing the research.

Feedback and Evaluation

Our mentor will provide regular feedback on our project during the whole process, including:

- Bi-weekly meeting (either via zoom or in person) to discuss the project
- Guidance in locating key literatures, setting clear research plans/goals and commenting on work-in-progress drafts
- Preparation workshop on ethnographic work (field-trips)

The project will be evaluated both in terms of its execution (the student's collaborative efforts throughout the summer) as well as its final result. By the end of the summer, students are expected to

submit a 1500-2500 word report outlining the project's key findings and significance, and may include a visual documentation as part of the evaluation.

Dissemination and Knowledge

We will constantly communicate with the mentor to decide this part. So far, we plan to return a research paper together with a documentary video by the end of summer. To share and listen to more ideas, we may post it on social media and engage those who are interested in this topic to have a deeper discussion. Based on that, we will again revise our paper in order to make it more comprehensive. Also, our mentor may invite us to share our research in the course she teaches next semester.

Project Budget

Equipment expenses:

- Professional field-recording devices (audio pen, monitoring headphone);
- Camera (if you can rent from IMA, list any possible rental fees/deposit etc).

Research expenses:

- Chinese books/articles purchased outside of the library resources;
- Media materials (DVDS,CDs) purchased during field trips;
- Entrance fees to museums/archives

	Item	Vendor information	Estimated fee
Equipment expenses	Professional field-recording devices (audio pen, monitoring headphone)	Jd.com	About 2000rmb
	Camera (including lens, batteries, etc)	Jd.com	About 3500rmb
Research expenses	Chinese books/articles purchased outside of the library resources	bookstores /online stores (e.g: Dangdang.com /CNKI)	About 300rmb
	Media materials (DVDS, CDs) purchased during field trips	Exact stores during field trips	About 300rmb
	Entrance fees to museum/ archives/ etc.	Exact places	About 300rmb (two people altogether)
Total			About 6400rmb