

The Chinese Mayor: An Examination of Gilles Deleuze's Political Philosophy from the Perspective of Deterritorialization

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The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Gilles Deleuze holds that deterritorialization is the coming undone created through the development of socialism. Along the lines of flight, a subject moves from their original place of living to a new territory physically, psychologically, and spiritually, and in turn, discovers their own potential and experiences qualitative changes. This process of becoming forms a new territory and provides the possibility of another “becoming.” Therefore, deterritorialization is the movement that produces changes and is featured with different levels of strength and dimensions, through which a new world can be created.

The Chinese Mayor is a documentary that records the implementation of a reconstruction project by the mayor of Datong, an important coal mining city in China. The mayor made use of his supreme power to demolish old houses in Datong in an attempt to transform the highly polluted city where the coal industry has declined into a cultural destination that possesses cultural values and attracts tourists. However, under the political system of authoritarianism that deprives people of their right to housing, the reconstruction project deviated from the ideal of the “great unity” that envisages a society where all people can live in peace and with equality.

In this study, the process of territorialization–deterritorialization–reterritorialization in *The Chinese Mayor* was examined, and the concept of cosmopolitanism and related problems were analyzed according to Deleuze’s political philosophy.

Keywords: Gilles Deleuze, deterritorialization, becoming, *The Chinese Mayor*, cosmopolitanism

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1. Proposal of definition and concept of deterritorialization

The political philosophy of Deleuze is neither a political opinion nor a political blueprint, territorialization, as its leading and self-consistent reflection and self-reflection, constitutes a political belief and becomes philosophical self-cognition through the rational classics of politics itself as well as the internal political life of the philosophy. Deterritorialization is a back-reflection based on the territorialization, and it contains the fundamental proposition of building a complete and comprehensive social whole, and as a basic idea with a high principle and a prerequisite foundation for politics, it points to a civic lifestyle. The civil life and political life of deterritorialization still consider the most traditional and fundamental question of politics itself, trying to clarify the relationship between human society and human beings within the legislative framework.

1.1 Embodiment of deterritorialization in Deleuze's political philosophy

Deterritorialization is the core of Deleuze's political philosophy and an important pillar of his philosophical thought. The proposal of territorialization is the premise and foundation of deterritorialization. Deterritorialization is a concept proposed by Guattari (1996), using Jaques Lacan's (1953) defines "the process of forming children's sensitive areas," believing that "deterritorialization" would "cause damage to a subject." In the modern countries or the civilised world, "territorialization" is the act that the state apparatus or ruling class (in capitalism as in the general context of Deleuze and other contemporary philosophers) suppresses, changes, codes and systematises emotion, spirit, and desire. Based on that definition, deterritorialization, in contrast, frees the desire and logical desire from the illegal status and the desire can break through obstacles, eliminate codes and restrictions, and meet the requirements for free communication, to explore production potential as well as the unification of material and spiritual high points.

Regarding world structure, Deleuze argued that people could understand the development and framework of the new world, and this composition of the known universe might lead to an unknown "mystery world." This unknown world would be created by the existing world and follow the structure of the existing world, but it was impossible for people to discover its specific features. Through this connection between the known and the unknown, the subject could get the liberation of personality as well as the exploration of creativity. Due to the existence of deterritorialization, "the unknown" is full of various possibilities. Meanwhile, deterritorialization could also bring a positive power and have a stronger pioneering ability. In this process, deterritorialization could not only bring the changes in material, geographical position, social position, social order, psychology, and spirit but also produce brand new, unknown, hopeful and creative style and features.

Based on the exploration of the essence, deterritorialization produces a changing movement. Through deterritorialization, the subject can obtain more freedom, break through the restrictions and shackles of the original field, release its potential in a brand new environment, and achieve a further exploration of productivity. In this process, the subject is free and powerful due to the existence of deterritorialization. Change is the independent consciousness of the issue. The issue is free from the

restriction and oppression of external pressure, and the external pressure no longer affects the issue.

1.2 The costs and results of deterritorialization in political philosophy

Deterritorialization is not a whole process, and it can be regarded as an inevitable result, but not a natural result. This process cannot be concealed. Any goal-directed process with a movement will make new waves under the existing social system and order, and even if it is a feeble wave, it will still be known by everyone. The forms and ways of movement affecting the existing law will provoke a backlash and obstruction. Since the deterritorialization is a separation from the original domain, the separation process must be full of resistance and pains. The unique world and order will endeavour to hinder this separation and confront it fiercely. The existing ruling class (namely capitalism), as a social subject maintaining the original order and way of life, will attempt to passivate, alleviate and manage this deterritorialization process. Through compensation and compromise, it will try to direct the results of the movement process towards the course expected by the regime to cope with the process. Meanwhile, deterritorialization is another force that cannot be ignored. The tension of these two poles, within their competition, maintains a dynamic balance, which is reflected in various kinds of social and ideological forms.

Deleuze's philosophy attaches great importance to the study of desire, maintaining that desire has positive significance, and it is something with strong initiative and creativity for promoting the liberation of productive forces and the natural flow of information. Non-centralization and non-integration of desire are also significantly restrained by desire. On this basis, it is of indisputable significance to exterminate centralisation and integration, exhibit the value of desire, and explore the subversiveness and revolutionary spirit of desire.

On the contrary, deterritorialization has another internal trouble which is formed very early but only emerges when it is complete. A person who owns the whole world may still be destroyed and disordered. Thorough deconstruction and openness, due to their loss of the foundation of ethics and orders, will lead to destruction and excessive transparency. There used to be three important nomadic peoples in the world, and all of them relied on the sand and grassland, wandering near the agricultural civilisation. Nomads could maintain their actual control through periodic plunders, but they are like carnivores which never maintained the civilisation of herbivores. The nomads destroyed the old world but did not create a new world and new order. The contact builds the concept of ethics and order among people, in which disorder and destruction hold a more powerful force, while it is more challenging to construct order and morality, which is also one of the orientations of deterritorialization.

1.3 Differentiation and reappearance of reterritorialization

Some concepts are self-evident, and this phenomenon is particularly prominent in political philosophy. Repeated reappearance at different levels constitute fractals, and repeated recurrence at different times is regarded as a reappearance, or the two concepts lead to a holographic image, namely, an identical, reappearing and self-evident form of social organisation. At the highest level, the monarchy represented by the United States symbolises a new method of rights collection; the

parliament is represented by the civilised world and the development of capitalism in the traditional sense, and the heterogenization of the proletariat constitutes the public. This form of organisation continuously reappears in social groups (e.g., associations and communities) in different countries and regions and commonly represents a tree-like, hierarchical and successively recursive organisational structure.

In the real world, deterritorialization is not something political groups like to see, because it violates the current order they have set. Deterritorialization tears apart and collide with the current environment and it attempts to make changes. At last deterritorialization, unsteady factors and risk factors in solutions proposed by deterritorialization are likely to cause damage to the present and long-term interests of the existing political groups. Because deterritorialization has a strong directionality and power, this damage is expected to be visible and cannot be ignored. Therefore, when the deterritorialization movement takes place, it has to face various obstacles designed by the current interest groups and political groups. They may affect the deterritorialization movement itself, numeralizing and dogmatizing it, to complete the suppression and domestication of the subject, and gear the movement process of deterritorialization back towards territorialization, thus preventing the occurrence of deterritorialization. In this case, the individuals in the deterritorialization movement, that is, the members of deterritorialization should overcome the obstacles and difficulties set by the political groups with a proactive attitude, and break through the restrictions of political behaviour on the subject, especially those soft and passive restrictions, namely compensatory efforts and intermittent concession.

2. Application of deterritorialization in the political structure of Deleuze

Seen from the perspective of both theory and political practice, the development of territorialization and deterritorialization is not static. It is a dynamically applied discipline and practical knowledge which are fully integrated with practical situations, and it is a discipline with rigorous theoretical property in the field of politics. Its guiding principles for practice are not dogmatic. Therefore, People can obtain directions, but not regulations. The discussion of political philosophy from the perspective of deterritorialization must combine with the historical background and actual situation. To enable the government, political groups and individuals to play their role better and promote the practical application of social, cultural, economic resources. Moreover, deterritorialization makes promote the overall improvement and sound development of the society, and to improve the free circulation and constant endeavours in a social environment. Geng depicted the new blueprint of Datong City. The ideology undoubtedly coincides with the philosophical thought of “territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization” put forward by Deleuze. This paper attempts to show the coincidence association through Datong City where citizens reshaped a chapter full of imaginations and fantasies. Various feelings about the construction and changes of the city were described from different perspectives of different parties, including Datong City and its residents, Mayor Geng Yanbo, director Zhou Hao and the audiences.

2.1 Territorialization process between Datong and its residents

Datong City in Shanxi Province is an ancient millennium capital with abundant historical sites. In recent years, it is faced with the problems of severe pollution and

outdated infrastructure. To reproduce the city's past prosperity and create a new future, Geng boldly and resolutely conducted urban renewal. With 100,000 households relocated in five years, the mayor aimed to tear down the old houses to make room for the reconstruction of the ancient cultural city by building an ancient city wall, ancient residences, museums, etc. The history and cultural heritage of Datong City are not only essential factors not to be ignored in any relief and reconstruction process in the future, but also are outstanding features of the territorialization process.

After entering modern times, Datong City has always been a place that supplies coal to the entire country China. Excessive coal mining led to the destruction of the urban environment, and at the same time, the city's construction had not undergone any significant development or change. Grey sky, old streets, and houses became the visual normal of the street scene in Datong City. Regarding the film's synopsis, what the director revealed was a purpose and process of destroying the old and establishing the new. A large number of contrasting pictures appeared in work. First, the city plan was outdated, houses were shabby, and there was a shortage of new buildings. Then, Geng arrived, and demolition and construction became constant in the city. Roads, bridges as well as the bleak Qiaodong region gradually became prosperous and bustling business districts. We also see content related to the demolition and construction regularly appear in the background pictures. All in all, the contrast between the old and the new runs through the whole film, thus indicating that the changes happening in Datong City are a rapid and positive development trend.

If its development process in the history is regarded as a gradual process of territorialization, the development process of tourism is the separation method of its deterritorialization. Through the deconstruction of the modernisation and reinterpretation of the history, some fragments, elements, and concepts were singly highlighted and emphasised, and the original social, organisational form and ideological structure were again stripped and decomposed. In the context of rapid economic development, the reconstruction and restoration of historical sites have become a new territorialization process. Meanwhile, Datong City also pays much attention to the needs of ecological development. The original wetland water system inside and outside the city was maintained and reconstructed, and the vegetation coverage area and ecosystem were recovered, which have become an essential part of the territorialization process of Datong City.

The old and new, good and bad of Datong City should not be identified and distinguished directly through the views expressed by the media. The most objective and genuine scenes of Datong City, as well as the right and wrong after urban construction planning, can be felt by examining the local people's statements. Distant shots and close-up shots showed the overall objective situation from different angles. Therefore, we can objectively know the pragmatic and diligent working spirit of Mayor Geng by looking at the mass' collective activities.

Case 1: There were images of two types of Datong people in the film before the demolition planning: the first is officials wearing dress shirts and trousers, while the second is populations from the grassroots level in old clothes. The former held complex attitudes toward demolition planning. Some of them wanted to serve their interests in this matter, while the others showed indifference towards demolition and

reconstruction. The latter seemed to have a relatively simple attitude towards demolition. They were very concerned about their own resettlement houses and compensations, and they didn't care much about the changes in the city's appearance.

Case 2: After the demolition and reconstruction work was completed, the above two types of people expressed their delight in the changes brought by the demolition and reconstruction. For example, through close shots and close-up shots, the documentary presented the officials' narration on the changes in their city in detail. "The shirts (officials)" provided a very detailed narration on the changes in the city's squares, bridges, streets, on what these changes mean. Meanwhile, ordinary people also showed happy facial expressions in the scene. Similar to the officials, those common people had clear viewpoints on the changes in the city as well as their housing. They held a positive and complimentary attitude towards the new look of Datong City. Meanwhile, they were optimistic about the future continuous reconstruction.

During the process of constant urban development, reconstruction and expansion, the municipal districts and main urban area of Datong City constantly encroached on the city's edges from inside, and the urban residents' lifestyle and attitude were also greatly affected by this process. Under the influence of traditional concepts and economic interests, a large number of residents were reluctant to leave their original residence, but they had gradually increased practical requirements for the living conditions, so this change of mentality conforms to the city's old pattern and development process. In the context of territorialization, the demand and movement of deterritorialization inevitably arise, which is consistent with the interests and development of social subjects, as well as the implementation of forced relocation and the control of societal events. This is regarded as a negative social impact, but this deterritorialization process will be dissociated by the reconstruction of the land and its attached building groups in this region, and the residents who move to the new living quarters and commercial areas will become new people with vested interests, thus maintaining the order of the communities and streets.

2.2 Embodiment of deterritorialization in the mentality of the mayor of Datong

Geng was the top local official responsible for managing the comprehensive development of Datong City, and the present and future of Datong City was dependent on the diligence of his administration. The history of Datong City should be considered to understand his ambition. Datong City, when called "Pingcheng" 1,600 years ago, was the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty for 100 years. Geng was determined to revive its "cultural value" and turn it into a sightseeing city. He believed that this could solve the problem of the outdated business model which relied on the coal industry and paid a heavy price for pollution. At first glance, the broad direction was good, but in practice, as he said, "We are a socialist country, so we should do better than a capitalist country!" He wanted to boldly and resolutely transform the landscape, build a complete ancient town in the centre of Datong City, plus a new town. In short, he formulated a stunning plan for land development and construction, which was to be implemented "quickly" and "relentlessly."

After his arrival in Datong City, Geng conducted a detailed on-the-spot investigation into the overall outlook of the city. It can be seen in the documentary that Geng, in ordinary clothes, was visiting various parts of the city. His dusty leather shoes

indicated he had been a diligent and enduring hardship. He left his footprints of those old leather shoes on both the streets of the old city and the construction sites.

Additionally, we can also see the scene that he reached the grassroots and chatted with various characters, and he talked with cadres at the grassroots level, people in business as well as labourers. During the conversation, the camera showed Geng's focus and concentration on the details of urban reconstruction planning. Meanwhile, his interviews with the people, field observations and so on all indicated that he not only took his work seriously but also attached great importance to urban construction.

In the meantime, it can also be seen that the mayor did not put on airs, acting arrogantly and he could get to the point directly. For example, during an on-site visit, he directly criticised the unfortunate job of local officials and the unscrupulousness of some developers in front of the crowd and reporters. To present the discourse, the film creator used the original voice of Geng. For example, Geng pointed at one developer and said, "He looks honest from the outside, but he is bad, and people like him are terrible!" The dialogue in Shanxi dialect in the clip highlighted the objectivity and reality of the story, showing the mayor was sincere. Meanwhile, it also revealed that the mayor dared to face up to the ugliness in society and he had no hypocrisy.

Chinese officials are full of conflicts, exchanges of interests and power transactions. In order to deal with and balance these conflicts, the political philosophy of disarming proposed by Deleuze was applied. These scenes are more real and meaningful than any compliments made by the media. Zhou said that what he did was what officials around the world wanted to do but could not do for various reasons. This movie is full of contradictions. Maybe it is exploring what kind of government we need and what kind of city human society needs. The film raised questions for the audience to think about, and Zhou said no conclusions.

2.3 Reterritorialized Datong in the eyes of the director and audiences

Chinese Mainland director Hao Zhou won the 51st and 52nd Golden Horse Awards for the best documentary with *Cotton* and *The Chinese Mayor*. He was originally a photojournalist before he became a documentary director. The changes he went through originated in his questioning himself and his quest for truth in social issues.

The Chinese Mayor, a character documentary directed by Zhou, records the story that Geng, demolished private houses and rebuilt the ancient town to achieve his goal of creating a "Cultural Datong." The director admitted that he had encountered some obstacles when shooting this "sensitive" documentary. For example, the interviewees fiercely asked him to stop shooting. However, he believed that documentary films should explore stories about those actions being contrary to humanity, and things people want to cover up. He hoped to promote the mutual understanding between Taiwan and China and challenge stereotypes through this documentary. Through pictures of the former mayor of Datong shot by following him closely, we can see the appearance of Datong City as well as its development and changing process. At the same time, we can also see the city's great removal and relocation led by Geng. Guided by the subjective shots, the film shows the urban development with rich characteristics of the Chinese era as well as the situation of ordinary people. Zhou followed and recorded Geng for one full year. During that period, the demolition and

vigorous construction of the “Cultural Datong,” which affected 30% of the population in Datong City, jointly resulted in contrary evaluations and embarrassing situation of Geng. Supporters of Geng thought that he was decisive, insightful and practical, while opponents of him believed that he was radical and unscrupulous. In the documentary, Zhou recorded various interesting contradictions, such as the urgency and absurdity of the reform, the naivety and blind bigotry of the reformers, the mixed motives of the house-owners to be relocated as well as their powerlessness when faced with the state apparatus, the praises about the rapid changes of the city as well as the forgotten victims. There was hardly a single person who could be simply judged, and there was no scene pointing to a definite conclusion. Even the seemingly propaganda scene, in which Geng signed his name on a petition brought by citizens, can provoke one’s thinking: Can an official order transcend the law? What kind of hidden dangers do lurk behind the complex of “Honest and Upright Officials”?

Zhao chose not to think about the truth. He only honestly raised the chaos and social issues he observed. In the process of editing a documentary, it is inevitable to delete individual clips. The deletion is not a compromise, not concealment. The thoughts and moods that you want to express are used to let the audience think and evaluate. Zhou doesn't like to be too precise, because he knows that the entire social system leads to the state of these people in the documentary, and chaos is the norm. This phenomenon is not only happening in China but everywhere in the world. In any case, don't want to tell the audience directly, because the documentary is that it hopes to be a trigger for the audience to think about specific issues. If you let the audience feel and judge, and then generate new ideas, then it will succeed. They are things that make you toss and turn around, keeping you awake or affecting your thoughts. If this documentary can achieve this effect, people of different cultural backgrounds can get different ideas from it, then the interpretation of the film will naturally be very different. This is what this article says territorialization–deterritorialization–reterritorialization.

Zhou had an obvious intention of producing this film: to present the public the details of the government’s internal operation. Furthermore, he used the film to paint a comprehensive picture showing the relevant steps and procedures the government took to govern the city and the problems the government encountered. In particular, by reviewing those details, one can see the practical issues that needed to be weighed and considered during China’s current transition. A review of these issues can provide many references for future urban development. As for the reason why he chose Datong and Geng, Zhou revealed that it was because he had personal relations facilitating his work. Therefore, the work was completed naturally. Zhou’s ideas about Datong City and Geng Yanbo were straightforward. By using camera lens to record the daily work of the mayor, Zhou utilised his speciality and made contributions to Datong’s urban development. Meanwhile, he had a positive viewpoint on the changes in Datong City as well as the work of the mayor.

Zhou deliberately kept a vast distance from his role in his film. He never surpassed “territorialization. ” Using this “territorialization” he thought of the distance between him and others. ¹When shooting the Chinese city, he followed and recorded the truth, but they always maintained a fixed distance. The mentality and trust between them

¹ Interview with Zhou Hao, the director of the Golden Horse Awards for the best documentary "Datong": "The real is impossible to be restored, only to be closer"

determine the boundary of this distance. All of us need privacy, and “territorialization” is the basis for mutual respect between people. There should be some appropriate distance between people, between people and regions, between regions and regions. If you deliberately pull closer, it will make the other person feel uncomfortable, which means that you will invade the other's field, and this feeling will be directly projected into the eyes of the audience. When observing others, you need a certain distance, because “territorialization” can promote understanding, prevent you from being confused by appearance, and forget the true face of spiritual things and things. There is no standard answer to the appropriate question. It all depends on one's inner feelings. After years of experience in journalists and documentaries, Zhou got some thoughts: This is similar to how decisions are made. That is, don't let the other person feel sad and feel embarrassed. The measurement of this distance cannot be estimated by others, not even Maybe by the audience, not his friends or enemies, only he can know the boundaries.

As in the documentary *The Chinese Mayor*, both the government and the public have different viewpoints. Perhaps we can think about what a good documentary is and what a bad movie is. Throughout the documentary *The Chinese Mayor*, pictures reflecting the changes of the city needed to show the reality and objectivity of things and characters fully. We should trust our feelings, or the intuition derived from the things we see with our mind. We should examine different viewpoints and relay them to the audience for contemplation. That is the result I want to achieve.” The documentary is not so much a story about a Chinese mayor, but multi-dimensional thoughts about China's intertwined political ecology and overburdened development model. Taking the film as a whole, it has the following three characteristics regarding its scenes and themes. Firstly, the creator depicted Datong City's urban reconstruction process with authentic and appropriate creation techniques, and there was a strong contrast between the old and the new. Secondly, the director had Geng play himself, which not only guaranteed the authenticity of the work but also reflected his strong capability of administration and his pragmatism. Thirdly, urban construction and development as well as characters depicted in the film and presented to the audience, contain a deep connotation. That is, China, currently in the process of transition and development, needs to answer this question as for how to properly face and solve the numerous problems existing in urban planning and transformation. Although the film eulogises the urban development and the positive actions of the government officials, we should also see environmental destruction, resettlement of the people, as well as inaction and negligence of the relevant local functional departments in the transformation process. Therefore, the creation of this film provides a poignant reflection on society.

3. Conclusion

The social development and urban construction of the ancient city ran through the vast history of thousands of years, and various social, ecological realities that have been occurring and inherited are an exciting course with rich connotations. Through an analysis of the development of urban evolution history as well as the process of demolition and reconstruction, this paper discussed the political philosophy of Deleuze from the perspective of deterritorialization. Deterritorialization was applied by Deleuze to the interdisciplinary deconstructive pathological psychology, while in the conventional context, it is used to describe the modern capitalist world, and it

contains the projection of internal state and external expression simultaneously. In the meantime, deterritorialization proposed by Deleuze is a solution for nomads (corresponding to territorialization) and schizophrenics (corresponding to codification). In the whole and unified background, the brand new order built by public resources will make better use of and excavate the resource itself. The public does not contribute public resources; preferably, they are the disorder and external part existing among personal resources that people fail to grasp and control. When the power of the individuals disorderly wanders and makes destruction in the wilds, the public resources are wasted. As a result, a force that is more orderly, more powerful, and more efficient in using these resources replaces and governs this basis. This new empire no longer takes advantage of private production methods and value orientation, but replaces it with socialised production, and invests more idle resources which are traditionally unavailable in new production modes, thus acquiring a higher value output. An ancient city, as an ancient manifestation form and entity carrier of political civilisation, has a particular implication and interest for the necessary reflection of philosophy as well as the reality of life. It is also an important exposition method employed in this paper. The term “territory” can be vaguely described and interpreted as the concept that individuals are integrated into the whole, that is, a concept of political philosophy this paper aims to frame – the great unity.

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