Abstract

HESHANG ( RIVER ELEGY ) is a six-episode television series produced by the China Central Television ( CCTV ) in 1988. The objective of the series is to convey a message: Chinese civilisation has come to an end, only westernisation could bring China to a new generation.

This academic exercise attempts to critically examine Chinese intellectuals’ reflections on Chinese civilisation from the discussion on HESHANG, and seeks to explore the cultural perception of Chinese intellectuals in different parts of the world.

The study begins with a review of Chinese intellectuals’ changing attitudes towards Chinese culture from ancient China to the 80’s and explains how it changes from superiority to inferiority.

Second part of the academic exercise is a brief introduction to HESHANG, followed by a critical analysis of the series based on the few images it used ( Dragon, The Great Wall, The Yellow River ). The paper also discusses the cultural perception of the scriptwriters as reflected in the series.

Since HESHANG has caught the attentions of Chinese intellectuals all over the world, it is also interesting to find out their response to the series and examine their attitudes towards Chinese civilisation. This academic exercise discusses the different views of intellectuals in mainland China and those outside China.

After the June Fourth incident, many intellectuals who once supported HESHANG have gone out of mainland China; what they believed in the past has changed. The concluding part of this academic exercise is to re-appraise the “RIVER ELEGY PHENOMENA” and explore the mentality behind the discussion.