UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Trans-media Strategies of Appropriation, Narrativization, and Visualization:

Adaptations of Literature in a Century of Chinese Cinema

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

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by

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The Dissertation of Liyan Qin is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Adaptation of literature has been an important genre in Chinese films from the 1920s till now. This dissertation seeks to trace the general history of Chinese filmic adaptations of literature, and examine important moments and figures within this history, to bring out strategies filmmakers use in their adaptations, in response to and in negotiations with different cultural, political and commercial needs. With the dissertation, I hope to contribute to this still largely uncharted field in Chinese film studies, to studies of

comparative literature and cross-media cultural translation between China, the West and Japan, and to offer insights into the cultural and political history in the periods addressed. In the dissertation, I employ techniques of literary and film studies, draw on adaptation and translation theories, and also use a cultural history perspective. Chapter 1 situates my study in current scholarships and gives an overview of what Chinese filmmakers chose to adapt and how they approach their sources. The following chapters are organized around representative figures or topics. Chapter 2 is on the Republican adaptations of foreign literature, in which I will give an overview of this genre and examine some of its recurrent motifs. Chapter 3 focuses on adaptations by Xia Yan, an arbiter of socialist films, in which I analyze Xia Yan's choices as shown in his adaptations in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter 4 explores adaptations by Xie Jin, the most important Chinese director in the early 1980s, to see how he uses the melodramatic mode in his films on the rightists and how that mode is specific to the period. Chapter 5 studies Zhang Yimou's adaptations in his early films to see his change from the 1980s to the 1990s, and his strategy of foregrounding visuality.

Chapter 1

Introduction:

The Concept of "Adaptation" and its Vicissitude in China

We have been encountering film adaptations of literature too often. Fans of the series novel *Harry Potter* eagerly wait for the release of each film episode. Fans of the film series *Lord of the Ring* buy the whole pack of books as birthday presents for themselves. Friends quarrel among themselves which Mr. Darcy is better, the one in the BBC TV series *Pride and Prejudice*, or the 2005 film. The same thing has been happening in China. Adaptation of literature has been an important element in Chinese films from the 1920s, when Chinese filmmakers began their work in earnest, till now, when they routinely win international acclaim. Their literary sources range from Chinese literary classics to works by contemporary Chinese writers, from plays of Shakespeare to novels of Tolstoy. However, this is a field still very much understudied, or in some aspects, un-studied. This dissertation seeks to trace the general history of Chinese filmic adaptations of literature, and examine important moments and representative figures within this history, to bring out ways and strategies filmmakers in different periods use in their adaptations, in response to and in negotiation with different cultural, political and

commercial needs. With this dissertation, I hope to contribute to this still largely uncharted field in Chinese film studies.

This dissertation also aspires to accomplish more. Filmic adaptations of literature, since they have a textual source for one to refer to, offer a convenient venue to address broader questions about culture, history and politics. The deletions, additions and other changes the filmmakers choose to make highlight their strategies in ways that may not be so obvious in films made from original scripts. Films based on the same source but made at different times, or the change of adaptation styles of the same filmmaker in different periods, can particularly highlight the dynamic of 20th-century Chinese history as well as the mutual influence between culture and history. By pursuing a comparative reading of the films and the literature they are based on, I aim to find consistent patterns across individual films and filmmakers, to account for these patterns in cultural and political terms, and thus to offer insights into the cultural and political history in the periods addressed in the dissertation.

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study located at the intersection of two media (film and literature). By studying one medium's transformation and appropriation of the other, I wish to enhance our understanding of both media in China. Also, one of my chapters will be on the adaptation of foreign literature by Chinese filmmakers, through which I hope to contribute to studies of comparative literature and cross-media cultural translation between China and the West.

Situating My Position in Current Scholarships

Before I proceed, I will first outline relevant scholarship in this field to situate my own position. There is a body of full-fledged studies in English on American and European filmic adaptations. This owes, above all, to the widespread practice of adaptation in western cinema. Dudley Andrew estimates that more than half "of all commercial films have come from literary originals," and James Naremore terms this situation "the reign of adaptation."[1] One Oscar award is given each year to the best adapted film script, and many adapted films have become classics, from *Gone with the Wind* to *Godfather*. Either Hollywood relies on the bestselling or classic status of a literary work, like the film *Da Vinci's Code* released in 2006, or the success of the adaptation will "confer bestseller status on a novel,"[2] as is the case of the film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). Such widespread practices draw attention of the academics. They have been exploring this field since the 1950s, if we see George Bluestone as the first to write a book on it. Since then, numerous books have been published, including many anthologies of case studies.[3]

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[1] Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," in James Naremore ed., *Film Adaptation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000), 29; James Naremore's introduction of the same book, 1.

[2] James Griffith, *Adaptations as Imitations : Films from Novels* (Newark : University of Delaware Press, 1997), 17.

[3] The interrelation between visual culture and literature can be mutual. Keith Cohen, among others, examines the influence of cinema on modern novel in his *Film and Fiction* (New Haven:

Traditional scholarship on adaptation largely addresses several intertwined questions: should we adapt literature into films? What is adaptation? What is the nature of film against literature? In the early days of filmmaking, adaptations were seen by some with suspicion. Thus Virginia Woolf believed that "[T]he alliance [of film and literature] is unnatural" and "the results are disastrous," and Ingmar Bergman argued that "we should avoid making films out of books."[4] Therefore, much early scholarship is aimed at defending adaptation.[5] One theorist, Andre Bazin, believes that what films take from novels is "only the main characters and situations," and cinema is a kind of digest for literature.[6] George Bluestone's way of defending adaptation is to see the adapted film as a totally new piece of art independent of its literary source, and the filmmaker as a new author, which then leads him to differentiate film from literature. His point is that "between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image lies the root difference between the two media."[7] Contrary to Bluestone, there are theorists who argue for the unity between film and literature. Joy G. Boyum believes that film "might

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Yale UP, 1979), and Nancy Armstrong explores the link between photography and Victorian fiction in her *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1999).

[4] Quoted in Morris Beja, *Film and Literature: An Introduction* (New York: Longman, 1979), 78.

[5] Hence in Joy Gould Boyum's *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (New York: Universe Books, 1985), one section is titled "in defense of adaptation."

[6] Andre Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," in James Naremore ed., *Film Adaptation*, 25.

[7] George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957),1. Other theorists locate the difference between film and literature elsewhere. For example, Andre Levison argues that "[I]n the cinema…one extracts the thoughts from the image; in literature, the image from the thought," quoted in Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Rutherford, N. J. : Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975), 11-12.

even be considered a natural next step in literature's evolution,"[8] and Morris Beja argues that "written stories…and filmed stories…are really two form of a single art—the art of narrative literature."[9] In all, such scholarship often takes a formalist approach. The aim is to evaluate the aesthetic excellence of a film, either in terms of its faithfulness to the original or in terms of its innate values.

Many western scholars are theoretically driven and want to propose a model to account for the relationship between adaptations and their literary sources.[10] Informed by recent theories such as semiology, intertextuality and reception, some scholars work out new theoretical approaches to address the issue, with the emphasis shifted to the flow and negotiations between texts. The intertextuality theory believes that artistic works, as texts, are not self-contained entities, but are full of quotations and references and are in constant dialogues with other texts.[11] This is especially true concerning filmic adaptations, when the audience already have some expectations or anticipations as to how the films will turn out. Barton Palmer, for instance, draws from the concept of intertextuality. Another theoretical piece, by Shenghui Lu, approaches the relation

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[8] Joy Gould Boyum, *Double Exposure*, 19-20.

[9] Morris Beja, *Film and Literature*, xiv. A new development in this direction is to argue for the unity of film and literature from a semiotic point of view, when both film and literature are seen as systems of signs which "at a certain level of abstraction…bear resemblance to one another." See Keith Cohen, *Film and Fiction*, 3.

[10] Examples are James Griffth's Neo-Aristotelian model and Kamilla Elliot's "looking glass" model. See James Griffith, *Adaptations as Imitations*, 35-40; Kamilla Elliott, *Rethinking the Novel / Film Debate* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 209-240.

[11] For this theory, see Julia Kristeva, "Word, dialogue and novel," in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

between texts from the perspective of reception. To Lu, film adaptation is one way of reading the literary source, and the film in turn needs the reading of the audiences.[12] These theoretical studies already discredit the traditional notion of "fidelity," break the hierarchy between literature (as high art, source, original) and the adapted film (as low art, derivative, and imitation) and shift the emphasis to relationship and flow.

Even more useful to me is the "sociological turn" that some scholars have called for and practiced recently, sometimes informed by these new theories. As early as 1984, Dudley Andrew makes such a call:

> It is time for adaptation studies to take a sociological turn. How does adaptation serve the cinema? What conditions exist in film style and film culture to warrant or demand the use of literary prototypes? Although the volume of adaptation may be calculated as relatively constant in the history of cinema, its particular function at any moment is far from constant. The choices of the mode of adaptation and of prototypes suggest a great deal about the cinema's sense of its role and aspirations from decade to decade. Moreover, the stylistic strategies developed to achieve the proportional equivalences necessary to construct matching stories not only are symptomatic of a period's style, but may crucially alter that style.[13]

As an example of this approach, Andrew analyzes, among other issues, how Renoir's adaptation of Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1935)-- the same play whose Chinese transformations Paul Pickowicz addresses--was a product of the specific time, and helped

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[12] See Shenghui Lu, "What is Film Adaptation," *IRIS* no.30 (autumn 2004), 113-127. Lu prefers to call such phenomenon "transformation," instead of adaptation or transposition.
[13] Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," 35.

"lead European cinema onto the naturalistic path."[14] In his practice, Andrew shows a good combination of theoretical, aesthetical and historical considerations.

With the release of two recent books in this field, we have evidence that the "sociological turn" for adaptation studies has gained momentum. One book is *Film Adaptation* (2000) edited by James Naremore, the other *A Companion to Literature and Film* (2004) edited by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo. That one of Stam's articles is included in Naremore's book reveals the link between the two projects. Both books show dissatisfaction with traditional scholarship on adaptation. Robert Stam complains,

> The traditional language of criticism of filmic adaptation of novels… has often been extremely judgmental, proliferating in terms that imply that film has performed a disservice to literature. Terms such as 'infidelity', 'betrayal', 'deformation', 'violation,' 'vulgarization,' 'bastardization,' and 'desecration' proliferate, with each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. Despite the variety of the accusations, their drift seems always to be the same--the book was better.[15]

James Naremore largely shares this view. Thus, in selecting articles for his book, he tries to move "away from the Great-Novels-into-Great-Films theme," and prefers "writings that give somewhat less attention to formal than to economic, cultural, and political issues."[16]

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[14] Ibid, 37.

[15] Robert Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 3.

[16] James Naremore, ed, *Film Adaptation*, introduction, 10. In the introduction of this book, Naremore gives a brief history of what Hollywood chose to adapt during different historical

As far as methodology is concerned, two pieces in Stam and Raengo's book are especially inspiring to me. One is Francesco Casetti's "Adaptation and Mis-adaptation." Based on the concept of discourse promoted by Michel Foucault, Casetti, instead of viewing art as "modes of expressions," suggests we consider "both film and literature….as *sites of production and the circulation of discourses*; that is, as symbolic constructions that refer to a cluster of meanings that a society considers possible (thinkable) and feasible (legitimate)." To him, what is important for a film adaptation is "the new role and place that the later event takes on within the discursive field, more than the abstract faithfulness that it can claim with respect to the source text."[17]

Another useful piece in the same book is Barton Palmer's "The Sociological Turn of Adaptation Studies: The Example of *Film Noir*." Palmer bases his conclusion on a notion of adaptation as "by definition intertextual, or transtextual."[18] He argues that "the sociological turn means that we no longer ask how the adaptation (pre)serves the source, but how adaptation, as a general phenomenon of intersemiotic relations, serves the cinema."[19] He puts the sociological approach into practice and analyzes the Hollywood *film noir* of the 1940s and 1950s in relation to the French *film noir* and to American and European fiction. Adopting a "global perspective," Palmer goes beyond individual films

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periods.

[17] Francesco Cassetti, "Adaptation and Mis-adaptations: Film, Literature, and Social Discourses," in Robert Stam and A. Raengo ed., *A Companion to Literature and Film* (Malden, MA ; Oxford : Blackwell Pub., 2004), 82.

[18] Barton Palmer, "The Sociological Turn of Adaptation Studies: The Example of *Film Noir*," in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo ed., *A Companion to Literature and Film*, 258.

[19] Ibid, 264.

to see the connection between cinema and literature.[20] Both Cassetti and Palmer insist on historicizing and contextualizing and emphasize the adapted film instead of the literary original.

Another field that is useful to my project is translation studies, since adaptation has often been seen as a kind of "translation," and both are often accused of "violating" the original. The limit of the traditional theories of "translation" in adaptation is that it cannot entirely avoid the notion of "fidelity," as is exemplified by McFarlane's book *Novels to Films: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996) on what factors in a novel can be adapted, and what cannot. James Naremore argues that "The problem with most writing about adaptation as translation is that it tends to valorize the literary canon and essentialize the nature of cinema."[21] However, recent scholarships on translation prove inspiring to me. Especially useful is the poststructuralist deconstruction of the original / translation binary with their concept of textuality. As Lawrence Venuti summarizes, the poststructuralists "do not proceed by elevating the translation into another original and turning the translator into an author, but instead question the concepts of originality and authorship that subordinate the translation to the foreign text."[22] On translation studies specific to the Chinese context, Lydia Liu has done marvelous theoretical works. Adopting a "China-centered approach," Liu believes that "meanings…are not so much

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[20] Ibid, 266.
[21] James Naremore, ed, *Film Adaptation*, introduction, 8.
[22] Lawrence Venuti, ed. *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, introduction. (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

'transformed' when concepts pass from the guest language to the host language as invented within the local environment of the latter."[23] If we extend the notion of "translation" as Lydia Liu does, change Liu's "translingual" to "transmedia," and view film as "the host language" and literature as the "guest language," Liu's observations is very useful for my study.

Compared with the ample English scholarship on adaptation in western movies, scholarship on Chinese adaptation, in Chinese or in western languages, is meager in number, but it points at some important and interesting directions. The first English study in this field is Lewis Robinson's 1984 article on several adaptations of Ba Jin's classic novel, *Jia* (Family). Robinson gives historical backdrops to different versions of the novel (one play and three films), but his main concern is their aesthetic merits. He shows many differences between the adaptations and the original to explore how the play or films find equivalents for the novel--for example, the novel's psychological descriptions--with the new media's specific techniques and within its limits. For example, he praises a film scene for being able to express "the equivalent of pages of narration."[24] Robinson argues that, with the novel aiming only at urban elites, "it was only through adaptation that the base was broadened."[25] Although still largely sticking to the

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[23] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice :Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity -- China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 26, 28.
[24] Lewis Robinson, "Family: A Study in Genre Adaptation," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 12 (1984): 45.
[25] Ibid, 49.

importance of “fidelity,” the article also shows the importance of paying attention to the transformation of a work with time, and to the audiences of different media.

Paul Pickowicz’s article, “Sinifying and Popularizing Foreign Culture: From Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* to Huang Zuolin’s *Ye Dian*,” compares Gorky’s play with its two Chinese adaptations, one a play, the other a film. Pickowicz convincingly points out the discontinuity of the three works and stresses that “the sinification process fundamentally altered the work.”[26] Through a meticulous close reading of the three texts, Pickowicz delineates the transition from Gorky’s plotless, pessimistic and impressionistic play, to the Chinese play, which uses “conventional plot line” and incorporates the May Fourth-style cultural criticism, to a melodramatic film focusing on the emotional entanglements of the characters. Pickowicz traces these changes to the differences in audiences, because the film was directed mainly to the un-educated, while the play to urban intellectuals. The article is an exemplary close study of the multiple transformations and the change of genre a foreign piece of literature can undergo in the Chinese context.

Also on Chinese adaptation of foreign literature, Zhang Zhen’s recent article, “Cosmopolitan Projections: World Literature on Chinese Screens,” is an ambitious project. Zhang seeks to provide a model to account for the transformation of world literature into Chinese films. Her theory of “cosmopolitan projection” focuses on the end

[26] Paul Pickowicz, “Sinifying and Popularizing Foreign Culture: From Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* to Huang Zuolin’s *Ye dian*,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 7.2 (1993): 8.

products, i.e., the Chinese adaptations, to see their roles and functions in the Chinese context.[27] Zhang situates the adaptations in their historical and cultural contexts, and expands her discussion to cover Chinese translation from the late Qing period and Lianhua Studio in the early 1930s. As far as methodology is concerned, Zhang Zhen points out the importance of drawing a larger picture, and shows interesting ways to link historical and theoretical analysis. Her cultural perspective is particularly inspiring to me. Yet, her close reading of individual films seems a little bit too slim to support so many grand conclusions. Thus, the article shows a need to strike a balance between micro- and macro-level analysis. I will explore this topic of Chinese adaptations of foreign literature in chapter 2 and will engage more with Pickowicz's and Zhang Zhen's articles there.

Hoare Stephanie's article, "Innovation through Adaptation: The Use of Literature in New Taiwan Film and Its Consequences" (1993) is quite similar in approach to Barton Palmer's analysis of *film noir* mentioned above. Hoare distinguishes New Taiwan Cinema from the mainstream cinema, since the former leads the audiences to reflection, while the latter "emphasizes emotion and convention."[28] What New Taiwan Cinema chose to adapt was contemporary Taiwan reflective literature, mainly the modernist or nativist literature after the 1950s. New Taiwan Cinema also emerged in an artistic milieu

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[27] Zhang Zhen admits that in this approach, she is taking cue from Lydia Liu's model of "translingual practice" and Zhu Ying's analysis of the "composite" new Chinese women with both translated "modern" attributes and traditional Chinese qualities. See Zhang Zhen, "Cosmopolitan Projections: World Literature on Chinese Screens," in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, eds. *A companion to Literature and Film*, 144-163.

[28] Stephanie Hoare, "Innovation through Adaptation: The Use of Literature in New Taiwan Film and Its Consequences," *Modern Chinese Literature* 7.2 (1993 Fall): 33.

similar to such literature. Focusing on individuality, local color, objectiveness and common people, this cinema exhibits strong literary qualities. Hoare in particular analyzes the way Hou Hsiao-hsian and Zhu Tianwen cooperated, which resulted in a new style of adaptation which gave the director much freedom. Like Zhang Zhen's study, Hoare's article is not so much on adaptation than on the larger mutual influence between a literary trend and a film movement with adaptation as one manifestation of that mutual influence.

Compared to these inspiring articles, one English book-length study that devotes much space to Chinese adaptation, *Lightness of Being in China* by Harry Kuoshu, is very disappointing. Kuoshu aims to see "discursive domination" and ideology through adaptation, which should have been a very promising approach.[29] Yet the book itself falls far short of that claim. The chapters, two on the adaptations of Lu Xun's short stories, one on two early films after 1949, one on the fifth generation's representation of national minorities, one on the filmic depiction of the urban youth, are put together without an underlying logic. Moreover, there are so many confusing and unconvincing big or small conclusions that the author tries to draw, and so many loose connections he tries to make, that the whole book becomes a failure. For example, the central trope of the book, as shown in the title "Lightness of Being" taken from Milan Kundera, cannot be reasonably explained and sustained. The author's equation of Kundera's notion of "Kitsch" with

[29] Harry Kuoshu, *Lightness of Being in China: Adaptations and Discursive Figuration in Cinema and Theater* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 10.

"ideology" is, to say the least, problematic.[30] All in all, the book has not much to offer to scholars, except for perhaps some basic materials about the existence of several versions of Lu Xun's adaptations.

The Chinese scholarship on adaptation is also far and sparse. Zhang Zongwei wrote a book titled *The Film and Television Adaptation on Chinese and Foreign Literary Classics*. The book, as can be seen in the title, tries to cover every topic of adaptation studies, from film to television, from the history of Chinese and western film and TV adaptations (mainly in the classic-literature-to-classic-films vein), to how to make a successful adaptation. Thus, the author has no time and space to engage these topics thoroughly. Zhao Fengxiang and Pang Li wrote a similar book with a similar title.[31]

Robinson, Pickowicz and Zhang Zhen all have noticed the scant scholarship devoted to this field of Chinese film adaptations. Sure enough, critical studies in both Chinese and English directly addressing thes topic are not many in number. Of them, the English article-length studies are most helpful. They set out some interesting directions to explore: Robinson pays attention to transformations of one literary work with time on stage and the screen; Pickowicz and Zhang Zhen examine the transformation of literature across

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[30] See Kuoshu, *Lightness of Being in China*, 3-4. Another equally enigmatic connection is the author's putting Lao Tzi and Mao Zedong together on their conception of weight and the loss of it (2).

[31] See Zhang Zongwei 张宗伟, *The Film and Television Adaptation on Chinese and Foreign Literary Classics* 中外文学名著的影视改编 (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2002); Zhao Zhao Fengxiang 赵凤翔 and Pang Li 房莉, *Film and TV Adaptations of Literary Classics* 名著的影视改编 (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 1999).

cultures, and Hoare links two movements across artistic media. The limited number of critical works, though frustrating in a way, also promises the possibility of fruitful pioneer works to be done in this field. Moreover, in both languages, I can consult a large number of critical studies on the history of Chinese films in general, not to speak of rich primary sources in Chinese, such as many volumes in which individual film scripts are compiled vis-à-vis their literary sources.[32]

Building on current scholarship on Chinese adaptations, I situate my research in the recent academic development of the "sociological turn," although my study is more about history, politics and culture than about pure sociology. I take the films as given cultural products and will not argue about their aesthetic values, nor whether they have degraded or improved their literary sources. I try to combine the atomic and global perspectives and strike a balance between the two. Thus, I base each chapter on a close reading of some adapted films to provide a solid textual foundation for higher-level conclusions to be drawn. I employ techniques of literary and film studies, such as analysis of plot, characterization, image and style, to examine these films. However, I avoid cataloguing the changes made by the filmmakers, but will choose those changes that are historically or culturally significant, and look for underlying patterns across films and periods to show the filmmakers' strategies. Although the recent tendency in western adaptation

[32] China Film Press (Zhongguo dianying chubanshe) compiled several such books, for example: Legend of Tianyun Mountain: *From Novel to the Film* 天云山传奇——从小说到电影(1983), *My* Memory of Old Beijing*: From Novel to Film* 城南旧事——从小说到电影(1985), The Black Cannon Incident*: From Novel to Film* 黑炮事件——从小说到电影(1988).

studies argues for a widening of the concept of adaptation, and even sees every artistic work as a kind of adaptation, I still limit my field of study to films based on literature, mostly novels, although the sources for films can be comic books, another movie, or even a song.

In the following two sections, I will outline Chinese filmic adaptations in two interrelated parts: what Chinese filmmakers choose to adapt during different periods, and how they adapt different kinds of literary sources. These two sections are meant to give an overview of a century of Chinese adaptations and to lay a foundation for my discussions in the following chapters.

The Intertwining of Chinese Film and Literature

Just like any filmography, the list of Chinese film adaptations of literature can seem chaotic and random at first glance. Yet, after reading the film adaptations against one another, against other films and the history of literature, patterns gradually take shape. What do Chinese filmmakers in different periods tend to adapt? What literary sources are taken up by one period, and then dropped by another? These are some of the questions to be addressed in this section

Dingjun Mountain (Dingjun shan, 1905), known as the first Chinese film, was born in a hybrid form, illustrating that the birth of Chinese cinema was deeply embedded in

the popular culture at that time.[33] With a fixed camera faithfully recording a fully costumed Peking Opera actor, in a role based on the popular literary classic *Story of the Three Kingdoms*, the not-so-film-like film showed an intimate link to the stage and literature, and a combination of western technology with Chinese content. To those involved in the making of the film, who very probably would not be aware of their historical significance, the film might be less a "film" than a recorded copy of Peking Opera, to utilize the fame of the opera and the actor, and to entertain the same audiences. Likewise, *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (Zhuangzi shiqi, 1913), one of the earliest short feature films in China, is based on a Cantonese opera. Opera films (*xiqu pian*), which can be called Chinese musicals featuring Chinese operas in many local forms and preserving the main singing and dancing elements, constitute an important genre of Chinese films which only suffer a decline in recent decades.[34]

Unlike classical operas that tell the stories about the ancient past, the so-called

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[33] Later, Chinese filmmakers sometimes revisited through their films this important moment of the "birth" of Chinese cinema. Chinese Films Group made a film also called *Dingjun Mountain* in 2005, directed by An Zhanjun 安战军, as an official centennial homage to this first Chinese film. Earlier, Hu An 胡安 already made a film on a similar topic, titled *Shadow Magic* (Xiyang jing, 2000), which presents the introduction of the film into China as an enlightening and civilizing force.

[34] Important filmmakers, such as Fei Mu 费穆 and Shi Hui 石挥, experimented with ways to transform operas into successful films. Also, this seemed to be the only room allowed for Chinese tradition after 1949. Cui Wei 崔嵬, who made "red canon" films, also made such opera films. Shi Hui's *The Heavenly Match* (Tianxian pei, 1955) ignited a craze in Hong Kong for films based on Huang Mei opera. However, in recent years, with the decline of popularity of traditional operas, such films also become rare. From 1953 to 1986, Shanghai Film studio made 61 opera films, but stopped making them in 1986 altogether. The same happened to Beijing Studio. See "When Will Opera Films Shine on the Screen Again" 银幕戏曲片何时再放异彩, *Liberation Daily* 解放日报, April 5, 2005.

civilized drama (*wenming xi*), an early form of Chinese modern (western style) drama, often addressed contemporary issues and supplied many materials for early Chinese films. Zheng Zhengqiu (1888-1935), the main director of Asia Studio, was also a dramatist. In 1913, he and Zhang Shichuan made *The Difficult Couple* (Nanfu nanqi, 1913), the first Chinese short feature film, and the whole cast were from their all-male civilized drama troupe. The early actors in this studio made films during the daytime and acted on stage at night. Their films, mostly funny short features, were shown mainly in between drama performances.[35] Later, Zhang Shichuan, sponsored by another studio, made *Wronged Ghosts in Opium Den* (Heiji yuanhun, 1916), condemning the social and familial ills resulting from opium addiction. The film was a faithful copy of a civilized drama, to the extent that it is similarly divided into acts.[36]

The early decades of the 20th-century were also a time of massive translation of western literature, mainly popular literature, into Chinese. The avidly read translations soon became part of Chinese popular literature and inspired early filmmakers to make use of western stories. Among early short features, there already was *Robbery in the Car* (Che zhong dao, 1920), based on an American story translated by Lin Shu. Moreover, in the early 1920s, what were shown in the foreign settlements in Shanghai were often

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[35] See Cheng Jihua 程季华 et al, *History of Chinese Film's Development* 中国电影发展史 (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1980, second edition), vol.1, 21, 23.

[36] *Yan Ruisheng* (1920), another film based on a successful civilized drama, which was in turn based on a contemporary murder case, was also well received by the public. Yet it was harshly criticized by Cheng Jihua on the ground that it "catered to the low tastes of some backward petty city dwellers.' Ibid, vol.1, 44-45.

western detective films or martial art films. *The Vampire* (Hongfen kulou, 1921), one of the earliest long feature films in China, was an example of this combination of western detective and the Chinese martial arts genre. The civilized drama mentioned earlier, a form imported from Japan, which was the transfer-point between the West and China, had a repertoire of translated plays, some of which are based on western or Japanese narrative literature. The Republican adaptation of foreign literature will be examined in detail in chapter 2.

At the same time when Chinese filmmakers looked to foreign literature for sources, they also took advantage of the rich ore of Chinese literature. In the early 1920s, the Commercial Press, which had a special department for filmmaking, began to adapt a series of traditional Chinese stories into films. Stories in *Strange Stories Narrated by Liaozhai* (Liaozhai zhiyi), by Qing dynasty writer Pu Songling (1640-1715), seemed to be its favorite subjects. The reason might be that Pu's stories are often short, perfect for short feature films. Moreover, among traditional writers who wrote in classical Chinese, Pu's works are akin in their spirit to popular literature, and it is easy for filmmakers to find entertaining elements in Pu. The Taoist practitioner in the film *An Empty Dream* (Qingxu meng, 1922), who believes he can go through a wall, provided the filmmakers with an opportunity to use special effects.[37] Filmmakers can also extract moral messages from these stories. *The Pious Daughter-in-Law's Soup* (Xiaofu geng, 1923) extols the

[37] Other entertaining elements in Pu taken up by later filmmakers include the supernatural and the erotic, as can be seen in *Heng Niang* 恒娘(1931) directed by Shi Dongshan.

virtues of a daughter-in-law, who, true to traditional Chinese moral requirements, remains loyal to her mother-in-law no matter how evil the latter is.

In 1927-28, there was a trend of filmmaking based on traditional Chinese stories, legends and poems, which was called by historians the "traditional film movement" (*guzhuangpian yundong*).[38] The movement was initiated by Tianyi Studio. Tianyi, after its establishment in 1925, focused on making such films to attract audiences in China and Chinese diasporas in southeast Asia. According to Shao Zuiweng, one of the four brothers who founded Tianyi and who was responsible for many such films, the strategy was more than a mere business decision. "At that time, Chinese new literature was advocating folk literature, and Mr. Shao also believed that folk literature was the only real Chinese mass literature."[39] Whether a business or cultural choice or a combination of the two, the strategy was very successful. However, because these films promoted such traditional values as filial piety, and because with Tianyi's success, other companies rushed to make similar but mostly bad films, Tianyi was condemned by historian Cheng Jihua as "stealing classical novels."[40] It was true that many such films have elements of sex and violence in order to entertain. However, by making films based on the popular literature in traditional China, which was then still very much alive among audiences with little education, Tianyi made an effective response to the May Fourth new literature and the

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[38] Quoted in Li Suyuan 郦苏元 and Hu Jubin 胡菊彬, *History of China's Silent Films* 中国无声电影史 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 221.
[39] Quoted in Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *History of China's Silent Films*, 89.
[40] Cheng Jihua 程季华 et al, *History of Chinese Film's Development* 中国电影发展史, vol.1, 86.

overwhelming influence of Hollywood.

The early film production system in Shanghai made it a tendency among studios to scramble for whatever topic that proved profitable. During the four years after 1928 until the onset of the leftist movement, Shanghai studios experienced another surge, this time of making films about martial arts, monsters and immortals. In 1928-1931, 400 films were made in Shanghai, 250 of which were in this genre. This surge was related to the popularity of martial arts novels during the 1920s. A case in point of the "marriage" of martial arts novels and film is the immensely successful *Burning the Red Lotus Temple* (Huoshao hongliansi, 1928-1932), based on an already well-received martial arts novel. The film saved the almost bankrupt Mingxing studio, continued for 18 episodes and ignited a series of films about "burning" something.[41]

Not only did filmmakers make use of existent literature, but writers were also actively involved in filmmaking. "Butterfly" writers were the first to intervene in cinema.[42] The "Butterfly" literature (鸳鸯蝴蝶派) was a popular genre during the late Qing and early Republican period, so called because of its depiction of romantic love

[41] However, most such films, taking advantage of the popularity enjoyed by martial arts novels, just came directly from the imagination of filmmakers. See Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *History of China's Silent Films*, 223. Martial arts films have always been an important genre in Chinese commercial cinema, many of which came from novels. The most significant writer whose works have been frequently adapted is Jin Yong (penname of Zha Liangyong). In recent decades, television series became the major adaptors of such lengthy novels. Indeed, *Burning the Red Lotus Temple*, in its 18 episodes, would look like a TV series now.

[42] Later, we can see several periods when writers were active in filmmaking. In the early and mid 1930s, leftist scriptwriters and "soft film" advocates, who belonged to two opposite camps, were mostly writers in the first place. Then, in the late 1980s and the 1990s, a similar phenomenon happened with such writers as Wang Shuo 王朔, Liu Heng 刘恒 and Liu Zhenyun 刘震云 recruited by film directors.

stories. This literature can encompass such sub-genres as romances, detectives and martial arts stories. From 1921 to 1931, that is, almost all the years before the emergence of leftist films, altogether 650 Chinese films were made, of which most involved "Butterfly" writers, and some were adaptations.[43] *Soul of the Jade-Peach* (Yu lihun), a sentimental story about two star-crossed lovers, was made into a film in 1924. One "Butterfly" writer, Bao Tianxiao, wrote screenplays and novels at the same time. He was hired by Mingxing studio as a scriptwriter in 1924 and wrote seven screenplays, often based on his translation works. Among these, both *Fall of the Plum* (Meihua luo, 1925) and *Orchid in the Deep Valley* (Kong gu lan,1926) came from his translation of Japanese novels. He also helped adapt his own novel *The Temptation* (Youhuo) into *The Poor Girl* (Kelian de guinü, 1925). The involvement of "Butterfly" writers in cinema not only provided films with sources, but strengthened the mainstream Chinese film tradition of telling an effective story.

Zhang Henshui was another "Butterfly" writer whose works were frequently adapted. Films based on his novels continued to be made from the 1930s to the 1940s.[44] His popular novel, *Fate in Tears and Laughter* (Tixiao yinyuan) ignited a fierce competition between Mingxing Studio and Dahua Studio. The two went to court, and Mingxing had to

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[43] See Cheng Jihua et al, *History of Chinese Film's Development* 中国电影发展史, vol.1, 56.

[44] For a complete list of filmic adaptations of Zhang Henshui's works, see Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film : Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford, Calif. Stanford University Press, 1996), 299, n.58. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Zhang's novels revived as television series.

pay Dahua much money to get the exclusive right to adapt the novel. However, contrary to the optimistic expectations of Mingxing Studio, the release of the film in 1932 was a disappointment. One of the reasons for its failure was that, with the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and invasion of Shanghai, audiences who used to prefer love stories and martial art spectacles now sought something else. It was against this background of national crisis that leftist filmmakers intervened. Significantly, Zhang Shichuan, before he decided to join the patriotic tide, summarized three moments of glory for Mingxing Studio, by which he divided the history of the studio into three "eras" (*shidai*): the era of *Orchid in the Deep Valley* (1926), the era of *Burning the Red Lotus Temple* (1928), and the era of *Fate in Tears and Laughter* (1932).[45] All three films were adaptations.

With the onset of the leftist movement, the link between literature and film continued, if not strengthened, though mainly not in the form of adaptations.[46] Although literati have participated in filmmaking before and after this, no group of writers was as concerted as the leftists in their efforts and as clear in their goals. They were determined to use the film as a means to educate the masses, inculcate into them an awareness of social ills in China, and interpret and resolve those ills in Marxist terms. It is noteworthy that the leftists carried out their political plan by entering studios as scriptwriters.

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[45] See Cheng Jihua et al, *History of Chinese Film's Development* 中国电影发展史, vol.1, 202.

[46] For the leftist movement, see Pang Laikwan, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); Hu Jubin, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

Leading leftists, such as Xia Yan, A Ying, Zheng Boqi and Tian Han, were all scriptwriters. The scriptwriting committee of Mingxing was under the guidance of the Cinema Group of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The phenomenon stressed the importance of scriptwriters in the early development of Chinese cinema. The scriptwriter, instead of the director, seemed to be the hub of the film. The partnership often came in the form of a leftist scriptwriter with an already established director, the former influencing and bringing the latter into the leftist agenda. Since the political message was what concerned the leftist filmmakers most, they preferred writing original scripts to adaptations.[47] One significant exception was *Spring Silkworms* (Chuncan, 1933), based on a short story just published by Mao Dun and written into a script by Xia Yan. This was the first time that a literary work in the May-Fourth tradition was adapted, and it contributed to the canonization of Mao Dun in the leftist tradition.

The Leftist movement ended, for various reasons, before the Sino-Japanese war. During the war years (1937-1945), while films in the hinterlands were mainly propaganda pieces to boost national resistance, in the isolated foreign settlements in Shanghai, films enjoyed a surprising prosperity. Zhang Shankun (1905-57), with his Xinhua Studio, the biggest studio in the foreign settlements, reverted to the traditional Chinese themes before the leftist movement. However, in this time of national crisis, even such seemingly apolitical films incorporated propaganda into entertainment and

[47] However, the story itself often did not originated from the scriptwriter, but from the director or the boss of the studio. See chapter 3 on Xia Yan.

conveyed the message of national resistance in a circuitous but unmistakable way. This might not only be due to the intentions of the filmmakers (Zhang Shankun later cooperated with the Japanese), but to an effort to appeal to patriotic sentiments.[48] This was a time when patriotism could mean profits at the box office. The complicated intermingling of the foreign and the local, of the old and the new, and even of the invaders and the invaded, can be further seen in adaptations by Japanese-sponsored filmmakers in 1942 of *Spring* and *Autumn* by Ba Jin, a leftist Chinese writer.

The year 1945 saw the defeat of the Japanese. Yet, to the public's disappointment, China did not enjoy the victory long, before it plunged into the civil war between the nationalists and the communists. Corruption and ineffectiveness in managing the economy made the nationalist government unpopular among the masses and many intellectuals, fostering a national sentiment favorable to the communists. In the years between 1945 and 1949, adaptations from classical Chinese literature declined sharply, perhaps partly because people could only enjoy such leisurely entertainment in times of relative security and prosperity.[49] Gone were martial artists, monsters and butterflies. Yet, in the 1940s, many foreign literary works were translated into Chinese and later appeared on the screen. Significantly, during this period, Chinese filmmakers chose to adapt some

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[48] *Mulan Joins the Army* (Mulan congjun, 1939) was a case in point. Based on a traditional poem about a girl who, disguised as a boy, joined the army and fought for her country, the film was very popular. Its way of adaptation will be further discussed in the next section.

[49] *Six Chapters in a Floating Life* 浮生六记, by a Qing dynasty writer Shen Fu 沈复(1763-?), was the only significant piece based on classical Chinese literature.

Russian literary works. Wenhua studio was a successful player in this area. Its adaptations include *Mother and Son* (Mu yü zi, 1947) from a play by Aleksandr Ostrovsksy (1823-1886), *Night Inn* (Ye dian, 1947) from a play by Maxim Gorky (1868-1836), and *The Watch* (Biao, 1949) from a novel by Leonid Panteleev. Adaptation of foreign literature like these will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, adaptation of literature continued to make up a big portion of Chinese films. Take Beijing Film Studio, one of the most important studios in China, for example. From 1949 to 1999, literary adaptations made up for half of the studio's output.[50] However, from 1949, Chinese cinema was drastically changed in terms of the dominant ideology, film language, and ways of production and distribution. Cinema became an enterprise owned by the government and led by the party, bearing the responsibility of propaganda and education. What filmmakers aspired to was often not artistic success, but political correctness. This tendency can be seen in adaptations too. The years from 1949 to the initiation of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 are characterized by short windows of freer political atmosphere and more and better cinematic productions, followed by campaigns denouncing such freedom and returning to a more rigid line, until the resultant films became unsatisfactory, quantitatively and qualitatively, even to the policymakers, who would then initiate the next cycle of relative freedom.

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[50] See Wang Taorui 王陶瑞, "Overview of Adaptations of Beijing Film Studio" 北影厂文学名著改编成就概评, *Dianying yishu* 电影艺术 (Nov. 2005): 85-93.

In 1950, Chen Bo'er, a former actress in the Republican period now in charge of the arts section in the national Films Bureau, said that "the sources of film stories should mainly come from the liberated area, should mainly be modern and Chinese; but they can also come from areas controlled by the nationalists, or foreign or ancient sources. Foreign progressive literary classics should be appropriately transformed, and stories about traditional history can also be chosen."[51] From these official guidelines, we can see that, on the one hand, the selection of sources seemed quite free. On the other hand, there was a clear priority and hierarchy among the possible sources. These guidelines were scrupulously followed in the years until 1966.

Films based on foreign literature, which used to be common before 1949, totally disappeared, although Chen Bo'er's guidelines still allowed room for them. No foreign literature, even if western and Soviet classical literature, was believed to be adequate to capture China's socialist reality and glorious revolutionary past. Adaptations of classical Chinese literature suffered a similar fate. Since the "New China" has a drastically and sometimes destructively new ideology with which to reinterpret Chinese tradition, history and literature, people found classical literature too much flawed. The traditional themes could only take refuge in such genre as opera films, which was the least politicized. One exception to this rule was *Qiu Meets the Goddess of Flowers* (Qiuweng yüxian ji, 1956), directed by Wu Yonggang, an established director since the 1930s, and based on a Ming

[51] Cited in Shu Xiaoming 舒晓鸣, *A Teaching Course on China's Film Art: 1949-1999* 中国电影艺术史教程: 1949-1999 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2000), 4.

dynasty short story. The film depicts the conflicts between a righteous poor man and an evil rich man, in a binary similar to the class demarcation, with the final triumph of the former, of course. Yet, situated in ancient China, it can only resort to fairies and fantasies to materialize the poor man's triumph. No wonder that in 1957, the director was labeled a rightist in the anti-rightist campaign against intellectuals the party distrusted.

Most films of this period deal with the immediate past and the present. Secure with their correct themes and useful in propaganda purposes are films that recount the history of the rise of the Communist Party, its leadership in the people's struggles against several evil enemies (feudalism and its local representatives, the Japanese invaders and the Nationalists). Filmic adaptations of literature in this vein were often made in the late 1950s and early 1960s. One reason for this is that this window saw relatively freer policies. Another reason might be that a canon of such literature took some time to form. One type of such adaptations deals directly with military actions against enemies. The communist army, led by the righteous and wise party, is destined to crush the enemies. Such adapted films include, among others, *Daughter of the Party* (Dang de nü'er, 1958), *Youth in War* (Zhanhuo zhong de qingchun, 1959), *Red Sun* (Hongri, 1963), *Struggle in an Ancient City* (Yehuo chunfeng dou gucheng, 1963).

Another type is about class struggles in the countryside before 1949. Peasants, under various forms of oppression, are presented as leading a miserable life. Anger already simmers in them. The party, represented by its army or local members, educates the

peasants with class consciousness and leads them against the oppressors. Such adapted films include *The White-Haired Girl* (Bai mao nü, 1951), *Legend of the Banner* (Hongqi pu, 1960), *Hurricane* (Baofeng zhouyu, 1961), *Sowthistle* (Kucai hua, 1965), etc. A new film aesthetic was also developed in these films about the military struggles and the countryside. The good are seen as handsome at the center stage in strong lighting, while the villains are often seen "stooped over as they conspire in the shadows."[52] As a result of the Chinese communists' emphasis on the countryside in military and political struggles, film adaptations are rarely about the working class, the "real" proletariat and the leaders of the new regime.[53] Cities, when they do appear in films, are represented as another battlefield for disguised communists against their enemies, or as the battlefield for triumphant army soldiers against hidden nationalist spies intent on sabotage.[54]

In this period, besides literature recounting the new regime's history full of struggles and conflicts, leftist literature was another major type permitted on the screen, which will be more fully treated in the next section and in chapter 3. Filmic adaptations about contemporary life were much fewer in number because historical events and characters were easier to construct. The few adaptations on contemporary topics are often situated in the countryside. Examples are *The Full Moon* (Huahao yueyuan, 1958) based on a novel

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[52] Paul Pickowicz, "Zheng Junli, Complicity and the Cultural History of Socialist China, 1949-1976," *The China Quarterly*, 2006 (188): 1059.

[53] An exception to this rule is *Storm* (Feng bao, 1959), based on a play, about a famous workers' strike led by the communist party.

[54] An example is *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* (Nihongdeng xia de shaobing, 1964) based on a play about communist soldiers fighting against the corrupting forces of the liberated Shanghai and tracking down hidden enemy agents.

by Zhao Shuli, and *Li Shuangshuang* (1962) adapted by Li Zhun from his own story. Both films feature elements of conflicts between poor peasants and rich and corrupted villagers. Thus, they continue the tradition of depicting the countryside struggles before 1949, although the enemies are now not so evil and the tone of the films is quite lighthearted and celebratory. On the other hand, films on economic developments or about leaders often fail the political test. A case in point is the *Rushing Waves* (Langtao gungun, 1961) based on a novel with the same title. The film narrates the conflicts between the correct and the wrong lines among higher officials during the construction of a dam. Though the province party secretary, a personal incarnation of the infallible party itself, finally delivers justice and the dam is successfully completed, the film exposes contemporary problems and was not approved for release until 1979.

Even when filmmakers chose to adapt themes that might entertain the audiences, such as love, marriage, or martial arts, they would make sure to divide the films into two parts: the past (before 1949) when everything just go wrong, and the present (after 1949) when all wrongs are corrected. Two adapted films on love and marriage, *A Changed World* (Huan le renjian, 1959) and *Spring Comes to the Withered Tree* (Kumu feng chun, 1961), both from plays, suggest this drastic change of the order of things even in their titles. Both tell a story about frustrated love and separated lovers in the old society. Now the lovers enjoy a happy reunion. By removing the obstacles to lovers, the new regime is depicted to remove at the same time some social evil: in the former, the gas explosions in

coal mines; in the latter, the disease (a plague) suffered by the heroine.[55]

It was in less politicized genres, such as opera films or ethnic minority films, that personal sentiments can be better expressed or disguised. Significantly, the two genres often combine, presenting the ethnic minorities in China as beautifully costumed dancers and singers. As Yingjin Zhang rightly points out, the minority films in the 1950s and 1960s, while superficially presenting cultural diversity, only consolidated "the Han Cultural hegemony."[56] We may add that these films also give filmmakers a permissible field, however small, to exercise their fantasy to some extent. *Ashima* (1964) is a typical one. Based on a minority folk poem, the film features a legend which was rare at that period, although also framing it in terms of class struggles.

There was a particular genre that fitted well with political requirements yet can at the same time provide entertainments the audience so hungered for. That was the anti-spy films (*fante pian*). Featuring the communist police tracking down Nationalist or American secret agents, who often disguise themselves as harmless or even benign common people, these films can mingle elements of suspense, horror and even sex.[57] This genre was intimately connected to anti-spy novels popular, especially among

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[55] A similar narrative strategy is found in *Hua who Flies Daggers* (Feidao hua, 1963), whose martial arts story is narrated in a framework of class struggle and national liberation.

[56] Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Ann Arbor : Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002), 166.

[57] Examples of anti-spy films are: *Ten O'clock on the National Day* (Guoqing shi dianzhong, 1956) developed from an anti-spy story; *Quiet Forest* (Jijing de shanlin, 1957); *The Mysterious Traveler* (Shenmi de luban, 1955) based on a novel. Films depicting Communist secret agents who disguise themselves and work among enemies provide similar entertainment.

children and youth, from the 1950s to the early 1980s.[58] On the one hand, this film-literature genre was a continuation, although in another guise, of the popular detective stories and films before 1949. On the other hand, it was rooted in the socialist reality of campaigns against alleged secret agents, and was also heavily influenced by Soviet novels.[59] This genre provides an interesting case of popular entertaining elements ensconced in political correctness.

The output of both film and literature in the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976) was meager, aptly summarized by a common saying as "eight model plays and one writer." Almost all other films or literature were unacceptable and denounced as "poisonous weed" (*ducao*). With the tightening of political requirements, acceptable themes and literary sources became greatly limited. Jiang Qing, Chairman Mao's wife and a member of the later denounced "gang of four," took full charge of filmmaking. Thus, there was almost no room for filmmakers' negotiation with politics. The major films of this period were the eight "model films" (*yangban xi*). From 1966 to 1973, except for the "model films," no other feature film was made at all, resulting in a weird situation in which, as a common saying puts it, "eight hundred million people watched

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[58] During the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976), novels in this vein persisted and circulated widely as manuscripts. After the Cultural Revolution, some manuscripts were resurrected as films or TV series to appeal to the memory of a whole generation of readers. The most widely read manuscript was *One Embroidered Shoe* (Yizhi xiuhuaxie). Telling a story about hunting down spies, the novel is essentially a novel of horror. It was not published until 2000. It was adapted into a film in the early 1980s and then into a TV series in 2003.

[59] A large number of such Soviet novels were translated and published during the 1950s and 1960s. They reached the audience not only in the form of books, but were read in radio broadcasting or made into small picture books (*xiaoren shu*).

eight films." The literary scene was likewise desolate. Only Hao Ran and a handful of others were officially recognized, and Hao Ran was the most frequently adapted writer in the latter part of the Cultural Revolution from 1973 to 1976.[60]

Interestingly, the eight model films are all extremely faithful adaptations of Peking operas or dance operas, which are in turn adaptations of local operas, novels, earlier films or drama plays. These are "new-style" operas, featuring not traditional China but revolutionaries. Unlike the usual repertoire of operas, these eight were made under the full supervision of Jiang Qing. The films based on such operas faithfully stick to the original actions and singing sessions, while at the same time employ such filmic techniques as composition and lighting to sharpen the contrast between the good and the evil. It was the first time that opera films (*xiqu pian*) were given so much political significance and took up so many propaganda functions. Besides the eight model plays, a few popular black-and-white films made after 1949 were remade into colored ones, although the audiences might still prefer the old versions. Thus, the Cultural Revolution film scenario was one of recycling and repackaging.

During the first two years after the ending of the Cultural Revolution (1976-78), films first seemed to revert to the pre-Cultural Revolution level and continued the disrupted traditions. Old films were again released and new films were made on

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[60] Films based on Hao Ran's works are *Bright Day* (Yanyang tian, 1973), *The Golden Path* (Jinguang dadao, 1975-76), and *Children of Xisha* (Xisha ernü, 1976). The last two, while in the process of making, met with the end of the Cultural Revolution and thus were never finished.

revolutionary history and anti-spy actions. In 1979, after this short period of recovery and with the official launching of the "reform and open-up" policies, films and filmic adaptations took a new departure. This "new era" (*xin shiqi*) of films began, just like literature, with exposing wounds left by the Cultural Revolution and reflecting on past national policies and their impacts on intellectuals and party officials. Many of Xie Jin's adapted films, to be dealt with in detail in Chapter 4, belong to this category. Other examples are *A Corner Forsaken by Love* (Bei aiqing yiwang de jiaoluo, 1980) and *At the Middle Age* (Ren dao zhongnian, 1982). All such adaptations are based on contemporary novels and suggest a parallel development in film and literature.

In the early 1980s, leftist literature, which vanished in the Cultural Revolution, reappeared. Yet, this was not a return to the pre-Cultural Revolution style and scope of adaptations. We still see those established leftist writers or playwrights: Lu Xun, Lao She, and Cao Yu. Lu Xun remained a favorite for filmmakers, yet their selection of his works changed. While the film *The New Year's Sacrifice* (1956) emphasized the suffering and oppression in the old society, filmmakers in the new era selected those stories of Lu Xun that have no apparent political implications. One such adapted film is *Regret for the Past* (Shangshi, 1981), a despondent story about a couple's love and then estrangement. The other is *The Story of Ah Q* (A Q zhengzhuan, 1981), revisiting the May-Fourth tradition of exposing the weaknesses and ugliness of the Chinese nation and culture. Meanwhile, in response to literary historians' efforts to rewrite the literary history before 1949,

filmmakers also looked at modern Chinese literature beyond the leftist scope. Shen Congwen (1902-1988), a non-leftist writer, was resurrected in literary history. Two films, *Border Town* (Biancheng, 1984) and *A Girl from Hunan* (Xiangnu xiaoxiao, 1986), were based on his stories, depicting love and life in a pristine mountain region not touched by the revolution.[61]

Communist history was still sometimes revisited, but now the focus is no longer the inevitable military victories, the perfect heroes and heroines or the class clashes, but personal emotions and experiences. *Little Flower* (Xiao hua, 1979), to be further discussed in the next section, is a good case of extracting lyrical and emotional elements from a Cultural Revolution novel written in 1972. Another way of re-narrating the communist history for films is to make use of marginal literary sources. *The Lily* (Baihe hua, 1981) is a case in point. The film came from a short story written by a woman writer Ru Zhijuan (1925-1998) in 1958. Unlike the mainstream masculine narratives of wars and struggles, this is a moving story about a shy young soldier and his encounter with his female comrade and a female villager. The story explores the delicate and intricate line between comradely love and sexual attraction. Thus in films made at this time, revolution takes on a humanistic color.

In fact, the fifth generation of Chinese filmmakers, a name given to those first graduates from Beijing Film Academy after the Cultural Revolution, made their

[61] Later, *A Woman for Two* (Chuntao, 1988) by Xu Dishan (1893-1941), a marginal and deeply religious writer, was also adapted.

appearance by making use of such marginalized revolutionary literature. *One and Eight* (Yige he bage, 1983) and *Yellow Earth* (Huang tudi, 1984) are two films that made the fifth generation, including such now illustrious names as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, known to the domestic and international audiences. Both films are inspired by literary works.[62] *One and Eight* is based on a narrative poem by Guo Xiaochuan written in 1959 but never published except for circulation for internal criticism (*neibu pipan*).[63] The basic plot of *Yellow Earth* is taken from a lyrical essay.[64] Unlike the optimistic tone of mainstream revolutionary narratives, both literary sources include elements of reflection and darkness. In *One and Eight*, a staunch revolutionary is wrongly condemned as an enemy by his comrades and has to spend his days with eight bandits. In *Yellow Earth*, the communist soldier fails to bring enlightenment and happiness to local people. By availing themselves of these marginalized or even condemned literary works before the Cultural Revolution, the fifth generation filmmakers made sure that their voice was a different one.

It might not be coincidence that the fifth generation, when they first emerged, chose a poem and a lyrical essay as sources of their basic story lines. Poetry and essays do not

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[62] Scriptwriter Zhang Ziliang helped write the two screenplays.

[63] As Wei Bida 韦必达, the head of Guangxi Studio which produced *One and Eight* remembers, the screenplay based on the poem had been put away in the studio for more than a year, mainly because its tone was too despondent and the studio leaders were not sure of its political implications. See Wei Bida, "The Launch of the Fifth Generation in Guangxi" 中国电影第五代在广西的起步, in *Yue Haifeng* 粤海风，3rd issue, 2002, on-line version: http://www.anewfocus.com/yhf/yhf2002-3-10.htm.

[64] The personal essay was written by Ke Lan 柯蓝, and titled "Echoes in the Valley"深谷回声.

emphasize plot even if they have narratives in them, and thus fit well with the fifth generation's artistic pursuit to downplay the plot. Furthermore, poems and essays, shorter than novels, leave much room for filmmakers to exert their freedom. Chen Kaige, director of *Yellow Earth*, was not perfectly satisfied with the script. However, he believed that "the script leaves room for our re-creation, and that is the loess plateau presented in our film."[65] The literary work and even the script provide not so much a restricting framework but a convenient vehicle for the filmmakers to load what was believed the most important thing of films: visual images.

When the fifth generation ended their experimental phase and entered the mainstream, they began to pay attention to novels, especially those by contemporary writers on the Republican period. Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige show surprisingly similar tastes for literary sources. Zhang's *The Red Sorghum* (Hong gaoliang, 1987), *Ju Dou* (1990) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (Dahong denglong gaogao gua, 1991), all based on novels, depict a phantasmagoric Republican world full of sexual oppression, murder and incest. Similarly, Chen Kaige directed *Tempress Moon* (Feng Yue, 1995), based on Ye Zhaoyan's novel. Both Zhang's *To Live* (Huozhe, 1994, from a novel by Yu Hua) and Chen's *Farewell my Concubine* (Bawang bieji, 1993, from a novel by Lillian Lee) narrate the 20th-century Chinese history through the rise and fall of traditional Chinese artists (one of the Peking opera, the other of the shadow play). Similar life experiences, mutual

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[65] Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, "How I Made *Yellow Earth*" 我怎样拍黄土地, in Luo Yijun edited, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories*, vol.2, 559.

influences and the same national and international contexts combine to produce a narrative pattern in the two otherwise different directors.

It seems that when a new generation of Chinese filmmakers emerges on the scene and want to assert themselves, they tend to downplay the literary qualities of their films. The same thing is happening to the sixth generation too. To emphasize their uniqueness and creativity, they often begin with writing scripts themselves or cooperating with avant-garde scriptwriters. A case in point is Zhang Yuan, whose early experimental films are based on original scripts, and who began to adapt literature after he was established. His film about homosexuality, *East Palace, West Palace* (Donggong xigong, 1996), is written by the posthumously famous novelist and essayist Wang Xiaobo (1952-1997). His recent film *Little Red Flowers* (Kan shangqu hen mei, 2005) was based on a novel by Wang Shuo, a writer deeply involved in Chinese filmmaking since the late 1980s. It may be expected that, as the sixth generation was more and more integrated into the mainstream, their attention to literature and the proportion of films adapted from literature will increase.

“Fidelity,” and the Relative Status of Film and Literature

This section will discuss the ways of adaptation related to classical Chinese literature, leftist literature, and the adaptation style of the fifth generation filmmakers through

looking into the issue of "fidelity." Shui Hua, who directed *Regret for the Past* (Shangshi, 1981), can been seen as the quintessential filmmaker who tried his best to be faithful to the literary original. According to Zhong Dianfei, Shui Hua could memorize Lu Xun's story without a single mistake.[66] In an interview after the completion of the film, the director evaluated his film against the short story to see if a particular sentence or phrase is well executed in visual terms.[67] During this interview, Shui Hua lengthily quoted from the short story. He had such admiration for the story that in the later stage of the filmmaking, he did not need or want to read the script anymore. The story is his script. His book copy of the story was covered with notes. Even with his intention to be as loyal as possible to the literary original "not only in intellectual contents, but in artistic styles," Shui Hua had regrets. He attributed many of these regrets to his failure to grasp the spirit of the original fully or accurately enough.[68]

Although it is common for moviegoers, critics and even filmmakers themselves like Shui Hua to judge the success of an adaptation by its approximation to the literary source, total fidelity is, if not impossible, a contradiction, as has been amply discussed by scholars of adaptation and translation. As Walter Benjamin theorizes on translation, "a translation issues from the original--not so much from its life as from its afterlife" which

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[66] Zhong Dianfei 钟惦棐, *Selected Works of Zhong Dianfei* 钟惦棐文集 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1994), vol.2, 97.
[67] See Luo Yijun 罗艺军 and Xu Hong 徐虹, "Interview with Shui Hua"水华访谈录, *Dianying chuangzuo*, 3 (1996): 68-73, 4 (1996):56-67.
[68] Ibid, 3 (1996):73, 71.

necessarily involves changes.[69] In the case of film adaptation, the changes arise from the interrelationships not so much of two languages but of two media. To change words into visual terms must necessarily involve interpreting and making decisions that have not been dictated by the writer. Still, we can distinguish relatively faithful or free adaptations. Like filmmakers elsewhere, Chinese adaptations can range from faithful adherence to the original, as Shui Hua did, to trying to capture the so-called "spirit" of the original which depends much on the interpretation of the filmmakers, to using the original only as a raw material on which to build one's own film. I will not argue for faithful or free adaptation here, but will take "fidelity" itself as an issue in Chinese film history. Where each adapted film finds itself in this spectrum of "fidelity" is the result of a combination of factors. Among these, two interlinked elements are especially significant: what the literary source is, and when the film was made.

In 1957, Xia Yan, talking about adaptations, argued that different literary works should be dealt with differently:

> I believe that [adaptations] should vary according to the nature of the originals. If the originals to be adapted are classics, works by such masters as Tolstoy, Gorky and Lu Xun, then I think the adaptors should by all means be faithful to the original. The deletions, additions and changes of even details should not exceed or be detrimental to the overall message of the original and its unique style. However, if the original to be adapted is myth, folk legend or the so-called "folk history," then I believe

[69] Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in his *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 71.

adaptors can have more freedom to add, delete or change. [70]

Thus, following Xia Yan's rule depends on what can be counted as classics, and the passage draws our attention to the canonization process of literature. Tolstoy and Gorky, whose works Xia Yan mentions as classics, only became so in China after 1949. Some of their works were adapted before 1949, and filmmakers did not have qualms in making them "Chinese" and making drastic changes in the plot.[71] It is only after 1949 and through officially distributed literary histories that Lu Xun, Gorky, and to a lesser degree, Tolstoy, became enshrined. In this canonization process after 1949, aesthetic values were less important than the political message. That both foreign writers Xia Yan mentions came from Russia (the then Soviet Union) is not sheer coincidence.

It is also noteworthy that Xia Yan did not include traditional Chinese literature in his list of classics. Indeed, his observation about the free adaptation of traditional Chinese literature is a good summary of Chinese films on such topics until then. The one century of Chinese cinema coincided with a wholesale revamping and critiquing of the Chinese tradition, first against such western values as democracy and science, then against the communist values of class struggles. With this generally critical attitude, even filmmakers

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[70] Xia Yan, "Miscellaneous Words on Adaptation"杂谈改编, in Luo Yijun, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories: 1920-198*9 中国电影理论文选(Beijing: Shoudu shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000), volume 1, 498.

[71] A Chinese film version of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, titled *The Recovery of the Conscience* (Liangxin fuhuo, 1926), has the Chinese Maslova and Nekhludoff united in a happy ending, in addition to other drastic changes.

who harbor some respect for Chinese literary classics deemed it necessary to inject some "new" (either western or communist) message into the films.

Many early film critics voiced such sentiments. A critical piece on *Mulan Joins the Army* (1939) explicitly argues that, in making films with traditional subjects,

> The only correct attitude… is not to faithfully copy the... stories onto the screen, but to inject a new statement through the correct viewpoint of the filmmakers to fit this great age. In other words, so long as it does not very much go against historical facts, the meaningful parts should be played up, and the meaningless parts should be downplayed as much as possible or simply cut.[72]

What is to be played up, and what to cut? In the late 1920s when films on classical topics reached a climax, scriptwriter and director Chen Zhiqing (1897-) argues that, filmmakers must re-evaluate traditional materials and choose materials that "represent strenuous struggles and poverty," while those about a peaceful life were ineligible.[73] Another contemporary critic concludes that only those traditional literary sources with "motion and energy" are suitable for the screen, while the hero and the heroine of *Dream of the*

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[72] Cited in Li Daoxin 李道新, *History of Chinese Cinema: 1937-1945* 中国电影史(1937-1945) (Beijing: Shoudu shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000),195. The film *Mulan Joins the Army* meets the critic's requirements. The minority girl in the original folk poem is transformed into a girl in Tang Dynasty, when Chinese culture reached its climax, and the girl fought against ethnic invading armies. This is clearly a reference to the Sino-Japanese war. For cinema in war-time Shanghai, see Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford University Press, 1993).

[73] Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan 中国电影资料馆, *Chinese Silent Films* 中国无声电影 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 639-42, 659.

Red Chamber, with their romantic love, are too sentimental and unwholesome.[74] Their values dovetailed with the May-Fourth trend and played up the strong and energetic aspect of Chinese culture in the face of western challenges.

Other important May Fourth new concepts are individualism, freedom and human right. *The Romance of the West Chamber* (Xixiang ji, 1927) is a case in point. When adapted into a film in 1927, the story is rewritten in terms of western values. According to the director and scriptwriter Hou Yao, the original author of the play, Wang Shifu, who lived in the late 13th and early 14th- century, "was a person imprisoned in the Confucian system (*lijiao*), yet he was brave enough and passionate enough to write *The Romance of the West Chamber* to promote sacred love, heavenly-endowed human rights, and to fight against the Confucian system."[75] Surely Wang Shifu would be surprised to see himself interpreted in this way in order to gain a new lease of life in a new era. Hou Yao's way of adaptation is to keep what he believes is the modern "spirit" of the play and adds plots that he believes do not contradict that "spirit," without caring much about faithfulness in details.[76] Those who were against such free styles of adaptation could show in a negative way the popularity of such practices. Sun Shiyi 孙师毅(1904-1966), who later wrote the script for the leftist film *New Women* (Xin nuxing,1935), complained in 1926 about "the frenzy of making traditional subjects in cinemas." Sun lamented that such adaptations

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[74] Ibid, 514.
[75] Ibid, 326.
[76] Ibid, 327 and 645.

were too free, and the resulted film was “neither a mule nor a horse.”[77]

After 1949, such traditional subjects suffered a sharp decline, only to be revived in the recent decades as TV series. In such series, free adaptation is still the rule, although this time the point is not so much of injecting a politically correct message as entertaining the viewers. Traditional Chinese historical stories and other literary works prove a rich ore for the entertainment industry to employ. These TV series feature palace intrigues, emperors and their romances, in the *xishuo* (“speak playfully of”) tradition which gives them the license to make up details. In TV series more than in movies, faithfulness to historical facts is not what the producers can fully afford to do. Nor do they care.

The Republican practice of injecting “correct” message into the materials continued in the adaptation of leftist canon, which reached its climax in the 1950s and 1960s. Xia Yan was an important figure in this field, and his adaptations of such leftist literature and their consequences will be examined in chapter 3. Generally, the filmmakers made the gesture to be faithful to the original, partly because the so-called canonical works had become familiar to the general public and deviations could be eye-catching and controversial. Yet in the socialist era, leftist literary canon cannot be left just as they are to cause confusion or despondence in the audiences. Messages of resistance and fraternity among the poor were thus injected into the films, which make them come closer to the socialist “Red Canon” which depicts class and military struggles under direct leadership

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[77] See Sun’s article collected in *Chinese Silent Films*, 643-5.

of the communist party.

Since visual images are often ambiguous, a way to make the message clear is to give it verbal forms. The filmmakers who adapted leftist literature in the 1950s and 1960s often add speeches, subtitles or voiceovers to make the message unmistakable, often at the beginning or in the end, and sometimes accompanied by music to enhance its effect. Xia Yan's *The New Year's Sacrifice* is typical in this aspect. The film is framed by two lengthy passages printed on the screen. At the beginning, we read a passage from Lu Xun, though not from this short story itself:

> We lament those people of the bygone age, and we promise: we ourselves and others will be pure, bright, brave and upbeat, and we will get rid of the mental confusion and the forces in this world that harm oneself and others…..We also vow to make human kind enjoy its rightful happiness.

This passage by Lu Xun, taken from an article written by Lu Xun in 1918, now resembles the communist message of struggle, optimism and strenuousness.[78] At the very end of the film, after the protagonist Xianglin Sao is going to die of misery, a male voiceover reads out loud the verdict, summarizing the story, pointing out the morals and telling the audiences how they should feel about the film:

> Xianglin Sao, this hard-working, thrifty and kind woman, after

[78] See Lun Xun, "My Concept of Loyalty and Chastity" 我之节烈观, in *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), vol.1, 125.

> innumerable miseries and humiliations, drops dead. That happened forty years ago, yes, that happened in a bygone age. Fortunately, that age is gone, never to return.

This is clearly not Lu Xun's voice, but Xia Yan's. The two verbal passages enclose the story, distance the audience from what happen on the screen and make them feel good about living in a new age.[79]

This resorting to words to drive home the meaning of the film was not restricted to Xia Yan, but was a common practice among adaptors of leftist literature. Thus, *Early Spring in February* (Zaochun eryue, 1963) ended with reading a letter written by the hero, in which he says he has "stopped his vaccilations, found the right way, and will plunge into the great torrents of the age." Similarly, Mr. Shen in *This Life of Mine* (Wo zhe yibeizi, 1950), a communist party member and a symbol of revolutionary consciousness, tells the confused old policeman, and through him the audiences, that the policeman had once unconsciously worked as a lackey "for the foreigners, for imperialism…for feudal powers, warlords and officials, and the rich," and that "in the past five thousand years, Chinese common people have lived such a life of ignorance."

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[79] Xia Yan used a similar technique in *The Lin Family Shop* (Linjia puzi, 1959). At the beginning of the film, there was also a long passage dictating the meaning of the film: "The story happened in 1931, that is, almost 30 years ago. That was when the Chinese people suffered the most. The three big mountains of imperialism, feudalism and big bourgeoisie weighed heavily on the heads of the Chinese people, and the working people were trapped in miseries. The businesspeople, who belonged to the exploiting class, could not control their own fate. That was a society where men ate one another. The writer depicts a social scene of big fish eating small fish, and small fish eating shrimps."

Based on Lao She's story, *This Life of Mine* can illustrate in another way the narrative pattern imposed on such literature. Films based on leftist literature must both expose the evils of the old society and look forward to the future. Different from the original literary works, these films often run towards a teleological end, preparing for the advent of communism. The protagonist of this film, a low-level policeman and reluctant participant in the oppression process, has to die before the birth of the all-new country, because he is not conscious of the class struggle ideology and thus does not know the answer to his sufferings. Xianglin Sao in *The New Year's Sacrifice* suffers a similar fate. Hope for the future resides in the youth. Thus, in *This Life of Mine*, the policeman's son leaves home to join the liberation army. Moreover, different from Lao She's story, after the miserable death of the policeman, the film ends in a triumphant note with the liberation of the whole country by the communist army. Such practices of imposing political correctness were as much a habit as a way of self-protection, perhaps a reluctant bow to the dominant political discourse.

Different from the case of classical Chinese literature, in spite of these sometimes drastic changes made to the leftist novels, no resentment or discontent is implied. The films still present themselves as paying homage to the writer and base their legitimacy on being a filmic copy or translation of the original. The changes are done in an unostentatious and subdued way and are believed to be compatible with the spirit and style of the original, as if the writers, including those already dead, would not have

opposed the changes. The gesture of acknowledging the primary nature of the source and one's secondary status can be seen in the opening of many adaptations of leftist literature in the 1950s and 1960s. Both *This Life of Mine* and *The Lin Family Shop* begin with an image of a book. The cover of the book is opened, showing the book title as the film title. The pages of the book are further turned, and the film is opened. *This Life of Mine* even has a disclaimer, not for the filmmakers, but for Lao She the literary author: "This film is adapted from Mr. Lao She's novel. The adaptors are responsible for whatever deviates from the original novel." In this film, the episodes of the film are presented as chapters of the book, and we often hear the protagonist (Shi Hui) reading from the book itself.

Even the credits at the beginning of the films imply an obvious hierarchy. In both *The Lin Family Shop* and *The New Year's Sacrifice*, the first credit, occupying a whole screen, is given to the original author, Mao Dun and Lu Xun respectively. The second credit, again on the whole screen, is the scriptwriter Xia Yan. The director only comes as the third on the credit list. *Early Spring in February* opens with a portrait of the original author Rou Shi, with the words "dedicated to the 33th anniversary of Comrade Rou Shi's death." Then comes the film title. All these gestures to pay respect to the literary source and the original writer are aimed to make people believe that the film is, or at least tries to be, an exact representation of the book. This constant referring back to the book shows the high status of the canonical writers. The filmmakers, by making use of these writers, were co-opting an important political resource. They were willing to make these

resources perfect by tinkling at the messages without endangering the writers' authorities.

The gestures also show the relative status of films vis-à-vis literature. Films until then had not enjoyed a high status as a form of art. To promote the respectability of the new art of film, it is sometimes necessary to relate it to already established art forms, first the drama, then novels. Hou Yao, an early filmmaker and theorist, was typical in this respect. In his handbook on scriptwriting published in 1926, he wrote that "film (*yingxi*) is a kind of drama, and whatever the drama has, the film has too, because it possesses all the merits of drama."[80] In another article written in the same year, he argued that "film is literature, it is living literature," because it has the essential elements literature has.[81] The emphasis on the literary qualities of a film led to an emphasis on the scripts, which is the linguistic base of the film. This tendency is very strong in Chinese film tradition, so much so that theorists claim a particularly "Chinese" film theory of "shadow-play" (*yingxi*), which foregrounds plot and narrative, as opposed to the western filmic tradition of emphasizing visuality.[82] Hence a quite unique branch of film studies in China, which is

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[80] Luo Yijun 罗艺军 ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories: 1920-1989*, vol.1, 49.

[81] Hou Yao 侯曜, "The Position of Film in Literature" 电影在文学上的位置, in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan ed., *Chinese Silent Films* 中国无声电影, 501.

[82] On the theorization of *yingxi* theory, see Chen Xihe 陈犀禾, "A Re-appreciation of Chinese Film Aesthetics" 中国电影美学的再认识, in Luo Yijun ed, 罗艺军 ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories: 1920-1989*, vol.2, 289-306; Zhong Dafeng 钟大丰, "On the History of the Shadow-play Theory" 影戏理论历史探源, in ibid, vol.2, 307-319. A risk in such a binary of the Chinese versus the western film theory is to overestimate the differences between the two traditions, or pitting the usual Chinese practices against the avant-garde aspect of western practices. Indeed, the Hollywood tradition is very much similar to the Chinese emphasis on narrative and plot, while Chinese filmmakers also made such non-narrative films as *The Spring in the Small Town* (Xiaocheng zhi chun, 1949).

labeled as “film literature” (*dianying wenxue*), a vague label sometimes referring to the scripts, sometimes to narration, characterization, in fact all filmmaking aspects except for the technical ones.[83]

This secondary and even dependent status of film more or less continued after 1949, and can be seen in a 1956 critical piece on what constitutes the unique qualities of film, written by Yuan Wenshu (1911-1993), then head of Shanghai Film Studio. Yuan argues that “the novel is the richest art among all literature and art.” However, the literary images cannot reach the uneducated masses, and here is when the film steps in, to popularize and make literature accessible to a larger audience.[84] Another contemporary writer and theorist Yu Min (1914-) believes that in the creation of film literature, “the common literature rules are the root (*ben*) and are primary, while the special rules for films are the branches (*mo*) and thus the secondary.”[85] The filmmakers’ way of adapting leftist literature, making changes yet trying to “appear” faithful, shows the lower status of film as an art form vis-à-vis literature.

This habit of paying respect to the literary source was carried by some senior

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[83] Thus there are histories of “film literature,” such as Zhou Xiaoming 周晓明’s *History of Modern China’s Film Literature* 中国现代电影文学史（Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1985）, Liu Jianxun 刘建勋’s *China’s Contemporary Film and TV Literature* 中国当代影视文学（Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1986）. Yet as early as 1956, film theorist Zhong Dianfei argued that “film literature is, to a large degree, a literature not yet completed,” in Zhong Dianfei, *Selected Works of Zhong Dianfei,* vol.1, 308.

[84] Yuan Wenshu 袁文殊, “Characters, Personalities and Plots in Films”电影中的人物、性格和情节, in Luo Yijun ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories: 1920-1989,* vol.1, 378-9.

[85] Yu Min 于敏, “The Root and the Branch” 本末, in Luo Yijun ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories: 1920-1989,* vol.1, 541.

directors into the early 1980s, which saw some of the most faithful adaptations in the history of Chinese cinema. Shui Hua's faithful adaptation of Lu Xun, mentioned at the beginning of this section, as the work of a director deeply immersed in the film practices and theories of the 1950s and 1960s, still possesses qualities of that bygone age. Xie Jin's extremely successful adaptations based on contemporary literature sources, to be examined in chapter 4, are very faithful, too. These faithful adaptations show the still dependent nature of film. Another senior director, Ling Zifeng, goes one step further than Shui Hua. Like Shui Hua, Ling prefers adaptations of pre-1949 literature. Yet, instead of the already canonical writers, he explored modern literature by "newly-discovered" writers. His efforts happened at the same time when historians also tried to revise the history of modern Chinese literature. Part of his intention of adapting *Border Town* (Biancheng, 1984) of Shen Congwen was to fight for a fair status for the writer (*da baobuping*).[86]

Significantly, Ling Zifeng adds something else to the literature: himself. His professed adaptation philosophy is "the original plus me" (*mingzhu jia wo*). Different from the 1950s and 1960s adaptors who added political messages into the films and did so in an often hidden way, what Ling Zifeng unabashedly adds is his personal feelings, experiences and interpretation. "I will be faithful to the original, but the spirit of the

[86] See Xu Xiaoxing 徐晓星 and Huo Zhuang 霍庄, "Ling Zifeng Shooting *Border Town*" 凌子风拍《边城》, *Dianying yishu*, 1 (2004): 76-81. Later on, Shen Congwen became a new canonical figure and there was no need to fight against the "unfairness" anymore.

original has to be executed through my personal understandings and styles. ….I think I am essentially faithful. But I believe I should not only be faithful to the original, but to myself as well."[87] In his *The Rickshaw Boy* (Luotuo xiangzi, 1982), an adaptation of a masterpiece by Lao She, Ling Zifeng refuses to make the hero suffer from syphilis, or to make the heroine a bad woman, because he cannot bring himself to do that.[88] Thus, Ling Zifeng can be seen as a bridge from the 1950s and 1960s to the subsequently freer use of the sources by the fourth and fifth generation filmmakers.

Even before the typically free adaptation of the fifth generation, younger filmmakers, especially when dealing with contemporary literary materials, became more confident. Wu Yigong, the director of *My Memory of Old Beijing* (Chengnan jiushi, 1982), traces some problems of the film not to the script, but to the flaws in the novel itself, perhaps partly because the novel is written by a Taiwanese author.[89] Huang Jianzhong, the assistant director of *Little Flower* (Xiaohua), in his report on the making of the film, refuses to categorize the film as an adaptation, since the film only uses some materials from the novel. All episodes about the war against nationalists in the novel are discarded, while fraternal connections are foregrounded. To support his notion of adaptation, Huang quotes Balacz to the effect that adaptors should only deem the original novel as materials

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[87] Quoted in Shu Xiaoming 舒晓明, "On the Film Adaptations of Ling Zifeng in the New Era," 谈凌子风新时期的电影改编，*Beijing dianying xueyuan xuebao* 1 (2001): 60.
[88] See Zhong Dianfei, *Selected Works of Zhong Dianfei*, vol.2, 569.
[89] See Wu Yigong 吴贻弓, "Pursuit of Essay-like Films" 对散文式电影的探求, in Luo Yijun ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories*, vol.2, 528.

to be worked on.[90] Huang believes that this approach stems from the uniqueness of the film art, and that "we must acknowledge the director's camera and the writer's pen are two different tools of art… We follow the rules of the special representational ways of the film art to look at the life in the novel, to decide on what to choose and what to discard."[91]

Huang Jianzhong here links the change in adaptation styles with an awareness of film as an individual art form. As mentioned above, the Chinese tradition of filmmaking emphasizes the dramatic aspects of a film. Yet in the early 1980s, both theorists and younger filmmakers were feeling a new surge of confidence in the film art. While in the early decades of its development, film was flattered if allied with other already established art form, now some people were trying to separate film from drama and further on from literature, to promote the ontological status of film. Arguments in this vein had popped up in the past, but have never been so systematic, and so in line with contemporary filmmaking practices.[92] Thus, senior critic Zhong Dianfei in 1980 called

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[90] See Huang Jianzhong 黄建中, "*The Little Flower*" 小花, in Ding Yaping 丁亚平 ed. *Collection of a Century of Chinese Film Theories: 1897-2001* 百年中国电影理论文选 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2002), vol. 2, 51-2.

[91] Ibid, 52.

[92] For example, in 1934, director Fei Mu advocated that "film art should quickly get away from the form of drama, and became an art form in its own right." See his "A Small Issue in *The Fragrant Snow Sea*" 《香雪海》中的一个小问题，quoted in Li Suyuan 郦苏元, *History of Modern Chinese Film Theories* 中国现代电影理论史 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2005), 362. The school advocating "soft film" against leftist films in the 1930s in Shanghai, led by Liu Na'ou, also promoted the independence of film from other art forms. See Li Daoxin 李道新, *History of Chinese Film Criticism* 中国电影批评史, 139.

for a “divorce of film and play,” and Bai Jinsheng for “getting rid of the walking stick of drama.” Interestingly, Bai, in separating film from drama, allies film with non-narrative literature. He asks that “since we have drama-like film, why cannot we have essay-like film, or poem-like film?”[93]

More influential and systematic is “On the Modernization of Film Language,” an article co-authored by new director Zhang Nuanxin and theorist Li Tuo and published in 1979.[94] The article recounts western film history as a linear progress, with the Italian New Realism, French New Wave and the long-take theory of Andre Bazin as the latest development. In contrast, Chinese films were believed to be backward and thus must catch up. Aspects of film language that must be improved include narration, color, shot, composition and rhythm. The tone of the article is reminiscent of the May-Fourth discourse of progress and the urge to catch up with the modern world. By citing Mao Zedong and Lu Xun and condemning the downsides of the bourgeois films, the article is very much phrased in a familiar language. Yet, it alerts Chinese filmmakers to the development of world cinema, promotes the separateness of film from drama, emphasizes

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[93] Bai Jingsheng 白景晟, “Throwing away the Walking Stick of Drama” 丢掉戏剧的拐杖, in Luo Yijun ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories*, vol.2, 5-6. For an English translation of the article, see George Semsel, Xia Hong and Hou Jianping ed., *Chinese Film Theory: A Guide to the New Era* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 5-9.

[94] Zhang Nuanxin 张暖忻 and Li Tuo 李陀, “On the Modernization of Filmic Language” 谈电影语言的现代化, in Luo Yijun ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories*, vol.2, 9-34. For an English translation of the article, see George Semsel, Xia Hong and Hou Jianping ed., *Chinese Film Theory*, 10-20.

the visual aspects of film, and paves the way for China's New Wave.[95]

It was with the launching of the fifth generation that visuality became foregrounded and that the free adaptation style became widespread. By choosing a poem and an essay as the literary bases of their first two important films the young filmmakers made it impossible to be faithful. This is a generation who feels free from the obligation to be faithful to the original. The directors still constantly look to literature for material and inspiration, yet what they seek is often a plot or a clue to build their films on. In "adapting" the sources, they not only have no qualms in making changes whenever and wherever they like, but, by resorting to a stylized use of elements unique to the film, they make the final products fully their own. Take *Black Cannon Incident* (Heipao shijian, 1985) by Huang Jianxin for example. Drastically different from the original novel, Huang adopted the style of "black humor," which he got from reading such western novels as *Catch 22*. By drawing the audiences' attention to color, composition and sound more than the progress of the plot, Huang tried to give the audience something they could never have experienced through other art forms.[96]

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[95] In this "film versus literature" debate, some still advocated the superiority of literature and the paramount status of a script. For one, Zhang Junxiang 张骏祥 believes that "film is literature, literature finished by filmic representational techniques." See his "Literature Expressed Through Filmic Techniques" 用电影表现手段完成的文学, in Luo Yijun ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories*, vol.2, 35-53.

[96] See Zhongguo dianying chubanshe 中国电影出版社 ed. *The Black Cannon Incident--from the Novel to the Film* 黑炮事件——从小说到电影 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1988), 214. However, different from the sense of absurdity and pessimism in western black humor novels, Huang tries to soften the critical edge of the film, and supplies an upbeat, if not happy, ending.

The leading figure of the fifth generation, Zhang Yimou, active from the mid-1980s till now, has not very much changed his preference for adaptation over original scripts. He can show the attitude of new filmmakers towards their sources and the change with time of that attitude. In the late 1990s, he lamented that Chinese novels were suffering a decline in quality, and could not offer filmmakers much inspiration. Speaking about the two writers on whom he based his *Not One Less* (Yige dou bu neng shao, 1998) and *The Road Home* (Wo de fuqin muqin, 1999), Zhang has this to say:

> Their novels can only give me a point to start with, and I have to walk from this point. Sometimes the changes to the original novel amount to 90%….because the present condition of Chinese literature was not like ten years ago. It is very difficult to see a complete and impressive novel…. It is impossible to see such novels as *The Red Sorghum* (Hong gaoliang) or *Wives and Concubines* (Qiqie chengqun), which are so complete in contents and meanings, and which we only needed to change 40%.[97]

It is hard to say whether literature really suffered a decline as Zhang Yimou believes, or whether it is because he is becoming more and more confident or even arrogant in his attitude towards literature. Anyway, his early films are based on novels by writers more or less well-known, and the writers became even more famous after the release of the adaptations. Yet his later works were all based on less-renowned writers, who are perhaps easy to manage. In return, the authors did not get the sensational rise after the films.

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[97] Zhang Ming 张明 ed, *Talks with Zhang Yimou* 与张艺谋对话 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2004), 49.

Zhang's comments also point out the change of the relationship between the scriptwriter and the director in the industry. Directors used to receive a script already completed in the studio, and his or her task is to make it into a film. For example, Shui Hua adapted Lu Xun's "Regret for the Past" as a political task to commemorate the centennial anniversary of Lu Xun's birthday. With the fifth generation, directors become more and more important and independent. As the pivots of the filmmaking process, they have more and more leverage in their dealings with writers. Writers are eager to have their works adapted for both the monetary benefits and the fame. They are willing to change their own works, or have them changed, in ways that will please the director. Zhang Yimou estimates that in his meetings to discuss the scripts with writers, 70-80% of the time would be taken up by him (the director).[98] He could pay five famous writers, including Su Tong and Bei Cun, to write a story on the same topic for him, from which he could choose.[99] Chen Kaige did the same. With his *Tempress Moon* (Fengyue, 1996), not satisfied with the original work by Ye Zhaoyan, he recruited another famous writer Wang Anyi. Thus, two renowned writers are voluntarily involved in the scriptwriting of the film, which turned out to be not quite a success.

All in all, the general tendency is an upward mobility of film vis-a-vis literature. From a new art that fought for its legitimacy by claiming that it was literature, to an art

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[98] See Zhang Ming ed, *Talks with Zhang Yimou*, 149.

[99] Zhang Yimou does not use this method very frequently, not because he could not afford to do so, but because he finds that the result of such processes often has the shortcoming of illustrating an already existent point. See Zhang Ming ed, *Talks with Zhang Yimou*, 172.

form that fought for its independence by trying to break away from literature, now film has became a dominant form over literature.

The following chapters are organized around representative figures or topics during a century of Chinese filmic adaptations. Chapter 2 is on the Republican adaptations of foreign literature, in which I will give an overview of this genre and examine some of its recurrent motifs. Chapter 3 focuses on adaptations by Xia Yan, an arbiter of socialist films, in which I analyze Xia Yan's options as shown in his adaptations in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter 4 explores adaptations by Xie Jin, the most important Chinese director in the early 1980s, to see how he uses the melodramatic mode in his films on the rightists and how that mode is specific to the period. Chapter 5 studies Zhang Yimou's adaptations in his early films to see his change from the 1980s to the 1990s, and his strategy of foregrounding visuality.

Although chapters 3 to 5 each has a filmmaker as a thread, this dissertation is not meant to be an auteur study, although it will surely enhance our understanding of those filmmakers. The aim of such selection is to provide a window or a convenient point of entry. To use Dudley Andrew's words, my selection is not because "such texts are themselves privileged," but because they provide us "a clear and useful 'laboratory' condition."[100] Seen in this sense, the focus of my study is not only adaptation, but a

[100] Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," 29.

study of film history from the perspective of adaptation. The perspective of cultural history is also important to me, which not only provides contexts for my analysis of the texts, but is also the area to which I hope to make some contributions on bigger issues of cultural production. As emphasized above, my interests in the study will be more historical and cultural than aesthetical, although it is sometimes difficult to separate these elements, and the aesthetical choices are often politically or culturally significant. Through an analysis of the filmmakers' strategies at different times in different political and social conditions, we will go beyond individual films and filmmakers to find broad patterns and explanations for these patterns in terms of what is "possible (thinkable) and feasible (legitimate)," to borrow Cassetti's words, culturally and politically at a specific period, Through the window of adaptation, hopefully light will be shed on the history of Chinese cinema and Chinese culture in the 20th-century.

Chapter 2

Appropriation as Transcultural Narrativization, 1920s-1940s

Chinese film *The Heroine in the Besieged City* (Gucheng lienü, 1936) is based on 19th-century French writer Guy de Maupassant's story "Boule de Soif." The Chinese heroine of Boule de Soif, like her French counterpart, is caught in a moral dilemma: should she surrender her body to a bad guy to save her fellow citizens? Both women choose to sacrifice themselves for others. However, the outcome and worthiness of the sacrifice in the Chinese film are just the opposite of those in the French literary source. Maupassant makes the girl's sacrifice pointless and worthless by portraying the beneficiaries of the act as mean snobs who look down upon her the more after they are saved by her. The Chinese heroine has a much better fate and is enshrined as a martyr. This difference highlights the radical transcultural and transmedia transformations when a foreign literary source traveled to China and finally landed on the Chinese silver screen. Such transformations offer revealing glimpses into the strategies Chinese filmmakers used and the attributes of the Chinese culture and filmic discourses at that time. This chapter will examine such Republican films adapted from foreign literature. First I will analyze these films generally. Then I will read two groups of films closely to trace two distinct discourses, one concerning the role of Chinese women, the other the

characterization of the Chinese rebel as a form of social critique.

Transnational Palimpsest: Cross-cultural Appropriation, Sinicization and Hybridization

Given that, with a few recent exceptions, films based on foreign literature almost totally disappeared after 1949, one cannot help being struck by the number and scope of such Republican movies. I have found 35 titles of such films.[1] The writers the filmmakers used include not only such illustrious names as Shakespeare, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Gorky, Maupassant, Dreiser, but also many less known names. Whether it is the Italy portrayed by Shakespeare, or the Russia by Tolstoy, now all become the Republican China in an amorphous co-presence suggesting a postmodern ambience, although China still tried to be "modern" at that time. The sources are so drastically transformed and sinicized, i.e., made more Chinese, that some films only have remote resemblance to the originals.

French theorist Gerard Genette develops the concept of "palimpsest," which originally means a piece of paper on which new text is written while the old text is not

[1] For a list of such Republican films, see Appendix. Yet only a small number of titles are available in DVD format. China Film Archive holds some of the other titles, but it charges an exorbitant price for the screening of each title (5000 *yuan*), which I believe few can afford. Thus, this chapter is based on my list and a close reading of the available ones. I hope that in the future, with more copies made accessible in some form to the general public by the China Film Archive, more research can be done in this area.

entirely erased. The concept is used by Genette to show the intertextuality between texts.[2] Although all filmic adaptations of literature, as texts which derive from and transform previous texts, can be seen in a sense as palimpsests, the early Chinese adaptations of foreign literature are especially so. Layers of new texts were written on top of one another to such an extent that the primary text is even beyond recognition, yet traces of the previous texts sometimes still can be glimpsed. Also, unlike most of the filmic adaptations of Chinese literature, this genre does not presuppose or require the audiences' previous knowledge of the literary sources or the original authors. Indeed, by a radical signification process, these films tried to pass for an original Chinese story happening on the Chinese soil.

Yet this both transcultural and transmedia field still remains un-explored. Several critics have done admirable pioneering work here. Paul Pickowicz (1993) analyzed in detail Gorky's play *The Lower Depth*, its Chinese drama version and film version, and lays out the changes in plots and characterization in the three works, exemplifying the method of doing comparative readings and analysis. Recently, Zhang Zhen, in an article mentioned in my Introduction, theorizes on this genre (2004). She also includes a close-reading of one such film in her book *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen* (2005). Zhang Zhen calls this genre of films "cosmopolitan projections," and insightfully points out the desire for a cosmopolitan identity couched in these films. Her theoretical

[2] See Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, translated by Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky).

framework of vernacular modernism is largely valid and useful. However, based mainly on the reading of two films, *The String of Pearls* (Yichuan zhenzhu, 1926) and *A Spray of Plum* (Yijian mei, 1931), especially the latter by Lianhua Studio, Zhang makes her conclusions about the Chinese desire for a cosmopolitan identity mainly applicable to this one studio and the early 1930s. In fact, such films have been made during the whole Republican period, and by all kinds of studios and all types of filmmakers. In the following pages, I intend to read these Republican films together, not in terms of studios, filmmakers or periods, but in terms of the similar patterns underlying some of their discourses and strategies.

The circuitous traveling route of the literary sources can highlight the palimpsest nature of the layers of texts. Before they finally found themselves on the Chinese screen, the original literary texts had often traveled several countries (sometimes via Japan) in several forms (printed translations, staged dramas) through multi-layer mediations, especially since some early translations or drama adaptations were notoriously free. Here, Japan's role was significant. Not only did Japanese literature supply some direct sources for Chinese films,[3] but, perhaps more importantly, Japan acted as the midway platform between China and the West (including Russia). Traditionally Japan had close ties with China, but Japan began its westernization process earlier than China. The Japanese had

[3] Examples of such films adapted from Japanese literary works are: *The Journey Home* (Buru gui, 1926) based on Tokutomi Roka 德富芦花's novel of the same title, detective film *It is Me* (Jiushi wo, 1928) based on a Japanese novel *Criminal in the Fire* (huoli zuiren), *Three Sisters* (San zimei, 1934) based on Kikuchi Kan 菊池宽's *Shinju Fujin*.

translated numerous western works, some of which were already digested in a way more compatible with the Chinese tastes. Then, with the tide of studying in Japan and the return of those students (many of whom became writers or playwrights), the Chinese started to translate from Japanese originals and Japanese translations. As of 1904, more than half of the translated works in China were (re)translated from the Japanese.[4] The western style of drama itself was imported from Japan into China.

Here, an immensely popular film *Orchid in the Deep Valley* (Kong gu lan, 1925) can provide a ready example of the complexity of the traveling route of these texts and how far from the original the final film could be. The story of the film was originally an English one by an English writer.[5] Then it was "translated" by Meiji period Japanese writer and translator Kuroiwa Ruikou 黑岩泪香 (1862-1920) into a Japanese novel *Orchid in the Deep Valley*. Like early Chinese translators Lin Shu and Bao Tianxiao, Kuroiwa Ruikou also translated freely.[6] Bao Tianxiao then rewrote the novel into a Chinese story serialized in *The Time Journal* (Shibao) in Shanghai. The popularity of the novel was noticed by Zheng Zhengqiu, one of the co-founders of Mingxing Studio. He approached Bao Tianxiao, asking him to write a script based on the novel for the studio with a high pay. Bao wrote not so much a script as a brief outline of only about

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[4] See Yuan Diyong 袁荻涌, "The Mutual Fertilization between modern Chinese and Japanese Literatures 近现代中日文学的交流互润, *Guiyang shizhuan xuebao* 贵阳师专学报 2 (1996), 41.
[5] The Chinese version of the English author's name is Hengli Hete 亨利·荷特, and his novel titled *The Wild Flower* (Ye zhi hua). I am unable to find out the identity of this English writer.
[6] He translated western detective stories, was the initiator of the detective novel genre in Japan and also wrote romances.

4,000-5,000 words, which became the base of the very popular film.[7]

The film *The Journey Home* (Buru gui, 1926) can illustrate how Japanese and Chinese literature influence each other, and what literary and stage forms the literary source took before it was made into a movie. Even as early as 1908, this novel titled *Hototogisu* (meaning "Little Cuckoo"), --published in 1898 by Tokutomi Roka 德富芦花 (1868-1927) [8]--was translated by the famous pair of Chinese translators Lin Shu and Wei Yi, interestingly through an English translation. The work was published by Commercial Press in Shanghai and was so popular that it was reprinted in 1913, 1914, 1915 and 1923, providing a ready audience for the later movie.[9] In another field of action, in 1907, the first western-style Chinese drama troupe, Chunliu Troupe, was founded in Japan by Li Shutong and others, presumably inspired by watching a stage version of *Hototogisu*.[10] Ma Jiangshi, a member of the Chunliu Troupe, adapted the novel into a Chinese stage

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[7] For the traveling and transformation of *Orchid in the Deep Valley*, see Xing Zuwen, "On *Konggulan*"关于空谷兰, 113; Bao Tianxiao, 97. The fact that the simple and "Chinese" story of the film came from a foreign source proved annoying to at least some in the audiences. The famous scholar Chen Yuan 陈源 (Chen Xiying), for one, asked "is the imagination of the Chinese so impoversished that they cannot even invent such a naïve plot, and have to resort to translation." See his comment on the film, collected in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan ed, *Chinese Silent Films* 中国无声电影 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 1134.

[8] Interestingly, the title of the original Japanese novel purposely smacks of Chinese flavor. See Ren Weiping 任卫平, "An Overview of the Exchanges between Chinese and Japanese Literatures"中日文学交流史略谈. *Liaoning daxue xuebao* 辽宁大学学报, 1(1994): 93. The English translation is titled *Namiko*.

[9] See Xie Tianzhen 谢天振 and Zha Jianming 查建明 ed, *History of Translated Literature in Modern China (1898-1949)*中国现代翻译文学史（1898-1949） (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), 578.

[10] See Yuan Diyong, "The Mutual Fertilization," 43.

play after his return to China and began the process of sinicization.[11] In 1923, *Hototogisu* was staged as a drama in Changsha by The Comrades of Drama (huaju tongzhihui). In 1926, it was made into a movie.[12]

The Journey Home illustrates the close link between the final Chinese film and previous Chinese literary or stage versions. Similarly, *Camille* (Chahuanü, 1938) employed the very popular novel translated by Lin Shu.[13] *The Watch* (Biao, 1949) was first translated by the literary master Lu Xun before it became a movie. First there was stage performance of *The Wandering of the Poor Child* (Ku'er liulangji) before it became the film *The Little Friend* (Xiao pengyou).[14] In fact, such is the case of most of the Republican films based on foreign literature. The published translation often familiarized the audiences with and prepared them for the story, while the stage form, besides having the similar effect, also provided ready dialogues and actions that can be conveniently

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[11] See Wang Xiangyuan 王向远, *History of the Translation of Japanese Literature in 20th-century China* 二十世纪中国的日本翻译文学史 (Beijing: Beijing shifandaxue chubanshe, 2001), 36. The Japanese novel contains chunks on the Sino-Japanese war in 1894-5, advocating Japanese militarism. This part was deleted by the Chinese playwright and now the focus was on the evil of feudal patriarchy.

[12] In 1933, it had another translated version. The translator of this version is Lin Xueqing.

[13] *Camille* was also made into movies in Hollywood at nearly the same time. The most famous version is the one featuring Greta Garbo (1936). Before that, it already had a 1921 version. It seems that its tear-jerking and melodramatic nature appeals to filmmakers and audiences all over the world. Even as recent as 1980, French director Mauro Bolognin made *La Dame aux Camelias*, which again illustrates the palimpsest nature of the work.

[14] See Bao Tianxiao's report, in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, *China's Silent Films* 中国无声电影, 295. In the same way, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* was translated by Bao Tianxiao into *The Woman Lawyer*(Nü lüshi) in 1911, and it was also performed on stage, and was one of the earliest plays by Shakespeare performed in China. Its film version (1927) still retains the title of Bao's translation. Similarly, Tolstoy's *Resurrection* was written into a play script by Tian Han in 1936, and then by Xia Yan in 1943. The novel has two Chinese film versions, one in 1926 called *Resurrection of the Conscience*(Liangxin fuhuo) by Zheng Zhengqiu, another one directed by Mei Qian titled *Resurrection* (Fuhuo) in 1941.

employed by filmmakers.

Many plays from Chinese early repertoire came from the west or Japan. Take the films *The Fan of the Young Mistress* (Shaonainai de shanzi, 1928, 1939) for example. For Chinese looking to the west for inspiration at that time, Oscar Wilde was one of the most important English writers. He was seen by the Chinese as the latest monument in the evolution of English literature. His aestheticism was not only highly appreciated by Chinese aesthetes with a like mind, but by "progressive" intellectuals who saw Wilde's rebellion against Victorian morality as analogous of their rebellion against the Confucian morality.[15] Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* was translated several times into Chinese.[16] In 1924, Hong Shen first rewrote the play into a Shanghai local opera (*huju*) titled *The Fan of the Young Mistress*. The script was first published in series, then performed on stage and became an important repertoire item for drama troupes everywhere. The drama troupes also often performed Wilde's *Salome*, while the subversive play was almost unthinkable as a film for the Chinese audiences, highlighting the different audiences the

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[15] Interestingly, the first translation of Oscar Wilde's work into Chinese was "The Happy Prince" by Zhou Zuoren 周作人 in 1908. Then, Wilde's influences were widely felt. For example, there are sexual "deviants" in Yu Dafu's works. See Zhou Xiaoyi 周小仪, "The Kiss of Salome: Aestheticism, Consumerism and Chinese Enlightenment Modernity"莎乐美之吻：唯美主义、消费主义与中国启蒙现代性, Chinese Comparative Literature 中国比较文学, 2 (2001), 67-89; Shen Shaoyong 沈绍镛, "Yu Dafu and Oscar Wilde" 郁达夫与王尔德, *Wenyi lilun yu piping* 文艺理论与批评, 4 (1996): 96-102.

[16] The titles of its various Chinese translations are *Shan wu* 扇误, *Wen Furen de shanzi* 温夫人的扇子, *Wendemi'erfuren de shanzi* 温德米尔夫人的扇子, *Shaonainai de shanzi* 少奶奶的扇子. See Xie Tianzhen and Zha Jianming, *History of Translated Literature*, 320-328.

two media addressed.[17]

Here we should also notice the overlapping of published literature, stage drama and cinema as far as participants were concerned. Numerous Chinese filmmakers used to work on stage drama when not making films. Names that easily come to our mind include Zheng Zhengqiu, Xia Yan and Huang Zuolin (who adapted several Russian literary works into films in the 1940s). Bao Tianxiao, a translator, writer and also editor of popular literary journals, was involved in the early production of Mingxing Studio as a scriptwriter. Tian Han, an active filmmaker in the leftist movement in the 1930s, had also studied in Japan, returned to China in 1928, performed *Salome* on stage and made Oscar Wilde a popular name. The sharing of participants between stage drama and cinema and the widespread belief that film (*ying xi*) was just another form of drama, although not performed on stage, made it easier for filmmakers to employ existent stage plays.

What types of foreign literary works did the Chinese filmmakers prefer? These adapted films are very diverse in genre or themes, yet we can still identify several important categories among them, although there are also many which cannot be easily classified. As far as the originating countries are concerned, the literary sources range from works of England, France, Russia, Japan, and to a lesser degree, Germany and the U.S., mostly of the 19th-century. As far as themes are concerned, Zhang Zhen points out

[17] It is amazing to see how enthusiastically the Chinese who used to be conservative could openly embrace the erotic. In 1929, Tian Han led his drama troupe to stage Salome in Nan Jing and Shanghai to packed houses. See Zhou Xiaoyi 周小仪, “The Kiss of Salome,” 71-2.

rightly that one "predominant theme…. is the question of women and their status within the family and in a society undergoing drastic changes in the wake of modernization."[18] Therefore a large number of these films deal with love, marriage and familial relationships, to be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Zheng Zhengqiu showed the kind of stories that are preferred when he suggested to scriptwriter Bao Tianxiao that "the plot should be circuitous and full of turns, but should not depart from the emotions of separation and reunion, sadness and happiness."[19] Thus Turgenev's *Nest of the Gentry*, in which the hero, who has long been abroad, seeks his national identity in Russia, becomes a melodrama of multi-angle love in the film *A Broken Dream at Late Spring* (Chuncan mengduan, 1947), with allusions to the Japanese invasion of China.

Some of these adapted films focus on children. Before this period, there was in China no special literary works for children, who used to read what the adults are reading, for example, the Confucian classics. *The Flying Shoes* (Feixing xie, 1925), based on an unidentifiable German fairy tale, was the earliest children's movie in China. While this film takes the form of a fantasy, *The Little Friend* (Xiao pengyou, 1925), re-written into a screenplay by Bao Tianxiao from French writer Hector Malot's *Sans Famille*, features a vagabond child going through a series of trials looking for his identity and family. Similarly, *The Watch* (Biao, 1949) also portrays poor and vagabond children. Such a

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[18] Zhang Zhen, "Cosmopolitan Projections," 153.

[19] Bao Tianxiao, *Memoirs from Chuanying Mansion: A Sequel* 钏影楼回忆录续编(Hong Kong: Dahua chubanshe 大华出版社, 1973), 95.

focus on children of the lower class fits well with many Chinese' concern for social justice and the elimination of oppression.[20]

Significant too are the detective-outlaw films which combine elements of suspense, crime or sex and which are more market-oriented and profit-driven. Just like detective stories which made up a big portion of early Chinese translations, such films take advantage of the audiences' desire for the adventurous and mysterious. Sherlock Holmes, Arsène Lupin, and Robinhood all appear on Chinese screen as Chinese characters fighting to restore social justice.[21] This category fits well with popular martial-arts movies. Thus, Guan Haifeng, director of one of China's earliest feature film *Vampire* (Hongfen kulou, 1924), chose the French detective story because at that time in Shanghai, "what are most popular are stories with martial-arts plots."[22] This film grafts the detective story and martial arts onto the modern urban crime of insurance fraud, and is modeled on American detective movies shown then in Shanghai.[23] Advertised as a "rare" film with "detectives, adventures, martial arts, romances and funny things,"[24] this film is

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[20] The very popular cartoon series *The Wandering Adventures of San Mao* (Sanmao liulang ji, 1947-48) is probably inspired by this type. The cartoon was also made into a film with the same title in 1949.

[21] Examples of such films about detectives or outlaws are *Lu Binhua* (1928) from the story of Robinhood, *It is Me* (Jiushi wo, 1928) based on a Japanese story; *The Cases of Sherlock Holmes* (Fu'ermosi zhentan an, 1931), and *Arsène Rupin* (Yasen luobin, 1931) based on French writer Maurice Leblanc's works.

[22] Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan ed., *China's Silent Films* 中国无声电影, 1492.

[23] The film's highlighting insurance fraud is a representation of the development of the industry in China. Even as early as 1875, the reformists in the Qing dystaty established an insurance company. In the 1910s, life insurance appeared in China. Five years after this film, in 1929, the KMT government passed a law regulating the insurance industry.

[24] See Cheng Jihua, vol. 1, 47.

a real hybrid.

The Chinese name for Robinhood in the film *Lu Binhua* 卢鬓花(1928) can give us a preliminary taste of the sinicization process of these films. None of the events in these "adapted" movies happens outside of China. The characters have Chinese names which resemble, sometimes remotely, their original names. This also agrees with the earlier practices of sinicization in translating foreign literature or films and giving the characters Chinese names.[25] Thus in *The Woman Lawyer* (Nü lüshi, 1927), based on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio became Ban Shanyi 白珊毅, Portia became Bao Qixia 鲍绮霞, and Antonio became An Dongyi 安东义. Other elements are transformed too, so that everything that is impossible or nonexistent in China is gone. Still in this film, "Shylock" is just an evil Chinese, not a Jew. In *A Spray of Plum* (Yijian mei, 1931) based on Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the Duke of Milan becomes the military commander of Guangdong, with squads of guards around the house and female soldiers as his daughter's maids.[26] Likewise, in *Go to Nature* (Dao ziran qu, 1937) directed by

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[25] In the Chinese translation of *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara became Hao Sijia, Rett Butler became Bai Ruide, and so on. All these names are like Chinese ones. When Bao Tianxiao translated novel *Cuore* by Edemondo De Amicis (1846-1908), he made the names, customs and material objects therein all Chinese, and gave the novel a Chinese title *The School Life of Xin'er* (Xin'er jiuxue ji 馨儿就学记), while Xin'er was the name of one of his sons who died young. See Fan Boqun, "The Contribution to Fiction of Bao Tianxiao, Zhou Shoujuan and Xu Zhuodai's Literary Translations" 包天笑，周瘦鹃，徐卓呆的文学翻译对小说创作之促进, *Jianghan xuebao* 江汉学报 6 (1996):174.

[26] Shakespeare's play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* tells a story about two pairs of lovers: Valentine and Sylvia, Proteus and Julia. The two friends Valentine and Proteus are in Verona. Proteus is in deep love with Julia, when Valentine mocks his love. Yet when Valentine goes to Milan, he himself falls in love with the Duke's daughter Sylvia. Proteus comes to Milan too, also immediately falls in love with Sylvia and forgets his faithful Julia. He betrays Valentine and

Sun Yu, based on James Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), Lord Loam became the commander-in-chief of Beiyang Fleet. This practice of transforming western aristocracy into Chinese warlords suggests the power that military people enjoyed during the whole period after late-Qing up to 1949.

To make the films better fitted for Chinese audiences, the filmmakers also changed the literary sources in ways that make them simpler in characterization and smoother and tighter in narration. Still take *A Spray of Plum* for example. The two pairs of lovers, originally unrelated to one another in Shakespeare, now become relatives, with Valentine being Julia's brother, and Sylvia being Proteus's cousin. Julia now disguises herself as a boy to go to pursue her brother, not her lover, highlighting the Chinese emphasis on familial ties. The characterization of the Chinese Proteus also illustrates the Chinese preference for a consistent characterization. Proteus, in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, changes from a loyal and gentle lover (of Julia) at the beginning of the play, to a bad guy who shifts his love onto his friend Valentine's lover Sylvia and betrays Valentine. The Chinese film makes him a philander—a perfume general (*zhifen jiangjun*) — from the very beginning. Unlike Shakespeare's play in which only the servants are clowns, this Chinese Proteus is made into a clown-like figure with typically hilarious gestures (squinting and constantly touching his moustache), in sharp contrast to

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makes the Duke banish Valentine, and Valentine becomes the head of a group of outlaws in the woods. Julia, disguised as a young man, comes to Milan to seek Proteus. Finally, every obstacle is cleared, the two pairs of lovers are reunited, and the friendship between Proteus and Valentine is restored too when Proteus is conscience-stricken.

the upright and handsome Valentine. Proteus' serious moral flaws are already suggested from the beginning and in his outer appearances. Even his way of falling in love with Julia anticipates his later change of heart, as the subtitle reads, "he who is not consistent in his love, always falls in love quickly."

As far as narration is concerned, these Chinese films, unlike their literary sources, seldom begin in medias res.[27] They strictly observe the chronological order, with clear beginnings, middles and ends. Thus in *A Spray of Plum*, the film begins when the two friends Proteus and Valentine have just graduated from a military academy with no experience in love at all, and then goes on to narrate how Proteus gets to know Valentine's sister Julia, while Shakespeare's play begins when Proteus is already deep in love with Julia. Similarly, in *The Fan of the Young Mistress* (Shaonainai de shanzi, 1939), the story is narrated from the very beginning, i.e., eighteen years before the beginning of the story proper in *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Wilde.

Sinicization may be a result of trials and errors. It seemed that, at least as far as stage drama is concerned, there were attempts of staging totally "foreign" plays. In 1921, Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was staged in Shanghai featuring famous actors and actresses, yet the play was a fiasco. It could not compete with the Chinese *Jigong the Living Buddha* (Jigong huofo 济公活佛) and the audiences kept withdrawing

[27] There were some cases of flashbacks, as in *A String of Pearls*, and the merging of two separate cuts, as in both *A Spray of Plum* and *The Heroine in the Besieged City*. These were used as novel devices to attract and surprise the audiences.

in the midst of the play, mainly because the lifestyle and the mentality therein were too alien to them.[28] Unlike the Chinese nowadays who routinely watch American movies and listen to Britney Spears, the Republican-era Chinese audiences were not yet exposed much to foreign cultural products. Sinicization allowed filmmakers to make films into what Chinese audiences could appreciate and care.

Yet, in spite of these obvious signs of domestication and transplantation, the stories themselves are, after all, from non-Chinese sources, and thus the films often present themselves as interesting hybrids, with elements both of the Chinese and the western, the familiar and the alien, the modern and the traditional. This is also symptomatic of the hybrid nature of the Chinese culture and society at that time. Take the adapted detective films for example. There was no such profession as a private detective in China. Yet the Chinese audiences are familiar with traditional stories about wise officials tracking down criminals and solving crime puzzles, and also with martial art heroes redressing social wrongs. The detective film genre can be seen as grafted conveniently onto these already existent genres or types, and the Chinese audiences are partially prepared for it. Similarly, the popularity of the *Camille* story (both in book and film versions) can be partially explained by the existence in China of a distinct group of classical literary works featuring a scholar's romance with a beautiful, loving and understanding courtesan

[28] See Ke Ling's recollection, in Luo Yijun 罗艺军 ed, *Selected Works on Chinese Film Theories* 中国电影理论文选, vol.2, 351.

despite parental or social obstacles.[29]

Hybridization can take various forms. Take for example *A String of Pearls* (Yichuan zhenzhu, 1926), based on Guy de Maupassant's "Necklace." The story is changed into a Chinese one, as already shown by the replacement of a pearl necklace for the original "diamond necklace," since in the eyes of Chinese, pearls are traditionally more valuable. However, the film proper mingles elements of both the Chinese and the western. The quite shabby lower-middle-class family of the original French couple now becomes a luxurious model of a modern Chinese family in a spacious house. The aristocratic parlor in the original story is changed into the living room of the Shanghai hostess. In *The Fan of the Young Mistress*, the heroine sometimes is dressed in cheongsam and sometimes in western style gowns. The party-goers in this film are all attired in a western-style, the ladies in evening dresses wielding western fans instead of Chinese fans, and the gentlemen in suits-and-ties. They dance western dances accompanied by English songs.

A Spray of Plum (Yijian mei) can illustrate other forms of hybridization, sometimes to an extravagant degree. Interestingly, the film has both Chinese and English intertitles, and the Chinese ones are written in a horizontal way from the left to the right, just like the English ones, as opposed to the traditional way of writing Chinese vertically from the right to the left.[30] The English intertitles retain the original foreign names of the

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[29] Examples of such stories are short stories in Ming Dynasty featuring such courtesan as Du Shiniang 杜十娘 and Yu Tangchun 玉堂春.

[30] *A String of Pearls* also has such dual intertitles with the Chinese ones in a western format.

characters, and sometimes even resort to a direct quotation of Shakespeare (for example, “love-wounded Proteus”), and make other subtle sleights of hand between the Chinese and the western, for example, the Chinese word *hongniang* (matchmaker) becomes “Cupid” in the English intertitles. Given that the exportation of Chinese movies to the West at this period was very rare, we can only explain the dual intertitles as meant to create exactly an impression of the hybridization, to appeal to the educated among the audiences, and to suggest to those un-educated an allusion to the west and the modern. Some of the scenes in the film are more modern than the 17th-century Shakespeare, suggesting a new westernized lifestyle among the social elites. Both heroines of the movie, the Chinese Julia and Sylvia, are “modern girls.” They are courageous, sporty and even boisterous. Sylvia likes riding. Julia plays the piano, sings and dances, in a non-lady-like fashion.

The title of the film, *A Spray of Plum* (Yijian mei), has numerous Chinese connotations. It is the name of a form of *ci*, a classical Chinese poetry genre. Plum is also universally recognized by the Chinese as a symbol of steadfastness and purity. One line of intertitle in the film reads that “Luo Hua [Sylvia] loves the plum most, for its beauty and purity agrees well with her personality.” The plum is used as an emblem for this pure girl, and appears everywhere as a visible sign or even synecdoche for her. Thus, she gives her lover a plum-shaped pin as a souvenir. Her lover draws a plum on a rock, and the two write out on the rock a poem in the “a spray of plum” structure. These are still what can

be expected by Chinese audiences and in the line of traditional Chinese culture. Yet the materialization of the plum metaphor can take unexpected turns. For example, Sylvia's room, combining Chinese and western styles, has plum-symbols everywhere. Even the big terrace in the room is shaped like a plum. The window is also in the form of a huge plum, with a Chinese traditional pearl curtain hanging there. The walls are decorated with plums. On the doorframes and the door panels are plums of all sizes. These avant-garde modes of presenting the plum can illustrate how a traditional Chinese emblem can be employed in these hybrid films.

For those who treasure purity and essence, such hybridizations prove annoying. Thus, Marxist critic Cheng Jihua lamented that *Vampire* (Hongfen kulou) concentrates all elements that are "neither like this nor like that, neither Chinese nor western" (*bulunbulei, buzhong buxi*).[31] Yet Zhang Zhen points out that this kind of transcultural, transmedia practices "create a space in which the original and the adaptation coexist with tension. At the same time, they generate a surplus of meaning that cannot be subsumed by either the source language/culture or the target language/culture."[32] As can be shown in the analysis above, the Chinese elements in the films serve to domesticate the foreignness of the source to cater to the ordinary Chinese movie-goers, while the western elements, mainly in the modern / western lifestyles represented in some films, illustrates a voluntary bow to the west in a semi-colonial China. The coexistence of these elements in

[31] Cheng Jihua, vol.1, 47.
[32] Zhang Zhen, "Cosmopolitan Projections," 146-7.

the resultant films make them transnational “palimpsests,” where layers of texts are superimposed on yet do not cancel out one another.

In the following two sections, I examine two groups of films based on foreign literature for the recurrent themes in them on the role of Chinese woman and on social critiques conveyed in the figure of a male rebel, to illustrate in detail how the Chinese filmmakers transform their literary sources and for what purposes in the Chinese context.

Containing the Chinese Woman: Wife, Mother, and Martyr

The constant concern for the status and role of women in modern China manifests itself in the ways some European literary works were transformed into Chinese films, which shift the emphasis to a discourse of containing the woman as a good wife, a loving mother, and, when situations demand it, a martyr sacrificing her body. This section explores three films to see the intricate workings of this important strain of discourse: *The Fan of the Young Mistress*(Shaonainai de shanzi, 1939), from Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan*;[33] *A String of Pearls* (Yichuan zhenzhu, 1926), from Guy de Maupassant’s “Necklace”; *The Heroine in the Besieged City* (Gucheng lienü, 1936), from

[33] This version was directed by Li Pingqian and written by Sun Jing, casting Yuan Meiyun and Mei Xi. There was an earlier version of this film in 1928, written by Hong Shen, co-directed by Hong Shen and Zhang Shichuan. I am unable to obtain a copy of this 1928 version, though judged by the synopsis in *The Complete Chinese Films* 中国影片大典(1905-1930, p26), it may not be much different from Li Pingqian’s version.

Maupassant's "Boule de Suif."[34]

Both *The Fan of the Young Mistress* and *A String of Pearls* focus on the upper or middle-class nuclear family. At the very beginning of *A String of Pearls* is an urban street scene with neon lights in Shanghai, as "signposts for modern consumption."[35] Then we see the couple with a baby, enjoying their family life in a spacious two-storey single house with a maid, when the subtitle reads that "there is nothing in the world more precious than a sweet home." The young couple in *The Fan of the Young Mistress* is similar, although they live a much westernized life in a westernized environment, partly because the film was made later and partly because the couple was supposed to be higher up in the social ladder than the one in *A String of Pearls*. This time, the young wife is already pregnant with child, and the servant is a butler, not a maid. Note that, different from traditional Chinese families, these modern families are composed of the young couple, the child and the servants, with no in-laws, and the focus is now the relationship between the young couple.

Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*, depicting the family as a prison for women who should break away from it, had been very influential in China since the May-Fourth movement in 1919. It generated a series of similar works and a heated discussion on whether women, when realizing the falsity of family life, should run away from home, and what they

[34] Guy de Maupasant was warmly received by modern Chinese readers and audiences, both because of his clear story lines and because of the patriotic messages against the Prussians in some of his works, while China was facing similar foreign threats.
[35] Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen : Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 178.

should do after their going away.[36] Lu Xun's story "Regret for the Past" (Shangshi) and Ba Jin's novel *Family* (Jia) are both examples of this discourse. Yet the counter-discourse was also strong. The discourses of liberating women and containing them competed and mingled with each other, and often co-existed in one work or on one writer or filmmaker.

Both *The Fan of the Young Mistress* and *A String of Pearls* can be read as examples of this counter-discourse. They stress the value of the traditional role of women as wife and mother and depict women who return to family values after their brief deviation. In both films, the stability and sweetness of the family life is disturbed by a severe threat coming from either the misunderstanding from or the vanity of the young wife, who deviates from her duty and her role. Yet after realizing her mistake, which is expatiated by herself or by others, she returns to be a better wife and mother, and the family is re-stablized on a higher level.

In *The Fan of the Young Mistress*, Meilin (Lady Windermere) suspects that her husband is having an affair with a Ms. Li, and runs away from home to Liu who declares love for her, leaving her husband a letter. Yet it turns out that this Ms. Li is Meilin's mother, long believed to be dead, who ran away from home when Meilin was a baby. When Meilin is in Liu's room, Ms. Li, after reading Meilin's letter, comes to persuade her to go back home. At that moment, Liu and a group of men come back to the room. The

[36] Joining this discussion was Lu Xun who, in his essay "What Happens after Nora Goes Away from Home" 娜拉走后怎样, argues that the penniless woman, away from home, can only degrade herself or die, and thus the most important thing is for women to have economic power.

two women hide behind curtains, yet Meilin's fan is seen by the men. Ms. Li comes out to claim that the fan is hers, putting her reputation into jeopardy, while Meilin escapes unseen in the commotion. Meilin happily reunites with her husband, and Ms. Li marries again too.

The basic story of the film is quite faithful to Oscar Wilde's original play. Yet, with Wilde's anti-Victorian sense of morality, we can hardly say that he intended the play to advocate family values, or that the play was perceived to do so in England.[37] Yet the adapted film acquired special significance and immediacy in China. The film can be conveniently read as countering the liberation discourse for women, not by attacking it directly, but by incorporating and then dissolving it. The liberation message is captured in the words of the character Liu who secretly loves Meilin and tries to persuade her to go away with him, giving his words cultural connotations absent in Wilde's work: "Go, go with your head high." "Men and women are equal; especially in these respects, they should be equal." When the timid Meilin says she dares not to do so, the angry Liu accuses her of being "completely the same as those un-educated women without thoughts," while Wilde's character accuses Lady Windermere of being "just the same as every other woman."[38] The words of Liu stress the new May-Fourth values of equality, education and thinking, which all support a woman's breaking away from her deceitful

[37] The main message of Wilde's play seems to be the lesson that people are very complex, and one cannot live by "hard and fast rules" of morality, as Lady Windermere used to do. See Oswar Wilde, *Selected Writings of Oscar Wilde*, Russell Fraser ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 31.
[38] Ibid, 48.

husband. Here, the Ibsenian liberation discourse seems to be dominant.

Yet we should also note that Liu is asking Meilin to break away from her husband and marry him, not to renounce marriage itself. As soon as Meilin runs away without her husband's knowledge to Liu's place, she already regrets her decision. Yet it is with the persuasion of Ms. Li (her real mother whom Meilin believes to be her husband's lover) that she finally returns home. Ms. Li outlines the hardships of being a single woman in the world. She especially appeals to Meilin's sense of motherhood, her duty to her yet unborn child, which is the strongest argument that contributes to Meilin's change of mind. Meilin realizes her error and returns to the "correct" path. Thus, the danger and threat to the family is eliminated, and two families are reunited. Meilin recovers her husband, Ms. Li recovers a sense of motherhood in protecting Meilin without disclosing her own identity, and she also finds herself a husband.

Also embedded in this Chinese version of Wilde's work is a story about a woman's renewing and reforming herself. It is with Meilin's mother, now Ms. Li (who used to have another name when married), that the biggest change from the original play occurs in the film. Ms. Li, who once abandons her child and husband, not only recovers her sense of motherhood, but redeems herself as a loving, independent, and socially useful person, and even finds true love. Ms. Li captures what mistake Meilin might have made, what she might have gone through afterwards, and what she should do now. The socially dangerous single women roaming at large return to family and are contained.

To make this woman's reformation possible, she must first be reformable. In Wilde's play, Mrs. Erlynne is a typical *femme fatale*, endowed with irresistible charms who knows perfectly how to handle men. She seizes each chance to her own advantage. She abandons her child when young. Knowing that her daughter marries a rich man, she blackmails her son-in-law. She is a cynical actress to others, complimenting them although she believes them to be fools and bores. Her only redeeming sentiment is her suddenly awakened maternal love for her daughter. When she sees that her daughter's happiness is in peril, she sacrifices her own interests to protect her daughter. This happens in a rare moment of crisis, and she admits that "only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings."[39] She does not mend her ways after this event, believing that "what consoles one now-a-days is not repentance, but pleasure," and that "Repentance is quite out of date."[40] She is even clever enough to explain away the event to her lover Lord Augustus, and finally wins him into marrying her.

Instead of the cynical opportunist in Wilde's play, Ms. Li, the Chinese version of the character, is not that bad from the very beginning. Thus, in her early life, she abandons her husband and child, because her husband is flirting with some women, though her running away seems to be over-reacting. In her letter to her husband, she claims that she had originally wanted to take the child away, but could not do so for various reasons. Much of her cunning in Wilde's play is subdued in the Chinese film to make her a more

[39] Ibid, 70.
[40] Ibid, 70.

lovable, and more genuinely gentle, Chinese woman. She is not blackmailing her son-in-law, but is just taking her due (the money left for her by her former husband). She is not using her lover, Mr. Zhang (Wilde's Lord Augustus), but he is her soul-mate, because only he understands that she is not an innately corrupt woman, that she has a soul and a heart, and that she wants to live an honest and independent life. Finally she fully realizes her mistake and symbolically returns to the role of a mother.[41] The irony of the film is that, although professing a modern belief in independence, Ms. Li has been in fact living on men all these years after she runs away from home, and now is living on the money left her by her former husband, thanks to whom her economic conditions improve a lot. Now she again marries triumphantly, although not to her soul-mate as a sacrifice for her daughter, but still to a rich man. She repeatedly declares that she wants to be an "independent and productive person," but all the time she is not. The film blames this onto the society, and displaces the criticism of a fallen woman into a social critique. This topic will be further discussed in next section.

If the two heroines in *The Fan of the Young Mistress* illustrate the danger of women deviating from marriage, then the fate of the heroine in *A String of Pearls* (1926) marks the reformation of women who forgets their duties within marriage.[42] The film is based

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[41] There were many Republican films glorifying motherly love, such as *Mother's Heart* (Mu zhi xin, 1926, made by Guoguang Studio), *Motherly Love* (Muxing zhiguang, 1933, made by Lianhua Studio); *Mother and Son* (Mu yu zi 1933, made by Mingxing Studio, but not the one to be discussed in next section); *Mother* (Muqin, 1935, made by Tianyi Studio); *Maternal Love* (Mu'ai, 1936, by Minxin Studio).

[42] This film was made by Changcheng, written by Hou Yao and directed by Li Zeyuan. Tianyi

on Maupassant's "The Necklace," a cruel naturalistic story about Matilde, a beautiful girl married to a clerk. She is invited to a ball. For fear that her dress might be too shabby, she borrows a necklace from a friend and enjoys full success in the ball. Yet afterward, she loses the necklace. The couple buys a similar one for a large sum of borrowed money, and returns the necklace to the friend. They repay the loan with ten years of back-breaking work. After every penny is paid, Matilde finds out that the original necklace is fake, while she returns to her friend an exorbitantly expensive real diamond one. The story illustrates how ordinary people's destiny can be ruthlessly manipulated by fate and how senseless and futile their work could be in the uncertain society.

It is interesting to see how this story is turned into a lesson for all women in the Chinese film: how vanity—their fatal weakness—can mean their undoing, how much trouble they could bring their husbands into, and how they should reform themselves.

Studio made another film based on this story, titled *One Night's Extravaganza* (Yige haohua, 1932). Zhang Zhen, in her *The Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, examines in detail the "prolonged economic trajectory" (172) of the pearl necklace in *A String of Pearls* and Hou Yao's "critique of commodity fetishism and urban modernity, and elevation of writing over image" (171). She analyzes the different urban spaces in the film, the attendant lifestyle, and the ambivalence of Hou Yao towards modernity. She also touches on the gender issue (177-181). My analysis mainly explores who bears the major brunt of the "retribution," and I also put the film into dialogues with other films and with its original source. For more critical pieces on *A String of Pearls*, see Gao Xiaojian 高小健, "The Advent of Western Influences and Early Chinese Films: Revisiting *A String of Pearls*" 西风东渐与早期中国电影——重读《一串珍珠》, *Dangdai dianying* 1 (1997): 41-45; Qin Xiqing 秦喜清， "In the Perspective of the Comparative Cultures of China and West: Interpreting *A String of Pearls* 在中西文化比较视野下——《一串珍珠》解读, *Nanjing yishu xueyuan xuebao* 南京艺术学院学报 4 (2004): 50-54.. Both articles depend on a China-west binary, attributing the differences of the film from the original to differences between China and the west, not as a form of discourse in the hybrid China.

The Chinese Matilde, Xiuzhen (note that she has no family name, symptomatic of her secondary position in the family), out of vanity, makes her husband borrow a necklace from a jeweler. When the necklace is stolen,[43] the husband has to embezzle money of the insurance company where he works to repay the necklace (which is not fake but somewhat cheaper), and is taken into prison. Xiuzhen learns a hard lesson for her vanity. She moves with her child into the poor quarters of the city and lives a difficult life on sewing. After the release of her husband from prison, the couple endures hardships together. After some strange twists of fate, they are eventually restored to their former property and social status.

The whole film can be viewed as a moral lesson for women. In one article, the scriptwriter Hou Yao declared that the film is meant to "attack vanity" and "advocate repentance."[44] Vanity is described by him as human nature, and the lack of repentance as a common disease in China. Yet in the film itself, it is the vanity and repentance on the women's part that is highlighted. Contributing much to this effect is the special use of the subtitles in this silent movie. In addition to the usual function of supplying dialogues, time, place and other information necessary for the narration, the subtitles in this film significantly also serve as a commentary on the film and give the illusion of an objective narrator similar to that in novels. Immediately after the title of the film, "A Pearl

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[43] The thief sneaks into the couple's bedroom, and even has the audacity to flash his flashlight repeatedly on them!

[44] Hou Yao, "The Ideas in *A Pearl Necklace*"一串珍珠的思想, originally published in 1926, collected in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan ed, *China Silent Films* 中国无声电影, 299.

Necklace," the bilingual subtitle reads:

> 君知否，君知否，
> 一串珍珠万斛愁，
> 妇人若被虚荣误，
> 夫婿为她作马牛。
> Don't you know? Don't you know? A Pearl necklace equals to million strings of sorrow. If a woman drag her self down to the road of vanity, Her husband will be her victim surely [sic]. [45]

The key words in this poem are "vanity" and "victim." In a way, the whole film is an illustration of this opening poem. The moral lesson is stressed throughout the film by all characters: by the husband victimized by his wife, by the wife herself who repents of her vanity and who reforms herself into a conscientious wife and mother; by the female friend of Xiuzhen named Fu Meixian who has the same weakness and who puts her husband into the same quagmire.[46] Near the end, the already reformed Xiuzhen lectures to Fu that "Vanity, vanity is the source of all troubles in women." When Fu tries to return the necklace to Xiuzhen, she incredibly refuses, declaring "no more vanity for me,"[47] showing the high moral status she now enjoys. Thus the film is not only a story of Xiuzhen, or even her vain friend Fu, but "we women," interpellating the women in the

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[45] Many subtitle-commentaries in the film are like this: classical in structure yet modern in essence. In this opening poem, the word "vanity" (*xurong*) is in fact nonexistent in traditional Chinese, pointing out a modern female weakness.

[46] Fu Meixian admires Xiuzhen's necklace. Fu's boyfriend Ma hires a thief to steal it from Xiuzhen's home, and gives it to her as a present. Yet the thief later repeatedly blackmails Ma for this. Thus, like Xiuzhen, Fu is directly responsible for Ma's wrong act and predicament.

[47] This is in spite of the fact that the necklace rightfully belongs to her, and that she can save only 20 dollars a year when the necklace is worth 10,000 dollars.

audiences. After all characters have learned their lessons, there is no more need for further hardships. So, Xiuzhen and her husband are restored to their former house, her husband again an accountant, and she presumably again a middle-class housewife in no need of sewing again. The final happy ending of the family echoes the first scene of the nuclear family. Thus, not only is the couple elevated morally, but they lose nothing materially.

In the film, the major harm of a woman's vanity is that it puts her husband into trouble. Unlike Maupassant's story, the film highlights the quagmire the poor husband finds himself in because of his vain wife. It is he who borrows the necklace from the jeweler,[48] and later money from relatives after the necklace is stolen. It is he who is imprisoned. What he goes through is much worse than the husband in Maupassant's story. The husband indignantly accuses the wife that "because of your ostentation, you got me into trouble," showing that the major concern of the film is, above all, the husband's interests.

Different from Maupassant's story, even before the catastrophe of the necklace, the vanity of the wife already leads to disturbance of the stable family. In the opening scene, the three family members are on a sofa, with the wife holding the baby, in an illustration

[48] How the jeweler in the film, which in Maupasant's story is a friend, can so happily lend such an expensive necklace off-handedly to others is not explained. In Maupassant's story, Matilde's friend knows that it is a fake necklace, but the Chinese necklace is a real one, and the jeweler knows it.

of the "precious" "sweet home" in the subtitle.[49] The next day, the husband leaves home to go to work, with the wife helping him with his coat, and the maid with his hat. A stable norm of the family is thus established. Then the norm is upset by the wife who wants to go to the party to enjoy herself. Disaster begins when she asks her husband to "try to be a mother tonight" while she is away. The next sequences of shots are very enlightening. The sequence makes a deliberate contrast between the husband and the wife: the one taking care of the child at home although he is so bad at it, the other enjoying the festival spectacles outdoors with her friends. The objective narrator in the subtitle obviously sympathizes with the poor husband, commenting that "it is too hard to act as a mother." The division of labor is reversed, which anticipates the disaster to come.[50] The parallel editing "works effectively to play out the ironic contrast between the private sphere now devoid of the crucial mother figure and the public space where Xiuzhen can flaunt her femininity."[51]

If *The Fan of the Young Mistress* and *A String of Pearls*, in their differences from the originals, highlight what are expected of the Chinese woman in relation to her husband and child, then *The Heroine in the Besieged City* (Gucheng lienu), again based on a story

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[49] Zhang Zhen reads this opening as portraying a "middle-class nuclear family transfixed in boredom" (*An Amorous History*, 178), yet it is hard to say that this was the message the scene wants to convey.

[50] The film has another similar cross-cut sequence, this time highlighting the difficult yet elevating reformation process of the couple. The shots shift from the husband working in a prison factory, to the wife sewing under a dim lamp. The sequence points out the moral values of poverty and physical labor. It is through labor (sewing) that Xiuzhen knows the virtues of being frugal and diligent.

[51] Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 181.

by Maupassant, with its radical changes and even reversals to the original, illustrates the Chinese woman's duty to the nation as a martyr sacrificing her body.[52] Maupassant's story, set in the French-Prussian war in the 1870s, tells how a kind yet patriotic French prostitute is induced to sacrifice her body to a Prussian officer to save her fellow French travelers, who turn out to be snobs and look down upon her for her sacrifice. The story ends in a painful irony for the prostitute and condemnation of the cowardice and hypocrisy of the other French people. Her sacrifice is noble yet senseless, since those who benefit from her deed are unworthy of it.

The Chinese film conveys a message just the opposite of Maupassant's: that women should sacrifice their body in times of national crisis, and such sacrifices are glorious and commendable. The film is set in 1928 when the Republican army — representing justice and good in the film—are marching northward against local warlords. The first shot of the film is an isolated picture of the Great Wall, which has nothing to do with the story proper, but is there as a symbol of the nation, pointing out the significance of the film. A nice girl Chen Yiyi (Chen Yanyan) is married to an upright young man Zhang Zhengke (Zheng Junli). Yet a local warlord Liu San, who desires Yiyi, intrudes into the wedding ceremony and forces the couple to flee. The husband goes away to join the Republican army the next day. When fighting breaks out between the Republican army and Liu San's troops, Yiyi and many others are held hostage by Liu San. Liu asks Yiyi to succumb to

[52] The film was made by Lianhua Studio, written by Zhu Silin, directed by Wang Cilong, featuring Chen Yanyan (heroine) and Zheng Junli (hero).

him, otherwise he will kill more than one hundred hostages. Among the hostages is a disguised high officer of the Republican army. He secretly tells Yiyi to succumb, which will not only save the hostages but will help the charging Republicans. Yiyi thus unwillingly goes to Liu's bed. The hostages are set free. The revolutionary army is victorious. Finally, to protect others, Yiyi pushes herself before the machine gun that Liu San is firing, and is recognized by her husband and the army as a martyr.

Significant in the film is the shift and displacement between the private (familial) and the public (national), where different moral standards are applied. Liu is a rival of Yiyi's husband Zhang, because Liu wants Yiyi too. Yet the rivalry between the two men is turned into a conflict between the revolutionaries and the local warlords, between the good and the evil. Zhang joins the army hoping to eradicate not only Liu, but such warlords as Liu. In observing his national and public duty, Zhang, understandably and commendably, forsakes his private duties, leaving his new wife and his old uncle at the second day of their wedding. When public and private duties conflict, he chooses the public one without hesitation. Before his departure, he lectures first to his uncle then to his wife that, "we should sacrifice our immediate happiness, unite and work hard, then there is hope for national security and stability," and that "when you sacrifice for the mass, your sacrifice is worthy." When the wife weeps and argues that his sacrifice might be futile, he says that "such thoughts of you are completely backward." These words not only sum up his mission, but anticipate what his wife will do. He is thus not only her

husband, but her guide and mentor.

With her husband in the army, Yiyi's duty to him is now changed into duty to the nation and to the revolution. The site of this duty is her body. The film depicts this woman's dilemma between her private and public virtues. Different from the prostitute in Maupassant's story, Yiyi is a chaste girl, so much so that she even refuses the caresses of her husband. Yet the hostage crisis and the revolution cause require her to give up her body for others. Note here how the concept of *lienü* (woman martyr) in this film, which appears in the title, is different from that in traditional China. "Woman martyr" used to mean a woman who would rather kill herself, mostly for her husbands and sometimes for the nation, than to have her body stained. The "woman martyr" as related to her husband was an out-dated value in Republican China where remarriage was not condemned. Yet the nation still retained the right to ask for the woman's sacrifice. Significantly, now the sacrifice is in the form of the woman giving up her chastity, not killing herself to protect her chastity.

When warlord Liu first approaches Yiyi and threatens her, she replies that "I would rather die than be sullied by you." This is the response usually expected of a traditional Chinese woman martyr, and Maupassant's heroine harbors the same sentiment. Yet now Yiyi faces her dilemma. If she surrenders, she saves the 100 hostages and helps the revolutionary army. Then it is the revolutionary officer in disguise among the hostages who goads her to her final decision. He shows her his revolutionary badge, and persuades

her that her surrender would be glorious. In a rarely sensual scene, the film then portrays how she is raped by Liu, showing part of her body. Finally, she pushes herself before Liu's machine gun. Thus the woman has nothing but their body to serve the revolutionary cause.

Here we can identify a discourse of the collective vs. the individual, and the public vs. the private, while the woman's body here is a sign of the private and the individual, which can be legitimately used as a convenient tool to enhance higher causes. The husband Zhang tells the dying Yiyi that "your sacrifice is completely correct… and contributes a lot to our nation." More authoritative than his voice is the verdict given by the Republican officer who advises Yiyi to surrender to the warlord. He comments to the husband in a matter-of-fact way that "what a glorious deed your wife has done." When Yiyi is dying on top of the gate of the besieged city when the victorious revolutionary army is marching in, this high officer salutes her from below. Yet ironically, after the public sacrifice is done, the private requirements now are effective for the woman. Thus Yiyi cannot survive the ending and has to die in her husband's arms, because, with an already stained body, it is impossible to imagine a harmonious marriage life for her after this.

From the films analyzed in this section, we can identify a discourse of containing the woman in both the private and the public spheres. In the private sphere, her deviations from a marriage life are corrected, and she is kept in her role as a good wife and mother.

In the public sphere, she is expected to serve the nation with her body. In the Republican-era, this discourse was both a continuation in new disguise of the patriarchal tradition of China, and co-existed, and indeed often was a part of, the May-Fourth discourse of liberation of the women.

Social Critiques and the Chinese Rebel

Already in the films discussed above, there is a tendency to hold the social, political and economic systems accountable for what goes wrong. Sympathy is shown for the under-privileged and the poor, who are presented as becoming what they are now through the forces and pressures of the unjust society. Thus, in *The Fan of the Young Mistress* (Shaonainai de shanzi), the debauchery and irresponsibility of the mother is attributed to the hardships a single woman must undergo in a "semi-feudal society," a phrase used by her certainly non-leftist former husband on his deathbed when he says "in this semi-feudal society, what can I do?" Also, there is a confidence in reformation and change both on the personal level and on the social level. Thus in the same film, Mr. Zhang, Ms. Li's soulmate, comments on the reforming mother Ms. Li that she becomes what she is "totally because of the influences of the environment…and you can surely change your life and environment, and be a good person." This is in spite of the fact that the film is made in 1939 in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, produced by the controversial

figure Zhang Shankun, and that the film eventually pins the women down to their traditional role as wife and mother. Similarly, in *The Heroine in the Besieged City* (Gucheng lienü) which gives the glory to the Republican army, the hero's speech is very much like that of a communist hero in films after 1949, when he declares that "our only way out is to unite our strength, beat down and eradicate this evil force from the very root." The saturation of such elements in these non-leftist films testifies the widespread influence of the leftist or patriotic discourse.

In the following pages, I will examine three rebel-figures in three films adapted from foreign literature. They are *Mother and Son* (Mu yu zi, 1947), based on a play by Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky (1823-1886) titled *Innocent as Charged*; *Night Inn* (Yedian, 1947) based on Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depths*;[53] *A Spray of Plum* (Yijian mei, 1931), based on Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In each literary source, there is an outcast figure driven to the margin of society: the abandoned bastard and misanthropic cynic Neznamov in *Innocent as Charged*; the cold and also cynical thief Peppel in *The Lower Depths*; the wronged lover Valentine who turns into a bandit in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Yet through specific discursive strategies, in the Chinese films, these figures are all turned into Chinese rebels with more agency, resisting and fighting against the evil social, political or economical forces and their agents,

[53] *Mother and Son* was produced by Wenhua Studio, directed and written by Li Pingqian. *Night Inn* was made by the same studio, written by Ke Ling, and directed by Huang Zuolin, featuring Shi Hui, Zhou Xuan and Zhang Fa.

correcting social wrongs and enforcing social justice.

Innocent as Charged, by A. Ostrovsky, tells the story of a reunion after many years between a mother and her son. The mother, after being abandoned by her lover, becomes a famous actress, independent yet extremely caring for others. The son Neznamov grows up as an orphan, becomes cynical, and now works in the same troupe. He believes himself to have been abandoned by his parents, and does not even know who they are. He suffers a lot because of his role as a bastard and has known nothing but pain all his life, making him a man-hater and a world-hater. He is an outcast despised by others, to whom he returns spite. He is a loner and a cynic, professing that "I'm nothing, less than nothing."[54] Yet against the hypocrisy of others around him, he has the virtue of speaking and seeking the truth. After their reunion, the maternal love cures the son of his cynicism.

The Chinese filmic version of Neznamov is named Han Chen. Like his original, Han Chen is cold, sometimes cynical and sharp-tongued. Yet he is given other qualities absent in his Russian counterpart, making him an outcast-cum-rebel. He is now not merely an orphan to be pitied and taken back into a loving mother's arms to heal his wounds. He is given more rebellious agency, and not only in the sense that his straightforwardness and honesty is a rebellion against moral conventions. His being a loner and not getting along with others becomes a virtue too. His mother, the only other character that understands and appreciates him before she knows that he is her son, comments on his cynicism that

[54] Alexander Ostrovsky, *Four Plays* (London: Oberon Books Limited, 1996, translated by Stephen Mulrine),298.

this shows “he has a sense of justice,” and that “this person really has a character.” Moreover, unlike the Russia man-hater, his rebellion is more politically oriented. Angry at a Shanghai hooligan who disturbs the backstage, he is the first to announce a strike to force the hooligan to apologize. His strike is supported by all other actors, especially by his mother, and their demand is satisfied. He is also brave enough to disturb the party presided over by the big boss of the troupe (his father who abandoned both Han Chen and his mother), and confronts the boss without trepidation.[55]

Different from the original play, the film also depicts Han Chen the outcast-rebel as a good actor, an artistic genius truly devoted to art. He performs well, and is praised by his mother as having “a strong capability of understanding.” He has originally believed that the realm of drama field is a “pure place,” and is now disappointed at the corruption in it, showing the ideals of a true artist. He also likes reading, and will buy books whenever he has money. Thus, in the Chinese film, both art and education become weapons of moral and political rebellion, and they also enhance the righteousness of the rebel. Through his bodily confrontations with the hooligan, Han Chen already shows a tendency for violent resistance. He even professes that he might “kill, set fire on things, be a robber, and kill off all these people.” His desire to be a criminal just to better rebel against the society is realized by the heroes in *Night Inn* and *A Spray of Plum*, one being a thief, the other a bandit.

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[55] In a typical move, the film makes this father not only a bad guy in family life, but in social and economic life (an irresponsible father and an exploiting boss).

The biggest change in *A Spray of Plum* from Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* happens after the noble lover and friend Hu Lunting (Valentine) is exiled because of the false accusations by his former friend Bai Lede (Proteus).[56] From that point onward, the Chinese film turns abruptly from a romance to a work of social critique, and Hu Lunting is changed from a lover into a redresser of social injustice. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, after being exiled from Milan, Valentine is caught by some outlaws in a wood at the border of Milan and Verona, and unwillingly becomes their leader. In this Shakespearian play as in many of his other plays, the wildness, as contrasted to the cities, is a place far from the maddening crowd where the hero can heal his wounds and enjoy his solitary freedom in the pastoral environment. Thus Shakespeare's Valentine soliloquizes that

> This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
> I better brook than flourishing peopled towns.
> Here can I sit alone, unseen of any,
> And to the nightingale's complaining notes
> Tune my distresses and record my woes. (V.iv.2-6)

This seems to agree more with the Chinese tradition of celebrating hermit-hood, especially for intellectuals, Buddhists or Taoists. Yet during the period of national crisis

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[56] Zhang Zhen analyzes *A Spray of Plum* in terms of its geography setting, its gender representations, and especially of its androgynous girls, and also the film's relation to national cinema and cosmopolitan identity. See her "Cosmopolitan Projections," 153-5, 158-9.

when the Chinese film *A Spray of Plum* was made, hermit-like bandits are obviously not favored for their escapism and weakness. Nature is not emphasized in the film, where bandit life unfolds in a big rock cave with torches burning. The rather passive Valentine enjoying nature and doing introspection is changed into an active Chinese bandit fervently pursuing social justice.

Hu Lunting, the Chinese Valentine, after being banished, arrives at the border area between Canton and Jiangxi, joins a group of bandits and becomes their new leader.[57] In clothing reminiscent of ancient China, and no longer the lovesick officer, he now looks like a completely new person at his inauguration ceremony. His speech highlights how he wants his bandits not just to survive, but to "aim for success." Shakespeare's character, Valentine, when asked by the outlaws to be their leader, does lay out some conditions:

> I take your offer and live with you,
> Provided that you do no outrages
> On silly women, or poor passengers. (IV.i.71-73)

This is enlarged in the Chinese film into a formal ceremony in which the new leader announces his three rules which are much more aggressive and definite than Valentine's. Standing high and authoritatively over the other bandits, Hu Lunting makes them swear (by raising their hands up, and himself by drinking a special wine), against his new

[57] In Shakespeare's play, the fundamentally good nature of the bandits are shown by the fact that some of them used to be gentlemen, "such as the ungovern'd youth / Thrust from the company of awful men" (IV.i.46-7). This emphasis on origin and blood is gone in the film.

banner with a plum emblem on it. He announces that “I’m setting down three rules and hope everyone will obey.”[58] The way he makes his statements stresses the strict hierarchy in a semi-military style among the Chinese bandits, as contrasted with the happy medley of outlaws loosely bound together in Shakespeare’s play.

Hun Lunting’s three solemn rules are as follows. First, “We aid the poor, relieve the distressed.” “Second, the weak be helped, villains be suppressed.” “Third, pay the fair sex respect and be blessed.” Note that in the first two rules, Hu is taking social justice as his responsibility, aiming at alleviating the class gaps. Yet the third rule is different from the previous two. The first two are immediately welcomed by the bandits, while the last one sounds to them like a joke. They all shake their heads in disapproval. The argument that the new leader then thinks of to convince them, which does convince them, is not that we should respect women as fellow human being, but that “woman is a bad thing for us bandits,” evoking the ancient Chinese male belief that indulging in women is bad for the male’s health and career. He proposes that “we have good pastimes other than women,” which is to let Fatty, a fat and funny bandit, to mock the role of a heavenly lady in a Peking opera.

Hu Lunting’s way of swearing and setting down his rules for the dis-privileged is reminiscent of such Chinese classical bandits as those in *Outlaws of the Marsh* (Shuihu zhuan). Yet in actual deeds of resistance, Hu Lunting acts not together with his bandits

[58] Unlike otherwise pointed out, the English subtitles of this film used here are all taken directly from its bilingual subtitles.

but single-handedly, this time reminding us of the heroes in martial arts novels. Hu Lunting the bandit now suddenly becomes good at martial arts, throws arrows accurately and jumps unto roofs easily, although we do not know how and where this former great lover learns these feats. Especially significant is his clothing. He wraps himself in a big black cloak with its tight hood on his head concealing his face. The look of this "Plum Flower Bandit" is quite bizarre, more akin to the lonely hero in American westerns than to Chinese martial artists, again illustrating the overtly hybrid nature of such films.

Hu Lunting begins to act out his three rules, in a spiderman-like way. His emblem is a piece of paper, driven home by an arrow, on which is written his second rule "the weak by helped, villains be suppressed" (*chuqiang furuo*), beneath which is his logo--a plum flower. The second rule is especially important, since it speaks out the bandits' agenda concerning both the weak and the strong. We should also note here the change of significance of the plum flower now. It used to represent the chastity of Hu Lunting's lover Luo Hua (Sylvia), now it is appropriated by Hu as a symbol for social justice. Hu's arch-enemies are still his former rivals in competing for Luo Hua's affection, but now they are appointed successively as heads of the military police, which bullies and oppresses the poor. The private rivalry between them now becomes a contest between different moral standards in a public sphere. Also, both Bai Lede (Proteus) and Diao Li'ao (Thurio), his two love rivals, try to violate Luo Hua, when he timely comes to the rescue, so that the three men's sentiments towards the woman are divided into noble ones

and despicably carnal ones. Ironically, Hu Lunting never confronts the evil forces (i.e., the military-police) directly, but only leaves his arrow with its logo in an act of intimidation, which leaves room for his future reconciliation with the authorities.

Noteworthy is the final reconciliation at the end of the film. The charge of treason against Hu Lunting is cleared up, and he is happily restored to his former position as a high officer. In this sudden reversal of fate, his career as a "plum flower bandit" is totally erased, despite the fact that the military-police he used to fight against is under the command of his future father-in-law, the military-commander in Canton. Not only so, but all his bandits are forgiven by the commander and taken into his army, some of whom even become officers, while in Shakespeare's play, they are just disbanded. Thus, the resistance from the margin is easily resolved and absorbed into the center.

The social reconciliation in this film in the 1930s, is impossible in *The Night Inn* in the 1940s. Based on Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, *The Night Inn* presents another kind of rebellion in the figure of a thief who wants to live an honest life.[59] Gorky portrays in his play a dismal and miserable night inn where a group of losers live together in despair and also torture one another.[60] Each indulges in an often false memory of past social glories,

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[59] Paul Pickowicz's article on *Night Inn* explains the historical contexts for the play and the film version, their distribution. He also compares the three cultural products in terms of plot and characterization, and points out the important sequences in the film. He stresses the sinicization and popularization process of the play and the film, with the film being a melodrama because of the different audiences addressed. This article is very inspiring for me. See Pickowicz, "Sinifying and Popularizing Foreign Culture."

[60] Thus when an old woman Anna is dying, another tenant comments that "well, then she'll stop

either in terms of social status (for a baron), passionate love (for a girl), or past fame (for an actor). They now live in sheer poverty. They drink, gamble and curse, with no hope whatever for the future. Old Luka is the only man who is capable of offering others sympathy and hope. Yet it finally turns out that the hopes he gives others are all beautiful lies despite his best intentions. The play shows an existentialist concern for such fundamental issues of truth, faith, destiny and the purpose of life, without giving a definite answer to any of them.

The Chinese film *The Night Inn* is based on a stage play written by Ke Ling and Shi Tuo. With the play as one of the mediating points, the final film is quite different from Gorky's play. By comparing the film against Gorky's work, I hope to be able to sketch out the tendency of the Chinese transformations, some of which already begun in the Chinese play-version. The opening subtitle of the film points out that the miserable age to be depicted is "gone," and even among such poor people, we should "see love, see light, and see the qualities of kindness and sincerity."[61] This opening mini-speech already sets a tone much different from the dark and despairing one in Gorky's, where what the people lack is exactly love, light, kindness or sincerity. The film, by sharpening the confrontation between the innkeeper Wen Taishi (Kostylyov) and the rebel Yang Qi

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coughing. Her coughing's been disturbing everybody." Maxim Gorky, *The Lower Depths and Other Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945, translated by Alexander Bakshy), 31.

[61] As pointed out by Paul Pickowicz ("Sinifying and Popularizing Foreign Culture," 26), this practice of having an opening subtitle to point out the moral of the film was prevalent in films in the 1950s and 1960s. *The Night Inn*'s opening subtitle is similar in style to them, although it puts the emphasis on morality rather than politics.

(Peppel), now shifts the focus to a critique of the social system.

In the same way as the young cynic in *Mother and Son* (Mu yu zi) rebelling against his father and the powerful and the rich his father represents, and the bandit in *A Spray of Plum* fighting against the oppressive military-police, to fashion a Chinese rebel, there must be an enemy, a personification of the evil social forces at work. Thus, in the Chinese film *Night Inn*, Wen Taishi is not only the bad and cruel innkeeper Kostylyov, but becomes the epitome of everything evil of the society. Different from the case of Gorky's innkeeper, even Wen Taishi's wife is sold to him because her father sells her to him when unable to pay back his debt. With one blind and hollow eye, this character's evil nature is written in his outer appearances. He exploits the tenants ruthlessly, raising their rent while providing them with an extremely poor living condition.[62] Wen Taishi's cruelty is especially brought out in a scene absent in Gorky's film, when he threatens the already dying Sister Lai (Lai saozi), crushes her hope of entering heaven after death, and even evicts the penniless, crying and pleading woman out of the inn, causing her death. Significant are the visual elements of the scene, with the evil Wen against the lighting, his face in deep shadows with his one eye shining and the other eye missing. Such violent and pathetic scenes already anticipate similar climatic class-clashes in the socialist film discourses after 1949.[63] Also like the cases of the evil guys in socialist movies, the film

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[62] He is already a precursor of the rural landlords of the 1950s and 1960s, although he is a landlord in the sense that he rents his house, while the landlords in socialist films rent their land and exploit peasants.

[63] For example, the family of poor Xiang Linsao is oppressed by her landlord in *The New Year's*

emphasizes the economic exploitation Wen Taishi exercises on the poor through usury. Moreover, different from Gorky's play, his inn is given a highly symbolic significance. The inn's name *Wen Jia Dian* (Inn of the Wen Family), written on a broken wall, reminds one of the *Kong jia dian* (Inn of the Confucius Family) that the May-Fourth radicals labelled the heritage of traditional China. At the end of the film, strong wind blasts down the delapidated wall bearing the inn name, symbolizing the collapse of this evil system.

One of the most prominent virtues of the thief Yang Qi (Peppel in Gorky's play), the Chinese rebel, is his courage to confront this evil landlord, for example, in protecting his lover who is Wen's sister-in-law but mainly a victim of the evil guy's exploitation. As Paul Pickowicz points out, Yang Qi is changed "from a despicable local bully into a highly sympathetic, popular hero who bears little resemblance to the mustachioed Peppel."[64] Like the rebel-outcast-hero in *Mother and Son*,[65] Yang Qi is less sinning than sinned against. As an orphan, he is called a thief ever since he is a child. His thieving is explained by his discontent for the social system, when he complains that "the rich have their money piled beyond their gates, and the poor have to go without meals throughout the day," and "when we, pardon me, 'borrow' something from them to use, it is called a crime." The film makes him a nice thief. When he notices that there is a photo in his loot, he even wants to find an address to return it to its owner. Also he is generous with the

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Sacrifice (Zhufu, 1956), and the widow with a little child is victimized by the police in *The Lin Family Shop* (Linjia puzi, 1959). Both films will be discussed in the next chapter.

[64] Paul Pickowicz, "Sinifying and Popularizing Foreign Culture," 20.

[65] Perhaps not accidentally, both young rebels are played by the same actor Zhang Fa.

loot in giving them away to the poorer and weaker. The sometimes vicious and cold cynicism in Peppel in Gorky's play is gone. Peppel once claims that "Honor and conscience are only important to those who have power and force,"[66] yet the Chinese version of Peppel, Yang Qi, has both honor and conscience. Gorky's Peppel, with his money, once asks another tenant to "get down on all fours and bark like a dog,"[67] while the Chinese Peppel never insults others like this. As discovered by Paul Pickowicz, "the movie advertising in Shen Bao referred to Yang Qi as a xiashi, or knight-errand,"[68] linking him to the arch-bandit in *A Spray of Plum*.

To highlight this Chinese thief's thirst for an honest life, and to make clear the fact that he could not live such an honest life because of the society, the film makes him actively looking for a job to break away from his former infamous occupation. Yet the mill he inquires does not want workers. To rent a rickshaw he needs a guarantor, while he cannot find one. Finally he is in a smith's shop, where the smith, though as poor as he is, accepts him. Stressing the fraternity and mutual help between the poor, the smith says that "in such a time we have to share our food with one another." Yet eventually Yang Qi is incriminated by the bad wife of Wen Taishi and is imprisoned for 10 years, crushing his wish for a better self and a better future.

Through the characterization of the rebels in these films, we can see the strategies of

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[66] Gorky, *The Lower Depths*, 15.
[67] Ibid, 17.
[68] Paul Pickowicz, "Sinifying and Popularizing Foreign Culture" (1993), 17.

social critiques made by such films. All three rebels are young men, one a thief, one a cynical actor, the third one an officer turned bandit. Their marginality and outcast status is not due to their own fault, but because of the social wrongs done them. They are outcasts, yet they are also the conscience of the society and the enforcer of social justice. They are no longer, as in their literary originals, recklessly cynical, nihilistic or eccentric. They now know what is right and want to fight back.

In addition to the characterization of Yang Qi as a rebel, the collective depiction of the poor people in *Night Inn* can also illustrate the conception of the poor in such Republican films. The film makes this collective lot a much better and happier one than in Gorky's play. Gorky's inn is practically a hell, where the characters make their life more miserable by their lack of sympathy, their exposing one another's wounds and destroying one another' illusions. Yet the Chinese group of people in the inn practically forms a community. Though poor, they have warmth, love and sympathy. They help, sustain and care for one another. They sometimes bask in the sun together, and together listen to a little girl among them singing. Sometimes they even enjoy hearty laughter together. In Gorky's play, Luka, the nice and gentle old man who offers empty hopes to others, is the only solace everyone else has. Yet in the Chinese film, this old man's stature is diminished, because the other poor are not so desperately in need of spiritual solace since they have one another to support. Especially they show care for the poor women among them. Instead of being left to die except for Luka's comfort, Sister Lai, when sick

in bed, has many people to comfort and care for her. After she dies, they collect money for her burial, and each donates generously. For many of them, except for the evil landlord and the landlady, this inn is not hell. It is their only home.[69]

Concluding Remarks

From the films discussed above, we already see a general tendency, when dealing with foreign literature, to shift from the individual, the private and the interior to the collective, the public and the social. Even non-leftist films often employed these strategies, showing the influence of the leftist, if not Marxist, message during the Republican-era when China was caught in national crisis. Many of these strategies survived in the socialist films after 1949, pointing out the link between the two periods. The elevating of the poor and under-privileged over the rich and the powerful, the upbeat ending, the presentation of women as typical victims of the old evil society, the capturing of the moral of the works in speeches and subtitles--all these elements remained and were blown-up, though later along the lines of class-analysis. There are of course also discontinuities. In Republican films, when the liberation and containment discourses concerning women's status compete with each other, the post-1949 poor women become

[69] Indeed, in many of the films we discuss in this chapter, from changes to originals, we see how the poor are represented as morally better than the rich. Thus in *A String of Pearls*, only the poor are ready to help the unfortunate couple while their rich relatives relentlessly turn them down. Also the couple regain their sense of justice only after they are poor.

exemplary victims to be liberated by revolutionaries. Also, the socially righteous rebel figure is no longer viable, since bandits, thieves or cynics are not permissible as positive characters any more. Thus Cheng Jihua criticizes *Night Inn* and *Mother and Son* for not critiquing the old society enough, and that *Night Inn* is hence "not as deep as the original [meaning Gorky's play]."[70] Cheng's comments show how even radical messages in the Republican period prove not radical enough in the socialist era.

The practices of appropriating foreign literature, so popular in the Republican period, totally disappeared in the socialist era after 1949. Then, in recent years, the genre popped up again, though only in a couple of cases. Zhang Zhen analyzes briefly *Bloody Morning* (Xuese qingchen, 1991) based on Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel and its link with the 1989 democratic movement.[71] Young woman actress and director Xu Jinglei made *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Yige mosheng nuren de laixin, 2005) based on Austrian writer Stefan Zweig's story with the same title, narrating a woman's lifelong love for a man who does not even remember her or her love. Then, famous director Feng Xiaogang's blockbuster *The Banquet* (Yeyan, 2006), based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, transplants the play to ancient China and tells a story about palace intrigues cloaked in martial arts. These two recent films can in some way illustrate the current tendency of Chinese films of either being obsessed with the extremely private and interior, as in Xu's case, or with

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[70] Cheng Jihua, *Development of Chinese Films* 中国电影发展史, vol.2, 262, 263. In fact Gorky is not at all "deep," in Cheng Jihua's sense of harshly criticizing the society, as the Chinese film.
[71] See Zhang Zhen, "Cosmopolitan Projections," 161.

visuality and spectacles, as in Feng's case.[72] Both films continue the practice of sinicization, telling basically a Chinese story with radical changes to the original. Yet the sinicization process is sometimes strained in *The Banquet*, and the supposedly Shakespearean sentences the ancient Chinese characters utter prove funny to many Chinese audiences. In all, the adaptation of foreign literature in Republican era not only gave the filmmakers useful plotlines that they were in urgent need of, but offered an important site for important discourses to be constructed.

[72] Visuality is usually a hallmark of the fifth-generation filmmakers, and Feng Xiaogang used to stand away from this tendency, working on his contemporary urban subjects.

Chapter 3

Adaptation as Communist Orthodox and its Dilemmas: The Case of Xia Yan, the 1950s and 1960s

During the Cultural Revolution, Xia Yan (1900-1995) was named by the radicals the "forefather" (*zushiye*) of Chinese cinema. Despite the pejorative connotation in the title, it is not unfitting in acknowledging his importance in fashioning communist Chinese cinema before his downfall in 1965. After the Cultural Revolution, this acknowledgement largely remains unchanged, though now in a definitely positive tone. Even as late as the year 2000, the centennial of Xia Yan's birthday, important critics and scholars in China still evaluate the importance of Xia Yan in the same way. Critic Ding Yaping sees Xia Yan as "a flag" in the history of 20th-century Chinese cinema, Hui Lin and Shao Wu believe Xia Yan is "the most important filmmaker in China," and Chen Ye looks upon him as "the giant in China's New Culture Movement and the arbiter on Chinese cinema."[1] Like Zheng Junli discussed bsy Paul Pickowicz, Xia Yan was once seen as "a

[1] For these recent evaluations of Xia Yan by Chinese critics, see Ding Yaping 丁亚平, "Twentieth-Century Chinese Film Discourse and Xia Yan" 20 世纪中国电影话语与夏衍, *Dangdai dianying* 6 (2000): 12; Hui Lin and Shao Wu 会林，绍武, "Xia Yan's Film Art and Theory" 夏衍电影艺术与理论, *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文艺研究 6 (2000): 94; Chen Ye 陈野, "Xia Yan and Hong Kong Cinema" 夏衍与香港电影, *Dianying yishu* 6 (2000): 20. Ding Yaping's and Chen Ye's articles continue to judge Xia Yan's works in terms of his contribution to revolution.

Partly because of Xia Yan's high official status in the party, Chinese scholarship on Xia Yan is focused on collecting primary materials, while critical studies center on Xia Yan's contributions

disgusting bourgeois degenerate," and now he was seen "as a progressive and enlightened saint." As will be seen in the following pages, again like Zheng, Xia Yan "was neither."[2]

In the 1930s, Xia Yan was appointed one of the founders of the Leftist League, which was the beginning of his involvement in cultural production. As head of the underground Film Group of Chinese Communist Party (CCP), he was one of the several communists to join Shanghai studios in the 1930s and launch the Leftist Movement in cinema, aimed at exposing social woes and polarizations to educate the masses. He wrote many film scripts for this movement advocating the leftist message, several of which were very influential, including *Wild Torrent* (Kuangliu, 1933), *Twenty-Four Hours in Shanghai* (Shanghai ershisi xiaoshi, 1933), and *Spring Silkworms* (Chuncan, 1933) based on a story just written by Mao Dun.[3] After the establishment of PRC in 1949, he acted as the

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to Chinese cinema and film theories. The critics' examination of Xia Yan's weaknesses usually does not go beyond what he himself had admitted in retrospect. In several compiled volumes of primary and secondary materials on Xia Yan published in China, significant is the absence of criticisms of Xia Yan made during the Cultural Revolution, highlighting Xia Yan's special position. Also, more scholarship is done on Xia Yan's works during the 1930s, while much less on those in the 1950s and 1960s.

For a balanced view of Xia Yan's film practices and theories, see Li Shaobai 李少白, "Xia Yan's Historical Contribution to Chinese Cinema" 论夏衍对中国电影的历史性贡献, *Dianying yishu*, 6 (2000): 4-13. Li Shaobai points out many unorthodox aspects of Xia Yan as a leader, a film theorist and a script writer, yet Li still tries to contain his article within the orthodox Marxist framework.

[2] Paul Pickowicz, "Zheng Junli, Complicity and the Cultural History of Socialist China, 1949-1976," *The China Quarterly*, No. 188 (2006): 1049.

[3] For the leftist movement, see Pang Laikwan, *Building a New China in Cinema*; Hu Jubin, *Projecting a Nation*. *Wild Torrent* was the film that signaled the change of Mingxing studio and believed by film historian Cheng Jihua to be the first film to depict "class struggles in the countryside." See Cheng Jihua et al, *History of Chinese Film's Development* 中国电影发展史, vol.1, 206. *Spring Silkworms* was the first time that a piece of new literature work was adapted into film, and the film was believed by some to be a "miracle" of that year. See Zhongguo

Propaganda Director and head of the Culture Bureau in Shanghai in charge of the cultural work there, including filmmaking. In 1954, he came to Beijing to be the vice-minister of Culture and head of the Film Bureau. In addition to his adapted scripts based on fiction to be discussed in the following pages, his essay, "Several Issues on Script Writing" (写电影剧本的几个问题), as Dai Jinhua believes, "was one of the most important works on film theory and narration / scriptwriting from 1949-1976."[4]

However, Xia Yan's role and strategies in the 1930s and after 1949 are different, because the political and cultural conditions for filmmaking had changed drastically.[5] After 1949, with the establishment of the communist regime, political propaganda became the aim of film production. Film, with its wide reach of audiences, was given much significance as a tool for the construction of a new national culture. The seventeen years before the Cultural Revolution were marked by several campaigns against unorthodox filmmakers and film, followed by relatively relaxed periods. Film studios in

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dianying yishu yanjiu zhongxin 中国电影艺术研究中心 ed., *China's Leftist Film Movement* 中国左翼电影运动 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1993), 440. Xia Yan later argued that in those 1930s film scripts "written" by him, mostly the stories were provided by the studio boss or by the director. What he did was to input some ideas, make some changes and come up with a script. See Xia Yan, *Lazily Looking for My Old Dream* 懒寻旧梦录 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1985), 233. If that is the case, then his preference for adaptation after 1949 might not be so much different from his film scripts in the 1930s. In both cases, he was building on already existent stories.

[4] Dai Jinhua 戴锦华, *Film Theories and Criticisms* 电影理论与批评手册 (Beijing: Kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 1993), 155.

[5] For the general historical and political context of this period, see Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 25-94; Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge. 2004), 189-224.

China were all nationalized by 1952. The initial prosperity of films after 1949 was soon cut short by the campaign against *Life of Wu Xun* in 1950, after which film production fell to a nadir. In 1956-7, under the slogan of "let a hundred flowers blossom, and let a hundred schools contend," films revived a little bit, but again cut short by the anti-rightist campaign in 1957, which caused heavy casualties among filmmakers. This campaign was soon followed by the Great Leap Forward in 1958.

It was in the late 1950s and the early 1960s after the Great Leap and before the Cultural Revolution, that films enjoyed some extent of freedom. Xia Yan's adaptation works were all made in this period, except for the *New Year's Sacrifice* in 1956. Yet on the whole, even in such freer periods, the party put much political pressure on the filmmakers to act conformingly. Based on the principles set down in Mao's Yan'an *Talks* in 1942, films were required to serve the workers/peasants/soldiers and to reach the widest audience. Acceptable subjects were limited, and revolutionary history with communist heroes in it became the safest subject for filmmakers. During the short windows between campaigns, films did flourish, but even these could not go too far.

Xia Yan himself firmly believes in the didactic function of cinema, that "film is the most popular and most powerful propaganda weapon."[6] However, although a loyal party member, Xia Yan helped shape relatively free policies, especially in Shanghai. When he was in charge of the takeover in Shanghai, American movies were allowed to be shown

[6] Xia Yan, "Several Issues on Writing Film Scripts" 写电影剧本的几个问题, in his *Essays on Film* 电影论文集 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1963), 108.

right into the summer of 1950. No book or opera was banned. Yet this honeymoon did not last long. He was soon criticized for a series of film "accidents." First, in 1950, he recommended two private studios in Shanghai, Wenhua and Kunlun, to adapt two novels, *Husband and Wife* (Women fufu zhijian) and *Commander Guan* (Guan lianzhang). Although he saw to it that the two novels were published in the renowned literary journal, *People's Literature* (renmin wenxue) affiliated with the Writers' Associations, he was criticized for both films. Then in 1951, he again had to admit his mistake for *Life of Wu Xun* (Wuxun zhuan), although he was actually not responsible for the making of that film.[7]

All these setbacks made Xia Yan careful in his future filmic endeavors. He later remembered that, after *Husband and Wife* and *Commander Guan* were criticized, he began to understand that,

> some subjects are good for novels, yet not all novels can be adapted into films. The reason is quite simple. The leaders may not read novels, yet if a novel is made into a film, it cannot escape the leaders' attention. Thus, after I transferred to the Culture Ministry to be in charge of films in 1955, to play safe, the films I myself adapted were all from works by Lu Xun and

[7] As Xia Yan remembered, Zhou Enlai told him that the main goal of the article on *People's Daily* criticizing *Life of Wu Xun* 武训传 "is to hope that the intellectuals in the newly-liberated areas should study seriously and enhance their thoughts." See Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan* 夏衍自传 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 241. Here we can see the efforts of the new authority in the anti-*Life of Wu Xun* campaign to chastise urban intellectuals. *Autobiography of Xia Yan* is a compilation of Xia Yan's biographical information based on primary sources, while *Lazily Looking for my Old Dream* 懒寻旧梦录 is Xia Yan's autobiography written in the 1980s, yet the book only covers the period before 1949.

Mao Dun (who was then the Cultural Minister).[8]

The passage clearly illustrates how he had learned important political lessons from his experiences and frustrations in Shanghai. He used the phrase "anxiously careful" (*zhanzhan jingjing*) to describe his new attitude.[9] His preferring adaptation of established writers to writing scripts by himself is already an effort to play safe. This sense of insecurity and fear was not his personal feelings, but typical of the general sentiments among cultural workers, especially after the anti-*Life of Wu Xun* campaign.[10] Xia Yan later remembered that the criticism of *Life of Wu Xun*, though not as devastating as later campaigns, had widespread influences. Filmmakers would rather do nothing than make films that could endanger themselves. It is against such historical and political context that he made his filmic adaptations in the 1950s and 1960s.[11]

Except for the earliest *Inescapable* (Renmin de juzhang, 1950), Xia Yan's film works in this period are all adaptations, and all were made during times when policies were relatively free. In 1956, he adapted *The New Year's Sacrifice* (Zhufu) based on Lu Xun's short story about the miseries of a woman in old China. In 1958, he wrote *The Lin Family Shop* (Linjia puzi) based on Mao Dun's novella written in 1931, describing the hardships petty businessmen have to go through in the 1930s. In 1959, he adapted a memoir by

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[8] Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan* 夏衍自传, 237.
[9] Ibid, 254.
[10] See Xia Yan, *Xia Yan: Selection of Essays Written in Seventy Years* 夏衍七十年文选 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 257.
[11] For an overall picture of film adaptations at the period, Xia Yan's theory of fidelity, and how filmmakers deal with leftist literature at the time, see my chapter 1.

communist revolutionary Tao Cheng into film *Revolution Family* (Geming jiating), telling how members of one family are involved in the revolution cause. Then in 1965, he adapted *Red Crag* (Liehuo zhong yongsheng), based on a communist novel by Luo Guangbin and Yang Yiyan, on the revolutionaries in Chong Qing right before the national victory of the communists in 1949.[12] Interestingly, besides these works that he wrote as a party official, in 1962, he also adapted *Between Smiles and Tears* (Guyuan chunmeng) based on Ba Jin's novel *The Restful Garden* (Qiyuan) for a Hong Kong studio. All writers that Xia Yan drew upon are established writers, and all of the original literary sources are acknowledged masterpieces. However, these films, with their different subjects and audiences, are dealt with differently and reveal different aspects of Xia Yan. How are these sources adapted differently by Xia Yan? Through his different ways of adaptation, what positions are revealed for Xia Yan to take in the 1950s and 1960s, and what are the consequences of those positions? These are some of the questions to be addressed in the following sections.

Xia Yan's Options and Their Consequences

Xia Yan played different roles in these adaptations. He acted as a conformist

[12] These four adapted films were all made by Beijing Film Studio, with which Xia Yan had a close relationship. Xia Yan's scripts for *Revolution Family* and *Red Crag* were expressly written at the request of the studio.

vanguard repeating and re-enforcing the official communist history, as is shown in his adaptations of *Revolution Family* and *Red Crag*. He was an ambivalent critic in the adaptation of *The Lin Family Shop* with its petite-bourgeois protagonist and its perhaps unintentional deconstruction of the official version of history. Then, he was a repressed humanist in the adaptation of *Between Smiles and Tears* because that script was intended for Hong Kong, a different space reserved for his largely unorthodox views.

Xia Yan as a Conformist Vanguard

In 1959, after seeing the list of films to be made, Xia Yan complained,

> They were mostly war films, with some about prisons and executions. So I said, yes, we should stick to the revolution rule (*geming jing*) and the war way (*zhanzheng dao*), yet, cannot we deviate from the rule a little bit?[13]

This would be used as one of his "crimes" in the Cultural Revolution. Here, Xia Yan showed discontent with the narrow choices of subject matters allowed on screen. However, as a high official, a loyal party member and an important player in the 1930s leftist film movement in Shanghai, Xia Yan had to, no matter how grudgingly, conform to the official discourse. As Paul Pickowicz puts it, Xia Yan was unable "to break completely with the thematic conventions" of the time.[14] Thus, two of his adaptations

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[13] Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan* 夏衍自传, 256.
[14] Paul Pickowicz, "The Limits of Cultural Thaw: Chinese Cinema in the Early 1960s," 118.

during this period, *Revolution Family* (1959) and *Red Crag* (1965) stick to the "revolution rule" that he complained about, while *The New Year's Sacrifice* (1956), by describing the pre-revolution woes in China, prepares the stage of the revolution drama. Also, in writing these works, whatever his intentions were, Xia Yan not only acted as a passive conformist, but as an active vanguard in fashioning a revolutionary and pre-revolutionary myth. His works were very successful and helped to propagate the communist myth.

The New Year's Sacrifice (1956) provides an occasion for Xia Yan to recount the pre-revolution Chinese history, and from Xia Yan's changes in his adaptation, we can see the trajectory of how that history is constructed. Lu Xun's original story narrates the misery a poor woman named Xianglin Sao undergoes through the point of view of "I', an intellectual who returns to his hometown. The woman's husband died and she is sold into another marriage. She flees home to work at Master Lu's home as a servant and is taken back by force to marry He Laoliu. After this second husband dies of typhoid and her little son is eaten by a wolf, she returns to Lu's household. Yet her nerves are shattered and she is not as efficient as before. Moreover, as custom has it, a widow is "unclean," so the master dismisses her. She begs in the street and finally dies.

Of all Lu Xun's short stories, this one might be the closest to the communist narration of the pre-revolutionary history. No wonder that communist filmmakers chose it to adapt to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Lu Xun's death. Xia Yan, as the script writer,

admitted that he accepted this adaptation "as a serious political task,"[15] which was to popularize Lu Xun's works in a politically-correct version to educate the audience. To make it a good communist propaganda piece, important changes have to be made. Many of these important changes are not Xia Yan's personal choices to enhance the aesthetic value of the work, but political choices to bring his adaptation in line with the official discourse.

As towards all pathetic figures in his stories, Lu Xun's attitude towards Xianglin Sao is twofold: "indignation at her misery, and anger that she does not rebel"(*ai qi buxing, nu qi buzheng*).[16] What Xia Yan chooses to highlight is the first part. First of all, Xia Yan subjects all characters to rigid class analysis before they appear on the screen. The economic division of class is translated into moral divisions, which are often reduced to stereotypes, such as evil landlords and good-hearted poor peasants. So, the blurred moral judgments in the original story, with much gray area in between, is turned by Xia Yan into sharp moral binaries in the film. On the one hand are the poor and virtuous (virtuous because poor). In addition to the protagonist Xianglin Sao, other poor characters in the story are made much better too, such as He Laoliu, Xianglin Sao's second husband. She is actually sold into this second marriage. Lu Xun writes that she resists, yet has to succumb because He Laoliu is physically strong. Xia Yan believes this is too vulgar, and

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[15] Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan* 夏衍自传, 247.

[16] The famous phrase first appeared in a slightly different version in Lu Xun's "The Poetic Force of the Demonic Poets"摩罗诗力说. See Lu Xun, *Complete Works of Lu Xun* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), vol.1, 80.

changes He into a kind and hard-working person. Moved by his kind-heartedness, she chooses to stay. Within the rigid class discourse, a poor hooligan is impossible. Being poor, one cannot be bad. In addition, people in the poor class naturally sympathize with one another and are sure to unite in one front. Their internal differences and conflicts are erased.

Going against the Chinese traditional wisdom of privileging the senior, the way Xia Yan adapts Lu Xun's story illustrates the communist tendency to prefer the young among those who are not yet communists. The older generation is believed to have too strong a link with the old society, its outdated mores and customs. The young, in their rebellious age, can be rebellious to the society too and are thus more eligible to be future communists. Interesting in this respect in *The New Year's Sacrifice* is how the murderous old social rules are personalized and projected by Xia Yan mainly onto the old, while the young are made much better. In Lu Xun's story, Xianglin Sao's young brother-in-law is also part of the conspiracy to sell her and even helps to take her by force. Yet in the film, Xia Yan makes this young man another sympathizer of Xianglin Sao. The similar hierarchy of age prevails in Xia Yan's depiction of Xianglin Sao's fellow servants in Master Lu's house. Of the two other women servants, the young one added by Xia Yan is sympathetic to others' distress, while the older one again represents the old social discipline.

As far as the bad guys are concerned, one important change Xia Yan makes to the

story is to pinpoint the bad guys and make them look as harsh as possible. Lu Xun's works often feature the murderous nature of the mob. In his original story, even if there are some who are mainly responsible for Xianglin Sao's death, all people around her in fact participate in the killing: her second husband, her brother-in-law and other gossiping town folks. The evil force is everywhere, yet one cannot locate it on somebody. Even the narrator "I" is partially responsible. When Xianglin Sao asks the narrator whether there is hell after death, he gives her a vague answer and then flees, endowing the story with a tone of self-deprecation and condemnation.[17]

However, in the film, the evil force has to be personalized and dehumanized. In Lu Xun's story, Master Lu and his wife, though not good, still have some redeeming traits and can sometimes be sympathetic with Xianglin Sao. These traits are all deleted by Xia Yan. One way to make the exploiter look harsher is to make him harsh on money issues. Since the class theory is essentially a theory of dividing the society in terms of property ownership, class exploitation mainly takes the form of relationships of money: land rents or room rents that the landlord insists on collecting and the poor cannot afford to pay; usury that the landlord must get back; wages that the factory owners refuse to pay the workers. To make Master Lu and his wife typical exploiters, Xia Yan adds two episodes involving money. In one episode, Mistress Lu computes the wages for Xianglin Sao. That

[17] This complex figure of "I" is rather incongruous with the communist version of Lu Xun as a great fighter and revolutionary. This might be part of the reason why the narrator "I" is omitted in the film. Furthermore, the deletion of Lu Xun obviously gives Xia Yan more freedom in interpreting the characters as he likes it.

day is the 23th of the month, so she only counts wages until the previous month, making Xianglin Sao work for nothing for the last 23 days. In another scene, Xia Yan makes Master Lu similar to He Laoliu's landlord. The underdogs of Master Lu report to him that in spite of all efforts, three poor families in debt to him just cannot pay back.

On the other side**,** Xia Yan underscores the money quagmire in which the poor are caught. He makes He Laoliu borrow from Seven Master, a character added in the film to make the evil force more palpable. The debt becomes a big burden that looms large over the poor couple's short-lived happy marriage. Then He Laoliu's death is changed by Xia Yan from a natural one in Lu Xun's story to one due to class struggles. In Lu Xun's story, He dies of typhoid. Xia Yan, however, makes He Laoliu overwork himself for Seven Master, again without pay. While he is ill in bed, the underdog of the creditor comes. Without any consideration for the ill man, the exploiter insists on getting the money back. He Laoliu becomes angry, gets up from bed and takes up his rifle (he is a hunter). The underdog pushes him to the ground. It is because of this turmoil that Xianglin Sao asks her little son to go outside, the child goes astray and is taken by a wolf. Xianglin Sao looks for the child only to find his lacerated body. Returning home, she finds her husband on the floor, dead too. Thus, two family members die on one day and because of one reason. The death of the child is a later accident in Lu Xun's story. In the film, he dies because of the debtors, though indirectly.

Yet, in the film, Xia Yan also makes the poor people exhibit some signs of resistance

and potentially capable of acquiring class consciousness. Their spontaneous resistance often appears at the climax of the film. He Laoliu used to bear all exploitations without complaints. Yet in the above-mentioned scene, Xia Yan makes him change. He is so cornered that he cannot help taking up his rifle. However, he does not fire at his enemies. Without the guidance of the party, the poor people's resistance can have no actual results. Similarly, Xia Yan also makes Xianglin Sao take up a big knife later, not to wield it towards her exploiters, but to chop at the doorsill that she donates to a Buddhist temple to redeem her "sin" of having married two men. This unexpected change in the disposition of Xianglin Sao from docility to militancy provoked some debate at the time.[18]

In Lu Xun's original story, Master Lu appears pedantic, and Xianglin Sao sometimes funny. These laughable traits are deleted by Xia Yan. For a revolutionary drama to succeed, laughter, even non-malicious laughter, must be excluded. If the audience laughs at the poor people, their misery becomes softened. If the audience laughs at the bad guys, the bad guys are humanized. Both effects were not desirable and that is perhaps why comedy was so rare after 1949. The communists' fear of laughter is further illustrated in *The Lin Family Shop* to be discussed in detail in the next section. In Mao Dun's story, the wife of the shop owner hiccups all the time. Yet Xia Yan believes that this will mitigate the tragic nature of the film. With agreement of Mao Dun, the hiccup is deleted.

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[18] One critic believed that it was good because it "foregrounds the accusatory nature of Lu Xun's original story." Another argued that it is not "realistic." See Xuzhong shifanxueyuan zhongwenxi 徐州师范学院中文系 ed. *Xia Yan: Special Issue for Materials of Modern Chinese Literature* 中国当代文学研究资料——夏衍专集 (1980), 425, 437.

While *The New Year's Sacrifice* describes a typical pre-revolutionary story, Xia Yan's *Revolution Family* and *Red Crag* deal with communist revolutionaries directly. In 1962, together with director Shui Hua, Xia Yan adapted the memoir by a communist revolutionary into film *Revolutionary Family*. Then, in 1965, Xia Yan adapted a classic revolutionary novel *Red Crag* into a film, again directed by Shui Hua. The two films offer us glimpses into how Xia Yan conformed to and helped construct the revolutionary discourse. Later in time, *Red Crag* presents a highly-developed and stylized revolutionary story similar to its original novel. It is through *Revolutionary Family*, with its many deletions, additions and twists of the original, that we can see more clearly the process of Xia Yan's fashioning a revolutionary myth and conforming to the political requirements on screen from materials that may not fit the myth that well.

The literary source of the film *Revolutionary Family* is a memoir titled *My Family* written by Tao Cheng. Her husband was a communist revolutionary who died in 1928. Her three children also grew up into communists. One of her sons, Ouyang Li'an (1914-1931), was killed by the nationalists in Shanghai at the age of 16, along with some other comrades, among whom were the famous five young writers affiliated with the Leftist League.[19] This martyr-son was the main reason why Tao Cheng was asked to write a memoir about her exemplary family. The memoir begins with the year 1911, when Tao was married, and ends in 1943. It narrates the drifting of the family from Changsha

[19] The five writers are Rou Shi 柔石, Hu Yepin 胡也频, Feng Keng 冯铿, Li Weisen 李伟森 and Yin Fu 殷夫.

to Wuhan, Shanghai, Wuhan again, Chongqiong, and finally Yan'an. Published in 1956, the book was very popular, sold six million copies in a short time, and was one of the most well-read books at the time.[20]

Tao Cheng was asked by editors of Gongren Press to write the memoir "to educate the younger generation with the revolutionary tradition."[21] The story was orally told by Tao and written (not exactly transcribed) by two collaborators. The book is well-organized, abounds with poetic diction, and is drastically different from the usually fragmented oral memoir one might expect it to be. As such, the book itself has already undergone several layers of censorship, including Tao Cheng's self-censorship as a devoted party member on what should be said and what not, the collaborators' rewriting, and the press' self-censorship. Still, the book includes family anecdotes, depictions of local customs and rather down-to-earth descriptions of what happened to the family during those tumultuous years, not only as a revolutionary family, but as a commonplace family that tried to survive. Thus, the memoir can still qualify as an oral history.

Communist national leaders Xu Teli and Xie Juezai, who encouraged Tao in the writing, or telling, of the book, wrote two prefaces for it. Xu comments that,

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[20] See Tao Cheng, *My Family*, postscript by the author written in 1978, 103. In the Cultural Revolution, the book was denounced and the author was imprisoned. Fortunately she survived the imprisonment. See an article on her, "Continuing the Long March with a Renewed Will"长征再继志犹在, in *Hunan Daily* 湖南日报, February 3, 1980. Online version website is: http: www.sports.gov.cn/hnfiles/unwenji/renwuzhi/renwu05.htm.

[21] Tao Cheng 陶承, *My Family* 我的一家 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1978), postscript by the author written in 1978, 102.

> This is a typical case of prioritizing the public over the private, the nation over the family. Families of Chairman Mao, Comrade Cai Hesen and innumerable other revolutionary families—they all have the noble qualities of "everyone for me, and me for everyone." [22]

Xie largely shares this view. Both prefaces try to downplay the particularity of this family and foreground its typicality. They enlarge the focus of the book from one single family to revolution families and finally to the whole revolutionary class. We can see how the two prefaces, to different extents, already interpret the message of the memoir in a spirit similar to its film adaptation by Xia Yan. The similarity of the film's message with the national leaders' reading suggests that the changes Xia Yan made are choices in line with the general political atmosphere.

We do not know whether Xia Yan took cue from Xu Teli's words "revolutionary families" in choosing the title of the film. Anyway, Xia Yan substitutes the original title "my family" (the individual) with "revolutionary family" (the collective and the political). The spirit of this change is carried out throughout the film. With it, Xia Yan repackages a personal memoir into a typical propaganda myth, not only using the revolution as a backdrop against which family events unfold, but also making the family an epitome of the revolution. With the focus now on "revolution," the film cuts all episodes in the memoir that are mere family events irrelevant to revolution. The family is now presented

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[22] Xu Teli 徐特立, preface to Tao Cheng, *My Family*, i.

as one unified entity intent on revolution alone. Omitted are conflicts within the family, such as those between father and son, which leads the son to leave the family only to return later. In the memoir, Tao Cheng also often touches on the hard life the family went through and on how the family tried to eke out a living. Xia Yan deletes such descriptions of the family's survival skills, both because they have nothing to do with the revolution, and because revolutionaries are not supposed to complain about the hardships of material lives.

To decrease the memoir's emphasis on familial ties, Xia Yan, by verbal messages inserted in the film, repeatedly reminds the audience that what is important is not the individual family, but, as Paul Pickowicz points out, the "new family, the communist party."[23] The party is the parent of all revolutionaries. Considering the ubiquity on screen of family separation or even lack of families, in the form of many orphans who grow up to be revolutionaries, one can even say that the revolutionary discourse does not encourage family members to stick together. Xia Yan embeds this message in the film mostly in oral forms as punch lines. Thus, when the family is reunited in Wuhan, the voiceover of the mother says, "we found our home in Han Yang. This home is the party." In another scene, a comrade comforts the mother who just lost her husband that: "You family is our family. Your children are all children of the party. The party will take care of you." Without the party's care, all family members, including the mother, are like orphans.

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[23] See Paul Pickowicz, "The Limits of Cultural Thaw," 117.

In the memoir, when newly arrived in Shanghai, the family was mainly concerned about finding a way of living. Yet in the film, this is replaced by an anxiety and bewilderment due to the loss of connections with the party. As long as family members are working for the same cause, the sticking together of the family is not very much sought after. Hence in the film, Xia Yan often separates family members. The mother, when told that her two children cannot live with her anymore, says happily, "To entrust them to the party, of course I will rest reassured." This strategy of immersing the biological family in the big revolution family is not unique to this film, but, as Dai Jinhua points out, is common among post-1949 films which deal with the revolution history.[24]

Predictably, Xia Yan puts the emphasis on family members' revolutionary roles rather than their familial roles. He makes the father not so much a father than a guide who leads his family into the revolutionary cause. The mother and her children are made not so much of two generations than co-revolutionaries and comrades. The priority of the cause over familial sentiments is exemplified in a scene in the film which is a drastic change from the memoir. In the memoir, the son Ouyang Li'an was arrested and secretly killed by the nationalists, and the mother does not know it until quite late. Xia Yan changes this into a typical revolutionary drama in which everything comes together. The mother is arrested too, and the son is brought before her. The nationalist officers tell her that, if she confesses, they will release her son. Otherwise, he must die. The mother

[24] Dai Jinhua also points out that women and children are often chosen as the protagonists of such films. See Dai Jinhua 戴锦华, *Film Theories and Criticisms* 电影理论与批评手册, 175.

steadfastly refuses the offer, and her son goes to death happily. In this scene, the obvious struggle of maternal feelings against revolutionary duties, with the triumph of the latter, plays on the face of the mother, which is shown in successive close-ups. Finally the scene concludes with sublime music. Xia Yan uses this scene to highlight what the revolutionaries prioritize: the cause is more important than even another family member's life.

Xia Yan's adaptation strategies also belie the gender politics within the orthodox communist discourse, especially between husband and wife. Different from the original memoir, a major theme of the film, especially in the early part, is the change the wife Zhou Lian (the film version of Tao Cheng) undergoes under the influence and guidance of her husband. She is brought up as a traditional Chinese woman before her marriage. Although she does not understand what her husband is doing, she believes whatever he does must be right. Gradually, with education from her husband, she becomes a conscious and conscientious revolutionary herself. Xia Yan emphazes her change, which is predicted, initiated and facilitated by her husband. In this respect, her husband is more like a party superior than a spouse.

Especially significant is a scene added by Xia Yan in the film in which the husband, assisted by the children, cuts the wife's hair. The husband is just back home and is full of revolutionary fervor. He predicts that the wife will change and become more revolutionary. Then, he hits on an idea. He tells a child, "bring me a pair of scissors," and

announces that he is to change the wife's traditional hairdo into short hair typically worn by revolutionary women. The scene almost verges on being violent. The resistant wife tries to run away, but is pinned by her children down to a chair. The son urges his father: "quick." The husband cuts her hair off by one stroke. Although she later finds the new haircut not bad in the mirror, the dominance of the male revolutionary in the scene is obvious.

Another subtle quality of the revolutionaries concerns their body. In early post-1949 films, the bodily moral mark is still not obvious: bag guys can be good-looking, and vice-versa. An example is *Inescapable* scripted also by Xia Yan.[25] Yet, as time goes by, with the increasing reification of filmic languages, the bodily distinction between the good and the evil becomes more and more rigid and unmistakable. The good are handsome and bear themselves erect. The bad look furtive and sly. Jay Layda aptly sees cinema of this period "a theater of masks….where instant recognition is essential."[26] As the body becomes a sign of moral qualities, the bodies of communists cannot be presented as lacking. Thus, bodily diseases have to be avoided. In *Revolutionary Family*, such is the case of Jiang Meiqing (the filmic version of Tao Cheng's husband). In the memoir, he had some chronic disease and married only because of the traditional belief

[25] The film is about a nationalist spy in Shanghai in the guise of a worker. He is intent on sabotaging the new socialist state, and his sabotage leads to the bombing of a factory which results in numerous deaths. The nationalist spy in that film is played by Wei Heling, the same actor who played the heroine Xianglin Sao's kind and taciturn husband in *The New Year's Sacrifice*.

[26] Jay Layda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (MIT, 1972), 199.

that marriage could cure diseases (*chong xi*). Later, illness overtook him and cost his life. Yet in the film version, Xia Yan does not mention his illness. As will be discussed later, his natural death by disease is transformed by Xia Yan into martyrdom. The same rule accounts for another change in the film. The wife Tao Cheng had bound-feet in the memoir, so she was dismissed by factories in Shanghai as inadequate. In her transformation into a revolutionary woman in the film, her hair can be cut, but her feet cannot be unbound. Thus, we do not see her bound-feet, those indelible bodily marks of feudalism.[27]

Xia Yan's conformism in his adaptations of this film can also be seen in how he tries to add Mao Zedong into the film, even against historical facts. In the period the memoir covers, the official communist headquarters were in Shanghai. Mao was then in the Jiangxi base, the so-called *suqu* (the Soviet-style region) and was not yet the unquestionable leader of communist China. So Tao Cheng's memoir never mentions Mao. Xia Yan not only inserts Mao as the off-scene leader, but, in accordance with the official party historiography after 1949, he represents the off-scene Jiangxi base as the center of communist actions and the Shanghai headquarters as only dependent on Jiangxi. Thus, one son of the family goes to Jiangxi. The mother Zhou Lian is arrested because she remains in the headquarters to wait for messengers from Jiangxi. After her arrest, the

[27] The same can be seen in the film *Red Crag*. The novel this film is based on vividly depicts the bloody and tortured bodies of communists, yet Xia Yan's film version avoids such visual images and makes the communists re-emerge after the tortures without much outer change. In the novel, one female communist lost one leg. That "lack" is gone in the film too.

nationalist enemies are concerned only about her connection with Jiangxi. To play safe, Xia Yan also cuts the family's linkage with He Mengxiong and Bo Gu, both staunch communist leaders yet with sometimes uneasy relationships with Mao. Through these strategies, even a film covering the period before the rise of Mao to party power can be made to pay tribute to Mao.

The myth-building process in this film adaptation also involves disregarding historical facts. Xia Yan only alludes to time vaguely. The historical gaps are now filled up with visual and audial conventions. The film extracts from the real people in the memoir some abstract qualities that are applicable to all communist revolutionaries. Thus we often find the characters in familiar poses recurrent in other films. They make passionate public speeches and shout slogans. They bear tortures in prisons gracefully and go to death courageously. They identify comrades using secret codes and narrowly escape enemies. They find tucked in the rice bowl in prison a piece of paper carried by god knows whom. They evade enemies following them on the street even if their errand is only to visit their children. They burn an important document, leaving only ashes for enemies who break in just late enough. With these familiar additions, revolutionary work becomes an inevitable series of victories and even adventures.

Xia Yan makes the revolutionaries, old and young, as excellent disguisers and actors. Often they pretend to be rich or powerful, clothed in expensive attire with all kinds of other luxuries. The fun lies in both enjoying and despising these usual symbols of social

status. The film *Revolutionary Family*, different from the memoir, highlights such a scene. In Shanghai, Zhou Lian, as an underground communist, once has a public identity as wife of a rich merchant. To do revolutionary work effectively, the family has to live in a big house. The daughter has to wear curled haircut, chong sam, scarf and high-heeled shoes, which are emblems of corrupt lifestyles. Her brother returns home too, handsomely wearing suit and tie, sunglasses, overcoat and leather shoes. They tease each other as "bourgeois." Such donning and then often doffing the despised clothes abound in this type of revolutionary films.[28] These visually impressive scenes provide the audience with the double visual pleasure of both seeing the good characters beautiful and shining, and then denying that enjoyment in ideological terms.

Most of the emblematic scenes in the film--bodily confrontations with enemies, heroic deaths, glorious strikes—are additions made by Xia Yan. Often accompanied by music and shot in close-ups, they become salient parts of the film clamoring for attention. Recurring in other films and carrying the political burden, these scenes become ritualistic. We can see from Meiqing's death how a fact is changed into a symbolic ritual. In the memoir, Meiqing dies of overwork and poor health. The death is grieved by his wife, yet to others, it is common. The nurse coldly tells the wife to "prepare for his funeral."[29] Yet Xia Yan changes this death into a climactic moment in which an array of symbolic

[28] In *Red Crag*, Jiang Jie has on a beautiful chong sam and changes to plain clothes when with comrades, and expresses her dislike of the chong sam. In *Red Detachment of Women*, the male party representative, when conducting a task, disguises himself as a rich guy from overseas, and immediately takes off such clothes when he arrives in the communist-controlled area.
[29] Tao Cheng, *My Family*, 42.

elements are concentrated. The death is attributed to injuries resulting from Meiqing's physical fight with nationalist policemen to protect other comrades. When he is dead and the nurse carefully pulls the white bedcover over him, loud music blares out to accompany the wife's crying. By sheer volume of the music, the filmmakers are reminding the audience that this is a memorable and glorious moment.

In socialist films featuring either the pre-revolution or the revolution history, death of the poor and oppressed or the revolutionary is especially useful, the former shown as pathetic to incite anger and pity, the latter seen as sublime and triumphant. The death of Meiqing in *Revolutionary Family*, He Laoliu in *The New Year's Sacrifice*, Jiang Jie and Xu Yunfeng in *Red Crag* are cases in point. These deaths are meticulously represented, fully equipment with tears, music and close-ups. In Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice*, after He Laoliu's death, days go by before a tragedy happens to the child. Xia Yan squeezes them into one climatic moment. As the director Sang Hu explains, "this combines deaths due to natural beasts with a man-made disaster, and seems more powerful for conveying the message."[30] Similar is the arrangement in the film *Red Crag* to let the male and female protagonists, both communist leaders, to die at the same time, making it yet another sublime moment, while they die at different times in the original novel.

The impact of such compulsory repetition of the political message in symbolic forms

[30] Cited in Xuzhou shifanxueyuan zhongwenxi 徐州师范学院中文系 ed., *Xia Yan: Special Issue* 夏衍专集, vol.2, 427.

was immense. Tao Cheng's memoir had already been very popular, inciting the younger generation to emulate the revolutionary forerunners. Within months of the publication of the book, she received more than 2,000 letters, mostly from young people who expressed that "they want to follow the examples of the forefathers, and devote all their hot blood to the glorious revolutionary cause."[31] Xia Yan had always believed that the importance of film as a tool of propaganda tool lay in its wide reach of audiences. Books are for intellectuals, yet even illiterate peasants can watch films and understand their messages. Such was Xia Yan's intention in adapting *Revolution Family* and was its contemporary effect. One critic wrote enthusiastically in 1961 that the film should be used as a "vivid communist textbook for people to extract great strength from."[32]

Much more sublimated, romanticized and stylized, Xia Yan's adaptations, together with numerous other novels and films in the same vein, form a concerted and systematic discourse. They fill the minds of the younger generation with revolutionary zeal. In a sense, the model films in the Cultural Revolution are only more rigid versions of such discourse to the exclusion of other competing forms. The younger people, born in an age of peace and unable to find enemies, turned against their fathers and frantically participated in the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution. As Dai Jinhua puts it, the Cultural Revolution is a "re-enacting of the dominant pre-Cultural Revolution

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[31] Tao Cheng, *My Family*, 103 (postscript in 1978).

[32] Xuzhou shifanxueyuan zhongwenxi 徐州师范学院中文系 ed., *Xia Yan: Special Issue* 夏衍专集, vol 2, 470.

ideology--the historical narrative mode of the myth of revolutionary wars." Repeating the fathers' revolutionary acts is "the only acceptable 'initiation' ritual to adulthood."[33] It is one of those historical ironies that, Xia Yan, and to a lesser extent Tao Cheng, constructed a revolutionary myth to educate the younger generation, who only turned against the educators. In the Cultural Revolution, Xia Yan was imprisoned for more than seven years and Tao Cheng for about five years. It is important to see these senior revolutionaries not as mere victims of the Cultural Revolution, but as contributors, though perhaps unknowingly and reluctantly, to the building of the pre-1966 ideology that anticipated the Cultural Revolution.

Xia Yan as an Ambivalent Critic

Xia Yan's adapted film *The Lin Family Shop* (1958) also deals with the pre-revolution history. This film has been highly acclaimed. In the 1970s, Jay Layda called it a "handsome film."[34] Recently, Li Shaobai believes that the film "is one of the rare best films made in the seventeen years after 1949 that can be handed down to future generations."[35] However, sharply different from *The New Year's Sacrifice*, in this adaptation, Xia Yan, perhaps unwittingly, plays the role of an ambivalent critic, so that the typical communist filmic techniques for recounting history are sometimes shaken,

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[33] Dai Jinhua 戴锦华, *Watching from the Slanting Tower: Chinese Film Culture, 1978-1998* 斜塔了望：中国电影文化，1978-1998 (Taipei: Yuan Liu, 1999), 38.
[34] Jay Layda, *Dianying*, 262.
[35] Li Shaobai 李少白, "Xia Yan's Historical Contribution," 12.

surprisingly endowing the film with subversive potentials.

Unlike Lu Xun, an idol-like figure who died in 1936 and left a very complex legacy, Mao Dun (1896-1981), the original author of *Spring Silkworms* (1933) and *The Lin Family Shop* (1932), was one of the very first communist party members in China. His way of approaching art is quite similar to Xia Yan's, and his sometimes simplified works often contain revolutionary messages easily convertible into politically correct films. Both Mao Dun and Xia Yan were high officials after 1949. Based on Mao Dun's work written in the 1930s, the film *The Lin Family Shop* was thus the result of collaboration between Mao Dun and Xia Yan, China's Culture minister and vice-minister, which, to use Jay Layda's words, was "enough to whet all expectations."[36] This should have sealed the film with authority and correctness, since few could have foreseen the fall of the two leaders in 1965, when articles appeared in *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao) critical of the film. This film became one of the reasons for Xia Yan's downfall.[37]

Xia Yan's way of approaching Lu Xun's works is to delete unacceptable parts to make Lu Xun appear right. Unlike this approach, we can see from *The Lin Family Shop* how a roughly sketched story can be turned into a complex film in which the political

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[36] Jay Layda, *Dianying*, 261.

[37] Xia Yan was first criticized for his association with the condemned film *Early Spring in February* (Zaochun eryue, 1962), which features intellectuals and which is also a May-Fourth adaptation. Then, in 1965, he was criticized for choosing a bourgeois hero in his *The Lin Family Shop*. In 1966, his *Essays on Film* 电影论文集, originally published in 1963, was criticized for ignoring the workers/peasants/soldiers and party leadership. Criticisms of Xia Yan were also linked to a condemnation of the leftist filmmaking tradition in the 1930s in Shanghai. For these criticisms of Xia Yan, see Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema,* 129-130。

stereotypes are shaken. *The Lin Family Shop* is about the difficult situation of a shop in a small town in the early 1930s. The shop has to face Japanese invasion, the pressure of cheap imports, tumultuous social conditions, exploitations of the nationalist authorities, fierce competition, and above all, the poor economic situation. Boss Lin tries to survive, yet he eventually fails. Hounded by debtors and other oppressors, he chooses to flee. The shop goes bankrupt, ruining at the same time its small shareholders. Unlike the obvious changes he makes to Lu Xun's story, Xia Yan's script here seems largely faithful to the original story, partly to show homage to Maon Dun, the Minister of Culture at the time. The script reads like a rewritten novella itself, with big chunks taken directly from the original.

Still, Xia Yan made some changes to the film, which are aimed at conforming, similar to those discussed in the previous section. Originally, Xia Yan had wanted to narrate the miserable story from the point of view of the happy present-day businessmen, yet he finally decided to drop this idea.[38] To conform to the stereotypes of young people as more "progressive," Xia Yan adds students who make speeches, shout slogans and march in the street. In Mao Dun's novella, Lin's daughter is a vain girl. Xia Yan makes her better and sometimes join the students in their actions, since she is, after all, young and therefore reformable. Yet, the other students are not individualized and act as mere props and symbols. The ending of the film is another big change intended to conform. It

[38] Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan* 夏衍自传, 251.

is made into a big clash between the poor and the rich, the weak and the powerful. Far more exaggerated and melodramatic than in the original, the bankruptcy of the little shop becomes an occasion for class struggle to be staged, with dramatic shows of crying, shouting, stampeding and bodily struggling. At the very end, Xia Yan again uses his usual way of concluding his adapted films with a male voiceover reading out the political verdict, “The Lin Shop is broke, and Boss Lin runs away with his daughter. However, the tragedy does not end there. The most stricken and most miserable are not them, but those trodden even lower and even poorer.” This message echoes the printed words at the beginning of the film, pronouncing that this film is a story about “big fish eating fish, and small fish eating shrimps.”

Yet with all these familiar trappings, what is striking in the film is the inner contradiction of the rigid representations of class struggles, which endows the film with potentials to subvert political stereotypes. Most salient in this respect is the characterization of the protagonist Boss Lin. Xia Yan did try to apply the usual techniques of class analysis to this character. Yet, when applied to a person in the middle-class, the process seems difficult, problematic, and shows gaps and holes. Boss Lin owns a shop, lives a well-to-do life in town and employs several young men. As such, he is an exploiter. On the other hand, there are those who pressure and exploit him. Positioned at the middle of the social ladder, he takes on the double qualities of the rich and the poor.

Boss Lin becomes a mixed personality in the film, which shows Xia Yan's ambivalence toward the old society and the revolutionary discourse. In Mao Dun's novella, Lin is a purely honest and hard-working person. Even his debtor praises him for his integrity, saying that a person like him would surely have made a fortune in better times. Yet Xia Yan believes that "it is imperative we do not describe Lin as a hundred-percent good guy, to prevent the present audience to empathize too much with him."[39] This procedure was approved by Mao Dun. Xia Yan's way of exposing the duality of Boss Lin is captured in a metaphor: "in front of wolfs, he is a sheep; in front of sheep, he is a wild dog. This is the general duality of Chinese businessmen."[40] Thus Xia Yan adds many scenes and elements to show that Lin can be cruel when dealing with those lower than him. At the beginning of the film, Lin is shown to privilege profit over patriotism. He lies that he does not have one single Japanese product at all, and then takes off the Japanese trademarks on his products and labels them as "made-in-China." He again lies when pressed by an old shareholder for her dividend. He takes sale items from an even smaller retailer who owes him money, against protests of his own apprentices. The retailer's wife is sick in bed and their children are crying. The scene is reminiscent of that in *The New Year's Sacrifice* in which the sick He Laoliu is cornered by creditors.

Yet, to what extent should the audience empathize with this character? That is the issue that Xia Yan is unable to solve due to the inner contradiction of his project. If Lin is

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[39] Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan*, 253.
[40] Xia Yan, "On Adaptation" 漫谈改编, collected in his *Essays on Film* 电影论文集, 247.

bad beyond redemption, he is an unworthy protagonist and the whole film does not make sense. Thus, Xia Yan devotes the major part of the film to the pressures and miseries Lin has experienced with his modest business. Ironically, with these pressures, it seems that Lin's above-mentioned "bad" actions are not so heartless after all. When an apprentice protests Lin's taking away a small retailer's sale items, Xia Yan makes Lin say, "we have no other way out. We cannot even take care of ourselves. How can we afford to take care of others?" When the sick wife of the retailer pleads, Lin says, "then what do you think I should do? You are doing business. Me too." His explanations sound tenable. Similarly, with his difficult situation, his lying to the small shareholders seems worthy of some sympathy. Even his eventual running away, which leads to a big class clash and leaves many others bankrupt with him, seems forgivable in spite of the stern condemning tone of the final voiceover. This mitigation of the despicable aspects of Lin stems from the very choice of a man in the middle of the social hierarchy as the protagonist. The result is that, to use Merle Goldman's words, Boss Lin becomes "a not unattractive capitalist whose plight evoked sympathy."[41]

Mao Dun writes in the novella a line about Lin's predicament:

> The nationalist officials blackmail him, the local bank pressures him, his fellow businessmen slander him, and his debtors are bankrupt. Who can bear so many strains of torture?... He has never harmed others, and has

[41] Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1981), 45.

never harbored an ill will…yet he is so unlucky…[42]

This punch line, with its favorable view of Lin, does not appear in the film. However, we do see in Xia Yan's characterization of Lin a narrative pattern of victimization similar to Xianglin Sao. In a cold winter night, Boss Lin is desperate. He is pressured by all sides clamoring for money, visualized as angry faces that are superimposed on the screen. He has nowhere to get money, and even thinks of committing suicide. All these familiar scenes usually applied to the poorest are now applied by Xia Yan to the Lin family. This in fact goes against the usual way of other more orthodox films to present landlords and businessmen as purely evil agents. The shifting of the perspective itself is subversive of communist discourse. If a man with the middle social status is a victim, why cannot one go further? Except for the topmost in the social hierarchy (who are necessarily few in number), who is not a victim? Relativization at one point often shakes up the whole structure based on a strict binary.

The world of Lin is hierarchically structured too. However, in Xia Yan's film adaptation much more than in Mao Dun's novella, many human relationships in this world are dominated by family, acquaintanceship and competition more than by class struggles. We see in the film all types of familiar characters, but they appear here in new relationships to one another. First, there is the relationship between Lin and his two

[42] Mao Dun 茅盾, "The Lin Family Shop," in *Complete Works of Mao Dun* 茅盾全集 （Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984）, vol.8, 268.

apprentices (employees). The two young men look nice and handsome, qualifying them as candidates to receive the class enlightenment like Xianglin Sao's young brother-in-law. The more important apprentice is even played by the same actor who plays the part of the revolutionary son in *Revolution Family*. Yet these young men seem contented with their status as apprentices. Lin's attitude towards them is not harsh exploitation, but is that of a father towards his children. In return, they look up to him as a father too. It never dawns on them that they should resist the employment. They are only preoccupied with helping him to do better business and outdo his rivals. What is more, the film even visually depicts the romantic sentiments between Lin's daughter and the older apprentice who is like Lin's true heir, all of which is quite unusual at the time.

Then there is the relationship between Lin and the poor peasants from the surrounding countryside. In economic terms, he is much better off and stands in a higher position. Yet in the film, he is dependent on them for his business. One major reason for his bankruptcy is that these clients are too poor to buy from him. His attitude towards them is one of pleading and obsequy. He tries to persuade them to buy, but they always go away without paying him any attention. Xia Yan even brings Old Tongbao in *Spring Silkworms* into the film. Old Tongbao stops his son from buying a hat from the Lin Shop since they cannot afford it. Yet, Old Tongbao feels guilty of disappointing Boss Lin, and admits that "Boss Lin has always been nice to me." Here personal feelings between a peasant and a shop-owner are highlighted.

Like many propaganda films such as *The New Year's Sacrifice*, the major issue in *The Lin Family Shop* is money: where to get enough money to pay others? How to strike a balance? Yet though Lin is short of money all the time, Xia Yan makes the human relationships that money entails far more complex than the binaries of lenders/exploiters versus debtors/exploitees. Lin's relationship with the small shareholders (represented by two poor women) is almost a reversal of what we have seen in *The New Year's Sacrifice*. The two poor women are the lenders who pressure Lin just as relentlessly as the nationalist officials. On the other hand, Lin also tries to collect money others owe him. In *The New Year's Sacrifice*, the creditors ask money back without considering whether the debtors can pay it or not, and the story is told from the debtor's point of view. *The Lin Family Shop* is told from the creditor's point of view. Eager to pay back others to whom he owes money, Lin has to collect enough money. His apprentice goes all around the town to collect money at risks of being robbed or taken into draft by armies. Lin anxiously waits for him, with one creditor from Shanghai sitting right there in his shop, waiting too. Thus, the creditor Lin is humanized. So is the creditor from Shanghai. Others owe Lin money, and Lin owes this Shanghai guy money. This Shanghai businessman stands in a higher position in the business ladder than Lin. However, he genuinely understands Lin's predicament even though he has to take the money away anyway.[43]

[43] Interestingly, this person is played by Chen Shu, who is one of the few recognizable and recognized actors who monopolized the casting of stereotypical bad guys at the time, for example in *Reconnaissance across the Yangtze River* (渡江侦察记).

Besides, in an overall portrayal of the old world as a hell, Xia Yan even introduces entertaining elements of local color into the film that lighten the tone and complicate the picture. Thus, when Lin has good business, two clowns appear, singing and dancing, to amuse him in return for some pocket money. This offers a pleasant visual spectacle. Mao Dun describes the New Year season in the town as completely desolate, yet we can feel in the film some happy and festive atmosphere. We see Miss Lin strolling on the street with her friend, surrounded by other people who seem to fully enjoy themselves. With scenes of local customs, the film offers some rare glimpses into a non-political world of Chinese culture and tradition.

In all, in this film about a petty businessman, through the ambivalent characterization of Boss Lin and the quagmire he is caught in, Xia Yan shows the loopholes of the official communist discourse, although we can only guess how much this is intended by him. No wonder that the film became Xia Yan's biggest "crime" in the run-up to the Cultural Revolution in 1965, which shows the unacceptability of such an ambivalent position in communist China of the time.

Xia Yan as a Repressed Humanist

Xia Yan's adaptation of Ba Jin's *The Restful Garden* (Qiyuan) for Hong Kong in 1962 can show by contrast that his strategies of adaptation in mainland China in the

1950s and 1960s were partly self-conscious efforts to conform.[44] This adaptation was between the making of his two other adaptations that directly feature communist revolutionaries, *Revolution Family* (1959) and *Red Crag* (1965) in mainland China. This Hong Kong film is renamed *Between Tears and Smiles* (Guyuan chunmeng). The occasion of Xia Yan's writing the script is sharply different from the propaganda aim of film production in mainland China. The film was written expressly for the actress Xia Meng, highlighting the star system in Hong Kong. Xia Yan's adaptation with no approved communist message reveals his yet another role as a humanist, though that role, reserved for Hong Kong, must be repressed for years, only to be revived after the Cultural Revolution.[45]

Ba Jin's novel is about the vicissitude of two families centered around a big compound, the titular Restful Garden. The first person narrator, a writer like Ba Jin, visits the garden and gets to know its story. The Yang family is the rich former owner of the compound. Within this big family, Yang Mengchi is an old-fashioned Chinese intellectual who lives a reckless life and leads his family to financial ruin. However, unlike other family members intent on monetary profits, he is reluctant to sell the old family house

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[44] This section is based on a reading of Xia Yan's script, since the actual film is unavailable. The film was directed by Zhu Shilin, and made by Fenghuang Studio in Hong Kong, which in the 1950s produced some leftist movies.

[45] Xia Yan had been in Hong Kong before. In 1941, he went to Hong Kong at the command of Zhou Enlai to flee the war and the persecution of KMT after the "Wannan Incident" 皖南事变 and to work as a journalist there. From 1947 to 1949, Xia Yan fled to Hong Kong, again at the command of Zhou Enlai, when the negotiations between KMT and the communists were sure to fail. See his *Lazily Looking for My Old Dream* 懒寻旧梦录, 447-455, 565, 571.

because it is designed by his father. He is later driven out of home by his elder son and lives miserably alone. However, his younger son always seeks him out and comforts him. The narrator's friend Yao Guodong is the present owner of the compound. He does not work yet is very rich and believes that he enjoys a happy family life. However, his kind new wife Wan Zhaohua is having a hard relationship with her stepson Little Tiger, who is spoiled by his maternal grandparents. The novel ends with two deaths: the drowning of Little Tiger and the death of Yang Mengchi.

In the 1955 version of this novel published in mainland China, the editor adds an "abstract" after the title page, saying that the novel "describes the inevitable decline of the feudal landlord classes. In this book, undeserved money becomes the cause of family catastrophes and lends opportunities for the younger generation to go to ruin."[46] This "abstract" represents the orthodox reading of the novel in the 1950s. Even after being given such overtones and interpretations, the novel would not have been eligible for adaptation in mainland China, because its content is irredeemably unorthodox. It has no class struggles, no great conflicts or dramatic events, and cannot qualify as a piece of leftist work. What is more, it is focused on several aristocratic families of old China and is fully sympathetic to them.

Xia Yan's version is an eye-catching anomaly among all his adaptations in the 1950s and 1960s. What interests me here is why Xia Yan chooses this novel to adapt and how

[46] Ba Jin, *The Restful Garden* 憩园 (Shanghai: Xinwenyi chubanshe, 1955), publication information page.

his ways of adaptation are different from those in mainland China. Xia Yan's filmic adaptation is very faithful to Ba Jin's novel, although not in terms of the fidelity that he professed but did not deliver in mainland China. It is against his adaptation strategies for mainland China that his fidelity to Ba Jin's novel here stands out as so striking. One might expect Xia Yan to at least insert some orthodox communist message into the film, as he had done in the 1930s in Shanghai, to educate the Hong Kong moviegoers. Yet the film, without accusations of the old society and without any revolutionary message, falls short of even the political standard of the 1930s leftist films. Obviously, the major changes Xia Yan makes to the novel are only for the sake of a smooth narration.[47] Since the novel is very long, Xia Yan cuts a lot. His script now reads as a compact and swift-moving drama of two families.

It is significant to see what he chooses to keep in his film. The two families in the novel who succeed each other as owners of the huge luxurious house are both aristocrats. Yao Guodong is a real landlord who, according to Ba Jin's novel, owns more than 1,000 *mu* (165 acres) of land. Compared to them, Master Lu in *The New Year's Sacrifice* and Boss Lin in *The Lin Family Shop* are close to nothing. These characters in *Between Tears and Smiles* would be typically seen as exploiters and are precisely the targets of revolution. Yet Xia Yan keeps them, and makes them kind and lovable. It is in them that

[47] This includes narrating the events in a chronological order, and adding some scenes that that are only narrated indirectly in the novel. Also, the narrator "I" is deleted, partly to simplify the plot and partly to avoid the confusion of this narrator with Ba Jin himself.

human nobility is enshrined. Both families have lots of servants, who are bonded to their masters and mistresses as family members and care deeply for the family. Xia Yan keeps this intact too. Also interesting is the focus on family relationships in the script of Xia Yan. For him, the center on family relationships is a new theme, when in *Revolution Family*, he tries to transcend the individual family and makes the party the ultimate family. In *Between Tears and Smiles*, the relationship between husband and wife, stepmother and stepson, father and daughter, father and son, are all dealt with in detail instead of being avoided or dismissed as irrelevant.

In this film, Xia Yan approaches his characters as human beings, not as typical specimens of a class. In 1983, he made a comment on the film, admitting that "I like this novel and am sympathetic to the several common yet kind characters."[48] These humanist concerns reveal a new aspect of Xia Yan. Also, according to Xia Yan, he is foregrounding the Chineseness of these characters, and in the film he is trying to "represent as much as possible these several ordinary Chinese characters with their happiness and sorrows."[49] This Chineseness seems to lie in the care people show for one another, especially among family members, and is encoded in old-fashioned characters of a bygone era. Thus what emerges from the film is a new image of the old China. This is not a China so corrupted everywhere that it must be destroyed with the fire of revolution and to be replaced with a

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[48] Xia Yan, *The Restful Garden: A Film Script* 憩园：电影文学剧本 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1983), postscript 憩园后记, 67.
[49] Ibid, 66, 67.

brand new China. Instead, this is a China with its beautiful moral relationships, a China whose decline and demise are lamented.[50]

Between the works that Xia Yan adapted as political tasks and this Hong Kong film chosen by himself, the latter might be closer to Xia Yan's heart.[51] He reserved his officially unacceptable feelings for Hong Kong.[52] The vicissitude of the script and the film itself is symptomatic of this repressed aspect of Xia Yan. Xia Yan was fully aware of the unorthodox nature of the film. To prevent troubles, he asked the filmmakers in Hong Kong not to include his name in the credit. Thus the film's director, Zhu Shilin, was shown as the scriptwriter. After the film was finished, Xia Yan refused to watch it. Fortunately, "with no reference to my name, no screening and no public distribution [in mainland China], [the film] thus went un-noticed." The unknown film did not harm Xia Yan, and he believed he forgot the film completely.[53] His "forgetting" this film might be better explained as a compulsive repression of a troublesome memory, because he was fully aware of the unorthodox and unacceptable nature of the work. In 1981, Lin

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[50] These sentiments can also be related to Xia Yan's personal feelings about the loss of his familial old house in Shaoxing. The immense house compound, with its more than 100 rooms, was turned by his brother into a factory. See Xia Yan's essay "Burning of my old Home," collected in Hui Lin 会林 and Shao Wu 绍武 ed, *Research Materials on Xia Yan's Plays* 夏衍戏 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1980), vol.1, 91.

[51] As Xia Yan's granddaughter remembers, both *Red Crag* and *Revolution Family* are not among Xia Yan's favorite adapted scripts, which include *Spring Silkworms*, *The New Year's Sacrifice*, *The Lin Family Shop* and *Between Tears and Smiles*. See Shen Yun 沈芸, "Historical Evidence, Memory and Researches, 75.

[52] Xia Yan's consciousness of Hong Kong as a different place to voice different views can already be seen in the film script he wrote in 1949, *The Way of Love* 恋爱之道, later made into a film by Ouyang Yuqian. The film features the choice of a woman for a poor but upright person over a rich but debauched guy. Love is the main thread of the story.

[53] Xia Yan, "Postscript to *The Restful Garden* "《憩园》后记, 67.

Nien-tung (Lin Niantong), a Hong Kong scholar, reminded him of the film, and Xia Yan felt like "finding an orphan that has been forsaken by me for years."[54] That these warm comments of Xia Yan on the film were made in 1983 also shows his new perspective of his past works. The humanism in this film anticipates the humanist adaptations of leftist literature in the early 1980s, such as Shui Hua's adaptation of Lu Xun's *Regret for the Past* (Shangshi, 1981), and Ling Zifeng's adaptation of Lao She's *The Rickshaw Boy* (Luotuo xiangzi, 1982).

Dilemmas for a Communist Intellectual

The contradictory roles that Xia Yan assumed as a conforming vanguard, an ambivalent critic and a repressed humanist bring out the dilemma of Xia Yan as a communist intellectual. Xia Yan had always been a loyal party member. His involvement in literature and art had never been a purely artistic activity, but rather an unabashedly political act. As he later summarized, "what I wrote was mostly to serve politics."[55] The film scripts he wrote in the 1930s are meant to educate the mass and propagate the communist message. We can say he became an artist, a highly political one for that, because he was a party member, and he soon became adept at both films and plays.

Yet his position changed dramatically after 1949. Before 1949, he was an energetic

[54] Ibid, 68.
[55] Xia Yan, *Autobiography of Xia Yan* 夏衍自传, 319.

cultural worker intent on attacking the nationalists and facilitating victory of communism. Yet when the victory did come in 1949 in the establishment of the PRC, it was not a brave new world that fully agreed with his dream. As Chinese critic Li Shaobai aptly points out, when the party came into power, cinema "switched to the upholding and extolling of the new regime from disagreeing and negating the previous regime."[56] In 1949, Xia Yan went to Beijing, and that was the first time he had ever been in a liberated area, where he felt unused to everything, including the military uniform and the pistol he was given. His quite liberal way of doing cultural work in Shanghai had to give way to the military way of doing politics as in Yan'An.

Many of his confusions can be traced to his years working against the KMT. As one of his former comrades and superiors Li Kenong told him in 1949,

> Previously we had only one goal: to fight against the nationalist establishments. At that time you could jump and gallop like a wild horse. But now the environment has changed. As a leader of the party in power, this wild horse has to be put into harness.[57]

The communist army were disciplined and organized, while Xia Yan and other underground party members and cultural workers had a habit of acting and speaking rather freely. Thus, Xia Yan was criticized for being too free with his old friends in the former Shanghai leftist film circle. As a former journalist and cultural worker, he was

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[56] Li Shaobai 李少白, "Xia Yan's Historical Contribution," 4.
[57] Xia Yan, *Lazily Looking for my Old Dream* 懒寻旧梦录, 640-1.

also not used to the condition of the press in Shanghai after 1949, where there was not a single advertisement in the newspapers, and the size of the newspaper was greatly reduced. In post-1949 Shanghai, he could not repress his urge to resume his work as an editor or journalist and published essays under many pen names. His directly involving himself in the filmmaking of PRC could also be partly attributed to this urge.

Another of Xia Yan's confusion or discontent with the military-style communism was the shocking ignorance of the cadres. He administered a test for these cadres in Shanghai and found few of them knew when the May-Fourth movement took place. Later this test was criticized as "enhancing the pride of the intellectuals and damping the pride of the workers, peasants and cadres."[58] Here we can see the conflicts between the two strains of Chinese communism: one based in cities and working among intellectuals, the other based in the countryside and focusing on military actions. As early as the Yan'an period, urban students and intellectuals who came to Yan'an, the revolutionary Mecca, had to be "rectified" to adapt themselves to the military-countryside style.[59] Xia Yan might have believed that with the national victory of the communists, the focus could now be shifted from the countryside to the city. He might not have anticipated that the countryside-style still prevailed over the urban style after 1949, and the conflicts

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[58] Ibid, 219.

[59] Paul Clark sees the post-1949 and pre-Cultural Revolution Chinese filmmaking as a constantly re-adjusting relationship between two strains of filmmakers respectively from Shanghai and Yan'an. The former are intellectuals and experts in techniques, and the latter emphasize political control. See his *Chinese Cinema*, especially chapters II and III. Clark's thesis is inspiring, but as Yingjin Zhang points out, the division between the two camps quickly blurred. See Yingjing Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema,* 199.

developed into a series of campaigns against intellectuals. Hence his difficult position. On one hand, he was a loyal party member. On the other hand, he had been working among intellectuals, and he himself can be seen as an intellectuals. In 1956, he even made a speech on "knowledge as power," which was later criticized too. After the Cultural Revolution, he openly lamented that,

> Chinese intellectuals supported the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) so devotedly, yet in the past four decades, what had they gone through? ….[In each campaign] they were the first targets. I had been pondering on this issue for a long time, yet I cannot find a logical answer, and can only say this is a tragedy of our nation.[60]

Here we can see how Xia Yan was still torn between his loyalty to the party and his sympathy with the intellectuals, which was one of his "crimes" during the Cultural Revolution.

Xia Yan used to be able to find ways to escape the nationalist censorship to promote his communist message. Now, he had to censor himself first. Sometimes, when the political atmosphere seemed loosened a little bit, his personal preference popped up. He had been always opposing the narrow choice of subject matters in films. In 1957, he used the metaphor that our food should not only be healthy but be tasteful, to lead to the conclusion that films should be "more diverse and tasteful."[61] His stance later also

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[60] Ibid, 244-5.

[61] Xia Yan, "Several Metaphors and Associations"几个比喻和联想, collected in his *Essays on*

contributed a lot to the cultural thaw in the early 1960s.[62] Of course, as Paul Pickowicz rightly points out, Xia Yan "was no liberal."[63] As a high official, his relationship with the communist regime is complex. Yet, as Paul Pickowicz puts it, Xia Yan simply believes that "such socialization work should not be done crudely."[64] All his "mistakes" returned with a vengeance in the Cultural Revolution. He had never been in prison under the nationalist rule, yet he was imprisoned in 1966-1975. When he was released, one of his legs was broken and his eyes were almost blind. Yet after his rehabilitation in 1978, he kept quiet on the topic of his personal experiences in the Cultural Revolution, saying that "I will not write on it, because such writing is not good for us. Of course, I remember those days very well."[65]

As Paul Pickowicz points out through the case of Zheng Junli, from 1949 to 1976, "the problem of the relationship between artists and the state remains the key issue."[66] Xia Yan, an artist-bureaucrat, may not fully like the revolutions and class struggles in his adapted films, yet often he had to conform, sometimes successfully, as in *The New Year's Sacrifice* or *Revolutionary Family*, sometimes not so successfully, as in the case of *The Lin Family Shop*. His works on mainland China neatly fit Pickowicz's concept of

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Film 电影论文集, 79.
[62] For his role in the early 1960s, see Paul Pickowicz, "The Limits of Cultural Thaw," 98-100.
[63] Ibid, 100.
[64] Ibid, 100.
[65] Qian Jiang 钱江, "Coming to Xia Yan's side" 来到夏衍身边, *Xinwenhua shiliao* 新文化史料, 1 (2000), 48.
[66] Paul Pickowicz, "Zheng Junli," 1068.

"creative accommodation"[67] He can only reserve his humanist concerns incognito for Hong Kong. He was discontent with the dominant ideology, yet some of his films promote that ideology and contribute to its reinforcement. He was persecuted in the Cultural Revolution, yet some of his works helped construct the revolutionary myth that fed the Red Guards' iconoclastic fervor. In his late years, he regretted the complicity of many in the catastrophes after 1949 which culminated in the Cultural Revolution, and lamented how we, "educated by May-Fourth, could have gone with the current, gradually became 'tame instruments' and lost the courage to think independently."[68] In retrospect, this might be read as an apt self-perception of his roles in cultural leadership and film adaptation in the 1950-1960s.

At the end, it might be apt to repeat some of the questions Paul Pickowicz raises concerning the position of artists after 1949.

> Who made accommodations with the Party? Who did not? To what extent were there degrees of accommodation? ….Are accommodation and complicity the same thing?...Was resistance an option?... How did survival strategies evolve? …How did artists prove their loyalty? …Did such artists really love the Communist Party? Did they have any choice? [69]

Xia Yan's film adaptation of literature during the socialist period demonstrated that not only did options exist but they also produced noticeable degrees of accommodation in an

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[67] See ibid, 1069.
[68] Xia Yan, *Lazily Looking for my Old Dream* 懒寻旧梦录, 642.
[69] Paul Pickowicz, "Zheng Junli," 1069.

artist's creative career. As a party official, Xia intentionally stayed away from resistance or opposition in his film works. Historically, serious criticism of the problematic socialist legacy was only possible after the Cultural Revolution, and this is the focus of my exploration of Xie Jin's film adaptations in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

History as Familial Melodrama: Xie Jin, the Early and Mid-1980s

The "Xie Jin Mode" and Melodrama

Xie Jin (19 -) is one of the most important film directors after 1949. With works that span three decades of socialist history, he is a phenomenon in Chinese film history. As Chinese critic Dai Jinhua puts it, Xie Jin means "an entire era," and addressing Xie Jin's films is no less than "addressing contemporary Chinese history."[1] He was already active in the 1960s. The story of his *Red Detachment of Women* (Hongse niangzijun, 1960) became one of the model plays during the Cultural Revolution. Some of his films, such as *Stage Sisters* (Wutai jiemei, 1964), were condemned. In the Cultural Revolution, Xie Jin was toppled yet was also given opportunities to make some films, such as *On the Docks* (Hai Gang, 1973), *Chunmiao* (1974) and *The Rock Bay* (Panshi wan, 1975). However, it was after the Cultural Revolution, in the early and mid-1980s, that Xie Jin's career gained a new lease and reached its peak.[2] Especially popular were his films reflecting on

[1] Dai Jinhua 戴锦华, "History and Narration--Xie Jin's Filmic Art" 历史与叙事——谢晋电影艺术管见, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998), 142, 160.

[2] Given the tight political control over films from the 1950s to 1970s, we can hardly say that Xie Jin's films made in those decades are his in the sense that they are stamped with his unique signature. It is only during the post-Cultural Revolution years that Xie Jin began to develop his

the past catastrophes during the anti-rightist campaign and the Cultural Revolution, i.e., *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (Tianyunshan chuanqi, 1980), *The Herdsman* (Muma ren, 1982) and *Hibiscus Town* (Furong zhen, 1986), which are the films to be examined in this chapter.

Yet during the mid and late 1980s, Xie Jin came under fierce attacks. In 1986, Zhu Dake, a critic based in Shanghai, started the first wave of sharp criticisms of Xie Jin at a conference, and his piece was published in *Wenyi Bao*. To Zhu, the most striking flaw of Xie Jin's films is their sentimentalism:

> Moral passions centered around the film protagonists ripple out cleverly and cunningly and excite the audiences to hot tears. The audiences are put in a state of emotional coma to be manipulated. They have to accept the artist's old-fashioned moral values. All with a common sense will, to their surprise, find that this out-of-date aesthetics, with sentimentalism as the highest value, has something in common with the religious propaganda of the medieval [Europe]. It is an implicit negation of the independent subjectivity, the modern reflective personality and scientific rationalism. [3]

Following Zhu's suite, other critics pointed out other flaws of Xie Jin's films. Jia Leilei argues that in *Hibiscus Town*, Xie Jin is replacing historical judgment with moral judgment, making those responsible for the anti-rightist campaign and the Cultural

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own style and subject and became one of China's most important film *auteurs*.

[3] Zhu Dake 朱大可, "The Weaknesses of Xie Jin's Mode of Filmmaking" 谢晋电影模式的缺陷, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 91.

Revolution also ugly and morally corrupt.[4] Wang Hui, an important theorist in contemporary China, similarly believes that Xie Jin's films tend to replace political power relationship by other types of relationship, such as love or moral allegories.[5] These criticisms popularize a largely negative term, the "Xie Jin mode" (*Xie Jin moshi*) of filmmaking.

In response to these scathing attacks on Xie Jin, some senior critics and filmmakers fought back. In response to Zhu Dake's charge of Xie Jin's sentimentalism, Shao Mujun published an article half a month later in 1986, also in *Wenyi Bao*, arguing that Xie Jin's films are both emotional and thought-provocative. Shao praises that Xie Jin, "in an epic scale, reveals the major social conflicts that the Chinese people experience the most deeply and that can best represent the eras."[6] Then, in a later piece, in response to Jia Leilei, Shao argues that by incorporating moral judgments, Xie Jin makes the historical judgments more effective, and audiences the worldwide embrace the formula that those responsible for political catastrophes must be morally corrupt.[7] Similarly, Chen Huangmei, a former party leader in charge of film production, in a piece before the

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[4] See Jie Leilei 贾磊磊, "Moral Judgments Should Not Impair Historical Judgments" 道德的批判不应有损历史的批判, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 497-501.

[5] See Wang Hui 汪晖, "The Secret to the Substitution of Politics by Morality in Xie Jin's films" 政治与道德及其置换的秘密——谢晋电影分析, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 178-205.

[6] Shao Mujun 邵牧君, "A Defense for Xie Jin's Films" 为谢晋电影一辩, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 96-7.

[7] Shao Mujun 邵牧君, "We are All Residents in the Same Hibiscus Town" 同是芙蓉镇上人, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 502-511.

making of the film *Hibiscus Town*, suggests that the film should combine "personal tragedies with tragedies of history and of the time," and that the four protagonists in the film "should form sharp contrasts of souls, of morality, of beauty versus ugliness and good versus evil."[8] To be sure, Xie Jin's film *Hibiscus Town* has these "desired" qualities.

Noteworthy is a piece in defense of Xie Jin written by senior film critic Mei Duo, which is striking in its phrasing and diction. Mei Duo describes a Xie Jin who "just stands up from ten years of humiliation [meaning the Cultural Revolution] and now has to face a storm [meaning the younger critics' attack of him]."[9] After the Cultural Revolution, Xie Jin shed tears, which are tears of a person who "whips his own soul, and who has suffered great sorrows and great pains," but his blood "is flowing with the blood of the people! He was reborn!"[10] Another critic Ren Zhonglun says that Xie Jin "is a realist full of idealism, a ceaseless explorer who tries to catch up with the times, and who pushes onward burdened with the mental cross given him by history."[11] Both critics, in their defense of Xie Jin, employs a melodramatic mode that is typical of Xie Jin's films,

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[8] Huang Mei 荒煤, "From Novel to Film: Speech at the Conference of the Adaptation of *Hibiscus Town*" 从小说到电影——在〈芙蓉镇〉改编电影学术讨论会上的发言, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 487, 488.

[9] Mei Duo 梅朵, "On Xie Jin: an Outline" 论谢晋——一个轮廓, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 19.

[10] Ibid, 20, 24.

[11] Ren Zhonglun 任仲伦, "On Xie Jin's Films" 论谢晋电影, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 3.

and Ren Zhonglun's characterization of Xie Jin is even similar to Xie Jin's own characterization of the rightist in his films.

The above attacks and defenses of Xie Jin show that they are not fighting over Xie Jin himself, but over a type of films which is usually called melodrama. Many of the characteristics of Xie Jin's works in the new era neatly fit in the melodrama category. His sentimentalism, his replacement of political issues by moral ones, his viewing history and the public sphere through the individual and the private, his polarization of good versus evil with no middle ground, his insistent representation of the victimization of the innocent and the righteous, his general plot of sudden reversals of fortunes--all these are typical features of the melodrama mode both western and Chinese. What the attacking and the defending sides in this debate disagree is not so much whether Xie Jin is employing such a mode, although they usually do not use the word "melodrama," but whether this mode is still valid for historical representation.

Melodrama studies have been flourishing in western academia since the 1970s. Thomas Elsaesser, in his seminal article, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," traces the historical development of melodrama in European countries and in Hollywood films, pointing out melodrama as a genre that is often popular in "periods of intense social and ideological crisis."[12] To Elsaesser, melodrama indicates

[12] Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in Bill

> the ways in which popular culture has not only taken note of social crises and the fact that the losers are not always those who deserve it most, but has also resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms.[13]

In another important book in the field of melodrama studies, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks sees melodrama "less as a genre than as an imaginative mode,"[14] and as "a mode of conception and expression, as a certain fictional system for making sense of experience, as a semantic field of force."[15] Both ways of addressing melodrama are useful in my project in this chapter, in which I will approach Xie Jin's works from the point of view of melodrama as both a popular genre in fiction and film, and as a mode of imagination that people remember and experience the past.

There are some important articles which study Chinese films, and Xie Jin's works in particular, from the perspective of melodrama, many of which were published in 1993 and 1994. Ann E. Kaplan's article "Melodrama /subjectivity / ideology: Western melodrama theories and their relevance to recent Chinese cinema," aims to combine an aesthetic genre approach with a political one.[16] Kaplan examines some Chinese films in

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Nichols, ed. *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1985), 167.

[13] Thomas Elsaesser, ""Tales of Sound and Fury," 170.

[14] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination n*: *Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), preface 1995，vii

[15] Ibid, preface 1995，xvii.

[16] Ann Kaplan, "Melodrama /subjectivity / ideology: Western melodrama theories and their relevance to recent Chinese cinema," in Wimal Dissanayake ed, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*

the 1980s from the feminist point of view, and sees Xie Jin's *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, though featuring many women, as still a "woman's melodrama" complicit with the patriarchal ideology.

Ma Ning's 1994 article, "Spatiality and Subjectivity in Xie Jin's Film Melodrama of the New Period," points out Xie Jin's melodrama as a continuation of the Chinese melodramatic tradition in its insider-outsider, moral-amoral divide through construction of the viewing subject. Ma Ning analyzes "the spatial relocation--or even dislocation--of the female characters" and its ideological significance.[17] Ma Ning's approach of examining the viewing subject is inspiring, yet he seems to adopt a somewhat unfounded generally negative attitude towards the Chinese ethical tradition, and many of his analyses of the positioning of characters on screen seem arbitrary and unconvincing.

Nick Browne, in his "Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Melodrama," aptly calls Xie Jin's works "political melodrama." [18] Browne focuses on

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(New York: Cambridge U P. 1993), 9-29.

[17] Ma Ning, "Spatiality and Subjectivity," in Nick Browne, Paul Pickowicz, Vivian Sobshack, Esther Yau eds., *New Chinese Cinemas* (NY: Cambridge UP, pp.15-39).16. Ma Ning has another article, published in 1993, on Chinese melodrama in general. The article, titled "Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s," analyzes the importance of family in Chinese society, and why Chinese family melodrama, especially in the early 1980s, "was quick to respond to significant changes in party politics" (32). Ma Ning in particular explores the family relationship as represented in several films representing the countryside. He argues that melodrama at this time perpetuated the power relationship within the family. See Ma Ning, "Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence," in Wimal Dissanayake ed, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, 29-58.

[18] Nick Browne, "Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Melodrama," in Nick Browne, Paul Pickowicz, Vivian Sobshack, Esther Yau eds. *New Chinese Cinemas*, 43. Browne also points out the risks of using the western genre term "melodrama" to China (42). See also Kaplan, "Melodrama /subjectivity / ideology," 9-11.

Hibiscus Town's narrative pattern of "crime, punishment, and restitution" which, Browne argues, is "figuration of a political interpretation of economic events: acquisition, loss, and return of objects of value (literal and symbolic)."[19] Paul Pickowicz's article, "Melodramatic Representation and the May-Fourth Tradition of Chinese Film," examines the melodramatic tradition that Xie Jin is carrying on from the 1930s and 1940s, when even the leftist filmmakers could not help using the melodrama mode.[20] Pickowicz aptly points out that Xie Jin's works emerged "in a context of profound cultural crisis, but this time it was the new socialist culture and morality that had taken root in the 1950s that were in crisis."[21]

I will build on these studies of Xie Jin's melodrama and examine Xie Jin's melodrama from the perspective of his adaptation of novels. Different from his works before and during the Cultural Revolution, most of Xie Jin's important works made in the "new-era" are adaptations of novels from contemporary fiction. *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* is based on Lu Yanzhou's novel with the same title, *The Herdsman* on Zhang Xianliang's short story "The Soul and The Flesh" (Ling yu rou), and *Hibiscus Town* on Gu Hua's novel of the same title. In addition to the three films dealing with the rightists, his *Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain* (Gaoshann xia de huahuan, 1982), *The Last*

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[19] Nick Browne, "Society and Subjectivity," 46.
[20] Paul Pickowicz, "Melodramatic Representation and the 'May Fourth' Tradition of Chinese Cinema," in Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang eds., *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993), 295-326.
[21] Ibid, 36.

*Aristocrat (*Zuihou de guizu, 1989) and *An Old Man and His Dog* (Laoren yu gou, 1993) are all adapted from contemporary fiction (one of which by Taiwanese writer Bai Xianyong). One striking feature of his early three films on rightists in the 1980s is their extreme faithfulness to the literary sources.[22] Among the works by major filmmakers covered in this dissertation, these films might be the most faithful in terms of plots and characterizations with many dialogues taken directly from fiction.

As I have said in the Introduction of this dissertation, faithfulness to the literary source is itself an issue in the history of Chinese filmic adaptations. Both Republican filmmakers and filmmakers of the fifth-generation like Zhang Yimou unabashedly make drastic changes. The filmmakers in the 1950s and 1960s, like Xia Yan, professed fidelity and respect for the literary sources. However, they made big changes in practices, although in a subdued and unostentatious way, to adjust the sources to the political requirements of the time. Yet during the early 1980s, filmmakers of the older generation, whose career had already been established before the Cultural Revolution, resorted to faithfulness. Among them, Xie Jin's use of contemporary literary works was extremely successful and showed the common ground between film and literature at this period.

In the early 1980s, there is a full-fledged literary genre called "reflection literature" (*fansi wenxue*) about the life of former-rightists, written by the so-called "return-ers"

[22] The early 1980s claimed some of the most faithful adaptations, such as films of Xie Jin and Shui Hua's adaptation of Lu Xun's classical story "Regret for the Past" ("Shangshi"). The cases of Shui Hua and Xie Jin are different in that they chose different literary sources to be faithful to. Shui Hua now could finally be faithful to the May-fourth tradition without too many political qualms.

(*guilai zhe*), former rightist writers who now returned to writing. Xie Jin's three films on rightists are based on such fiction. These literary works and the films adapted from them share a narrative pattern of the good person suffering at the hands of evil guys. In the end, justice is restored and the good rightist is rehabilitated. Besides, these works also aim to evoke strong emotional response. As Xie Jin puts it, "[U]nless a novel or a literary work moves me, it won't move my audience…It has to move the audience, but first, it has to move me to tears before I can be sure that I will be able to make that happen."[23] His films and important literary works at the time both use the melodramatic mode in their sentimentalism and their characterization of good versus evil. An affective chain is thus formed: the literary works move Xie Jin, and he tries to move the audiences in the same way, or move them even more strongly and deeply with his filmic techniques.

The melodramatic mode was already extensively used in the 1950s and 1960s, but now they take on a new look in Xie Jin's works.[24] Different from the fourth and fifth-generations of Chinese filmmakers, Xie Jin, like before, still puts strong emphasis on the script, believing that the script "is the basis of the film." He argues that a script graded at 70 points can be elevated by the filmmakers into a grade of 80, but a script with

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[23] George Semsel, interview with Xie Jin, in Semsel's *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 108.

[24] There is also continuity between his careers before, during and after the Cultural Revolution. One of his works, *Qiu Jin* (1983), is based on a play written by Xia Yan in the 1930s, revisiting the earliest stage of the official version of the revolutionary history of China. Even after the Cultural Revolution, Xie Jin maintained a close relationship with former cultural leaders such as Xia Yan and Chen Huangmei.

a grade of 60 can never be elevated to 80.[25] An emphasis on the script leads him to literature. In 1985, when interviewed by George Semsel, Xie Jin says that "in recent years the progress made in literature is far greater than that made in film."[26] He looks to literature for inspiration and envies novelists for their relative freedom from censorship and concerns of reception.[27]

Xie Jin also shared a lot with those rightist writers and the rightist figures in their works. Born in 1921, he witnessed the heyday of socialism in the early 1950s. During the 1950s and 1960s, these writers and filmmakers already cultivated a strong identification with the dominant communist ideology. When the anti-rightist campaign began in 1957, Xie Jin was fortunately in a basketball team to familiarize himself with the life there, and thus evaded the campaign. He directed an anti-rightist film *The Raging Wind and the Strong Grass* (Jifeng jincao) in 1959. Later he seldom mentioned this film, of which he might feel guilty. Yet he did suffer in the Cultural Revolution. The suffering sometimes plunged these filmmakers and writers into doubt and desperation, but their rehabilitation after the Cultural Revolution only strengthened their confidence and faith in socialism. Ironically, their socialist ideals, largely intact when they suffered in the countryside, were shattered piecemeal during the subsequent market economy in the late 1980s and especially the 1990s, although how this works out can only be amply examined in

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[25] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit of the Art of Film Direction* 我对导演艺术的追求 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998), 116.
[26] George Semsel, interview with Xie Jin, 108.
[27] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 97, 116.

another project.

Perhaps different from western melodrama and Republican-era Chinese melodrama, especially in the three films on rightists to be examined in this chapter, Xie Jin voluntarily foregrounds national politics. These films are not apparent propaganda works like those in the 1950s and 1960s, but they also go quite smoothly with the national policies of reflecting on the past. The family events and personal vicissitudes in the films are used to represent national events. Xie Jin's political ambition in these films is striking. *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* assumes for itself the "necessary" political mission of "summarizing this period of history [the anti-rightist campaign]."[28] Likewise, Xie Jin intends *The Herdsman* to represent "the inner differences of two countries [China and the U.S.], two political systems [the socialist and capitalist ones], two generations, two kinds of people (the working class and the capitalists), two lines (the right one and the wrong one), new China and old China."[29] Xie Jin's goal for this film already displays a melodramatic imaginative mode of sharp conflicts and polarization.

His three films on rightists follow roughly the same narrative pattern, although *Hibiscus Town* stands further apart from the other two. The male protagonist, an intellectual, is wrongfully condemned as a rightist in the 1957 campaign, after which he lives in exile among working people, doing menial work and enduring all kinds of hardships. Yet these sufferings do not dishearten him. He remains upbeat and becomes

[28] Ibid, 77.
[29] Ibid, 135.

mature with the years of suffering. He gets comforts from his political ideals, from the companionship of a trusting woman and from nature. After the Cultural Revolution, he is restored to his former position and lives happily afterwards.[30] In the following pages, I will explore Xie Jin's characterization of the rightists and the comforting elements that he enjoy, the ways these films concur with their literary sources and the ways in which Xie Jin foregrounds some elements to enhance the melodramatic effect.

The Innocent Rightist Persecuted

Melodrama both in the west and in China resorts to a pattern of the innocent and the righteous persecuted. So are Xie Jin's films on the rightists. Different from 18th-century British melodrama in which an innocent girl from the middle-class is sexually persecuted by an evil aristocrat, or the Chinese socialist melodrama in the 1950s and 1960s in which

[30] Here are the plots of the three films. In *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, Luo Qun is an upright party official. He is condemned in 1957 as a rightist, partly because of the intervention of a bad cadre Wu Yao. His former girlfriend Song Wei breaks up with him for political reasons, yet another woman, Feng Qinglan comes to help and support him. Song Wei marries Wu Yao instead. Even after the Cultural Revolution, Luo Qun and his family live in a poor condition. The guilty Song Wei quarrels with her husband Wu Yao for Luo Qun. Finally, Luo is restored to his former position, but his wife dies.

In *The Herdsman*, Xu Lingjun becomes a rightist when young and is exiled to work as a herdsman. He marries Li Xiuzhi. After the Cultural Revolution, he is restored to his position as a teacher. His rich father comes back from the U.S. to China to take him abroad. Xu Lingjun refuses and chooses to stay.

In *Hibiscus Town*, the kind and simple woman Hu Yuyin accumulates some wealth by selling bean curd. Yet she is condemned by the female communist cadre Li Guoxiang, and Hu's husband is persecuted to death. Hu has to sweep the streets together with a rightist named Qin Shutian. The two fall in love and Hu is pregnant. For their relationship, Qin is imprisoned for ten years. After the Cultural Revolution, Qin returns home to his wife and his son.

a girl like Wu Qionghua or “the white-haired girl” from the poorest class is persecuted by an evil landlord, Xie Jin chooses the rightists and their women as carriers of innocence and integrity. They have to suffer undeservedly at the hands of those evil ones, the higher cadres who not only stick to a leftist policies but often have unspeakable sexual motivations, like Wu Yao who is jealous of Luo Qun and steals his girlfriend in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, or like Li Guoxiang who is jealous of Hu Yuyin in *Hibiscus Town*. Yet in the end, these rightists are restored.

The rightist is the unmistakable hero of these films, although in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, he is sometimes presented indirectly through others’ voices, and in *Hibiscus Town*, he emerges quite late in the film and his wife, is also the protagonist. One feature of these rightist heroes is their knowledge, which earns them respect and position yet is also their undoing. With visual strategies absent in the original novel, Xie Jin, in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, especially foregrounds this intellectual aspect of the hero Luo Qun. When the rightist campaign begins in 1957, he is the political commissar of an investigation group of the Tianyun Mountain area. The political commissar is usually an emblem of political correctness, whose mission lies in political and ideological education. Yet the fact that the team he is leading is a quasi-scientific expedition adds scholarly colors to his position. Xie Jin adds one scene in the film to make his intellectual color even stronger. Luo Qun is seen in his office. He holds a stone in his hand, makes some notes, and then puts the stone in a panel of already classified stones representing

the natural resources in the area. Even the poster on the wall of his office, “Be the Strong Force in the Peaceful Construction” (zuo heping jianshe de shenglijun), is surprisingly consistent with the post-Cultural Revolution ideology of “construction” and “modernization,” while devoid of overt political meanings of class struggles.

The fact that Luo Qun is an official-scholar strengthens his position, making it possible for him to implement in his team policies favorable to intellectuals. Yet these local policies are against the national policies of suspecting and guarding against intellectuals. Thus, the film presents Luo Qun as another case in the long tradition of the tension between the party and the intellectuals who are loyal to the party yet who want to have their own say. Luo Qun is willing to respect his engineers, while the party officials led by the major bad guy Wu Yao suspect and try to control the intellectuals all the time. As presented in the film, history proves that Luo Qun’s line of party leadership is the right one. Though cut short by the political campaigns, this line of leadership is to be resumed after the Cultural Revolution. His reports on the construction of the area now prove useful to leaders and the younger generation intent on construction, which reasserts his value.

In this film of Xie Jin, linked with this favorable image of the intellectuals is the use of spectacles as a symbol absent in the original novel. In Cultural Revolution posters, the robust workers, peasants and soldiers are always without spectacles, and the spectacled guy is often presented as pedant, pathetic, funny or despicable. In *Girl Basketball Player*

No.5 (Nulan wu hao, 1957) directed by Xie Jin, the only guy with glasses, though not totally bad, is thin, from a well-to-do family and is full of out-of-date ideas, contrary to the energy of the basketball team. Yet in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, Luo Qun's loyal wife Feng Qinglan's glasses are made much of, although the novel does not in any way specify her glasses. They become recognizable emblems of her virtues. Spectacles, which used to be a funny and despicable sign of bookish intellectuals, now become positive symbols.

The three literary sources of these films were written at roughly the same time.[31] It is interesting to see how in Xie Jin's films, the stature of the rightist as a bearer of knowledge has diminished over time. Luo Qun in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* is apparently an enlightening-hero who brings his knowledge to educate others in issues of great consequence. After being labeled a rightist, deprived of the position as a party-official, he becomes an intellectual intent on private researching and writing. He researches not in the academic sense of the word, but always with an eye of some day implementing his findings.[32] The titles of his manuscripts manifest the spatial and temporal scope of his concerns: *Science, Technology and China*; *The Past, the Present and Future*. He is assuming a gigantic mission, as if he is the one single thinking and

[31] Lu Yanzhou's *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* was published in 1979, Zhang Xianliang's "The Soul and The Flesh" ("Ling yu rou") in 1980, and Gu Hua's *Hibiscus Town* in 1981.

[32] Zhang Xianliang's *Mimosa* (Luhua shu 绿化树) and *Half of Man is Woman* (Nanren de yiban shi nuren 男人的一半是女人) also depict the male hero who employs his free time as a rightist in reading, thinking and writing. Surprisingly, he reads *Das Kapital* of Karl Marx thoroughly, which gives him new visions of history and new spiritual solaces.

waking consciousness during these decades of political chaos. At the beginning of the film, Xie Jin presents him pushing a heavy cart out of the muddy road while discoursing on the fate of China, making this scene absent in the novel an allegory that only with such characters as Luo Qun is China pushed forward.

Different from this strong figure of the rightist in the public realm, the rightist Xu Lingjun in *The Herdsman* and Qin Shutian in *Hibiscus Town* are not party members, let alone high officials. They more and more become heroes among the folks and family members with less and less official credentials. Among the two, Xu Lingjun, although much more humble, is an enlightener in his own way. He has never enjoyed political power, yet he is a school teacher before the anti-rightist campaign, teaching the students about China. Being restored after the Cultural Revolution, he resumes this job in the classroom, still focusing on imparting the message of patriotism. Moreover, in his talks with his billionaire father coming back from the U.S., he enlightens his father not only of his personal experiences, but the lessons he has learned and the patriotism he has cultivated. He succeeds in his persuasion and his father understands him to some extent.

By contrast, Qin Shutian in *Hibiscus Town* is largely confined to his personal sphere. He does not seem to have much concern for the country or for politics beyond his personal survival and the well-being of his nuclear family. His way of dealing with suffering is particularly noteworthy, because his approach is devoid of the sublime halo but adds an absurd and abject color to his life. His approach can be called “mimicking,”

for he cooperates readily with his persecutors and co-opts their condemnations of him, sometimes to his advantages. Instead of the patience and martyrdom of Luo Qun, Qin Shutian acts as a clown. When others condemn him, he condemns himself even more strongly, so that there is no room for others to go further. When others call him “rightist Qin,” he answers happily and loudly, as if that is an honorable title. No wonder that he is called Crazy Qin. When his request for a permission to marry is refused, he argues that “even chickens, pigs and dogs are allowed to mate.” His strategy of coping with suffering is to make a virtue out of necessity and to accept fate. This philosophy is close to later films by younger directors such as *To Live* by Zhang Yimou.

Yet in the latter part of both the original novel and Xie Jin’s adapted film, Qin Shutian transforms from a clown to an innocent and righteous person like Luo Qun. Before his relationship with Hu Yuyin, Qin is not the innocent persecuted person suitable to be the protagonist of a melodrama. His way of going with the persecutors evokes laughter, not tears. In the first part of *Hibiscus Town*, it is Hu Yuyin the new-rich-peasant who fulfills this role of the innocent victim. Yet after Hu Yuyin and Qin Shutian come together, his role changes, and he too becomes innocent and righteous. In light of this latter part, his characterization in the first part of the film also takes on a melodramatic color: imagine how painful it could be to have to act nonchalantly and self-condemningly when he is bleeding inside! After his restoration, he runs into Li Guoxiang on a boat, and lectures to her. His air of confidence and self-righteousness makes him resemble Luo

Qun.

However, Xie Jin avoids in his film too negative a description of Qin Shutian to fit him in the melodramatic mode. In Gu Hua's novel, Qin's complicity goes deeper than surface conformism. In the novel, Qin Shutian tries to gain a higher position among those condemned by persuading his fellow-victims that his crime is much lighter than theirs.[33] He even composes a song titled "Song of the Five-Bad Elements," which is a perfect tool for others to persecute the "bad elements:"

> The five bad elements have not given up their evil plans 五类分子不死心,
> Against the party, against the country, and against the people 反党反国反人民.
> The commune militia hold their guns tightly, 公社民兵紧握枪
> And shoot whoever dares to make trouble……谁敢捣乱把谁崩!

This complication in Qin Shutian is avoided by Xie Jin, because the melodramatic mode cannot tolerate a morally suspicious act of a good person.

Xie Jin also makes Luo Qun in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* more pathetic, while Luo is a perfect hero in the original novel. The novel depicts Luo Qun as a person of an iron will, incapable of being influenced by the ups and downs in his fate and easily keeping his hope and optimism. He never shows any hint of despair or pessimism. After the Cultural Revolution, he looks even stronger and handsomer than before. Even his

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[33] See Gu Hua 古华, *Hibiscus Town* 芙蓉镇 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 39.

profile looks like a "Greek statute."[34] This figure of Luo Qun in the original novel is reminiscent of the communist hero in the 1950s and 1960s films, for example, Xu Yunfeng in *Red Crag*. They are to be emulated, not to be pitied. Commenting on this characterization of Luo Qun in the original novel, Xie Jin believes that "the material provided by the author is not concrete and well-rounded, for example, whether he [Luo Qun] has been pessimistic or has despaired at his fate."[35] This comment is valid. Thus in his adapted film, Xie Jin adds elements to highlight the pathetic aspect of Luo Qun's fate. Only as such, as a human being capable of suffering, can the audience identify with him and pity him. Thus, in the film, after he is labeled a rightist, he begins to smoke to lighten his depression. Isolated, he is stoned by local children. He sometimes despairs. Instead of the iron-man in the novel, Xie Jin depicts him as rich in emotions.

Different from the novel, Xie Jin highlights the undeserved sufferings of this hero. Especially telling is one recurring scene in the film that is given much more weight than in the novel. Luo Qun has to do menial work even after the Cultural Revolution since his case has not been heard yet. Bending heavily under a huge load, he slowly climbs up a flight of stairs. The scene is taken a photo by Zhou Yuzhen, and she takes the photo back to Song Wei, Luo Qun's former girlfriend who is now partly responsible for re-considering these wrongful cases. When Song guiltily looks at the photo, the Luo Qun

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[34] Lu Yanzhou 鲁彦周, *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* 天云山传奇 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1980), 11.
[35] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 83.

in the photo begins to raise his head and look back at her reproachfully. The scene is made symbolic by Xie Jin also because of the many references in the film about Luo Qun "carrying a heavy cross," and carrying by himself "this heavy load." The reference to the cross that Jesus carried in order to redeem mankind highlights the martyrdom nature of the conditions of the rightists.[36]

Similarly, in *The Herdsman*, Xie Jin does not hesitate to make the rightist's condition worse. Different from the short story it is based on, Xie Jin even makes Xu Lingjun considering suicide. Yet this does not mean that Xie Jin can or wants to go beyond political acceptability. Thus in *Hibiscus Town*, he omits the bodily torture that Li Guoxiang might have inflicted on Hu Yuyin in the original novel. The worst physical suffering Hu Yuyin and Qin Shutian undergo in the film is their having to stand in the rain. So Xie Jin will make the victims in his films suffer, but the sufferings are never horrible and can be swallowed by the audience, though with ample tears.

Like the literary sources, these films by Xie Jin all have a rather happy ending. The rightist-heroes are not defeated by suffering or by despair. They are saved by their faith in a type of justice different from the one dealt out in the real political world. This justice is that of the party, the country or the people, with the emphasis shifting in different films. Both Luo Qun in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* and Xu Lingjun in *The Herdsman*, though wronged, do not change their faith in socialism or the country. Luo Qun has been

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[36] Rightist writer Zhang Xianliang often alludes to both Marx and to the Bible in his works.

a loyal party member all the time, and the correctness of the party, at least of its image, is crucial in ensuring his identity. Even in his worst times, he keeps the abstract image of a correct party and a correct revolution. Although excluded, he trusts that "the revolution has not dismissed me, the people have not dismissed me, and I myself have not dismissed myself." To him, the present chaos is just an aberration that will soon be set aright by the party. Even when having to go into exile, he exhorts others not to "have misgivings against the party because of me." This is clearly also Xie Jin's intention in making the film, to make the audiences "all the more love socialism, the party, the people, and pursue a new life."[37]

Both Luo Qun and Xu Lingjun have fond and grateful memories of the golden age before the anti-rightist campaign. Luo Qun is young and powerful. Xu Lingjun, a discarded son of a capitalist, enjoys the parent-like support of the party, and is admitted into the League of the Young Pioneers (*shaoxiandui*) under a red flag. Those fond memories supply them with faith and gratitude. Even Qin Shutian in *Hibiscus Town*, before being a rightist, is dressed decently in his real role as an intellectual. Thus, all three films come to almost a full circle at the end, with a return to the pre-anti-rightist campaign. In *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, Luo Qun is again an official. In *The Herdsman*, Xu Lingjun again a teacher. In *Hibiscus Town*, Qin Shutian joins Hu Yuyin in her bean curd business, in a scene almost identical with the opening scene of the film.

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[37] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 78.

Yet there is also a tendency in these films to decrease the significance of the representative of the party. In *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, the first secretary of the province, an old man, is the one who hears the case of Luo Qun and presides over his rehabilitation against obstacles set by such not-so-high officials as Wu Yao. In *The Herdsman*, the party does not personalize. In *Hibiscus Town*, Gu Yanshan, the former communist army officer, is seen by public opinion as the symbol of the righteous and just party. He even presides over the hero and heroine's wedding ceremony when the two are forgotten and downtrodden.[38] Yet this figure is physically impotent and politically helpless. He never enjoys an official position as the head of the town.

Different from the emphasis on party and revolution, what the hero in *The Herdsman* identifies with more is China the country. When his father concludes that "so you're a staunch socialist," he does not deny, neither does he confirm enthusiastically. What he is attached to and cannot leave behind is China the country. His patriotism is fed by many forces. First, it is cultivated by traditional Chinese ethics. His wife quotes a Chinese saying to him, "a son will not complain about his mother's ugliness, and a dog will not complain about the poverty of its home." It is appropriate that at the first class after he is restored as a teacher, the first line he writes on the blackboard is "our great motherland." Xie Jin also foregrounds this theme of patriotism by giving China tangible

[38] Similarly, in former-rightist writer Wang Meng's *The Bolshevik Solute*, a wedding is also attended by a former leader who is now toppled down. See Wang Meng 王蒙, *The Bolshevik Solute* 布礼 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2003), 41.

emblems in the film. A prop used as a symbol of China added in the film is the national map. When Xu is rehabilitated as a teacher, he immediately hangs such a map on his wall. When he and his father visit a Beijing school, the teacher also happens to draw a map of the province where Xu works.

Before he leaves for Beijing, Xu asks his wife Li Xiuzhi what if he goes to the U.S. She replies ironically that “why not? You can live in a big house, sit in a car and dance naked dances.” This answer is taken directly from the original story. Li Xiuzhi’s reply gives a picture of the U.S. that is materialistic, promiscuous and corrupt. The Chinese values in the film are presented against the supposedly American ones. It is as if the two sides are fighting for Xu’s soul and the American ones have no chance of winning. It is in his arguing with and persuading of his father that Xu Lingjun himself clarifies his own Chinese stance. His father is a senior Chinese doing successful business in San Francisco and is presented as mainly Chinese and only to a lesser extent American. Thus he is capable of being persuaded by his son and shows some misgivings against the American values. He has several children in the U.S., all of whom are dandies. The American family ties are seen as cold and tenuous, and Xu’s father has to seek emotional satisfaction in his homeland, China.

The film, like the original short story, emphasizes the money-oriented and consumerist life-style of the Americans. In an antique shop, Xu’s father buys a china vase for 800 Chinese *yuan*, while Xu Lingjun buys a plain bowl for only 1.50. Yet money and

wealth is shown as unimportant. Xu's father is rich but lives a hollow life. As a billionaire, he describes himself as a beggar in terms of emotional resources. What's more, Xu in the end forsakes the prospect of being a billionaire for a poor but supposedly more satisfactory rural life. The contempt for money is not his personal inclination, but is seen as a family value and a Chinese value. Thus his wife tells their little son that only money earned by oneself is good to use, and not to accept money from the grandfather is called "integrity" (*zhiqi*).

Xu Lingjing does not want to leave China not only because of his bond with it, but because he sees hope in its future. He says that "I see the hope of my homeland…and I am willing to climb uphill with the Chinese." This belief in the future and in the justice of history is also underlined in *Hibiscus Town*. The rightist Qin Shutian does not have many grandiloquent words to say about the party or the country, but he does articulate generalizations about another abstract entity: human beings (*ren*), which is largely added by Xie Jin in his film. When Qun Shutian's enemy Li Guoxiang is toppled down by Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution, he offers her help and says to her: "you, too, are a human being." During the worst of their sufferings, he still believes "human heart is not dead" (*renxin bu si*). *Ren* here captures the common people, the real force that drives history forward. In the end, Qin extorts the now crestfallen Li Guoxiang that she should not do things against "the common people" (*laobaixing*), presenting himself as a mouthpiece of the folk.

These films, like their original sources, tend to personalize the evil forces in one or two bad figures who have a high position and indulge in class struggles with hidden motives. Wu Yao in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* and Li Guoxiang in *Hibiscus Town* are opposed to Luo Qun and Hu Yuyin both in political and personal life, and they use their political power to avenge private grudges. In the films, the bad characters are not favored in outer appearance either. Their most striking lack is the lack of gender marks. Wu Yao, old and thin, is opposed to the virile and manly Luo Qun. Li Guoxiang, ugly and in male clothing, is opposed to the pretty and feminine Hu Yuyin. These sexually nondescript cadres are responsible for the persecutions of the innocent. The removal or rectification of them will ensure that history is on the right track. This is a necessary strategy if the catastrophe of the anti-rightist campaign and the Cultural Revolution is seen not as a systematic error, but as aberrations. This melodramatic strategy is different from the later representation of this era in such works as Zhang Yimou's *To Live* and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite*, in which the evil force seems to be ubiquitous and the persecutors often collective and not individualized. The atmosphere itself in those films is absurd, with all caught in this trap.

The A-political Solaces: the Chinese Woman and Nature

In these rightist-films of Xie Jin, especially *The Legend of the Tianyun Mountain*

and *The Herdsman*, the rightist is not without his moments of despair and desperation. Even his faith in himself, in the future and in the eventual goodness of the political system sometimes fails. Then, some elements that recur in the films come to his rescue: a faithful Chinese woman and the wild nature.[39] Xie Jin puts much more efforts in presenting the woman-nature part to heighten the melodramatic and emotional effect of these films.

Xie Jin's melodrama depends heavily on music. All three films have theme songs that begin with the title of the film and recur at significant moments throughout the film. Interestingly, all three songs are devoted to these comforting elements in the film to balance the pathetic elements, to give solace to both the rightist and the audience. The theme songs accompany theme scenes that also recur. In *The Herdsman*, the theme scene is the vast grassland, accompanied by a song of a deep male voice. In *Hibiscus Town*, the theme scene is Hu Yuyin milling bean curd accompanied by a local song of a female voice. Especially impressive is the theme song-scene in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*. The theme scene is Feng Qinglan dragging the sick Luo Qun in a cart in a blizzard, accompanied by a song of a female voice. The scene is only narrated briefly by four lines in the original novel:

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[39] The lower class people who are ready to help Chinese are also a source of comfort. Chinese critic Li Yiming 李奕明 names these outside solaces "the god of the people and the earth-mother," see his "The Status of Xie Jin's Film in Chinese Film History" 谢晋电影在中国电影史上的地位, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 77.

> That day, I drew the cart myself, with my lover on it. We went against the cold blizzard, on the road beneath the old fortress. Many people looked at us in surprise. I held up my head high, went forward proudly, and turned my head to exchange an understanding smile with him. I felt that genuine happiness belonged to us![40]

This short passage is lengthened into the signature scene of the film recurring several times. We see Feng Qinglan flounder in the blizzard. Snowflakes fall on her scarf. She stops to look after Luo Qun. Luo looks back at her lovingly and takes off her glasses. The cart leaves imprints on the snow. The scene is shot in close-ups, medium shots and far shots that melt into one another. Accompanying all this is the theme song absent in the novel, which sings that "when the soul-mates (*zhiji*) share their heart, do not say that the road is full of hardships." With this scene frequently revisited, Feng Qinglan's devotion to her husband is made a salient feature of the film.

In each of the three films, there is a woman who serves to give a family atmosphere to the film and to supply solaces. She is the balancing element in these political melodramas. She unquestioningly believes in the male rightist's worth even when he is forsaken by everyone else. She devotes herself totally to him, providing him with not only spiritual comfort but with a sweet home. She sustains him through the difficult times and makes him taste happiness that he has never experienced before. In all three films, this wife is a listener and admirer. She is the more so in *The Legend of the Tianyun*

[40] Lu Yanzhou 鲁彦周, *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* 天云山传奇, 70-1.

Mountain. In this film, the three narrating voices are all voices of women, and they all speak about the rightist Luo Qun, to whom all three are emotionally related. Song Wei is his former girlfriend who now regrets her breakup with him. Feng Qinglan is his wife. Zhou Yuzhen is his future companion.[41]

Of the three, Luo's wife Feng Qinglan stands out as not only a model wife but a model Chinese woman. Xie Jin puts much more emphasis on paying homage to this figure. Yet we should note that the "soul-mates" sung in the theme song, which seem to be mutual, is in fact one-directional. Except for Luo Qun's soul, Feng has no soul of herself. She helps him, feeds him, gets him books that he needs for his research projects and keeps his manuscripts. Because of her ferocious protection of those manuscripts in the Cultural Revolution, she is tortured. After the Cultural Revolution, she makes petitions for his case to be reconsidered. She shows his manuscripts to the also admiring Zhou Yuzhen. The spiritual gifts she gets from Luo Qun are seen to make her happier. In her deathbed, this loyal wife thanks her husband for giving her "the revolutionary ideals, faith, spirit and love."

To heighten the emotional impact of this character, Xie Jin makes much of Feng Qinglan's death. Death is an often used melodramatic device in Chinese films in the

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[41] Ann Kaplan calls *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* "complicit woman's melodrama" from a feminist point of view, pointing out its perpetuation of existent gender relationships. See her "Melodrama /subjectivity / ideology: Western melodrama theories and their relevance to recent Chinese cinema," in Kaplan, "Melodrama /subjectivity / ideology," 16.

1950s and 1960s, when deaths of the innocent or the communists are climaxes in the film, such as He Laoliu's death in *The New Year's Sacrifice* and death of the father in *Revolution Family*. Interestingly, Xie Jin can only use this device sparingly, because death can mean too sharp a condemnation of past national policies, and Xie Jin does not want to go that far. Feng Qinglan's death is the only major death in Xie Jin's films on the rightists. Lu Yanzhou's original novel only mentions her death indirectly in passing. Yet Xie Jin makes the death a hub for all emotions to convene. We see the doctor holds the husband's hand firmly and comfortingly, in a gesture so reminiscent of that in *Revolution Family* when the father is dead. Then we see husband and daughter beside the deathbed in tears, and the dying Feng give them comforts. The husband helps her putting on her emblematic spectacles for her to see him better. Zhou Yuzhen enters the room, bringing them good news that Luo Qun is to be rehabilitated. Feng Qinglan dies happily. Thus, her death mingles elements of the pathetic and the comforting to make one sad yet still hopeful.

Feng's death, which is one of the most melodramatic moments in the film, can be read symbolically. We know vaguely that Feng is tortured by the Gang of Four, though we do not know her exact ailment. She is almost Luo Qun's female double who shares and thus lightens his burden. A male friend once asks her "why should you carry such a heavy cross," in a sentiment typically addressed to Luo Qun or voiced by himself. Yet she bears the brunt of the bodily persecution on Luo Qun. In the Cultural Revolution, it is she

who is so much tortured that her body collapses while Luo Qun remains unscathed. After the Cultural Revolution, when Luo Qun is ready to be restored as a high official, she dies. She receives what should fall on Luo Qun and symbolically dies for him as a sacrifice and a martyr so that he can revive. It is also noteworthy that her death will not deprive Luo Qun of much, since Zhou Yuzhen, an equally understanding and admiring, younger, prettier and more modern woman, is ready to take her position.[42] Therefore, Luo Qun the rightist will always have a female companion by his side.

Feng Qinglan protects Luo Qun not only because of himself, but because of his loyalty to "the party, the people and socialism." This means that she too judges him in political terms, but her standard is different from the dominant one from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. Thus, in the film in the anti-rightist movement in 1957, we see Song Wei speak enthusiastically at a meeting (though not against Luo Qun), and later writes Luo Qun a letter to break up with him. Yet Feng Qinglan says "nothing" at a meeting against Luo Qun. Feng reaches a personal judgment of Luo Qun that "I think you have no problems at all." This contrasts with Song Wei in the same film and characters like Li Guoxiang in *Hibiscus Tow*n who tie themselves too tightly with the dominant leftist politics.

Feng herself is a party member and an intellectual, and her relationship with Luo Qun can be said to be partly comradely. However, Li Xiuzhi in *The Herdsman* and Hu

[42] Zhou Yuzhen represents the type of "new women" in the new era, who are physically attractive and verbally aggressive.

Yuyin in *Hibiscus Town* are presented as women from the lowest class without much education and who stay away from politics. They are devoted to their husbands not because they are symbols of something larger and higher, but because the husbands are their "men" (*nanren*). In *The Herdsman*, when Xu Lingjun tells Li Xiuzhi that he is a rightist, Li answers that "they told me you are not a bad guy." These women are using the simplest moral and emotional yardsticks. Yet also in this film, Xie Jin gives Li Xiuzhi a new political awareness after the Cultural Revolution when she says that "it is no longer the time of the Gang of Four when they could frame up whatever they want. Now the party center (*dang zhongyang*) let the people speak." Thus her former political insensitivity is only a shield to protect her and her husband, and her political awareness wakes up in the new era. By contrast, Hu Yuyin in *Hibiscus Town* shows complete political ignorance and indifference.

If Feng Qinglan is the aid and preserver of Luo Qun's intellectual pursuits, then Li Xiuzhi and Hu Yuyin can be the students of their rightist husbands. Xu Lingjun teaches Xiuzhi to read and write. She even keeps a diary for him to read. Qin Shutian in *Hibiscus Town* does all the writing in the household, and his wife Hu Yuyin admires him when he writes. Hu Yuyin used to be the sole protagonist of the film. In her previous marriage, she is the unmistakable head of the household. Yet with the development of her relationship with Qin Shutian, Qin overshadows her, and she becomes a loving, obedient and protected wife.

Also noteworthy is the change of the outer appearance of these devoted wives of the rightists in the films. Feng Qinglan in *The Legend of the Tianyun Mountain* is quite plain. When young, it is the pert Song Wei whom Luo Qun loves, and Feng is only Song's best friend and confidante. Li Xiuzhi in *The Herdsman* is girlish but pretty. Hu Yuyin in *Hibiscus Town* is from the beginning a beautiful mature woman. *Hibiscus Town* lavishly shows her beauty and her sexual attraction to other men in the town. Moreover, both Li Xiuzhi and Hu Yuyin are clothed in traditional Chinese clothing, different from the masculine style of the women actively engaged in politics.

The Chinese women in these films are not only devoted and loyal, but hard-working. In *The Legend of the Tianyun Mountain*, we are repeatedly given glimpses of the household stuff that is a materialization of Feng Qinglan's devotion: the board on which to chop food, the window curtains, etc. Then, in both *The Herdsman* and *Hibiscus Town*, this Chinese woman shows an enthusiasm for manual labor. Both films have lengthy scenes depicting the women working. Xie Jin believes that Li Xiuzhi in *The Herdsman* is "a Chinese working woman with great creative potential."[43] With her dexterous hands, Li Xiuzhi in *The Herdsman* converts the miserable hut of Xu Lingjun into a sweet home. Everything is brightened. Zhang Xianliang, author of the literary source for *The Herdsman*, writes briefly that Li Xiuzhi makes "more than 1,000 earthen bricks."[44] The

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[43] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 147.

[44] Zhang Xianliang, 张贤亮, "The Soul and the Flesh"灵与肉, in his *Mimosa: Zhang Xianliang's Fiction on Western China* 合欢：张贤亮西部小说选 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1992), 30.

matter-of-fact phrase is enlarged by Xie Jin into a lengthy scene. Li Xiuzhi, in short-sleeved shirt, works energetically and enthusiastically, making one brick after another, with sweats on her face and mud on her clothes.

Similarly, in *Hibiscus Town*, the original author Gu Hua narrates that, to make their new home, Hu Yuyin and her first husband "were busy for a whole winter and a spring, and both lost a lot of weight."[45] Xie Jin again greatly lengthens this scene. The audience sees the couple carry heavy load of rocks and timber and help each other. These scenes alternate with scene of their making bean curd to make money for the new house, accompanied by music. Such a sequence of scenes offers rare glimpses at the sensual bodies of the female characters, strong, healthy and attractive. Also, the labor of the woman is not for the country or for others, as labor is defined before, but for the family alone. Li Xiuzhi makes bricks to build a fence and a hut for the family. Hu Yuyin labors to build a new house. These activities are linked with establishing a home and a domestic space which is very important for the rightist. He now not only has a home, but a space free from supervision and persecution. All three films emphasize the importance of the family, which is a reaction against the previous dominant condemnation of family ties in favor of abstract political ties such as class fraternity and camaraderie. The nuclear family emerges as the fortress of personal integrity and faith.

In depicting Feng Qinglan in *The Legend of the Tianyun Mountain*, Xie Jin says that

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[45] Gu Hua, *Hibiscus Town*, 55.

he wants to present “a typical character of the Chinese woman,” and condemns those contemporary new women who aspire to go abroad.[46] Thus, the Chinese qualities of these women are emphasized. In *The Herdsman*, Xie Jin presents us an opposite of the “Chinese woman,” that is the America-born Miss Song, who is the senior Xu’s secretary. On first meeting Xu Lingjun, she asks him whether he likes some “brandy,” making her a carrier of American lifestyle. She is in every respect the opposite of Xu’s Chinese wife Xuzhi and embodies many of the bad American values. She speaks Chinese fluently, yet with an unnatural tone and sometimes an American inflection. Clothed in so-called modern clothes, she seems to be flaunting her vain sexuality. She is shallow, materialistic, without self-consciousness and steeped in consumption. Against such an opposite, the strong, loyal and hard-working Chinese woman stands out more strikingly.

Having a devoted Chinese wife, even in his miseries, the male rightist is given the gift of romantic love. Representative for this is the street dance of Hu Yuyin and Qin Shutian in *Hibiscus Town*, which is absent in the original novel. The two are condemned to sweep the streets of the town together, but they turn this punishment into a romance. Accompanied by music, the two street-sweepers dance with their brooms. The isolated streets become an ideal place where no one is supervising them. The possibility that they can do this goes beyond credibility and shows to what length Xie Jin will go in depicting romantic love.

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[46] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 83, 79.

Xie Jin's using the family to strengthen the melodramatic effect of his films can also be seen in the way he adds scenes where family members enjoy each other's companionship to foreground "emotion"(qing). Family has always been an indispensable part of melodrama. Lu Yanzhou, in his novel *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, narrates the family life of Luo Qun and Feng Qinglan as mainly centered on Luo Qun's research. In the novel, each evening, the family members discuss political or academic issues heatedly, making the family more like a study group. Yet in what is supposedly the filmic equivalent of this passage, Xie Jin cleverly downplays this implausible color of the family and foregrounds the bond between family members. In the film, we see the couple and their adopted daughter eat at a table, carry wood together, or the mother and daughter washing clothes in the river, with the little girl holding an umbrella for the mother. Again, this is accompanied by music to emphasize the warmth and sweetness of family life. Xie Jin is using these ordinary family details to appeal to the audiences' emotions.

In both *The Herdsman* and *Hibiscus Town*, Xie Jin adds indoor scenes for the couple to stay together. In *The Herdsman*, he makes the young couple read in bed Xiuzhi's diary, when the two tease each other and the husband teaches the wife Chinese characters. In one similar scene in *Hibiscus Town*, Qin Shutian and Hu Yuyin sit in bed, when Qin shows Hu photos of himself and of his parents, telling her that this is her "mother-in-law," and that is her "father-in-law." These "cozy" scenes also imply the gender hierarchy in the family. The husband is superior to the wife in knowledge, as in

The Herdsman. Or the husband initiates the wife into his extended family, as in *Hibiscus Town*.

In *Hibiscus Town*, the way Hu Yuyin and Qin Shutian consummate their love highlights Xie Jin's emphasis on the traditional family structure. In Gu Hua's novel, the two are caught in a storm. They go to Hu's place where they have their first sex. Yet in Xie Jin's film version, the sexual union is preceded by family-like procedures, making the unmarried couple just like married, since the political authority is not legitimate enough to authorize the marriage anyway. In this marriage-like scene, Hu again prepares bean curd by herself, after long periods of not being allowed to do so. She invites Qin to her place, and serves him the bean curd. Qin comes in decent clothing. The scene already prefigures the later formal marriage of the two, which is a private marriage again without official authorization. Here, with the presence of Qin Shutian the man, Hu Yuyin finally regains her role as a housewife and a food-provider, a role that is deprived her by the unjust political campaigns.

In these films, Xie Jin also makes extensive use of nature as an affective device. Nature supplies him with images of symbolism. In this respect, Xie Jin seems to carry on the filmmaking tradition in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, in *Revolution Family*, when the revolution is in its ebb, we see an overcast sky. Thus, at the end of *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, the short confusing period after the Cultural Revolution is finished, and we see colorful flowers to usher in a bright new age. Especially noteworthy is the use

of heavy rain in these films to symbolize disasters. Luo Qun is led away twice by those in power in heavy rain. Qin Shutian and Hu Yuyin are condemned also in pouring rain. Rain allegorizes the unhappiness of the events. However, in contrast to socialist films in which thunder and lightening are used to accompany the death of revolutionaries or the cruelty of enemies, the rain symbolism does not go too far in its capturing the bad forces, which are, after all, from the political authorities.

In *The Herdsman*, in addition to the Chinese wife, the wild nature as seen in the vast expanse of grassland is also a soothing force. The film has lengthy scenes with the camera panning over the grassland. The rightist feels no pressure here and finds himself accepted. The Chinese wild nature, like the Chinese woman, is apolitical and has no artifice, and both become symbols of China the country. At the very beginning of the film, we see vast and impressive shots of the beautiful Chinese grassland, with Xu Lingjun lying on the grass, looking at the sky and smiling. Accompanying the scene is the theme song of the film, whose lyric is an old Chinese folk poem “The Chi Le Grassland” (“Chi Le Chuan”). After the theme song is finished, we hear Xu Lingjun’s voice narrating, “Chi Le Grassland, I read of your ancient name in a textbook when I was twelve years old…now I have been with you for twenty years.” To name this grassland Chi Le Grassland is to confer historical significance on it. The poem was originally written by nomadic ethnic minorities in ancient China and then translated into Chinese. The poem is not in the original story, and is added by Xie Jin and given great significance. The film

says that it is the first “Chinese free-verse poem,” which is academically not true, but which endows the ancient poem with a modern color. The song also captures the patriotic tradition Xu Lingjun is heir to. The poem is taught by an upright teacher after 1949 to the young Xu Lingjun. Three years later, when he becomes a teacher himself, he is seen teaching the same poem. As a rightist, he still teaches it to his wife. With this poem, homeland is identified with a Chinese tradition of the folk, instead of the mainstream Confucian tradition.

In all three films, the bond between the land and the rightist is foregrounded, and special value is given to out-of-the-way places where Chinese values are preserved. Thus at the end of each of the films, the mountainous area, the grassland and the small town are where the rightists choose to stay. Although in the original novel, Qin Shutian returns to the county seat, the film *Hibiscus Town* has him remain in the small town to operate a bean curd business with his wife. Especially telling in this respect is *The Herdsman*, in which China is symbolized in the rural areas instead of the cities. In the visual images of the film, Beijing loses its aura as the political center and is obviously held in a negative light. The film opens with Beijing with its familiar landmarks: the Tian’anmen square, the airport and the Heavenly Temple. Yet the scene is not glorious, but seems dismal, confined and lifeless compared to the open expanses of the grassland. In Beijing, Xu Lingjun finds himself out of place and alienated. Its places of pleasure, its hotels, restaurants and dance halls --all prove disagreeable urban spectacles to him. In the dance

hall, men and women dance in dim lights, waving their bodies in a sensual way, accompanied by western-style music. Xu Lingjun finds the place suffocating and intolerable.[47] Only later when they visit an old Beijing school does Xu Lingjun find the classroom so familiar to him.

To sum up, Xie Jin uses filmic techniques of sound and visuality to enhance the melodramatic effects of his films, though his literary sources already have the basic structure of melodrama.

The End of the Melodrama Era

Peter Brooks points out that,

> melodrama is a form for a post-sacred era, in which polarization and hyperdramatization of forces in conflict represent a need to locate and make evident, legible, and operative those large choices of ways of being which we hold to be of overwhelming importance even though we cannot derive them from any transcendental system of belief.[48]

Brooks' observation is enlightening for us to see the early 1980s in China. Bei Dao, the leading poet of the "obscure poetry school" (Menglong shi) which flourished in the late

[47] The original writer Zhang Xianliang describes people in the dance hall as "women who look like men and men who look like women" ("The Soul and the Flesh," 19), linking the modern corruption with a confusion of gender identities.
[48] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, preface 1995, viii.

1970s and early 1980s, has two lines which are known to almost all Chinese: “Evil is the passport of those evil ones, and nobility is the epitaph of the noble ones”(卑鄙是卑鄙者的通行证，高尚是高尚者的墓志铭). The lines’ polarization of the noble versus the evil and the victimization of the noble well capture the popular mood in the years immediately after the Cultural Revolution. Melodrama is often successful in times of crises. Moreover, melodrama is not only a mode of literary or cinematic representation, it is also a mode of looking at and experiencing life and history. Wang Yuejin points out that our sense of history often takes the form of melodrama.[49] If this is true, the more so with the three decades of Chinese socialist history after 1949, with their many dramatic events and their innumerable reversals of fortunes.

It is impressive to see the success of these films by Xie Jin on past politics with the political authorities, the general audiences and contemporary film critics. The three films won a list of important prizes. In 1981, *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* won overwhelmingly the Jinji and Baihua awards, two most important Chinese awards given annually to domestic films. The letters from the viewers Xie Jin received after the screening of the film amounted to more than 10,000.[50] The film even generated an enthusiastic article in *People’s Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) on its apt characterization of the old-fashioned authoritarian cadre Wu Yao.[51] According to Xie Jin, the audience of *The*

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[49] See Wang Yuejin, “Melodrama as historical understanding: the making and the unmaking of communist history,” in Wimal Dissanayake ed, *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, 73-100.
[50] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 415.
[51] See He Kongzhou 何孔周, review in *People’s Daily* on Feb 2, 1980. Xie Jin endorses the

Herdsman reached 130 million.[52] *Hibiscus Town* again won both Baihua and Jinji awards.

Commenting on the fact that many people wept after screening the films, Xie Jin says that "These films were a means of a necessary release. This is the ideal response to which I aspire."[53] The success of these early films by Xie Jin can be seen as a combined result of national policies, audience expectations and Xie Jin's strategies. Embedded in the melodramatic age, Xie Jin's melodrama was taken by many who watched them as "real." In 1981, film critic Zhong Dianfei, after the release of *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, believes that the characters in the film are all "inevitable products" of the period, and that Wu Yao, the bad cadre in the film, is "true to life, of which I have no doubt."[54] Similarly, in 1982, after watching *The Herdsman*, Zhong Dianfei writes that the film is "wonderful," and he cannot help repeating the word three times.[55] Another important senior filmmaker Zhang Junxiang comments on Xu Lingjun's decision not to go to the U.S. in this film "not only credible, but inevitable."[56] Many respond to the

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author's reading.

[52] Quoted in Luo Yijun 罗艺军, "Xie Jin, My Fellow Traveller" 谢晋，我的同路人, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui 中国电影家协会, ed.. *On Xie Jin's Films(continued)* 论谢晋电影（续集）(Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2001), 29.

[53] George Semsel's interview with Xie Jin, in Semsel, ed. *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1987). 110.

[54] Zhong Dianfei 钟惦棐, "Foreseeing a Prosperous Future--Essay on *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*" 预示着矫健发展的明天——《天云山传奇》随笔, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 294, 296.

[55] Zhong Dianfei 钟惦棐, "Notes on the Film *The Herdsman*" 电影〈牧马人〉笔记, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 423.

[56] Zhang Junxiang 张骏祥, "Praises for *The Herdsman*" 赞《牧马人》, in Zhongguo dianyingjia

films by identifying themselves or someone else they know with characters in the films.

Paul Pickowicz has done admirable work in this area. He analyzes some typical political melodramas in the early 1980s, including *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, to see the intricate connections between films, popular thoughts and official announcements. He concludes that "the popularity of these films can be explained, in part, by the audience's obvious approval of the basic social view espoused."[57] The main audiences "basically accepted the system and recognized, however grudgingly, the authority of the party and state."[58] Xie Jin's use of literature and his success show that his is not an idiosyncratic version of the past, but his melodramatic recounting of history captures some of the popular sentiments, which, at that time, were not drastically different from the sentiments endorsed by the party and the government of reflecting, though cautiously, on catastrophes in the past, putting the blame on some evil guys, especially the Gang of Four, without questioning the political system per se. Rarely in modern Chinese history, the political authorities, the mainstream writers and filmmakers largely agree with one another both in principles and in practices.[59]

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xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's Films* 论谢晋电影 (1998), 418.

[57] Paul Pickowicz, "Popular Cinema and Political Thought in Post-Mao China: Reflections on Official Pronouncements, Film, and the Film Audience," in Perry Link, Richard Madsen, Paul Pickowicz eds., *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Though in the People's Republic* (San Francisco: Westeview Press, 1989). 45.

[58] Ibid, 51.

[59] Thus in 1986, in the debate on the so-called "Xie Jin mode" after Zhu Dake's attack, Zhong Dianfei is perspicuous enough to recognize that "what is now called 'Xie Jin mode' indeed has many downsides which are flaws of the literary sources, and when made into films, the process naturally incorporate the director's identification [with the sources]." Zhong Dianfei 钟惦菲, "Ten Thoughts on Xie Jin's Films"谢晋电影十思, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *On Xie Jin's*

We should see the double functions of Xie Jin's films in the early and mid-1980s. On the one hand, they have the subversive edge of criticizing the radical leftism in the past decades. That these films of Xie Jin were widely acclaimed is partly because they are exploring a hitherto forbidden zone in history and the mistakes the party made in the past. *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* is the first film on the anti-rightist campaign. When making it, many crew members were worried that the subject of the film might be "against the policies" (*weifan zhengce*).[60] After the condemnation of *Bitter Love* (Ku lian), *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* was also criticized and its screening discouraged.[61] The same thing happened in the making of *The Herdsman*, when, as Xie Jin remembers, "the subject seemed to be a taboo."[62] Although these films do not venture into a critique of contemporary politics, their criticisms were stunning at the time of their releases. For the audiences who just emerged from the Cultural Revolution and who might be at a loss as to how to make sense of those absurd years, such films give them a channel of catharsis, present some bad characters for them to vent their anger on, and provide a vindication of their own righteousness and innocence. Yet at the same time, by giving easy cathartic channel, such melodrama also prevents the audiences from thinking of their own complicity in the disastrous history.

The debate on Xie Jin's mode began in 1986, after the fifth-generation filmmakers

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Films 论谢晋电影(1998), 102.

[60] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 77.

[61] Paul Pickowicz, "Popular Cinema and Political Thought in Post-Mao China," 42.

[62] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit*, 129.

already launched their first pieces, *One and Eight* (Yige he bage, 1984) and *The Yellow Earth* (Huang tudi, 1984), with the latter winning international acclaim. Writers were also experimenting with new fictional modes such as the absurd and the fantastic. The younger critics' attacks of Xie Jin have as much to do with Xie Jin as with the need for iconoclasm and for Chinese film and culture to break away from the melodramatic. Xie Jin, with his success and his established status, offers a convenient object of attacks. It seems that the melodramatic era of the early 1980s was drawing to an end.

Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town,* also made in 1986, largely continued his melodramatic tradition, yet it also tries to incorporate some new elements. The history as represented in *Hibiscus Town* is much more absurd and threatening than in *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* and *The Herdsman,* and the film's promise of justice is much less certain. Thus, at the end, a figure who thrives on the previous campaigns now becomes mad and intrudes into the happy ending. He strikes a gong and announces that "a campaign is coming," hammering terror into the otherwise happy people. With this film, Xie Jin also hopes to put into practices a new set of aesthetic principles, presenting not only the tragically sublime, but the "grotesque, the distorted, the abnormal, the strange, and the alienated,"[63] though these elements only play a minor part in the still overwhelmingly melodramatic film. This film may be seen as an effort for Xie Jin to modify the melodramatic mode. Yet after *Hibiscus Town,* his films can never repeat their former

[63] Xie Jin, *My Pursuit,* 199.

success, partly because social and ideological crisis had ebbed, and people were no longer eager for consumption of political melodrama. It seems that even without the younger critics' attack of Xie Jin, his mode already slips to a bygone time.

Meanwhile, the new generation of filmmakers produced their version of the communist history in China. They often focus on the Cultural Revolution, which many of them personally experience. They approach this history in different ways, from the accusatory tones shown in the cycle of catastrophes and strong visual images in *Farewell my Concubine* (Bawang bie ji, 1993) by Chen Kaige, *Blue Kite* (Lan fengzheng, 1993) by Tian Zhuangzhuang, and *To Live* (Huo zhe) by Zhang Yimou, to the somewhat celebratory tone of *In the Heat of the Sun* (Yangguang canlan de rizi, 1995).[64] These films, different from Xie Jin's political films warmly received by domestic audiences, often garnered international awards. Yet, however daring and diverse these films might be, they never reach the kind of national success Xie Jin's films did. They are mainly seen as pieces of art, not as "real" representations as in the case of Xie Jin's films. The older generation, with filmmakers as Xie Jin and writers as Lu Yanzhou, Gu Hua and Zhang Xianliang, did produce a coherent and consistent narration of the past that is soothing, triumphant and politically acceptable. Yet China's political and cultural atmosphere from the late 1980s onwards is no longer suitable for the emergence of a coherent and widely accepted narration of the Cultural Revolution. Politics, which used to be the sole focus of

[64] Note that these films were all made around the same years from 1993 to 1995.

people's life, now becomes only one of their interests.

Commenting on the younger generation of Chinese filmmakers, Xie Jin believes that their works largely ignore the literary elements, and are thus "too far removed from the Chinese way of looking at films and the classic Chinese aesthetic experience."[65] It is true that the fifth-generation's beginning works, such as *One and Eight* and *Yellow Earth*, have meager literary qualities, although even these two also build on literary works. Yet later on, as will be shown in the next chapter in the case of Zhang Yimou, the leading director of the fifth-generation, this generation also turns to literary adaptations, although they tend to make drastic changes and foreground visuality.

[65] George Semsel, interview with Xie Jin, 112.

Chapter 5

Constructing China:

Zhang Yimou's Adaptation of Novels in His Early Films

Chinese director Zhang Yimou's film *Ju Dou* (1990) won the Luis Bunuel Award at Cannes and the nomination for the best Oscar foreign film. In the film, Yang Jinshan, the paralyzed old owner of a dying mill, is furious yet helpless at the adultery between his young wife Ju Dou and his nephew Tianqing. Yet to his great comfort and joy, the child Tianbai, a result of that adultery, calls him "father." Then, the film turns violent. The little child Tianbai drags the bucket in which his old "father" sits, jumps across the dying pool in the house, and Jinshan falls into the pool. Tianbai, looking on, laughs in a fiendish way, obviously enjoying the old man's futile struggle for life. Towards the end of the film, Tianbai's biological father Tianqing dies in the same pool, and this time Tianbai is the unmistakable killer. The already grown-up Tianbai dumps Tianqing into the pool. When Tianqing struggles for life, Tianbai takes a log, strikes Tianqing and finishes him. Thus, two fathers die in the hands of their son. In the very end, the heroine Ju Dou sets fire to the dying mill and completes the destruction.

In the credit part of the film, we read that the film is based on Liu Heng's novel *Fuxi, Fuxi*. Liu Heng himself is also one of the scriptwriters. Yet, if we check on the novel for

the above-mentioned scene in the film, we find something totally different. Everybody ends up differently in the novel than in the film. The old man Yang Jinshan dies one day peacefully in the sun outdoors. Tianqing, despairing of his hopeless relationship with Ju Dou, drowns himself in a quite honorable and even glorious way. Ju Dou, instead of being consumed in flames, lives maybe till now. Tianbai, the demonic child in the film, in the novel leads a perfectly normal life. He marries and has a son himself. The radical differences between the novel and the film lead us to ask: why are all these radical changes? What functions do they serve?

Zhang Yimou often prided himself on having a keen eye for literary works with great film potential, and said that "among contemporary Chinese directors, I might be the most diligent one in reading novels, and the most eager one in trying to dig out something for film-making."[1] He also is confident that "long experiences as a director have sharpened my ability to adapt and re-create [literary works]" (Yang 136). Four of his important early films, *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*, 1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* (*Dahong denglong gaogao gua,* 1991), and *To Live* (*Huo zhe*, 1994), are all based on novels, respectively by Mo Yan, Liu Heng, Su Tong and Yu Hua. All four writers remain important in the literary scene of China today. Like Liu Heng, Mo Yan and Yu Hua are also listed among scriptwriters in the filmic adaptation of their own novels. However, who are listed as scriptwriters is less important than how the scripts came into being. In

[1] See the web page www.usacn.com/weekly/week12/63.htm.

fact, Zhang Yimou's input is crucial in shaping the scripts. As Zhang puts it, in each film, he himself was one of the scriptwriters, although he did not take credit for it.[2] Zhang Yimou often emphasizes that in his filmic adaptations, he tries to be "loyal to the spirit of the original work."[3] Thus, the changes he chose to make to the novels are all the more striking.

Of course, changes are necessary in any filmic adaptation. What interests me in this paper is how Zhang Yimou remodeled these novels into films marked with his own signature. I will read his four early films *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, and *To Live* as a group, both against the novels they are based on and against one another. The four films are grouped together because all are successful, and all are based on novels of important writers. Moreover, they all deal with the Chinese past in the 20th-century, and all are focused on Chinese culture and history. What are the patterns underlying the changes Zhang Yimou made to the novels? How are these changes to be explained? What image of China emerges from these films highlighted by the changes he made? How has this image itself changed with time? These are some of the questions to be addressed in this paper. I will examine Zhang Yimou's literary adaptations from three intertwined angles: the "culture" images he adds, the patriarchs and issues of sexuality he

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[2] Zhang Jiuying 张久英 ed, *Recasting Zhang Yimou* 翻拍张艺谋 (Beijing: Zhongguo mangwen chubanshe, 2001), 111.

[3] Zhang Yimou, interview with Li Erwei 李尔葳, "Pave the Road for Chinese Films to Go to the World," 为中国电影走向世界铺路, in *Zhang Yimou* 张艺谋 (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 386.

represents, and the Chinese history he tries or tries not to engage. I will also put Zhang Yimou into his context, including not only the transnational or global context, but also the national context in which the films were made.

Constructing a "Chinese Culture": Rituals, Arts and Space

When one compares Zhang Yimou's films with the novels they are based on, one feature of the films stands out: different from the novels, they are heavily flavored or sprinkled with cultural elements and details. Take the famous sedan-dance scene in *Red Sorghum* for example. The heroine Jiu'er (Gong Li) is married to a leper, owner of a winery, by her father against her will. Mo Yan writes in his novel that, on the way of the bride Jiu'er's journey to her leper husband's house, "the lazy drummers and horn-players stopped playing not far away from the village."[4] Although the sedan-bearers do jostle the bride amid their dirty jokes, so much so that the bride vomits. Yet this detail is enlarged in the film into a prolonged and memorable scene. The sedan-bearers stop their progress, perform a well-rehearsed dance, and sing a song to its full-length, to the accompaniment of drums and horns. The scene takes up one ninth of the whole length of the film.

A similar combination of dance and song, of the visual and the audial, is frequently found in Zhang's films. These dance-song episodes are self-contained, long, and often

[4] Mo Yan 莫言, *Red Sorghum* 红高粱 (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1995), 39.

mean an interruption of the movement of the plot. In another scene in *Red Sorghum*, the laborers of the winery, to celebrate the success of their new wine, stand solemnly before the image of the wine-god and sing a song in praise of their wine. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, the process of raising the lanterns is depicted in meticulous details. The highly-stylized and rhythmical body movements of the lantern-raisers are accompanied by the beating of drums and gongs reminiscent of Peking-operas. In fact, Meishan, the third mistress of Master Chen in the film used to be a Peking-opera singer, and we see her sing and dance several times in the film.

Most of these audial-visual spectacles are absent in the novels, and, as Yingjin Zhang points out, "few would expect all rituals and ethnic details in these films to be historically accurate."[5] One of the functions of these ritual-like episodes is to entertain. It is as if Zhang Yimou were putting his camera before a real stage, recording some performance on the stage—shadow play, Peking-opera, or sedan-dance. Zhang Yimou insisted that "entertainment is what I have been trying to obtain in my film-making."[6] With these dances and songs, he is taking full advantage of the film as a medium, and entertains

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[5] Yingjin Zhang, Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, U of Michigan Press. 2002), 229. Zhang Yimou himself admits that he and even Mo Yan do not know for sure how the sedans were jostled, how wine was made, and whether there was a custom of worshipping the wine-god in wineries. He believes that "art allows for creation, and folk customs can be created too." See Zhang Yimou, "To praise life, and to prioritize creation: the directing and making of Red Sorghum" 赞颂生命，崇尚创作：《红高粱》的导演创作, in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui ed., *Annals of Chinese Cinema* 中国电影年鉴 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1988), 2-6.

[6] Zhang Yimou, "Pave the Road," 412.

audiences both domestic and abroad. If western audiences find these Chinese “rituals” exotic, so do most of the Chinese audiences. Moreover, these cultural elements are also used in a structural function in the films. The rituals often recur with slight variations, such as the wine-god prayers in *Red Sorghum* and the lantern raising in *Raise the Red Lantern*. Even if the ritual itself cannot be fully performed at each occurrence, Zhang Yimou will make the ritual felt by sending a tangible symbol of the ritual to many scenes, which helps sustain narrative unity.

We can analyze the shadow play in *To Live* in detail as a case in point, to see how the cultural rituals and other cultural elements might work. The shadow play is typical of the ways in which “culture” is employed by Zhang Yimou both thematically and formally. The shadow play is a crucial addition to the original novel, in which there is not one word speaking of shadow plays, and the protagonist Fu Gui is by profession a peasant tilling the field. The addition of the shadow play to Fu Gui’s life in the film is one that conveniently serves multiple functions. First, the shadow play is again a combination of songs and dance: the performers play instruments, sing behind the screen, maneuver the puppets and project their shadows onto the screen. Thus, the shadow play easily appeals to both the western audience’s appetite for the exotic oriental, and the Chinese’s audience’s zeal for the local and the traditional. The shadow play is a product of another space and another time. Its colorfully crafted figures, its archaic songs, its purely Chinese musical instruments and its magical projections—all these contribute to its attraction.

With its combination of the visual, the audial and the ritual, the shadow play is a perfect choice to present an ethnographic China.

The shadow play in the film is not only an exotic spectacle for entertainment, but has a symbolic significance. It serves as a symbol of the pre-communist Chinese culture, which is always threatened and finally destroyed by the advent and the reign of the communists. Its fate in communist China is an epitome of the fate of the old Chinese culture in the hands of the communists. For Fu Gui, the shadow play is not only a form of art, but a means to make a honest living. As Long Er, the former head of the shadow play troupe, puts it in the film, “when I was in charge of the shadow play troupe, I had never needed to ask others for help.” As a dandy, Fu Gui used to be materially affluent yet morally corrupt. Only when he assumes the role as the leader of the troupe, and learns to care for others and live on his own, self-sufficient both materially and morally, does he reach the peak of his career. However, the shadow play, with the Chinese culture it represents and the wish for decency it embodies, is beautiful yet fragile, and is always endangered. The waves of political upheavals in 20th-century China imprint themselves on the box of shadow play puppets Fu Gui has. That the puppets are flat human beings carries the implication that their fate somehow parallels the fate that overtakes real people.

This box of puppets is also a structuring technique, a thread that runs throughout the film and strings the political campaigns together. It is first threatened by the Nationalist

troops, yet it remains intact. Here, the nationalists seem much more lenient to the puppet box than the charging communists, who trampled down the puppets under their feet. A communist soldier points his gun at Fu Gui, sees the puppets, and coldly pokes one puppet up with the point of his bayonet. The fragile and helpless puppet on the tip of the bayonet foreshadows all the terror and havoc the communist regime is going to inflict on Chinese culture.

The shadow play goes through one ordeal after another in the post-1949 decades. In the Great Leap campaign, Fu Gui's son You Qing drags out the box, and suggests to the town head that there is still some iron left in the box. Fu Gui then comes up with an ingenious idea that he can use his shadow play as a propaganda form on the steel-making "battlefield." Here, Fu Gui is preserving the shadow play not for a living (very probably he gets nothing by playing it in the Great Leap), but for its cultural value. The loud shadow play indeed accompanies the grand steel-making spectacle. Yet the puppets cannot survive the "destroy the four olds" (*po sijiu*) campaign at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. With the advice of the town head, Fu Gui lets his daughter burn the puppets. However, the box miraculously survives the Cultural Revolution as an undying remnant of the old culture. At the end of the film, Fu Gui drags the box out from under the bed, and the box serves as the container for a batch of chickens representing hope.

The shadow plays projected onto the screen also allegorize national and personal events, in spite of Zhang Yimou's allegation that "the content of the plays is not of great

importance."[7] The chosen items with captions are highly suggestive, and can be neatly read against the development of the film. Thus, when Fu Gui gambles in the gambling-house, what he sings as an amateur is an unabashedly erotic passage, implying his decadence way of life.[8] When he loses his family house to Long Er, and has to sing to make a living, he sings passages that denounce the villainy of his enemy.[9] The passage he sings for the communist soldiers is especially suggestive:

Guang Chengzi raises the big seal,	广成子使起翻天印
Which hits one hard;	宝印起处疼杀人
I transfer the two generals in a hurry,	急忙我把二将换
And hastily flee to the Yellow Flower Mountain.	速速逃奔黄花山

The passage clearly refers to the overwhelming victory the communist army is gaining, the defeat of Jiang Jieshi and his disgraceful retreat to Taiwan. Similarly, the last playing of the shadow play on the steel-making field in 1958 implies the omnipotence of Mao: "whatever he says, you just do it."[10]

In *To Live*, this tendency to capture tradition and culture in some objects also manifests itself in the fate of Fu Gui's luxurious old house. The film attaches much weightier significance to the well-built old house than it has in the novel. In the novel, Fu

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[7] Quoted in Wendy Larson, "Displacing the Political: Zhang Yimou's *To Live* and the Field of Film," in Michel Hockx ed, *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 189.

[8] The passage reads in Chinese: 望老天多许一更，奴和潘郎宵宿久，象牙床上任你游.

[9] This passage reads: 文仲心中好惨伤，可恨老贼姜飞雄，青龙关上逃性命.

[10] The Chinese words are: 吩咐一声莫怠慢.

Gui's gambling rival Long Er is obsessed with Fu Gui's land, not his house. In the film, the significance of the house to Long Er is greatly magnified, so much so that he finally dies for the house. In the novel, after 1949, Long Er is executed because he is a landlord. Yet in the film, his death assumes some heroic dimension: he is executed because he tries to protect the old house against communists, and even burns the house lest it falls into communist hands. When Long Er is executed offstage, the film presents Fu Gui as if he receives the five bullets that kills Long Er. Through Long Er, Fu Gui dies a vicarious death. Talking about resistance, Long Er's protection of the old house in defiance of death seems the greatest act of resistance in the film. Yet himself a dubious character, Long Er's death only teaches Fu Gui the important lesson of not going against the communist tide.

Zhang Yimou's construction of Chinese culture on screen is not only represented in these isolated cultural elements—dances, songs, puppets, houses—but whole spaces can be saturated with "culture." It is not by accident that the protagonists of three of the four films are respectively wine-makers, dyers, shadow-play performers, while Yang Tianqing in *Ju Dou* and Fu Gui in *To Live* are mere peasants in the original novels. By making them artisans or artists, Zhang Yimou links them with culture and tradition. Furthermore, he can more conveniently put them into a well-defined space. In *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern*, one of the most significant carriers of "culture" is to be named the space Zhang Yimou constructs in which to unfold his stories, and in which

isolated cultural elements combine to create a mood.

It is interesting to see how the space and the spirit of the culture in the spaces change in his films with time. Both the winery in *Red Sorghum* and the dying mill in *Ju Dou* are places of manual labor where work is still done with primitive-looking equipments. Yet these spaces are made to contain different moods. By changes made to the original novel, Zhang Yimou constructs the winery in *Red Sorghum* practically into a utopia, a place far away from the world and untouched by social realities. In the novel by Mo Yan, the winery is located in a village. Yet in the film, the winery stands by itself in an isolated place, far from everything else.[11] When the leper is in the winery, it is a place everyone shuns. When the heroine Jiu'er succeeds her leper husband to preside over the winery, the shunned place becomes a self-sufficient space free from political authorities and social surveillance.[12] The free and celebratory mood is represented in the cleansing of the winery after the leper's death, and the wine making process afterwards.

Zhang Yimou also deliberately erases the social distinction between Jiu'er and the common workers in the winery. In the novel, Jiu'er, as the proud and energetic mistress of the winery, exercises an effective and tight control over the workers, and "seldom pays attention to the sweating workers."[13] The workers stand in much awe of her, and often gossip against her. Yet in the film, Jiu'er happily stands on the same level as the workers.

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[11] Zhang Yimou chose a desolate place in northwestern China as the location of this winery, which, according to the novel, is in Shangdong.

[12] There is a whole long Chinese tradition of such spaces, as represented by Tao Yuanming's "Taohua yuan ji" [The Peach-Blossom Spring].

[13] Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum*, 138.

In her announcement to the workers when they are prepared to leave after the old master's death, Jiu'er insists that they do not call her "mistress," that "we are equal in this winery," and that "if the winery works, everyone has a good share." This is very much reminiscent of the traditional communities. Jiu'er herself also labors in the film. When watching the making of the wine, she tries a hand at drawing the bellows, and the action makes her one of the laborers. In the novel, after the wine is made, Jiu'er attempts to drink the wine, and the laborers, out of their awareness of her higher status, compliment her by saying that "You're sure a good-drinker, mistress." Yet in the film, the laborers only watch her drinking in brotherly love and admiration. The winery becomes a big fraternity.

The workers in the winery are presented by Zhang Yimou as a group. Except Luo Han, Zhang Yimou does not distinguish between the other workers. They have no individual names or personality. They are one. They work together, pray together, and fight against the Japanese together. Their muscular bodies, their vigorous work, their innocent good-humor, all contribute to the energy of the film. Their equality stands in sharp contrast to the rigid hierarchy in *Raise the Red Lantern*. In the latter, each mistress has a number before their titles, a position in the family, and a well-defined courtyard. Each is enclosed in her own space.

The proportion of the indoor and outdoor also changes in Zhang Yimou's films from the 1980s to the 1990s. In *Red Sorghum*, we seldom have an indoor scene. Scenes in the

winery do not give the impression that they happen indoors, as if the vision is free and unobstructed. The indoor and the outdoor form one big unity. However, in *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern*, the settings are changed "from the liberating outer space of primitive nature to the claustrophobic inner space of traditional culture."[14] The vision becomes severely restricted in *Ju Dou*. In the original novel by Liu Heng, the relationship between Tianqing and Ju Dou happens in the fields where they work together for Yang Jinshan. By contrast, in Zhang Yimou's filmic version, most actions happen indoors. The indoor space of the mill is under two layers of surveillance: first, it is the territory of the patriarch Yang Jinshan, the mill owner; then, embedded in rows of houses in the village, the mill is also subject to social pressures from the village community. Yet Ju Dou and Tianqing can still sometimes steal to the outdoor to enjoy themselves. The bright cloths hung in the courtyard can still sometimes break through the enclosed space.

If the dye mill in *Ju Dou* is partially closed, then the mansion compound in *Raise the Red Lantern* is totally closed. There is no way out. Contrary to the exaggerated open space of *Red Sorghum* in which spontaneity is celebrated, Zhang Yimou makes the house in *Raise the Red Lantern* a prison. Everything in it is artificial. In the original novel, there is still a garden, which Zhang Yimou cuts to make the enclosure of the compound complete. He is determined to strip the house of anything natural. There is of course no waving sorghum in it. There is not even a tree. In the original novel, Songlian meets her

[14] Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China*, 227.

potential lover Fei Pu, the master's son, among chrysanthemums. Yet in the film, they find each other in a big room on top of the mansion. In whatever direction you look in the film, you either see a courtyard, a wall, a screen, or a cavernous room framed by walls and ceilings. After Songlian steps from the outdoor world into this prison, she never leaves it. This is an enclosed world governed by its own iron laws.

Su Tong, author of the original novel, never pays much attention to the architecture of the house. By contrast, Zhang Yimou makes the mansion compound an almost living thing, and an important character itself. The house has nothing new to reveal to us: it only copies itself horizontally and vertically. The symmetrical and overwhelming architecture often fills the whole screen, in which tiny human beings move, who seem unable to bear the pressure of the architecture and are even swallowed by it. Their resistance looks futile. Songlian is our guide in this architectural maze.[15] However, she herself is engulfed by the maze. There are also recesses in the mansion unknown to her, where fearful secrets are hidden. Examples are the "death hut" on the very top of the mansion, and one maid's servant room, where shabby lanterns are lit and witchery is executed.

Not only are spaces increasingly stifling, but the spirit of the cultural rituals performed in the spaces become more and more stylized and empty. Compare the rituals of wine-god prayer in *Red Sorghum* and raising the lanterns in *Raise the Red Lantern*.

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[15] On her second day in the compound, she is led by the butler to see the other mistresses from one courtyard to another. Then, one morning, awakened by the third mistress Meishan's opera singing, she goes through many zigzags up to the roof of the mansion.

The former is crude, rugged, yet energetic, and even to some extent sublime. The latter is precise and also accompanied by music, but the performers are wordless. In both films, red is an important color, and "red" appears in the titles too. Yet the significance of the color has changed. In *Red Sorghum*, it is life, happiness and freedom. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, it is the contorted desire of the mistresses for being chosen by the master. The redness of the lanterns seems weak and weird against the gray and blue background of the house. Thus, there is a perceptible tendency from *Red Sorghum*, through *Ju Dou*, to *Raise the Red Lantern* to become more and more oppressive. Also contributing to this tendency of increased oppression is Zhang Yimou's characterization of the old patriarchs and the young lovers.

The Patriarchs and the Young Lovers：Demonization and Agency

Wendy Larson's summary of Zhang Yimou's early films is very accurate: "The female character played by Gong Li is positioned between two men, one an older man who is diseased, perverted, or cruel… and the other a younger man who … is attracted to her erotically."[16] This pattern applies to *Red Sorghum, Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern.* At the beginning of each film, we find a soon-to-be married or newly married woman

[16] Wendy Larson, "Zhang Yimou: Inter/National Aesthetics and Erotics," in Soren Clausen, Roy Starrs and Anne Wedell-Wedelsborg eds. *Cultural Encounters: China, Japan, and the West: Essays Commemorating 25 Years of East Asian Studies at the Univerisity of Aarhus* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus UP, 1995), 227.

(Gong Li), on her way to be initiated into horrible knowledge of her husband and her marriage. Each marriage is against her will. In *Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou*, her father practically sells her into the marriage. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, she "sells" herself into the marriage, since she believes this is the best option out. However, within this single narrative pattern, the films are different in their representation of the patriarchs and the young lovers.

The main patriarchal figure in these films is the woman's old husband, rather than her father. Compared with the original novels, these patriarchal figures are dehumanized and later even demonized. One strategy of Zhang Yimou is to make them "invisible." In *Red Sorghum*, at Ju'er's wedding night, her leper husband is not represented on the screen. We do not see him or hear his voice. We only see Jiu'er, a pair of scissors in hand, retreat inch by inch from this figure off-screen, which is reminiscent of a similar scene in *Huang tudi* [Yellow Earth] (1984). Similar is Zhang Yimou's treatment of Master Chen in *Raise the Red Lantern.* In the original novel, Master Chen, though cold and cruel, still has his weaknesses. He can feel "curious and warm" in his first dating with Songlian in a western-style restaurant.[17] He can be embarrassed and exhausted by the endless rivalry between his wives. Yet in the film, we never see his face clearly. Either he is shown in long shots, almost always in black clothes, or his presence off-screen is suggested by fragments of his clothes. We only hear his voice, cold, flat and commanding. Even in the

[17] Su Tong, *Wives and Concubines* 妻妾成群, in *Collected Works of Su Tong: on Marriages* 苏童文集：婚姻即景 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 112.

one single scene that may humanize him, that of him listening to his little son laboring to recite a Chinese poem, we still cannot see him clearly. He is thus deprived of this one chance of being humanized.

The complex ritual of raising the lanterns also contributes to his dehumanization. Su Tong's novel mentions no such lanterns, yet the lanterns become crucial and highly symbolic in the narration of the film, as analyzed in the previous section. However, upon closer examination, the ritual defies logic and common sense. At each night, the four wives will stand before the gates of their courtyards, apparently waiting for the master to choose with whom he would spend the night. A red lantern will be placed before the lucky mistress, and others return to their courtyards in jealousy and disappointment. In fact, even such a philander as Ximen Qing in the famously erotic book *Jin Ping Mei* [Golden Lotus] tries to make peace among his several wives, so that he can have fewer troubles himself, and can enjoy his household more. However, Master Chen in *Raise the Red Lantern* seems to be intent on exciting jealousy among his wives. Even his first wife, the only legitimate wife, is reduced to the same rank as the concubines, who are further reduced to the rank of prostitutes. Chen, even when changing from one mistress to another at midnight, has lanterns raised and lighted for him with incredible pomp and fuss.

Chinese critic Dai Jinhua believes that the "absence of the male protagonist" in *Raise the Red Lantern* is "to make the position empty, waiting for a western vision, a gaze of

the western male."[18] I would rather argue that by making the patriarch invisible, Zhang Yimou is not making him absent, but omnipresent. He becomes a pure surveilling and commanding "gaze." We can sense his menacing presence precisely because he is not seen. He is not seen so as to be better sensed and suggested. This suggestion of something off screen might also be part of Zhang Yimou's filmmaking theories. Ni Zhen, a teacher of the fifth-generation directors when they were in the Beijing Film Academy, said that in *One and Eight* (*Yige he bage*, 1983), in which Zhang Yimou was one of the two cinematographers, the actors "were to be on one side of the shot or the other, with scenery obscuring them in order to avoid any subtle expressions of feeling."[19] The theory is that "on-screen and off-screen were linked together to produce a whole….In order to suggest off-screen space, one may compose a single frame incompletely…to imply the connection between the on- and off-screen space."[20] The technique to make the patriarch "invisible" might be a continuation of this practice.

In *Ju Dou*, the old and cruel patriarch Yang Jinshan does appear in some humanized details. He can be ridiculously miserly, and has much weakness toward his mule. It is in Tianbai, Yang Tianqing's biological son and Yang Jinshan's acknowledged son, that demonization culminates. In the original novel, Tianbai, as a teenager, is strong, smart,

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[18] Dai Jinhua, *Landscape in the Fog* 雾中风景 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 254.
[19] Ni Zhen, *Memoirs From the Beijing Film Academy: The Genesis of China's Fifth Generation* (Durham: Duke UP, translated by Chris Berry, 2002), 168.
[20] Ibid, 169.

and even good at writing. After the death of Tianqing, he is "inconsolable."[21] He kills no one. Yet in the film, he kills both of his fathers. The child Tianbai never utters words except those naming ones that nail the other characters to their social roles: *die* ("father"), *niang* (mother) and *ge* (elder brother). At first, we may suspect that Tianbai will become a lovely child, as children often are on screen. Yet this potentiality is instantly killed the moment he assumes the role of Yang Jinshan's son by calling him "father." From then on, Tianbai becomes a pure symbol of the patriarch: a mere grim and cold presence, and a pair of killing hands.

Although the demonized patriarchs appear in *Red Sorghum, Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern*, their authority is drastically different. With time, there is a tendency for him to become more and more powerful. In *Red Sorghum*, Li Datou the leper appears "invisibly" only once, and then mysteriously dies, presumably murdered.[22] Not only does he die, but every trace of him is destroyed. In the novel, after his death, under the supervision of the now sole mistress Jiu'er, all workers of the winery burn what the former masters have used, and sterilize everywhere. After that, Jiu'er "awards each worker three dollars."[23] This matter-of-fact episode is turned in the film into an exuberant and extravagant festival. Jiu'er and the workers celebrate the death of the old

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[21] Liu Heng, *Fuxi, Fuxi*, collected in his *The God-Damned Grain* 狗日的粮食 (Beijing: zuojia chubanshe, 1993), 108.

[22] In the novel, Mo Yan makes it explicit that "my grandpa" kills the leper and his father. Yet in the film, the voice-over narrates that "Li Datou was killed by someone," supposedly by "my grandpa," but we can never be sure. Obviously Zhang Yimou is reluctant to make the hero "my grandpa" a killer.

[23] Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum*, 126.

leper, and Jiu'er suggests that "they douse" the whole place "with sorghum wine thrice." Not only is Jiu'er glad to be free of the hated husband, but the workers are glad too to be rid of a leper master. They laugh, run, and throw wine at each other in a festive mood. The burning fire and the red wine make sure that the old world is completely eradicated, and on the same place, a brand-new world is created, not for Jiu'er alone, but for everyone.

The old patriarch Yang Jinshan in *Ju Dou* is much more powerful than the leper in *Red Sorghum*. Yang Jinshan is crippled for life, but he can still rob Tianqing of his son, and can transmit his message effectively to Tianbai. Tianbai is Yang Jinshan resurrected with a vengeance and with more authority. Ju Dou and Tianqing, the unfortunate lovers, can defy the old patriarch, but they cannot defy Tianbai the child-patriarch. Tianbai's presence alone is enough to persecute them. Even at the end of the film, when Ju Dou sets fire to the dying mill, we are not told what may become of Tianbai. The fire in *Red Sorghum* is happy and celebratory, but the fire in *Ju Dou* is destructive and suicidal. Ju Dou is sure to die in the flames, but not Tianbai. We do not know what may become of him. It is as if he, as the pure "symbol" of patriarchy, is able to somehow survive the fire. He is indestructible. Similarly, Master Chan is absolute in his authority in *Raise the Red Lantern*.

The patriarchs in Zhang's films not only become more and more powerful themselves, but they gain more and more support from tradition and society. The leper in

the 1980s *Red Sorghum* works by himself. Yet, the patriarchs in the works of Zhang Yimou in the 1990s can invoke the collective and accumulative authority of tradition. The emphasis on this vicious patriarchal tradition is almost entirely added by Zhang Yimou. Thus, in *Ju Dou,* we see Yang Jinshan bow to the altar of his ancestors, thanking them that he finally has a "son." With the birth of the baby, it is the patriarchs in the family who convene and choose a name for Tianbai, a name which makes him always the brother of his biological father Tianqing. After the death of Jinshan, the patriarchs convene again, pronouncing their verdict that Ju Dou is not to be remarried, that Tianqing should move out, and that they should exhibit their loyalty to the dead by stopping the funeral march 49 times. The lovers are acting against the whole Yang family, and the whole unsympathetic village community.

In *Raise the Red Lantern,* Songlian's first stop in her tour of the compound is the room where the portraits of the ancestors of the Chen family are hung. This room, nonexistent in the original novel, is also where the family dines under the gaze of the ancestors. In this film, Zhang Yimou makes the phrase *lao guiju* ("old rules") a recurring theme. Everything is according to the old rules. The mistress chosen by the master is privileged to have lanterns raised in her courtyard and her room, to be massaged by an old hag, and to have her favorite dishes cooked for her. All these are "old rules." These rules are so powerful that Songlian later employs them in her competition with the other mistresses. The "old rules" make what happen in the story timeless. Master Chen is only

one of a series of patriarchs, and Songlian is only one of the many victims. Mistresses like her died before her, and will die too after her. After Songlian goes mad near the end of the film, another mistress is married into the mansion, innocent and ignorant just like Songlian used to be. The reign of the patriarch is thus perpetuated.

Red Sorghum, *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* all have a worship scene which is similar in format. In *Red Sorghum*, the laborers pray to the wine god. In *Ju Dou*, Yang Jinshan worships before the altar of his ancestors. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, the butler kneels before the portraits of the family ancestors. Yet the worship is different in significance. The wine-god worshipped in *Red Sorghum* is a mythical figure and the laborers' spiritual guide. Their method of worship is also unique. They stand upright before the god, chant a song, and then smash their wine-bowls on the ground. Here, drinking "is not only done as a social event but is specifically performed as a ritual."[24] The god, rather than to be feared or obeyed, is a god who legitimates such enthusiasm. From this upright position of the labors, to the bowing Yang Jinshan, to the kneeling butler, the worshipped object becomes more and more austere, and the worshippers more and more servile.

With the tendency of the patriarchal figure to become stronger and stronger, is a parallel tendency of the male lover to become weaker and weaker. From *Red Sorghum*, through *Ju Dou*, to *Raise the Red Lantern*, the male lover degenerates from a hero to a

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[24] Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China*, 212.

coward, to even less than a coward. In both the novel and film *Red Sorghum*, "my grandpa" is a heroic figure. Contrary to this energetic hero of the 1980s is the weak male lover in the 1990s. Telling are the changes Zhang Yimou makes to Tianqing, the male lover in *Ju Dou*. In the original novel, Tianqing is only 16 when he meets Ju Dou. He is physically strong and mentally romantic, "innocent and healthy, happy and exuberant."[25]. His story is that of a "love hero."[26] He commits a graceful suicide by drowning himself in a water vat nakedly. Even years later, his death is still legend among the children, who admire his potent manhood. The characterization of Tianqing is thus not without a touch of the sublime or heroic. Yet in the film, Tianqing is already in his early forties.[27] The actor (Li Baotian) is thin, almost withered, and docile. The romanticism of Tianqing and his great sympathy for the abused Ju Dou are diluted in the film. This filmic Tianqing is only a diminutive version of the same character in the novel. The film also has Tianqing killed by his son "Tianbai," ensuring his total defeat. The male lover in *Raise the Red Lantern*, the patriarch's son, is more pathetic than Tianqing. The romantic sentiments between him and Songlian even never materialize.[28]

In these three films, the woman—or more exactly, her body—is what the male lover

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[25] Liu Heng, *Fuxi, Fuxi*, 16.
[26] Ibid, 108.
[27] In one of Liu Heng's earlier draft scripts for the film, Tianqing is in his 20s. Thus we see that Zhang Yimou is determined to make this character older.
[28] Significantly, the young male-lover is also bound to the patriarch by stronger and stronger ties. "My grandpa" in *Red Sorghum* does not know the leper before his affair with "my grandma." In *Ju Dou*, the male lover is the patriarch's nephew. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, he is the patriarch's son. The moral demands on him are increasingly stringent.

and the patriarch are contending for. In each film, the woman (played by Gong Li) exhibits her body to us. In *Red Sorghum*, she is a willing sacrifice on that "marriage bed" trampled in the sorghum field by "my grandpa." In *Ju Dou*, she, half-naked, is bound and abused by her legal husband, and displays her bruised body to the peeping Tianqing. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, she is shown blurredly on the marriage bed, again a victim of the patriarch. Feminist critics have long criticized Zhang Yimou of fetishization of the female body. To Rey Chow, Zhang's primitivism is exemplified by the woman on exhibition: "The woman's body becomes the living ethnographic museum," and the woman also "becomes a way to *localize* China's 'barbaric' cultural institutions, from which she seeks to be set free."[29] I want to add that the female body is not only displayed to western audiences, but to Chinese audiences too. Zhang Yimou's films are daring in their depiction of sexuality. Made in the 1980s when talking about sex and sexuality was still a taboo, the case of *Red Sorghum* is typical.. To Chinese audience, the sensual depiction was shocking. In this sense, Zhang Yimou's obsession with sexuality seems in part an excessive re-action to the Maoist asceticism of the previous age.

Besides, the female, though reduced mostly to her body, can also be a subversive factor in the films. Her body is seductive to the audiences, and it also seduces and inspires the male lover in the film into action. In *Red Sorghum*, Jiu'er looks at "my grandpa" daringly in face of the robber, and her gaze whips him into fighting. Later, it is

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[29] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 47.

also she who arouses the labors into fighting against the Japanese. In later films, ins rebellious. It is the woman, rather than the man, who makes the sexual advances and takes the initiatives. Ju Dou in Liu Heng's original novel is quite docile and innocent, and does not know that Tianqing is peeping at her all the time. Yet in the film, she is unabashed enough to take advantage of his peeping to display herself. In *Raise the Red Lantern*, Songlian in the end has the courage to accuse the patriarch of murder, and play a gramophone to scare the master's lackeys after the third mistress' death.

In these films, the female can be more resistant to the patriarchal society than the male. Similarly, in *To Live*, the female is depicted as more resistant to political pressures than the male. Jia Zhen, Fu Gui's wife in *To Live*, is stripped of much of the seductive power usually accorded to women played by Gong Li, yet the film gives her more weight than the novel. Her female code of behavior based on emotion, common sense and family ties, seems to go against the male's code based on economical or political concerns. Thus, she leaves Fu Gui when she believes he is still prosperous, and returns to him when he is penniless. Her stubbornness is all the more precious after the establishment of the communist regime. While Fu Gui feels the need to be deferent to Chun Sheng, the district head who kills their son by accident, Jia Zhen refuses to see him. Yet when Chun Sheng is brought down in the Cultural Revolution and nobody dares to approach him, Jia Zhen softens and shows her sympathy. In the all too politicized atmosphere, she, with her womanly and motherly qualities, proves resistant, though unconsciously so.

The increasingly powerful patriarchs and their final triumph, and the weaker and weaker rebellion and its futility are often cited as evidence of Zhang Yimou's conformism to the current regime. It seems that we should distinguish between what the film represents, and what the film makes the audiences identify with. Take Tianqing in *Ju Dou* as an example. Zhang Yimou deliberately makes him much weaker than in the original novel. Yet the stance of the director himself is obvious. Zhang Yimou is ambitious to make Tianqing representative of the Chinese national character. To him, Tianqing "is a typical Chinese…He has a very heavy burden, and his mind is repressed and distorted," and he "represents the repressed part of we Chinese."[30] Here, Zhang Yimou seems to be carrying on the self-assumed task of Chinese intellectuals ever since the May Fourth Movement: to expose and critique the ugly side of the so-called Chinese "national character."

Engaging the History of Chinese Communism Obliquely

In rewriting 20th-century Chinese history, Zhang Yimou has to deal with the rise and victory of communism and the history of the communist regime. He was born in 1950, and communism is the part of Chinese history he finds himself in. From changes Zhang Yimou makes to the original novels, it is interesting to see how his strategies evolve in

[30] Zhang Yimou, "Pave the Road," 386.

tackling this problem, and how he sometimes tries to avoid the problem, and sometimes confronts the problem in a circuitous way.

The novel *Red Sorghum* has big sections on the communist troops. Like the nationalists, the communists also appear after “my grandpa” Yu Zhan’ao has finished his fight with the Japanese, only to ask for weapons he has got from the Japanese paid at the cost of blood. The communist leader’s speech to Yu, full of political jargons, sounds ridiculous, and Yu is not persuaded or fooled. These disrespectful descriptions of the Communists are deleted by Zhang Yimou in his film. Furthermore, he makes uncle Luo Han, a senior worker in the winery, into a communist. In the novel, Luo Han is just one of the workers, and is seized by the Japanese because he attacks the livestock of the Japanese. In the film, Luo Han disappears from the winery, and it is said that he joined the communists. Then we find him already in the hands of the Japanese and is flayed. His death is the trigger of the final action of the workers, led by “my grandpa,” to attack the Japanese. In this sense, he is a stereotypical communist hero, inspiring the masses to their national consciousness and to resistance.

Yet except this, his other qualities are quite different from those of the classic communist hero. In the film, Luo Han is old, and looks thin and docile. He is not the angry strong young man we expect to leave home for communism. Why does he join the communists? What does he do as a communist away from home? How does he fall into the hands of the Japanese? All these questions remain unanswered. His communist

history is a mystery. Besides, he is flayed. His death, though tragic and violent, is unsightly. Classic communists in films do not die in this way. Their lives are often ended by bullet, and the execution is often done offstage. The audience can only see their heroic march to the execution, and hear their dauntless shouting of Communist slogans before their death. In contrast, Luo Han's death is described in the film in almost ghastly details. Besides, Luo Han is by far outshone by "my grandpa." The thin, old and silent Luo Han seems negligible besides "my" energetic, muscular and rambunctious "grandpa." Luo Han obviously harbors some romantic sentiments for Jiu'er. Yet Jiu'er falls for "my grandpa." When Luo Han knocks the door to tell Jiu'er that the wine is a success, it is "my grandpa" who appears to answer his call.

The real hero of the film *Red Sorghum* is, no doubt, "my grandpa." Zhang Yimou deliberately makes this hero different in every way from the hero in classic communist films. In the film, "my grandpa" is almost rascal-like, and not even decent. Courage is his main feature. In the novel, one of grandpa's methods to woo Jiu'er is to implement a new technology in the winery. This color of modern technology is deleted in the film, and grandpa remains reckless. In the novel, he inadvertently steps into a restaurant run by the bandits, and encounters the bandit leader by accident. Yet in Zhang Yimou's film, he is brave enough to deliberately venture alone into the bandits' den.

The final fight with the Japanese in the film can well illustrate how Zhang Yimou tries to make "my grandpa" into a spontaneous hero not guided by any fixed ideology.

"My grandpa" Yu Zhan'ao is usually called "Commander Yu" in the novel, because he has under his command a semi-regular troop, no more than 40 in number, armed with all kinds of rifles and other weapons. He has long experiences of drilling and training his soldiers. He plans the ambush to be a concerted action between his troops and the nationalists, although the latter fail to show up. Yet in Zhang Yimou's film, grandpa, grandma and the winery workers are pure *lao baixing* [commoners], with no allegiance to any political authority. Their major motivation is passionate hatred towards the Japanese. As Yingjin Zhang puts it, "Grandma sees the importance of fighting not in terms of Communist ideology but simply in terms of the loyalty an individual must demonstrate to his or her own community."[31] Their ambush is without much planning, done at the spur of the moment, and with simple homemade weapons. It is an action purely of the folks and by the folks. Thus the film, although with a communist figure in it (maybe to pay the communists some lip services), gives the glory to a spontaneous and reckless hero and the folks he represents.

Then in *Ju Dou*, Zhang Yimou tries to avoid an engagement with the Communist history, and deletes all traces of Communist presence in the original novel. *Fuxi, Fuxi*, on which the film is based, has the same potential as *To Live*. In the novel, the story begins in 1944, when Yang Jinshan marries Ju Dou. After that, the village experiences one communist campaign after another: from the "*jianzu jianxi*" [reducing the rents and

[31] Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China*, 214.

interests], to land reform, to "*huzhu zu*" [cooperative groups], to communes, even to the Cultural Revolution. The Yang family is affected more or less by each campaign, and the impact of the advent of the communists on village life is quite similar to *To Live*.[32] Yet in the film *Ju Dou*, not only are all these traces of communist history deleted, but, to make the story totally a pre-revolutionary story, the beginning time of the story is changed from 1944 to the 1920s. Thus, even with the growing-up of Tianbai, the story can still end itself before the advent of the communists. However, to try to avoid an engagement with the Communist history does not mean that Zhang Yimou is not interested in the history. The interest is only temporarily repressed and returns with a vengeance in *To Live*.

If *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* are snapshots of the Republican period, then *To Live* is ambitious enough to be a national epic. According to Yu Hua, author of the original novel, the novel is first of all a story of one man's life, and lastly a story of a nation. Zhang Yimou's film elevates this last theme over and above other themes, presenting the story of a nation through one family's fate largely defined by and against communist politics. We may find that, to remold the novel, a story of a man, into an epic about the fate of a nation, Zhang Yimou adds more "culture" into the film, plays up the significance of national politics, and at the same time avoids a too direct critique of politics. The result is a miniature epic encapsulating the history of communist China.

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[32] For example, in the novel, Ju Dou's father sticks to his 20-acre field, and swings a hoe to defend his property against the communists, which may remind us of Long Er desperately defending his house in the film *To Live*.

To make the protagonist Fu Gui and his family more representative of China, and more exposed to the impact of national politics, the film transplants Fu Gui's family from a village in the novel to a town. In the village, the influences of the politics are tenuous in terms of both scale and intensity. The town helps to magnify and clarify the repercussions of national politics, which in the village can only be vaguely and remotely felt. For example, in the novel, the Great Leap Forward in 1958 is marked by only one furnace made of an iron barrel, while in the film, the steel-making campaign appears in the far more imposing spectacle of rows of furnaces burning day and night. Similarly, if the film is situated in a village, the Cultural Revolution street scenes full of slogan-shouting red guards will be impossible.[33]

National politics is greatly magnified and its impact more intensely felt in the film than in the novel. The focus of the novel is on Fu Gui's family, and national politics serves only as a vague backdrop against which the family life unfolds. In the novel, the peasant Fu Gui is not very sensitive to politics as long as it does not bother him. The novel even does not in any way mark the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Yet the film's representation of communist China is completely structured around national politics. The captions tell the audience the time and the national events at that time. Scenes and things emblematic of the age are profusely used. The result is that

[33] Yet the transplanting is sometimes not very plausible. The *duizhang* [team leader] in the novel is transformed in the film into a *zhen zhang* [town head]. While a team leader can know everyone in the village, it is a little stretching to think of a town head walking into every household and knowing everybody well.

politics looms much larger in the film than in the novel. The Cultural Revolution, represented in the novel by two meager parts about some red guards condemning the team leader and Chun Sheng being paraded and beaten, shows itself in the film in numerous forms: the ubiquitous faces of Mao; the ever-present loudspeaker reading the latest editorial in an emphatic voice; streets full of crowds and big character posters. The political background comes to the foreground, and becomes the focus of the film.

An especially extravagant blowing-up of politics in the film is the marriage scene of Fu Gui's daughter Feng Xia. In the novel, the marriage is fondly remembered by Fu Gui as the most memorable marriage in the village, and the peak of his dear daughter's life, when the bridegroom distributes cigarettes and bonbons to everyone, and Feng Xia is extremely beautiful in her new dress. Yet the film practically repackages this rustic marriage into a typical Cultural Revolution ritual: every detail is emblematic of the Cultural Revolution. Different from the novel, Feng Xia is in a military form. The bridegroom comes in a great pomp accompanied by the blaring of the song "navigating on the sea depends on the helmsman." The marriage gifts are selected works of Mao and Mao's statuettes in all sizes and postures. All guests join in the singing of the exemplary Cultural Revolution song, "the sky and the earth are not greater than the benevolence of the party," and the film even allows the guests to sing the song to its full length. The marriage then ends with the whole family posing for a photo on a fake revolutionary ship, against the big portrait of Mao, each person in a military posture, holding a "red treasured

book." This marriage spectacle highlights the film's reification and aestheticization of history and politics.

Yet serious political critique can be conveyed through the film's highlighting of politics too. More tragic and fatal than the above happy marriage is the coincidence of Fu Gui's family catastrophes with political campaigns. National politics is the obvious murderer of Feng Xia. If her marriage is a packaging of the happy or harmlessly laughable elements of the Cultural Revolution, her death captures the dark side of that movement. In the novel, Feng Xia dies of bleeding in a hospital staffed with normal doctors. "After giving birth to the child, Feng Xia bled, and died before the nightfall."[34] Thus her death is narrated by Yu Hua in starkly simple words, without any mentioning of the Cultural Revolution or linking her death with it. Her death, although traumatic, may well happen at any period. Yet this death is fleshed out into the most tragic scene of the film. The red guards seizing the hospital and condemning the old doctors as "counterrevolutionary expert authorities;" the escorting to the hospital of an old doctor from the *niu peng* [bull hut]; Fu Gui going to the crowded streets to buy some food for the doctor; the irreversible and irrevocable dying process of Feng Xia--all these elements in the film are added by Zhang Yimou. Feng Xia dies because the medical students (now red guards) are incompetent doctors, and because the real doctor is abused and can offer no help. With these, the scene is transformed into an indirect yet no less strong critique of

[34] Yu Hua, *To Live* 活着 (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1998), 171.

the radical politics that is responsible for Feng Xia's death.

This may bring us to a feature of the political critiques couched in the film. These critiques are often indirect, oblique or cloaked in ambiguity. Lip services are paid to the authorities, yet images presented in the film often negates the lip services. One telling example is the scene of the defeat of the nationalist army. Lao Quan, a fellow nationalist soldier, tells Fu Gui and Chun Sheng confidently that the communist army is kind to captives so long as you hold your arms high up. Yet Lao Quan himself receives a communist bullet, which almost cancels out his praise of the communists. The following scene of Fu Gui and Chun Sheng being overtaken by the communist soldiers is a striking representation of the menacing and ominous advent of the communists. First we have an overview shot of Fu Gui and Chun Sheng, two tiny black spots floundering in the snow. Then we see the avalanching of the communist soldiers approaching and overwhelming them. Here the assault of the communist army is silent, without the heroic shouting of "hurrah" or blaring of horns that inevitably accompanies such scenes in official military films. The coming of the communist terror is almost like a silent coming of a giant beast, which engulfs Fu Gui and Chun Sheng who look so helpless. Yet, this unusually unflattering representation of the communists, due to its visual nature (no words are uttered), lends itself to multiple interpretations, and thus may hope to escape the tight censorship.

Another political twist the film gives to the novel concerns the metaphor of the

growing chicken. In the novel, the image is used by Fu Gui's father after Fu Gui loses the family property in gambling. The father tells Fu Gui of their family history:

> It is as if, the ancestors of our Xu family were raising a little chicken, which grew into a goose, which in turn grew into a sheep, which again grew into a cow. Our family made it big in this way… Yet in my hands, our cow shrinks into a sheep, which in turn shrinks into a goose. In your hands, the goose turns into a chicken. Now, even the chicken is gone. (29)

Thus, in the novel, the from-the-chicken-to-the-cow image is a metaphor for the fortune of Fu Gui's family, to capture its progress to prosperity and then its decline. The film takes the metaphor out of its context, and confers on it a far broader and deeper significance. The metaphor is used in the film twice by Fu Gui. The first time is when he carries the sleepy You Qing to school. After Fu Gui tells the prospect of their family growing better and better, from a chicken into a cow, You Qing asks: "what then?" Fu Gui confidently answers, "then it is communist society, and we can eat dumplings and meat every day." The metaphor is here changed into a trope for the common people's faith in the communist vision. At the end of the film, Mantou, Fu Gui's grandson, has a bunch of real chickens. After Fu Gui reiterates the chicken-to-cow process, Mantou again asks, "what then?" Fu Gui hesitates for some seconds, and then answers, "then Mantou will grow up." Fu Gui's different answers to the same question show his disillusionment and loss of faith in the communist promise. He now contents himself with a vision of the

future far more modest.

One paradox of the political critiques in the film is that, on the one hand, unlike the novel, it adds much more political content. On the other hand, when the political criticism of the novel is too obvious or direct, it will be downplayed or displaced in the film. For example, the famine in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, described in detail in the novel, is absent in the film. One more example is the film's different treatment of You Qing's death. In the novel, You Qing dies a terrible death because of a loss of blood: his blood is pumped out to save the wife of the country head. This is too horrible a critique of the brutality and inhumanity of the cadres and doctors. In the film, Zhang Yimou softens You Qing's death and presents it as an accident, which, though tragic, one cannot easily locate a murderer to blame for.

The ending of the film is especially noteworthy. One aspect different from the novel is its temporal dimension. The novel narrates Fu Gui's life right up to the present. Fu Gui, living with his grandson, experiences de-collectivization, which makes his life even worse since his family has only one labor. His grandson dies of eating too many soybeans after the de- collectivization in the early 1980s. The film, by contrast, is ended immediately after the Cultural Revolution. All contemporary references are deleted. Thus, the film purposely stops short of venturing into the present, perhaps for fear that contemporary references may more easily offend the censors. All political critiques launched by the film are aimed at the past, which is already safely dead and buried. The

contemporary is left out of its picture.

The note of the film's ending is also drastically different from that of the novel. The novel ends in an unmistakably pessimistic note. Fu Gui, bereft of all his family members, now has only an old cow to keep his company. By contrast, the film is blessed with a subdued happy ending. Not only do four family members survive, but the survivors represent three generations. Besides, the symbol of hope, the chickens, is secure in the shadow play box. In the end, the four family members eat their dinner, talking and laughing, when the credit lists appear on the screen, conveying a sense of everlasting peace and security, as if this life can continue forever. The critic Rey Chow sees nothing beyond eating in this last scene.[35] This might be a result of her failing to read the nuanced message.

In changing the ending of the film in this way, Zhang Yimou might want to ease the impression of doom and gloom after a series of disasters, cater to the audience's hope for something positive, and appease the censors. At the same time, perhaps we should also guard against the temptation to read too many critiques into his films. His attitude toward the communist history might be more complex than a simple desire to critique. This is an ambivalent attitude. The grand commune dining scene, the steel-making scene, and Feng Xia's marriage: these are not without a dimension of the carnival, although the happy mood in each case soon turns sour or tragic. Zhang Yimou believes that, "at the time,

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[35] Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1998), 119.

people willingly threw themselves into these two great movements [the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution]."[36] In fact, similar to Feng Xia's husband in *To Live,* Zhang Yimou himself was good at drawing portraits of Mao during the Cultural Revolution. His personal involvement in this history determines that he can only look at it with mixed feelings. When Rey Chow demands the characters in *To Live* "to speak out against injustice and to propose political alternatives,"[37] she might be expecting too much or having too fixed a view of agency or resistance. Not only are the characters not allowed to speak out at all, but they sometimes internalize the current ideology to such an extent that they do not want to speak out, or have nothing to speak out in the first place.

Visuality Foregrounded: Zhang Yimou's Filmic Strategies

Zhang Yimou is no doubt the most renowned Chinese director now, and his success both domestic and abroad is spectacular. Not only did he win one prize after another at important international film festivals and in China, but none of his films lost money. It is amazing how he could garner artistic acclaim and commercial profit at the same time. How are we to account for his success? In fact, he shared with other fifth-generation directors many characteristics. As far as film content is concerned, the obsession with China--Chinese culture, history and national character--seems their common feature.

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[36] Quoted in Wendy Larson, "Displacing the Political," 193.
[37] Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism,* 124.

Moreover, in *Yellow Earth* directed by Chen Kaige, we already have such rituals as praying for the rain and the drum-dance. In Tian Zhuangzhuang's films about remote areas in China, we also have unfamiliar and elaborate rituals and lifestyles of the Mongolians and the Tibetans. Yet no other fifth-generation director is as successful as Zhang Yimou. Where lies his secret?

His emphasis on visuality is perhaps one of the most important reasons. His films are beautifully made, no matter what the subject matter is. Striking images are his trademarks. From the previous analysis, we can see that when adapting novels onto the screen, he not only translates some passages of the novels into visual images, but adds more visual elements of his own. The Chinese rituals, architecture, local art forms and artifacts he added into the films we analyzed above, appear often as strong visual images with an impressive and rich color design. In films like *Raise the Red Lantern*, visuality is so deliberately devised that each image looks like a picture.

This foregrounding of the visual may have something to do with his training and early career as a cinematographer. It also stems from his understanding of the nature of the film as an artistic media. It seems that to him, the essence of the film lies in its visual nature. Commenting on his own adaptation of novels, he emphasized that novels and films are different artistic forms, and what is good in novels may not be good on the screen. He expressed this view in many interviews. He observes that "Even an adaptation

of a good literary work must first become a film,"[38] that "[O]ne of the advantages for films is to attain strong impact with strong images,"[39] and that "When making movies, I always want to add visual elements to the story that would bring something new and make it flow better."[40] However, perhaps the most important purpose of this foregrounding of the visual is to attract and to entertain. Zhang Yimou never believes in art for art's sake, and is always aware of the audiences and the market. Talking about *Keep Cool* (*Youhua haohao shuo*, 1997), he admitted that 'the first thing we had to consider when making the film was how to attract an audience."[41] This observation might be applied to each of his films.

The visual elements he adds to his films are often those that can sell well, and that appeal to both the western and the Chinese audiences. To western audiences, what is presented in his films in dazzling details is the Chinese culture, the "other" as opposed to the Western culture. In this transnational perspective, his success can be read as a symptom of global capitalism and the postcolonial situation. This aspect of his films has been amply studied by important critics both in the West and in China. Yingjin Zhang writes that Zhang Yimou's films are "exhibited for the gaze of the West."[42] Rey Chow

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[38] Ye Tan, "From the Fifth to the Sixth Generation: An Interview with Zhang Yimou," *Film Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (Winter 1999-2000): 5.
[39] Kwok-Kan Tam, "Cinema and Zhang Yimou," in Frances Gateward ed, *Zhang Yimou: Interviews* (Jackson, Mississippi: U P of Mississippi, 2001), 118.
[40] Hubert Niogret, "Interview with Zhang Yimou," in Frances Gateward ed, *Zhang Yimou: Interviews*, 60.
[41] Mut Ya, "Zhang Yimou, Do You Have Any More Films," in Frances Gateward ed, *Zhang Yimou: Interviews*, 143.
[42] Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China*, 222.

also argues that the Chineseness of his films is "the sign of a cross-cultural commodity fetishism."[43] To the audiences in China, these films are equally or even more engrossing, because they show them a China they are not familiar with yet they can relate to. This is a China of the remote areas (unfamiliar in space), and of the past (unfamiliar in time), with its strange customs and costumes, architecture and artifacts. The audiences can see on the screen what they have to pay for in tourism.

One feature of visual images is that they, unlike words, can generate ambiguity, and lend themselves to multiple interpretations. Zhang Yimou employs this to his full advantage, so that each set of audiences can see in his visual images something they want to see. His films can mean different things for different people, although the different meanings may be contradictory to each other. Take one scene in *Ju Dou* for example. The naked Ju Dou turns herself to the peeping Tianqing, weeping and displaying the bruises on her body. The scene is inviting in many senses. It is a woman under patriarchy who reaches out for help. It is the exhibition of an oriental victim of sexual abuse. It is moreover a beautiful woman displaying herself to a man and the audience, who can consume the image of the female body. Yet the image also forecloses possible accusations of obscenity from the censors by making the female body a carrier of anti-feudal and anti-patriarchal significance, which are legitimate subject matters in China. Thus, with his visual images, he cleverly makes himself enjoyable to both the Chinese and the western

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[43] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions,* 170.

audiences, and even acceptable to communist censors.[44]

One result of this focus on visuality is an aestheticization of everything. When Mayfair Young interviews Zhang Yimou and commented to him that "You make your tragedies very beautiful in *Red Lantern*," Zhang answered that "when tragedy is 'made aesthetic'(*meihua*), then it is all the more overpowering."[45] Maybe so. But seen in another way, the tragedy is also diluted, and the actions or practices which are supposed to be condemned may turn out attractive and desirable. A case in point is the practice of having the mistress's feet massaged in *Raise the Red Lantern* when that mistress is favored by the master. The massage, like the lanterns, is supposedly a manifestation of the power relationships and rivalry between the mistresses, and a form of control of the patriarch. Yet, by depicting a mesmerized Gong Li enjoying the massage, the film presents it as a form of sensual pleasure, and in a way makes the audiences desire it too. That which is "made aesthetic" often lost at least some of its subversive edge.

Zhang Yimou's stress on visuality was revolutionary at the early stage of his films against the Chinese film-making tradition which is based on stage drama, and in which the story and conversations are the main means of filmic expression, while visual images were largely ignored. Yet, when this emphasis on visuality turned routinized and even

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[44] With such visual images, even if the censors do sense something wrong, it is difficult for them to pinpoint it. For example, the scene in *To Live* discussed in this paper, in which Fu Gui and his companion are overtaken by an avalanche of communist soldiers. The image gives the impression that the communist power is dark and menacing, yet Zhang Yimou never openly endorses this interpretation. He just leaves the image there, open for appropriations.

[45] Mayfair Yang, "Of Gender, State, Censorship, and Overseas Capital: An Interview with Chinese Director Zhang Yimou," In Frances Gateward ed, *Zhang Yimou: Interviews*, 40.

automatic for Zhang Yimou, it became less and less subversive, and more and more hollow. It is interesting how the further removed the time of the story in the film, the more stylized are the images. In works dealing with contemporary life, such as *The Story of Qiujun* (Qiuju da guansi, 1993), and *Not one less* (Yige dou buneng shao,1999), Zhang Yimou's attention to visuality is less obvious. The films examined in this paper represent a middle-ground in this spectrum. His two most recent films, *Hero* (Yingxiong, 2003) and *The House of the Flying Daggers* (Shimian maifu, 2004), presumably about ancient China, have gong to an extreme in their excessive foregrounding of visuality at the expenses of other filmic elements. Visuality here exists for its own sake. The two films' beautiful costumes and scenery, and the dazzling martial arts special effects, strung together by an at best meager story-line and ridiculously shallow conversations, become mere spectacles for consumption. The enticing visuality, after all, may turn to be a double-edge sword which can ironically reduce the power of film as a multifaceted platform of arts.

Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to study Chinese filmic adaptation of literature from a cultural history perspective. Francesco Cassetti, when talking about film adaptation of literature, points out that

> we should consider these two realms [cinema and literature] as sites of production and circulation of discourses and connect them to other social discourses in order to trace a network of texts, within which we can identify the accumulation or dispersion, the coming forth or the reformulation, the emergence and the disappearance of some themes and issues.[1]

Lawrence Venuti, a scholar on translation studies, believes that translation scholars should address

> such questions as which foreign texts are selected for translation and which discursive strategies are used to translate them, which texts, strategies, and translations are canonized or marginalized, and which social groups are served by them.[2]

If we substitute “adaptation” for “translation” and “literary texts” for “foreign texts” in this text, Venuti’s and Cassetti’s passages can well capture my approach in this dissertation. As an important element in a century of Chinese filmmaking, adaptation offers a convenient window not only for us to see the changing strategies of the

[1] Francesco Cassetti, “Adaptation and Mis-adaptations,” 90.
[2] Lawrence Venuti, ed. *Rethinking Translation*, introduction, 11.

filmmakers, but through these strategies, the changing conditions for cultural productions in different periods. By exploring in detail some representative figures and moments of various periods, this dissertation seeks to shed light on the cultural history during the periods. Inspired by the "sociological turn" in current western adaptation studies and building on the existent scholarship on Chinese adaptations in particular, I want to go beyond the question of whether adaptation films should be faithful to their originals or not, but to see why filmmakers chose to be faithful or unfaithful at different junctures.

From the very beginning, Chinese cinema was closely related to opera and drama, and made extensive use of classical Chinese literature and foreign literature. The 1928-28 craze in Shanghai studios for traditional Chinese subjects, the 1928-1931 scramble for martial arts and monsters films, and the return to the traditional themes in Japanese-occupied Shanghai—these all show the link between Chinese films, traditional Chinese literature and popular literature at that time. The Republican-era film adaptations, especially when dealing with traditional Chinese literature and foreign literature, often adopt a free style without much fidelity to the sources. Moreover, "Butterfly" writers and then leftist writers were deeply involved in filmmaking, although the former focused on entertaining elements and the latter on political messages.

Adaptation of foreign literature was an important part of Republican cinema. The Republican filmmakers drew upon such wide range of writers as Shakespeare and Wilde, Maupassant and Tolstoy. The literary sources often traveled extensively, sometimes

through Japan, and often via drama stage versions, before they landed on the Chinese screen. Many of such films feature women, children or detective-outlaws. The sources are drastically changed and made into Chinese stories, plots and characterization are made simpler and more straightforward, although the original texts still show, making the final products transnational “palimpsest.”

Among these Republican-era adaptations of foreign literature, we can identify two important motifs, one on the role of the Chinese woman, the other on the figure of the Chinese rebel. Some films emphasize the importance for a woman to be a good wife or mother, to reform herself and return to the nuclear family after her deviations, or to sacrifice her body for the national cause. These films contain the Chinese woman and illustrate a counter-discourse, or at least another aspect, of the May-Fourth discourse of liberating the woman. Another group of such films presents a Chinese male rebel who is socially marginalized, but who is a righteous and fights against social injustice. Different from their originals, these films emphasize politics, convey a social critique very much leftist-oriented and anticipate the socialist discourse after 1949, thus forming continuity between the two periods.

After 1949, the party exercised a tight control over cinema, which was given great importance in propaganda. With successive campaigns against unorthodox intellectuals in general and filmmakers in particular, the party made it imperative for filmmakers to be politically acceptable. Foreign literature and classical Chinese literature almost

disappeared on screen. Adaptations were often from literary works on military campaigns, class struggles in the rural area before 1949, and leftist literature by established writers. In the adaptation of leftist literature, the filmmakers paid homage to the authors, since film was still inferior to literature as an art form, but they also made drastic changes to make the earlier literature conform to the official discourse at the time, often by giving verbal or written political messages in the films..

Xia Yan was an important player in this area. As a leftist scriptwriter in the 1930s and a high party official after 1949, as both an intellectual and a loyal party member, he showed his position and strategies in the new regime in his adaptation works. He assumed different roles in different works. He conformed to and reinforced the official party discourse in his adaptation of Lu Xun's *The New Year's Sacrifice*, revolutionary memoir *My Family*, and revolutionary literature *Red Crag*. In *The Lin Family Shop*, he was an ambivalent critic showing the loopholes in the official discourse. He reserved his unorthodox humanist views for Hong Kong in the film *Between Tears and Smiles*, adapted from Ba Jin's novel. Xia Yan's works illustrate in their different options and consequences how cultural politics worked at that time.

During the Cultural Revolution, film production was meager. After national politics took a new departure in 1978, film adaptation began a new era too. Senior directors took up leftist literature and other non-leftist literature before 1949, and revolutionary history was also revisited but with the focus now on humanism. Xie Jin, with his adaptation

works based on contemporary literature written by rightists and on rightists, was extremely successful in the early 1980s. His works are very faithful to the literary sources yet enhance their melodramatic effects. With a rightist as the innocent persecuted and a Chinese woman or the Chinese nature to console the rightist, these melodramatic films, together with the literature they are based on, provide a much-needed channel for catharsis after the traumatic Cultural Revolution and a way for the audiences to make sense of the immediate past. These works have a subversive edge of critiquing past politics, while at the same time blunt that edge by presenting an ultimately correct party, nation or history, and prevent the audiences from inquiring into their own complicity.

In the mid-1980s, the melodramatic era captured in Xie Jin's works gradually drew to an end. Then the fifth-generation filmmakers appeared. They first made use of a marginalized revolutionary poem and essay in their opening pieces. Then, as the directors became gradually established, they often used contemporary writers' works on the Republican period. These directors make free changes to their literary sources and indicate a new dependency of literature upon film. Typical are the early works by Zhang Yimou. With filmic techniques and changes to the original novels, he constructs a China that is rich in cultural rituals and arts. Yet this image of China also changes from the openness and spontaneity of the 1980s to increasing oppression in the 1990s. Zhang Yimou places emphasis on the characterizations of an old patriarch versus a pair of young lovers, while over time, his patriarch becomes more and more powerful, and the young

male lover weaker and weaker, resulting in an image of Chinese tradition that is more and more stifling. With his and other fifth-generation directors' emphasis on visuality, more recently even visuality for its own sake, their initial revolutionary power has greatly waned.

The field of Chinese filmic adaptations has been a largely unstudied area. With my dissertation, I hope to point to new departures for future studies, which can focus on other important players or moments in Chinese film adaptation. Possible topics for future researches may include: Republican-era adaptation of classical Chinese literature; opera films in China; anti-spy movies in the 1950s and 1960s; adaptation of pre-1949 literature in the early 1980s; adaptation of Wang Shuo's works in the late 1980s and 1990s. With these future studies, hopefully more light will be shed on the history of Chinese film and Chinese cultural history.

Fifth-generation director Chen Kaige's recent blockbuster *The Promise* (Wuji, 2005) can be used to illustrate a new tendency in the relationship between literature and film in China. This time, the film became the starting point and literature a byproduct. Chen sold the adaptation right of the film to a publisher, and the publisher, to promote the novel, launched an on-line campaign for audiences to vote for the adapter (writer). On-line promotion and voting in the "American idol" style fully testifies the increasing commercialization of literature and the ascendance of visuality in the new internet age,

which may call for a new project with a new theoretical framework to account for it.

Appendix

List of Republican-era Films Based on Foreign Literature

(In chronological order, followed by their literary sources)

1920

Robbery in the Car 车中盗, based on an unidentified American novel whose Chinese version is titled *Troubled* 焦头烂额

1924

Vampire 红粉骷髅, based on an unidentified French novel whose Chinese version is titled *Ten Sisters of the Insurance Gang* 保险党十姊妹.

1925

The Little Friend 小朋友, based on French writer Hector Malot's *Sans Famille*.

1926

The Journey Home 不如归, based on Japanese writer Tokutomi Roka 德富芦花's novel with the same title.

Orchid in the Deep Valley 空谷兰, based on Japanese writer Kuroiwa Ruikou 黑岩泪香's translation of an unidentified English source.

The Resurrection of the Conscience 良心复活, based on Leo Tolstoy's *The Resurrection*.

A String of Pearls 一串珍珠, based on French writer Guy de Maupassant's story "The Necklace."

1927

The Woman Lawyer 女律师, based on William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice.*

1928

Fan of the Young Mistress 少奶奶的扇子, based on Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

Lu Binhua 卢鬓花, based on the British Robinhood story.

The Flying Shoes 飞行鞋, based on an unidentified tale "May Bird"五月鸟, taken from an unidentified collection of German fairy tales *Luo Lun* 罗仑.

It's Me 就是我, based on an unidentified Japanese novel, translated by Chen Lengxue 陈冷血 into the Chinese title *Criminal in the Fire* 火里罪人.

1931

Arsène Rupin 亚森罗宾, based on French writer Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin stories.

The Cases of Sherlock Holmes 福尔摩斯侦探案, based on Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.

A Spray of Plum 一剪梅, based on William Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Love and Responsibility 恋爱与义务，based on Polish writer Madame Horose's novel of the same title.

1932

One Night's Extravaganza 一夜豪华, based on French writer Guy de Maupassant's story "The Necklace."

1934

Three Sisters 三姊妹, based on Japanese writer Kikuchi Kan 菊池宽's *Shinju Fujin.*

1936

The Heroine in the Besieged City 孤城烈女, based on Guy de Maupassant's story "Boule de Soif"

Go to Nature 到自然去, based on James Barrie's play *The Admirable Crichton*.

1937

The Money Tree 摇钱树, based on Sean O'Casey *Juno and the Paycock*.

1938

Camille 茶花女, based on *Camille* by French writer Alexandre Dumas, fils.

The Silent Wife 哑妻, based on French writer Anatole France's play *The Man who Married a Dumb Wife*.

1939

Fan of the Young Mistress 少奶奶的扇子, based on Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

1941

Resurrection 复活, based on Leo Tolstoy's *The Resurrection*.

1942

Four Sisters 四姐妹, based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

1943

The Female Soul-mate 红粉知己, based on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

Love Tide 情潮, based on Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

1944

The Super-rich Family 大富之家, based on William Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

1945

Don't Waste Your Youthful Days 莫负少年头, based on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

1947

A Broken Dream at Late Spring 春残梦断, based on Russian writer Ivan Turgenev's *Nest of the Gentry*.

Mother and Son 母与子, based on Russian writer Aleksandr Ostrovsky's play *Innocent as Charged*.

Night Inn 夜店, based on Russian writer Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depths*.

1949

The Watch 表, based on Russian writer Leonid N. Andreyev (1871-1919)'s novel.

Mirror for Romance 风流宝鉴, based on American writer Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*.

Character List

A Q zhengzhuan 阿 Q 正传
A Ying 阿英
aiqi buxing, nu qi buzheng 哀其不幸，怒其不争
An Zhanjun 安战军
Ashima 阿诗玛
Ba Jin 巴金
Bai Jingsheng 白景晟
Bai mao nü 白毛女
Bai Xianyong 白先勇
Baihe hua 百合花
Bao Tianxiao 包天笑
Baofeng zhouyu 暴风骤雨
Bawang bieji 霸王别姬
Bei aiqing yiwang de jiaoluo 被爱情遗忘的角落
Biancheng 边城
Biao 表
Bo Gu 博古
Bu li 布礼
Buru gui 不如归
Cai Hesen 蔡和森
Chahua nü 茶花女
Che zhong dao 车中盗
Chen Bo'er 陈波儿
Chen Duxiu 陈独秀
Chen Huangmei 陈荒煤
Chen Kaige 陈凯歌
Chen Shu 陈述
Chen Xihe 陈犀禾
Chen Yanyan 陈燕燕
Chen Yuan 陈源
Chen Zhiqing 陈趾青
chengfen 成分
Chengnan jiushi 城南旧事
Chi Le Chuan 勅勒川
chongxi 冲喜
Chun can 春蚕
Chun Sheng 春生
Chun Tao 春桃
Chuncan mengduan 春残梦断
Chunliu she 春柳社
Chunmiao 春苗
Cui Wei 崔嵬
Da Hua 大华
Dahai hangxing kao duoshou 大海航行靠舵手
Dahong denglong gaogao gua 大红灯笼高高挂
Dai Jinhua 戴锦华
dang daibiao 党代表
Dang de nü'er 党的女儿
dang zhongyang 党中央
Dangdai dianying 当代电影
Dao ziran qu 到自然去
die 爹
Dingjun shan 定军山
Donggong xigong 东宫西宫
ducao 毒草
dui zhang 队长
Dujiang zhencha ji 渡江侦察记
fansi wenxue 反思文学
fante pian 反特片
Fei Mu 费穆
Fei Pu 飞浦
Feidao hua 飞刀华
Feixing xie 飞行鞋
Feng bao 风暴
Feng Keng 冯铿
Feng Qinglan 冯晴岚
Feng Xia 凤霞
Feng Yue 风月
Fu Gui 福贵
Fu'ermosi zhentan an 福尔摩斯侦探案

Furong zhen 芙蓉镇
Fusheng liuji 浮生六记
Fushi 腐蚀
Fuxi, Fuxi 伏羲，伏羲
Gaoshan xia de huahuan 高山下的花环
Geming jiating 革命家庭
geming jing 革命经
ge 哥
Gong Li 巩俐
Gouri de liangshi 狗日的粮食
Gu Hua 古华
Gu Yanshan 谷燕山
Guan Haifeng 管海峰
Guan lianzhang 关连长
Gucheng lienü 孤城烈女
guilai zhe 归来者
Guoqing shi dianzhong 国庆十点钟
Guyuan chunmeng 故园春梦
Haigang 海港
Hao Ran 浩然
He Mengxiong 何孟雄
Heiji yuanhun 黑籍冤魂
Heipao shijian 黑炮事件
Hengli Hete 亨利·荷特
Hong gaoliang 红高粱
Hong ri 红日
Hong yan 红岩
Hongfen kulou 红粉骷髅
Hongqi pu 红旗谱
Hongse niangzijun 红色娘子军
Hou Yao 侯曜
Hu Yepin 胡也频
Hu Yuyin 胡玉音
Huahao yueyuan 花好月圆
Huaju tongzhihui 话剧同志会
Huan le renjian 换了人间
Huang Jianxin 黄建新
Huang tudi 黄土地
Huo zhe 活着
Huoshao hongliansi 火烧红莲寺
huzhu zu 互助组
Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石
Jiang Qing 江青
Jiang Wen 姜文
jianzu jianxi 减租减息
Jiazhen 家珍
Jia 家
Jiejie meimei zhan qilai 姐姐妹妹站起来
Jifeng jincao 疾风劲草
Jijing de shanlin 寂静的山林
Jin ping mei 金瓶梅
Jinguang dadao 金光大道
Jiu shi wo 就是我
Jiu'er 九儿
Ju Dou 菊豆
Kan shangqu hen mei 看上去很美
Ke Lan 柯蓝
Kelian de guinü 可怜的闺女
Konggu lan 空谷兰
Ku caihua 苦菜花
Ku Gen 苦根
Ku lian 苦恋
Kuang liu 狂流
Kumu feng chun 枯木逢春
Kunlun 昆仑
Langtao gungun 浪涛滚滚
lao baixing 老百姓
lao guiju 老规矩
Lao Quan 老全
Laoren yu gou 老人与狗
Li Baotian 李保田
Li Bihua (Lillian Lee) 李碧华
Li Datou 李大头
Li Erwei 李尔葳
Li Guoxiang 李国香
Li Kenong 李克农
Li Minwei 黎民伟
Li Shuangshuang 李双双
Li Shutong 李叔同
Li Tuo 李陀

Li Weisen 李伟森
Li Xiuzhi 李秀芝
Li Zeyuan 李泽源
Li Zhun 李准
Lian’ai zhi dao 恋爱之道
Liangxin fuhuo 良心复活
Liaozhai zhiyi 聊斋志异
Liehuo zhong yongsheng 烈火中永生
Lin jia puzi 林家铺子
Lin Shu 林纾
Ling yu rou 灵与肉
Liu Heng 刘恒
Liu Zhenyun 刘震云
Long Er 龙二
Lu Binhua 卢鬓花
Lu Xun 鲁迅
Lu Yanzhou 鲁彦周
Luo Han 罗汉
Luo Qun 罗群
Luo Yijun 罗艺军
Ma Jiangshi 马绛士
Mantou 馒头
Mao Dun 茅盾
Meihua luo 梅花落
meihua 美化
Meishan梅珊
Mo Yan 莫言
Mu yu zi 母与子
Mulan congjun 木兰从军
Muma ren 牧马人
Nanfu nanqi 难夫难妻
neibu pipan 内部批判
Ni Zhen 倪震
niang 娘
Nihongdeng xia de shaobing 霓虹灯下的哨兵
niu peng 牛棚
Nü lüshi 女律师
Nülan wuhao 女篮五号
Ouyang Li’an 欧阳立安
Ouyang Meisheng 欧阳梅生
Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩
Panshi wan 磐石湾
po sijiu 破四旧
Pu Songling 蒲松龄
Qin Shutian 秦书田
Qingchun zhige 青春之歌
Qingxu meng 清虚梦
Qiqie chengqun 妻妾成群
Qiu Jin 秋瑾
Qiuju da guanci 秋菊打官司
Qiuweng yuxian ji 秋翁遇仙记
Qiyuan 憩园
Rendao zhongnian 人到中年
Renmin de juzhang 人民的巨掌
Renmin wenxue 人民文学
renxin bu si 人心不死
Rou Shi 柔石
Ru Zhijuan 茹志鹃
San zimei 三姊妹
Sang Hu 桑弧
Sanguo yanyi 三国演义
Shanghai ershisi xiaoshi 上海二十四小时
Shangshi 伤逝
Shao nainai de shanzi 少奶奶的扇子
Shao Zuiweng 邵醉翁
Shen Congwen 沈从文
Shen Fu 沈复
Shengu huisheng 深谷回声
Shenmi de lüban 神秘的旅伴
Shennü 神女
Shi Dongshan 史东山
Shi Hui 石挥
Shimian maifu 十面埋伏
Shui Hua 水华
Song Wei 宋薇
Songlian 颂莲
su qu 苏区
Su Tong 苏童
Tao Cheng 陶承

Tao Yuanming 陶渊明
Taohuayuan ji 桃花源记
Tian Han 田汉
Tian Yi 天一
Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮
Tianbai 天白
Tianxian pei 天仙配
Tianyunshan chuanqi 天云山传奇
Tixiao yinyuan 啼笑因缘
Wan Erxi 万二喜
Wang Anyi 王安忆
Wang Meng 王蒙
Wang Shuo 王朔
Wang Xiaobo 王小波
Wei Heling 魏鹤龄
Wei Yi 魏易
weifan zhengce 违反政策
Wen Hua 文华
wenming xi 文明戏
Wo de fuqin muqin 我的父亲母亲
Wo de yijia 我的一家
Wo zhe yibeizi 我这一辈子
Women fufu zhijian 我们夫妇之间
Wu Qionghua 吴琼花
Wu Yao 吴遥
Wu Yonggang 吴永刚
Wutai jiemei 舞台姐妹
Wuxun zhuan 武训传
Xia Meng 夏梦
Xia Yan 夏衍
Xiangnü xiaoxiao 湘女萧萧
Xiao hua 小花
Xiao pengyou 小朋友
Xiao Yemu 萧也牧
Xiaocheng zhi chun 小城之春
Xiaofu geng 孝妇羹
xiaoren shu 小人书
Xie Jin moshi 谢晋模式
Xie Jin 谢晋
Xie Juezai 谢觉哉
Ximen Qing 西门庆
Xin Hua 新华
Xin nüxing 新女性
xin shiqi 新时期
Xin’er jiuxue ji 馨儿就学记
xiqu pian 戏曲片
Xisha ernü 西沙儿女
Xiyang jing 西洋镜
Xu Dishan 许地山
Xu Lingjun 许灵均
Xu Teli 徐特立
Xu Zhenya 徐枕亚
Yan Ruisheng 阎瑞生
Yang Jinshan 杨金山
Yang Tianqing 杨天青
yangban xi 样板戏
Yangguang canlan de rizi 阳光灿烂的日子
Yanyang tian 艳阳天
Yasen luobin 亚森罗宾
Yaxiya 亚细亚
Ye dian 夜店
Ye Zhaoyan 叶兆言
Yehuo chunfeng dou gucheng 野火春风斗古城
Yi chuan zhenzhu 一串珍珠
Yi jian mei 一剪梅
Yige dou buneng shao 一个都不能少
Yige he bage 一个和八个
Yin Fu 殷夫
Yingxiong 英雄
Yiye haohua 一夜豪华
Yizhi xiuhuaxie 一只绣花鞋
You hua haohao shuo 有话好好说
You Qing 有庆
Youhuo 诱惑
Yu Hua 余华
Yu li hun 玉梨魂
Yu Min 于敏
Yu Zhan’ao 余占鳌

Yuan Wenshu 袁文殊
Zaochun eryue 早春二月
Zhang Henshui 张恨水
Zhang Junxiang 张骏祥
Zhang Nuanxin 张暖忻
Zhang Shankun 张善琨
Zhang Shichuan 张石川
Zhang Xianliang 张贤亮
Zhang Yimou 张艺谋
Zhang Yuan 张元
Zhang Ziliang 张子良
Zhanhuo zhong de qingchun 战火中的青春
zhanzheng dao 战争道
Zhao Shuli 赵树理
zhen zhang 镇长
Zheng Boqi 郑伯奇
Zheng Junli 郑君里
Zheng Zhengqiu 郑正秋
zhiji 知己
zhiqi 志气
Zhong Dianfei 钟惦棐
Zhongying Jituan 中影集团
Zhou Yuzhen 周瑜贞
Zhu Shilin 朱石麟
Zhuangzi shi qi 庄子试妻
Zhufu 祝福
Zuihou de guizu 最后的贵族
zuo heping jianshe de shenglijun 做和平建设的生力军
zushiye 祖师爷

Filmography

(In chronological order)

1905
Dingjun Mountain (Dingjun shan). Beijing: Fengtai Photography Shop.

1913
The Difficult Couple (Nanfu nanqi). Zhang Shichuan / Zheng Zhengqiu. Shanghai: Yaxiya.
Zhuangzi Tests His Wife (Zhuangzi shiqi). Li Beihai. Hong Kong: Huamei.

1916
Wronged Ghosts in Opium Den (Heiji yuanhun). Guan Haifeng / Zhang Shichuan. Shanghai: Huanxian.

1920
Robbery in the Car (Chezhong dao). Ren Pengnian. Shanghai: Commercial Press.
Yan Ruisheng (Yan Ruisheng). Ren Pengnian. Shanghai: Zhongguo yingxi yanjiushe.

1922
An Empty Dream (Qingxu meng). Ren Pengnian. Shanghai: Commercial Press.

1923
The Pious Daughter-in-Law's Soup (Xiaofu geng). Shanghai: Commercial Press.

1924
Soul of the Jade-Peach (Yu li hun). Zhang Shichuan / Xu Hu. Shanghai: Mingxing.
Vampire (Hongfen kulou). Guan Kaifeng. Shanghai: Xinya.

1925
Fall of the Plum (Meihua luo). Zhang Shichuan / Zheng Zhengqiu. Shanghai: Mingxing.
The Flying Shoes (Feixing xie). Pan Chuitong. Shanghai: Minxin.
The Little Friend (Xiao pengyou). Zhang Shichuan. Shanghai: Mingxing.
Orchid in the Deep Valley (Konggu lan). Zhang Shichuan. Shanghai: Mingxing.
The Poor Girl (Kelian de guinü). Zhang Shichuan. Shanghai: Mingxing.

1926
The Journey Home (Buru gui). Yang Xiaozhong. Shanghai: Guoguang.

The Resurrection of the Conscience (Liangxin fuhuo). Bu Wancang. Shanghai: Mingxing.
A String of Pearls（Yichuan zhenzhu）. Li Zeyuan. Shanghai: Changcheng huapian gongsi.

1927
The Woman Lawyer (Nü lüshi). Qiu Qixiang / Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Tian Yi.

1928
Burning the Red Lotus Temple (Huoshao hongliansi). Zhang Shichuan. Shanghai: Mingxing.
Lu Binhua (Lu Binhua). Dan Duyu. Shanghai: Shanghai yingxi gongsi.

1931
Arsène Rupin (Yasen luobin). Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Tian Yi.
The Cases of Sherlock Holmes (Fu'ermosi zhentan an). Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Tian Yi.
A Spray of Plum (Yijian mei). Huang Yicuo. Shanghai: Lianhua.
One Night's Extravaganza (Yiye haohua). Shao Zuiweng. Shanghai: Tian Yi.

1932
Fate in Tears and Laughter (Tixiao yinyuan). Zhang Shichuan. Shanghai: Mingxing.
Wild Torrent (Kuang liu). Cheng Bugao. Shanghai: Mingxing.

1933
Spring Silkworms (Chun can). Cheng Bugao. Shanghai: Mingxing.
Twenty-Four Hours in Shanghai (Shanghai ershisi xiaoshi). Shen Xiling. Shanghai: Mingxing.

1934
Goddess (Shennü). Wu Yonggang. Shanghai: Lianhua.
Three Sisters (San zimei). Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Mingxing.

1935
New Women (Xin nuxing). Cai Chusheng. Shanghai: Lianhua.

1936
The Heroine in the Besieged City (Gucheng lienü). Zhu Shilin. Shanghai: Lianhua.

1937
Go to Nature (Dao ziran qu). Sun Yu. Shanghai: Lianhua.

1938

Camille (Chahua nü). Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Guangming.

1939

Fan of the Young Mistress (Shaonainai de shanzi). Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Huaxin.

Mulan Joins the Army (Mulan congjun). Bu Wancang. Shanghai: Hua Cheng.

1947

A Broken Dream at Late Spring (Chuncan mengduan). Sun Jing and Ma Xu Weibang. Shanghai: Zhongqi yingyishe.

Mother and Son (Mu yu zi). Li Pingqian. Shanghai: Wenhua.

Night Inn (Ye dian). Zuo Lin. Shanghai: Wenhua.

Six Chapters in a Floating Life (Fusheng liu ji). Pei Chong. Shanghai: Shanghai shiyan dianying gongchang.

1948

The Spring in the Small Town (Xiaocheng zhi chun). Fei Mu. Shanghai: Wenhua.

1949

The Watch (Biao). Zuo Lin. Shanghai: Wenhua.

The Way of Love (Lian'ai zhi dao). Ouyang Yuqian. Hong Kong: Nanqun.

1950

Erosion (Fushi). Zuo Lin. Shanghai: Wenhua.

Inescapable (Renmin de juzhang). Chen Liting. Shanghai: Kunlun.

The Life of Wu Xun (Wu Xun zhuan). Sun Yu. Shanghai: Kunlun.

This Life of Mine (Wo zhe yibeizi). Shi Hui. Shanghai: Wenhua.

1951

Commander Guan (Guan lianzhang). Shui Hua. Shanghai: Wenhua.

Husband and Wife (Women fufu zhijian). Zheng Junli. Shanghai: Kunlun.

The White-Haired Girl (Bai Mao nü). Wang Bin / Shui Hua. Changchun: Dongbei.

1954

Reconnaissance across the Yangtze River (Dujiang zhencha ji). Tang Xiaodan. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1955

The Heavenly Match (Tianxian pei). Shi Hui. Shanghai: Shanghai.

The Mysterious Traveller (Shenmi de lüban). Lin Nong, Zhu Wenshun and Zhu Wenyue. Changchun: Changchun.

1956

Family (Jia). Chen Xihe and Ye Ming. Shanghai: Shanghai.

The New Year's Sacrifice (Zhufu) . Sang Hu. Beijing: Beijing.

Ten O'clock on the National Day (Guoqing shi dianzhong). Wu Tian. Changchun: Changchun.

Qiu Meets the Goddess of Flowers (Qiuweng yuxian ji). Wu Yonggang. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1957

Girl Basketball Player No.5 (Nulan wuhao). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Tianma.

Quiet Forest (Jijing de shanlin). Zhu Wenshun. Changchun: Changchun.

1958

Daughter of the Party (Dang de nü'er). Lin Nong. Changchun: Changchun.

The Full Moon (Huahao yueyuan). Guo Wei. Changchun: Changchun.

1959

A Changed World (Huan le renjian). Wu Tian. Changchun: Changchun.

The Lin Family Shop (Lin jia puzi). Shui Hua. Beijing: Beijing.

The Raging Wind and the Strong Grass (Jifeng jincao).Xie Jin. Shanghai: Tianma.

Song of Youth (Qingchun zhi ge). Cui Wei and Chen Huaiai. Beijing: Beijing.

Storm (Feng bao). Jin Shan. Beijing: Beijing.

Youth in War (Zhanhuo zhong de qingchun). Wang Yan. Changchun: Changchun.

1960

Legend of the Banner (Hongqi pu). Ling Zifeng. Beijing: Beijing / Tianjin: Tianjin.

Revolutionary Family (Geming jiating). Shui Hua. Beijing: Beijing.

1961

Hurricane (Baofeng zhouyu). Xie Tieli. Beijing: Beijing.

Red Detachment of Women (Hongse niangzijun). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Tianma.

Rushing Waves (Langtao gungun) .Chen Yin. Beijing: Beijing.

Spring Comes to the Withered Tree (Kumu feng chun). Zheng Junli. Shanghai: Haiyan.

1962

Early Spring in February (Zaochun eryue). Xie Tieli. Beijing: Beijing.

Li Shuangshuang (Li Shuangshuang). Lu Ren. Shanghai: Haiyan.

1963

Hua who Flies Daggers (Feidao hua). Xu Suling. Shanghai: Haiyan.
Red Sun (Hong Ri). Tang Xiaodan. Shanghai: Tianma.
Struggle in an Ancient City (Yehuo chunfeng dou gucheng).Yan Jizhou. Beijing: Bayi.

1964
Ashima (Ashima). Liu Qiong. Shanghai: Haiyan.
Between Tears and Smiles (Guyuan chunmeng). Zhu Shilin. Hong Kong: Fenghuang.
Sentinels under the Neon Lights (Nihongdeng xia de shaobing). Wang Ping and Ge Xin. Shanghai: Tianma.

1965
Red Crag (Liehuo zhong yongsheng). Shui Hua. Beijing: Beijing.
Sowthistle (Ku caihua). Li Mao. Beijing: Bayi.
Stage sisters (Wutai jiemei). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Tianma.

1972
On the Docks (Haigang). Xie Jin and Xie Tieli. Shanghai: Shanghai / Beijing: Beijing.

1973
Bright Day (Yanyang tian). Lin Nong. Changchun: Changchun.

1975
Chunmiao (Chunmiao). Xie Jin, Yan Bili and Liang Tingduo. Shanghai: Shanghai.
The Golden Path (Jinguang dadao). Lin Nong and Sun Yu. Changchun: Changchun.
The Rock Bay (Panshi wan). Xie Jin and Liang Tingduo. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1976
Children of Xisha (Xisha ernü). Shui Hua. Beijing: Beijing.

1979
Little Flower (Xiao hua). Zhang Zheng and Huang Jianzhong. Beijing: Beijing.

1980
Bitter Love (Kulian). Peng Ning. Changchun: Changchun.
The Corner Forsaken by Love (Bei aiqing yiwang de jiaoluo). Zhang Qi and Li Yalin. Chengdu: Emei.
The Legend of Tianyun Mountain (Tianyunshan chuanqi). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1981
The Lily (Baihe hua). Qian Xueque and Zhang Xin. Beijing: Beijing dianying xueyuan

qingnian dianying zhipianchang.
Regret for the Past (Shangshi). Shui Hua. Beijing: Beijing.
The Story of Ah Q (A Q zhengzhuan). Cen Fan. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1982
At the Middle Age (Ren dao zhongnian). Wang Qimin and Sun Yu. Changchun: Changchun.
The Herdsman (Muma ren). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Shanghai.
My Memory of Old Beijing (Chengnan jiushi). Wu Yigong. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1983
One and Eight (Yige he bage). Zhang Junzhao. Nanning: Guangxi.
Qiu Jin (Qiu Jin). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1984
Border Town (Biancheng). Lin Zifeng. Beijing: Beijing.
Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain (Gaoshan xia de huahuan). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Shanghai.
Yellow Earth (Huang tudi). Chen Kaige. Nanning: Guangxi.

1985
Black Cannon Incident (Heipao shijian). Huang Jianxin. Xi'an: Xi'an.

1986
A Girl from Hunan (Xiangnü xiaoxiao). Xie Fei. Beijing: Beijing dianying xueyuan qingnian dianying zhipianchang.
Hibiscus Town (Furong zhen). Xie Jin. Shanghai: Shanghai.

1988
A Woman for Two (Chuntao). Ling Zifeng. Beijing: Nanhai / Shenyang: Liaoning.

1989
The Last Aristocrat (Zuihou de guizu). Xie Jin. Hong Kong: Yindu jigou / Shanghai: Shanghai.

1993
Farewell my Concubine (Bawang bieji). Chen Kaige. Hong Kong: Tomson.
An Old Man and His Dog (Laoren yu gou). Xie Jin: Hengtong yingshi youxian gongsi.

1995

In the Heat of the Sun (Yangguang canlan de rizi). Jiang Wen. Beijing: China Joint Production / Hong Kong: Ganglong / Taipei: Xiehe.

Tempress Moon (Feng Yue). Chen Kaige. Hong Kong: Tomson.

1996

East Palace, West Palace (Donggong xigong). Zhang Yuan. Quelqu'Un D'Autre Productions; Ocean Films, Amazon Entertainment Ltd.

The Road Home (Wo de fuqin muqin). Zhang Yimou. Nanning: Guangxi / Beijing: Xinhuamian yingshi.

2000

Shadow Magic (Xiyang jing). Hu An. Beijing: Beijing.

2005

Little Red Flowers (Kan shangqu hen mei). Zhang Yuan. Beijing: Shiji xixun wenhua fazhan youxian gongsi / Shiji yingxiong dianying touzi youxian gongsi.

Bibliography

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