

Film for the New Long March

*The Search for National Identity
in Chinese Cinema, 1984-2000*

Note on Romanization

All transcriptions of Chinese are in the pinyin. Pinyin replaced Wade-Giles as the standard for romanization in the 1970s. The only exceptions to my use of pinyin occur when the author of a cited work used the Wade-Giles system for the transcription of his name; my footnotes and bibliography reflect the author's choice, and thereby, often the date of publication.

Note on Interviews

All interviews performed by the author were conducted in Chinese. Translations are my own.

Introduction

What is repudiated and disavowed, however, always returns to threaten the boundaries of the subject.

—Lynne Layton¹

In the spring of 1992, a compatriot film director at the Xian Film Studio attacked Zhang Yimou for what he perceived to be Zhang's pandering to the gaze of the Western Other: Zhang "feeds his Western audience's image of exotic, primitive, timeless China. In fact, I'm going to take a leaf out of his book and set my next film in the boondocks, too. Why not? It's a formula that works."² (Un)fortunately for Zhang's indignant-cum-jealous critic, a new generation of filmmakers is contesting the "formula" that gave birth to Chinese New Wave³ cinema and catapulted Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige to international acclaim. In contrast to the early Fifth Generation films' dominant narrative location in the barren hinterlands and mythical past, the contemporary urban city has emerged as the nodal signifier of the Sixth Generation.⁴ Peter Loehr, of the independent production house Imar Film Co., maintains that "young people don't want to watch movies that are set in the rural areas, or back in the past. We make urban stories for people living in the city. We

¹ Lynne Layton, *Who's that Girl? Who's that Boy? : Clinical Practice Meets Postmodern Gender Theory* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998),50.

² Lynn Pan, "Zhang Yimou: A Chinese Master," *New York Times*, 1 March 1992.

³ The terms "New Wave" and "Fifth Generation" are used synonymously to mark the students of the Beijing Film Academy class of 1982, the first class to enter and graduate from the Academy after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. Before 1982, Chinese film historians catalogued Chinese film directors into four periods: 1905-1932, 1932-1949, 1950-1960, and 1960-1980.

⁴ The "Sixth Generation" label marks the filmmakers of Beijing Film Academy classes 1988 and 1989.

try to emphasize real lives—stuff that the audience can relate to.”⁵ More is riding on this squabble over audience share than cinematic spatiality and temporality: the root of this intergenerational debate lies in the creation and control of Chinese identity.

However, most contemporary academic and journalistic Western critics of Chinese cinema since 1984 mistake this search for the Self as a self-orientalizing performance, staged for the Occidental spectators’ titillation. Rey Chow argues that the films of the Fifth Generation are less about contesting the discourse of internal Chinese identity and more about the Chinese preoccupation with its victimization by the West. Consequently, Chow contends that Chinese intellectuals are indifferent to their own totalitarian oppression by the People’s Republic of China, as their focus lies in framing China—the Middle Kingdom—as still central in world discourse.⁶ Chow never questions, however, what other possibilities and constraints might contribute to the artists’ relationship with the State. By not investigating the specific historical, cultural, and economic situations surrounding the emergence of the films of the 1980s and 1990s, Chow continues to reinscribe an Orientalist approach to studying China. Edward Said has identified this underlying assumption that the East is no more than a primordial playground for the fantasies of the West in his oeuvre *Orientalism*. In the orientalists’ vision, the Orient, “as primitivity, as the age-old antetype of Europe, as a fecund night out of which European rationality developed, the Orient’s actuality recede[s] inexorably into a kind of paradigmatic fossilization.”⁷ Due to an approach through the Orientalist episteme, much of the previous analysis

⁵ Richard James Havis, “China’s Home Truths: Astute filmmakers have found a way to live with the censors,” *Asianweek*, 11 June 1999, 40.

⁶ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995).

⁷ Edward W. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” in *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-84*, ed. Francis Barker et al. (London: Methuen, 1986), 215.

of the Chinese cinema has attempted to locate the meanings of works without critical regard to their historical and cultural location.

China's civil battle for a viable national identity *is* complicated by the historical scars left by the Euro-American Orientalist relationship with China. In his study of the relation between cultural identity and cinema, Yuejin Wang maintains that "only when one feels oneself encouraged by a permeating force from the Other is one alert to the integrity of one's Self; and only when one is uncertain about the Self does one feel promoted to self-examination."⁸ Self-recognition and the subsequent (creation and) delineation of the "native" require an awareness of the presence of the Other. Arif Dirlik has also similarly examined the way in which not only awareness, but also acceptance of the Euro-American Other has been integral to the defining of modern China's sense of Self: "In the twentieth century . . . Euro-American Orientalist perceptions and methods become a visible component in the formulation of the Chinese self-image, and the Chinese perceptions of the past. The process was facilitated by the emergence of nationalism."⁹

Similar to Orientalism, nationalism homogenizes the disparate spatial and temporal qualities of the country, condensing variegated parts into one symbolic whole. Just as Orientalism conceives of disparate local histories as "coherent unities" within a "universalizing historicism,"¹⁰ so does Chinese nationalism. Partha Chatterjee observes that "nationalist thought accepts the same essentialist conception based on a distinction between 'the East' and 'the West', the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same 'objectifying' procedures of

⁸ Wang, "The Cinematic Other," 34.

⁹ Arif Dirlik, "Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism," *History & Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 106.

¹⁰ Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," 223-234.

knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.”¹¹

According to Dirlik, this process of reinscribing Orientalism nationally “serves to perpetuate, and even to consolidate existing forms of power.”¹² Dirlik warns that those that “are inconsistent with the national self-image are swept aside as foreign intrusions.”¹³

In the PRC, nationalist rhetoric is used to eschew all that is perceived by the State power as a subversive to its hegemony. Dissent is couched as a “spiritual pollutant,” purportedly generated by the West and fit only for the West. Wong Ain Ling, a Hong Kong scout of Chinese films, laments that “everything now is put down to ‘peaceful evolution.’ Foreign acclaim amplifies a film’s influence in China, and to the Chinese authorities that’s not desirable.”¹⁴ In order to bulwark the official narrative, the State silences the voices whose existence disputes the universality of the master representation. Unlike the critics who accuse Zhang Yimou and his peers in the Fifth Generation of pandering to Western audiences, the Chinese State recognizes the internal threat posed by Zhang’s alternative narrative to the Chinese Communist Party’s monopolization of China’s national identity .

The words of Mao Zedong’s 1942 speech at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature are critical to understanding the conscious role of art in Chinese nation-making and the threat Zhang portends:

In our struggle for the liberation of the Chinese people . . . there are the fronts of the pen and of the gun, the cultural and military fronts . . . [the] army alone is not enough; we must also have a cultural army, which is absolutely indispensable for uniting our own ranks and defeating the enemy.¹⁵

¹¹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 38.

¹² Dirlik, 114.

¹³ Dirlik, 106.

¹⁴ Lynn Pan, “Zhang Yimou: A Chinese Master,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1992.

¹⁵ Mao Zedong, “On Literature and Art,” Yan’an Forum, May 1942, quoted in *Marxism and Art*:

Zhang and his films signify a mutiny. While restrictions may seem to have slackened since 1949, Chris Berry reminds us that “no matter how much [Chinese and Western film scholars] stress the difference between the bad old days and the present, internal difference is still not tolerated in the People’s Republic.”¹⁶ It is in this context that Zhang’s final words to his crew before ending production on *The Story of Qiuju*¹⁷ make sense: “To survive is to win. To survive is to win.”¹⁸

The practice of splitting off what the State perceives as subversive to its control over national identity has fractured the Chinese political landscape into shards coded as either desirable or undesirable, revolutionary or counterrevolutionary, native or foreign. By couching dissent as foreign, the CCP has framed all opposition to the Party line as a betrayal of the true—CCP-defined—Chinese self. From the Party’s earliest days in Yan’an through to its 51st year in control of the PRC, it has used mass campaigns to extirpate those whom it perceived as threatening its hegemonic power.

Sixth Generation filmmaker Wang Xiaoshuai, who has himself been a target of the State’s wrath, articulates the ways in which the constant trauma inflicted by the purges and campaigns of the CCP has affected the country and its people:

The Chinese have suffered such endemic oppression . . .
It’s affected people’s way of interacting with each other . . .
it’s caused such a strange change in us. When each person
thinks about his own life, about others’ lives, or about the
life of the country, it bares a deep mark—a harmful
practice. Everyone is marked by it. But we cannot
communicate this situation. You are not allowed to talk

Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism, eds. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams (New York: David McKay Co., 1972), 108.

¹⁶ Chris Berry, “Hu, Where and When: Locating ‘Contemporary Film Theory in China,’” www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/reruns/hkrrintro.html, 25 March 1998.

¹⁷ *Qiuju da guansi* (The Story of Qiuju), dir. Zhang Yimou, Sil-Metropole Organization, Youth Film Studio of Beijing Film Academy (1992).

¹⁸ Lynn Pan, “Zhang Yimou: A Chinese Master,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1992.

about it. You are not allowed to talk about the political, about your difficulties, about yourself; to stir things up.¹⁹

Wang Xiaoshuai's description of life in the PRC evokes the experiences of prolonged victims of abuse. Wang's words make clear that the effects of the CCP's leadership cannot only be traced in the politics of the PRC, but in the minds of its people as well. In her study of survivors of prolonged trauma, Judith Lewis Herman observes that "these methods [of oppression] are designed to instill terror and helplessness, to destroy the victim's sense of self in relation to others, and to foster a pathologic attachment to the perpetrator."²⁰ Consequently, it is not only the dialectical relationship of self/other that is critical to understanding the search for identity in modern China, but abuser/abused as well.

The complexity of the relationship between the State and the artist, abuser and abused is evinced by the production credits of the Sixth Generation film, *Frozen*.²¹ Having been blacklisted by the PRC from making feature films in 1994, Wang Xiaoshuai assumed the pseudonym of Wu Ming—Chinese for "No Name"—during the production and distribution of the film. The four years in which he was forced to deny his own identity to complete and show his film, seems rhetorically to answer the question posed by Wang Xiaoshuai's *Frozen* narrative: "Wasn't a life too high a price to pay for a work of art?"

Even in his refusal to be silenced by the PRC's blacklist, Wang reveals how deeply he has been affected by the traumatic relationship between China and its people. His use of a pseudonym draws international attention to both the peril and

¹⁹ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview by author, New York, NY, 18 February 2000.

²⁰ Judith Lewis Herman, "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome of Survivors in Prolonged and Repeated Trauma," in *Essential Papers on PostTraumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. Mardi J. Horowitz, M.D. (New York: New York UP, 1999), 88.

²¹ *Jidu banleng* (Frozen), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, An Another Film Co., Shu Kei's Creative Workshop in association with the Hubert Bals Foundation (1994).

the import of Wang's artistic dissidence, yet his choice to represent himself as "No Name" reflects the dramatic loss of self experienced by survivors of prolonged trauma. Herman explains that "While the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is 'not herself,' the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably, or she may lose the sense that she has any self at all."²²

The predominance of Western scholarship on Chinese cinema has heretofore ignored the complex political and historical background against which these filmmakers are searching to revision a self from amongst fragments, to cross the rigid lines that separate the Self from the Other.

While many insightful interpretations of Fifth Generation films have been written over the past fifteen years, none have attempted an integrated reading of the interplay between culture and history, symbolic and reality from the Chinese perspective. As E. Ann Kaplan admits in the introduction to her article, "Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis," when Western theorists "pronounce judgements on them [Chinese films] . . . we tended[*sic*] to do in terms of *our* particular research interests."²³ Consequently, feminist theorists Peter Hitchcock, E. Ann Kaplan, and Esther C. M. Yau²⁴ each insightfully analyze the ways that power and gender intersect in Fifth Generation films, yet none question how the symbolic role of women may differ in Chinese and Western contexts. While they acknowledge the backdrop of feudal patriarchy, they have not investigated how gender representation

²² Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* ([New York]: Basic Books, 1992), 86.

²³ E. Ann Kaplan, "Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Case of Women in the Recent Chinese Cinema," *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 40; emphasis added.

²⁴ Peter Hitchcock, "The Aesthetics of Alienation, of China's 'Fifth Generation,'" *Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1992): 116-141; E. Ann Kaplan, "Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Case of Women in the Recent Chinese Cinema," *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 40-50; Esther C. M. Yao "Cultural and Economic Dislocations: Filmic Phantasies of Chinese Women in the 1980s." *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 6-21.

has played out under the rule of the CCP. Chris Berry, Paul Clark and Tony Rayns²⁵ have each analyzed the symbolic created by the Fifth Generation films in terms of the directors' life-stories as well as the history of cinema in China. However, they did not investigate why the development of Chinese cinema took the path it did, nor the ways in which the filmmakers' personal identity formations reflect broader cultural characteristics. By delving into the specificities of the gender symbolic in modern China, as well as the nature of the relationship between the artist and the State since the rise of the CCP, I seek to provide new grounds from which to interpret the ways the Fifth Generation seeks to create an alternative Chinese national identity.

The Fifth Generation is not end of film's Long March²⁶ in search of a viable self, but the beginning. Only eight years after *Yellow Earth*²⁷ marked the emergence of the Fifth Generation, *Beijing Bastards*²⁸ signified the rise the Sixth. Unlike the Fifth Generation, there has been no academic scholarship on this new generation of Chinese cinema, and only scattered journalistic coverage. While the directors of the Fifth Generation are amongst the most popular in China,²⁹ the directors of the Sixth are little known. Despite their relative obscurity within China, the films of the Sixth

²⁵ Chris Berry, "Market Forces: China's 'Fifth Generation' Faces the Bottom Line," in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: British Film Institute, 1991); Paul Clark, "Reinventing China: The Fifth Generation of Filmmakers," *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 121-136; Tony Rayns, "The New Chinese Cinema," in Tony Rayns, Chen Kaige, and Wan Zhi. *King of the Children and The New Chinese Cinema* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989).

²⁶ The Long March (1934-1935) plays prominently in shared Chinese memory. It was the yearlong journey of 6,000 miles made by the Communists after the Nationalists advanced against their Jiangxi Soviet. Of the 80,000 people who began the campaign, only 8,000 to 9,000 survived the ordeal to establish the new Communist base in Yan'an. I see the Communists' original Long March as analogous to the Fifth and Sixth Generation's struggle to create a new symbolic Chinese identity.

²⁷ *Huang tudi* (Yellow Earth), dir. by Chen Kaige, Guangxi Studio (1984).

²⁸ *Beijing zazhong* (Beijing Bastards), dir. Zhang Yuan, Beijing Bastards Raw Shot Production Group (1992).

²⁹ According to a poll conducted by Horizon on 1 September 1998, Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige are the 2nd and 4th most popular filmmakers in China. "Yingshi zuopin: xinsong yougan hao dudian" (Film and Television News: Light and Funny is Most Popular), *Horizon: Diyishou* (First Hand) 36, no. 330, 1 September 1998.

Generation are integral to charting the direction China's political vanguard is taking into the next century. By exploring key films of the Fifth and Sixth Generations within the context of art and film in post-1949 China, I hope to ascertain whether these filmmakers can succeed in their project to forge a divergent path toward China's future.

One

Setting the Course

Art and Ideology in New China

Every time an original work or new theory arises, judgements are made. What is more, such judgements invariably claim to be absolutely authoritative, creating self-contradictory questions later. This has been the case since the 1950s.

—Hao Dazheng³⁰

Every new or old relationship is approached with the implicit question: Which side are you on?

—Judith Lewis Herman³¹

From the earliest days of the Communists' search for a new Chinese identity in the Jiangxi Soviet,³² Mao Zedong had declared that forging a strong sense of self, independent of Western hegemony and China's imperial past, would require the execution of two integrated campaigns, fought on two separate fronts. The Communists could not triumph over feudalism unless existing land rights and family kinship practices were drastically altered. Supplanting landlords from economic and political dominance would have to be coupled with overturning millennia of entrenched ideology. Mao thereby concluded that the Communist Red Army would

³⁰ Li Tuo, Zhong Dafeng, and Hao Dazheng "What Is Film? A New Look at the Question," *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*, ed. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 155.

³¹ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* ([New York]: Basic Books, 1992), 92.

³² The Jiangxi Soviet was established in 1928 as an experimental Communist commune. Forced to abandon Jiangxi due to a Guomindang blockade in 1934, the Communists fled to the north, beginning

employ the pen as well as the gun: “The thought, culture, and customs which brought China to where we find it must disappear, and the thought, culture, and customs of proletarian China, which does not yet exist must appear.”³³ From the outset, Mao couched the revolution in the binaries of proletariat/bourgeois and Chinese/Western. In the same vein, he announced in 1939 that the litmus test for the emergence of proletarian ideology and practice would be the presence of what had been absent: “The day all women in China stand on their feet is the time for victory for the Chinese revolution.”³⁴ Consequently, Mao superimposed another polar relationship onto the distinction between proletariat and bourgeois: women/men. As Julia Kristeva explains, “because of its agrarian reform, [the revolution] was immediately anti-patriarchal. And a revolution against the father had to constitute at the same time a revolution of women.”³⁵ Since daily life could not be permanently altered until daily thoughts were transformed, art and literature became both the CCP’s primary ideological weapon and its target, while the power dynamic between men and women became the touchstone for success of the Communist Revolution.

Kristeva observes that from the beginning of the Communist rise to power “numerous voices . . . demanded that the problems of women and the struggle against the patriarchal *jia* be given priority.”³⁶ The revolution’s obstacles to altering patriarchal dominance of women in Chinese discourse were great. In traditional Chinese agrarian kinship, the subordinate role of the woman is not only morally and legally sanctioned, but also linguistically inscribed. The Chinese pictograph used to

the yearlong 6,000-mile Long March that only 8,000 out of 80,000 would survive.

³³ Andre Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 465.

³⁴ *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), 25 August 1966.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, “On the Women of China,” trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy, *Signs* 1, no.1 (Autumn 1975): 57.

³⁶ Kristeva, 58.

mark a man's marriage, *qu*, is composed of the character meaning "to take," *qu*, itself composed of the radical that connotes a hand, *you*, grabbing an ear, *er*, placed over a woman, *nu*. Placing the female radical, *nu*, next to the character for family, *jia*, designates a woman's marriage, *jia*. The pictograph for family is itself created by placing a pig, *shi*, under a roof. Like a sow, a woman's role within the kinship structure is to produce sons, *zi*. The semiotics of written Chinese suggests an underlying belief that without providing her household with a litter of male offspring, there can be neither good in the house nor in the world; the character for good, *hao*, can only be formed by placing a son, *zi*, next to a woman *nu*.³⁷ Once Chinese is recognized as an ideological hieroglyphic system, Laura Mulvey's critique on the way in which semiotic levels of meaning bind women becomes more relevant and more damning: "Woman then stands in a patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as a bearer of meaning, not a maker of meaning."³⁸ By proclaiming the new presence of the previously absent woman as the yardstick of the Communist revolution, Mao identified the very foundations of Chinese society as the enemy.

However, even as the Party was seeking to discredit feudal patriarchy in thought, culture, customs and economics, it was also highlighting its importance by making the absence of patriarchal forms the symbolic determinant of the Party's success and by inscribing the opposition between feminine and masculine as integral to the revolution. By conflating gender identity with political power, the State

³⁷ To read this paragraph with the Chinese characters inserted for their pinyin romanizations, see the Selected Glossary.

³⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 7.

exacerbated the psychic difficulty of the already problematic process of identity formation. Works by psychoanalytical feminists such as Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin articulate the ways in which negotiating independence and dependence from authority are marked by gender inequalities within the culture.³⁹ Mao's appropriation of gender for political ends complicates the process of gender identification with the internal experience and enunciation of political loyalty and dissidence. Since in the CCP approved gender norms and relations are not just culturally, but politically imposed by the totalitarian state, reactions against the State often play on masculinity and femininity. In the PRC, the meanings of gender representation are not purely psychical, but historical as well.

In order to place women at the vanguard of the revolution, the first laws enacted by both the Jiangxi Soviet and the People's Republic of China gave women the same rights in marriage as men. Hu Chi-hsi notes that "in its breadth and audacity," the *Regulations on Marriage* decreed by the Jiangxi Soviet in 1931 was "without precedent in the history of China."⁴⁰ Based upon the foundation of the *Regulations* and after eighteen months of deliberations, the *Marriage Law* was announced on by Mao on May 1, 1950. It immediately and radically altered the daily lives of men and women across the country. The essence of the *Law* is manifest in

Chapter One:

Article 1

The arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system, which is based on the superiority of man over woman and which ignores the children's interests shall be abolished.

The New Democratic marriage system, which is based on free choice of partners, on monogamy, on equal rights for

³⁹ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

⁴⁰ Hu Chi-hsi, "The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet," *China Quarterly*, no. 59 (July/September 1974): 482.

both sexes, and on protection of the lawful interests of women and children, shall be put into effect.

Article 2

Bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference with the re-marriage of widows and the exaction of money or gifts in connection with the marriage shall be prohibited.⁴¹

The hierarchical obligations of Confucian ideology, buttressed by millennia of hegemony, received a direct attack. Since the fifth century AD the patriarchal Confucian ethical system had decreed the absolute right of husband over wife, while establishing the social maxims “women like slaves are hard to manage” and “the subordination of women to men is one of the supreme principles of government.”⁴² In one stroke women were symbolically raised to equal status with men.

By enunciating the rights of women within marriage, the *Marriage Law* moved beyond abstract freedom and equality to force practical change. Article 7 declares that “Husband and wife are companions living together and shall enjoy equal status in the home,” thereby denying that there is one head of the family, or that the father possesses all authority.⁴³ Article 10 endows women with “equal rights in the possession and management of family property.” After the passage of the 1950 *Marriage Law*, married, divorced and unmarried women could all hold land in their own names. Speaking as the vice-president of the Revolutionary Committee of western Beijing, Xiu Gang noted that

In order to underline the equality between man and woman on the economic level, peasant women were given their own personal land grants with their own names as well as their family names, written thereon. Many of them, who had been known up to then only by such names as “woman of the house of So-and-So” or “mother of X”

⁴¹ *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1950), 1-2.

⁴² Elisabeth Croll, “A Recent Movement to Redefine the Role and Status of Women,” *China Quarterly*, no. 71 (September 1977): 593.

⁴³ *Marriage Law*, 4.

were specifically addressed by their own names for the first time.

Article 11 strikes a direct blow against patrilineal agrarian kinship by recognizing a woman's right to keep her maiden name after marriage.⁴⁴ It was unprecedented in Chinese society for a woman to possess the signifier of her own identity and location within society. No longer would she be the male's other but her own self. Kristeva marks the relationship between naming and the acquisition of phallic power in her essay, "Women of China":

One's Name (the proper noun) is, we have said, the symbolic equivalent of unity and power in society . . . To authorize women to keep their names is, consequently, not only to act against patrilineal descent . . . but, at the same time, to elevate women to power on the symbolic plane. This 'virilization,' this 'phallicizing' of women, can help them emerge from the home, from the 'bedroom.'

The intent behind the *Marriage Law* was not merely to rewrite women into a new interpretation of the Confucian ethical system, but to create an entirely new symbolic and practical plane in which women become the self with which the new PRC identified. In a speech to students and cadres regarding the *Marriage Law* on May 14, 1950, Deng Yingzhao, Vice-Chairman of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation announced: "Today it is important for us to institute in a positive way a new marriage system; but what is of still greater importance is for us to destroy the old system in the first place."⁴⁵

In possibly the most severe blow to traditional Chinese ethics, the *Marriage Law* legalized women's right to divorce. In imperial China, only men had the right to sue for divorce.⁴⁶ Under the *Law*, divorce is automatically granted when both

⁴⁴ *Marriage Law*, 4.

⁴⁵ Deng Yingzhao, "On the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China," *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1950) 28.

⁴⁶ Deng Yingzhao, 32.

husband and wife desire it, but is also permitted when only one spouse petitions. For the first time, women shared in the power to terminate the family bond. Moreover, previous to the 1950 *Marriage Law* there had been no legal requirement to register marriages, or divorces, with the State. Involving Party authority in reshaping the family underscores the political nature of the kinship structure. In its interpretation of the *Marriage Law*, *People's Daily* explained that divorce would not be granted in cases where the complaint is a women's physical defect or failure to provide children.⁴⁷ This prohibition directly attacks the traditional ideology encompassed in the Chinese understanding of the “good.”

As discussed above, good is “created” by placing a son by the side of a woman-mother. By preventing divorce due to lack of children, the *Marriage Law* undermined the entire Chinese system of ancestor worship predicated upon male progeny. Since familial blood was thought to pass only from father to son, a woman—mother or daughter—could never be considered as part of the family, and therefore could not secure her place in heaven through offerings to ancestors. The revised *Marriage Law* of 1980 further disrupted patrilineal kinship by permitting matrilocal marriage.⁴⁸ Previously, upon marriage women joined their husbands' family; now the newly married couple had the right to choose to join the wife's family.

The dramatic alteration of women and men's social roles was only one part of China's communist revolution, however. While laws such as the *Marriage Law* abruptly delineated the parameters of a new social system, custom and culture would also have to be altered in order for the ideal of law to come into reality. Mao's

⁴⁷ *People's Daily*, 27 December 1951, in M. J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1971) 109.

⁴⁸ *The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982), 7.

solution to the bridging of the chasm between politics and society, the Party and the State was to make culture a primary front in the revolution by appropriating art and literature as official ideological weapons.

Mao Zedong first addressed the revolutionary role of “workers in literature and art” during the Yan’an Conference on May 2nd and 23rd 1942. In an attempt to squeeze the Party’s Long March veterans and the urban intellectuals into one mold, the Party began what came to be known as the Rectification Campaign of 1942. In order to increase discipline and streamline the CCP’s bureaucratic organization, every member of the community was invited to comment on the work and lifestyle of all those living in the Communist base at Yan’an . After two months of pointed criticism in local newspapers and pamphlets, Mao called for a meeting of writers, intellectuals and cadres to discuss the proper role of critique, art and literature in the Party’s struggle to form a new republic. Mao, party chairman and leading ideologue, opened and concluded the conference.

In an allusion to Lenin’s 1905 essay “Party Organization and Party Literature” Mao announced:

Our meeting today is to ensure that literature and art become a component part of the whole revolutionary machinery, so they can act as a powerful weapon in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy, and help the people achieve solidarity in their struggle against the enemy.⁴⁹

Each artist must tweak his position, attitude, audience, work and study such that it conforms to the Communist Party mold, until he is as a cog in the revolutionary machine. His position must bridge the identity of the masses and the policies of the

⁴⁹Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art” in *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, trans. Bonnie McDougall (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1980), 58.

Party. Thus, the artist's negotiated position forces him to take a multivalent attitude that encompasses the needs of enemies, friends, and masses:

The task of our cultural army is to expose the enemy's atrocities, treachery, and inevitable defeat . . . To our friends, our allies of various kinds, our attitude should include unity and criticism according to the circumstances . . . But we should criticize and oppose anyone who is anti-Communist and anti-people, who goes on taking the road of reaction day after day. As for the popular masses, we should obviously praise their toil and struggle, their army and their party.⁵⁰

Workers, peasants, soldiers and, most importantly, cadres comprise the artists' appropriate audience, which Mao calculated as over 90% of China's total population.⁵¹ By the conclusion of the "Talks," Mao collapsed his separate demands regarding artists' position, attitude and audience into one: "be for the masses" (*wei dazhong*).⁵² Art must not only take the masses as its subject and destination, but also as its inspiration. The artist's project is to transform himself from bourgeois to proletariat by studying the language and lives of the masses, and then to convey proletariat reality in their art. Mao emphasized that rather than gifted visionaries, artists were technical craftsmen whose work improves with training by repeatedly addressing artists as "*workers* in art and literature." Mao warned that the change of the artists' character and work must not be superficial, nor could they merely "dress their characters up as workers, peasants, and soldiers" to hide their "petty bourgeois faces."⁵³ Revolutionary art relies upon and reflects the "wall newspapers, murals, folk songs, folk tales, popular speech, and so on" of the proletariat, not the leisure or

⁵⁰ Mao, "Yan'an," 59.

⁵¹ Mao, "Yan'an," 65.

⁵² Bonnie McDougall, introduction to *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, trans. Bonnie McDougall (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1980), 16.

⁵³ Mao, "Yan'an," 66

lore of the landowning classes.⁵⁴ Finally, Mao decreed that Marxist-Leninist ideas must be foremost in the artists' thoughts: objective class struggle impels subjective feelings; there is neither love nor freedom, truth nor human nature apart from that created by class conflict.

Implicit in Mao's denunciation of the existence of emotions divorced from economics was an attack upon writers such as Wang Shiwei, who believed that politicians' task is "to transform the social system;" artists' "to transform people's heart, spirit, thinking, and consciousness."⁵⁵ According to Wang, writers should not preoccupy themselves only with changing the world, but should embrace the universal characteristics and experiences of humanity: art should not be political, but humane. Wang believed that by employing the sympathy of the artist with the human soul, the Communists' revolutionary project could be hastened. Wang held that until the soul was transfigured, the revolution could not be complete.⁵⁶

Although Mao does not criticize either the May Fourth movement or Wang for seeking to awaken and revitalize China through the arts, he denounces them for what he saw as their naïve enthusiasm and failure to capture the grit of reality, calling them "heroes without battlefield, remote and uncomprehending."⁵⁷ While he lauds the May Fourth movement for its heroic pursuit of a rejuvenated China, he castigates its adherents for not realizing that "Art for art's sake, art that stands above class and party, and fellow-travelling or politically independent art do not exist in reality."⁵⁸ In Mao's framework, art is by its very nature formalized propaganda. In a May 29, 1970 editorial elaborating upon the meaning of the "Talks," *People's Daily* warned that

⁵⁴ Mao, "Yan'an," 66.

⁵⁵ Wang Shiwei, "Politicians and Artists," *Wild Lily, Prairie Fire*, eds. George Benton and Alan Hunter (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), 75.

⁵⁶ Wang, 75-78.

⁵⁷ Mao, "Yan'an," 60.

⁵⁸ Mao, "Yan'an," 75.

whatever the intentions of the artist, his work is propaganda, either for the revolution or against it. An artist who claims his work to be other than propaganda is consciously seeking to deceive his audience.⁵⁹ Mao unequivocally declared that political criteria always trump the artistic: “Insofar as a work is reactionary, the more artistic it is the more harm it can do to the people and the more it should be rejected . . . What we demand, therefore, is a unity of politics and art.”⁶⁰

Despite having invited discussion and critique of the Party’s policies, Mao was intolerant of independent thought, particularly from intellectuals. For stating his opposition to subordinating art to politics, Wang was labeled as a bourgeois individualist, and consequently, an enemy of the Party. Four days after Mao concluded the conference, meetings to denounce Wang began. By June 2, Wang begged to be dismissed from the Party. Instead of admitting guilt, however, Wang cited irreconcilable differences with “the spirit of utilitarianism that had overtaken the Party.”⁶¹ His request was refused, and a week later he rescinded his request under the advice of friends. Yet Wang remained recalcitrant and refused to admit to any mistake, holding to the belief that democracy and equality were integral to the Communist struggle. Such an attempt to include multiple perspectives within the revolution was anathema to Mao and his leadership, who by then strictly defined both ideas and people into the polar, co-implicated categories of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary. For his conviction in the universality of humanity and desire for democracy, Wang was labeled a “Trotskyite”—an incendiary term that in 1940’s China that connoted both corruption of Chinese thought by the West, as well as

⁵⁹ *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), 29 May 1970, 2; cited in *Survey of China Mainland Press*, no. 4674, 11 June 1970, 73-82.

⁶⁰ Mao, “Yan’an,” 78.

⁶¹ Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967), 38.

contempt for authority.⁶² For his incompatibility with Mao's desired national self-image, Wang was indicted for "indiscriminate plagiarization, imitation, or substitution in literature and art of dead people or foreigners [which] is an extremely sterile and harmful literary and artistic dogmatism,"⁶³ and beheaded in 1947. His body split into two, Wang physically represented the Party's defensive need to disavow what had threatened it—multiplicity. Unwilling to recognize that Wang's criticisms came from an alternative Chinese vision of reform, the Party annulled the legitimacy of Wang's position by slandering his dissent as foreign. After the Communist defeat of the Nationalists, categorizing diversity as traitorous dissidence resulting from foreign corruption would become the CCP's dominant method of discrediting opposition to the Party from within the PRC.

Mao's attack on Wang was not an isolated outburst, but a precursor of the ideological molding campaigns that would prove indispensable to the CCP's maintenance of power. While Wang's execution manifested the Party's intolerance of insubordination, Ding Ling and Ai Qing's excommunication and subsequent rehabilitation laid bare the foundation for the Party's policy on self-criticism. As intellectual associates of Wang, and advocates of the independence of politics and art, Ding and Ai were both vociferously criticized after the "Talks." Unlike Wang, Ding and Ai both recanted their beliefs under pressure from the Party and admitted their "bourgeois" inclinations. They also viciously turned on Wang as proof of their renewed allegiance to the Party. While both Ding and Ai spent the following two years in mandated "thought reform" in the countryside, they were able to emerge with their lives and return to the literary scene. As would later become official policy

⁶² Goldman, 40.

⁶³ Mao, "Yan'an," 69

during the Cultural Revolution, Ding and Ai's case taught all other intellectuals to remember:

Disclosure is better than no disclosure; early disclosure is better than late disclosure; thorough disclosure is better than reserved disclosure. If one sincerely discloses his whole criminal story and admits his crimes to the people humbly, he will be treated leniently and given a way for safe conduct, and his case will not affect his family.⁶⁴

However, the purpose of Mao's attacks against dissent was to break not only family and peer allegiances, but also the individual's sense of an integral self. Ding Ling and Ai Qing's self-criticisms were not penance enough to be allowed back into the Party. In order to realign themselves with the Party, they also had to denounce their close associate, Wang Shiwei. In practice, "thorough disclosure" meant turning on others. This was not simply an adaptive method of redirecting blame, but a process encouraged by the State. In her work on prolonged victims of trauma, Judith Lewis Herman observes that it is by coercing those who have already been victimized to partake in the infliction of trauma on others that the perpetrator completes the denial of the victim's subjectivity.⁶⁵ The State demands access into the inner lives of Chinese by forcing them to contradict their own convictions in order to espouse and promulgate those of the State. Moreover, by forcing the betrayal of one's peers, the CCP effectively isolates Chinese from familial and social networks. This isolation from community, in conjunction with participation in the continued traumatization of others, causes an intense psychological bond to form between the victim and perpetrator: the perpetrator also becomes the liberator.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Lee Hong-yung, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1978, 292-293.

⁶⁵ Judith Lewis Herman, "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome of Survivors in Prolonged and Repeated Trauma," in *Essential Papers on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. Mardi J. Horowitz, M.D. (New York: New York UP, 1999).

⁶⁶ Herman, *Trauma*, 92.

Consequently, the triangulation of perpetrator-victim-savior collapses into a singular relationship as the perpetrator becomes conflated with the savior. During the attack against Wang Shiwei, Mao was clearly the leader of the purge that also ousted Ding Ling and Ai Qing. Yet by realigning themselves with Mao, Ding and Ai could save themselves from being extirpated from the Party. Through Wang Shiwei, Mao taught his revolutionary companions that defiance of the hegemonic norm would lead to the dissident being severed from the Party, while realignment allowed for the possibility of survival.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 did not bring about a cease-fire of Mao's battle with intellectuals, artists, and writers; on the contrary, it marked the beginnings of a campaign to force all of China to live according to Party dictum. In the 10 years after the first publication of the "Talks," over eighty editions of the 1942 text were printed. After the establishment of the PRC, Mao revised and published all of his major speeches and essays in one edition in 1953. Despite the dramatic change in the historical circumstances between 1942 and post-1949, the essence of the "Talks" remained unchanged. In the 1953 revised form, the "Talks" became canonized as literary policy for all artists in the entire country, regardless of the artists' personal political affiliations. The attack on *The Life of Wu Xun*,⁶⁷ the Anti-Rightist campaign, and the havoc of the Cultural Revolution would ensure that all artists realize that not only must art be unified with politics, but also with the Party.

Based on the real-life experiences of Wu Xun (1839-1896), the film *The Life of Wu Xun* opened to critical and popular acclaim in the spring of 1951. Written and directed by Sun Yu, a veteran of the leftist cinema movement of the 1930s, the film

⁶⁷ *Wu xun zhuan* (The Life of Wu Xun), dir. Sun Yu, Kunlun Film Company (1950).

tells the story of an illiterate peasant determined to change the destiny of the poor by giving them an education. In the face of constant mistreatment and insurmountable obstacles, Wu works for 30 years to save enough money to open a public school for poor children. Pained by students who seek only to earn appointments from the imperial court, Wu chastens them: “When you grow up, never forget you are the children of peasants!”

Despite *Wu Xun*'s focus upon the oppression of peasants by the landowning classes, Mao feared that the film would discourage revolutionary loyalty. He was disturbed that, in contrast to Wu's friend, Zhou Da, who joined peasant rebels, Wu sought change from within the system. Advocating social reform through education instead of through violent revolution emerged as Wu Xun's crime. On May 16, 1951, *People's Daily* launched a national attack on *Wu Xun*. On May 20th, Mao himself wrote an editorial questioning Wu's class background and complicity with feudal government, insinuating that Wu was at heart bourgeois behind a peasant façade. Over the next two months hundreds of articles in papers throughout the country castigated *Wu Xun* for exemplifying what Mao considered to be an incorrect stance—that turbulent revolution is not integral to change.

In the most extensive ideological powerplay since the “Talks” at Yan'an, the CCP ordered that one quarter of daily newspaper space be reserved for enumeration of Wu Xun's transgressions.⁶⁸ A 45,000-word report published by *People's Daily* on July 23 and 28, 1951 signaled the height of *Wu Xun*'s condemnation. Compiled by Jiang Qing, Mao's fourth wife, in order to back his denunciation of Wu Xun, the report concluded that “the real Wu opposed peasant revolution, that his attempts at building schools came to nothing and even helped ‘repair’ the feudal establishment,

⁶⁸ Merle Goldman, 91-92.

that he had ties with the local underworld and extracted money from people, and that his school was never exclusively for children from poor families.”⁶⁹ After publication of Jiang’s unsubstantiated report, the State officially banned *Wu Xun*, and all persons associated with its production, distribution and promotion were subject to severe scrutiny and fierce pressure, culminating in public self-criticisms admitting their guilt in veering away from accepted Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. None of the criticisms of *Wu Xun* were aesthetic or technical, thus reinforcing Mao’s stance that art be subordinated to politics. Every filmmaker and intellectual throughout the country was now duly warned that to be on the wrong side of the Party’s view of history carried bitter consequences. The condemnation of *Wu Xun* taught peasant, worker, soldier, cadre and intellectual alike that all of their beliefs were culpable: only Mao’s consciousness could never be proven false.

In the wake of the national campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun*, the seven existent private studios “willingly” assimilated into the CCP-controlled Shanghai Film Studio. To the same extent that Mao feared that *The Life of Wu Xun* would undermine his ideology, he understood that under the control of the State, film could be an extremely “effective method of socialist education.”⁷⁰ After 1951, independent studios would remain glaringly absent from China for the next 40 years.

Now under total State control, film became a primary tool in the revolutionary struggle. Taking the “next radical move” beyond where Marx stopped, Mao made “cultural history material.”⁷¹ During the land reform that began in 1958, Mao demonstrated that the “constitutive social process” of culture is integral to shaping material history. Despite widespread peasant resentment of the Great Leap

⁶⁹ Zhang Yingjin and Xiao Zhiwei, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 24.

⁷⁰ Mei Chen, “1949-1989 China Film Distribution and Exhibition,” *China Screen*, no. 3 (1990), 26.

⁷¹ Raymond Williams, *Marx and Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 19. Williams laments that Marx’s inability to take this step is a reflection of his inability to completely transcend the dominant

Forward's collectivization campaign, filmmakers were coerced into depicting enthusiastic peasants eager to work for People's Communes. They were instructed to "look for those elements [of socialism already in place] and not concentrate on temporary problems. The message was clear: sing the Party's praises and do not criticize life in China under the CCP."⁷² Rather than reflect the pains caused by the rapid collectivization of 99% of all 120 million peasants in just over a year, or the beginnings of a catastrophic famine that would claim over 20 million lives and drop China's median mortality rate to 9.7 years by 1963,⁷³ directors were compelled to make films lauding the triumph of the Great Leap so as to make each peasant believe that it was only his commune that was failing, and that if he continued working toward the radical transformation of production he too would soon taste the victory of the revolution. Yingjin Zhang notes that "According to the Party line, the peasants' reluctance to participate was nothing less than backward thinking, correctable given time, so that films should focus on what reality ought to look like, not how it actually appeared."⁷⁴ Through the use of film as revolutionary mechanism, Mao exploited the unique property of human labor identified by Marx: "What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality."⁷⁵

The artists' experience during the Great Leap Forward forced them to use doublevision to re-imagine as genuine a reality they simultaneously knew to be counterfeit. While what they saw and experienced contradicted the official reality as transcribed by the CCP, many artists concurrently believed in the socialist realist

thought of the time.

⁷² Zhang, *Encyclopedia*, 25.

⁷³ Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 583.

⁷⁴ Zhang, *Encyclopedia*, 26.

⁷⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 344.

project of reality creation. Socialist realist artistic principles declared that by artistically incarnating the success of the proletariat revolution, the actual revolution would soon follow. This ability concurrently to register and erase the disjunction between one's personal experience and the hegemonic, Party-defined discourse seems to be an adaptive mechanism of survival within totalitarian states. While Herman notes that "ordinary psychological language does not have a name for this complex array of mental maneuvers, at once conscious and unconscious,"⁷⁶ she sees George Orwell's characterization of *doublethink* as capturing this process:

Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The [person] knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity.⁷⁷

The artists' doublevision goes beyond this description of doublethink, however. They are not only "playing tricks with reality" in their own minds, but buttressing the hegemonic view of reality put forth by the CCP. In the process of adapting to the constant and arbitrary purges of the Party, the artist becomes part of the force that enables the CCP to dominate both himself and the country.

Despite the intellectual and artists' pathological relationship with the Party, throughout the 1950s, Mao continued to fear that they would undermine the force of his totalizing logic. Convinced that any heterodoxy would crack the foundation of his authority, Mao continued to persecute intellectuals throughout the decade. In a direct parallel to the attack on Wang Shiwei some ten years earlier, left wing writer

⁷⁶ Herman, *Trauma*, 87.

⁷⁷ George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classic Edition, 1949), 176-177.

Hu Feng was labeled a “counter-revolutionary” and imprisoned in 1955. Since the Party then controlled not just Yan’an, but the entire country, the persecution of “Hu Feng elements” touched every intellectual in China, provoking widespread suicides in literary and artistic circles. Hu would remain in prison, with only one short respite, until 1979. The decisive estrangement of intellectuals from the Party, however, would not occur for another three years.

Out of fear that unremitting repression would foster upheaval, Mao welcomed the spring of 1956 by calling for the “blooming and contending” of the arts and sciences. Against the backdrop of continuing agrarian and kinship reform, Mao declared that “Discipline that stifles creativity and initiative should be abolished. We need a little liberalism to facilitate getting things done.”⁷⁸ Intellectuals’ silent withdrawal from political participation due to the terrors of 1951 and 1955 was stalling the advent of socialism. In a speech delivered May 2, 1956 to a closed session of party leaders, Mao revealed his plan of “letting a hundred flowers bloom” in the field of culture, and “a hundred schools of thought contend” in the fields of science.⁷⁹ Mao realized that only by accepting the pluralist criticism of intellectuals could he win their allegiance back to the Party and the Socialist project.

Due to opposition from within the Party to allowing dissent and discourse, it was not until April 1957 that Mao succeeded in instituting a full rectification campaign. In a deliberate echo of the 1942 Yan’an Rectification campaign, from which the “Talks” emerged, intellectuals were encouraged to attack the “bureaucratism, sectarianism and subjectivism” of the CCP.⁸⁰ While many intellectuals were suspicious of the Party’s constantly fluctuating stance, a spray of

⁷⁸ Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1999), 455.

⁷⁹ Spence, 568.

⁸⁰ Spence, 570.

criticisms turned into a five-week wave of vitriol that buffeted the Party from May 1-June 7, 1957. Intellectuals attacked every aspect of the Party's rule, from agrarian collectivization to treatment of intellectuals, from acting as a Soviet lackey to lack of elective practice. The report of pioneering sociologist Fei Xiantong, whose essays on rural China and the gentry system had been famous throughout China in 1930s and 1940s, was particularly damning of the Party's record of reform. Having conducted fieldwork in Kaixiangong village in a remote part of Jiangsu during the Republican government, Fei returned to Kaixiangong to observe its current conditions. He noted that irrational irrigation planning practices, disregard for local industries, failure to raise livestock suited to the environment, and total neglect of children's education continued throughout the region, just as it had in the Republican era. Thereby, Fei not so subtly implied that the revolution had failed to transform peasant life.⁸¹ A Manchurian professor directly alluded to the similarity of the Communist and the Imperial governments by decrying the "feudal princes and stinking charlatans" that infest the Party, and the "many privileges which make them a race apart."⁸² Echoing the May Fourth movement's calls for radical change, the students of Beijing University struck at the very heart of the Party by debating the advantages of capitalism over socialism. Lin Xiling, a 21 year-old student, directly accused the Party of "feudal socialism," while thousands of other students formed magazine salons whose very names reveal their perception of the Party as a bureaucratic class alienated from the masses: *Bitter Medicine*, *Voices from the Lowest Level*, *Wild Grass*, and *Spring Thunder*.⁸³ One economics lecturer went so far as to

⁸¹ James McGough, *Fei Hsiao-t'ung: The Dilemma of a Chinese Intellectual* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1979) 62.

⁸² Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Hundred Flowers* (London: Stevens, 1960), 92.

⁸³ Short, 467.

criticize the Party for assuming that it had become synonymous with the Chinese state:

China belongs to [all of its] 600 million people, including those who are counter-revolutionaries. It does not belong to the Communist Party alone . . . If you [Party members] work satisfactorily, all well and good. If not, the masses may knock you down, kill you and overthrow you. This cannot be described as unpatriotic, for the communists would no longer be serving the people. The downfall of the Communist Party would not mean the downfall of China.⁸⁴

Stunned by the degree of the widespread bitterness and mistrust Chinese felt toward the Party, Mao answered the mass assault on the legitimacy of Communist rule and on the success of the PRC's purported social revolution with a decisive strike against the CCP's detractors. In June, 1957, Mao revised the text of the document that had officially started the Hundred Flowers campaign, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," so that it read as if the promised intellectual freedoms were to be used only if they contributed to the strengthening of socialism:⁸⁵ "Fragrant flowers," he argued, must be separated from "poisonous weeds."⁸⁶

At the front of the ignominious list of "poisonous weeds" to be plowed into fertilizer stood the filmmaker Lü Ban. Lü's 1956 *Before the New Director Arrives*⁸⁷—the singular satirical Chinese film—derides officials who seek to curry favor with their superiors at the expense of the public. Jay Leyda contends that it was the scathing form of Lü's film that roused the Party's wrath:

The unaccustomed deluge of satirical portraits in the film—bureaucrats, toadies, time-wasters, amateur art

⁸⁴ Short, 465.

⁸⁵ Spence, 572.

⁸⁶ Short, 468.

⁸⁷ *Xin juzhang daolai de ren* (Before the New Director Arrives), dir. Lü Ban, Changchun Film Studio (1956).

authorities (discussing the painted ornamentation for the new director's walls), big planners, and (perhaps worst of all) the large number of underlings habitually saying Yes to anything the boss wants—was too much for those people in the film and culture administrations who had sat for these portraits.⁸⁸

Moreover, by placing the film in the present, Lü makes clear that the new director, who will put an end to the obsequious pandering for power of the bureaucrats and their correlative neglect of the masses, has not yet arrived, and thereby is not embodied by the CCP. Lü's derisive ridicule of the Party made him and *Before the New Director Arrives* prime targets for the Anti-Rightist campaign. His condemnation came from within the Changchun studio for which he worked, and was reported in *Popular Cinema*. Lü's "mask of humor and his appeal to the superficial laughter of the audience" were impugned for concealing his anti-Party stance. "Lü Ban looks on our new society as if it were exactly the same as the old society before liberation."⁸⁹ Lü's casual remark made before the onset of the rectification—"Let them laugh—it's good for their health"—sealed his fate as an enemy of Socialism.⁹⁰ All of his films were pulled from circulation, and he was dismissed from the Changchun Studio. After 1957 there is no record of his ever working again.

By July the resultant Anti-Rightist campaign was in full force. By the end of 1957, 520,000 intellectuals were sent to the countryside to undergo thought reform, and the label of "Rightist"—shorthand for Western apologist—ended their careers.⁹¹ The treatment of Fei Xiantong demonstrated that this time, not even self-denial could abate the Party's wrath. Even after he made a public confession denouncing his Kaixiangong study to the National Peoples Congress, Fei Xiantong was

⁸⁸ Jay Leyda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), 220.

⁸⁹ Leyda, 222.

⁹⁰ Leyda, 222.

forbidden to teach, publish, or conduct research on Chinese society.⁹² He fared better, however, than myriad intellectuals and students who were driven to suicide by the psychological pressure of public struggle sessions. To emblazon the Party's refusal to relinquish authority onto the consciousness of the masses, public executions of vocal critics were held throughout the country. At the start of the 1957 academic year, students who had criticized the Party administration at Hanyang First Middle School were shot in front of an audience of 10,000.⁹³ As Philip Short notes, by the end of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the reactionary Anti-Rightist Campaign that followed it, "the very people who Mao needed most to build the strong, new China he had been dreaming of since his youth had been definitively alienated."⁹⁴

To say that intellectuals and artists were now alienated from the Party is not to say that they were no longer constrained by attachments to the Party. In actuality, the Hundred Flowers Campaign and its concomitant Anti-Rightist Campaign deepened the dialectic relationship. By allowing artists and intellectuals to critique and dissent from the CCP, only then to punish them for doing what the Party had permitted, the CCP increased its control over artists' functioning. As Herman relates from her research into psychological domination, "fear is also increased by inconsistent and unpredictable outbursts of violence and by capricious enforcement of petty rules."⁹⁵ In *Violations of Human Rights and Information: The Chilean Experience*, this cycle of permission and penalty is catalogued under psychological torture as "gratification-punishment": "they gratify the prisoner by satisfying one of his or her necessities or wishes . . . In this way they produce habituation. When they have

⁹¹ Short, 470.

⁹² McGough, 81.

⁹³ Spence, 573.

⁹⁴ Short, 471.

achieved this they suddenly cancel it. In this way they produce a sort of syndrome of abstinence.”⁹⁶ By soliciting criticism only then to crucify those who spoke, the CCP reinforced the perception that silence was the only means of guaranteeing survival.

Despite having estranged artists from their art through the campaigns against *Wu Xun* and the Anti-Rightists, it would take the Cultural Revolution to enable the Party fully to appropriate the artists’ pen to the authorized revolutionary front. Significantly, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) witnessed the return of the “Talks” of Yan’an to political prominence. *Red Flag* reprinted the “Talks” in full on July 1, 1966; *People’s Daily* followed suit by reprinting “Talks” on May 23, 1967, the 25th anniversary of the Yan’an conference. *Chinese Literature*, the only literary magazine in publication from 1966-1972, reprinted the complete “Talks” in October 1966, again in August 1967, and a third time in May 1972. As Bonnie McDougall notes, “the periods of greatest circulation of the ‘Talks’ have coincided with the most intense censorship and persecution of individual writers.”⁹⁷

The first incendiary shot of the Cultural Revolution was carefully aimed by Mao both to solidify his totalitarian power and to provide him the excuse he needed to seize art and literature as political contraband. Despite having premiered in 1961, Wu Han’s play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, suffered the incipient blow. In 1959—in the midst of the Great Leap Forward—Mao asked Wu, a noted historian and writer, to revive the reputation of the celebrated Hai Rui, the Ming official who criticized the emperor for wasting the country’s resources while the famished population was driven to the brink of rebellion. Mao had called for Party members to emulate and extol the virtues of Hai Rui in response to the exaggerated claims of grain production

⁹⁵ Herman, *Trauma*, 77.

⁹⁶ *Violencias a los Derechos Humanos e Información: La Experiencia Chilena* (Violations of Human Rights and Information: The Chilean Experience) (Orellana, Chile: FASIC, 1989), 62, quoted in Inger Agger and Søren Buus Jensen, *Trauma and Healing Under State Terrorism* (Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1996), 77-78.

in 1958 that led to a catastrophic nationwide famine.⁹⁸ In reply to Mao's call, Wu's September 1959 *People's Daily* article described the sixteenth century emperor who dismissed Hai as "craving vainly for immortality" and as "being self-opinionated and unreceptive to criticism."⁹⁹ First staged by the Peking Opera Troupe in February 1961, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* praises the uprightness and compassion of Hai Rui, the selfless defender of the peasants who the Ming emperor dismissed from government service due to the emperor's total disregard for the needs of the people.

Despite having encouraged Wu's creation of *Hai Rui* and the criticisms it voiced, the tumultuous political climate of the mid-1960s inspired Mao to turn on Wu. Threatened from within the Party by the increasing influence of his appointed successor, Liu Shaoqi and by Liu's own pointed questioning of Mao's use of mass political campaigns, Mao and his wife Jiang Qing solicited Yao Wenyuan to write a 10,000-word indictment of Wu's *Hai Rui* as a "poisonous weed."¹⁰⁰ On November 10, 1965 the first round of the Cultural Revolution began with the publication of Yao's essay. Historian Jonathan Spence notes that Yao's indictment of Wu Han and *Hai Rui* focuses on the play's implication that "individual 'moral' men could somehow transcend the economic and social realities of their own time."¹⁰¹ Yao criticizes *Hai Rui* for denying Mao's political tenet that mass movements—not individuals—are the engines for historical change. Echoing the events surrounding the purge of Wang Shiwei, demonstrations of affinity for the individual were denounced as bourgeois. By endorsing the "capitalist road," *Hai Rui* was labeled as treacherously counter-revolutionary. The final blow landed in December 1965 when

⁹⁷ McDougall, 41.

⁹⁸ The 1958 harvest had not been the initially reported 375 million tons, or the government's revised 260 million tons estimate, but only 200. 1960 harvested only 143 million tons. It is estimated that from 1959-1960 at least 25 million Chinese starved to death.

⁹⁹ Spence, 599-600.

¹⁰⁰ Short, 528.

Mao announced that *Hai Rui* was an allegorical attack not just on his integration of State and society through mass campaigns, but also against his own personal leadership. Despite its historical setting, Mao read in Wu's words an indictment of his dismissal of Long March veteran and senior-ranking CCP member Peng Dehuai for his criticism of the Great Leap in 1959. *Current Scene* reports Mao as having said, "The point is the emperor dismisses Hai Rui. I dismissed Peng Dehuai."¹⁰²

Mao's contention was not without reason. Employing historical allegories and traditional themes to critique contemporary society was common literary practice from 1960-1962. In addition to Wu, other prominent writers who used allegory included Wu's co-authors of *Notes from Three Family Village*, Deng Tuo and Liao Moshu, as well as Yang Shu and his conspirators on *Long and Short Notes*. By glossing the well-known evils and shortcomings of Ming rulers in contexts analogous to those being experienced under Mao's reign, these writers indirectly questioned not only Mao's current policies, but also the overall success of the revolution.

The attack on *Hai Rui* as an allegorical condemnation of the Party paved the way for Mao and Jiang Qing to seize control over all cultural activities. In 1966, all literary, artistic, and academic journals were closed except for the Party-controlled *Chinese Literature*. As the only channel of artistic production completely under state supervision,¹⁰³ the film industry was the most drastically affected by the havoc of the Cultural Revolution. At the outset of the Revolution, Jiang Qing blacklisted 54 films and closed the national film school, Beijing Film Academy. Many of the filmmakers responsible for the production of the blacklisted films were sent to re-education camps or were imprisoned for their alleged treason of the revolutionary cause. In

¹⁰¹ Spence, 601.

¹⁰² "New Ground Rules for Peking Opera?" *Current Scene* 10, no. 3, (1972): 17.

¹⁰³ The entire film industry was nationalized in the wake of the campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun*. See discussion above.

June 1966 all feature film production ceased. Jiang Qing's answer to creating "unity of art and politics" was only to allow Party-authorized "model" dramas to exist. All cultural activities—theatre, film, writing, performance, and criticism—would revolve around the model dramas, and thereby, proletarian ideology would be instilled in every Chinese person.

Beginning in late 1969, revised versions of five model operas were produced: *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, October 1969; *Shajiabang*, May 1970; *The Red Lantern*, May 1970; *On the Docks*, January 1972; and *Raid on White Tiger Regiment*, September 1972. The model operas were joined in their ideological battle by three revolutionary ballets: *The White Haired Girl*, October 1965; *Red Detachment of Women*, May 1970; and *The Song of Yi Meng Mountain*, August 1971. A focus upon the "superhuman tasks" of indomitable heroes, "ready to risk their lives" for the masses emerges as the unifying theme of the five model operas.¹⁰⁴ The guiding principle for the model operas elaborated by Jiang Qing was epitomized by the three prominences: positive characters must receive preeminence over negative, heroes over other positive characters and the leading hero above all others. Significantly, none of these heroes succeeds in living in the utopian Communist society they strove to create; each becomes a martyr for the revolutionary cause.

Productive use of art as a national apparatus for inculcating ideology required not only the creation of model operas, but also their dissemination. Innumerable opera festivals erupted across the country. Scripts of the operas became the only officially published fiction. Picture books of the model operas were created for children and for the illiterate. *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *The Red Lantern*, and

¹⁰⁴ D. W. Fokkema, "Maoist Ideology and Its Exemplification in the New Peking Opera," *Current Scene* 10, no. 8 (1972): 18.

Shajiabang were filmed in order to provide even greater penetration into the countryside of the Party's authorized proletarian ideology.

In a *People's Daily* July 15, 1970 article entitled "Do a Good Job in Popularizing Model Revolutionary Theatrical Works," all amateur and professional theatre troops were called upon to learn the model operas. Once the troupes had mastered the model, they were to perform the operas extensively throughout the region. Those who thought that industrial production was paramount and that they lacked "idle" time to devote to learning, let alone popularizing the model operas, were forced to attend study sessions to ponder the 1942 "Talks" and its contemporary applications.¹⁰⁵ By August 31, 1970 more than 200,000 people had participated in performing model theatrical works in the single county of Jiaying, Zhejiang.¹⁰⁶ Xinhua News Agency announced on May 21, 1972 that "nearly 1,300 amateur theatrical groups with 40,000 members" existed in the "factories, rural peoples' communes, schools, shops and neighborhoods" just in and near the city of Wuhan. School children from Lhasa to Peking were organized into literature and art propaganda teams to rehearse the songs and dances from the dramas.¹⁰⁷ For ten years, over 800 million people were forced not only to watch, but to live only eight model dramas. By the denouement of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, art had become synonymous with Party-controlled ideology.

One of the most striking changes in the content of art during the Cultural Revolution was the prominent role of women. The lead characters in *On the Docks*, *Red Detachment of Women*, *The White Haired Girl*, and the 1972 version of *Ode to Dragon River* are all women. In the original 1964 Peking opera version of *Ode*, the lead was a

¹⁰⁵ *Summary of World Broadcasts*, 10 September 1970, FE 3478.

¹⁰⁶ *Summary of World Broadcasts*, 10 September 1970, FE 3478.

¹⁰⁷ *Guangming*, 4 June 1972, 3 and 20 August 1972, 3.

man. This change led China News Analysis to comment: “Under Jiang Qing, this is a world of women heroes.”¹⁰⁸ Like all revisions of art and literature after 1949, this change was manufactured with political intent: by rewriting hero as heroine the Party reiterated its break with China’s feudal, patriarchal past.

The roles of Jinghua and Xi'er in *Red Detachment of Women* and *The White Haired Girl* reflect the hostility and resentment of male-dominated society inherent in the ideology of the Communist revolution. China’s first full-length indigenous ballet, *Red Detachment of Women* is set amidst the intense civil war between Communist led peasants and the Nationalist army that ravaged Hainan Island from 1927-1937. The action follows the escape of Wu Jinghua, a slave in the Tyrant of the South’s Coconut Grove Manor, and her subsequent liberation of the peasants from the Tyrant’s control as part of the Red Detachment of Women. Refusing to be sold, Jinghua turns the whip long used in her own torture on Lao Szu, the Tyrant’s henchman, and flees the Manor. Following her capture by the Tyrant and Lao Szu, she is beaten and dragged by horses. The Tyrant and Lao Szu leave her for dead. Finding Jinghua barely alive in the woods during a scouting mission, two soldiers of the Communist Red Army tell Jinghua of a platoon of women-soldiers who are fighting the landlords and tyrants on the island. In the “March of the Red Detachment of Women,” the women-soldiers sing as they tout guns over their heads:

Forward! Forward!
Important the soldiers’ task, deep the women’s hatred.
Smash your shackles, rise in revolution!¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *China News Analysis* 878 (21 April 1972) 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Red Detachment of Women*, China Ballet Troupe, May 1970; in Lois Wheeler Snow, *China on Stage* (New York: Random House, 1972), 219.

Once having joined the detachment of the Communist Red Army, the Company Commander “urges Ching-hua [Jinghua] to continue raising her proletarian consciousness and to channel her hatred into annihilating the enemy . . . Ching-hua practises shooting and grenade throwing.”¹¹⁰ In the final scene, all the women freed from the Tyrant’s rule join the Red Detachment of Women. “Millions of new revolutionaries rise . . . The people’s army grows in size and strength. Revolution’s torrent cannot be stemmed. In the bright sunlight, the swelling ranks stride forward along the path crimson with the blood of the fallen”¹¹¹—the blood of the men. Scores of women, guns and grenade in hand, march toward their next battle of the revolution, felling the patriarchy with every shot.

In *The White Haired Girl* the young Xi’er is taken as a slave by the local landlord, Huang Shiren, who killed her father for not paying his debts. Determined to liberate Xi’er and the peasant village from Huang’s clutches, her fiancé joins the Red Army. Xi’er is driven to despair by Huang’s physical abuse, and flees to the mountains, vowing to avenge Huang’s cruelty:

Whips lash me, needles stab me,
I care not how savagely you beat me.
I will escape this house . . .
Hatred heaped on hatred,
Ever deeper is my hatred . . .
I will become a storm!
I will become thunder that
Shakes the nine heavens!¹¹²

Alone in the hills, Xi’er lives in a cave. Malnutrition and mental suffering devastate her body, turning her long black hair stark white. As she searches for food amongst the offerings at a mountain temple, she encounters Huang and his lackey, Mu, who are seeking refuge from the Red Army in the hills. Piercing music cuts the air as

¹¹⁰ *Red Detachment of Women*, 228.

¹¹¹ *Red Detachment of Women*, 239.

Xi'er leaps from the temple altar and hurls a heavy incense burner at her previous captor. When Lois Wheeler Snow saw *The White Haired Girl* performed in Xian and Shanghai during the late 1960s she noted that at the climax of this scene “the audience responded with an audible gasp—Women’s Liberation was on stage.”¹¹³

The audience’s reaction to Xi’er’s leap makes evident the CCP’s effective integration of art and ideology. After a generation of being taught to read art and literature as political treatises, every member of the audience knew that *The White Haired Girl* was not simply a well-constructed story made to entertain. Art had become the vanguard of China’s socialist project; that Xi’er leapt into the air and attacked the Tyrant could not have happened unless the Party willed it so. By permeating Chinese thought and culture with a carefully formulated Party message, the CCP effectively bridged the chasm between Party and State. No art or literature would be allowed to exist for itself. After 30 years of purges and rehabilitations, all Chinese were aware that every piece of art and literature—even if it did not directly address the Party’s rule—was a direct political statement. Since the Party had become synonymous with the State, any work that did not adhere to the didactics of socialist realist art and portray the success of the revolution without ambiguity was subversive to the Party-State’s message.

Thirty years of psychological—and often physical torture—made sustained struggles against the Party’s hegemony psychologically problematic, however. In her work on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Herman observes that in cases of prolonged and repeated trauma, “the field of initiative is increasingly narrowed within confines dictated by the perpetrator. The prisoner no longer thinks of how to

¹¹² Lois Wheeler Snow, *China on Stage* (New York: Random House, 1972), 210.

¹¹³ Snow, 211.

escape, but rather of how to stay alive, or how to make captivity more bearable.”¹¹⁴

In China, the abuse suffered by the people at the hands of the CCP has not only been prolonged and repeated, but arbitrary. The criterion by which the Chinese were to negotiate between ally and enemy, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary constantly changed.

The psychological effects of the vicissitudes of totalitarian oppression on identity formation, self-assertion and relational structures experienced are well dramatized in the 1994 film, *To Live*.¹¹⁵ By following the life of one family, led by Fugui and Jiazhen, from China’s pre-revolutionary 1940s through the 1970s, *To Live* stages the process by which the CCP traumatized the whole nation through the experiences of one family. While greeting Fugui back from the war between the Communists and Nationalists, the new CCP head of his township, Comrade Niu, remarks that in a “typical counter-revolutionary tactic” the current owner of the old Fugui family home burnt down the house rather than allow the CCP to occupy the property. “It burnt for days,” Comrade Niu continues, looking at Fugui, “Your family’s timber was really first class.” A medium shot of Fugui reveals fear in his eyes—only people in the landlord class would have first class family timber, and to be a landlord was to be counter-revolutionary. The shot holds Fugui as a silent pause fills the screen with the presence of his psychological conflict. He releases his breath to declare: “No. That wasn’t my family’s timber. It was counter-revolutionary timber.” As he rewrites himself out of his family’s past, his eyes communicate their new identity to his wife, and then return to Comrade Niu. “Right. Counter-revolutionary timber,” parrots his wife Jiazhen. “Of course,” Comrade Niu concludes, “You’re you, he’s him.” In order to avoid arrest and

¹¹⁴ Judith Lewis Herman, “Complex PTSD,” 89.

execution as a (previous) landlord, Fugui immediately realigns himself with the new hegemonic ideology, and eschews his past—even though that means denying his own family history. After the execution of Long'er, the accused landlord to whom Fugui lost his home to pay off gambling debts, Jiazhen desperately searches for the certificate given to Fugui by the People's Liberation Army for his days of service. She finds it in the pocket of a pair of pants she was laundering. A close-up shot focuses on Jiazhen and Fugui's fingers delicately unfolding the soaked and tattered paper. Even as they touch it, it tears. "I'll get a frame for it tomorrow," Jiazhen's voice assures, "We'll hang it on the wall." Like the laundered paper to which they must cling for validation of their lives, Fugui and Jiazhen must construct their identity out of shreds. This constant cutting out of the newly disavowed, and reformation of the self along the latest hegemonic fault lines leads to a loss of self.

The degree to which this forced fluidity is an ingrained process of survival is articulated through the family tree Fugui constructs for his son, Youqing. Carrying Youqing on his back, Fugui tells his sleepy child "Our family is like a little chicken. When it grows up it will be a goose. And then it will turn into a sheep, which will become an ox." Through each successive incarnation, the family is imagined as a stronger and more powerful animal. Out of his slumber, Youqing asks, "And after the ox?" Fugui pauses, "Then we will be in communism! And we will have meat and dumplings everyday." Through this progression Fugui conveys that the driving force of his family's reshaping is the CCP, and the promise of physical reward. The hollowness of this promise, and the pain of identity fragmentation, is evinced in the next scene. Jumping from the father-to-son narration of the family fable, the camera cuts to a young boy whispering into Fugui's ear—now it is the child who completes

¹¹⁵ *Huozhe* (To Live), dir. Zhang Yimou, ERA International, Shanghai Film Studio (1994).

the fable. The camera focuses on Fugui's frozen, fear-filled face. Youqing is dead. The Communist district chief's truck backed into the schoolyard wall. It collapsed on the sleeping Youqing. The children warn the parents: survival through adaptive fragmentation and disavowal is illusory.

After another twenty years of political quakes and shifting fault lines, Fugui and Jiazhen's naming of their grandson evokes the generational effects of prolonged trauma in the PRC. Awaiting the birth of their first grandchild, Fugui and Jiazhen contemplate names for the child. Jiazhen suggests *mantou*—little steamed bun. Fugui turns to her incredulously. Jiazhen insists that calling the child “dog”, “cat,” or “little bun” is the only way to ensure that it survive. She explains that since the name does not follow proper ancestral naming practice, it would not be listed in the Register of Names. Consequently, “the devil would not know that the child exists.” After a generation of trauma, Jiazhen imagines the only means of survival in nonhuman terms. This tendency for survivors to conceive of themselves in nonhuman form has been well described by both the political imprisoned Jacobo Timmerman and the sexually exploited Linda Lovelace.¹¹⁶ With all senses of autonomy invaded by the perpetrator, the individual is effectively erased from his own mind.

After Mao's death in 1976, the Cultural Revolution came to an end, and attempts at national and personal healing began. For forty-years, China's plains had been striated with the constant and often contradictory promotion of desired Selves and splitting off of unacceptable Others: women/men, proletariat/bourgeois, and East/West. Mao's constant redefinition of these dialectical categories into binary opposites dislocated these cultural touchstones from any inherent meaning. Yet

¹¹⁶ See Jacobo Timmerman, *Prisoners without a Name: Cell without a Number*, trans. Toby Talbot (New

while what each of these categories labeled could change, the label itself coded whatever it marked as either permitted or proscribed. Consequently, attempts to reconnect the myriad dislocated and fragmented parts of the Chinese self are complicated by the multiple codings of self/other. It is from within this problematical dialectic that China's Fifth Generation of filmmakers emerged in 1984.

York: Vintage, 1988); Linda Lovelace and Mike McGrady, *Ordeal* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel, 1980).

Two

Turning Backward *The Fifth Generation Revisions the Past*

Have I no voice of my own?
—Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum Family*¹¹⁷

What thou has inherited from thy fathers, acquire to make
it thine.

—Goethe, *Faust*¹¹⁸

While the search for an authentic representation of Chinese cultural identity could be framed merely as an anxious and defensive response to the burning glare of the Western gaze, the framing of China solely as the homogeneous Other not only ignores China's own heterogeneity, but also its existence as an entity independent of the West's imagination. That China must be recognized as a Self rather than merely an Other does not preclude consideration of the role of the West, however. In his study of the relation between cultural identity and cinema, Yuejin Wang maintains that "only when one feels oneself encouraged by a permeating force from the Other is one alert to the integrity of one's self; and only when one is uncertain about the Self does one feel promoted to self-examination."¹¹⁹ Self-recognition and the subsequent delineation of the native require a presence of the Other.

¹¹⁷ Mo Yan, *Red Sorghum*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 357.

¹¹⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Woodstock, 1993).

¹¹⁹ Yuejin Wang, "The Cinematic Other and the Cultural Self?: De-Centering the Cultural Identity on Cinema," *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 34.

For many critics, both inside and outside of China, Zhang Yimou is all too aware of the gaze of the Western Other. To detractors such as Jane Ying Zha, the only proof needed of Zhang's complicity with the Orientalist project is that "all [her] American friends love Zhang's movies."¹²⁰ Embedded within Zha's critique of Zhang is the premise that the very ability for which he is famous—his lusciously sensual cinematographic eye—threatens his authenticity as a Chinese filmmaker. Moreover, his choice of remote, semi-primitive, oppressively feudal locations, his attention to ethnographic detail, his sumptuously colored and sweeping cinematography, and his focus on female sexuality are attacked as exoticizing China at the expense of greater attention to the complexities of Chinese society. Zha argues that seeing Zhang's films is "like using a Western man's hand—the arm of a Western movie camera—to slowly caress the Chinese landscape and Chinese people; it provides a pleasure and a stimulation at once familiar and strange."¹²¹ Yet is it only the Westerner that is seduced by the sensual languor of Zhang's visual language? On the contrary, the Chinese viewer is also enticed by the spectacle that is the Other. China's identity is not a single but a fractured reflection of East and West, of past and present. Within the films of the Fifth Generation, the Other is not imagined along a simple East-West pole, but rather as inhabiting a space free from both the influence of the Party as well as of the West. In their struggle to recreate a self free from both Orientalist and nationalist discourse, the Fifth Generation turns its gaze inward, and backward, framing the Other as a China lost to time and revolution.

While in Chinese cultural identity there is a sophisticated awareness of the Western Other, searches for Self have focused on discovering a more primordial Self

¹²⁰ Jane Ying Zha, "Excerpts from 'Lore Segal, Red Lantern, and Exoticism,'" *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 329.

¹²¹ Zha, 332.

within China's own geographic borders. Yuejin Wang argues that it is this "dialogic" relationship between China/West and self/other that explains the paradox in Chinese audience reception of the main early works of the Fifth Generation filmmakers:

Yellow Earth (1984), *On the Hunting Ground* (1985), *Horse Thief* (1986) . . . and others, all have unfamiliar settings to Chinese intellectual and urban eyes: barren, arid, terraced loess; remote grassland and snowy mountains inhabited by minority peoples; stony and barren landscapes in some forgotten past; or stylized and visually transfigured fishing villages encroached upon by industrial expansion. To the average urban Chinese these landscapes are equally alien, remote and "other-looking," as they presumably appear to a Western gaze.¹²²

Although Westerners are likely to make the fallacious assumption that the various geographic areas and ethnic details are unified in their "Chineseness," urban Chinese are struck by their ethnic difference and Otherness. The caress of the camera exoticizes a cultural Other for both the Westerner and the Chinese.¹²³ For the Western eye, the Other created by Zhang's lyrical anthropological journey is immediately catalogued along the East-West pole. For the Chinese, this Other cannot be simply essentialized to the cultural pandering expressed in Jane Ying Zha's indictment of Zhang as explicitly "selling oriental exoticism to a Western audience."¹²⁴ Even as the Western eye continues to gaze, constructing its own image of the "Oriental," the Chinese eye searches for an image, and a hope, of the "Native" in the dust of China's past. The films of the Fifth Generation do not play into the Oriental dialectic as easily as critics would like. Rather than pandering to Western tastes for exotic chinoiserie, these films are an attempt at locating an identity in

¹²² Yuejin Wang, "The Cinematic Other," 35.

¹²³ Wang, "The Cinematic Other," 35.

¹²⁴ Jane Ying Zha, "Excerpts from 'Lore Segal, *Red Lantern*, and Exoticism,'" *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 329.

China's past that provides an alternative to the PRC's present. Consequently, the Fifth Generation's films are representative of a "war within the Self."¹²⁵

This fractured war for cultural identity did not begin with film, but rather with literature. Despite critical buzz regarding the primitiveness of the locations used by Fifth Generation films, it was the novels upon which these films were based that determined the physical and temporal settings of the work. Zhang himself has made explicit his reliance upon and ideological grounding in the literature of the 1980's: "It is easier to make a movie about the past. But all three¹²⁶ of my movies were adapted from prize-winning novels, and the three novels were all set then. So I have to ask: Why were the writers concerned with that period? Maybe it's easier for them to write about the past too."¹²⁷ The literature of the 1980's is marked by distressed denunciations of the past and desperate attempts to leave recollections of the myriad Maoist cultural purges behind. Despite fluctuating political winds during the 1980's,¹²⁸ literature blossomed as writers searched for the roots that would nourish China's modern flowering. Since the close of the Cultural revolution in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's liberalizations of 1978, the relatively tolerant attitude of the post-Mao era encouraged the separation of literature from socialist service: by no longer using literature as the immediate tool of the Party, writers were able to begin their own revolution. Prominent amongst this literary blossoming was the *Xungen*

¹²⁵ Wang, "The Cinematic Other," 35.

¹²⁶ Zhang's first three films were all based on contemporary novels: *Red Sorghum* (1988) on Mo Yan's *Hong gaoliang jiazu* (The Red Sorghum Family) (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1987); *Judou* (1990) on Liu Heng's "Fuxi fuxi," in *Zhongguo xiaoshu yijiubaba* (Chinese Fiction 1988), eds. Wang Ziping and Li Tuo (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1989), 80-171; and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) on Su Tong's "Qiqie chengqun" in *Qiqie chengchun* (Wives and Concubines) (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1990).

¹²⁷ Sheila Johnson, "Film: The China Syndrome," *The Independent* (London), 31 January 1992, 19.

¹²⁸ While the prevailing wind favored literary resurgence, the environment was not free from periods of stormy "rehabilitation." The ideological presence of the State was bolstered through the campaign against underground literature and the *Bai Hua* incident of 1981, the anti spiritual pollution campaign of 1983, and the campaign to curb "bourgeois liberalism" in 1987. See Richard Baum, "The Road to Tiananmen: Chinese Politics in the 1980's," in *The Politics of China: 1949-1989*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

pai, or “Searching for Roots” movement. According to the dictums of the roots-searching writers, totalitarian oppression of the people by feudal and Communist rule reduced the people to a state of powerlessness; this powerlessness was caused by the ways in which the Party severed the people’s connections with their “roots.” Ah Cheng, one of the earliest self-identified members of the Searching for Roots School, maintained that the ten years of the Cultural Revolution had disjoined the connective filaments of Chinese culture, leaving the younger generation without a bridge to the origins of Chinese culture and civilization.¹²⁹ Consequently, the *Xungen pai* used their art to try to reconnect China’s present with its pre-1949 past, to discover the roots of Chinese life that had been excised by the CCP. Tonglin Lu observes that this “Nostalgia for a remote past . . . leads contemporary Chinese experimental writers to the exploration of an origin that is free of any Communist influence. . . . [This] may be perceived as a fantasized origin serving as a counter-image or a mirror-image of the Communist culture.”¹³⁰ By searching for China’s origins in the time before 1949, the writers of the *Xungen pai* disputed that the communist revolution was the natural path for China’s modern development. From the past, the *Xungen pai* sought an alternative road that would lead toward China’s political and cultural resurgence.

In order to understand the significance of this new artistic project that would spread though both literature and film, the sacrosanct nature of socialist realism under Mao’s rule must be taken into account. In Mao-speak, “to be for the masses,” which Mao declared as the artists’ *raison d’être* at the 1942 “Talks” at Yan’an, meant that artists’ work must not only take the masses as the audience, but also “be in the

¹²⁹ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, introduction to *Spring Bamboo: A collection of Contemporary Chinese Short Stories*, ed. and trans. by Jeanne Tai (New York: Random House, 1989), xiii.

¹³⁰ Tonglin Lu, “Red Sorghum: Limits of Transgression,” in *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China*, eds. Liu Kang and Tang Xiaobing (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 190.

interests of” the masses.¹³¹ In practice, however, this meant that the artists’ work must be in the interest of the Party. Since Yan’an, all art without approved Party political content was censored, and the artist “rehabilitated.” At the height of the Cultural Revolution, all artistic activity was suppressed, and five “model” proletarian operas and three model proletarian ballets took control of China’s stage and screen. Contrary to Mao’s plan, however, the model dramas did not reform the people of China into his ideal revolutionary proletariat. Rather than rededicating the people’s loyalty, his new revolution led to severe disillusionment. The catastrophic quakes of the Cultural Revolution created a shattered generation whose previously unshakable devotion to Mao was rent asunder by their bitter experiences living out enforced countryside exile.

Shaped by the harsh landscapes of China’s hinterlands, the young writers of the Searching for Roots School turned back to the often hostile lands that shaped their “peasant” experience, and the myth and folklore that Mao’s sweeping anti-feudal hand had attempted to expurgate. In their pursuit to “redefine their own culture as they seek to redefine themselves . . .” these new writers, while differentiated by distinctive voices, all tend to “set [their stories] in a seemingly remote landscape, where myth and reality are so interwoven as to create a universe unconnected to a specific time and place, yet somehow strangely familiar.”¹³² In their feverish resistance to contemporary politics and the Maoist tradition, these authors looked for their cultural and historical roots in an imagined, primordial China as embodied by the marginalized: peasants, geographically remote locations, and minority peoples.

¹³¹ Bonnie McDougall, introduction to *Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”*: *A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, trans. Bonnie McDougall (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1980), 16.

¹³² Lee, xv.

Marginal cultures become the “Other” that enables the dominant Chinese to critically view their own culture through a looking glass. These primal tales are more than diachronic inquiries, however. The years in which the tale is told are just as important as the years that are narrated. Significantly, contemporary Chinese society is only registered in its absence. As film theorist Yao Xiaomong observes: “In this sense, we could take a film as the author’s discourse, as his psychic being. No matter what subject matter a film represents or when the story takes place, it always creates a modern myth.”¹³³ Both Mo Yan’s novel, *Red Sorghum Family*, and Zhang Yimou’s film, *Red Sorghum*, were incredibly popular because the Grandson’s story, while presented as an individual’s memory, is actually a myth that mediates contradictions of Chinese society in the 1980s.

At the same time that the Xungen writers were beginning to experiment with the nexus between illusion and reality, the Fifth Generation of filmmakers had just graduated as the first post-Cultural Revolution degree class of the Beijing Film Academy. Due to the censorship process, filmmakers had to develop an entirely different range of signifying practices from those found in mainstream cinema, which would enable them to communicate subversive messages while maintaining a façade acceptable to the government censors. Such practices include direct devices such as symbolism, visual motifs, and unresolved endings that question the possibility for closure and the authority of the status quo. Chinese film theorist Hu Ke relates that the “seemingly unified and complete classical theory was unable to account for” the Fifth Generation’s use of “visual and narrative distancing techniques” and “fragmented texts.”¹³⁴ The dominant treatise on the production and

¹³³ Yao Xiaomong and Hu Ke, “Film: A Myth with Hidden Ideologies,” in *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*, eds. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 172.

¹³⁴ Hu Ke, “Contemporary Film Theory in China,”

structure of film, Xia Yan's *Problems of Screenwriting* (1959), decreed that the camera was not to be moved other than to the progression of the plot; every action and word of dialogue must have a distinct purpose in advancing the plot as well. The predominance of technique and form, previously subordinated to narrative, in Fifth Generation films reflects, according to Ma Ning, a "tension between an attempt at realism and an obsession with symbolic expressionism."¹³⁵ This friction was carefully controlled by the Fifth Generation directors, who were intentionally trying to "hammer away at traditional viewing habits."¹³⁶ By supplanting distance in place of identification, the Fifth Generation sought to inspire the audience actively to participate in the creation of meaning, replacing China's one-way directed messaging with the pursuit of two-way dialogue.

In addition to an abrupt and drastic change in style, these filmmakers eschewed the previous dominant tropes regulating both location and character. Paul Clark observes that "previous generations of Chinese filmmakers had usually represented China with a quintessentially southern landscape. Water, trees, cultivated fields, and cozy settlements had been the norms . . ."¹³⁷ Scenes tend toward the idyllic; characters are predominantly virtuously proletarian and inevitably place duty to socialism and the State above self. On the contrary, Fifth Generation films appear "directly masculine in harshness of landscape, bluntness of characters, and directness of visual form."¹³⁸ Scenes are often brutal; characters are most often drawn from a motley crew of traitors, thieves, and bandits. The delicate sensibility of

www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/reruns/hkrr2b.html, 25 March 1998.

¹³⁵ Ma Ning, "New Chinese Cinema: A Critical Account of the Fifth Generation," *Cineaste* 17, no. 3 (1990): 34.

¹³⁶ Liu Shusheng, of the China Art Institute, as recorded in Xia Hong, "The Debate Over Horse Thief," in *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*, eds. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 46.

¹³⁷ Paul Clark, "Reinventing China: The Fifth Generation of Filmmakers," *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 123.

previous generations is absent. Masculinity became the nodal point in the signifying process as these filmmakers searched for what would enable their emasculated country to regain its virility.

Restoration and retrieval of masculinity dominated both artistic themes and public discourse during the 1980s. Esther C. M. Yau argues that the historical-political connotations of gender formed by the CCP after 1949 are key to understanding the “narcissistic pleasures” men feel as they watch *Red Sorghum* and the other films of the Fifth Generation.¹³⁹ Qian Jing, of the China Social Science Institute, also warns that the Fifth Generation’s “type of ‘tough film’ is not an isolated phenomenon . . . it indicates a cultural aspect of the collective consciousness.”¹⁴⁰ As the political rhetoric of women’s emancipation gained strength through the Marriage Law of 1950, men were often vilified by the party as vestigial feudal remnants. Women were lauded as the litmus of the revolution.¹⁴¹ Men, on the other hand, experienced a dramatic loss of both individual and gendered power vis-à-vis the State: “while political militancy was indeed represented as masculine and potent, these representations often proceeded on the logic of castration of all forms of male power except those conforming to the Party’s.”¹⁴² “Given the prior phallic order,” argues E. Ann Kaplan, men “may be harmed even more than women”¹⁴³ by

¹³⁸ Clark, 123.

¹³⁹ Esther C. M. Yau, “Cultural and Economic Dislocations: Filmic Phantasies of Chinese Women in the 1980s,” *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 17.

¹⁴⁰ Xia, “The Debate Over Horse Thief,” 49.

¹⁴¹ It should be remembered, however, that even though Mao often quipped that “women hold up half the sky,” and despite dramatic changes in women’s rights and opportunities, women’s equality remained more ideological than experiential.

¹⁴² Yau, 18

¹⁴³ E. Ann Kaplan, “Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Case of Women in the Recent Chinese Cinema,” *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 50.

their emasculation by the state into “obedient instruments of the Party”¹⁴⁴—to use the phrase of Liu Shaoqi, ex-chairman of the CCP.

Consequently, men’s attempt to reappropriate their masculinity from the Party is often expressed misogynistically. Tonglin Lu contends that it is “because the ideological basis for the traditional patriarchy has not truly been shaken by the aborted women’s emancipation in China, [that] the Chinese people’s resentment of the Communist regime is very often articulated by men as their resentment of women’s equal rights, as if Chinese men had been disempowered by women’s empowerment.”¹⁴⁵ After seeing the Fifth Generation films of the 1980s, E. Ann Kaplan also believes that “the contemporary male’s unconscious desire for revenge on women for the new-found liberation in the Communist State which insists on parity between the sexes in the public sphere” plays a prominent role within the semiology of the film text.¹⁴⁶ Due to the Party’s self-proclaimed identification with women’s emancipation, male critics of the Party eschew it as feminine, and the cause of their loss of the phallus. Thus, critiques of the Party that emerged after the Cultural Revolution were often hidden within misogynistic portrayals of women and celebrations of young, brutal men. China’s 1980s “war within the self” in pursuit of its origin/Other turned into a battle over gender representation, and possession of the phallus.

The roots of this dramatic reversal of representation of gender in Fifth Generation films is more than just an effect of the general ethos of the 1980s, however. It can be traced back to the Fifth Generation filmmakers’ own experiences. Sent away from their urban homes in 1968 or 1969, along with most other students

¹⁴⁴ Liu Shaoqi, *Gongchangdang yuan de xiuyang* (The Self-Cultivation of the Members of the Communist Party) in Tonglin Lu, introduction to *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society*, ed. Tonglin Lu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 8.

¹⁴⁵ Lu, introduction, 8.

and intellectuals of the period, these young men, most with just a couple years of high school education, discovered the savageness of peasant life. However, “learning from peasants” presented these youths with more than just the pains of hard work and primitive living conditions; it also symbolically tied them to the land in all its harshness and beauty. Clark postulates that “the significance of this harsh representation of China seems to lie in a conviction that the nation needs toughness.”¹⁴⁷ As in the literary work of the *Xungen pai*, Fifth Generation films create a visually violent world, and China's place amidst this turbulence is far from secure.

The Fifth Generation filmmakers’ crisis of faith in the state began long before the Cultural Revolution, however. Since Mao’s ascension to power in 1949, delineating between the state and CCP has been meaningless. The first campaign against intellectuals, of whom writers and filmmakers are a part, began in 1951 with the attack against the film *The Life of Wu Xun*,¹⁴⁸ gained momentum during the anti-Hu Feng campaign three years later, and then culminated in the sweeping forced rehabilitations of the Anti-Rightist movement in 1957-1958. Born in 1950 and 1952 respectively, Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige are unfortunate heirs to the disillusion and despair that arose out of the intimacy of the party-state relationship. The political and cultural upheavals of the Cultural Revolution only served to ingrain this sense of loss and futility. Returning to the cities in the early 1970s, this generation of Red Guards sought to re-situate their lives. For nearly a decade this generation had been left in limbo, and found their search for a place in post Cultural Revolution China difficult:

Those sent to the countryside returned to find a new society not ready to take them back. They were out of school too long to meet the competitive requirements for

¹⁴⁶ Kaplan, 46.

¹⁴⁷ Clark, 124.

¹⁴⁸ *Wu Xun zhuàn* (The Life of Wu Xun), dir. Sun Yu, Kunlun Film Studio (1950).

higher education in an era when technical expertise is stressed. They are beyond the age of finding suitable spouses. From the government's point of view, they are also politically unreliable. Most important, they find it difficult to forget their part in a political drama that denied human compassion and shattered dreams.¹⁴⁹

This estranged generation's search for a blossoming New China could not have begun, however, without a radical change in Chinese Communist Party policy after Mao's death on September 9, 1976. In August 1977, Chairman Hua Guofeng declared at the CCP's 11th National Congress that "for socialist culture to prosper, we must conscientiously carry out the policies of letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend."¹⁵⁰ In October 1979, Vice-Chairman and Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping declared that "in such a complex mental labor like literature and art, it is extremely necessary for writers and artists to give free rein to their individual creative spirit."¹⁵¹ Although this relaxation was never thorough and often intermittent, as evinced by the anti-spiritual pollution and anti-bourgeois liberalization campaigns of the 1980s, China may have been "at its most free since the pre-1949 years."¹⁵² Left free to commemorate and contemplate, *Xungen* writers and Fifth Generation filmmakers created literary furrows on the plains of Chinese culture, mimicking the furrows they hoed on China's isolated plains.

The first two films of the Fifth Generation, *Yellow Earth*¹⁵³ and *One and Eight*,¹⁵⁴ for both of which Zhang Yimou served as the cinematographer, eloquently

¹⁴⁹ Helen F. Siu, "Social Responsibility and Self-Expression: Chinese Literature in the 1980s," *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no.1 (Spring 1989): 23.

¹⁵⁰ Hua Guofeng, "Political Report to the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of China," *Peking Review* 26 August 1977, 51.

¹⁵¹ Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)*, trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin Under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 205.

¹⁵² Judith Shapiro and Liang Heng, *Cold Winds, Warm Winds: Intellectual Life in China Today* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1986), 187.

¹⁵³ *Huang tudi* (Yellow Earth), dir. Chen Kaige, Guangxi Studio (1984).

¹⁵⁴ *Yige he bage* (One and Eight), dir. Zhang Junzhao, Guangxi Studio (1984).

capture this generation's fascination with the origins of Chinese culture and the brutality of peasant life. Clark contrasts this celebration of violence with the soft, effeminate nature typically associated with Chinese intellectuals.¹⁵⁵ Ironically, Mao's own conviction that "softness was anathema to a strong nation"¹⁵⁶ led to the rural experiences that would cause the Fifth Generation filmmakers to denounce his society. Attacked as intellectuals, along with all the other urban students in the late 1960s, Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and their peers were vilified as too effete, and sent into the countryside to learn from the coarse, rough life of the peasants. Already suffering from the Party's general emasculation of men, the exiled students suffered a second castration. These exiles learned their lesson from the peasants all too well, however. They came to take the harsh hinterlands, along with the innate physical hardship of Chinese peasant life, as the antidote not only to their feminization, but also as a cure to the feminization of the State. It is this creation of a super-virile male subject, who fills both the lack of filmmaker and the feminized State, that serves as the unifying trope of the Fifth Generation. This generation's sense of violation and revenge is distilled in the film *One and Eight* in which "the sole female character ... has to be shot to save her from the consequences of her own femininity."¹⁵⁷

As the so-called "first" of the Fifth Generation films, Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* found the roots of Chinese civilization not in the Party-State, but in the yellow earth along the Yellow River. The narrative framework of *Yellow Earth* serves only as a superficial premise for diachronic reflections into China's history. As Fifth Generation filmmaker Tian Zhuangzhuang enunciates: "it isn't a matter of whether

¹⁵⁵ Clark, 124.

¹⁵⁶ Clark, 124.

¹⁵⁷ Clark, 124.

we told it [the story] clearly or not. The story is only one part of the film, and not the most important part.”¹⁵⁸ From the opening scene, Chen expresses his own vision of life in China: the film opens with a series of slow dissolves showing weathered ravines and slopes devoid of any vegetation and a lone figure approaching from the low horizon. During interior shots, only the seep of natural light into the cave-home is used, creating a sense of claustrophobia. This use of slow dissolves and still shots dominates the form and pace of *Yellow Earth*, conveying stagnancy that evokes a desire for change in the viewer. The pacing of *Yellow Earth* does not alleviate the anxiety it creates, however. As Zhang’s sensuous cinematographic caress of the landscape inextricably binds the peasant and the land in a seamless web, resistance to change is framed not only as ingrained in China’s barren land but also in its intractable psyche. Only a sliver of sky slithers across the top of the great depths of the yellow loess. The camera’s gaze firmly roots the “yellow race” in the furrows of the yellow land—national origin, and future, lie in the millennia old birthplace of the people who created Chinese culture. Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou symbolically warn: to transplant the Chinese from the harsh, dry, untamed wilderness to the cultivated, overworked civilization of the modern Chinese city is to forever change the essence of the Chinese.

The CCP did not approve of the harshness and poverty captured in *Yellow Earth*, condemning the film for “displaying the backwardness and ignorance of the Chinese peasantry.”¹⁵⁹ On the contrary, H. C. Li contends that the CCP’s disapproval of the film stems from its valorization of the rural peasant as opposed to the Party: “The China they reveal is poor yet authentic, the landscape is barren yet

¹⁵⁸ Xia Hong, “The Debate Over Horse Thief,” 45.

¹⁵⁹ H. C. Li, “Color, Character and Culture: On *Yellow Earth*, *Black Cannon Incident*, and *Red Sorghum*,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 99.

brehtaking, and the characters are illiterate yet noble.”¹⁶⁰ It is not simply this depiction of the peasants’ fortitude in the face of physical and emotional adversity that riled the CCP, however. *Yellow Earth*’s transgressive message is that the Party is not the cure to the peasants’ ills. On the contrary, it increases their suffering by giving them false hopes of a better world only to forsake them.

In further opposition to the Party line, which touts the equality of men and women, *Yellow Earth* makes clear that the constitutive essence of the Chinese is male. By using repetitive ritual and music, accompanied by the pulsating, sweat-glistened bodies of half-clad men, viewed only by other men, the film creates an idealized, sexualized masculine space. Women are marginalized both by the development of the story line and the camera.

While nothing in *Yellow Earth* directly relates the filmmakers’ experiences in the countryside as exiled students, or *zhiqing*, the film’s distinctive cinematography and subversive portrayal of an Eighth Army soldier who breaks his promise to a young peasant girl correlates with the alienation and political disillusionment that these men came to experience in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Tony Rayns argues that “only filmmakers with *zhiqing* backgrounds would have wanted—or dared—to make a movie literally without precedent in Chinese cinema, a movie aggressively out of step with mainstream culture . . .”¹⁶¹ As Zhang Yimou makes clear, the experimental ways in which *Yellow Earth* was filmed was not simply meant as an avant-garde artistic endeavor, but rather as a direct repudiation of previous technique:

We reacted against the bland, uniform lighting we'd seen in most Chinese films . . . We resolved to use nothing but natural light-sometimes nothing but a few rays of sunlight

¹⁶⁰ Li, 99.

¹⁶¹ Tony Rayns, “The New Chinese Cinema,” in Tony Rayns, Chen Kaige, and Wan Zhi, *King of the Children and The New Chinese Cinema* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989), 15.

coming through a hole in the ceiling. That meant we were shooting on full aperture, on very fast film stock. What we wanted was the look of woodcuts: bold, decentered compositions, and a real sense of *chiaroscuro*. We ended up filming on location in Ningxia, where the landscape is harsh and monochromatic; other sites we looked at were too green.¹⁶²

This technological repudiation was inherently political. By eschewing the didactic, propagandist art of the 1950s and 1960s, this new generation of filmmakers began visually to rewrite the Chinese political landscape.

This revision required more than just new technological advances in filmmaking; it required the film directors not only creatively to adapt literary works for the screen, but also to conceive the literary in terms of the visual. According to Li, it is this break from “traditional Chinese film aesthetics, which is based on literary and dramatic conventions and heavily dependent on the spoken word” that separates the Fifth Generation from its progenitors.¹⁶³ Zhang Xianliang, who himself has had three of his literary works adapted for the screen, advises filmmakers to remember the inherent differences between film and literature:

A few years ago, it was suggested that cinema should strengthen its literary [narrative] qualities. My view is just the opposite. Cinema should enhance its cinematic [montage] qualities. Cinema is cinema, itself a unique artistic form. A fine film artist has only to grasp the most stirring element in the literary original (*viz.* the work’s “soul”) and express it in cinematic terms.¹⁶⁴

While such an approach to film was decades old in the West, from the first Chinese films in the early 1930s until the late 1970s, cinema was conceived of as “filmed drama” rather than as its own art form.¹⁶⁵ The relationship between drama and film became even closer as the Gang of Four rose to power, and the Cultural Revolution

¹⁶² Rayns, 14.

¹⁶³ Li, 98.

¹⁶⁴ Li, 108.

began. During this period of tumult and tribulation, the Gang of Four felt that vigorously promoting the “three prominences”¹⁶⁶ and censoring all other artistic expression was not enough to ensure ideological control of cultural forms; they also publicly tortured to death Ju Baiyin for his essay “Monologue on Cinematic Innovation,” which argued that film has a separate aesthetic from drama. Not until the Gang of Four had been ousted from power did film theory begin to evolve in China from its retarded state. Closed off from developments in the West for close to two decades, merely trading plot and character development for dramatic visual composition and organic simplicity was revolutionary.

Zhang Yimou’s successful adaptation of the first two chapters of Mo Yan’s novel *Red Sorghum Family*¹⁶⁷ serves as testament to the radical shift in Chinese film away from traditional dramatic forms toward the montage of the camera. First published in 1986 as two separate novellas, *Red Sorghum* and *Sorghum Wine*, these chapters were revised and scripted for the film by Chen Jianyu, Zhu Wei, and Mo Yan himself. Zhang did retain control over the final form of the script, and heavily revised Mo’s suggested script before filming began.¹⁶⁸ Despite Zhang’s attention to the details of the dialogue, it is his stylized cinematography that dominates the film. As one American film reviewer noted, “The subtitled dialogue may be important in telling the story, but you could ignore it and still be transported by the unforgettable imagery of *Red Sorghum*.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the power of these images is that the import of the story is entangled within them.

¹⁶⁵ Luo Yijun, foreword to *Chinese Film Theory: A Guide to the New Era*, eds. George S. Semsel, Xia Hong, and Hou Ranping (New York: Praeger, 1990), xiv.

¹⁶⁶ The three prominences are: give prominence to the positive among all characters; give prominence to the heroes among the positive; give prominence to the major heroes among the heroes. See Chapter I for further discussion.

¹⁶⁷ Mo Yan, *Hong gaoliang jiazu* (Red Sorghum Family) (Beijing: Jiefangchun wenyi chubanshe, 1987).

¹⁶⁸ Li, 109.

¹⁶⁹ “New Chinese Film is Rarity that Defines Soul of Nation,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 January 1989,

Zhang made clear what he sees as the essence of *Red Sorghum* in his explanatory notes to the production staff of the film:

From time immemorial people have been telling love stories. This film is yet another one. There is an old saying: food and sex are the prime desires of mankind. The sadness and the joy in the relationships between men and women are still captivating filmgoers. In the red sorghum fields at Qingshakou [Green Killer's Crossing], "my grandpa" and "my grandma" burn with passion for each other. This film expresses the intensity of their emotions. . . . These peasants are used to freedom. They don't want to be bullied. In their anger, they will fight for their lives.¹⁷⁰

Contrary to conceptions of the "love story" in the West, the love story in the contemporary Chinese context is politically oppositional to the State, and thereby, takes on masculine connotations. Stories that allow the individual to possess sexual desire inherently transgress the CCP's stance against sexuality: "Sexual potency is a matter of vibrancy that goes against institutional organization and the prohibition of desires."¹⁷¹ Moreover, in order sexually to desire another, one must be sexed, itself a subversive notion in a "sexless collectivity."¹⁷²

Since Zhang's directorial debut won the Golden Bear Award in Berlin on February 23, 1988, *Red Sorghum* has enjoyed enormous success, both at home and abroad. Li maintains that "Of all the films directed by Fifth Generation directors, *Red Sorghum* is the first film accepted and welcomed by the film establishment, the critics, and the general audience."¹⁷³ Out of an annual crop of 120-140 productions by China's 16 state-owned studios, *Red Sorghum* tied for the best film of 1988 in all three national film competitions.¹⁷⁴ In 1988-1989, Chinese box office admissions topped

3G.

¹⁷⁰ Li, 110.

¹⁷¹ Yau, 13.

¹⁷² Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Emerging from the Surface) (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1989), 31.

¹⁷³ Li, 112.

¹⁷⁴ Linda Mathews, "The Gang of One Who Altered China's Film Image," *Los Angeles Times*, 24

off at 75,682,000,¹⁷⁵ over twice the 30 million admissions the China Film Corporation has estimated that a film must secure to turn a profit.¹⁷⁶ In fact, in the short span between May and September 1988, the film earned a profit of RMB\$40 million.¹⁷⁷ *Red Sorghum* is also the only Fifth Generation film to rank among films with the highest number of copies sold in China; it had 206 prints in circulation.¹⁷⁸ Taking into account that China's urban film attendance dropped by over 7 million between 1980 and 1985 due to the increased accessibility of television, the film's local success becomes even more dramatic, and significant.¹⁷⁹ The film was also highly acclaimed abroad. Although the film was not in official competition at the Cannes festival, screenings were so popular that seats had to be secured 45 minutes early.¹⁸⁰ Not only was *Red Sorghum* a commercial success in the US,¹⁸¹ it was also a hit at the Telluride Film Festival and was also chosen as the closing film at the 1988 New York Film Festival. This success serves as quite a reception for a film shot in 68 days, edited in six and a half, and costing just under US\$200,000.¹⁸²

Filmed in rich, old-fashioned three-strip Techni-color, the colorfully lavish and openly bawdy *Red Sorghum* stunned audiences with its kaleidoscope-like visual dance and exuberant sexuality. The powerful mythic qualities of *Red Sorghum*, and its Carnavalesque celebration of growth and virility, violence and revenge, is said to have actualized “a powerful Chinese version of masculinity” and “a new version of female

October 1988, sec. C3, part 6, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, “Of Gender, State Censorship, and Overseas Capital: An Interview with Chinese Director Zhang Yimou,” *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 298.

¹⁷⁶ Johnson, 19.

¹⁷⁷ Johnson, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Li, 113.

¹⁷⁹ Yang, 298; Li, 113.

¹⁸⁰ Li, 112.

¹⁸¹ Vincent Canby, “Film View: Why Some Movies Don’t Travel Well,” *The New York Times*, 23 October 1988, 1.

¹⁸² Steven Spielberg and Kathleen Kennedy, “China and the Oscars,” *The New York Times*, 25 March 1991, sec. A, 17.

¹⁸³ Li, 111.

sexuality.”¹⁸³ Embedded within affirmations and transgressions of Chinese conceptions of gender is a complex intertextual canon surrounding the ancient Chinese metaphysical forces of *yang* and *yin*. Polysemic rather than singularly coded, the meanings of *yang* and *yin* constantly slip and shift in their dialectic relationship. It is necessary to essentialize these terms, if only for purposes of analytic study. According to Mary Ann Farquhar, the dualism of *yang/yin* symbolically “evokes the oppositions of light/dark, sun/moon, sky/earth, fire/water, and red/black.”¹⁸⁴ Yuejin Wang adds that “connotations attached to *yang* are . . . warmth, summer, daylight, masculinity, ascent and action; while attributes clustered around *yin* include the opposites: . . . cold, winter, night, femininity, descent and inaction.”¹⁸⁵ Despite their shifting polysemous nature, *yang* and *yin* are mutually exclusive and antithetical, as exhibited by the traditional Confucian ethical principal: *nanzun nubei*. Men are noble, women are base. Dong Zhongshu, the Han dynasty scholar who secularized Confucianism and brought it into cultural dominance, writes in an essay entitled “*Nanzun Nubei*” that “the *yang* is benign while the *yin* is malign, the *yang* means birth while the *yin* means death. Therefore, *yang* is mostly present and prominent; *yin* is constantly absent and marginal.”¹⁸⁶ Whereas Western theorists have seen woman “as a signifier for a radical lack—the lack of the phallus,”¹⁸⁷ ancient Chinese metaphysics defines woman as lack. This explicit and defined gender dichotomy was not limited only to matters of sexual difference, but was also an ingrained tenet of the patriarchal feudal system. Despite the ancient “baseness” of women, however, *yang* and *yin* must be balanced in the cosmos in order to achieve a harmonious social order. Excess *yin*

¹⁸³ Yuejin Wang, “*Red Sorghum*: Mixing Memory and Desire,” in *Perspective on Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 85, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Mary Ann Farquhar, “Oedipality in *Red Sorghum* and *Judou*,” *Cinemas* 3, nos. 2-3 (Spring 1993): 66.

¹⁸⁵ Wang, “*Red Sorghum*,” 82.

¹⁸⁶ As quoted and translated in Wang, “*Red Sorghum*,” 82.

¹⁸⁷ Kaja Silverman, “Masochism and Subjectivity,” *Framework* 12 (1980): 2.

leads to disease as the body becomes passive and absorbs ill vapors. It is this correlation between disease and *yin* that has led to the description of the weakened Chinese State not only as feminine, but emasculated.

While the Chinese State was first described as a diseased body during the semi-colonial era, the Cultural Revolution again forced the Chinese to contemplate what forces led to this national social and political catastrophe. Yuejin Wang plaintively asks,

How could the massive absurdities and follies [of the Cultural Revolution] be possible without a historically and culturally bred condition? . . . The questioning of the Cultural Revolution evolved, therefore, gradually from the moans and outcries over the wounds of the cultural body to the more quiet speculations on the physiology and pathology of our cultural psyche.¹⁸⁸

Idealized, robust masculinity was universally prescribed as the cure to China's paralytic submission and alienation, to eradicate the debilitating, "culturally bred" feminine condition.

Zhang's *Red Sorghum* proposes a powerful Chinese version of masculinity as a means of cultural critique. With only one female screen presence (despite the existence of an additional minor, nameless woman within the plot), the world of *Red Sorghum* is unquestionably male. The glorification of the bawdy, violent drunkard derives its subversive quality from its opposition to the traditional Communist patriot idealized in the literature and films of the 1950s and 1960s, and the fiercely enforced "three prominences" of the Gang of Four. By inscribing the historically marginalized into dominant cultural discourse, *Red Sorghum* calls for the return of those subjects exiled to folklore and myth. "*Red Sorghum* is therefore," concludes Wang "a return of the collectively repressed, an evocation of the cultural

¹⁸⁸ Wang, "The Cinematic Other," 35.

unconscious, a remembrance of the forgotten, and a tapping of intertextual memories.”¹⁸⁹

Zhang Yimou makes clear that *Red Sorghum*'s subversion of feudal structures and ideology is more than a mythic enterprise; it is a direct attack upon present-day China: “The Revolution has not really changed things. It’s still an autocratic system (*zhuanzhi*), a feudal patriarchal system (*fengjian jiazhangzhi*).”¹⁹⁰ Identifying the feudal system as symbolic of China's current state is critical to Zhang's filmic endeavor. Due to strict censorship policies which require that the film “serve socialist principles,” the open battles included in Mo Yan’s novel between the rising Communist Party and the villagers could not be included in the film script. In the face of regulations that can bury scripts completely or delay production for years, Zhang has quipped, “There are still taboos. We all know what they are, and we all work around them. If you show one Communist Party member in a bad light in your film, you’d better show 10 in a good light. That’s about the proper proportion.”¹⁹¹ While a director can say that one man has misinterpreted the Communist ethic, he cannot say that Communism itself is wrong. Moreover, the film’s climactic flaying of Luohan by Japanese soldiers is accompanied by a voice over from the grandson/narrator commenting that his crime was that he had been a Communist organizer in the film. In the novel, the villagers openly fought the rising Communist Party, which had attacked Gaomi township several times, and Luohan/Uncle Arhat was killed for his own individually resistant act of killing the mules the Japanese had stolen to use to build a highway. Unable to make a direct

¹⁸⁹ Wang, “Red Sorghum,” 86.

¹⁹⁰ Yang, 301.

¹⁹¹ Mathews, part 6, 1.

attack on the party, Zhang must create a myth that symbolically encodes his denunciation.

Visually dominating the screen, the wild sorghum stands as the “free and unfettered” essence of social and sexual relationships Zhang idealizes.¹⁹² The film’s Grandson/narrator emphasizes the unbridled life force of the sorghum, marking it as a space uncultivated, uncivilized by human restraint: “No one planted it, no one harvested it.” In Mo Yan’s description, the red sorghum is positioned as the nodal point of liminality, and, thereby, the first signifier in the layers of myth-making: “Tall and dense, it reeked of glory; cold and graceful, it promised enchantment; passionate and loving, it was tumultuous.”¹⁹³ The sorghum stands as symbolically synonymous with primeval man, his desires, and his phallus. Ritualistically, man feeds on the plant and drinks the wine distilled from its stalks. During battle, the tall, erect stalks of the sorghum provide cover from enemy attacks. The jubilant, jostling male sedan carriers bear a melancholy Grandma through the suffocatingly close stalks of the sorghum. Both times Grandma is sexually attacked, it is into the labyrinth of the sorghum that first the bandit, and then Grandpa lead her.

The sorghum is more than masculinized sustenance and sanctuary; it is the ordained source of human existence. Within the shelter of the stalks Grandma and Grandpa consummate their love, creating Father in an altar-like space. Overcome by her surging sexual desires, she looks longingly upon Grandpa. Even as she is full of her own feminine desire, she is blinded by the overpowering vision of the man before her. Squinting against the blazing sunlight, itself symbolic of the masculine *yang*, Grandma closes her eyes, blinded by the presence of his masculine body,

¹⁹² Zhang Yimou, “An Interview with Zhang Yimou,” *Raise the Red Lantern*, excerpted from *Esquire*, (Chinese Edition) January 1991 (Taiwan: ERA International, n.d., brochure), n.p.

¹⁹³ Mo, 4

illuminated like the sun itself. Zhu Ling notes that it is this depiction of Grandma as subsumed by Grandpa that enables the masculine to dominate and to define female desires.¹⁹⁴ Zhu Ling goes on to describe this sexual scene as a rape, even though she acknowledges that Grandma “submits to the man with great pleasure.”¹⁹⁵ Although Zhu Ling's essentializing of the sexual consummation as rape is popular among many Western theorists, this reductionist approach ignores the complex ritual embedded within the scene.

This paradoxical intermingling of desire and submission is preserved in Zhang Yimou's direction of the abduction sequence and “marriage” scene:

A masked man crashed out of the sorghum / My
grandmother screamed in fear:
The man forced my grandmother off the donkey.
The sorghum flashed before my grandmother's eyes:
The thick sorghum was forced open, then swiftly closed.
They disappeared
Suddenly the man fell. My grandmother struggled and
escaped, running for her life;
A desperately fleeing grandmother; A man hot in pursuit.
A desperately fleeing grandmother; A man hot in pursuit.
A desperately fleeing grandmother; A man hot in pursuit.
My grandmother stumbled / My grandmother suddenly
stopped;
The man took off his mask-it was my grandfather!
My grandmother said, “Heaven.”
My grandfather's hot blood surged, his eyes burned.
My grandmother's eyes filled with tears;
My grandfather trampled the sorghum with his body / He
trampled the sorghum with his feet.
In the sea of green sorghum a space was cleared . . .
(Full shot) The trampled sorghum formed a round altar in
a sea of green. My grandmother lies motionless, facing the
sky. My grandfather kneels.¹⁹⁶

Not recognizing Grandfather due to his mask, she resists the force of the unknown man. Despite running as fast as she can, he appears standing before her, deep in the

¹⁹⁴ Zhu Ling, “A Brave New World? On the Construction of ‘Masculinity’ and ‘Femininity’ in *The Red Sorghum Family*,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Chinese Literature and Society*, ed. Tonglin Lu (Albany: State University Press of New York), 124.

¹⁹⁵ Zhu, 124-125.

tall sorghum field. The camera's subject position is her own. The camera moves in slowly from an establishing shot of the masked man surrounded by tall, erect stalks to a close-up of his face as he pulls off his mask. The shot structure then collapses into rapid shot-reverse shot. He stares at her, chest heaving. Startled, she recognizes the sedan carrier who had earlier saved her from the bandit. In a close-up of her face, Jiu'er calmly stares directly ahead at him. She breathes in, and her lips slightly part in an orgasmic yearning. The shot reverses to Grandpa's eager face, followed by a sensual close-up of Jiu'er, surrounded by wildly pulsating sorghum stalks. She swallows. The camera then moves out again to show Jiu'er standing still as Grandpa tramples down a large circular patch of sorghum. The two are united in the frame; Grandpa then carries her into the "altar." The shot structure then again collapses from a long shot to a detail shot of Jiu'er's face angled toward the sky, framed only by the light blueness of the air. Her face then slowly falls back out of the frame of the tilt shot. As her eyes close, the ritualistic music of the *suona*¹⁹⁷ begins. The next long shot takes in a ceremonial tableau of Jiu'er lying flat on her back upon the trampled sorghum; Grandpa, seen from the back, kneels down before her parted legs. Ritual worship and desire between earth and sky, woman and man, is the sign of this *mise en scene*. When the camera unites previously "warring individuals" into one frame, according to Chinese film theorist Chris Berry, balance is "literally and cinematically" signified in the frame.¹⁹⁸

Critical to the signification of this ritual scene as the culmination of equal subject desire is the lack of a single gender-identified viewing subject and its fetishized object. Rather than inscribing the male subject as the possessor of the

¹⁹⁶Hong gaoliang, *wanquan taiben*, trans. Mary Ann Farquhar (n.p., n.d.), quoted in Farquhar, 70-71.

¹⁹⁷ A Chinese musical instrument, similar to a horn.

¹⁹⁸ Chris Berry, "Sexual Difference and the Viewing Subject in *Li Shuangshuang* and *The In-Laws*," in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 37.

camera/phallus and the woman as his fetishized object, *Red Sorghum*'s use of the shot-reverse shot sequence turns the woman's gaze of desire upon the male. Roland Barthes articulates the possibility of this reversal of the subject/object voyeur/fetish dialectic in his essay on ravishment in *A Lover's Discourse*: "It is the *object* of capture that becomes the *subject* of love; and the *subject* of the conquest moves into the class of loved *object*."¹⁹⁹ Grandpa physically captures Grandma; she captures him with her look of desire, motivating him to action. Both Grandpa and Grandma serve as subjects and objects for one another. While *Red Sorghum* does appropriate forms of "the traditional scenario of subjective/active/aggressive male versus the objective /receptive /passive female,"²⁰⁰ it also transgresses and subverts this scenario through not only allowing the woman to look, but also to desire.

This alternating possession of the camera/phallus by man and woman in *Red Sorghum* problematizes the Western psychoanalytic film discourse which "takes as a starting point the way [classic Hollywood] film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle."²⁰¹ Building upon Christian Metz's inventory of syntagmatic categories,²⁰² Laura Mulvey and Raymond Bellour have created a theoretical discourse that analyzes the ways in which conventional cinematic interaction visually ingrains sexual difference.²⁰³ In the opening frames of Hitchcock's *Marnie*, Bellour identifies the consistent alignment between the subject-place and stock Hollywood characters: shot structures, specifically the shot-

¹⁹⁹ Roland Barthes, "Ravissement/ravishment," *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 188. Emphasis in original.

²⁰⁰ Wang, "Red Sorghum," 94.

²⁰¹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6.

²⁰² See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982).

²⁰³ See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," and "Mulvey on *Duel in the Sun*," *Framework* 6 (Summer 1981); Raymond Bellour, "To Segment, To Analyse," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 3 (1976), and

reverse shot and point-of-view shot, cinematically organize the text, acting as a relay for the viewing subject. Relays are predominantly the protagonist upon whom the narrative is centered. Consequently, the viewer's understanding of and perspective on the events of the narrative correspond to that of the relay more closely than to any other character in the diegetic reality of the film. The relay is nearly universally male, its object the female. Thereby, the pleasure of the viewing subject is constructed around the voyeuristic fetishization of the female. The final securing of the female figure in a stable object relation to the male subject often forms the central problem structuring the narrative of the film. "In this Western paradigm, then," Chris Berry observes that "the place of male figures, the subject-place and the place in reference to which the text is ordered are mapped on top of one another so that maleness, subjectivity and centered ordering are all hooked into each other to constitute one phallogentric viewing subject."²⁰⁴ Laura Mulvey maintains that the most sacrosanct of all cinematic codes in classic Hollywood cinema is that "the male protagonist is free to command the stage . . . in which he articulates the look and creates the action."²⁰⁵ By allowing the woman not only to look, but also to incite action and possess sexual desire, *Red Sorghum* contravenes this seemingly sacred cinematic convention, and seemingly vitiates the construction of an idealized masculine subject.

With eroticized eyes, Jiu'er challenges men to action on her behalf. The power of her gaze is crystallized in the scene that captures the moment in which she first encounters a man other than her father. Yuejin Wang unequivocally declares this encounter between the 16 year-old bride and her potential bandit-kidnapper "one of the most transgressive and ambiguous moments in Chinese cinema."²⁰⁶

"Hitchcock, The Enunciator," *Camera Obscura*, no. 2 (1977).

²⁰⁴ Berry, 33.

²⁰⁵ Mulvey, 13.

²⁰⁶ Wang, "Red Sorghum," 94.

Through use of the shot-reverse shot structure, Jiu'er's calm defiance and inquisitive sexual desire are clearly marked. Framed by the light filtered through the red silk of the sedan chair, Jiu'er hears a male voice commanding the sedan carriers to stop. The female interiority of the sedan chair is then violated by the bandit raising the protective curtain. The frontal shot of Jiu'er within the sedan is held still, correlating to the gaze of the bewildered bandit. Overwhelmed by her sensual presence, he pauses. The point of view abruptly switches to that of Jiu'er, as she follows the bandit's gaze slowly tilting down, caressing her body from head to foot. Christian Metz argues that this slow tilting down of the camera over a body acts as a primary process of fetishization. *Red Sorghum* reverses Metz's formula, however, by allowing the female's gaze to sexually explore the male body. The bandit then reaches for her foot, arguably the most fetishized female organ in Chinese sexual discourse, and the subject-place switches to the bandit. Jiu'er's gaze continues to follow along with the path laid out by the bandit's eyes. He lightly fondles her silk slippers foot. Looking directly up into the bandit's eyes, Jiu'er breaks into a full, beckoning smile. As stunned as the viewer, the bandit steps back, shocked at the displacement of power: "he is just an uncertain man desiring a woman who has an equal undiscovered and unchannelled desire."²⁰⁷

This reversal of the classic formula of male voyeurism and fetishization is dramatically distilled in the opening scenes that focus visually and symbolically on the sedan chair. Against a setting of barren, yellow land, eight shirtless, pulsating men jostle the red sedan chair. Enclosed within this womb-like structure, Jiu'er sits, awaiting her arranged marriage to a leper more than 30 years her senior. She is not passively awaiting her fate, however; holding a pair of scissors close to her chest,

²⁰⁷ Wang, "Red Sorghum," 94.

Jiu'er stares wearied but defiant into the dense light of her sedan. Hidden by the protective curtains of the sedan chair, long shots of the bawdy dance and vulgar song of the carriers are unable to capture Jiu'er. Rather, it is her subjectively autonomous vision that objectifies the sweaty, muscle-bulging backs of the men in carrying her sedan. With the movement of her foot, she raises the curtain that had bound her into a limited space and tip-toes into her "oceanic self," appropriating the telescopic gaze away from the man. By dispossessing the masculine of scopophilic control, *Red Sorghum* highlights the disjuncture between the penis and the phallus.

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret Jiu'er's transgressive expression of sexual desire as a complete subversion of the privileging of the male subject. A masculine gaze controls the first shot of the film: the camera holds a close-up of Jiu'er's face, lips parted and eyes wide-open. There is no background or scenery—only a black screen frames her face. While Jiu'er's seductive gaze motivates men to act, she must patiently await their action. Indeed, it is the actions of men that propel the narrative and determine Jiu'er's fate: her father sells her into marriage for a mule, a bandit attempts to kidnap her, Grandpa saves her from the bandit, Grandpa kills her leprous husband. Despite her vocal refusal to marry Big Head Li, her voice does not matter. Only the actions of Grandpa could free her from her fate. Her subjectivity and empowerment are limited to sexual desire by the patriarchal order she is powerless to change. While her gaze can elicit action, Jiu'er cannot act. Symbolically, Grandpa, as the idealized masculine subject, forewarns Grandma of the inadequacy of her gaze. After having led the raucous song that mercilessly teased and insulted the young bride, Grandpa invalidates Jiu'er's ostensibly subversive act of lifting the sedan curtain: "Peeking's no use anyway."

Grandpa, however, does possess the power effectively to subvert the patriarchal feudal order. It is his natural male potency that arouses and fulfills Jiu'er's desire. Moreover, his youth, virility, exuberance and violent temper dramatically counter the image of the 50 year-old puss-filled, impotent leper. While Big Head Li's impotence is magnified by his absence from the visual text of the film, Grandpa's vitality is evinced by his ability to assume the leper's wife and bed as his own. Indeed, Grandpa's ability to possess Jiu'er, and with her have a son, flouts the traditional order of the patriarchy. The depiction of Big Head Li as impotent and unable to consummate his marriage, due to Jiu'er's use of the pair of scissors in her defense, serves as a scathing indictment of China's past, and present.²⁰⁸ As Chinese masculinity is defined around exclusive possession of a young woman and birth of sons,²⁰⁹ Big Head Li, and the patriarchy he represents, is judged as a failure according to China's own feudal ethics.

Even as Grandpa transgresses the codes of the feudal patriarchy, he reinscribes those same "feudal" codes in the "new" order he symbolically creates through his union with Grandma. After having killed Big Head Li, Grandpa returns to the winery several days later to claim his "wife." In front of the winery workers, he publicly declares his ownership of Jiu'er, "We were in the sorghum! . . . (pointing to Jiu'er's bedroom) That's my room. She's my wife!" Like Big Head Li before him, Grandpa seeks to sexually monopolize Jiu'er. Jiu'er's physical and emotional subordination to Grandpa is further demonstrated in the scene that depicts the ritualistic making of the first wine of the season. Returning for the second time to claim Jiu'er as his wife (she rejected his first attempt), Grandpa bares his penis

²⁰⁸ Zhang Yimou explicitly states that he still sees China as remaining in an oppressive feudal state. See Yang, 301, previously quoted.

²⁰⁹ Farquhar, 62.

directly in front of her. Grandpa then urinates into the “concave,” “vaginal” vats,²¹⁰ and the camera unites the phallus and the penis as one. This public rape and subsequent possession of Grandma is made even more explicit by the close relationship between the wine and Jiu’er: not only is the wine made on her birthday, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, but the word for wine, *jiu*, and Jiu’er’s name are homonyms. After having urinated into four vats, Grandpa picks up Grandma and carries her like a sack of sorghum seed into her bedroom. Grandpa has now appropriated the winery and its workers as his own. His phallic potency is later validated by the manager of the winery, who proclaims the wine laced with Grandpa’s piss to be the best the winery has ever produced: Grandpa’s virility is both sexual and commercial.

In analyzing *Red Sorghum*, it is important to remember that Jiu’er is not an autonomous woman; she is the imagined creation of two men: Mo Yan and Zhang Yimou. When asked in an interview why he uses “women to make a statement,” Zhang Yimou responded, “What I want to express is the Chinese people’s oppression and confinement. Women express this more clearly on their bodies (*zai tamen shenshang*).”²¹¹ In his choice of the woman’s body as the surface of expression, Zhang has followed in Mao’s discursive tradition by taking the signifier of the communist revolution as his own marker of progress in China.²¹² That Jiu’er cannot escape continued dominance by narcissistic men, who are incapable of seeing her as a separate and distinct person, is an indictment of the CCP’s claim that it has eradicated the patriarchy. At the same time, however, Zhang’s symbolic use of women in his film reinscribes patriarchal practice. Through his choice to figure

²¹⁰ Farquhar, 71.

²¹¹ Yang, 300.

²¹² See Chapter One for discussion of the symbolic role of women in China’s communist revolution.

women and their oppression as nodal signifiers, Zhang suggests that such male narcissism is integral to the formation of an alternate national identity. Chinese film theorist Yao Xiaomong emphasizes that while

Red Sorghum relates a story of the 1930s at the same time it represents . . . modern mentality. . . . the one who is competent is . . . a man who can actualize his life, provided he has desire to conquer. “My grandpa” in the movie holds “my grandma” in an inverted configuration, itself rich in significance.²¹³

Created in response to the desires and fears of the male psyche, women do not possess their own meaning, but rather are merely a refraction of man’s reflection. Luce Irigaray contends that by “specularizing” female characters in order to construct an ideal manhood, authors entrench patriarchal relationships.²¹⁴ Kaja Silverman further suggests that “the writing of the history of the male subject is really a writing out of the history of the female subject. It constitutes an elaborate *verneinung*, an elaborate denial of passivity and masochism.”²¹⁵ Consequently, even as Zhang’s films undermine the legitimacy of the CCP by revealing the myth of women’s liberation, they perpetuate the Communist revolutionary rhetoric.

The ultimate denial of the female subject is encoded in Jiu’er’s death. Forced into a rhythmic dance of spasms and blood by Japanese bullets, Jiu’er slowly spirals to the ground. The *suona* shrieks the same ritualistic song heard during Jiu’er’s “marriage” to Grandpa. Jiu’er cries out in “ecstasy,”²¹⁶ and as her blood seeps into the black soil, the air becomes the color of red sorghum wine. The agonized ecstasy and the ecstatic agony, sexuality and death, all fuse together. The celluloid of the film saturates with pure redness. Evoking desire, passion, wine, blood, beauty,

²¹³ Yao and Hu, 172.

²¹⁴ See Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), Chapter 4 for explication of Irigaray’s concept of specularization.

²¹⁵ Silverman, 8.

violence, and masculinity, red floods the scene. In direct parallel to their sacred union on the sorghum-altar, the scene is sated with orgasmic splendor. The woman's virginal body—as symbolized by Jiu'er's all white clothing—is bloodily penetrated. Grandpa and Jiu'er's nine year-old son stand tall, charred with fire, caked with mud, over the prostrate body of Grandma. Jiu'er is silenced. Orgasmic union leads to the woman's death and the man's triumph. Consumed by the “the erotic impact” of the woman's death, Grandpa glorifies in the spectacle of death, even as he is blinded by the burning rays of the solar eclipse. Tall and erect as the stalks of sorghum, Grandpa and Jiu'er's son look straight into the lens of the camera, awakening the spectator to his primal ancestors standing before him. Standing against the red sky like charred totems of pre-civilization, Father and Son proxy for the ideological wish-fulfillment of a generation.²¹⁷

Masculine mastery and national allegory are also encoded within the wedding/union narrative of *Yellow Earth*. A long shot reveals a bridal parade zig-zagging through the barren, yellow hills, beating drums and blowing trumpets. All thirteen scenes exactly duplicate a previous wedding procession at the opening of the film. The long shot and the repetition distances the audience, preventing sympathetic stimulation on the behalf of the young female protagonist, Cuiqiao, who is being married off against her will. The audience's identification with Cuiqiao is then elevated to a reflection on national culture.

Just married to a man she has never seen, a medium shot reveals Cuiqiao kneeling between two folded reams of red cloth in a dark interior room. Low natural

²¹⁶ Mo, 64.

²¹⁷ Recall Yuejin Wang's contention that the essence of the Fifth Generation's films is “a return of the collectively repressed, an evocation of the cultural unconscious, a remembrance of the forgotten, and a tapping of intertextual memories.” Wang, “Red Sorghum,” 86.

light filters in from behind the camera position and blurs the edges of the objects in the frame, making Cuiqiao seem to dissolve into the background. The scene jumps to a close-up of Cuiqiao recoiling from the encroaching gaze of the unseen groom/camera. She whimpers. The steady close-up of her face captures the fear in her unblinking eyes. A shot-reverse shot sequence subjectively locates Cuiqiao's tormentor: a dark, dirty hand stretches toward her. The camera reverses back to Cuiqiao's face, focusing on her fear-frozen eyes. The silence is broken by piercing symbol crashes as the film then cuts suddenly to the blinding daylight of Yan'an and the jubilant dance of hundreds of synchronized men.

In perfect unison, the camera unites hundreds of bare-chested men who spin jubilantly through the air, beating horizontal, cylindrical drums with sticks. The triumphant bleating of the symbols and *suona* echoes the music of traditional Chinese weddings. This *mise en scene* functions on two critical levels: first, to signify Yan'an and the CCP as Cuiqiao's attacking groom, and second, to frame masculine physicality as the solution to the torpor of traditional Chinese life. When the scene jumps to Yan'an and the ritualized celebration of men's bodies through dance, it is the first time in *Yellow Earth* that the stagnancy and slow pacing of the film—and lives of the yellow earth's people—has been allowed to erupt in vigor and vitality. While *Yellow Earth* previously framed the Chinese people as subject to the vicissitudes of the harsh land, the Yan'an dance scene depicts the force of these amalgamated, virile men as inexorable. The sharpness of the scene is relieved by a shot in which the silence of the barren earth fills the entirety of the frame. But then the drum-beating men emerge, line-by-choreographed-line from beyond the edge of the horizon. The camera holds its gaze on the wave of vital men trampling the earth with their spirited legs.

Desperate to escape her feudal marriage, Cuiqiao decides to find Yan'an on her own to join the Eighth Route Army. Refusing her younger brother Hanhan's entreaties to stay, Cuiqiao rows across the Yellow River alone in the darkness of night. As she paddles the torrential waters, she sings the song the Eighth Route Army officer taught her:

This paradoxical discrediting of the Party while
With sickle, hammer and pick
We make the new road for the poor
Our methods will achieve so much
It's the C—

As her voice begins to evoke the first syllable of "communist," Cuiqiao's voice disappears into the sound of the rushing river. Her silence left by her suicide audibly contradicts the ethos of the words she could not utter: "It's the Communists who save the people." Yet the very water which has destroyed Cuiqiao, is also the life-giving force worshipped by all the male peasant-farmers. Just as the Yellow River, which nurses the Chinese nation, also devours its daughters.

At the same time as the Fifth Generation critiques the burdens of traditional culture, it pays homage to the starkness of the Shaanxi province from which both the Chinese people and state are mythologized as having emerged. Chen Kaige's dry, cracked land of Shaanxi and fierceness of the Yellow River as well as Zhang Yimou's dense, fertile sorghum are important metaphors for this collusion between indictments of the CCP's path toward power and the Fifth Generation's own symbolic vision of China. Like the virile men in the *Yellow Earth's* Yan'an dance, the Fifth Generation rush without hesitation toward a new cultural spirit and seek a new balance in life and a new perfection. Yet their new vision—while itself anathema to Party ideology—continues to reinscribe the discursive symbols of the CCP. In his 1984 address to the First Annual Meeting of Learned Society of Chinese Film

Criticism in Dalian, Zhong Dianfei warned of the conflicted nature of memory and allegiance to China's yellow earth:

Even the yellow earth of North Shaanxi weighs heavily on my emotional world. But in the progress of society, emotions can play a positive role only in specific times. Once beyond certain limitations, they become a regressive force and prevent us from seeing new things in the bud, even make us the antithesis of the new.²¹⁸

At the heart of the Fifth Generation is an encounter of two worlds that are at once similar and different. Each is betrayed by the other. There is potential for progress in this contradiction, however. Echoing Marx, Mao declared, "it is the development of contradictions that pushes society forward."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Zhong Dianfei, "Innovation in Social and Cinematic Ideas: A Forward Given at the First Annual Meeting of Learned Society of Chinese Film Criticism, Dalian 1984," in *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*, ed. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 7.

²¹⁹ Peter Hitchcock, "The Aesthetics of Alienation, or China's 'Fifth Generation,'" *Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1992): 120.

Three

Boundary Crossing

The Sixth Generation Breaks the Line

Repression is a seamless garment . . . dictators are always—or at least in public, on other people’s behalf—puritanical. So it turns out that my “male” and “female” plots are the same story after all.

—Salman Rushdie, *Shame*²²⁰

The borderline of culture demands a “newness” that is not part of the continuum of past and present.

—Homi Bhabha²²¹

“It’s very important that we note the date of this interview, 2 February 1985,” Chen Mei, then editor of *World Cinema*, noted to George Semsel, “because even after a year, many things change here.”²²² Only a year after *Yellow Earth* premiered at the 1984 Hong Kong Film Festival, and three years before *Red Sorghum* would captivate audiences, the foundations for the most radical change to date in Chinese cinema were already being laid. Only six months after Chen and Semsel discussed the emergence of a Fifth Generation, the directors and cinematographers who would become the Sixth Generation were entering their first year at Beijing Film Academy.

²²⁰ Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (New York: Knopf, 1983).

²²¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

²²² George S. Semsel, “China,” in *The Asian Film Industry*, by John A. Lent (Austin: University of Texas

As the first film since the nationalization of the film industry in 1951 to be entirely independently financed, and produced outside of all channels of the State system, Zhang Yuan's *Beijing Bastards*,²²³ while rough in form, clearly marked a new movement in Chinese cinema. Even before the first shot of *Beijing Bastards* begins, the audience is warned that film production has changed. Before the beginning of each film produced by a State studio and approved by the Film Distribution Corporation, two standard frames appear in sequence: the government issued license number followed by the name of the studio responsible for the project. *Beijing Bastards* lacks the frame displaying the distribution license number. Centered in the following frame is not the name of one of the State studios, but rather Beijing Bastards Raw Shot Production Group. By taking the same name for the film and the production group—*Beijing Bastards*—Zhang implicates himself as well as his filmic practice as an illegitimate but unwilling-to-be-denied offspring of Beijing. The double metonymic practice which uses “Beijing” to simultaneously refer to China as a whole and to the seat of power of the CCP complicates this film title. Zhang and the narrative encapsulated in his film are not only bastards of the Chinese nation, but of the official Party line as well. Moreover, the characters that I have translated as “raw shot,” *shelie*, also convey multiple meanings: while foreshadowing the unfinished quality of the film, the phrase also carries the double image of film as a raw, tearing edge and a festering wound. Zhang and the filmmakers of the Sixth Generation announce themselves and their films as a fissure rending its way through the Chinese cultural and political landscape.

Press, 1990), 11.

²²³ *Beijing zazhong* (Beijing Bastards), dir. Zhang Yuan, Beijing Bastards Raw Shot Production Group (1992).

The inversion of expected signs continues with the opening shot sequence of the *Beijing Bastards*. The beat of drums prefaces the shot. A hand-held medium shot then frames a large traditional Chinese drum in the foreground; only the thighs, clad in loose cloth, of the player and the strike of his mallets can be seen. This image recalls scenes of peasant ritual performance typical of Fifth Generation films. As the shot pans the drum/drummer 180°, the sound of a synthesizer joins the percussion. The shot then jumps and a dark wall fills the frame. The camera quickly tracks to the right, then takes an abrupt turn to reveal the drummer in a long shot. As the camera completes a 90° turn, what had been constructed as a traditional drummer is revealed to be one player in Cui Jian's rock band. The traditional Chinese drum has been co-opted to create rock 'n roll music. As the CCP has condemned rock 'n roll as a form of "spiritual pollution" from the "decadent" West,²²⁴ the use of a native Chinese instrument in a rock band questions polarizing along a traditional-modern, East-West divide. For those, such as the filmmakers of the Sixth Generation, who lived through the trauma of the 1989 massacre that ended the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement, this reconfiguring of the Chinese drum into a rock instrument was more than an inversion of the traditional into the modern, East into West. It was an indictment of the State's legitimacy.

In addition to the signification of the drum itself, its particular use in Cui Jian's band heightens the scene's censorial significance. Obliquely suggesting that after 40 years of CCP leadership the Chinese people are left with "nothing," Cui's ballad "Nothing to My Name" became the anthem of the student demonstrators in

²²⁴ Deng Xiaoping defined spiritual pollution at the Second Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee (October 1983) as "disseminating all varieties of corrupt and decadent ideologies of the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes and disseminating distrust of the socialist and communist cause and the Communist Party leadership." In Michel Oksenberg, Lawrence R. Sullivan, and Marc Lambert, eds., *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict: The Basic Documents* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 401.

Tiananmen. Released in the spring of 1989, his lyrics seemed to reflect the emotions of the youth and their movement:

I keep asking without rest, when are you going to walk
with me?
But you always just laugh at my having nothing.
I have given you my dreams, given you my freedom,
But you always just laugh at my having nothing.²²⁵

As the protests of the spring of 1989 became more urgent, Cui went to the square himself. Blindfolded by a blood-red piece of cloth, Cui stood upon the ledge of the Monument to the People's Heroes and sang to the masses of protestors overflowing the square. The students understood his message: red communism had blinded the Party from seeing. Now, he and the students—as the new heroes of the people—would lead China on a new Long March²²⁶ to democracy. After a wire service photo captured Cui in this now classic pose, he and his music became indelibly imprinted in the minds of Party officials as the incarnation of the protest spirit. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre, Cui was forced into hiding and banned from performing in Beijing. Filmed during a brief window of official reprieve against his performances in 1992, *Beijing Bastards* not only positively reinforces Cui's rebellious image, but also portrays part of his revolution as the mixing of drum and rock, East and West.

Set against the repression and enforced political silence of post-Tiananmen China, the radical emergence of the Sixth Generation's new form of film—both in style and production—is itself a revolt against the mainstream ideology of the Party and State. The content of the films of the Sixth Generation may not seem overtly

²²⁵ Cui Jian, “Yi wu sou you” (Nothing to My Name), *Xin changzhenglushang de yaogun* (Rock and Roll for the New Long March), re-release (Beijing: Beijing East West Music and Art Production Limited, 1999).

²²⁶ The Long March (1934-1935) was the yearlong journey of 6,000 miles made by the Communists after the Nationalists advanced against their Jiangxi Soviet. Of the 80,000 people who began the

political to the uninitiated Western eye, but the transformation of film production into a private and individual, rather than State and communal activity, signified a cleavage between the State and individual that had not occurred since the nationalization of the film industry in 1951. Read against the template of Chinese political and cultural history, the narratives of Sixth Generation films represent a stark contrast to approved political practice and discourse.

As the students who would become the filmmakers of the Sixth Generation were completing their final projects before graduation, millions of Beijing residents were taking to the streets to demand democratic reforms of the State. The first spark of the spring of 1989 was lit after the announcement of Hu Yaobang's death on April 15th. As a first generation leader of the CCP, Hu was a veteran of the Long March and leader of the Communist Youth League. Upon Deng Xiaoping's rise to power, Hu was named Secretary-General of the CCP. Disturbed by the arbitrariness and excessiveness of the Mao era mass-enforced political campaigns, Hu Yaobang played a leading role in Deng Xiaoping's rehabilitation of three million victims of Mao's purges.²²⁷ Partly because of his popularity among intellectuals and cadres alike, Deng ousted Hu for not having constrained the student-led democracy protests of 1986-1987. In hopes that Deng would reverse the counter-revolutionary verdict against the 1986-87 student protests, and thereby legitimize students' call for reform, thousands of university students from across Beijing gathered at the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square on April 17th. When the April 26th editorial of People's Daily entitled "It is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand Against Disturbances" was published, the students realized that their protests

campaign, only 8,000 to 9,000 survived the ordeal to establish the new Communist base in Yan'an.
²²⁷ Kathleen Hartford, "Summer 1988-Spring 1989: The Ferment Before the 'Turmoil,'" in *China's Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989*, ed. Suzanne Ogden et al. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992), 9.

would not lead to a reversal of the 1986-87 verdict. Instead, their mourning-cum-movement was receiving its own counter-revolutionary label. The editorial decreed that the students' "purpose was to sow dissension among the people, plunge the whole country into chaos and sabotage the political situation of stability and unity. This is a planned conspiracy and disturbance."²²⁸ Little did the Party expect that their edict condemning the student protest in fact strengthened and expanded it. One hundred thousand students marched on Beijing May 4th. On May 17th—the fifth day of a three thousand-student hunger strike—an amalgam of students, workers, intellectuals, and party members numbering two million marched into Tiananmen Square. The residents of the city that had come to represent the seat of state power turned on the CCP. This populist mutiny would not last long. In the early hours of June 4th, the residents of Beijing could no longer hold the People's Liberation Army on the city's outskirts. Tanks ploughed through the streets. Convoys rattled neighborhoods with gunfire. The People's Liberation Army had not entered Beijing since 1949, and then to liberate the city from the Nationalists without a shot being fired. In 1989, it left several hundred to several thousand corpses in its wake.

In direct address of the spectator, *Beijing Bastard's* Cui Jian looks straight into the camera. He rhythmically incants the lyrics to his rock ballad "The Last Complaint":

I remember that day.
I was hardly pure of heart, anger in my soul.
I am walking straight into the wind, anger in my heart.
I don't know when I was hurt,
but I am inspired by the pain.
I want to find the source of the rage,
but I can only walk into the wind.
I want to vent all my feelings,
but I can only walk into the wind.

²²⁸ *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 26 April 1989.

I want to forget all the pain and sorrow,
but I can only walk into the wind.
I want to bring the last complaint to an end,
but I can only walk into the wind.

That the day that Cui Jian remembers is June 4th 1989 is made explicit by the scene that prefaces it. As light rain falls, heading north on the east side of Tiananmen, the camera tracks an empty Tiananmen square. The obelisk-like Monument to the People's Heroes stands alone. The Great Hall of the People looms in the background. The car in which the camera is located then turns onto Changan (Eternal Peace) Avenue heading West towards Xidan. The camera continues to track the grey, lifeless square. Looking out upon Tiananmen Square from the perspective of the titan-sized portrait of Mao's head that gazes on the square from the entrance to the Forbidden Palace, this shot indicts Mao's vision. As the camera looks through Mao's eyes, the bleak emptiness of Tiananmen Square contrasts with shared memories of its fullness. From the balcony of the gate to the Forbidden Palace after which Tiananmen Square is named, a million jubilant people crowded the square on October 1, 1949 to hear Mao proclaim that China had risen up. From April 17-June 4, 1989, millions came to this symbolic center of the People's Republic of China in order to inspire a new wave of reform, only to have thousands killed or injured in the wake. In order to solidify that Mao is the subject of this gaze, *Beijing Bastards* reverses the common order of subjective view. After tracking the length of the square along Changan Avenue, the camera jumps to a second tracking shot of the east side of the square heading north. This time, however, the camera's gaze follows the path of the street rather than looking into the square. In the background, the camera captures Mao-as-portrait overseeing the square. The vision he claimed would reinvigorate and renew China left it in mourning, its symbolic center dead empty. Just over forty years after Mao declared victory for the people, the people are nowhere to be seen.

After June 1989, the State tightened control over all cultural spheres. “Film should follow mainstream ideology” (*zhuxuan yingpian*) became the new official slogan.²²⁹ This tide of mainstream ideology was defined in defiance against the flood of Western influence. According to Michael Yahuda, after Tiananmen several Chinese leaders accused the West of deliberately using “China’s increasing linkages with the outside world in order to undermine and transform their system—a policy they called ‘peaceful evolution.’”²³⁰ Under government auspices, Zhang Jingyuan translated Fredric Jameson’s “Third World Literature in the Era of Multi-national Capitalism” in 1989, igniting heated debate in *Contemporary Cinema*²³¹ on how China should seek its own position beyond the hegemony of Western discourse and “superculture”.²³²

By framing the West as a polluting influence of Chinese culture, the State was also couching communism as native and democracy as foreign. Since the Party defined all of the West as bourgeois and all true Chinese as proletariat, economic capitalism and cultural decadence were also construed as forms of foreign adulteration. The practice of condemning opposition to the Party in terms of Western exploitation and bastardization of the native was a common mode of the CCP. In this way Orientalist practice permeates Chinese nationalist ideology. Like Orientalism, nationalism homogenizes the disparate spatial and temporal qualities of the country, so that through metonymic reduction a few traits are taken as emblematic of the nation. Partha Chatterjee observes that “nationalist thought accepts the same essentialist conception based on a distinction between ‘the East’

²²⁹ *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*, ed. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 84.

²³⁰ Michael Yahuda, “China’s Foreign Relations: The Long March, Future Uncertain,” *China Quarterly* no. 159 (September 1999): 653.

²³¹ China’s leading magazine covering film theory.

²³² *Dangdai dianying* (Contemporary Cinema), no. 6 (1989).

and ‘the West’, the same typology created by a transcendent studying subject, and hence the same ‘objectifying’ procedures of knowledge constructed in the post-Enlightenment age of Western science.”²³³ China’s history has proven correct Arif Dirlik’s warning that those traits that “are inconsistent with the national self-image are swept aside as foreign intrusions.”²³⁴ This framing of the West as the dangerous Other that must be extirpated was made explicit throughout the Communists’ rise and mastery of power: from Mao’s Talks at Yan’an in 1942 to the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957-1958, from the Campaigns against Spiritual Pollution in 1983 to the Campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization in 1987. This process, Dirlik notes, “serves to perpetuate, and even to consolidate existing forms of power.”²³⁵ It is not surprising then that this strategy resurfaced after the Tiananmen rebellion. During the first anniversary of June 4th, the media was awash with editorials and dramas bitterly recalling China’s history of oppression by foreigners since the Opium War of 1839. “In its desire to unify the ‘Chinese nation,’” Rey Chow observes, “the Chinese government thus continues to fantasize its own brutality retroactively in the form of a Chinese nationalist struggle, in which ‘Western imperialists’ alone are the real enemy.”²³⁶ Opposing the Communist Party is constructed as a betrayal of China itself.

Following the CCP’s historical practice, the State cracked down on the film industry in the aftermath of Tiananmen by mobilizing conservative forces in the intricate web of the State agencies responsible for production and distribution: the

²³³ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 38.

²³⁴ Arif Dirlik. “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism.” *History & Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 106.

²³⁵ Dirlik, 114.

²³⁶ Rey Chow, “Pedagogy, Trust, Chinese Intellectuals in the 1990s—Fragments of a Post-Catastrophic Discourse,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 16, no. 3/4 (1991): 205.

Filmworkers Association, the Film Bureau, and the Film Distribution Corporation.²³⁷ In 1991 Teng Jinxian, then director of the Film Bureau, noted that the backlog in the state film production schedule, which had delayed the release of 14 out of 15 films scheduled to be completed by the Shanghai Film Studio in 1990 until the fourth quarter, was due to the censorship process. “Some films [had] various isolated problems,” explained Teng, “but after our discussions with filmmakers, they [were] willing to change the shots in question.”²³⁸ While films then in production were altered, films previously approved and already in distribution were taken out of showing. The Film Distribution Corporation pulled prints of most Fifth Generation films out of circulation, while the Film Bureau ordered the studios to make films that extolled the army, the party, and the police. Schools required students to attend such screenings; work units received free tickets for mandatory screenings. While Paul G. Picowicz lamented that “most filmmakers faced the difficult choice of making these ‘command’ films or making nothing at all,”²³⁹ a few young directors were able to create a third path. During the production of *Beijing Bastards* and *The Days*,²⁴⁰ neither Zhang Yuan nor Wang Xiaoshuai consulted with the Film Bureau or the Film Distribution Company. Shunning the studio system and the State’s monopoly, Zhang and Wang created a new, private space.

While the group label “Sixth Generation” is widely used to identify Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai, neither they nor their peers of the 1989 class of the Beijing Film Academy take the label willingly as their own. Wang Xiaoshuai prefers to assert his independence from, rather than allegiance to, the group: “We each have

²³⁷ Teng Jinxian, “Teng Jinxian Expounds China’s Film Policy,” *China Screen* no. 3 (1989): 10.

²³⁸ “Teng Jinxian Interviewed,” *China Screen*, no. 1 (1991): 2.

²³⁹ Paul G. Picowicz, “Velvet prisons and the political economy of Chinese filmmaking,” in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 211.

²⁴⁰ *Dongchun de rizij* (*The Days*), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, Shu Ke’s Creative Workshop Ltd. (1993).

our own individual style, our own individual stories.”²⁴¹ Zhang Yuan also complains that “discussing directors as cohesive generations collapses varied styles into one.”²⁴² Jia Zhangke “simply doesn’t see the point”²⁴³ in using the generational title. Despite this shared call for individuality, the filmmakers who are loath to acknowledge the Sixth Generation moniker as representative of a group ethos are quick to differentiate themselves from their immediate predecessors. While inspired by the aesthetic of the Fifth Generation, Wang Xiaoshuai complains that “they did not take it far enough. They made beautiful films with strokes like oil paintings, but they did not make *films*. They did not explore the reality, the subjectivity that film can create.”²⁴⁴ Zhang Yuan laughs that “They [the Fifth Generation] had a slogan: ‘Not like the past.’ It motivated us to create our own: ‘Not like the Fifth Generation.’”²⁴⁵ Chen Daming, an actor-cum-director of the 1989 BFA graduating class, chides the Fifth Generation directors for “not making films that reflect our daily lives. When I am driving around Beijing in a car, how is a story about peasants in rural ancient China supposed to relate to me?”²⁴⁶ Despite their calls for individual recognition, it is this sense of the immediacy and importance of contemporary urban life as the seedbed for their films that does unite the varied approaches of the filmmakers who would like not to be called Sixth Generation.

This passionate drive towards individuality, while often considered regressive in modern Western theory, is both a transgressive and progressive act in contemporary China. Under the recurrent and arbitrary mass political campaigns of the PRC, the totalizing logic of the state consumed the individual. In her analysis of

²⁴¹ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview by author, New York, NY, 18 February 2000.

²⁴² Zhang Yuan, interview by author, Cambridge, MA, 3 November 1999.

²⁴³ Jia Zhangke, interview by Chris Bardon, Beijing, China, 15 August 1999.

²⁴⁴ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview, 18 February 2000.

²⁴⁵ Zhang Yuan, interview, 3 November 1999.

²⁴⁶ Chen Daming, interview by author, Beijing, China, 20 November 1998.

the effects of Stalin's regime, Hannah Arendt notes the absolutism of totalitarianism in which the individual becomes:

submerged in the stream of dynamic movement of the universal itself. In this stream the difference between ends and means evaporates together with the personality, and the result is the monstrous immorality of ideological policies. All that matters is embodied in the moving movement itself; every value has vanished into a welter of superstitious pseudoscientific immanence.²⁴⁷

The constant purges and rehabilitations under Mao taught the Chinese that rational discussion and dependence upon ends and means was impossible; only Mao himself could determine what would be acceptable thought and practice.²⁴⁸ Judith Lewis Herman explains that the final step in the “breaking” of the trauma victim is not completed until he has been forced to betray his most basic attachments to family and friends by witnessing or participating in crimes against others.²⁴⁹ Mao integrated such tactics into his political strategy from the beginning of his rise to power. In addition to requiring self-criticisms from those who betrayed his authority, he demanded that in order for their self-criticism to be accepted, they must turn upon their peers. Ding Ling and Ai Qing were both coerced to turn on their friend and writing associate Wang Shiwei in 1942. The same journalists and critics who had praised *The Life of Wu Xun* reversed their stance on the film and its production staff after Mao changed its status from revolutionary to counter-revolutionary.²⁵⁰ The demand to betray another in order to save oneself became necessary for survival in Mao's China.²⁵¹ Such random eruptions of violence enforced with vise-like pressure

²⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 249.

²⁴⁸ See Chapter 1.

²⁴⁹ Judith Lewis Herman, “Complex PTSD: A Syndrome of Survivors in Prolonged and Repeated Trauma,” in *Essential Papers on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*, ed. Mardi J. Horowitz, M.D. (New York: New York UP, 1999), 88.

²⁵⁰ See Chapter 1.

²⁵¹ For a dramatic depiction of how decades of political campaigns affected one family see Shu Fenzhu's 1985 novel *Huozhe he si zhubi renmen* (To Live); or Zhang Yimou's 1994 film adaptation of Wei's novel, also entitled *Huozhe* (To Live).

produced dramatic changes in the formation and expression of individual identity. Herman observes that “All the structures of the self—the image of the body, the internalized image of others, and the values and ideals that lend a sense of coherence and purpose—are invaded and systematically broken down.”²⁵² In some totalitarian systems, this invasion of self-identity goes so far as even to take away the victim’s name.²⁵³

The Sixth Generation’s own demand for individuality as well as their focus on personal, subjective stories directly confronts State ideology while attempting to break out of the perpetrator-victim dialectic that has dominated Chinese social and political history. In direct parallel to the Cultural Revolution rhetoric used to denounce the prominent author, Ai Qing,²⁵⁴ Sixth Generation filmmaker Jia Zhangke originally titled his first film *Jin Xiaoyong’s Buddy, Hu Meimei’s Sugar Daddy and Liang Changyou’s Son*. Rather than using his name, Xiao Wu, the lead character and the film about his life were referenced only by his position within society. Jia confides, “It struck me that for so many years Chinese have never had their own identity. When you identified someone, you’d always put him in the context of his relationships to other people: He’s so-and-so’s friend, so-and-so’s child. But the only thing he isn’t is himself.”²⁵⁵ By identifying *Xiao Wu* by name, rather than by his communal relationships, Jia attempts not only to symbolically reclaim his own identity, but also to oppose the rhetoric that has denied his own existence. Jia further emphasizes this

²⁵² Herman, “Complex PTSD,” 90.

²⁵³ See Patricia Hearst and Alvin Moscow, *Every Secret Thing* (New York: Doubleday, 1982); Jacobo Timmerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Name*, trans. Toby Talbot (New York: Vintage, 1981).

²⁵⁴ During the interview, Jia Zhangke discussed the Cultural Revolution era *People’s Daily* editorial that announced Ai Qing as the next target of the purge. Rather than specifically naming him, he was identified as “Ding Ling’s friend, so-and-so’s partner, and so-and-so’s buddy.”

²⁵⁵ Jia Zhangke, interview.

generation's profound association with the personal as opposed to the social, as he quotes a favorite two-line poem by his friend and poet Xi Chuan:

The crow solves the crow's problems
I solve mine.²⁵⁶

In the Sixth Generation's China society is no longer condensed into one body that infiltrates the lives of all members. By asserting simultaneous yet distinct realities, the Sixth Generation denies the Party's 40-year monopoly on the authority to define reality.

The Generational title is useful, however, in that it serves as a metonymic encapsulation of the shared life-experiences and influences of this motley crew of directors. Lou Ye, director of *Suzhou River*,²⁵⁷ jokingly calls his generation the 386 MHz generation: "3 for the fact that we are all in our 30s, 8 because we grew up in the 80s, and 6 since we are the Sixth Generation of filmmakers."²⁵⁸ As the generation that came of age during Deng's sweeping economic reforms, the Sixth Generation's experiences growing up under Communist Party rule substantially differ from those of the Fifth. While the Sixth Generation's youth took place during the most economically and culturally open years of the PRC's existence, the Fifth Generation's youth was spent during China's turbulent and traumatic years of the Cultural Revolution. After being sent from his Beijing home to the countryside in his early teens, Chen Kaige spent six years in the People's Liberation Army. Upon returning to Beijing, he spent three years at the Beijing Film Processing lab before he passed the examinations to enter the Beijing Film Academy in 1978. Zhang Yimou, also sent down as an "educated youth" during the Cultural Revolution, spent three

²⁵⁶ Jia Zhangke, interview.

²⁵⁷ *Suzhou hejiang* (Suzhou River), dir. Lou Ye, Dream Factory and The Coproduction Office (2000).

²⁵⁸ Lou Ye, interview by Norman Brock and Placidus Schelbert, Berlin, Germany, January 2000.

years toiling on a farm in Shaanxi and then another seven years as a worker in the Number Eight Textile Factory in Xianyan before joining Chen at the BFA. Chen and Zhang were twenty-six and twenty-eight years old, respectively, when they entered the BFA's first post-Cultural Revolution class. In striking contrast, the Sixth Generation entered the Academy as 18 year-old teenagers, most straight from elite performing arts secondary schools. Both Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai were trained in oil painting from their childhood.

Upon graduation, the economic outlook for the Sixth Generation differed radically from that of the Fifth. In 1979, cinema ticket sales totaled \$3.5 billion; by 1993, totals were down by two-thirds to only \$1.2 billion.²⁵⁹ In 1992, six of the sixteen state studios were losing money.²⁶⁰ The crisis in the film industry paralleled the experiences throughout the State-run socialist economy. Just over a decade after Deng re-opened China's doors to the West in 1979, China's socialist economy could no longer sustain the needs of all of its citizens. By 1992, 15,000 workers were being laid off each year in Beijing. In 1994, an official Chinese publication reported that of the 2,711,000 people employed by Beijing's state and collectively owned enterprises, at least 228,000 were soon to "become surplus to requirements."²⁶¹ As the vicissitudes of the economy broke China's promised "iron rice bowl,"²⁶² China's iron grip on the daily lives of its citizens was also loosened. During the Mao Era, the State controlled the daily lives of the masses through the work unit (*danwei*). In contrast to modern Western working agreements, the work unit controlled more than wages and bonuses: it was a microcosm of state power. Access to housing,

²⁵⁹ Nisid Hajari, "Socialism, Take Two," *Time* 12 May 1997.

²⁶⁰ "Chinese Province Ends Film Distribution Monopoly," *Agence France-Presse*, 26 September 1998.

²⁶¹ *Zhenli de Zhuiqiu* (Beijing) 11 August 1995.

²⁶² *Tiefanwan*, or iron rice bowl, is a Chinese idiom that refers to the ultimate security from want promised by the CCP. Through the *danwei*, or work unit, communism would provide everything, including daily rice. Since this provision was considered inviolable, it was denoted as "iron."

education, medical benefits, consumer goods, travel visas, marriage and divorce certificates was controlled by the work unit. As the State could no longer afford to keep workers employed, it could no longer define the elements of individuals' personal lives.

The Sixth Generation filmmaker's ability to survive without a State-sanctioned job was also a result of Deng's economic reforms. As China's economy privatized and diversified, the margins of society steadily expanded, creating areas where nonconformists, entrepreneurs, musicians and film directors could find refuge and work beyond the reach of government interference. Turning the challenge of bankrupt studios into an opportunity, Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai both financed their early films, *Beijing Bastards* and *The Days*, respectively, by using personal funds they had accrued through filming MTV music videos and commercials. For a society that had allowed no such sanctuaries for more than four decades, the emergence of fringe zones represented a turning point in the history of the People's Republic.

Consequently, when George S. Semsel postulated in 1990 that any "movement towards independent filmmaking is not a matter of aesthetics, but a matter of market-place,"²⁶³ he was both right and wrong. The radical economic changes in post-Tiananmen China sent the previously starkly black and white Chinese value system spinning. The 1990s found Deng's cherished black cat/white cat to be grey. Australian Sinologist Geremie Barmé described the new *huise wenhua*, or grey culture, as a phenomenon mixing "hopelessness, uncertainty and ennui with irony, sarcasm and a large dose of fatalism."²⁶⁴ Its method of enunciation mirrors what it enunciates: it is less a movement than a state of mind. By turning Party

²⁶³ Semsel, "China," 28.

ideology as well as method on its head, the culturally sophisticated youths who embody this temperament have backed away from directly pushing for change of the State. Chinese historian Orville Schell observes that by “Ducking and weaving to avoid the party’s counterblows, gray culturalists are co-opting the system rather than trying to change it.”²⁶⁵

Not long ago, the word *liumang* was a pejorative term that denoted immoral and offensive behavior and conjured up images of gangsters and hooligans. After Tiananmen, China’s disillusioned youth appropriated *liumang* as the code word for the alienated urban rebel who seeks to distance himself from State culture and its official definition of terms. The widespread disjunction between State and society is evinced by the receptivity of the youths’ alternate definition. Even outside the discourse of rebellious youth, *liumang*’s previous negative associations with dishonesty and criminality have been superseded by attributes such as individualism, defiance and independence. The significance of this shift of meaning is particularly revealing given that individualism, defiance, and independence, now construed as positive through redefinition of a common name for petty thieves, are the very attributes the Communist Party and New China have enumerated as anathema to the State.

As the Sixth Generation blurred the black and white categories of Chinese society into grey, they also reconfigured the dominant abuser-abused dialectic that had permeated Chinese society, and was reflected in the films of the Fifth Generation. Victims of prolonged trauma tend to construct all of their relationships along lines of “victims, abusers, and rescuers, who are locked in a dialectical

²⁶⁴ Geremie Barmè, “The Greying of Chinese Culture,” *China Review* (1992).

²⁶⁵ Orville Schell, “China’s Rock and Roll Underground,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 November 1992

dance.”²⁶⁶ The films of the Sixth Generation symbolically alter these constricted structures and identity roles by implicating everyone as both abuser and abused. In response to a question about why Sixth Generation directors do not make films that articulate the same polarized gender construct that dominate films of directors like Zhang Yimou, Wang Xiaoshuai retorted:

He made movies about women, women’s oppression. There is a new problem. Where is their oppression coming from? Is it from women or men or from society or from somewhere else? If you have pressure, someone is applying that pressure to you. So if women are being oppressed someone is actively oppressing them. If this coming from a man, the man is ill, isn’t he? Yes, he is. . . . If a man oppresses or discriminates against women, it is because he is ill, his own heart is not healthy. If you think about it, the majority of men in China are ill in this way. It’s not just men though. We are all ill. This is about all of us.²⁶⁷

Consequently, rather than the dichotomy between politically infused masculinity and femininity, mental illness became the touchstone for the Sixth Generation. Zhang Yuan argues, “In China, there’s no real difference between those that are said to be crazy and sane.”²⁶⁸ Despite the varied subject matter of each of their films—from rock and roll to alcoholism, performance art to love story—mental illness plays a key role in Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai’s films. The father in *Sons*²⁶⁹ is put into a mental hospital by his own wife, who refuses to release him. In *Frozen*,²⁷⁰ Long-Hair-Guy remarks that “Hygiene of the mind is more important than keeping the streets clean. But 99% of our country is mentally ill.” Wang Xiaoshuai insists that “100% of Chinese people are mentally ill. Now I don’t mean that they are running around

²⁶⁶ Lynne Layton, *Who’s that Girl? Who’s that Boy? : Clinical Practice Meets Postmodern Gender Theory* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), 130.

²⁶⁷ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview, 18 February 2000.

²⁶⁸ Zhang Yuan, interview by author, Cambridge, MA, 4 November 1999.

²⁶⁹ *Erxi* (Sons), dir. Zhang Yuan, Beijing Expression Culture Communication Center (1995).

²⁷⁰ *Jidu hanleng* (Frozen), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, An Another Film Co., Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop in association with the Hubert Bals Foundation (1994).

screaming, 'I'm crazy.' . . . What I'm talking about is an illness of the spirit and of the mind. It affects all of our lives, the way we think, the way we act."²⁷¹ By conceiving as a fluid spectrum what had been both constructed—and experienced—in dialectical opposition, the Sixth Generation symbolically disrupts the cycle of splitting and disavowal between the dichotomous categorizations of self/other that had dominated both national and personal identity formation since 1949.

The filmmakers of the Sixth Generation continued to defy traditional practice by not only making their films outside of State channels, but also by writing screenplays specifically for their own films. Through the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese film theory defined film simply as one of the various forms of drama—as *yingxi*, or shadow play. Film was conceived not as its own medium, but rather as another method for disseminating a piece of literature. Even when the Fifth Generation was experimenting with film technique, their film scripts were still adapted from novels, short stories, and epic poems. Consequently, use of original screenplays is a dramatic break from traditional film theory and practice. Moving even further from previous film form, Zhang Yuan relied extensively on improvisation during the production of *Beijing Bastards* and *Sons*. *Beijing Bastards* did not even have a formal screenplay. For *Sons*, Zhang worked with the real-life “sons” in this family drama to construct a rough story-line. That the actors, who were playing themselves, often became carried away during shooting and would interject their own lines rather than strictly follow the screenplay did not bother Zhang. He contends that “bringing out the self of the actors” is critical to “finding the truth” of the story.²⁷² By seeking to depict moments of every day life in all their dysfunctionality, Zhang and his compatriots directly flout the dictum that cinema is

²⁷¹ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview, 18 February 2000.

to follow Mao's socialist realist principles. Instead of showing the glory of the Party and the masses, the films of the Sixth Generation capture the lives of people driven to madness and masochism. Wang Xiaoshuai's *The Days* was also developed out of loose script and extensive improvisation, and based on two artists who play themselves in the film. Wang's *Frozen* was based on the performance art of a real-life Beijing artist who committed suicide on June 20, 1994. In his article on Zhang's *Sons*, China-based journalist Ian Johnson vocalizes the radical nature of the Sixth Generation's use of made-for-film screenplays based on fact: "In China, what could be stranger than telling a true story?"²⁷³ It is so strange, in fact, that the government would not allow Chinese to see *Beijing Bastards*, *Sons*, *The Days*, or *Frozen*. Except for underground distribution of sample tapes and smuggled Video Compact Discs (VCDs) from Hong Kong and Japan, these films remain unseen by the Chinese public.

Telling true stories in China was more than strange, however; it was dangerous. In April 1994, Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai were officially banned from making films in China. Five other directors were also singled out for punishment for working outside the studio system and exhibiting their films overseas without approval: Tian Zhuangzhuang, He Jianjun, Wu Wenguang, and Ning Dai.²⁷⁴ Other artists were directed not to work with them; companies were ordered not to rent them equipment. Despite threat of further punishment, the Sixth Generation continued to surmount government obstacles in order to make films.

In his first post-1994 film, Zhang Yuan not only flouted the ban against his work, but the taboo against homosexuality as well. When Zhang collaborated with

²⁷² Zhang Yuan, interview, 4 November 1999.

²⁷³ Ian Johnson, "True Gift: You Won't See China's Sixth Generation of Film Directors at Cannes," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 July 1996, 46.

²⁷⁴ Maria Barbieri, "Chinese Cinema Between Myth and Reality," *China Perspectives* no. 3

acclaimed novelist Wang Xiaobo to write the screenplay for *East Palace West Palace*;²⁷⁵ inspiration for the narrative did not come from fiction, but from the news. It was after reading an article in *Life News* about an AIDS research institute, which used police to force gay men to fill out surveys, that Zhang became interested in writing about homosexuality in China. After conducting many interviews, Zhang began to focus on the oppression and discrimination that gay men face:

When I first began the script, there were a lot of characters: policemen, sociologists, gay men. As I wrote I found the key to all this was power, and the connection between sex and power. Why did the police have the power to make these people talk about their lives? Why would these gay men reveal their private lives to the police?²⁷⁶

Zhang has also made it clear that while the film's surface reflects sexually charged interactions between a gay man and a police officer, the significations of the film go far deeper than that: "I love my country and I love the Party just as A Lan loves the policeman."²⁷⁷ Significantly, A Lan's love of the policeman, Shi Xiaohua, is repeatedly expressed through sado-masochistic fantasies in which A Lan is always the one being dominated. Zhang Yuan's statement parallels the dialectical phrasing of A Lan's own avowal of devotion to the policeman, Shi Xiaohua: "The convict loves the executioner. The thief loves the jailkeeper. We [homosexuals] love you [policeman]. There is no other choice." The mixing of compulsion and desire felt by A Lan—and Zhang Yuan—for the incarnation of the powers that label him as trash is representative of victims of long term psychological trauma. According to Judith Lewis Herman, systemic and repetitive methods of inflicting psychological trauma induce the victim to form a psychological bond with the perpetrator:

(January/February 1996): 57.

²⁷⁵ *Donggong xigong* (East Palace West Palace), dir. Zhang Yuan, Quelqu'un D'autre Productions (1996).

²⁷⁶ Zhang Yuan, interview, 3 November 1999.

These methods are designed to instill terror and helplessness, to destroy the victim's sense of self in relation to others, and to foster a pathologic attachment to the perpetrator . . . Fear is also increased by unpredictable outbursts of violence and by inconsistent enforcement of numerous trivial demands and petty rules.²⁷⁸

As he recalls his childhood to Shi Xiaohua, A Lan revels in the memory of being chastised by his mother: “When I was bad, she always used the same threat: ‘be good or the policeman will come get you.’ I loved that sentence. The policeman was coming to get me! I waited.” A Lan is disturbed not by the threat of punishment, but rather that the threat was never fulfilled. Just as A Lan is compelled to desire to seduce the policeman, Zhang Yuan is drawn toward the Party. Even though he has been previously “treated” for his homosexual “illness” through emetic therapy, A Lan continues to frequent the park, knowing that police will question and possibly arrest him. He even seeks out the attention of a specific Shi Xiaohua by sending him a book as token of his love. Rather than acting in ways to avoid both mental and physical punishment, A Lan seeks it out.

That Zhang's relationship with his country and Party is also one of dominance and submission is reflected in the dialectical dance of his own life. Soon after his first film, *Mama*, was released, the Film Distribution Company pulled all prints without explanation. After filming and then exhibiting abroad *Beijing Bastards*, Zhang was officially banned from feature film production in 1994. He continued to work outside the official State system, making a short, clandestine documentary on Tiananmen Square—*The Square*—and then *Sons*. Just a few days before the July 1, 1996 Ministry of Radio, Film and Television Regulations²⁷⁹ explicitly prohibiting film

²⁷⁷ Zhang Yuan, interview, 3 November 1999.

²⁷⁸ Herman, “Complex PTSD,” 88.

²⁷⁹ On July 1, 1996, the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, the regulatory agency that then oversaw the activities of the Film Bureau and the Film Distribution Corporation, issued a new 64-

production not in cooperation with the studio system came into effect, Zhang smuggled the negatives of *East Palace West Palace* to France for post-production. After becoming aware that Zhang had finished yet another illicit feature, and that *East Palace West Palace* was chosen for official entry in the *Un Certain Regard* division at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, the Chinese State confiscated Zhang's passport upon his return to China from Hong Kong on April 10, 1997.

The very title of *East Palace West Palace* marks the symbolic realm of the film as the discourse between the center and the margin, the official and the banned. As alluded to in the first scenes of the film, the title refers to the slang term used by Beijing gay men for the bathrooms on either side of the Forbidden Palace—the mythic seat of Chinese State power in the center of Beijing. The choice of this location flouts the CCP's taboo against homosexuality by placing the proscribed Other at the heart of the PRC's Self. According to Zhang, “After 1949 the Communist Party pretended that homosexuality did not exist in China. Even the word ‘homosexual’ disappeared from newspapers, books—even people’s vocabularies.”²⁸⁰ The *Beijing Evening News* corroborated Zhang, while revealing why the founding of New China was the date that homosexuality was repressed: “In our country, homosexuality has been swept away since liberation in 1949. Can we still sell this spiritual pollution . . . when we are trying to construct a socialist spiritual

article system of regulations. In order to explicitly prohibit work outside of the official studio system, the regulations enumerated that no film can be produced, distributed, exhibited (locally or abroad), or imported without prior approval of all censorship levels. While vague, the 1996 Regulations do outline seven content areas that will be forbidden: anything that endangers the Chinese State, discloses state secrets, libels or slanders others, or promotes pornography, feudal superstition or excessive violence. As if the vagueness of the first six prohibitions were not enough to give the censors free reign, the seventh taboo was listed simply as “other content forbidden by state regulations.”²⁷⁹ Punishment for those filmmakers who violate the Regulations include fines ranging between five to ten times any profits gained from illicit productions, and the possibility of criminal prosecution. Interestingly the punishment chosen for the first director to be remonstrated under the Regulations is not included therein: Zhang Yuan was officially banned for making feature films in China; others in the industry were warned that to work with him in future projects would also incur the State's wrath.

²⁸⁰ Zhang Yuan, interview, 4 November 1999.

civilization?”²⁸¹ The attempt totally to eradicate homosexuality after the rise of Mao was due to the CCP’s conflation of homosexuality with Western influence.²⁸² Mythologized by the Party as a mental illness spread by Western capitalist decadence, homosexuality was forbidden. When identified, homosexuals were treated with electric shock and emetic therapies in order to “cure” the illness. Even as late as 1990, Gao Caiqin, considered a pioneer in sex studies in China, maintains that homosexuality “is caused by an unhealthy mentality . . . it is abnormal and a mental disease, and it can be cured.”²⁸³ Consequently, *East Palace West Palace*’s treatment of the homosexual experience as one of inner torment marked by sado-masochistic relationships should not simply be read within homosexual discourse, but rather within the complicated and contradictory mythology of East and West, dominant and submissive.

The opening tracking shot of *East Palace West Palace* sets the somber tone that permeates the whole film. Winter-dead branches crackle against a grey background. The camera slowly pans up the brittle branches until the top of a grey outer wall is breached and an internal garden with a covered walkway revealed. In the second shot, the camera glides in a continuous movement, contrasting with the motionless scene. The garden is as lifeless as the concrete wall: grey, still. The concurrent soundtrack eerily evokes a horror film’s score in combination with traditional Chinese musical instruments. The shot then cuts to a faded red wall, and then, panning upward, reveals a faded red building. The character for “man” is painted on the wall. The scene then cuts to the interior of the men’s bathroom. Only the edge

²⁸¹ “China Lashes at Oscar-Nominated Film Involving Homosexuality,” *United Press International*, 11 February 1994.

²⁸² Contrary to official CCP history, male homosexuality had been long present in Chinese society. See Bret Hinsch, *Passion of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

²⁸³ Nicholas D. Kristof, “China Using Electrodes To ‘Cure’ Homosexuals,” *New York Times*, 29

of A Lan's back, in three-quarter profile, can be seen. He is urinating in a stall. He turns out of the stall to meet the gaze of an uniformed police officer. The camera's gaze holds the two in one frame as the officer questions the man as to his domicile, work and bicycle registrations. While the narrative purports to relate a confrontation, the film apparatus constructs a union. By showing two figures in the same frame, Andrew Sarris notes that the spatiality of the film creates a bond between those two figures.²⁸⁴ Upon handing his I.D. over to the officer, the camera cuts to capture the officer's face intensely staring directly at A Lan. A Lan is not entirely cut from the frame—the profile of his face remains in the shot. The officer does not blink or alter the directness of his stare, except for when he looks down at the I.D. The shot then turns to a close-up of A Lan's pale face, eyes looking-not-looking at the officer. Rather than maintaining the officer's view as A Lan leaves the bathroom, the next shot angles down in view from the ceiling. As an impossible objective view,²⁸⁵ this draws attention to the technical construction of the film, and dissociates the camera's gaze from the diegetic characters. Consequently, even though the shot reveals the officer's gaze continuing to follow A Lan even after he has left the frame, it also displaces phallic control from his perspective. From the opening sequence of *East Palace West Palace*, A Lan and the police, the marginal and the center of Chinese discourse are united even as the privileged position of the center is questioned.

Framing similar to the opening sequence is used when A Lan gives the policeman who will become his captor-prey an off-balance kiss. In the darkness of

January 1990.

²⁸⁴ Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 118.

²⁸⁵ A term coined by Francesco Casetti to describe a configuration of the camera that draws attention to the technical self-construction of the film by disallowing that any human character within the film could possess the perspective of the given shot. See Francesco Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film*

the garden-park, the shot holds A Lan as he turns to face the spot of the flashlight in Shi Xiaohua's hands. While the focus of the shot is on A Lan, the profile of Shi Xiaohua's face remains within view. A Lan's lips give a glimmer of a smile as Shi Xiaohua's arm reaches to his shoulder and A Lan is chastised for his homosexual pursuits. The perspective of the over-the-shoulder shot changes abruptly as Shi Xiaohua pushes A Lan out of the frame. The next cut interjects another officer chastising other gay men as "dregs of society." The scene then cuts to a silhouetted A Lan and Shi Xiaohua in profile stumbling along the covered walkway. As the tracking shot pulls back, A Lan and Shi Xiaohua turn toward the camera. Shi Xiaohua's arm holds A Lan gruffly about the shoulder. As A Lan jerkily turns into Shi Xiaohua's body and struggles to place a kiss upon his cheek, the shot collapses into a close-up of the two men's faces. The camera then cuts to Shi Xiaohua's shocked face. He is silent. Again, even as focus is turned to Shi Xiaohua and a confrontation is depicted in the narrative, A Lan remains in the frame. The shot continues as Shi Xiaohua walks forward, edging A Lan off-screen. The camera then jumps to a close-up of A Lan's face: his eyes are glistening as his mouth curves into a smile. As he backs away, he nibble-licks his finger. Now, as A Lan backs away, Shi Xiaohua is pulled back on-screen, his back to the camera. The camera cuts again to a close-up of Shi Xiaohua's face. Silent and still, eyes wide and glazed he looks to be in a trance.

Not only has the camera united the two men in film, but Shi Xiaohua's silence in the scene also reveals his own desire—and impotence. As the PRC's frontline force against homosexuality, Shi Xiaohua should have followed his duty as a police officer to immediately arrest A Lan. Not only was he a homosexual, but he

and its Spectator, trans. Nell Andrew (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1998).

was also predatory—worst of all, his prey was a representative of the CCP’s power. That Shi Xiaohua remains still and silent reveals a confused pleasure rather than the uncontrolled rage the film has constructed as what one would expect from someone in his position. Both the framing and sound of the scene corroborate Shi Xiaohua’s desire while also problematizing it. While the camera does at first create the classic subjective view of Shi Xiaohua gazing at A Lan after the kiss, the next cut takes a close-up of Shi Xiaohua’s face. The camera does not, however, complete the second subjective cycle; it does not return to the object—A Lan. Consequently, Shi Xiaohua’s ability to possess his desired object is undermined. Sound also highlights Shi Xiaohua’s conflict between desire and impotence. The score from the opening scene of the film returns during the post-kiss close-up on Shi Xiaohua. Stringed instruments plaintively, ominously seer in unison. The effect is to portend the conflict between Shi Xiaohua’s internal, repressed longing and the State’s taboo. Shi Xiaohua’s glaring silence also contributes to the feeling that his longing is existent but deeply restrained. During some of the most intense parts of A Lan’s story, Shi Xiaohua silently encircles the chamber into which he has brought A Lan. Fragmenting and eroticizing A Lan through holes in the lattice-work, Shi Xiaohua impotently circles the “diseased” A Lan. Even though A Lan is diegetically framed as the enunciator of the narrative due to extensive use of flashback, he is also depicted as impotent. In each of his flashbacks relating attempted sexual experiences, he is silent: he cannot speak to his only female crush in middle school; he does not respond to the factory worker who encourages the other workers to beat him after sex; he undresses silently and then lies quietly on his stomach awaiting his teacher. He is only playing a role in these flashbacks, however. They are all told in order to draw out the latent sadistic desire A Lan reads in Shi Xiaoshua’s eyes. In

contrast, A Lan cannot keep his mouth shut when talking with Shi Xiaohua. Despite his consistent and persistent passivity and submissiveness in both social and sexual roles, it is A Lan who instigates both social and physical contact with Shi Xiaohua.

Even then, however, there is an involuntary quality to A Lan's proclamation of love to Shi Xiaohua. It is as if A Lan has no choice but to love the policeman, as the female thief in his fantasy loves the executioner. After Shi Xiaohua tells him to go, A Lan leaves the police chamber. The camera cuts to a long shot of Shi Xiaohua leaning against his desk. Through the light of his bar-crossed window, A Lan appears, looking longingly in at Shi Xiaohua and the interior of the room. This framing reverses and realizes A Lan's fantasy: rather than being the self-reflexive subject of his fantasy—seeing (himself as) the thief in operatic costume—he is framed behind the bars of the police chamber's window. This *mise-en-abîme* construction highlights the nexus between A Lan's fantasy (and flashbacks) and the film's diegetic structure. In addition to calling attention to A Lan's multivalent identity positions and the possibility that his flashbacks—not just his dramatic fantasy—are expressions of desire for Shi Xiaohua, this tableau also positions Shi Xiaohua as a participant in the fantasy. For the first time in the film, the cinematic space mimics A Lan's dream of sado-masochistic seduction. Having visually included Shi Xiaohua in the fantasy world that had previously only been played out in A Lan's mind, this scene serves as a transition to allow Shi Xiaohua to actively play out his fantasy. In her analysis of fantasies and desire related to the film *She Must Be Seeing Things*, Teresa de Lauretis marks the difference between shared and single fantasies; a shared fantasy

presupposes at least two terms of the fantasy, two bodies . . . Here the specularization involves both the self and other, and both active and passive forms (seeing, being seen), producing the subject as both subject and object,

autoerotically doubled and yet split from itself and invested
in the fantasmatic pursuit of the other . . .²⁸⁶

However, discrepancies between the incarnations of Shi Xiaohua and A Lan's fantasies are evinced in the scene in which Shi Xiaohua berates A Lan into dressing as a woman. While each longs to play out his reverie, each has his own twist on its rendition. Although A Lan faces Shi Xiaohua in this frame, Shi Xiaohua barks that A Lan must "put on these clothes so that I can see your real face." Notably, A Lan's back is to the spectator. Even as self and other unite in subject-object desire, the nature of the desire is split off and repressed. Shi Xiaohua cannot see A Lan as a man. By forcibly demanding the pretense of sexual difference, Shi Xiaohua is refusing to see A Lan as a reflection of himself. To accept A Lan as a man while succumbing to his own desire would force Shi Xiaohua to admit that in a profound, primal sense he and A Lan are the same person. In de Lauretis' analysis, sharing an erotic fantasy with the same sex relies on "the other, reflexive or primordial form of the instinct (seeing oneself) . . . [and] would seem to imply a different kind of specularization in which the subject would see herself reflected not in the terms of the fantasy (active and/or passive, subject and/or object) but in the very representation of desire. . ."²⁸⁷ To see A Lan as a man is to be unable to hold on to a definitive delineation between oppressor and oppressed: seeing the Other as himself forces him to participate in both roles. On the contrary, A Lan's love is based on a reflexive seeing of himself in Shi Xiaohua. Creation of an implied sexual difference, by sublimating his desire through cross-dressing as a woman, disturbs A Lan. When Shi Xiaohua keeps clamoring at A Lan to put on the women's clothes, A Lan responds "This is not what I want."

²⁸⁶ Teresa de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994), 96.

Shi Xiaohua's inability to see A Lan as reflexive image of himself parallels the CCP's inability to recognize Zhang Yuan and the Sixth Generation as an integral part of the Chinese self. If the State were reflexively to share in Zhang Yuan's filmic fantasy by endorsing the vision in his films, the State would be unable to cling to its hegemonic position. Like A Lan, Zhang wants to be seen and accepted as himself. That hegemonic control is not static but dynamic—as Gramsci conceived—is manifested through the progression of Shi Xiaohua's seduction. Enraged that A Lan has not yet put on the transvestite's clothing, Shi Xiaohua rushes up behind A Lan and pushes him to the floor. From an impossible objective view from the ceiling, the camera angles down from behind Shi Xiaohua. He is seen crouching over A Lan. As he struggles to hold A Lan down, he forcibly pulls A Lan's jacket and shirt down to his waist, revealing his muscled, masculine back. The struggle abruptly stops. Shi Xiaohua pulls back in horror. He has seen the unseeable—his repressed erotic desire surfaced in reality. Repulsed, Shi Xiaohua pulls back. The camera then jumps to Shi Xiaohua bursting out the door of the police room, and marching out into the park. Just as fast as he marched away, however, he returns to A Lan. While A Lan is dressed as a woman upon Shi Xiaohua's return, during Shi Xiaohua's rough and violent attempt to sublimate his desire, the various trappings of A Lan's female attire fall away. Falling into the rhythm of A Lan's fantasy/flashback, their liaison takes on the same sado-masochistic forms as those played out in the convict-executioner dialectic of his imagination. At dawn, Shi Xiaohua leaves their dreamed-reality behind. While sexual union—and ejaculation—is alluded to by the water/waterhose during Shi Xiaohua's seduction, his collapse into A Lan's (and his

²⁸⁷ de Lauretis, 96.

own) fantasy is not complete. In the final scene of *East Palace West Palace* A Lan stands on the balcony looking at the retreating back of Shi Xiaohua.

While A Lan was not able to fulfill his erotic desire for Shi Xiaohua, he was able to lure Shi Xiaohua into admitting his own attraction to A Lan. This admission builds upon Shi Xiaohua's tacit acknowledgment of the validity of A Lan's sado-masochistic fantasy. After having been viciously beaten by his lover and the lover's coworkers, still in flashback A Lan muses: "Suddenly I was aware of how much I had suffered in my life. It would have been better if I had never been born." Then in a close-up of A Lan's face, he looks knowingly up at Shi Xiaohua and confides "But this kind of experience makes life worth living." A long shot then frames Shi Xiaohua turning to look over his shoulder at the seated A Lan. They are harmonized in the same frame. Silently he offers A Lan a drag on his cigarette. A Lan stands and walks into the foreground—but remains a noticeable step behind Shi Xiaohua. He delicately takes a drag off the cigarette, clearly savoring its taste. Shi Xiaohua's eyes never leave A Lan. As A Lan slowly pulls the cigarette back to his lips for a second drag, Shi Xiaohua rips it out of his fingers and with deliberate emphasis throws it to the floor. While acknowledging the truth of A Lan's admission, Shi Xiaohua cannot relinquish the role of the sadist.

While this acceptance of the sadistic role in A Lan's fantasy may not seem like a victory for A Lan, his successful entrapment of the policeman creates a new synthesis of the convict-executioner dialectic out of the symbolic of the film. While Shi Xiaohua's walking away does not allow for fulfillment of A Lan's desire, it does recognize the power of his existence. By walking away, Shi Xiaohua admits both his desire for A Lan and the futility of attempting to "cure" A Lan of his "homosexual illness." Moreover, Shi Xiaohua's sharing and participating in A Lan's fantasy not

only recognizes A Lan as a separate subjectivity, but also as one of strength. To deconstruct the film's meaning one level beneath the surface, as Shi Xiaohua's monopoly on power and agency is broken, the symbolic center held by the State is decentered. This is not to say that the marginalized—A Lan and Zhang Yuan alike—assume the center. They do not. However, they are no longer positioned on the periphery. By breaking the active/passive, dominant/submissive mold, they have fundamentally changed the power dynamic. To peel away yet another semiotic level, to where the “mentally ill” homosexual and Zhang as marginalized contemporary film director are revealed as signifiers of the repressed Western Other, the displacement of State power from the symbolic center also displaces China—along with all the mythology that the imperial Forbidden Palace carries—from the center. The hegemonic centrality of native, historical, imperial, mythological China as the center of the world in China's cultural identity has been questioned—the very *Zhong* in *Zhongguo* disputed.²⁸⁸

Wang Xiaoshuai's *The Days* captures the intricate balance the Sixth Generation has envisioned between East and West. *The Days* follows “the most ordinary couple” Xiaodong and Xiaochun in the last months of their tumultuous relationship. The grainy black and white celluloid reflects the bleakness of their lives. While economic or political pressure seem absent from their lives, Xiaodong's conversation with his unnamed friend locates *The Days* in the grey culture of post-Tiananmen. Careful pacing and a precipitation of details create a textured, yet seemingly hopeless view of contemporary life in China. The dominant thread of the film alternates between Xiaodong's securing an exhibition with a Hong Kong gallery and Xiaochun's emigration to New York. Wang Xiaoshuai describes Xiaodong and

²⁸⁸ *Zhong* means center, central; in Chinese, China is *Zhongguo*—the central country, the middle

Xiaochun as “constantly in search of something, a goal in life, the meaning of survival The young woman [Xiaochun] in the film even leaves for America for her search. But what is it that she’s looking for? The man [Xiaodong] remains trapped in his cell.”²⁸⁹ Wang Xiaoshuai’s choice of language reveals the symbolic import he imposes on his own work. What one critic has termed simply as “personal boredom,”²⁹⁰ Wang conceives as a need to survive. *The Days* captures the desperate need to reassess the direction both of their personal lives as well as of the nation that permeates the films of the Sixth Generation.

The controlling signifier in both Xiaodong and Xiaochun’s search for survival is the foreign—all that is *wai*. Throughout the film, emphasis is placed on all that comes from the outside, whether that is people, money, telephone calls, or letters. Xiaodong’s conversation with the local postal worker exemplifies this privileging of the foreign:

Xiaodong: Any letters for me?
Postal worker: You mean a letter from a foreign country?
Yes.
With foreign stamps?
Yes.
With foreign writing on beautiful envelopes?
Right, right. You have them?
No.
No?

While he does not have a foreign letter for Xiaodong, it is clear that the government postal worker has carefully catalogued the attributes of mail from foreign countries as opposed to mail from within China. As Xiaodong turns to leave, traditional Beijing opera music plays on the postal worker’s radio, and his (and the postal

kingdom.

²⁸⁹ Wang Xiaoshuai, “Director’s Statement,” in *The Days: a Film by Wang Xiaoshuai* (n.p, n.d., publicity brochure).

²⁹⁰ Caryn James, “Frustrations of Two Artists in China,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1994.

worker's) fetishization of the foreign is framed by an audible reminder of their locality.

Although all that is *wai* is privileged in Xiaochun and Xiaodong's imagination, this fascination with the foreign inhibits their daily lives even as it motivates them. Living in a small dormitory room without access to hot water or a kitchen, Xiaochun and Xiaodong both desire to move into a home of their own. Since their work-unit provides their salary in goods and services rather than currency, they cannot purchase their own home without making an income in the private market. Moreover, as the Chinese currency, Renminbi, is not convertible, its value is neither stable nor able to be taken out of the country. Consequently, opportunity for financial security as well as escape lies in USD. Xiaodong muses that with the then current exchange rate of 6.9 to 7RMB/USD "If I sell eight paintings we'll be rich. We could buy a house." "Stop dreaming," Xiaochun chastises him. Despite her own sarcastic quips, she constantly pushes Xiaodong to haggle harder with his agents. The narrator, who uses the third person to relate Xiaodong and Xiaochun's experiences, then interrupts the diegesis, implicating himself—and China—through his use of the first-person plural to confess "We dreamt of nothing but being rich so that we couldn't even paint."

An earlier scene in the film captures this sense of the interdependence and incompatibility between China and the West that permeates *The Days*. A close-up shows Xiaodong's hand placing a cassette into a portable radio/cassette player. Jimi Hendrix's *Purple Haze* blares into the scene. The camera then jumps to a medium shot, tilting down on Xiaodong as he looks out into the room and drags on a cigarette. Then the camera cuts to a full shot silhouetting Xiaochun at the washing machine, followed by a medium frontal close-shot of her calling to Xiaodong over

Hendrix's guitar, "Didn't you hear me?" The rock and roll music has blocked his attention to her voice. In contrast to the playing of *Purple Haze* in Xiaodong's studio, whenever the camera focuses on Xiaochun the China Central Evening Radio Broadcast is heard. Throughout this interchange, Xiaodong and Xiaochun are never seen in the same frame. Consequently, the heuristics of the shot isolate their locations and responses from each other.²⁹¹ The scene then returns to a medium shot of Xiaodong from behind, taking off his glasses and leaning back in his chair. The object of his earlier gaze is revealed as a canvas—a completely blank canvas. Rather than liquidating his "lack" through "an object of desire"²⁹²—the West—Xiaodong's lack glares back at him in the emptiness of his canvas. Hendrix continues to wail. Xiaochun's voice breaks into the room "Come here quick!" As the camera returns to a long shot of Xiaochun, the China Central Evening Radio Broadcast mixes with *Purple Haze*. The sounds of official government messaging and the churning chords of Western rock and roll garble into one, and both become unintelligible.

Through Xiaochun's departure to America at the end of the film, *The Days* reinforces its earlier articulations of a painful incongruity between China and the West. What Xiaodong could only take "as a joke, a fantasy of hers," comes true when Xiaochun leaves him for New York. After her departure, Xiaodong does not speak again during the film; his silence betrays his powerlessness. Xiaochun writes him letters frequently. The narrator confides that "they were full of thrill and excitement in the hope that he would share in it with her." Echoing the sentiment of Xiaodong's absent voice, the narrator remarks that in Xiaochun's letters it was "as if

²⁹¹ See William Paul, *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) and Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979) for further analysis of same-frame heuristic reading and its use to create distance between characters.

²⁹² Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: New Left Books, 1982), 31-

the past had suddenly evaporated. He wanted to write but did not know how.”

When director Wang Xiaoshuai discusses the profound disassociation that occurs between Xiaodong and Xiaochun due to her departure, he also reveals how his own experiences became reflected in *The Days*:

This is what I have realized: due to Xiaodong’s pride, neither his imagination nor his thought can help him connect with her. While I was in China and would talk to Chen Daming,²⁹³ he would say “Hello! Oh my agent, my Beverly Hills, my big car.” I have no response. I am not in that world. How am I supposed to talk to him about my bike, about riding the bus in Beijing? It’s too different a level. So when Xiaochun left Xiaodong and arrived in America, there was no longer any kindred emotion between them. When they were in China together, they could share noodles; they could be bored together. Now Xiaodong doesn’t know how to act, what to say.²⁹⁴

The fragmentation that Xiaochun’s departure to the West causes Xiaodong is further expressed in the final scene of the film. Looking into the camera as if it were a mirror, Xiaodong adjusts the coat he has just put on and scrutinizes his face. As he gazes into his reflection, the narrator discloses that after breaking all the glasses in the school “we sent him to the hospital . . . the doctor told me it [Xiaodong’s behavior/illness] is due to the patient’s own personality. Five out of ten are like this.” The construction of the camera’s gaze brings Xiaodong into confrontation with his own mirror-stage: a “fragmented body” suffering from “organic insufficiency in his natural reality.”²⁹⁵ Xiaochun’s departure has forced him to confront that while East and West are intricately related, like the seasons encapsulated in each of their names—*dong* means winter while *chun* means spring—

32.

²⁹³ A classmate of Wang Xiaoshuai’s at the Beijing Film Academy. Chen Daming was in the acting department, class of 1989. He emigrated to the US in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident in 1990.

²⁹⁴ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview, 18 February 2000.

²⁹⁵ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton,

they are not compatible. By merging the mirror into which Xiaodong looks with the gaze of the camera, the spectator is positioned as the reflection into which Xiaodong gazes. Through this hall of mirrors, Wang Xiaoshuai uses cinematic space to trap the spectator within the film, and reveal his own lack of totality. Xiaodong's defiant, steely stare into the camera/spectator's gaze encodes this realization of his own simultaneous dependency on and irreconcilability with the Other not as defeat, but coup. Critical to the symbolic of *The Days* is this realization that both the West and China take on different meanings given the location from which each is viewed and experienced.

From their own position on the periphery as the State's marginalized Other, the filmmakers of the Sixth Generation have disrupted the mapping of power that had previously dominated China's national discourse. Moving beyond the binary divisions which have confounded and conflated China's relationship with the West and with its own internal *differend*, the Sixth Generation has articulated a radical deprivileging and indeterminacy of self/other and East/West, giving life to what Homi Bhabha has conceived as an agency of counterhegemonic resistance.²⁹⁶ Such a "newly emergent cultural space," argues Xie Shaobo, "proves subversive to both the Western and the indigenous, allowing neither of them cultural and discursive continuity."²⁹⁷ Rather than continuing within the discourse mandated by the CCP, the Sixth Generation has moved into a liminal area that betrays the dominance of any one enunciator—be it A Lan or Shi Xiaohua, Xiaodong or Xiaochun, Beijing Bastards or Mao Zedong. By moving beyond the rhetoric of East/West, and center/periphery, in the words of Homi Bhabha, China's Sixth Generation is "part

1977), 4.

²⁹⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

²⁹⁷ Xie Shaobo, "Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism," *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 17.

of a revisionary time, a return to the present to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Bhabha, 7.

Conclusion

By looking out his window, he is also looking in at himself.
—Lou Ye²⁹⁹

A year after being named amongst the seven directors blacklisted in 1994, Tian Zhaungzhuang was hired by the Beijing Film Studio to recruit the independent Sixth Generation filmmakers back into the studio system. Tian explained his decision to return to the State controlled film system in terms of market demand: “They knew they couldn’t turn out the same drivel they’d been making for the past 40 years.”³⁰⁰ Tian’s return to the State controlled studio system was also influenced by the frustration of being denied the audience that he most wanted to see his films, and for whom his films were made: Chinese spectators. The deep sense of frustration and futility felt by those directors whose films have been banned from distribution in China is expressed by Sixth Generation filmmaker Lou Ye: “There’s no point in working hard on a project only to have it collecting dust in the bottom of someone’s desk drawer.”³⁰¹ This fear that their labor has been in vain has driven many of the Sixth Generation back into partnership with China’s official studio system.

Despite already having delayed production of his latest film—tentatively titled *The Taste of Spring*—since October 1999, Wang Xiaoshuai patiently awaits the Film Bureau’s approval of his screenplay. He has been told that approval will likely

²⁹⁹ Lou Ye, interview by Norman Brock and Placidus Schelbert, Berlin, Germany, January 2000.

³⁰⁰ David Ansen, “Raising a Red Flag: China Bans a Star Director from the New York Film Festival,” *Newsweek*, 9 October 1995, 24.

come in late March 2000, but even then it is only approval of the script. *The Taste of Spring* will still have to submit first its negatives and then its final cuts to the Film Bureau before being awarded an elusive license from the Film Distribution Corporation. Wang Xiaoshuai knows that this can be a long process. After independent production of *The Days* and *Frozen*—and only being able to exhibit his work at international film festivals rather than in China—Wang was eager to work with Tian Zhuangzhuang at the Beijing Film Studio, and received initial financing and censorial approval for *So Close to Paradise*.³⁰² While Wang completed post-production in 1995, the Film Bureau did not give Wang final approval to show the film until spring 1999. Even then, it required Wang to change the temporal setting of his portrait of the seedy, illegal operations of underworld mafiosi in Wuhan. So as not directly to contradict the CCP's claim that quality of life in China's cities was approaching Western standards without "Western" ills like prostitution, gangs, and crime, the Film Bureau compelled Wang to locate *So Close to Paradise* in "the late 1980s." After making this change, China allowed *So Close to Paradise* to screen in *Uncertain Regard* at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival. While the Film Distribution Corporation has officially licensed the film, it has effectively prevented its distribution by not ordering any prints. Some critics of Chinese cinema maintain artists' self-censorship serves only to perpetuate and legitimize the State's control of society.³⁰³ According to this logic, Wang Xiaoshuai's decision to return to work within the studio system and his choice to placate the censors by altering the

³⁰¹ Lou Ye, interview.

³⁰² *Biandan guniang* (So Close to Paradise), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, Beijing Film Studio (1999).

³⁰³ See Paul G. Picowicz, "Velvet prisons and the political economy of Chinese filmmaking," in *Urban spaces in contemporary China: The potential for autonomy and community in post-Mao China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); Geremie Barmé, "The Chinese Velvet Prison: Culture in the 'New Age': 1984-1989," *Issues and Studies* 25, no. 8 (August 1989): 54-79.

narrative frame of *So Close to Paradise* creates the false sense that China's totalitarian regime is being liberalized. To some extent, however, this sense is not false.

While the CCP remains in power, the artists that worked within the system in the 1980s have loosened its iron grip over Chinese society. While the directors of the Fifth Generation lacked the vision to see the possibility of—or need for—an independent cinema when they began their careers,³⁰⁴ they did envision a symbolic space that confronted and contended with State controlled ideology. Given the economic situation of the early 1980s, working outside of the official *danwei* system was a physical impossibility. The Fifth Generation's ideological identification with China's mythic past—a symbolic space free from the touch of both communism and the West—also inhibited Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige's conception of what was possible. Framed by their own traumatic experiences in the Cultural Revolution and their memory of the earlier purges against those who openly criticized Mao's vision of China, the Fifth Generation's view of China's national and spiritual identity was framed by the very structures they sought to vitiate. Although they experimented with mise-en-scène and creation of the symbolic through filmic form, they were unable to see beyond the discourse in which they were written. To Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, film was still a tool of the State, and China's road to modernization and national strength would be found in the roots of its native past.

Despite their inability to move beyond the ideology that structured their own experience, the Fifth Generation was able to reconfigure the instruments of Mao's revolution for their own insurgent message. While they continued to envision art as a political tool, they appropriated it for their own message. The semiotics of gender

³⁰⁴ Chen Kaige's 1985 statement to George Semsel crystallizes the Fifth Generation's view of their relationship with the State: "There will never be a fully independent system like the one in the U.S. because there's no reason for it. The way I'm working now is China's solution for the film artist, I think it works." In *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic*, ed. George Semsel (Westport,

continued to dominate their discourse, but they reconfigured the dialectic championed by Mao in order to impinge both the means and end of the Chinese communist revolution. Their focus on the masculine, the physical, and the sexual reacts against the CCP's emasculation of men in favor of the ideological prominence given to women and official State repression of erotic desire. The sado-masochistic treatment of women functions on two symbolic levels: first, to reinforce the male filmmakers' anger at being symbolically castrated by the party, and second, to deny the liberation of women from men, and thereby deny that Mao's revolution ever succeeded. Despite being on the State payroll, by reconfiguring the meanings of the CCP's own symbols, the Fifth Generation opened up a space in which to contest the State's monopolization of China's symbolic identity.

Out of this space, and set against different economic and historical circumstances, the Sixth Generation not only critically altered the relationship between the artist and the State in the PRC, but also fundamentally reconstituted the terms of China's identity. By producing their films outside of the State system—*itself a taboo*—the Sixth Generation was able to reveal what the CCP had repressed: that what it had encoded as the Western Other were actually integral parts of the Chinese self. Despite repeated political purges and mass campaigns—*self-mutilations* played out on a societal scale—the CCP was not able to erase the presence of its Other despite its repeated attempts to extirpate those Chinese that no longer fit with the CCP's desired identity traits. In his work on the development of male identity, psychologist David Lisak illustrates through case examples how self-mutilation often arises from the need to eradicate from the self attributes that are at once felt to be integral to the self, yet which the society codifies as characteristics

CT: Praeger, 1987), 133.

which should solely belong to the other gender.³⁰⁵ Reading Lisak's work in terms of nationality illuminates the hegemonic power that the conflict between what is coded as self and other, native and foreign, East and West plays in the Chinese social—and individual—psyche. Inserting nationality for gender in the following analysis of sexual abuse by Lynne Layton further elucidates the highly charged dialectic between East and West that informs China's search for a modern identity: "each identity is split between highly negative and highly positive traits; identifying with either is fraught with anxiety and pain because each has complex associations to the abuse and the gender of the abuser."³⁰⁶ The films of the Sixth Generation reveal both symbolically and practically that despite the PRC's attempt to extirpate characteristics that are coded in opposition to what is socially acceptable, it is impossible wholly to excise a part of the self.

The Sixth Generation's ability to make films that reveal the taboo margins of Chinese society is only made possible by financing and support from the West. Without the money of MTV, Benetton, the Hubert Bals Foundation, as well as other Western cultural institutions, neither *Beijing Bastard's* Cui Jian nor *East Palace West Palace's* A Lan could have been given voice. However, this dependence upon the West to enable their independence from State control ensured that the PRC would marginalize them in the same way that the State had pushed other characteristics coded as Western to the periphery. By the very process of operating outside of the State controlled film industry, the Sixth Generation ensured that their films only could be seen in the West. Despite the filmmakers' symbolic creation of a liminal

³⁰⁵ Lynne Layton, *Who's that Girl? Who's that Boy? : Clinical Practice Meets Postmodern Gender Theory* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), 128-129.

³⁰⁶ Layton, 129.

space that transverses static boundaries between China's encoded self and other, to do so only for the benefit of a Western viewer defeats the Sixth Generation's project.

Given the extent to which censorship and its concomitant punishments have inhibited the work of the Sixth Generation, it is striking how loath these filmmakers are to talk about it—and how it is universally couched as a concern of the West. During a public question-and-answer session following the US premiere of *Seventeen Years*,³⁰⁷ his first work to be approved by China's Film Bureau since *Mama* was pulled from distribution in 1990, Zhang Yuan laughed "So the third question is about censorship. Usually that is the first question Westerners ask."³⁰⁸ Lou Ye's condescension is less oblique, and reveals more: "I'm sick of talking about censorship . . . I think censorship is exhausting for both sides, the censor as much as the censored."³⁰⁹ While to some extent both directors are playing into the role of the victim who denies the extent of abuse to protect the abuser, the very existence of their films, which directly address and counteract the trauma inflicted by the State, prevents easy categorization of the Sixth Generation. Replacing references to censorship with references to production reveals an inherent bias in the West's viewing of Chinese cinema. While limits of budget and box office viability are the rules in production of film in the West, such concerns are not allowed for the *West's* Other. True to Orientalist form, by viewing Chinese cinema through the Western lens of censorship, the West frames Chinese film in terms of independence, freedom, and artistic control without ever asking the Chinese how they view their own filmic project. By not engaging China on its own terms, many film critics and sinologists

³⁰⁷ *Guonian huilai* (Seventeen Years), dir. Zhang Yuan, Keetman Limited, Xian Film Studio, Fabrica (1999).

³⁰⁸ Zhang Yuan, public discussion, Harvard Film Archives, Cambridge, MA, 5 November 1999.

³⁰⁹ Lou Ye, interview.

miss the intricate relationship that ties the filmmaker to the State, the complexity of censorship, and the ways in which the director can work within the system to alter it.

At the end of a two-hour interview, Wang Xiaoshuai began to divulge the careful positioning of the censored in relation to the censor, and their simultaneous awareness of the other:

They're stupid—too stupid. No. They're too clever. They look at the script to see what *they* want, and to figure out what *you* want. Once they figure out what you are trying for, they see if there is enough of what they want—if they can control you or get you to change. If there's more of what they want, they'll let you do it. . . . They're so clever.³¹⁰

While Wang emphasizes the Film Bureau's cleverness, it is in his first breath that he betrays the hidden power of his return to working within the State studio system. "They're stupid—too stupid." While the censor tries to figure out the subversive intentions of the director, and then counterbalance them with "approved" messaging, the intention of the director, while potentially mitigated, will permeate the film. Once the Bureau has given its official stamp to the film and it is played across the country, due to its very nature as "electric shadow,"³¹¹ film not only captures what is actively constructed, but also what is passively reflected. Moreover, it turns the passive image—the shadow—into a critical part of the film's semiotic structure. Consequently, the Sixth Generation's re-engagement with the China's state-run film industry is more likely to indict rather than legitimize the State's totalitarian power.

³¹⁰ Wang Xiaoshuai, interview by author, New York, NY, 18 February 2000.

³¹¹ The literal translation and original meaning of the Chinese word for film, *dianying*, is electric shadow.

Bibliography

Film and Music

- Beijing zaxiong* (Beijing Bastards). Dir. Zhang Yuan. Beijing Bastards Raw Shot Production Group, 1992.
- Biandan guniang* (So Close to Paradise). Dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, Beijing Film Studio, 1999.
- Cui Jian. “Yi wu sou you” (Nothing to My Name). *Xin changzhenglushang de yaogun* (Rock and Roll for the New Long March), re-release. Beijing: Beijing East West Music and Art Production Limited, 1999.
- Dongchun de rizi* (The Days). Dir. Wang Xiaoshuai. Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop Ltd., 1993.
- Donggong xigong* (East Palace West Palace). Dir. Zhang Yuan. Quelqu’un D’autre Productions, 1996.
- Erzi* (Sons). Dir. Zhang Yuan. Beijing Expression Culture Communication Center, 1995.
- Guonian huilai* (Seventeen Years). Dir. Zhang Yuan, Keetman Limited, Xian Film Studio, Fabrica, 1999.
- Huang tudi* (Yellow Earth). Dir. Chen Kaige. Guangxi Studio, 1984.
- Huozhe* (To Live), Dir. Zhang Yimou. ERA International, Shanghai Film Studio (1994).
- Jidu hanleng* (Frozen). Dir. Wang Xiaoshuai. An Another Film Co., Shu Kei’s Creative Workshop in association with the Hubert Bals Foundation, 1994.
- Qiuju da guansi* (The Story of Qiuju). Dir. Zhang Yimou. Sil-Metropole Organization, Youth Film Studio of Beijing Film Academy, 1992.
- Suzhou hejiang* (Suzhou River). Dir. Lou Ye. Dream Factory and The Coproduction Office, 2000.
- Wu xun zhuan* (The Life of Wu Xun). Dir. Sun Yu. Kunlun Film Company, 1950.
- Xin juzhang daolai de ren* (Before the New Director Arrives). Dir. Lü Ban. Changchun Film Studio, 1956.
- Yige he bage* (One and Eight). Dir. Zhang Junzhao. Guangxi Studio, 1984.

Interviews

- Chen Daming. Interview by author. Beijing, China, 20 November 1998.
- Jia Zhangke. Interview by Chris Barden. Beijing, 15 August 1999.
- Lou Ye. Interview by Norman Brock and Placidus Schelbert. Berlin, Germany, January 2000.
- Wang Xiaoshuai. Interview by author. New York, NY, 18 February 2000.
- . Interview by author. Beijing, China, 15 November 1998.
- . Interview by author. Beijing, China, 21 March 1999.
- Zhang Yuan. Interview by author. Cambridge, MA, 3 November 1999.
- . Interview by author. Cambridge, MA, 4 November 1999.
- . Public discussion, Harvard Film Archives. Cambridge, MA, 5 November 1999.

Books and Articles

- Agger, Inger and Søren Buus Jensen. *Trauma and Healing Under State Terrorism*. Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1996.
- Ahn, Byung-joon. "The Politics of Peking Opera, 1962-1965." *Asian Survey* 12, no. 12 (December 1972): 1066-1081.
- Andors, Phyllis. "Politics of Chinese Development: The Case of Chinese Women, 1960-1966." *Signs* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 89-119.
- Ansen, David. "Raising a Red Flag: China Bans a Star Director from the New York Film Festival." *Newsweek*, 9 October 1995, 24.
- Arac, Jonathan. "Postmodernism and Postmodernity in China: An Agenda for Inquiry." *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 135-145.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).
- Barbieri, Maria. "Chinese Cinema Between Myth and Reality." *China Perspectives* no. 3 (January/February 1996).
- Barmé, Geremie. "The Chinese Velvet Prison: Culture in the 'New Age': 1984-1989." *Issues and Studies* 25, no. 8 (August 1989): 54-79.

- . “The Greying of Chinese Culture.” *China Review* (1992).
- Barthes, Roland. “Myth Today.” In *Mythologies*. Trans. A. Lavers. New York: Hill & Wang, 1972.
- . “Ravissement/ravishment.” In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill & Wang, 1978.
- Belden, Jack. *China Shakes the World*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.
- Bellour, Raymond. “Hitchcock, The Enunciator,” *Camera Obscura*, no. 2 (1977).
- . “To Segment, To Analyse.” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 3 (1976).
- Berry, Chris, ed. *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1991.
- Berry, Chris. “Hu, Where and When: Locating ‘Contemporary Film Theory in China.’” www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/reruns/hkrrintro.html. 25 March 1998.
- . “Sexual Difference and the Viewing Subject in *Li Shuangshuang* and *The In-Laws*.” In *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*. Ed. Chris Berry. London: British Film Institute, 1991.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bordwell, David. *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Canby, Vincent. “Film View: Why Some Movies Don’t Travel Well.” *The New York Times*, 23 October 1988.
- Casetti, Francesco. *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and its Spectator*. Trans. Nell Andrew. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1998.
- Chan, Elaine. “Structural and Symbolic Centers: Center Displacement in the 1989 Chinese Student Movement.” *International Sociology* 14, no. 3 (September 1999): 337-354.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Chen Tuxiu. “Shegao.” *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), 15 September 1915. In Lin Yusheng. *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979.
- “China Lashes at Oscar-Nominated Film Involving Homosexuality.” *United Press International*, 11 February 1994.

- China News Analysis* 878, 21 April 1972.
- “Chinese Province Ends Film Distribution Monopoly.” *Agence France-Presse*, 26 September 1998.
- Chiu, Fred Y. L. “The Specificity of the Political on Tiananmen Square, or a Poetics of the Popular Resistance in Beijing.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 16, no. 3/4 (1991): 333-347.
- Chow Tse-tung. *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960.
- Chow, Rey. “Pedagogy, Trust, Chinese Intellectuals in the 1990s—Fragments of a Post-Catastrophic Discourse.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 16, no. 3/4 (1991): 191-207.
- . *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
- . *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Clark, Paul. “Reinventing China: The Fifth Generation of Filmmakers.” *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 121-136.
- Croll, Elisabeth. “A Recent Movement to Redefine the Role and Status of Women.” *China Quarterly*, no. 71 (September 1977): 591-597.
- Dangdai Dianying* (Contemporary Cinema). no. 6 (1989).
- de Lauretis, Teresa. *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994.
- Deng Xiaoping. *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (1975-1982). Trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin Under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984.
- Deng Yingzhao. “On the Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China.” In *The Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1950.
- Ding Ersu. “Philosophical Discourse of Postmodernity in the Chinese Context.” *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 21-29.
- Dirlik, Arif. “Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism.” *History & Theory* 35, no. 4 (December 1996): 96-118.

- Eagleton, Terry. "The Contradictions of Postmodernism." *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 1-6.
- Ellis, John. *Visible Fictions*. London: Routledge, 1982.
- Farquhar, Mary Ann. "Oedipality in Red *Sorghum* and *Judou*." *Cinemas* 3, nos. 2-3 (Spring 1993): 60-86.
- Flieger, Jerry Aline. "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye." *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 87-109.
- Fokkema, D. W. "Maoist Ideology and Its Exemplification in the New Peking Opera." *Current Scene* 10, no. 8 (August 1972): 13-20.
- Goldman, Merle. *Literary Dissent in Communist China*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from Cultural Writings*. Eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. Trans. William Boelhower. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Guangming*, 4 June 1972.
- Hajari, Nisid. "Socialism, Take Two," *Time* 12 May 1997.
- Harasti, Miklós. *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism*. Trans. Katalin and Stephen Landesman. New York: Basic Books, 1987.
- Hartford, Kathleen. "Summer 1988-Spring 1989: The Ferment Before the 'Turmoil'." In *China's Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989*. Ed. Suzanne Ogden et al. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992.
- Havis, Richard James. "China's Home Truths: Astute Filmmakers Have Found a Way to Live with the Censors." *Asiaweek*, 11 June 1999.
- Hearst, Patricia and Alvin Moscow. *Every Secret Thing*. New York: Doubleday, 1982.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. "Complex PTSD: A Syndrome of Survivors in Prolonged and Repeated Trauma." In *Essential Papers on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Ed. Mardi J. Horowitz, M.D. New York: New York UP, 1999.
- . *Trauma and Recovery*. [New York]: Basic Books, 1992.
- Hirsch, Bret. *Passion of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
- Hitchcock, Peter. "The Aesthetics of Alienation, of China's 'Fifth Generation.'" *Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1992): 116-141
- Hong gaoliang, wanquan taiben* (Red Sorghum Complete Script). Trans. Mary Ann Farquhar. n.p., n.d. In Mary Ann Farquhar. "Oedipality in Red *Sorghum* and *Judou*." *Cinemas* 3, nos. 2-3 (Spring 1993): 60-86.

- Hong, Lawrence K. "The Role of Women in the People's Republic of China: Legacy and Change." *Social Problems* 23, no. 5 (June 1976): 545-557.
- Hsia, T. A. *Twenty Years After the Yen'an Forum*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1963.
- Hu Chi-hsi . "The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet." *China Quarterly*, no. 59 (July/September 1974): 477-490.
- Hu Ke. "Contemporary Film Theory in China."
www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/reruns/hkrr2b.html. 25 March 1998.
- Hua Guofeng. "Political Report to the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of China." *Peking Review*, 26 August 1977.
- Irigaray, Luce. *The Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- James, Caryn. "Frustrations of Two Artists in China." *New York Times*, 29 March 1994.
- Johnson, Ian. "True Gift: You Won't See China's Sixth Generation of Film Directors at Cannes." *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 July 1996, 46-47.
- Johnson, Sheila. "Film: The China Syndrome." *The Independent* (London), 31 January 1992.
- Kang Liu. "Hegemony and Cultural Revolution." *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 69-86.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. "Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Case of Women in the Recent Chinese Cinema." *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 40-50.
- Kristeva, Julia. "On the Women of China." Trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy. *Signs* 1, no.1 (Autumn 1975): 57-81.
- Kristof, Nicholas D. "China Using Electrodes To 'Cure' Homosexuals." *New York Times*, 29 January 1990.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." In *Écrits: a Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton, 1977.
- Layton, Lynne. *Who's that Girl? Who's that Boy? : Clinical Practice Meets Postmodern Gender Theory*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998.
- Lee Hong-yung. *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

- Lee, Leo Ou-Fan. Introduction to *Spring Bamboo: A Collection of Contemporary Chinese Short Stories*. Ed., trans. Jeanne Tai. New York: Random House, 1989.
- Leyda, Jay. *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972.
- Li Tuo, Zhong Dafeng, and Hao Dazheng. "What Is Film? A New Look at the Question." In *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Eds. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Li, H. C. "Color, Character and Culture: On *Yellow Earth*, *Black Cannon Incident*, and *Red Sorghum*." *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 91-119.
- Lin Yü-sheng. *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979.
- Liu Shaoqi. *Gongchangdang yuan de xiuyang* (The Self-Cultivation of the Members of the Communist Party). In Tonglin Lu. Introduction to *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society*. Ed. Tonglin Lu. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Luo Yijun. Foreword to *Chinese Film Theory: A Guide to the New Era*, edited by George S. Semsel, Xia Hong, and Hou Ranping. New York: Praeger, 1990.
- Ma Ning, "New Chinese Cinema: A Critical Account of the Fifth Generation." *Cineaste* 17, no. 3 (1990): 32-35.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick, ed. *The Hundred Flowers*. London: Stevens, 1960.
- Maloney, Joan M. "Chinese Women and Party Leadership: Impact of the Cultural Revolution." *Current Scene* 10, no.4 (1972): 10-15.
- Malraux, André. *Anti-Memoirs*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.
- Mao Zedong. "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art." In *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Trans. Bonnie McDougall. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1980.
- . "On Literature and Art." Yan'an Forum, May 1942. In *Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism*. Eds. Berel Lang and Forrest Williams. New York: David McKay Co., 1972.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*, vol. 1. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton, 1978.
- Mathews, Linda. "The Gang of One Who Altered China's Film Image." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1988.

- McDougall, Bonnie. Introduction to *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Trans. Bonnie McDougall. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1980.
- McGough, James. *Fei Hsiao-t'ung: The Dilemma of a Chinese Intellectual*. White Plains, NY, 1979.
- Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua. *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Emerging from the Surface). Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1989.
- Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Trans. Celia Britton et al. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982.
- Mo Qi. "Leadership, Management, Service—An Introduction to the Film Bureau." *China Screen* no. 4 (1991): 10-11.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Mulvey on *Duel in the Sun*." *Framework* 6 (Summer 1981).
- . "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.
- Neale, Steve. "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema." *Screen* 24, no. 6 (November-December 1983): 2-16.
- "New Chinese Film is Rarity that Defines Soul of Nation." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 January 1989.
- "New Ground Rules for Peking Opera?" *Current Scene* 10, no. 3 (1972): 14-17.
- Ni Zhen. "After *Yellow Earth*." In *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*, edited by George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Ning Wang. "Orientalism versus Occidentalism?" *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 57-67.
- Ogden, Suzanne, Kathleen Hartford, Lawrence Sullivan and David Zweig, eds. *China's Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992.
- Oksenberg, Michel, Lawrence R. Sullivan, and Marc Lambert, eds. *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict: The Basic Documents*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990.
- Pan, Lynn. "Zhang Yimou: A Chinese Master." *New York Times*, 1 March 1992.
- Paul, William. *Ernst Lubitsch's American Comedy*. New York: Columbia UP, 1983.
- Picowicz, Paul G. "Velvet Prisons and the Political Economy of Chinese Filmmaking." In *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy*

- and Community in Post-Mao China*. Eds. Deborah S. Davis et al. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Pye, Lucian W. *The Authority Crisis in Chinese Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Center for Policy Study, 1967.
- Rayns, Tony. "The New Chinese Cinema." In Tony Rayns, Chen Kaige, and Wan Zhi. *King of the Children and The New Chinese Cinema*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1989.
- Red Detachment of Women*. China Ballet Troupe. May 1970. In Lois Wheeler Snow. *China on Stage*. New York: Random House, 1972.
- Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 25 August 1966; 29 May 1970; 26 April 1989.
- Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 27 December 1951. In M. J. Meijer. *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1971.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Shame*. New York: Knopf, 1983.
- Said, Edward W. "Orientalism Reconsidered." In *Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-84*, Eds. Francis Barker et al. London: Methuen, 1986.
- . *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1979.
- Sarris, Andrew. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*. New York: Dutton, 1968.
- Schell, Orville. "China's Rock and Roll Underground." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 November 1992.
- Semsel, George S. "China." In *The Asian Film Industry*, by John A. Lent. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.
- Semsel, George, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong, eds. *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Semsel, George S., ed. *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1987.
- Shapiro, Judith and Liang Heng. *Cold Winds, Warm Winds: Intellectual Life in China Today*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1986.
- Short, Philip. *Mao: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1999.
- Shu Fenzhu. *Huozhe he si zhudi renmen* (To Live). ,1985.
- Silverman, Kaja. "Masochism and Subjectivity." *Framework* 12 (1980): 2-9.

- Siu, Helen F. "Social Responsibility and Self-Expression: Chinese Literature in the 1980s." *Modern Chinese Literature* 5, no.1 (Spring 1989).
- Snow, Lois Wheeler. *China on Stage*. New York: Random House, 1972.
- Solomon, Richard H. *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971.
- Spence, Jonathan. *The Search for Modern China*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.
- Spielberg, Steven, and Kathleen Kennedy. "China and the Oscars." *The New York Times*, 25 March 1991.
- Spoto, Donald. *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979.
- Steiner, George. *After Babel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.
- Summary of World Broadcasts*, 10 September 1970, FE 3478.
- Teng Jinxian. "Teng Jinxian Expounds China's Film Policy." *China Screen* no. 3 (1989): 10.
- . "Teng Jinxian Interviewed." *China Screen*, no. 1 (1991): 2.
- The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1950.
- The Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1982.
- Timmerman, Jacobo. *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Name*. Trans. Toby Talbot. New York: Vintage, 1981.
- Wang Shiwei. "Politicians and Artists." In *Wild Lily, Prairie Fire*. Eds. George Benton and Alan Hunter. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- Wang Xiaoshuai. "Director's Statement." In *The Days: a Film by Wang Xiaoshuai*. n.p., n.d., publicity brochure.
- Wang Yuejin. "Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and Desire." In *Perspective on Chinese Cinema*. Ed. by Chris Berry. London: British Film Institute, 1991.
- "The Cinematic Other and the Cultural Self? : Decentering the Cultural Identity in Cinema." *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 32-39.
- Widmer, Ellen and David Der-wei Wang, eds. *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marx and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.

- Wollen, Peter. *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*. London: New Left Books, 1982.
- Xia Hong. "The Debate Over Horse Thief." In *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Eds. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Xie Shaobo . "Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism." *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 7-19.
- Yahuda, Michael. "China's Foreign Relations: The Long March, Future Uncertain." *China Quarterly* no. 159 (September 1999): 653.
- Yang Bolan and Chan Beizhen. "Smash the Mental Shackles that Bind and Enslave Women." *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), 2 February 1974.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. "Of Gender, State Censorship, and Overseas Capital: An Interview with Chinese Director Zhang Yimou." *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 297-313.
- Yao Xiaomong and Hu Ke. "Film: A Myth with Hidden Ideologies." In *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Eds. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Yau, Esther C. M. "Cultural and Economic Dislocations: Filmic Phantasies of Chinese Women in the 1980s." *Wide Angle* 11, no. 2 (1989): 6-21.
- "Yingshi zuopin: xinsong yougan hao dudian" (Film and Television News: Light and Funny is Most Popular). *Horizon: Diyishou* (First Hand) 36, no. 330, 1 September 1998.
- "Youth to the Countryside—And Back Again." *Current Scene* 5, no. 16 (1967): 1-8.
- Zha, Jane Ying. "Excerpts from 'Lore Segal, Red Lantern, and Exoticism.'" *Public Culture* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 329-332.
- Zhang Guoqiang and Sidney Kraus. "Constructing Public Opinion and Manipulating Symbols: China's Press Coverage of the Student Movement in 1989." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 412-425.
- Zhang Yimou. "An Interview with Zhang Yimou." In *Raise the Red Lantern*. Taiwan: ERA International, n.d., brochure. Excerpted from *Esquire*, (Chinese Edition) January 1991.
- . "From the Fifth to the Sixth Generation: An Interview with Zhang Yimou." Interview by Tan Ye. *Film Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (Winter 1999-2000): 2-13.

Zhang Yingjin and Xiao Zhiwei. *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Zhao, Henry Y.H. "Post-Isms and Chinese New Conservatism." *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 31-44.

Zhenli de Zhuiqiu (Seeking the Truth) (Beijing). 11 August 1995.

Zhong Dianfei. "Innovation in Social and Cinematic Ideas: A Forward Given at the First Annual Meeting of Learned Society of Chinese Film Criticism, Dalian 1984." In *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989*. Eds. George Semsel, Chen Xihe and Xia Hong. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.

Zhu Ling. "A Brave New World? On the Construction of 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity' in *The Red Sorghum Family*." In *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Chinese Literature and Society*. Ed. Tonglin Lu. Albany: State University Press of New York, 1993.