China redux: The central frontiers of the modern nation in Chinese cinema

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CHINA REDUX

The Central Frontiers of
The Modern Nation in Chinese Cinema

JIYU ZHANG

CHINA REDUX

The Central Frontiers of the Modern Nation in Chinese Cinema

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For my parents

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Note on Transcription

Transcriptions of Chinese-language names, phrases, and titles are mostly provided in accordance with the *pinyin* system. On occasions, Wade-Giles transliterations of Mandarin, and English transliterations of Cantonese pronunciations are also used.

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CHINA REDUX

The Central Frontiers of the Modern Nation in Chinese Cinema

Jiyu Zhang

Introduction
Three Moments of Chinese Cinema

This study advances a new interpretation on the national formation of modern China through the lens of Chinese cinema. To illustrate my emphases in the study, this introduction will be punctuated by my reflections on three contemporary Chinese-language films, namely, *Shadow Magic* (2000), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and *Hero* (2002). Weaving together my thoughts on these titles, I intend to highlight three key aspects of Chinese cinema—the historical, the national, and the geopolitical. In so doing, this introduction aims to unfold the historical development, national influence, and geopolitical implications of Chinese cinema in the process of China's nation-building. Toward a nuanced understanding of Chinese cinema, this project explores how cinema—a modern invention imported from the West—has shaped China's sociopolitical transition from a dynastic empire to a nation-state. It is argued that, the concurrence of motion picture's arrival and nation-state's advent in China at the turn of the twentieth century, is not to be considered as unrelated threads, but rather as a dialectical dynamism in which the imagined community of modern China has largely relied on cinema for its symbolic construction, and yet encountered constant resistance from cinematic representation.

The cinematic configuration of the Chinese nation-state, in particular after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, has rested upon a multifocal and intersectional vision of society, featuring characters such as children, women, ethnic minorities, and diaspora. Although portrayals of these groups have been integral to the symbolic construction of the Chinese nation-state on screen, in reality they have been relegated to the margins of China's culture, society, and territory. This study, so to speak, begins from the recognition of this paradox, in which this range of demographics is marginal in reality but central in imaginary. As such, it sets out to explore the contingencies and contradictions of the collective formation of modern China by delving into the ambiguous relationship between the national and the cinematic. This fraught relationship has been mediated through a series of politically charged social figures, which span a wide range of locations, periods, and dialects in the Sinophone world.

On the one hand, Chinese cinema provides a vantage point from which we can observe how China has ventured into modernity by way of continual negotiations among cultures, languages, and ideologies, drawn from both China and the West. On the other hand, cinema functions as a contested site of discursive formulation. In cinema, schisms between tradition and modernity, the vernacular and the foreign, the political and the personal are articulated formally—in images, sounds, and narratives. If cinematic images, sounds, and narratives encapsulate the ways in which China has reimagined itself, then, I argue, Chinese cinema can be understood as a vibrant field of signifying practices. Together, these practices have redefined the meaning of China under the auspices of modern technology and institutions. In this sense, the emergence of Chinese cinema not only coincides with the birth of the Chinese nation, but also contributes to how China is conceptualized today.

While situating filmic texts in the context of cross-cultural dialogues between China and the West, this study takes issue with cinematic embodiment against the backdrop of China's nation-building and modernization project. For this purpose, my textual and contextual analyses of selected films foreground a distinct synergy between different forms of cinematic semiosis. Through this synergy, a unified national image emerges from multiple loci of representation. Often dismissed as a complicity between motion picture and the nation, I contend, such symbolization on an extensive scale is much less a coercive measure of state ideology apparatus to interpellate individuals into a political consciousness or a national identity, than an engaged arena where the collective and the individual confront one another. Focusing on this persistent tension between ideological indoctrination and individual expression, my approach endeavors to demonstrate how Chinese cinema has disseminated and propagated the idea of nation, an idea that brackets discrete groups of people while crisscrossing geographical, cultural, and lingual boundaries.

Although Chinese cinema has emerged in resonance with the Chinese nation on various occasions—especially during the socialist era—it is by no means consistent with the authorities' ideological agenda. In fact, on numerous occasions Chinese cinema has directly opposed the governing view of the imagined community, primarily by asserting ordinary people's quotidian experiences. This project, then, intends to unveil Chinese cinema's resilience and resistance in the face of nationalist sentiments. Each of them revolving around a central theme in the symbolic construction of a homogeneous modern nation-state, the following chapters are meant to pry open the veneer of uniformity and lay bare diverse voices and perspectives emerged in Chinese cinema. More importantly, by exposing subversive tendencies emanated from these integral parts, those private moments and intimate encounters will show how the very process of cinematic signification in the name of the nation can be turned against itself.

This study aims to pinpoint the intrinsic, structural fragility of the Chinese nation through the lens of cinema.

Last but not least, my interpretations of Chinese films also involve reflections on the discipline of Chinese cinema studies itself. Through these meditations, I undertake a broad consideration of how these films speak to ideological disparities among contemporary scholars aligned with different geopolitical entities and cultural values. For decades, the discipline has been plagued by ideological confusion and disputes, not least over the definition of Chinese cinema. Scholars remain divided on fundamental issues, such as where to draw the boundaries of Chinese cinema, what kind of film qualifies as a Chinese production, and ultimately what the word "Chinese" stands for. To be sure, the disarray of Chinese cinema studies is more than a competition among conceptual frameworks, but a consequence of realpolitik among Sinophone communities across the globe.[1] It is the power dynamics between China as a centripetal heartland, and other places including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Tibet as centrifugal borderlands, that perpetuates and extends the dilemmas of the Chinese nation-state into the academic world.

Accordingly, my investigation of Chinese cinema will address current debates over methodology. There are two perspectives to my discussion. First, the quarrel over theoretical approaches to Chinese films results from divergent attitudes toward the notion of Chineseness. Many think that "Chinese" strictly pertains to a territorially bounded sovereign state under communist rule. To this mindset, all Chinese-language films ought to be subsumed under one rubric, Chinese cinema, regardless of their diverse places of origin, forms of speech, and political orientations. Others however view Chineseness as a floating signifier that is not essentially tethered to the geographical, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic borders of the Chinese state. This group adopts a pluralist approach to the study of Chinese films. Breaking up the monolith of Chinese cinema, they distinguish between distinct strands of filmmaking practices and discourses, such as Chinese cinema, Hong Kong cinema, and Taiwanese cinema. Together, these might be alternatively referred to as Chinese cinemas. The multiplicity of theoretical paradigms in the field of Chinese cinema can be partly attributed to these conflicting positions. Second, China's economy still wields a formidable influence over international politics and global commerce, bending neighboring regions and even distant trading partners to its will. So much so that economic growth has reversed China's historical geopolitical standing in that this once poverty-stricken nation now dominates developed economies such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, China's film industry has turned into a trans-regional hub of creative talent and capital investment. It caters not only to China, but a disarray of Chinese-speaking territories at large.

In the wake of China's rise, it is no longer possible for scholars to ignore Chinese cinema's expansion in the wider Sinosphere, even if they concentrate exclusively on films produced either inside or outside China. Whatever ideological positions they endorse, scholars are, more likely, compelled to acknowledge the complexity of Chinese cinema, which operates at once on national and transnational levels. Chinese cinema might be rigidly construed as part of the national enterprise of the People's Republic of China. It is increasingly, however, connected with other Chinese-speaking communities and beyond. As such, Chinese cinema should be recognized as a transnational cinema. What we find in Chinese cinema studies, therefore, is a contention between an inclusive viewpoint, which acknowledges that China's national cinema has a global reach, and an exclusive viewpoint, for which Chinese cinema ends at China's national borders. These two positions are invariably at odds with each other. To indicate the ways in which historical, national, and geopolitical dynamics are implicated and intertwined in Chinese cinema, I now go on to analyze three contemporary Chinese-speaking films.

A Looking Glass into History

The 1905 film *Dingjun Mountain* is widely considered to be the first film ever made in China.[2] It was created by Ren Qingtai, the owner of a photographic studio who lived in the imperial capital Peking (now Beijing). Cinema arrived at the dawn of China's modern era, as the embattled Qing empire was crumbling in the face of foreign powers and domestic rebels. As a Western invention which had just begun to enjoy its transatlantic popularity, cinema did not immediately stir up questions over its status either as a novel art form or a mass commodity of mechanical reproduction upon its arrival in the withering kingdom. Rather, alongside other Western novelties shipped to Chinese shores, such as photography, radio, and the telephone, cinema amounted to a dialectical dynamism of Chinese modernity which changed how people experience the world, and how they perceive themselves.

Attending to the reception of Western visual instruments (such as moving pictures, X-ray slides, and the microscope) in China at the turn of the twentieth century, Laikwan Pang maintains that these devices "provided and fostered a set of cultural conditions in which the Chinese saw things anew." These "acts of seeing," she adds, "in turn defined what modernity was" (2007, 1-2). In other words, new Western visual technologies brought about a transformation in China that was not limited to the field of visual perception. It permeated the physical, psychical, and social realms, ushering in "an alluring yet threatening sense of identity that was not available before" (2007, 2). The historical emergence of *Dingjun Mountain* exemplifies how cinema informed the Chinese of alternative realities with technical advances and sensorial thrills, and in the meantime, how cinema prompted people to reinvent their way of life.

Featuring a classic sequence performed by the renowned Peking Opera artist Tan Xinpei, *Dingjun Mountain* is both a silent film and a visual document of traditional Chinese opera.[3] Despite being basic in form and content, *Dingjun Mountain* embalms a unique moment in the history of Chinese cinema. It shows that, even in its very beginning, Chinese cinema crisscrossed boundaries—above all boundaries between genres. For instance, David Der-wei Wang has argued that *Dingjun Mountain* is not just the first Chinese film, but also demonstrates how "cinema and Beijing Opera were two of the most popular performing arts in early modern China" (Wang 2015, 271). Tracing elements of traditional opera in Chinese cinema, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar also present *Dingjun Mountain* as the earliest Chinese "opera film." This film, they argue, inaugurated continuous attempts on the part of Chinese film practitioners to appropriate "traditional narratives" and thereby "sinicize foreign film technology, creating a syncretic Chinese modernity onscreen as part of the transition from empire to modern nation-state" (2006, 55).[4]

The birth of modern China was at least partly induced by Western imperialism. Against that background, Chinese cinema can be seen as a cultural arena in which the Chinese tried to cope with, and make sense of, the uneven relations involved in the process of China's nation-building as well as drastic social upheavals. At one stage, films allowed people to envision a possible future in which social differences could be reconciled in much the same way as early Chinese cinema combined vernacular opera and foreign film technology. A relevant question today, however, concerns how cinema enables individuals to negotiate their sense of self in modern China, that is, how it allows them to come to terms with the changing circumstances of personal existence in the larger context of nation-building. In fact, the tension between selfhood and nationhood remains a potential flashpoint—a fraught interface along which political unrest and ideological clashes have often erupted as China has modernized. Cinema thus offers a prism through which to examine such episodes of crisis. Cinema is uniquely well poised to do so, I argue, for it has occupied an intermediate position between the national and the individual ever since cinema emerged in China in the final years of the nineteenth century. As this study shows, Chinese cinema has both served as a propagandistic instrument through which ruling powers have sought to legitimize themselves *and* articulates the quotidian lives, subjective feelings, and desires of ordinary people.

Nearly a century after it appeared, Chinese-American filmmaker Ann Hu paid homage to *Dingjun Mountain* with her own directorial debut, *Shadow Magic* (2006). *Shadow Magic* is a fictional reconstruction of the origins of Chinese cinema based on historical figures and events. It is both a love letter to cinema, which has travelled the world to enchant innumerable peoples, and an ode to the unsung heroes who paved the way for the development of cinema in China.[5] Contrary to expectations, Hu's film does not foreground Ren Qingtai, the much-celebrated owner of an early film studio. In an imaginative twist, she shifts the focus of the narrative onto Ren's lesser-known protégé, Liu Jinglun. A receptive and energetic young man, Liu is portrayed as already well-versed in the use of photographic equipment and always keen to expand his knowledge. He is on a self-assigned mission to bring motion pictures to Chinese audiences. Still, this is no isolated endeavor: Hu's depiction of Liu Jinglun emphasizes his interactions with other men. These include Master Ren, his mentor and employer; Old Liu, his father; Lord Tan, an iconic performer in Peking opera with whose daughter Liu falls in love; and Raymond Wallace, a British businessman who hopes to establish a lucrative trade in moving image projectors, which he imports to Peking from the UK.

While providing a vivid image of how Western ideas and practices—in particular filmmaking—spread through late imperial China, *Shadow Magic* presents early Chinese cinema as not merely a foreign import, but the result of cross-cultural transaction. Bound up with the broader transformations wrought by China's modernization, cinema emerged as a dynamic locus of transcultural exchange. In generating new ways of approaching reality, it stimulated people to cultivate correspondingly new forms of identity. In this regard, I would like to introduce Emilie Yeh's observations concerning early cinema's repercussions in Hong Kong and Taipei, both of which were subjected to colonial rule following the Qing government's military defeats at the hands of the British and Japanese empires:

> A newly arrived cinema is a colonial tool and technology par excellence. Motion pictures come from the West, from capitals like Paris, London, and

> New York; they carry novelty, a marvel that combines virtues of photography and projected imagery, of which we can choose phantasmagoria or magic lantern slides as prime examples. It prompts amazement and wonder, due to accurately reproduced motion of the subjects captured, and multiplied by the reaction of many others sitting nearby in the hall. Cinema, with a sensitive operator, could be a powerful collective reinscription of the scenes for a new century. (Yeh 2018, 5)

Yeh's observation resonates with Hu's film, which emphasizes the significant role that cinema played in the city of Peking. Echoing Yeh's remark, the protagonist Liu Jinglun is presented as being acquainted with photography already. Furthermore, *Shadow Magic* shows how moving images were being exhibited to rapt audiences at the beginning of the twentieth century. In colonial Hong Kong and Taipei, cinema may have served as "a means of forging an imagined cosmopolitan identity for colonized subjects," which gradually shifted their sense of belonging so much so that they became citizens of foreign empires (Yeh 2018, 5). Cinema in the heartland of modern China, in contrast, prompted individuals to reimagine themselves. No longer feudal subjects in a Chinese empire, people saw their horizons expand and open up to a wider world. In *Shadow Magic*, Liu epitomizes cinema's transformative power. In enthusiastically embracing Western technologies such as photography and cinema, he struggles to navigate his relations with other male characters who hold a range of opinions on motion pictures. Given that they share the same faith in cinema, Liu secretly joins Raymond's venture as a projectionist. A champion of Peking opera, Lord Tan sees cinema as a threat. Although practically invested in photography, Master Ren rebuffs Liu's conviction that cinema heralds a bright future. Moreover, he rejects Liu's proposal that the photographic studio could benefit from branching out into motion pictures. Upon hearing that Liu's has fallen out with Master Ren, Old Liu compels his son to leave the household.

When most of these characters cross paths in the Forbidden City, the escalating tensions surrounding Liu Jinglun come to head. As part of the celebrations for her seventieth birthday, the Empress Dowager Cixi invites Liu, Raymond, Ren, and Tan all to present their specialties. Everything runs smoothly until the projector explodes during film screening, injuring Liu and leading to Raymond's deportation. With a wounded leg and a stranded hope, Liu's passion for motion pictures is only reinvigorated when he receives a letter from Raymond, who sends him raw footage that they had once made together. Fortified by Raymond's encouragement, Liu restores the damaged projector and makes plans to screen films again. Meanwhile, Old Liu has a change of heart and decides to help his son renew the projector lens using his own eyeglasses. On the night of the first screening, the locals gaze in amazement at the faces and landscapes onscreen. At the same time, Tan Xiaoling, Lord Tan's daughter, arrives. In the projection room, Liu and Tan finally reveal their feelings for each other, and kiss. The film ends with captions telling us that later on, Liu and Ren will collaborate on the first Chinese film, *Dingjun Mountain*, in which Tan will perform.

Shadow Magic tells the story of early cinema in China through the lens of the protagonist's shifting personal fortunes. This film, in Laikwan Pang's words, delineates how "the Chinese people first responded to imported images like lithography, photography, cinema, or spectacular theatrical settings with awe, yet they also had their own ways of coming to terms with the overwhelming effects of these spectacles" (2007, 7). Set at a time when cinema was still a novelty, *Shadow Magic* creates an array of characters whose fields of interest range from traditional opera (Lord Tan), through photography (Master Ren), to cinema (Liu Jinglun). By reenacting a historical event (the making of the first Chinese film), the narrative dramatically plays these conflicting attitudes toward cinema off against each other. As Carlos Rojas had noted, the protagonist's position amid the other characters not only foregrounds differences between "representational forms and practices." Moreover, it allows Hu to indicate how the characters' different stances boil down to a dispute among "distinct modes of *seeing*" (2013, 10; original emphasis). Above all, Ann Hu's historical fiction focuses on the politics of visuality. The film is concerned less with "the powerful West seeing the powerless China so much as the Chinese people seeing their new but fragile selves emerge in the face of a drastically new modern commodified environment, newly imported ideologies, and transformed everyday life" (Pang 2007, 3).

Besides Raymond, his British friend, Liu is the only character who is determined to develop cinema in China. Accordingly, the rapprochement between these Chinese men signals cinema's vicissitude in modern China. The final realization of the first Chinese movie suggests that these characters have engaged with cinema in one way or another. Together, they have "mediated cinema as a new invention from abroad and facilitated its local practice, forecasting its eventual Chinese indigenization" (Yeh 2018, 10). Through their varying associations with cinema, Liu Jinglun and his cohort are not passive spectators but active participants who retain their subjectivity in realigning their sense of self with the changing circumstances. The making of *Dingjun Mountain* reveals that "what the Chinese ultimately wished to see was not simply a new self or a new world, but a new self placed within this new world, which was a public and collective experience," whether that be in fiction, reality, or both (Pang 2007, 5). Despite the differences among the characters, *Shadow Magic* depicts cinema as an opportunity to merge different interests into a composite art form. As the prototype of Chinese cinema, *Dingjun Mountain* sutures Western techniques with Chinese aesthetics. In this way, cinema became a bridge between cultures—"an imagined space" between images, ideas, and locales, as Rojas puts it (2013, 1). But more importantly, it allows people to assume a subject position with respect to a wider social order and formulate an identity in the realm of cultural imaginary. As I continue to discuss, though, cinema is more than an imagined space in which individuals are able to reimagine themselves. Beyond that, it is also the imagined ground on which a national community is both constructed and contested.

Spectacles of the Nation

As *Shadow Magic* demonstrates, Chinese cinema is a nodal point around which individual existence, interpersonal interaction, and collective experience revolve. In the transition from late imperial to twentieth-century China, I argue, Chinese cinema is defined by the fraught relationship between the individual and the collective. In fact, cinema has fluctuated between the personal and the political throughout the process of Chinese nation-building. This tension has to do with what I term China's *central frontiers*. The tension between individuality and collectivity in Chinese cinema derived from the historical drive to create a unified nation-state so as to withstand both internal and foreign threats. As part of their nation-building efforts, social elites and intellectuals fostered the emergence of a national cinema. Tasked with inculcating a shared sense of belonging to the nation-state, a suite of new filmic texts were to embody the politics and morality of Chinese nationalism.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that the definition of Chinese nation (and thus also the purpose of national cinema) has varied radically due to a series of regime changes over the course of China's modernization. The concept of Chinese national cinema, in other words, is historically variable, developing in relation to successive administrations' shifting ideological agendas and cultural policies. In studying it, therefore, scholars attend closely to the particular social and political conditions in which it is received. The import of Chinese films bifurcates as they play out in specific cultural contexts. At one level, Chinese cinema often amounts to a propaganda vehicle in that it attempts to cement forms of national identity and political allegiance. At another, though, it also galvanizes individuals into realizing their artistic and intellectual freedoms against collective consciousness. The double-sidedness of Chinese cinema is borne out if we compare it to Benedict Anderson's grasp of the nation as "an imagined political community" that is "both inherently limited and sovereign" (1983, 7). Chinese films often construct images of a cohesive sovereign nation out of disparate constellations of characters. At the same time, however, it represents the lived experience of ordinary individuals who attempt to defy narratives of imagined collectivity. In short, Chinese cinema attests to both the power and fragility of China's national self-image.

Across the range of periods, topics, and theoretical frameworks in contemporary film studies, the relationship between cinema and the nation is a common theme.[6] That said, the question of how to comprehend the role and significance of the national in Chinese cinema in different times and places remains as-yet unanswered. Highlighting the formative years of Chinese cinema, during the crisis of imperialist encroachment, Jubin Hu asserts that "the concept of 'Chinese national cinema' refers not only to the way in which the nation was filmed and the national culture embodied, but more importantly, it also relates to a type of nationalism which reflects Chinese political struggles" (2003, 19). Attentive to the fact that the Republican Era was overshadowed by the escalating political, ideological, and military rivalry between the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT or Kuomintang) and Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Hu posits cinema as "both the reflection of Chinese nationalism and a medium for the reinforcement and reproduction of that nationalism." As such, it is "a site where different versions of nationalism were expressed and contested." In making this argument, Hu compares Chinese national cinema to its European counterparts. Whereas European national cinemas concentrated on cultural values in an attempt to counteract the influence of Hollywood, "what the Chinese cinema performed most efficiently as a national cinema was in fact a *political* function" (2003, 18; original emphasis). With this in mind, Hu aims to flesh out "mobilizations of 'the national' in pre-1949 Chinese cinema." The idea of nation, he concludes, served as "the thread that can be traced throughout and used to bind this history together" (2003, 5).

Even if the concept of national cinema holds the key to understanding how nationalism shaped the path of modern China (despite its many permutations over the last century), it is important to note that Chinese national cinema should not be reduced to either political propaganda or a site of cultural production. In fact, adhering to strict dichotomy between politics and culture only obscures our view of Chinese cinema, which calls for a balanced analysis sensitive to reciprocal influences between text and context. Laikwan Pang's study of the left-wing film movement in China during the 1930s is instructive in this regard. She advocates broadening the scope of film criticism by calling reductive binaries into question:

> The Chinese intellectuals always idealize a transcendental position of art from politics in order to protect the former from the control of the latter. Obviously, with such outright and prominent "political" concerns, these Chinese thinkers are prevented from fathoming the many possible ideas and nuances the two notions "politics" and "aesthetics" may bring along…It was the organic integration of form and content (i.e., art and politics) that could bring the cultural products to influence the popular mass and help them to understand the social deceptions the dominant class put into force. (Pang 2002, 7)

To be sure, Pang's argument here is not that Chinese cinema is an outright national enterprise, which would preclude any further consideration of individual subjectivity or creative agency (2002, 9). Rather, she cautions against a hierarchical division between politics and aesthetics within the discipline of Chinese cinema. Such a division would obfuscate the ways in which Chinese filmmakers have had to construct cinematic representations strategically so as to navigate political circumstances. This is why Pang, whilst evoking Fredric Jameson's famous assertion in *The Political Unconscious* that cultural artifacts are "socially symbolic acts" (1981, 5), insists that "text and context were mutually interwoven, and it is this weaving process that made these films unique" (Pang 2002, 9). Following Pang's methodological intervention here, this section unpacks Zhang Yimou's historical epic *Hero* (*Ying Xiong*, 2002) in demonstrating the prominence of the interplay between politics and aesthetics in Chinese cinema.

Set in the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) of ancient Chinese history, Zhang Yimou's *Hero* tells of how an assassin called Nameless attempts to kill the King of the Qin in his tightly warded palace. Just as Nameless prepares to strike a fatal blow, however, he decides to spare his target's life. In his hope that the King's vision for a unitary empire might bring the conflicts and conquests to an end, Nameless does not go through with the assassination, despite the fact that this will result in his own punitive demise. The film progresses over the course of Nameless and the King's conversation, during which Nameless reveals how he eliminates looming threats for the King, a gesture to win the monarch's trust and so he can talk to the King from a closer distance. Overall, *Hero*'s narrative is interspersed with multiple renditions of a journey during which Nameless defeated many other assassins. This narrative structure recalls Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's diegetic approach in *Rashomon* (1950). Envisioned on an epic scale in elaborate visual spectacles, each episode of Nameless's account is visibly differentiated by a dominant hue. The story, then, filtered through successive colors. Following in the footsteps of Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (released worldwide in 2000), Zhang Yimou's *Hero* turned out to be even more ambitious, with its story dating back to the beginning of China's imperial era. Whereas Lee's film features a rebellious martial arts prodigy, who leaves her prestigious family behind to pursue personal freedom at any cost, Zhang's blockbuster centers on the imposing figure of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor to unify the vast territory that we know as China today. Initially dismissed for slavishly aping Lee's achievement, *Hero* was nonetheless a sweeping success at the box office, and was widely lauded by critics in China and beyond.

Although already admired for his masterful visual storytelling, in *Hero* Zhang further refined his cinematographic vocabulary so as to breathe new life into the often whimsical concepts and nebular ambiance of the *wuxia* genre. Despite precedents in classical Chinese fiction, *wuxia* emerged as a modern literary genre only at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Stephen Teo, it was Chinese writers and students living in Japan who sought to rejuvenate a decaying China by introducing the Japanese concept of *Bukyo*—"a series of militaristic adventure stories to denote militaristic virtues of heroism and gallantry"—to modern Chinese literature (2009, 2). First manifest in novelistic form, the literary genre of *wuxia* brought forth a cosmos of vigilantes and villains whose fates are determined less by their physical prowess than their ethical deeds. It was not long before that this world extended into the silver screen. When cinema began to thrive in the 1920s (the early years of Republican China), for instance, *wuxia* films already played a pivotal role in the industrial development of Chinese cinema. At the same time, they functioned as a form of "spiritual and political resistance to Western powers on the part of Chinese filmmakers and audiences" (Hu 2003, 62).[7] The coming of the *wuxia* genre to Chinese literature, film, and culture at large, portended a continuing struggle between politics and aesthetics. Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Zhang Yimou's *Hero* may have aroused a "kung fu fever" that has elevated Chinese-language films to global prominence since the new millennium; nevertheless, the tension between politics and aesthetics is crucial to the interpretation of these films.

Hero was so well received on account of the director's audacious reinvention of the *wuxia* genre, that reports and reviews in the US media focused mainly on the dazzling sequences and swashbuckling choreography, brushing aside controversial themes that lurked behind the spectacle. Many have been wary of the film's glorification of the King of Qin, who is presented as an ambitious ruler yearning to end violence and chaos by enforcing his own order. For these critics, *Hero* appears to shore up the hierarchy by which the individual must succumb and dedicate themselves to the nation, as though the new power structure would guarantee everyone's livelihood. Despite its aesthetic wonders, *Hero* is suspected of justifying authoritarian rule. Moreover, critics claim that it sings the nation's praises, writing off individual subjectivity. For many, this makes the film politically unpalatable.

According to Kenneth Chan, the uneven response to Zhang's film is symptomatic of the disproportionate attention that many critics have paid to "*Hero*'s ostentatious visuality, chromatic ingenuity, and technical virtuosity." This has often led them to privilege "aesthetic beauty over ideological content" (Chan 2009, 101). For Chan, the director's tenuous narrative construct—in which a pack of noble warriors forgo their shared ambition to eliminate the King and instead devote their lives to a monolithic empire born out of conquest and bloodshed—is steeped in "a politics of ambiguity." Chan claims that Zhang intentionally embedded this politics in the film. This is how he deciphers Zhang's diegetic strategy:

> This notion of ambiguity permits, on the one hand, Chinese cultural centrists and the Chinese government to celebrate the film as a paean to self-sacrifice for the good of society and country; on the other hand, allowing liberal critics to embrace the film as an ironic critique of blind submission to institutional power, hence further offering a criticism of Chinese authoritarianism. (98)

The film was released in the US in 2004. Recalling the US political climate at that time, which was characterized by an upsurge of jingoism in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Chan suggests why many US reviewers shied away from *Hero*'s controversial connotations:

> What I am suggesting here is that embracing the film's aesthetics (which is not a problem in itself), without taking on its politics, is a way for moderate and even political left critics (and possibly viewers) in America to enjoy the film ... And, finally, mainstream acceptance of *Hero* also reflects audience and critical identification with a film that grapples uneasily with the logic of a nationalist unity that advocates military intervention, while simultaneously promoting personal sacrifice and submission, all in the name of achieving a peace that seems perpetually out of reach. (101)

Admittedly giving rise to a global popularity of the *wuxia* genre, Zhang's *Hero* is found political, nationalist, and characteristically Chinese.[8] Zhang's earlier works, by contrast, focus largely on the hardship suffered by ordinary Chinese people throughout much of the twentieth century. *Ju Dou* (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), and *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1992) attend to the traditional patriarchy, which physically and psychologically confines women; *Red Sorghum* (1987), *To Live* (1994), and *Keep Cool* (1997) variously depict the uncertainties that people face in times of war, political turmoil, and social reform. This concern with social hardship, however, seems to have bent under the weight of national politics. This is not to question the fact that *Hero*'s phenomenal success rests in large part upon the painterly universe that Zhang conjured up in this film, which has been appreciated around the world. What invites criticism, however, is the film's *denouement*, which suggests that "a united nation requires submission to a leader who symbolizes China" (Berry and Farquhar 2006, 164). In this instance, Stephen Teo suggests, "the *wuxia* film seems to have become an instrument of the state" in that it serves "to maintain the myth of a warrior tradition and its historicist concepts of chivalry and knight-errantry in order to justify the modern concept of the nation-state" (2009, 8).

The controversy surrounding *Hero*, which has been presented as both political subservient and aesthetically radical, revolves around a gap between text and context. This gap stems from a set of power-laden tensions between the individual and the collective, the national and the global, East and West. On the one hand, *Hero*'s *wuxia* style is heavily invested in traditional Chinese culture. This not only reinforces myths about China's historical longevity and cultural continuity, but also implicitly presents the West with an orientalist fantasy of ancient China in a self-exhibitionist fashion. On the other hand, bringing together capital and talent from China, Hong Kong, and the US, the film deliberately appeals to a transnational audience, presenting a politically acceptable version of China to both domestic and foreign viewers. According to Anthony Fung and Joseph M. Chan, *Hero*'s commercial success and mixed reception foreground the contradictions of Chinese national cinema in a global age: "as a corporate-led production in Chinese communities," they contend, "*Hero* does not aim to be a national movie that every Chinese should be proud of. Rather, to make *Hero* notable in Chinese film history, it has to succeed in the Western market" (Fung and Chan 2010, 209).

In other words, it is precisely *Hero*'s ambivalent position, which speaks to both nationalist ideology and ethnic culture, that allows it to function as either as state-sanctioned propaganda or a highly crafted commodified spectacle. On both counts, Zhang's film is gauged in terms of national politics. If we recall that early Chinese filmmakers in the Republican Era also had to negotiate a viable approach to cinema between Westernization and Sinicization, Zhang's cinematic politics of ambiguity no longer seems so peculiar (Hu 2003, 48). In the final analysis, the ambiguity at the heart of *Hero* derives from the dynamics inherent in Chinese cinema, which come down to the question of "how the imported discursive techniques of the cinema work with and are worked upon by existing local narrative patterns and tropes, creating cinematic traditions in which Chinese national identities are cited and recited" (Berry and Farquhar 2006, 9). Driven by a historical imperative to define a Chinese national identity, Chinese cinema has generated a wide range of characters who reify the zeitgeist of modern China. These characters, such as women and children, embody the range of ideological dogmas and moral positions characteristic of the national community. This cast of prototypical figures, however, does not capture the intricacy of personal lived experience, let alone all those intimate moments of romance and desire that the socialist regime in China has often repressed in the name of spiritual purity and revolutionary ethics. But how has a single narrative of the nation emerged from a constellation of different films? What are the permutations of this narrative? Focusing on the cinematic representation of a national identity in modern China, in the following chapters I will interrogate films that present particular people as indispensable parts of the collective. Although at one level these characters are expected to embody or speak for the nation, at another they strive to find their own voice.

A Thousand Voices

In the previous sections I have visited the historical and national aspects of Chinese cinema, by which I propose cinema, first, as a prism through which to scrutinize the historical trajectory of modern China's nation building, and second, as a site where competing forces are engaged in power dynamics of the nation between the foreign versus the vernacular, the political versus the aesthetic, and the collective versus the individual. Since its inception, cinema has participated in the formation of the Chinese nation. It has been a boon to the nation-building project, presenting an ample repertoire of cultural practices that runs the gamut from grand narratives to personal stories. Looking beyond historical and national dimensions, I now turn to the geopolitical implications of Chinese cinema, for these too must factor into my study. I address the geopolitics of Chinese cinema from two perspectives.

First, the dissemination of global modernity saw the partial colonization of late-imperial China, denting its sovereignty and fragmenting its territory. After 1912, the newly founded Republic of China tried to challenge the dominance of the imperial powers. However, its attempts were soon thwarted by the Japanese invasion. Shortly after World War II, Chinese communists overthrew the Nationalist regime and established their own government. Though the founding of communist China marked a significant leap forward in terms of national independence and liberation, this succeeding regime has in effect implemented an authoritarian rule ever since. Throughout the Cold War the party state operated largely in isolation from both the West and even most members of the Eastern Bloc. The prolonged separation between China and the former colonies, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, have thus spawned a parallel of historical, economic, and cultural realities. Over the past century, the factual coexistence of several self-governing entities in the region, which are economically linked, geographically adjoined, culturally affiliated, but politically divided, is responsible for fraught relationships among these Chinese-speaking communities, such as perennial disputes over national sovereignty between China and Taiwan, and constant pro-democracy protests in the post-handover Hong Kong. Channeling both political sentiments and personal feelings, cinema plays a crucial role in the formation of local communities and identities across Sinophone territories.

Second, geopolitical concerns reverberate through critical paradigms of such cultural texts. This is why, the theoretical research of Chinese cinema—an academic discipline encompassing multiple locations where China-related films are produced—has long been tackling a fundamental dilemma, that is, what does "Chinese" mean in "Chinese cinema"? Is it specifically confined to ideological propaganda of the People's Republic of China, or, in a broader sense, pertinent to people who immerse China's cultural legacies into filmic texts all around the world? Is it a category principally characterized by the Chinese speech, a linguistic criterion that further begs the question—which language(s) should a Chinese film speak? If either Mandarin or Cantonese readily fits into this domain, then what about those ethnic minorities living in mainland China, such as Tibetans, Mongolians, and Uyghurs, whose mother tongues differ from the official lingua franca? And what about those who immigrate overseas—Chinese Americans, for example—who have to adopt a foreign language in their adopted countries? All things considered, to critically engage with Chinese cinema now has become an intersectional endeavor, the chief concern—and challenge—of which is to tease out multivalent transactions within the cumulative signifier of "Chinese".

The various vectors of identity politics which overlay one another in the discursive field of Chineseness, such as nationality, ethnicity, and language, allow us to locate a film's codified messages in the context of China's modern transition, national formation, and global expansion. Thereby cinema serves as a thread that weaves together distinctive labels into an overarching identity, be it national, ethnic, or cultural. As such, it offers clues as to how a unified concept can be constructed out of discrete units. On the flip side, cinema also reveals the seams of national identity—possible scenarios and points of tension at which it might fall apart. While there might be little confusion over what "China" indicates nowadays, as it refers in common knowledge to a totalitarian state in East Asia with the largest population on earth, when it comes to "Chinese", however, the word consists in a tangled web of temporal, spatial, and political formulations, which revolves around two distinctive but intersecting power structures, namely, Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism. To sketch out the interplay between Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism in the discursive construction of "China," "Chinese," and "Chineseness," I now look at Ang Lee's award-winning film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Concentrating on the film's transnational production process and international acclaim, I explore how cinematic representation implicates and engages with the geopolitical realities and cultural imaginaries of

Sinophone communities. Last but not least, this section surveys the different theoretical frameworks at stake in Chinese cinema studies. In this way, I reveal how Ang Lee's film has inspired scholars to theorize and even challenge the power relations that suffuse prevailing notions of Chineseness.

Prior to the unrivaled success of *Parasite* by South Korean director Bong Joon-ho—the first foreign-language film that has won the award for Best Picture at the Oscars—Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was a landmark in Hollywood history.[9] Adapted by Chinese writer Wang Dulu (1909–1977) from a *wuxia* novel of the same name, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was the first Asian foreign-language film to receive significant attention in the Western world. Although I recognize the hierarchy between Western and non-Western cultures, and that Anglophone culture still dominates global cultural production, here I want to close in on this film's narrative strategy and production model. On the one hand, the film strategically showcases alluring local cultural landscapes as a means of attracting global audiences. It consciously broaches the cultural dynamics between East and West. On the other, the film's dialogue intentionally features often discordant variants of Mandarin. In this way, it frustrates the idea that China is a unified, monolingual whole. I will now briefly recapitulate the film's plot before proceeding to unpack the geopolitical message embedded in this narrative arc.

Set in the Qing dynasty, the story centers on Jen Yu, the daughter of the recently promoted Governor Yu, who has just moved from the peripheral region of Xinjiang to Peking in the heartland. Having received years of secret martial arts training from Jade Fox under the guise of private tutelage, Jen flees from an arranged marriage after her family relocates to Peking. Around the same time, Li Mu Bai, a master of the Wudang clan, decides to resign from his distinguished career after a spiritual retreat. He consigns "Green Destiny," his sword, to Yu Shu Lien, a seasoned swordswoman living in the south. Widowed by Mu Bai's friend, Shu Lien is the true reason that prompted Mu Bai to retire. Heading a group of mercenaries, Shu Lien travels with Green Destiny on a commission to Peking, and delivers the sword to Sir Te, a mutual friend of both Shu Lien and Mu Bai. However, the sword is stolen in the middle of the night. In her pursuit of the suspect, Shu Lien discovers that it was Jen who, having visited Sir Te's compound just days before, snatched the treasure. Before long, Mu Bai arrives in Peking, resolves to reclaim his lost weapon. A cat-and-mouse game ensues, in which Mu Bai and Jen encounter love, loss, and redemption.

Speaking of genre, the film subverts gender stereotypes. Its protagonist, Jen, moves about against the grain of the masculinist *wuxia* tradition. Although there have been occasions on which a female character has taken the lead—in King Hu's martial arts films *Come Drink with Me* (1966) and *A Touch of Zen* (1971), for instance—by and large the *wuxia* genre presents a man's world, whether in literature or film. By contrast, half of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*'s cast are women. Moreover, the film's female characters carry the same weight as their male counterparts. In the West, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was commended for its feminist posture. In fact, the narrative is driven by three female characters' mutual grudges against one another—Jen, Shu Lien, and Jade Fox. On the run, Jen becomes not merely an independent person dashing through a violent world, but also a renegade, whom her kung fu master, Jade Fox, can no longer tame. While chasing the young and restless Jen, Shu Lien also seeks to bring Jade Fox to justice, for Jade Fox murdered Mu Bai's own master years ago. An illiterate elder woman, Jade Fox is enraged when she realizes that Jen has surpassed her in martial arts. As they studied the Wudang scriptures over the years, it transpires, Jen had been concealing arcane martial knowledge from her all along.

Therefore, the story is thrust by these intricate conflicts between a juvenile outcast and combat veteran, an aged murderer and her victim's avenger, a disgruntled schemer and a rogue follower. The prominence of female characters has led critics and scholars to underline the film's feminist flavor, which integrates Western social values into a Chinese narrative genre. This might be seen as a tactical move to engage audiences to identify with the gender dynamics embedded in the film. As Huaiting Wu and Joseph Man Chan have noted, "Ang Lee took advantage of a feminist touch to attract Western audiences, particularly women. It should not be seen as a mere coincidence that he chose a *wuxia* novel that focuses on tough female characters and wove the ideas of feminism into the Chinese martial arts film" (2007, 209). In other words, the secret ingredient of Ang Lee's *wuxia* recipe lies in a mixture of Chinese aesthetics and Western ideology. Grafting globalizing concepts onto a local culture, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* appealed to audiences around the world—so much so that it contributed to a broader feminist reinvention of China's popular cultural tradition.[10]

Ang Lee's approach to the *wuxia* genre cleared the way for other transnational Chinese blockbusters in the years to come. Still, many scholars alert to euphoric appraisals of the film's epochal achievement. Designating *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as "a quintessential example of global cinema," Sheldon Lu argues that Ang Lee inadvertently reproduced "the non-existent imaginary old China," which now circulates as "a dehistoricized, disembedded entity in the global commercial film market" (2005, 231). Meanwhile, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* has been accused of perpetuating several fallacies, one of which is the variety of Mandarin accents with which the different characters speak. Given that the stellar cast includes actors from Chinese communities all over Asia—for example, Chow Yun-fat (Hong Kong), Michelle Yeoh (Malaysia), Zhang Ziyi (China), and Chang Chen (Taiwan)—the film's sync-sound dialogues appear somehow counterintuitive to native ears, as Lu observes:

> A very funny, yet jarring, aspect of the film is the phenomenon of real accent in cinema...Their accents breach the rule of plausibility and verisimilitude and indeed elicited giggles from Chinese audiences watching the film...The usual question about successful Chinese-language films has been raised again in regard to Lee's film this time: who is his target audience? Did he make a Chinese-language film for the Chinese or for the global market? Is he susceptible to the accusation of orientalist self-fantasy? (Lu 2005, 227)

In Lu's view, the film not only harnessed an ambivalent stance poised between ethnic culture and global capitalism, intriguing Western audiences at the risk of orientalizing itself. Moreover, it shored up a transnational Chineseness.[11] Despite its failure to accommodate local audience's expectations of cultural authenticity (this partly accounts for why *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* flopped at the box office in mainland China), the film offers a glimpse into the diverse landscape of Chinese language and culture. In stark contrast to most kung fu movies, which are typically dubbed in either Mandarin or Cantonese, Ang Lee opted for a bundle of different tongues and tones. Whereas this is considered the common practice in Hollywood, Ang Lee in fact unveiled the social reality of Chinese-speaking communities, in which multiple topolects are subsumed under the overarching rubric of "Chinese." Moreover, disparate pidgin dialects still subsist alongside the standardized lingua franca. Dwelling on the linguistic plurality showcased in the film, Shu-mei Shih claims that Ang Lee's presentation of language here has a subversive potential:

> The linguistic dissonance of the film registers the heterogeneity of Sinitic languages as well as their speakers living in different locales. What it

> engenders and validates, ultimately, is the heteroglossia of what I call the Sinophone: a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries. What the film makes audible, hence also visible, is confirmation of the continuous existence of the Sinophone communities as significant sites of cultural production in a complex set of relations with such constructs as "China," "Chinese," and "Chineseness." (Shih 2007, 4)

Taking Ang Lee's film as a springboard for theoretical intervention, Shih proposes the concept of Sinophone to inspire the periphery's resistance to the center of Chinese language and culture. "Films such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, even though they work largely through and within Hollywood commercialism and the political economy that underlies it," Shih argues, "nonetheless allow for noncentrist and nonstandardized articulations of 'Chineseness' against China-centrism" (2007, 14). Put another way, the cacophony of accents in the film serves as a travesty of normative conceptions, namely, "monolingual *putonghua* (Beijing standard), monological Chineseness, or a monolithic China and Chinese culture" (2007, 5).[12] In essence, Shih uses the notion of the Sinophone to critique China's historically constructed supremacy, be that in the sphere of politics, culture, or economics. Instead of submitting Chinese-speaking communities to a concentric geopolitical dispensation in which the center dominates the peripheries, Shih calls for radical change. The Chinese-speaking world can no longer be reduced to the uniformity of the Chinese nation-state. Rather, Shih enjoins us to recognize "a pan-Chinese world—a collective of diverse identities and positionalities that a single geopolitical, national entity is unable to contain" (Lu 2007).

The concept of the Sinophone allows critics to circumvent the question of the nation. More importantly, as Rey Chow has observed, it unleashes "the diverse and multifaceted experiences that are articulated under the study of Chineseness" (1998, 24).[13] In this sense, the stories told by marginal and marginalized subjects are not necessarily bound by totalizing discourses of the nation. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, for example, is directed by an American Chinese filmmaker and features a rebellious swordswoman. Traversing an array of temporal and spatial distances, such films mediate between physical and psychical dimensions. Thus understood, the many voices of Chinese cinema, as captured by the concept of the Sinophone, are neither reducible to one another nor obstacles hindering mutual comprehension. Taken together, Chinese films guide us through the everyday struggles that people face as they confront the geopolitical tension between China and the West, providing both realistic and imaginative solutions to the conundrums of everyday life in China.

Overview

Focusing on the historical, national, and geopolitical dimensions of Chinese films, this study foregrounds Chinese cinema's unique position with respect to interpretations of modern China. Viewing the formation of the Chinese nation-state from a cinematic perspective, my study posits Chinese cinema as a form of "cinematic modernity" that entails "the translocal, transregional and transnational circulation of images, speeches and dialects inside and outside China" (Lu 2012, 24). Furthermore, my theoretical contribution centers around the tensions and contradictions between marginal figures and central vantage points as represented in Chinese films. This set of paradoxes, I propose, points to the fundamental condition of China's modern transition, which is to reconfigure social relations amid political unrest and epistemic shifts induced by Western imperialism. In the wake of foreign intrusions, China became a modern nation-state through waves of mass mobilization involving people from all walks of life.

In the course of modernization, those who had long been repressed by the feudal order of imperial China were now assigned new and vital roles—chiefly to enact and embody structural reforms to the state system. Now that the nation has been installed, however, individuals are once again coerced into a new form of collective identification. As much as it is supposed to personify the unity of a homogeneous community, the individual is coming to signify a site of resistance to enforced ideologies. In approaching this unresolved dilemma, this study is dedicated to mapping out a dialectical relationship between China's internal conflicts and external tensions. Through an extensive investigation of cinematic embodiment, I hone in on four groups of characters that I term the "central frontiers" of modern China's cultural imaginary: children, women, ethnic minorities, and diaspora. Often situated at a distance from cultural, social, and geographical centers, these characters are charged with symbolic significance. As such, they are well-placed to embody a national ethos. At the same time, though, these figures are often shown expressing discontent. Although each chapter focuses on a particular type of protagonist, what I intend to show overall is how these categories intersect with one another, so that a single character might be viewed as part of the larger the ideological state apparatus, whose operation turns out not as effective as expected.

In the first chapter I situate depictions of childhood in relation to cross-cultural and trans-medial exchanges. Comparing the initial Bildungsroman (a literary genre concerning a young protagonist's coming-of-age) that emerged in tandem with European bourgeois society with equivalents in Chinese film, I emphasize how the intrinsic values of the Chinese Bildungsroman differ from European examples. In Chinese cinema, coming-of-age stories are packed with political allegories and social satires of the communist state. An epitome of modern Chinese culture, the genre of the Chinese Bildungsroman embodies China's emergent national identity as it has negotiated external and internal discords. I focus particularly on two contemporary Chinese films (along with the novels on which they were respectively based): Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) and Zhang Yuan's *Little Red Flowers* (2006).

The second chapter examines how representations of Chinese women have served to symbolize the Chinese nation. My analysis is premised on a distinction between Chinese and Western notions of "woman," which departs from universalizing gender discourses originating from the West. Moreover, against the backdrop of the social, political, and epistemological transformation of China, this chapter shows how narratives of femininity, in particular the idea of Chinese Woman, mediate between the individual and the nation, convention and conversion, China and the West. My discussion centers on two Chinese-speaking films, *Song of Youth* (1959) and *Lust, Caution* (2007). The first derives from the first decade of China's Socialist Era; the second from the period marked by the dramatic upsurge of economic globalization in the new millennium.

In the third chapter I interrogate the ways in which the tension between the Sinocentric nation-state and ethnic minority groups plays out in contemporary Chinese cinema. Analyzing the dialectical relations between the center and the periphery, I reflect briefly on how cinematic representation has been used to propagate a shared belief of the Chinese nation among minority communities. In tracing different permutations of representational approaches, this chapter shows how portrayals of ethnic minorities are often neither accurate nor diverse. To this end, I examine two films featuring Tibetan people in contemporary China: Pema Tseden's *Tharlo* (2015) and Zhang Yang's *Paths of the Soul* (2015).

The fourth and last chapter attends to the Chinese diaspora, a community that is often seen as politically questionable on account of their geographical distance from the "homeland" and proficiency in the "mother tongue". Continuing my critical discussion of the idea that the modern nation is articulated in Chinese languages, my analysis focuses largely on different definitions of the problematic concept of *guojia* in Chinese language and culture. Investigating forms of ideological interpellation at work in cinematic representations, I draw attention to the ways in which the political, national, and cultural identity of modern China is resisted and negotiated in different cultural contexts. In exploring these themes, I analyze three Chinese films: *The Herdsman* (1982), *Comrade: Almost a Love Story* (1996), and *Mountains May Depart* (2015).

In conclusion, in considering the historical, national, and geopolitical dimensions of Chinese cinema, this study claims neither that China's central frontiers are restricted to one particular period of Chinese history, nor that the tension between marginal social figures and national narratives pertains to Chinese cinema alone. Rather, I seek to explore how drastic social and cultural changes translate into collective violence at a symbolic level. In a world that is increasingly divided among nations, races, and cultures, this study reminds us of how power is exerted ever so surreptitiously through images, sounds, and words. Looking back, the construction of nationhood played a central role in redeeming China from a series of crises in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, it has been converted into regimes of governance that often resort to brute force. In this regard, I hope that the figures at the fore of this study might inspire readers and viewers. To borrow a phrase from Rey Chow, it is when such individuals are "productively put under erasure … not in the sense of being written out of existence but in the sense of being unpacked" that the central frontiers of modern China begin to transcend the boundaries between East and West, imagination and reality (1998, 24).

Chapter 1

Children's Republic: The Chinese Bildungsroman as National Allegory

This chapter concentrates, at the outset, on a long-standing inquiry that takes cinema as both a front of cultural exchange and interface of identity formation among Chinese-speaking communities. Situating cinema at the intersection of nation, culture, and politics, I turn to the portrayal of youth in Chinese cinema. Locating such portrayals in the narrative genre of the Bildungsroman, the chapter interrogates how ideologies such as nationalism, statism, and communism are imprinted on, projected through, and resisted in cinematic representations of personal growth. Beginning with a brief survey of the concept of the Bildungsroman and its variants in modern China, I aim to establish how coming-of-age stories in Chinese cinema align with, or differ from, narrative traditions of the Bildungsroman. In particular, I call attention to how a tension between realism and idealism, which is so characteristic of this genre, plays out in its variegated manifestations in Chinese films.

In dialogue with Fredric Jameson's notion of the "national allegory," I propose that the Bildungsroman constitutes a site of social contention in Chinese cinema. More specifically, I stress how the trope of youth is used to allude to China's ideological challenges. The Chinese Bildungsroman, I argue, illustrates both external challenges posed by the intrusion of Western discourses and values, and internal struggles between the state and individual. In this context, depictions of youth in these coming-of-age films function as a prism of culture, history and politics. By viewing through this prism, we are enabled to discern asymmetries of knowledge production, the dynamics of global power relations, and differing strategies of cultural representation across the world.

The Bildungsroman: Nationalism, the Bourgeoisie, and Modernity

> [A]t the turn of the eighteenth century much more than a just rethinking of youth was at stake...Europe plunges into modernity, but without possessing a *culture* of modernity. If youth, therefore, achieves its symbolic centrality, and the 'great narrative' of the Bildungsroman comes into being, this is because Europe has to attach a meaning, not so much to youth, as to *modernity*. (Moretti 2000, 5; original emphases)

Coined by Karl Morgenstern in public lecture of 1819, the term Bildungsroman was only brought into wider circulation by Wilhelm Dilthey toward the end of the nineteenth century (Boes 2009, 647; Kontje 2015, 109). From its inception onward, the Bildungsroman has been used generically to refer to narratives of personal growth that feature a young man's maturation to adulthood (Kontje, 109). As Franco Moretti writes, with a thematic focus on the protagonist's moral, spiritual, and psychological development, the Bildungsroman symbolically renders a central conflict of modern bourgeois society "between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*" (2000, 5-15; original emphases). This conflict can be explained by recourse to its historical context. Following the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, Europe was moving toward secularism and the separation of church and state. With religious authority in decline, European societies became increasingly engaged in the pursuit of personal freedom.

Derived from the thinkers and writers of the German Enlightenment, the notion of *Bildung* (often translated as "education" or "cultivation") resonated strongly with this tendency toward individualism. It not only "reflected a profound faith in the harmonious reciprocity of individual and collective self-legislation," but also facilitated "a project for the emerging middle classes that shared a common ethical value system" (Wheeler 2015, 107-108). As this makes clear, the word Bildung's connotations came to extend far beyond its etymology (which suggests notions of "image" and "formation"). The concept points to "the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch and by extension the achievement of learning about that same body of knowledge and acceptance of the value system it implies" (Hardin 1991, xi; Wheeler 107). In short, the concept of Bildung was part of a cultural campaign led by the burgeoning European middle class. In striving to legitimatize a new system of political and cultural institutions, the bourgeoisie laid claim to the prerogatives of all humankind. In the realm of literature, this campaign moved to emancipate humanity through the spread of liberal rationalism, which in turn gave rise to the Bildungsroman.

Therefore, the conflict between self-determination and socialization, which Moretti deems characteristic of the Bildungsroman, marks a literary response to an epochal social change, in which social structures were transforming and the individual's personal experiences took on a new significance. On the one hand, the Bildungsroman was set up to encourage individual self-cultivation so as to better navigate expanding and uncertain external realities. On the other hand, portrayals of this formative process revolve around distinctly bourgeois social values. The Bildungsroman was implicated in a set of bourgeois ideals and aims, above all the idea that all people should acquire reason through a process of self-cultivation. Given these universalist and cosmopolitan intentions, the elements of classism, sexism, and racism in the Bildungsroman (for instance, the protagonists mostly being learned white men) must be weighed against the trajectories and ramifications of European modernity. Of particular relevance here is one of the ideological undercurrents informing the Bildungsroman, which can be traced to the emergence of bourgeois society in Europe during the nineteenth century: nationalism.

According to Tobias Boes, the Bildungsroman was closely associated with nationalist sentiments from the outset (2009, 648). For instance, Wilhelm Dilthey claimed that the Bildungsroman principally serves to construct a national community on the basis of cultural traditions—specifically, a national community of German traditions (Boes 2009, 648). This nativist interpretation was echoed by later commentators, such as Thomas Mann, who similarly emphasized the genre's nationalism. In particular, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*) came to be seen as "typically German, legitimately national in character" (Jacobs and Krause 1989, 26). This narrow conception, for which the Bildungsroman has an exclusively national character, is driven by an urge to forge a collective identity. Stories of young individuals, who, in aspiring to integrate into a community, encounter challenges and predicaments, held out "an imaginative space into which collective dreams and fantasies may be projected" (Boes 2007, 116). Widely regarded as a distinct literary symptom of German nationalism, it can sometimes seem that the Bildungsroman has become little more than "a means to cultivate national cohesion rather than individual autonomy" (Boes 2007, 116; Wheeler 2015). In this view, the Bildungsroman is an offshoot of German nationalism.

This parochial position is contradicted, however, by the genre's success and acceptance across a variety of literary contexts.[14] In contrast with accusations of complicity with German nationalism, another strand of literary criticism contends that the Bildungsroman is a facet of bourgeois culture as such. This body of work shows how the Bildungsroman provided a narrative framework for national identity formation in a diversity of different European contexts. This broader perspective helps account for novels of human development in English and French, for example, making it possible to assess different ways in which the tension between the individual's progress toward maturity and socio-economic conditions was narrated in various national literatures. Some scholars even suggest that, while focusing on personal growth, the English Bildungsroman places particular emphasis on social mobility and class conflict. As a result, its outlook is more realistic than that of the German Bildungsroman (Hardin 1991, xxi). Acknowledging different articulations of the Bildungsroman in different European national cultures, scholars in this field do not ignore the Bildungsroman's ideological role in forging imagined national communities. While defying the exclusive association between the Bildungsroman and German nationhood, and bearing in mind a range of different national variants, they have recast the Bildungsroman as a transnational and supranational category. In accordance with this expansive view of the genre, a number of critics, including Moretti, postulate that the Bildungsroman functions as a grand narrative for the bourgeoisie's transformation of society. In this narrative of transformation, the maturation of youth came to symbolize the development of modernity.

In attending to different facets of the Bildungsroman, I have teased out a string of overlapping themes and practices, including national imagination, class consciousness, and individualist aspiration. Taken together, these observations also indicate that the notion of the Bildungsroman, far from being a mere terminological contrivance, is laden with historical and ideological significance. At first sight, it might seem that the Bildungsroman's central theme—the conflict between individual autonomy and social integration—is ubiquitous across world cultures. The solutions to this conflict presented in Bildungsroman narratives, however, are by no means always commensurate with non-Western cultures for this narrative model was designed by and for the emergent culture of the European bourgeoisie (Solomon 2005, 84; Vazquez 2008, 33).

The complexity of the Bildungsroman, which inculcates bourgeois values through a variety of literary strategies, cautions us against any apolitical or ahistorical understanding of the genre. This validates especially when one examines its manifestations in global contexts, which bear little resemblance to Europe's political, historical, and cultural landscapes. If the Bildungsroman was once a distinctive form through which the values and subjectivity of the European bourgeoisie were inscribed, it is now important to recognize how it has become a contact zone where disparate cultural values converge and collide. The ways in which the Bildungsroman has been adopted and adapted in formerly colonized and conquered territories are especially crucial. Against this backdrop, this chapter explores the Bildungsroman's circulation in Chinese society.

By drawing attention to coming-of-age narratives in Chinese literature and film, I aim to map out a literary geography of the Bildungsroman. This entails tracing the genre's temporal and spatial departures "into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (Damrosch 2003, 6). Put simply, this chapter examines how this Western literary concept has been transmitted and transfigured in the Chinese context. This involves a two-sided approach: on the one hand, I undertake a comparative analysis of how Western cultures and ideologies encoded in the Bildungsroman have been accepted in China. On the other, I look into the specific vicissitudes of Chinese articulations of the Bildungsroman. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that the Chinese Bildungsroman offers a vantage point from which we can discern the unevenness of the cultural transactions inflicted on China. Furthermore, I show how the Chinese variant of the genre speaks to internal conflicts between individual and community in modern Chinese society. Establishing China as my central frame of reference, in what follows I attend to stories of youth in Chinese literature and film. In so doing, I mean to debunk many of the values and beliefs they articulate, both in China and beyond. Before I engage with specific case studies, though, a brief overview of the Chinese Bildungsroman is in order.

From Childhood to Nationhood: The Chinese Bildungsroman as Modern Chinese Literature

The literary history of the Chinese Bildungsroman dates back to the early decades of the twentieth century. After the demise of China's last imperial dynasty, a republic—the first of its kind in Asia—was founded in 1912. Needless to say, this is a watershed moment for the people of this ancient civilization. A prolonged era of feudalism had been succeeded by a new form of authority, which was modeled on Western ideas and polities. Far from being a historic triumph, this fundamental change was in fact prompted by China's vulnerability to Western colonial powers. This had been underlined by the Sino-British opium wars in the late nineteenth century. Although the Chinese mainland was never entirely colonized by Western forces, a number of regions were either ceded or leased to foreign governments. This led to political crises that compelled Chinese intellectuals to reform their cultural traditions (Chen 2010, 6). Furthermore, the newly established republic was still under the imminent threat of attack by residual loyalists of the overthrown feudal regime.

Activist scholars and thinkers urgently sought to supplant traditional culture. Targeting Confucian thought, which they condemned as the scourge of China's backwardness and ineptitude in the face of the West, these militant elites waged a series of campaigns to renew Chinese, thought, education, and society. This series of revolutionary actions came to be called "the New Culture Movement" (Mitter 2004, 18).[15] Against this backdrop, revolutionaries committed to modernizing China pursued and promulgated Western ideas, concepts, and theories (Li 2001, 34). Amid the New Culture Movement, the Chinese Bildungsroman was born.

Literature was a major vehicle by which Western knowledge was transported to Chinese society. Accordingly, foreign fictions centered on youth development have not only been a source of literary inspiration. Moreover, they have precipitated political transformation. Coinciding with China's modernization project, the Chinese Bildungsroman became a key arena in which progressivists enthusiastically articulated revolutionary ideologies with strong aspirations to Western precedents. Hua Li stresses that, whereas the European Bildungsroman manifested:

> a response to the historical condition of modernity in nineteenth-century European society ... the appearance of Chinese Bildungsroman narratives in the early twentieth century is the Chinese writers' response to the rise of a new identity of youth as a key stage of life as well as Chinese intellectuals' vision of rejuvenating an old Chinese civilization so as to build a newly modernizing nation-state. (Li 2011, 27)

The unequal treaties, territorial cessions, and war indemnities that Wester powers imposed on the Qing empire coerced China into the nation-state—a political concept and form of community stemmed from European modernity. The emergence of the Bildungsroman in modern Chinese literature attests to this transition, inasmuch as it was introduced to and adopted by Chinese literati and intellectuals to forge a symbolic juxtaposition of personal growth and nation building. In other words, from personhood to nationhood, the Chinese Bildungsroman primarily serves to narrate the nation.

Revolving around an axis of "nation" and "modernity," the invention of the Chinese Bildungsroman portends the beginning of modern Chinese literature. Dedicated to a symbolism of youth, coming-of-age stories in Chinese literature (and later, film) have proved central to construction and reproduction of Chinese national culture. In his account, Mingwei Song registers five themes that appear in Chinese Bildungsroman texts:

> The enlightenment project to formalize and mobilize youth; the revolutionary teleology imposed on the mind and body of youth; the ethical, affective, and aesthetic agencies of youth in the formation of a utopian vision of a perfect society; the pedagogical machine to educate and discipline youth; the ideological use and abuse of youth in the making of national imagery. (2005, 7)

The ideological, propagandistic, and heuristic functions that Song attributes to the genre map onto the shifting balance between individuality and collectivity. For much of modern Chinese history, the relationship between public and private spheres has often been presented as harmonious. As Hua Li writes, from the May Fourth movement (1919) until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution (1966), there was "a gradual withdrawal of individualistic subjectivity and a surfacing of a collective spirit" in the Chinese Bildungsroman. By contrast, in the post-Maoist era, and especially the 1980s and 1990s, individualism becomes more pronounced in coming-of-age stories, while collectivism ebbs away (2011, 9). Oscillating between individualism and collectivism, renditions of youth in modern Chinese literature cannot be understood in isolation from their historical contexts. Song and Li have shown how youth often emerges as a literary theme during phases of social discord and confrontation.[16]

In this chapter, however, I focus on cinema: an indisputably Western creation that arrived in China shortly after its invention. Stretching from the end of the nineteenth century to the present, the history of Chinese cinema bears witness to the social, cultural, and political conflicts of China's modernization. Given that cinema now permeates modern Chinese culture, analytical instruments are required to detect and critically analyze these conflicts and their repercussions. Considering the pivotal role of youth in the political rhetoric and cultural construction of modern China, my film analyses will concentrate on coming-of-age narratives, whose protagonists try to achieve maturity under a variety of circumstances. In this way, I mean to accentuate contradictory understandings of the Bildungsroman at work in contemporary Chinese cinema. To this end, I have chosen to look at two Chinese films: *In the Heat of the Sun* (dir. Jiang Wen, 1994) and *Little Red Flowers* (dir. Zhang Yuan, 2006). My selection is based on several concerns: first, both films are adapted from novels by the author

Wang Shuo, whose work has often been adapted for popular film and television. Second, the narratives of both films are semi-autobiographical in that they relate to the period of Wang Shuo's adolescence. As such, the protagonists' uneasy transitions from boyhood to adulthood are caught up in the tumult of the Cultural Revolution. Third, despite the fact that Wang Shuo, Jiang Wen, and Zhang Yuan were all born in the 1960s and grew up amid political turmoil, they represent childhood memories, personal experience, and collective trauma in markedly divergent ways.

These stories—both in the original novels and their film adaptations—do not entertain the prospective that the individual is reconciled with the community. Such a contention thus defies the narrative conventions that guide the classical Bildungsroman, which progress toward social incorporation. Neither do they provide narrative closure in the form of the main character's achieving personal maturity. This gesture, I claim, rebuts the progressivism and teleology inherent in received formulations of the genre. Overall, these instances of the Chinese Bildungsroman refuse revolutionary idealism. They do not directly express their lack of belief in modern ideologies such as socialism and nationalism. Rather, it is manifested in the introduction of surreal or mythical elements into the narrative, confounding the films' ostensible realism. I argue that these indirect representational strategies are in large part necessitated by the political climate of authoritarianism in socialist China. In accordance with this, these coming-of-age narratives elicit an allegorical reading focusing on the symbolic articulation of national conditions. Lastly, in investigating the allegorical dimension of these texts, I draw attention to how the Chinese Bildungsroman has evolved in interaction with its political contexts.

A Farewell to Revolution

Early Chinese cinema, which was thriving in the 1920s, was disrupted by the eruption of war. Filmmakers were keen on instilling patriotic, anti-imperialist sentiment during the period of the Japanese military invasion. Accordingly, from the 1930s onward, the Chinese Bildungsroman on screen centered on narratives of young intellectual revolutionaries. Yang Mo's autobiographical novel *The Song of Youth* (*Qingchun zhi ge*) of 1958, for example, which was adapted for film the following year, tells of a schoolgirl's political awakening with the advent of the Sino-Japanese war. The protagonist is Lin Daojing, an immature but compassionate teenager who longs to defend the destitute people and ravaged land. Over the course of the film, she grows into a faithful communist, constantly engaged in left-wing movements. In focusing on the female protagonist's self-improvement as a patriotic citizen, the film is firmly grounded in nationalism. However, the political tenor shifts over the film's duration. Whereas it initially stresses the protection of China's sovereignty and integrity, ultimately the narrative comes to present communism as providing the only viable future for the nation. Of course, this ideological discourse became prevalent only after the founding of the People's Republic. Since the birth of "New China" in 1949, the Chinese Bildungsroman has largely served propagandistic purposes promoting collective subjectivity and presenting ideological role models such as Lin Daojing. In the face of incessant political violence on the part of China's political authorities, however, the tide started to turn.

In early Chinese cinema, coming-of-age stories were infused with revolutionary passion. However, Bildungsroman films produced in the ensuing decades, in particular after the demise of Mao, have increasingly morphed into rebellion, irony, and sarcasm toward Chinese socialist ideals. Jiang Wen's directorial debut, *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi,* 1994), inspired by Wang Shuo's original novel *Wild Beasts* (*Dongwu xiongmeng*, 1991), is paradigmatic of this trend. Set in the last years of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, the film's protagonist, a boy named Ma Xiaojun, lives in a military compound in Beijing. Whereas many books and films had depicted the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution through adult characters, *In the Heat of the Sun*, by contrast, centers on innocent (and often fidgety) children. This distinctive approach to characterization lends the film a formal affinity with the classical Bildungsroman. Unlike that established narrative framework, though, the film does not offer a developmental storyline charting the protagonist's personal growth. Instead, *In the Heat of the Sun* parodies dominant representations of childhood, by challenging communism's affirmative and teleological portrayal of youth. Moreover, by blurring the distinction between memory and reality, Jiang Wen calls into question the authenticity of historical accounts and the veracity of revolutionary ideology. Originally titled "Bright Sunny Days,"[17] *In the Heat of the Sun* opens with a wistful monologue delivered by the adult Ma Xiaojun (played by Jiang Wen himself), who attempts to rewind his memory. In a somber voice, he admits how difficult it is to tell reality from illusion:

> Beijing, has changed in the blink of an eye. It took it just twenty years or so to become a modernized city. In the here and now, I can no longer find anything that belongs to my memory. In fact, such drastic change

> has wrecked all of what I remember, leaving me confused as to what is illusory and what is real. My childhood stories, it seems to me, always took place in the summer. The sweltering heat compelled people to uncover more of their skin, laying bare their desires. Back then, every day seemed to be sunny; the blazing sun always kept us company. There was so much sunshine that our vision was overwhelmed by the piercing daylight, making us blind with fitful darkness.

Passing through puberty while finishing middle school, Ma Xiaojun is in most respect like any other teenager his age, except that his father is a high-ranking military official. This sets up the peculiar situation in which the story unfolds. Given their perceived duty to national security, military personnel and their families were arguably the section of society least affected by the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. The protagonist's childhood is somewhat exceptional, in other words, in that his family is unlikely to suffer political persecution. In addition, Xiaojun's youth prevented him from either enrolling in the army or rustication in the countryside. Had he been older, his life would have taken a significantly different turn.[18] Whereas the adults around him are fraught with the angst, fear, and grievance of this dark time, Xiaojun and his juvenile friends lived happily under the protection of their military fathers. While the whole country is obsessed with class struggle, caught in economic stagnation, and teetering on the brink of anarchy, the protagonist hangs around with his playmates lightheartedly. Left unattended, these children virtually become a "forgotten generation," inasmuch as their pubescence goes unnoticed (Choy 2008, 163).

Like the uncaged wild beasts that the novel's original title implies, Xiaojun and his cohort spend days at a loose end: smoking cigarettes, picking fights, and chasing girls. Hijinks aside, Xiaojun is preoccupied by picking locks. Adept at making skeleton keys, Xiaojun deftly sneaks into a number of buildings and empty rooms, one after another. The boy indulges himself in guilty pleasures, from eating leftover dumplings in somebody's house to taking a nap in a stranger's bed. By chance, a portrait photograph on the wall, which shows a girl in red swimsuit, instantly plucks Xiaojun's heart-strings. Consequently, Xiaojun's infatuation with the anonymous girl repeatedly leads him back to her room, where he waits to see her again. In a voice-over, the narrator even describes himself like "a cat on a hot tin roof." Eventually, Xiaojun recognizes the girl outside the room. One day, when tying his shoelace, he notices the rubber band she wears on her ankle as she passes by. Xiaojun walks up and talks to her brazenly, and finally they befriend each other. The girl, slightly older than Xiaojun, is named Milan. At the end of their first conversation, Milan agrees to visit Xiaojun and his friends at the military compound. However, the budding romance between the two takes an unexpected turn once Milan has joined Xiaojun's gang. Coming back from his grandfather's funeral in a nearby city, Xiaojun finds out that Milan has become the girlfriend of Liu Yiku, the gang leader and oldest boy in the group. Furious and jealous, Xiaojun breaks into Milan's room and tries to rape her. Milan throws Xiaojun out, leaving him to roam the streets alone.

Against the backdrop of a society plummeting into chaos, Jiang Wen's lighthearted portrayal of a bunch of streetwise rascals recalls Western films in which bittersweet coming-of-age experiences are circumscribed by harsh realities. Well-known examples include *The 400 Blows* (dir. François Truffaut, 1959) and *Once Upon a Time in America* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1984). *In the Heat of the Sun*'s buoyant tone stands in stark contrast to prevailing cultural memories of that era, which are dominated by party-orchestrated struggle sessions, rural labor, and forced exile. Taking a romantic relationship between teenagers as its central narrative thread, the film foregrounds individual libido, not collective trauma. With this distinctive approach, the film evades two narrative traditions that characterize the Chinese Bildungsroman. First, it disrupts the reciprocal relationship between revolutionary ideologies and personal growth in established narratives, in which onscreen characters embody and justify reigning political ideals. In other words, Jiang Wen's (and Wang Shuo's) approach resists the narrative pattern mandated by the socialist regime, in which personal development is woven in the nation's advance toward modernity. According to the cultural critic Dai Jinhua, the preponderance of individuality in this film—most clearly manifested in sexual desires, fantasies, and boyish behaviors—turns cultural memories of political violence into an occasion for sexual romantization. Further, it privatizes the narration of history, which is relayed in an autobiographical fashion that "embodies the 'self' and the expression of self" (Dai 2000, 214). In depicting a juvenile character becoming a sexual subject, *In the Heat of the Sun* advocates for self-awakening that revolutionary narratives have rather neglected. Far from reinforcing collective subjectivity under ideological influences such as nationalism, statism, and communism, the film's representation of youth emphasizes individuality and selfhood.

Second, although Jiang Wen's privatized coming-of-age story suggests a new individualist tendency in the Chinese Bildungsroman, *In the Heat of the Sun* signals another important change in Chinese cinema in general. I am referring here to how it playfully negates realism—the narrative style that had hitherto dictated youth narratives in the post-Maoist era. If in the 1980s the Chinese Bildungsroman relied on realistic representations, from the 1990s, it has increasingly turned to surrealism or mythorealism. Jiang Wen's directorial debut marks a key turning point in this shift. However, this is not to say that no realistic films have been made since the 1990s, nor that every Chinese film made since the 1990s should be read as a political allegory of the nation. Rather, this stylistic departure from realism means that the concept of the national allegory becomes increasingly useful as an analytical tool with which to approach Chinese Bildungsroman films by influential directors. I would argue that the fluctuating fortunes of realism and idealism in Chinese cinema point to the tension between individual and collective specific to China's the totalitarian party-state.

To illustrate the changing tide of realistic aesthetics in Chinese literature and film, I turn briefly to two cultural phenomena that arose after the end of the Cultural Revolution upon Mao's death in 1976: "scar literature" (*shanghen wenxue*) and "root-seeking" literature (*xungen wenxue*). In retrospect, both movements set out to unravel the experience of political catastrophes under socialist rule in China. Sharing Chinese literature's ethical and intellectual concerns, Chinese films have also centered on the plight of young people in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Notably, a number of films directed by Fourth- and Fifth-Generation filmmakers strove to convey the physical and psychological torment that the Chinese youth endured during China's intense political upheavals. These films include Teng Wenji and Wu Tianming's *Thrill of Life* (1979), Huang Zumo's *Romance on Lushan Mountain* (1980), and Xie Jin's widely acclaimed "Reflection Trilogy": *Legend of the Tianyun Mountain* (1980), *The Herdsman* (1982), and *Hibiscus Town* (1986). In line with scar literature, most of these films adopted realism so as to reconstruct the crude circumstances of the Cultural Revolution. In these straitened circumstances, political purges had detrimental effects on swathes of Chinese children, many of whom were sent away for manual labor in farms or factories (Mitter 2004, 203). In scar literature and film adaptations, realism works to reenact traumatic events in the past. By representing their lost youth, this field of cultural practice spoke directly to the so-called "sent-down" generation that underwent forced internal migration and labor. Offering candid depictions of person ordeal, they filled the void left by the collapse of socialist idealism.

Whereas this post-revolutionary realism stoked resentment against authoritarian rule in the mid-1970s, another trend would incite even more radical criticism. A new group of directors, including Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian

Zhuangzhuang, emerged in the 1980s. Having been "sent-down" youths themselves, these filmmakers channeled their frustration with Chinese political realities by reflecting extensively on people, culture, and history. The first films made by these freshly graduated filmmakers testify to their painstaking examination of the innumerable failures that mark modern Chinese history, above all the sociopolitical and cultural crises brought about by socialist rule. Two prime examples are *Yellow Earth* (dir. Chen Kaige, 1984) and *Red Sorghum* (dir. Zhang Yimou, 1988). In line with the cultural trends of their time, these films steered away from the received realism of Chinese cinema. Instead, they turned toward a new style of cinematic expression that transcended quotidian reality. The purpose was to show how the problems driving China's meltdown were located not only in present political realities, but, by extension, in longstanding tensions between cultural conventions and modernization in China. In other words, the Fifth Generation's iconoclastic cinematic innovations coincided with the urgent need to rethink Chinese national identity against the backdrop of modernization. Under the socialist regime, this question had been obfuscated and deferred. Stepping back from realism to engage in experiment and speculation, these filmmakers have concentrated on issues such as Chinese cultural reactions to Western ideas and institutions, such as capitalism and Marxism.

Portrayals of youth in the Fifth Generation's early films, then, are less concerned with the specific conditions of life. Posing metaphysical questions about China's past, present, and future, they seek to establish a coherent conception or interpretation from which a national consciousness can be derived. Often, this involves grafting political critiques of (and philosophical meditations on) post-Maoist China onto an array of historical scenarios. In both *Yellow Earth* and *Red Sorghum*, for example, contemporary reflections are projected onto the Second Sino-Japanese War. In this way, these younger directors attempt to address the conundrums of Chinese modernity. Why had the democratic republic failed in modern China? How could a socialist regime survive in spite of social unrest? Confronting these questions, the Fifth Generation contemplated what constitutes the idea of "China," exploring—and ultimately redefining—Chinese culture. In so doing, the young generation of directors who had emerged after the decline of Maoism reworked the Chinese Bildungsroman, toning down the realistic film language that had imbued previous coming-of-age stories. The Chinese Bildungsroman lent them a discursive space where they challenge the government's legitimacy and search for roots of China.

Whether in the form of scar literature or root-seeking literature, the Chinese Bildungsroman offered intellectuals and artists a medium of political criticism. When it came to realism, however, their approaches to representing youth diverged markedly. Whereas scar literature relies heavily on realistic aesthetics to represent traumatic fragments drawn from young lives, works created under the rubric of "root-seeking" inevitably put China in a long historical perspective. One result of this generalizing tendency was that root-seeking works of the 1980s all but dispensed with situated understandings and realistic portrayals of the individual. It was not until the 1990s, with the arrival of the Sixth Generation, that realism regained its prominence in Chinese cinema.

In the post-revolutionary era, Chinese cinema seems to have followed a pattern whereby each new generation of filmmakers breaks with the cinematic style of its predecessors. Broadly speaking, Chinese cinema has shifted from realism (1970s) to abstraction (1980s) and back to realism again (1990s). With the *In the Heat of the Sun* (his directorial debut), Jiang Wen interfered with this general trend. As such, the film poses an intriguing instance of the Chinese Bildungsroman and post-Maoist cinema at large. This is not because his film veers from realistic depictions of romantic and revolutionary tragedies among adolescents. Rather, my interest in the film is driven by the fact that, in dismissing dominant social values and libidinal impulses, it turns against the coming-of-age narrative itself. In a striking example of cinematic reflexivity, Jiang Wen's skepticism of revolutionary ideologies serves as a parody of nostalgic coming-of-age narratives—that is, of the Bildungsroman. In the film, beliefs concerning the reliability of memory and authenticity of history are decisively undermined.

Fanciful Childhood, False Memories

Now let me turn back to the film to demonstrate how it parodically negates history and memory. Having shown Xiaojun and Milan's chance encounter on the street, the film does not so much linger on their burgeoning intimacy as to focus on a series of adventurous and humorous moments among the gang of boys. Two characters are given more exposure in these interposed sequences: the toughest boy, Liu Yiku, who leads the gang, and Yu Beipei, a naughty and vigorous girl who hangs out with the boys every now and then. The way in which Yu Beipei is introduced to the audience implicitly hints at the plausibility of memory: when Xiaojun first discovers Milan's photograph, the camera presents a close-up of the image. This shot of Milan's smiling portrait then fades into a mid-distance shot of Yu Beipei, who is also smiling. Two scenes are connected by the superimposition of the girls' images. This is the first time that either girl is seen in the film.

This narrative transition from one scene to another provides a visual clue that the narrator is tampering with his own story. Later in the film, Xiaojun and Milan are having a casual conversation in Milan's room. Xiaojun asks Milan where the photograph of her in a red swimsuit has gone. Denying that there ever was such a photograph, Milan eventually brings out a black-and-white portrait photograph. Like the photograph of Xiaojun's memory, it shows a smiling Milan, only now she is dressed in a blouse and the colors have disappeared. At the level of cinematic narration, incoherencies of memory such as the contradictory versions of a photograph, are either implied through montage or revealed by characters themselves. Ultimately, this falsification of memory culminates in the climactic scene in which the narrator (the adult Ma Xiaojun) concedes that his recollection of the past is erroneous.

Over halfway through the film, we see the whole gang, including Milan, celebrating Xiaojun's and Yiku's birthdays at the Moscow Restaurant, one of Beijing's most prestigious venues. Xiaojun has just returned to the neighborhood from his grandfather's funeral, only to find out that Yiku and Milan have already got together. Feeling jealous and betrayed, Xiaojun wants Milan to leave the gathering. Soon afterwards, Xiaojun's anger leads to a fight with Yiku. At the height of this violent sequence, Xiaojun repeatedly jabs Yiku with a broken wine bottle. Regardless, Yiku does not bleed. Even as Xiaojun mechanically repeats the attack, no wound appears. The vehement confrontation between two rivals dissolves into an innocuous scuffle. Unscathed, Yiku seems embarrassed by this rather ridiculous situation, whereas Xiaojun turns straight to the camera. For a few seconds, the image comes to a standstill, while the voice-over goes on:

> By all means, don't believe any word I have said. Even though it is my genuine intention to tell nothing but the truth, I was never brave and heroic enough [to strike someone] like that. The stronger the will, the greater the difficulty. It saddens me to realize that no reality can be restored. All the memories I have are disfigured by my emotions, which keep meddling with me, betraying me, leaving me dazed and confused … I began the story with a humble promise, but after laborious and persistent retrospection of my childhood, these details

> have turned out to be naked lies … It is barely possible for one to be honest.[19]

In his book *Witness against History*, Yomi Braester remarks on this ironic scene. He notes that in Chinese revolutionary rhetoric, bodily wounds evoke a sense of reality: violence, he writes, "signals the place where history hurts, and engaging in violence is tantamount to making history" (2003, 196). The film's narrator has admitted that he has fabricated much of the story, not least the fight sequence, in which neither blood nor wounds materialize. With this confession that memory has been tampered with, the illusion that the narrator's nostalgic recollections are trustworthy entirely collapses. The revolutionary ethics of the New China—supposedly embodied by these vigorous youths—have fallen away too. For all their revolutionary symbolism, the children grow up with blithe indifference as the nation is overtaken by a political frenzy. The disembodied wound in the violent scene, then, points to the futility of revolutionary ideals and fragility of the political realities that they aim to establish. According to Jerome Silbergeld, the self-reflexivity of the unreliable storyteller enables the film to "subtly yet radically subvert the fundamental values of the Communist Revolution and the rhetorical devices of its propagandists" (2008, 18). The socialist regime's legitimacy rests on the belief in revolutionary progress and the superiority of China's political culture. What is most deeply unsettled by the narrator's self-conscious parody of historical memory, is the authoritarian state's alleged validity and historical mission.

Disguised behind an atmosphere of nostalgia, Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* reappropriates the Chinese Bildungsroman, dismantling the political motifs which it has served in socialist China. Through the sexualized romantization of traumatic history and self-reflexive narration of childhood memory, Jiang Wen and Wang Shuo break with the orthodox state ideologies of communism, patriotism, and heroism. Furthermore, the banal, even vulgar style of Jiang's and Wang's storytelling challenges that cultural elitism which had dominated China for decades. Admittedly, neither Jiang nor Wang have shaken off the label of elitism. Still, by mobilizing the Chinese Bildungsroman in support, not of supposedly elevated values, but of the popular and mundane, they opened up a new discursive space. In this new space, the ideological tenets and moral codes of socialist China have been discarded and ridiculed. As Hua Li upholds, *In the Heat of the Sun*'s parodic reiteration of the coming-of-age narrative marks a rupture with both the classical European Bildungsroman and the Chinese

Bildungsroman that emerged in the Maoist era. In both the original novel and film adaptation, Hua Li explains, the young protagonist has neither developed into a mature member of community having achieved knowledge of himself, nor reconciled himself to a revolutionary career as part of the collective (2011, 77). Contradicting their own social status, Jiang's and Wang's interventions in the Chinese Bildungsroman in film and fiction have undermined the genre's political allegiance to communist ideals and revived secular individualism in the aftermath of Maoism.

After the political upheavals that peaked in the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government urgently needed to reestablish its authority. Accordingly, the party-state determined to reinvigorate the stagnant economy and resumed the project of modernization. Sustaining a robust economy has become the authorities' top priority. In consequence, the new millennium has seen aggressive growth in Chinese industry, commerce, and commodity production. At the same time, the central government has sought to strengthen its autocratic control, imposing restrictive policies on cultural production, including cinema. This period is what I call the post-socialist era. As China's economy expands and the government's surveillance reaches ever further into society and culture, Chinese cinematic realism seems at a loss. Ironically, the decline of realistic art cinema, which began around the beginning of this century, has gone hand in hand with the bankruptcy of revolutionary idealism. What remains is a population with a consumerist mindset and an increasingly pragmatic society geared toward securing individual financial gain. Navigating between economic boom and political regulation, some Chinese filmmakers produced big-budget blockbusters brimming with visual effects, martial arts, and whimsical fantasies. Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige of the Fifth Generation are good examples of this trend. On the one hand, this foray into commercial filmmaking is a response to the times, a shrewd move that reflects China's sprawling market economy. On this basis, we might divide the history of cinema in mainland China into a propagandistic era and commercial era. On the other hand, these more commercially orientated filmmakers have managed to skirt sensitive political issues, in that the spectacles staged in their films only scratch the surface of contemporary China's social and political realities.

Some Sixth-Generation film directors (such as Lou Ye, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Zhang Yang) have persisted in taking a realistic approach to the drastic transformations undergone individuals in post-socialist China. However, others from the same group (such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Quan'an, and Zhang Yuan) have introduced unrealistic elements into otherwise realist narratives. The mixture of reality and imagination in their works is encapsulated in director Zhang Yuan's *Little Red Flowers* (*Kan shang qu hen mei*, 2006), a coming-of-age film adapted from Wang Shuo's eponymous novel. This is the only film in which Zhang Yuan's employs an allegorical, not realistic filmic language. As such, it invites a political reading that engages with Fredric Jameson's concept of national allegory. In the following section, I closely attend to Zhang Yuan's allegorical narration in *Little Red Flowers*. This strategic use of the Chinese Bildungsroman, I argue, is less a tragicomic portrayal of childhood that can be generalized to adolescence as such, than a continued effort to criticize ideological discipline and the repression of historical trauma under the socialist regime. To begin my argument, I begin with Zhang Yuan's personal history.

The Little Boy and the Big Brother

The term I have been using, the "Sixth Generation," loosely refers to Chinese filmmakers who graduated from Beijing Film Academy in the late 1980s. Whereas the work of the Fifth Generation received international acclaim at film festivals, this next generation of film graduates (Zhang Yuan among them) was annoyed by its philosophical and abstract tendencies. Rather than evoking a lost Chinese culture, which in any case had been devastated by the political turbulence of the twentieth century, Zhang Yuan and his cohort sought to capture the ever-changing realities of contemporary China. Showing little interest in the search for cultural roots, most Sixth-Generation directors appear indifferent to grand national narratives. Instead, the central principle of their work is to candidly portray Chinese everyday life during the process of modernization, by grappling with evolving conflicts among people, families, and larger communities, not to mention the tension between the individual and the state.

Zhang Yuan's early feature films are grounded in realistic aesthetics. In films such as his directorial debut *Mama* (1990), *Beijing Bastards* (1993), *Sons* (1996), and *East Palace, West Palace* (1997), Zhang's work has depicted a wide range of characters. From a single mother raising a son with learning difficulties to gay men struggling with their sexuality, Zhang Yuan has devoted much of his cinematic articulation to social identities that have sprouted against the backdrop of China's aggressive modernization. More specifically, he is invested in how these identities play out in quotidian life. Commentators note that Zhang Yuan, who started off an independent filmmaker, has established his reputation by depicting marginal realms of everyday life in Post-Maoist China (Kuoshu 2011, 11; Chu 2012, 179). Along with his pioneering independent filmmaking, Zhang Yuan was one of the first among his generation to regularly take on commercial assignments such as music videos and advertisements. His early work in the 1990s also includes a suite of documentaries, whose critical edge resonates with his feature films.[20] In light of his contumacious resistance to state censorship, Zhang Yuan was officially banned from filmmaking with state-owned studios in 1994, along with six other directors, including his long-time collaborator and then wife, the celebrated screenwriter Ning Dai.[21] Even though Zhang Yuan had been able to finance his filmmaking through private funds before the ban, this punitive measure effectively severed his ties with the state-owned studio system, which at that time dominated film production, and thus inhibited the public release of his works ever since. Like many of his generation, Zhang Yuan's recalcitrance in the face of the authoritarian government has made him a target of official supervision and frequent interdiction.

It was until the turn of the millennium that the official ban placed on Zhang Yuan's career was relaxed. Under this circumstance, Zhang Yuan released *Little Red Flowers*, his third feature-length film. Like *In the Heat of the Sun*, it was based on another novel by Wang Shuo, *Could Be Beautiful*. The novel was published in 1999, three years after *Wild Beasts*. Set in a kindergarten in Beijing at an unspecified time, *Little Red Flowers* revolves around a group of innocent children, particularly a four-year-old boy named Fang Qiangqiang. The story begins with a crying Qiang forcibly sent to the kindergarten by his father. As a newcomer, Qiang must adjust to communal life. Although Qiang tries, he repeatedly fails to observe the rules. In the kindergarten, good behavior is rewarded with a little red flower. One day, Qiang realizes that the rules are unfair and that there is no way for him to earn a flower. Frustrated, he becomes more and more audacious. At length, he convinces all the children to pull a prank on the headteacher, Aunt Li, whom Qiang alleges is a cannibal monster. Once he has been located as the source of the rumor, Qiang is increasingly estranged from classmates, who are bored by his ceaseless rebellion. In the end of the film, Qiang wanders out of class to hide in a lonely corner, where he falls asleep by a cold stone.

Apparently, Zhang's *Little Red Flowers* is distinct from Wang's *Wild Beasts* and Jiang's *In the Heat of the Sun* in several respects. First, Zhang's film focuses on preschool children who are as-yet unbound by adult dogmas, not revolutionary sentiments and sexual impulses among Chinese adolescences. In fact, by foregrounding the process through which ingenuous children are turned into submissive pupils, the film mirrors the systematic disciplining of docile subjects in a totalitarian society. At the kindergarten, Fang Qiangqiang is treated as an unwelcome dissident who openly defies the whole community, especially with the strict teachers. Second, Zhang's film also deviates from Wang's approach to narration in the original novel, which lingers on the ambivalent relationship between history and memory. In the preface of *Could Be Beautiful*, Wang Shuo makes clear that this story is set between 1961 and 1966 (when the Cultural Revolution broke out) and that the kindergarten is located on the Fuxing Road in Beijing, probably where the author himself lived as a child. In this way, Wang Shuo skillfully wove political criticism into this semi-autobiographical novel's historical context. Ostensibly at least, Zhang Yuan's *Little Red Flowers* retreats from this more antagonistic position in that it does not exactly locate the narrative in time or place. Abstracting from realistic political contexts as such, Zhang Yuan prompts the viewer to conceive the film as an allegory of the nation.

The kindergarten, for instance, is located in a historic building with red walls, yellow tiles, and white granite stairs. It is almost unfathomable that such an ancient palace is used as a place for a kindergarten, let alone when the very place is—should anyone familiar with Beijing's iconic attractions recognize—*Tai Miao*, a sacred place where emperors of Qing dynasty paid tributes and respects to their forebears in the Forbidden City. In fact, many of China's ancient buildings were occupied or even destroyed during the twentieth century, whether by communist officials, groups of revolutionary protesters, or the militant students of the Red Guards. In this light, the seemingly whimsical coupling of a solemn temple and a bustling kindergarten in *Little Red Flowers* provides an allegorical mask behind which the film hints at a number of politic ideas. With its distinctive location and design, the kindergarten stands for an archetypical institution, where every subject is kept in check through strictly enforced bodily and mental discipline. In this sense, those little red flowers, awarded to children who comply with the kindergarten's code of conduct, are designed to induce individuals to identify with the community's value system—that is, socialist ideology.[22] Fang Qiangqiang questions the rationality of the kindergarten's rules and the teachers' authority. Whereas most children are submissive, he gives his personality free rein. This can be demonstrated by several iconic moments in the film.

As soon as Qiang arrives in the kindergarten, Aunt Li already finds him unpleasant to the eye. Commanding the other kids to hold him still, Aunt Li snips off Qiang's thin plait, for the rules are that no boy is allowed to wear his hair long. The five rules, it emerges through the film, stipulate that one should dress and undress alone, wash one's hands before meals, not wet the bed, stay quiet at night, and go to the toilet regularly and cleanly. Adherence to each rule is rewarded with a little red flower, made out of paper. Any child who observes all five rules over the course of a day is eligible to be class leader. Like a fish out of water, Qiang is estranged by this implicitly competitive environment, not to mention the restrictions it imposes. With the help of twin sisters named Nanyan and Beiyan, and compassionate young teacher Miss Tang, he makes an effort to blend in. Nevertheless, there are some things he cannot fix—his continuous bedwetting and anxiety about defecating in the presence of other classmates.

Qiangqiang's bedwetting episodes are often shown as a recurring dream. In the film, a naked Qiang time and again leaves the palace on a snowy night to relieve himself. As much amusing and baffling as they seem, Qiang's dreams of urinating into the untainted snow express his disaffection with the kindergarten's regulations. While the first half of the story turns on innocuous hijinks and Qiang's playfulness, the second foregrounds the boy's indiscipline and consequent alienation from the community. After convincing his classmates that Aunt Li eats children, Qiang leads a coup while Aunt Li is asleep. No real harm is done, but the shocked Aunt Li decides to lock Qiang up as a punishment. Following this incident, Qiang wets the bed again. Surrounded by grinning teachers, the half-naked boy stands in pride, boasting about literally ″pissing off″ a scary monster. Confronted by the teachers' hideous laughter, Qiang is scared, and bursts into fearful tears. Soon afterwards, the film ends with Qiang walking away from the kindergarten.

Every encounter between Qiang and his stern teachers—particularly Aunt Li, who is always keen to denounce his innocent blunders—can be understood both within and beyond of the film's narrative. Comprised of bitter childhood experiences, this film casts doubt on preschool pedagogy as a form of social normalization, and much else besides. Focusing on a disobedient protagonist, it recalls the narrative framework of the Bildungsroman, which "has accustomed us to looking at normality *from within* rather than from the stance of its exceptions" (Moretti 2000, 11; original emphases). The way in which Zhang Yuan appropriates the genre, however, flies in the face of Moretti's assessment here. Zhang's narration is focalized through the rebellious and estranged Qiang, who represents an exception to normality in his community. Moreover, Qiang's defeat and exile diverges markedly from the character's successful incorporation into society that concludes many works in the classical European Bildungsroman tradition. Similar to the bewilderment and isolation experienced by Ma Xiaojun in *In the Heat of the Sun*, Qiang's banishment reflects the repression of the individual at the hands of the collective. As Kiu-wai Chu puts it, in representing childhood, *Little Red Flowers* presents "a system of conformity defined by rules and regulations, which is in reality not beautiful at all" (2012, 194). At the same time, the film points to the repressed childhood memories of Zhang's own generation through "the metaphoric and nostalgic fabled story" (Chu, 194). Grounded in metaphorical representations, rather than realistic stylistics, Zhang's calculated use of the Chinese Bildungsroman circumvents state censorship, allowing him to voice his political critique of China's reality.

Growing up during the Cultural Revolution, Zhang bore close witness in his youth to the crackdown of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Having sought to open an honest debate on the nation's past and the present, his career was almost stifled by the authorities. It is against this backdrop that we should assess *Little Red Flowers*' obscure plot. Here I reflect on the director's intentions in telling this children's tale, whose ambience is uncanny and yet poignant. Chen Xiaoming proposes that Chinese films can be seen as national allegories. A political reading, he suggests, allows us to discern the veiled recurrence of history, which in turn provides a metaphor for contemporary sociopolitical conditions (2000, 231). For cultural critic Fredric Jameson, the need for Chinese cultural practitioners to create allegorical works stems from the "embattled situations of the public third-world culture and society," which prompt us to associate stories about individuals with social and national matters (1986, 69). Reading works of film and literature allegorically reveals how "the psychological points to the political and the trauma of subalternity" (Szeman 2001, 810). Recognizing Zhang Yuan's coming-of-age narrative as a national allegory, hence, provides a way of understanding the confrontations that take place between the individual (Fang Qiangqiang) and collective (the teachers and other children). More crucially, it allows us to grasp the political struggle between Zhang Yuan—a member of the Chinese creative class—and censors working on behalf of the authoritarian state, who restrain the public from questioning official ideologies. Given the increasingly narrow space available for public debate, Zhang has reverted to an allegorical mode, which steps back from the realism of scar literature in the early post-Maoist era. Furthermore, his national allegory differs from films made in the 1980s by the Fifth Generation. Those films spun grand narratives of Chinese history, speculating about the relationship between the nation's mythic origins and its unfolding modernization. In conjunction with other Sixth Generation filmmakers, who are similarly engaged with realism, Zhang prefers to utter his thoughts in a circuitous way. *Little Red Flowers* remains Zhang's only film to have won critical acclaim since 2000.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have concentrated on two recent films that pivot on coming-of-age experiences, situating them in the broader field of the Chinese Bildungsroman. In contrast to the bourgeois cultural values integral to the original model of European Bildungsroman, the Chinese Bildungsroman has tended to cultivate revolutionary ideals, especially after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. The hegemonic ideologies inscribed in the Chinese Bildungsroman are various, encompassing the nationalist sentiments of democratic republicanism, to the ideals of communism, collectivism, and patriotism promoted by the authoritarian nation-state.

Moreover, the umbrella term "Chinese Bildungsroman" masks a variety of internal differences, which reflect historical shifts between different regimes and social structures. In the Republican Era, the Chinese Bildungsroman promoted modern bourgeois culture. With the advent of communism, this middle-class value system has been displaced by revolutionary ideals. Later on, with the end of the Cultural Revolution, communist ideology has given way to the more mundane and secular aspects of everyday life in a growing commodity society. A generation of young filmmakers, above all Jiang Wen and Zhang Yuan, has emerged in the context of China's economic reform and waves of financial privatization. Their seemingly apolitical coming-of-age narratives, which include parodic portrayals and resistant characters, resonate with the individualist tendencies of this new era.

The coming-of-age narratives analyzed in this chapter offer a cultural lens through which to explore ideological challenges inherent in contemporary China, especially as it integrates into the global economy. Specifically, Jiang Wen's and Zhang Yuan's films rework the genre of the Chinese Bildungsroman so as to address historical issues and political conditions, whether by adopting a nostalgic, nightmarish, or allegorical tone. Playing with the relations among history and memory, reality and allegory, both stories of personal growth are symptomatic reflections of conflicts between individual pursuits and national ambitions.

Chapter 2

En/Gendering the Nation:

Womanhood, Femininity, and Nationalism

> The focus on "woman" is thus a way of foregrounding the politics of so-called structural, systemic differences, by foregrounding the oppressed existence of those who occupy the low side of the male/female opposition. As a means of formal analysis, "woman" deals not only with gender but also with the power-invested processes of *hierarchization* and *marginalization* that are involved in readings of culture.
>
> —Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*

In the previous chapter, I introduced the genre of the Bildungsroman in my analysis of Chinese cinema. In so doing, I attempted to debunk the articulation of nationalist ideologies in coming-of-age narratives since the foundation of modern Chinese literature and cinema in the early twentieth century. Focusing on the nexus of childhood and nationhood in cinematic representation, my interpretations sought to unravel the ways in which the figure of youth has been symbolically associated with a range of political agendas. Whereas some depictions of youth were calculated to incite a collective national consciousness; others mobilize individual sensibility against the collective, thus challenging the legitimacy and superiority of the communist party state. If in Europe the Bildungsroman originated as a literary response to the advent of secular society and formation of the modern state, its variant in modern China, by contrast, is a site of discursive contestation. In and through the narrative space of the Chinese Bildungsroman, Chinese society and culture are both transformed by and pitted against Western knowledge and practice. The trope of youth has served to energize the national image, wherein China—once withering and wounded—can now rejuvenate and heal, indeed thrive. At the same time, it also feeds into critical intellectual movements that repudiate ruling authorities. The epitome of modern

Chinese culture, the genre of the Chinese Bildungsroman embodies an emergent national identity that negotiates external and internal conflicts.

In European literary history, the Bildungsroman worked to shore up bourgeois cultural hegemony and the privileged figure of the educated white man. Far from assimilating this worldview, the Chinese Bildungsroman complicated the tenets of the Western middle class. In their place, Chinese iterations of the genre instill revolutionary ideals—such as statism, nationalism, and socialism—to which China has attempted to resolve crises at various historical junctures. To grasp one of the salient ways in which the Chinese Bildungsroman has been ideologically reconfigured, consider a film titled *Song of Youth*, which I cited briefly in the previous chapter. The film presents a telling episode in Chinese women's history. It is set in a period in which an inchoate republican government is being thwarted by military factionalism and imperialist invaders. The female protagonist is Lin Daojing, a well-groomed and compassionate woman raised in an indigent family. In Lin's formative years, she zigzags through society as an exile who constantly encounters misogynic bigotry. At the same time, the prospect of war looms large. Throughout, Lin remains defiant to arranged marriage while devoted to revolution. This narrative of a young woman's experience registers nothing less than a new form of subjectivity—an epochal change of women's social status in China. More than a rebellion against her own personal circumstances, the female protagonist's pursuit of gender equality and personal freedom resonate with the socialist grand narrative of Chinese nation-building. In this sense, both the individual citizen and nation are redefined so as to establish a better society—whether in securing women's individual autonomy or the nation's sovereign integrity. Therefore, it is crucial that we investigate the connections between gender and nation in the Chinese context.

Central to this enquiry, I propose, are the ways in which representations of Chinese women have served as a symbol of Chinese nationhood. My prime concern lies in how nationalist ideologies have shaped cultural conceptions of womanhood over time. In the course of this volatile process, a variety of gender differences and relations (such as masculinity and femininity, man and woman) have been reworked into a new, modern, and national subject. Alerting to the fact that China's modernization has carried through over a century under successive regimes, I will address changing conceptions and expressions of femininity in modern Chinese society and culture, while focusing on the portrayal of female characters in Chinese cinema. My analysis is premised on a distinction between Chinese and Western notions of “woman,” according to which Chinese discourses of gender diverge from the universalizing vocabulary of gender emanated from the West. Moreover, against the backdrop of the transformation of Chinese society, politics, and epistemologies, it is equally important to interrogate how “woman” has transformed, to show how the concept has varied with the country’s modernization and shifting relations with the West (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002, 34). Accordingly, this chapter intends to grapple with how narratives of femininity—above all the idea of Chinese Woman—mediate among a set of forces and factors, namely the individual and nation, convention and conversion, China and the West. Dwelling on womanhood, the chapter offers a vantage point on the complex interplay between gender and nation in Chinese culture.

Two Chinese-language films, *Song of Youth* (*Qing chun zhi ge*, 1959) and *Lust, Caution* (*Se jie*, 2007), provide pertinent cases studies for my discussion in that both were adapted from novels by female authors and organized around female characters. The first derives from the first decade of China’s Socialist Era, The second belongs to the dramatic onset of economic globalization in the new millennium. Considering the time that elapsed between the two films, I argue that they furnish an apt comparative lens through which we can account for changing definitions of womanhood in modern Chinese culture. In *Song of Youth*, as we know, the female protagonist stands for a revolutionary figure. She not only breaks with from traditional Confucian ethics, which relegate women to the trivia of domestic life, but also subsumes her personal struggle under a larger leftist movement. In stark contrast *Lust, Caution* tells a different story. The female protagonist lives in similarly turbulent circumstances, which wed her personal existence to the nation’s struggle for survival. Unlike Lin, this film’s heroine unexpectedly forsakes her patriotic convictions. Rather than assassinate a treacherous spymaster, she gives in to love.

My analysis embarks upon the rifts between tradition and revolution, morality and desire, the individual and the nation that surface in these narratives of women. I begin with a brief survey of how ideologies of gender and nation have been mobilized since the advent of Chinese modernity, before turning to the conflicts over value, culture, and politics played out in representations of Chinese women.

Chinese “Woman,” Western “Gender”

The emergence of a new notion of "woman" in China at the beginning of the twentieth century gathered momentum on two interrelated spurts. The first is the global transmission of Western knowledge and technology through the process of colonial expansion, in which late-imperial China was imbricated. The other is the onset of nationalist movements in China, which set out to supplant feudalism and Confucian values with a modern nation. Together these overlapping historical currents unfold a dialectic of national integration and disintegration—that is, a constant negotiation of what constitutes Western culture and what Chinese. Against this backdrop, conceptions of womanhood have undergone a drastic transition. In place of the inferior, compliant, submissive and ultimately subjugated role reserved for women in China's traditionally patriarchal society, the twentieth century saw the emergence of a new female subjectivity. This independent, capable, and versatile agent of the nation-state engages fully in the project of revolution. If the birth of the Chinese nation represents a collective response to Western intrusion, then this protean new "Chinese Woman" testifies to China's nation-building trajectory that mediates between Western knowledge and Chinese circumstances. Moreover, this new vision of femininity marks a distinguishing feature of Chinese nationalism. Chinese modernity is bound up with the female subject, as Chinese national identity is embodied, for the most part, by female figures. To explore the close entwinement of nationality and femininity in the cultural imagination of modern China, I will first present the ways in which notions of womanhood have transformed, while highlighting several decisive moments in the history of constructions of gender in China.

With the arrival of Western colonial powers in the mid-nineteenth century, the last monarchy of the imperial China, the Qing dynasty, suffered a string of military defeats. This sets the tone for the ensuing decades. In the gloom that followed the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the scholar Yan Fu (1854-1921), who had studied in Victorian England, pioneered the introduction of Western thought to China. To do so, he published a series of translations, ranging from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* to Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*. His very first book, *Tian Yan Lun* (1898), inspired China's enlightenment, which in turn precipitated the onset of national modernization at the dawn of the twentieth century. In this book, which is based on British biologist Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (1893), Yan Fu drew a comparison between biological evolution and human society. Mapping Charles Darwin's "natural selection" onto Herbert Spencer's notion of the "survival of the fittest," Yan urged that China must evolve if it was to survive fierce competition among nations. Anchoring his beliefs in historical progressivism, Yan resolved to strengthen China by means of thorough reforms, as did many of his compatriots. Paradoxically enough, nationalist intellectuals and activists argued that the country's future could only be secured against Western incursion by emulating Western ideals and institutions. Coming to grips with this task, they looked to Western Europe, America, and Japan. This is where Homi Bhabha's indictment of the colonial project, his notion of colonial mimicry in particular, serves to diagnose this fraught emulation of the colonized. Late imperial China, he writes, fostered "a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline" to imitate elements of Western science and democracy (Bhabha 1984, 126). At the same time, though, it established itself as "the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal"—a disavowal, that, of the sameness that China felt forced to take upon itself (Bhabha 1984, 126). Put simply, China underwent a contradictory process in which it had to both accept and refuse Western models. Not least in the domain of gender relations, Chinese society and culture sought to navigate between internal and external sources of identity (Watson 2007, 175). Conceptions of womanhood were thus a key arena in which this balance was struck: a site at which China attempted to redefine itself by assuming a new gendered image.

Modern China's national identity was formulated, in the first instance, on the basis of racial discourses. This racialization of national identity implies that China's entrance into the colonial hierarchy was dictated by the West. Still, many in China came to recognize the nation's place in this hierarchy or races, In fact, shortly after the first Sino-Japanese War was lost, Yan Fu wrote a commentary that lashed out at imperial China's chauvinistic and narcissistic mentality. This mindset, he argued, had led to the emergence of dangerous illusions over the previous centuries. In trying to disabuse his compatriots of their complacence, Yan described the faltering empire as a "sick man"—a polity that appeared far less vital, less "physically active" than his Western counterparts (Rojas 2015, 2). This derogatory metaphor had been used before to characterize other nations that, like the Ottoman Empire, which were tumbling in the face of the West. Nevertheless, Yan's incentive rhetoric reinvented the analogy, such that the trope of the sick man was widely taken up as a racialized and pathologized stereotype for the late imperial China (Rojas, 14; Heinrich 2008, 76). This stereotype implicated not only China's geopolitical weakness, but also the urgent need to structurally transform the nation. The metaphor of a dying patient's terminal disease captured the widespread apprehension that China—an archaic kingdom—was plummeting to the bottom of the hierarchy of races, which was dominated by the industrial West.

The phrase “sick man of Asia” (*Dong ya bing fu*) has become a notorious pejorative label for modern China. It brings into focus the power relation between China and the West, so much so that it projects a biased distinction between white and Asian or “yellow” races in cultural discourse. Whereas the phrase implicitly accords the West the role of a white robust male, the Chinese are denigrated as bearers of contagion: a “yellow peril” (Rojas 2015, 2). In appropriating this figure of speech, Yan Fu strategically acknowledged epistemic and material asymmetries between China and Western colonial powers. In so doing, he sowed the seed of nationalism, arguing that Western theories and inventions were the remedy that could cure China’s malaise: “[to] promote the people’s strength, expand their knowledge, and revive their virtue” (Price 2000, 260). Yan viewed nation-states through the prism of eugenics and social Darwinism. The goal for Chinese civilization, he proposed, should be to unburden all individuals of the physical and moral constraints imposed by social conventions and cultural creeds. With this imperative, Chinese women became the focus of intense debate and revolutionary efforts. Having long been constrained by Confucian patriarchal ideals of female chastity and domestic servitude, their fortunes would change from the late nineteenth century onward.

The racial slur of the “yellow peril” tainted the whole national community. Gender—in particular femininity—is another front of discursive formation that shaped the cultural imaginary of late-imperial China. The weakening of China’s state power and cultural influence damaged the nation’s masculine self-image, which devolved to the trope of a “sick” man. In this context, the image of China changed into that of a woman. This shift, I claim, also echoes the dissemination of feminism as part of the wider influx of Western knowledge into China. “While colonial racial discourse exerted an emasculating effect on the Chinese people,” suggests Ping Zhu, Chinese intellectuals feminized the nation image (2015, 5). As such, China positioned itself “in the colonial world hierarchy as the feminized other of the West” (Zhu 2015, 13). For much of Chinese history, conceptions of race and gender have been closely intertwined in the discursive construction of national identity. At this historical conjuncture, however, a series of discursive shifts occurred. The constructed rivalry between strong/white and weak/yellow races was gradually displaced by two further contrasts: first that between a masculine man and an effeminate man, and then that between masculinity and femininity. In *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*, feminist theorists Lydia Liu, Rebecca Karl, and Dorothy Ko shed light on the historical context in which the latter shift took place:

> As the civilizational status of the gentry class—coded "male"—came under increased threat by the superior military and discursive forces of the West, a number of contradictory social conditions began to emerge and prepare the ground for the rise of feminism in China. The movement began with a kind of protofeminist rhetoric and activism led by Chinese men alongside the responses of Chinese women at the turn of the century. (2013, 6)

Chinese intellectuals, albeit mostly male, posited women's emancipation as the cornerstone of the nationalist enterprise. In this way, the discursive construction of Chinese nationalism emerged through the gendered discourse of what constitutes a modern "woman."

The rise of feminism amid China's transition to modernity is telling on several counts. According to sociologist Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, it reveals "how gender relations frame nationalist demands," the ways in which "nationalist ideology configures gender relations within specific geopolitical contexts," and "how gender shapes relationships between nations," in this case, China and the West (2013, 2). Unlike nationalism in Europe and America, which is invested in narrowly masculinist ideologies, the birth of nation in modern China was bound up closely with feminism (Thapar-Björkert 8; Nagel 2010, 245). The feminist disposition of Chinese nationalism deviates from the masculinism upheld in both the West and traditional Chinese society. By means of a close reading of "woman" in cultural texts, centrally two contemporary films, I aim to trace the varied trajectory of womanhood in modern and contemporary China. The female subject on screen, I claim, is an index of China's political landscape. Attending to constructions of femininity then, I ultimately seek to unpack what Rey Chow describes as the "representational positioning characteristic of modern and contemporary cultural politics" (2013, 1).

In the most generic sense, Chinese feminism set out to extricate women from Confucian patrilineal society, in which they were denied access to the public domain. In reality, however, Chinese feminism is less a monolithic orchestra than a polyphonic ensemble of distinct fragments. In recounting the development of Chinese feminism, it is crucial to attend to its different overlapping strands. Feminist scholar Tani Barlow suggests that a pair of Chinese concepts, *nüxing* and *funü*, corresponds to two correlated yet competing threads that run through modern China's feminist project. Whereas *nüxing* refers to a sexual, erotic, and carnal subjectivity resonant with Western sexology and eugenics, *funü* pertains to an ethical, political, and humanist stance in line with China's nationalist revolution (2004, 38). The conceptual demarcation of womanhood, along with the interaction between the two concepts of *nüxing* and *funü*, maps onto the tension between individual and collective. This latter tension figures prominently across various periods of China's governance, from the Republican (1912-1949), through the Maoist (1949-1979), to the Post-Maoist era (or post-socialist, 1979-present).

Here, I approach Chinese-language cinema through reference to *nüxing/funü* dyad, observing film narratives as a central stage on which the two concepts are voiced or performed by a broad cast of female characters. In exploring cinematic representations of Chinese women, it becomes clear that the notion of woman registers changing patterns of ideological struggle in the formation of Chinese nationhood.

Revolutionary Ideal and Mundane Desire

The film *Song of Youth* (*Qing chun zhi ge*, 1959) is an adaptation of a 1958 novel of the same name by Yang Mo (1914-1995). The story recounts a vibrant and tumultuous period during the 1930s, as the newly founded Chinese Republic faced the imminent threat of imperialist intrusion and upsurge of public resentment against the government's compromised negotiations with Western colonial powers. The film's protagonist is Lin Daojing, who was born to a peasant mother and landlord father. Soon after Lin's birth, her father left her mother and remarried. Now eighteen years old, Lin is betrothed to a local official. This arranged marriage is being forced upon her by her stepmother. In an attempt to escape her engagement, Lin finds employment at a rural primary school in Hebei province, away from her hometown Beiping (now Beijing). The headmaster of this school, however, turns out to be yet another villain in that he wants to take advantage of Lin. Wary that he will trade her off as a concubine, Lin beings to despair. At length, she decides to drown herself in the ocean. A Peking university student named Yu Yongze happens to witness Lin's suicide attempt, rescuing her in the nick of time. Upon her recovery, the two fall in love. On September 18, 1931, Japanese invaded Manchuria—a landmark incident that piqued fury across China, which would fight the Japanese army until 1945. Following the invasion, Lin returns to Beiping and agrees to marry Yu. Their marriage soon falls apart, however, because of their irreconcilable differences regarding national politics. Their feud involves a student and communist activist named Lu Jiachuan, who wins Lin's heart with his radical view of proletarian revolution.

Unsurprisingly, the two men that accompany Lin during her formative years, Yu and Lu, appear to be one another's nemeses. Although both are university students, Yu prides himself on his profound knowledge of literature, whereas Lu is primarily concerned with the fate of the nation. The chasm between the two is best illustrated by the ways in which Lin relates to them. When Lin still works as a junior teacher, for instance, she is drawn to Lu's inspiring speech. A patriot, Lin admires Lu's sense of responsibility, a quality sorely lacking in her husband Yu. In the novel on which the film was based, Lin's feelings for Lu are described as follows:

> Lin Daojing simply cannot turn her eyes away from Lu Jiachuan. Those impassioned words spark something other than outrage in her heart: she is enthralled. She has never met anyone like him before, as Lu Jiachuan is so different to Yu Yongze. Yu would frequently pontificate on either the fine arts or some sentimental anecdote. But this university student, whom she had only just met, solely devotes himself to state affairs. What he said with such ease and eloquence has opened up another world, a world she has not yet explored.[23]

At this moment, the key difference between the two men comes forth clearly. Lu is an outright revolutionary, who vehemently condemns the government's suppression of communism and inability to stand up to the Japanese. Yu, in contrast, is a young pedant who hopes to associate himself with cultural officials in the government. He despises communism. Worse still, Yu shows himself to be a manipulative husband, keen to confine his wife to the domestic sphere. A hypocritical patriarch, he is not the compassionate man he initially claimed to be. All of this earns Lin's revulsion; she dreams of participating in social and political movements like Lu, her spiritual guide. In fact, the tension between these two male characters serves to externalize Lin's torn state of mind as her political consciousness awakens. Lin switches sides, leaving the reactionary Yu for the revolutionary Lu, which also entails a transition from romantic desire to political idealism. Here then we encounter the tension endemic to Chinese womanhood: that between *nüxing* and *funü*. In modern Chinese history, as I will soon discuss, the interplay between these two concepts has defined the contours of womanhood.

Funü (which literally means both a married or unmarried woman) initially seems to suggest that women are reproductive vessels of patrilineal kinship relations and Confucian ethics. In contrast, *Nüxing* (which literally means the female sex) is a new category that Chinese intellectuals devised as part of the 1919 May Fourth Movement, in defiance of conventional values (Barlow 2004, 40; Zhu 2015, 133). The traditional Chinese understanding of woman is premised on Confucian principles, according to which women are restricted to patriarchal marital and kinship relations (Barlow, 38). Reduced to docile objects, women are meant to uphold male supremacy. The category of *nüxing*, on the contrary, implies that Chinese women conform to an epistemological framework that is mediated by Western knowledge and theories of sexuality. This framework foregrounds the significance of anatomy and physiology (Zhu 2015, 11). Treating binaries of both gender and sex as universally valid scientific facts, *nüxing* is a fundamentally biological, even evolutionary concept. As such, it feeds into China's urgent need to reinvent itself as a modern nation-state. Hence, whereas *funü* represents a moral ideal of womanhood, which dismisses female autonomy, biology, and libido, *nüxing* deliberately breaks away from this conception. Rather, it conceives of woman as a conscious subject of sexual difference and erotic desire (Zhu 2015, 14).

However, the *nüxing/funü* dichotomy does not provide a yardstick by which perceptions of women can be neatly categorized. In fact, perceptions of women and their social conditions are often ambiguous, and might well fall between these two poles, Consider, for instance, *The Goddess* (*Shen nu*, 1934). This film's female protagonist is played by Ruan Lingyu—an icon of Chinese cinema adorned with glamor and melancholy. Her character embroiled in a life of hardship in the modern, colonial, and cosmopolitan Shanghai in the 1930s. A prostitute who seduces men under the cover of night, the female protagonist is also a caring mother, who strives to create a brighter future for her young son. This character encapsulates an apparent contradiction between lucrative sexuality and motherly love. Hence, this representation of femininity confounds the *nüxing/funü* dichotomy, undercutting the strict division according to which one is either a sexual subject or moral agent. The mother figure represented in *The Goddess* embodies an ambiguous construction of femininity. Some other representations, such as Lin Daojing in *Song of Youth,* show women as engaging in a perpetual opposition of the antitheses to established norms, as befits the political turmoil and social unrest since modernity entered China.

Despite the ambivalent bifurcation of Chinese femininity, Tani Barlow suggests that both the concepts of *nüxing* and *funü* themselves, and the relation between them, have varied over time. The sexed and eroticized female of *nüxing* became prevalent in the Republican Era, reflecting a wider political and social tendency through which individuals detached themselves from moral discipline. In this way, new systems of shared knowledge and belief dislodged existing epistemologies (Barlow 2004, 37). In post-socialist China, however, *nüxing* came to embody emancipatory individualism. In this context, it stood at odds with Mao's sweeping ambition to mobilize class struggle and unify the mass. Instead, *funü* became the dominant model of womanhood during the Socialist Era. What makes this transition significant, Barlow stresses, is that the notion of *funü* was refashioned as "a national subject that stood for the collectivity of all politically normative or decent women" (38). Simply put, *funü* was enmeshed in the grand scheme of social revolution and socialist modernization.

To be clear, Mao's era marked a return—if not regression—to femininity, which enforced women's incorporation into the public sphere and encroached upon their privacy. The cost of establishing *funü* as an archetype of femininity for the New China, then, was that *nüxing* was denounced as its binary opposite: a Westernized, bourgeois, individualist, and voluptuous form of femininity (Barlow 38). Against this backdrop, *Song of Youth* offers a glimpse into the vacillations between *funü* and *nüxing* through which "woman" was defined in Chinese feminism. Specifically, the discursive construction of "woman" comes to be couched in the language of idealism and desire. For Yang Mo, the concept of womanhood is defined by the central character's commitment to revolutionary ideals and repudiation of mundane desire. This choice is somewhat romantically delineated as Lin's preference of Lu over Yu, who embodies idealism and desire respectively. As the narrative unfolds, Lin's political allegiance is bolstered by a situation of life and death in which she finds herself.

After arriving in Beiping, Lin Daojing moves in with Yu Yongze. Before long, she encounters Lu Jiachuan at a student gathering on New Year's Eve. Lin, Lu, and the other students have a shared sense of patriotism. Even still, they all resent the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT). Lin is convinced that China's future lies on a different path—that led forward by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). From this point on, Lin immerses herself in Marxist thought under Lu's guidance. She ardently aspires to become a Communist. Stunned by the development between his wife and college mate, Yu becomes an obstacle standing in their way. He fears that Lin's and Lu's pursuit of communism will sabotage his promising career. This is the first climactic moment of the film. Lu shows up at Lin's doorstep one night with a package full of propaganda pamphlets for her to take care of. Knowing that numerous policemen are on Lu's tail, Yu refuses to shelter him, despite Lin's protest. Soon after having left the quarreling couple, Lu is arrested by the authorities. He is later executed. Realizing that their marriage is beyond repair, Lin parts ways with Yu. Once again, she walks away from home.[24] Through the two departures that mark the female protagonist's life, the film signifies the transformative passages undergone by Chinese womanhood in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Lin's escape from the arranged marriage represents a rejoinder to the repressive patriarchal society. However, her divorce from Yu—who pulled her back from the brink of death after all—is not so much another escape from domestic repression as a declaration of her political independence. Accordingly, her two departures are implicated in the differentiation between *nüxing* and *funü* in Chinese feminism. Lin's personal growth has taken several turns: having initially sought personal integrity and liberty during the Republican Era, she eventually dedicated herself to nationhood, as conceived by a particular political ideology, that is, communism. For Meng Yue, this plot development covertly reinforces the legitimacy of the party state through the representation of women:

> The combination of authentic political identity with womanhood is a double play. On the one hand, the state's political discourse translated itself through women into the private context of desire, love, marriage, divorce, and familial relations, and, on the other, it turned woman into an agent of politicizing desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self, and all private emotions … [F]emale images in

> socialist literature functioned as a special agent of the state's appropriation of the "public." (Yue 1994, 118)

In this light, when it comes to womanhood in the Socialist Era, Lin Daojing is portrayed in a way that politically elevates the public over the personal. Although the narrative commences with Lin's genuine wish to establish individual autonomy, this personal struggle for gender equality is surmounted by collectivist ambitions.

The protagonist's mundane emotions and intimate desires, in the meantime, also dissolve into the grand sweep of history. In creating a female protagonist whose formative years coincide with China's course of modernization, Yang Mo—the author of the novel—staged the dramatic historical transition through which republican China (under the governance of the KMT) veered into another trajectory. Between the lines, as it were, this is less a biographical narrative than a story of the historical emergence of the CCP. In fact, Yang Mo's literary inscription of the femininity complies with the national history dictated by the communist bureaucracy. According to Meng Yue, this complicity between fiction and historiography poses a grave danger, in that as "it leaves no room open for a public or imagined public other than the one offered by the Communist Party" (129).

Recalling what I have argued in the previous chapter, it would seem that *Song of Youth* is characteristic of the Chinese Bildungsroman in that the heroine's maturation serves as an allegory of China's modern transformation. This allegorization of the feminine is highly problematic, for it means that the feminist project is displaced by, and reduced to, the central character's "simplified identification with the only available ideal subject position", namely, a national polity of communism (Yue 1994, 130). Switching from an emphasis on her individual gender equality to building the communist state, Lin identifies with a collective ideal, not private intimacy. This demonstrates not only the conflicts at work in the construction of the female subject, but directs formations of China's national identity at a certain ideological position. As a primary site of cross-cultural exchange, at which traditional Chinese society adapted to Western knowledge and practice, notions of womanhood register China's ideological battles over time. In particular, they bring into focus the tension between the individual and the state.

Sublime Mind and Profane Body

During the 1960s, at the height of the Maoist era, Chinese cinema enrolled the female figure as a means of addressing the national condition and conjuring collective consciousness. From the late 1970s onward, however, the communist regime has toned down its revolutionary rhetorics and shifted its focus to the economy. In this post-socialist period, the symbolic connections between womanhood and nationhood have been subjected to increasing skepticism. Following the uneasy realization that the country was doomed to failure if its continual state of political tumult could be not be quelled, the ruling party opted to defuse domestic tensions by reaching beyond its borders. Among other consequences, this foray into capitalist globalization has enlarged China's borders in the cultural imagination. Now, the Mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, despite their varied colonial pasts and historical processes of modernity, are all often seen as part of China.[25]

Whereas rhetorics of nationhood once united individuals together in a common project, today the bankruptcy of revolutionary idealism and widespread of neoliberal capitalism have together produced a disenchantment with nationalism in China. Now that the legacy of Maoism has waned, the symbolic equivalence of woman and nation has moved into the domain of personal experience, rather than totalizing ideology. Contemporary Chinese-speaking cinema is permeated with depictions of femininity that cut against the myth of China's modernity, in which CCP steers the nation through a progressive, developmental, and triumphal history. Among various filmic narratives that foreground modern Chinese women, Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* exemplifies how portrayals of women might refuse nationalism by playing on the ambiguity between *funü* and *nüxing*. Riveted on female emotions and desires, this film offers a close look at those intricacies of the human psyche that are irreducible to national sentiments. On the one hand, attentive to female sexuality and body, the film emphasizes that the protagonist is not merely submissive in the face of revolutionary ethics. On the other, it allows for an alternative historiography of modern China, which has been concealed by official narratives. As will become apparent in my analysis, the central female figure in *Lust, Caution* points to an epistemic shift within the category of "woman" in the post-socialist era. This transition heralds the emergence of an amoral and apolitical conception of womanhood as an individual with a reinvigorated sexual and psychic life.

Similar to *Song of Youth*, the film *Lust, Caution* centers on a young and innocent woman suffering from great distress. Set in the same historical period—the 1930s—the story revolves around Wong Chia Chih, an émigré who was born in Shanghai, flees at the outbreak of war to Hong Kong, the erstwhile British colony.[26] While studying at Lingnan University (one of the many schools to be evacuated from mainland China during the Second Sino-Japanese War), Wong joins a theater group on campus. There, she becomes associated with a group of patriotic students. The group leader, Kuang Yu Min, is secretly fond of Wong. Although their propagandistic plays are a great success, Kuang comes up with a daring plan: to kill a real enemy. The troupe plots the assassination of Mr. Yee, a confidant of Wang Jingwei (who will soon become the president of Japan's puppet government in China). Assigned to lure Mr. Yee into a trap, Wong Chia Chih assumes the identity of a businessman's wife. After several attempts, she infiltrates Mr. Yee's house by making the acquaintance of his wife. Just as their plan seems to go smoothly, Mr. Yee is summoned back to Shanghai on short notice, leaving the students with no choice but to abort their mission. Having dropped out of college and returned to Shanghai due to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, Wong reconnects with Kuang and the others four years later. Recruited by Chiang Kai-Shek's war-time government in Chongqing, Wong and the rest of the group are dispatched to finish where they left off.[27] Wong resumes her dangerous liaison with Mr. Yee, who has been appointed as the security chief in the collaborationist regime. The film begins with Wong Chia Chih's last day alive, just as she is about to bring her enemy to justice.

Lust, Caution is based on an eponymous novella by Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing, 1920-1995), arguably modern Chinese literature's most celebrated female author, certainly among Chinese-language communities. In fact, the film induced a renewed appreciation of her literary legacy. *Lust, Caution* is rather shorter and less known in comparison with Chang's other books, such as *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qing cheng zhi lian*) and *The Golden Cangue* (*Jin suo ji*). Still, it brings together political intrigue and psychological thrill with remarkable narrative finesse. The storyline, as it turns out, bears traces of Chang's own life experience. Born in Shanghai in a privileged family that had fallen on harsh times, the author suffered an unhappy childhood due to her parents' divorce. If not for these setbacks, Chang would have studied in Britain had it not been for the World War II, which derailed her plans.[28] Instead, Chang studied English literature at the University of Hong Kong until 1941, until the colonial harbor fell into Japanese hands. Chang was first forced to return to Shanghai the following year, before eventually leaving mainland China after the Communists took over.

Inspired by a real assassination of this era, [29] Chang wove a story around her own adventures, romances, and migration.[30]

Although the original story was not published until the late 1970s, Chang had already completed the first draft as early as in the 1950s, under the title of "The Spyring" (*Apple Daily* 2008). The film version basically adheres to the original novel's structure. Like the novel, it features a lengthy flashback showing how Wong Chia Chih embarks on her mission. Ang Lee's filmic rendition of Chang's espionage thriller is distinguished by its explicit depictions of sex, which is merely hinted at in the novel.[31] The film is punctuated by three graphic sex scenes involving the heroine Wong Chia Chih and villain Mr. Yee. Moreover, it presents another lengthy flashback showing how the protagonists become both intimate lovers and implacable foes. Through Wong's encounters with Mr. Yee, the narrative unveils an aspect of modern Chinese history that has yet to be openly acknowledged by the communist authorities. To be sure, this story's central ideological conflict is not that between the KMT and the CCP, although this tension would ultimately result in the overthrow of the Chinese Republic and their clash in civil war. Rather, the explanation as to why the female protagonist is willing to sacrifice herself by seducing a callous man, lies in the warring factions inside the nationalist regime itself.[32] The peculiar historical context in which Eileen Chang (and Ang Lee) sets the story, Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, has been addressed by neither Chinese nor Western critics of the film (2008, 227-8).

Lust, Caution distances itself from the grand historical narrative in which China withstood Japanese invasion through a military coalition between nationalist and communist forces. Instead, it explores how individuals grapple with extraordinary tasks in ordinary circumstances. In other words, by focusing on a Chinese woman's private life, the film invites us to ponder the extent to which the nation interferes with, calls upon, or commandeers the individual. Further, it prompts reflection on whether ordinary people can assert their agency in maneuvering among various political ideologies and personal sensibilities. In this case, the female protagonist achieves personal agency by engaging emotionally and sensually with her sworn enemy. At long last, these emotional and somatic intensities discharge her of ingrained political dogmas.

This narrative approach is clearest in scenes of sex and sensuality, through which Ang Lee teases out aspects of Wong Chia Chih's personhood from behind the ideological facade. The first time that Wong and Mr. Yee have sexual intercourse is an egregious case of rape. Inside a secret chamber in a suburban flat, Mr. Yee tears off

Wong's cheongsam, presses her to a wall, ties her hands with his belt, pins her down against the bed, and forcibly penetrates her.[33] On the one hand, the sexual violence endured by the heroine is a form of physical torture. The cruelty unleashed in this scene seems to justify the victim's patriotic cause. It further prepares the ground for a later plot twist in which her enmity toward Mr. Yee eventually gives way to affection. On the other hand, the female body becomes a gendered trope. As such, it brings into focus the ways in which Chinese women have fallen prey to male chauvinism. It provides a metaphor for the violation of the Chinese nation by imperialist powers and their accomplices.

Having given him sexual favors over a considerable period, Wong gains Mr. Yee's trust. Ironically, it is Wong, the victim of sadism, who loses moral ground (Berry 2012, 84). After Mr. Yee agrees to provide her a flat for their intimate rendezvous, Wong realizes that her feelings have grown for him, despite his treachery. Finally, she voices her internal struggles, through which she tries to reconcile her competing commitments. At this point, her superintendent, Old Wu, decides to postpone the assassination attempt, despite the fact that they could now lure Mr. Lee to the flat. At a hideout somewhere in a riverside village, the protagonist confronts Old Wu and her old-time lover, Kuang Yu Min:

> Wu: Remember, for an intelligence agent, there is only one rule—loyalty: loyal to the party, loyal to the people, and loyal to your country. Is that understood?
>
> Wong: Rest assured. I will do whatever you say.
>
> Wu: Very well then. Now you just need to keep him in the trap. If there is anything you need…
>
> Wong: What do you mean by "the trap"? My body? What do you take him for? He knows better than either of you how to put on an act. Not only does he sneak inside my body, but also my heart, deeper and deeper, like a snake. I have to let him in as if I am a slave…Only by staying loyal can I get into his heart. Every time he is inside me, he will not be gratified or feel alive until I bleed or cry. He is the only one who can tell what is real in the dark…
>
> Wu: That is enough.

> Wong: This is exactly why…why I can torture him too, by keeping him busy even when he is tired, until I am too exhausted and collapse.
>
> Wu: Enough…
>
> Wong: Every time he comes, I wonder if this is the moment you barge in and shoot him in the back of the head, and so his blood and brains will spill all over me!
>
> Wu: Shut up![34]

Here, in this sudden emotional outburst, the female protagonist opens up about her inner troubles. For the noble cause of saving the country and serving the people, Wong has not only relinquished her body to the enemy, but her sense of self. In this scene, she decries Old Wu's simple-minded plan, according to which she would simply engage in sexual acts with Mr. Yee as an insensate object. Here Wong claims her subjectivity by emphatically addressing her anguished existence. Although she agrees to stay on the mission, this moment reveals the character's resentment toward the grand ambitions in which she once convicted and so upheld.

The character of Wong Chia Chih recalls femme fatales in film noir—Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) in *Double Indemnity* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1944), for instance. The allegiances of such female figures are contradicted: she not only loves the man she has vowed to kill, but also struggles between personal and political callings, which contest the mind/body distinction. If we return momentarily to female protagonists in socialist Chinese cinema, such as *Song of Youth*, we see that, more often than not, the narratives abstain from the issue of sexuality. In this way, female characters are largely portrayed through reference to their spiritual, psychical, and intellectual development—Lin Daojing being a case in point. Earlier Chinese films desexualized these figures by foregrounding their intellectual development, which transcends their individual being with national rhetorics of patriotism and revolution (Berry 2012, 85). This representational approach to Chinese women replaces the individual's sexual desires with ideological devotions. The paradigm of this operation was the Model Works (*Yang ban xi*, often described as "revolutionary operas") of the Cultural Revolution. Devised to inculcate Maoist ideologies among the public, these shows employed repetitive narrative styles and patterns (Rao 2016, 222).

In Meng Yue's words, in socialist Chinese cinema the female image functions as a symbolic placeholder of the party state's transcendental authority over individuality, which is located in the private psyche as opposed to the body (1993, 124). For Ang Lee, however, the female image emerges from the decoupling of the personal from the political. With this separation, female characters' physical and psychical experiences become inseparable from one another. Lee's individualist approach to female embodiment, premised on sentimentality and eroticism, conforms to neither the submissiveness of *funü*, which is associated with masculinist nationalism, nor revolutionary ethics. On the contrary, this approach equates femininity with the sexuality of *nüxing*, thereby neutralizing the docile subject's ideological interpellation. Of course, this representation of gendered subjectivity does not follow poststructuralist feminism all the way in subverting socially constructed gender categories altogether. Instead, it speaks to a resurgence of the private domain, as against the politicization of gender identities in the name of nation. That is why, when Wong Chia Chih is presented with a glamorous ring that Mr. Yee offers her toward the end of *Lust, Caution*, its beauty takes her by surprise. Caught in between her patriotic mission and guilty conscience, Wong warns off Mr. Yee at the last minute, as she watches him hop into an armored car and narrowly make his escape. After infiltrating Mr. Yee's spy ring at grievous personal cost, Wong ultimately finds herself alone in a rickshaw on Shanghai's busy streets. Both morally and politically, she is disoriented. Soon afterwards she is captured and gunned down alongside her comrades. Wong Chia Chih's death contradicts stereotypical visions of heroism that exalts the protagonist's solemn devotion. Instead, her execution foregrounds how ideologies that blur the boundaries between the nation and the individual have grossly failed.

Conclusion

The novels behind the two films analyzed in this chapter were both written during the same period, and both combined true historical events with personal love affairs. Nevertheless, Yang Mo's and Eileen Chang's approaches to representing women differ significantly. Whereas Yang's *Song of Youth* embeds women in the national community, diminishing female individuality, Chang's *Lust, Caution* imbues the female character with intricate sensibilities.

This difference between the two novels aligns with shifting trends in the discursive construction of femininity in China, which oscillated between a conception of woman as a political subject (*funü*) or sexual subject (*nüxing*). Initially, *funü* is taken up as a symbol of the nation, whether because women embody Confucian ethics and patriarchal tradition, or revolutionary ideologies and collective unity. Based on overlapping binaries of sex and gender, *nüxing* affirms women's biological characteristics and bodily needs. In this chapter, I have unraveled how the female protagonists of two films, Lin Daojing and Wong Chia Chih, can be attributed to these two distinctive categories of womanhood. In so doing, I have reflected on the ways in which political movements have intervened in the development of Chinese feminism. Still, my interpretations of these films do not confirm a binary differentiation of the female subjectivity in Chinese cinema. The differentiation between *funü* and *nüxing*, I have shown, is rarely static and clear. Nor does *funü* pertain to the subject's mind, while *nüxing* has merely to do with the body. I have rather deciphered and applied this dyad as a relational and comparative construct, as befits the rapid transformation of Chinese society and culture. Attending to fluid constructions of gender in this way has allowed me to explore changing power dynamics among individuals and the state.

Chapter 3

Speaking of Us:

Borderlands, Soundscapes, and Ethnic Minorities

Story-telling is not an impersonal myth, but neither is it a personal fiction: it is a word in act, a speech-act through which the character continually crosses the boundary which would separate his private business from politics, and which itself *produces collective utterances.*

—Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*

The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced, complex, mid-wifery properties for menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge.

The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie.

—Toni Morrison, Noble lecture

The most difficult questions surrounding the demarcation of boundaries implied by "seeing" have to do not with positivistic taxonomic juxtaposition of self-contained identities and traditions in the manner of " this is you" and "that is us," but rather, who is "seeing" whom, and how? What are the power relationships between the "subject" and "object" of the culturally overdetermined "eye"?

—Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*

One Nation, One Voice

In the Xinhai Revolution of October 1911, nationalist revolutionaries toppled the Qing dynasty. This brought an end to not only three centuries of Manchu rule, but also the two millennia of China's Imperial Era. Despite their success in overthrowing China's last empire, the founders of the Republic confronted an acute political situation. The previous regime had incurred numerous military defeats, ceding territories and owing war indemnities to the Western powers. Immediately after the republican takeover, what remained of China's sovereignty came under immediate threat of ethnic disintegration. Now that the unifying force of Qing rule had evaporated, the intra-ethnic unity of diverse non-Han peoples (mostly the Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and Uyghurs) stumbled.

In fact, as the revolution gathered momentum in imperial China, much of the nationalist sentiments were directed against the Manchu ethnicity to which the Qing dynasty belonged. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the architect of the republican China and leader of the KMT, fanned the flames of this ethnic hostility to popularize his anti-feudal revolution (Zhao 2004, 64; Zheng 1999, 68). Exploiting the grudge that the Han people had long harbored against their Manchu overlords, the revolutionaries exacerbated ethnic tensions among Han and Manchu people. Moreover, they disturbed the equilibrium established by the imperial monarchy, which continually mediated between their Han subjects and ethnic minorities (Schneider 2017, 7; Zheng 1999, 68).

The major predicament facing Sun Yat-sen's nationalist movement in striving to subvert the Qing dynasty, was that their anti-Manchu rhetoric gave rise to an ideology of Han ethnocentrism. This burgeoning ideology, they soon realized, would hinder national cohesion among a population comprised of diverse ethnic groups (Schneider 2017, 9). Although non-Han ethnicities accounted for only a small proportion of the population, they occupied swaths of China's borderlands. If the fledgling Republic identified itself exclusively with the Han, it would exclude non-Han regions from the nascent nation. This approach would alienate potential allies, discouraging them from joining hands with Han nationalists in the greater cause of eliminating feudal oppression and repelling colonial aggression (Zhao 2004, 22). For the founders of the Republic of China, then, the process of nation building eventually boiled down to an assimilative program, in which the Han Chinese subsumed all non-Han communities (Schneider 2017, 49). To secure his political and territorial control over the former empire, and consolidate the unity of the Chinese nation, Sun withdrew the provocative slogan "Expel the Tatars, Revive China" (*quzhu dalu, huifu zhonghua*).[35] Instead, he disseminated the more inclusive rubric of the "Republic of Five Peoples" (*wuzu gonghe*), in a bid to restore connections among the Han with other ethnicities (Leibold 2007, 31; He 2013, 229; Duara 2002, xv; Schneider 2017, 8; Mullaney 2011, 25). While tuning down their rhetoric to mitigate the discrepancy between the Han majority and ethnic minorities, it occurred to the revolutionaries that, there had been no consistent collective identity for the peoples of imperial China, despite its long dynastic history (Elliot 2011, 178).

The task of formulating a national identity, therefore, was at the center of China's modern revolution. This new identity would have to encompass multiple ethnic communities regardless of their geographical, cultural, economic, linguistic, and religious differences (Schneider 2017, 38). Although a fraction of radical Han nationalists wanted to renounce the imperial legacy by excluding non-Han territories and populations from the new nation altogether, this policy was not pursued after all.[36] Rather, the nationalist revolutionaries averted an unfortunate potential scenario in which the new republic, still in its infancy, would have to wrestle with foreign invaders while being undermined from within by ethnic regimes (Schneider 2017, 9). The revolutionaries envisioned that a new collective identity had to be imagined, an identity that would incorporate the Han and the state's other disparate peoples under republican rule. At this juncture, the concept of "the Chinese people" (*zhonghua minzu*) functioned as a collective term that would weld all ethnic groups into a cohesive entity (Wu 2002, 169).

The notion of the Chinese people, an integrative identifier, was not the brainchild of the revolutionaries alone. In fact, it had also been conceived by their political rivals, the Chinese reformists, who argued that the new nation-state should be a constitutional monarchy rather than a constitutional republic. Although the reformists' campaign against colonialism and imperialism ultimately failed, their contribution survived. At the forefront of the reformists was Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a leading political thinker who determined to solve the dilemma of Chinese national identity (Leibold 2007, 10; 32). It was Liang, who, in addressing the fragmentary cultural identities that characterize Chinese history, first contrived the term of *zhonghua minzu* (the Chinese people), a composite moniker subsumes an array of ethnicities under the unified community of China (Zheng 1999, 2; Wu 2002, 169).

In line with this concept, Liang fostered a new approach to Chinese history. His distinctly Sinocentric approach to history downplayed the discontinuities marked by the various dynasties of ancient China. Instead, Liang produced a linear narrative of how non-Han peoples have been gradually integrated into the Han sphere of influence—whether through conquering China or being conquered themselves (Schneider 2017, 8-9; Duara 1995, 33). Liang's historiography acknowledged that in invading and ruling China, the Mongol Yuan and Manchu Qing brought with them distinctive traditions of cultural practice and social organization. Nevertheless, he argued, these non-Han nomadic groups consolidated their power over "China proper" (by which he means the Central Plains, populated by the Han) essentially because their forms of governance came to be deeply informed and nourished by Han culture. Far from imposing new norms on their Han subjects, these "alien tribes" adopted the Han's customs and values to such an extent that their original ways of life eventually faded into oblivion. This polemical history of imperial China gave birth to a myth of civilizational continuity, which took hold in the collective imagination. Such a myth underwrote ethnocentric ideas about China's enduring superiority. Despite the fact that Chinese history is clustered with conquests and collisions between Han and other ethnicities, the nationalist intelligentsia refurbished history around the mythical centrality of the Han people and culture. In repeatedly adopting Han customs and thought through processes of Sinicization, marginal peoples only underlined the priority of the Han ethnicity (Duara 2002, xiii-iv).

The myth of the cultural primacy of the Han Chinese was not new; it had precedents in premodern China. What distinguishes Liang Qichao's vision of Chinese history, though, is his account of how the Han Chinese maintained a centripetal hold on bordering ethnic groups. He referred to this as "China's assimilative power" (*zhong guo tong hua li*) (Leibold 2007, 11; Schein 2000, 69; Schneider2017, 62). In Liang's view, the Han Chinese did not operate with a hierarchical dichotomy of self and other. Conversely, their assimilative power allowed them to integrate formerly external peoples. On the one hand, Liang's assertion of China's historical evolution coincides with the nation-building project promulgated by revolutionaries in the late Qing period. Both political camps sought to inaugurate a national identity that could mobilize all members of the state and produce a single unit of history. On the other hand, Liang developed his theory by strategically appropriating Western knowledge. As such, it is bound up with an epistemic shift in China during this period. As much as social Darwinism emboldened Chinese politicians and intellectuals to consider the global system of nation-states as a game of survival for living species, Liang applied national rhetorics to justifying the subjugation of diverse ethnicities under the Chinese nation-state.

In envisioning the future of China, Liang worked extensively with the political theories of modern nation-state formulated by the Swiss jurist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881) (Schneider 2017, 81). Based on Bluntschli's enumerated types of nation-states with regard to ethnicity, Liang identified three possible scenarios in which the Chinese nation-state would appear: 1) a nation-state inhabited by a single ethnicity; 2) a nation-state consisting of several different tribes belonging to the same ethnicity; and 3) a nation-state comprising of multiple ethnicities (Schneider 2017, 84). Given that there were five major ethnic groups under Qing rule, Liang favored Bluntschli's multi-ethnic model, among others, for China's nation-building project. In particular, Liang's decision was informed by Bluntschli's emphasis on how "the unity of the state is better secured, when the nation can primarily rely on One People as its main component" (Bluntschli 1874, 41-43; Schneider 2017, 84). Evidently, the multi-ethnic model corresponded to the realities of late-imperial China in Liang's vision. While acknowledging the multitude of ethnic communities, he concluded that "one mighty powerful ethnicity must be made the center, which unifies and leads all other ethnicities" (Liang [1903, 1]1983, 73; Schneider 2017, 86).

Needless to say, the "one mighty powerful ethnicity" that Liang had in mind was none other than the Han. Liang's proposal for a unified Chinese people promoted two major claims. First, he objected to the idea prevalent among some Chinese revolutionaries, the idea that a nation should be established by, for, and of the Han Chinese alone. As I have mentioned earlier, this discriminatory policy was ultimately abandoned by Sun Yat-sen and his cohort. In excluding the Manchu and other ethnic groups from republican China, and aggravating inter-ethnic conflicts, it would ultimately have compromised the security of new nation-state. Second, by introducing a new category, Liang initiated a process of identity formation in the emerging Chinese nation-state. Ostensibly at least, this identity would be inclusive. In this way, Han Chinese elites hoped to replace one political order with another, in which all ethnic communities—even the Han themselves—would be inseparable components of one ethnic nation. The nation was not to be monopolized by any one ethnic group. Still, there is obviously something deeply problematic here, insofar as in reality national unity would be predicated not on equality among ethnicities, but quite the opposite: an asymmetry of power whereby the Han majority dominated the minorities. By cementing the Han's dominance in this way, the notion of the Chinese people, for better or for worse, allowed reformists and revolutionaries alike to institute political legitimacy in a period of national crisis.

At a time in which global geopolitical order was realigning, and the cohesion of ethnic groups in China faltering, Han Chinese elites were swift to establish themselves as the backbone of the nation. Their disavowal of ethnic equality and diversity, however, sowed the seeds of discontent and resentment among those who found themselves relegated to the margins (Duara 1995, 15). On the face of things, Chinese nationalism was once well poised to salvage the country from foreign intrusion and domestic partition by forming a new collective community. In reality, however, the new state produced a stalemate in ethnic politics, which had been inherited by ensuing administrations. The tension between two conceptions of the nation—as being either homogeneously Han Chinese or heterogeneously multi-ethnic—has perpetually hindered political cohesion and territorial integrity in both the Republic and People's Republic of China. Today, China's ethnic minorities still account for a smattering of the overall population, take up fractions of territory, and living in modest economic conditions. Nevertheless, as I have pinpointed, they are at the front and center of political discourse in China.

Taking into account differing social, geographical, and political circumstances, in what follows I explore how the tension between the Sinocentric nation-state and ethnic minorities has played out in visual and aural representations, above all, cinema. Tracing the dialectical interplay between the center and its peripheries in Chinese culture, I reflect on how cinematic representation constitutes a means of political mobilization. Cinema promoted a national ethos among minority communities, inscribing a shared belief in Chinese nationhood into subjects, especially those of the minorities. Attending to a variety of representational approaches, this chapter interrogates how ethnic minorities have been portrayed as parts of a greater nation—often at the expense of veracity and diversity.

Two films featuring Tibetan people in contemporary China, Pema Tseden's *Tharlo* (2015) and Zhang Yang's *Paths of the Soul* (2015), offer a prism through which we can examine these problematics. In comparing and contrasting these films, this chapter unfolds with three analytical dyads—subject versus object, fiction versus reality, and image versus sound. Triangulating the two films in relation to these binary concepts, I locate the ways in which they represent the lived experience of Tibetan people in contemporary China. Furthermore, by tracing dominant paradigms of cinematic representation of Tibet in both Chinese and Western cultural imaginaries, this chapter also situates cinematic embodiments of ethnic minorities in their historical contexts. Finally, in analyzing these case studies, I aim to examine how the films' respective directors—Pema Tseden and Zhang Yang—have each reworked and resisted stereotypical representations of Tibet in their own distinct way. In so doing, this chapter probes into their different ethnic identities, narrative approaches, and relative positions against the backdrop of modern China.

Cacophonies of a Nation

Ethnic minority cinema did not gather momentum until the founding of the People's Republic.[37] Whereas the Nationalist regime had struggled with plutocrats, warlords, and ethnic insurgencies in the borderlands, the communists brought China under the yoke of a powerful central government. To fortify its ideological legitimacy, the communist government implemented an extensive regulatory bureaucracy and concentrated power in the party leaders. Two substantial changes must factor into ethnic politics in China during the Socialist Era. First, in attempting to restore political stability in the aftermath of the Civil War, the central government tightened its grip on non-Han ethnic minorities, in particular those at the fringes of the national territory. Second, whereas private motion picture companies had thrived under the Republic, state-owned film studios became central to China's film industry. The New China not only entrenched its control over ethnic minority areas, but indistinctly, even arbitrarily, identified diverse ethnic groups with the newborn nation.[38] In large part, the regime relied on cinema to produce this cohesive cultural identity. Ethnic minority films thus emerged as a distinct genre in the early decades of communist China, which served to constitute national unity.

As a key part of the communist government's ideological state apparatus, ethnic minority films were disseminated far and wide in the formative years of socialist China. In addition to administrative organizations, several film studios were set up in ethnic minority regions, whose sole task was to produce ethnic minority films. The three peripheral provinces of Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Guangxi, for instance, each established a film studio with a political mandate for integrating ethnic minorities (the Mongols, Uyghurs, and Zhuangs respectively) into a unified Chinese nation (Clark 1987, 60). As a result, the burgeoning category of ethnic minority films accounted for a stable proportion of Chinese cinema in the subsequent decades following the inception of socialist China (Berry and Mary Farquhar 2006, 181). On a related note, during the "Seventeen Years Period" between 1949 and 1966, an amount of 47 ethnic minority films were produced, which covered as many as 18 ethnic groups (Chen and Hao, 2014, 13).

The storm of political violence that swept the country over the ensuing years, however, meant that few films made it to the screen. Only when the ruling party halted at the precipice of political collapse, and shifted from class struggle to economic development, did regular film production and release resume. As a recent survey has shown, a total of 135 ethnic minority films appeared between 2000 and 2016 (Lei 2018, 168). Unlike earlier productions, nearly half of ethnic minority films have directors being ethnic minorities themselves (Lei 2018, 169). If the end of the Cultural Revolution marks the ideological downfall of socialist China, the growing presence of ethnic minority directors signifies a deepening crisis of the post-socialist authoritarian state. Across a diverse array of ethnicities, the imagined community of the Chinese nation finds it a challenging task to redeem its lost ideals. With both political unity and national identity in jeopardy, it comes as no surprise that individual ethnicities should seek to resist their coerced incorporation into the collective community, and assert greater autonomy.

The Tibetan director Pema Tseden, who started out as a writer, was born in Amdo, a traditional Tibetan region in Qinghai province. Over the years, his consistent literary efforts have earned him first a local and then a national fame. Alongside his stable output of novellas and proses, Tseden has also nurtured a vital interest in cinema. This led to his admission to the Beijing Film Academy, the cradle of China's cinema maestros. As the institution's first Tibetan student, Tseden extended his self-reflexive storytelling from literature to cinema. *The Silent Holy Stones* (*Jingjing de Mannishi*, 2005), the first Tibetan-language film by a Tibetan director in China, launched Pema Tseden into wide recognition among domestic and foreign film critics. More importantly, this film established him as the leading figure of an emergent Tibetan cinema.[39] Tseden's first feature length film, *The Silent Holy Stones,* revolves around a young monk who becomes enamored with a popular television series based on the Chinese legend *Journey to the West* (*Xi you ji*). Contrary to what many might have expected, it does not play into the dilapidated condition of Tibetan religion and culture enforced by the Chinese state. Instead, the film depicts modern China's hinterlands as bucolic, emphasizing how the local people have cultivated a harmony between local traditions and modern inventions in the texture of their daily lives. Rather than staging an outright confrontation with overwhelming external interferences, *The Silent Holy Stones* affords a modest portrayal of contemporary Tibet.

At the same time, Tseden does not comply with romantic imaginations of Tibet in Western films, which often portray Tibet as an unsullied (and thus vulnerable) realm of purity, naiveté, and transcendence, amounting to nothing more than Orientalist obsession and ideological preference (Lo 2015, 46).[40] The protagonist, a young lama, persists in religious disciplines while navigating an increased exposure to secular lifestyles.

Setting the film in the pastoral village in which he grew up, Tseden neither renders the film's protagonist and plot at the service of the resistance to national unity, nor reiterates romantic imaginations of Tibet, which have long circulated in Chinese and Western delineations. Deliberately avoiding political resentments and exotic spectacles, Tseden stated that his cinematic endeavors stem from a genuine interest in seeing "someone who has lived and experienced that culture himself make a movie representing that real experience" (Trace Foundation). To explore the lived experience embodied in *The Silent Holy Stones,* and how Tseden's representational approach deviates from previous films, I will analyze the film in relation to some definitive moments in the development of ethnic minority cinema in socialist China, as well as a range of Western films. In this way, I show how Tseden seeks to move beyond current paradigms of representation of Tibet in both China and the West. Focusing on the politics of representation, in particular the cinematic construction of subjectivity, my interpretation attends to the individual's subjective experience. In Tseden's film, this is illustrated first and foremost by a dynamic of sight and sound. Through this formal dynamic, Tseden articulates the self-consciousness of a viewing/speaking subject. Furthermore, I draw attention to an ambiguity inherent in Tseden's realistic portrait of the Tibetan landscape, the ideological implications of which cannot be easily reduced to a simple denunciation of inter-ethnic unity or yearning for ethnic autonomy. His realistic aesthetics invite us to rather consider the existential condition of the ethnic subject from a broader universal and humanistic perspective.

During the early days of China's Socialist Era, the all-encompassing mission of class struggle, through which the proletariat should eliminate the bourgeoisie and establish its dictatorship, displaced a range of complex socio-political conflicts and tensions. Cross-ethnic issues, in particular, were either downplayed or neglected. Accordingly, in this period ethnic minority films aimed to instill collective class consciousness among ethnic communities.[41] This, in turn, justified the cause of the ruling regime. This genre is characterized, above all, by the fact that most productions were in Mandarin and that the cast and crew were normally comprised of Han Chinese. True, ethnic-minority performers participated in film projects every now and then. Nevertheless, either the dialogue or the folk songs (which often captivated audiences with catchy melodies) were rarely presented in ethnic languages. In short, early ethnic minority films almost invariably present an advanced, civilized, and emancipatory CCP bringing enlightenment to downtrodden, primitive, and subdued indigenous peoples. Governed by this recurring leitmotif, the wide range of stories about China's "ethnic minorities" demonstrated in these films, fed into the idea that they were each an integral part of the communist revolution and the new state (Lo 2009, 233).

A well-known instance is *The Serf* (*Nongnu*, dir. Li Jun, 1963). The film centers on Jampa, a young Tibetan who lost his parents to a brutal landlord and grew up as an embittered laborer. He is doomed to suffer the same fate as his parents did until the arrival of the People's Liberation Army, who expels the monarchs and monks, and frees the protagonist from his oppression. Having previously been aphasic due to his abusive master, the protagonist now regains his speech. The first word that he utters after all the years of torture he has endured, is nothing other than "Chairman Mao" (Powers 2004, 124). At this moment, he gives voice to the film's central theme. Being lost and found, Jampa's voice serves as a dramatic device that spells out Tibet's radical transition from an old to a new society. The trope of muteness alludes to the protagonist's humiliating subjugation: verbal ability, it appears, stands as a trope for whether or not a subject can speak for themselves politically. Focusing intensely on embattled class dynamics, the film's rendition of Tibetan society foregrounds its hierarchal structure at the cost of any sense of the central character's selfhood. The representational approach leaves little room for individual identity formation and characterization. This absence of selfhood, I argue, is also central to Tseden's cinematic intervention, which gravitates toward an alternative mode of addressing Tibetan identity in modern China and globalizing culture. Tseden's film breaks new ground in developing a distinct audiovisual approach that cuts against dominant modes of representing ethnic minorities.

The Emergence of a Minor Cinema

Based on his own eponymous novella, Pema Tseden's film *Tharlo* is emblematic of recent innovations in the cinematic representation of Tibet. A grown orphan, the protagonist is a shepherd named Tharlo (played by Shide Nyima), who lives by tending sheep on the desolate steppe. A sanguine, middle-aged bachelor, Tharlo takes pride in guarding his flock day and night, and never bothers to escape from his tough circumstances. One day, however, Tharlo is asked to visit the local police station, where he is told to acquire a national identity card. The task bewilders him. To get an identity card, he must first have his photograph taken in the nearest town. Upon his arrival in town, because Tharlo's appearance has been roughened by a harsh life, the photographer persuades Tharlo to smooth his look at the hair salon across the street. Yangtso (played by Yangchuk Tso), the hairdresser, while adeptly scrubbing Tharlo's ruffled hair, finds out that Tharlo's sheep are worth a fortune. Following their brief, chance encounter, Tharlo is already smitten with Yangtso, who has navigated him through tantalizing occasions of worldly desire and urban pleasure. Tempted and thrilled, Tharlo cashes out all of his livestock, planning on a future shared with the girl he just met. However, after spending their first night, Tharlo wakes up to an empty room; Yangtso has disappeared with his money. The spark that has just been kindled within Tharlo is now stamped out. After riding back toward the mountains, he runs out not only of gas, but also of faith and hope. The film ends by showing Tharlo lighting up a firecracker in dead silence. Right before the closing credits start rolling, we hear a muffled sound, indicating a detonation in his hand.

During the Socialist Era, Chinese films narrated ethnic peoples' trials and tribulations by foregrounding a collective struggle to rescue China from vernacular feudalism and foreign imperialism. Tseden's *Tharlo*, by contrast, emphasizes an urgent need to redeem one's cultural and ethnic identity (Yu 2014, 130). Rather than the ambivalence of his earlier works on this theme, *Tharlo*'s melancholy derives from the tension between Tibet's decaying cultural heritage and the modernization brought in by both China and, by extension, globalization. In Tseden's second feature *The Search* (*Xunzhao zhimei gengdeng*, 2009), for instance, the protagonist is a filmmaker who, accompanied by a skeleton camera crew, searches for talented actors with whom to reenact a classic Tibetan opera. Reminiscent of Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami's poetic realism (especially in *Through the Olive Trees*), *The Search* is less invested in surveying Tibet's rural landscape and traditional customs, than in examining "this fragmentation, the missing collective consciousness, the delusion of a homogeneous and unified Tibet, and the absence of a pre-existing people" (Frangville 2016, 111).[42] In following this meditative yet inconclusive journey, the film captures a sense of loss in Tibetan society, which is caught in between a repressed past and a compromised present. In his next film, *Old Dog* (*Lao gou*, 2011), Tseden only intensifies this feeling of loss by depicting the generational conflict between a father and son. The son, Gonpo, secretly sells his father's Tibetan mastiff, a symbol of the natives' nomadic way of life. His father Dorje eventually strangles the dog rather than see it sold into the booming urban pet market. The old dog's uncalled-for demise, the result of Dorje's cruel repudiation of consumerist intrusion, implies that the values and beliefs purportedly preserved by Tibetan people have been withering away. Whereas in *Old Dog* the collision between tradition and modernity is signified by the father's and son's irreconcilable attitudes toward their dog, in *Tharlo* it assumes the form of Yangtso's allure to which Tharlo surrendered once he set foot in the outside world.

The antagonistic relations among these characters, who are bound together by kinship or intimacy, suggest that today Tibet's collective identity is divided. Whereas some remain loyal to their historical roots, others turn their back on local conventions. The identity of Tibetan people, in other words, has fundamentally ruptured. Pema Tseden's narratives, then, chart a dialectical relationship between the Tibetan ethnic minority and the Chinese nation-state. On the one hand, with its overwhelming power, the state apparatus aims to integrate minority other(s) in the frontier regions into the national identity. This estranges indigenous peoples from their distinctive traditions. On the other hand, ethnic societies and cultures are by no means stagnant and impervious to change, indicating that ethnic subjects are autonomous agents in the first place. Ethnic subjects must be situated in their engagements with surrounding circumstances. Both of these scenarios delineate a Tibetan identity that is fractured, though in different ways. Whereas the former suggests that the ethnic subject's autonomy has been violated from without, the latter acknowledges the ways in which ethnic subjects and societies are in a constant process of internal change. Dwelling on this bifurcated understanding of Tibet's identity conundrum, Tseden seeks to establish "new spaces of meaning and resistant polyphony" in the domain of ethnic minority films, an approach that gives rise to a "minor cinema" (Frangville 2016, 107). Building on Deleuze's concept of minor cinema, Vanessa Frangville asserts that Tseden's films signify a "minor movement", which is "a result of a process of becoming minor within the major," namely, a process "by which one crosses the boundaries of an existing territory and disrupts traditional structures of expression" (2016, 107). Therefore, by weaving allegories, ironies, and symbols in his filmic narratives, Tseden counters hegemonic narratives of Tibet's political and cultural position in modern China.

In this light, *Tharlo* marks a radical departure from Pema Tseden's visual style. Unlike his earlier works, which were filled with tender colors and gregarious people, this story unfolds in black-and-white images at a slow pace. The whole film consists of mere eighty-four shots organized into ten sequences (Tseden 2017, 48). The dichromatic contrasts that distinguish the cinematography, as the director revealed in an interview, allude to the innocence of the protagonist who has lived a hermetic life (Tseden 48). In fact, the film's contestation of cinematic representation is more palpable in Tseden's use of sound. The instant that the narrative opens, Tharlo's voice reaches the audience's ears. Shortly after a static shot showing a tiny lamb in a cloth bag, the frame cuts to an even longer stationary shot, with Tharlo facing the camera. The backdrop is a wall on which five poster-size Chinese characters have been painted. They spell out "*Wei ren min fu wu*" (Serve the People)—a catchphrase from Mao's landmark speech in memory of Zhang Side, a devotional revolutionary soldier. Aurally, Tharlo recites Mao's text verbatim, in its entirety. The camera stays still for over three minutes, confining our vision to the speaking figure. Aside from registering the character's modest appearance and stillness, the viewer is, as it were, listening to the image. With its central statement literally writ large, Tharlo's husky and accented recitation of Mao's famous address performatively recasts communist ideals such as altruism, universalism, and egalitarianism on which the New China was built. Repeating Mao's epochal slogan in another time, space, and speech, this sequence compels the audience to ponder the gap between the actual conditions in which ethnic minorities live and the ideological dogmas by which they are governed. A laborious feat in its own right, Tharlo's long recital not only hints ironically at the miserable fate in store for the character. It also, more personally, insinuates the director's compassion for his innocent protagonist, whose failed attempt to convert from a traditional to a modern way of life encapsulates the common dilemma that has befallen the Tibetan populace. The film is more than a story about a cheerful Tibetan shepherd who falls prey to China's expansive urban growth; it stands as a poignant testimony to an embattled identity when tradition is in danger.

The Paradox of Ethnofiction

Compared to ethnic minority films that aimed to establish national unity, Zhang Yang's *Paths of the Soul* concerns little with the sublime notion of Chinese nation. Instead, it touches on how people adhere to time-honored religious traditions in the modern age. The film follows a group of eleven Tibetan villagers for much of a year, depicting their pilgrimage to the Mount Kailash, a sacred mountain known as Gang Rinpoche among local folks. The pilgrims, including a senile peasant, regretful butcher, little girl, disabled young man, and pregnant woman, must prostrate themselves every few steps for the entire journey. Having lived through moments of life and death, they eventually reach their destination. Despite its critical acclaim and commercial success, the film arose controversy. Whilst most critics in the West applauded the film's ingenious combination of documentary and fictive modes, a number of viewers in China railed against its alleged exploitation Tibetan practices and beliefs.[43]

For skeptical commentators of the film, the director should have neither dramatized a journey of faith nor fed into Han Chinese people's utopian perception of Tibet as an idyllic retreat from their daily grinds. In essence, these critiques accuse Zhang Yang of orientalist exoticism and commodity fetishism. Historically, Han Chinese urbanites have fetishized subaltern ethnic minorities in both of these ways. Although the cast of non-professional performers was made up of ordinary Tibetans villagers, the very fact that the crew—including Zhang Yang himself—was all Han Chinese seems to contradict the filmmaker's claim to have approached the indigenous community in a nuanced manner. The heated debate over whether the film appropriates ethnic practices, or even exploits people from ethnic minorities, boils down to the question of *who is representing whom* (Lo 2009, 231). To determine whether Zhang Yang's film should be justified or dismissed, then, we must interrogate the relation between the subject and the object of representation. In the context of modern Chinese cinema, tackling this tension has become a principal way in which film analysis can ascertain the power dynamics among the Han majority and non-Han minorities.

An echo of nation-building rhetorics from the beginning of the twentieth century, the rationale behind this line of critique, once again, pits Han ethnocentrism against Chinese nationalism. Ethnocentric cinema consolidates a dichotomy between self and other, constructed through spectacles of primitive, exotic, and mystic ethnic minorities inhabiting remote frontiers. What should concern us the most, here, is the way in which the Han majority foists its system of values and beliefs onto other ethnicities under the umbrella of China. "When these portrayals are crafted by those possessing higher social ranking and more access to means of dissemination than those imaged," cultural anthropologist Louisa Schein asserts, "the term 'representation' denotes the discursive authority of the representers, their power to shape subjectivity and to legitimate domination" (2016, 267). Bearing in mind what Schein terms "internal orientalism", I will dissect Zhang Yang's film (see Schein 2000; 2015; 2016). In so doing, it is imperative that I reflect on how asymmetries power among ethnic groups is perpetuated through cultural representation and on how the mechanisms through which ethnic minorities are cinematically represented have varied over time. This variation of representational modes indicates more than just a top-down hierarchy of knowledge and power, in which the Han majority controls the image and sound of film narratives. It also hints at myriad bottom-up formations of identity and subjectivity articulated by ethnic minorities themselves (Fan 2016, 2092). Differentiating between the relative positions of the representer and the represented, I show how the film's treatment of Tibetan people confers a sense of actuality. This is achieved through the director's blend of documentary and fictive modes into the hybrid genre of "ethnofiction."[44]

On the one hand, ethnofiction draws on the legacy of Western scientific disciplines such as anthropology and ethnology, and postwar documentary movements in European and American societies. As such, it affords a means of presentation by which the lived experience of traditional peoples can be intimately observed and recounted. On the other hand, the fly-on-the-wall perspective furnished by ethnofiction runs the risk of recapitulating patterns of knowledge production through which the West has long gazed upon others. At this point, Zhang Yang's depiction of Tibetan villagers seems to be complicit with the hierarchies of Western orientalism. But even if Zhang Yang's film is culpable for internal orientalism, is there nothing of merit to the story, such as how it addresses viewers? After all, the genre of ethnofiction is far from equivalent to ethnography, in that it also "employs the use of creative writing and poetic language" to engage people affectively while collecting and displaying empirical data (VanSlyke-Briggs 2009, 336). Together, the cinematic techniques used in this film (its distinctive imaging, pacing, sequencing, and casting) work to "invent a story that sums up the truth of a group experience" (Picornell-Belenguer 2013, 34; Bogue 2003, 152). Through a two-thronged approach, I will elaborate on how Zhang Yang's ethnofiction is both an audiovisual repertoire of indigenous lived experience, and a narrative act through which a new ethnic subject is constructed. In parallel, my analysis delves into the emergence of ethnofiction in the West, and the transformation of ethnic minority films in modern China. In this way, I provide a situated understanding of these narratives.

Zhang Yang has long aspired to make a film about Tibet. His second feature length film, *Shower* (*Xi zao*, 1999), paints a plaintive picture of the effects of China's cutthroat modernization on ordinary people. Against the backdrop of massive urban infrastructural development, the story focuses on the owner of a public bath who lives in one of Beijing's old neighborhoods. Having once been the beating heart of the community, the public bath now faces demolition. More and more local residents have relocated to high-rise buildings, in which each apartment has its own home shower system. Alongside the story of the elderly man's staunch commitment to his dwindling business and faltering family life, the film also embeds two subplots. These additional stories both tell of how the practice of cleaning oneself has become integral to regional cultures, not least that of Tibet.[45] Despite this desire, it was only fourteen years later that Zhang Yang could dedicate an entire title to Tibetan culture and people.

According to the director's memoir, the cast and crew spent almost a whole year journeying from a landlocked town in Mangkang (formerly Markam) county, which neighbors Sichuan and Yunnan provinces in western China, to Mount Kailash by way of Lhasa, the provincial capital. The route zigzags across the Himalayan Plateau for more than 2000 kilometers, stretching from the east to the west of Tibet. For a good part of a year, the eleven villagers went on their pilgrimage to Kang Rinpoche, with Zhang Yang and his personnel tagging along (Zhang 2017). In the Tibetan calendar, the Year of the Horse (2014) is Mount Kailash's zodiac year. For believers, the potency of every prayer and blessing will increase twelvefold if a *kora* (circumambulation around a sacred object) is performed around the holy mountain over the course of a year. Given the sacred merit of this endeavor, Zhang Yang cast a local farmer named Nyima Zadui, who is well into his forties, and ten other villagers as characters in the film. For the record, their real names were used in the narrative. In spite of the benefit of a commercial contract, the film project was a collaborative effort: if he or she agreed to join the cast, each member of the pilgrimage would receive a wage. In return, they would allow themselves to be filmed along the way and enact some slightly scripted episodes for the purposes of the narrative. After assembling a variety of individuals—selected on account of their age, gender, physical and psychological conditions—Zhang's documentary film eventually kicked off in March 2014 (Zhang 2017).

In its fictive-cum-documentary mode, the film depicts rural people moving across the natural landscape of Tibet. Doing without a typical screenplay, the story shows how faithful Tibetans submit their minds and bodies to their rite of passage. Only occasionally did the pilgrims have to comply with a prearranged scenario. In one scene, for example, a landslide interrupts the pilgrims' progress, with a fallen rock scraping a man's leg. In another, the tractor towing supplies driven by Nyima Zadui collides with an oncoming jeep. Physical injuries aside, the engine damage was so severe that the pilgrims had to ditch the tractor. After this incident, they hauled the supplies themselves using straps thrown over their shoulders. Toward the end of the film, the eldest member of the group, Yang Pei, passed away at the foot of Kang Rinpoche. Although none of these incidents befell the cast, Zhang Yang's memoir reveals that some episodes in the film were inspired by real events that they witnessed on the road (Zhang 2017). Still, these scenes remind the audience of the dangers faced by the cast on their long and difficult journey. Fortunately, they were spared major accidents. By way of these fictional elements, then, the film has raised awareness of the real perilousness appeared in Tibet every day. Intertwining *what has happened* with *what could have happened* into a cohesive narrative, Zhang Yang's transgressive approach unsettles the binary opposition of documentary and fiction.

The Virtue of Fabulation

At this point, *Paths of the Soul* recalls experiments in documentary filmmaking and dramatic storytelling undertaken by the French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch (1917-2004). An innovative ethnographic filmmaker from the beginning of his career in the late 1940s, Rouch focused on particular ethnicities in postcolonial Africa, especially Niger. Hailed as a pioneer who invented the genre of ethnofiction, Rouch introduced elements of narrative cinema into the raw footage of ethnographic documentary filmmaking. His well-known film, *Jaguar* (1957-1967), encapsulates his creative practice. Rouch's first ethnofiction film recounts the seasonal migration of three Nigerians, played by Damoré Zika (Rouch's friend and longtime collaborator), Lam Ibrahim Dia, and Illo Goudel'ize. It is built around the actors' improvisatory performances along the course of their voyage (Bogue 2003, 151; Sjöberg 2008, 230).

By "incorporating into the story the chance encounters they experienced on the road," film theorist Ronald Bogue writes, Rouch not just blended performative elements into ethnographic recording of sounds and images, but also proposed that such a mixture of performance and documentation be recognized as a site of general knowledge about local society and people (2003, 151). Similarly, anthropologist Steven Feld maintains that Rouch's ethnofiction be construed as an attempt to "get beyond observational passivity", as he argues:

> Rouch indicates that ethnographic cinema can be exciting and liberating (as cinema and as ethnography) precisely because of the capacity to intimately project the richness of local sensibilities. One can go beyond

> descriptive inventories; one can grasp and show and reveal significances, some of which are only emergent in the actual process of filmmaking and editing. (Feld 2003, 16)

This creative process not only allowed Rouch to organize ethnological information in a continuous narrative. More importantly, it also compensates for what that information might otherwise have lacked: namely, a wide range of situations that was as-yet captured. An ethnofiction, in this sense, is a composite of the factual and fictional. The blurred distinction between fact and fiction, for Rouch, transformed cinema and ethnography. In an interview with Italian film director Enrico Fulchignoni, Rouch mused on the dialectical relationship between the two:

> For me, as an ethnographer and filmmaker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction. The cinema, the art of the double, is already the transition from the real world to the imaginary world, and ethnography, the science of the thought systems of others, is a permanent crossing point from one conceptual universe to another. (Rouch 2003, 185)

To Rouch, ethnofiction is a paradoxical and yet reciprocal exchange between "the staging of reality" and "the documentary point of view of the imaginary" (Rouch 2003, 185). Grasped in these terms, *Paths of the Soul* is Zhang Yang's response to the ambiguous conflict between the real and the imaginary at play in ethnofiction. This should not be understood as, however, that Zhang's foray into the genre tallies seamlessly with Rouch's practice of ethnofiction. Unlike *Jaguar*, Zhang's film features neither a voiceover nor extra-diegetic sound. It contains only synchronous sounds, in stark contrast to the dubbed dialogues of Rouch's protagonists. True, Rouch was able to apply synchronous sounds to his later films thanks to the development of audiovisual recording equipment. Nevertheless, he shifted the emphasis of ethnographic filmmaking from an observational stance toward a participatory one. As such, his filmmaking marks a significant stylistic transition. For some, this methodological turn implies a decisive change from direct cinema to cinéma vérité. This latter movement was crystallized in the groundbreaking documentary film named *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961) made by Rouch, with his collaborator Edgar Morin, and unknown Parisians that they encountered in the streets (Henley 2009, 160).

Zhang Yang's ethnofiction, in contrast, does without the techniques characteristic of Rouch's cinéma vérité. In *Paths of the Soul* Zhang Yang has neither added voices and sounds in post-production, nor staged encounters between filmmaker and subject in front of the camera. Resolutely adhering to an observational perspective by hiding behind the lens, Zhang Yang preferred not to stress the presence of cinematic apparatus, much less himself and the crew. Departing from Rouch's aggressive interference with the filmmaking process, their involvement is at most implicated in the use of panning shots, long takes, and of course, the chronological arrangement of all sequences—all of which veers from Rouch's ubiquitous hand-held shooting and discreet editing. Zhang's seemingly conservative attitude toward ethnofiction, actually, is fueled less by a reluctance to transcend what Feld dubs "observational passivity" on the part of filmmaker, than by the practical fact that it was almost impossible for the director to speak to his subjects in their language (Feld 2003, 16). Whereas Jean Rouch and his Nigerian actors all spoke French (the "mother tongue" imposed on Nigeria during its colonization), Zhang Yang could only communicate his ideas to the Tibetan villagers with the help of a native speaker. Inevitably, this ruled out an unmediated exchange between Zhang and the Tibetan actors involved in the film. However, at the same time, I argue, it enables an observational distance. This distance figures first and foremost aurally, in the linguistic difference between the Han filmmaker and the Tibetan pilgrims.

With Zhang's at the helm, this documentary film puts forward a representation of Tibet that is inhabited solely by people of the Tibetan ethnicity. On the one hand, this representation of Tibet may well reflect the villagers' actual condition. Their knowledge of Mandarin, China's official language is scarce. On the other hand, this portrayal is romanticized in that it downplays the pilgrims' access to modern inventions and conditions, such as vehicles, technologies, and urban life. In fact, it is more than halfway through the film, for instance, that the pilgrims are shown using cellphones, and then it is only to call their relatives back home (Kenny 2016). A more patent example of the travelers' contact with modernity is their two-month stint in Lhasa, in which we briefly glimpse into how they navigate a modern (and yet still pious) society. Working part-time at a car wash or on a construction site, the men manage to earn some quick money with which to supplement their budget for the upcoming trip. Once they have stashed enough money away, the pilgrims set off on the road to the sacred mountain once again. Overall, Zhang's cinematic depiction emphasizes the spiritual purity of the Tibetan people. With the film steeped in native speech and landscapes, Zhang's preference for a distanced viewing position (as opposed to actively participating in the scene) reduces his subjective interventions to a minimum. As such, it constructs an objective perspective on another people and culture.

Imposing neither his presence within the frame nor his judgement on the soundtrack, in *Paths of the Soul* Zhang intends to tell the story of Tibet truthfully, as if the storyteller were never there. Narratively speaking, this observational distance between the ethnographic filmmaker and filmed subjects allows a third-person perspective within which fictions can be constructed. It opens up a diegetic space in which the filmmaker assumes a vantage point from which he or she can structure audiovisual materials at their discretion, using narrative techniques such as sequential ordering, rhythm, characterization, and focalization (Verstraten 2009, 32). By means of external focalization, Zhang establishes himself as what Gérard Genette calls a "heterodiegetic narrator," that is, a narrator who is hidden from the narrative (1980, 248). The combination of fact and fiction therefore amounts to a broader scope of lived experiences of the local community, overcoming a limited amount of random moments culled from an unscripted process of ethnographic filmmaking. At this point, Zhang distinguishes that his methodology stimulates the film′s subjects' creative agency:

> *Paths of the Soul* is a documentary-style feature film. A feature film usually consists of fictive components, and actors are needed to carry out those imaginative moments with their performances … Once fictional elements prevail in the story, actors must distinguish between reality and cinema, so they could transform from who they are in life to those who they have *become* in the film—a process that amounts to dramatic characterization. (Zhang 2017, 81; my emphasis)
>
> The actors had to make an effort to constantly adjust to this particular filmmaking pattern. I would immediately show them the clip of each scene once it was wrapped, so to let them know what they were doing, instead of making them feel sidelined all the time. As soon as they got the gist of what you asked from them for the film, they became the *creative subjects* of this project too, rather than being mere objects at the director's command. (Zhang 2017, 60; my emphases)

Zhang Yang's cooperative approach, by which he worked closely with actors during the production process, resonates with Jean Rouch's methodological insistence on what he referred to as "shared anthropology" (*anthropologie partagée*), a process of equal and reflexive dialogue between the director and protagonists (Feld 2003, 18; Rouch 2003, 44). For Rouch, the practice of shared anthropology rests on tactics such as the practice of "screen back" and "informant feedback," which involves "screening rough-cuts of the films to the informants to receive feedback and sometimes having the protagonists improvising a narration to the film rushes during the final stage of production process" (Sjöberg 2008, 232). In fostering similar techniques, Zhang has tacitly conformed his filmmaking practice to that of Rouch—although Zhang does not refer to the influential French filmmaker.

After all, *Paths of the Soul* can be viewed as a prime example of how Rouch's shared anthropology has reverberated in Chinese cinema. Zhang's approach not only relinquished full directorial authority so as to make way for "a new type of relationship between the anthropologist and the group he observes" (Rouch 2003, 44). Furthermore, it also "allows the ethnographer-filmmaker to meditate openly and self-critically on his or her own role" (Feld 2003, 19). In spite of that Zhang's hidden position from the camera is in contrast to Rouch's active involvement in ethnofiction, they share a common ambition to subvert the filmmaker's dominance over the ethnographical representation of indigenous people. On the one hand, an interdependent collaboration between the representer and the represented is integral to this pursuit. There must be an "audiovisual reciprocity" (*contredon audiovisuel*) that contributes to a process of mutual learning, not partial and biased projection (Feld 2003, 18; Rouch 2003, 44). On the other hand, this urge to overcome the hierarchies embedded in the cultural representation of people from ethnic minorities, prompts both the ethnographic filmmaker and filmed subjects to "enact and narrate a fictional story, but one that combines historical experiences in the formation of a new collectivity that emerges through the process of making the film" (Bogue 2003, 152).

In both sharing representational authority among the subject and the object, as well as blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, ethnofiction traverses boundaries and conjoins genres as a means of articulating the collective experience of an ethnic group. In this light, what Zhang Yang and his Tibetan collaborators demonstrate in this film is not so much what the real characters experienced on their journey. Instead, the story sets out to "convey something fundamental about the real lives" of Tibetan people, a fundamental truth about how ethnic minorities go about their daily routines and ceremonial rites in contemporary China (Loizos 1993, 50; Sjöberg 2008, 234). According to film theorist David Rodowick, this revelation of truth through a cinematic assemblage of documentary realism and fictive composition, is congruent with what Gilles Deleuze terms *fabulation*. This creative mode of storytelling points to "a becoming-other appropriate to the invention of a people who are 'not yet' but who may find a means of collective enunciation as a line of variation in the dominant cinematic discourse" (Rodowick 1997, 83). In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989), Deleuze reflects on Rouch's ethnographic films in suggesting that the value of ethnofiction lies not in its challenge to the divide between fiction and reality. Rather, it stems from ethnofiction's defiance of hegemonic mechanisms of narrative and representation that perpetually relegate people to the margins, and the status of minority or subalterneity (1989, 150-51).

For Deleuze, "what is opposed to fiction is not the real," nor "the truth" (which, he adds, is "always that of the masters or colonizers") (1989, 150). On the other side of fiction, rather, "is the *story-telling function* of the poor, insofar as it gives the false the power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster" (1989, 150; my emphasis). By invoking the storytelling function of fabulation, which oscillates between reality and fiction, the hybrid concept of ethnofiction provides a means of collective enunciation of memory, history, and culture for minorized peoples. In this way, they can "raise this creative process to a serialism capable of formulating a collective identity in time" (Rodowick 1997, 156; 161). The creative approach of fabulation disturbs the boundaries between description and narration, subjective and objective, true and false. It is a transformative process, which entails concurrent metamorphoses of the ethnographic filmmaker and filmed subject. In Rouch's *Jaguar*, for instance, the Nigerian protagonists' improvised performances are somehow staged. There is an underlying purpose to this, which is not that of documenting their seasonal migration per se. The ultimate goal is rather to give shape and voice to shared experiences of the ethnic community by fictionally elaborating upon actual events. It is precisely because of their concerted effort at improvisation and emplotment that the real characters become more than figures playing themselves. Apparently, in contributing to the narrative, they enter into an ambivalent state of embodying the individual and collective simultaneously. In this state, "[t]he character is continually *becoming another*, and is no longer separable from this becoming which merges with a people" (Deleuze 1989, 152; my emphases).

According to Deleuze, the filmmaker undergoes a parallel transition into someone other than him- or herself, "in so far as he takes real characters as intercessors and replaces his fictions by their own story-telling'"(1989, 152). In assessing this transformation, it is particularly important to consider that Rouch is, after all, a French director conducting ethnographic filmmaking in a former French colony. Under these colonial circumstances, it is not only sensible but also ethical that the representer should forsake both of his presumptions and prerogatives in approaching local realities. Accordingly, the filmmaker ought to shift his frame of reference from the West to the vernacular, so as to be epistemologically and methodologically evenhanded when he works with the indigenous people. Only through immersive experience and situational awareness, I propose, can the filmmaker reign in the inherent inequality of cross-cultural representation—a hegemonic form of narration that condescends to people of ethnic minorities. The virtue of fabulation, therefore, lies in a metaphoric passage through which a minority formulates an identity. In Deleuze's words: "where the film-maker and his characters become others and the one through the other, a collectivity which gradually wins from place to place, from person to person, from intercessor to intercessor" (1989, 153).

Of course, Zhang Yang and his non-professional actors come from different ethnic backgrounds. Ostensibly, the filmmaker's detachment from narration seems to reiterate the Western voyeuristic gaze of the long ethnographical tradition. Following this logic, Zhang, a member of the Han Chinese cultural elite, has usurped the viewer's superior position so as to pry into the lives of the exotic, mysterious, and pristine Tibetan other. True that a number of critics charge the film with internal Orientalism and Han nationalism, what they have failed to appreciate, however, are the reciprocal dynamics between the filmmaker and real characters, both on- and offscreen. In taking the story of a Tibetan pilgrimage at face value, these commentators miss the mark. In Zhang's audiovisual tableaux, they see a blatant appropriation of a minority culture and a vivid demonstration of the Han majority's cultural, political, and economic supremacy. This strain of criticism would stand to reason if *Paths of the Soul* consisted of nothing more than clichéd tropes of innocence and piety. These accusations that the director's presentation of Tibet is stereotypical, however, ignore the way which he collaborated with his subjects. Moreover, they overlook the political potential that can be derived from this film.

Not surprisingly, the film does not provide closure. Instead, it shows the pilgrims continuing their prostration rituals around the snow-clad Mount Kailash. Far from giving the impression that the Han Chinese have penetrated the Tibetan regions, for much of the story that are no signs of Han Chinese to be found. Similar to the seemingly intact Tibet in Pema Tseden's filmic rendition, the paucity of the Han conjures up a world inhabited by Tibetans themselves, an audiovisual domain saturated with their ethnic language and culture (Berry 2016, 96). Together, the constant chanting of Buddhist scriptures by Tibetan pilgrims, the folk songs they sing along the road, and the conversations occur between them every now and then, all serve to "displace dialogically a Western visual narrative tradition with an oral one, creating a hybrid form where orality invades and transforms the visual, and where the visual then transforms the oral as a medium of social cohesion" (Rodowick 1997, 161). The film′s representation of the Tibetan soundscape functions as the sensory and mnemonic foundation upon which the narrative image builds a new form of subjectivity and collective enunciation in response to Chinese rule (Rodowick 1997, 160-161). The construction of this diegetic dimension evokes a sense of minority autonomy. Everything the viewer witnesses, whether visually or aurally, "expresses an affirmative force that inaugurates a cinematographic discourse of minorities," which stands against the majority's normative authority (Rodowick 1997, 153). Transposed into the Chinese context, such a discourse of minorities makes possible an alternative mode of cultural representations of ethnic minorities—in this case, Tibetans—within mainstream cultural production. Rather than fall prey to a Han nationalist perspective, by melding fact and fiction, Zhang Yang has brought forward a perceptibly extant and intact Tibetan way of life.

By dismantling the boundary between reality and fiction, Zhang Yang's cinematic approach contributes to the collective formation of a minority people. I argue that Zhang Yang's ethnofiction sheds light on the complexities of representing ethnic minorities in Chinese cinema. Precisely because of its venture into the paradoxes of fabulation, Zhang's film heralds a new approach to cinematically representing ethnic minorities. It marks a new era in which narratives of ethnic minorities in contemporary China gradually disintegrate, decentralize, and diversify. In contesting implicitly hierarchical dichotomies such as that between documentary and film, *Paths of the Soul* also suggests that the filmmaker's own ethnic and cultural identity may be caught between Han ethnocentrism and Chinese nationalism. This comes out especially clearly in the discrepant reactions to the film at home and abroad. Pundits in the West, who have been near-unanimous in their praise of the film, have evaded the cross-ethnic issue entirely. In China, however, the film has been condemned by some critics, who have sought to discredit its intentions on the grounds that it reinforces Han chauvinism. Neither of these perspectives is productive in that the one risks neglecting China's inter-ethnic conflicts while the other perpetuates the binarism of dominant and dominated. This is where Zhang Yang's film proves most valuable, it seems to me. *Paths of the Soul* offers a reconciliatory, relational, and reflexive perspective, which has the potential to diffuse the tension between the majority and minorities. All in all, the film vouchsafes the heterogeneity and multitude of ethnic identities and cultures in modern China.

Chapter 4

The Ideology of the Homeland: Nationhood, Kinship, and Individuality

In modern Chinese languages, or in Mandarin at least, the term *guojia* consists of two separate words: *guo* and *jia*. Whereas *guo* refers to a country, nation, or state, *jia* stands for home and family. Sometimes rephrased as *jiaguo*, this word reflects an isomorphism in Chinese political thinking, a deep-seated perception of congruity between the family and the state. This isomorphism essentializes what I call an "ideology of the homeland." Drawing on Confucianism and ancient Chinese political thought, this ideology advances the idea of the family-state (*jiaguo*), for which the state, family, and individual were each wholly consistent with one another. Furthermore, the ideology of the "homeland" has also played a pivotal role in China's nation-building. A string of military defeats at the hands of the industrialized powers of Europe, the United States, and Japan in the late nineteenth century galvanized imperial China, which undertook a project of rapid modernization. In the face of manifold geopolitical crises, China underwent drastic changes. As the feudal empire waned, a modern state awakened. At this moment China started to reimagine itself as a nation.

To construct a Chinese nation/race/ethnicity (*zhonghua minzu*), intellectuals waged a series of political and social campaigns that aimed to inscribe an imaginary of the nation-state into China's resurgence. At the core of these new narratives of nationhood was a perception of China's victimhood at the hands of colonialism and imperialism. The burgeoning historical consciousness, as Rey Chow has put it, derived from a "logic of the wound" (1998, 6). The myth of a collective suffering served to downplay or diminish the hierarchy between China's major and minor ethnicities (Matten 2012, 64). With the founding of the People's Republic, the ruling party strategically deployed rhetorics of a Chinese homeland to bridge widening social divisions—a strategy that not only appealed to those between ethnicities and classes, but also to those who dwell outside China, at a distance from their so-called ancestral land. In China as elsewhere, people have been pursued by such visions of utopian harmony, in which all social conflicts and political tensions are supposed to disappear into thin air.

Historically, the nation-state, family, and individual in China are not seen as being at odds with one another. In consequence, individuals are anchored in their identification with "China"—an imagined collective that encompasses various physical and psychic boundaries. This in turn confers an overarching national, cultural, and political identity upon these subjects, who thus became "Chinese." The ideology of the homeland also defies the limits of the nation-state. The original European model of the nation-state, which was imagined as being coextensive with a single ethnicity, fails to address the multiplicity of China's ethnoscape. The ideology of the homeland mystifies the Chinese nation, as if political and social divisions among ethnicities or classes can be metaphysically reconciled as a bickering family might be brought together, under the reign of a patriarch (Shih 2007, 46).

In line with this logic, China's ideology of the homeland perpetuates a bond between nationhood, kinship, and the individual. Premised on a vertical, concentric social structure, which rests upon the pillars of nationhood and kinship, the ideology of the homeland shapes individuals according to a set of cultural conventions and political rationales drawn from Confucian ethics, Marxism-Leninism, and socialism. The ideological operations through which a sense of belonging is propagated, however, are inevitably interrupted and interfered with by the horizontal, multifarious economic and cultural flows of global capitalism (Appadurai 1996, 33). Whereas the ideology of the homeland presumes a centripetal dynamic, which upholds political allegiance and cultural loyalty to a central authority, globalism and cosmopolitanism unfold into a centrifugal force, which decouples the individual from local, national, and global attachments. This world of globalization ultimately boils down to the permeations of capital, not ideological agendas. In this age of globalization, in which the fluidity, flexibility, and mobility of human conditions and identities are increasingly valorized and facilitated, the essentialist ideology of the homeland presents a distinctly homogeneous concept. The differences between these two conceptions have resulted in a growing number of confrontations.

Against this backdrop, Shu-mei Shih calls for new analytic frameworks with which to investigate discrepancies between the ideology of the homeland and globalism in relation to China. Revolving around the diversity and complexity of Sinophone cultural productions, Shih proposes a multi- and interdisciplinary paradigm under the name of Sinophone studies (2013, 6). Following Stuart Hall's postcolonial criticism, Shih's concept of "the Sinophone" focuses on uneven forms of political and cultural violence inflicted on language, ethnicity, and nationality (2007, 44). By first and foremost unsettling the hierarchies among Sinitic languages, the concept of the Sinophone affords a critical vantage point from which to examine the dissemination of ideologies of China and Chineseness. Among its major interventions, for instance, is to explore why being Chinese has come to mean that one speaks only one language and pledges allegiance to only one polity? This assumption mirrors a recent process of Sinification or Mainlandization of Chinese cultures and languages, about which many scholars have voiced similar concerns (Yeh 2002; Liew 2012; Szeto and Chen 2014). Moreover, queries have been raised regarding the formation of majorities and minorities as identity markers in the Sinophone world.

At the same time, Sinophone studies latches onto the increasing significance of visuality. Built on Mieke Bal's and W.J.T.Mitchell's theories of narratology and of image, Shih's approach to visuality attends to how subjectivity is produced via image, narrative, and mediacy (2007, 32). In Shih's view, visual practice taps into articulations of locale, language, and logic with regard to China. In this light, cinema has become a vital field of inquiry in Sinophone studies, in that film is a means of conveying ideology that relies on visuality and aurality. As an ideological apparatus, film effectuates by activating subjective identification in its spectators. Given cinema's capacity to mediate between visuality and identity, Shih underlines an imperative to take into account the numerous languages, cultures, nationalities registered in Sinophone films (2007, 21).

Adopting a critical perspective, this chapter both explores the complex conditions of cinematic identification in the Sinophone world, and reflects on the field of Sinophone studies. Accordingly, this chapter attends to some key filmic texts so as to scrutinize the ways in which the ideology of the homeland is manifested in a global era. In my analysis, film characters in the grip of this ideology do not necessarily reinforce notions of China and Chineseness. In short, formal manifestations of the ideology of the homeland do not always create the conditions for its reproduction. Further, I consider how Sinophone cinema can be put into conversation with other disciplines, such as comparative film studies and transnational film studies (Zhang 2004; Lu 2014; Chen 2015). In this way, I assess the critical efficacy of the Sinophone framework.

The Myth of *Guojia*

In Chinese language and culture, the family-state isomorphism is integral to a grand narrative of *guojia*, which ties individual, family, and nation together in a mythical bond. In instilling a sense of belonging in people and groups, assertions of this imagined connection risk neutralizing people's free will. Given that *guojia* is indispensable to the governance of historical and modern China, one might wonder how the concept is defined and disseminated in cultural production. It is also important to explore how this ideology—which has been systemically ingrained in the population—can be unlearned and undone. In approaching these issues, I will look at three Sinophone films—*The Herdsman* (1982), *Comrade: Almost a Love Story* (1996), and *Mountains May Depart* (2015). Encompassing distinct periods and locations, these films demonstrate how the affective and emotive pull of *guojia* can be suspended due to people's physical and psychic displacements. In dissecting these filmic texts, therefore, I aim to contextualize conceptions of China as one's origin, home, and roots. In doing so, I hope to unpack possibilities for dismantling the fantasy of *guojia* as a cultural imaginary.

Based on writer Zhang Xianliang's 1980 novel *Body and Soul* (*Ling yu rou*), director Xie Jin's *The Herdsman* (*Mu ma ren*) narrates a reunion between father and son after their thirty-year separation. The protagonist, Xu Lingjun, was born as the CCP was prevailing over the KMT during the civil war. Xu's father, a bourgeois man who is wary of his social class and weary of his marriage, fled to America prior to the establishment of the PRC in 1949. Her heart broken, Xu's mother soon passed away in a hospital. Growing up as an orphan in the new political climate, Xu endured great misery. In the 1950s, during the Anti-Rightist Movement, Xu was branded as a rightist, and then sent down to the countryside. Only after the Cultural Revolution did Xu clear his name with an agreeable life. Now a schoolteacher based in the prairies of northwest China, Xu heads for the capital city of Beijing to meet his long-lost father. Since leaving the country, his father has become a billionaire entrepreneur who owns a chemical corporation in San Francisco. In their meeting, the father tries to persuade Xu to emigrate to the United States and take over the family business. However, Xu declines the offer. In the belief that China's future is bright (and thus that his family's future is secured), Xu returns to his humble home, where his wife and son await him.

Often cited as one of Xie Jin's most important works, *The Herdsman* is closely associated with his two other films made in the same period: *Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (*Tian yun shan chuan qi*, 1980) and *Hibiscus Town* (*Fu rong zhen*, 1986). These three films enunciate a common set of attitudes toward the PRC's political campaigns, in particular the Cultural Revolution. That is why, the three films were later referred to as the "Reflection Trilogy." The trilogy resonates with social crises at a time when China was in urgent need of sobriety and reflection. According to Yingjin Zhang, Xie's trilogy was occasioned by both the loosening of political control and his own self-conscious contemplation (2004, 224). Enjoying freedom of artistic expression, at least temporary, filmmakers such as Xie were given room to "break away from old ideological confinement, reconstruct their personal and artistic identity, and cultivate new subjectivity along with new aesthetics, film language and directorial styles" (Zhang 2004, 224). Produced in the context of this new critical awakening, *The Herdsman* takes account of the suffering inflicted on individuals during consecutive years of political upheaval. Its protagonist, Xu Lingjun, is emblematic of the generation of victims.

The film opens with a series of shots showing both the pasture and herds of the Chilechuan region, and, in contrast, Beijing's ancient monuments, cement roads, and concrete buildings. In opposition with one another, the landscape and cityscape pictured in this sequence conjure an array of dissonances: rural versus urban, marginal versus central, and subalterneity versus dominance. Observing a hierarchy between the different spaces represented here, Michael Berry suggests that the sequence also juxtaposes temporalities (2012, 559). For example, the rural farm alludes to the protagonist's banishment and torment in the past, while Beijing's street views evoke the nation's potential for modernization in the present. These interlaced images comprise a nonlinear narrative logic, insofar as neither the temporality nor spatiality of the depicted events has been configured chronologically. Rather, this logic disrupts common perceptions of time and space such as here and there, now and then. In fact, such a montage technique paves the way for how Xu Lingjun's personal trauma is illustrated in the film—that is, the use of flashbacks.

In the scenes in which father and son are reunited, the film often cuts to a flash of memory. These moments reveal the protagonist's agonized experience of the political purges. Shortly after the opening scene, for instance, the two meet at the lobby of a luxury hotel. Back in his room, Xu decides not to give his father the gift of a basket of boiled eggs, having been astonished by the expense of the lavish dinner they have just had. In his voiceover monologue, Xu figures that to a well-groomed billionaire, the free-range eggs would simply seem worthless and unsavory. During the voiceover, the film shows a carriage loaded with haystacks, with the same basket of eggs fixated at the center of the frame. In the carriage, Xu sits with his wife Li Xiuzhi and son Qingqing, as they make their way to a bus station in the local county. Similarly, another flashback is triggered during the father and the son's conversation in a hotel suite, telling us how Xu was labeled as a rightist on account of his family history. Due to his capitalist family background, Xu was expelled to labor reform (*laogai*). Once a promising student, he was condemned to remain a herdsman. In a moment of extreme despair, Xu determined to hang himself with a bridle in the staple. Dramatically, his action was dissuaded by a horse nearby, which approached him just in time. Above all, each of these retrospective fragments indicates that Xu is haunted by the past. His everyday experience in the present involuntarily sends him back to traumatic memories that he would rather disown. During the conversation in the father's suite, Xu reveals his conviction in *guojia*:

> The father: I find that in China nowadays the intelligentsia is very much concerned about so-called state [*guojia*] affairs.
>
> The son: That is because for Chinese, the destinies of the nation [*guo*] and the family [*jia*] are tied to each other. They share the same ebb and flow.
>
> The father: The chemical corporation in San Francisco is my own kingdom. In the West, values are appreciated on a personal level. Individual endeavor is what they treasure the most.
>
> The son: That might be true, father. You are honored by what you have achieved. Maybe because I have spent so many years in a community, what I treasure the most is the honor of our *guojia*.

Guojia, at this point, can be understood first and foremost as a union between the nation-state and the family. In this originally Confucian isomorphism, the political entity of nation-state and the social unit of family constitute an imagined community, which is premised on a firm belief in shared destiny. This shared destiny mystifies the bond between the collective and the individual. Whereas the nation-state demands political allegiance, the family solicits an ethical commitment to consanguinity. In Nick Browne's words, Xie Jin's *The Herdsman* looks closely at "the two large systems of ethical/political thought, Confucianism and socialism, that operate in some composite form in contemporary Chinese society" (1994, 53). The concept of *guojia* manifested in the film thus implies a multifaceted discursive formation that declares multiple claims on subjects. These claims have become essentialized knowledges and practices, such as morality and loyalty. Through filmic narrativization, the concept of *guojia* is disseminated as a hegemonic ideology, an ideology of the homeland, which perpetuates a coherent imaginary of nationhood, kinship, and the individual.

As much as he is a victim of political violence and survivor of state injustice, Xu Lingjun has also become captive to a sense of belonging. On the individual level, this is due to the loss of his family and intellectual career. This was later compensated by new forms of belonging, as Xu started his own family (albeit through an arranged marriage, like his parents') and was rehabilitated as a school teacher after twenty years in exile. On the communal level, his sense of belonging is built on his bond with the local community. His close ties with local residents shelter Xu from continuing class struggles, which would only aggravate his suffering. The local peasants and herders not only offer the protagonist sanctuary and care; they in fact contrive to protect Xu as one of their own. As Xu explains in one of his monologues, he sees the natives symbolically as mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, despite without blood relations. On the national level, the local government's support of Xu's rectification heralds a new era of the PRC, which began with the government making amends for past political purges. From an indicted laborer to a reinstated citizen, Xu's physical and mental displacement into an agrarian community serves as a trope for how personal trauma can be redressed, for a utopian sanctuary where wounds can be healed.

Ultimately, Xu's ostracism fortifies his sense of belonging; with the help of his family and community, all of his adversities have been endured. At the close of the film, we see Xu eagerly walking across grassland toward Xiuzhi and Qingqing, with all three silhouetted against a sunlit sky. Not for the first time, Xu's voiceover utters: "This is the place where people helped me live through those days; this is the place where my sweat soaked the soil; this is the place where I am accompanied by my wife and son; this is the place where my life's roots lie." This concluding soliloquy reads like a manifesto, inasmuch as it accentuates his ethical validity while glossing over his political disenfranchisement. In stark contrast to his attitude toward the rural community, Xu's speech explicitly renounces his father for his moral aberrance and ideological heresy. In closely focusing on family values, the story of *The Herdsman* promotes the ideology of the homeland, which champions an individual's rootedness in one's own family, community, and country.

It is no surprise that Xie Jin's melodramas (of which *The Herdsman* is one) have been regarded as an official mouthpiece. As a matter of fact, Xie Jin has been accused of complicity with the postsocialist regime, which seeks to reconcile the fissures between the Party leadership and the populace at large (Browne 1994, 2; Ma 1994, 34). In Ma Ning's words, *The Herdsman* exemplifies how postsocialist China has reestablished its legitimacy through "a reaffirmation of traditional Chinese family and cultural values" (1996, 32). Xie's films were castigated so vociferously that one critic, Zhu Dake, even called for an end of the "Xie Jin's Model"—a narrative pattern that he espied in Xie's melodramas (Zhu 1990 [1986], 145). Intervening on Zhu's barrage of criticism, Yingjin Zhang points out that Xie Jin's methodology was considered heavily reliant on moralization and polarizing characters and narratives, which "creates a myth of compromised solutions to social conflicts" (Zhang 2004, 230).

To be sure, the propagandistic aspect of *The Herdsman*'s narrative should be acknowledged. Its focalization of the victimized Xu Lingjun, who exhibits filiality, domesticity, and patriotism, is patently charged with ideological values. The film's climatic ending, which is structured according to the genre of melodrama, appears to bolster the ideology of the homeland. However, the film's critics have largely overlooked another, equally integral aspect of the film, namely personal memory. Given that both Xie Jin and the original novel's author Zhang Xianliang witnessed the political upheavals of modern China, *The Herdsman* can be seen as a personal testimony. Unlike propagandistic films, which proclaim the superiority of political leaders and revolutionary heroes, Xu Lingjun's story foregrounds the experience of individuals who subsist at the mercy of absolute state power. In the wake of radical partisanship in China, the retainment of one's memory points to a partial agency under conditions of state ideological control, so as to tread a path between socialist discipline and individual freedom (Zhang 2004, 224). Rather than adopt the univocal historical narrative sanctioned by socialist collectivism, *The Herdsman* dares to speak of individual memory.

The death of Mao marks a watershed moment in modern Chinese history. The nation was dumbfounded and dismayed by the end of the Cultural Revolution, which had wrought havoc on the entire country. Following the collapse of socialism's ideological hegemony, many of the literary and filmic texts in this era attempted to mediate the chaos and violence of the recent past. As Yomi Braester has noted, works such as *Body and Soul* and *The Herdsman* not only responded to the onset of privatization and the diversification of public discourse (2016, 435). As significantly, they also constructed historical accounts that stood as alternative memories, which could not be reduced to a single shared point of view. To resist a dominant historiography that inscribes a collective memory of the political traumas, Chinese intellectuals and artists resolved to intervene in the writing of history by introducing multiple voices and perspectives. In China, there is a cacophony of cultural memories. On one side, memories of recent history have been narrated around the composite concept of *guojia*, so as to forge a new cultural and political imaginary of China and Chineseness. On another, the population also harbors diverse memories, many of which deviate from reigning accounts of the past. Memory itself has become dynamic and intersectional, exposing the tension between the collective and the individual. It is in the sphere of memory, I contend, that the ideology of the homeland is subverted.

The fragments of memory that feature in *The Herdsman*, however formulaic, are less invested in the necessity of forgetting than that of remembering. Literary and filmic texts that present traumas and memories from an individual point of view, notes Braester, participate in deconstructing the collective amnesia imposed by official historiography (2016, 434). In Xu's story, the ethical imperative to recollect the past seems to prevail, in that *The Herdsman* recalls rather than obliterates personal lived experience. In Maureen Turim's words, the film deviates from others' experiences and thus denies any collective formation of memory (2001, 210).

At this juncture, it might be said that *The Herdsman* does not necessarily shore up the ideology of the homeland, for it does not establish a collective identity based on shared memories. However, whereas experiences might seem like "direct, unmediated, subjectively lived accounts of reality" in a strictly individual sense, Ernst van Alphen argues that experiences are also dependent on the discourse "in which the event is expressed, thought, and conceptualized" (1999, 24). As Van Alphen points out, experiences such as memory and trauma are fundamentally discursive constructs and as such are bound up with society and culture (1999, 37). Once they have come into being, experiences are no long tethered to the individual, but shared within a cultural milieu. The individual memories visualized in *The Herdsman*, therefore, also speak to a collective. They rather orient toward a potential solidarity, for, as Turim maintains, "when one is a member of a traumatized collectivity, what has happened to others like one's self has the potential to multiply the wounds" (2001, 210). Paradoxically, Xu Lingjun's experiences also precipitate a "heterogenization of memory," by which polymorphous accounts of the past proliferate, without being collapsed into the singularity of an official history. As against the collective amnesia, aphasia, and apathy, this heterogenization ventures to establish an outpost of critical consciousness. In the contested landscape of "post-Maoist politics of memory," it departs from the univocal history framed by the ideology of the homeland (Braester 2016, 434).

The ambiguity of memory lies in its discursivity, considering that it is imbricated in rival ideological formations. Chinese films of the postrevolutionary era are telling examples in this regard. The bonds between the individual and the collective have proven precarious, so much so that the symbolic order, affective linkages, and language itself have been suspended by cinematic reflection (Wang 2004, 95). In this sense, processes of mystifying and demystifying the Chinese nation-state, as Esther Yau's puts it, take the form of competing memory claims (2010, 156). So long as collective identity is forged in the discursive field of collective memory, it will be subject to contingency and subversion through the articulation of other memories.

The Sojourner's Ballad

Although reflecting on the past is necessary if one would like to establish historical agency, lived experiences in the present are equally significant. Looking beyond memories of political unrest, the ideology of the homeland also looms large in the contemporary trajectories of nation-building in China. I approach the discursive prominence of the homeland by posing a series of questions. How does this discursive formation—a string of claims devised to bind the national community—affect the individual *now*? How is a life lived on margins—both realistic and symbolic—of China and Chineseness? Is it possible to live beyond the discourse of the homeland and still identify as a Chinese? In addressing these problematics, I now pivot to Hong Kong, a city that has long been a nodal point of contemporary cultural politics.

Some parallels can be drawn between the historical development of Hong Kong, which was once a crossroad of Western colonialism and Chinese modernity. The phased transfer of the city from the British Empire to China was considered a watershed moment attesting to the revival of the Chinese nation. Much of the population of Hong Kong, however, was anxious about the city's present and future. This anxiety stems from a combination of a colonial past with a nationalistic mindset (Yau 1999, 181-183). On the one hand, Hong Kong's hybrid constitution (which includes Western political institutions, social structures, and legal systems, with Chinese cultural conventions) have made this fringe port into a cosmopolitan hub of local, national, transnational, and global economic flows. On the other hand, this intricate balance might also become a burden, in that Hong Kong has invariably been susceptible to ideological and geopolitical conflicts. Recently there seems to have been a backlash against Hong Kong's hybridity, for the cultural identification of the locals is always caught in a dilemma of taking sides.

Speaking of the cultural politics that persist between mainland China and Hong Kong, Esther Yau aptly describes how Hong Kong's cinema serves as a "textual site of contradiction and negotiation informed by the historical conjuncture" (1999, 183). Hong Kong cinema, she deliberates, encapsulates the political ambivalence and cultural syncretism that have shaped this hybrid society. Yau's construal is certainly useful in sketching out the path by which Hong Kong has navigated Western colonization and the dominant Chinese culture. As Rey Chow explains, this path that "cannot simply be collapsed into the latter [Chinese culture] even as resistance to the former [Western imperialism] remains foremost" (1998, 153). Conceiving the broader scope of these implications, my discussion of Hong Kong's fluctuant and flexible survival tactics will be guided by a Sinophone approach.

For Shu-mei Shih, the category of Sinophone studies primarily serves to engage the hegemony and supposed legitimacy of essentialist cultural discourses. She argues against "the eternal validity of being Chinese, the measurable quality and quantity of Chineseness, and the centrality of China as the homeland" (2007, 185). Dwelling on a deconstructive attitude, Shih rebuts the ideology of the homeland, which normalizes rhetorics of superiority, authenticity, and loyalty. Shih's polemic, so it seems, is less a critique of chauvinistic Sinocentrism than an invitation to speculate on the openness and porousness of the linguistic communities, geopolitical confrontations, and cultural interactions grounded in Sinitic languages and cultures. In what follows, I demonstrate how a similar perspective can be found in Peter Ho-sun Chan's *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* (*Tian mi mi*, 1996).

The story of *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* does not obey the regular formula of the romance genre. As its title implies, it is bittersweet. More importantly, the story is enriched by displacements of language, place, and time in everyday experience. Two strangers from the mainland, Li Xiaojun (Leon Lai) and Li Qiao (Maggie Cheung), arrive in Hong Kong on the same train on March 1, 1986. The pair's paths cross again when Xiaojun enters a McDonald's restaurant for the first time. A man from Tianjin (formerly Tientsin, a coastal city near Beijing in northern China), Xiaojun lands a job at a small deli thanks to his aunt Rosie, his only relative in Hong Kong. Qiao, on the other hand, who works as a cashier, comes from Guangzhou (formerly Canton), which makes her a native speaker of Cantonese. Distinguished by their mother tongues (or, more precisely, their preferred dialects), Xiaojun's first conversation with Qiao reveals the role of language in Hong Kong's identity politics.

Xiaojun, who barely speaks any Cantonese, is so inarticulate in attempting to order a meal, that his order would have not been possibly placed without Qiao's help. Qiao, who literally stands on the other side of the counter, faces no language barrier. The instant that Qiao realizes that Xiaojun is a mainlander, we can detect the reluctance and perhaps even shame from her countenance. It is as if someone reminds her of an inconvenient truth—namely, that she is too, a migrant from the mainland. Through an exchange of words, this episode amplifies how one's identity is attached to, and demarcated by, language. Social integration is predicated on the nativistic aspect of language. This is exposed shortly afterwards, when Xiaojun asks Qiao about the prospect of working at McDonald's. Their dialogue proceeds in an amusing manner:

> Qiao: (in Cantonese) Are you from the mainland?
>
> Xiaojun: (in Mandarin) Yes, but how can you tell?
>
> Qiao: From your Cantonese, of course! So terrible! It will be a huge problem if you can't speak English.
>
> Xiaojun: I know. I don't know what to do.
>
> Qiao: Do you know there are many schools in Hong Kong...[switches to Mandarin] Can you follow what I just said?
>
> Xiaojun: Yes, yes.
>
> Qiao: There are schools that especially teach mainlanders to speak English. It is not that hard actually.
>
> Xiaojun: Are you from the mainland too?
>
> Qiao: Of course not! Just listen to my Cantonese!
>
> Xiaojun: But your Mandarin is so fluent...

> Qiao: People who speak Mandarin might not be mainlanders, but people who can't speak Cantonese must be mainlanders! Do you want to learn English or not?
>
> Xiaojun: So can I work at McDonald's if I speak English?
>
> Qiao: You can work anywhere if you speak English.

Unbeknownst to the newcomer, Qiao urges Xiaojun to learn English only because the school will reward her with kickbacks for anyone she passes their way. (On a side note, this scene also broaches the Anglo-American centrism of globalization.) Her trickery aside, Qiao's posing as a Hong Kong native exposes a mechanism of social exclusion, whereby Xiaojun is discriminated against on the grounds that he does not belong to a local identity. As Hong Kong is a bilingual society, those who can speak either Cantonese or English will likely be recognized as natives. Those who cannot will unfortunately be singled out as mainlanders. Yet by "passing" with her proficient Cantonese, Qiao verbally disrupts the authenticity of Hong Kong identity (Leung 2015, 274). In a Butlerian sense, the social and cultural identity of Hong Kong is performative, in that it can be constructed through bodily practices that repeat and replicate naturalized categories such as Chineseness (Lo 2005, 4). By the same token, Qiao also challenges the authenticity of Chinese identity, for she successfully pretends not to be a mainlander.

For Pierre Bourdieu, to equate one's social identity with one's mother tongue is to impose the symbolic power of language on people so as to construct distinctive groups (1989, 22). Aligning identity with language in this way intensifies divisive identifications—in this case, the difference between mainland China and Hong Kong. Moreover, it overlooks the nuances of self-identification, which often forms in response to multilingual realities (Ansaldo 2010, 621). In *Ethics after Idealism* (1998), a treatise released one year after Hong Kong's return to China, Rey Chow poses astute questions about Hong Kong's cultural and historical agency in the post-handover era:

> What would it mean for Hong Kong to write itself in its *own* language? If that language is not English, it is not standard Chinese (Mandarin/Putonghua) either. It would be the 'vulgar' language in

> practical daily use—a combination of Cantonese, broken English, and written Chinese—a language that is often enunciated with jovial irony and cynicism. (1998, 153; my emphasis)

For Chow, the performances that Qiao conducts on a daily basis so as to pass as a "true" Hongkonger can be located in the "struggle between the dominant and subdominant within the 'native' culture itself" (1998, 153). For so long as everyday life either in mainland China or Hong Kong requires that inhabitants are "native" in a certain sense, people who migrate across geopolitical borders will have to navigate discrimination and enact forms of nativeness. Alert to the violent equivalence inherent to identity politics in the Chinese-speaking world, Shu-mei Shih emphatically states that, "to the extent that communities may be multilingual, linguistically determined communities necessarily trace porous and contingent boundaries" (2007, 186). In other words, Qiao's migration to postcolonial Hong Kong entails assuming a subject position that must straddle discriminative borders. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha attributes such a subject position to a "third space": a space that "represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" (1994, 36). In this third space, which is embodied in the characters' translocal and multilingual experiences, their displaced and disjunctive self-identifications create new possibilities of existence.

In both cases, mainlanders and Hong Kongers are subsumed under the larger rubric of Sinophone cultures. No matter which Chinese dialect a film's characters speak, the rest of the world will still likely to identify them as "Chinese." The notion of Chineseness thus seems not only bound up with monolingualism and nationalism, but ethnocentrism and racism. It becomes all the more conspicuous as the plot of *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* unfolds, when cultural affiliations hinge on multiple markers. Following their acquaintance, Qiao and Xiaojun's relationship takes many twists and turns. The two help each other settle in, strive for better lives, fall in love, and part ways. The film ends in a very different place and time—New York City, May 8, 1995. Having both emigrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong, then from Hong Kong to New York, Qiao and Xiaojun run into each other on a street in Chinatown, by an appliance store. They are both drawn to a television inside the shop window, which is broadcasting news of the death of the pop singer Teresa Teng (Deng Lijun). Teng's song “Tian mi mi” (from which the film’s Chinese title is derived) plays, first within and then without the narrative. Side by side in front of the shop window, Qiao and Xiaojun come to realize that they are standing next to each other. Stunned and still, they smile.

An icon of popular culture in the Chinese-speaking world, Teresa Teng was born in Taiwan in 1953. By the time of her untimely death, Teng’s was well known across not only Greater China, but Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Americas. A polyglot in her own right, Teng performed her songs in a variety of Sinitic and non-Sinitic languages, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, Japanese, and English. It could be said that Teng’s popularity and legacy seem to benefit from, and contribute to, an imagined community built on cultural and lingual hybridity. *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* or rather *Tian mi mi*, is punctuated by Teng’s well-known melodies, which the protagonists themselves sing at times. Although a decade has gone by since they separated, and they are living on another continent, both characters are still transfixed by Teng’s music. The reason, suggests Sheldon Lu, is that “the popular, deterritorialized, pan-Chinese songs of a Taiwanese singer more than the national anthem unite ethnic Chinese and Hong Kongers into some sense of communal bonding” (2000, 278).

However, in “The Voice of the Sinophone,” Song Hwee Lim takes issue with the concept of the Sinophone, pointing out that it overestimates the role of language in identity politics (2014, 63). Drawing attention to the voice in Chinese/Sinophone cinema, including (non)diegetic sounds, Lim challenges the predominance of the phonic, the verbal, and the aural in communal bonding. For him, there seems a privileging of the “phone” over the “Sino,” of a lingua-centric conception that contradicts “the multilingual polyphony that contemporary subjects increasingly inhabit” (2011, 38; 2014, 68). In other words, the language one speaks does not necessarily designate one’s affinity with a certain community, be it a nation or ethnicity, for communities are not exclusively determined by language. As a result, Teng’s songs and their impact must not be seen as symbolizing a cultural imaginary or fulfilling the purpose of a single polity and ideology. Conversely, the lyrics and rhythms conveyed through Teng’s vocal performances should be construed as an assemblage of visceral and psychic intensities, transferred through the libidinal economy of commodity fetishism.

Building on Jean Baudrillard’s *The Consumer Society*, Rey Chow notes how the associative quality of Teng’s songs is driven by consumerist desires and habits

(Baudrillard 1988, 24; Chow 2007, 112). Consumption is an active mode of production and relation, which ultimately regulates signs and assures group integration. Simply put, the reason that Xiaojun and Qiao are captured by the same song at a particular time and place, is that they are both susceptible to consumerist culture, which engineers their desire for certain commodities—in this instance, popular songs. This susceptibility to mass commodities, according to Chow, shores up interpersonal bonds. Communities, it follows, are formed not in response to individual needs, but through consumption (2007, 113). What Teng's music evokes between the two characters, in this case, is less a sense of belonging to a distant homeland, than a mutual reaction (albeit vacuous) to intersubjective affects. The film's last scene seems only to reaffirm this tendency. Reprising the opening sequence in black and white, it reveals that Xiaojun and Qiao were not only both on the same train. In fact, they were sitting back to back. In sharing the same train of desire that brought them into a world of commodities, consumption, and capitalism, they were already connected. The film shows how, having been filled with the same desires, they finally come together again.

Notably, *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* was produced in 1996, the penultimate year of British rule in Hong Kong. As such, it resonates with what Esther Yau calls "the 1997 consciousness," which haunted the city's psyche at the dawn of another historical turn (1999, 181). The romantic journey of Xiaojun and Qiao, it seems, charts an escape route as the clock to handover counts down. For them, to have a place to live in the world is to escape from the places where they used to live. It might seem ironic then, that when Qiao eventually acquires a green card by working as a tour guide in New York, the mainland tourists wonder why she still stays in the United States. Many Chinese immigrants have returned to mainland China, where prospects are looking up. But for Qiao, as for Xiaojun, the process of repeatedly arriving in and departing from a place is driven by their mutual desire to secure a better future. As such, this process precipitates continual displacements, a continual elusion of the local. In Kwai-Cheung Lo's view, "the notion of the local in Hong Kong cinema exists in the form of a desire to become what it is not, in the hope of losing as well as simultaneously reconstituting itself in the process of globalization" (2001, 275). That said, in migrating among communities, both characters have achieved, and hope to achieve again, variations on their local identities (mainland Chinese, Hong Konger, and American). In pursuing happiness, Xiaojun and Qiao are perpetually displaced from the local. Yet this same pattern of displacement leads them back to where they once were. What must be underscored, here, is not that returning home is an irresistible desire, but that the concept of "home" itself has become fluid. Now notions of home and local identity are continually reimagined and reconstructed by subjects on the move. In this light, I will further examine how the ideology of the homeland has shaped cultural imaginations of home among diasporic Chinese subjects.

The Nostalgia of Future

In inaugurating the Sinophone as a critical paradigm, Shu-mei Shih asserts that the notion of Chineseness figures an "inescapable, ontological, a priori condition," which insists on "an ideology of origin that refuses to accept an end date to diaspora" (2007, 185). Shih seems to suggest that diasporic communities, who have left their ancestral homes, should be allowed and enabled to throw off the burden of nostalgia and melancholy of homelessness altogether. For Rey Chow, the essentialization of "home" threatens individuals with homesickness (2007, 29). Attentive to forms of displacement and dislocation in lived experience, scholars have explored how identities are affiliated with places. This accentuated rootedness of a physical location indicates that although someone might leave the places with which their identity is connected, they will be ineluctably drawn back to it. In applying the concept of the Sinophone, Shih's reflection on the Chinese diaspora points to a "linguistic present and future," in which Chinese people living overseas (often named *haiwai huaren* or *huaqiao*) will integrate into their host communities and eventually disappear (2011, 716). Others, however, have argued that the concept of the Sinophone itself is dubious, for cultural practices and products are not exclusively linguistic (Lim, 2014; Chen, 2015). Eliding logocentrism, my investigation now turns to the topography and chronopolitics of cultural belonging. The cultural dynamics at work in rhetorics of belonging, I intend to show, entail variety of affects and memories, which are not reducible to the linguistic. Focusing on the trajectories of the ideology of the homeland as it moves across spatial and temporal boundaries, I call for a rethinking of the tensions surrounding Chinese cultural identity in diasporic contexts.

The latest film from China's leading director Jia Zhangke, *Mountains May Depart* (*Shanhe guren*) is paradigmatic of the entanglement between nationhood, kinship, and individuality in Chinese culture. With an episodic structure, the narrative spans nearly three decades. It tells the story of Tao, a woman in the small town of Fenyang. At the end of the last century, Tao finds herself trapped in a love triangle with two admirers, Liangzi and Jinsheng. Jinsheng, the wealthier suitor, uses the profits from a gas station he runs to purchase the coal mine where Liangzi works. In consequence, Liangzi is laid off. Having lost the competition, Liangzi leaves the town before Tao and Jinsheng's wedding. Fifteen years later, the couple has already divorced. Tao stays in Fenyang while Jinsheng lives in Shanghai with their son, Dollar (Daole). Another decade on, in the year of 2025, the little boy has grown into a man and an immigrant in Australia. After a squabble, Dollar walks out on his father. Across the Pacific on a snowy night, Tao dances peacefully, all alone.

Whereas Jia's previous film *A Touch of Sin* (*Tian zhu ding,* 2013) features murderous and revengeful characters, the prosaic and pensive undertone of *Mountains May Depart* marks a stylistic return to his early works. The protagonist Tao is an ordinary person, played by Jia's longtime collaborator and wife Zhao Tao. Her portrayal bears traces of figures in Jia's previous films, widely known as the "Hometown Trilogy": *Xiao Wu* (1997), *Platform* (*Zhan tai*, 2000), and *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiao yao*, 2002). What these figures have in common is that they never leave the same place, whatever the reason. Jia's recent films, however, break with this narrative pattern. Instead, he turned to those who are removed from their places of origin, such as rural migrants, inhabitants of cities, and fugitives. Although the films do not directly address the originality invested in place, I reckon, the absence of rooted placehood in Jia's later works only serves as a foil to the bond between people and place, which Tuan Yi-fu refers to as "topophilia" (1974, 4). In *Mountains May Depart*, Jia reveals how topophilic feelings are disseminated and contested through temporality. The awareness of that our affective ties with place might die away, is prompted not only by geographical distance, but also by a fear of time. The film draws on an obsession or fixation on the negation, decadence, and erasure of memories and feelings due to the inevitable progress of time. Pamela Lee terms this obsessive fear "chronophobia" (2004, 14). Through close reading, I argue that Jia's *Mountains May Depart* captures the ways in which the protagonist's lived experience is heightened by topophilic and chronophobic intensities.

According to Tuan, the neologism "topophilia" designates humans' relations to the environments they inhabit, including aesthetic appreciation, physical contact, and emotional response (1974, 93). Subtly deferred from survival and adaptation, the notion of topophilia refers to a structure of feeling that "one has towards a place because it is home, the locus of memories, and the means of gaining a livelihood" (Tuan 1974, 93). Accordingly, topophilia provides a vantage point from which to interpret how cultural identities are shaped by, and anchored in, spaces and places. In *Mountains May Depart*, topophilic emotions are expressed primarily by the female protagonist Tao. Having once been a cheerful person, Tao is now fraught with grief owing to a series of misfortunes. Despite her failed marriage, losing custody over her son, and father's death, Tao does not run away from Fenyang, the town where these disappointments and crises unfolded. On the contrary, these experiences make her determined to stay. At intervals, there are scenes showing Tao, sometimes alone, against the backdrop of the surrounding landscape. Time and again, the image of Tao is superimposed onto a Buddhist pagoda, frozen river, or undulating mountains, producing a composite image in which the connections between person and place are made palpable.

In another instance, Liangzi once avowed that if he left town he would never return. However, in the second episode, which is set in 2014, Liangzi has nonetheless returned with his wife from a neighboring province. He has been diagnosed with pneumoconiosis, a terminal disease common among coal miners. Liangzi's homecoming resonates with the notion of nostalgia in Chinese culture. The character's actions can be associated with classical proverbs, such as "niao fei fan xiang, hu si shou qiu" (a bird adrift finally returns; a dying fox returns to its den), and "ye luo gui gen" (a leave nurtured by the soil comes back to the soil). For Tao and Liangzi, Fenyang is a safe harbor for their damaged lives. It is a shelter of last resort in which they can bear an erratic present and enigmatic future. Through framing and storytelling, Jia highlights a mythical relationship between individual and place. This relationship affords people an illusion of nostalgia, a sense of belonging, and a yearning for "home."

It is in the figure of Tao's son Dollar, however, that this perception of original placehood is distorted by time. Upon Tao's request, an eight-year-old Dollar arrives in Fenyang after his grandfather's death. Wearing an international school uniform and equipped with digital gadgets, Dollar seems well accustomed to a Western-tinged and middle-class way of life. When they meet at the airport, Dollar addresses Tao as "mommy," not "ma" in Chinese. Whereas Tao mostly uses the local dialect, Dollar speaks either Mandarin or Shanghainese. Showing up in an underdeveloped hinterland, Dollar seems to epitomize China's modernization and globalization, through which tradition has seemingly been abandoned and poverty largely eliminated. The very fact that the boy is named after a global currency, the dollar, underscores the irony that socialist China has embraced a capitalist dream. His uncommon interactions with his mother, moreover, attest to intractable anxieties about the loss of roots. Dollar, it seems, has been cut off from the orthodoxies of his place of origin. This displacement has arrested his sense of nostalgia. Aware of that Dollar will soon move to Australia, Tao insists that she accompany him home to Shanghai by train, rather than by train. Asked why, she confides, “The slower it goes, the more time we have.”

Given its divided structure, the film’s major theme is time. To render the temporal disjunctures still more visible, Jia consciously adopted three different aspect ratios in the three segments. Explaining this cinematographic method in a commentary, Jia writes:

> I made a lot video footage back in 1999, some of which are used in the film. The first scene I saw in that footage is a dancing crowd in a disco ballroom. Replicating the scene and its ambience seems impossible, as does simply reenacting it dramatically. Since the footage was shot in a 4:3 frame, I decided to make the first part of the story in the same format. The second part follows this logic. It involves some footage I recorded later in the format of 16:9. For the last part I simply used a widescreen format, to distinguish all three periods with different frames. All in all, my purpose is to incorporate this footage into the film. (November 5, 2015)

As some scholars have noted, this way of incorporating audiovisual materials from the past into a contemporary film links back to the tradition of realism in postsocialist Chinese cinema. According to Xudong Zhang, the notion of postsocialism defines China’s postmodern condition. Characterized by “a bewildering overlap of modes of production, social systems, and symbolic orders,” postsocialism emerges in the tensions between China’s ideological institutions and global capitalism (Zhang 2008, 10). Considering its circumstances, postsocialist Chinese cinema took a realistic approach to the country’s drastic and swift socioeconomic transformation, which involves conflicts between past and present. Taking on temporality as a site of social critique, Jia’s films consistently deploy documentary imagery. However, Jia has moved to break down the boundaries between verisimilitude and reality, for instance, by using documentary techniques (such as synchronous sound and imaging) rather than narrative devices (such as voiceovers and flashbacks) in his fiction films. Even though animated and computer-generated elements also appear at times, Chris Berry argues, Jia's persistent recourse to documentary practice lends his films an "on-the-spot" aesthetic and "in-the-now" temporality (2009, 114).

As Rey Chow suggests, the immediacy delivered by documentary realism serves to present the past not as a bygone reality, but rather as a matter of found footage (2014, 27):

> The past is given to view as what has been cut into countless times already, by processes and apparatuses of (audial, visual and narrative) recording. The acute senses of ephemerality, loss and ultimately melancholy which characterise many a moment in Jia's films are the results of this deeply-felt sensation of hypermediality—indeed, of the composite material, tracks and symptoms left on human perceptions and interactions by media forms such as print, photography, film, newsreel images, historical reportage, popular songs, interviews and, most importantly, storytelling. (Chow 2014, 27)

Chow's mention of hypermediality sheds light on Jia's cinematic techniques. Hypermediality can be found throughout *Mountains May Depart*. For example, when Tao and Dollar are sitting on the train to Shanghai, the camera shows a video clip on Dollar's tablet. The same display is then taken over by out-of-focus televised images. These images eventually dissolve as the film transitions to the last episode, which is presented in widescreen. The video clip on Dollar's table is an advertisement for Australia‘s tourism, which is showing the natural landmark of the Twelve Apostles—great limestone stacks on the coastline. Due to continual erosion, the narrative informs us, the twelve stacks will soon become three. In addition, two songs that recur in the film—Pet Shop Boys' *Go West* (1993) and Hong Kong pop singer Sally Yeh's *Take Care* (*Zhen zhong*, 1990)—provoke nostalgia by thematizing ephemerality. The hypermediary of Jia's film, so it seems, resonates with Fredric Jameson's discussion of "nostalgia films", because such films convey a sense of "pastness" to the present by imaging alternative historical situations with new aesthetic methods such as pastiche and parody (1991, 17-19). As Esther Cheung's puts it, Jia hopes to challenge discourses of authenticity and historicity that dominate the present (2015, 58). But what seems even more provocative, according to Chow, is that Jia's characteristic aesthetic allows for a new way of envisioning China, "not simply as a land, a nation or a people, but first and foremost as medial information" (2014, 27). What Jia's films offer, then, is an ahistorical fragmentation of "reality"—understood here as mediated lived experience, "characterized by loss of history and an in-the-now tense of distraction and sensation" (Berry 2009, 114). To resist the authority of national historicism, for Jia, is to displace a coherent and progressive temporality with disjunctive and differential temporalities. The temporal splits in *Mountains May Depart*, therefore, attest to his critical methodology.

The last segment of the film revolving around Dollar, envisions a dystopian future for notions of cultural heritage. After living in Australia for almost a decade, Dollar can no longer speak his mother tongue. His father Jinsheng, in contrast, can only speak Chinese. Their few conversations often carry out with belated responses, for they both must rely on translation software to understand each other. It is interesting to note that, in an Oedipal twist, Dollar falls in love with his Mandarin teacher, Mia (Sylvia Chang), who is about his mother's age. With Mia translating for them, the father and son's conversations are full of time lags. It is as if despite living in the same place, even the same room, the father and son live in disparate temporalities. Walking down to the beach, facing the sea, Dollar calls to mind the only word of his native language that he can remember: "Tao," his mother's name, which also means wave in Chinese. Oceans apart, an elderly Tao dances in the open to the extradiegetic *Go West*—the same song to which she used to dance. Whereas the son's name "Dollar" implicates an ambition for global capital and satirizes contemporary China's skin-deep socialism, his mother's name seems to become a bridge that connects people across geographical distances. As much as the sea divides people, it also unites them.

For Shu-mei Shih, to order an expiration date on the Chinese diaspora, at which migrants will be absorbed into their host cultures, would undo their topophilic allegiance to the homeland. This notion entails a mobile conception of "homeness" and "origin" (Shih 2007, 190). Unlike his father, Dollar barely recognizes a sense of homeness. Still, his romantic relationship with Mia suggests a longing for his mother, a hope that Mia's presence will fill that void left by Tao. If Tao embodies a topophilic affinity with home and locality, then Dollar and Mia's love translates into an affective bond between the diaspora and the place of origin.

In the film, this affective bond is accented by hypermedial elements that express Dollar's yearning for Tao. When the son looks out to the sea, we hear the waves.

This sound extends into the following scene, remaining audible in the background. As long as Tao dances to the music, the sound of waves continues. The overlapping sounds of the music and waves function as a two-way response. On the one hand, the sound of Tao (meaning waving and waves) addresses the person named Tao. On the other, Tao's presence responds to Dollar's calling. Symbolically, this scene spells out an immigrant's diasporic memory of his homeland. Furthermore, the two characters seem immersed in different temporalities—as Tao revels in the favorite song of her youth (the past), Dollar dwells on the residual memory of his mother (the present). By arranging times in this way, the film suggests an alternative temporal logic. Given that the past and present have both become sites of nostalgia, the implications for the ideology of the homeland, and how memory can be preserved and performed, are contingent on people's specific conditions.

A World without Chineseness?

In this chapter I introduced the idea of the ideology of the homeland, demonstrating how notions of China and Chineseness play out in the domains of culture, language, and geopolitics. The kernel of this ideology posits the congruity of the state and family, which together circumscribe the individual with political institutions and ethical imperatives. By cultivating a mythic belief in *guojia*—an imagined bond between nationhood and kinship—this symbolic order effects personal identification. In analyzing the film *The Herdsman*, I show how films use ideological interpellation to produce a Chinese national identity. Nevertheless, the collective formation of national identity can be hampered by personal testimonial and memories. Rather than totally subjugate subjects, the complex character of memory affords individuals a certain degree of critical autonomy.

Furthermore, this ideology of the homeland is sustained through an essentialization of language, as expressed in the notion of "mother tongue." The notion of the mother tongue, or native speech, is problematic in that it has othering effects discriminating against those who either do not speak the language or do so with accents and dialects. In the Chinese-speaking world particularly, habitual discourses, practices, and native languages have become integral parts of local culture, providing a basis for local identity. This is where the Sinophone framework makes it possible to critique nativistic claims on languages, for it recognizes the Chinese-speaking world's heterogeneous languages, national discourses, and ethnicities. *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* grapples with language's exclusionary power, revealing the constructedness of notions such as "mother tongue" and "native speaker." Once their constructedness is acknowledged, cultural identities premised on an equivalence among language, nationality, and ethnicity are seen as flimsy presumptions.

Alongside language, emotional investment in places also contributes to people's sense of belonging. This can transform into a strong commitment to a local community, or nostalgia for an origin or roots. People's attachments to place constitute a form of topophilia, even among migrant and diasporic subjects, who have left their erstwhile places of origin. As much as topophilia is intensified by geographical dislocation or displacement, it can also be disrupted by experiences of time. Temporal duration may either augment or attenuate one's affiliation with his or her original place. In *Mountains May Depart*, Dollar ends up unable to speak Mandarin. An immigrant, he now speaks English. Although over time Dollar's topophilic affection for Fenyang, the town in which he was born, may have given way to foreign locations, he remains nostalgic for his mother, Tao, who stays in Fenyang. This nostalgia, ultimately, tempers his severance from China.

In this way, the paradigm of Sinophone studies foregrounds the malleability of identities and forms of self-recognition. At one level, this comes down to linguistic, political, and cultural conditions. At another, it points to the ambivalence and indeterminacy of changing identities. Shu-mei Shih imagines a future Chinese diaspora that would have forfeited its associations with China—conceived here as a geographical referent—and dissolve into new social and lingual environments. However, this seems to dismiss other anchors in cultural identification, such as affect and memory. In highlighting heterogeneity, the Sinophone approach contributes toward fracturing the ethnocentrism and monolingualism that characterize the Chinese-speaking world. Notwithstanding, this critical recognition of plural dialects as national languages, draws restrictive lines between Chinese and non-Chinese languages. This, I claim, reduces multiple, polymorphous conditions of existence to linguistic practices. After all, cultural formation is by no means confined to the linguistic domain; it is also located in other areas of lived experience, including the physical and psychic.

Even if a person of Chinese descent has adapted to a different language, culture, and society, the cultural and political presence of China, whether benevolent or threatening, cannot be denied. The presence of China is only heightened by the accelerated forms of technological exchange and commodity consumption that define the global age. More importantly, diasporic communities are not static and isolated. It is crucial to keep in mind the dynamism and porosity of the Chinese diaspora, which is engaged in an indefinite process of differing and deterring—a *différance* of Chineseness. In this process, traits and traces of Chinese culture, politics, and discourse intermittently reappear in the diasporic experience.

Engaging with Shih's interventions, I contend that cultural identities of overseas Chinese are rarely dissociated fully from their places of origin. This is not to say that China, with its sheer cultural and economic clout, will inflict itself upon Chinese immigrants and their descendants for all eternity. I rather foreground the trans/formation and dis/accordance of Chinese cultural identity and its "derivative" others. In the words of Stuart Hall, cultural identity is neither "a fixed essence…lying unchanged outside history and culture," nor "a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute Return;" rather, it is "always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" (1990, 226). In other words, diasporic identities—cultural identities in general—correspond to differential "positionalities" that intersect with nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism in different local contexts (Hall 1990, 237). Consequently, various scenarios of one's relation to China or Chineseness caution us against any finite conclusions about how one's identity is prescribed by a fixed position in the world (Chun, 1996; Chow, 1997; Ang, 1998). In this light, we should further explore how fluctuating positions, poised between worlds of difference, can open onto myriad ways of being.

Note on translation

The English translations of dialogues, idioms, and Jia Zhangke's commentary are mine. For Jia's original text in Chinese, see Jia Zhangke (2015).

Glossary in Chinese

Guojia 国家; *zhonghua minzu* 中华民族;

niao fei fan xiang, hu si shou qiu 鸟飞返乡，狐死首丘; *ye luo gui gen* 叶落归根

Epilogue

Anatomy of an Empire

China Inside Out

Aghast at the staggering pace of China's urbanization, cultural anthropologist Robin Visser writes that "the capitalist city—denounced as parasitical under Mao and devalued by the norms of traditional Chinese ethics—now functions in China as a site of individual and collective identity" (Visser 2010, 2). This, she claims, is the crux of the phenomenal transformations that have overtaken this once desolate landmass. Needless to say, since its impassioned pursuit of capitalist economism following the downturn in communist ideology, China becomes irrevocably bound to global commerce. Moreover, in claiming to have ushered in a new imperium at the expense of the existing world order, the nation has prompted more concern than esteem. It is still too early to tell whether China has "won" the race among superpowers, if ever. Still, its ferocious proliferation of megalopolises and metropolitans, soaring skyscrapers, dashing trains, and bustling seaports, all attest to an inconceivable transformation.[46] Granted that Visser's corollary holds true for China's metamorphosis over the last decades, it becomes all the more necessary to scrutinize the radical shifts from China's imperial past, through the revolutionary era, to the cosmopolitan present.

The observational premise on which Visser seeks to explain China's unlikely advance in national wealth and global stature, entails a retrospective search for its defining moments in history. A critical juncture surfaces if we turn to the formative years of Mao Zedong's seminal career back in the 1930s. In this period, republican China was plagued by the strife between the ruling Nationalists and revolting Communists, while a Japanese invasion loomed on the horizon. Drawing lessons from previous armed uprisings, which had been resolutely crashed by Nationalist troops, Mao devised a stratagem for breaking out of the predicament in which the Chinese Red Army was ensnared. Considering his party's scarce appeal to the bourgeois urbanites, Mao evaded a head-on collision with superior forces by retreating to rural areas. This flanking tactic allowed him and his cohort to rally droves of rural people to their cause as they strode across China. (Even today, this demographic group accounts for the vast majority of China's population.) Eventually, this strategy would circumscribe and consume the enemy (Karl 2010, 21). Hailed as a quintessential exemplary of modern guerrilla warfare, in which the few outgrew the many, what can be wrested from Mao's victory is much less a numerical miracle than a shrewd perception of the dialectical relationship between the center and the periphery. Accumulating momentum and stimulating a collective consciousness as their army traversed extensive tracts of China over the course of time, the Communist leaders did not simply wager their survival on a gradual expansion of their military might. Rather, they leaned on a better grasp of on the fungible positions within power structure and turned the tables on their enemies. In view of this historical episode, China's winding trajectory toward modernity, which is haunted by abrupt sweeps of regime change, appears to be gauged by a dynamics of the center and periphery. This tension has sustained through variegated incarnations of Chinese modernity over the past century.

Not only does Mao's wisdom of how "the countryside surrounds cities" testify to the uneven distribution of wealth between the urban and the rural in China, it also lays bare the geopolitical impasse between heartlands and hinterlands (Xiang 2016, 158). Here, what concerns the present inquiry with the country's concomitant foray into modernity and nationalism, so to speak, resides not so much in a continuity as a *discontinuity* intrinsic to China's contingent departure from a faltering agrarian monarchy to first a burgeoning industrial state, and then a global economic power. This discontinuity, I argue, reveals ruptures within the Chinese nation. That said, the collective formation of modern China as a united community—particularly in the case of the Chinese Communist regime—operates on multiple fronts. This imagined unity encompasses a wide array of individuals and communities who, precisely due to their historical repression, have been strategically mobilized from the periphery to the center as a consequence of the ruling power's agenda.

Throughout the previous chapters, I have dismantled the veneer of ideological maneuvers as such with recourse to historical contexts. By honing in on those whose existence has been positioned as marginal, whether in terms of language, culture, or territory, I have sought to identify distinct categories of people who are characteristic of the nation-building project. Children, women, ethnic minorities, and overseas Chinese have all been integral to the process of imagining China anew. Rather than being removed from the center, I contend, these regimented subjects together constitute an axis of politics, history, and memory, around which a new cultural imaginary is animated. In this sense, the marginal subjects, who have supposedly been cast out, fenced off, or relegated to the boundaries of "China," are always already at the heart of the Chinese nation. Those who have been taken as peripheral to Chinese identity, it turns out, are constitutive of a nation in the making.

My interventions in the seemingly fragmented composition of modern China do not aim to consolidate perceived hierarchies. Neither do I intend to suggest that social divisions, despite permeating conceptions and practices of Chinese selfhood, should continue to govern people's way of life. Rather, my critical engagement with the multiple facets of Chinese modernity is driven by a comparative and relational approach. It aims to explicate how Chinese society and culture have aligned with, or otherwise deviated from, national politics—a contentious process that has been variously represented and reified in modern and contemporary Chinese cinema. While remaining responsive to the volatility of modern Chinese history, I have chiefly focused on interlinkages among subjects delimited by various normative binaries, namely age (childhood versus adulthood), gender (man versus woman), ethnicity (Han majority versus ethnic minorities), and kinship (both cultural and familial). I have shown how these binaries play out in films in China and, by extension, the Sinophone world.

Within the scope of the current investigation, it is crucial to grapple with the monolithic construct of the Chinese nation. On the one hand, this entails dissecting epistemological and geopolitical transactions between China and the West. On the other hand, it commands mapping out intersectional affinities and interstitial tensions among the components of the supposedly holistic nation-state. Consider the 1959 film *Song of Youth*, for instance. The coming-of-age story of the protagonist Lin Daojing dovetails with Communist revolution and China's collective battle against domestic oppression and Western intrusion during the Republican Era. After she joins the Communist party, Lin Daojing's personal growth comes to resonate with the nation's salvation. In addition, her story indicates how gender ideology—specifically, the idea of woman—conformed to Chinese nationalism in the new socialist age. At this juncture, the categories of both children and women become intertwined with one another, converging in cultural representations of the nation (Ban 2016, 237-244).

This project consists of a series of reflective efforts to contest and transcend national borders. As such, it situates the modern Chinese state at the porous and precarious boundaries between nominally discrete elements. In this dissertation, I have sought to contribute toward a nuanced understanding of China's national formation. This has revolved around a fundamental antinomy: on one side, the symbolic whole of China in effect derives from distinctive loci of signifying practices designed to construct a cohesive Chinese identity; on the flip side, subjects who seem to be inexorably destined for frontiers of the hegemonic power, play a central role in China's political and cultural formulation. This paradox, I argue, points to an ambiguity in China's hierarchical structure. Oppositional binaries—such as center and periphery, outside and inside, whole and parts—are rendered at once reciprocal, interwoven, and indistinguishable. As I have shown, the ambivalence of China's nationalization and modernization allows for potential scenarios in which marginalized and minoritized subjects challenge ideological interpellations. Equipped with a range of representational tactics, they open up new possibilities for subject formation, subjective articulation, and self-expression in the face of the nation state.

Empire on Edge

Whereas my discussion above demonstrates the ambiguity and contingency of the modern Chinese nation-state through the prism of film, contemporary thinkers and scholars have ventured beyond the confines of the nation. Concentrating on the politics of language, history, and epistemology, they have sought to unravel the ways in which the presence of China, or Chineseness, is felt among both individuals and groups. This is a disconcerting age, in which the tension between an increasingly ecumenical identity politics premised on liberalism, egalitarianism, and pluralism, faces up against "static, essentialist and totalitarian conceptions of 'national culture' or 'national identity'" (Ang 2001, 34). At this juncture, there is a pressing need to address human existence and social conditions in the light of China's relentless push for global influence and national strength. In consequence, many have weighed in on the conflicts in the wake of China's expansion at home and abroad. These tensions manifest themselves in both tangible and intangible constraints imposed on the lives of ordinary people. Among the daunting tasks ahead, first and foremost is that of locating the problems of the Chinese nation. Put differently, this entails asking what we mean by "the Chinese nation" in the first place. What is at stake here?

Rather than approach Chinese nationalism with reference to the Western conception of the nation, Chinese historian Ge Zhaoguang argues that the process of nation-building in China is distinct. In his alternate construal of nation, Ge questions the efficacy of Western theory. He argues that the history of China has been interpreted *in Western terms*, at the cost of what Spivak calls "epistemic violence"

(Spivak 2015, 76). Ge aims to challenge, in his words, "a theory that considers traditional empires and modern nations as appropriate for separating historical periods is not suited to Chinese history, and also not suited to the national consciousness and the national formation of China" (Ge 2017, 23) The Song Dynasty (960-1279) figures prominently in Ge's consideration. The apogee of premodern China, the Song is known for its robust economy, vibrant culture, and leading technologies. At the same time, it faced constant existential threats from bordering regimes. On Ge's account, the origin of Chinese nationalism lies in the rise and fall of the Song. The Song period saw the beginnings of a collective consciousness as a result of a stand-off between agrarian and steppe societies. Having been one of the most prosperous and advanced of China's imperial dynasties, the beleaguered Song was ultimately overthrown in the Mongol invasion (in this period, nomadic troops conquered almost all of Eurasia). Despite or rather precisely because of the empire's fall to external forces, Ge maintains that, a "Han-centered national sovereignty forming gradually since the Song dynasty has led to early formation of the 'nation-state' on *China's own terms*" (2017, 21; my emphasis). In short, the Chinese nation-state appeared centuries earlier than its equivalents in the West. This signals that modern China is nothing else than "a product of the traditional empire, preserving remnants of the ideology of empire, from which we can see that the histories of both were intertwined" (Ge 2017, 23).

To be sure, Ge's assertions that "Chinese cultural identity and Chinese traditions are durable," or "China has always had a clear and stable center," allude to prevailing national imaginations (2017, 21). Instead of incorporating a decentralized worldview into his speculation, Ge risks mystifying the geopolitical landscape at that time while privileging the ethnogenesis of today's vast majority of Chinese population, the Han people, over other ethnic groups within the communist state. With his provincialism of the modern Chinese nation-state's provenance, another act of epistemic violence has been done. An equivalence of Chinese national identity and Han ethnocentrism is erected as a narrative arc, hence poised to cement its symbolic and realistic dominance in popular imagination. In search of a theoretical methodology that would more subtly cater to the watershed moment in the course of Chinese history, a moment when a throng of regional powers on the continent rivaled with, turned against, and merged into one another, what Ge should have contributed to, is not so much a linear, coherent, and progressive storyline of homogeneity pertaining to one singular community, as a disruptive, incongruent, and amorphous manifestation of heterogeneity contributed by preexisting and continuous interplays among languages, cultures, and ethnicities.[47]

To elucidate the idea of nation in the Chinese context, now it seems, has to invariably reckon with two major fallacies in the field of cultural inquiry. The first is the indisputable prevalence of Western (read: West European and North American) theories which have *extensively* defined our analytical conducts. Bogged down in a colossal matrix of lexicons, taxonomies, and paradigms, it requires a greater effort and a situational awareness for Western and non-Western intellectuals alike, to decouple from a habitual thinking by which universalizing theories take precedence over discrete realities. This imperative, however, aims not to dispense with Western concepts and thoughts entirely, but rather alerts to the pitfalls when the validity engendered by and redounded to Western theories remains unquestioned, as if they were a priori knowledge comfortably exempt from concrete experiences (the same argument, for that matter, extends to the dialectics of theory and reality well beyond the dichotomy of the West and the Rest). After all, as Shu-mei Shih rightly points out, the knowledge production on the Rest by the West, which was largely initiated as a colonial project, is still now possessed by a racial logic based on which areas and peoples across the globe are perpetually separated by "race as an organizing category" in "our contemporary era of empires." (Shih 2019, 33; 65). The quest to redress the systemic disparity between knowledge in the West and the Rest, notes Walter Mignolo, begins with a delinking from "the knowledge built upon geohistorical imperial/colonial locations responding to racial and patriarchal classification of bodies and regions" (2012, xiv).[48] This dissertation has set out to engage in this critical dialogue by showing the rich tapestry of China's modernizing project, which cuts across an array of historical conjunctures, social movements, collective experiences, and private moments. In so doing, I seek not only to enhance our grasp of diverse histories and cultures, but more specifically, to bridge the gaps between China and the world, by designating cinema as a vital site of the nation-state where we can probe its repressive dictates and inevitable limits so as to rid of exceptionalist pretenses and universalist prejudices.

The second conundrum, in contrast, does not so much derive from a tendentious interpretation of China entrenched in the orthodox orientalism in the West, as has persisted in the minds of those who, in the words of John Hutchinson, adhere to a cultural nationalism which furnishes a "conception of the nation as a historical community." (Hutchinson 2013). Whereas political nationalism rests upon a "vision of the nation as a political autonomous community," cultural nationalism leads to what John Hutchinson describes as "ethno-historical 'revivals' that promote a national language, literature and the arts, educational activities and economic self-help" (Hutchinson 2013). Symptomatic of this form of nationalism is an *excessive* valorization of a consistent culture and people, which imposes a sense of belonging and reifies the national community.[49] In the case of China studies, this chauvinistic conception of the nation is voiced not only in the opinion that Chinese identity is built around or tantamount to the Han majority. It is also expressed in a broader idea that China should aspire to "redeem" its former glory in Asia and the world. Wary of that deconstructionist critics in Western and Chinese academia might uproot belief in Han- or Sino-centrism, scholars like Ge rightfully call for the integrity of non-Western scholarship, and yet appear to tilt toward cultural nationalism. In constructing a consistent history in which to anchor a coherent Chinese identity, they willfully forget that history is littered with random twists, arbitrary shifts, and capricious breaks, which might become sensible only in retrospect.

To wade through the uneven terrain of tangled and vying ideologies such as West-centrism, Sinocentrism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, and so forth, we shall never cease to contextualize the past while historicize the present, and, to situate into the particular while relativize with the regular. Only in this way, I suppose, can we face off against extensive and excessive claims by cultivating a critical instinct to discern the underlying logics concealed in the body of knowledge we procure and produce. That is why, when it comes to modern China, it is all the more difficult, and yet more important, to steer clear of the double bind that Prasenjit Duara justly brings to mind:

> Armed with this narrative of History, and with a battery of discourses from social Darwinism to Marxism which often reproduced the assumptions of History, modernizing nationalists and the nation-state in China have sought to either obliterate or appropriate the otherness of those who do not belong to its ideal of self-consciousness—such as popular religious groups or secret societies—into the narrative of History. Even when the idea of a national History has not been challenged, proponents of a centralizing, statist narrative have destroyed and buried alternative paths to a modern nation. (Duara 1995, 229)

Contemplating the dilemmas posed by thinking the past and present, here and there, West and Rest, Duara cautions us against a malaise that is endemic in the discursive construction of "China." Currently, the syndrome I have in mind is spreading from political rhetoric to scholarly writing. On the one hand, so much so that the Chinese nation-state gains its legitimacy from "history"—a deliberate historiographical narrative dictated by the ruling ideology—as a locus of homogeneity, it concomitantly promotes a collective sense of self at the expense of those minoritized and marginalized.[50] By establishing and policing national boundaries of language, culture, and territory, the emergence of modern China amounted, as Duara puts it, to a process of "appropriating and sublating the Other within itself" (1995, 19). On the other hand, it must also be recognized that the other does not merely stem from within the confines of the self, but also from without. In a global era, the demarcation between the Self and the Other in terms of national affairs is no longer reducible to a series of isolated events within closed borders; nor is what lies at the both sides of geopolitical frontiers to be stringently considered as parallel dimensions calling for our divided attention.

As I intend to show, the relationship of the self vis-à-vis the other is a continual struggle so intense and unruly, that it is bound to ripple through boundaries between the local and the global, collective and individual, and the central and the marginal. Insofar as nation is a historical construct and a political concept rather than a given, we must guard against the lure of demagogues, xenophobes, and jingoists who sing the praises of the nation-state. In the face of a monotonous voice and a singular view, the critical commitment of our time, of any time, is more than just to defy a dominant narrative of history, but to unearth buried facts, and listen to stifled cries.

Worlds between Words

Perhaps no other contemporary academic discipline illustrates the yawning gap between China and the West better than film studies. Over the past few years, a series of vigorous exchanges over the discipline of Chinese cinema has foreshadowed, if not exacerbated, an escalating ideological rift between an exclusionary stance of nationalism and a conversationalist approach to a world wherein national boundaries are known to be traversed. In 2012, the Chinese-born American film scholar Sheldon Lu assessed four influential paradigms in Chinese film studies in *Journal of Chinese*

Cinemas (followed by a Chinese version later that year). In so doing, he provided an overview of the theoretical development, methodological proliferation, and geopolitical divides that mark this growing field (Lu 2012, 15-26). Two years later, an interview with Lu was published in *Contemporary Cinema* (*Dangdai dianying*), one of the most renowned venues for film studies in mainland China (Lu 2014, 62-67).

In the interview, Lu elaborates the co-existence of different paradigms, including Chinese national cinema and Sinophone cinema, in the study of Chinese films. He emphasizes how they can supplement each other when, for example, a multinational film production like Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) eludes rigidly defined national perimeters by virtue of its global cultural capital. Shortly after the interview was released, however, Li Daoxin a professor of cinematic arts at Peking University, criticized Lu's intervention, claiming that it represents yet another attempt by overseas academics to subordinate vernacular scholarship to that of the West. Accused of undermining Chinese intellectuals' collective subjectivity by depreciating, if not outright diminishing, the notion of Chinese national cinema, Lu, in his opponent's opinion, is complicit in "the discursive hegemony of Western theories and America-centered transnationalism" (Li 2014, 53-58). At the end of 2012, the accuser and the accused sat down with each other, along with the journal editors of *Contemporary Cinema* and faculty members of Peking University, in hope of reconciliation. Unsurprisingly, it was to no avail (Lu 2015, 68-78).

The deadlock wrought a seismic reaction among scholars of Chinese cinema both inside and outside China—so much so that the journal itself became a battleground in which people of opposing views have fought continuously until today. To be sure, the tendency to integrate a wide range of concepts and methodologies into Chinese film studies, derives in large part from the rise of identity politics fueled by cultural and political disparities across China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and other Chinese-speaking communities since the Cold War era. Still, this diversity of approaches is now censured as "unpatriotic"—a form of fealty to Western knowledge/power and US hegemony. Apparently, some Chinese film scholars dread the scenario wherein the nation's intellectual integrity is gravely compromised by Hollywood's cultural-industrial clout or US academia's global reach. Among those who nurture a pluralist view of culture, the diversification of research methods in the discipline of Chinese film studies serves to disrupt the hierarchical connotations of concepts such as "China" and "Chineseness." As the controversy simmers on, it reflects the fact that film studies has become a stronghold of nationalist sentiment. Some Chinese scholars, who feel simultaneously wounded by China's past of foreign invasions and emboldened by its current economic achievements, vow to defend the nation's pride every time they sense a potential threat. Having a foot in both worlds, Lu was intent on bridging the gap. Alas, he was also indicted by fellow researchers in his ancestral homeland, who dragged him through the mud.

Even though it was for sure not the first time a scholar of Chinese origin dwelling in the West was branded as a foreign agent and a native informant, the ongoing clash over Chinese cinema unveils the troubled image of China—of its current officialdom, to be exact—on the global stage. Projected by an awakening of national consciousness, this image reflects a desire to assert the autonomy of a monolithic unity, whilst spontaneously it indicates a dangerous mindset intoxicated with complacent isolationism. Since its instrumentalization and institutionalization in China, cinema has served as a nodal point whereby different sets of values are negotiated across temporal, spatial, and societal distances (modernity versus tradition, the foreign versus the vernacular, the individual versus the communal, for instance), and through which power structure is reconfigured while social relations realigned. It follows that the aforementioned intellectual debate showcases how cinema entwines with politics when the theoretical invention of Chinese cinema, or the evolution of Chinese film theory, is caught between a tacit move to expand the influence of Western knowledge and a deliberate effort to inscribe nationalist ideologies into an indigenous body of academic writings (Fan 2015, 4-6).

In fact, these polarized positions scarcely ever correspond to the aesthetic and technical aspects of cinema that address our senses and produce sensations. Rather, they tap into historical and political dimensions of cinema, compelling us to tackle existential differences born of geography, culture, language, and so on (Leung 2006, 71-73). In this way, the medium of cinema not only connects the personal with the national. Once cinema has been politically mobilized, ideologically charged, and even militarily weaponized, the personal and the national can also turn against one another. In the light of cinema's capacity to either pacify or incite different social groups, the cinematic articulation of ideas and experiences reveals how the normative social categories are exerted or curbed. This revelation might come short of an ultimate exposition for where power generates from, or the extent to which it effectuates. Still, a political and historical analysis of Chinese cinema enables us to see more than what is merely performed out front on the stage, as we are able to see how various actors interact with each other behind the curtain.

The primary purpose of this dissertation has been, first, to investigate how "socially, politically, and historically specific projects contest each other in the construction of Chinese national agency" (Berry 1998, 129-150). Second, it has aimed to demonstrate the uneasy relationship between the individual and the national by looking at "boundary-crossing, *intra-national* and *intercultural* citations of images, themes, motifs, styles, genres and other cinematic or cultural conventions" (Zhang 2004, 7). Given the current state of affairs in China's global engagement with its Western counterparts such as America and Europe, and its regional interventions in both controlled and claimed territories including Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, it is more crucial than ever to explore such strategies by which the idea of nation is fleshed out, filtered through, and forced upon the individual. The nation's presence, therefore, is being reinforced in several domains. Still, we should pay closer attention to how people's struggles over identity and identification are embodied in cinema, especially at a time when it seems that cinema's capacity for reifying everyday experience is being outstripped by, if not collapsing into, the digital realm.

Ironically, precisely because digital technology and communication networks are becoming an indispensable part of state assets due to their strategic importance to economic growth, public governance, and national security, it comes as no surprise that both tangible and intangible components of media and information infrastructures are locked in the geopolitical competition of nation-states (Aouragh and Chakravartty 2016, 559-575; Winseck 2017, 228-267). That said, with the rising tide of nationalism around the world, the challenge ahead for film studies, or cultural studies in general, is more than offering a critique of how a cultural artifact like film serves as a profitable commodity and a propaganda instrument of nationalists, but to engage culture, particularly cinema, as a vital site of socio-political transformation where in the face of political domination and cultural homogenization, people bond over shared visions while individuals make their voices heard. In the case of Chinese cinema, to interpret a narrative, eventually, is to locate collective beliefs and personal aspirations in sound and image, through space and time.

To paraphrase André Bazin, cinema is neither an escape from reality nor a utopia of imagination (2005, 20). Between the two possibilities, cinema allows us to bridge the real and the imaginary, hence building up a passageway whereby we finally come to resist setbacks, redress woes, and redeem our lives. If the field of Chinese cinema is bound to be under constant scrutiny because of the ever-changing perimeters of its linguistic, ethnic, political, and territorial implications, the vigor of

Chinese cinema, I believe, stems from a flexible understanding of the world. All in all, what this field of inquiry relies on, is a lively venture of seeing, listening, and reading the world.

Notes

[1] According to Rey Chow (1998), the increasing marginalization of Western theories in China studies is a reflection in the academic sphere of China's expanded role in the global economy.

[2] The biography of Ren Qingtai (1851-1930, whose official name is Ren Jingfeng) is still in dispute. According to an article by Wang Dazheng (2005), Ren was born in Laizhou County (Shandong Province) in Qing China. As a child, Ren moved to Faku County (Fengtian Province) with his parents. Later, he learned about photography. The owner of a local photography studio, for whom Ren already worked as a carpenter and builder for years, appointed him to manage the business. After studying photography in Japan for a while, Ren opened China's first photography studio in Peking in 1879. He named it Fengtai Photo Studio, after himself. Given the novelty of photography at that time, Ren's studio was a success, earning him both profit and a good reputation in the capital. Using his wealth and experience, Ren began filmmaking with the photographic assistance of Liu Zhonglun (an apprentice in his studio). For more on Ren's life and the production of *Dingjun Mountain*, see Dazheng (2005, 9-14).

Carlos Rojas contends that *Dingjun Mountain* was neither "the first film to be *screened in China*," nor "the first film to include *Chinese content*," nor "the first film *produced in China*," nor "the first cinematic work produced in China *by a Chinese*" (2015, 6-7; original emphasis). His more precise definition suggests that *Dingjun Mountain* should be referred to as "the first *complete* film produced in China by Chinese filmmakers and featuring Chinese content." (2015, 7; original emphasis)

[3] The original copy of *Dingjun Mountain* is lost. Consequently, scholars have to rely on archival research to corroborate their knowledge of the film's existence, production, and reception. See Hu (2003, 38-39).

[4] Recently there has been much debate over whether the narrative tradition of "shadowplay," or *yingxi*, is unique in Chinese cinema. Some scholars support the claim that there is a strong tradition of shadowplay in Chinese films and that it emerged as a mixed genre that incorporates elements of Chinese theater into Western forms of filmic narration. Others argue that conceptions of cinema vary across Chinese-speaking communities. The so-called shadowplay tradition, therefore, does not unify Chinese cinema. See Emilie Yeh (2019) and Jason McGrath (2013).

[5] Although the film's characters are based on real persons, their names were slightly changed to avoid controversy. As a result, the name of almost every major role alludes

to someone real. The protagonist Liu Jinglun, for example, was called Liu Zhonglun in real life, whereas the character based on Ren Qingtai appears as Master Ren, whose full name is never revealed in the film. I have somehow downplayed this distinction between actual and made-up names, but instead focus on the director's artistic intention in how she presents these characters.

[6] Scholars of Chinese film largely structure their research according to the three major political periods in the modern history of China: the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the Republic of China (1912–1949), and the People's Republic of China (1949—present). Chinese-language cinema garnered international acclaim during the 1980s. Accordingly, much of the scholarship focuses on Chinese films produced in recent decades. Films made earlier received comparatively less attention. The phenomenal expansion of Chinese cinemas in the late twentieth century demands close scrutiny, a project that goes beyond the scope of this study.

There are several reasons for the neglect of earlier films. Film production in China came to an abrupt halt due to the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Production only resumed once it was over, with a new generation of filmmakers (such as Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and Tian Zhuangzhuang) breaking new ground in cinematic expression. In Hong Kong, a new film movement (initiated by key figures including Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, and Wong Kar-wai) set out to reinvigorate the local film industry by ushering in new narrative genres and stylistic elements. Starting in the late 1970s, this movement sought to address social issues. As such they were a far cry from popular martial arts films, which were unconcerned with social reality. Around the same time, in the early 1980s, filmmakers including Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien waged similar campaigns to break loose from the monotony of Taiwanese cinema, as dictated by the KMT regime. Following the lifting of martial law in Taiwan, the movement later referred to as New Taiwanese Cinema went into full swing. Interest in the pre-1949 Chinese cinema has grown in recent years, with an exciting array of monographs dedicated to this subfield. For a deeper understanding of Chinese cinema in the Republican Era, then, I recommend that readers consult these following books: Pan (2002), Yueh-yu Yeh (2018), Ma (2015), Fan (2015), Bao (2015), and Zhang (2005).

[7] Attributing the development of Chinese cinema from 1921 to 1930 to what he terms "industrial nationalism," Hu Jubin locates two tendencies that both overlap and clash in Chinese cinema: Westernization and Sinicization. "Westernization prevailed in the first half of the 1920s," he explains, in that Chinese filmmakers largely relied on

Western themes and technologies. In this way, they competed with foreign films for audiences' attention. Following the emergence of the May Thirtieth movement in 1925, Chinese cinema suddenly changed course, with film studios emphasizing "the production of films with strong 'Chinese characteristics'," in response to the "nationalist sentiments of Chinese audiences [that] ran extremely high later in the decade." Amid this Sinicization campaign, martial arts films (*wuxia pian*) rose to prominence as means to "boost the morale of the Chinese public." See Hu (2003, 47-74).

[8] In an essay on *Hero*'s reception in North American media, Wendy Larson takes stock of various commentaries on the film: "Overall, political considerations have been a common theme for North American reviewers, most of whom have made note of the potentially pro-authoritarian position of *Hero*" (2010, 159). Furthermore, in a contribution published in the same volume, media scholars Anthony Fung and Joseph M. Chan remark that "*Hero* juggles huge numbers of complex Chinese elements, a nationalist imperative and the demands of a global market" (2010, 200).

[9] In addition to its success at the Palme d'Or earlier in Cannes, *Parasite* garnered four Oscar awards in total—Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film. This makes it the first and only non-English language film to win these major categories. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden*, in comparison, was also awarded in four categories, including Best Foreign Language Film, Best Art Direction, Best Original Score, and Best Cinematography.

[10] According to cultural studies scholar Fran Martin, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* presents "a simulacral, postmodern, and transnational version of 'Chineseness'," which manages to "fantasize the contemporaneity of third-wave pop-feminism into the heart of a re-imagined 'Chinese tradition'." In short, Martin argues that by merging a sense of Chineseness with "girl-power," the film reinvented the *wuxia* genre as a "popular cultural tradition" and allowed it to circulate on a global scale. See Martin (2005, 158).

[11] In contrast to other interpretations of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, such as Sheldon Lu's, literary and gender scholar Petrus Liu insists on a historicist reading of Lee's film. In Liu's account, "the invention of the 'woman warrior' has little to do with the infantilizing and fetishistic gaze of the West, patriarchal society in rural Taiwan, or the jingoistic attitude and imperialist ambitions of the People's Republic of China." For Liu, "the female martial figure was constructed more than half a century ago, and

the story embodies a historically determinate literary interest in the category of women in the 1930s and 1940s vocabulary of anticolonial nationalism." Although it is important to interpret a text with respect to its historical contexts, what Liu actually proposes is a shift of analytical focus. He concentrates on the historical circumstances of the original novel rather than integrating that with the more recent circumstances of the film adaptation. As a result, Liu's historicist reading of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* gravitates toward the original literary text—so much so that the intertextual interactions between the novel and the film are hardly explored. This goes especially for the way in which the film repackages the anticolonial nationalism of the Republican Era into a form of transnational culturalism. See Liu (2011, 71).

[12] In a response piece to Shih, Sheldon Lu surveys four major theoretical paradigms in the field of Chinese film studies, including a concise genealogy of the concept of the Sinophone, which Shih coined. Whereas Shih excludes China from the scope of the Sinophone world, Lu argues that "Sinophone cinema denotes the field and range of Chinese-language cinema and yet at the same time is particularly sensitive to issues of diaspora, identity-formation, colonialism and postcoloniality." Therefore, in Lu's opinion, "it would be more productive if we include mainland China within the range of the Sinophone." In fact, Shih herself has amended the concept so as to include marginal individuals and groups in China. See Lu, (2012, 15-26).

[13] As Rey Chow rightly points out, "the poststructuralist theoretical move of splitting and multiplying a monolithic identity (such as *China* or *Chineseness*) from within—powerful and necessary as it is—is by itself inadequate as a method of reading, that the careful study of texts and media becomes, once again, imperative, even as such study is now ineluctably refracted by the awareness of the unfinished and untotalizable workings of ethnicity" (1998, 24). To be sure, my usage of the Sinophone throughout this study does not square entirely with Shih's early definition of the concept. Initially Shih contends that those on the margins of China and Chineseness would be able to exercise their autonomy simply by detaching from or even denouncing their variously tangible or intangible associations with China. For example, Shih claims that people no longer face "an either/or choice between the ancestral land and the local place, which has been shown to jeopardize the well-being of the immigrants and their descendants" (2007, 190). For me, one's subjectivity is called into being precisely through engagement with the power structures in which one is embedded, not disengagement from them. If some individuals and groups are constantly relegated to

the lower echelons of Chineseness (non-native speakers of Chinese Mandarin, for example, are often discriminated against because their speech does not measure up to the standard), we should expect them to challenge such hierarchical constructions instead of proliferating sites of authority in isolation.

[14] The connections between German nationalism and the Bildungsroman, however, must be assessed with regard historical circumstances. Wheeler asserts that the importance accorded to German nationalism in literary histories of the Bildungsroman can be explained by way of reference to the French Revolution, in response to which Germanic intellectuals constructed a national identity of their own (see Wheeler 2015).

[15] The New Culture Movement and May Fourth Movement are similar in many respects and, as such, are sometimes used interchangeably. Nevertheless, a distinction should be made here. The former refers to cultural campaigns that played out during the first decades of republican China. These aimed to establish a modern culture and society akin to those in the West. The latter refers to a specific event, which occurred on 4 May 1919, in which a group made up mainly of Beijing students took to the streets in protest at the Chinese government's agreement to Treaty of Versailles (see Mitter 2004).

[16] In his doctoral dissertation, "Long Live Youth: National Rejuvenation and the Chinese Bildungsroman, 1900-1958," which was later published as a book, Mingwei Song surveys the emergence and development of the Chinese Bildungsroman from the late Qing dynasty until early years of Communist China. In her doctoral dissertation, "Coming of Age in a Time of Trouble: the Bildungsroman of Su Tong and Yu Hua," which has also been published as a book, Hua Li examines the Chinese Bildungsroman's development in the post-socialist era. In providing a literary history of the Chinese Bildungsroman, Hua Li focuses on coming-of-age stories published by the two writers between the 1980s and '90s.

[17] Allegedly, the reason that the English title of Jiang Wen's film was changed from *Bright Sunny Days* to *In the Heat of the Sun* was that the latter title is reminiscent of the Russian film *Burnt by the Sun* (1994). Directed by Nikita Mikhalkov, *Burnt by the Sun* similarly deals with a boy's coming-of-age, though in the context of Stalinism (see Liu 2000, 135).

[18] Toward the end of the 1960s, the government denounced the notorious Red Guards for their unruliness and atrocities (see Mitter 2000, 217). This consequential shift

diminished the possibility for young people to commit organized crime in the form of cult of personality.

[19] This fragment of voiceover is translated with reference to Yomi Braester's previous translation (Chapter 9, 196). Although the word *zhenshi* (truth) appears several times in this segment of the film, I have translated it differently as "truth" and "reality" as I see fit.

[20] Zhang Yuan has produced a string of documentaries tackling a wide range of social issues, including *The Square* (1996), *Demolition and Relocation* (1997), *Crazy English* (1999), and *Miss Jin Xing* (2000). In parallel with his feature films, they address themes such as the Tiananmen Square massacre, urbanization, financialization, and the politics of sex and gender.

[21] The ban was widely covered by media outlets in English and Chinese. For details, see: http://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/30/news/30iht-filmchin.html; http://www.nytimes.com/2001/02/18/movies/film-glimpses-of-china-never-seen-in-china.html; http://www.happyjuzi.com/article-121461_3.html; http://yule.sohu.com/20110908/n318813941.shtml.

[22] According to Kiu-wai Chu, the little red flowers can be understood with recourse to propaganda campaigns promoting revolutionary role models (2012, 185). In 1963 Mao initiated a campaign titled "Follow the example of Comrade Lei Feng," to give one example. It called on the populace to learn from the soldier Lei Feng's altruism and allegiance to Communism (Lei Feng had died in an accident). A national day was devoted to his memory.

[23] Unless noted otherwise, all excerpts from screenplays in this chapter have been translated by me.

[24] In the original novel, as well in the film adaptation, Lin Daojing's story continues beyond this point. After leaving Yu Yongze, she becomes acquainted with Jiang Hua, an undercover Communist who is based in the countryside. Lin is later exposed by a double agent working for the government and jailed. After a series of cruel interrogations, Lin is released. Soon afterwards, Lin is reunited with Jiang. He vouches for her so that she can become a qualified member of the CCP.

[25] During the Qing dynasty, both Hong Kong and Taiwan were Chinese territories until the late nineteenth century. The Treaty of Nanking, which was signed on August 29, 1842 after the first Opium War, stipulated that Hong Kong be ceded to the United

Kingdom. The Treaty of Shimonoseki, which was signed on April 17, 1895 after First Sino-Japanese War, stipulated that Taiwan be ceded to the Empire of Japan.

[26] Hong Kong was occupied by the Imperial Japanese Army from 1941 to 1945, when Japan surrendered to the Allies.

[27] Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek were political rivals within the Nationalist/ KMT government. Both laid claimed to rightfully represent the Republic of China.

[28] Chang was initially admitted to the University of London on a full scholarship. The outbreak of the World War II interrupted Chang's journey to the West, forcing her to enroll in the University of Hong Kong instead. After this stint in Hong Kong, Chang came back to the city in 1952, before moving to the United States in 1955.

[29] The target of the real assassination attempt was Ding Mocun (1901-1947), a former member of the CCP who had joined Wang Jingwei's collaborationist regime during the war. The assassin, Zheng Pingru (1918-1940), was a trained agent of the KMT government. Zheng's mission failed, resulting in her execution at the age of 22.

[30] Upon her return to Shanghai in 1942, Chang rose to fame after publishing a sequence of novels, including *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qing cheng zhi lian*, 1943) and *The Golden Cangue* (*Jin suo ji*, 1943). In 1944, Chang met an admirer named Hu Lancheng (1906-1981), a leading literary figure serving in the Propaganda Ministry for the Wang Jingwei government. The two married in secret in August that year, but soon Hu left her for another woman. Following Japan's defeat he went into hiding, using a number of pseudonyms. Chang and Hu's marriage ended in 1947, while Hu was still on the run.

[31] Unsurprisingly, Lee was required to make a director's cut of *Lust, Caution* that did not feature graphic sex. This was the version released in theaters in mainland China, among other regions. Still, the film was released uncut in Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to a directive issued by China's regulating body, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT), the leading actress Tang Wei, who plays Wong Chia Chih, was subsequently banned from acting and publicly appearing onscreen.

[32] In the wake of the Japanese invasion, the ruling Nationalist Party split into two camps. Despite their common anti-communist line, tensions grew between the two factions. Whereas the camp led by Chiang Kai-shek sought to defeat Japanese imperialism, that led by Wang Jingwei opted to negotiate with the Japanese authorities. This resulted in the formation of a separate collaborationist government in Nanjing (formerly Nanking), which lasted between 1940 and 1945.

[33] Cheongsam is a traditional garment of Manchu origins that was popularized and modified by the Han Chinese, especially in modern Shanghai during the 1930s.

[34] I have largely translated this myself, with reference to Chang's novel and the translated screenplay by Ailing Zhang, Wang Hui Ling and James Schamus (2007).

[35] Tatar here refers to the Manchus, as defined by the Nationalists. The term is intended as pejorative.

[36] According to Schneider, "only a few intellectuals like Liu Shipei considered the non-Chinese identity of the Qing emperors and of other inhabitants an unbearable threat and came to the conclusion that the Manchus and the other non-Chinese people had to be territorially excluded from a Chinese nation-state" (9).

[37] The first ethnic minority film in China is arguably *Yao Shan Yan Shi* (An Amorous History of Yao Mountain), which was produced by the Yilian Film Company in 1933. Directed by Yang Xiaozhong, the film tells of a Han Chinese protagonist traveling through mountainous areas in southern China populated by the Yao people. According to the film critic Zhang Huiyu, the portrayal of people from ethnic minorities in this film reinforces a hierarchy between the civil Han and barbaric Yao. For William Schaefer, however, the filmic narration, although complicit in a Sinicization agenda, does not discriminate against ethnic minorities in any colonialist or orientalist way. For their respective interpretations see Zhang (2013, 23) and Schaefer (2017, 211-212).

[38] There are fifty-six officially recognized ethnicities in the People's Republic of China. Most of these ethnicities make up only small proportions of the population in comparison to the Han Chinese. In fact, the emergence of ethnic minorities in socialist China is an immediate and intended consequence of the Ethnic Classification Project conducted in 1954. Thomas Mullaney provides a detailed account of the motives behind, and repercussion of this project in his book, *Coming to Terms with the Nation* (2011).

[39] It is important to note that, prior to Pema Tseden's rise to fame, there were a number of Tibetan-language films produced by Tibetans outside their native territory. Anthropologist Dan Smyer Yü distinguishes Pema Tseden's output from other Tibetan films in spatial and temporal terms. In contrasting them with Tibetan films made overseas, he refers to Pema Tseden's films as "native Tibetan Cinema." In contrasting from films about Tibet that either appeared in the early socialist China or came out under the direction of Han Chinese, Smyer Yü names Pema Tseden's work "the New

Tibetan Cinema." As a fellow Tibetan and Tseden's collaborator, Smyer Yü provides a nuanced understanding of the evolution of Tibetan cinema (see Yü 2014). Sonthar Gyal and Lhapal Gyal, two of Tseden's longstanding collaborators, have joined the ranks of Tibetan cinema (see Ding 2017).

[40] In the earlier version of his article on Pema Tseden's work (2015), which is published in Chinese, Kwai-Cheung Lo enumerates a variety of Chinese and Western productions about Tibet ranging from the 1950s to the present. Chinese films about Tibet date back as far as in 1953, when the film *The Gold and Silver Plain* (*Jinyintan*, dir. Ling Zifeng) was released. After the Cultural Revolution, Chinese cinema saw a renewed interest in cultural representations of Tibet, as evidenced by Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief* (*Daomazei*, 1986), Feng Xiaoning's *Red River Valley* (*Honghegu*, 1996), and Lu Chuan's *Kekexili: Mountain Patrol* (*Kekexili*, 2004). Regarding Hollywood films, there are, for example, *Lost Horizon* (dir. Frank Capra, 1937), *Storm Over Tibet* (dir. Andrew Marton, 1952), *Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas* (dir. Val Guest, 1957), and more recent ones such as *Kundun* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1997) and *Seven Years in Tibet* (dir. Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997). Reflecting on these films, Lo contends that either Chinese or Western portrayals tend to objectify and stereotypify Tibetan culture, all of which committed orientalism one way or another. It is noteworthy that in the English version of Lo's article (2016), this enumeration is omitted.

[41] One noteworthy example is *The Victory of the Inner Mongolian People* (*Neimeng renmin de shengli,* dir. Gan Xuewei, 1950). This was the first ethnic minority film in socialist China to raise concerns among the leadership soon after its public release. Originally titled *The Spring of Inner Mongolia* (*Neimeng chunguang*), it tells the story from the Communists' victory in the Civil War. In 1947, Mongol and Han people living in the inner Mongolian borderland joined forces to eradicate the tyranny of the nationalist regime. In presenting this ethnic coalition, the film was an attempt to rid communism of the menace of Han chauvinism and imperialism (in the film, the nationalists are shown as not only pushing an ethnocentric agenda, but also as allied closely with the United States). Despite this ideological goal, and the fact that it received favorable audience responses across the nation, the narrative disturbed the authorities. The early version of the film depicted the local Mongol aristocracies as reactionary collaborators with the nationalist regime; in the eyes of the current administration, this portrayal undermined their promotion of unity within and across ethnic groups.

As a result, the storyline underwent a massive overhaul. In the final version, the entire Mongol community—both nobles and plebeians—engage in the project of national liberation, led by the CCP (Gu 2017, 22). The film's new title (*The Victory of the Inner Mongolian People*) was conferred by none other than the New China's supreme leader, Mao himself. The twists and turns of this film's production indicate the ruling party's nous when it came to manipulating the cinematic representation of ethnic subjects for the sake of national unity. This ideological project constructed an all-encompassing collectivity by writing off internal differences between ethnic communities. It aimed to establish a common ground for the Chinese nation-state on the basis of revolutionary camaraderie and class equality. What is at stake here, however, is the ethnic minorities' own sense of autonomy, as their local histories and cultural forms have faded into the background.

[42] In an interview on his film career, Pema Tseden acknowledged the influence of Abbas Kiarostami on both the subject matter and style he brought to bear in the film *The Search* (see Tseden 2017).

[43] See Kenny (2016), Kuipers (2015), and Douban.com (n.d.).

[44] According to the social scientist and media scholar Johannes Sjöberg, ethnofiction refers to "an experimental ethnographic film approach, where the practitioner asks the subjects of the fieldwork to act out aspects of their life-experience in front of the camera in improvisations" (Sjöberg 2009, 11).

[45] In the memoir published after the film's release, Zhang Yang reveals that he originally planned to divide his earlier film *Shower* into four sections, with each one telling a local story about shower in different regions, including Beijing, Tibet, Yunnan, and Shaanxi. As such a structure seemed to be a repeated pattern, Zhang dropped the idea, and chose to focus on the story in Beijing, with other two stories (one in Shaanxi, and one in Tibet) shortened to subplots. For details, see Zhang 2017, 29.

[46] China's ascent as a military and economic contender with the United States, however, has ushered in a grim new prospect, based on both prudent speculation and alarmist hyperbole. One needs only glance at a few headlines from major Western news outlets to arrive at the impression that another epochal "clash of empires" (as Lydia Liu has put it) seems inevitable. A fatalist rhetoric of a "new Cold War" is reaching its crescendo. For detailed discussions, see Brands (2019), Denyer (2018),

Landler (2018), Liu (2019), Perlez (2018), Sanger (2018), Wolf (2018), Wong (2019), and Wyne (2018).

[47] No less problematic is the assumption is the notion of Han Chinese people are all identical with one another and comprise a homogeneous unity.

[48] Mignolo likewise challenges the idea of "absolute knowledge" conjured up by "the European idea of a universal historical chronology" from the age of Enlightenment onward (2012, xiii-xiv). This resonates with Duara's rebuttal of the Hegelian conception of History, and subsequent proposal that China's national history should be seen in detachment from one in favor of "coherent and cohesive totalities" (1995, 230).

[49] The term "cultural longevity" is drawn from China studies scholar Simon Leys (2013, 236).

[50] Even before the modern era, there had been a long tradition of historiography during the imperial period of Chinese history. By and large, dynastic histories were compiled by successive courts. As such, they were "often biased toward explaining those predecessors' downfall, but at the same time giving legitimacy to the idea of a unified narrative of the people as a collective body" (Mitter 2013, n.p.). This left a legacy after the monarchies had died out. Novels and films in socialist China, for example, typically castigate the nationalist regime. For Rana's thesis on the pivotal role of nationalism in modern China, see his article "Nationalism in East Asia, 1839–1945" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199209194.013.0014).

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Summary

Focusing on the historical, national, and geopolitical dimensions of Chinese films, this study foregrounds Chinese cinema's unique position with respect to interpretations of modern China. Viewing the formation of the Chinese nation-state from a cinematic perspective, this project designates Chinese cinema as a form of cinematic modernity. Furthermore, my theoretical contribution revolves around the tensions between marginal figures and central categories in Chinese films. These tensions, I propose, point to a fundamental condition of China's modern transition, namely Western imperialism, which induced a wholesale reconfiguration of social relations amid political upheavals and epistemic shifts. In the wake of foreign interventions, China morphed into a modern nation-state through waves of mass mobilization involving people from all walks of life.

In the course of modernization, those who had long been repressed by the imperial order of premodern China were now assigned new and vital roles—chiefly to enact and embody structural reforms to the state system. Now that the nation has been installed, however, individuals are once again coerced into a new form of collective identification. As much as it is supposed to embody the unity of a homogeneous community, the individual is again coming to signify a site of resistance against enforced ideologies. In approaching this unresolved dilemma, this study is dedicated to mapping out a dialectical relationship between China's internal conflicts and external tensions. Through an extensive investigation of cinematic embodiment, I hone in on four groups of characters that I term the "central frontiers" of modern China's cultural imaginary: children, women, ethnic minorities, and diaspora. Often situated at a distance from the cultural, social, and geographical center, these characters are charged with symbolic significance. As such, they are designated to embody a national ethos. At the same time, though, these figures are often shown expressing discontent. Although each chapter focuses on a particular type of protagonist, what I intend to show overall is how these categories intersect with one another, so that a single character might be viewed as part of the larger ideological state apparatus, whose operation turns out not as effective as expected.

In the first chapter I situate depictions of childhood in relation to cross-cultural and trans-medial exchanges. Comparing the initial Bildungsroman (a literary genre concerning a young protagonist's coming-of-age) that emerged in tandem with European bourgeois society with equivalents in Chinese film, I emphasize how the

intrinsic values of the Chinese Bildungsroman differ from European examples. In Chinese cinema, coming-of-age stories are packed with political allegories and social satires of the communist state. An epitome of modern Chinese culture, the genre of the Chinese Bildungsroman embodies China's emergent national identity as it has negotiated external and internal conflicts. I focus particularly on two contemporary Chinese films (along with the novels on which they were respectively based): Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) and Zhang Yuan's *Little Red Flowers* (2006).

The second chapter examines how representations of Chinese women have served to symbolize the Chinese nation. My analysis is premised on a distinction between Chinese and Western notions of "woman," which departs from universalizing gender discourses originating from the West. Moreover, against the backdrop of the social, political, and epistemological transformation of China, this chapter shows how narratives of femininity, in particular the idea of Chinese Woman, mediate between the individual and the nation, convention and conversion, China and the West. My discussion centers on two Chinese-speaking films, *Song of Youth* (1959) and *Lust, Caution* (2007). The first derives from the first decade of China's Socialist Era; the second from the period marked by the dramatic upsurge of economic globalization in the new millennium.

In the third chapter I interrogate the ways in which the tension between the Sinocentric nation-state and ethnic minority groups plays out in contemporary Chinese cinema. Analyzing the dialectical relations between the center and the periphery, I reflect briefly on how cinematic representation has been used to propagate a shared belief of the Chinese nation among ethnic minority communities. In tracing different permutations of representational approaches, this chapter shows how portrayals of ethnic minorities are often neither accurate nor diverse. To this end, I examine two films featuring Tibetan people in contemporary China: Pema Tseden's *Tharlo* (2015) and Zhang Yang's *Paths of the Soul* (2015).

The fourth and last chapter attends to the Chinese diaspora, a community that is often seen as politically questionable on account of their geographical distance and proficiency in the "mother tongue". Continuing my critical discussion of the idea that the modern nation is articulated in Chinese languages, my analysis focuses largely on different definitions of the problematic concept of *guojia* in Chinese language and culture. Investigating forms of ideological interpellation at work in cinematic representations, I draw attention to the ways in which the political, national, and cultural identity of modern China is resisted and negotiated in different cultural contexts. In exploring these themes, I analyze three Chinese films: *The Herdsman* (1982), *Comrades: Almost a Love Story* (1996), and *Mountains May Depart* (2015).

In conclusion, in considering the historical, national, and geopolitical dimensions of Chinese cinema, this study claims neither that China's central frontiers are restricted to one particular period of Chinese history, nor that the tension between marginal social figures and national narratives pertains to Chinese cinema alone. Rather, I seek to explore how drastic social and cultural changes translate into collective violence at a symbolic level. In a world that is increasingly divided among nations, races, and cultures, this study reminds us of how power is exerted ever so surreptitiously through images, sounds, and words. Looking back, the construction of nationhood played a central role in redeeming China from a series of crises from nineteenth through twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, it has been converted into regimes of governance that often resort to brute force. In this regard, I hope that the figures at the fore of this study might inspire readers and viewers.

Samenvatting

Met de focus op de historische nationale en geopolitieke dimensies in Chinese films, brengt deze studie de unieke positie van de Chinese cinema, inzake de (bestaande) interpretaties van moderne China, op de voorgrond. De formatie van de Chinese natiestaat wordt in deze studie vanuit een filmisch perspectief bekeken, waarbij de Chinese cinema wordt gepositioneerd als een vorm van filmische moderniteit. Voorts, zal mijn theoretische bijdrage zich richten op de spanningen en contradicties die er bestaan tussen de marginale figuren en invalshoeken zoals deze worden gerepresenteerd in Chinese films. Deze spanningen, zo stel ik voor, wijzen op een fundamentele conditie van Chinese moderne overgangen, namelijk het Westers imperialisme, hetgeen op grote schaal herconfiguratie van sociale relaties heeft veroorzaakt te midden van politieke onrust en epistemische verschuivingen. In de nasleep van buitenlandse inmenging werd China een moderne natiestaat te midden van de mobilisering van de massa waarbij individuen uit alle lagen van de maatschappij waren betrokken.

In de loop van de modernisering werden aan degenen, die tijdens het Keizerrijk van het premoderne China lange tijd in onderdrukking hadden geleefd, nieuwe en belangrijke rollen toegekend—hoofdzakelijk bestond dit uit het uitvoeren

en belichamen van structurele hervormingen van de staat. Nu dat de natie tot realisatie is gekomen, werden individuen desondanks wederom gedwongen in een nieuwe vorm van collectieve identificatie. Hoewel het de bedoeling is om de eenheid van een homogene gemeenschap te personaliseren, wordt het individu wederom aangeduid als een vorm van verzet tegen opgedrongen ideologieën. Om dit onopgeloste dilemma aan het licht te brengen, is deze studie gewijd aan aan het in kaart brengen van de dialectische relatie tussen China's interne conflicten en externe spanningen. Middels een uitgebreid onderzoek van Chinese cinema, zal ik mij richten op vier groepen van karakters die ik zal aanduiden met de term 'de centrale marges' van modern China's culturele ficties: kinderen, vrouwen, etnische minderheden en diaspora. Vaak gepositioneerd op een afstand van het culturele, sociale en geografische centrum, zijn deze karakters van grote symbolische waarde. Gelet daarop is hun positionering de juiste voor de belichaming van een nationale ethos. Tegelijkertijd, wordt door deze figuren onvrede uitgedrukt. Hoewel elk hoofdstuk zich richt op een bepaald type protagonist, is het mijn bedoeling om in het algemeen aan te tonen hoe deze categorieën met elkaar zijn verwezen, zodat een enkel karakter beschouwd kan worden als onderdeel uitmakend van een groter ideologisch staatsapparaat, wiens optreden niet zo effectief bleek te zijn als verwacht.

In het eerste hoofdstuk situeer ik de weergave van de jeugd in relatie tot de cross-culturele en transmediale uitwisselingen. Door een vergelijking te maken tussen enerzijds de initiële Bildungsroman (een literaire genre waarin de coming-of-age van een jonge protagonist centraal staat) dat zich ontwikkelde parallel met de opkomst van de Europese burgermaatschappij met anderzijds equivalenten in de Chinese film, leg ik de nadruk op hoe de intrinsieke waarden van de Chinese Bildungsroman verschillen van de Europese voorbeelden. In de Chinese cinema zitten de coming-of-age verhalen vol met politieke allegorieën en sociale satires van de communistische staat. Een belichaming van de Chinese cultuur maakt dat het genre van de Chinese Bildungsroman de opkomst van de Chinese nationale identiteit en daarbij de externe en interne conflicten uitbeeldt. Ik richt mij voornamelijk op twee contemporaine Chinese films (in samenhang met de novels waarop zij respectievelijk zijn gebaseerd): Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) en Zhang Yuan's *Little Red Flowers* (2006).

Het tweede hoofdstuk onderzoekt hoe representaties van de Chinese vrouw hebben gediend als een symbolisering van de Chinese natie. Mijn analyse is gebaseerd op een onderscheid tussen de Chinese en Westerse noties van de 'vrouw', hetgeen als vertrekpunt de van oorsprong Westerse vertogen omtrent gender neemt. Bovendien toont dit hoofdstuk tegen de achtergrond van de sociale, politieke en epistemologische transformatie van China aan, hoe narratieven van vrouwelijkheid, in het bijzonder het idee van de Chinese vrouw, bemiddelt tussen het individu en de natie; conventie en conversie; China en het Westen. Mijn discussie richt zich op twee Chinese films waarin de Chinese taal wordt gesproken, *Song of Youth* (1959) en *Lust, Caution* (2007). De eerste film is afkomstig uit het eerste decennium van de Chinese Socialistische periode; de tweede film komt uit de periode gemarkeerd door de dramatische stijging van de economisch globalisering in het nieuwe millenium.

In het derde hoofdstuk staat het vraagstuk centraal op welke manieren de spanning tussen de Sinocentrische natiestaat en de etnische minderheid een rol speelt in de contemporaine Chinese cinema. Door de dialectische relaties te analyseren, reflecteer ik kort op hoe de filmische uitbeelding is gebruikt om onder de minderheidsgroepen een gedeeld geloof van de Chinese natie te propageren. Met het traceren van verschillende permutaties van de representatieve benaderingen, toont dit hoofdstuk hoe de weergave van etnische minderheden noch accuraat of divers is. Hiervoor heb ik twee Chinese contemporaine films onderzocht met daarin rollen toegekend aan Tibetaanse personen: Pema Tseden's *Tharlo* (2015) en Zhang Yang's *Paths of the Soul* (2015).

Het vierde en laatste hoofdstuk is gewijd aan de Chinese diaspora, een gemeenschap die vaak wordt gezien als politiek twijfelachtig vanwege de geografische afstand en bekwaamheid in de 'moedertaal'. Mijn kritische discussie is een vervolg op het idee dat de moderne natie is gearticuleerd in Chinese talen. Hierbij zal mijn analyse zich grotendeels richten op de verschillende definities van het problematische concept omtrent *guojia* in de Chinese taal en cultuur. Middels een onderzoek naar de vormen van ideologische interpellatie werkzaam in filmische representaties, breng ik onder de aandacht de manieren waarop de politieke, nationale en culturele identiteit van modern China worden weerstaan en behandeld in verschillende culturele contexten. Bij het exploreren van deze thema's analyseer ik drie Chinese films: *The Herdsman* (1982), *Comrades: Almose a Love Story* (1996), en *Mountains May Depart* (2015).

Tot slot, daarbij rekening houdend met de historische, nationale en geopolitieke dimensies van de Chinese cinema, claimt deze studie noch dat de Chinese *central frontiers*, beperkt zijn tot een bepaalde periode van de Chinese geschiedenis, noch dat de spanning tussen de marginale sociale figuren en nationale narratieven alleen tot de Chinese cinema behoren. Eerder onderzoek ik hoe drastisch sociale en culturele veranderingen zich vertalen in homogenisatie op symbolische niveau. In een wereld die in toenemende mate verdeeld is tussen naties, rassen en culturen herinnert deze studie ons aan hoe beelden, geluid en woorden een krachtige uitwerking hebben op ons. Terugkijkend heeft de constructie van de natie een centrale rol gespeeld in het verlossen van China van een reeks crisissen in de 19de en 20ste eeuw. Desalniettemin, het is verworden tot regimes van bestuur die vaak resulteren in het gebruik van bruut geweld. In dit verband hoop ik dat de figuren die in deze studie op de voorgrond staan lezers en het publiek zullen inspireren.

Curriculum Vitae

Born in Xi’an, China, Jiyu Zhang is a PhD researcher at the Department of Film and Literary Studies, Leiden University. He received a Bachelor’s Degree in Journalism and Communication from Northwestern University in China, and a Master’s Degree in Film and Photographic Studies from Leiden University in the Netherlands. His fields of interest include film and media studies, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, modern Chinese literature and culture. He has published articles in *Historisch Tijdschrift Groniek* and *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices.* Prior to his candidature, Jiyu Zhang was a journalist at Shenzhen Press Group, and later an editor at China Radio International Online.

This dissertation advances a new interpretation on the national formation of modern China through the lens of Chinese cinema. Primarily, this project explores how cinema—a modern invention imported from the West—has shaped China's sociopolitical transition from a dynastic empire to a nation-state. It is argued that, the concurrence of motion picture's arrival and nation-state's advent in China at the turn of the twentieth century, is not to be considered as isolated events, but rather as a dialectical dynamism in which the imagined community of modern China has largely relied on cinema for its symbolic construction, and yet encountered constant resistance from cinematic representation.

Viewing the formation of the Chinese nation-state from a cinematic perspective, this study centers around the conflicts between marginal figures and central categories in Chinese films. In approaching this unresolved dilemma, Jiyu Zhang dedicates his study to mapping out a dialectical relationship between China's internal and external tensions. Through an extensive investigation of cinematic embodiment, Zhang hones in on four groups of characters that he terms the "central frontiers" of modern China's cultural imaginary: children, women, ethnic minorities, and diaspora.

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