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

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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.