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

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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).