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Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu/Transnational Chinese Cinemas

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Historical Introduction
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Chinese Cinemas (1896–1996)
and Transnational Film Studies
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Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu

This volume of essays is a collective rethinking of the national/transnational interface in Chinese film history and in film studies and cultural studies at large. The contributors come from the various disciplines of Chinese history, Chinese literature, comparative literature, cultural studies, English, and film studies. We embark on an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural venture into a topic of shared interest. The occasion for such a project is the globalization of Chinese cinemas in the international film market and the rapid rise of Chinese cinema studies in Western academia. The entrance of Chinese cinemas in the international film community prompts us to closely examine the nature of Chinese “national cinema,” the advent of “transnational cinema,” the relation of film to the modern nation-state, the nexus between visual technology and gender formation, and film culture in the age of global capitalism after the end of the Cold War.

Chinese cinemas cover a broad geographic and historical terrain, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and to some extent overseas Chinese communities. Asserting themselves boldly on the world stage since the mid-1980s, Chinese filmmakers have captured numerous major international film awards in recent years, and the international following for Chinese films grows annually. With this increasing popularity, the Chinese film industry has attracted a sizable amount of foreign capital and has been involved in frequent joint productions. With internationalization on this scale at both production and consumption levels, the issue of what actually constitutes Chinese cinema comes to the forefront—is it film produced by Chinese for Chinese? Assuming that some consensus on the nature of Chinese cinema can be reached, are there characteristics of this cinema that draw upon Chinese deep culture and set it apart from the Hollywood phenomenon? How reliably can these characteristics be perceived and interpreted by the international film community, and to what extent can these characteristics inform and influence the international dialogue on the meaning of film?

When I reflect on the development of a century of Chinese cinemas, a

number of historical events of global significance come to mind. A little more than a hundred years ago, in 1895, film was invented in the West. The year was significant not only in world film history but was also the year when the Qing empire ceded Taiwan to Japan after a military defeat. Since then, developments in the technologies of visibility in the international arena and the domestic political events of China, a would-be modern nation-state, have become more and more connected. On August 11, 1896, “Western shadowplays” (*xiyang yingxi*) were exhibited in the Xu Garden in Shanghai. In the ensuing one hundred years, imported Western film technology has been put to indigenous use and has become an indispensable part of the social, political, and cultural life of the Chinese nation.

As this book goes to press, another monumental historical event is approaching. Hong Kong, which became a British colony in the aftermath of the Opium War in the mid-nineteenth century, will revert to its “motherland” on July 1, 1997, and will be once again part of the Chinese nation. It is gratifying to know that the publication of this book will coincide with an international political occasion as rare and momentous as the return of Hong Kong to China. In fact, in May 1996, the veteran Chinese director Xie Jin began the production of the historical epic *The Opium War* to commemorate the event. In a few short years, a new century, and indeed a new millennium in the Christian calendar, will arrive, and history will turn another page.

The precise centennial scope (1896–1996) of the periodization of Chinese film history in this study is not accidental but was predetermined by the far-reaching global and national events mentioned above. We begin in 1896 because that was the year of the beginning of film consumption and distribution of an essentially transnational nature in China. (It is conceivable that an account of Chinese *national* cinema could start with the first Chinese film production in 1905 or with the first Chinese-made narrative film in 1913.) We end our discussion of the tripolar (Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong) Chinese cinemas in 1996, for from mid-1997 Hong Kong will no longer be a geopolitical entity separate from the Mainland. This entirely new chapter of Chinese history will undoubtedly have implications for the development of its cinemas, especially postcolonial Hong Kong cinema.

Although it is premature to predict the future configurations of Chinese national politics and Chinese film, we can at this critical juncture examine a century-long history of transnational Chinese cinemas as it comes to completion. We will track the successive modes of image production and consumption, from traditional “shadowplay” (*yingxi*), to “electric shadows” (*dianying*, the Chinese word for film) in the modern age of mechanical reproduction, and finally to electronic images in the postmodern era of simu-

lacrum, throughout the course of exactly one hundred years of Chinese film history. It is my assumption that such a historical poetics of visibility is inextricably linked to the politics of the modern nation-state and deeply embedded in the economics of transnational capital. Since the film medium is fully integrated in both the economy and culture and mediates the two, it provides us with a privileged instance to scan and map the contours of Chinese cultural politics in relation to the capitalist world-system in the twentieth century.¹

In what follows I will present a brief history and propose a theory of a century of what might be called “transnational Chinese cinemas.” For reasons that will become apparent, it seems that Chinese *national* cinema can only be understood in its properly *transnational* context. One must speak of Chinese cinemas in the plural and as transnational in the ongoing process of image-making throughout the twentieth century. Transnationalism in the Chinese case can be observed at the following levels: first, the split of China into several geopolitical entities since the nineteenth century—the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—and consequently the triangulation of competing national/local “Chinese cinemas,” especially after 1949; second, the globalization of the production, marketing, and consumption of Chinese film in the age of transnational capitalism in the 1990s; third, the representation and questioning of “China” and “Chineseness” in filmic discourse itself, namely, the cross-examination of the national, cultural, political, ethnic, and gender identity of individuals and communities in the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora; and fourth, a re-viewing and revisiting of the history of Chinese “national cinemas,” as if to read the “prehistory” of transnational filmic discourse backwards. Such an operation has the aim of uncovering the “political unconscious” of filmic discourse—the transnational roots and condition of cinema, which any project of national cinema is bound to suppress and surmount, for the sake of defending the country against real or perceived dangers of imperialism or in order to uphold national unity by silencing the voices of ethnic and national minorities.

I take the Chinese example as paradigmatic of the situation of world cinema at the present time. Transnational cinema in the Chinese case as well as in the rest of the world is the result of the globalization of the mechanisms of film production, distribution, and consumption. The transformations in the world film industry call into question the notion of “national cinema” and complicate the construction of “nationhood” in filmic discourse. Thus, my outline of Chinese film history may be read as an exemplary instance and a case study of the general tendencies in world film history. The study of a given national cinema then becomes the project of transnational film studies.

• National Cinema and the Modern Nation-State

As a new technology and form of art originated in the West, film was first brought to Shanghai in 1896, one year after its invention. Short films were exhibited in a variety show in the Xu Garden, perhaps by a cameraman-showman of the Lumière brothers. The next showman to arrive in Shanghai was an American, James Ricalton, who brought Edison's films and screened them in teahouses and amusement parks in 1897.² In the years up to 1949, foreign films were regularly shown in China, first in teahouses and then in movie theaters, and dominated the Chinese film market, accounting for as much as 90 percent of the market. As one might expect, Hollywood films were the predominant presence.

In 1905, the first Chinese film, *Dingjun Mountain* (Dingjun shan), was made by Ren Jingfeng at his photography shop in Beijing. It was a filming of an act of Beijing opera performed by the famous actor Tan Xinpei. Zheng Zhengqiu's short family drama, *The Difficult Couple* (Nanfu nanqi), made in 1913, has been regarded as the first Chinese feature film. Yet this film was produced by the Asia Film Company, an American studio in China owned by Benjamin Polaski. In the same year, Li Minwei and Polaski produced the first Chinese film in Hong Kong, *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (Zhuangzi shiqi). Polaski later took the film back to the United States, and it became the first Chinese film screened abroad. We can conclude from this that Chinese film was an event of transnational capital from its beginning.

The emergence and consolidation of a Chinese "national cinema" (*minzu dianying*) in the ensuing years must be read against this background of the importation of film as a Western technology, ideology, and medium of art.³ In the official narrative of Chinese film history, *The History of the Development of Chinese Film* (Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi), a monumental study written by Cheng Jihua and others in the early 1960s, the development of a leftist, progressive national cinema is to a great extent the story of an agonistic struggle against the cultural domination of foreign film, especially American film.⁴ The life-and-death struggle of China's national film industry is isomorphic with the plight of China as a nation-state in the twentieth century. Modernity, nation-building, nationalism, anti-imperialism, antifeudalism, and new gender identities are among the central themes of such a national cinema. Chinese national cinema necessarily becomes part and parcel of the forging of a new national culture. Amidst the proliferation of "soft" entertainment films (romance, butterfly fiction, martial arts, ghosts, costume drama), the left-wing film workers seized upon the political and revolutionary potential of this new technology of visibility and attempted to make it

into a mass art of conscious social criticism.⁵ Like other national cinemas, Chinese cinema is the “mobiliser of the nation’s myths and the myth of the nation.”⁶ Through the creation of a coherent set of images and meanings, the narration of a collective history, and the enactment of the dramas and lives of ordinary people, cinema gives a symbolic unity to what would otherwise appear to be a quite heterogeneous entity: “modern China.”

Film production aside, film censorship, studio ownership, government intervention, and public opinion are all important terrains in the establishment of a new symbolic China. Zhiwei Xiao’s essay in this volume, “Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship During the Nanjing Decade, 1927–1937,” amply documents the contours of a national policy of film censorship. Immediately after the unification of China by the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) in 1927, the central government established a film censorship board, which continued until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, to check foreign films to be screened in China. Films perceived to portray the Chinese people in a degrading, offensive way could not be released in China.⁷ A famous case, as Xiao describes, is the controversy surrounding the screening of Harold Lloyd’s film *Welcome Danger* in Shanghai in 1930. Other banned Western films include *Death in Shanghai* (1933), *Shanghai Express* (1932), *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), *Wandering Through China* (1931), *Klondike Annie* (1936), *Cat’s Paw* (1934), *Thief of Bagdad* (1924), and the German/Japanese coproduction *New Land* (1937). American films such as *The Ten Commandments*, *Frankenstein*, and *Top Hat* were also banned on the grounds of “superstition,” as in the first two cases, or “sexual content,” as in the last case.

In the same period, a conscious effort was also made to prevent foreign ownership of film studios. There was often a “united front” among intellectuals, the public, and the government to protect a vulnerable Chinese film industry and resist foreign “cultural invasion.” Film censorship and the protection of the national film industry have been enduring legacies throughout the twentieth-century in China. During the period of Nationalist rule the government also stipulated that Mandarin be the standard dialect in films for the sake of cultural unity. (This policy had ramifications for any “local” Chinese cinema, such as that of Hong Kong, in which Cantonese rather than Mandarin has been the favorite dialect of filmgoers. Here is an instance of the resistance of the local to the national.)

Over the years, Chinese national cinema has grown to be a key apparatus in the nation-building process. It is an indispensable cultural link in the modern Chinese nation-state, an essential political component of Chinese nationalism. As Andrew Higson has written, national cinema has performed a dual function:

a hegemonising, mythologising process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings. At the same time, the concept of a national cinema has almost invariably been mobilized as a strategy of cultural (economic) resistance; a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of (usually) Hollywood's international domination.⁸

The double process of hegemony and resistance in relation to the domestic audience and international film culture has defined the path and function of Chinese national cinema.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, national cinema turned into a state-sponsored, state-owned enterprise. As Paul Clark has argued, it was the key to fostering a mass national culture in Maoist China.⁹ The effort to build a unified and unifying picture of national identity through cinema has been intense and ferocious. This can be observed at both the level of the film industry and the level of the filmic text or film aesthetics.¹⁰ Film studios are no longer privately owned. They are reorganized and merged into a new national film industry. The biggest studios to emerge from the reorganization and consolidation include Changchun Film Studio, Shanghai Film Studio, Beijing Film Studio, and August First Film Studio, all under the ultimate surveillance and leadership of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Propaganda. The state has the absolute and exclusive right in film production and distribution. Cinema is often subject to being a vehicle of political propaganda and ideological indoctrination. There is strict censorship of both domestic and foreign films. The foreign films that the Chinese audience is allowed to see are selected predominantly from socialist-bloc countries. Hollywood films virtually disappeared from China.

The nationalization of cinema does not, however, imply a smooth and easy road, free from conflicts, contradictions, and collisions. The "Sinification" of a Western technology and the development of a native form of socialist art remain the paramount tasks for Chinese film artists. The enormity and complexity of such a process can only be hinted at here. Gina Marchetti's essay, "*Two Stage Sisters: The Blossoming of a Revolutionary Aesthetic*," examines the arduous search for a new aesthetic. Film artists such as Xie Jin must find a solution to the question of how can one create an art form that must be, paradoxically, at once Chinese and Western, Marxist and Maoist, revolutionary and socialist. What is "socialist" cinema with unique "national," "Chinese" characteristics like? As Douglas Wilkerson puts it, "Can Western modes of cinematography, linked to the very mechanism of the camera through the dominant postmedieval perspective system, be

replaced by modes which are linked to traditional Chinese aesthetics?"¹¹ First, filmic texts must render Marxist, Maoist, and socialist interpretations of Chinese history. The subject matter of film is to depict the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people to overthrow their imperialist, feudal, and capitalist oppressors and to reflect the socialist construction and nation-building in the postliberation (post-1949) period. Second, it is imperative that artists find ways to achieve a synthesis of film as an imported Western medium and indigenous, Chinese artistic conventions (traditional Chinese painting, literature, poetry, storytelling, local operas, folk art). The struggle to find a new film aesthetic in Maoist China was more often than not far from being a smooth process, but was instead full of intense debates and conflicts between different factions within the Communist Party apparatus and film circles, frequently resulting in criticism, self-criticism, and purge.

The myth-making and legitimizing function of film narrative in the formation of a homogeneous Chinese national identity was also accomplished by reducing internal ethnic and cultural differences. Questions of nationhood and ethnicity are important issues for the new regime. A major film genre that emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s is the "ethnic minorities film." Yingjin Zhang's essay, "From 'Minority Film' to 'Minority Discourse': The Questions of Nationhood and Ethnicity in Chinese Cinema," offers a refreshing, critical perspective on the matter. In exoticizing and eroticizing the ethnic minorities, this genre in fact consolidates the central position of the Han (Chinese) nationality. Be it the display of "ethnic harmony and solidarity" or the representation of the Han nationality as the liberator from slavery, feudalism, and ignorance, films of this genre are essential for the formation and legitimation of the Chinese nation-state. The other is needed for the confirmation of the self, and the peripheral is appropriated for the purpose of the central. Real internal differences and tensions in race, ethnicity, class, gender, and region are erased for the sake of the construction of an imaginary homogeneous national identity.

In the post-Mao era, a new wave of filmmaking emerged in the New Chinese Cinema, most noticeably "Fifth-Generation film"¹² (film by the class that graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982) in the 1980s. The makers of these films are active participants and definitive fashioners of a broad, nationwide intellectual movement self-styled as "cultural reflection" (*wenhua fansi*) and "historical reflection" (*lishi fansi*). (At approximately the same time, Taiwanese New Cinema and the Hong Kong New Wave also arose.) Their task is to reflect deeply on the entrenched patterns of the history and society of the Chinese nation and civilization. This critical enterprise is sustained by an ambivalent attitude toward China's past: an iconoclastic attack on tradition in the fashion of the intellectuals of the May 4th

Movement (1919) and, at the same time, a return to, or a search for, the deep roots that gave life to Chinese civilization in the first place.

While engaging in relentless cultural critique, the Fifth Generation forged a distinctive style of its own, an “autoethnography.”¹³ Chinese national cinema is the self-reflexive gaze of the nation. The signature pieces from this period, such as *Old Well* (Lao jing),¹⁴ *Yellow Earth* (Huang tudi), *Big Parade* (Da yuebing), *King of the Children* (Haizi wang), *Red Sorghum* (Hong gaoliang), and *Life on a String* (Bianzou bianchang), are profound national allegories of China in the sense defined by Fredric Jameson.¹⁵ The stylistic mannerism of these films is significant in the imagining and imaging of China as a community, for as Benedict Anderson states, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”¹⁶ The explorations in the art of cinematography and manner of narration in these films have contributed to the innovation of Chinese cinematic conventions and the creation of a new film language.

The self-reflexive ethnographic turn is again accomplished by way of a detour—a search for the *other*. In films such as Zhang Nuanxin’s famous *Sacrificed Youth* (Qingchun ji), the ethnic other is still needed for a critique of the self. Even though the politics and culture of the Han nationality are subject to interrogation in view of the values of the ethnic minority, the cinematic gaze, the “point of view,” the narrative voice, and the consciousness and memory of the storyteller are those of the Han/Chinese “ethnographer.” Ultimately, difference and marginality are wooed and pursued for the self-same interest of the center.

In 1988, Zhang Yimou’s first film, *Red Sorghum*, received the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin international film festival. It was the first Chinese film to receive a major award from a Western film festival; it was also the beginning of an end. As some film scholars contend, this entrance of Chinese cinema into the global film market marked the end of the short-lived classical phase of New Chinese Cinema, a phase characterized by intellectual elitism, disregard for the film market, idiosyncratic mannerism, and artistic experimentation.

One may say that New Chinese Cinema in the 1980s was primarily a national cinema, and the predominant trope was “cultural critique.”¹⁷ Film was a crucial constituent of the intellectual and critical currents that swept across China in that period. Chinese cinema in the 1990s has entered a new phase of development and thus demands a fresh theoretical description. It is undergoing an unprecedented process of internationalization and is on its way to becoming a transnational cinema in the conditions created by global capital/capitalism.¹⁸ While formerly targeted primarily at the domestic film audience, Chinese cinema is an integral part of the international film market

today. Some films that originated from centers of Chinese culture such as the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have been viewed and accepted by a large overseas public. As part of the broader trends in the global film industry, Chinese cinema partakes of a process of transnational production, exhibition, distribution, and consumption in the world market. The number of coproductions with foreign companies has been increasing since the beginning of the 1990s, and in 1993 about a quarter of China's films were funded by foreign capital.¹⁹ There were twenty-one coproductions in 1992, fifty-six in 1993, and thirty in 1994.²⁰ Most of these coproductions were funded by sources in Hong Kong and Taiwan. China's film industry is caught in the throes of a transition from a state-controlled system to a market mechanism. National cinema suffers from a decline in funding and audience and is in a deep crisis.

One may observe several categories of film production in terms of funding and audience in contemporary China. The state gives funds directly to major studios such as August First Studio to produce "mainstream" (*zhu xuanli*) pictures. These films depict historic moments in the communist revolution, lives of important communist leaders, and stories of honest, model workers and cadres. A number of films from this category, for example, *Zhou Enlai* and *Jiao Yulu*, seem to be rather popular among audiences. Needless to say, the producers are not concerned with funds and the film market. Another category is that of "entertainment pictures" (*yule pian*, that is, kung-fu, detective, gangster, comedy) funded by a wide range of sources such as state-owned studios, Hong Kong and Taiwan producers, and nonstate Chinese producers with backing from businesses. Then there are "art films." They are mostly new productions, or more precisely, coproductions, of the former Fifth-Generation film artists. Some of them, such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, have been working with producers outside of the Mainland. Their "transnational" films are primarily targeted to non-Mainland audiences and international film festivals and are distributed outside of China. Finally, there are small-scale, experimental films by Sixth-Generation and post-Fifth-Generation film artists. These young filmmakers, such as Zhang Yuan, Hu Xueyang, and Wang Xiaoshuai, are in no position to compete with the Fifth Generation in attracting major funds at the moment. They operate with small budgets, sometimes a cash award won at an international film festival, to put through their conceptions of film art. There is little interest on the part of domestic producers and general audiences in the kind of off-beat films they produce.

In early 1995, the United States and China signed an agreement regarding intellectual property rights. Under the agreement, the People's Republic lifted the quota on the import of Hollywood films to China for the first time while

retaining the right to exercise censorship. American feature films and Disney cartoons such as *Forrest Gump*, *The Fugitive*, *True Lies*, and *The Lion King* were soon imported to China and screened all over the country. “Hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic Chinese viewers filled once desolate theaters in order to see the films, producing hefty profits for an industry which had experienced lackluster business in recent years.”²¹ The arrival of American films is both an opportunity to regain the domestic film audience and a potential threat to China’s own film industry. In an even more interesting development, the first Sundance Film Festival in China opened in Beijing in October 1995.²² Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, along with some other American films, was premiered at the event. At the end of the twentieth century, Chinese national cinema is once again seriously challenged by the global cultural hegemony of Hollywood even as the state attempts to save it by censoring the foreign.

In the post-Tiananmen era (1989 to the present), or what Chinese intellectual historians call the “post-New Era” (*hou xin shiqi*), Chinese society is characterized by the expansion of consumerism, the spread of popular culture, the commercialization of cultural production, and the advent of postmodern formations.²³ Postmodern Chinese film is already in sight at the fin de siècle. The film *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, 1995) by Jiang Wen, based on the stories of Wang Shuo, exhibits in its uncut version ostensibly postmodern stylistic features. Fragmentary and random narration, pastiche, parody, irony, the blurring of the distinction between history and fiction and between film and reality, semiautobiographical narrative, the appearance of Jiang Wen and Wang Shuo themselves in the film, the deconstructive reconstitution of the history and memory of the Cultural Revolution, carnivalistic self-abandon—all these characteristics point to the possible beginning of another direction in filmmaking.²⁴

In the historical transition to an era of transnational postmodern cultural production, film constitutes a crucial site. The entrance of Chinese cinema into the global market of film culture has provided the occasion for ongoing contemporary debates among critics of Chinese film. Several crucial issues emerge from this context. For native/nativist Chinese critics, what they witness seems to be the global homogenization of cultural production. They feel compelled to formulate a discursive resistance to what they see as commodification of Chinese film to an unprecedented degree. (Hence, resistance of the local to the global in China means resistance to encroaching neocolonialism, Orientalism, and other “hegemonic” discourses from the West.)

On the domestic front, many indigenous critics are also opposed to the commercialization of film in China’s cultural market. In the conditions of the 1990s the production of avant-gardist, experimental film is no longer pos-

sible; artists, writers, and filmmakers have to operate according to the principles of a market economy and consumerism. There is little domestic audience for serious film. Art film suffers from the rapid commercialization of popular culture in China. Other forms of mass media and mass entertainment such as television programs have drastically reduced the size of the film audience. The question is whether there is still a place for art film in China and whether the internationalization of Chinese film is the solution.

Furthermore, the transnational production and distribution of Chinese film may turn out to be an oppositional discursive formation on another level. It is a viable strategy of survival and of resistance to a domestic hegemony; it is a means to evade film censorship. The filmmakers can still carry out, in a larger international arena, the project of "historical-cultural reflection," a project that is by all appearances hopelessly narcissistic and out of fashion in the consumer society of the 1990s. Internationalization as such is a way both to evade and to defy the internal domination of the regime. Here, indigenous cultural critique and global capital seem to merge in this transnational process.

Because of these new developments, the very idea of national cinema becomes problematic in Chinese film study and film studies in general. Films such as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Farewell My Concubine*, directed respectively by Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, the two most renowned auteurs of China's New Cinema, are unmistakably "Mainland" films in terms of thematic concerns and stylistic characteristics. Yet, as soon as the question of their country of origin is brought up, they belong to the category of Hong Kong cinema. First of all, the political economy of these films is such that they were funded by foreign capital (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Europe), produced by Chinese labor, distributed in a global network, and consumed by an international audience. Second, and even more important for film scholars, the very process of reading, reception, and interpretation in these instances is always already of a transnational nature. Any critical understanding of what we call transnational Chinese cinema must go beyond national boundaries. National cinema founded upon the notion of the modern nation-state is now subject to interrogation in the postmodern and postindustrial condition of global cultural production and consumption.²⁵ The borderlines between nations are blurred by new telecommunications technologies, which can transmit electronic images and simulacra instantly across the globe.

To make films not for the domestic audience but for international consumption entails certain stylistic and thematic changes in the film art of distinguished Fifth-Generation directors such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. It seems that there is still the ambition and commitment to continually en-

gage in a historical/cultural critique of the Chinese nation on the part of the film artists. At the same time, it is imperative for them to utilize popular cinematic conventions and cater to the tastes of international audiences for commercial success. My own essay in this collection, "National Cinema, Cultural Critique, Transnational Capital: The Films of Zhang Yimou," spells out both the continuities and discontinuities in New Chinese Cinema. It points to the significant changes and linkages between the earlier experimental, introspective "avant-garde" film (mid- and late 1980s) and contemporary "transnational Chinese cinema," between a desire for the artistic purity of "cultural critique" and the contingencies of film as an (inter)cultural commodity. The greatest irony of contemporary Chinese cinema seems to be that some films achieve a transnational status precisely because they are seen as possessing an authentically "national," "Chinese," "Oriental" flavor by Western audiences. In the meantime, the domestic Chinese audience dismisses the same films as "misrepresentations" and "mystifications" of China.²⁶ In an interesting development, Zhang was invited to produce a new film version of the opera *Turandot* in Italy in 1996. His gifted "Oriental" sensibility, as shown in his earlier films, was thought to be most suitable for making such a classic, romantic (Orientalist) work about the East. This anecdote sheds some light on a serious matter, namely, the nature of East-West, international cultural dynamics at the end of the century.

• **Transnationalism in the Cinemas of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese Diaspora**

It is difficult to speak of Chinese national cinema after 1949 as a single entity. Rather, there are three cinemas: those of the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. These three cinematic traditions have developed in separate directions and yet all attempt to signify a shared object: "China." China as a modern nation-state, a "location of culture," however, is subject to deconstruction, hybridization, multiplication, fragmentation, division, and erasure.²⁷ Modern China is a collective of communities, peoples, ethnicities, regions, dialects, languages, and temporalities. The history of the Inter-China area, or "Greater China" (Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong), is one of migration, diaspora, colonialism, nationalism, political rivalry, military confrontation, and cultural interflow all at the same time. To reduce the history of Taiwan and Hong Kong to that of the Mainland is to suppress their cultural and political specificity.

Nearly simultaneously with the rise of the Mainland's New Cinema, Taiwan's New Cinema emerged in the 1980s. Like its Mainland counterpart, Taiwan's New Cinema aims at the innovation of worn-out film language as

well as a deep reflection on the history, society, and culture of Taiwan. Hou Hsiao-hsien's films have become the most representative case of this movement. June Yip's ambitious, instructive essay, "Constructing a Nation: Taiwanese History and the Films of Hou Hsiao-hsien," analyzes the issue of the "national" identity in Hou's Taiwan Trilogy—*City of Sadness*, *The Puppetmaster*, and *Good Men, Good Women*. The Trilogy spans the history of one hundred years of Taiwan's colonial, postcolonial, and Nationalist rule (1895–1995). Taiwanese history has its unique memory of the past, a past shaped by the forces of the Mainland, ex-colonizer Japan, the Nationalist government, and the West. Taiwan's nationality or "transnationality" in relation to these forces is marked by deep political, geopolitical, cultural, and emotional ties as well as ruptures. Jon Kowallis' essay, "The Diaspora in Postmodern Taiwan and Hong Kong Film: Framing Stan Lai's *Peach Blossom Land* with Allen Fong's *Ah Ying*," is another study of the representation of the "transnational identity" of Chinese in the cinemas of Taiwan and Hong Kong. It examines, among other provocative subjects, how Lai's film responds to the competing territorial, political, cultural, and emotional claims of Mainland China as homeland on the one hand and the Republic of China in Taiwan as land of residence on the other.

In another important juncture, all these films discussed by Yip and Kowallis enact for us what might be called the poetics and politics of successive modes of visibility in the span of a century and trace how modes of visibility are imbricated in the formation of history, memory, nationhood, and modernity. From photography (*City of Sadness*), puppet show/shadowplay (*The Puppetmaster*), and theater (*The Peach Blossom Land* and *Ah Ying*) to film itself (*Good Men, Good Women*), the stories within stories chronicle the history of visual technologies, exacerbate the possibility and modality of representation itself, and configure the convoluted relationship between illusion and reality, image and history, and stage and the world. It is no coincidence that such issues also constitute the narratives of several other historical films examined in this volume: *Two Stage Sisters* (more than twenty years of Shaoxing opera), *Farewell My Concubine* (half a century of Beijing opera), and *To Live* (several decades of Chinese puppet show).

While delving into the specific locality of the indigenous Taiwanese experience, Taiwan cinema also renders a dizzying representation of postmodern urban spatial dislocation. Taiwan, as a "newly industrializing First World tier of the Third World,"²⁸ is itself a map of the unevenness of the world system of global capitalism. As Fredric Jameson describes it, a film such as *Terrorizer* (Kongbu fenzi, 1986) by Edward Yang contains an overlap of various spaces in Taipei: *traditional* space (the barrack apartments of the policeman), *national* space (the hospital), *multinational* space (the publisher's office

housed in a great glass high-rise), and *transnational* anonymity (the hotel corridor with its identical bedrooms).²⁹ The overdetermination of spatiality in Taiwanese urban cinema points in the direction of an expanding global postmodern culture that seems to transcend national boundaries.

The best-known Taiwanese director in America (or Chinese American director?) is undoubtedly Ang Lee, whose films are the subject of study by Wei Ming Dariotis and Eileen Fung in their collaborative essay, "Breaking the Soy Sauce Jar: Diaspora and Displacement in the Films of Ang Lee." In their essay, they bring up the crucial issues of subject position, identity politics, and multiculturalism in Lee's films. *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman* were tremendously popular films in the United States and were nominated for an Oscar for best foreign film. *Pushing Hands* and *Eat Drink Man Woman* take place in cross-cultural, transnational settings and deal with the themes of the Chinese diaspora, migration, and cultural identity. *Sense and Sensibility*, based on Jane Austen's novel, scripted by Emma Thompson, and starring Thompson and Hugh Grant, was named the Best Motion Picture at the Golden Globe Awards and nominated for several Oscars. Lee said that as a Taiwanese/Chinese he was closer to the world of Jane Austen than many people in contemporary Britain could be. Lee's film art, as a paradigmatic case of transnationalism, not only crosses national boundaries but also consolidates national and local identities in uncanny ways. Although he does not reconstruct Taiwanese history in the way Hou Hsiao-hsien does, there is still an attempt to foreground a unique Taiwanese experience. The transnational, cross-cultural background in some of his films opens up new ways for the expression of Taiwanese, Chinese, national sentiments.

Hong Kong, a hybrid cosmopolitan space, a nexus in the flow of transnational capital, a colony and soon-to-be postcolony, is a particularly noteworthy case in the discussion of global film culture. What is Hong Kong like? Who owns it? In the epic film *Commissioner Lin* (Lin Zexu), produced in 1959, the Mainland offered its official filmic account of the loss of Hong Kong to Great Britain. In fact, it was suggested that the event signaled the beginning of a century of Chinese heroic resistance to Western imperialism, and the peasant uprising in Sanyuanli at the end of the film prefigured the Communist revolution. On May 8, 1996, Xie Jin, the seventy-three-year-old veteran Mainland director, began shooting his historical film *The Opium War* (Yapian zhanzheng) at the town of Tiger Gate (Humen), at whose fortress Lin Zexu burned Western opium shipped to China in 1839, causing the start of the Opium War. Production of the film (at 80 million *yuan*) is expected to be finished by July 1, 1997, the day of the return of Hong Kong to the Mainland, in order to commemorate the historic, monumental occasion.³⁰

What is the self-image of Hong Kong in Hong Kong cinema then? Does Hong Kong have its own voice? Hong Kong cinema often reenacts the ambivalent relation of the city to the Mainland.³¹ Hong Kong's cultural identity seen through its cinema is at once an identification with and distancing from the Mainland. In the "grand narratives" of Mainland cinema, the identity of Hong Kong is omitted, elided, and erased. Hong Kong does not fit in the world-historical scheme of China. Even in the recent epic film *Farewell My Concubine*, a properly Hong Kong production, Hong Kong itself has no place in the narrative. In the original novel, the main characters emigrated to Hong Kong in 1984, the time when the Sino-British Joint Declaration on returning Hong Kong was signed. Chen Kaige's film version altered the ending and utterly cut out the existence of Hong Kong.

Small as it is in size and population, Hong Kong as a city-state boasts the third largest film industry in the world, after the United States and India. To see Hong Kong cinema as local cinema is misleading. For decades Hong Kong cinema has been a regional and transnational cinema in a way that Mainland cinema could not be. Its viewers and fans stretch across East and Southeast Asia. Box-office sales from these regions contribute a significant portion of the revenue of the Hong Kong film industry. Even more broadly, Hong Kong films, in the varieties of action film and kung-fu film, have fans and dedicated followers in "Chinatowns" and overseas Chinese communities, on college campuses, and among the general public throughout North America, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and indeed all over the globe. Superstars such as Jackie Chan and Chow Yun-fat have cult status among their fans around the world. There is no lack of fanzines, websites, cyberspace, and Internet activity devoted to Hong Kong cinema and its stars. Thus, a *Village Voice* reporter wrote of Hong Kong cinema in cyberspace:

For the moment, though, movie-related Web time still bears a close relationship to channel surfing. Some of these sites, like the elaborate Hong Kong Cinema you can find at University of Pittsburgh.edu, are obviously labors of love, maintained by fans for fans at what I'd imagine are significant financial [costs].³²

To be able to log onto <http://hkcinema> not only allows entry into cyberspace but also poses a crucial question for us as to what constitutes the filmic text at the present time. With advances in computer technology and the appearances of CD-ROMS, the information highway, the Internet, and computer graphics, the media of cinema are going through a profound change. The global screening of China/Hong Kong/Taiwan, not in a theater or in front of a VCR, but through a computer, say, on a college campus or in one's private home in North America, adds a new dimension to the nature of

transnational cinema. “Electric shadows” (*dianying*) on the screen in the public space of a theater are transforming themselves into electronic images in cyberspace.

Anne T. Ciecko’s essay, “Transnational Action: John Woo, Hong Kong, Hollywood,” dissects the operation of global capital and follows the transnational trans/action of Woo’s film productions between Hong Kong and Hollywood. In his contribution, “Jackie Chan and the Cultural Dynamics of Global Entertainment,” Steve Fore analyzes aspects of Hong Kong’s film industry, its international presence, and another Hong Kong superstar-director-producer, Jackie Chan. Both Ciecko and Fore also guide us in navigating the intricate cultural politics of screening Asian masculinity in the present setting of global entertainment. Building on the international appeal of his earlier hits, *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *The Killer* (1989), and with the uncertain future of Hong Kong after July 1997, John Woo has left Hong Kong for Hollywood. That a high-profile Hong Kong auteur with a most distinct individual style, a style that amounts to a staple of Hong Kong cinema, now directs Hollywood productions further complicates the problem of national cinema. Traveling between Hong Kong and Hollywood, Woo’s films such as *Hard Target* (1993, starring Jean-Claude Van Damme) and *Broken Arrow* (1996, starring John Travolta) cross and cross out national and geographic boundaries. It is worth noticing how a Hong Kong director transforms local film genres, with all their culture-specific symbols and meanings, into spectacles for cultural consumption on an international scale. While Woo readily acknowledges the influence of Western film artists on his career, American filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez are eager to appropriate Woo-esque stylistic elements in their own films. Genres of Hong Kong action film are undergoing a process of globalization in the hands of filmmakers from various regions.³³

With the release of *Rumble in the Bronx* in multiplexes all over the United States on February 23, 1996, Jackie Chan, hailed as “Asia’s number one star,” finally “made it” in America after his failed attempt to cross the Pacific in the 1980s. *Rumble* was one of the best-selling films of the year in the United States. As a result of the success of the film in the U.S. market, Chan’s future films, as well as past films (*Supercop* and others), will be gradually released in U.S. theaters. With the arrival of Chan, one must redefine what global entertainment film is. It is no longer an exclusive, one-way Hollywood export to other parts of the world. A Hong Kong film, such as a Golden Harvest production in the case of Chan, offers an alternative route for the global circulation of cultural products.

The globalization of cinema brings with it an erosion of the fixed geographic boundaries of nation-states. Yet, it may not necessitate the disappear-

ance and homogenization of cultural and ethnic identity. At times, transnationalism in fact strengthens and reasserts a sense of cultural selfhood. It is evident that in Jackie Chan's films there is often a subtle or not so subtle assertion of his *Chineseness*. There is never a mistake about his Chinese identity. Lovable, affable, funny, and heroic to a broad spectrum of viewers of all nationalities, Chan is positioned above all as a Chinese kung-fu hero who always wins in the end. While Hong Kong talents such as John Woo, Jackie Chan, Tsui Hark, Wong Kar-wai, and Ringo Lam are appearing in the United States one by one, Chow Yun-fat, another Hong Kong/Asian superstar, is contemplating his move to Hollywood. Yet he has been more cautious as an Asian *male* action film superstar. His Asian masculinity, visage, and physique will be under the scrutiny of broad segments of the American audience. (His case is different from both Woo and Chan. While Woo is a director, Chan is a kung-fu star, an admittedly Asian skill by Western reckoning.) When asked by a reporter about his plans to act in a Hollywood film, Chow expressed both anguish and responsibility as an Asian star:

A good role is important. But more than that is the script. Because for me, an Asian, I have a lot of fans, people that support me. If I choose the wrong role in a movie, they will feel shame. For me and for them. If the first movie is not a big success in the United States, I don't give a damn. But for Asia. . . .³⁴

With the proliferation of Chinese cinemas on the international scene, there have appeared a plethora of films that attempt to write and rewrite Chinese histories. Each of the Chinese cinemas creates its own authentic version of "Chinese" history. Each signifies a different China and preserves a national or local history of its own through the art of historiography/"historiophoty."³⁵ While discussions of the relation of Chinese film to the world tend to center on the binary opposition of China versus the West or the "Third World" versus the "First World," more attention should perhaps be given to the tensions and relations among distinct Chinese communities: the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities. Each has its own claim to China's past and present. Mainland Chinese critics seem to be less sensitive to the relations of center versus periphery and global versus local that exist explicitly or implicitly in the minds of the people in these locales of Chinese culture. Whereas a Mainland critic may only see the possibility of a Chinese film such as *Farewell My Concubine* becoming a victim of the "cultural hegemony" of the West (via the Orientalist route), a Taiwanese critic may think otherwise. He or she may feel particularly uneasy about the "grand narrative," the "epic style" of this film by Chen Kaige.³⁶ The film covers a long sweep of China's modern history: the warlord period,

Japanese occupation, Guomindang rule, the Communist victory, the Cultural Revolution, and the New Era. Its narration of Chinese history is Sinocentric, or more precisely, Mainland-centered, relative to the “local” histories of Taiwan and Hong Kong. It constructs a monolithic, monological modern China. For the people of Chen Kaige’s generation, the momentous historical events of the Mainland such as the Cultural Revolution are the most important, most formative, and yet most disillusioning experiences in both their personal and collective lives. Chen’s portrayal of Chinese history (i.e., Mainland history) is thus passionate and totalizing, lacking in irony and distance. The film constitutes nothing less than a hegemonic discourse of its own kind which marginalizes the claims and stories of people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Any version of China-centered cultural imperialism is as dangerous as Western cultural imperialism. Thus, the writing and rewriting of forgotten, repressed national, regional, and local histories from a non-Mainland perspective remain equally important tasks for the filmmaker.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to mention nascent Chinese American film (or Chinese Canadian film, Chinese European film, for that matter) in a volume that purports to problematize the concept of “national cinema.” I take Chinese American film as a telling instance of the formation of what might be called a new transnational Chinese culture. There have been several films directed and produced by Chinese Americans; most notably, Wayne Wang’s 1993 film, *The Joy Luck Club*, achieved box-office success in the United States. The event signaled the beginning of the entrance of Chinese American film into mainstream American film culture.³⁷ Questions of the Chinese diaspora, cross-cultural/double identity, and generation gaps become central themes in such films. An instructive example is again Ang Lee. One may ask: Are Ang Lee and his films Taiwanese? Chinese? American? Taiwanese American? Chinese American? In the case of *The Wedding Banquet*, the film has been advertised under different rubrics for different audiences: a gay and lesbian film, a Chinese American film, a Taiwanese film, and so forth. The lack of a clear answer to such questions indicates the very nature of transnational Chinese cinema.

Chinese American film is a revealing manifestation of a resurgent transnational Chinese culture. This is what Tu Wei-ming refers to as “Cultural China” in a well-known essay.³⁸ Cultural China includes the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in its first “symbolic universe,” overseas Chinese communities in the second symbolic universe, and non-Chinese who have an interest in Chinese affairs in the third symbolic universe. The idea of Cultural China is closely tied to a revival of Confucianism. The identification with China is not a matter of legal or territorial consideration but a matter of

cultural affiliation. “Greater China,” “Greater China economic zone,” “East Asian modernity,” and “Cultural China” are notions that stake out a grand global role for China at the end of the twentieth century and in the next century. Whether perceived as a renewed Sinocentrism or a counterhegemonic discourse against Euro-American domination, the idea of Cultural China fully articulates the ambition and reality of a new transnational Chinese culture in the making. Along with Chinese “national” cinemas, Chinese American film is to become an active participant in this trans-Pacific, global film discourse.

It is instructive to return to the films of Wayne Wang at this point for a look into the shaping of trans-Pacific ethnic communities. One of his earlier films, *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1989), reenacts the horrors and effects of the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act upon two generations of Chinese immigrants in the New York Chinatown, albeit in a gentle and humorous tone.³⁹ The act separated Chinese families and deprived Chinese men of women. Its systematic extinction of Chinese families created a severe psychic trauma among Chinese communities that cannot but remind us of what T. W. Adorno said about the Holocaust (one cannot write poetry after Auschwitz). In the opening sequence, a long line of Chinese men wait in turn to see a prostitute. Chinatown is reduced to a withering bachelors’ town. The dysfunctional sexuality of the old generation caused by racial discrimination did have lingering effects on the children. Yet, the ending of the film tells a story of recuperation as Mei Oi gives Ben Loy, her husband, a special tea “all the way from China” to restore his potency. The final shots betoken ethnic continuity, the birth of grandchildren, and the reestablishment of a new family in a new land.

Likewise, *The Joy Luck Club* narrates the tale of another Chinese community, this time on the West Coast—San Francisco. It is a story of two generations of Chinese women—four mothers from the Old China and their four daughters born and reared in America. Despite the lack of communication between moms and daughters, June embarks on a soul-searching journey to China to meet her long-lost twin sisters and find her roots. The question for herself and her generation is: What does it mean to be a Chinese? Or an American, for that matter?⁴⁰ There is a suggestion of the possible forging of a new “Chinese-American” ethnic identity by reconciling the forces of past and present, China and the West. The envisioning of Chinese communities by émigré Chinese film artists in America not only adds a new voice to the discourse of ethnicity and nationhood in American film culture but also contributes to the formation of a trans-Pacific, transnational Chinese film culture.⁴¹

• Gender, Modernity, Nationhood in Chinese Film History

The construction of nationhood has been intimately bound to gender formation in Chinese film from the beginning. Gender issues come to the forefront in Chinese film whether dealing with “women’s problems” or offering star images to its spectators. To re-view Chinese cinemas not from a male-centered perspective but from a consciously gendered and feminist standpoint is part of our undertaking. The question of perspective becomes doubly important and difficult at this point for it must be at the same time a “cross-cultural” one. In fact, any investigation involving more than one culture or seeing one culture from the eye of another must be conscious of its own risks, potentials, and challenges. Does an effort to engage a non-Western text by a Western scholar or Western-trained scholar always result in some form of cultural imperialism or neocolonialism?

As E. Ann Kaplan suggests in “Reading Formations and Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine*,” the first thing that a U.S. feminist critic might do in dealing with a non-Western text is to be at least self-conscious of the emotional impact of a film on her and of her subjectivity. It is fruitful to examine the mechanism of subject-formation of a white, Western woman trained in Western academia who uses feminist theories, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies in specific ways. While being fully aware of its limitations, a white feminist reading of Chinese film texts might uncover strands of multiple meanings that escape the notice of critics of the originating culture by bringing in different perspectives and frameworks. To test her assumptions, Kaplan reads a Chinese film text, *Farewell My Concubine*, from her gendered, white feminist perspective. The alternative to not paying attention to cross-cultural analysis is to turn back to an essentialist position, to “cultivate one’s own garden.”

Engendering Chinese history and nationhood through a gendered discourse is a strategy frequently used since early Chinese cinema. In the progressive, left-wing film tradition before 1949, many films were produced to represent the plight of Chinese women. In fact, the theme of “modern women” in cinema has been tied to a series of weighty questions such as modernity, the spiritual health of the nation, and anti-imperialism.⁴² Over the years, film studios that were infiltrated or influenced by left-wing filmmakers, such as Mingxing (1920s–1930s), Lianhua (1930s), and Kunlun (late 1940s), produced a series of provocatively titled films dealing with women’s issues. These films include *Three Modern Women* (San’ge modeng nüxing, 1933), *The Goddess* (Shennü, 1934), *A Modern Woman* (Xiandai yi nüxing, 1933), *The New Woman* (Xin nüxing, 1934), and *Three Beautiful Women* (Li renxing, 1949). Womanhood is often a trope for the nation, a national allegory. As in

modern Chinese literature since the May 4th Movement, women have been portrayed as victims of feudal oppression. Their bodies have been the bearers of suffering and cruelty in a dehumanizing society. Kristine Harris' essay, "The New Woman Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai," examines the representation of women in a silent film of the 1930s. In a feminist approach different from Kaplan's psychoanalytic, Lacanian orientation, Harris focuses on the social history of women, stars, and spectatorship in Chinese cinema of the period. The story of Ruan Lingyu, nicknamed the "Chinese Garbo," the lead actress in the film, who committed suicide at the age of twenty-five after its completion, has become a legend. The film roles she played and her own life have all become symbols of the modern Chinese woman. (A testimonial to the perpetual allure of her story is the 1991 Hong Kong film *Ruan Lingyu/Centre Stage*, directed by Guan Jinpeng [Stanley Kwan].) It appears that in films of this sort there is an ambiguity and uneasy tension between the goals of what might seem to be a Chinese feminist discourse as such and the language of some overarching, sublime, national, collective struggle that transcends gender specificity.

After 1949, gender politics was no less visible and crucial for the sake of socialist nation-building. What should be emphasized here is that gender discourse is usually reduced to and subsumed in the grand discourse of class struggle and national liberation. While the female symbolizes the victim of oppression (in the forms of child bride, concubinage, slavery, and the like), the male represents the agency of revolutionary change (through a series of familiar symbols and characters: male commissar, armed struggle, the gun, the Party, and the sun). Class consciousness overshadows gender identity. Women's newly found freedom from feudal, capitalist, and imperialist bondage is followed by integration into a new social order, a "socialist patriarchy."⁴³ In many cases, the liberation of women is concomitant with a process of gender erasure (for instance, the familiar sight of Chinese women wearing unisex Maoist uniforms). While revolutionary heroes and heroines are depicted to be in full possession of newly empowered masculinity and femininity, sexuality itself is minimized and elided.

These new revolutionary gender formations are most vividly staged and choreographed in two revolutionary film classics and their subsequent ballet versions: *The White-Haired Girl* (Baimao nü, 1950) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (Hongse niangzijun, 1961). Both films were turned into "revolutionary modern ballets" during the Cultural Revolution. (Needless to say, the ballets owed their life and popularity to their film versions, which were shown all over China for revolutionary education.) While the female lead characters, Xi'er and Wu Qinghua, are victims of cruel feudal oppression, the lead male characters, Dachun and Hong Changqing, represent the Party, the

Red Army, and the agent of revolutionary change. It is men who liberate women from slavery and lead them to revolution.⁴⁴ In fact, Xie Jin, director of the film *The Red Detachment of Women*, also rehearsed the by-then popular legend of the “White-Haired Girl” within the narrative of another famed film, *Two Stage Sisters* (Wutai jiemei, 1964/65, the subject of Gina Marchetti’s essay). Chunhua, the heroine of the film, a formerly abused and oppressed actress of Shaoxing opera in the “old society,” had transformed, liberated, and empowered herself by performing progressive programs (Lu Xun’s story, *The New Year’s Sacrifice* [Zhufu]) and revolutionary subjects (“The White-Haired Girl”). Toward the end of the film, her performance of the role of Xi’er (the White-Haired Girl) on the new, reformed stage of the Shaoxing opera brought tears and identification from the female audience (a characteristically non-Brechtian moment in Chinese opera). In the final shot of the film, Chunhua tells her stage sister, Yuehong, to “sing a lifetime of revolutionary opera” together. The (melo)drama of the “stage within a stage” has been over a long stretch of time an apt metaphor for new gender formation and social change in many Chinese films in the Mao era as well as the post-Mao era. (Consider, for instance, *Woman Demon Human* [Ren gui qing, 1988] by the woman director Huang Shuqin and the tale of “two stage brothers” in *Farewell My Concubine* by Chen Kaige).

In New Chinese Cinema, the rediscovery of gender differences is also the process of rediscovering individuality. Regendering history and nationhood involves a multiple critique of masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and their lack. The remaining essays in this section, “Gendered Perspective: The Construction and Representation of Subjectivity and Sexuality in *Ju Dou*” by Shuqin Cui, “The Concubine and the Figure of History: Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine*” by Wendy Larson, and “Narrative Images of the Historical Passion: Those *Other Women*—On the Alterity in the New Wave of Chinese Cinema” by Yi Zheng, address gender politics in this period of Chinese cinema. Through a meticulous examination of the cinematic conventions of the film *Ju Dou* (offstage sound, point of view, narrative structure), Cui traces some characteristics of gender construction in Zhang Yimou’s films. We witness a situation where an unconscious male desire searches for and reasserts a lost subjectivity and an emasculated sexuality. The woman character Ju Dou embodies a visible female sexuality, a signifier of male desire, a recipient of punishment. No matter how powerfully she is framed in the foreground, Ju Dou is not a subject, nor an agent of change, but remains a confirmation of the psychical wound suffered by Chinese men under a repressive social system. It seems that these observations are generally true of much of Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era. In Larson’s analysis, Chen Kaige’s films are usually grand, male, narcissistic narratives where women play marginal

roles. In the historical epic film *Farewell My Concubine*, half a century of modern Chinese history is configured through personal stories of males despite the presence of Juxian, played by Gong Li. The central roles of history are played by men, not by women. Zheng's essay takes on the theme of gendering China as the "feminine" and the "other" in the imagination of both the West and New Chinese Cinema. The obsessive self-recasting of women in film is the century-old "obsession with China." Woman in Chinese cinematic expression is the trope for the modern Chinese nation. In their feminist critiques, Cui, Larson, and Zheng all perceptively demonstrate that the male filmmakers of the New Cinema have displaced the burden of Chinese history and modernity and have re-placed them upon the shoulders of Chinese women.

Broadly speaking, gender formation in filmic discourse in the Mao era (1949–1976) was manifested as the empowerment of both masculinity and femininity through revolutionary struggle and socialist construction. In the post-Mao era (late 1970s and 1980s), New Cinema's cultural and social critique was necessarily couched in gender terms as well. Dysfunctional sexuality and "abnormal" gender relations, for example, impotency, emasculation, and concubinage, are veiled allegories of the nation. Again, Zhang Yimou's film art is an exemplary case in portraying Chinese masculinity in trouble and crisis. He offers the viewer spectacles of impotence and incest (*Ju Dou*), concubinage and polygamy (*Raise the Red Lantern*), injured phallus and testicles (*The Story of Qiu Ju*), the inability of men to save their spouses and children (*To Live*), and adultery (*Shanghai Triad*). Impotence, idiocy, and handicap on the part of the father and the son are the causes of the lack of emotional and libidinal fulfillment of a family in rural China in yet another highly publicized film, *Women from the Lake of Scented Souls* (*Xianghun nü*) by Xie Fei, which was the co-winner of the Golden Lion Award at the 1993 Berlin Film Festival with Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet*.⁴⁵

In the 1990s, there is a resurgent recuperation of Chinese masculinity in the condition of transnational capitalism. The accelerated transformation of Hong Kong action and martial arts film into a global cinema foregrounds the heroics of Asian masculinity. After a hiatus of several decades, Bruce Lee's position is finally to be filled by a new Asian star, Jackie Chan. These Asian heroes must now compare and compete with "indigenous" American male mythologies established by actors such as Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Jean-Claude Van Damme in the American and international film markets. Hence, Chow Yun-fat's anguished, uneasy crossing to Hollywood, as mentioned earlier. (In regard to Asian kung-fu heroines in Hong Kong action films, their physical prowess, to the contrary, is not a sign of the assertion of an independent Asian female subjectivity. Their feminin-

ity, like the scantily covered female bodies in the woman-warrior genre of American cult film, seems to be fabricated for the visual pleasure of the masculine gaze.)

In January 1997, Jackie Chan's film *First Strike (Police Story 4)* was released in theaters across the United States at the same time that two other sexually charged American films—*The People vs. Larry Flynt* and *Evita* (starring Madonna)—were being screened. Chan, in the role of a Hong Kong cop/detective, embarks on a heroic transnational adventure and sets out to break a smuggling ring that steals nuclear weapons from Ukraine. The spectator watches him perform his characteristically extraordinary, breathtaking stunts first in the snowcapped landscape of Ukraine in the cold of winter and then in blue water in the warm climate of Australia on the other side of the globe. We witness Chan's triumphant tracking of the world for a righteous cause one more time, as he did the same in Yugoslavia (*Armor of God*, 1987) and New York City/Vancouver (*Rumble in the Bronx*, 1995). In this film, Chan's "spectacular body," acting, and performance may outdo his American counterparts, such as John Travolta and Christian Slater in John Woo's film *Broken Arrow*, on the same subject of stopping the theft of nuclear weapons. Yet, Chan's sexuality is as ambivalent and troubled as ever. At times he is stripped naked, and his tanned, muscular, nude body is exhibited to and scrutinized by passing women. One of the most self-reflexive moments within the diegesis of the film is when Chan says that his adventurous career is very much like that of James Bond but without the company of pretty girls. He casts himself in the role of something resembling an asexual, Chinese/Hong Kong James Bond. His role has been invariably a comic, lovable, optimistic, dutiful person dedicated solely to the completion of the task assigned to him, disinterested in and dodging the pursuit of libidinal fulfillment, although such opportunities are always present.

In Mainland China in the 1990s, unabashed recuperation and aggrandizement of Chinese masculinity have occurred in the domestic film and TV industries, which have taken on a transnational gender character. Films and TV serials such as *Beijing'ers in New York* (Beijingren zai Niuyue), starring Jiang Wen; *Russian Girls in Harbin* (Eluosi guniang zai Harbin), starring Jiang Wu, Jiang Wen's brother; *A Wild Kiss to Russia* (Kuangwen Eluosi); *Chinese Girls in Foreign Companies* (Yanghang li de Zhongguo xiaojie); and *Foreign Babes in Beijing* (Yangniu'er zai Beijing) describe the trafficking between Chinese and foreign men and women. Most noticeably, these texts depict how Chinese men have won the love of "foreign babes" through their entrepreneurial ability in the creation and accumulation of capital and wealth. The libidinal economy of Chinese nationals is linked to the political economy of the nation. The recuperation of the Chinese nation via Chinese masculinity is

now achieved through transnational libidinal dynamics. The projection of such a transnational male imaginary is a disguised attempt to resurrect the Chinese nation/patriarchy.

As we come to the end of this brief overview, the contours of the evolution of Chinese cinemas become clear to us. Film first came to China as a foreign, Western technology at the end of the nineteenth century. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the struggle for the formation of a distinct Chinese national cinema, as part of the construction of the modern Chinese nation-state, was first and foremost a reaction to the international domination of its *other*, namely, Western film. Hence, film in China has always been of a transnational character. Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Chinese cinemas have consisted of those of the Mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and to a certain extent a diverse overseas community. They cross national borders and traverse vast geographic territories. In the case of the Mainland and Taiwan (Republic of China), we may speak of two competing Chinese "national" cinemas as a function of the Chinese nation-state; in the case of Hong Kong and Taiwan again (as a Chinese "province"), what we see is the flourishing of local Chinese cinemas, often spoken in dialects (Cantonese, Fukienese); the popularity of Chinese films, especially Hong Kong action films, in Southeast Asia and East Asia also creates a regional Chinese cinema; finally, the spread of Chinese films across the entire world makes Chinese cinema a global cinema. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, at the end of the twentieth century, new patterns of international coproduction and global distribution render the idea of Chinese national cinema rather problematic. The study of *national* cinemas must then transform into *transnational* film studies.

Therefore, it seems impossible to justify the notion of a single Chinese cinema—thus the plural in the title of this book. The emergence of China as a modern nation has in part been molded by the concurrent emergence of a national cinematic style. The development of nationhood is multifaceted; it is based to some extent on defining itself by identifying what it is *not*—by rejecting and reacting against foreign influences or by validating its own values through the depiction of exoticized national minorities, for example. Yet, as we know, a pure, clean, distinct national cinema can never exist but remains an imaginary construct. Some degree of hybridity is built into the very fabric of the medium of film. Film has always been a transnational entity. Before long, nationhood evolved into transnationalism in the age of global capitalism, with all its attendant peculiarities. To this point, there are already several versions of Chinese cinema: the official mainstream tradition, popular entertainment film, the avant-garde in its formative stage, and the

emergent transnational cinema. Taiwan cinema and Hong Kong cinema, thriving but largely unrecognized on the periphery of mainstream Chinese (People's Republic) cinema, chronicle the effects of marginalization in some way and contribute to an alternative discourse of nationhood. Yet another voice from the margin emerges when we reinterpret the film corpus through a feminist perspective. A careful examination of gender formation in filmic discourse reveals to us the strategies of nation-building in a century of Chinese cinemas.

To query the transformation of Chinese national cinema, to inscribe the emergence of a transnational Chinese film culture, and to engender, to give rebirth to Chinese film discourse through regendering it, have been our collective desire in this study. To accomplish such a task requires an alertness to the changing historical conditions in the formations of national and transnational cinemas throughout twentieth-century China. The unprecedented globalization of film culture in the "new world order" at the end of this century provides cultural workers a unique opportunity for critical intervention. It is in such a spirit of critical, interdisciplinary, and cross-cultural intervention that we intend to revisit and reenvision cinema studies.

• Notes

Lucy Fischer, Anne T. Ciecko, and the readers of the University of Hawai'i Press read earlier drafts of this essay and kindly offered insightful comments for revision. I have incorporated many of their suggestions and have also benefitted from queries at the society for Cinema Studies conference held in Ottawa in 1997.

1. For an explanation of a Marxist approach to film, see Colin MacCabe's preface to Fredric Jameson's book, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), ix-xvi.

2. For accounts of the early history of film in China, see Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* [History of the development of Chinese film], 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1963); Jay Leyda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).

3. "National cinema" and *minzu dianying* are similar but not synonymous terms. The Chinese term *minzu* has the connotation of "race," "ethnicity," and "people," and *minzu dianying* signifies a Chinese effort to develop an indigenous film distinct from the Western model. For relevant discussions, see Chris Berry, "Race: Chinese Film and the Politics of Nationalism," *Cinema Journal* 31, no. 2 (1992): 45-58; Chris Berry, "A Nation T(w/o)o: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)," *East-West Film Journal* 7, no. 1 (1993): 24-51. For a critique of Berry's position, see Yingjin Zhang's essay in this volume. For a study of the relation between nationalism and early Chinese cinema, see Ma Junxiang, "Minzu zhuyi suo suzao de xiandai Zhongguo dianying"

[Modern Chinese cinema as shaped by nationalism], *Ershi yi shiji* [Twenty-first century] (February 1993): 112–119.

4. Cheng et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*.

5. As a European contemporary of left-wing, underground communist Chinese film workers in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin also reflected upon the revolutionary utility of film as a new mass art. See his often-quoted 1935 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Film and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 665–681.

6. Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14. For recent parallel studies of other national and regional cinemas, see Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Sumita Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, *Black African Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema, 1896–1996* (London: Routledge, 1996); Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies, 1939–1990* (London: Routledge, 1991); Tom O’Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996); Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

7. For an informative historical study of the obverse side of the issue, namely, Hollywood’s strategies of representing Asians in relation to race and sex, see Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”: Race, Sex and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

8. Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” *Screen* 30, no. 4 (1989): 37.

9. See Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

10. Wimal Dissanayake suggests that national cinema in Asia “can be analyzed very broadly at two levels: the textual and the industrial. At the textual level we can examine the uniqueness of a given cinema in terms of content, style, and indigenous aesthetics while at the industrial level we can examine the relationship between cinema and industry in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition.” See Wimal Dissanayake, ed., *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xiii–xiv.

11. Douglas Wilkerson, “Film and the Visual Arts in China: An Introduction,” in *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan*, ed. Linda Ehrlich and David Desser (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 40.

12. For a classification of the five generations of Chinese film artists, see George S. Semsel, ed., *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People’s Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 11–14.

13. For a study of contemporary Chinese cinema as “autoethnography,” see Rey

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

14. *Old Well* was directed by Wu Tianming, a “Fourth-Generation” director, then head of the Xi’an Studio. He was regarded as the father of the Fifth Generation in helping the new directors start their careers at his studio. Zhang Yimou played the lead role in this film.

15. See Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text* 15 (fall 1986): 65–88.

16. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6. As Fredric Jameson comments on the style of New Chinese Cinema, there might be a connection between the privileging of “an epic midshot” of landscape, a “midpanoramic perspective,” an epic narrativity, and the desire to recuperate the Chinese nation. See Fredric Jameson, “Remapping Taipei,” in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, ed. Nick Browne, Paul G. Pickowicz, Vivian Sobchack, and Esther Yau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120–121.

17. See Nick Browne’s introduction in *New Chinese Cinemas*, I–II.

18. See Masao Miyoshi’s seminal essay, “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 726–751. For informative discussions of “global capitalism” as it relates to China, see Arif Dirlik, *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), and Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third-World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1994): 328–356.

19. See William Brent, “Lights! Cameras! Action!” *The China Business Review* (September–October 1994): 36–39. Also see George S. Semsel, “Report on the Current Situation in the Chinese Film Industry,” paper presented at the Chinese cinema studies conference, University of Pittsburgh, September 1994.

20. See Lin Lisheng, “Jiushi niandai Zhongguo dianying de jingji biangeng he yishu fenye” [The economic changes and artistic patterns of Chinese cinema in the nineties], *Dianying yishu* [Film art] (May 1996): 37–41, 83.

21. Cui Lili, “Facing the Challenge From Hollywood,” *Beijing Review* (February 5–11, 1996): 13.

22. Rex Weiner, “China Opens Its Doors to Sundance Fest,” *Variety*, October 9–15, 1995, 13, 16; Rex Weiner, “Sundance Festival Takes Show on the Silk Road: Chinese Independents,” *Variety*, October 16–22, 1995, 24.

23. For attempts to arrive at an inventory of constitutive features of postmodern culture in China in the late twentieth century, see my “Postmodernity, Popular Culture, and the Intellectual: A Report on Post-Tiananmen China,” *boundary 2* 23, no. 2 (1996): 139–169; “Art, Culture, and Cultural Criticism in Post-New China,” *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (1997): III–133; “Global POSTmodernIZATION: The Intel-

lectual, the Artist, and China's Condition," forthcoming in *boundary 2* 24, no. 3 (1997).

24. See Wang Ning, "Lüelun Zhongguo dangdai dianying de liangnan ji chulu" [On the dilemma and solution of contemporary Chinese film], *Dianying yishu* [Film art] 6 (1996): 4-7.

25. For recent discussions of the problems of national/international film, the nation-state, and transnationalism, see the special issue "Mediating the National," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14, no. 3 (1993); Katherine Verdery, "Beyond the Nation in Eastern Europe," *Social Text* 38 (spring 1994): 1-19.

26. The manufacture of images and spectacles of China for the Western gaze is in part fulfilled through the strategy of self-exoticization and self-eroticization in Fifth-Generation films. Such a procedure has achieved some measure of success, for example, in the case of *Farewell My Concubine*. Yet, there is a sign of exhaustion. Consider the disappointing reception of Chen Kaige's *Tempress Moon* (Feng yue) at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival. Its producer, Xu Feng, invested much more heavily in this film than in *Farewell*. Despite the appearance of stars such as Gong Li and Leslie Cheung (Zhang Guorong), the film was badly received. A story about Oriental sexuality (incest, this time) eluded the gaze of Western spectators in Cannes. The complete, thorough transformation from narcissistic, elitist experimentation in the early period to the relentless, blind pursuit of commercial success and sensationalism is the tragedy of Chen. See Yuan Shengjun and Wang Jun, "Chen Kaige de beiju gaosu le women shenmo?" [What does Chen Kaige's tragedy tell us?], *Zhongguo yinmu* [China screen] (July/August 1996): 30-34.

27. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

28. Jameson, "Remapping Taipei," 148.

29. Jameson, "Remapping Taipei," 148.

30. See "Humen yiri: Yapian zhanzheng shezhizu paishe jishi" [One day in Humen: A report of the shooting of the production team of *Yapian zhanzheng*], *Zhongguo yinmu* [China screen] (July-August 1996): 20; Patrick E. Tyler, "In China, Letting a Hundred Films Wither," *New York Times*, December 1, 1996, H1, H26.

31. For a discussion of this aspect, see Ping-kwan Leung, "Minzu dianying yu Xianggang wenhua shenfen: Cong *Bawang bieji*, *Qiwang*, *Ruan Lingyu* kan wenhua dingwei" [National cinema and the cultural identity of Hong Kong: Looking at cultural orientation in *Farewell My Concubine*, *Chess King*, and *Ruan Lingyu*], *Jintian* [Today] no. 26 (autumn 1994): 193-204.

32. Gary Dauphin, "Cyber: Ready for My Website, Mr. DeMille," *Village Voice*, January 2, 1996, 15.

33. For an informative introduction to the world of Hong Kong action films, see Bey Logan, *Hong Kong Action Cinema* (London: Titan Books, 1995).

34. Quoted from R. J. Smith, "The Coolest Actor in the World," *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1995.

35. See Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1193–1199.

36. Liao Ping-hui, "Shikong yu xingbie de cuoluan: Lun *Bawang bieji*" [Temporal, spatial, and gender disorder: On *Farewell My Concubine*], *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* 22, no. 1 (1993): 6–18.

37. Indeed, the narrative strategy of telling about two generations of Chinese women in an ethnic community in the film has had a discernible influence on other new films. See, for example, *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995), which tropes on the structure and theme of *The Joy Luck Club* and narrates the tale of two generations of women in several Caucasian American and African American families.

38. Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center," *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (1991): 1–32. For a critique of Tu's notion in relation to Chinese film culture, see W. A. Callahan, "Gender, Ideology, Nation: *Ju Dou* in the Cultural Politics of China," *East-West Film Journal* 7, no. 1 (1993): 52–80.

39. For a discussion of other Wayne Wang films, see Peter Feng, "Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: *Chan is Missing*," *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 4 (1996): 88–118.

40. June's heightened sense of self-awareness is also vividly described in Amy Tan's original novel of the same title, on which the film is based. The passage needs to be quoted at length:

The minute our train leaves the Hong Kong border and enters Shenzhen, China, I feel different. I can feel the skin on my forehead tingling, my blood rushing through a new course, my bones aching with a familiar old pain. And I think, my mother was right. I am becoming Chinese.

"Cannot be helped," my mother said when I was fifteen and had vigorously denied that I had any Chinese whatsoever below my skin. I was a sophomore at Galileo High in San Francisco, and all my Caucasian friends agreed: I was about as Chinese as they were. . . .

But today I realize I've never really known what it means to be Chinese. I am thirty-six years old. Mother is dead and I am on a train, carrying with me her dreams of coming home. I am going to China. (Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* [New York: Ivy Books, 1989], 306–307.)

41. Ming-na Wen, the lead actress in *Joy Luck Club*, performing the role of June, is a Pittsburgh native and now resides in Los Angeles. Her family restaurant, Chinatown Inn, is the only surviving Chinese restaurant in Pittsburgh's old Chinatown, which has long disappeared in the cityscape and memory of Pittsburgh. Her family has opened a new karaoke bar, appropriately named Club Joy, to serve as a meeting place for students and new immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China on weekend evenings. The entrance of the restaurant is filled with posters of scenes from the film. What I may call "ethnic film" as such has its origins in the life

story of immigrants and does seem to have a real “after-life” and an effect on the given ethnic community.

42. See, for instance, Paul G. Pickowicz’ essay, “The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930s,” *Modern China* 17, no. 1 (1991): 38–75. See also Yingjin Zhang, “Engendering Chinese Filmic Discourse of the 1930’s: Configurations of Modern Women in Shanghai in Three Silent Films,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 2, no. 3 (1994): 603–628.

43. See Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

44. In August 1996, I saw a new performance of the *White-Haired Girl* by the Shanghai Ballet Troupe at the Theater of Beijing Exhibition Hall in Beijing, an example of Soviet-style architecture that, like ballet itself in China, dates back to the 1950s. There have been some changes in choreography from the old Cultural Revolution version. The new choreography of the duet between Xi’er (White-haired girl) and Dachun in their reunion scene makes their relationship more intimate. The romantic dimension of the original story was basically eliminated in the old ballet version in order to minimize private libidinal dynamics and highlight revolutionary devotion.

The life story of ballerinas in Red China, the Soviet influence on Chinese ballet, and the emergence of a “revolutionary” Chinese ballet have been the subject of several new films. See, for instance, the 1996 production *Red Swan* (Hong tian’e).

45. The whole idea of turning impotence into a critique and allegory of the Chinese nation can be traced back to the literature of the mid-1980s, most notably to Zhang Xianliang’s stories. See my “When Mimosa Blossoms: The Ideology of the Self in Modern Chinese Literature,” *Journal of Chinese Language Teachers Association* 28, no. 3 (1993): 1–16.

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