

© Copyright 2017

Yizhong Gu

The Myth of Voluntary Death: The Representation of Sacrifice and Martyrdom in the

Maoist Films (1949-1976)

Yizhong Gu

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2017

Reading Committee:

Yomi Braester, Chair

Tani Barlow

James Tweedie

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media

Abstract

The Myth of Voluntary Death: The Representation of Sacrifice and Martyrdom in the Maoist Films (1949-1976)

Yizhong Gu

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Yomi Braester

Professor, Byron W. and Alice L. Lockwood Professor in the Humanities
Department of Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media

The dissertation investigates into the layered narratives of sacrifice and revolutionary martyrdom in Maoist films. Martyr's death is abstracted and elevated from unpredictable personal event to be a collectively controllable and foreseeable public event. I refer to such ideological control over citizen's death *necropolitics*. Maoist necropower interpellates revolutionary subjects, justifies the nation's secular necropower transmitted from the transcendental ideals, surrogates martyrs bodies and minds to speak for them, and conceals martyr's marginalized position as the sacrificial object and martyr's dead body as disposable abject.

I argue that the key mechanism of the Maoist necropolitics lies in *the absent causes* that originate from the transcendental revolutionary ideals. These socialist ideals can never be realized completely and are catachresis that lack sufficient referents. In other words, any socialist ideal essentially stands for a collective historical experience that cannot be fully presented but

must be presupposed to regulate personal lived experience. Respectively, these three absent causes are: the future ideal of perfection, the ideal socialist female type, and “the absolute spirit of selflessness.”

Chapter 2 argues for the homogeneity of the onscreen Maoist male martyrdom, which follows a constant formula both in theme and in style. Although the orthodox representation of male sacrifice looks formulaic and stiff, I argue that the flawless sublime heroic figure is exactly the embodiment of the communist ideal of the future perfection. Its impossibility of being sufficiently represented opens up the room for audience’s unlimited imagination of the future totality. During the process of fantasy construction, the future ideal of perfection is implanted into the present reality. Chapter 3 argues that the onscreen female martyrdom is far more complicated than the simple generalization of the “erasure of femininity.” The Maoist ideology requires femininity to be emphasized when women are called to die for the nation, to show that the communist revolution is inclusive and universal regardless of any gender difference. However, sexuality needs to be concealed when the libidinal force is uncontrollable and runs the risk of threatening male authority and revolutionary purity. By a close reading of the film *Dr. Bethune*, Chapter 4 unveils the entangled implications of foreignness and selflessness in constructing and keeping the sameness of the revolutionary individual and collective identity. By the representation of an influential foreign martyr, the revolutionary narrative and the cinematic strategies cooperate to minimize the potential threats of disintegration of the local solidarity from the benevolent foreignness, while maximizing the validity of transnational communism. I argue that the ideal revolutionary individual identity, “the spirit of absolute selflessness” as Mao called for, is a *void*. But it is exactly such a void that keeps the homogeneity and sameness of the individual identity which defies any change occurred in time and becomes permanent. Chapter 5

investigates the rarity of the Maoist films where unconventional martyrdom is represented through genre twists. These film genres include comedy, suspense thriller, and children's films. The genre twists potentially expose the original paradox and the inherent problems of martyrdom. Being subjects, objects and abjects at the same time, martyrs are at once celebrated and marginalized.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	9
Chapter 2. The Cinematic Representation of Male Sacrifice: From the May Fourth to the “Three Prominences”	40
Chapter 3. From <i>Lienü</i> to <i>Lieshi</i> : The Socialist Female Martyrs on the Screen.....	98
Chapter 4. The Spirit of Absolute Selflessness: Foreign Martyrdom and Communist Selflessness in the Film <i>Dr. Bethune</i>	142
Chapter 5. Unwelcome Heroes: Genre Twist and Unconventional Martyrdom in the Maoist Films.....	179
Epilogue. Post-Maoist Martyrdom: Reflection on the Maoist Martyrdom.....	230
Bibliography.....	237

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the old Chinese proverb says, “there is no word to sufficiently express the deepest gratitude and appreciation.” I totally agree with the proverb, for the difficulty in finding words to express my gratitude. I would firstly thank my committee chair Professor Yomi Braester, for his thought-provoking instruction, care and help for my study and life ever since I has been a graduate student in the University of Washington. The dissertation would not have been possible without his consistent encouragement, support and inspiration.

I would like to thank my committee members, Professor Tani Barlow and Professor James Tweedie. Professor Barlow has always inspired and encouraged my academic research ever since I took graduate student course with her. I am honored to contribute to several of her academic projects, which significantly benefit my theoretical thinking and the dissertation writing. Professor Tweedie’s insights and broad knowledge of cinema inspire me greatly on the film theory part, especially to contextualize the Maoist cinema in a transnational perspective in the dissertation.

Professor Francisco Benitez deeply influences me with his suggestions on nationalism and sacrifice during the early stage of the dissertation. Professor John Christopher Hamm offers me insight into modern Chinese literature with the premodern connection. Professor Madeleine Yue Dong gives me constructive comments on the Maoist martyrdom. I especially cherish the time when I watched and discussed the Maoist films together with my senior fellow Zhuoyi Wang, now professor at Hamilton College. Many sparks of thought came from the informal chat then.

I thank the Department of Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media for offering me teaching assistant position for many years. Many of my thoughts on the Maoist cinema were fleshed out and fine-tuned during the teaching process. I thank the China Studies Program in

Jackson School offering me Chester-Fritz Fellowship Award and Freeman Foundation Teaching Fellowship. I am also grateful for the assistance from the Graduate Program Advisor Yuko Mera, who is always there to help me with various issues during the dissertation writing.

Professor Ban Wang in Stanford University gave me valuable advice and helped the revision of my essay on the “three prominences,” which is published in his edited book *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*. A portion of the Chapter 2 in the dissertation is rewritten from this essay and benefits from his insight on the Cultural Revolution model plays.

Lastly, my deepest appreciation goes to my parents Guanxiang Gu and Hongping Zheng, and my wife Meiyang Liang. Without their understanding and support the dissertation would not have been materialized. I thank my little son Jerry, who is always the warmest sunshine in my heart and leads me out of the rainy seasons in Seattle.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Produced and released almost sixty years ago during the Maoist period, *The Story of Liubao Village* (Liubao de gushi 柳堡的故事 1957, dir. Wang Ping) is still widely remembered in today's China. Based on and adapted from a real story, the film weaves a beautiful love story in a warm spring in the Jiangnan area. In the film, the New Fourth Army soldier Li Jin 李进 falls in love with the village girl Er Meizi 二妹子. After much hesitation, he follows the army to the battlefield, temporarily sacrificing his personal love for the sublime revolutionary ideal. The film presents the audiences with a happy ending: five years later Li returns to the village, and finds that Er Meizi has already become a communist leader in the village. Although the year of 1944 registered the rigid and endless battles in most part of China, the spring of Jiangnan, often associated with leisure and romance in the classical Chinese poems, is still filled with the windmills, willow leaves, light boats on the screen. The high-key lighting throughout the film sets the film apart from many other Maoist war films, where the gloomy life or death struggle is the dominant theme. The film is especially influential for the theme song *On a Sunny Day in the Spring* (Jiujiu yanyang tian 九九艳阳天), with its lyrics delicately written as:

On a sunny day in the Spring,
the eighteen-year-old brother tells you, little Ying Lian,
I will go across mountains and oceans
I will go for a long journey for two or three years,
I will go through storms of shots.

We can only meet each other again after the victory of the revolution.

九九那个艳阳天来哟

十八岁的哥哥呀告诉小英莲

这一去呀翻山又过海呀

这一去三年两载呀不回还

这一去呀枪如林弹如雨呀

这一去革命胜利呀再相见¹

No matter how beautiful and romantic the song sounds in the film, many soldiers still could not luckily find warm love when they came back from the battlefield. They died on the cold battlefield and were not able to wait and meet their lovers after the victory of the revolution. Many of them died as nameless martyrs, and were collectively commemorated through memorial service, cemetery burial, and literature/films during the Maoist period. Many of their families did not even know how they died and why they died. Their death are made abstract, and the Party usurp their bodies and minds to speak for them. They are claimed to die for “the Party,” for “the Nation,” or for “the people.” The family often received their cremation urn with a Party symbol on it (red star, Party emblem, etc.), abstracting their death with their bodies represented as ashes. A certificate of martyrdom will be issued to the family, if the family is lucky enough. Such a symbol can survive the family through many political turmoil later on. To exchange for the symbols of honor, martyrs’ death are re-made and narrated concretely by the Party. The abstract ideas are fleshed out through literature and films.

¹ All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated in the dissertation.

The real story in the Liubao Village was later unearthed to be tragic. The young soldier sacrificed his life on the battlefield, and never came back. The fiction *Story of Liubao* was adapted from the material on a troupe in the Eastern China Field Army (huadong yezhan jun 华东野战军). As a soldier in that troupe, Wang Hao later wrote an article in the newspaper and recorded the real story:

At that time the army soldiers and the villagers were really close to each other, like a big family...The young soldier found in his pocket a slip of paper writing ‘you are really good.’...he certainly also liked the villager girl (who wrote the scrip), but he knew that love relationship was not allowed in the army... They secretly fell in love.

Their love were finally discovered and reported to the company commander. At that time, the commander took such issue seriously, and reprimanded the young soldier, asking him to break up with her.

Later, the troupe went to the battlefield. That young soldier did not wait for the order and jumped out of the trench, and charged towards the enemies. The commander was shocked and he shouted out “Come back! Lie down!” But the young soldier did not listen. He ran straight to the enemies with the gun. The enemy army was scared as well and shot him to death. He sacrificed his life in this way.

The troupe returned to the village after the battle. The village girl could not find the young soldier, and asked the commander. The commander told her everything on the battlefield.

The village girl understood now. Her lover was criticized by the commander and could not take it anymore. But he was a revolutionary soldier and could not commit suicide.

Therefore, he bravely died under the enemies' gun.

After several days, villagers found that the girl hanged herself dead on a tree. The girl felt that the young soldier died for her, and she decided to follow him...²

While we may be amazed that the romantic story in the film *Story of the Liubao Village* turns out to have such a tragic ending, we are also reminded that martyrdom is narrated by parties who hold other agendas, no matter whether it is the Party, the authority, or various witnesses. The dead cannot speak, and the motivation and process of the death (why the martyr dies and how he or she dies) can only be represented, either by written words, oral storytelling, or film images. It is therefore imperative to critically investigate all the stories of martyrdom that are claimed to be real.

However, does the real story even exist?

The original concreteness of the incident is unavoidably gone once the incident transpires, leaving only the essentialized and abstract narration of the reminiscences from other agenda, with various self-interests involved in the testimony. Even though the testimony is from the eye-witness or even the dead martyr revives³, it is still not totally reliable since the testimony can be self-interested and purposefully fabricates the story, or trauma-plagued and unconsciously distorts the story.

On the other hand, it does not even quite matter whether Wang Hao's reminiscence of the

² Wang Hao, from *Tonight (Jinwan bao 今晚报)*. Cited from Qi Xiaoping, *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds*, pp.60-61.

³ Brain death is redeemed irreversible and the diagnosis of brain death is scientifically regarded as the legal death (Robert M. Sade, M.D, "Brain Death, Cardiac Death, and the Dead Donor Rule," pp.146–149.) However, during the war time of the 20th century China when the actual situation (such as the massive casualties, lack of medical equipment and medical staff) rendered the diagnosis of brain death unrealistically luxurious, most death were claimed or announced once the person stopped heart beating. Recent researches, however, show numerous examples on the continuation of the heart-beat after the heart-beat stops for hours. In that scenario, the dead person revives.

archetype of *The Story of Liubao* reflects the real historical truth or not. It provides the possibility of a different scenario of the martyr's motivation beyond the official adaptation. It blurs the boundary between suicide and martyrdom. Furthermore, Wang's account exposes the key gap of narration that is often neglected by the readers/audiences, namely, the surrogate speaker/thinker.

A surrogate is more than a substitute. The surrogate actively usurps the position of the original, speaks and acts for him/her. Unlike the substitute who accepts the subordinate position under the original, the surrogate deliberately annihilates the original and make believe that the thinking from the surrogate coincides with the thinking from the original. The narrator is a surrogate when speaking for the other person, consciously or unconsciously. Such characteristic of the narrator is even more obvious when he/she serves as an ideological agent.

However, the critical reading of the text exposes the unreliability of the real story and reveals the surrogate speaker/thinker. How does the village girl know that the young soldier is dying for her when the young soldier has already been dead? How does the narrator know that the village girl think in this way about her lover when she has been dead? How do the villagers know that the girl dies for her lover? How do the narrator assume the villagers think in that way? All these gaps point to a surrogate and omniscient narrator, which inherently contradicts the position as an eye-witness.

For most of the Maoist films, the Party often serves as an underlying omniscient narrator and the surrogate speaker/thinker, who leads the audience to accept and internalize all the ideological indoctrination in the films. In some other films in which there is a narrator present (voice-over or first-person narration), double surrogates occur. First, the narrator surrogates the character(s) in the film to speak. Second, the Party surrogates the narrator's role to speak. The

key question is, how does the Maoist ideology bridge that gap, persuade the audience to temporarily forget such incoherence? What are the mechanism for onscreen make-belief? Are there any uncontainable elements inside the fissures of the layered narrative of martyrdom and occasionally loom out? If there are, how do they manifest themselves and interact with the mainstream orthodox ideology? These are the key questions of the dissertation.

This dissertation investigates into the layered narratives of sacrifice and the cult of revolutionary martyrdom in films made in the PRC during Mao's reign (1949-1976), or in short, Maoist films. It addresses the cinematic representation of the male martyrs, female martyrs, foreigner martyrs, and various film genre twists in the dominant war film genre on the representation of martyrdom. Both during the Maoist era and in today's Chinese society, the words *lieshi* (martyr) and *xisheng* (sacrifice) were often used uncritically and ambiguously, leaving the ideological construction on the myth of martyrdom much room to examine.

The cinematic representation of voluntary self-sacrifice to death was one of the most painful yet powerful testimonies for the necessity of the Maoist revolution.⁴ The new-born China from 1949 depended to a large extent on the rhetoric of individual voluntary sacrifice to validate its revolutionary narrative. For wider dissemination of the Maoist ideology, film became the primary vehicle for narrating individual death into collective events, and engraving personal sacrifice onto public memories of the revolution.

Chang-tai Hung's recent monograph devotes a chapter on the "cult of the red martyr" in Mao's China.⁵ Hung delineates the formation of the martyrdom cult through memorial festivals and physical sites (such as cemeteries, monuments, etc.) in the Maoist China. I argue that film

⁴ The dissertation does not deal with sacrifice in its metaphorical signification, for example, "I sacrificed my whole night to attend a boring party with you." Sacrifice in this dissertation only refers to the scenario when one's life is threatened, and the actual death occurs.

⁵ See Chang-tai Hung, *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic*.

watching, as the most popular and accessible experience of mass entertainment during the Maoist era, played a no less significant role to cultivate the martyrdom cult. The celluloid sacrificial images, in various stages, indoctrinated the mass spectators' mental simulation of martyrdom, later to be modelled and potentially enacted in real life. The heroic sacrifice was performed repeatedly on the screen, internalized to be an organic part of the mass psychology, and reinforced through memorial festivals and physical sites.

Martyr(s), as words or images, frequently appeared on newspapers, films, textbooks, songs or propaganda banners, among many other media during the Maoist era. The heroic action of martyrdom naturalized mass perception, as if without martyrs' bloodshed sacrifice no one could live peacefully and happily under the protective motherhood of the Maoist nation-state. The Maoist cult of martyrdom was a nationwide phenomenon, a top-to-down policy strictly executed and secured by the Maoist ideology of death and sacrifice. I will refer to such an ideological control over citizen's death *necropolitics*.

Necropolitics Onscreen

While the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics has been widely discussed in Western academia and has recently shaped a new theoretical perspective for Modern China studies, necropolitics—the other side of the same coin—is a relatively new concept that has received less attention.⁶ In 2003, the South African scholar Achille Mbembe's essay "Necropolitics" was translated and introduced to the English language academia.⁷ If the Foucauldian concept of

⁶ For example, Hart and Negri (2000) and Agamben (1998)'s influential works incorporate "biopolitics" into their main theoretical frames. Sheldon Lu's *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics* provides a biopolitical perspective on modern Chinese literature and cinema.

⁷ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," pp. 11-40.

“biopolitics” unveils the governmental practices on the living conditions of human beings (such as health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race, etc), Mbembe argues that “biopolitics” does not adequately account for the various contemporary forms of death.⁸ By displaying an appalling “deadscape” manipulated by necropower, Mbembe shifts our attention to the governmental sovereignty that not only controls the living conditions, but also dictates who may live and who must die. Written in the context of the haunting 9/11 Attack on the World Trade Center and the rise of global terrorism, Mbembe’s essay provides an insight into resistance, sacrifice and terror in some third-world countries, perhaps in response to military intimidation, cultural subversion, and economic domination prosecuted by first-world countries.

I argue that the impact of necropower extends far beyond the specific globalization era, and the art of necropolitics is reflected widely and persistently in various narrative forms in any nation-state. Necropolitics is an essential part of nationalism, and the investigation of various narrative forms of necropolitics can provide key answers to Benedict Anderson’s question in his now classic *Imagined Communities*: what generates colossal sacrifices for nations when religious communities are declining?⁹

The dissertation focuses on one crucial constitutive part of necropolitics reflected in cinema: the narrative production of the national myth of martyrdom—individual’s voluntary subjugation of life to the power of death. Using primary materials from the Maoist films, the dissertation investigates various narratives of sacrifice and martyrdom, and the underlying mechanism of necropolitics.

⁸ Foucault *The Essential Foucault*, pp.202-207; Mbembe, “Necropolitics.”

⁹ Anderson *Imagined Communities*, Chapter 8

In premodern Chinese literary tradition, funerary writings—such as elegies (wanshi 挽诗 or lei 诔) and epitaphs (beiwén 碑文 or, muzhiming 墓志铭)—were important literary sub-genres that explored the merits and achievements of deceased persons in retrospect.¹⁰ Such elegies tended to draw much more attention if the deceased person sacrificed for the family, the dynasty or an ethical ideal such as righteousness (yi 义). In the Late Qing period, the intensified clashes between China and Western civilization brought new consciousness of modern nation-state to China. Late Qing intellectuals increasingly realized that China, both geographically and culturally speaking, was merely one of many nation-states in the world, rather than one that occupied a central position “under heaven” (tianxia 天下).¹¹ The rise of the modern national consciousness shaped a literary transformation of the funerary writings, both thematically and stylistically.

During the early 20th century, the nationalist ideology utilized the rhetoric of sacrifice and martyrdom to unite the Chinese nation and serve for multiple political tasks. The rhetoric of sacrifice was intensified by various narrative strategies during the Maoist era, and the film media rendered the images of martyrs widely disseminated and firmly established as an essential part of the national myth. It is no exaggeration to claim that Maoist ideology is inextricably intertwined with the art of necropolitics with the writings of sacrifice as its key manifestation.

Despite the centrality of necropolitics, its incorporation into the Maoist narrative systems has not been systematically explored. Although there are many scholarly works on Maoist literature and cinema in English and Chinese academia, most of them mention in passing the writings of sacrifice and martyrdom, or take the concept of sacrifice uncritically. For example,

¹⁰ Plaks, *Chinese Narrative*, p.343

¹¹ Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*.

Cui Shuqin points out socialist women's "psychological burdens of self-sacrifice" and notes that a socialist woman "put(s) everyone else's needs (husband, family, working unit, the state) above her own." Cui uses the term "self-sacrifice" metaphorically rather than literally to examine the Maoist discourse that "degender(s) female body and erase(s) sexual difference."¹² She fails, however, to further critically investigate the concept of sacrifice, the discursive implication of which are far more complex than a simple negation of femininity or an annihilation of any socially unacceptable. I use the concept of sacrifice literally (voluntary annihilation of one's life), and argues that sacrifice is a positively constructive rhetoric for Maoist necropolitics: Maoist discourse on sacrifice and martyrdom interpellates revolutionary subjects, justifies the government's secular power transmitted from a transcendental entity (the nation), and forecloses any leak or ambivalence during the process when individual identifies with the transcendental revolutionary ideals. Up to now there has been no monograph devoted to this topic, and this dissertation aims to contribute to the current China Studies scholarship.

To critically examine sacrifice and martyrdom in Maoist literature and cinema, it is imperative, first, to clarify and examines two key words—*xisheng* (牺牲 sacrifice) and *lieshi* (烈士 martyr)¹³—in their specific Chinese contexts. Most scholarships take these two words uncritically as if they share the same meanings and backgrounds as their Western counterparts from the Christian tradition. It is impossible, however, to study the cinematic representation of *xisheng* and *lieshi* without first knowing the specific Chinese connotations of these two words in

¹² Shuqing Cui, *Women through the Lens*, p.56

¹³ In Western culture, martyrdom means the death of a martyr or the value attributed to it. Chinese language does not have a word that exactly corresponds to the Western connotations of martyrdom. *Xun* 殉 might be a candidate, as *xunguo* 殉國 (sacrifice for one's nation) well matches. But *xun* can also be used in *xunqing* 殉情 (sacrifice for one's lover), or *xunca* 殉財 (die for money)—which are improper to use "martyrdom." Therefore, this introduction will investigate the Chinese word *lieshi*, the individual who conducts martyrdom instead.

their origins.¹⁴ How are their original meanings in premodern China developed to the modern China? How does necropolitics selectively conceal or foreground multiple connotations of *xisheng* and *lieshi* from premodern China to Maoist China? What is at stake for the Maoist necropolitics to manipulate the meanings of these two words?

***Xisheng*: The Manifestation of Necropower from the Premodern Rituals to the Maoist Cinema**

As the breakdown of the English word “sacrifice” into two roots [*sacra* (sacred rites) + *facere* (to do, perform)] clearly shows its etymological origin to ancient rites and performance, its Chinese counterpart *xisheng* 牺牲, as the “sacrificed animals,” is closely related to the sacrificial rites as early as Shang dynasty (approximately 1600 BC-1046 BC). The original meaning of *xisheng* means “the sacrificial animals for ritual purpose.”¹⁵ The connotation of *xisheng* gradually transforms from the sacrificial objects in premodern China to the subjects’ heroic death for the nation/state in modern China. Although the historical contexts vary greatly from dynasty to dynasty, some of the basic characteristics of *xisheng* still remain the same.

According to Xu Shen 许慎 (approx. 58-147) whose *Shuowen jiezi* 说文解字 is the first Chinese dictionary investigating character etymology, the character *xi* 牺 is not an *old character* 古字 (Xu follows Jia Kui 贾逵 (30-101)’s judgment on this issue). This means that *xi* appears neither in the oracle bone script in Shang Dynasty nor the bronzeware script in Zhou Dynasty.

¹⁴ Benefiting from Lydia Liu’s comprehensive study on the linguistic shift during the May Fourth period, we can assume that the words *xisheng* and *lieshi* are not translated from Japanese or any Western vocabularies (Liu, *Translingual Practice*). However, it is still waiting to be studied whether Japanese language has any influence on the semantic shift of these two words in modern Chinese language.

¹⁵ Wang Li, *Dictionary of Classical Chinese*.

The word *xisheng*, at latest, appears in the late Spring and Autumn Era. In *Zuozhuan* 左传, written by Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (approx. BC 502- BC 422), the king of Lu 鲁庄公 says, “in the sacrifices to the Gods I have trusted more to eagerness of heart than to costly displays. 牺牲玉帛，弗敢加也，必以信”¹⁶ According to Xu Shen, *xi* means “the sacrificial animals in worship sites” 宗庙之牲也, and *sheng* means “an entire ox” 牛完全也. Xu’s interpretations on the separate two characters perfectly correspond to the meaning of the word *xisheng* in *Zuozhuan*. Therefore, we can consider the original meaning of *xisheng* to be “animals sacrificed for ritual purpose,” as defined by the classical Chinese linguist Wang Li (1900-1986).¹⁷

Further investigation on various later scholarly interpretations of *xisheng* reveals more important implications of this word, which reflect the vicissitudes of necropolitical systems in Chinese history. *The Dictionary of Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字诂林 comes to be a handy resource because it collects various interpretations on the character *xi* and *sheng* from Qing scholars, who lead meticulous evidential studies 考证学 on historical interpretations of the two characters since the Spring and Autumn Era.¹⁸

For *xi* 牺, many scholars articulate its connotation of the *purity* of the sacrificed animals: “the king sacrifices the pure-colored ox (to the heaven), the warlords sacrifice the large oxen (to the heaven)” 天子以牺牛,诸侯以肥牛.¹⁹ The different grade and type of the sacrificed animals strictly parallel the hierarchy of the social status. The purity of *xi* is also noted by the renowned

¹⁶ “Cao Gui on War 曹刿论战,” from *Zuozhuan Zhuanggong shinian* 左传 • 庄公十年. Although some scholars argue that *Zuozhuan* was written during the early Warring States Period, most of the later scholars consider the author of *Zuozhuan* to be Zuo Qiuming, including Sima Qian 司馬遷 and Ban Gu 班固.

¹⁷ Wang Li, *Dictionary of Classical Chinese*.

¹⁸ Ding Fubao (ed). *The Dictionary of Shuowen Jiezi*.

¹⁹ “Summary of the Rules of Propriety,” Part 2, from *Books of Rites* 禮記 曲禮下

scholar Zheng Xuan (127-200), who claims “*xisheng* are the animals that have pure color and perfect (complete) hair”牺牲也，毛羽完具也，色纯。²⁰

Besides the connotation of purity, *xi* has two other underlying insinuations: performance and rareness. *The Dictionary of Shuowen Jiezi* mentions: “*xi* indicates performance”牺，戏也; “*xi* means rareness”牺，稀也。²¹ These two connotations echo with the primary meaning of *xi*, since the pure-colored animals are rare and they certainly serve for the ritual performance.

For the character *sheng* 牲, Kong Yingda 孔颖达 (574-648)’s annotation of *Zuozhuan* indicates: “*sheng* and *chu* is the same thing. The animals that people raise are called *chu*; the animals that people use together are called *sheng*.” 牲、畜一物，养之则为畜，共享则为牲。²² In this regard, *sheng* represents the animals that are going to be killed or sacrificed before many witnesses. Xu Shen points out the original meaning of *sheng* to be the entire sacrificial ox, but later *sheng* becomes the general category of the sacrificed animals. For example: “the six *sheng*” 六牲 means ox, horse, goat, pig, dog and rooster, with ox as the superior sacrificial animal.²³ The feature of *sheng* is its wholeness, as *Zuozhuan* indicates that a soon-to-be sacrificed ox is abandoned because mice eat its horn. 鬯鼠食郊牛角。改卜牛，鬯鼠又食其角，乃免牛²⁴.

Although different scholars of the Chinese classical language have their own opinions of *xi* and *sheng*, they agree upon some basic characteristics of *xisheng* as a compound word. The word stands for the category of sacrificial animals that are very carefully chosen according to the criterion of purity and wholeness. The differentiation on the grades and types of sacrificial

²⁰ Zheng Xuan’s annotation on *Zuozhuan*

²¹ *The Dictionary of Shuowen Jiezi*

²² Kong Yingda’s annotation on *Zuozhuan*

²³ From *Shuowen tongxun dingshen* 說文通訓定聲, in *The Dictionary of Shuowen Jiezi*

²⁴ “Chenggong shinian,” from *Zuozhuan*

animals is determined by the sacrificer's social status. The qualified sacrificial animal for the superior ruler is rare, and the sacrificial rites are conducted as public performances.

How, then, do the sacrificial animals and rites manifest the necropower in different dynasties in premodern China? What is the basic mechanism of necropolitics that modern China has inherited from the premodern China?

According to the recent archeological discovery and scholarly readings of the oracle bones, Shang-dynasty governors particularly emphasized the importance of grand sacrificial rituals, killing animals and even human beings to offer to *tian* (天 heaven), the spiritual beings or ancestors.²⁵ Ge Zhaoguang argues that the massive sacrificial rites in the Shang dynasty show Shang people's attempt to put the mystical power in order to understand the nature of *tian*.²⁶ But Ge does not mention that underlying the desire of knowledge there lies deep a desire for necropower. These sacrificial animals (or human beings) are the surrogates symbolizing the process of power transmission from heaven to the earth. The heavenly power is unknown, but men can transfer that power down to earth, and render it understandable and maneuverable by killing sacrificial animals or human beings in an orderly and symbolic way. Therefore, I regard the sacrificial rite not only as a symbolic solution to the incomprehensibility of the appalling heavenly power, but also as a symbolic demonstration of the validity of the governor's secular necropower to rule the human society in order.

²⁵ An oracle bone script writes: "offer three cows to the Eastern Mother" 燎於東母三牛. According to Chen Mengjia's explanation, "燎" is one of the many forms of offering sacrifices (ji 祭), and the Eastern Mother indicates the sun. (Chen Mengjia, 1981, p.574.). For the evidence of killing human beings as sacrifices, refer to the archeological discovery of the relic to worship the Earth God in tongshan qiuwan 銅山丘灣社祀遺址 in Shang Dynasty. According to Yu Weichao's account, next to four megaliths symbolizing the Earth God lie about twenty skeletons. Their heads were smashed by stones and obviously, these people were human sacrifices. (Yu Weichao, "tongshan qiuwan shangdai shesi yiji de tuiding" 銅山丘灣社祀遺址的推定, in *Xianqin lianghan kaoguxue lunji* 先秦兩漢考古學論集, Beijing: wenwu chubanshe, 1985, p.55

²⁶ Ge Zhaoguang, *History of the Chinese Thoughts*, Vol I.

Sacrificial rites in the Shang dynasty are the initial documented manifestation of necropolitics in Chinese civilization. From the Shang dynasty to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), sacrificial rites constitute an essential part of necropolitics in pre-modern China. Sacrificial rites were increasingly regulated and executed with more strict rules during the Zhou dynasty. The Han dynasty (BC 206- AD 220) incorporated sacrificial rites into the Confucius political system to symbolize the strictly fixed hierarchical order. From the Jin dynasty (265-420) to the Tang dynasty (618-907), the ups and downs of Daoism and Sinicized Buddhism complicated the univocality of the rigorous Confucian ritual system. The Song dynasty (960-1279) reinforced the Confucian rhetoric of necropolitics, until the impact of Western culture in the Late Qing period clashed all the confidence on the legitimacy of traditional Chinese value system. This simplistic guidance map, of course, cannot cover the vicissitudes of sacrificial rites for over three thousand years of premodern China.²⁷ While the dissertation addresses the lingering Confucian necropolitics from the Late Qing period to the Republican Era (1911-1949), reflected in the Chinese films of that period, it does not aim to lead a historical research on various sacrificial rites as the manifestation of necropower in premodern China. Rather, the focus is on the persistence and continuation of necropower—with the sacrificial rites as its manifestation—from premodern China to modern China.

Although the rawness and cruelty of sacrificial rites in Shang Dynasty have been gradually annihilated—using human beings as *xisheng* are rarely found in the Confucian ritual system, the basic discursive practice of sacrifice still lingers: the sacrificial animals are not only the communicative medium between a human society and a transcendental power, but also the *symbolic surrogates demonstrating the validity of power transmission from a transcendental*

²⁷ See Chen Lie, *The Chinese Sacrificial Culture*.

being to the secular rulers. The carefully chosen sacrificial animals are disposable objects, but they cannot become the symbol of sacredness until they are killed.²⁸ The supreme sacrificer (the king or the emperor as the heaven's sole agent) is the only one who can sacrifice the purest and flawless oxen to demonstrate his uttermost sovereign of necropower, which determines what to kill, how to kill, and killing for what. The sacrificial rite is carried out in an orderly and systematic way to showcase the effectiveness of necropower to rule over not only the sacrificial rite, but also the human society as a whole.

Necropower is transmitted or transformed twice during the sacrificial rite. The first time occurs when the ruler (governor, king or emperor) demonstrates his legitimacy to inherit the necropower from heaven (or a transcendental power) by killing (or demanding to kill) the sacrificial animals and contributing them to heaven in return. The second time, which brings more profound influence to necropolitics, occurs when the legitimate necropower that the ruler gains from heaven is transformed into *any form of secular necropower* to govern the human society. If the ruler can demand to kill the purest and flawless animal and sacrifice it to a transcendental being during the rite, the ruler can also claim his legitimacy to kill any person in the group, and sacrifice him/her for a transcendental ideal (such as the Confucian ideal and the nation as an ideological construct). The performance of the sacrificial rite in front of many witnesses (such as the emperor's relatives and officials) renders the necropower potentially threatening to anyone, and the later historical documentation of sacrificial rites further expands the influence of necropower to the whole society. Such transmission of necropower from sacrificial rites to secular human society transcends the temporal and spatial limitation of sacrificial rites (e.g., twice a year, on the top of the Mountain Tai) and makes possible the

²⁸ René Girard points out the dilemma of the sacrificial animals. The sacrificial animals have to be killed in order to be sacred. But they must have certain sacred elements to be selected and killed. See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

execution of necropolitics *anytime* and *anywhere*. And, the execution of the necropower not only forms the collective identity, but also the personal identity, since it is through the realization of other people's death and the regime's capacity to kill that the personal identity can be formed.

However, when necropower extends to the human society, its appearance of bare killing has to be disguised and the rhetoric of self-sacrifice is developed to ensure the execution of necropower under a benevolent sugarcoating. The Confucian ideal, which emphasizes benevolence 仁 and righteousness 义, considers the Legalism 法家's utilitarian principle of "punishment and killing" 刑罚 to be brutal and can not bring persistent effect to the harmony of human society.²⁹ Confucian ideal relies on the inherent moral imperative rather than the external threatening power to maintain the stability of human society. Therefore, although the word *xisheng* is not necessarily used, the rhetoric of self-sacrifice can be mostly found from Confucian ideals such as righteousness, loyalty 忠, filial piety 孝³⁰, or Sinicized Buddhism' ideal on the abandonment of one's body to achieve a social good or a spiritual purity.³¹

Xisheng gradually develops from a noun (expendable and passive animals) to a verb (voluntarily die), and in modern Chinese it means "give up one's life for a just cause." 为正义事业舍弃生命.³² Although the original brutality of *xisheng* has been gradually put into oblivion in modern China, its essential characteristics from premodern China still haunt the necropolitical discourse today. In summary, these characteristics include:

²⁹ *History of the Chinese Thoughts*, p.262.

³⁰ Mencius says, "I desire life, and I also desire rightness. If I cannot have both of them, I will give up life and take rightness. 生，亦我所欲也，义，亦我所欲也；二者不可得兼，舍生而取义者也。" As the prominent scholars in Song Confucianism, Chen Yi 程颐 notes, "Death by starvation is preferable to loss of chastity 饿死事极小，失节事极大！"

³¹ See the story of Sushanti, who slices the flesh off his own body to feed his parents. From Chung Tan ed. *Dunhuang Art: Through the Eyes of Duan Wenjie*, p.112.

³² *Modern Chinese Language Dictionary* 现代汉语大词典

- 1) The *xisheng* manifests the validity of secular necropower transmitted from a transcendental power.
- 2) The *xisheng* becomes sacred only after it is negated (killed).
- 3) The *xisheng* is carefully chosen, according to the grade of purity and entirety of its body, to represent and justify the social status of the sacrificer.
- 4) The body of the *xisheng* is expendable and disposable, but the spirit of *xisheng* lingers to function in a continuous manner.
- 5) The *xisheng* as the sacrificed object is killed in a performative and ritualistic way, preferably repeated endlessly in the society.

All these characteristics of the *xisheng* from the premodern China still remain, albeit through variations, in the Maoist ideology, manifested by the Maoist cinema. These lingering characteristics manifest the necropower of the political regime. Cinema, by its nature of standardized repetition and powerful indoctrination by images, is an ideal form for the modern ritual of sacrifice. Through the cinematic representations, the Maoist necropower inherits the major characteristics listed above from the premodern *xisheng* ritual.

- 1 The voluntary death of the Maoist martyrs on the screen validates the power from a transcendental ideal, namely, the Maoist communist revolution. Secular death and the transcendental ideal is connected via the representation of the sublime.
- 2 Maoist martyrs are only sublimely sacred after being killed. Before death, they are ordinary or even nameless.
- 3 Maoist martyrs are carefully chosen from various representative groups, including men, women, children, minority ethnicity, foreigners, etc. They validate the inclusiveness and universality of the communist revolution. These people are pure in the communist belief

in the beginning of the film, or is purified during the process of the socialist education or through the revolutionary maturation. At the moment of sacrifice, martyrs are required to show the purity on their unshakable communist belief on the screen. There is almost no exception about it.

- 4 The body of the martyr is concealed on the screen since it is the indigestible abject.

Audiences only see the abstract and sanitary form of martyr's body: usually the cremation urn or the tombstone, with Party's symbol stamped on them. But the spirit of the martyr is everlasting even though his/her body is annihilated. Martyr's spirit is often represented, enshrined, and usurped by the Party symbols, such as the Red Flag, and Party badges.

- 5 Films can be shown repeatedly and endlessly, so that film media serves as an effective tool in the ritualistic Maoist society. Especially during the Cultural Revolution period when the release of new films were highly limited, the repetition of the authority-sanctioned films overwhelmingly interpellated the audiences to turn their heads around and internalize the dominant ideology.

Although the Maoist ideology interpellates the citizen-subject to *xisheng* (sacrifice, used here as a verb) for the newly-built nation/state, the original meaning of *xisheng* as a sacrificial animal or object still lingers. The Maoist necropolitics design the rhetoric of *xisheng* to foreground its discursive construct of self-sacrifice 自我牺牲, while maximally concealing its original facet of being sacrificed. However, the boundary between the sacrificed subject/object as martyrs (self-sacrifice) and as scapegoats (forced to sacrifice) is still blurry. As we investigate various cinematic representations of *xisheng* in the Maoist films, we can see constant struggles between the ideological maneuver that interpellates the subject to sacrifice, and the power of cinema that reveals the martyr as an object or abject to be sacrificed.

***Lieshi*: The Paradoxical Coexistence of Unsubmissiveness and Discipline**

When the necropolitical discourse of *xisheng* shifts its emphasis from the sacrificed objects (animals) to the self-sacrificed subjects (human beings), *lieshi*—the subject who makes the sacrifice—also witnesses a semantic transformation. The etymological investigation of *lieshi* 烈士 in premodern China shows a different trajectory from *xisheng*. If *xisheng* refers to the sacrificial animals to be expended and consumed in the ritual performance, *lieshi*, on the contrary, is characterized by one's unbending and unsubmitive subjectivity. According to Xu Shen, *lie* 烈 means the ferocity of fire 火猛也; and *shi* 士 shares the meaning of 事, referring to those “who takes the position of doing things” 士者，事也。³³ Xu Shen's explanation of *shi* is not able to pinpoint what specific position *shi* takes to do things, and what these things are. Thanks to Yu Yingshi's monograph tracing the etymology and evolution of the word *shi* from the Spring and Autumn Era to the Qing dynasty, we can know that *shi* mainly refers to the group of intellectuals taking positions as government officials.³⁴ Although at times *shi* can rely on their control of the cultural discourse to be differentiated from *li* (吏 functional political officials), *shi* is still confined by their secular positions in government. As Mencius 孟子 (372-289 BC) notes, “an officer's being in office... is like the ploughing of the husbandman 士之仕也，犹农夫之耕，” *shi*'s government positions and social status render them more or less involved in the political issues in premodern China.³⁵

³³ *Shuowen Jiezi* 《白虎通·爵》

³⁴ Yu Yingshi, *Scholars and Chinese Culture*, Chapter 1.

³⁵ “Teng Wen Gong,” Part II, from *The Works of Mencius*, p.371.

Lieshi, however, is different from *shi*, as *lie* implies the fire that is potentially too ferocious to be under control. *Lieshi* originally refers to “the dignified and ambitious person” 有节气有壮志的人,³⁶ whose subjectivity can transcend the entanglement with the regulating political power. As Hanfeizi 韩非子 (ca. 280–233 BC) notes, “...those who like fame but want no office, the world calls heroic patriots (*lieshi*).而好名义不仕进者, 也谓之烈士,” a *lieshi* does not need to take a government position, but he must stand firmly on this personal ambition and virtue.³⁷ Sima Qian (ca. 145 or 135 BC–86 BC) regards Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齐 as “*lieshi* dying for honor” 烈士徇名, and these two figures die precisely because of their refusal to be incorporated in the regulating political system. Unlike its connotation in modern China, *lieshi* in premodern China does not even need to die, as shown from Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220)’s poem “*lieshi* retains his high aspirations even in old age 烈士暮年, 壮心不已,” and Yuan drama *Dong Suqin*, “Precious swords are sold to *lieshi*, rouge and powder are given to beauties 宝剑卖与烈士, 红粉赠与佳人.”³⁸

It is not clear yet when and how *lieshi*, whose unyielding subjectivity to the political discourse is foregrounded, becomes a key rhetoric of necropolitics which transforms *lieshi* to be an object sacrificed for a “just cause” in modern China. A possible explanation is that *lieshi* also belongs to the category that Japanese language borrows from classical Chinese to translate certain European concept, and modern Chinese adopts the Japanese translation and reincorporates the word into its language system.³⁹ In Japanese, 烈士 (れっし) takes its origin

³⁶ *Modern Chinese Language Dictionary*, p.4093.

³⁷ Chapter XLV. “Absurd Encouragements 诡使,” from *Hanfeizi*

³⁸ Cao Cao, *Steps through the Illustrious Gate* 步出夏门行. Anonymous, *Dong Suqin* 冻苏秦

³⁹ However, Lydia Liu does not include *lieshi* in this category, although many modern concepts such as *geming* 革命 and *jieji* 階級 do appear in this category.

from those who died for the Menji Restoration and Revolution,⁴⁰ and it is possible that the Chinese reincorporation of this word ever since the Late Qing period bears the mark of dying for the construction of a modern nation-state. In modern Chinese language, *lieshi* 烈士 refers to “those sacrifice their lives for a just cause”为正义事业而牺牲的人.⁴¹ “The just cause” is a maneuverable category, and its fluid boundary is contingent upon a value system within a specific social context.

Since a society’s value system is not a natural form, but a mixture of political imposition and social response, the concept of *lieshi* becomes a crucial rhetoric of necropolitics and a contested site between the political and public discourse. During the Republican Period, *lieshi* was yet to be an official title acknowledged and conferred by the government. In October 1950, the PRC issued the *Tentative Regulations on the Praise, Honor, Comfort and Compensation of the Revolutionary Casualties* 《革命工作人员伤亡褒恤暂行条例》, which officially entitles the honor of *lieshi* to “those who sacrifice their lives for fighting enemies or maintaining the public good”凡对敌斗争或因公光荣牺牲者，给予烈士称号.⁴² During the Maoist period, *lieshi* refers mainly to those who die voluntarily for the revolutionary ideal, for the national unification, or for the general public good. The definition of *lieshi* is increasingly blurry in the post-socialist China as the value system becomes uncertain, which leads to many social debates on the acknowledgement of *lieshi* in some grey-area scenarios. Although various voices contest the naming system of *lieshi* in China today (especially via the cyberspace), the PRC government

40 フリー百科事典『ウィキペディア (Wikipedia)』<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/烈士> (accessed 02/07/2016)

⁴¹ *Modern Chinese Language Dictionary*, p4093, Entry of *lieshi*.

⁴² <http://www.flssw.com/fagui/info/3504303/>

is still the only authority that can officially name and acknowledge *lieshi*, a title of supreme honor and dignity.

Essentially *lieshi* is the product from the necropolitical naming system, which bestows a national value to a deceased person and transforms his concrete and particular death into an abstract national symbol. As George Mosse describes martyrdom as the “nationalization of death,” the national discourse substitutes *lieshi*’s position to speak, probably even distorts and usurps his/her original intention.⁴³ Although *lieshi* is still regarded as the embodiment of virtue today, such virtue is no longer the individual ambition and dignity against the political interpellation, but the collective virtue endorsed by political ideology, such as patriotism and selflessness.

The essential characteristics of *xisheng* and its related discursive functions maintained from premodern China to Maoist China. However, its appearance of bare killing had to be disguised and the rhetoric of self-sacrifice needed to be developed to ensure the execution of necropower under a benevolent sugarcoat. *Lieshi* as the self-sacrificial subjects precisely meet this need, and the mutation from *xisheng* as the sacrificed animals to *lieshi* as the voluntary sacrificial heroes shows the importance of the discursive shift from killing the passive sacrificed objects to calling for self-sacrificial subjects.

This discursive shift, along with the paradoxical coexistence of passivity and activity in the connotations of *lieshi* and *xisheng*, results in the ambiguous representation of sacrifice and martyrdom in Maoist films. How and why did the Maoist necropolitics design the rhetoric of *xisheng* to foreground self-sacrifice, while concealing its original facet of being sacrificed? Could the disposable sacrificed bodies return spectrally to contest the dominant Maoist

⁴³ George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, p.37.

necropolitics? Can we clearly delineate the boundary between the sacrificed subject/object as *lieshi* (self-sacrifice) and as scapegoats (forced to sacrifice) in Maoist narrative systems? Finally, what makes us *take for granted* of martyrs' voluntary sacrifice for the nation? All these issues will tease out the demystification of the necropolitical construction of *lieshi* and *xisheng* during the Maoist Era.

Maoist Necropolitics Onscreen: The Absent Causes and the Transcendental Revolutionary Ideals

While the dissertation mainly focuses on the necropolitical discourse in the Maoist cinema, I will briefly trace back the trajectory of the cinematic representation of sacrifice in the Chinese cinema before the Maoist Era in each chapter. The purpose is twofold: first, by investigating the history and the representative films on sacrifice and martyrdom during the Republican Era, I try to reveal that Maoist cinema does not come out as a whimsical invention, or is revolutionarily brand new. On the contrary, it is deeply rooted in the Chinese film and cultural tradition. Films from the left-wing cinema act as the harbinger and greatly influence the Maoist films, both in theme and in style. Second, by investigating the ever-shifting social contexts and the synchronic co-existence of various discourses in the Republican China, I reveal how the ambiguous literary representations of sacrifice manifest an unstable relationship among the self, the family and the nation. I argue that it is precisely these conflicting discourses of sacrifice that the Maoist films tries to unify and fixate into an unequivocal revolutionary necropolitics.

Since Mao Zedong's 1942 "Yan'an Talks," the characterization of positive and heroic figures became the central task of the communist literature and cinema. The decree of "Provisional Regulations on the Compensation for the Revolutionary Casualties" defined the

Maoist *lieshi* to those who died voluntarily for the revolutionary ideal, for the national unification, or for the general public good. The PRC government was the only authority that can officially name and acknowledge *lieshi*, a title of supreme honor and dignity. Therefore, these *lieshi* were worth unreserved and exaggerated eulogies in the Maoist films.

Maoist necropolitics regulated all the cinematic representations of martyrdom during the Maoist Era (1949-1976). However, as early as the Yan'an Period (1936-1949), Maoist necropolitics had already been witnessed by Mao's essay "Wei renmin fuwu" (为人民服务 "Serve the People") (1944), which differentiates the noble death for the revolutionary purpose from the ordinary and trivial death. The impact of Maoist necropolitics still lingered for several years after Mao's death in 1976, as reflected from many Post-Mao but pre-Deng films.

During almost forty years under Maoist necropower, national grief over martyrs' sacrifice was even more important than national celebration of the triumphs over enemies. Questions arise accordingly: Why was the establishment of the martyrdom myth important for a socialist nation? What were the various narrative strategies to realize this goal? Besides the characterization of the male fallen soldiers as the archetype of socialist martyrdom, what is at stake to characterize women martyrs and foreign martyrs in Maoist literature and films? Finally, can the repressed original connotations—*xisheng* as the sacrificial animals for ritual performance, and *lieshi* as the individual with unsubmitive characteristic—loom large to potentially contest the dominant Maoist necropolitics?

These questions tease out the main theoretical concerns of the dissertation: the mechanism of Maoist necropolitics on the screen. I argue that the *myth* of the Maoist martyrdom greatly lies in *the absent causes* that originate from the transcendental revolutionary ideals. As *xisheng* in premodern China justified the process of power transmission from a transcendental being to a

secular regime, Maoist necropolitics also utilized the image of martyrdom to symbolize the transcendental revolutionary ideals. If the German philosopher Fichte is correct in arguing that any nation form is ultimately built upon the belief on the transcendence of finitude, the socialist nation also relied on the myth of martyrdom to embody the socialist ideals that ultimately transcended the finitude. In many Maoist films, martyrs have firm belief that their revolutionary spirits continue everlastingly even after their bodies are extinct. The socialist ideals reflected in cinema justified and elevated the martyrs' secular action of killing themselves to the ideal level of revolutionary sacrifice. These socialist ideals, however, could never be realized completely and were catachresis that lacked sufficient referents. In other words, any socialist ideal essentially stood for a collective historical experience rather than a personal lived experience. Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 each discusses one transcendental revolutionary ideal as the "absent cause" to move History forward in a teleological way: the perfect communist future (represented from the omnipotent sacrificial heroes under the literary principle of the "three prominences," Chapter 2), the ideal type of socialist women (Chapter 3), and "the absolute spirit of selflessness" (represented from the film on the foreign martyr Dr. Bethune, Chapter 4).

Chapter 2 traces the trajectory of the male martyrdom from the left-wing cinema to the Maoist films. It examines the mutation on the representation of the male martyrdom, especially the power of the revolutionary transcendental ideal as the driving force for the voluntary sacrifice. I argue that the gap between the catachrestic transcendental revolutionary ideals and the empirical realities could only be filled by producing an ideological illusion of the *virtual reality* based on secular realization of these ideals. Ban Wang's monograph *The Sublime Figure of History* shows that the sublime is crucial to the representation of socialist martyrdom (Wang, 1997), but it is worth further exploring the stakes in "the representation of the unrepresentable"

(according to the Kantian concept of sublime) under the Maoist necropolitics. I argue that the sublime representation of martyrdom functioned to fill in the gap and demonstrated the validity of the transcendental revolutionary ideals as the “constitutive impossibility.”⁴⁴ A good case in point for the idealistic characterization of the male martyrdom is from “the three prominences,” the foremost literary principle during the Cultural Revolution Period. It required the main heroic figure be unreservedly elevated into an overblown image of perfection composed of all heroic merits. Although “the three prominences” was denounced by many post-Maoist critics as ridiculous or insane, I will reveal its validity under the context of the ritualistic performances of the heroic martyrdom, and contend that it is precisely the “impossibility” of this principle that rendered the representation of the male sacrifice sublime and powerful.

Chapter 3 examines the trajectory of the ideal socialist female martyr archetype in the Maoist films. Ever since the tradition of *lienü* 烈女, the absent cause that regulates what women should be has already been set in an abstract form. The chapter investigates the problem on the scholarly discussion of the regulated socialist femininity that can potentially essentialize and abstract the lived experience of the female martyrs. In premodern China, *lieshi* only referred to the male subjects, while the word *lienü* indicated the ideal women who hold firm to the female virtues even under extremely threatening conditions. For example, woman who gives up her life to protect her virginity and chastity is often regarded as a *lienü*. Lee Haiyan argues that in the “Confucian Structure of Feeling,” men were able to directly sacrifice for the nation, while women’s sacrifice for nation had to be mediated by the family or romantic nexus⁴⁵. To redress such a differentiation on sacrifice between sexes, the 1950 decree of “Provisional Regulations on

⁴⁴ See Žižek (1989, 2003), Butler (1993)

⁴⁵ Lee *Revolution of the Heart*, p.91

the Compensation for the Revolutionary Casualties” rendered the title of *lieshi* neutral in gender—*lieshi* could refer to both male and female martyrs, and the word of *lienü* almost disappeared in the Maoist vocabulary. It can be argued from this point that the abolishment of sexual differentiation on the title of *lieshi* witnessed the “erasure of femininity”.⁴⁶ However, I argue that female martyrdom on the screen under the Maoist necropolitics was far more complicated than the simple “erasure of sexual difference.” The interaction among the female martyrs/male characters/omnipresent Party symbols in the films reveal the gender problem under the ideological interpellation. The end of the chapter suggests a real feminist perspective going back to the original historical concreteness, rather than falling into the trap again to reduce the femininity into a symbol or a concept under the male perspective.

Li Yang’s monograph on socialist realism argues that the fundamental structure of socialist modernity is based on binary oppositions.⁴⁷ Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 discuss two sets of binary oppositions: foreign/domestic martyrs on the screen and orthodox/unorthodox representations of martyrs. By a close reading of the film *Dr. Bethune* (白求恩大夫, 1964, dir. Zhang Junxiang), Chapter 4 unveils the entangled implications of foreignness and selflessness in constructing and keeping the sameness of the revolutionary individual and collective identity. In December 21, 1939, Mao Zedong wrote an article in memory of Dr. Bethune as a foreign martyr, calling for every Chinese communist to learn from his “true Communist spirit,” namely, “the spirit of absolute selflessness.”⁴⁸ I argue that the revolutionary individual identity, the selflessness as Mao called for, was a *void*. But it is exactly such a “void” that kept the homogeneity and sameness of the individual identity which defied any change occurred in time and became permanent. In this

⁴⁶ Cui *Women through the Lens*, Dai, *Wuzhong fenjing*,

⁴⁷ Li *Kangzheng suming zhilu*.

⁴⁸ Mao Zedong, “In Memory of Norman Bethune” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Vol.II.

regard, it is also an absent cause that drives the communist History forward. As Mao's essay was required to recite for everyone, the Cultural Revolution witnessed a widespread public mourning of Dr. Bethune who selflessly sacrificed for the Chinese revolution. The assimilated foreignness not only reinforced the popular identification with Chinese nationalism, but also imposed the same responsibility of selfless sacrifice on every Chinese people.

Maoist Necropolitics Onscreen: Subject Formation, Performativity, and the Haunting Objects

Besides the absent causes as the major mechanism of the Maoist necropolitics on the screen, Maoist necropolitics also alternately calls martyr-as-subject and martyr-as-non-subject. Etienne Balibar argues that the national narrative calls people to be subjects and non-subjects, alternately requiring their passivity and activity—passivity to be the obedient constitutive elements of the State apparatus, and activity to take part in the permanent revolution.⁴⁹ This precisely echoes with the etymological origin that reveals the paradoxical coexistence of passivity and activity in *lieshi* and *xisheng*. The Maoist necropolitics tried to conceal its objectification of *lieshi* by producing freedom and organismic metaphor as its key rhetoric. As modern free agents and rational subjects, *lieshi* voluntarily sacrifice for the nation as if they fight to protect a part of their own bodies. The Maoist necropolitics produced an illusion that every *lieshi* partook a part of the virtual body of the nation. However, the only sovereignty lies in the hands of those who can call whether a scenario is sacred or not, and in Maoist necropolitics the only sovereign subject was

⁴⁹ Balibar, "Citizen Subject."

the Party (and the embodied nation).⁵⁰ The dissertation investigates the Party's usurpation of the martyr's voice by the alternate calling of subject and object in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.

Similar to the performative sacrificial rites in premodern China, Maoist necropolitics also relied on the ritualistic representation of martyrdom and its reiteration and performance in public. To fix people's identification with martyrs' sacrifice, repetitive performances had to be carried out in public to maximally foreclose the leak and ambivalence within the identification process.⁵¹ Since imaginary identification was crucial to suturing any individual identity into oneness, Maoist ideology created the image of martyrdom to blur the boundary between fantasy and the empirical reality, between fiction and history as well. Most socialist literature and films on martyrdom claimed their authenticity by drawing original material from "real person and real facts" in historical documents. By the ritualistic performances of these martyrs' stories in public, the representation of martyrdom in literary or cinematic form was gradually indistinct from martyrdom in reality. Literature and films *spoke for history* and modified the historical documents, from which the next round of literature and films drew *real* materials. It is this endless circle that rendered blurry between history and the representation of history. During this process, history became fiction, and fiction became history.

Although the Maoist discourse minimizes the inherent contradiction of the leftist literary principle, designs the rhetoric of *xisheng* to foreground its discursive construct of self-sacrifice, while concealing its original facet of being sacrificed, martyr is still a sacrificed object functioned to serve the necropolitical system. As the abject being, martyr's corpse needs to be concealed from the people (audience)'s vision, and is ultimately disposable and put into oblivion. However, will the disposable sacrificed body return like a specter to contest the dominant

⁵⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.67

⁵¹ See Hall *Questions of Cultural Identity*; Butler, *Bodies that Matter*; Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*.

necropolitics? Will the highly homogeneous representation of martyrs still has its underlying variation to break through the formulaic representation, at least momentarily?

Chapter 5 investigates some of the unconventional representation of martyrdom in the film genres that cross over with the war film genre. These film genres have their genetic power to refuse the political interference and aim to entertain the audiences. These film genres include comedy, suspense thriller, and children's films. The chapter examines the possible genre power that are unquenchable and uncontrollable by the dominating ideology. These genre twists potentially expose the original paradox and the inherent problems of the Maoist martyrs on the screen. After all, Maoist martyrs are still at once celebrated and marginalized: being subjects, objects and abjects at the same time.

The investigation on the different film genres other than the orthodox war film genre reveals that although the representation of the climatic martyrdom appear similar on the surface, film still has its unique characteristics and cannot be reduced to and treated as a singular group of the "Maoist film." Although the dominating ideology is overwhelming during the Maoist period, there are still crucial vicissitudes from one film to the other for the representation of sacrifice, reflecting interaction among different dominating agenda, film genre, and director's personal artistic preference in each film.

Chapter 2

The Cinematic Representation of Male Sacrifice in the Maoist Films: From the May Fourth to the “Three Prominences”

As is shown in the etymological study from the Introduction, sacrificial animals (*xisheng*) in premodern China were carefully chosen, according to the grade of purity and entirety of their bodies, to symbolize different social status of the sacrificers (who kill the sacrificial animals). Reflecting the conflicting discourses of sacrifice during the 1930s China, films such as *Daybreak* (天明 1933, dir. Sun Yu), *Little Toys* (小玩意 1933, dir. Sun Yu) or *The Girl in Isolated City* (孤城烈女 1936, dir. Zhu Shilin) characterize the impure female sacrificial protagonists such as the heroic prostitutes, flirtatious and sexy female martyrs, in the transitional period when the traditional Confucian value was at odds with the “New Women” ideology.

Such characterizations of the impure martyrs were rarely seen in the Maoist films. Maoist necropolitical ideology required puritanical images of martyrdom to embody the purest socialist ideals that ultimately transcend the finitude and eulogize the communist spiritual permanence after the bodily death of the martyrs. If the sacrificed is selected to embody the future communist ideal, it has to be pure enough to symbolize the imaginable future ideal, rather than to mirror the impure social reality.

This chapter focuses on the cinematic representation of male sacrifice, which I regard as the manifestation of the purest communist ideal of martyrdom. Compared with female martyrs that are traditionally bonded by family and whose sacrifices are more emotionally charged, male martyrdom is represented as based on male martyr’s mature and rational choice and largely free

from emotional impulse.⁵² To keep the spiritual purity of the martyrs, Maoist films appear to be notorious for its homogeneity in representing male sacrifice, even to the extent of banality. Most onscreen male martyrdom occurs in the genre of war film, the dominant genre that intends to propagate the orthodox Maoist ideology. Although it is not clearly stated in the official documents, there lies an underlying formula tacitly acknowledged by the party and artists, and governs the cinematic representation of male sacrifice in the Maoist films.

Questions arise: first, what is this underlying formula governing the homogenous representation of male martyrdom? Second, does the claim of homogeneity run the risk of the reductionist view on the Maoist films, thus neglecting the variation? Third, why do we still need to study the homogeneity and its underlying mechanism, having known that the majority of the Maoist films are the products of a gigantic state propaganda machine under a standardized formula?

Homogeneity and Variation in the Representation of Martyrdom

I use the word “homogeneity” to indicate a constant formula that prevails the representation of onscreen martyrdom in most of the Maoist war films. While I acknowledge the variations of representing martyrdom in some Maoist war films that cross over the war genre boundary, I argue that the majority of the Maoist war films still follow a standardized formula in representing martyrdom, especially when treating male martyrdom in the climax sequence of the protagonist’s

⁵² In Chapter 3 I discuss in detail that female martyrs traditionally sacrifice for the nation/state with male mediation, either for the husband or for a male member in the patriarchal family system. In this regard, female martyrs mostly die for the nation in an *indirect* way. The Maoist regime intends to liberate women from the family bonding and female martyrs seemed to die directly for the nation as equally as the male counterparts. However, I argue that the traditional family value and male mediation still exist during such martyrdom. It is the nation or the CCP that is transformed into the symbol of a Big Family that substitutes the small family.

heroic death.

One of the recent scholarly book on Maoist cinema is from Zhuoyi Wang's *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*. Wang insightfully points out the problem of the previous scholarly consensus on the homogeneity of the Maoist films, which assumes "a uniform group of party-state elites monopolized the power to determine meaning and implemented it top-down in film production, distribution, and reception." Instead, Wang argues that Maoist films did not convey the ideological messages in the closed texts, they are "discursive sites open to multifarious struggles and conflicts during the revolutionary cycles, which did not follow a single, coherent propagandistic line in the first place."⁵³

The dissertation acknowledges the variations of the Maoist films. Therefore, it analyzes not only the representation of male sacrifice in the Maoist war films, but also the female sacrifice, foreigner sacrifice, children sacrifice, etc. The similarity and difference in the martyrdom representation of different social groups distinguished by gender, age, and identity purity resonate with the similar and different treatments on the sacrificial animals in the pre-modern rites. As is analyzed in the Introduction, different groups of the sacrificial animals were treated differently according to the grade of purity and entirety of their bodies during the rites of the premodern China. Although the modern nation-state bestows the martyrs with the honor of the highest sublime subjectivity (as the human subject voluntarily sacrifices the life for a transcendental purpose, either for the nation-state or for a religious belief), I argue that the impurity of martyr's subjectivity—a mixture of citizen subject, sacrificial object and disposable abject—still attests to the authority's necropolitical power, either calling it a sacrificial animal, or naming him/her as a sacrificial martyr. Such impurity and complexity of

⁵³ Wang, *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*. pp, 11-15.

martyrdom can be seen more in the cinematic representation of female martyrdom, foreign martyrdom, and martyrdom in some cross generic films other than the male martyrs in the war genre film. The analysis of the cinematic variations and their stakes in later chapters of the dissertation lead to some crucial arguments that reveal the complex mechanism of the Maoist necropolitics and the contentions and dilemmas within the system.

However, concerning the majority of the cinematic martyrdom, especially the male martyrdom in war genre films, I still argue that the homogeneity of representation is astonishingly obvious during the Maoist Era. The discursive conflicts do widely exist in the comedy and historical drama, as Wang points out with convincing supportive examples. However, the war genre films involving the direct representation of the CCP generals, cadres and soldiers were still highly controlled and need to strictly follow the formula and the rules. The violation of such rules was not the matter of any artistic preference by the directors and screenwriters, but a choice of promotion or demotion, or even a choice of life or death during the grimmest years.

My data research supports the argument on the dominating homogeneity of the onscreen martyrdom under the Maoist necropolitics. Out of the over three hundred Maoist films that I have watched and researched in total, there are about 70 films representing onscreen martyrdom in a direct and orthodox way. There are only less than five films that provide the unconventional martyrdom representation. Either the martyr is completely missing throughout the film (*Visiting Relatives* 探親記 1958, dir. Xie Tian), or the representation of the martyrdom goes awry from the conventional war film genre, and gets mixed with the elements from comedy or thriller film genres (*Captain Guan* 關連長 1950, dir. Shi Hui, and *The Cold Dawn* 五更寒 1957, dir. Yan Jizhou). Albeit rare in quantity, these films are an inseparable part of the Maoist films and the

discussion of the unconventional onscreen martyrdom will be the focus of the Chapter Five.

Compared with these five films, quantitatively overwhelming are the 70 Maoist films that represent martyrdom in a direct and orthodox manner. I use “direct” to categorize films that take heroic martyr(s) as either the main protagonists or the important characters. In these films, the hero or the martyr is not an absent figure that drives the plot, such as the martyr who never appears before the audiences in *Visiting Relatives*. “Orthodox” means that no matter how their gender, age or national identity varies, these martyrs are homogeneously firm believers of the Chinese Communism. They can make mistakes and their actions can sometimes be proved to be immature or childish, but they cannot make political mistakes to fall into the traitors’ or anti-revolutionaries’ camp. Of course films vary one from another, since different event, battle and historical background in the films require different types of martyrs. But once these male martyrs are on the battlefield or face the execution, the representation of their heroic martyrdom is highly homogenous, to the extent of banality or even ridiculousness.

From the early Maoist films such as *Steel Soldiers* (钢铁战士 1950, dir. Cheng Yin) to the late Maoist films during the Cultural Revolution such as *The Red Lantern* (红灯记 1970, dir. Cheng Yin), although the art milieu and dominant literary principles changed rapidly and frequently, male sacrifice on the screen appears to follow a constant formula, both in terms of the theme and the style. The details of the formula with actual examples will be given in the coming sections, but I would like to briefly mention it here. In terms of the theme, male martyrs have unshakable Communist faith. They rationally choose to sacrifice their lives for the revolutionary cause without any fear or hesitation. In terms of the film style, it often includes low-angle shots to elevate and foreground the protagonist’s dominance; close-up is then introduced to emphasize the facial expression, showing hero’s indomitable braveness and defy of death under brutal

circumstance. Audiences often hear the slogan “Long Live Chairman Mao” or “Long Live Communism” before the moment of execution or dying of the male martyr. The camera tries all means to avoid showing the very moment of death. Instead, with solemn music arises (often from the variation of *Internationalism*), the camera cuts to the landscape shot such as mountain, ocean wave, pine tree, dark cloud, or flame and lightening. Either in Chinese tradition or Western tradition, these symbols are associated with righteousness, permanence, and more importantly, heroic sublimity.

Maoist war films exemplify this dominant manner of representing male martyrdom. Although varying slightly from time to time during the Maoist period, such orthodox cinematic representation of male sacrifice looks at best formulaic and stiff, at worst corny or even insane. However, key questions obsessively haunt: how did Maoist audiences react to the formulaic martyrdom? Why did many of them accept the blatantly *unrealistic* representation of martyrdom on the screen, identify with the heroic sublimity, and some of them even emulate these martyrs’ action in real lives? The unrealistic formulaic representation in the films seems to be at odds with audiences’ live experience. Is it possible for such contradiction to be compatible? These questions lead to two major tasks of this chapter. One requires a historical trajectory on Chinese film audiences/readers habituated reception of the onscreen/literary martyrdom, and the other one needs a theoretical investigation on the underlying mechanism of the homogeneity, which I regard as an essential constituent to the Maoist necropolitics.

Two Major Tasks of the Chapter

The first task of the chapter traces the historical development of representing male sacrifice from the Early Chinese Cinema to the Maoist films, and the underlying literary thoughts from the

May Fourth Period to the Maoist Era as well. I argue that Maoist films are not whimsically invented by Mao's fiat. Although communist ideology and the Maoist necropolitical system significantly influence the films during the Maoist period, films still need to follow the basic rules of the film art, the tradition of representing martyrdom in the Chinese culture, and film audiences' habituated acceptance. How does the male sacrifice onscreen change from the pre-Maoist period to the Maoist period? Why are some of the stylish conventions retained, while the others modified or deleted? How are the changes related to different literary thoughts under various social milieus and necropolitics from the Republican Period to the Maoist Era?

The second task of the chapter attempts to untangle the theoretical knot between the concept of realism and the representation of the sublime, which I argue is a crucial part of the Maoist ideology. Ban Wang's monograph *The Sublime Figure of History* analyzes various forms of sublimity in the Maoist films.⁵⁴ If the representation of sublime martyrdom is to "represent of the unrepresentable," how is it compatible with the realistic depiction of the heroes according to the principle of socialist realism?⁵⁵ The intensifying formulaic characterization of the heroic martyrdom reached the peak during the Cultural Revolution. Under the principle of "three prominences," martyrdom has to be represented under strict rules to give overblown and unreserved prominence to the main protagonist. The principle of "three prominences" was cherished as an infallible touchstone to distinguish proletarian art from non-proletarian art during the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁶ It was, ironically, denounced by many post-Maoist critics as ridiculous, "a putrid hodgepodge of dogmatism, revisionism, feudalism and fascism."⁵⁷ I

⁵⁴ Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*.

⁵⁵ See the Kantian concept of sublime in *The Critique of Judgement*

⁵⁶ See Wen Qiao, "Suzao gongnongbing yingxiong renwu shi shehuizhuyi wenyi de genben renwu."

⁵⁷ *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue sichao shi*, p.504. This book is a well-received scholarly work, whose unreserved criticism on the "three prominences" represents the major Chinese academic views on this issue in the post-Mao era.

contend, however, that the formulaic and the seemingly unrealistic representation of male sacrifice in the Maoist films has its historical trajectory developed from the contradictions inherent in the literary realism ever since the May Fourth period.

The representation of the sublime martyrdom onscreen may be overwhelming or even horrifying for the audiences, but the gap caused by representing the unrepresentable opens the unlimited room for imagination. It is the evocation of audiences' imagination of the perfect future ideal, embodied from the male martyrdom in the Maoist films that manifests one of the key mechanism of the Maoist necropolitics: using an imaginable transcendental ideal to validate the secular regime power.

Under the specific social contexts, the abyss of the representation, namely, the gap between the transcendental revolutionary ideals and the empirical realities could be filled by an ideological illusion of the *virtual reality*. Cinema is the suitable media to fill in such *virtual reality* with formless revolutionary passion and ideals. For audiences during the Maoist period, the crucial task for cinema is to generate an 'as if' presentation where however there can be no such presentation in experience. Jean-François Lyotard's work is useful here to explain this point. He notes the essence of the revolutionary sublime in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. The sublime feeling involves a narrative that places a substitute into the absence, and making audiences believe that such a substitute is present, rather than is represented. During the process of such making-believe, the boundary between the future ideal and the present reality is deliberately blurred. And the misrecognition that takes the future ideal as the present reality transpires among the audiences. I argue, however, the collective misrecognition between the real and the sign, the present and the absent, the sacrificing martyr and the sacrificed substitute, is the prerequisite for maintaining the Maoist necropolitical system, and containing the contradiction

within the Maoist myth.

The historical tracing from the Left-wing Cinema to “the three prominences” not only gives a paranormal view of the Chinese films in representing martyrdom, but also investigates some of the crucial theoretical problems inherent in the historical development. Even though the cinematic representation of male sacrifice appear to be highly homogenous during the Maoist period, it is still meaningful to examine the mechanism of representing death and its correlation with the Maoist necropolitical system. From the historical and theoretical analysis we can see how the Maoist sublime is represented and functioned to evoke revolutionary passion from the masses. We can know why the homogeneity on the representation of male martyrdom is crucial to the ideological construction.

Confucian Value of Sacrifice and the Nation-State ideology of Sacrifice: From the May Fourth Literature to the Left-Wing Cinema

It has been argued that the May Fourth Movement cannot be regarded as the clear-cut watershed standing between premodern China and modern China.⁵⁸ Haiyan Lee also delineates the continuous influence of the “Confucian Structure of Feeling” and its social role in the Republican Era.⁵⁹ During that transitional period, the conflicts among various discourses of sacrifice transpired frequently in social life, as reflected from the transformation of literary tradition and social milieu. This change greatly influenced the literary/cinematic representation of male sacrifice as well.

⁵⁸ Kirk Denton persuasively argues this point in the “General Introduction” of his *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*.

⁵⁹ Haiyan, Lee. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*.

The historical linkage on the discourse of *qing* 情 and sacrifice from the Late Qing to the Republican period provides an interesting perspective on the transition of the discourse of sacrifice. In Chinese *qing* can mean love, emotion, sympathy, feeling and passion, depending on different contexts. Such semantic flexibility of *qing* renders it a highly loaded concept for multiple ideological investments, including the necropolitical discourse. Wu Jianren 吴趼人 (1867-1910) notes the multiple ideological manipulations of *qing* in his *Sea of Regret* (1906):

Qing . . . can be applied to any sphere of life, the only difference being in the manner of its application. When applied to a ruler, it is loyalty; when applied to parents, it is filial piety. When applied to children, it is parental love, and when applied to friends, it is true fellowship.

60

With the rise of the nationalist consciousness of a modern China calling for individual's sacrificial patriotism in Late Qing, *qing* was channeled into a public discourse and was further evoked as the affective mediation among the sacrificial individual, family and the nation.

The transition elevates the role of sacrifice to a nobler course. Sacrifice increasingly refers to sacrifice for the nation-state, rather than for personal righteousness or family integrity. During the early 20th century, the nationalist ideology utilized the rhetoric of sacrifice and martyrdom to unite the Chinese nation and serve for multiple political tasks. In the literature field, it also shaped a different mindset of sacrifice both thematically and stylistically.

⁶⁰ Wu Jianren, *Henhai* 恨海 *The Sea of Regret*, p.103.

Many May Fourth intellectuals celebrated the emancipation of *qing* from the shackles of Confucian dogmas, and they looked for new forms of vernacular literature to express the liberated self. The desire of self-sacrifice can be witnessed from many poems and fictions from the members of Creation Society, whose literary style was heavily inspired by European romanticism. Yu Dafu 郁达夫's auto-biographical fiction "Chenlun" (沉沦 "Sinking," 1921) and Guo Moruo 郭沫若's poem "Tiangou" (天狗 "The Sky Dog") reflect strong martyrdom desire with excessive expression of *qing* inherent in the writings from the "Romantic Generation of Chinese Writers"⁶¹. For them, the desire for death is a necessary prerequisite for the foregrounding of the self. However, such self-consciousness on the other hand reflects "strong obsession with Chinese nationalism".⁶² The martyrdom instinct in their literary works is associated with their fascination with European romanticism to foreground self-expression. But unlike the European poets, their ultimate purpose is still to evoke readers' emotional identification with the nation-state. Their emotional outcry is crude, outward, and utilitarian, rather than delicate, inward, and narcissistic.

Romantic writers believed that the death of the protagonists in their works could evoke the sentimental identification with the nation among the mass. Lu Xun 鲁迅, on the other hand, considered such a solution to be utopian in an apathetic society of modern China. In the short fiction "Zhufu" (祝福 "New Year's Sacrifice"), Lu Xun foregrounds the original connotation of *xisheng*, indicating an insignificant woman's dead body as disposable as the sacrificial animals during the New Year's Eve. The coldness of the death body is in sharp contrast with the New Year's Eve, which is supposed to be the happiest day of the year, at the cost of many

⁶¹ Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Chinese Writers*.

⁶² Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*.

sacrificial animals' or human being's lives. In "Yao" (药 "Medicine"), Lu Xun further questions the possibility of martyrdom to evoke mass' sentimental identification with the nation and the Republican Revolution. Although martyr's death is heroic, it does not resonate with the general public that are locked inside the "iron house." There is no emulation, or even sympathy towards martyrdom from the lower-class common people, who utilize martyr (dom) for their own interest. The loafers make fun of martyr's death in the teahouse. The jailer strips martyr's clothes for monetary gain. The patient buys and consumes martyr's blood to cure lung disease. Dark and tragic as it is, Lu Xun still keeps certain hope in the end of the *Medicine* when the martyr's mother finds a wreath of red and white flowers around her son's grave. But the readers are not informed who lays these flowers and Lu Xun's struggle between hope and despair soon resurfaces. The martyr's mother asks the crow to fly onto the grave as a sign to justify her son's heroic death. The crow, of course, does not listen and "flies like an arrow towards the far horizon." For Lu Xun, the hope that martyr's heroic death can enlighten the lower class people to join the revolution and save the nation turns into despair quickly.

However, Lu Xun's desperation of the people inside the "iron house" neglects the underlying power of the public discourse on sacrifice, which potentially contests the national necropower and defies the law system. Eugenia Lean's study of Shi Jianqiao's 施剑翘 case provides a counter-example that the public could utilize the modern print media to form a strong public discourse on sacrifice, which potentially contested and redressed the law system.⁶³ Woman's sacrifice for her patriarchal family (especially for the father) won much more "public sympathy" than woman's sacrifice for nation (Qiu Jin's) and woman's sacrifice for her sexual

⁶³ Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China* 2007

lover (Liu jinggui's case), demonstrating the lingering "Confucian structure of feeling" in the Republican China.⁶⁴

In sum, when the flexible *qing* became the driving cause of the sacrifice, discourses of sacrifice were destined to be conflicting with each other during the Republican Era. On the one hand, the May Fourth intellectuals eulogized the sacrifice for the nation. On the other hand, such sacrifice for the nation is inseparable from writers' self-sacrificial instinct to pursue the freedom of the libidinal self. Lu Xun refuses to acknowledge the emotional identification with the sacrificial martyrs from the lower class people. For him, hope and despair are the inseparable twins. Finally, the public discourse manifests its power to exempt the female assassin from the state law penalty. In Shi Jianqiao's case, filial piety to the patriarchal family is regarded as moral heroism, which finally overrides the legal system. These examples show that when the sacrificial individual, the family and the nation were connected with each other by "feeling" or affective mediation, the public evaluation of martyrdom was un-systemized and fickle. The Maoist necropolitics attempts to turn the unreliable and multi-directional *qing*-based sacrifice into the reliable and calculable sacrifice based on rational choice. In this way, the conflicting discourses on sacrifice is united by one dominating discourse, and the various forms of representing sacrifice are minimized into one formula.

Although nurtured in the same social milieu, film industry, however, had a very different trajectory from the literature field. Starting as the substitute for Peking Opera and was firstly exhibited in the teahouse, Chinese film was born to cater to the low-brow audience rather than carry the burden of national salvation. Pioneers of the May Fourth intellectuals even did not pay

⁶⁴ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*.

much attention to cinema since it was not regarded as a serious art form.⁶⁵ During the 1910s, Chinese film industry was established in response to the increasing cultural invasion of the Hollywood films, many of which had contents debasing Chinese ethnicity. After constant ups and downs, the 1920s witnessed the establishment of several successful film studios. The majority of the Early Chinese Cinema resorted to mere entertainment (as seen from the sensationally successful *Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* 火烧红莲寺 1928, dir. Zhang Shichuan), or the pictorial presentation of the old Confucian value (such as *An Orphan Rescues his Grandpa* 孤儿救祖记 1923, dir. Zheng Zhengqiu). Compared with the critical insights offered by the legacy from the May Fourth intellectuals, and endless stream of breakthroughs in literary forms in the 1920s China, Chinese film in the 1910s and 1920s was eager to step onto the stage of social significance but was not quite ready for its artistic maturity.

With the so-called “soft film” increasingly occupying the film market, Chinese intellectuals finally realized that film plays an equal, if not more important, role to literature. At the wake of Japanese invasion to China in 1932, it was crucial to evoke general audiences’ patriotism through the visual medium that the majority of the Chinese people—the illiterate could easily understand and identify. Cinema was thus bestowed with the critical power to expose the social darkness as its literature peer had already done. The prominent May Fourth intellectuals such as Xia Yan 夏衍 and Tian Han 田汉 were increasingly involved in the film industry, and initiated the so-called Left Wing Cinema Movement, which symbolized “the awake of the film consciousness.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Gu Kenfu “Foreword to the Film Magazine” (《影戏杂志》发刊词), in Luo, Yijun, ed, *Chinese Film Theory: An Anthology*, pp.3-10.

⁶⁶ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying wenhua shi* .p.141.

The evaluation of the left-wing film movement and the films require critical scrutiny. Firstly, largely due to the dominant communist ideology during the Maoist era whose criterion leaned more towards political correctness than artistic achievement, the evaluation and credit of the left-wing films was constantly changing through various political movements afterwards. Cheng Jihua and Li Shaobai's *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* 中国电影发展史, the orthodox history book on Chinese cinema during the Maoist era, eulogizes the left-wing film movement since it was the first film movement led by the Communist Party.⁶⁷ Cheng and Li were persecuted in 1965 and their book was criticized as the mouthpiece for Xia Yan and Tian Han. Many left-wing films were also regarded as the “poisonous weeds” during the Cultural Revolution. After Mao's death, both the book and most of the left-wing films were given back positive historical evaluation, given the fact that some of the left-wing film artists were reinstated in their original position in the Cultural Bureau after Deng Xiaoping took over the office. Such inconsistent and fickle evaluation on films due to different interests involving various dominant agenda set hurdle for fair film criticism.

Secondly, historical research showed that left-wing film movement might not be as linear as that is described by Cheng and Li. It has its own variation and bifurcation. Pang Laikwan argues that the left-wing film movement was not actually “led” by the communist Party (against Chen and Li's major argument). Although major pioneers such as Xia Yan and Tian Han had affiliation with the Communist Party, the CCP then was not strong enough to support and lead that movement. The artists and promoters of the Film Movement, on the contrary, spent most of their time and energy dealing with the KMT cultural bureau, looking for the endorsement and

⁶⁷ See *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* Chapter 3, “Dang Lingdao le Dianying Yundong” 党领导了电影运动 (The Party leads the Cinema Movement) .

support from the KMT before their films could be publicly released. In this regard, left-wing films only occupied a portion of the film market in China at that time, struggling to compete with the “soft films” and the Hollywood-imported films. Pang’s argument explains well why male martyrdom represented in the left-wing films cannot propagate CCP’s ideology, at least on the surface. Rather, it needs to resort to a broader connotation of sacrifice: sacrifice for the nation and for the Chinese people, rather than for a specific party. Yomi Braester also points out that although many left-wing films have obvious political tasks, they still need to be market-oriented, and follow the same rule as other films when advertising and exhibition are concerned, as is exemplified by the horror genre film *Song at Midnight* (夜半歌声 1937, dir. Ma-Xu Weibang) . Braester’s argument provides a new perspective for the representation of martyrdom: how to represent the sacrificial hero in a distorted and de-sublimated manner (such as a monster) in a market-oriented film industry?

Although the historical evaluation of the left-wing films still needs to be further examined, Left-wing films are the first group of films that consciously represent national martyrdom in the Chinese film history.⁶⁸ Before the Left-wing films, the representation of sacrifice was also seen in the martial arts genre film and the old Confucian value-laden family melodrama. But their focuses were not on the sacrifice for the Chinese nation-state, but sacrifice for family, for sexual love, or for revenge. The left-wing films appear far less critical than their contemporary literature peers by heavily relying on the sentimental evocation from the audience, rather than establish a distance for the audience’s critical thinking. However, these films were still effective in conveying their political information to the audiences.

⁶⁸ In most textbooks or film history monograph today, the Left-wing films are still largely occupying the 1930s Chinese film map, as if the “soft films” and Hollywood-imported films did not exist.

The film languages of the left-wing films, such as mise-en-scene, camera movement, editing, music, acting, etc, try all means to evoke audience's emotional identification with the protagonists. Such emotional engagement is inherited and firmly rooted in the Maoist films. Both in terms of the style and content, the representation of male martyrdom in the left-wing films directly influences the Maoist films. Therefore, I make a detour in the sections below to conduct case studies on the male sacrifice in the left-wing films *The Big Road* (大路 1934, dir. Sun Yu), *Children of Trouble Time* (风云儿女 1935, dir. Xu Xingzhi), and *Song at Midnight*. I focus on how these films lay a foundation for the Maoist films, and how the Maoist films modify or eradicate the themes and styles that are not compatible with the Maoist necropolitical system. More importantly, these films introduce the *imaginable reality* that interacts with the transcendental ideal and the empirical reality, which was greatly reinforced during the Maoist Period.

The Dead Revives: Sun Yu's *The Big Road* and Romantic Sacrifice

As one of the pioneers and the prominent directors in the Left-Wing cinema movement, Sun Yu was regarded as a “poet director 诗人导演.” His films provide multi-vocal representation of sacrifice mingling the revolutionary ideal and the popular tastes. In Sun's films, the sacrificial ideal for one's nation coexist with the sacrificial values for one's sexual lover or family. On the surface, Sun seems to be “too romantic” or somewhat even absurd in representing the sacrifice scenes—by making Lingling pose beautiful gestures before execution in *Daybreak*, or by making the worker-soldiers revive after being shot by the Japanese fighters in *The Big Road* (Fig 1). I argue, however, such “unrealistic” representations reflect the conflicting discourses of realism since the May Fourth to the heyday of the Maoist films. Sun Yu's manner of representing

sacrifice also reflects his own taste as a poet director, drawing the thematic and stylistic influences from Hollywood melodrama and Soviet socialist realism (In Alexander Dovzhenko's film *Arsenal*, the martyr never dies even he is shot multiple times. See Fig 2). More importantly, Sun Yu's romantic representation of male martyrdom predicts the way martyrdom represented during the Maoist period. It also exposes a key question to the Maoist necropolitical system: how to handle the dead men's bodies after their sacrifice?



Fig 1. Martyrs revive in *The Big Road* (1934)



Fig 2. The undead martyr in *Arsenal* (Арсенал, 1929)

Studying in the University of Wisconsin-Madison and New York Institute of Photography from 1923 to 1926, Sun Yu was similar to many Chinese intellectuals studying abroad at that time, feeling ashamed when watching Hollywood films that “distorted Chinese people and made them the symbol of stupidity and sinister.”(歪曲丑化的对象和阴险愚蠢的象征)⁶⁹. When he returned to Shanghai, he began directing his first film *Tears of Xiaoxiang* (潇湘泪, 1928). The film depicts a fisherman Old Wu who “keeps his promise and sacrifices for his friend.”(一诺千金，为友牺牲)⁷⁰, a conventional theme in the old category of Confucian sacrifice. The film was not successful, since audience then began to lose interest in the family melodrama brimming with tears. It was later renamed *Queer Knight with Harpoon* (渔叉怪侠), reflecting the Great Wall Studio’s 长城 reaction to the change of the market taste from the family melodrama to the martial arts genre films. The Great Wall Studio still filed bankruptcy soon, as Sun lamented over the situation:

For the martial arts genre films, the film brokers from the Southeast Asia had their criterion: the best one—ten scenes with ten action scenes, the second best one—ten scenes with eight action scenes. If your film only has four to five action scenes out of ten, it will fail and has to be sold cheaply...Chinese films are getting worse every day, since the ‘Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly’ intellectuals full of feudal and capitalist-broker minds can only make the so called love films with rascal-like male protagonists and prostitute-like female protagonists...⁷¹

⁶⁹ Sun Yu, *Yinhai Fanzhou*, p.38.

⁷⁰ *Yinhai Fanzhou*, p.51

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.57-58

Sun regarded the year of 1930 as the watershed, since on the spring of 1930 Lianhua Studio was established with its goal of “reviving the Chinese national cinema” (复兴国片). Sun directed his first two films in Lianhua Studio: *The Dream of the Ancient Capital* 故都春梦 and *Women of Easy Virtue* 野草闲花. Although the framework of these two films are still based on family melodrama, as we see from the film illustrations and Sun’s own explanation of these films, the films still set themselves apart from other 1920s films. They establish tighter linkage between the protagonist’s destiny and the social darkness, thus providing the audiences with positive educational information rather than indulging them with mere entertainment. The right films, says Sun, should be the ones that “incorporate education within entertainment.” (寓教于娱乐之中)⁷². This principle was in line with many other left-wing films. Especially after the Japanese invasion to China in 1932, the educational task that alarmed the audience of the impending danger to be the slaves of a foreign nation was emergent and crucial.

Among the left-wing directors, Sun is unique by his excessive romantic characterization of martyrdom. Sun does not deny that death is the termination of one’s life, but he tends to emphasize on the energy of life (*shengmingli* 生命力) under any tough circumstance. He notes, “I write a lot on the sufferings from people at the bottom of the society, but what I dislike most is to show their passivity and desperation. I always want to encourage them to brace up and never give up. I deeply believe that the power of life inside the Chinese people has been continuous for thousands of years.”⁷³ In Sun’s films, the female star Li Lili 黎莉莉 is characterized by showing

⁷² Sun Yu, *Yinhai Fanzhou*, p.68

⁷³ Ibid.

abundant energy of life. Her youthful spirit and sexy female body attract audience's eyes to the extent that the Maoist audiences could not even imagine. In *Queen of Sports* (体育皇后 1934) and *Little Toys*, Sun deliberately uses close-up shots to display her slender legs and well-rounded body. *Daybreak* characterizes Li as a fallen prostitute who sacrifices for her cousin (a nationalist soldier). In one of the bravest scenes in the left-wing cinema, Sun shows her posing beautiful feminine gestures right before the execution. The representation of sacrifice seems to be too romantic or ideal to the extent of unrealistic or even absurd. However, Sun's emphasis on the life energy explains well why he takes this stance.

In the autobiography, Sun further explains how his thought of life energy influences the representation of death. Although the film *Women of Easy Virtue* was adapted from Alexandre Dumas's novel and play *Camille*, Sun changes the ending so that the protagonists Liyun and Lilian can still live forward. "I want them to fight against the social darkness in the old society, even though such fight will be tougher and requires more courage than going to death!"⁷⁴ For Sun, to give the protagonist easy but simple death is not as meaningful as give them life, or even revive them after death.

The representation of after-death in Sun's films betrays the realistic representation of death, presenting a blurry boundary between the transcendental ideal and the empirical reality. After the January 28th Incident in 1932, Sun read an essay on Maxim Gorky's revolutionary romanticism, and then wholeheartedly embraced Gorky's theory. He clipped off the essay, kept it in a notebook, and regarded revolutionary romanticism as his major artistic principle. He notes:

⁷⁴ Ibid. 65

I believe that revolutionary romanticism is a very effective way of art creation, since it is based on the reality of life itself. With the basic principle of realism, it objectively, positively and confidently pursues for the realizable and feasible future ideal, which sets it apart from the capitalist utopia.⁷⁵

It looks to be awkward to build revolutionary romanticism on the foundation of realism. However, as one of the major thesis in this chapter, *I argue that Chinese style of realism had been intertwined with romanticism ever since its initial introduction to China.* The major Maoist literary principles, from socialist realism, to the “Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism,” to the “three prominences,” witnessed the increasing portion of the romantic elements, driven by the transcendental revolutionary ideal. However, these Maoist literary principles share the same essence with Sun Yu’s thoughts, which were also seen from many other intellectuals during the Republican Era. The difference lies in the fact that Mao elevated these literary principles into an organic part of his top-to-down policy, and the representation of martyrdom either in literature or in films was not a voluntary choice for artists, but the essential part of the Maoist necropolitics that the any artist must follow.

While the historical trajectory on the interaction between realism and romanticism will be analyzed in the following section, just concerning the left-wing films, Leo Ou-fan Lee notes that the 1930s left-wing films were often marked by “sentimental and naively idealistic terms.”⁷⁶ In a more recent scholarship on the 1930s left-wing cinema, Laikwan Pang uses the term “engaging realism” to suggest its capacity to incorporate the ideological socialist realism and the inherited

⁷⁵ Ibid. 74.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 8.

traditional Chinese “heavy sentimentalism”⁷⁷. “Engaging realism” describes the “intensity of emotions, instead of the degree of reality” in the left-wing cinema. A somewhat exaggerated but actually insightful phrase says: “90 percent of female characters weep, while 70 percent of the male characters whine.”⁷⁸ To some extent, the left-wing cinema continues from the early Chinese cinema that emphasizes operatic dramatic characters (in the filmed Peking opera and its variation) and spectacles (martial arts films). The early Chinese cinema was never realist-oriented. Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar’s argument on “melodramatic realism” also points out the impurity of the realism in the Chinese cinema, which mixes with intensive emotion and moral indoctrination.⁷⁹

Sun Yu does not mention what particular essays of the newly introduced soviet socialist realism influenced him in the 1930s. He tries to set his films apart from the excessive emotional charge characterized by the family melodrama, a staple genre of the Early Chinese Cinema. But his films manifest the combination of realism and idealism, and attest to the uneasy co-existence of the thematic and stylistic co-influences from Hollywood melodrama and Soviet socialist realism. In Sun’s films, the frequent female victims are the major thematic center, as shown in the Hollywood family melodrama such as *Broken Blossoms* (US, 1919) and *Way Down East* (US, 1920). The moral contrast between the city and the rural area in Sun’s films reminds audiences of *Sunrise* (US, 1927). Finally, the miraculously invincible martyr on the screen from *Arsenal* (Soviet Russia, 1929) provides a coincidental reference frame for Sun Yu to construct his style of cinematic martyrdom.

Sun’s unrealistic romanticist representation of martyrdom was endorsed and widely

⁷⁷ See Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement 1932-1937*, Chapter Eight.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*. p.78.

welcomed at that time. The major reason is that Chinese realism has always been accompanied by romanticism since its introduction from the May Fourth Period. Many film critics praised Sun's style without mentioning the unrealistic part, since the impure realism of Chinese literary style was implanted deep into the mindset of the intellectuals. Sun Yu's own explanation also proves this point and harbingers the later Maoist onscreen representation of martyrdom:

In *Daybreak*, I characterize a young woman who supports the Northern Expeditionary Army, and is sentenced to death by the landlord. On the execution ground before daybreak, she poetically poses her most beautiful smile, and confidently shouts 'you cannot kill all the revolutionaries!' In the film *the Big Road*, I sung the ode to a group of young road workers and two strong-minded young women. They die bravely in the fight against the imperialist invaders and feudal despots. Then I allow the audience to see their heroic spirits 英魂 to stand out from the bloodpool, continuing operating the road machine, and sing the song 'let us finish the road of freedom.'⁸⁰

Sun's thoughts and practice on constructing cinematic martyrdom have been very close to those of the Maoist films. Both of them foreground spiritual permanence to eulogize martyrs' transcendence of finitude and immortality 永垂不朽. The excessive romantic representation of the martyrs is hardly based on the principle of realism. Compared with Sun's films, Maoist films provide a more idealistic, intensive and cleaner images of martyrdom.

However, one crucial differences set Sun's films from most Maoist films. Sun lets the audience see the actual dead bodies on the screen. In the end of *the Big Road*, bodies are left over

⁸⁰ Sun, Yinhai fanzhou, p.75

unadorned on the bombed ground and are overlapped with each other, like the slaughtered sacrificial animal bodies. By contrast, Maoist films avoid showing any dead bodies of the martyrs by all means. As the hindrance of the spiritual permanence, dead bodies are more like the abject which negatively influence the purity of the spirit. They are “unclean and improper” to be represented on the screen. For Julia Kristeva, dead bodies are the intolerable abject that can leak fluid and wastes, such as bloods and other body fluids.⁸¹ In this regard, the clean and clear self-consciousness is stained by the uncontrollable leakage of body fluid after one’s death.

The direct onscreen representation of dead bodies prevents realism from the erosion of excessive idealism. The abject corpse foregrounds materiality over spirit, and limits the development of the overwhelming spiritual power. One’s consciousness on the transcendence of finitude is forced to set back when one sees the inevitably unclean corpse after death. For the Maoist films, the revolutionary spiritual permanence after one’s bodily death is elevated, and any hindrance to remind the un-transfigurable and unassimilable bodies need to be contained or erased. Otherwise, the inaccessible but imaginable virtual reality built on the screen is broken by the reminiscence of the empirical reality of the dead bodies.

In reality, the Maoist necropolitics also required the dead bodies be buried or cremated as soon as possible after the soldiers’ death. To emphasize the spiritual permanence, martyrs’ corpses are forced to disappear and to be transformed onscreen, substituted with the Party symbols such as the red flag or other Party emblem. Ideally, a memorial ceremony is conducted to turn the personal death into a collective event, which manifests the Hegelian social and communal transformation of the personal death. Hegel uses the example from the Greek Tragedy *Antigone* to show that family rescues the martyr from the natural negativity of death, celebrates

⁸¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.3.

the death through burial rites, and converts a natural and irrational incident into a rational and socially-controllable act. In other words, the family community and the society gives meaning to the death and raises the specific personal event to universality.⁸² The ultimate Big Family everyone belongs to, during the Maoist period, is the newly-established Chinese nation-state. In most Maoist films representing male sacrifice, the dead bodies of martyrs are quickly buried by camera movement and editing. The symbol of the sublime and permanence (either natural objects such as pine tree, waves, mountains, or the Party symbols) replace the dead bodies to symbolize martyr's spiritual permanence.

But for Sun Yu's films, the corpses are still laid bare on the ground. Furthermore, in the end of *the Big Road*, He uses superimposition to show martyrs spirits come out of the dead bodies. They wander around like ghosts, one even drives a construction vehicle. In this regard, Sun's cinematic martyrdom follows the Chinese literature tradition of depicting the after-death spirits coming out from the corpses (linghun chuqiao 灵魂出窍), which is frequently seen in the classical Chinese fictions of ghost and spirits, such as *Journey to the West* 西游记 and *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* 聊斋志异. Film directors, either in China or in other countries, tend to use shadowy images 虚化影像 to represent ghosts, or spirits without bodies. The martyrs in *the Big Road* are transfigured into ghosts, and the ending of the film brings the film into the genie film category 神怪电影, a film genre completely denied during the Maoist period.

Maoist films reject the representation of any ghost or unknowable spirits. In the 1950 film *White-haired Girl* 白毛女, the female protagonist accuses the old society that turns her life into the ghost-like status, but she claims determinedly, "I am human being, not a ghost (我是人, 不

⁸² See Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Also see Adkins, *Death and Desire in Hegel, Heidegger and Deleuze*, pp.85-88

是鬼)。” Maoist films refuse the representation of ghost since it belongs to the category of feudal superstition. Any worship of ghosts or spirits needs to be eradicated to ensure the orthodox leadership from the Communist Party, under which everything is controllable and foreseeable.⁸³ Films such as *The Harmful Cult of Yiguan* (一贯害人道 1952, dir. Li Enjie) condemns the cult of Yiguan that rips apart families and ruins positive personal value. The superstition-believer will lose self-consciousness and become the victims, either having tragic ending or saved by the Communist Party. The denial on the representation of the ghost in the Maoist films attest to a society where nothing can exist beyond Party's control. However, such a gray area was still handled on the screen in the Republican Era, even by the left-wing cinema. *Song at Midnight* is another good example to show the blurred boundary between ghost and martyr, reflecting the conflicting discourses of sacrifice in this transitional period, which was largely eradicated in the Maoist films.

Ghost or Martyr? Blurred Boundary

In Chapter One, I show how the essential characteristics of *xisheng* and *lieshi*, as well as their discursive functions, maintained and mutated from premodern China to modern China. *Xisheng*, as its pre-modern reference to the expendable sacrificial animals or human beings to be slaughtered for the blessing from a transcendental power, shows an economy based not on rational calculation, but on mystic belief. The word *lieshi* was initially constructed in a paradoxical manner. The co-existence of *lie* and *shi* foreshadows the tension in a compound word—*lie* describes the uncontrollable and unsubmitive characteristic of an individual, while

⁸³ Marxism is the official doctrine that communists should hold belief. Marxism regards religion as the opium for the people, which is coincidentally compatible with the Confucian value that stays at a respectful distance with the ghosts and gods 敬鬼神而远之.

shi takes the position as a government official and must act according to the politically regulated norms.

I argue that the representation of male sacrifice in the left-wing films manifests the tensions underlying the original connotations of *lieshi* and *xisheng*. The reasons are twofold. First, left-wing films were born in the transitional period when the new ideology of building a strong nation-state was on the one hand ruptured with, but on the other hand still accommodated hard into the old Confucian ideology. Therefore, the constantly conflicting discourses of sacrifice among the communist, nationalist and the public render the representation of sacrifice on the screen correspondingly complicated, depending on the various and constantly-changing political positions the studio take, and the camp that the artist belongs to. Therefore, even though left-wing films are usually regarded as a group, each film is still unique and cannot be pigeonholed into a stagnant category.

Second, the center of the left-wing films is undoubtedly Shanghai, a half-colonial city whose nickname is “heaven for the capitalists, paradise for the explorers.”(资本家的天堂，冒险家的乐园). Although communists or left-lean artists wrote scripts or directed most of the left-wing cinema, they were still bond by the studio system, and their films were largely market-oriented under the pressure of the strong competitors, among which “soft films” and Hollywood imported films are the major two “enemies.” No matter how their political stances meet the criterion of the dominant ideology, left-wing films still need to follow general rules of film economy in the highly competitive film market in Shanghai. Compared with the Maoist films that were under almost zero pressure of the box office income, and under the dominant overwhelming ideology that required homogenous representation, left-wing films had much more leeway in presenting various male sacrifice.

The film *Song at Midnight* is a case in point where the representation of male sacrifice has to meet the requirement of the horror film genre and market appeal. Yomi Braester insightfully points out that in the film, the revolutionary rhetoric of the 1930s is in constant conflict with the public discourses. “The fashioning of revolution through the hero’s facial deformity literally fleshes out the inner contradiction of revolutionary utopia and underscores contemporary doubts about appealing to the masses.”⁸⁴ Bearing many thematic and stylistic similarities with *Phantom of the Opera* (US, 1925) and *Frankenstein* (US, 1931), the film presents the gothic atmosphere from the very beginning when most shots use low-key lighting and under-lighting to build the horror atmosphere and facial distortion. The male protagonist Song Danping tells Xiao Ou about his past: he was a young revolutionary leader in the 1911 revolution, and used to lead thousands of revolutionaries. The written words under his picture show that he was willing to sacrifice for the revolution. However, he had to escape and changed his name to Song Danping because he was listed as wanted. After Song’s face gets deformed by the rich local tyrant, he hides in the loft of the opera house, singing songs for his loved one, alone.

The film shifts Danping’s identity from the subject (a revolutionary leader) to the abject (the ghostly outcast with a deformed face), from a *shi* 士 to a ghost. In the film he is frequently referred to be a ghost (even Xiao’ou asks whether he is a human being or a ghost). His facial frontal is introduced in the middle of the film, with an over-one-minute sequence when the doctor tears apart the gauze one by one around the face. Maxu Weibang, the film director, takes time to build up the suspense, until finally the audiences see the deformed face of the protagonist with huge astonishment. The lightning and thunder are used to highlight the horrific effect, rather than to elevate the heroic sublimity of the protagonist, as many Maoist films do.

⁸⁴ Braester, *Witness Against History*, p.81.

Although Song Danping cannot perform on the stage again, he passes his revolutionary legacy to Xiao'ou by giving him the modified script of *Hot Blood* 热血, Danping's favorite play when he was a revolutionary. The play gains huge success and revives Xiao'ou's troupe. In this way, Danping changes back from a ghost to a *shi*, still keeping the hope that revolution can continue and freedom can be obtained. However, "the protagonist's double role as revolutionary hero and fantastic apparition concedes that even revolutionary ideology must rely on the allure of the spectacle."⁸⁵ The ending of the film shows violent action scene again when Danping is dead at the hands of the crowd. Ironically, the revolutionary subject—the people—kill the revolutionary leader in the name of wiping out the monster. Braester points out that Danping's death is "exceptionally disheartening" because the mob "continues to persecute him even when his revolutionary identity is made known."⁸⁶ In this regard, Danping's martyrdom is actually questionable, since he does not die for the people. Instead, people kill him although his identity is a revolutionary. This makes him on the one hand the sacrificial subject ready to die for the revolution, on the other hand the sacrificed object that is killed by the people. Furthermore, his unclean, improper and disposable ghost-like figure renders him an abject as well. On Danping's characterization, *lieshi* (the subject that sacrifices) and *xisheng* (the object that is sacrificed) coexist uneasily and exposes the inner contradiction of the concepts.

Even in some more politically orthodox left-wing films, the boundary between martyr and ghost is still not clear. *Children of Troubled Times* provides the theme song that was later adopted as the anthem of the PRC. The lyrics read: "Arise, those who refuse to be slaves! / with our flesh and blood/ we shall build a new Great Wall!" The lyrics attest to the solid sacrificial devotion, when the protagonists are ready to spend their body parts on the construction of the

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.83.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.104

nation. However, in the ending scene right before the song, the film uses much low-key and under-lighting, rendering revolutionary protagonists ghost-like. Right before the parade when the male protagonist knows his best friend's martyrdom on the battlefield and reads the last letter, he solemnly swears: "Friend, I will not let you down. Like you, I will also be a heroic ghost on the Great Wall. 长城上的雄鬼." In comparison, the onscreen Maoist martyrs can hardly call themselves "ghosts." If the ghosts still linger on earth after the detachment from their original bodies, Maoist martyrs have to be transfigured into spiritual permanence to keep the validity of the transcendental revolutionary ideal. Therefore, the boundary between ghost and martyr needs to be solidly set clear, disallowing any ambiguous reading to tarnish the martyr's heroic sublimity.

The Typical Representation of Male Sacrifice in the Maoist Films: From the Socialist Realism to the "Three Prominences"

The previous sections made long detour to male martyrdom in the left-wing films, aiming to investigate the origin, correlation and development of the cinematic martyrdom from the left-wing films to the Maoist films. The first major question appears accordingly, what is typically the direct and orthodox representation of the Maoist male martyrdom?

As I mentioned in the previous sections briefly, "direct" means films that take heroic martyr(s) as either the main protagonists or the important characters. "Orthodox" means that no matter how their gender, age or national identity varies, these martyrs are homogeneously firm believers of the Chinese Communism. Film *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (*Yinxiong Ernu*, 1964, dir. Wu Zhaoti) offers a classic and influential Maoist male sacrifice imitated by many Chinese

people during the Cultural Revolution, or mocked during the Post-Mao Period.⁸⁷ The male hero dies at about one-third of the film, leaving much room for the film to develop the post-sacrifice stories, such as commemoration of the martyr and succession of the heroic deeds. The film depicts the male martyr Wang Cheng 王成, a common communication soldier with his hidden identity as a general's son in the Korean War. After he uses up all his bullets and grenades on the battlefield, he throws rocks towards the swarming enemies who try to occupy the peak of the mountain. The relative positions that Wang Cheng and the enemies are placed create ideal camera angles for the representation of male martyrdom, since Wang is on the peak of the mountain, shot from the low angle, making him look bigger than usual. On the other hand, the enemies are shot from the high angle, dwarfed and weakened. Wang Cheng fights bare hands with the enemies and punches them with a bangalore torpedo (the enemies always do not shoot!). With a revolutionary song increasingly developed to climax in the background (no ambient sound at all), Wang utters his last words using his communication device: "Dear leaders, comrades, and Commissar Wang, the victory will finally belong to us!" With a sudden cut, he jumps onto a stylized backdrop, as shown in the Fig 3:



Fig 3

⁸⁷ See *In the Heat of the Sun* (1995, dir. Jiang Wen)

The long shot foregrounds the hero in the middle, and the typical natural symbols of the heroic sublimity. The flames, hills, dark clouds with the sunlight coming from behind, connote that with the brave soldiers like Wang Cheng (the upright hills) fighting relentlessly (flame), sacrificing his life for the people and nation (and for the communist brother nation North Korea as well), the enemies (dark clouds) will be wiped out and the victory will come soon (sunlight). The camera zooms in gradually, providing a close-up of Wang's invincible face, cut back and forth between Wang and the scared enemies. With the bangalore torpedo ignited, Wang jumps into the enemies, kills all the enemies around and sacrifices his own life with a huge explosion. Certainly the audiences do not see the corpse of the hero like that in Sun Yu's film. The camera quickly moves to other sublime symbols including upright pine trees and sunlight, etc. Finally, Wang's fellow soldiers know his sacrifice, grieved but fight more bravely against the enemies, until all the enemies are wiped out.

Heroic Sons and Daughters was released in 1964, produced by Changchun Studio. It was the time when the representation of martyrdom according to the principle of Mao's 2RR (Combination of Revolutionary Romanticism and Revolutionary Realism, a variation of the socialist realism) was mature. The film was not listed as one of the "poisonous weeds" films in Jiang Qing's *Summary* two years later, and was widely exhibited during the Cultural Revolution. These facts show that the representation of martyrdom in the film was orthodox enough to be acknowledged even by the strictest principle of "three prominences." Let us examine how martyrdom is represented under the "three prominences."

"The three prominences" (*san tuchu* 三突出) was even more escalated than the 2RR in presenting martyrdom, to the extent of extremity. In May 1968, Yu Huiyong 于会泳 initially proposed and defined the principle in this way: "Among all characters, give prominence to the

positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters; among the main characters, give prominence to the most important character, namely, the central character.”⁸⁸

As the main composer for the Revolutionary Model Plays (*geming yangban xi* 革命样板戏), Yu Huiyong had gone through a number of ups and downs in the official hierarchy until finally receiving favor from Jiang Qing. Before proposing the principle, Yu had already collected plenty of Jiang Qing’s concrete but scattered directions on the model plays and tried hard to summarize an abstract and universal formulaic principle. This principle was supposed to be applicable to all the model plays and thus give guidance to future proletarian art works. Summarizing the gist of Jiang’s instruction, Yu observed, “Comrade Jiang Qing lays strong emphasis on the characterization of heroic figures,” and therefore, “according to Comrade Jiang Qing’s directions, we generalize the ‘three prominences’ as an important principle upon which to build and characterize figures.”⁸⁹

One year later, Yao Wenyan, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, modified Yu’s version and elevated the “three prominences” from an “important principle” (in Yu’s definition) to a fundamentally indispensable principle, thus indicating the absolute dominance of the principle over all the proletarian literature and art until the fall of the “Gang of Four” in October 1976.

⁸⁸ Yu Huiyong, “*Rang wenyi wutai yongyuan chengwei xuanchuan maozedong sixiang de zhendi*” 让文艺舞台永远成为宣传毛泽东思想的阵地 (Let the Stage of Art be the Everlasting Front to Propagate the Thought of Mao Zedong), in *Wenhui Bao* 文汇报 (Wenhui Daily), May 23, 1968. Translation (with my revision) refers to Lan Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution*, p.29.

⁸⁹ Ibid. For the detailed autobiography and historical evaluation of Yu Huiyong, see Dai Jiafang, *The Rise and Fall of Yu Huiyong, Minister of Culture in the Cultural Revolution*, 1994 and Richard Curt Kraus, “The Rise and Fall of Yu Hui-Yong,” in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, 1991.

The practice of the “three prominences” is witnessed today through literature works and the filmic adaptation of the model plays since 1970s. Take model play films as an example: all the artistic elements in the model plays—from a single flash of light, a single property on the stage, a single actor’s line or action, to the plot and narrative structure of the play—should strictly follow the “three prominences.” Any violation was punished not just for artistic imperfection, but for political mistake.

Yao’s article gives detailed instruction on how to foreground the main heroic protagonist by all means.⁹⁰ I will explain the application of the theory to the actual films. First, the negative characters serve as foils to the main heroic images. In the Scene III of *The Red Detachment of Women* (1971), two enemies capture the political instructor Hong Changqing as the main heroic character (fig.4-7). The enemies are darkened and marginalized, compared with Hong’s figure bright and central-positioned. The enemies’ clothes are dirty and shabby, while Hong’s costume clean and neat. The first shot shows almost the same height of enemies and Hong, while in the second shot enemies cringe and are dwarfed by the rising Hong. Similar to the *Heroic Sons and Daughters*, a rough cut (almost a jump cut) is followed to show the entire landscape comprising of sublime symbols of lightening and mountain. With all the enemies in dark area, the central-positioned and high-key lit male hero is given full prominence when the sequence ends with the last shot: a typical zoom-in with invincible facial close-up.

⁹⁰ See The Performing Group of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, “Strive to Create Dazzlingly Brilliant Proletarian Heroic Images.”



Fig.4-7

Second, the other positive characters serve as foils to the main heroic character. *The Red Lantern* (1970) depicts three ready-to-be martyrs in the execution scene (the young woman is not executed in the end) (fig 8-10). To give prominence to the male protagonist Li Yuhe, the camera is angled to place Li Yuhe at the central position. His brightly-lit and unrealistically super-white shirt draws the major attention from the audience as well. Like Sun Yu's female martyr in *Daybreak*, three martyrs fix their hair before the execution, but this time there is no tantalizing and deliberate posing at all. They head toward the execution ground with solemn smile. The final shot of the sequence presents only a landscape with sublime symbols of pine tree and mountain, without showing the actual execution. Li Yuhe's prominence among other positive

figures is shown again by emphasizing his voice of shouting out the slogan “Long Live Chinese People” before execution.



Fig 8-10

Third, the stage designs serve as foils to the main heroic character. All the sublime symbols mentioned in the previous two examples from the model plays serve this function. In the original version of the model play *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy Scene VIII*, the main protagonist Yang crouches in a damp narrow cave. This stage designs make the audience feel somewhat frustrated. The revised version arranges Yang tower over all at the top of the mountain, singing in the rays of splendid sunshine. Such replacement presents the audience with a sublime revolutionary image and gives prominence to the main heroic character.

The hierarchy among three kinds of characters (the main heroic character, the other heroic or positive characters, and the negative characters) is simple to be applied in theory, and easy to be recognized by mass audience/readers. Paul Clark regards the “three prominences” as “a useful, relatively objective yardstick by which to measure correctness.”⁹¹ In practice, however, the symbolic relationship is not as clear-cut as that in theory.

First, the awkward position of the main heroic character is reflected in the relationship between the main heroic character and negative characters. Artists could give full prominence to the main heroic character by establishing his (her) absolute superiority (morally or intellectually) over all the negative characters. In other words, by denigrating the negative characters as being stupid or vulnerable, the main heroic character could be easily foregrounded. However, as a critic noted, the negative characters as “the opposite dimension of paradox,” should also be emphasized to a certain degree to foil and elevate the main heroic character, otherwise the main heroic character cannot fully develop his (her) heroic characteristics and thereby be paradoxically downplayed.⁹² For instance, according to the “three prominences,” the general cinematographic strategy to represent the enemies should be “far, small, dark”(yuan, xiao, hei 远 小黑). When the struggle occurs, however, if the enemies appear to be too small and dark, the toughness of the struggle cannot be witnessed, and the hero’s prominence comes cheap if the powerful hero only beats the powerless enemies. In the previous example from the martyr Hong Changqing’s final struggle with the enemies, the enemies are characterized as powerless and timid, to the extent that the audiences naturally tend to ask why Changqing is still captured and

⁹¹ Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, p.47.

⁹²See Ye Xiaosheng 叶晓生, “Yingxiong guanghui zhao yinmu” 英雄光辉照银幕 (Heroism Shines on the Screen), in *Ten Years of the Revolution in Beijing Opera*, pp.180-184.

finally executed by the enemies. In this way, dwarfing negative characters simultaneously gives and does not give prominence to the main heroic character.

Second, the main heroic character's awkward position is also manifested in the relationship between the main heroic character and other heroic/positive characters. To ensure the prominence of the main heroic character among all the positive characters, artists usually applied two strategies: "*Shuizhang chuangao*" 水涨船高 (the rising river raises the boat) and "*Shuiluo shichu*" 水落石出 (when the river ebbs the stones appear).⁹³ The positive characters are compared to a "river," and the prominence of the main heroic character can be accentuated either by elevating or dwarfing the positive characters. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the ebbing river can make the stone stand out but cannot elevate the stone. Therefore, "the rising river raises the boat" became the preferred approach.

However, while a rising river can elevate a boat, it can also capsize the boat. In some filmic versions of the model plays, it is hard to determine who the main heroic character is.⁹⁴ The model play *Sha jiabang* 沙家浜 exemplifies such a difficulty. Although Guo Jianguang 郭建光 (the army leader) is the flawless main heroic character, Sister Aqing 阿庆嫂, an underground communist coming from the folk, seems to undermine Guo's supremacy. Her legendary life and acute mind to outwit the male enemies seems to be more fun to watch. In a recent study of the "three prominences," Gu Yuanqing 古远清 points out, "In practice, the artistic brilliance of Sister Aqing overshadows Guo Jianguang who is only able to make empty gestures. This woman

⁹³See Fang Yun 方耘, "Shi 'shuiluo shichu' haishi 'shuizhang chuangao'" 是 "水落石出" 还是 "水涨船高" (Whether "shuiluo shichu" or "shuizhang chuangao") in *Ten Years of the Revolution in Beijing Opera*, pp.172-175.

⁹⁴ For the detailed description on how such a difficulty generated various political debates and struggles in the model play films *The Red Lantern* 红灯记 (1971) and *The White-haired Girl* 白毛女 (1972), See Qu Jiannong, *The Red Past: Chinese Cinema during 1966-1976*, pp.111-112, 139-140, 151-156.

coming from the folk is always, in the audience's minds, the main heroic character."⁹⁵ In the previous example from the *Red Lantern*, the audience can also identify more with the young lady, or even the old lady, rather than the male main protagonist Li Yuhe. In this sense, the contradiction between the disambiguation of political symbols and the uncontrollable textual dynamism seems to put the hierarchical system of the "three prominences" in crisis.

Sequence examples from the film *Heroic Sons and Daughters* and the CR model play films, attest to the typical and orthodox onscreen representation of male martyrdom. They point to some crucial questions: how is the representation of the martyr in a perfect (or close to perfect) model without any blemish seem to be real and can be accepted by the audience during the Maoist period? Is such representation against the principle of realism? Can the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the "three prominences" be contained or solved? In the following section I will analyze the trajectory of Chinese realism from the May Fourth Period to the "three prominences." The genealogical study hopes to suggest a red thread running through, and argues for the continuity, rather than rupture, from the May Fourth discourse to the Maoist revolutionary discourse. The study shows that the acceptance of the "unrealistic" characterization of martyrs has been historically grounded, and was reinforced by the Maoist necropolitical system and ideological maneuver. From the other perspective, the theoretical study shows the importance of one of the "absent causes" and examines how it becomes an essential part of the Maoist necropolitics to drive History forward: the perfect communist future as the transcendental

⁹⁵ Gu Yuanqing, "San tuchu"三突出 (the three prominences), in Hong Zichen and Meng Fanhua eds, *Key Vocabulary in Contemporary Literature*, p.148. See a similar comment from Chen Sihe, *Ten Lectures on Key Vocabularies in Contemporary Chinese Literature*, p.154. Chen's insights on the "latent folk structure" (minjian yinxing jiegou 民间隐形结构), which resisted the dominant revolutionary discourse during the CR period, shed light on the CR audience's response. For Chen, the model plays draw CR audience's interest because certain parts of the plays inherit from the folk art and popular culture. (See Chen, *Ten Lectures*, pp.130-165) It is certainly an important aspect, but it does not capture the "hypnotic and seductive power" of the CR art in the ritualistic CR society. (See Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetic and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, p.213.)

revolutionary ideal.

The Historical Trajectory: Romanticism in Realism

From Sun Yu's representation of martyrs to the "three prominences," one question haunts all the time: how to romanticize and elevate martyr's images based on the principle of realism? Many intellectuals discussed realism and romanticism during the 20th century China, but these two terms have many connotations under different social contexts and agendas. To untangle the intertwined complicatedness, a historical trajectory needs to be provided. However, from the typical and orthodox representation of Maoist martyrdom, we immediately see two inherent contradictions in the representation of martyrdom.

The first contradiction lies in the simultaneous faithfully real (according to the empirical reality) and the sublimely idealized (according to the communist ideal) representation of the martyr. Maoist discourse requires the heroic martyr be unreservedly elevated into an overblown image of perfection composed of all heroic merits. Such an elevation, however, is not realized by unbounded fantasies, but by the so-called "typicality" (*dianxing* 典型). The martyr character draws traits from many proletarian heroes in real life, selects and purifies these traits, and then represents them in a *real* but much heightened plane. A crucial incompatibility arises accordingly: How can the real description and the ideal prescription of the martyr occur simultaneously?

The second contradiction can be seen from the tension between the politically controllable symbolic meanings and the uncontrollable textual dynamism. Maoist discourse aims to ensure the disambiguation of various political symbols in literature and art. In other words, the interpretation of symbols, or of relationship among symbols, must be predictable and fixed,

leaving little room for textual tension and alternative interpretations. However, it is still questionable whether the symbolic meanings can be totally controlled by the political discourse, or there inevitably occurs the “revenge of écriture” —no matter how the rigid formulaic system blocks the textual indeterminacy and symbolic ambiguity, “there are always cracks, ruptures, elements that are irrelevant or that resist entering into the general configuration.”⁹⁶

Since the 1920s, these two contradictions ingrained in leftist thought stimulated various debates and conflicts, rendering the cinematic representation of martyrdom a crystal on the development of leftist thoughts, an inevitable outcome formed and intensified in a long historical process.

Realism was acclaimed as a progressive and critical literary approach in the May Fourth period, as Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 claimed, “Down with stale, pompous classical literature; up with fresh, sincere realist literature!”⁹⁷ May Fourth thinkers regarded realism as the most effective literary approach to unveil and analyze various social problems. However, as Marston Anderson correctly argues, realism was endorsed in China not primarily because of its nonchalantly objective representation of the empirical reality, as is usually associated with Western critical realism.⁹⁸ Rather, the introduction of realism coincided with China’s urgent need for “a new model of creative generativity and literary reception,” from which May Fourth intellectuals could not only cognitively observe the society, but also affectively express their moral standpoints to

⁹⁶ Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, p.253. This argument can find its predecessor from Roland Barthes’s famous reading of *Sarrasine*, in which he proposes that the “limited plurality” can allow multiple and contradictory readings from the coherent and self-enclosed realist works. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z*.

⁹⁷ Chen Duxiu, “Wenxue geming lun” 文学革命论 (On Literary Revolution), in Kirk Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, p.141.

⁹⁸ Realism in Western literary tradition is a loaded and contested term. Its slippery nature denies sweeping definition. It is, however, the particular Chinese discursive practices that built the “tropes of equivalence” in translation, appropriating and reinterpreting the concept of realism in a new context. For the discussion of realism in Western literary tradition, see Pam Morris, *Realism*, 2003. For the investigation of “tropes of equivalence,” see Lydia H.Liu, *Translingual Practice*.Chapter One.

the audience at the deepest level.⁹⁹ In this way, realism—with its mimetic pretense to represent the real world scientifically—was adulterated with Chinese intellectuals’ sentimental expression and moral obligation since the beginning of its introduction to China.

The Oxford English Dictionary offers a definition of realism as “any view or system contrasted with idealism.”¹⁰⁰ If idealism is “a system of thought that subordinates sensory perceptions of the world to intellectual or spiritual knowledge,” modern Chinese idealism—characterized by intellectuals’ pre-existing moral obsession with the nationalist ideal, and their inseparable nexus to the traditional Chinese expressive literary style—paradoxically constituted an indispensable part of modern Chinese realism.¹⁰¹ From the initial introduction of realism to China, to its later development from social realism and socialist realism, what occurred was not the stark rupture and distortion, but the continued escalation of idealist proportion within realism.¹⁰² Idealism was inherent in the borrowed, translated, and reinterpreted concept of realism, whose contradictory twin constituents were never separated: the descriptive, objective observation has ever been shadowed by the prescriptive, subjective signification.

The 1927 Revolutionary Literature debate first clearly witnessed the tension of this idealism-realism contradiction. As the leading theorist from the Communist party-sponsored Sun Society (*Taiyang she* 太阳社), Qian Xingcun 钱杏村 accused Lu Xun of exposing the dark side

⁹⁹ See Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁰ See Pam Morris, *Realism*, p.2.

¹⁰¹ See C. T. Hsia, “Obsession With China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature,” in C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, pp.533-554.

¹⁰² Chen Shunxing, a leading Chinese scholar working on socialist realism, led a comprehensive investigation on the reception and transformation of socialist realism in China. But she jumps her analysis directly from the year 1962 to the year 1976 with only one sentence to generalize the literary thought in this fourteen-year-period: “We can say that the reception of socialist realism in China from then [1962] on was in such a distorted way that this reception was absolutely blocked until the ‘thaw’ in the post-CR period.” (Chen Shunxing, *The Reception and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China*, p.370.) This paper tries to argue that the “three prominences” was not a distortion, but an intensified form of socialist realism.

of life at the expense of eulogizing political ideas.¹⁰³ For Qian, the new “proletarian realism” (*puluo xianshi zhuyi* 普罗现实主义) should guide literature “(to) do more than simply describe life—it should create new life, that is, actively propel society into the future.”¹⁰⁴ Lu Xun refuted and criticized such future-oriented prescription for its refusal to face harsh realities, although Lu Xun still obeyed the “revolutionary vanguard’s order” by leaving certain bright idealistic hopes in the end of some his fictions.¹⁰⁵

The introduction of socialist realism to China by Zhou Yang 周扬 in 1933 further manifested the description-prescription contradiction in a single literary doctrine¹⁰⁶. Socialist realism, by its original Russian definition, requires two tasks¹⁰⁷. The descriptive task is “a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality,” and the prescriptive task is “ideological molding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.” As for how to reconcile these two contradictory tasks in one doctrine, Zhou Yang defended it with a rhetorical question: “Socialist realism requires writers to depict the reality; isn’t it true that revolutionary romanticism is included in such a living reality?”¹⁰⁸ Zhou’s defense regarded “positive

¹⁰³ See Qian Xingcun, “Siqu le de A Q shidai” 死去了的阿 Q 时代 (The Bygone Age of Ah Q), in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, pp.276-288.

¹⁰⁴ Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, p.49.

¹⁰⁵ See Lu Xun “Zi xu” 自序 (Preface to Call to Arms), in *Nahan 呐喊 (Call to Arms)* (Beijing: Renming wenxue chubanshe, 1997). English translation in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, pp.238-242. Lu Xun applied such *qubi* 曲笔 (translated as “innuendos” (Denton), or as “distortions” (Anderson)) most famously in his fiction “Yao” 药 (“Medicine,” from *Call to Arms*) by leaving wreath on the son’s grave to cancel certain pessimistic effect of the fiction. For the discussion of *qubi*, see Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁶ See Zhou Yang: “Guanyu shehui zhuyi de xianshi zhuyi yu geming de langman zhuyi” 关于 “社会主义的现实主义” 与革命的浪漫主义 (On Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism), in Zhou Yang, *Selected Works of Zhou Yang*, Vol I, 101. Although the standard definition of socialist realism was not proposed until the First Congress of the Soviet Writers in 1934, Zhou Yang had sensitively grasped the essence of socialist realism one year earlier.

¹⁰⁷ The standard definition of socialist realism is as follows:

Socialist realism, being the basic method of Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time this truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological molding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.

(Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934*, p.197.)

¹⁰⁸ Zhou Yang, “On Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism,” p. 113.

romanticism” as an inherent part of realism, and such an argument essentially inherited from the hybrid formation of Chinese realism since May Fourth period. In contrast with Zhou’s foreground of “heroism” in the “darkness surrounding us,”¹⁰⁹ Hu Feng’s 胡风 argument on realism, on the other hand, emphasized the social particular—“the injured and insulted” —rather than a bright universal truth.¹¹⁰ As a student of Lu Xun, Hu was associated with the other trend of 1930s leftism, whose humanistic concern to expose the social darkness differentiated it from the ideologically charged “socialist realism.” In this light, no matter “social realism” or “socialist realism,” the idealist proportion persisted in the hybrid formation of leftist realism.

Mao Zedong’s “Yan’an Talks” in 1942 legitimized the idealistic and prescriptive elements in leftist realism. For Mao, “life” reflected in art works “can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”¹¹¹ “Yan’an Talks” predicted the “three prominences” in two ways. First, when literature and art are “cogs and wheels in the whole machine,”¹¹² they could only passively yet faithfully produce the standard art works under the necessary guidance of a definite form, such as the formulaic principle of “three prominences.” Second, Mao notes that the equal treatment of social brightness and darkness should give way to “bring out the brightness of the whole picture.”¹¹³ This note can almost be paraphrased as “Among all the characters, give prominence to the positive figures.”

Since Mao’s “Yan’an Talks,” the characterization of the positive and heroic figures became the central task for the communist literature and art. In 1948, Hu Ling 胡零 differentiated the

¹⁰⁹ See Zhou Yang “Thoughts on Realism,” in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, p.344.

¹¹⁰ See Hu Feng “Realism: A Correction,” in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, pp.345-355.

¹¹¹ Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art”, in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, p.470.

¹¹² Ibid., p.474.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.479.

positive characters with the heroic characters. He noted, “Not all the positive characters need to be depicted as perfectly as the heroic characters,” but the new heroic characters “should be perfect.”¹¹⁴ In 1951, Chen Huangmei 陈荒煤 called for efforts to create new heroic models, eulogize their sublime characteristics rather than depict their backwardness.¹¹⁵ In 1953, the Second Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers endorsed socialist realism—with its idealistic proportion rapidly swelling up—as the highest principle for literature and art. The conference report made by Zhou Yang again revealed the description-prescription contradiction of leftist realism. Zhou noted that “real life” should be the foundation to characterize heroic figures. But he also claimed that “to prominently represent the brilliant characteristics of the heroic figure, it is allowable and even indispensable to intentionally ignore some unimportant defects of the heroic figure, thus making him the idealized character admired by the masses.”¹¹⁶ In the top-down communist literary system, Zhou’s report brought enormous puzzles for the writers: what are the “unimportant defects”? How can the erasure of these defects according to a prescriptive ideal still be based on “real life”?

These uncertainties derived from the description-prescription contradiction rendered the communist artists always “dance on the knife blade”¹¹⁷ After the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957, to lean towards the descriptive end (expose the social darkness) or the prescriptive end (eulogize the socialist brightness) of socialist realism became the yardstick to judge the artist’s

¹¹⁴ See Hu Ling, “Cong ‘ruhe chuangzao zhengmian renwu’ tanqi” 从 “如何创造正面人物” 谈起 (A Discussion from the Topic “How to Build Positive Characters”), in *Dongbei wenyi* 东北文艺 (Northeastern Literature and Art) Vol.4(6), 1948.

¹¹⁵ See Chen Huangmei, “Wei chuangzao xinde yingxiong dianxin er nuli” 为创造新的英雄典型而努力 (Strive to Create New Heroic Models), in Wu Di ed., *Research Documents of Chinese Film 1949-1979* pp.86-91.

¹¹⁶ Zhou Yang, “Wei chuangzao gengduode youxiude wenxue yishu zuopin er fendou” 为创造更多的优秀的文学艺术作品而奋斗 (Strive to Create more Brilliant Literature and Art Works), in *Selected Works of Zhou Yang*, Vol.2, 243.

¹¹⁷ Qi Xiaoping, *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds*, p.2.

communist belief and revolutionary loyalty¹¹⁸. Under such rigid political enforcement, artists had no alternative choice but to neglect the defects of heroes as many as possible. Only by doing so could they still remain in the socialist leftist camp. The 1958 Great Leap Forward (*dayuejin* 大跃进) called for more artistic representation of the omnipotent and flawless heroic characters to echo with its over-exaggerated capability of material production. To foreground the unconquerable communist ideal, Mao Zedong coined the principle of “combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism” to replace socialist realism in 1958.¹¹⁹

Such a replacement predicted that the idealistic portion within leftist realism escalated continuously until it culminated in the “three prominences.” Aesthetic debates were explicitly transcribed into political struggles after Mao’s direction “never forget class struggle” in 1962.¹²⁰ His two harsher comments on the realm of literature and art in 1963 and 1964 further put artists on trial.¹²¹ Following this vein, in February 1966 a forum hosted by Jiang Qing generated a combative “Summary,” which claimed that ever since the establishment of the PRC, a “black line”(heixian 黑线) had usurped the literature and art realm. To theoretically support the characterization of the flawless heroic models, the “Summary” also attacked the theory of “truthful writing”(xie zhenshi 写真实) as the foremost poisonous theory in the Eight Negative

¹¹⁸ For the comprehensive and authoritative analysis of the aesthetic/political struggle between the Leftist camp and the Rightist Camp, see Zhou Yang “Wen yi zhan xian shang de da bian lun” 文艺战线上的大辩论 (A Huge Debate in the Battlefield of the Literature and Art Realm), in Wu Di ed. *Research Documents of Chinese Film*, Vol.2, pp.167-183.

¹¹⁹ Mao actually recognized the idealistic aspect within socialist realism as early as the 1940s, when he wrote the slogan “realism of the Anti-Japanese War, romanticism of the revolution.” (*kangri de xianshi zhuyi, geming de langman zhuyi* 抗日的现实主义,革命的浪漫主义); See Chen Shunxing, *Shehui zhuyi xianshi zhuyi lilun zai Zhongguo de jieshou yu zhuanhua*, p.321. Such a nominal modification also reflected Mao’s increasing concern that Chinese revolutionary experience should be distinguished from Soviet influence.

¹²⁰ In September 1962, Mao Zedong made this comment in the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth CPC Central Committee.

¹²¹ Mao Zedong, “Guanyu wenxue yishu de liangge pishi” 关于文学艺术的两个批示 (Two Comments on the Realm of Literature and Art), in *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 (Renmin Daily) May 28, 1967. Mao originally made two comments in December 1963 and June 1964.

Expressions (*hei balun* 黑八论).¹²² The “Summary” fully reflected Jiang Qing’s literary thought, and provided a canonical text for Yu Huiyong to generalize Jiang’s thought into a formulaic principle. This principle was the “three prominences.”

The Theoretical Study: The Power of Mind’s Eye

The genealogical study of the “three prominences” shows the red thread running through: the “three prominences” was not a whimsical invention, but an intensified formula developed from the hybrid formation of Chinese leftist realism since the May Fourth period. The tension from the inner contradiction in leftist realism—faithful description of the empirical reality and prescriptive idealization of the revolutionary heroes—culminated in the “three prominences.” With the idealistic proportion within leftist realism swelling up, the flawless heroic martyrs seem to be free from the bonding of reality, as Leo Ou-fan Lee comments on the CR films as “grossly unreal when seen side by side with the social-realistic films made in the 40s.”¹²³

However, rather than rush to the conclusion that such unresolved inner contradiction renders the representation of male martyrs *unreal* under the principle of “three prominences,” we need to reconsider the slippery nature of *reality* itself. The truthful description of heroic figures according to *reality* had never been denounced even by extreme leftists. The political attack on “truthful writing,” as is shown in the “Summary,” was not an attack on *truth* itself but on the truth in the rightist artists’ minds, which tended to expose the dark side of the socialist system.

¹²² The full name of the “Summary” is “Linbiao tongzhi weituo Jiangqing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao” 林彪同志委托江青同志召开的部队文艺工作座谈会纪要 (Summary of the Forum on Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing), in Wu Di ed. *Research Documents of Chinese Film 1949-1979*, Vol. 3, pp.3-11.

¹²³ Leo Ou-fan Lee, “The Tradition of Modern Chinese Cinema: Some Preliminary Explorations and Hypotheses,” p.15

Such rightist truth needed to be distinct from the idealized leftist truth, which is criticized as *unreal* nowadays but might be regarded as *pure reality* during the CR period.

Empirical reality differs from, but is also bound up with, the morally prescribed reality by the ideology. As Terry Eagleton suggests, we need to distinguish “‘false’ as meaning ‘untrue to what is the case,’ and ‘false’ as meaning ‘unreal.’”¹²⁴ If the first “false” implies ethical evaluation, the second “false” is based on empirical observation. The complicatedness lies in the fact that ideological discourse mediates through “a complex network of empirical and normative elements, within which the nature and organization of the former is ultimately determined by the requirements of the latter.”¹²⁵ In other words, by a certain ideological practice, idealistic prescription can influence and even determine the empirical description, thus blurring the boundary between the two.

The previous genealogical study demonstrated the hybrid formation of leftist realism, as well as some intellectuals’ (Qian Xingcun, Sun Yu, Zhou Yang, Mao Zedong, etc.) claims that the prescriptive revolutionary romanticism /idealism was an indispensable part of leftist realism. In this light, it is legitimate to ask the question: is it possible that such a description-prescription contradiction from today’s retrospective standpoint was not a contradiction for these intellectuals and many other people at that time, because they simply regarded the prescriptive ideal as the descriptive real?

Social truth/reality is ultimately an ideological construction in a symbolic system. In an analysis of Balzac’s novel *La Vieille Fille*, Frederic Jameson investigates “the relationship between desire, ideology, and the possibility for certain types of narrative apparatus to lay claim

¹²⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p.22.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.23.

to a social and historical ‘realism’”¹²⁶ For Jameson, social reality comes to us in narrative forms, and the representation of social reality inevitably goes through the symbolic mediation. It is a master narrative (ideology) that contains (if not solves) the historical contradictions and provides coherence and comprehensibility for a collective unity, from which the individual desire and fantasy could find the symbolic affirmation.¹²⁷

In a vivid illustration of such symbolic affirmation of coherence, Jonathan Crary examines the regulated knowledge in fusing and unifying the spectators’ vision. He points out that from the late 1500s to the late 1700s, the European spectators used camera obscura to confirm their epistemological ordering of the world. By “excluding anything disorderly or unruly,” the spectators could find symbolic correspondence “between exterior world and interior representation.”¹²⁸ Crary’s argument again proves the bonding of the descriptive and the prescriptive. In front of the ideological apparatus such as camera obscura or cinema screen, *what the spectator desires to see determines to a large extent what he empirically sees.*

Crary’s argument on “mind’s eye” suffers from his assumption of the universal spectatorship.¹²⁹ Therefore, given the very complexity of the Cultural Revolution,¹³⁰ it is presumptuous to assume any CR audience’s/readers’ position to judge whether or not they identified with the flawless heroic characters and regarded the prescriptive ideal as the

¹²⁶ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.179.

¹²⁷ See Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, especially Chapter One, Three, Five and Six. For two brilliant readings of *The Political Unconscious*, see William C. Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to The Political Unconscious*, and George Hartley, *The Abyss of Representation*, Chapter Five.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp.42-43.

¹²⁹ See Heidi J. Nast and Audrey Kobayashi, “Re-Corporealizing Vision,” in Nancy Duncan ed. *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, p.81.

¹³⁰ These complexities include, for example, the heterogeneous spectatorship/readership, the regional diversity in China, and the ever-changing social contexts of each period during the Cultural Revolution. For recent scholarship focusing on such diversities of the Cultural Revolution, see Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz and Andrew G. Walder eds., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*.

descriptive real.¹³¹ It is, however, feasible and necessary to investigate how the revolutionary ideology functioned, trying to *contain* the description-prescription contradiction by merging the idealized future world with the real present world during the CR years.¹³² If for Jameson the symbolic act in the aesthetic realm can potentially invent “imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions,” the other way also holds true: social imaginary of a future totality can potentially contain (if not solve) the description-prescription contradiction in a literary principle.¹³³

The Cultural Revolution began with a revolution in the realm of literature and art. For Mao Zedong, the establishment of an autonomous kingdom of proletarian art was possible and necessary. Mao’s privileging of culture dated back as early as 1937 to his essay “Maodun lun” 矛盾论 (On Contradiction), in which he noted, “when the superstructure (politics, culture, etc) obstructs the development of the economy, political and cultural changes become principal and imperative.”¹³⁴ Mao boldly carried out this belief in political practice by liberating the cultural from the economic during the CR period. Such a practice, however, could easily slide toward another extreme, as Liu Kang correctly points out: “Mao’s privileging of culture, as a way in its inception to counter the economic determinism of classical Marxism, was eventually turned into a ‘culturalist’ determinism and essentialism.”¹³⁵

When the culture was liberated from the shackles of materialism and became a dominant

¹³¹ Perry Link distinguishes four types of readers in the socialist literary system: The Mass Audience, The Popular Readership, Socially Engaged Readers, and Elite Readers. See Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature*, pp.211-283.

¹³² See Frederic Jameson’s term “strategy of containment,” which indicates an alternative mode of ideology other than “false consciousness.” Ideology provides coherence and comprehensibility by containing (not necessarily solving) the real social contradictions. See Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp.52-53. Also William C.Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx*, pp.76-93.

¹³³ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.79.

¹³⁴ Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction”, in *Selected works of Mao Zedong*, Vol 1.

¹³⁵ Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), preface xi.

motivation in social development, an idealistically spiritual movement inevitably occurred. Rather than reflect on the present world critically, such a spiritual movement introduced an invisible but imaginable future world, and stimulated an increasingly inflating imagination unrestricted by material boundaries. As a popular saying during the Great Leap Forward goes, “There is only that which has not been thought of, not that which is impossible to achieve” (*Meiyou gan budao de, zhiyou xiang budao de* 没有干不到的，只有想不到的)¹³⁶, the key cultural strategy of the Party was to stimulate collective imaginary of the “future ideal world” in order to transform the shape of the “real world” in the minds of the masses.

In this sense, consciousness of the boundary between the present and the future was strategically obscured. Such leftist cultural strategy is reminiscent of Lukács’ discussion on epic narrative¹³⁷. For Lukács, the heroic figures in Homeric time indicate a golden era when the totality of life and the original harmony remained. Such an original unity can not be regained in a modern age characterized by rupture and uncertainty. Therefore, Western critical realism necessarily builds up psychologically divided heroes that face an increasingly segmented capitalist modernity. For Mao, however, class struggle could eliminate such rupture and the original harmony would revive thereof.¹³⁸ By provoking unrestricted imagination of a future world where capitalism and labor segmentation have been negated, Mao’s cultural strategy nostalgically called for the unity of the past and connected it with future totality, which was

¹³⁶ See “The Great Leap Forward,” from Chinese Online Encyclopedia Baidu 百度百科, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/8601.htm> {accessed June 26, 2009}

¹³⁷ See György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p.56. Also see Wang Ban’s analysis on Lukács’ notion of epic in relation to the memory of realism in Modern China. (Wang Ban, “Epic Narrative, Authenticity, and the Memory of Realism: Reflections on Jia Zhangke’s *Platform*,” in *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution*, ed. Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, pp.193-216). Régine Robin also analyzes Lukács’ epic heroes to demonstrate their incompatibility with socialist realism. (Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, pp.240-243.)

¹³⁸ For Mao’s utopian impulse to escape the historical blemishes and restore the original unity on a “clear sheet of paper,” see Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, Chapter Eighteen.

implanted into the present and redefined as the consciousness of reality. *The future is the present; the prescriptive ideal is the descriptive real.* In an “aesthetically driven, ritualistic and theatrical” CR Society,¹³⁹ the main heroic figures prescribed by the “three prominences” not only symbolized the revolutionary achievements, but more importantly, represented the future totality as well.

Žižek’s arguments shed further light on such representation of the future totality. For Žižek, ideological fantasy constructs social reality by designating a future totality, which is ultimately a void. To make the void represent-able, the future totality needs to efface “the traces of its own impossibility” by calling for a sublime object to occupy the empty holy place.¹⁴⁰ Žižek defines such sublime object as “immaterial corporality.”¹⁴¹ “Immaterial” because it is a symbol whose meaning depends on a symbolic order (the symbol is not sublime itself, but the “holy place” renders it sublime); “corporality” because it is the embodiment to fill the void. The sublime object needs to be “indestructible and immutable,” and it “persists beyond the corruption of the body physical.”¹⁴² In this regard, nothing fits more suitable as the sublime object than the flawless main heroic figures to represent the future totality. They are represented to be perfect to be “immutable,” and their sublime sacrifice ensures the continuation of the next sublime figure to fill the void, rendering the revolutionary spirit “indestructible.”¹⁴³ The “three prominences” provided a rigid symbolic order to foreground the sublime object, and it was the social imaginary of the future totality during the CR years that justified the “three prominences” and potentially contained its inherent description-prescription contradiction, which had been unresolved for long

¹³⁹ Wang (1997), p.219.

¹⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p.50, p.221.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ I will discuss in detail the continuation of revolutionary spirit in the “spontaneity-consciousness mode” in next section.

time in leftist literary thought.

Textual Revenge and Ideological Containment

In the previous sections discussing the awkward position of the main heroic character, I mention that it is hard to fixate the audience's identification with the martyr, with the other positive characters, or even with the negative characters. In this sense, the contradiction between the disambiguation of political symbols and the uncontrollable textual dynamism seems to put the hierarchical system of the “three prominences” in crisis.

However, to decide whether or not textual dynamism takes effect again requires the investigation of CR audience's /readers' responses under the social contexts. Given the heterogeneity of the CR spectatorship, it is equally presumptuous to assume the CR audience “in their minds” identified more with Guo Jianguang or with Sister Aqing. Hence, I will continue investigating the ideological practice of the Party—its cultural strategy trying to fix the symbolic meanings and block the textual revenge.

First, it is doubtful whether textual revenge necessarily occurs in every scenario.

Yomi Braester suggests that the power of writing “stems from the chasm between text and what it represents, and draws on ambiguity and paradox.”¹⁴⁴ Concerning the film versions of the model plays, however, he notices that the polyphonic text was “effectively silenced” by totalitarian political semiotics during the CR years: only the Party had absolute authority to interpret all the signs—for instance, the “sublime sign” of the coded message in *The Red Lantern*.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Braester, *Witness against History*. Preface, ix.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. pp.107-127.

The sublime characteristic of symbols is exactly the point from which social imaginary of the future totality potentially represses the textual dynamism. As the previous section argued, the flawless main heroic figure as the “sublime object” represents, and fills the void of the future totality, while the other positive/heroic characters—fallible in action or unsteady in revolutionary belief—represent the imperfect present. From today’s retrospective standpoint, textual revenge occurs because the main heroic character is prescriptively conceptualized, in contrast to the more “realistic” depiction of other positive characters. But, if the crucial ideological strategy of the Party during the CR years was to reshuffle the collective consciousness of the present and the future, and implant the future totality into the present reality; the positive characters can not necessarily threaten the supremacy of the main heroic character because the descriptive real was rendered hard to distinguish from the prescriptive ideal.

Textual dynamism is further repressed by one of the basic narrative modes in the CR arts, namely, the “spontaneity-consciousness mode.”¹⁴⁶ Spontaneity stands for the present time when groups or individuals “are not sufficiently enlightened politically and might act in an undisciplined or uncoordinated way.” Consciousness signals the future totality, when people “act from complete political awareness.”¹⁴⁷ The representative characters to fit this narrative mode are Wu Qinghua 吴清华 and Hong Changqing 洪常青 in the Revolutionary Ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*. The positive character Wu Qinghua is “spontaneous” at first—she is not able to restrain her personal resentment when she shoots and injures her enemy Nan Batian 南霸天, thus frustrating the original Party plan.¹⁴⁸ After the main heroic character Hong Changqing

¹⁴⁶ Katrina Clark, “Socialist Realism with Shores,” in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, eds. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, pp.27-50. Clark investigates this mode in soviet novels. Such a mode is also applied in many CR artworks.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.29.

¹⁴⁸ See *The Red Detachment of Women*, Scene III, in *Compilation of the Revolutionary Model Play Scripts*, Vol.1.

educates her with the model of “consciousness,”¹⁴⁹ Wu makes all effort to transform herself into such “consciousness.” Hong sacrifices his life in *Scene VI* to leave the “Holy place” of the future totality empty again, and Wu, inheriting the “consciousness” from Hong, functions as the successive symbolic embodiment to fill the void. In correspondence with the social imaginary process that the present reality is led by, modified from and finally merged with the future totality, the “spontaneous” positive character is first frustrated, then educated, and finally transformed into the “conscious” main heroic character. When the future totality sets to be the ultimate orientation for all the positive characters, and calls for their symbolic embodiment in a successive sequence, textual dynamism is potentially contained because every symbol will become essentially the same, sooner or later, as the “sublime object” to embody the dominating future totality, an immutable void.

To Die or Not to die? A Postscript

In the 21st-century China where feverish pursuit of material interests has replaced the social imaginary of the future totality, what are the destiny of the CR artworks, as well as the underlying principle of the “three prominences”? Instead of throwing away the model plays into dustbin, a new tendency arises rapidly these years under the logic of “going to market.”

In the name of reviving the “Red Classics” (Hongse jingdian 红色经典), the TV series market has witnessed a number of adaptations from the model plays, such as *The Red Detachment of Women* (2004), *Sha jiabang* (2006), and *The Red Lantern* (2007). To restore the “distorted” heroic characters and enrich their “empty” characteristics, directors/scriptwriters tried all means to rewrite these model plays—not only to get rid of the “three prominences,” but also

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Scene IV.

to cater to the market economy. For instance, the TV series *The Red Detachment of Women* invited famous stars and added many love stories to attract not only the older audience living through the CR period, but also the younger audience fascinated by Japanese/Korean idol dramas.¹⁵⁰ Changqing's sacrifice occurs on the 22 out of 24 series, giving much more time and room to develop the love stories between Changqing and Qinghua than those in the original film/ballet. Frustratingly, neither group welcomed these changes.¹⁵¹ The original scriptwriter Liang Xin 梁信 refused to watch the TV series¹⁵², and The State Administration for Radio, Film and TV issued a notification to demand "more serious adaptations" of the "Red Classics" into TV series. The negative models in this notification included *The Red Detachment of Women* unreleased yet.¹⁵³

The critiques from the audience, critics, and the state bureau were similar. Take the authoritative state notification as the example, it followed audience/critics opinions¹⁵⁴, and criticized that these adaptations "invest too much romance on the main characters and emphasize their love stories...deliberately endow the heroic figures with multiple characteristics (*duochong xing*, 多重性格), and seek for the so-called 'humanism' (*renxinhua* 人性化) from the negative

¹⁵⁰ See Li Yan 李彦 "Hongse niangzi jun gemingju jingchen oushangju" 《红色娘子军》革命剧竟成青春偶像剧 (The Red Detachment of Women became an Idol Drama), in *Jingri xinxi bao* 今日信息报 (Today's News), March 14, 2004.

¹⁵¹ See Li Yan, "Xinban hongse niangzi jun gen hongse bu tiebian" 新版《红色娘子军》跟"红色"不贴边(The New Version of *The Red Detachment of Women* has nothing to do with the "Red"), in *Beijing qingnian bao* 北京青年报 (Beijing Youth), July 3, 2006.

¹⁵² Liang was the scriptwriter of the 1961 film version of *The Red Detachment of Women*. He castigated on this TV series because five or six people have worked on rewriting the script without his consent. See Ding Guanqing 丁冠景 "Dangnian yuan dianying bianju liangxin jukan dianshiju hongse niangzi jun" 当年原电影编剧梁信拒看电视剧《红色娘子军》(The original scriptwriter Liang Xin refused to watch the TV series *The Red Detachment of Women*), in *Nanfang ribao* 南方日报 (Nanfang Daily), June 15, 2005.

¹⁵³ See "Guanyu renzhen duidai hongse jingdian gaibian dianshiju youguan wenti de tongzhi" 关于认真对待"红色经典"改编电视剧有关问题的通知 (Notification on the serious treatment of the TV series adaptations from the Red Classics) <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/22114/33943/33945/2523858.html> {accessed June 29, 2009}

¹⁵⁴ For the critiques from the audience/critics, see Li Yan, "The New Version of *The Red Detachment of Women* has nothing to do with the 'Red'."

characters...”¹⁵⁵ Ironically enough, in light of the dominant post-socialist discourse that condemned the “three prominences” as dogmatic or ridiculous, or regarded the CR main heroic characters as empty or unreal, these rewritings in the TV series exactly aimed to extend the male martyr’s life, thus displaying more “real” life of the martyr as human being. What has been most severely denounced in the “three prominences” seemed to be endorsed again. In this regard, is there any theoretical validity of the “three prominences” that transcends different social contexts? Why is the condemnation of the heroic characters as “unreal” simultaneously accompanied by the resistance to rewrite them to be more “real”? How can we situate the CR artworks (or, their adaptations) in today’s China, where “the dominant trend of marketization” is still haunted by “the remnants of the state heteronomy”¹⁵⁶? Finally, do people still feel nostalgic for or even longing for the future perfect ideal even though the myth of the absent cause has collapsed with the market economy? These questions are worth further reflections.

¹⁵⁵ “Notification on the serious treatment of the TV series adaptations from the ‘Red Classics’”

¹⁵⁶ Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*, p.12.

Chapter 3

From *lienü* to *lieshi*: The Onscreen Maoist Female Martyrs

This chapter focuses on the characterization of female martyrs in the Maoist films. In premodern China, *lieshi* refers to the male subjects, while *lienü* 烈女 indicates the woman that holds firm to the female virtues even under extremely threatening conditions. For example, the woman who gives up her life to protect her virginity and chastity is often regarded as *lienü*. Lee Haiyan argues that in the “Confucian Structure of Feeling,” men are able to directly sacrifice for the nation, while women’s sacrifice for nation has to be mediated by the family or romantic nexus.¹⁵⁷

To redress such differentiation on sacrifice between sexes, the 1950 decree of “Provisional Regulations on the Compensation for the Revolutionary Casualties” made the title of *lieshi* neutral in gender—*lieshi* can refer to both male and female martyrs. It can be argued from this point that the abolishment of sexual differentiation on the title of *lieshi* demonstrates the “erasure of femininity.” However, I argue that Maoist discourse is far more complicated than the simple erasure of sexual difference can generalize. Following Tani Barlow’s argument that the category of “women” is anachronistic and historically catachrestic (Barlow 2005), I examine the characterization of the socialist female martyrs in the films *Daughters of China* (中華女兒 1949, dir. Lin Zifeng), *Daughters of the Party* (党的女兒 1958, dir. Lin Nong), *Struggles in an Ancient*

¹⁵⁷ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, p.91.

City (野火春風斗古城 1963, dir. Yan Jizhou), *Bitter Cauliflower* (苦菜花 1965, dir. Li Mao), *Living Forever in Burning Flame* (烈火中永生 1965, dir. Shui Hua), and *Ode to Yimeng* (沂蒙 1975, dir. Li Wenhui). I investigate the cinematic figuration of the ideal female martyrs with the background of the melodrama tradition in Chinese cinema. No matter it is the *lienü* or *lieshi*, or any ideal type of the socialist women, they are all abstract forms that regulate what women should be, an absent cause that lacks concrete referent. The ideal type of the socialist women is a future totality, which is ultimately a void. But it is again such constitutive void that drives the communist History forward by constructing the social imagery of the future ideal and evoking the formless revolutionary passion.

Since female martyrs in the Maoist films are mostly in constant interaction with the male characters and the Party, I pay special attention to how female martyrdom is related to the voyeuristic psychology of the socialist male audiences, and how the Party usurps the female martyr's voice to speak for itself. Finally, I explore how death as a narrative necessity solves the potential trespass into some forbidden areas in the Maoist cinema, such as love triangle among the communist comrades.

The other major issue in this chapter examines the relationship among the Maoist female sacrifice, gift theory, and woman's body. Regarded as the mixture of interestedness and disinterestedness, gift links the personal experience with its initiation into the community consciousness. Unlike the western Enlightenment ideal characterized by ration, equal value market exchange and calculable science; the socialist ideal, on the contrary, resorts to passion, imagination and gift-indoctrinated mindsets, which are unquantifiable and uncalculatable. I contend that Maoist China exemplifies a complicated gift-exchange social system. Since the gift from the Party benefactor is abstract, incalculable and unrepresentable (such as *enqing* 恩情), it

puts the beneficiaries continuously in the feeling of indebtedness. The onscreen martyrs symbolize the perfect communist future, and they function as the Party's gift to save the people, as they die for the people's sake and substitute for people's suffering. The process involves a simultaneously voluntary and obligatory repayment to the Party. Since the gift from the Party was unrepresentable and irredeemable, the feeling of indebtedness and the sacrificial drive were persistent and never-ending, until one's death. Such logic was performed repeatedly to validate sacrifice as a crucial metaphor for organic nationalism: when everyone cannot clear the debt and regards himself as part of the nation, the boundary between the voluntary and obligatory death is no longer distinguishable. For some female martyrs, the protection of their chastity or integrity of bodies are more important than the protection of lives. For some other female martyrs, they are ready to self-sacrifice both their bodies and lives, although the body may become the last resort to resist the Party's interpellation.

Female Sexuality: Erasure or Foregrounding?

The very first question of this chapter is straightforward but important: since the abolishment of sexual differentiation was manifested in many state policies during the Maoist Era and *lieshi* can refer to both male and female martyr, do we still need to study socialist female martyrdom as a unique category, or can we treat them the same as the male martyrdom? Both in terms of the theme and film style, many Maoist films present the female martyrs almost the same as the male martyrs. They can equally control their emotion and behave even more politically mature than the male counterparts. They rationally choose to sacrifice without hesitation. From these points, it is reasonable that many directors applied the same formula for the sublime female

martyrdom in the death sequence as they use for the male martyrs.¹⁵⁸ For example, it does not make much difference if Li Yuhe replaces Jiang Jie in the execution scene of *Living Forever in Burning Flame*, with similar camera angles, background music, slogan called out, and sublime symbols after the death. In this regard, the influential scholarly argument on the “erasure of femininity” in the Maoist literature and films seems to be valid. I will delineate the development of this argument and raise my own argument in the following.

Since the late 1980s, both Chinese and North American academia have shown increasing interest in the gender issues of the modern Chinese literature and cinema. Among these various issues, an influential argument which deals with the gender identity in the literature and art during the “Seventeen Years” (1949-1966) and especially the Cultural Revolution Period (1966-1976) is gradually established and prevalently acknowledged. This argument suggests that in the name of the pursuit for egalitarian between men and women, the PRC was established and developed at the expense of the loss of femininity in women, as is widely reflected in the literature and art during the “Seventeen Years”. Such tendency culminated in the CR period when the class distinction far overweighed the differentiation of gender identity. The overwhelming sublime figures in CR literature and art highly epitomize such dominance of the heroic muscularity and the erasure of femininity.

As one of the first feminist critics in the mainland China, Dai Jinhua points out that Chinese women in the contemporary period (in Dai’s sense it means the post-1949 period) gradually loses their feminine characteristics under the irresistible dominance of the masculine discourse. During the 1949-1976 period, the pre-modern Chinese heroine Hua Mulan 花木兰—a woman who substitutes his father to go to the battlefield only when she disguises herself as a man—turned

¹⁵⁸ The details of the formula is discussed in Chapter 1.

out to be the model for the Chinese women to emulate, ready to sacrifice anytime for the nation-state. Dai argues that although the newborn P.R.C save many Chinese women from the tragedy of Qin Xianglian 秦香莲—a woman discarded by her husband in Song Dynasty, it place them in the similar situation as Hua Mulan.¹⁵⁹

Arguably the first English scholarship dealing with this issue transpired at the same time. Meng Yue's essay "Female Images and National Myth" argues that the Maoist literature contains the unique female sexuality according to the uniform political standard. Therefore, when the individual sexuality is displayed at the public realm, sexuality must be concealed so that the very sameness of the collective consciousness can be attained.¹⁶⁰

Ban Wang expresses similar view in his book *The Sublime Figure of History* (1997). From Wang's point, the post-1949 grand enterprises such as the building of a nation or the ongoing revolutions, either systematically wrote off the Chinese women's identity or submerged them into revolutionary uniformity. Wang raises a pertinent example of Mao Zedong's poem "Dailishuyi" 答李淑一 (Reply to Comrade Li Shuyi) (1957), which not only responds to but also sublimates Li Shuyi's original *guiyuan* 闺怨 (anguish in a woman's bedroom) to a higher revolutionary idealism. In this way, all the feminine sobs and widow's tears are transformed to another kind of tears—joyful tears on the victory of the revolution, namely, men's tears.¹⁶¹

From a sociologist perspective, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang argues that the Maoist public space is characterized with the "gender erasure."¹⁶² As far as the Maoist films are concerned, Shuqing Cui argues that the film *Red Detachment of Women* is a pertinent example to showcase the

¹⁵⁹ See Dai Jinhua 戴锦华, "Bu kejian de nuxin" 不可见的女性 (The Invisible Women), in *Dangdai Dianying* 当代电影 (The Contemporary Cinema), 1994(06).

¹⁶⁰ In Tani Barlow ed. *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, 1994

¹⁶¹ See Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, Chap.3, "The Sublime and Gender."

¹⁶² Yang, 1999, pp 40-46.

socialist erasure of the sexual difference. "Socialist film discourse denies sexual difference while fostering class consciousness." ¹⁶³ In this regard, scholars who argue for the "erasure of femininity" support the idea that the Maoist class consciousness is strong enough to submerge the female sexuality into uniformity. And Mao himself wrote a poem to prove his thought, "Most Chinese daughters have desire so strong /To face the powder and not to powder the face" 中华儿女多奇志，不爱红装爱武装。 ¹⁶⁴

Chen Xiaomei discusses this issue from a different perspective in *Acting the Right Part* on the CR Model Plays. Chen notes that the typical women characters in the Model Plays are lacking any acquaintance with motherhood and intimacies of family life. Such special "Cultural Revolution Feminism" actually erases gender differentiation and sacrifices female subjectivity to the agenda of the nation/state. However, as a girl growing up in the CR period, Chen could still clearly remember her ecstatic excitement when she received a photo of the elegant and shaped body of Wu Qinghua ——the female protagonist of the ballet *Red Detachment*——as her 16th-year-old birthday present. ¹⁶⁵ The "long straight legs and graceful body" of Wu Qinghua with the flamboyant red color apparel seems to be a solid evidence to substantiate the existence of the gender differentiation in the Model Plays. However, Chen argues that such theatrical representation of the feminine body is mainly for the purpose of sexual titillation. It is the "ingenious example of the patriarchal appropriation of women's bodies to serve as the beautiful object of gaze." ¹⁶⁶——men's gaze to stimulate their erotic imagination. Although Chen still places the femininity under the dominance of masculinity, from her writing we could

¹⁶³ Cui, p.82.

¹⁶⁴ Mao: "Militia Women" (七 绝 为女民兵题照), translated by Xu Yuanchong

¹⁶⁵ See Xiaomei Chen, "Growing up with Posters in the Maoist Era", in Harriet Evans eds *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, pp.111-112.

¹⁶⁶ Xiaomei Chen, *Acting on the Right Part*, p 116.

nevertheless sense the inner visual tension of Qinghua's figure, as well as Chen's own psychological chasm inside—her first intuitive response to Qinghua's feminine characteristics when she was an innocent girl, and her cognitive thinking of Qinghua's subordinated femininity when being a scholar.

Chen's chasm shows that this gender issue during the 1949-1976 is not as simple as the "erasure of femininity" could summarize. Rosemary Roberts argues against the prevalent idea of the "erasure of femininity" in the CR period. Through detailed analysis of various semiotic systems in the Model Plays (including language, tone, facial mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, props, décor), Roberts finds abundant evidence of gender differentiation in the representation of male and female positive characters within the Model Plays¹⁶⁷. She also points out, in another essay, that the CR female character costumes serve to "gendering the revolutionary body." The costumes are not randomly picked up, but are symbolically loaded with numerous cultural meanings, and are highly sexualized and gendered.¹⁶⁸

The history of sexual identity under the Maoist ideology is also memorized with two different versions in the post-Mao China. Wendy Larson insightfully points out: "The first establishes the past as an era of sexual repression that must be overcome in order for one to move into the future. The second reinterprets past revolutionary ideology, recasting it as sensual, erotic, and interesting as revolutionary eroticism."¹⁶⁹ Though it is quite in the opposite, these two approaches of memorizing the gender history during the Maoist period are both sustainable, because it is exactly the trick played by history that makes them opposite. On the surface, Mao

¹⁶⁷ See Rosemary Roberts, "Positive Women Characters in the Revolutionary Model Works of the Chinese Cultural Revolution," in *Asian Studies Review*, Dec 2004, Vol.28, pp.407-422.

¹⁶⁸ Rosemary Roberts, "Gendering the Revolutionary Body: Theatrical Costume in Cultural Revolution China." In *Asian Studies Review*, June 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Wendy Larson, "Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution", in *Modern China* Vol.25, No.4, October 1999, p.423.

calls women to take off their red apparels and put on the army coats which make them uniformly masculine; Under the surface, history ironically requires one party look for a distinct otherness to recognize and justify its own existence——proletarians look for bourgeois, and men look for women. On the one hand, the different sex threatens the sameness of the One, on the other hand, men need to foreground the sexual differentiation to reaffirm their own identity. This is where tension and dilemma lie in, and can possibly break through the standardized formula under the dominating ideology.

I argue that sexuality needs to be alternately highlighted and repressed in the Maoist discourse. It is neither erasure of femininity, nor foregrounding the femininity, but alternately keep the balance between these two to meet the rigid political requirements. The Maoist ideology requires femininity to be emphasized when female sacrificers are called to die for the nation, to show that the communist revolution are inclusive and universal, regardless of any gender difference. However, sexuality needs to be concealed when it is uncontrollable and runs the risk of threatening male authority.

The simultaneous foregrounding and erasure of femininity also requires us to place the Chinese socialist femininity under a more concrete historical context, rather than simplify and essentialize it into a general pattern that defines socialist femininity. The notion of catachresis becomes valuable here. Tani Barlow argues that it is important to restore the notion of Chinese femininity into the “tangible, immediate, irreducible and concrete referents.”¹⁷⁰ It has been long time since the Chinese women are interpellated with a highly ideological abstraction, either the “New Women” (*xin nvxin* 新女性) in the Republican Period, or the “Female Comrades” (*funv tongzhi* 妇女同志) during the Maoist period. It is easy and convenient for multiple purposes,

¹⁷⁰ Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, p.33.

either for political, educational or research purposes. But such abstraction reduces the female real lived experience into the abstract normalization. Catachresis means that “there is no one-to-one correspondence between concept and referent.” Linked with immediate experience, “a catachresis is, therefore, concrete.”¹⁷¹ Barlow continues to write,

So for me, the absence of a true referent is precisely the characteristic that makes the notion of catachresis valuable. True referents are apparitions that live only in theories of representation. The absence of a true referent just means that the term stabilizes diverse parts or elements. That is how a historical catachresis such as women in feminist thought can contribute to writing histories that are empirical in the sense of being grounded in diverse written or other material archives, and yet read the archive as a repository of normalizing strategies.¹⁷²

Barlow is quite correct in pointing out that representation is actually a myth since it attaches the concept with the specific referent, and representation often serves as the “normalizing strategy.” In many occasions, the political discourse disciplines the way of the representation should be, and renders it a political tool. Chinese female has been usurped the original concreteness by being bestowed with different names and abstract forms that discipline and normalize them in the long history of China, be it *zhennü* 贞女 (chaste women), *lienü* 烈女 (women martyrs), *xin nüxing* 新女性 (New Women), or *funü* 妇女. In this regard, both the argument of “erasure of femininity” and “foregrounding femininity” essentialize “femininity” into certain pattern as an abstract form, thus losing the original concreteness. It is important to

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.34.

¹⁷² Ibid.

always historicize, and restore the concreteness of the lived experience as much as possible. It is also crucial, on the other hand, to studying the representation as the abstract, but also as the mostly widely disseminated and influential form in a certain period.

Therefore, before we study the cinematic representation of the socialist female martyrs, we need to briefly examine its historical root during the 20th century China, including the gender performativity and female martyrdom history dated back to the Late Qing Period.

Qiu Jin, Shi Jianqiao and the *The Girl in Isolated City*: Historical and Onscreen Female Martyrs before the Maoist Period

Premodern China has many stories of *lienü* dying for husband, for the family, and for keeping chastity. As the prominent Lixue 理学 scholar Chen Yi 程颐 notes, “Death by starvation is preferable to loss of chastity” (饿死事极小，失节事极大)¹⁷³ Many chastity memorial archway 贞节牌坊 were built to eulogize *lienü* for either never getting married after their husbands’ death, or for dying voluntarily for their husbands. Female sacrifice for the nation or ethnic group has to be mediated by the female sacrifice for family. Disguised as a male soldier, Mulan substitutes her father to fight on the battlefield. When the Manchus invaded Ming Dynasty, Liu Rushi 柳如是 also suggests to her lover, the prominent official Qian Qianyi 钱谦益 that “you die for the nation, and I will die for you” (你殉国，我殉夫)

Arguably the first female with modern consciousness of martyrdom to die for nation is Qiu Jin 秋瑾 in the Late Qing Period. From Qiu’s essays and poems, it is noticeable that her sacrifice

¹⁷³ *The Complete Works of Chen Hao and Chen Yi*, Vol.22 (《二程全书·遗书二十二》)

was explicitly political and radically feminist. She mentions frequently in her poems that she is ready to “sacrifice for the nation.” (为国牺牲).¹⁷⁴ She is also known for cross-dressing to emulate men’s revolutionary heroism. Qiu Jin exclaims, “Many men died for the anti-Manchu (光复 guang fu), but women’s sacrifice had never been heard of. This is a humiliation for women!”¹⁷⁵ For Qiu, women should have the equal confidence and responsibility to carry out men’s business.

In 1935, Shi Jianqiao assassinated the warlord Sun Chuanfang 孙传芳 in revenge for her father. The accident generated heated public debate on filial piety and the legal system. Under the huge pressure from the mass media, Shi was released from jail. The case of Shi relates to a broad range of important issues, including gender, performance, and public sphere; the transition from traditional Chinese ethics to modern legal system; the state-sanctioned violence and ideology, etc. I discussed in Chapter 1 this case from the perspective on the conflicting discourses of sacrifice based on the multi-directional *qing*. Here we can find out how the different types of femininity lead to distinct results.

For the discussion of female martyrdom, what is at stake is not only the distinct destiny of Qiu Jin and Shi Jianqiao, but also the different public responses to the female martyr (or to-be martyr). Qiu Jin serves as an archetype for the martyr figure in Lu Xun’s short fiction *Medicine*, which laments the public’s apathy towards the martyr’s sacrifice. Qiu’s tomb was relocated nine times for different reasons, reflecting the disturbance and difficulty for Qiu as a female revolutionary martyr to find a resting place.¹⁷⁶ By contrast, although Shi Jianqiao’s assassination was violently against the law, she immediately emphasized her female weakness to the mass

¹⁷⁴ Qiu Jin, *Selected Works of Qiu Jin*. p20, p26, p82, p88, p108.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p.40.

¹⁷⁶ Nagata Keisike, *Qiu Jin: The Female Warrior*, 2007.

media after she was arrested. First, she claimed that the assassination was non-political, and it represented the traditional female virtues of filial piety and loyalty to family members rather than to the modern nation. Second, Shi claimed that she indeed resorted to her brothers and husband to carry out this assassination in the first place, but none of them could carry it out. So she *had to* do it by herself. Therefore, Shi always emphasized her as a female victim when facing the public media. Qiu and Shi's difference in foregrounding feminine characteristics and the distinct reasons for their sacrifices generated different public sympathy.

The Confucius and Buddhist filial sentiment (孝 xiao) in the transitional Republican Era play a crucial part in giving rise to the new communal form of ethical sentiment—"public sympathy" (同情 tongqing). The assassinator can be judged by the public either as a punishable plain killer or as a ready-to-be martyr who kills for a traditionally justified reason. In Shi's case, the public chose the latter. Self-sacrifice for one's family has been long recognized as moral heroism in Chinese tradition. Arguing against Benedict Anderson's view that the nationalism is built on the imagined nexus of communities in a temporal simultaneity, albeit in different spaces; Gopal Balakrishnan points out that the family nexus plays a key role in creating the initial community identification.¹⁷⁷ Balakrishnan's argument is especially pertinent in the case of Shi Jianqiao, when the public generated their sympathy mainly from the shared filial sentiment rather than from nationalist identification. Such a characteristic also distinguishes Shi's case from another female assassin Liu's case at the same period, in which Liu killed her husband's lover merely to unleash her personal hatred of her husband's extramarital affair.¹⁷⁸ Besides the filial sentiment, another key factor that aroused public sympathy is Chinese knight-errantry tradition.

¹⁷⁷ Gopal Balakrishnan, "The National Imagination," in *New Left Review*, May-June 1995.

¹⁷⁸ Lean, *Public Passions*, pp.137-140.

The self-sacrificial spirit rooted in the swordsmanship legitimated Shi's reprisal in a violent way, and imbued the assassination with heroic flair.¹⁷⁹ However, these two factors might not function without Shi's own personal performance before mass media. For Lean, both "emotional urgency" and "rational premeditation" performed by Shi "underscored the sincerity of her virtuous sentiment."¹⁸⁰ As Shi's continuous performances during the Republican Period and Maoist Period show, the performative attribute of sacrifice is crucial to shaping not only the individual subjectivity of the martyr, but the collective subjectivity of the responsive public as well. For the general public in the Late Qing and Early Republican Period, sacrifice for the nation generated far less sympathy than sacrifice for the family. Such public sympathy was significantly transformed during the Maoist period, which called for much more identification with the Party/State than with the family. In fact, the Maoist nation or the CCP was transformed into the symbol of a Big Family that substituted the small family bonding, rendering either the value of filial piety or chastity for one's husband much inferior to the sacrifice for the Party/State.

Female performativity is emphasized in Sun Yu's films as well. As analyzed in the Chapter 2, Sun Yu shows abundant vitality in the female star Li Lili. Her youthful spirit and sexy female body attract audience's eyes to the extent that the audiences of the Maoist Era could not even imagine. In *Queen of Sports* and *Little Toys*, Sun deliberately closes up on her slender legs and well-rounded body. *Daybreak* characterizes Li as a fallen prostitute who sacrifices herself for her cousin, a nationalist soldier. Sun shows Li posing in beautiful feminine gestures right before the execution. The representation of sacrifice seems to be too romantic and ideal to the point of being unrealistic, if not absurd.

The conflict between the old and new value systems surrounding female chastity and

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p.37.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p.43.

sacrifice is manifested in the film *The Girl in the Isolated City* (孤城烈女 1936, dir. Wang Cilog). Loosely adapted from Guy de Maupassant's short fiction *Ball of Fat*, the film shows several crucial differences that fit into the Chinese context of the 1930s. Firstly, it does not present a prostitute-with-a-golden-heart theme. Rather, the protagonist is a newly-wed wife named Yiyi. Chastity is a contested notion during the transitional period when the old Confucian value was in conflict with the new state-promoted concept of "New Women." The newly-wed wife loses virginity to her husband, which is acceptable and laudable in the Confucian tradition. But she sacrifices her body to the warlord so that other people can be saved. Among those people include a high-ranked Nationalist Officer, who later thanks Yiyi for not only saving his life, but saving the Party as well. It is the choice between chastity and sacrifice that generates the discursive conflicts.

The film smartly makes the balanced choice, trying not to offend either side by rendering female martyrdom a tradeoff arrangement. To cater to the New Women ideology that eulogizes women's independence and sacrifice for the Nationalist Party, the film bestows the female protagonist a title of *lienü*. But losing chastity to the warlord is extremely humiliating to her husband and to the patriarchal family as well. Therefore, the film punishes her by letting her get killed in the end. Similar to Sun Yu's films in which those displaying female sexual bodies tend to be killed in the end, *The Girl in the Isolated City* also lets the one who is raped and loses chastity finally lose her life as well. Such tradeoff arrangement is to cater for the audience who still holds firm to the Confucian value of the female chastity.

The film indicates that the title of *lienü* is simultaneously a national honor and a tradeoff byproduct. It used to refer to the woman who loses her life for keeping chastity or virginity, but this time it refers to the woman who loses life for saving other people (and the Party) by losing

her chastity. For the film, chastity is no longer a criterion to judge whether a woman is a *lienü* or not, as long as the action of losing chastity is valuable and constructive for the nation-building. However, the film also exposes the strong lingering Confucian value that relentlessly punishes woman's extramarital sexual act. The director has to keep the balance by making Yiyi die in the end. The *lienü* is de-sublimated and becomes a tradeoff byproduct reflecting the economy of the cinematic martyrdom.

Daughters of China: Documentary Impulse and Female Martyrdom

Daughters of China was one of the first films produced in the new-born PRC in 1949 Dongbei Film Studio. It revolves around a conventional revolutionary film theme. Eight female soldiers fight against the Japanese army and finally sacrifice their lives by bravely walking into the river after they are surrounded by the Japanese enemies. Their voluntary death is also for the purpose of leaving no chance of their dead bodies being raped or humiliated by the enemies. For female martyrs, the extra concern is the integrity of their bodies, derived from the strongly lingering Confucian tradition on the importance of female chastity or virginity. From the other perspective, the cleanness and integrity of the bodies also determine the grade of the sacrificial animals in the pre-modern China. Although the female soldiers are the sublime subjects voluntarily dying for the nation, they are also the objects to be sacrificed for the goodness of the nation. From both perspectives, their bodies must be kept clean.

Regarding films produced during the so-called “Seventeen Years,” recent scholarship tends to abort the “negation school” which regards the seventeen-year-period as “hibernation”(*chenji*) or “suffocation” (*zhixi*) of cinematic creativity.¹⁸¹ But the view from the “perfectionist school” is

¹⁸¹ Luo Yijun, *Chinese Film Theory: An Anthology*, Vol II, p.401.

also obsolete, which argue that Maoist film during the seventeen year period not only fulfills its educational purpose to build a strong socialist state, but also attains laudable artistic establishment.¹⁸² Instead, most of the film scholarships take the centrist views that acknowledge the artistic establishment of many films in this period, while also lament over the heavily-loaded political indoctrination imposed on many other films.¹⁸³ In this regard, films produced during 1949-1952 are regarded as witnessing the period of “prosperously ascending” (*pengbo xiangshang*)¹⁸⁴, “brilliance of people’s art” (*renmin yishu de guangcai*)¹⁸⁵ or the “golden childhood of the Red Cinema”¹⁸⁶, to be pitted against the later entrapment of Maoist cinema under the increasingly intensified political struggle. The underlying argument is that the progress, stagnancy or regress of the artistic value of most Maoist films is directly linked with the relaxation or intensification of the political atmosphere. The more relaxed the political atmosphere was, the better films it produced. However, I argue that *Daughters of China* stands out as a special film (might also be the first Maoist film) on female martyrdom not because it is politically unengaged, but because its final scene of sacrifice betrays its previous raw and documentary style, characteristic of the Yan’an tradition. This betrayal predicts the compromise between the Yan’an tradition and the Shanghai tradition in the later years.

As the director Ling Zifeng’s first but “most cherished” film, *Daughters of China* conveys a unique Yan’an style throughout most of the film.¹⁸⁷ It lacks complicated storyline and rich characterization. Such kind of rawness provides a “blank paper” to experiment with alternative cinematic language uninfluenced by the Shanghai tradition (more akin to the Hollywood

¹⁸² Li Suyuan and Hu Ke eds., *Fifty Years of Chinese Film since 1949*, p.48.

¹⁸³ See Greg Lewis, "New China's Forgotten Cinema, 1949-1966: More Than Just Politics."

¹⁸⁴ Chen Huangmei ed, *Contemporary Chinese Film*.

¹⁸⁵ Meng, *History of New China's Film Art, 1949-1959*.

¹⁸⁶ Ying Hong and Ling Yan, *A History of Film in the PRC, 1949-2000*.

¹⁸⁷ Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, p. 214

classical narrative).¹⁸⁸ In 1938, Yan'an Film Corp was established to shoot documentary films, characterized by presenting less tightly-knit plot but more raw and concrete material. Such documentary impulse continued to take effect and was manifested from many feature films produced in Dongbei Film Studio after the establishment of the P.R.C.

However, if most of *Daughters of China* leaves many first-time viewers vague impression on characterization and plot, the final sequence of sacrifice betrays its consistent style. The film does not attract audience with dramatic events, fast editing, or suspenseful plot. What audience feel more is the raw but concrete material presentation of reality. But the final scene abandons its rawness and distance from the audience, and the national narration comes up quickly to suture the spectator-subject into the identification with the nation. After the eight female soldiers walking into the river, solemn music arises aloud with the image of the soaring waves. As the music recesses with a solo oboe, the camera pans to the sublime symbols such as the mountain and sky, and finally falls on the firearms and bullet boxes left by the martyrs on the riverbank. The camera then moves back and tilts up to show a group of male soldiers mourning over their female comrades' death. With the music quickly crescendos, the camera falls onto a close-up of one male soldier, gazing at the superimposed images of eight female martyrs' close-ups panning slowly from the left to the right. It is arguably only until then the audiences identify with these female protagonists emotionally because throughout the film the camera avoids all means to give close-ups and always keeps a distance from the audiences.

However, what is more interesting is that audiences can only emotionally identify with the female martyrs through a male soldier's gaze. In this regard, audiences must take the position of the male soldier first, and their emotional identification with the female martyrs is indirect and

¹⁸⁸ Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*, Chapter 2.

mediated. Such identification with female martyrdom through male mediation is again manifested in the following shots. After the male gaze shot, the camera shows a Parthenon-like Greek style architecture Museum of the Revolutionary Soldiers (革命烈士纪念馆). It dissolves into a shot of an oil painting of the eight female soldiers. The camera pulls back again, only showing two male visitors solemnly gazing at the painting. The narrative shifts to the present time when visitors commemorate the martyrs by viewing the representation of martyrdom, either by oil painting or by Chairman Mao's epigraph on martyrdom hanging on the wall. It writes "The communism is unstoppable. A single spark can start a prairie fire. Long Live the Martyrs!" (Fig 1-4)

The final sequence of the martyrs' death shows how national narration attempts to come up to suture the audiences into the identification with the martyrs and the nation from the male perspective. To make the identification process easier for the new PRC audiences who may have not even watched a single film before, the film provides two real person positions for the audiences to take: the male soldier and two male museum visitors. Shared with the same gazing positions when the audiences gaze at the screen, audience assume their role as the male soldier and the two museum visitors. In this process, audiences conflate the present time with the past time, both of which stimulate audiences' strong emotional identification with the martyrs and the nation they fight for.

In this regard, the film reflects strong patriarchal presence in the final sequence, in spite of the fact that its main heroes are all females. The identification with female martyrdom is through male mediation. Or, put it bluntly, the film shows that female martyrdom can be identified only after it is acknowledged and justified by the male power. First, the male soldier initiates the audience's emotional identification by gazing at the superimposed images of the female martyrs

close-ups. Then, two male museum visitors commemorate and evaluate female martyrdom in the representation of the painting. Finally, Chairman Mao, the strongest male figure in China, endorses female martyrdom by the authoritative and indisputable epigraph, which is the last shot of the film. (See fig 1-4)



Fig 1-4

The final sequence also reveals an abyss of representation that the narrative cannot contain. The painting of martyrdom may potentially render the film audience realize that the martyrdom they identify with is only possible via the representation. It is through the painting that the visitors or audience know about the female martyrs' heroic sacrifice, not through what they

actually see on the scene of the sacrifice. In other words, sacrifice cannot *be directly presented* before every individual within the community, but is mostly *represented* via various art forms in a later time.

Time is again a crucial issue here. In Chapter One I have discussed how the confusion of the future ideal and the present reality renders the theory of “three principles” possible. The soldier’s gaze of the female martyrs and the film audience’s gaze of *Daughters of China*, conflate the past time with the present time, as if the eight female martyrs’ sacrifice is happening now before the eyes. Maoist necropolitics strives to minimize the recognition of time belatedness since the lapse of time allows multiple ideological inscriptions and thus unsteady. Rather, only when people can imagine a fictitious community in a homogenous, empty time then sacrifice can *be indirectly represented* for all the citizens.¹⁸⁹

Film is the ideal form to create empty and homogenous time. The final sequence of the *Daughters of China* evokes strong emotional identification and sutures the spectator-subject into the pre-determined film structure. The audiences easily forget the presence of the camera, the difference between the character’s gaze and their own gaze, thus taking the positions of the camera or the male soldier naturally. The film conflates time into countless instant nows, and enlarges nation’s desire and capacity to confuse presentation and representation of sacrifice before its citizens.

However, the visitors’ gaze of the painting reveals the representational abyss. The frame of the painting potentially awakes the film audiences that what they see about the martyrs’ sacrifice is through the frame and representation, not through frameless presentation. The frame of the painting leaves narrative trace and exposes the time belatedness. In this regard, the ending of the

¹⁸⁹ Anderson *Imagined Communities*, Chapter 1.

film on the one hand tries to suture the audience's identification with the national memorization of the martyrs. On the other hand, however, it potentially exposes the fissure between the representation and presentation, rendering the film audience aware of the film media as merely a representational form, just as a painting is.

The representation of martyrdom in *Daughters of China* sets a conventional model for later Maoist films in dealing with the female sacrifice. Although Paul Clark argues that by the late 1950s Yan'an has triumphed over Shanghai¹⁹⁰, I argue that it is mostly in theme rather than in style. Although the documentary impulse still persists in many films (such as *Serfs (Nongnu* 1963, Li Jun)¹⁹¹, the climax of the martyrs' death requires the style of revolutionary melodrama. It resorts to the audience's psychic engagement to "sublimate their libidinal energy into the revolutionary ideal."¹⁹² Therefore, the Shanghai-Hollywood film style for emotional identification and suturing is much more useful than the Yan'an documentary impulse. The later Maoist films on the climax of the female sacrifice, from *Zhao Yiman* (1950), *Liu Hulan* (1950), to *Daughter of the Party (dangde nv'er* 1962), *Red Crag (Zai leihuo zhong yongsheng*, 1965), all apply the convention similar as that of the *Daughters of China*: The close-up of the martyr shouting out slogans, followed by the shot-reverse shots to show the anger and dignity of other comrades or the cruelty of the enemies, intersected with the sublime landscape images such as pine tree, sky, river, etc.

These stylistic conventions are similar to those of the onscreen male sacrifice, which are analyzed in detail in the Chapter Two. However, there are still many vicissitudes that cannot be ignored for the female sacrifice, especially when the gender issue is concerned. The strong

¹⁹⁰ Clark *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*, also see Lewis "The History, Myth, and Memory of Maoist Chinese Cinema, 1949-1976." p.164.

¹⁹¹ See Braester "The Political Campaign as Genre: Ideology and Iconography during the Seventeen Years Period."

¹⁹² Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, p.130

patriarchal presence in *Daughters of China* render *China* (中华) in the film title almost a symbol of male power. The Confucian value of *lienü* haunts back again even though the Maoist necropolitics only uses *lieshi* to show the abolishment of sexual differentiation. The emphasis of female members' filial piety and chastity to male family members still lingers and strongly influences the new-born Maoist films. A much bigger family—China as a family-nation with Chairman Mao as the family leader—is formed to coexist with billions of small families bonded by marital and blood relationship. If female sacrifice is strongly mediated by male gaze in *Daughters of China*, the next section investigates *Daughter of the Party*, produced and released in 1958. We will see how the *Party* differs from *China* in terms of the gender role, and how the Party and male figures act upon female sacrifice.

The Absence of the Powerful Male and the Feminist Power: *Daughter of the Party*

Adapted from Wang Yuanjian's fiction *Party Membership Dues* (*Dang Fei* 党费) in 1954, *Daughter of the Party* was directed by Lin Nong 林农, and produced and released from the Changchun Studio. Lin is a veteran director who was famous for his depiction of the ethnic minority films. Films such as *Mysterious Travelling Companion* (神秘的旅伴, 1955) and the *Beacon Fire on a Frontier* (边寨烽火, 1957) have established his fame before he took the task of filming the war film *Daughter of the Party* in 1958. *Daughter of the Party* was widely acclaimed by the general public and the film critics after its release. In a poll by the *Beijing Daily* 北京日报, it ranked the first place of "my favorite film in the year of 1958." The minister of the Cultural Bureau Mao Dun 茅盾 wrote an article and claimed that "*Daughter of the Party* is a good film."

Mao Dun regarded the film as both politically correct in its content and mature in its artistic representation, with its storyline suspenseful and logical.¹⁹³ Especially marvelous is the performance of the actress Tian Hua 田华, a veteran artist famous for her leading role in the *White-haired Girl*. Mao Dun noted that “without her superior performance, the film could not have been so impressive and influential.”¹⁹⁴

As is noted by Mao Dun, the film inherits many credits from the director Lin Nong as an excellent storyteller. The film begins in the post-1949 period on a stage show, with the colorful display of the stage and complete rendition of a joyful song to celebrate the peaceful newly-built PRC. The old general Wang Jie suspects that the singer is his long-time-missing daughter, who bears great resemblance to his wife whom he has not seen for about 20 years (both roles of the mother and the daughter are played by the same actress Tian Hu). The flashback traces General Wang’s memory back to 20 years ago when he departs his wife and the newly-born daughter, and gets ready for the Long March. His wife Yumei, the protagonist of the film, is left alone in the KMT-dominated district and serves as a member of the underground Communist Party. As a low-rank soldier then, Wang told her daughter to “do as your mom tells you.” He told Yumei to “keep up revolutionary struggle no matter how difficult it is,” then leaves Yumei the money (one silver coin) that he gets from Yumei but saves for many years.

The major story of the film depicts Yumei’s revolutionary struggle in the severe situation as a relentless female fighter, along with other brave female comrades. Unlike the film *Daughters of China*, male figure is either absent, needs to be protected by the female, or serves as the negative force throughout the film. This is a rare case for the Maoist war films. Although female

¹⁹³ See Meng Liye, *History of New China’s Film Art, 1949-1959*, p.303.

¹⁹⁴ From Baidu Encyclopedia. <http://baike.baidu.com/subview/914870/6093925.htm>.

martyrdom occurs frequently in the Maoist films, most films show the presence of the male leadership, even though the major focus of the film is on the female hero. Male figure serves either as the senior leader or supervisor, such as Xu Haifeng in *Living Forever in Burning Flame* and Hong Changqing in *The Red Detachment of Women*; or as the powerful and dependable comrades, such as Lieutenant Wang in *Zhao Yiman*. Or, male figure can also serve as a catalyst for women's revolutionary consciousness in a family, such as the father figure Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern* and the model husband Mei Qing in *A Revolutionary Family* (革命家庭 1961, dir. Shui Hua). Male figure furthermore can serve as the unstated lover in the war film, and such role is often entwined with the role of leader or dependable comrade, such as Lei Zhenlin in *The Youth in Flames of War* (战火中的青春 1959, dir. Wang Yan). I investigate more about the female martyr's death and love relationship in the Maoist films in the next section.

Whatever role male figure takes on the screen, most Maoist war films avoid the absence of the powerful male figures from the very beginning, and the female protagonist (s) to take the initiative throughout the film. In this regard, *Daughter of the Party* provides an interesting example of the exception.

As I note above, Yumei's husband Wang leaves at the beginning of the film, leaving Yumei just the abstract instruction and insignificant money. The male underground Communist leader Zhishu (Party Secretary) is also arrested and executed by the KMT in the following sequence, among many other male communists in the village. Yumei is miraculously not shot to death and becomes the only survivor. Therefore, within the ten minutes of the film, two men that Yumei can rely on, either her husband or her senior leader, disappear either voluntarily or involuntarily. Although General Wang reappears in the end of the film after the flashback ends, his figure appears full of tears, melancholically and indeterminately. More importantly, General Wang fails

to save his wife and daughter when they are in need of him most urgently. What he holds in hand is the crying daughter and the money that Yumei leaves to pay for the Party Membership Dues. This time it is two silver coins, even doubles what he leaves for Yumei for the living cost in the beginning of the film.

Besides the disappearance of the husband and male leader from the beginning, other positive male figures are either weak or simply manage to survive because of Yumei's sacrifice. In the end of the film, the young communist soldier Xiao Chen hides in Yumei's house when the KMT army comes to search. Yumei sees the enemy soldiers are close to find Xiao Chen and the goods she stores for the Communist army. To distract the enemies, she stands out, fights against the enemy and sacrifices herself. Under that situation, Xiao Chen first plans to shoot the enemies. But the next shot cuts to Yumei's extreme close-up, showing that she sees Xiao Chen's action. To abort Xiao Chen's plan and sacrifice herself, she hysterically shouts out, "Xiao Niu (her daughter's name), do not cry, do as your mom tells you." These are her final words in the film.

Such words are ambiguous because it addresses both to Xiao Chen and her daughter Xiao Niu. On the surface it addresses to her daughter who is crying hard at that time, but the connection of the shots shows that the words actually is her order to Xiao Chen, as if asking him to stay quiet rather than act recklessly. Such connotation is confirmed by the next shot when Xiao Chen holds back his gun, closes his eyes and cries, but Yumei's voice "do as your mom tells you" still repeats as the off-screen sound. The shot reverse-shot presents audience the suggestion that Yumei sacrifices her life as any mother usually does, to protect both her daughter and the young communist male soldier.(fig 5-7)



Fig 5-7

The absence of the powerful male positive figure forms sharp contrast with the powerful negative male figures. After surviving from the execution, Yumei finds out that the only man left in the group that she used to trust turns out to be a traitor, and it is because of him that the underground Communist group gets wiped out. The traitor Lao Ma disguises himself well and finally the film does not show the traitor gets executed or even prisoned, which runs against the usual doomed destiny of the traitor in the Maoist films. The KMT officer also looks composed and witty. In many sequences he outsmarts the communist party members. Similar as the communist traitor, the film does not show him get punished in the end, when he orders to execute Yumei for the second time.

In this regard, although the film was acclaimed either by the public or the cultural leader such as Mao Dun, the film was listed as one “poisonous weed” during the Cultural Revolution. Such result is expected since the film represents the relationship among the female martyr and other male figures in an unusual way. The specific evaluation writes:

The film propagates the cruelty of the revolutionary war, and advocates the philosophy of ‘to live’活命哲学. It is against the proletarian revolution, and represent it in a tragic way—as if the only outcome of joining the revolution is to die in the end. If you want to keep your life, you have to become a shameful traitor...¹⁹⁵

The evaluation reads pertinent, if we take into consideration the complete female initiation into martyrdom without any powerful man’s back-up. Unlike the film *Daughters of China* where female sacrifice is strongly mediated by male power, the absence of the male power and the empowered female figures truly echo with the title of the film *Daughter of the Party*. Questions arise accordingly: first, if we regard Yumei as the daughter of the Party, then, how is her role of mother compatible with the role of the daughter? Second, what is the role the Party plays in the film?

The Interpellation of the Party and the Symbolic Mother

The climax of the film *Daughter of the Party* occurs when Yumei is ready to sacrifice herself. She fights bravely against the enemies, and shouts hysterically to Xiao Niu (her real daughter) and Xiao Chen (the young male communist soldier she aims to protect) with her last

¹⁹⁵ Qi Xiaoping, *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds*, p.208

words, “do as your mom tells you.要听妈妈的话.” Since the tense of the Chinese is vague, this sentence can mean both “do as your mom tells you now,” and “do as your mom tells you in the future.”

This moment of sacrifice attests to one of the key mechanism of the Maoist female martyrdom: when the body of the real mother is going to perish soon, the symbolic meaning of mother still exists, and the Party surrogates the role of mother to raise the offspring of the martyrs. Therefore, both Yumei and her daughter Xiao Niu are the daughters of the Party.¹⁹⁶ Yumei’s last words have multiple meanings. It both addresses to Xiao Niu and Xiao Chen. It orders them to stay quiet and do not behave recklessly now, and it also means that when Yumei’s martyrdom occurs and her real role of mother ceases, her daughter Xiao Niu should regard the Party as the symbolic mother, and listen to the Party.

The original novella written by Wang Yuanjian states that purpose more clearly. It narrates from Xiao Niu’s perspective:

...As I was about to jump down, she turned her head back, her eyes looking straight at her frightened child and said to her, slowly, ‘My child, do as Ma told you.’ That was the last time I heard her.

Her last words reminded me of what she had said to me before the soldiers had entered her house, and I held myself back. I was probably the only one who could figure out their real meaning: do as Ma told you; Ma was the Party organization.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ The original Chinese of the film title can either be translated to “daughter of the Party,” or “daughters of the Party.”

¹⁹⁷ Wang Yuan-Chien, “Party Membership Dues,” from Kai-Yu Hsu ed. *Literature of the People’s Republic of China*.

Therefore, even if there is no powerful male figure present in the film or in the novella, the female martyrdom and women's revolutionary struggle are still backed up and facilitated by the symbolic power of the Party. It is omnipresent and almighty, and it requires the imagination and fantasy to bridge the gap between the physical materiality and the symbolic connotation. In the novella, Xiao Niu imagines the actual meaning of her mother's last words, "do as Ma told you; Ma was the Party organization." Does Yumei really mean that? It cannot be proved and the gap can only be filled by imagination.

For me, it is not important to prove the actual meaning of Yumei's last words, or whom she really addresses to. It is more important, though, to point out that the writer Wang Yuanjian and the director Lin Nong, both of whom lived under the Maoist ideology, try to lead the readers or audiences to bridge the gap from the real mother to the symbolic mother. By using words and connecting the shots, Wang and Lin clarify and fixate the meaning of Yumei's last words for the Maoist readers and audiences, minimizing the ambiguity of the meaning and other possible readings. At this moment, the Maoist ideology interpellates the readers and audiences to be the "good subjects" in Althusser's sense.

More importantly, the transformation from the real mother to the symbolic mother is an ideological imperative, which validates the necessity of female martyrdom. The symbolic mother becomes much more important once the real mother's physical existence annihilates.

In the end of the film, the father figure reappears to take care of the daughter. The female martyr Yumei's physical body annihilates, and what is left for the father and the daughter to cherish and commemorate is the symbolic substitution of her presence: a Party member certificate and the Party membership dues. General Wang says emotionally, "your mom is a good daughter of the Party. For over 20 years, so many martyrs died for the nation like your

mom.” The shot of the Party certificate and membership fee dissolves into the final shot of the film, the national flag of China (See Fig. 8-9). Without any reappearance of Yumei’s physical body, the Party fully substitutes the female martyr’s existence. The material concreteness (martyr’s image, although it is also represented) is transformed into the abstract symbols of the Party. And the father’s final line serves as the summary of the whole film, trying to transform the individual death (his wife’s martyrdom) into a collective revolutionary event. Since so many nameless martyrs die for the nation, Yumei is just one of the “good subjects” that follows the Party’s interpellation of calling for death in the Maoist necropolitical system.

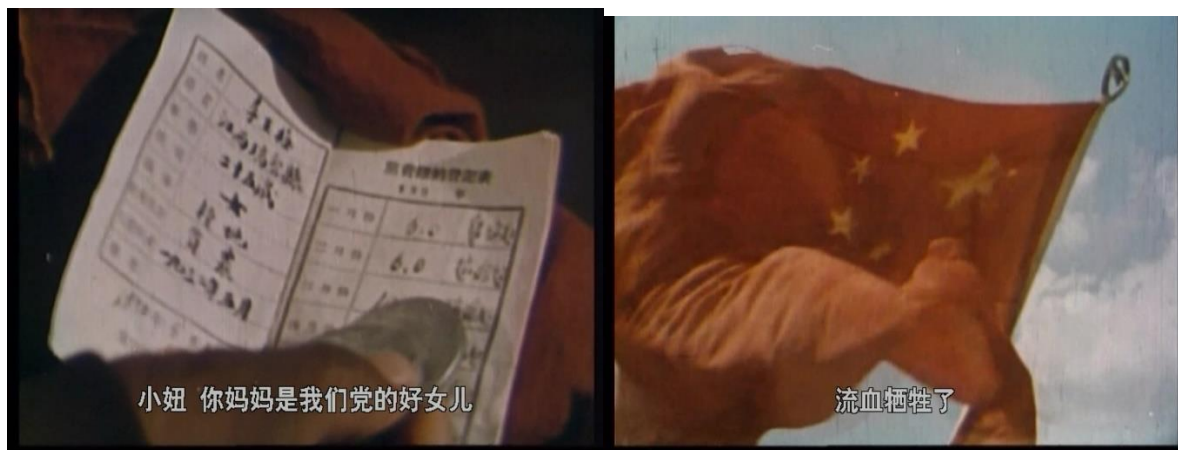


Fig 8-9

The Party’s role as the symbolic mother is a key entry into one of the other major mechanism of the Maoist onscreen martyrdom. It requires the disappearance of the actual body, and heavily relies on audience’s imagination to bridge the gap between the original physical existence of the martyr and the substituted abstract symbolic order. Since such argument needs the examination on the myth of ideology, I will take a detour delineate the debates on the ideology theory, especially focusing on the role of imagination to bridge the gap between the material real and symbolic representation.

Although Karl Marx's theory was modeled as the theoretical backbone of the Maoist ideology, the bourgeois ideology Marx deems as the "false consciousness" also bears some similar characteristics to the Maoist ideology. In *German Ideology*, Marx argues the importance to restore "the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life," because "empirical observation must be made empirically, not by mystification and speculation. Consciousness for Marx can "flatter," it can become something that is "other than the consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing the real."¹⁹⁸

However, if ideology is false consciousness, why does the ideological interpellation render individuals to turn their heads around?¹⁹⁹ Eagleton argues that there is a shift of Marx from his *German Ideology* to regard ideology as false consciousness to his later work (especially *Capital*) to reflect on the immanence of ideology in daily material life.²⁰⁰ Eagleton points out the murkiness of Marx's notion of ideology: it can mean illusory beliefs, but it also "expresses the material interest of dominant class."²⁰¹ In this vein, it is not surprising that Lenin raises his notion of "socialist ideology" to serve the "dominant class" of communists. But Marx's later ambivalence on ideology more importantly informs the capacity of the illusionary and the imagined reality to infiltrate into the empirical reality. If commodity fetishism makes the subject believe a desk dances before us, the boundary between the real and the imaginary is blurred. Marx's ambivalence directly influences later theorists such as Althusser and Žižek.

From another functionalist perspective, William Dowling also notices Marx's ambivalence

¹⁹⁸ Marx *The German Ideology*, p.37, p.41, p.50.

¹⁹⁹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*

²⁰⁰ Marx, *The German Ideology, Capital* Vol.I.

²⁰¹ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* pp.83-84

of ideology in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. The false consciousness limits the subjects to see the concrete real, but it provides a simplified symbolic map for subjects to gain some form of coherence and comprehensibility.²⁰² Dowling's argument is based on Frederic Jameson's view that ideology serves as a "strategy of containment." Such a containment of the real is accompanied by the reduction of concrete materiality to its symbolic representation. Therefore, ideology provides the "symbolic solution to the real contradictions."²⁰³

Marx's ambivalence towards ideology opens the window for the later theorists' revision. First, ideology is not merely false consciousness. Some crucial elements such as affective emotion, fantasy or unconsciousness can all become the constituents of ideology.²⁰⁴ Second, ideology can only get access to the subject by its symbolic representation.²⁰⁵ Third, ideology is not merely negative, but it can also be an integral part of the society to provide coherence and comprehensibility.²⁰⁶ I will address these revisions in detail.

First, ideology calls for imagination and fantasy to fill in the gap between the abstract indoctrination and the concrete materiality. Ideology pertains to be an image of the past or of the future that sublates the concrete materiality. For Ricoeur the past can only be memorized and represented as an image²⁰⁷, it is imperative for the viewer to forget the difference and imagine the identity that defies temporal vicissitudes. A photo viewer acknowledges a past "I" in the photo taken tens years ago as the same "I" now, because he presupposes "permanence in time" to sustain his imagination for identity.²⁰⁸ In the similar vein, Althusser argues that "ideology has no history"--ideology in general has a transcendent and eternal characteristic that defies historical

²⁰² Dowling Jameson, Althusser, Marx, pp.76-77

²⁰³ Jameson . *The Political Unconscious*, Chapter 1.

²⁰⁴ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, For Marx*; Eagleton, *Ideology*; Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

²⁰⁵ Barthes, *Mythologies*; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*; Hartley, *The Abyss of Representation*.

²⁰⁶ Althusser , *Lenin and Philosophy, For Marx*; Dowling, Jameson, Althusser, Marx.

²⁰⁷ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chapter 1

²⁰⁸ Ricoeur *Oneself as Another*, p.125.

vicissitudes.²⁰⁹ Therefore, the abstractness of ideology requires imagination to fill in to unify different experiences into coherence and identity.

Second, to fill in the gap between the abstract indoctrination and the concrete materiality, ideology must be symbolically represented, which is seen in the ending sequence of *Daughter of the Party*. Among other theorists, Althusser, Žižek and Jameson provide stimulating discussion on the symbolic representation as vehicle for imagination and fantasy. Althusser's classic definition of ideology—"the representation of the imaginary relationship of the individuals to their real conditions of existence"²¹⁰—illuminates two things. First, "representation" is a reduction because of the very nature of signification process involves a myth, a naturalization process that transforms meaning into form.²¹¹ Second, the "imaginary" functions to blur the boundary between the fantasized world and the real existence by the verisimilitude of representation. But Althusser has to admit the positive function of ideology because "ideology is a necessary organic part for every social totality"²¹². Žižek also argues that fantasy-construction is the basic dimension for ideology. To conceal the inconsistency of the ideological interpellation, we need fantasy, sustained by a symbolic system, to fill out the empty space of a fundamental impossibility.²¹³ Frederic Jameson also points out that all ideologies, in their strongest sense, are utopian. The ideological form of collective unity requires the symbolic affirmation of its represented "reality".²¹⁴ For all the three thinkers, they agree on the importance of imagination and fantasy in constructing ideology in a symbolic system.

²⁰⁹ Althusser *Lenin and Philosophy*, p.161.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p.162.

²¹¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*

²¹² Althusser *For Marx*, p.232

²¹³ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p.45, p.141.

²¹⁴ Jameson *The Political Unconscious*; Hartley, *The Abyss of Representation*

However, these three thinkers think differently on the individual subject under the ideological interpellation. For Althusser, ideology interpellates individual into a certain subject position.²¹⁵ For Žižek, subject reflects a fundamental lack and split.²¹⁶ For Jameson, individual subject is always positioned in a social totality; it is the projection of the collective unity onto the individual subject that renders the subject meaningful to carry on the class struggle.²¹⁷ The different arguments on the formation of the subjects bring in the different subjects' response under the ideological interpellation, which greatly complicates Marx's notion of false consciousness.

The Maoist ideology reflected in films tries to standardize the interpellation process, during which most of the audiences become "good subjects" and turn their heads towards the Party's call. In *Daughter of the Party*, the writer and the director, either through the words or lens, persuade the audience to believe that the female martyr's last words "Do as what mom tells you" means "take the Party as the mom." The real mother's body is substituted with the symbols of the Mother Party. Such make-believe is realized through writer/director/audiences/readers' defaulted collaboration via imagination and fantasy, connecting abstract symbols with material concreteness.

No matter how powerful the Party's interpellation is, we still need to think about the possibility of the "bad subjects," who potentially refuse to turn their heads towards the Party's interpellation. I argue that female sexual desire and their bodies are one of the effective ways to resist the Party's interpellation. However, such body power is constantly under the surveillance by the Party. It is in the never-ending struggle for the Maoist strategy to contain female sexuality,

²¹⁵ Althusser *Lenin and Philosophy*, p.170

²¹⁶ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Chapter 5.

²¹⁷ Jameson *The Political Unconscious*, Chapter 6

while simultaneously foregrounding female sexuality. Such strategy is usually carried out through the process of sublimation.

Sublimation and Female Bodies: *Struggles in an Ancient City and Bitter*

Cauliflower

Sublimation as a psychoanalytical term was first put forward by Freud, who indicates that the unbounded libido must be displaced, channeled and transformed into some socially useful categories, thus avoiding the chaotic incidents in the society. This process is called sublimation. For an individual, personal sexual desire is strongly linked with the death instinct and must be controlled. For the Maoist society, it is also crucial to sublimating various personal desires into a collective revolutionary goal.

Although Freud's theory was introduced to China since the May Fourth Era, it has been appropriated and reinterpreted for different discursive practices. Wendy Larson argues that the most pivotal part of Freud's theory—the sexualized unconscious—fails to take hold in China, because there is a strong, and historically determined tendency in China to view the subject as socially embedded rather than individual-psychologically shaped. During the May Fourth period, “Freudian theory becomes part of the discourse of enlightenment, science, and modernity.”²¹⁸ Chinese intellectuals introduced and analyzed Freudian theory, but more importantly, they appropriated and reinterpreted Freudian theory to gear it towards a socially oriented direction. In this regard, Larson regards the failure of the total acceptance of Freud's theory in China as “promising,” because it marks the Chinese intellectuals’ “unwilling (ness) to completely accept

²¹⁸ Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng*, p.33.

the fully sexualized person as the only way to modern.”²¹⁹ Obsessed with nationalism and social issues in a global context, Chinese modernity becomes an alternative one diverged from the Western trace.

Larson argues against the previous scholarship (Liu Jianmei, Liu Jihui) regarding revolutionary spirit built on the foundation of unconscious sexual desire being channeled and sublimated into revolutionary passion. For Larson, it is the subjectivity and consciousness—rather than Freudian sexually saturated unconsciousness—that constitute the essence of Chinese revolutionary spirit.²²⁰ While I agree with Larson’s argument that the revolutionary subjectivity is built upon the consciousness rather than unconsciousness, I also think that Larson’s limitation lies in the fact that she does not give enough account on the mechanism of how that process is carried out. Namely, how is it possible to sublimate the unbounded libido into the collective revolutionary consciousness?

The film *Struggles in an Ancient City* and *Bitter Cauliflower* provide good examples to explain that mechanism, in which martyrdom is introduced in the middle of the film to nip the emerging sexual desire in the bud. Female and male sexual desire is channeled and sublimated into the collective revolutionary passion. Therefore, female martyrdom is at times introduced not for the main purpose of the glorification of heroes, but to eradicate the distraction that possibly hinders the other characters from reaching mature revolutionary consciousness.

Martyrdom is imperative for these two films to eliminate the potential love triangle and the excessive and uncontrollable libidinal force. Two sisters Jing Huan 金环 and Yin Huan 银环 assist the communist leader Yang Xiaodong in *Struggles in an Ancient City*. Played by the same

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.73.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.10.

actress Wang Danfeng, Jing Huan and Yin Huan have different characteristics. The older sister Jing (on the right of the frame) is a mature underground guerilla who has worked for a long time with the male leader Yang. She disguises herself as a shrewish woman and contains her sexual desire. The younger sister Yin (on the left of the frame) is more innocent and girlish, and she reveals to her sister her feeling on the leader Yang when they first meet (Fig 10). Such plot design could potentially develop into a love triangle story, thus distracting the common revolutionary goal. Like the early Chinese film *The Girl in Isolated City*, the economy of martyrdom takes effect here as well. Jing Huan bravely commits martyrdom when she is arrested, normalizing the revolutionary love story for her sister and the leader Yang in the rest of the film.

The other woman who also voluntarily sacrifices her life is male leader Yang's mother. The mother and Yang are both captured by the enemy, and since Yang appears to be a filial son, the enemy tries to threaten Yang to take his mother's life if he does not surrender. The enemy fails since the mother quickly commits martyrdom by jumping out the window immediately, so that her son is not distracted by her existence and makes tough choice (Fig 11). Therefore, two women in the film carry out martyrdom in exchange for the male leader's undistracted revolutionary goal, as well as the normalized and disciplined libidinal power. To keep the integrity and stableness of the revolutionary consciousness, the individual sexual desire does not need to be completely eradicated before the rigid principle of the "three prominences," but it must be kept normalized and disciplined.



Fig 10-11

Similarly, *Bitter Cauliflower* presents Juan'er 娟儿's feeling for the male communist leader Yongquan. As a militia woman, she makes a pair of shoes to Yongquan, obviously showing her love towards him. However, when she dresses up and excitedly comes over to Yongquan's house to give him the shoes, there is another female character with him inside the house. She is Zhao Xinmei, a communist cadre coming to the village to work with Yongquan. The film can be easily developed into a love triangle story, since Juan'er appears to be embarrassed and unnatural when Yongquan introduces Xinmei to her. The shot also puts Xinmei in the same side of Yongquan, with the connotation of the possible relation to be developed between them. (Fig 12) Juan'er says to Xinmei, "I should learn from you," in the manner of an insincere courtesy. Then, Juan'er continues unwillingly, "you two stay here, I have some other things to do and I need to leave." It betrays her original intention to deliver the shoes to Yongquan to express her feeling for him.

When Yongquan sees Juan'er out, he asks her impression on Xinmei and says "we should learn from her." Juan'er does not respond, with a sullen face, obviously reluctant to acknowledge what she just spoke with Xinmei a moment ago. Before she leaves Yongquan, she takes out the

shoes. Yongquan then knows her intention, he fondles the shoes and the camera lingers on Yongquan's face as he gazes her out of the sight (Fig 13).

Maoist war films usually use gazes to show the unspoken love feeling between sexes. The ambivalence of the male character is revealed when compared with the later sequence: he almost uses the same gaze with the same expression and position to see Xinmei off the sight (Fig 14-15). This can lead to a serious mistake since the involvement in a love triangle without any clearer indication of whom he loves more can undermine the glorious image of the communist male leader. Especially in the sequence when Yongquan sees Xinmei off, the audiences already know that Xinmei is married, although her husband is far away. In order to ensure that such harmful ambivalence stops immediately, the economy of martyrdom is introduced again and Xinmei is called to sacrifice for the villagers. After Xinmei's martyrdom, the storyline turns back to the normal orthodox development of the mature revolutionary consciousness: Yongquan laments over Xinmei's death, but says that the revolution must go on. The plot is then able to focus on the heroic actions by the mother of Juan'er, who is actually the main female protagonist in the film.





Fig 12-15

In the Maoist films, the introduction of female martyrdom is one of the effective ways to prevent the “good subjects” from turning into the “bad subjects.” Since sexual desire and emotion are volatile and uncontrollable, they can become the catalyst to split the subject, rendering the subject resistant to the Party’s interpellation. Eagleton points out Althusser’s misreading on Lacan when Althusser presupposes a homogenous subject to turn his head around toward interpellation. Instead, Lacanian subject is split and cannot be unified.²²¹ Eagleton argues that Althusser’s subject is more like Freudian superego, which is characterized by self-incarceration and self-surveillance.²²² However, Eagleton does not notice that Althusser also mentions the “bad subject” that can resist the interpellation. Unfortunately, Althusser does not elaborate on this point.

Judith Butler finds a place where resistance to identity can be realized. This place is deep inside the psychic life.²²³ Although power produces the continuity and visibility of subject, there always remains the remainder of the subject that cannot be assimilated. For Butler, as Stuart Hall

²²¹ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, p.144.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Butler, *Psychic Life of Power*, p.97.

summarizes, identifications belong to the imaginary field. They are never fully and finally made, but require incessant reconstitution, and they are subject to the volatile logic of iterability.²²⁴

While I recognize the flaw of Althusser's subjection theory and believe that certain inassimilable part of the subject can relentlessly refuses identification with the ideological hailing, we still need to note the powerful ideological mechanism to prevent the "bad subjects." The never-ending reiteration of the ideological information to generate imagination and fantasy, the make-believe on the sameness of the abstract symbol and concrete material, as well as the premature annihilation of the potential development of the unbridled libidinal power, all attest to the mechanism of the Maoist ideology, as well as the necessity on the representation of the female martyrdom.

In the end of this chapter, I want to point out another complicated scenario on the "bad subjects" under the ideological hailing. Such scenario complicates Marx's false consciousness theory and Althusser's interpellation theory, thus pointing to a deeper power structure and psychological mechanism. Also, such case redresses the concept of the femininity, and offers us a new perspective on the onscreen female martyrdom.

Postscript: *Lust, Caution* and the Feminist Power

Although it is not a Maoist film, Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* (2007) sets a pertinent example for further discussion of female martyrdom. Adapted from the real case of Zheng Pingru martyr and Eileen Chang's novella, the film revolves around a female assassin who sacrifices her virginal body to seduce and assassinate a traitor of the nation. The assassination fails at the very

²²⁴ Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, p.16.

moment when the female assassin aborts the collective national ideal by remembering her bodily love with the traitor. Strongly echoing with all the cases of female martyrdom in this chapter, the case of *Lust, Caution* provides an ideal example to complete the discussion of the female bodies, political interpellation, and true feminism.

Zheng Pingru's case—represented from Eileen Chang's novella and Ang Lee's 2007 film—introduces a different perspective from all the female martyrdom cases in the Maoist films. Zheng's final abandonment of the assassination attests to the power of the body and sexual desire that act against the mesmerizing national interpellation. The historical case, as well as the novella and film, contest the uniform national narrative of sacrifice by foregrounding conflicts and contingencies of narratives repressed by the progressive History. The reason that Zheng terminates the assassination is, as Chang writes: "she suddenly thinks: 'this man really loves me.'" It is only through the memory of the intimate body contact that Zheng (Wang) recalls her real body, which is powerfully sensitive and ceaselessly resists the mesmerizing national narrative that valorizes the meaning of sacrifice. Zheng's final decision reflects the shift of sacrifice—from sacrifice for the nation, to the sacrifice for her lover. Both Eileen Chang and Ang Lee's interpretations of the Zheng's case offer different perspectives on the female martyr's subjectivity, and add up to the increasing complexities of martyrdom and sacrifice in modern China.

From this case, it looks that the female body finally breaks up the myth of the ideology and resists the ideological interpellation. Bahktinian carnivalesque and Žižekian *k-ynicism*²²⁵ both point out the sensuous body's resistance to the dominant codes. However, undisciplined body

²²⁵ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p.26.

can be primitived and essentialized as the raw otherness. This paradox is best witnessed from the female bodies that are often labeled as “volatile.”

The key theme of the film, as well as its original novella *Lust, Caution*, can be grasped from one sentence in the original novella: “The way to a woman’s heart is through her vagina.”²²⁶ Following this logic, this film is easily read as the remainder—the very material foundation of the volatile female body—resists against the collective ideal of nationalism. While such a reading reveals the power of the remainder, it nevertheless normalizes sexual binarism by foregrounding the volatile materiality of female bodies against transcendental male spirit. As Butler argues, sex is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled through forcible reiteration of the norms. Therefore, materiality is also the effect of power.²²⁷ The traditional binary opposition of “matter” and “form” and its corresponding sex regulation (man offers form, woman offers matter) need to be critically reflected, insofar as the form as a receptacle always names the matter, which is literally fluid, formless and unnamable.²²⁸ Therefore, following Luce Irigaray, Butler argues that true femininity is outside the binary opposition and becomes a catachresis, whose formless externality constitutes the inside. If we take the “good subjects” in the *Lust, Caution* as the “bad subjects,” we fall into trap of the ideological re-inscription of the female bodies again.

The case of *Lust, Caution* shows that either the claim of “turning the head around” or the refusal of the “turning head around” take the male perspective. The real feminist perspective goes back to the original historical concreteness, rather than reduce the femininity into an abstract symbol or a concept from binarism. Thus, if we think beyond both the arguments

²²⁶ Eileen Chang, “Lust, Caution,” p.36.

²²⁷ Butler . *Bodies that Matter*, p.2.

²²⁸ Ibid., Chapter 1

“erasure of femininity” and “foregrounding of femininity” to generalize the Maoist films, we will get out of the trap of essentialism, and can reach deeper into a real feminism.

Chapter 4

The Spirit of Absolute Selflessness:

Foreign Martyrdom and Communist Selflessness in the Film *Dr. Bethune*

Norman Bethune, a world-famous surgeon and a member of the Communist Party of Canada, volunteered to work for the Communist Eighth-Route Army in the heyday of the Chinese Anti-Japanese War in 1938. As recorded from Zhou Erfu's war reportage *Fragment on Norman Bethune* (诺尔曼白求恩断片), Dr. Bethune brought advanced Western medical equipment and technique to the under-developed rural area, trained a group of Chinese amateur army-doctors, and saved hundreds of communist soldiers' lives as a surgeon. He insisted on giving medical treatment and surgery to the wounded soldiers in extremely dangerous working conditions, ignoring his own safety and health. He spent his pension buying nutritious food for the injuries, on many occasions even transfused his own blood to the dying soldiers. Many soldiers regarded Dr. Bethune not just as a doctor, but as their comrade and their father.²²⁹

Dr. Bethune died of bacterial contamination in the November of 1939, on his way to the battlefield to treat the injuries. The Communist Party conducted a grand memorial ceremony for his sacrifice. On December 21, 1939, Mao Zedong wrote an article in memory of Dr. Bethune, calling for every Chinese Communist Member to learn from Bethune's "true Communist spirit," namely, "the spirit of absolute selflessness."²³⁰ On the year of 1952, Dr. Bethune's tomb and monument were relocated to the Martyr's Memorial park (aka. North China Military Martyrs

²²⁹ Zhou Erfu 周尔复, *Nuoerman Baiqiuen Duanpian*.

²³⁰ Mao Zedong, "In Memory of Norman Bethune" in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol.II.

Cemetery 华北军区烈士陵园) in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. He was officially recognized as a communist martyr, although he was more often referred to as “a fighter for internationalism.” (国际主义战士)²³¹

Norman Bethune’s heroic deeds add more nuances to the definition of martyrdom: if a martyr dies only for the national cause and the power to name martyrdom belongs only to the state system, to name a foreign martyr transgresses over the national boundary and potentially undermines the racial nationalism, whose consolidation is based on the sharing of the same language, culture, history and racial characteristics. On the other hand, however, to name a foreign martyr further justifies the validity of the national independence and the universality of the revolutionary discourse—especially if that foreigner is educated by the antagonistic ideology, realizes its corruption and betrays from the enemy camp. It would be even better if a foreigner can join “us” and fight for a discourse that is opposite to his native ideology. In that case, the foreigner can act as a powerful witness, and his testimony can potentially elevate the communist discourse from narrow nationalism to internationalism.

This chapter traces the representation of Dr. Bethune in literature and film. While focusing on the film, it investigates Mao’s influential article and some literature and artworks prior to the film, including Mao’s article “In Memory of Norman Bethune” in 1939, Zhou Erfu’s reportage *Fragment on Norman Bethune* in 1944, Zhou Erfu’s novel *Dr. Bethune* (白求恩大夫) in 1946²³², Zhang Junxiang 张骏祥 and Zhao Tuo 赵拓’s film script *Dr. Bethune* in 1963²³³, and finally, the film *Dr. Bethune* (白求恩大夫), completed in 1965 but was not released until 1977. In the post-

²³¹ See “Brief Introduction of the Martyrs in the North China Military Martyrs Cemetery” 华北军区烈士陵园烈士事迹介绍 (http://www.hbjqlsly.net/news/?23_25.html, 8/2/2014)

²³² Zhou Erfu, *Baiqiuen Daifu*.

²³³ From Zhang Junxiang, *Zhang Junxiang Diayin Juban Xuanji*, pp.235-335.

Maoist period, Dr. Bethune's figure was still seen in the mainstream artworks, from the film *Bethune: The Making of a Hero* (白求恩：一个英雄的成长 1992, dir. Phillip Borsos), to the TV series *Norman Bethune* (诺尔曼·白求恩 2006, dir. Yang Yang). Although the heroic halo of Dr. Bethune was much dimmer during the post-Maoist period, the chapter still briefly discusses them as a reference frame for the continued influence from a foreign martyr.

The literature and films of Dr. Bethune, I argue, are pertinent cases of Maoist ideological construction of foreignness to confirm and solidify the authority of the Maoist necropolitics. The ideal type of the Communist selflessness is another absent cause that drives History forward, just as the imagined perfect future analyzed in the Chapter One, and the ideal socialist woman in the Chapter Two. The writings of a real historical figure in literature and films engage tightly with the writing of history, to the extent that at some points the communist history and the history reflected from the artworks become indistinguishable.

The educational model of Dr. Bethune serves multiple functions. It shows the atrocity of the Japanese Fascist Militarism and validates CCP's credits during the Anti-Japanese War. It condemns Chinese National Party's non-resistance policy, irretrievable corruption and doomed failure. Also, it exposes the apathetic, money-driven and corrupted capitalist ideology that nurtures and influences the thoughts of early Dr. Bethune, thus warning all the Chinese communists or the ordinary Chinese people against the potential danger from the corruptive thoughts. Finally, it incorporates foreign martyrdom to showcase the universality of the communist revolution. However, many vicissitudes occurred from Mao's initial article in 1939 to the final release of the film right after Mao's death. Constant rewriting and editing of the real historical figure Dr. Bethune offer an intriguing picture of the Maoist necropolitical system. With the political milieu ever-changing and unpredictable, authors or artists during the Maoist period

can only meticulously select the content and material that were deemed suitable for the current political milieu. Such selective adaptation or fictitious depiction manifests the mechanism of the Maoist ideology, and the film finally crystalizes Maoist necropolitical thoughts with its mature form of socialist realism.

“In Memory of Norman Bethune”: Mao’s Key Guidelines

On December 1st 1939, twenty days after Bethune’s death, the grand memorial service was held in Yan’an. Mao wrote on the couplet on the wreath: “Learn from Comrade Bethune’s internationalism, learn from his spirit of sacrifice, his heart of responsibility and passion for work.”(学习白求恩同志的国际主义，学习他的牺牲精神，责任心和工作热忱)²³⁴ The couplet is short but essential, elaborated in Mao’s following article “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” written on the December 21st of 1939.

To hold the grand memorial service for Dr. Bethune in Yan’an was not just to commemorate the dead, but more importantly, to educate the living. Although material shortage was a big problem for the Yan’an regime, Mao’s emphasis on grand memorial service for important martyrs still defied all the material difficulties, which was manifested further in his later article “Wei Renmin Fuwu” 为人民服务 (Serve the People) :

From now on, when anyone in our ranks who has done some useful work dies, be he soldier or cook, we should have a funeral ceremony and a memorial meeting in his honor. This should become the rule. And it should be introduced among the people as well. When

²³⁴ Ji Junmei 冀军梅, “Brief Meeting, Eternal Friendship” (短暂的会见，永恒的友谊), *Dangshi Bocai* 党史博采, Vol.5, 1995.

someone dies in a village, let a memorial meeting be held. In this way we express our mourning for the dead and unite all the people.²³⁵

Mao's necropolitical thoughts reveal the function of the memorial service in two folds. First, it honors the dead regardless of his high or low rank/position. Whoever has done some "useful work" for the revolution will be honored, no matter he is a general, a soldier, or a cook. In theory, Mao's arguments emphasize the importance of equality in the Communist system—martyr's honor is not discounted with lower rank. In reality, however, for the lower-ranked soldiers, the communist system usually commemorates them in a nameless mode—a memorial service held for numerous martyrs all-together without even mentioning their names. Unless the lower-ranked soldier has done special deeds that can be set as the heroic model for educational purpose (such as Lei Feng 雷锋, or Zhang Side 张思德), most martyrs sink into oblivion, although they are honored by an overwhelming collective naming system, calling them "lieshi men" 烈士们 (martyrs).

Second, the expression of mourning serves just as a formal procedure, while the major purpose is to "unite all the people." The memorial services showcase the equality and inclusiveness of the communist ideology, which claims to be able to unite all the people regardless of their social status. Only by showing such inclusiveness can the communist revolution be indefinitely expanded and developed. The mourning has clear and important political purposes. Martyrs are useful because they have "done some useful work" when they are alive, and they continue to be useful in the necropolitical system after they die. Their death images can be even more powerful than those from the living beings to expand the revolution

²³⁵ Mao Zedong, "Serve the People" in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol.III.

indefinitely.²³⁶ Therefore, Mao requires the mourning of the martyrs to be set as the “rule.”

Mao’s two articles “Serve the People” and “In Memory of Norman Bethune” became so influential that they were both listed as the “three canonical articles” (*laosanpian* 老三篇) in the early period of the Cultural Revolution, requiring almost every Chinese to read, study and recite. Such bible-like essays crystalize the essence of Mao’s necropolitical thoughts. Compared with “Serve the People,” “In Memory of Norman Bethune” is the specific elaboration and longer version of Mao’s couplet on Bethune’s death mentioned above. Questions arise accordingly: why was Dr. Bethune, neither a general nor even a Chinese, chosen to be a special martyr to hold grand memorial service for? Why was his figure elevated to a sublime position during the Maoist period? What kind of special characteristics from Dr. Bethune can be utilized to “unite all the people”?

The importance on the *foreignness* of the martyr is foregrounded in the beginning of the essay, which corresponds to the first sentence of Mao’s couplet: learning from Dr. Bethune’s internationalism:

Comrade Norman Bethune, a member of the Communist Party of Canada... arrived in Yanan in the spring of last year, went to work in the Wutai Mountains, and to our great sorrow died a martyr at his post. What kind of spirit is this that makes a foreigner selflessly adopt the cause of the Chinese people's liberation as his own? It is the spirit of internationalism, the spirit of communism, from which every Chinese Communist must learn... We must unite with the proletariat of all the capitalist countries, with the proletariat of Japan, Britain, the United States, Germany, Italy and all other capitalist countries, for this is the only way to overthrow

²³⁶ Previous chapters have discussed how film has the function of mummifying the living being to be eternal, and the frozen image serves as the object of fetish.

imperialism, to liberate our nation and people and to liberate the other nations and peoples of the world. This is our internationalism, the internationalism with which we oppose both narrow nationalism and narrow patriotism.²³⁷

The unreserved eulogy and large-scale mourning of a foreign martyr Dr. Bethune demonstrate the foundation of the communist ideology of sacrifice as beyond any “narrow nationalism,” a feature characteristic that distinct Dr. Bethune from all other Chinese martyrs. Martyrdom at this point is not national, but transnational or international, which greatly justifies the Maoist necropolitical system as malleable, flowing, and nonexclusive. If one dies not for his own nation, but for a shared transnational belief regardless of any ethnicity differentiation, language or cultural barrier, the socialist ideal can be boundlessly expanded.

To “unite all the people,” Mao calls on the Chinese communists to unite the entire proletarian class from all the capitalist countries, no matter it is the country that is either invading China (such as Japan) or used to invade China in recent history (such as Britain, USA, and Germany). The nuance here is clear: the Chinese communists do not welcome narrow nationalism or xenophobia, but embrace internationalism. The foreigners are our comrades as long as they share with us the communist ideal and belief. In other words, all the communists worldwide ultimately share the same identity, no matter what history and culture their countries have, what languages they speak and what ethnicity they belong to. As Bethune says, “you and I are all internationalists, no boundary of ethnicity, skin color or language can set us apart.”²³⁸ The identity identical to everyone is: we are the communists.

²³⁷ Mao Zedong, “Serve the People” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol.III.

²³⁸ *Weida de guojizhuyi zhanshi baiqiu*, p.23.

In the second part of the couplet, Mao calls the communists to learn from Dr. Bethune's "spirit of sacrifice." The essay further elaborates such "spirit of sacrifice" to be the "utter devotion to others without any thought of self. Mao claims: "We must all learn the spirit of absolute selflessness from him." What is at stake here, I argue, is that the "spirit of absolute selflessness" becomes one of the kernels of the Maoist necropolitical ideology. I will delineate, in the following sections, the meaning of such "selflessness" in detail.

The third part of the couplet asks the communists to learn from Dr. Bethune's responsibility and "passion for work." The function of Mao's essay, again, is not only to commemorate Dr. Bethune, but to educate the communists as well. Mao further criticizes that "not a few" communists are irresponsible in their work, and that "they feel no warmth towards comrades and the people but are cold, indifferent and apathetic."²³⁹ During the Maoist era, intellectuals or professionals' coldness and apathy towards the *gongnongbin* (workers, peasants and soldiers 工农兵) were increasingly condemned to be the unforgivable crimes during the numerous rectification movements that followed. What is equally important, though, is the attitude from the *gongnongbin* towards the professionals or the experts. The foreign martyr figure Dr. Bethune in literature and films provides a two-way traffic to showcase the friction and interaction between the professional elite and the ordinary people, and the cultural shock between the local and the foreign.

Mao emphasizes the importance of the technique of the professionals. The legacy left from the martyr Dr. Bethune includes his "constantly perfecting the skill." On the contrast, some Chinese communists "despise technical work as of no consequence or as promising no future."²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

The tension between the technique part and the spiritual part of the professionals escalated during the Cultural Revolution. In 1939 Mao still called for the communist professionals to learn from Dr. Bethune's outstanding techniques. However, especially since the early 1960s when the relationship between China and the Soviet Union exacerbated, it became more suspicious than encouraging to learn the advanced techniques from the so-called "foreign experts." The increasingly left-leaning political wind during the late Maoist period went wild enough, to the extent that the better technique a professional has, the more impure his revolutionary spirit is. This principle can be seen from many historical documents, as well as many Cultural Revolution films such as *The Second Spring* (第二个春天 1975, dir. Sang Hu and Wang Xiuwen) or *Spring's Seedling* (春苗 1975, dir. Xie Jin and Yan Bili).

Mao's article "In Memory of Dr. Bethune" serves as an indisputable guidance to all the later representations of Dr. Bethune in literature, films, or other art works during the Maoist era. All the artworks need to flesh out Mao's thoughts generalized in the couplet and elaborated in the article. Practice is always harder than theory-raising. What material should the artists select and edit to represent Dr. Bethune's internationalism that transcends the narrow nationalism? Will Bethune's foreignness disintegrate the national solidarity? How is Dr. Bethune's "selflessness" linked with his "spirit of sacrifice?" Every author or artist needs to treat these questions very carefully under the overwhelming political pressure. After all, the top-to-down nationwide mourning and commemoration of Dr. Bethune bears specific political functions to validate the communist revolution and expose the corruption of the capitalist ideology. If Zhou Erfu's pre-1949 reportage and novel still have some leeway for critical realism, the 1960s adaptation to the film is extremely limited since it has to strictly meet the criterion of the socialist realism,

retaining “truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality” while fulfilling the “task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism.”²⁴¹ Even though the socialist realism is not an “impossible aesthetics,”²⁴² dancing with chains all around the body is indeed quite difficult.

Before turning to these three aspects and tracing their changes from literature to the film, I will briefly introduce some background information: the general representation of the western foreigners in the Maoist film, and the specific production history of the film *Dr. Bethune*.

The Representation of the Western Foreigners in Maoist Films

For the representation of Western foreigners in Chinese cinema, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar argue that there are generally two types of representation in Chinese film history. First, Western foreigners are the imperialist invaders or spies.²⁴³ Many western foreigners in the Maoist films are sheer class enemies, such as the British officials in *Lin Zexu* (林则徐 1959, Zheng Junli), the American spies in *Sentinels under the Neon Lights* (霓虹灯下的哨兵 1964, Wang Ping), or the Russian revisionist engineer in *The Second Spring*. More frequently, western foreigners are simply enemies in group without any individual characteristic in the Maoist films. They are merely faceless invaders following orders from the above and doomed to be wiped out by the brave Chinese soldiers. For example, films on the theme of the Korean War showcase the evil American invaders, such as the American soldiers and generals in *Battle on Shangganling Mountain* (上甘岭 1956, Sha Meng and Lin Shan) and in *The Heroic Sons and Daughters*.

²⁴¹ Definition of Socialist Realism was raised in the Statute of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934. See Abram Tertz *On Socialist Realism*. p.196.

²⁴² See previous chapter on the discussion of socialist realism as an “impossible aesthetics.”

²⁴³ Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on the screen: Cinema and Nation*. Pp.25-29.

Such type of representation is straightforward and one-dimensional. Western high-class officials, spies and technicians are depicted as atrocious, crooked and conspiratorial, while Western low-class soldiers are represented as ferocious, stupid and timid. In contrast, Chinese soldiers are brave and Chinese generals are smart. Such extreme binarism between the Chinese Self and the Western Other forecloses any possible interchangeability between the two sides, since they are mutually exclusive and the only interaction between them is through struggle and annihilation. To keep one's Chineseness impenetrable by the Western corrupted capitalist ideology becomes a life and death issue. For Maoist filmmakers, it is not an artistic concern, but a political imperative.

Second, there is an alternative cinematic representation that cannot be strictly categorized into such distinctive binarism, even though the Western foreigners are still marked as ethnically different. Berry and Farquhar call such a representation "good foreigners" in a "tribute system."²⁴⁴ Post-Mao films such as *Grief over the Yellow River* (黄河绝恋 1999, Feng Xiaoning), *The Wedding Banquet* (喜宴 1993, Ang Lee) and *The Black Cannon Incident* (黑炮事件 1986, Huang Jianxin) characterize the benevolent western foreigners that make contribution to, and are gradually incorporated into the specific Chinese groups in respective ways. For these films, the boundaries between the foreign other and the native self are blurred. The Maoist films show much less quantity on the representation of the benevolent western foreigners. In this regard, *Dr. Bethune* stands out as a special case in point.

In a more comprehensive study, Dai Degang leads a quantifiable statistic study on the cinematic representation of foreigners. He examines 2493 films produced in mainland China

²⁴⁴ Ibid.,

from 1979 to 1998 and locates 224 films that represent the foreigners.²⁴⁵ He then categorizes nine types of representation of foreigners ranging from “invaders (Chinese people show extreme hatred towards them)” to “benefactors (Chinese people show extreme love towards them).” Dai’s statistics show that the first three types combined (“hatred” to “extreme hatred” towards foreigners) accounts for 49.7% of the total, while the last three types combined (“love” to “extreme love” towards foreigners) only amounts to 20.7% of the total. As for the representation of Asian foreigners (Japanese and Vietnamese combined), the ratio of the number from the first three types(hatred) and the number from the last three types (love) is 152:26; while for Western foreigners (American, British, German and French combined), such a ratio is 29:23.²⁴⁶ From these statistics, it can be argued that the representation of foreigners in post-Maoist Chinese cinema as the antagonistic Other far overweighs that of the good-willed benefactors who pay the tribute; and the cinematic representation of foreigners tends to highlight the atrocity of Asian invaders, while keeps a more ambivalent attitude towards Western foreigners. Such a tendency is closely related to the communist party’s ideology to justify its credits during the Anti-Japanese War on the screen, in contrast to the KMT’s passive and involuntary resistance. Although Dai does not tackle Chinese films in Maoist era, it can be deduced that, in such a period characterized by a much clearer distinction between imperialist other and revolutionary self, the representation of the imperialist invaders far overweighs that of the “good foreigners,” rendering the latter category almost negligible.

Although Dai, Berry and Farquhar acutely note different representational modes of foreigners on the screen, their analysis, however, remain more or less descriptive and fail to elaborate more on the specific historical contexts that lead to the differences of the cinematic

²⁴⁵ Dai Degang, “Xinshiqi dalu dianying zhong de waiguoren xingxiang,” pp.12-22.

²⁴⁶ For the complicatedness of the Sino-Russian relationship, Russians are not counted as western foreigners here.

representation of foreigners. In terms of Berry and Farquhar's argument, *Dr. Bethune*, *Black Cannon Incident*, and *Wedding Banquet* are indeed pertinent examples of the benevolent foreigners paying tribute. However, these three films were released in different time period with distinct historical contexts: respectively in Maoist era, post-Maoist era, and in the United States with an Asian-American diasporic context. For a "tribute system" represented on the screen, it is important to ask further: who pays the tribute? Why does he pay it? Who receives the tribute? Why does he receive it? What kind of Western products, technology, or spirit can serve to make a tribute? Under what circumstances can the action of paying tribute be acknowledged in an alien land with a distinctive cultural background? The answers to these questions vary greatly in different historical and social contexts. One thing is in common, though. The communication between foreigners and Chinese necessarily brings cultural shock for both parties. In this regard, either one culture clashes with the other and becomes antagonistic (as shown from the first type of representation). Or, one culture takes an upper hand to accommodate and possibly assimilate the other culture. Which culture is being assimilated is not randomly chosen, but determined by power relations.

For the film *Dr. Bethune*, the ultimate tribute is paid: one's life. Which tribute is bigger than life? Dr. Bethune's case defies the stereotypical representation of the western foreigners during the Maoist era. It also provides a new perspective on martyrdom. If martyrdom is engendered by a state naming system, it cannot explain whether Dr. Bethune is a Chinese martyr, a Canadian martyr, or simply a communist martyr that beyond any "narrow nationalism." If the first type of representation of foreigners can only generate narrow nationalism by stimulating xenophobia, the second type of representation is a necessary supplement, or even more important, to validate the inclusiveness of the nationalist ideology, and to provide an imaginary power relationship that

fulfills self-identification desires.

Dr. Bethune: From Reportage to Novel and Film

The production and exhibition of the film *Dr. Bethune* went through trials and tribulations throughout many years. The film itself witnesses the ever-changing and willful manipulation of the film policies during the Maoist period, and the dramatic transformation of the public discourse in the post-Mao milieu.

Five years after Mao's influential article "In Memory of Dr. Bethune," the writer and journalist Zhou Erfu wrote the reportage *Fragment on Norman Bethune* in 1944. Zhou worked as a war journalist then, and his reportage constructs the narrative backbone of all the later adaptations. Although significant editing occurs in the later adaptations, the basic story and the narrative structure, the plain and unadorned writing style still remain similar. The way the reportage treats Dr. Bethune is straightforward but powerful, neither condescending nor conceding, but full of meaningful details. The reportage is fully aware of Mao's thoughts on Dr. Bethune and it successfully fleshes out Mao's doctrines through vivid details.

In 1946, Zhou Erfu wrote the novel *Dr. Bethune*, which uses most material from the reportage with more detailed depiction. In 1951, the Department of Culture planned to produce a film on Dr. Bethune and Zhou himself wrote the film script. This project was rejected by Jiang Qing 江青 (Mao's wife), whose reasoning was "We have enough Chinese materials to deal with, why bother focusing on foreigners' fights and lives?"(中国人都拍不过来, 为什么拍外国人的战斗和生活?)²⁴⁷ In 1963, this aborted project was resumed by scriptwriters Zhang Junxiang 张

²⁴⁷ See Zhou Erfu, "Tan bai qiu en da fu" 谈《白求恩大夫》(Discussion about *Dr. Bethune*) in *Baiqiuen da fu* (*Dr. Bethune*) (Beijing, Shangwu yin shu guan, 1999).

骏祥 and Zhao Tuo 赵拓. After serious discussions with the original novel writer Zhou Erfu, Zhang and Zhao worked on the script. Zhang directed the film during the year of 1963 and 1964 and completed the film on the September of 1965.

However, the film was not released until October 1977 after the Cultural Revolution. It was Jiang Qing who again killed the project. On January 1966, Jiang watched the pre-screen of the film and strongly opposed it to be publicly released. She claimed, “This subject matter cannot be dealt with. Chairman Mao has already written an article on it, what else do you want to do?”(这个题材根本不能拍，毛主席已经写了文章了，你们还想怎么样)²⁴⁸. Jiang made the comments just one month ahead of the notorious “Summary,” which was approved with revision by Mao on March 1966 and served as an indisputable guidance for all literature, art and film works during the Cultural Revolution.²⁴⁹ We may consider Jiang’s comments on *Dr. Bethune* as deriving from her thoughts on film criticism and theory, elaborated systematically one month later in the “Summary.”

Jiang Qing’s comments held valid for more than ten years and the original film of *Dr. Bethune* was kept confidential in the Film Bureau throughout the Cultural Revolution Period. Soon after Mao’s death on September 1976 and the immediate arrest of Jiang Qing on October 1976, the film was finally released to the public on 1977. As almost all Jiang’s comments and reviews on films were then regarded as nothing but tyrannical, willful, ridiculous and evil, her comments on *Dr. Bethune* were also rebuked and ridiculed. Film critics, reviewers, and film crew members of *Dr. Bethune* joined the unanimous chorus to blame Jiang and her sidekicks for

²⁴⁸ Zhang Junxiang and Zhao Tuo, *Dr. Bethune (Film Script)*, p.1.

²⁴⁹ The official and complete name of “Summary” is *Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with Which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ching* 林彪同志委托江青同志召开的部队文艺工作座谈会纪要

destroying the film art. The film reviewer Chen Tongyi notes, “We may have already forgotten *Dr. Bethune*, since the ultra-Leftist thought froze and submerged its existence. But now it finally breaks the shackle and is accessible to all audiences as a ‘new’ release.”²⁵⁰ The art designer of *Dr. Bethune* Han Shangyi 韩尚义 comments: “I wrote a ten-thousand-word summary on the art design of *Dr. Bethune* after its completion, but the extremely vicious Lin Biao and ‘Gang of Four’ frenetically persecuted many artists, and my summary was burned to ashes when the sidekicks were sent to search my house.”²⁵¹

Dr. Bethune mirrors the political complexity during the Maoist era. It also, more importantly, provokes contemplation on the reason why this film, tackling the theme of “good foreigners”, was twice banned. It is noteworthy to point out that the comments on the film as cited above were published in post-Maoist era, when reviewers or artists could easily but distortedly impute most of the crimes committed in the realm of literature and art to Jiang Qing. She sometimes, however, appeared as a scapegoat. The unanimous attack on Jiang Qing or “Gang of Four”’s comments on film or literature might be as subjective and biased as, if not more than, Jiang’s own words.

However, when reflecting on Jiang’s two comments on the film *Dr. Bethune*, one can find the consistent logic running through. In the first comment, Jiang’s point is focusing not on foreigners, but on native Chinese. In the second comment, her point is focusing not on the alternative representations, but on Mao’s most orthodox interpretation. Both these comments have a clear Self/Other distinction and show Jiang’s anxiety that the threat from the western Other can potentially destabilize and disintegrate the sameness of the Chinese selfhood. The

²⁵⁰ Chen Tongyi, “He is really like an old Ba-Lu—Review of *Dr. Bethune*.” in *Dangdai Dianying* 当代电影, Vol.3, 1985.

²⁵¹ Han Shangyi, “Make All Efforts to Ensure its Simplicity and Truthfulness---Thoughts on the Art Design of *Dr. Bethune*.” In *Dianying Yishu* 电影艺术, vol.1, 1979.

sameness of the revolutionary collective identity is threatened by the infiltrating foreignness that cooperates with, rather than antagonizes the native people, rendering the native people bite the “sugar-coated bullets” voluntarily. The reason for Jiang Qing’s opposition lies in the key fact that in the Maoist China, constructing and keeping the sameness of the revolutionary personal and collective identity is one of the foremost tasks of the communist cultural strategy.

However, I argue that Jiang Qing’s anxiety over the threat from *Dr. Bethune* was unnecessary. In the cinematic representation, the threat from Dr. Bethune’s foreignness to destabilize the sameness of the revolutionary identity, or, from the Other to interrogate the validity of the Self, are successfully dissolved in the narration of *the selflessness of selfhood*. In other words, rather than functioned as a force of disintegration, foreignness without the core of selfhood justifies and contributes to the construction of the sameness of the revolutionary identity, thus reinforcing the mutual communist solidarity across the national boundaries.

In the sections that follow, I will examine three key aspects of the Maoist necropolitics reflected from the foreign martyrdom. 1) foreignness and internationalism 2) the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness, 3) the professional technique and the revolutionary spirit. While three aspects are connected with each other, the first investigation is on the meaning of foreignness to Chinese revolution, tackling the question of how and why foreignness is alternately dissolved and retained in the film. Such a strategy blurs the boundary of the Self/Other distinction to credit the internationalism of the communist revolution, while contains the potential disintegration such internationalism might bring. Then I will examine how the spirit of “absolute selflessness” of Dr. Bethune is appropriated by the revolutionary discourse as one of the key elements to homogenize the personal identity, for the sake of constructing and keeping the very sameness of a higher collective revolutionary identity. The essence of such identity, I argue, lies in the transcendental

revolutionary ideal that acts as an “absent cause” to substitute the lived personal experience with the collective historical experience. Film media, as the ideal vehicle that easily blurs the boundary between reality and illusion, is greatly conducive to achieve this goal. Finally, I will look into Dr. Bethune’s professionalism, and investigate how his increasing despise of his western profession and his “selflessness” ironically leads to his death.

Foreignness Outside in: The Representation of Foreignness

The representation of foreignness reflects the unbalanced power structures between the East and the West, and the screen becomes the contested site of the universal claim of capitalism and the corresponding local resistance. As Edward Said made clear in his work *Orientalism*, the representation of otherness (Oriental) is the precondition for the construction of selfhood (Occidental).²⁵² This argument has been widely accepted, as well as criticized, during the past 30 years. In terms of the cinematic representation of otherness, Miriam Hansen argues that the early Hollywood films incorporate numerous elements of foreignness to project a utopian vision of vernacular modernity to standardize all diversity into a uniform and transcendental subject—a universal cinematic language. The universality of the cinematic language lies exactly in the representation of difference.²⁵³ Such a call for the universal cinematic language is increasingly contested by the rising nationalist movements against the global capitalism and the local resistance to universality. Nationalists claim that the uniqueness of national identity is based on the shared understanding of the common cultural legacy and specific history within its members, and the universal cinematic language is a hallucinatory myth.

²⁵² See Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

²⁵³ See Miriam Bratu Hansen, “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism,” pp.59-77. See also Nick Browne, “Orientalism as an Ideological Form,” pp.23-31.

However, the paradox of local resistance lies in the fact that fighting against the Western Other is preconditioned by the *recognition* of the existence of the Western Other. Solanas and Getino's manifesto of the Third Cinema points out that the Third Cinema is characterized by its resistance to be assimilated by system and its resolute struggle against the colonial universal claim. The Third Cinema manifests "the decolonization of culture."²⁵⁴ However, I think that such "decolonization" is the negation of "colonization," and the event of colonization inevitably precedes the negation of it. In other words, if there is no First Cinema, there will be no Third Cinema consequently. Foreignness outlines the boundaries that define the selfhood, and the representation of foreignness is paradoxically an indispensable part to construct the selfhood in national cinema.

In terms of the representation of foreignness in the specific historical context of the revolutionary China in 1964 when *Dr. Bethune* was produced, the situation was even more complicated. First, as Xiaomei Chen argues, for Chinese political practices, the construction of the Western Other is "not for the purpose of dominating the West, but to discipline the Self."²⁵⁵ This claim holds true for the Maoist era, when the notion of the Western Other was appropriated not mainly for Chinese hegemony in the Third World, but for the consolidation of different groups to keep the sameness of revolutionary identity within the Chinese territory. It is inward and domestic rather than outward and global. Second, Arif Dirlik points out that Chinese Marxism has been greatly influenced by the Marxist globalized historical consciousness. In this way, the history of modern China should be incorporated into a part of the universal history from a teleological communist perspective.²⁵⁶ In this regard, the simultaneity of inward and outward

²⁵⁴ Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Towards a Third Cinema." pp.33-57.

²⁵⁵ Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism*, p.5.

²⁵⁶ Arif Dirlik, "Marxism and Chinese History: The Globalization of Marxist Historical Discourse and the Problem of Hegemony in Marxism," p.158.

orientations constitutes a paradox. By bringing foreignness outside in, the Marxist global consciousness potentially threatens the stability of the sameness of the revolutionary identity. This is exactly where Jiang Qing's anxiety comes from, as I mentioned in the previous section.

The outcomes of the clash between the foreign others and the native selfhood can be generalized into three types. First, when foreign power is represented as an antagonistic power, the consciousness of the sameness of the revolutionary identity is reinforced among the Chinese audience due to the sharp Self/Other distinction. Second, when foreign others are represented as the benefactors paying tribute, the outcomes are contingent: either the foreign other dissolves into the sameness of the revolutionary identity; or the original sameness within the revolutionary identity loses its initial identity, ceasing to be the same and becoming disintegrated. For the film *Dr. Bethune* representing the benevolent foreigners, it has to face such a contingent outcome and a thorny dilemma: foreignness outlines the boundaries that define selfhood, but the representation of benevolent foreigners can run the risk of disintegrating revolutionary identity. Facing this challenge, the film applies various cinematic approaches and narrative strategies to alternately dissolve and retain Bethune's foreignness, rendering his foreignness both visible and invisible.

Unlike Zhou Erfu who starts his reportage and novel directly in Yan'an, Zhang and Zhao's film script devotes the whole Chapter One (first 30 pages) to Dr. Bethune's life and work back in Canada. Its major purpose is to expose the corrupted and apathetic capitalist society that lacks any sympathy to the poor people, and to delineate the transformation of Dr. Bethune from a humanist to a communist.

However, the text has its own power to betray the original purpose. The text does provide

the Chinese readers with an exotic picture of the foreign life, a romantic love story between Dr. Bethune and Edith, and a cold but modernized western city. Having studied in Yale University from 1936 to 1939 and obtained a Master degree in Theatre, the director Zhang Junxiang had much experience living in a developed western society. Although in the script he tries all means to inform the Chinese readers that the western society is apathetic and corrupted, there are still considerable amount of details on the cold but modernized hospital, corrupted but captivating party, clean apartment and beautiful city, etc. In other words, although Zhang makes the contrast between Montreal and Yan'an to foreground Dr. Bethune's internationalist spirit—giving up all his privileges in the modern Canada and going to the undeveloped China, the depiction of the modern western society still runs the risk of providing Chinese readers (and potential audiences) with an exotic and attractive foreign landscape.

Unfortunately or fortunately, Chapter One of the film script was completely deleted in the actual film. The budget concern is one of the reasons, but the more important reason is that the depiction of the foreign land is potentially dangerous to keep the sameness of the Chinese identity, as I mentioned above concerning Jiang Qing's comments. In the post-Maoist milieu when the political control of the Zeitgeist increasingly loosened, the depiction of Dr. Bethune was more exotic and legendary-oriented. Bethune's love story and life in Canada are extended or even emphasized, and he becomes an adventurer searching for excitement, or is even involved in a love triangle.²⁵⁷ There are also some interrogations about the real motivation of Bethune coming to China. A scholarly essay points out that Dr. Bethune used to idolize Walter Pater, believing in his idea that “not the fruit of **experience**, but **experience** itself, is the end”²⁵⁸ Dr. Bethune also promised his ex-wife Frances that “I may not give you richness, but I will not let

²⁵⁷ See *Bethune: The Making of a Hero* (1992), and the TV series *Dr. Norman Bethune* (2006)

²⁵⁸ See Hong Jun, “Duochong shiye xia de Baiqiuen.”

your life be banal.”²⁵⁹ These essays do not argue against Dr. Bethune’s communist spirit as the major motivation to China, but they also point out that his adventurous characteristic may be another important reason to visit China to gain different experiences as well. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the investigation on the real motivation for any martyr’s behavior is not fruitful, since the dead people cannot speak, and the testimonies from the surrogates are doubtful if not totally wrong. It is more important, I think, to investigate what elements of foreignness is selected to be foregrounded, controlled or contained by different political discourses under various contexts. Therefore, during the post-Maoist period when Deng Xiaoping’s opening-up policy dominated and the Chinese audiences were eager to see the representation of the foreign elements, it is understandable that the Western part of Dr. Bethune was emphasized on film or the TV series. During the Maoist period, by contrast, the large-scale representation of the foreign elements had to be contained or deleted, even though its major purpose was to expose and condemn the western ideology.

The deletion of the Chapter One from the script to the film of *Dr. Bethune* also showcases the everlasting conflict and compromise between the Shanghai and Yan’an filmmaking tradition during the Maoist period. In one of the pioneer scholarly works on the Maoist films, Paul Clark raises the argument of the “Shanghai-Yan’an split.”²⁶⁰ The city of Shanghai crystalizes the foreign impact since the Shanghai International Settlement (上海公共租界) was established in 1844, while Yan’an as the cradle of the CCP symbolizes more native tradition and orthodox CCP spirit. From this criterion, Zhang Junxiang is a typical Shanghai school director, having studied in Yale for many years and being promoted from the manager of the Shanghai Film Studio to the

²⁵⁹ See “Huan ni yige zhenshi de Baiqiuen” 还你一个真实的白求恩 (The Real Bethune Rediscovered), in Yang Wen, Pei Xiaomin eds. *Bei lishi yiwang de lishi*

²⁶⁰ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949*.

head of the Shanghai Film Bureau. Not surprisingly, Zhang devotes almost 1/3 length of the whole script to Bethune's life and work in Canada prior to the trip to China, since it is the material that he is more familiar with than that from the Yan'an school. However, the film is co-produced by the Shanghai Haiyan Film Studio (上海海燕电影制片厂) and the August First Film Studio (八一电影制片厂), and the August First Studio usually handled more serious and orthodox army-related material that strictly follows the CCP Yan'an spirit. In this regard, Zhang has to compromise to the extent that the foreign part has to be completely deleted, and his Shanghai identity needs to be assimilated by the Yan'an identity. Zhang makes his standpoint clear by writing an interesting conversation in the end of the Chapter One:

(To Bethune) "Hello, you are still here!" The door of the bar opens and the couple of Americans walks out, somewhat drunk.

They walk towards the railings, and the American man speaks in a joke manner: "Come with me to Shanghai, I guarantee that you will forget all the troubles in one night!"

Bethune does not speak, obviously very unpleasant.

That merchant continues to nag: "What? You still want to go to Yan'an—that God forsaken place? To fight against the Japanese?"

"Yes." Bethune controls his anger and reputes...²⁶¹

Such Yan'an-leaning connotation is clearer as the film shows its first shot on the profile of Dr. Bethune on the ship, looking steadily towards the sunlight, with the main music theme adapted from the song "Ode to Yan'an" (延安颂). Just as Dr. Bethune is going to give up his

²⁶¹ Zhang and Zhao, *Dr. Bethune (A Film Script)*. p.264.

foreign identity and his very selfness, ready to be assimilated into the Chinese local identity, the director Zhang Junxiang is also going to get rid of his “foreign” element—Shanghai spirit, and wholeheartedly adopts the Yan’an spirit in the film *Dr. Bethune*.

Without much hesitation, the film moves directly in a small village close to Yan’an, and the dissolution of foreignness is seen again via the unbalanced interaction between English language and Chinese language. Bethune comes to China with almost no knowledge of Chinese. He notes before setting off to China: “I have to admit, except for Edgar Snow’s book and some reports on the Long March, I know nothing about China.”²⁶² Therefore, the translator Tong is a crucial figure in mediating between two languages, as well as between foreignness and local. In the film, Bethune introduces Tong and calls Tong “my other half.” In this way, Bethune’s selfhood is almost half lost as soon as he arrives in China. In Pierre Bourdieu’s arguments, linguistic capacity has a significant meaning for the consciousness of selfhood, and the inequality of the linguistic exchanges reflects the biased power balance. Since utterances are valued by the receivers, the choice of the way of utterance depends on the socially structured evaluation of linguistic competence.²⁶³ The cinematic representation of languages also conforms to this principle. Bethune tries hard to study Chinese, but there is almost no Chinese people in the film even trying to study any English. Within a year before his death, Bethune has made astonishingly significant progress on Chinese. In most cases, he can communicate with Chinese people without the translator Tong’s mediation. Such an *immediacy* of linguistic exchange symbolizes the gradual disappearance of the gap between Bethune and other Chinese people, between foreignness and native as well. In the final scene of the film when Translator Tong translates and

²⁶² Zhou Erfu, *Dr. Bethune*, p.42. This dialogue is not included in the film version, which begins from Bethune’s arrival to China.

²⁶³ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Introduction and Chap.1.

reads Bethune's last words from the typewriter, he reads it so fluently as if it is written in Chinese rather than in English (we know that the typewriter cannot print Chinese characters). In this sense, English as the native language for Bethune, both in oral and in written form, transforms in the direction to be merged into the local language of Chinese, rather than the reverse way that dominates the post-Maoist Chinese society, as represented from the documentary *Crazy English* (疯狂英语 1999, dir.Zhang Yuan). The transformation from the voluntary dissolution of one's foreignness to the local (during the Maoist era), to the local's fetishistic idolization of foreignness (during the post-Maoist era), witnesses the shifting power relations between the East and the West with language as one of the most conspicuous symptoms.

However, while at times foreignness dissolves into the sameness of the local, Bethune's foreignness has to be retained and in some occasions even further addressed. As I previously analyzed, foreignness is paradoxically an indispensable part for the construction of nations. In a book examining the origin of nationalism, Vicente Rafael insightfully argues that nationalist movements can be understood as the process of translation, replacing what is foreign while keeping its foreignness.²⁶⁴ Such a translation process is emphasized when Bethune is making a farewell public speech just before he plans to go back to Canada to order more medical equipment (1.19.54). The scene shows five soldiers walking towards Bethune in turn, each bringing a souvenir banner for him. From the first to the last, the Chinese characters on each banner write "Dr. Bethune, our consultant," "Dr. Bethune, our teacher," "Dr. Bethune, our model," "Dr. Bethune, our fighter," "Dr. Bethune, our comrade." The last banner is the most important one as a souvenir, which is last received by Bethune who expresses intense excitement

²⁶⁴ See Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*, p.1.

after knowing that he transforms from a “consultant” to a “comrade.” Such a sequence shows the increasing intimacy and the decreasing distance between the local and the foreign. However, when Bethune begins his speech, his foreignness is addressed. Not only is his speech given in English with the sentence-by-sentence translation, his speech also emphasizes that although he imparts some medical techniques to China, he is essentially a student of these Chinese soldiers as well. In this regard, from a consultant to a comrade, and later from a comrade to a student, the hierarchical gap between the foreign and the local is firstly dissolved, then restored again. But this time it is in an inverted way, when the dominating foreignness characterized by Western techniques is replaced by the subordinated foreignness as Bethune realizes that he needs to be a “student,” learning from the selfless spirits of the Chinese communist soldiers and to get rid of his own Western selfishness. At this point, Bethune naturally concludes his speech in Chinese passionately, showing his determination to learn, emulate, and finally join the local communists as a no less inferior revolutionary fighter. Again, the gap is closed.

The blurred boundary between the foreign Self and the Chinese Other can be best exemplified by the blood transfusion scene. In the documentary film *In Memory of Dr. Bethune* (纪念白求恩, 1951), blood transfusion is eulogized as the climax of the international comradeship. The narrator claims, “Comrade Bethune’s blood flows inside the Chinese soldiers’ blood vessels.”(中国战士的血管里有着白求恩同志的鲜血在流动着！). However, back to Zhou Erfu’s reportage in 1944, when asked to donate blood, nobody is willing to volunteer. Cadre Ye claims that he has donated blood recently and was not able to do it again, and Nurse Qiu says that he feels sick these days. Seeing that situation, Dr. Bethune stands out to donate his blood.²⁶⁵ Two years after Mao’s “Yan’an Talks” and the Incident of Wang Shiwei 王实味, Zhou’s

²⁶⁵ Zhou, *Fragments*, pp.98-100.

original reportage still maintains some degree of critical realism, satirical on the bureaucratic way²⁶⁶ and critical on the apathetic onlookers.²⁶⁷ It actually corresponds tightly to Mao's article, which criticizes some communists' coldness and apathy towards the ordinary people. However, twenty years after the reportage, the artists were no longer able to follow Mao to do the criticism. In the film script and the film, such critical realism is totally contained. Selfish cadres and apathetic crowd are replaced with the selfless cadres and passionate crowd. In the film script, when there is the need to transfuse blood, Dr. Bethune is the first volunteer, followed by Cadre Yu and Dr. Fang passionately volunteer as well.

The film offers a more complicated sequence to showcase such a sublime climax when communist internationalism is reached. While Dr. Bethune's foreignness is at times reminded, the foreign identity and the Chinese identity finally merge into one through careful editing of blood transfusion. After Dr. Bethune decides to donate his blood, the rich orchestra music arises with the main theme as a variation of the song *L'Internationale*, connoting that all the proletarian people around the world need to unite together. The sequence is about two minutes long, with only music and no line. The most important part is how to foreground and contain Dr. Bethune's foreignness almost at the same time. Zhang Junxiang uses two sets of shots to reach that goal skillfully.

²⁶⁶ For the comic depiction of the communist cadre, see *Fragments* p.96. When Dr. Bethune is already ready to set for the frontier, Cadre Gu and other cadres just got up and still have not had breakfast yet. "They have to follow (Dr. Bethune) with their empty stomach." (顾部长他们只好饿着肚子跟着走).

²⁶⁷ For the depiction of the apathetic onlookers, see *Fragments* p. 94. When Dr. Bethune is conducting the surgery, many people peek from the outside window and chat with each other, "Dr. Bethune finishes the operation, and throws out a gauze full of blood into the crowd angrily, saying: 'this is not a theatre, nothing to have fun, this is an operation room.'"(这也不是戏院子, 有什么热闹好看, 这是手术室啊。)



Fig 1-4





Fig 5-9

The first set of shots (Fig 1-4) begins with a medium shot showing Dr. Bethune's foreign facial characteristics, reminding the audiences who is donator of the blood. The camera slowly pushes forward to the close-up of Bethune's arm, which is now indistinguishable from a Chinese soldier's arm. A dissolve is introduced to connect it with the third shot, also a close-up of an arm, with the position of the arm and the syringe almost the same. Such a graphic match symbolizes the homogeneity between a foreign body and a Chinese body, and Dr. Bethune is regarded as not a foreigner, but an organic part of the Chinese communist collective. The camera pans to the left to show the soldier's face, reinforcing audience's impression that the foreign identity and the Chinese identity merge into one.

The second set of shots (Fig 5-9) bears similar logic of representation as the first set. Fig 7

and Fig 8 are in one shot. The connection between the foreign and the native is not via graphic match, but via eye-line match from a nurse in an eye-witness position. The nurse's gaze provides continuity, as well as meaningful connection between Dr. Bethune and the soldier. It is also worth noting that during the blood transfusion two minute sequence, the duration of shots is much longer than that in the rest of the film. It ensures prolonged impression from the audiences on the inseparable connection between the foreign and the native, and the spirit of internationalism is revealed through the skillful maneuver of the film visual language.

In summary, by the representation of an influential foreign martyr, the revolutionary narrative and the cinematic strategies cooperate to minimize the potential threats of disintegration of the local solidarity from the benevolent foreignness, while maximizing the validity of transnational communism. The deletion of the Chapter One in the film script entirely transforms the dominating foreignness to the subordinated foreignness. By alternately making visible and invisible of the foreignness, the revolutionary narrative and cinematic language reconcile the potential conflict between the communist global consciousness and the local revolutionary identity. Besides the examples that I analyze in this chapter, numerous other film details also attest to such a narrative strategy alternately dissolving Bethune's foreignness (Bethune tries hard to use chopsticks, etc.), and foregrounding his foreignness (local people make fun of Bethune's awkward use of chopsticks, etc). In this way, Bethune's foreignness is appropriated by the revolutionary discourse to construct and keep the sameness of both the personal identity and the collective revolutionary identity.

Revolutionary Identity: the selflessness of selfhood

National identity is not a natural givenness but is ideologically constructed via narrations

suturing dislocated elements into unity.²⁶⁸ During the Maoist China, the collective revolutionary identity shared many characteristics with the Chinese national identity. But the crucial difference is that the revolutionary identity transcends the national boundary with the Marxist proletarian globalism as the guidance. In the previous section, I analyzed the necessity of introducing Bethune's foreignness to form the local solidarity and the importance to alternately retain and dissolve his foreignness to construct the Chinese revolutionary identity. This section focuses on "the spirit of absolute selflessness" of Dr. Bethune. I investigate how the selflessness, a void of selfness, plays a crucial role in maintaining the sameness of the instable personal identity, thus forming a unified collective revolutionary identity. First, it is important to distinguish two kinds of identities: personal identity and collective identity.

In Paul Ricouer's seminal examination of the relationship between personal identity and narration, he points out that viewing personal photos taken from various periods is an effective way to *make believe* the existence of personal identity, namely, the uninterrupted continuity between the first and the last stages in the personal development represented from these images. Ricouer argues that identity necessarily involves the dialectical interaction between *idem-identity* (sameness), and *ipse-identity*, which is always in the flow with the time. Hence, identity never keeps the "same", but is *called* and *narrated* to be in the position of sameness.²⁶⁹

Being aware of the narrated sameness within the personal identity, Ricouer further questions the reliability of narration. He points out the paradoxes of personal identity derived from the unreliability of memory trying to eternalize the continuity of personal development. For example, when a person looks at his photo taken ten years ago, how can he make sure that it is

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities*; Homi K. Bhabha ed. *Nation and Narration*; Slavoj Žižek, "On the One"; Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*.

²⁶⁹ See Paul Ricouer, *Oneself as Another*, Fifth Study.

the same him as he is now? Since *time* necessarily involves in personal development, the selfhood (*ipse-identity*) is always in the flow. Although by saying “I remember,” one retains the position of sameness in personal identity, memory (it is also a kind of narration) can still at times provoke hesitation, doubt, or contestation. In Ricouer’s sense, “doubt is not far away when we compare a present perception with a recent memory.”²⁷⁰

If looking at photos makes one believe his sameness of personal identity, audiences’ gaze of national images, most notably from the films, also establishes the fantasy on the sameness of the collective revolutionary identity. These images narrate and construct a unified national history, which “secures for the contested and contingent nation the false unity of a self-same.”²⁷¹

However, if personal identity is narrated to be the same and it is instable because of the unreliability of memory, the national collective identity is similarly prone to provoke hesitation and contestation. Chris Berry and Mary Faquhar argue that Chinese national identity “not as a unified and coherent form that is expressed in the cinema but as multiply constructed and contested.”²⁷² Berry and Farquhar’s argument is valid considering that the book deals with Chinese cinema in the entire 20th-century. The argument especially holds firm in terms of the post-Maoist era when Chinese cinema reflects over the validity of the Maoist patriarchal narrative, and when Chinese language films (produced in Hong Kong, Taiwan, or by diasporic Chinese directors) contest the uniformity of the national identity.

However, I would also argue that, the argument of the variegated and unstable national identity as represented on the screen cannot sweepingly generalize all the situations in light of different historical contexts, especially during the Maoist era. As Xin Liu notes, in terms of

²⁷⁰ Paul Ricouer, *Oneself as Another*, p.117.

²⁷¹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. p.4.

²⁷² Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on the Screen*. p.9.

personal identity, the post-Mao era is characterized by the discontinuity in the personhood of a person. In other words, personal memory can no longer relate oneself to the grand History and the increasing gap between state ideologies and personal life renders people unable to tell the stories about “Self”. Rather, it is the instant, temporary, and consumerist “self” that matters.²⁷³ Although Liu’s study focuses on the post-Maoist era, his investigation, on the flip side, suggests the continuity of personal identity in the Maoist era. Such continuity of personal identity corresponds to the sameness of the collective revolutionary identity. During the Maoist era, expressing “selfhood” is equivalent to the manifestation of “Selfhood,” and vice versa, speaking the “Selfhood” infiltrates every personal story inevitably. The key question is: we know that the sameness of identity is narrated, but how does the revolutionary narrative manage to maintain the sameness of both personal identity and collective identity, foreclosing personal and collective memory to betray the narrated nature of identity?

In the film, Dr. Bethune first comes to China with his strong dissatisfaction of medical conditions in China. He scolds vehemently on Fang, a local doctor, that Fang should not have used bamboo as the replacement of plasterboard to treat the broken-leg soldier. He also initially rejects Fang to attend his lectures because “Fang should not be called as a doctor.” All these behavior of Dr. Bethune are the natural products from his long-term western medical education and personal experience as a doctor in the Western medical system. In other words, he makes the evaluation and judgment based on his Western selfness. In this regard, although prior to the China trip Bethune responds to his Canadian colleague’s rhetoric question “who does not care for

²⁷³ See Xin Liu, *The Otherness of Self*. Liu avails himself with ethnographical investigation on the entrepreneurs in the 1990s China. His argument is well-grounded, except for the transformational period of 1980-1989, when the personhood of a person did not discontinue, but resumed with the ideal for economic and political modernization substituting the ideal of communist revolution. Both ideals keep the unified personal identity until the ideal was desperately decomposed after the Tiananmen Square Event in 1989. See Xiaobing Yang, “Toward a Theory of Postmodern/Post-Mao-Deng Literature”, in *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*, ed. Laughlin Charles. pp.81-99.

self?” with his absolute contempt that “this (selfness) is the most poisonous virus disseminated by capitalism,” his Western selfness still stands out in his first days in China.²⁷⁴

As Bethune gradually realizes his mistakes due to his Western selfness, he transforms himself from a “consultant” to a “student” in order to become a “real revolutionary fighter” as his Chinese peers do. This process manifests the narrative strategy not only alternately dissolving and retaining his foreignness as previously analyzed, but also reshaping his personal identity from Western selfness to revolutionary selflessness. He learns to use Chinese bamboo to treat the wounded soldiers, he acknowledges his mistake that he does not respect the local practice, he despises Western newspaper inviting him to write “some exotic material” in China, and he finally sacrifices his life as many Chinese soldiers do.

The value of Bethune’s selfless spirit is highlighted and crystallized in Mao’s article, when Mao calls for a nationwide “pure” and “noble-minded” “spirit of absolute selflessness.” It is a key element in constructing and maintaining the sameness of revolutionary personal identity. The reason why memory always threatens the sameness of personal identity is that memory inevitably invokes the consciousness of *time* when one compares the selfhood of the previous moment with that of the instantaneous moment. The consciousness of change which results in the instability of personal identity occurs in one’s realizing that time is flowing. However, the revolutionary personal identity, as the selflessness that Mao calls for, is a *void*. Its contents are evacuated and transferred to a collective revolutionary identity, which dissolves all the personal concrete contents into a collective revolutionary ideal like a ring circling around the void. The selfless revolutionary personal identity is a void, but it is exactly such a “void” that keeps its homogeneity and sameness which defies any change occurred in time. The void personal identity

²⁷⁴ Zhang and Zhao, *Dr Bethune (A Film Script)*, p.43. This scene does not appear on the screen finally because of the budget issue.

is indispensable in that it acts as a “hole” to construct the form of the ring.²⁷⁵ Without the extraction of the concrete selfness, the collective revolutionary identity cannot be established.

Another question arises accordingly: why does the revolutionary collective identity function as a material form of the ring? In regard to this question, Althusser provides a convincing argument on the form and function of ideology. He argues that “ideology has a material existence,” which means that ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practices.²⁷⁶ The revolutionary collective identity functions as an ideology represents “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”²⁷⁷ Therefore, such a revolutionary collective identity is imaginary but *real*, endowed with a material existence. It keeps its sameness because its narration presupposes an ideal or transcendental notion of time, which in Ricoeur’s sense is “the permanence in time.” When the revolutionary discourse makes its promise, it transcends the realm of reality and its validity can only be justified by ethical belief and imagination, which necessarily manifest a denial of change in the real time, project back a mirror-image for the revolutionary individuals to perceive as their *real* living conditions, and finally transform all diversity into identity.

Conclusion: Selflessness and Martyrdom

Dr. Bethune dies of bacterial contamination. It seems to be an accident. However, I think it inevitable. Although Mao says that Dr. Bethune is perfecting his skill every day, Dr. Bethune is actually losing his long-term-learned skills every day. Being assimilated into the Chinese local and increasingly becomes selfless, Dr. Bethune loses not only his western identity but also his

²⁷⁵ For the brilliant analysis of how nothingness subsists being, see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p.485.

²⁷⁶ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, p.165.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.162.

western strictly-practiced professionalism. As a doctor who has received modern medical education and strictly follows the sanitation procedure, Dr. Bethune struggles and hesitates. Finally he criticizes and abandons the essential rule of his professionalism during his stay in China.

In the reportage, novel, and the film, Dr. Bethune at first strongly opposes to using bamboo plaster and wood saw to treat the injuries. These items are unsanitary and easy to cause infection according the standard western medical protocol. However, learning from Chinese local doctors and conforming to the actual war situation, he acknowledges his mistake, takes the lead to use these items by himself, and even scolds those who regard these unconventional medical equipment as unsanitary or dirty.

At this point, Dr. Bethune goes too far that his spirit of selflessness engulfs his rational selfness. His western identity as a mature doctor gives way to the communist collective identity of selflessness. In a sequence of the film when he visits the local hospital, he finds a doctor wearing a gauze mask and immediately questions angrily: “why do you wear this? Are you offended by the smell?” Such over-reaction indicates on the one hand that Dr. Bethune rejects the distance between the doctor and the patients, and he treats these patients just like his own children. However, on the other hand, it also indicates that Dr. Bethune begins to lose his rational selfness as a good doctor strictly following the necessary procedure. In the end, even though he clearly knows the outcome of cutting his fingers during an operation, he still ignores the huge risk and continues to work, until he is seriously ill and is not able to work again.

I conclude this chapter by readdress the tight connection between selflessness and martyrdom. Selflessness is not only a constitutive void that keeps the sameness and stability of the revolutionary identity, it is also a stimulus to the road of martyrdom. The more one becomes

selfless, the more risks one will die as a martyr. In this regard, Mao's calling on the nation-wide learning of "the spirit of absolute selflessness" is a call for the potential martyrdom that every Chinese needs to be deeply internalized inside the collective consciousness of the Maoist communism.

Chapter 5

Unwelcome Heroes: Genre Twist and Unconventional *Lieshi* in the Maoist Films

The etymological study of the word *lieshi* in the Introduction shows the paradoxical coexistence of free will and submissiveness in one word. The *lieshi* dies voluntarily for a just cause by his or her absolute free will, as *lie* connotes to the freedom to act. However, *shi* means that the martyr is affiliated with the state system and the heroic action of martyrdom needs to be acknowledged by the nation/state authority before he/she can be named as a martyr. In Chapter Two, I have argued that such uneasy coexistence was mostly contained by the Maoist necropolitical discourse, as reflected from the orthodox and conventional representation of male sacrifice in the Maoist war films. The almost homogenous representation may look banal or even insane nowadays, but the ideological maneuver to arouse the imagination of the perfect communist future as an absent cause validates the transcendental martyrdom in a special social milieu filled with revolutionary passion.

The implantation of the future ideal of perfection into the present reality, as well as the establishment of the ideal socialist female type and the foregrounding of the communist selflessness, constitute three major pillars of the Maoist discourse of martyrdom. The Maoist discourse minimizes the inherent contradiction of the leftist literary principle, designs the rhetoric of *xisheng* to foreground its discursive construct of self-sacrifice, while concealing its original facet of being sacrificed. However, will the disposable sacrificed body return like a specter to contest the dominant necropolitics? Will the highly homogeneous representation of martyrdom still have its underlying variation to break through the formulaic representation, at

least momentarily?

This chapter investigates the rarity of the Maoist films where unconventional martyrdom is represented. As I noted in the Chapter Two, out of the over three hundred Maoist films that I have watched and researched, there are about 70 films about martyrdom. Out of these 70 films, 95% display conventional martyrdom except for only about 5% deviating from the conventional martyrdom representation. Either the martyr is completely missing throughout the film (*Visiting Relatives* 探親記 1958, dir. Xie Tian), or the representation of the martyrdom twists the conventional war film genre, and is mixed with the elements from other film genres, such as comedy (*Captain Guan* 關連長 1950, dir. Shi Hui), and thriller (*The Cold Dawn* 五更寒 1957, dir. Yan Jizhou).

Although 95% of the films overwhelmingly occupy the center stage of the Maoist representation of martyrdom, 5% are priceless for offering different perspectives on the Maoist films, and manifesting the power of film art itself to variate and transform even under the rigid political atmosphere. These films were released in public only when the tight political control was either in the embryonic stage, or temporarily loosened. They were severely criticized, condemned and banned during the Maoist Era. Most of these films have not been available for viewing only until recently, thanks to film scholars' continuous effort to rethink and rediscover the value of the Maoist films. Albeit rare in quantity, these films prove the porous nature of film art even in the airtight political container. They expose the long-contained original essence of the *lieshi*: being a subject, an object and an abject altogether, the *lieshi* is simultaneously celebrated and marginalized.

Film genre has its own power of life and generic rules that potentially defy social control. In Chapter Two, I discuss the horror genre film *Song at Midnight* under the background of the Left

Wing Cinema Movement of the 1930s. The revolutionary Song Danping is represented as a physically distorted martyr, ironically persecuted to death in the end by the “people” he aims to save. Although the Left Wing Cinema Movement aims to convey a clear political message to educate the general audience, it cannot change the fact that most audiences were lured into the theater because of the “allure of the spectacle” and the graphic horror of the film. The film was widely advertised to highlight its visual sensation and unsuitability for young children (“Children under six not admitted”).²⁷⁸ The political message conveyed in the film and the sensational allure inherent in the horror film genre are constantly in negotiation throughout the entire film.

The Maoist Culture Bureau clearly knew the power of film genre, which has its own power to develop and enrich itself beyond rigid political control. Therefore, there was almost no horror film, by strict definition, during the Maoist Era. All ghosts, monsters, and spiritual beings were condemned. On the surface, spiritual beings belong to the category of feudal superstition and need to be wiped out in the Maoist new society. On a deeper level, many spiritual beings reflect social injustice. For example, the hungry ghost 饿死鬼 attests to the lack of essential material (food) in the society, the mistreated ghost 冤死鬼 mirrors the legal injustice, while the love-stricken ghost 情鬼 reveals the ethical problems of the society. In a society guided by the fantasy of future perfection, it was important to minimize the exposure of the current social injustice.

Two things need to be specially noted for the Maoist genre films. First, although foreign films (especially the Soviet films and Hollywood films that many Chinese directors and scriptwriters learn from) bring huge influence to the Maoist films, Maoist films do not need to follow, and cannot be strictly categorized into the Soviet or Hollywood definition of genre films. For example, the Hollywood romantic comedy usually follows the “boy meets girl, boy loses

²⁷⁸ Braester, *Witness against History*, p.98.

girl, boy re-meets (marries) girl” routine, which is not an industrial standard or entertainment formula for the Maoist romantic comedy. Similarly, many local dialect opera films 戏曲电影 were filmed during the Maoist period to cater to the local tastes. Such genre films are rarely seen in the Soviet or Hollywood tradition. Therefore, specific film genres that I discuss in this chapter is for convenience purpose, rather than trying to find strictly one-to-one correspondence to the style and theme of the Hollywood or Soviet film genres.

Secondly, Maoist film criticism had heated debates over two important concepts *tikai* 题 (theme) and *tikai* 体裁 (genre), which are well examined in Yomi Braester’s essay.²⁷⁹ Being different from time to time though, Maoist films and film criticism largely pay more attention to the film theme. Whether the film has a theme that eulogizes the workers, peasants and soldiers, or a theme that beautifies the landlords or bourgeois class, is a life-or-death political issue. Discussion on film theme far overweighs that of the film genre in newspapers and journals. In terms of the film theme, following the Maoist ideology and policy to represent politically correct characters and orthodox history is the only option for the directors and artists. For the film genre and style choice on the other hand, albeit highly limited as well, directors at least have some leeway to adopt certain personal preferences.

Such highly limited leeway brings valuable varieties to the orthodox and conventional war genre films. This chapter delves into such rare but indispensable film generic elements that cross over with the war film genre to represent martyrs. The generic cross-over were usually welcomed by the audiences, but not welcomed by the authorities. The newly established nation-state must set itself to be the only authority to name and define martyrdom. Therefore, the representation of martyrdom with a less serious film genre such as comedy or thriller, is dangerous in that genre

²⁷⁹ Braester, *Witness against History*.

films have their own narrative modes and style imperative that may potentially violate the orthodox narrative within the Maoist necropolitical system.

In terms of the film themes, these films have already showed distinctiveness from the conventional war film. In *Captain Guan*, a war film crossed over with the comedy genre, the sacrificial hero dies for a trans-class and humanistic purpose, saving the children regardless of their parents' class. In the revolutionary thriller *The Cold Dawn*, the abandoned communist soldiers face the uncooperative villagers and are terrified by the impending and omnipresent death. In the family melodrama *Visiting Relatives*, the father is overwhelmingly sad when learning his son's sacrifice on the battlefield. The real martyr is missing throughout the film. All these films generated heated debates or harsh criticism from newspapers and film journals, leading to the issue of the political correctness to represent onscreen sacrifice. Compared with the previous chapters trying to analyze how the ideological mechanism is built up, this chapter provides a reverse way to examine the scenario when identification linkage is broken between the idealized sacrificial images and the general audiences. The narrative modes and style imperative of the film genres play crucial roles for the breakage.

The investigation on different film genres crossed over with the orthodox war film genre reveals that although the representation of the climatic martyrdom appear similar on the surface, film still has its unique characteristics and cannot be reduced to and treated as a singular group "Maoist film." Heterogeneity is born out of the homogeneity, reflecting directors' struggle to find balance among political correctness, generic elements, and director's personal artistic preference in each film.

Laughter and Martyrdom: A Rare and Dangerous Connection

One of the important film genres to attract low-brow film audiences is comedy. To represent martyrdom in a comedy seems dangerous at first: if a martyr behaves in a comic way, is his/her heroic sublimity necessarily subdued? Why is the comic representation of martyrdom subversive to the political ideology?

It is commonly acknowledged that laughter can potentially bring the power of revolt. Bakhtin uses the example of Rabelais to argue that during the days of carnival, grotesque and laughter play a key role to liberate the people from daily suppression by the authority power.²⁸⁰ In psychoanalysis, if the superego always holds the moral standard and appears to be stern and unlovely, the *id* is unorganized and acts upon instinct. Žižek argues that the comedy film *Duck Soup* (1933, dir. Leo McCarey) explains this mechanism where the youngest brother (standing for the *id*) always makes fun and acts weirdly to bring laughter, while the big brother (the superego) is serious in speech and manner. In this regard, it is the youngest brother who brings laughter and revolt against the serious state system.²⁸¹ Through laughter, the socially established hierarchy is potentially dissolved and freedom is temporarily retained.

Chinese films were first exhibited in tea houses. To cater to the low-brow tea-drinking audience, comedy has been an indispensable part of Chinese film entertainment since its initiation. During its development, Chinese comedy film gradually forms its own characteristics: melodramatic, focusing on the low class city dwellers (*xiaoshimin* 小市民), and often filled with educational purpose through laughter. The first existing Chinese film *Love's Labors* (劳工之爱情 1922, dir. Zhang Shichuan) is a slapstick comedy about a fruit peddler who plays tricks to win his future father-in-law's approval. Many Hollywood slapstick comedy strategies are

²⁸⁰ See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

²⁸¹ See Žižek, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006)

applied in this short film, such as falling down on the ground from stairs, head getting hit by a cooking pan, etc. The 1930s left-wing film movement shaped the unique Chinese characteristics of the comedy films. After many slapstick comedies were categorized and criticized as “soft films,” the left-wing comedy films are melodramatic and educational, with laughter often alternating with tears. The representative film is notably *Crossroads* (十字街头 1936, dir Shen Xiling). After the anti-Japanese war, the late 1940s witnessed the revival of comedies that inherit the basic characteristics of the Left-wing comedy films. *The Winter of Three Hairs* (三毛流浪记 1949, dir Yan Gong and Zhao Ming), adapted from the comic book with the same title, reveals the protagonist Three Hairs’ tragic life in Shanghai. Produced by Kunlun Studio, the film is another tragic-comedy. Tear-jerking melodramatic elements are mixed with serious educational purpose to expose the social darkness in the semi-colonized Shanghai. Another notable Kunlun Studio comedy is *Crow and Sparrow* (乌鸦与麻雀 1949, dir. Zheng Junli), which satirizes the bureaucratic KMT officials from the perspective of many vividly-characterized low class city dwellers. These low class people have many shortcomings, such as self-interested, short-sighted, greedy etc. As the major protagonists of the comedy, they are antithesis to the heroic sublimity.

The genre of comedy requires its protagonists far from being set up as the perfect heroic model for the audience to learn and imitate. Instead, the protagonists are destined to be set as inferior to the audience, at least in certain aspect. Such setup ensures audiences’ laughter resulted from their privileged position, and the laughter can be easily transformed into sympathy. I call such requirement of film genre a *genre imperative*.

The genre imperative of comedy is at jarringly odds with the representation of martyrdom, insofar as once martyrdom is represented in a comic manner, it loses the solemnness and sublimity. And the perfect hero’s superiority is mostly damaged by showing his/her aspect of

inferiority. Although strictly speaking we can only regard Chinese films on martyrdom as having some comic elements, rather than categorize them into comedy film genre, these comic elements on martyrs already run the risk of blasphemy and transgression offending the state authority.

The film *Anecdotes of An Actor* (*Liyuan yinglie* 梨园英烈 aka *Erbaiwu xiaozhuan* 二百五小传 1949, dir Zheng Xiaoqiu) provides a pertinent example on the linkage between comedy and martyrdom at the time when Maoist ideology had not yet taken firm ideological control over the private studios in Shanghai. Produced by Datong Studio and written by one of the left-wing film activists Tian Han, *Anecdotes of An Actor* depicts an opera actor Shaolou who is nicknamed “Erbaiwu,” a Chinese idiom meaning “a silly man.” The protagonist’s tardy reaction and irrelevant responses to questions bring comic effect. But such silliness also turns out to be a merit: when many seemingly smart people quickly react to the ever-shifting reality and change camps frequently, Shaolou’s patriotism and belief is inflexible and unchanged. Such stubbornness costs him of his lover, his career, and ultimately, his life.

The comic effect is juxtaposed with the heroic martyrdom at the climax of the film. Shaolou plays the role of *chou* (丑 clown) in the opera, since the boss of the playhouse thinks that the role fits him perfectly because “a silly guy can always play a silly guy well.” An opera full of comic elements is shown onscreen for considerable time length, with the comic performance of Shaolou interposed with reaction shots of audiences’ joy and laughter. (fig. 1-2)

However, similar to the film *Song of the Midnight*, *Anecdotes of An Actor* does not depict audiences as enlightened as those in the Maoist films. The audiences enjoy the comic play, but when in the end of the play Shaolou protests against the traitor’s play (汉奸戏剧) and is shot dead by the Japanese soldiers on the scene, audiences swarm out of the theatre quickly (fig 3-4). One of the audiences looks at Shaolou’s dead body and says “again, this silly guy!” The

exposition of martyr's dead body and the derogatory comment betrays the sublime representation of the hero.

To keep the balance between the representation of the martyr as a subject and as an abject, the film adds an ending when one year later people gather together at the tomb of the martyr. The martyr's girlfriend says "he will live forever in our hearts." Although such common ending of the martyr's mourning or commemoration appears warm-colored, it cannot conceal the fact that the representation of martyrdom in this film is far different from that in the orthodox Maoist films. The hero dies on the scene without any common sublime symbols, his corpse is seen directly onscreen and is gazed and commented derogatorily, not by his enemies, but by other ordinary people who appear to be far from being enlightened.



Figure 1-2



Captain Guan: The Comic Twist of the War Film

Audience's laughter occurs mostly on the negative characters of the Maoist films. Many of the foreign invaders are characterized as timid or stupid, prepared to be laughed at. Some other supporting positive characters can also at times bring comic effects to the films to ease the tension of the war film genre, mostly seen from the young soldiers for their immaturity, or the reckless but righteous villagers. It is extremely rare though, to depict the main protagonist, especially the heroic martyr as comic or laughable. In this regard, *Captain Guan* stands out as a rare exception.

Captain Guan was produced by the Wenhua Studio on 1951. Established on 1946, the privately-owned Wenhua Studio had extensive experience producing comedy films before 1949. *Long Live the Wife* (*taitai wansui* 太太万岁 1947, dir. Sang Hu) presents a classic Hollywood form of romantic comedy, which brings reputation to the comedy star Shi Hui 石挥. Shi's performance on the laughable but pathetic *xiaorenwu* was further well established in the film *My Lifetime* (*wozhe yibei* 我这一辈子 1950, dir. Shi Hui). He also plays supporting roles in some serious drama films such as a merchant boss in *Night Inn* (夜店 1947, dir. Huang Zuolin), and a rascal in *Stand Up, Sisters* (姐妹们站起来 1951, dir. Chen Xihe). Shi's typecasting as a laughable *xiaorenwu* was already well established before he starred the war film *Captain Guan*. It seems to be quite a misfit since Shi's comic typecasting diminishes the sublime halo surrounding the heroic martyr of Captain Guan.

In Jiang Qing's *Summary* on films during 1949-1966, *Captain Guan* is labeled as the "poisonous weed" for its "extremely vilifying the PLA soldier's image" (极度丑化中国人民解

放军形象).²⁸² If the orthodox onscreen martyrdom of the PLA soldiers are homogenized under the principle of the “three prominences,” it will be interesting to investigate the vilified version of the PLA soldier martyrdom. What does it look like and why was such representation totally intolerable for the Maoist regime?

Captain Guan’s first appearance in the film is accompanied with laughter right away. An intellectual who is newly enlisted to teach Marxism in the army looks for Captain Guan. He asks a senior soldier for Guan’s whereabouts, and is told that “maybe he is watching the wrestling game over there.” The camera does not rush to show Guan in the direction where the senior soldier points at. Rather, it takes more than one minute to present an excerpt of Shandong Kuaiban (山东快板 aka 数来宝), a local story-telling form in a comic manner from the Shandong Province. The actor of kuaiban is Chen Zhi 程之, also well-known for his comedian performance during the Maoist period.²⁸³ The kuaiban excerpt looks to be irrelevant to the plot construction of the film on the surface, but its presence adds non-diegetic comic effect to the film.

After the show, the camera finally cuts to Guan, who rises from dust and laughter of the wrestling children. Obviously Guan turns out playing wrestling game with the kids rather than merely “watch” them play as the senior soldier suggests. (fig 5)

²⁸² *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds: Films in the Red Era*

²⁸³ Representative works include *Feidao Hua (The Knife-Thrower)*, 1963, dir Xu Suling), and *Moshu Shi de Qiyu (Magician's Adventure)*, 1962, dir Sang Hu), etc.



fig.5

Such an initiation of the main protagonist Captain Guan, a soon-to-be revolutionary martyr, is lackluster or even awkward compared with the orthodox representation of the Maoist martyrdom. Rather than being created to symbolize a transcendental ideal, the hero of Captain Guan comes from the earthly dust, and from the group of ordinary people without any sacred halo surrounded.

Comic effect is at once conveyed via the protagonist's local Shandong dialect. The Beijing-dialect-based Mandarin Chinese was set as the official language to promote the Nationalist revolution in the early 20th century. It was acknowledged by the Nationalist Government then as the *guoyu* (nationalist language 国语). Most films produced during the Republican Era used *guoyu*, and it is only through the exception of comedies and local *xiqu* films that different local dialects are introduced. The 1949 film *The Winter of Three Hairs* relies heavily on the local Shanghai dialect to create comic effects. Its companion volume *Three Hairs Learns Business* (三毛学生意, 1958, dir Huang Zuolin) even emphasizes the clash among the Shanghai dialect, the mandarin language, and various local dialects from different regions of China. The spoken dialect distinguishes social stratum. For example, policeman speaks Shandong dialect, and tailor speaks Ningbo dialect. They truthfully reflect different job positions those immigrants tend to

take after they come to Shanghai.

The interaction between local dialects and the official Mandarin Chinese brings comic effects in the films, but it is not beneficial to achieve the educational purpose of the Chinese National Cinema. In order to unify people from different regions in China, it is crucial to enforcing the sharing of the same language and the same pronunciation of that official language. The Maoist comedies were marginalized and many of them were labeled as the “poisonous weeds” during the Cultural Revolution.²⁸⁴ For the comedies that highlight local dialects to strengthen the comic effects, the attack could be even more severe since they reflect the local *xiaoshimin*’s lower taste 低级趣味 and does not meet the communist task to unite all the people and ethnicity with a sublime ideal.

Captain Guan is arguably the only Maoist film that foregrounds a heroic martyr that speaks local dialect in the entire film. Audiences were amused by Guan’s awkwardness and misunderstandings when he cannot communicate well with the new-coming young intellectual because of the language barrier. In their first meeting, Guan suggests that the young intellectual can sleep beside him and “lala gua” 拉拉呱 with him. The intellectual does not understand the meaning of “lala gua”, and Guan explains that it just means “chat with each other.” But Guan is not able to explain the exact meaning of such an idiom. Guan then asks the way to express that meaning in a university, and the intellectual responds that “it is ‘liaoliao tian’ ” 聊聊天. Guan laughs, “all these three sayings share the same meaning.” Although these three sayings obviously have different connotations, the film still conveys the idea that Chinese people either speaking mandarin or local dialect can still communicate effectively, although it might begin with misunderstanding and need a little more effort of clarification.

²⁸⁴ See Qi Xiaoping, *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds*, pp.199-240.

Guan and other low-rank soldiers all speak local dialects throughout the film. The Shandong dialect is culturally associated with the unique characteristics of the Shandong people; bold and forthright, carelessness on small matters, and possibly, revolutionary. These characteristics are reflected from the well-known classic fiction *The Water Margin*, and numerous peasants uprisings sparked from Shandong Province in Chinese history. During the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the CCP-KMT civil war (1946-1949), the rural area in the Shandong Province was one of the bases for the CCP regime, whose military activities was hugely supported by the local Shandong people.

By contrast, the young intellectual speaks Mandarin all the time. He appears formal and unnatural, to the extent of being bureaucratic and distant from the common soldiers. Unlike the good foreigner in the film *Dr. Bethune* who tries hard to learn the local language and dissolve his foreign identity, the young intellectual does not change or even try to change his mandarin speaking, even though he is in the Company that mainly comprises of the Shandong soldiers. When he teaches the soldiers the highly theoretical Marxism in mandarin, the soldiers obviously cannot understand, possibly both the content and the pronunciation. The film presents an interesting shot to show the intellectual's awkwardness and impractical education. (fig 6)



Fig.6

The shot juxtaposes the sweating intellectual with a Buddhist sculpture as the background. It criticizes that the young intellectual only has the book knowledge without any practical accommodation to the common people, just as the ethereal and transcendental Buddhist who cannot save the people from the immediate sufferings. After the intellectual is later educated by the communist officers to correct his bookishness, he realizes that it is imperative for him to reform thoughts to get closer to the low-rank soldiers and better serve the army. This theme mirrors the intellectual reformation theme in other contemporary films such as *The Problem of Thought* (思想问题 1950, dir. Huang Zuolin) and *Between the Couple* (我们夫妇之间 1951, dir. Zheng Junli). Produced during the same period and by the private studios as well, these films are the contributions from the Shanghai directors to the newly-established Chinese nation-state. They also serve as the confession from these Shanghai-based directors that they are in dire need to embrace the thought reformation to completely transform their petit bourgeois thoughts.

Similar to the young intellectual, all the army officers ranked higher than Captain Guan also speak standard mandarin without any dialect. They act like the educational mouthpiece of the communist propaganda machine and their characters are plain and stiff. Although the historical communist leaders rarely appear in the Maoist films, the post-Mao era witnessed many mainstream films where the leaders such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping speak in their hometown dialects, while the rest of the nameless or figurative characters speak standard mandarin. The foregrounding of the local dialect emphasizes the uniqueness of the leader characters. On the contrary, *Captain Guan* pays special attention to the common soldiers rather than the communist leaders, treat the soldiers as the ordinary human beings who frequently joke, speak in vulgar language specific in the local dialect.

The martyrdom of the Captain Guan occurs in the end of the film when the Eighth Company takes the task to attack an important building. The Nationalist Army occupies the building and takes hostage of many children. Soldiers around Captain Guan suggest him to launch attack anyway to clear the barricade for the army that follows. After much waiting and hesitation, a flashback narration shows that Guan remembers his good time with children, which echoes with the initiation of Guan in the wrestling game with children in the film. He believes that children are the future of the communist revolution. He decides to take his time, looks for chance to take the building by strategy. In the end, the army under Guan's leadership outsmarts the Nationalist army, and Guan is the first one to dash into the building trying to catch the Nationalist General. Unfortunately, he was shot and dead. His last word is to give signal to the following army. He leaves a letter as well, saying that if he sacrifices his life in the war, he will appreciate if someone submits his saving of thirty-five Chinese yuan to the Party.

Captain Guan's comic characteristics are subdued in the final sequence of martyrdom, giving way to an intense battlefield atmosphere. He still uses his vulgar language to condemn the nationalist army for their inhumanity to treat the children cruelly during the battle. His unreserved love for children is emphasized throughout the film, with the final shot on his figure superimposed with many children's faces. The final shot serves as a summary of the theme: Guan's sacrifice is worthwhile since his death continues the lives so many children. One's current death is exchanged for the continuation of the future revolution, until the day Communism is achieved.



Fig.7

Captain Guan induced much criticism, not only for the comic characterization of a heroic martyr, but for the motivation of his sacrifice as well. Guan's sacrifice is based on a humanistic ideal, which considers children as innocent and needs to be protected at any cost, regardless of their class status. Guan's sacrifice appears to be trans-class, since it is not clear about these children's family background at all. One can assume that Captain Guan's sacrifice unintentionally saves a child whose father is a nationalist spy concealed in the communist party. Such an ambiguous scenario renders the film lose its purity of Captain Guan's sacrificial sublimity. Compared with *The Steel Soldiers* produced by Changchun Studio in the same year of 1951, Guan's martyrdom is impure and de-sublimated. The ending of the *Steel Soldiers* also uses flashback to remind the audiences of the martyrs' heroic images. But the shot superimposes the martyrs' images with the sublime symbols such as mountain and pine tree, which is the typical cinematic representation of martyrdom detailed in the Chapter 2. In contrast, Captain Guan's sacrifice is not backed up by a transcendental ideal. His sacrifice is just driven by a simple and straightforward motivation: to save the innocent children.

Captain Guan as well as the criticism on the film also show the incompatibility between

comic effects and the general principle of the Revolutionary Optimism 革命乐观主义.

Revolutionary Optimism is one of the key elements in Maoist thoughts. As early as 1917, Mao wrote the poem “Struggle,” (《四言诗 奋斗》), suggesting that happiness (le 乐) can be gained through endless struggles with natural obstacles and with the enemies.²⁸⁵ Throughout Mao’s life, he emphasized the importance of the revolutionary optimism. Most film artists who strictly follow Mao’s thoughts make their heroic characters immune from crying, or from appearing hesitant and helpless even in most difficult situation. In the film *Battle on Shangganling Mountain* (上甘岭 1956, dir Sha Meng), all the communist soldiers are trapped in a cave without any water supply. To overcome that extreme hardship, the platoon leader Chen Dehou tells a story about the historical character Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220). In a battle when the warlord Cao Cao’s army runs shortage of water supply, he orders the soldiers to imagine a group of plum trees right ahead to forget the thirstiness. Chen Dehou uses this historical story to stimulate soldiers to go through the difficulty. This sequence adds some comic effect in this serious war film, and it was approved and applauded by most of the film reviews. *People’s Cinema* comments on this sequence and theorizes that “for the depiction of the heroic images, it does not necessarily need to be handled like the way serious drama does. Depending on different themes and different characters, it is suitable to adopt some strategies from comedy appropriately... This is the reflection of the Revolutionary Optimism.” (对英雄人物的描写,并不一定永远采取正剧的手法,根据不同的题材,不同的人物,适当地采用一些**喜剧**手法这是革

²⁸⁵ With struggling against the sky,
I am never bored! (与天奋斗其乐无穷)
With struggling against the earth,
I am never bored! (与地奋斗其乐无穷)
With struggling against the people,
I am never bored! (与人奋斗其乐无穷)

命乐观主义的体现。)

The difficulty lies in the determination of the threshold, namely, the extent that comedy elements could be used in the war genre films. It is extremely hard to pinpoint what the vague word “appropriately” (适当地) means to make the Romantic Optimism appropriate. Unlike the essay writers or the policy makers who still have the leeway to use vague words to circumvent the potential political accusation, filmmakers have to present the images clearly on the screen. Comedy element that is meant to show Revolutionary Optimism also runs huge risk to distort the heroes, once the unclear threshold is unconsciously passed. For those that only have a snip of comedy element, like *Battle on Shangganling Mountain*, it was approved and the film was not listed as a “poisonous weed.” But *Captain Guan* had a distinct destiny. With excessive comic effects from the major heroic martyr who speaks local dialect with vulgar languages at times, the film was not deemed as “appropriate” and severely criticized.

Film scholar Meng Liye regards *Captain Guan* as “filled with Revolutionary Optimism.” He comments: “Shi Hui, as both director and actor, used unique (comic and humorous) aesthetics to express the theme that other directors usually treats as a serious war film. At the time when style and pattern variances in the Chinese films were scarce, Shi’s effort was precious and creative.”²⁸⁶ Meng also points out that the key problem of the film is “too much vulgar language from Captain Guan... and the film crew did not realize that they are obsessed with the rural characters, perhaps mixed with some mocking on them. Criticism on these aspects of the film are valid.”²⁸⁷ While I agree with Meng that the comic elements of a heroic martyr provide a rare and creative genre twist in the Maoist films, I contend that the vulgar language and representation of

²⁸⁶ Meng Liye, *Film Arts in New China, 1949-1959*. p.75

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

the rural characteristics are exactly where the director wants to emphasize. These aspects render Captain Guan and other low-rank soldiers stand out from the mandarin-speaking, formal and formulaic officers. Comic effects are thus deeply rooted in the local art and cultural tradition. The film was not welcomed by the orthodox ideology then, it nevertheless entertained the general audiences that are more familiar with the local comic elements, and created the heroic protagonist that is not a symbol of the transcendental ideal, but a vividly-depicted human being among the ordinary people.

The Cold Dawn: Thriller Twist of the War Film: Death as a Formidable Being

The years of 1956-1957 marked the thriving and prosperous period of the Maoist films, both in quality and in quantity. The political control of films became temporarily loose after Mao's speech in the April of 1956, calling for "let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend." (百花齐放 百家争鸣). Film artists welcomed this policy and they organized groups to discuss and study the new development of foreign films. Shanghai Film Studio was also upgraded into a corporation, governing three separate studios: Jiangnan Studio 江南, Haiyan Studio 海燕 and Tianma Studio 天马. Each studio has its own strength in making different genre films.

Film studios headquartered in Beijing used to be more conservative than those in Shanghai. However, changes also occurred on the year of 1956. As the studio that specializes in the orthodox war film genre, August First Studio produced a heterodox war film *The Cold Dawn* in 1957. Directed by Yan Jizhou 严寄洲, the film presents communist soldiers in an unusual way. They feel desperate on the impending death, and the shadow of death looms throughout the film. Different from other war films that are usually stick to the principle of Revolutionary Optimism,

The Cold Dawn is filled with dark pessimism and desperate atmosphere. If plot development in most of the Maoist war films is predictable and even the hardest situation is brightened by the warmth of the communist ideal, *The Cold Dawn* built up its unpredictable thrill by constant suspense, and a touch of horror by the uncontrollable and permeating darkness.

Thriller film is in essence against the nature of the revolutionary narrative. Setting up the suspense to keep audiences in the state of indetermination is against the Maoist ideology, which requires the audience believe the teleological historical narrative and the predetermined communist future. The major suspense of *The Cold Dawn* lies in the fact that the communist soldiers fight in the extremely difficult and even bizarre situation. With betrayal from comrades inside the Party constant and threatening, death seems to be impending.

Strategically abandoned by the regular army and unsupported by the local villagers, some of the communist soldiers betray the party or die one by one. Audiences do not know which one in the leftover group betrays or dies next, and the suspense is accumulated till the end. The last shot of the film presents an open ending that opens for ambiguous interpretation, thus leaving more room for suspense. Although the orthodox war films also foreground sacrifice and death of the communist soldiers, it constantly keeps on reminding the audiences that the CCP army will win eventually. These films convey the clear revolutionary belief: enemies are atrocious, but audience should have the confidence that the almighty communist army can wipe out the enemies in the end. *The Cold Dawn* does not follow this formula. It presents a controversial but more common situation when the communist soldiers are trapped in desperation. Their revolutionary mindsets are reasonably wavering, and the final outcome of the battle is unsure. In terms of the film style, while most orthodox war films use high-key lighting on the face of the heroes, especially in the sacrifice sequence to symbolize the bright communist future, the low-

key lighting scenes in *the Cold Dawn* are excessively throughout. Death as a formidable being always haunts around the film, making everyone terrified. No matter it is the hero or enemy, everyone looks unsteady and suspensefully dangerous.

To a certain extent, the film witnesses against Mao's requirement of the communist soldiers that they should "fear neither hardship nor death" (一不怕苦二不怕死).²⁸⁸ The threat of death comes from everywhere, including extreme hunger, freezing coldness, lack of medication, and powerful enemies. The film boldly show all these difficulties which potentially waiver the communist belief. Accordingly, it does not excessively distorts the betrayers, as if they are naturally evil without any reason. Rather, the film shows that these betrayers' choice seems to be reasonable based upon human instinct of preserving one's life.²⁸⁹

The film does not beautify and sublimate any communist officer either. Even the main hero Lao Liu appears desperate in the difficult situation. He is neither almighty nor healthy-looking, and almost dies in the middle of the film when no villager allows him to come inside the house to take a rest. Lao Liu's physical appearance is thin and short, and his face looks chapped and wizened with his head bald (fig 8). The director Yan seldom uses high-key lighting or close-up on his frontal face, downgrading him to the extent that merely from the appearance audience can hardly tell which camp he belongs to. *The Cold Dawn* provides a rare case for the Maoist films, where most audiences can easily judge the protagonist as good or evil, comrade or enemy at the

²⁸⁸ The slogan was widely used in the PLA during the Liberation War Period (1945-1949), and Mao raised the slogan again in the speech of the First Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee 九届一中全会 in 1969. Mao said, "I will approve the slogan of "Fear neither hardship nor death" (see <http://cpc.people.com.cn/>).

²⁸⁹ One of the other films in the same period that also showcases human being's natural instinct of preserving one's life is from *Song of the Coconut Forest* (Yelin Qu, 椰林曲, 1957, dir Wang Weiyi) . When arranging the Party's task to break through the enemies' blockade, one of the communist soldiers flinches, "I am afraid that my boat will be ruined, I am afraid that I lose my live."

first sight of his/her appearance.



Fig 8 Lao Liu (on the left)

Such unusual characterization and the unpredictable choices and destinies of the characters make the film stand out as a suspenseful war film. The director Yan mentioned that he was a fan of Alfred Hitchcock and watched many Hitchcock's films when he was young lad working in Shanghai. He also likes to play a cameo role in his film, just as what Hitchcock does.²⁹⁰ Like Hitchcock's birds in *Birds* (1963), or the notorious mother figure in *Psycho* (1960), death in *The Cold Dawn* also serves as the omnipresent driving force to determine every figure's motivation and action in the film. Obsessed with the impending death, someone chooses to betray the Party and extends life for a while, but is still unavoidably executed in the end. Some others choose to stay in the Party. They either die (sacrifice) in the middle of the film, or live and suffer until the end.

Therefore, the film was severely criticized upon its release, for its characterization of the Middle Figure 中间人物, its blurry boundary of the class differentiation, and more importantly, its dark and suspenseful atmosphere throughout the film. The official denunciation during the Cultural Revolution writes, "... (the film) depicts the communists' wavering and betrayal. The mass is terrified so that they do not get close to the guerillas, and do not fight (the enemy). The

²⁹⁰ Qi Xiaoping, *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds*, p.42

whole film is gloomy, and it brings shame to ourselves. But it encourages the enemies...”²⁹¹

The film conveys the vague political message, but such unclearness brings suspense. The film is more complicated than the director's other war films with the thriller twist, such as *The Courageous Fighter* (英雄虎胆, 1958) and *Struggles in an Ancient City* (野火春风斗古城 1963), which are linked more closely with the folk legendary storytelling. If the Maoist films avoid any horror effect by curbing the horrific physical appearance, *the Cold Dawn* presents the thriller that is psychologically suspenseful and lasts for a long time.

The other major suspense in the film lies in the uncertainty of the communist promise to rescue the abandoned soldiers. Although the unwavering communist soldiers in the leftover group always emphasize throughout the film that the communist army will come back to rescue them, whether those suffered in the Dabieshan area 大别山区 will be eventually rescued is still questionable and unclear in the end. Therefore, the rescue myth becomes a suspenseful McGuffin to drive the plot, but it is as empty as the communist promise offered in the *Yellow Earth* (黄土地 1984, dir Chen Kaige).²⁹² The unconventionality of the film *The Cold Dawn* lies in the fact that it focuses not on the heroic winners on the battlefield, but on the group of the abject soldiers, the leftover from a tactical strategy.

Most war films during the Maoist Era depict either the regular army which undoubtedly wins in the end,²⁹³ or the guerillas/underground armies that support the regular armies to

²⁹¹ Ibid. 40.

²⁹² In the end of the *Yellow Earth* Comrade Gu comes back to the village to keep his promise to take Qiaozhen away, but she has already been dead. All the villagers are conducting their traditional rite, and paying no attention to Gu's arrival.

²⁹³ These films include *From Victory to Victory* (Nanzheng Beizhan 南征北战 1952, dir Cheng Yin), *Red Sun* (Hong Ri, 红日 1963, dir Tang Xiaodan), etc.

sabotage the enemies.²⁹⁴ *The Cold Dawn* on the other hand represents the soldiers that are ordered to drag down the enemies' attack speed to make room for the regular army being safely transferred to its own turf. The film was adapted from the real history in the year of 1946, when the Nationalist army attacked the Dabieshan area with overwhelming army forces. The Communist regular army, led by Li Xiannian 李先念 was forced to abandon the area. Therefore, the leftover soldiers are abject and dispensable sacrificiers. No matter from what perspective, such as the quantity and quality of the soldiers, the military equipment and the army supplies, the Nationalist army was far superior.

Even though *The Cold Dawn* is an unconventional war film, it still needs to follow the general principle of the Maoist war film: the under-numbered communist soldiers must survive and win in the end. However, the film leaves an ambiguous ending that leads to more suspense. After killing the communist traitor and arresting the leftover enemies, Lao Li and his comrades stand on the hill as they hear the noise of cannon from far away. Lao Li claims, "Listen, comrades, this time it is no longer the sound of the water mill, it is the real sound of the cannon, and our regular army is coming!" The final shot of the film uses zoom-in, showing eager expectation from Lao Li and his comrades. But the unconventional thing is that the film ends without showing the actual appearance of the regular army coming back.

Therefore, it is simply the expectation rather than the actual appearance that drives Lao Li and his comrades' communist belief. The director only presents a landscape shot without any army's physical trace (fig 9). In this regard, who can guarantee that this time it is not the sound of the water mill again? Lao Li's expectation connotes that they used to mistake the water mill

²⁹⁴ These films include *Railway Guerrilla* (铁道游击队, 1956 dir Zhao Ming), *Underground Points* (地下尖兵, 1957 dir Wu Zhaodi), etc.

sound for the cannon sound, therefore he uses the word “no longer” 不再, meaning, not again.

Furthermore, the film ends with a superimposed title “The new story begins” (新的故事开始了 Fig 10) . It does not specify what the new story is. One possibility is that Lao Li and his comrades are saved by the Communist Army, which meets the expectation. But some other possibilities cannot be ruled out: a more severe and difficult situation is waiting for them in the near future, or the Communist Party even does not recognize Lao Li and his comrades’ credits at all and suspects their collaboration with the Nationalist army in order to survive. The film leaves all these possibilities open in the air.



Fig 9



fig 10

The title of the film *The Cold Dawn* echoes with the omnipresent death and sacrificial abject themes of the film. As the scriptwriter Shi Chao 史超 notes, the film’s title is based on the symbolic meaning of “dawn of Wugeng” 五更, which according to the Chinese traditional timing system spans from 3 a.m. to 5 a.m. “When it is getting closer to Wugeng, the colder it will

be. But when we get through Wugeng, the sun comes out and it will be warm.”²⁹⁵ In the freezing dawn, the communist soldiers are like pathetic leftovers without aid from the Party. While some of them betray and go to the enemy’s camp, those who still hold the communist belief are threatened from the increasingly dangerous position, lack of essential material, and more importantly, the desperate feeling of being abandoned by the Party. The Party can easily make promise and commemorate those who are abandoned and die in the name of martyrs, for their brave persistence in fighting with enemies even though the friend or foe strength disparity is huge. However, these soldiers are dead, and they cannot speak and are essentially scapegoats and disposable abjects.

The theme of the abandoned soldiers and the blurry boundary between martyrs and scapegoats are also treated in the post-Maoist film *The Assembly* (集结号, 2007, dir Feng Xiaogang). *The Assembly* focuses on the protagonist Gu Zidi, a veteran who leads a group of young soldiers for the task of fighting against a group from the Nationalist army. The battle is extremely fierce and the nationalist army is much more formidable than that in Gu’s imagination. Although Gu’s group succeeds in the task, all the young soldiers die in the battlefield except Gu. After the establishment of the P.R.C, Gu struggles to petition and appeal for the effort that all these dead young soldiers are bestowed with the martyr honor and their families lead a good life with honor. The film reaches the climax towards the end when Gu astonishingly finds that his group was actually abandoned and ready to be sacrificed, so that the Communist regular army could safely retreat. There was not a plan to take them back at all, as promised by Gu’s superior officer. Although the film conforms to the mainstream ideology by adding a memorial scene in the end, it still questions the necropolitical maneuver of martyrdom and the boundary between

²⁹⁵ Qi Xiaoping, *Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds*, p.41.

martyrs and scapegoats.

Although the Maoist film *The Cold Dawn* cannot go as far as to question the communist promise of savory, as well as the boundary between enforced sacrifice and voluntary sacrifice, it does not provide a memorial scene to conform to the Maoist necropolitics either. By simply leaving an empty expectation rather than giving an actual appearance of the rescue army, it leaves many possibilities open and provides a much more suspenseful reading than that from most of the orthodox Maoist war films.

The unpredictable behavior from the common people constitutes another suspense throughout the film. The most unbearable hardship that the communist soldier faces in *The Cold Dawn* is not the internal treason, not the outnumbered enemies and significant material lack, but the unpredictably apathetic or even hostile response from the villagers. It is different from the orthodox Maoist war films where the ordinary people, without any hesitation or reservation, support and help the communist army even in the most difficult situation.

Lu Xun's style of depicting the apathy and volatility of the Chinese ordinary people has been extensively modified and rewritten during the Maoist era. Intellectuals were not able to look down the ordinary people in a privileged position since Mao's "Yan'an Forum Talk" requires that arts need to serve the workers, peasants and soldiers. Therefore, all the negative aspects of the ordinary people, such as apathy, volatility, submissiveness, forgetfulness, self-intoxication and self-enclosure need to be rewritten into a teleological history where Chinese ordinary people under the leadership of the CCP are revolutionary, determinate, optimistic, passionate and enlightened. In the end of the film *New Year's Sacrifice*, adapted from the short fiction of Lu Xun, the voice-over narrator claims Sister Xianglin's death that "This is the tragedy occurred forty years ago. It is fortunate that such tragedy is bygone now, and will never come

back!”²⁹⁶ When Lu Xun’s critical realism is simply confined to the depiction of the era of the dark past, most of the films had to beautify the ordinary people, if they appear differently in the original literature. In the film of *Dr. Bethune*, the ordinary people voluntarily donate their blood without any hesitation, while in the original reportage or fiction, they are either merely apathetic onlookers, chatting with each other on Dr. Bethune’s surgery, until Bethune orders them to be silent; or, they simply claim sickness to skirt the blood donation.²⁹⁷

Ordinary people in *The Cold Dawn* show unusual unsteadiness, indetermination or even hostility towards the communist soldiers when revolution is in low ebb. Like Lu Xun’s figure of Ah Q, they do not understand the revolution and the side they choose to join depends largely on their own interest. When the starved and injured Lao Liu has nowhere to hide and knock on the doors of three villagers, asking for some food and a shelter to sleep, none of the villagers open the door for him. Lao Liu has to go back to the cave. Feeling unable to tolerate the pain anymore, he desperately goes back to the village to try his luck again. Finally a villager opens the door for him and treats his injury. Another case in point is from the old peasant Tailor Mo, an honest ordinary villager. His son is executed by Lao Liu’s army for helping the enemies, and Mo laments over his son’s dead body. Lao Liu sympathizes his situation and asks another villager to give him some money for consolation. At this point Mo’s anger flares up: “are you trying to buy me?” When he is told that Lao Liu thinks he is a good man and is different from his son, he murmurs to himself: “I am a good man, I am a good man...” Such anger and uncertainty from the ordinary villager, and their refusal to give the communist leader a shelter, make the communist protagonist a truly unwelcomed hero.

In summary, the suspense and uncertainty in *The Cold Dawn* witnesses the generic

²⁹⁶ *New Year’s Sacrifice*, 1956, dir. Sang Hu.

²⁹⁷ Zhou Erfu, *Dr. Bethune, a Novel*.

incompatibility of the thriller films with the revolutionary narrative. Its treatment on the unpredictable personal death and betrayal of the communist soldiers, its foreclosure on the appearance of the rescue army, and its depiction of the unreliable ordinary villagers are all at odds with the orthodox Maoist war films.

The Meaning of the Missing Martyr: Communal Elevation of the Personal Death

To leave death as an unpredictable personal event or to sublimate individual death to be a collectively controllable and foreseeable public event is what sets apart *The Cold Dawn* with the other orthodox Maoist war films. Death is omnipresent like the haunting ghost in *The Cold Dawn*. The communist soldiers are threatened by death at any moment, either by hunger, injury or execution. The film exposes the threatening of death without sublimation, and there is no following memorial service for the martyrs in public. The film provides a theoretical entry point on how individual and community are influenced, linked together and interact with each other under the impending and formidable Being of death.

Death has internalized into every lived one's thoughts since their birth. It is the death that influences the lived experience, rather than lived experience influences death. Personal identity and actions are, consciously or unconsciously, more or less, determined by realizing the inevitable and impending death waiting ahead in future. Heidegger incorporates death as constitutive of human existence, since we are "thrown back" to life by Death as the formidable Being. Therefore, before the actual death occurs, it has already partaken the life of us.²⁹⁸

For Hegel, The social and communal aspect of death is even more important than the

²⁹⁸ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

individual death. It is through the society that the personal and singular death is elevated into a collective event. Martyrdom only has meaning within a collective entity, since it is the society, nation or state that decides whom can be named as a martyr. Such a naming event must be acted out in public. Hegel notes that the family, as a small but constitutive unit of the nation-state, rescues the martyr from the natural negativity of death, celebrates the death through burial rites, and converts what was something solely belonging to nature and thus irrational into an ethical and rational social act.²⁹⁹ While Hegel thinks that community precedes individual and transfers death into a social act, Heidegger's thinking of death is transcendental, reflecting the individual's internal tension as anxiety.³⁰⁰

Most of the Maoist war films turn personal death into a social rite, trying all means to bestow the personal death with collective meaning. The random and socially insignificant death is kept unnoticed. Many films show the memorial services after the heroic sacrifice. The importance lies in the fact that the unpredictable individual death is hereby changed into a predictable and controllable public event, thus giving the necropolitical authority back to the state.

The society requires personal death and sacrifice to validate itself, it also kills to maintain its necropolitical authority. The key problem is how the society can kill without generating revenge. Rene Girard argues that it is through the society sanctioned and conducted sacrificial ritual to reach the goal. In the ritual, substitution is used to act as a scapegoat. It is similar to but not identical to the original one. During the ritual, sacrificial catharsis prevents the unlimited propagation of violence. Because the victim is sacred, it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is

²⁹⁹ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

³⁰⁰ See Adkins, *Death and Desire in Hegel, Heidegger and Deleuze*

sacred only because he is to be killed.³⁰¹ In modern days, I regard the public execution as such a ritual. It goes hand in hand with the memorial services as the manifestation of the necropolitical power.

Bataille regards the sacrificial ritual as positive. Although the victim is the accursed share, destined for violent consumption, the curse tears him away from the order of things: it gives him a recognizable figure, which now radiates intimacy, anguish, and the profundity of living beings.³⁰² Nancy also suggests that individual and community freedom cannot be reached without the sacrifice. He suggests that death of the other calls the subject beyond itself and thus delivers it to its freedom. Freedom is necessarily shared, and the experience of the other's mortality constitutes something like a condition of this sharing. Like love (itself inseparable from an experience of mortality), it calls the subject out and beyond itself, exposing it to alterity and to its freedom.³⁰³

Death cannot be dissociated from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself, and reciprocally. Nancy argues that if "I" disappear in effect in its death, it is because the "I" is something other than a subject. All of Heidegger's research into "being towards death" was nothing other than an attempt to state this: I is not-am not-a subject. Community is revealed in the death of others, hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others. It is not the space of the egos, but of the "I"s, who are always others. Community therefore occupies a singular place: it assumes the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being in the form of a subject.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*. p.1. p.30

³⁰² Bataille, *Accursed Shares*, p.59.

³⁰³ Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xv

³⁰⁴ Ibid, p.15.

Back to the film of *The Cold Dawn*, the instinctual choice for an individual before the impending Death is to sustain its existence, even though for just a short period. That is why some communists choose to betray and join the enemy's camp. However, some other communists stay and suffer, since they have transcended the instinctual stage and came to know the communal aspect of death. Death is introjected back bearing its family and communal meaning to the individual, either for the revenge of the family member, or to fight to liberate the village or the whole district. During that process, it needs to validate and prove its power to kill as well. Therefore, to kill the enemy at a public-accessible place proves its necropolitical power. Or, it is even better to execute a traitor before the public, since traitor only witnesses in the instinctual level of avoiding death. By killing, the group reinforces its shared identity and becomes an organic whole. The other's mortality constitutes the backbone of the community, which regains the immanence and the intimacy of a communion. As Batallie notes, "what community reveals to me, in presenting to me by birth and by death, is my existence outside myself."³⁰⁵

In another Maoist film *Visiting Relatives*, the unpredictable personal death is elevated into a collective and controllable event in a more bizarre way. Martyr's life miraculously continues through the other person's body by identity exchange, which manifests the communal extension of life to minimize the influence of personal death to a family. In the film, Tian Laogeng visits Beijing to see his son, who has not met his father for ten more year since he joins the communist army. However, Tian receives money mailed to him every year from Beijing. In this first day of visiting Beijing, Tian only sees his daughter-in-law, and then he is informed that his son goes out of town for a business trip. Tian finally sees his son, surprisingly realizes that this is not his real

³⁰⁵ Batallie, *Accursed Shares* p.26.

son, but a substitute. His real son sacrificed his life to save other people's life many years ago, and it is his close comrade-in-arms that hides the news of the death and sends back money every year, using the identity of the dead son.

Tian Laogeng feels extremely sad and cannot control his tears at the news of his son's death. The sequence was criticized at that time since it is improper to whine at martyrdom, which is regarded as a national honor rather than a personal sad story. Martyrdom cannot be cried upon excessively without any pre-designed ritual form. In the post-Maoist milieu, such criticism was condemned to be inhumane and extremely politically distorted.

I argue that both lines of criticism miss the point. The important thing is not whether or not it is within or against the human nature, but the interaction of the personal death and communal usage of death for its own purpose. The son's personal death has been maneuvered to be sublimated into a collective event. The substitute has to get the Party's approval for the validity of the white lie, so that the personal sacrifice can be en-valued to be collectively useful. The Party's interference into such personal issue is emphasized throughout the film. *Visiting Relatives* attests to another kind of genre twist of the regular war film by providing the focus on the aftermath of war. It is equally powerful to show the importance of the Maoist ideology to turn the personal death into a collective event. When death becomes a communal issue, it does not matter who died and who will die. As long as there is a substitute in the collective (and there will always be!), the sorrow from the personal death can be kept to the minimum, and the revolution can be continued with little influence from the loss of individual person.

War Films of the Children and for the Children: Another Kind of Martyrdom

Maoist films boast for its wide production of children's films (ertong pian 儿童片), which I

define as either use children to act as the protagonists, or are specially made for children audiences. Children during the Maoist period were called to be “flowers of the motherland” (zuguo de huaduo 祖国的花朵), and it is important to make films of them, and for them as well. For the war films with children as the protagonists, many of them concern children martyrdom. Such films include *The Letter with Feathers* (鸡毛信, 1953, dir Shi Hui), *Red Children* (红孩子, 1958, dir Su Li), *Little Heroes* (英雄小八路, 1961, dir Gao Heng), *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* (小兵张嘎, 1964, dir, Cui Wei), *Sparkling Red Star* (闪闪的红星, 1974, dir Li Jun), etc. For war films that are not acted by children but made for children, most of them are animation films. Among them, the famous one concerning children martyrdom is *The Little Sisters in Grassland* (草原英雄小姐妹, 1965, dir Qian Yunda) .

Children’s images in the Maoist films appear to be roughly in two categories: either they are little heroes in the war film genre, or the protagonist as a good child is either suffered in the Old Society³⁰⁶, or bathed in happiness under the Maoist sunlight.³⁰⁷ The latter type is more associated with genre film specifically made for children, with children as the protagonists. The former type include not only children’s war films such as *The Letter with Feathers*, but also include films that children only play as supporting roles, such as *Dr. Bethune*.

Foreign children images are rarely represented in the Maoist films. By nature, they cannot be represented as bad kids. The communist humanitarian claim regards the enemies’ evil as the by-product of the capitalist system. It is acquired by the capitalist corruptive surroundings rather than naturally born. Indeed, it is also difficult to represent good foreign kids. Films such as *The*

³⁰⁶ Films in this category include *Sanmao Learning Business* 三毛学生意.

³⁰⁷ Films in this category include *Flowers of Our Motherland* 祖国的花朵 (1966, dir. Yan Gong), and *The Little Bell* 小铃铛 (1963, dir. Xie Tian).

Kite (风筝 1958, dir. Roger Pigaut / Wang Jiayi) are rare cases to represent good kids in a developed capitalist country of France. Film directors avoided getting involved in the risky representation of the good foreigners, unless those foreigners are authorized by Mao's talking or indication, such as Dr. Bethune.

During the post-Mao Period, Maoist children films were criticized for its over-adultlization of the children. The onscreen children appear to have been more aware of class-consciousness than the adults, which is unnatural and distorted. In films such as *The Shining Red Star*, the protagonist Pang Dongzi 潘冬子 is characterized as mature enough to handle the task even adults have difficulty with. For example, when he hears about his mother's death, his initial response is struggling hard to contain his sadness, rather than simply cry out as most children would behave. Pang Dongzi's natural instinct as a ten-year-old child has been almost erased by his mature revolutionary spirit. Although the film was produced and released during the period when the "three prominences" dominated (see chapter 2), Pang Dongzi's character still looks to be distorted, if not to an unacceptable level.

Some other representations of children are distorted enough to the extent of being against the basic scientific facts. Children in *Little Heroes* work as the communication soldiers. In the end of the film, they are hand in hand to serve as the body medium to connect the telephone line, under the fierce bombing from the enemies. It is certainly against scientific fact that children's bodies, even if they are hand in hand, can substitute the telephone cable and restore the lost signal. Nevertheless, it manifests again the almighty revolutionary spirit that overcomes all the difficulties. Children's revolutionary spirit is equally as powerful as that of the adults, and

sometimes they even appear much stronger.³⁰⁸

This section focuses on the special characteristics of children's films representing martyrdom, which provide a genre twist from the orthodox war films. These films expose some key problems related to the Maoist necropolitical system. Children are by nature childish, and film directors cannot ignore that fact even though the children protagonists are elevated into an incredible level of mature class consciousness, many characteristics unique to children still need to be retained. After all, if children protagonists lose all the children characteristics, children's films no longer effectively function to its major audiences, the children.

Just like the contradictions revealed from the genre films of comedy and suspense thriller, children martyrdom is also inherently contradictory. The instinctual consciousness of self-preservation is at odds with the revolutionary consciousness of sacrificing for a transcendental purpose. The erasure of all childish instinctual behavior render the children become adults. But if the instinctual spontaneity is emphasized, their acquired class consciousness will be severely undermined and the film will cease to be educational model that it originally plans to be.

The other key aspect of the Maoist children's films revolves around the concept of equality. For the war film genre, Maoist discourse emphasizes equality within the revolutionary class, requiring all the previously under-privileged social groups have their own free will to unite together and fight against the mutual class enemies. The group of children is not an exception. Even though they may behave childish in some aspects, in the most crucial moment, their free will makes crucial decision strictly according to the most orthodox revolutionary rationale. In *Little Heroes*, one of the protagonists Xiaoming fails to ring the bell for the army because he

³⁰⁸ Children films produced during the Cultural Revolution provide ample cases of such over-adultlization. In *A Yong* (阿勇 1975, dir Yan Xueshu), and *The Story of Xiangyang Neighborhood* (向阳院的故事 1974, dir Yuan Naichen), children fearlessly fight against adults' sabotage of revolution.

indulges in playing some interesting games, and forgets the important political task. After much education and encouragement on Xiaoming from the adults, Xiaoming grows to be a mature revolutionary fighter. In the final crucial moment, his body becomes the medium to convey the telephone signal. At this moment, his spirit also partakes the mature revolutionary spirit, equally with other children.

The equality of revolutionary consciousness from the children is also reflected from their courage and action to correct their parents even though they are physically and economically subordinate. When parents appear to be politically indecisive or even make political mistakes, children as their dependents will most likely correct these adults and direct them back into the right track independently. The children protagonists Xiaobao and A-long in *Such Parents* (如此爹娘 1963, dir Zhang Tianci) correct their parents misbehavior to steal small public properties, and educate them to be good people. Although such free will of children is highly subordinate to the big Other and is thus not free at all, children in the films still look to be freely carrying out their individual will and free from any adults' enforcement, even for the gravest choice of life and death.

In return, the Maoist necropolitical system also equally acknowledges children's revolutionary free will and their contribution. Not only children's words are treated seriously by the adults, children are also assigned important revolutionary tasks as well. If children sacrifice occurs when they are on duty, their martyrdom is commemorated equally, or in a more elevated standard than the adult martyrdom. Their heroic deeds are set as the educational models for all the children nationwide and worldwide.

However, the differentiation between the children and adult martyrdom is as important as the emphasis on their equality. Although children's revolutionary consciousness never appears to

be inferior to that of the adults when the final moment of martyrdom transpires, film directors still need to emphasize some unique childish characteristics that distinguish children martyrdom. The tasks assigned to children soldiers are different from those to the adults. Children often assist adults with some minor but no less important and dangerous tasks, such as working as scouts, communicators, logistic associates, and guerilla specifically composed of children, etc. Children usually do not fight with the adult enemies and die directly in the battlefield. The reason is that if many children sacrifice directly on the battlefield, the position of the Chinese male soldiers will be awkward, and their heroic sublimity will be undermined as well.

Although the representation of male adult martyrdom is still the primary and dominant task of the Maoist films, the onscreen children martyrdom is also an indispensable constituent of the whole Maoist necropolitical system. It aims to provide varieties besides the formulaic dominant type of male martyrdom, and it orients towards the children audience group.

However, onscreen children martyrdom on the one hand serves to validate the inclusiveness of the Maoist revolution, on the other hand it exposes some gaps left in the coherent necropolitical narration. Because of the generic elements that are not compatible with the conventional war film genre, children's film, just as comedy and thriller film, provides a genre twist that potentially exposes the ideological narration that tries to suture the incoherence and containing the paradox.

If one gap, as analyzed previously, lies in the incompatibility of children's natural instinct and the mature revolutionary consciousness enforcing on them, the other major gap is seen from children's physical weakness and the communist adults that fail to protect or rescue them on time. Children by nature need to be protected by adults, especially male adults during the war time. The children sacrifice on the one hand attests to the sublimity of the revolutionary spirit, on

the other hand exposes the weakness of the male adult soldiers, who are the primary protagonists of most orthodox war films, and are usually depicted as omnipotent. Many children martyrs die as scouts, either de facto or on the screen. Scouting is a suitable position for children since it does not involve much frontal confront with the regular army of the enemies. Strategically speaking, it is easier for scouts to conceal their identities when they are simply children, since the enemies naturally do not realize that Chinese children have same mature level of the revolutionary consciousness, and take no less important revolutionary tasks than the adults.

However, scouting is an extremely dangerous job since children scout often work individually without any help from the adults. When a child scout needs to face a group of adult enemies, his/her only way of survival is either simply run away, or to outsmart the enemies and wait for the adult soldiers to come over for rescue. The first scenario is easier to succeed but is not the material that a Maoist film wants to treat, since it has minimal educational purpose to show a child soldier simply escapes from the enemies by luck. The second scenario is educational, but it is very cruel by nature: when the communist adult soldiers do not catch the time to wipe out the enemies or even do not show up to save the children, the powerless children scouts are doomed to die. Haiwa in the film *The Letter with Feathers* is lucky enough to survive since the Eighth Route Army arrives at the exact time before the enemies are about to kill him. But some other children are not that fortunate. Among the children scout martyrs the most famous historical figure is Wang Erxiao 王二小 (1929-1942).

At the age of 13, Wang served as the scout and deliberately led the enemies to the dead end, ready to be ambushed and wiped out by the Eighth Route Army. The enemies finally found out their desperate situation and they immediately killed Wang at the scene, before the adult soldiers could save him. Wang's martyrdom was well-known during the Maoist period, thanks to the

widespread song *Ode to the Little Cowherd Erxiao* (歌唱二小放牛郎, 1942). Composed by Fang Bing 方冰, a poet in Yan'an, the lyric reads heroically beautiful:

Our Er Xiao, the thirteen-year old boy,
heroically sacrifices at the hill.
He brings safety to the cadres and villagers,
but he sleeps at the freezing mountain.
His face is filled with smile,
and his blood dyes the blue sky red.

我们那十三岁的王二小，
英勇的牺牲在山间。
干部和老乡得到了安全，
他却睡在冰冷的山间，
他的脸上含着微笑，
他的血染红蓝蓝的天。

The film based on the heroic Wang Erxiao was not produced and released until 1992 (*Erxiao the Cowherd* 二小放牛郎 1992, dir Zhang Chi). However, the ballad song was widely disseminated during the Maoist period, and Wang Erxiao's example was firmly set as a model for school boys and girls. By remembering and commemorating the child martyr, children as the flowers of the new China were educated to cherish their sweet lives without wars and sufferings, which were said to be exchanged for with martyrs' sacrifice.

Martyrs' blood not only "dyes the blue sky red" as the lyric shows, it also dyes the national flag red under the Maoist ideology. Children were educated that the Five-Starred Red Flag 五星红旗 is made of martyrs' blood symbolically.³⁰⁹ As the symbol of the Young Pioneers' League 少年先锋队, the red scarf (*hong Lingjin* 红领巾) is also said to be part of the Red Flag, and is thus made from martyrs' blood as well. The best of the elementary school students are encouraged to join the Young Pioneer's League in their second or third grade. Many schools organize the ceremony of joining the League in martyrs' cemetery, and children who join the League often swear to devote to the communist revolution before martyrs' tomb. Arguably this is one of the initiative moments for children realizing their social responsibility. With such an initiation rite within the community of students, children are baptized not under the gaze of God, but under martyrs' spirits.

However, if Wang Erxiao's heroic sacrifice has been widely emphasized through songs and publications, what is intentionally neglected or downplayed is the regular army's failure to rescue the child scout, or even deliberately sacrifice the child scout for their victory. According to writer Chen Mo's children's literature *Wang Erxiao: The Young Hero*, the Eighth Route Army already sets up an ambush in the dead-end road that Wang leads the enemies to, and the Japanese enemies immediately kill Wang after they hear the sound of gun and know their desperate situation.³¹⁰ In this regard, why does the ambushing Eighth Route Army start gunfire regardless the powerless child scout who is still in the hands of the Japanese enemies? They may either consider the child scout as the dispensable abject, ready to be sacrificed for a greater good; or

³⁰⁹ The metaphorical link between the redness of the flag and martyrs' blood occurs frequently during the Maoist period. In *Heroic Sons and Daughters*, the famous theme song *Ode to Heroes* sings: "Why is the war flag as beautiful as a picture? Because the heroes' blood dyes it red." (为什么战旗美如画,. 英雄的鲜血染红了它)

³¹⁰ Chen Mo, *Wang Erxiao: The Young Hero*.

they are simply not witty enough to ensure the victory of the battle while at the same time rescue the child. Either way it is, Wang Erxiao dies from the failure of adult soldiers' rescue on time. But either from the famous song or from literature publications, this failure is deliberately downplayed.

The similar tragedy of the powerless child scout is seen from the film *Dr. Bethune* as well. Although *Dr. Bethune* is not a children's film and its main focus is on the foreign martyrdom, as is analyzed in the Chapter 4, children martyrdom serves as a catalyst for Bethune's change. The child scout Tiewa is killed when he tries to lead the enemies to the wrong way to save the villagers. His death brings huge impact on Dr. Bethune, who changes his mind from strictly following the western medical practice to adapt to the real Chinese war situation. Tiewa dies in the middle of the film and changes Bethune's mind from the teacher of the Chinese people to the student of the Chinese people. But similar to Wang Erxiao's death, Tiewa dies in a hopeless situation and is abjectly disposable. He has no power to fight back the group of enemies and no chance to survive. With no adult soldier coming over to help the powerless child, he sacrifices tragically.

The second gap of the martyrdom narrative occurs when children sacrifice their lives to protect the collective properties. On the one hand, from the communist humanism standpoint, it is not worthwhile to save any properties at the cost of one's life. On the other hand, the children's devotion to save the public properties regardless of their lives can be narrated to be the manifestation of extreme communist selflessness, and their sacrifice are thus more honored and elevated. The most famous case in this category is from the protagonists of Long Mei and Yu Rong in the film *Little Sisters in Grassland*. Adapted from the real story in the year of 1964, the animation film is released in the year of 1965 and presents two Inner Mongolia girls, aged nine

and eleven respectively, lead the sheep of the People's Community out of the thunderstorm. They do not die in the end of the film, thanks to the timely arrival of the rescue team, and careful recovery in the hospital. They go back to the grassland and lead a happy life again. In real history, however, two sisters are both severely injured and permanently handicapped. Some other historical cases in this category include Jin Xunhua 金训华 and Lai Ning 赖宁. The young adult Jin Xunhua died at twenty in the year of 1969 when he tried to save two electric poles of the People's Community in the water and is drowned to death. *The People's Daily* and *the Red Flag* immediately call on a nationwide movement to learn from Jin's heroism, and eulogize Jin as one of the best examples of "Chairman Mao's Red Guard."³¹¹ During the sensitive period of the Tiananmen Incident in the year of 1989, Lai Ning's martyrdom was widely propagated in the elementary and middle schools. Lai tried to put out the forest fire and died after relentless struggle with the fire in the year of 1988.

These children/adolescents died or were ready to die for the safety of the collective properties. Their heroism were all widely propagated during the time when China was still in lack of material goods and most goods were possessed and distributed by the People's Community or the state-owned Danwei 单位. In nowadays China when the marketing economy dominates, the collective properties are on the verge of diminishing, and the martyrdom of saving collective properties are rarely heard. The current Chinese society boasts for its abundance of material goods, and it looks ridiculous to sacrifice one's life for simply two electric poles, or a group of sheep. In a magazine article in the year of 2002 when a journalist asked Yu Rong's thoughts of sacrifice back to 1964. Yu Rong said, "at that time one sheep was worth two

³¹¹ See "Chairman's Red Guard—Leaning from Comrade Jin Xunhua as a Model for the Revolutionary Youth." (毛主席的红卫兵——向革命青年的榜样金训华同志学习), in *The Red Flag*, December 1969.

Chinese yuan. There were 384 sheep in total, and 3 died. For the six yuan, I was permanently handicapped.” But she smiled and added, “you cannot calculate something spiritual with money.”³¹²

Similar to most of the Maoist films that emphasize the almighty revolutionary spirit, in the animation film for children audience, Yu Rong and Long Mei are determined to save the sheep and ready for sacrifice without any interest calculation or rational choice. They sing in the film, “I am afraid of neither frozen injury nor hunger, for the sake of protecting the community property.”(为了集体财产，不怕冻伤，不怕饥饿) On the contrary, the adults who try to save them are more rational, concerning more about the lives of the sisters than those sheep. The leader of the rescue team says, “It is fine to just lose some sheep, the important thing is to find back the kids.” However, these girls become revolutionarily devotional when the storm is increasingly severe. They do their best to lead the sheep out of the storm. The younger sister loses consciousness because of the severe coldness, and the older sister carries her out from the storm as if not by her weak body, but by her strongest revolutionary spirit. They are finally saved by the rescue team.

The animation film rewrites real history in the way more suitable for the children audiences under the Maoist necropolitical ideology. The film shows the older sister recovers in the hospital. The doctor tells her that the younger sister also recovers well, and they are really “Chairman Mao’s good children” (真是毛主席的好孩子). This line serves as a sound bridge to connect to a shot of the photo picture in which Mao stands in the middle surrounded by the happy children. Among them one child is helping Mao to wear the red scarf, a symbol of martyrdom (Fig 11). The camera tilts down to show two sisters reading books, with letters and souvenirs all around

³¹² From Baidu Encyclopedia, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/59718.htm> accessed on 10/28/2015.

the table. They are waving to the children friends outside. In the end of the film, they go back to the grassland to herd the sheep again, as if nothing tragic happened previously. In real history, however, two sisters were severely injured and permanently handicapped. Yu Rong was amputated and was unable to walk ever since. After being discharged from the hospital, they never herd the sheep again and went to the school under the government's support.



Fig 11

The rewriting of the history into the film discloses necropower's fear of displaying physical bodies. Amputation and handicap leave a permanent scar that cannot be erased and transfigured by any symbolic substitutes. Unlike death that leads to the cremation or disappearance of the physical body, the trauma of committing martyrdom is left on the body in the form of incompleteness. The necropolitical system either rewrites to restore the body to its original complete status, as the animation film does, or make the protagonist die to eulogize the death and martyrdom with the spiritual commemoration without the ruined or handicapped physical body at presence.

The narrated completeness of bodies can also be seen from many sculptures of the children heroes or martyrs, nowadays still visible in many places around China. Clean, tall and heroic, Two Sisters' sculpture in Shanghai Zoo, Wang Erxiao's sculpture in Hebei Province (Fig 12), and many other martyrs sculptures, are standing still to remind new generation of old generation's

heroic sacrifice. These sculptures function in the same way as the overwhelming posters of the heroic martyrs during the Maoist period. They provide the all-pervasive after-images. These images retain in one's memory after the actual screening, are reinforced again and again to be deeply rooted in people's minds. In the post-script of this chapter, I will further tease out the correlation between the popular genre film and the mainstream ideology, as well as investigate the importance of after-images of martyrs in today's China.



Fig 12

Postscript: Cinema, Space and Afterimage

Cinema does not stop after the screening. It relies on the after-images to continue its life and possibly ever last in one's memory. The screening is just a one-time deal, but the power of cinema takes effect and is reinforced by posters, sculptures, architectures, toys, and all the other by-products related to the film. Pierre Nora uses the term “site of memory” to indicate the importance of memory linked with specific locations to construct nationalism. The physical and material location, as well as the overwhelming posters and sculptures during the Maoist period, all greatly contribute to the effectiveness of the Maoist necropolitical system.

The tightest connection between onscreen martyrdom and location of martyrdom occurs in the 21st century China. In the year of 2002, Zhang Yimou's martial-arts blockbuster *Hero* set up many new records in the history of Chinese cinema. It had been the highest-grossing Chinese film in the domestic box-office. It had been one of the very few Chinese films that ever grasped the winner of the weekly box-office in the United States. Furthermore, it had been the first commercial film that had its world premiere in the Great Hall of the People, which is located in Tiananmen Square, a place that might instantly provoke two indelible images. In 1966, millions of Red Guards waited in the square to be reviewed by Chairman Mao. In 1989, thousands of desperate students fast to resist the autocratic state. Their self-sacrificial action did not lead to the democracy that they had been longing for, but the government's bloodshed crackdown.

On the surface, the profit-oriented blockbuster *Hero* appears sharply inharmonious with its premiere location. As a space fully loaded with serious political implications, Tiananmen Square might be the last refuge that resists the commercial intrusion occurred everywhere in the globalized China today. The everyday ritual of the national flag raising, the grand military parade in the Chinese National Day, and the omnipresent gaze of Chairman Mao from his portrait hanged above the Tiananmen Gate, all attest to a milieu of sacredness and sublimity devoid of commercial corruption.

The film *Hero* reveals the tight alignment between the cinematic representation (text) and film exhibition (space), both serve to reinforce, rather than subvert, the mainstream political ideology. Recent scholarship has focused on Tiananmen Square as the geographical symbol demonstrating the intertwined entanglement among public space, cinema and political ideology. Yomi Braester's monograph *Painting the City Red* examines the cinematic portrayal of Tiananmen Square from 1949 to the present, and reveals the conflict, as well as the

interdependence, between the state-imposed vision from the “monumental space” of Tiananmen Square, and the personal gaze on such space.³¹³ Haiyan Lee’s also indicates that Tiananmen Square serves for an official iconography that constructs the charisma of the political power through the “military sublime.”³¹⁴ The highest architecture of the Tiananmen Square is Monument to the People's Heroes (人民英雄纪念碑), built on 1958 to commemorate countless famous or nameless martyrs sacrificing their lives in wars. The colossal Monument attests to the permeating sublimity within the “monumental space.”

Echoing with the film exhibition space as sacred and sublime, the film *Hero* revolves around the theme of self-sacrifice. The assassin Nameless 无名 in the end voluntarily abolishes his plan to assassinate Emperor Qin, because he turns to believe that Emperor Qin is the only person who has the power to unify “our land” (*tianxia*, 天下) and bring peace to the people. The assassin is executed as an assassin but buried as a hero, followed by a grand-scale mourning ritual. The film *Hero*, along with its premiere location exhibition, offer a modern spectacle of sacrificial ritual to reinforce the discourse of martyrdom as a key element for nationalism.

The specific exhibition location of the Great Hall of the People 人民大会堂 also mirrors *Hero*’s theme of represented sacrifice. First and primarily used for the National Representative Congress, the Great Hall was built in 1959 under the Maoist regime. It has been regarded as one of the key buildings that symbolize the communist ideal of equality and unity: theoretically, every single person in China, regardless of gender, race or social status, is entitled to be elected by local people, thus *represents* local people to discuss and vote political issues at the National Representative Congress. However, due to the large population in China, the Great Hall cannot

³¹³ Braester, *Painting the City Red*.

³¹⁴ Lee, “The Charisma of Power and the Military Sublime in Tiananmen Square.”

hold millions of local representatives. Hence, local representatives elect the second-tier representatives, and second tier ones elect the third-tier ones. Such selected representativeness continues until the final tier representatives, around the number of two to three thousand, physically join the annual Congress in the Great Hall.

Such political representation is indirect without immediacy, building on the logic that the representative can speak for people without every people's presence. It mirrors the essence of sacrifice that is based on surrogates and immediacy. The assassin Nameless in the film also claims to be the representative of several top assassins' collective will. However, these top assassins' opinions are not uniform at all. Finally his abandonment of assassination represents the thought from the assassin Canjian 残剑, who discourages assassination for the unity and peace of China. The film questions the capacity of the representative to represent a collective will, since such a collective and uniform will might not be existent. It is at odds with the basic function of the Great Hall where the people's representatives represent people's collective voice. However, the mainstream ideology downplays the unreliability of representation underneath the film, meanwhile emphasizing the film's face value to promote for the national unity, which is completely suitable for its premiere in the Great Hall.

The case of the film *Hero* shows that even if a generic film is not suitable for the mainstream political purpose, the Party can still accept it when interpreting it for its political benefits. However, the multivocality and ambiguity of the film text can still loom out and its contained meaning will be uncovered. The representation of martyrdom can cross over many genres and each of the film genre has its unique characteristics that are unquenchable by the overwhelming ideology. Even though the political requirement of the Maoist films was rigid, and the orthodox war films dominated in quantity, a few unconventional representation of martyrdom

still transpires if they incorporate generic elements from comedy, thriller, or children's films. On the one hand, they enrich the variety of the Maoist films. On the other hand, they expose some crucial inherent gaps of the Maoist necropolitics.

Epilogue: Post-Maoist Martyrdom: Reflection on the Maoist Martyrdom

The post-Maoist *lieshi* is a more contested title reflecting the conflicts of various discourses, including the dominant CCP national discourse, the public discourse developed from the newspaper to the cyberspace, the globalization discourse, and the voice of the abjects. If the Maoist discourse largely repressed various voices to build a uniform necropolitics, ensuring the certainty of the Maoist value system, the definition and boundary of *lieshi* was increasingly blurry in the post-Maoist cinema as the value system became volatile and uncertain. Under the co-existence of the market capitalism, neo-colonialism and the residue of the communist discourse, the conflicting discourses of sacrifice appear more obviously and frequently in the post-Maoist films. If film directors during the Maoist Era were under huge pressure from the top-to-down political review and approval, the political interference into the post-Maoist films were much relaxed compared with that of the Maoist era. However, the double pressure from the box-office and the film bureau also rendered the representation of martyrdom much convoluted and multifaceted.

Unlike some other national cinema pouring out many anti-war films to criticize or make parody of the meaning of martyrdom after the collapse of the political regime, Chinese films even after the Maoist era have never wholly negated the heroic sublimity of martyrdom. But change did occur when some of the post-socialist films critically reflect on, rather than enthusiastically glorify sacrifice and create the overblown images of the prominent heroes.

The first group of the post-Maoist films, mostly produced and released during 1977 to 1982, mostly inherited the lingering Maoist narrative of sacrifice after Mao's death in 1976, albeit with variation. War films such as *A*, *Yaolan* (啊,摇篮 1979, dir. Xie Jin) *Little Flower* (小花 1979, dir. Huang Jianzhong), *Starry is the Night* (今夜星光灿烂 1980, dir. Xie Tieli), *Wedding*

on an Execution Ground (刑场上的婚礼 1980, dir Erji Guangbudao) all attest to the glorification of martyrdom, albeit in a more lyrical way focusing on restoring human emotion into the films rather than continuing indoctrinate political rationale. The one-dimensional Maoist discourse that clearly distinguishes the good and the bad on the screen still lingers in these films.

The 1976-1980 period also witnessed many films that link personal sacrifice with victimization claim during the Cultural Revolution. In line with the dominating literary trend of trauma literature and reflection literature after Mao's death, most of the films, such as *The Tears Stain* (泪痕 1979, dir Li Wenhua) or *The Suffering Heart* (苦难的心 1979, dir Chang Zhenhua), unanimously condemn the "Gang of Four" that brought havoc and tragedy to the nation and to the ordinary people during the Cultural Revolution. The film theme of the unreserved condemnation on the "Gang of Four," is essentially the same as the condemnation of the capitalist roader (zouzipai 走资派) in the late Cultural Revolution films initiated by the "Gang of Four." (such as *Chunmiao* 春苗 1975 dir. Xie Jin, or *The Counterattack* 反击 1976 dir. Li Wenhua).

Among the films that reflect on the Cultural Revolution disaster, the film *Maple* (枫 1980, dir. Zhang Yi) offers an interesting perspective on martyrdom. It condemns the brutality of the physical struggle (wudou 武斗) among the Red Guards. In the film, the lovers belong to two antagonistic camps and during a battle they accidentally fight against each other. When they realize the situation, the tragedy has already occurred. Although those who die during the *wudou* are not regarded as martyrs since the nation/state is the only authority to name martyrdom, the film nevertheless questions the validity of the transcendental ideal that evokes thousands of Red Guards to sacrifice for. Their young lives were sacrificed during the unprecedented nationwide ritual of the Cultural Revolution, and could not be claimed back. The film *Maple* provides a good

example to reflect on the motivation of sacrifice and its linkage with victimization during the social turmoil. It, however, still puts the blame of the tragic martyrdom to the fault of the “Gang of Four,” and fails to investigate deeper on the sacrificial subjects as the imperative for the national ideology, no matter it is during the turmoil years or any peaceful years.

The meaning of sacrifice under the Maoist necropolitics is further reflected upon in the films during the mid and late 1980s, but this time the reflection pushes further to the essence of martyrdom. The film *Wreaths at the Foot of the Mountain* 高山下的花环 (1984, dir. Xie Jin) begins the contemplation on the tragedy of being a martyr in a more general sense. The platoon leader Jin Kailai 靳开来 fights most bravely on the battlefield and dies when he tries to find water source for the dying soldiers. But he does not even earn the honor of martyrdom after his heroic death. It is only because he dares to grumble about some bad phenomenon in a straightforward way, thus being disliked by his superiors. The commander Liang Sanxi also sacrifices his life when saving Zhao Mengsheng, only leaving debt and his poor wife, mother, and son. The other protagonist of the film Zhao Mengsheng, the son of an old general, gets promoted after the victory even though his mother tries hard to let him quit the army before going to the frontier. Although all these problems are readdressed in the end and the film ultimately emphasizes CCP’s credit and sole authority to honor the martyrs, the film still exposes some key problems of martyrdom. Audiences see injustice occurred when the state names a martyr, the tragic destiny of a martyr and his family, and the bureaucratic system that always neglects the nameless and favors the privileged.

The birth and thriving of the Fifth-Generation directors in the mid-80s further complicates the representation of sacrifice in the war films. *The One and The Eight* (一个和八个, 1983, dir. Zhang Junzhao) takes the impure sacrificers such as prisoners, army deserts, as the

protagonists, which is rarely seen in the Maoist films. Heroic sacrifice is no longer necessarily the patents of the politically correct communists, the film presents the bandits and the deserters that make sacrifices. *Red Sorghum* (红高粱, 1987, dir.Zhang Yimou) also foregrounds how the purportedly impure sacrificers as Jiu'er sacrifices her life when all the winemakers and sedan-lifters are fighting against the Japanese invaders. Jiu'er is also an impure woman by the Confucian criterion, bravely pursuing for her own sexual freedom and being involved in the illicit affair with a sedan-lifter. Also, in the film *Evening Bell* (晚钟, 1988, dir.Wu Ziniu), the boundary between the Japanese enemy and the communist soldiers is blurred, to the extent that the motivation of sacrifice is unclear and indecisive throughout the entire film.

Two films in the late 1980s and early 1990s also enrich the complexity of women martyrdom and children martyrdom on the screen. The film *Echo from the Qilian Mountain* (祁连山的回声, 1989, dir. Zhang Yongshou) reveals the dilemmas that many female soldiers face, but such dilemma has not yet made clear on the screen, since it can push back *lieshi* into the *lienü* tradition. The film lays bare two difficult choices that the female soldiers have to choose from in the desperate situation. Either they protect their bodies from being raped or protect their lives. Since the protection of their bodies can fail easily and may result in the failure of the protection of their lives as well, these women soldiers made quite rational choice of sacrificing their lives. In this regard, the film makes it clear that at times committing martyrdom is from a rational and earthly choice, rather than for a transcendental ideal. The film *The Meridian of War* (战争子午线, 1990, dir.Feng Xiaoning) is a neglected masterpiece focusing on the transformation of children in the war. The typical Maoist over-adultation of children is absent in this film. Rather, *The Meridian of War* convincingly presents the children transformed from innocence to the war machines. Children are not naturally born to hold the gun and shoot, they

hesitate and struggle in that process. The film shows the helplessness of children in the war without anyone coming over to save them. In the ending sequence, the landmine that one of the children uses to kill the enemies (but also kills himself) turn out to be the modern toy for the new-generation kids. It is an irony to criticize the post-Maoist society that is fully geared towards the market economy and consumerism, while easily forgets the martyrs' bloodshed in the past.

The 1990s marked the increasing marketization of film industry. Especially after 1995 when the quota of the imported Hollywood films was introduced to China, the cinematic representation of martyrdom needed to be more engaged with the box-office result and audience's taste. In this regard, the mainstream war films that traditionally represent martyrdom in a poker-face manner are mixed with more attractive genre elements to cater for the audiences. Also, the increasing opening-up for the Hong Kong or oversea co-production of Chinese films render the representation of martyrdom more versatile. Female nudity is displayed excessively in the anti-Fascist film *Red Cherry* (红樱桃 1995, dir. Ye Daying). *A Time to Remember* (红色恋人 1998, dir. Ye Daying) involves a transnational love triangle story with the Hong Kong star Leslie Cheung acting as the communist martyr. Feng Xiaoning, the director of the *The Meridian of War*, also directs the "war trilogy" (*Red River* 红河谷 1997, *Grief over the Yellow River* 黄河绝恋 1999, *Purple Sun* 紫日 2001). Added with Tibetan, American, Russian or Japanese elements, all these films present exotic and erotic atmosphere when martyrdom is at the same time represented. Audiences went to the film theaters not only just to watch war films, but they also enjoyed being bathed in the beautiful foreign landscape, experiencing exotic elements from faraway lands, and watching the love stories with the foreigners.

The Chinese underground films were also born and developed in the 1990s. Although martyrdom is not the very material these films were interested in, some of the films interrogate

the meaning of death and self-sacrifice in an increasingly money-oriented, cold society. Wang Xiaoshuai's film *Frozen* 极度寒冷 (1997) exemplifies how the voice of the socially unacceptable group can only be expressed by a performative self-sacrifice, while the sublimity of such sacrifice is ironically dissolved in the market-economy society. In the end of the film, the performance artist does not feel any social response towards his performative death. It looks like his performative death only appears on the newspaper for very short time, and people forget him as quickly as they consume a cup of instant coffee. Therefore, the artist commits real suicide in desperation. Zhang Yang's film *The Quitting* 昨天 (2001) presents a similar story with the real experience of the actor Jia Hongsheng. Jia used to be a famous actor, but got increasingly bored with everything around him. His parents make all the effort to help and encourage him, but he still commits suicide in the end of the film. Unlike the heroic martyrdom that influences everyone during the Maoist Era, these two films show that self-sacrifice has no influence to the 1990s society at all. In both films, ordinary people surrounding the protagonists need to work and entertain, accumulate and consume the wealth, with no time to care about the meaning of the self-sacrifice. The protagonists for both films are acted by Jia Hongsheng 贾宏声. Same as the protagonists' destiny in the films, Jia committed suicide in the year of 2010.

Globalization, cyberspace and social network were the benchmarks of the new century in China. Li Zhiqiang's 李志强 case in 2006 and Yang Jia's 杨佳 case in 2008 generated heated debate via cyberspace to potentially contest the nation-state's sole authority to name the *lieshi*.

³¹⁵ Zhang Yimou's film *Hero* 英雄 (2002) rewrites a premodern Chinese martyrdom in the

³¹⁵ Li Zhiqiang served as the city inspector 城管 to monitor the license of food peddlers. On August 11, 2006, Li confiscated all the equipment and belongings of the sausage peddler Cui Yingjie for lack of license. Cui stabbed Li in the neck and Li was dead in hospital. Cui was later caught and sentenced to death penalty, and the Beijing Municipal Government bestowed Li with the title of "revolutionary martyr." This incident generated heated debates

context of China's entry into WTO in 2001. *The Assembly* 集结号 (2007) provides a reference framework for the deserted objects in the Maoist films. Also, Ang Lee's *Lust Caution* 色戒 (2007) discusses the possibility of an alternative femininity. Although martyrdom appears to be an obsolete word in the economy-oriented 21st century China free of large-scale wars, it is necessary for necropolitics to manipulate martyrdom to sustain and adjust the current value system. After all, everyone in the modern society is a *homo sacer*. As Agamben argues, the sovereign state is permitted to kill anyone without acknowledging a homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice.³¹⁶ In this way, we are all negligible sacrificial animals on the altar of a "just cause."

on the internet as whether or not Li deserved the honor of "martyr." Many netizens claimed that Li was the 21st century bandit in the government uniform to rob and oppress the small peddlers.

Yang Jia's incident similarly reflects the underprivileged people's discontent towards the government officers. Yang claimed that a police officer did not follow the correct procedure to inspect his bicycle, and he filed complaints several times but in vain. Yang decided to take revenge. On July 1st 2008, Yang brought homemade bombs to the police station and killed six police officers. He was sentenced to death penalty. Many netizens sympathized with Yang Jia and called him martyr on the internet. The documentary film *When the Night Falls* (我还有话要说, 2012, dir. Ying Liang), based on Yang Jia's incident and sentence, won the Best Director Award in Festival del film Locarno.

³¹⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.55.

Bibliography

- Adkins, Brent. *Death and Desire in Hegel, Heidegger and Deleuze*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. New York: Verso, 1992.
- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983.
- Anderson, Marston. *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Andrew, Dudley. *The Major Film Theories*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2009.
- Balakrishnan, Gopal ed. *Mapping the Nation*. New York: Verso, 1996.
- Balibar, Etienne. "Citizen Subject," in Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy, eds. *Who Comes After the Subject?*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Barlow, Tani ed. *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*. Durham: Duke UP 1994.
- Barlow, Tani. *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1957.
- Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share, Vols. 1. 2 and 3*. Zone Books, 1993.
- Berry, Chris and Mary Ann Farquhar. *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*. New York: Columbia UP, 2006.
- Bhabha, Homi ed. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1991.
- Braester, Yomi. "The Political Campaign as Genre: Ideology and Iconography during the Seventeen Years Period." *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, 1 (March 2008): 119-40.
- Braester, Yomi. *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010.

- Braester, Yomi. *Witness against History: Literature, Film and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.
- Browne, Nick. "Orientalism as an Ideological Form", *Wide Angle*, v11, n4, Oct 1989, 23-31.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.
- Chang, Eileen. "Lust, Caution," from *Lust, Caution: The Story, the Screenplay, and the Making of the Film*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2007.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema*. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.
- Chen, Huangmei, ed. *Dangdai zhongguo dianying* 当代中国电影 (Contemporary Chinese Film). 2 Vol. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989.
- Chen, Lie. *Zhongguo jitian wenhua* 中国祭天文化 (The Chinese Sacrificial Culture). Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2000.
- Chen, Mengjia, *yinxu boci zhongshu* 殷墟 荀辞 综述. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981
- Chen, Mo. *Shaonian yinxiong wang erxiao* 少年英雄王二小 (*Wang Erxiao: The Young Hero*) Jinan: Jinan chubanshe, 2014.
- Chen, Shunxing. *Shehui zhuyi xianshi zhuyi lilun zai zhongguo de jieshou yu zhuanhua* 社会主义现实主义在中国的接受与转换 (The Reception and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China). Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.
- Chen, Sihe. *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue guanjianci shijiang* 中国当代文学关键词十讲 (Ten Lectures on the Crucial Terms of Contemporary Chinese Literature) Shanghai: Fudan UP, 2002.
- Chen, Sihe. *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi* 中国当代文学史 (The History of Contemporary Chinese Literature). Shanghai: Fudan UP, 1999.
- Chen, Xiaomei. *Acting the Right Part: Political Theatre and Popular Drama*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.
- Chen, Xiaomei. *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.
- Chow, Rey. *Ethics after Idealism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.
- Chow, Rey. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.

- Chung, Tan (ed). *Dunhuang Art: Through the Eyes of Duan Wenjie*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1994
- Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.
- Clark, Paul. *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Clark, Paul. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*. Boston: MIT Press, 1992.
- Cui, Shuqin. *Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.
- Dai Jiafang. *Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu* 样板戏的风风雨雨. Beijing: Zhonghua gongshang lianhe, 1994.
- Dai, Degang. “Xinshiqi dalu dianying zhong de waiguoren xingxiang” 新时期大陆电影中的外国人形象 (The Representation of Foreign Figures in Chinese Films during the New Period), *Beijing Dianying xueyuan xuebao* (Beijing Film Journal), no.2, 2001.
- Dai, Jiafang. *Wenge wenhua buzhang Yu Huiyong chenfulu* “文革”文化部长于会泳沉浮录 (The Rise and Fall of Yu Huiyong, Minister of Culture in the Cultural Revolution) . Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1994.
- Dai, Jinhua. *Wuzhong fenjing* 雾中风景 (Scenes in the Fog: Chinese Film Culture 1978-1998). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2006.
- Denton, Kirk. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Ding, Fubao (ed). *The Dictionary of Shuowen Jiezi*,. Kuming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2006
- Dirlik, Arif. “Marxism and Chinese History: The Globalization of Marxist Historical Discourse and the Problem of Hegemony in Marxism” *Journal of Third World Studies* 4:1 (1987)
- Dirlik, Arif. *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005.
- Donald, Harriet and Stephanie Evans, eds. *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999.
- Dowling, William.C. *Jameson, Althusser, Marx*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984.
- Duara, Prasenjit. *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Duncan, Nancy (ed). *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Ermolaev, Herman. *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism*. New York: Octagon Books, 1977.

Esherick, Joseph W., Paul Pickowicz and Andrew Walder, eds. *The Chinese Revolution as History*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006.

Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power", "Panopticism", "Governmentality," "The Birth of Biopolitics" in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Essential Foucault*. New York: The New Press, 2003.

Ge, Zhaoguang. *Zhongguo Sixiang Shi* 中国思想史 (Chinese Intellectual History), 2 Vol. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2000.

Gemin Yangbanxi juban huibian 革命样板戏剧本汇编 (Compilation of the Revolutionary Model Play Scripts) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1974).

Girard, Rene. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1972.

Haiyan, Lee. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007.

Hall, Stuart and Paul du Gay, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Press, 1996.

Hansen, Miriam Bratu. "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism", *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), 59-77.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000

Hartley, George. *The Abyss of Representation: Marxism and Postmodern Sublime*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.

Hong, Jun. "Duochong shiye xia de Baiqiuen" 多重视野中的白求恩 (Bethune from Multiple Perspectives), in *Wenyi lilun yu piping* 文艺理论与批评 (Literature Theory and Criticism) Vol 06, 2003.

Hong, Zichen ed. *Dangdai wenxue guanjian ci* 当代文学关键词 (Crucial Terms in Contemporary Literature). Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe. 2001.

Hsia, C.T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999(3rd Edition)

- Hsu, Kai-Yu ed. *Literature of the People's Republic of China*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.
- Hu, Jubin. *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.
- Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.(original 1898)
- Hung, Chang-tai. *Mao's New World: Political Culture in the Early People's Republic*, Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2011
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.
- Karl, Rebecca. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.
- Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. New York: Basic Books, 1969.
- Kraus, Richard Curt. "The Rise and Fall of Yu Hui-Yong," in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, eds. A.Joseph, Chistine P.W.Wong and David Zweig. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Kristeva, Judith. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- Lahusen, Thomas and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds. *Socialist Realism without Shores*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
- Larson, Wendy. *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008.
- Laughlin, Charles, ed. *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005.
- Lean, Eugenia. *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Lee, Ching Kwan and Guobin Yang. *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007.
- Lee, Haiyan. "The Charisma of Power and the Military Sublime in Tiananmen Square." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 70, Issue 2 May 2011. pp. 397-424.
- Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007.
- Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *The Romantic Generation of Chinese Writers*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1973.
- Levenson, Joseph R. *Confucian China and its Modern Fate: The Problem of Intellectual Continuity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958.
- Lewis, Greg. "New China's Forgotten Cinema, 1949-1966: More Than Just Politics." *Education*

about Asia (Fall 2004): 57-64.

Lewis, Greg. "The History, Myth, and Memory of Maoist Chinese Cinema, 1949-1976." *Asian Cinema* 16, 1 (Spring/Summer 2005): 162-83

Li, Daoxin. *Zhongguo dianying piping shi* 中国电影批评史 (1897-2000) (History of Chinese Film Criticism). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2007.

Li, Daoxin. *Zhongguo dianying wenhua shi (1905-2004)* 中国电影文化史 (History of Chinese Film Culture). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005.

Li, Suyuan and Hu Ke eds. *Xinzhongguo dianying 50 nian* 新中国电影 50 年 (Fifty Years of Chinese Film since 1949). Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2000.

Li, Yang. *Kangzheng suming zhilu*. 抗争宿命之路 (Fighting the Destiny: Investigating Socialist Realism 1942-1976). Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 1993.

Link, Perry. *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000.

Liu, Kang. *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Liu, Lydia. H. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937*. Stanford, Stanford UP, 1995.

Liu, Xin. *The Otherness of Self: A Genealogy of the Self in Contemporary China*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Lu, Sheldon. *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007

Lukács, György. *The Theory of the Novel*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971.

Luo, Yijun, ed. *Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan*. 中国电影理论文选 (Chinese Film Theory: An Anthology). 2 Vol. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1992.

Mao, Zedong. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1969.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1998.

Marx, Karl. *Capital* Vol.I. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

Mauss, Marcel. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. New York: Norton Company, 2000.

Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics" trans. Libby Meintjes. In *Public Culture* 15 (1):11-40, 2003.

- McGrath, Jason. *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008.
- Meisner, Maurice. *Mao's China and After*. New York: The Free Press, 1986.
- Meng, Liye. *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishu shigao, 1949-1959* 新中国电影艺术史稿 (History of New China's Film Art, 1949-1959). Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2002.
- Morris, Pam. *Realism*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Mosse, George. *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 833-845.
- Nagata, Keisike 永田圭介. *Qiu jin: jinxiong nvxia* 秋瑾: 竞雄女侠 (Qiu jin: The Female Warrior). Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 2007.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Inoperative Community*. Minnesota: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Pang, Laikwan. *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.
- Plaks, Andrew. *Chinese Narrative*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.
- Qi, Xiaoping. *Xianghua ducao: Hongse niandai de dianying mingyun* 香花毒草: 红色年代的电影命运 (Fragrant Flowers and Poisonous Weeds: The Destiny of Films in the Red Years). Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2006.
- Qiu, Jin. *Qiu jin ji*. 秋瑾集 (Selected Works of Qiu Jin) Hong Kong: Chang feng tu shu gong si, 1974.
- Qu, Jiannong. *Hong se wang shi 1966-1976 nian de Zhongguo dian ying* 红色往事: 1966—1976 年的中国电影 (Red Past: Chinese Film in 1966-1976). Beijing, Taihai chubanshe, 2001.
- Rafael, Vicente. *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.
- Redfield, Marc. "Imagi-Nation: The Imagined Community and the Aesthetics of Mourning." *Diacritics*. Volume 29, Number 4, winter 1999. 58-83
- Ricoeur Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Ricoeur Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Roberts, Rosemary. "Positive Women Characters in the Revolutionary Model Works of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: An Argument against the Theory of Erasure of Gender and Sexuality", in *Asian Studies Review*, Dec 2004, Vol.28, pp.407-422.

- Robin, Regine. *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992.
- Rosen, Michael. *On Voluntary Servitude: False Consciousness and the Theory of Ideology*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Sade, Robert M. M.D. "Brain Death, Cardiac Death, and the Dead Donor Rule," in *J S C Med Assoc*. 2011 Aug; 107(4)
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, London: Routledge, 1994.
- Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Towards a Third Cinema," in Michael Martin ed., *New Latin American Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974.
- Sun, Yu. *Yinhai Fanzhou* 银海泛舟 (Sailing in the Sea of Cinema). Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe.
- Tang, Xiaobing. *Chinese Modern*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000.
- Tertz, Abram. *On Socialist Realism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960.
- The Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge. Changsha, Hunan chubanshe, 1992.
- Wang, Ban. *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.
- Wang, Li. *Guhanyu zidian* 古漢語字典 (*Dictionary of Classical Chinese*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000.
- Wang, Zhuoyi. *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014.
- Weida de guojizhuyi zhanshi baiqiuen* 伟大的国际主义战士白求恩 (The Great International Fighter Dr. Bethune). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1979.
- Wen, Qiao, "Suzao gongnongbing yingxiong renwu shi shehuizhuyi wenyi de genben renwu" 塑造工农兵英雄人物是社会主义文艺的根本任务 (To Build the Heroic Characters of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers is the Fundamental Task of Socialist Literature and Art), in *Shanxi ribao* 山西日报 (Shanxi Daily) July 12, 1974.
- Wu, Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao (1949-1979)* 中国电影研究资料 (Research Documents of Chinese Film). 3 Vol. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006.

Wu, Jianren, *Henhai* 恨海 (The Sea of Regret), trans. Patrick Hanan. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-Hui. *Spaces Of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Yang, Wen and Pei Xiaomin eds. *Bei lishi yiwang de lishi* 被历史遗忘的历史 (The history that is neglected by History). Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 2008.

Ying, Hong and Ling Yan. *Xin Zhongguo dianying shi, 1949-2000* 新中国电影史 1949-2000 (A History of Film in the PRC, 1949-2000). Changsha: Hunan meichu chubanshe, 2002.

Yu, Yingshi. *Shi yu zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Scholars and Chinese Culture). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987.

Zhang, Junxiang and Zhao Tuo, *Baiqiuen dafu* 白求恩大夫 (电影剧本) *Dr. Bethune (A Film Script)*. Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1978.

Zhang, Junxiang, *Zhang Junxiang Dianying Juben Xuanji* 张骏祥电影剧本选集 (Selected Film Scripts of Zhang Junxiang). Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985.

Zhang, Yingjin. *Chinese National Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Zhang, Zhen, ed. *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007.

Zhou, Erfu, *Baiqiuen Daifu* 白求恩大夫 (Dr. Bethune) .Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1964.

Zhou, Erfu. *Nuoerman Baiqiuen Duanpian* 诺尔曼白求恩断片 (Fragment on Norman Bethune). Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1949.

Zhou, Yang. *Zhouyang wenji* 周扬文集 (Selected Works of Zhou Yang). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984.

Zhu, Zhai. *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue sichao shi* 中国当代文学思潮史 (A History of Contemporary Chinese Literary Thought). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1987.

Žižek, Slavoj. "On the One," in *For They Know Not What They Do*. New York: Verso, 1991

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Boston: The MIT Press, 2003.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso, 1989.

VITA

Yizhong Gu is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media in the University of Washington. He has published essay in *Words and their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), and translational work in *positions: east asia cultures critique*.