HOW FAR CAN WE GO:

POPULAR FILM AND TV DRAMA IN POST-1989 CHINA

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation addresses two major issues in Chinese contemporary film and TV studies: the first is the proliferations of new forms of subjectivities and the state's attempt to regulate them via the construction of an ideal citizenship on the film and TV screen; the second is to develop an approach to understand the political economy of screen culture (*yingshi wenhua*), as well as freedom and control in post-1989 China. My project investigates key contemporary state-sponsored (*zhuxuanlü*) and state-criticized/banned screen products as a way to explore socialist values advanced by the Chinese Communist Party, as well as the ways in which and the extent to which individuals are able to challenge them.

The ways in which my project contributes to the fields of film and TV studies in China are fourfold. First, close readings of selected films and TV dramas inform us of three emergent forms of subjectivity that were previously theorized as a synthesized sublime subject. Second, I conceptualize qualities of the on-screen socialist spirit that the state uses to counteract the three new forms of subjectivity and maintain its superiority. Third, by discussing the state's intervention and control on production and consumption of screen products, I reveal the state's vested interests and individuals' execution of agency in popular culture. This emphasis on state-individual interactions challenges the

current focus on TV and film as merely a profit-oriented industry; it also unravels conflicted ideologies in screen products and questions the understanding of popular culture as mainstream culture. Fourth, by achieving the above tasks, my research exposes that the state's tolerance of its citizens' partial freedom is for the purpose of political stability.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chinese people in the People's Republic of China (thereafter PRC) seem to live in a freer and more relaxed atmosphere in which they have freedom to explore desire and consumption in an alleged "socialist market" characterized by privatization, consumerism, and marketization, as compared to the revolutionary era. Popular culture epitomizes such a site that allows "free" consumption and commercialization, as market force appears to be a dominant factor, among others, in producing cultural commodities. However, such a current understanding of the "socialist market" seems to be overemphasizing the role of the market and belittling "socialist" force, to the extent that we see discussions about whether or not China is achieving neo-liberal status.[1] To further complicate this understanding, my dissertation explores the state's socialist force in regulating feature film and TV drama as a window through which to better understand the ways in which marketized popular culture is a battlefield on which competing ideologies are at odds. Meanwhile, I also pay attention to cultural worker and audience responses in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the official forces, hoping that my research ultimately contributes to the understanding of state-individual interactions in contemporary China.

How does the Chinese "socialist" government participate in the realm of popular culture? It often intervenes in cultural industries. More specifically, it expresses official attitudes towards cultural products. Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, urged cultural industries to bolster China's cultural power, as he perceived that the overall strength of Chinese culture and its international influence had to catch up with

[1] For example, David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 151.

China's international status.[2] The state also sponsors a particular mode of productions called zhuxuanlü (主旋律, literally "main melody") to advocate state ideology and Party-patriotism, which I will discuss in detail in the following section. Moreover, the censorship system ensures popular culture's contents conform to historically specific state ideology, and to eliminate content that is undesirable to the state. For example, when the TV drama *Narrow Dwelling* came out and provoked controversial debates among audience members, senior officials of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television publicly criticized the TV drama's "bad" influence on society. In other words, the state has yet to offer true freedom to the market to develop wholesale cultural industries.

However, this, by no means implies that the state is omnipotent in fully controlling cultural products, nor does it mean that the state has successfully established a boundary that is impermeable, free of fissures through which officially undesirable elements might flow. The existence of state-criticized cultural products proves leakage or room for resistance within state power. I argue that Cultural workers are able to creatively negotiate this censored creative environment and produce cultural products that serve their own agendas. For example, film director Li Yang produced two versions of the ending of *Blind Mountain*; one pleased the state and won a screening permit, while the other revealed a serious social problem—human trafficking—that remains unsolved due to the impotence of the police.

[2] See Edward Wong, "China's President Lashes Out at Western Culture," *New York Times*, Jan 3, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/world/asia/chinas-president-pushes-back-against-western-culture.html (accessed Mar 23, 2012).

This dissertation investigates the tug-of-war between the state and individuals. Providing close readings of screen products (feature film and television drama), a significant part of popular culture, I endeavor to tease out complex interactions between the state and individuals. The key question that I pursue in my dissertation is "how far can we go"— in terms of the state's control, as well as individuals' agency and negotiations with state power. I do not believe that either side has complete control over the other, but I believe that the long-term on-going process between them is shaping our cultural realm. This project examines what the state promotes in zhuxuanlü film/TV drama and how effective it is; what censorship system prevents screen products from screening and how successful it is; and to what extent cultural workers' products and the audience's decoding of screen products are controllable by the state.

Specifically, I scrutinize representations of three subjectivities on the screen—the economic, the sexual, and the political—and the state's attempts to regulate them in order to develop an approach by which to understand the political economy of popular culture as well as freedom and control in post-1989 China. By investigating state-sponsored and state-criticized films and TV dramas that depict the three subjectivities, my project aims to understand what socialist values an exemplary Chinese subject should embody and what form of subjectivity the state disallows on the screen. It also explores the ways in which and the extent to which cultural workers simultaneously negotiate with the state's cultural policies, pursue productions that express their concerns over current forms of subjectivity, and meet the market's needs.

The ways in which my project contributes to the fields of film and TV studies in China are fourfold. First, close readings of selected films and TV dramas inform us of

three emergent forms of subjectivity that were previously theorized as a synthesized sublime subject. Secondly, I conceptualize qualities of the on-screen socialist spirit that the state uses to counteract the three new forms of subjectivity and maintain its superiority. Thirdly, by discussing the state's intervention and control on production and consumption of screen products, I reveal the state's vested interests and individuals' execution of agency in popular culture. This emphasis on state-individual interactions challenge the current focus on TV and film as merely a profiteering industry; it unravels conflicted ideologies in screen products and situates popular cultural products in various spectra. Fourth, by achieving the above tasks, my research exposes that the state's tolerance of its citizens' partial freedom is for the purpose of political stability.

Contesting the Chinese "Popular"

To begin with, I will introduce what "popular culture" refers to in this dissertation. I by no means intend to give a comprehensive and exhaustive definition of popular culture; instead, I introduce the definitions of popular culture that are useful in framing my project, and through developing an approach to investigate the political economy of popular culture on Mainland China, I hope to shed light on state-individuals relationships.

Popular culture is a rich yet elusive concept that encompasses various social and cultural practices. Different scholars define and delineate popular culture in different ways, and therefore, reach and reflect different understandings of contemporary China. Depending on scholars' preferences and inclusion of texts, the term can range from mass products for market, food, religions, sports, music, to culturally Chinese activities, and so on. In this section, I will introduce the reader to scholars' conceptualizations of popular culture and why I find that their definitions and/or analyses have left behind a void to be

filled. Then I introduce two working definitions of popular culture that inform my formulation of Chinese popular culture and define the scope of my project. I will also explain what popular texts I choose to support my project to fill the gap, why I select them, and how they will improve our knowledge of Chinese popular culture and contemporary China. Drawing a boundary around my project is necessary given the broad range of subjects the umbrella term "popular culture" is able to encompass. More importantly, my selection of popular cultural texts will allow me to reveal another layer of state-individuals interactions that existing research has yet to been explored thoroughly.

Current scholars' approaches to Chinese popular culture have taken several paths. Some scholars interpret popular culture as "unofficial culture;" for example, in their 1989 and 2002 edited volumes, Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul Pickowicz, attempt to probe popular culture that is "distinct" from official culture, which they define as the official ideology of the Chinese state.[3] This emphasis on the "unofficial culture" leads us to believe that some individuals' cultural practices are independent from state interference. Jing Wang has countered that this binary definition of official and unofficial reflects the Western fantasy about China and its people as a site of resistance.[4] While

[3] In their 1989 edited volume, the original Chinese term of "unofficial" is *wu guanfang* 無官方 or *fei* 非正統 *zhengtong*, and the three editors define "popular culture" as any kind of culture, including any idea, belief, and practice, that "has its origin in the social side of the tension between state and society" and has "origins at least partially independent of the state." The topics discussed in the book are something that "the government has wanted to suppress or sought to discourage…, or pretended to ignore…, or warily tried to co-opt." See Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul Pickowicz, *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 5. In their 2002 edited volume, they once again belittle the state's role in the production of popular culture, and propose an emphasis on different aspects of globalization that they argue to have stronger centrality than the state in shaping tension in popular culture. This time, they analyze "a variety of relatively uncensored forms of expression and communication" such as *shunkouliu,* which Perry Link and Kate Zhou claim contain popular thought and sentiment. Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul Pickowicz. *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002) 1, 3.

[4] Jing Wang, "Guest Editor's Introduction," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9, no. 1 (2001):3.

Link, Madsen, and Pickowicz strive to search for a potential utopic space where people's ideology is unofficial and distinguishably free from that of the official, I am more interested in investigating cultural forms that actively confront or engage in dialogues with the state ideology and illustrating how the state appropriates and absorbs forms of "unofficial" culture as long as it attracts wide attention across the country.

Some other scholars who share my vision of researching popular culture as a site of ideological struggle have brought up popular culture's commercialization and the state's role in shaping popular culture. When discussing media reform in China, James Lull reminds us of the shadow of censorship cast on popular culture.[5] Concentrating on fundamental tensions in Chinese popular culture, where he sees both global consumerism and commercialization and revolutionary culture of the masses fill the field,[6] Liu Kang neglects the multi-layered power dynamics in revolutionary culture of the "masses," although he is aware of the government's presence in popular culture. Sheldon Lu maintains that popular culture, in undergoing commercialization and undermining the hegemony of the state and intellectual elitism, is subject to the appropriation of state ideology.[7] Kevin Latham negates the definition of popular culture as existing in a realm of society as opposed to the state, and illuminates the fact that "popular culture does not exist outside of or in contrast to the state but very often in a constant and evolving dialogue with it."[8] While both Latham and Lu's accounts contribute to our understanding

[5] James Lull, *China Turned on: Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1991), 127-153.

[6] Liu Kang, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 80-1.

[7] Sheldon H. Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001), 211-2.

of popular culture in China, they lack detailed close readings of popular texts and nuanced readings of the state and the popular.[9]

The two working definitions that help to define my pool of texts are those of Thomas Gold and Mukerji and Schudson. Gold uses "popular culture" to refer to "cultural products produced for the mass market, which reflect market-determined popular taste and are for enjoyment. This is in contrast to more elite or high culture which has a much narrower appeal and poses more of an intellectual challenge to the consumer. It is also in contrast to politically contrived directed culture."[10] While I believe that the "popular" should contain a sense of popularity, I agree only with the first half of Gold's definition, that popular culture bears popular tastes and enjoyment. I disagree with his second half,which is akin to the ideas of Link, Madsen, and Pickcowiz and assumes a set of cultural practices that are independent from the state. Although such an assumption celebrates culture that belongs entirely to the people, it ignores the state's presence and control over what people are allowed to do. More importantly, it assumes a dichotomy between the state and people, neglecting the state's flexibility in co-opting or even encouraging people's popular tastes in order to serve political purposes. To supplement

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[8] Kevin Latham, *Pop Culture China!: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2007), 32.

[9] I agree with Latham's conceptualization of popular culture. Yet, his approach is a brief historical outline of different forms of popular culture. He does not perform elaborated close readings to illustrate how the content of popular culture interacts with the state. His work is an "introductory overview," as he puts it, or good for leisure reading, as stated on the back page of the book. See Latham, 32, and back page. Lu's account is useful in seeing how various kinds of revolutionary culture underwent commercialization and became popular culture that simultaneously challenges dominant state ideology and elitism and is subject to appropriation of the state ideology. However, he does not explain what good qualities the state uses to establish its reputation and moral superiority during the process of domesticating cultural forms, nor does he evaluate the different levels of the state's appropriation. Moreover, he ignores the presence of a censorship system that renders state manipulation more direct.

[10] Thomas Gold, "Go with Your Feelings: Hong Kong and Taiwan Popular Culture in Greater China," *The China Quarterly* 193 (1993): 908, footnote 2.

this shortcoming, I employ Mukerji and Schudson's definition to delineate popular culture in the People's Republic of China, for they take into account both the state and commerce's roles in theorizing popular culture. These two factors are particularly pertinent to the PRC context, in which the state remains (in)visibly active such that we should not lose sight of it if we are to construct a fuller picture of Chinese popular culture. Mukeriji and Schudson refer to popular culture as "the beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organized, that are widely shared among a population. This includes folk beliefs, practices, and objects rooted in local traditions, and mass beliefs, practices and objects generated in political and commercial centers."[11] Their explanation helps us to understand the state's role in creating, co-opting, and encouraging the popular culture that its citizens consume. It also emphasizes how popular culture generates profit for the national economy and displays China's soft power, or cultural influence.

Among the cultural products produced for the mass market, I select TV and film as examples to illustrate the political economy of Chinese popular culture, which manifests competing discourses among the state, cultural workers, and the viewer. These two forms of media are the most *visible* as China emerges as a global power, and they also share similar creative environments that allow us to examine state-individual interactions.

Looking at the Political Economy of Film & TV to Understand Post-1989 China

Existing literature on Chinese film and TV studies revolves prominently around the nation and/or the national/transnational, trivializing the state as an active governing entity

[11] Chandra Mukerji, and Michael Schudson, *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

that plays an important role in film and TV culture.[12] This also applies to the emergent trend of looking at both industries under the umbrella term of "screen culture/industry."[13] It suggests a lack of attention to the state, as we have seen so much scholarship on the

[12] Compared to Chinese TV studies, Chinese film studies is a relatively well-researched area. For example, monographs that use a national/transnational approach include Zhang Yingjin, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Chinese Studies, 2002); and *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Chris Berry, and Mary Ann Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Gary Xu , *Sinascape: Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Song-hwee Lim, discussing Chinese homosexual films, also maps his book's contribution to Chineseness and Chinese cinema (s), see *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006). Sheldon Lu's recent book, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, uses film and TV, among other media, to explore modernity, biopolitics, and cityscape. See *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007). Although my focus is PRC China, I also see concerns over the nation in Taiwan cinema. For instance, see Gou-Juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Edited volumes on Chinese cinema, covering issues of gender, historiography, identity, diaspora, environmental issues, Chinese languages, (post) modernity, and (post)socialism are also compiled under an over-arching theme—Chineseness or national/transnational Chinese. Some examples are Sheldon Lu, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); See-Tan Kam, Peter X. Feng, and Gina Marchetti, ed., *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity and Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Sheldon H Lu, and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, ed., *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Sheldon H., Lu, and Jiayan Mi, ed., *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Olivia Khoo, and Sean Metzger, ed., *Futures of Chinese Cinema: Technologies and Temporalities in Chinese Screen Cultures* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2009); Song Hwee Lim, and Julian Ward, ed., *The Chinese Cinema Book* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Chinese TV, compared to Chinese film, is an emergent field; yet, there are promising book-length efforts that have introduced *Chinese* TV drama and TV industry to English-speaking academia. Some academics are aware of politics in TV drama or in the industry as a whole, but they do not provide detailed analysis, which is long overdue. Some of these attempts include James Lull, *China Turned on: Television, Reform, and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1991); Michael Curtain, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai, ed. *TV Drama in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008); Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008); Ying Zhu, and Chris Berry, ed. *TV China* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). There are also many sporadic articles on the development of the TV industry, production, content, and reception of TV programs. For a more detailed record of scholarship on Chinese TV studies, please refer to Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market* (London: Routledge, 2008), 13-7.

[13] There are recent books series that treat TV and film as compatible under the theoretical framework of "screen culture" or "screen industries." They, however, not only neglects the state's role, but also overlook the politics of the two media forms' common production environment. See the TransAsia Screen Cultures Series by the Hong Kong University Press (for example, and the International Screen Industries Series by the British Film Institute.

nation, the national/transnational. While writing about Chinese cultural texts, I refocus on the state's role in producing these texts. Despite the fact that the national/transnational approach is productive to area, film, and TV studies, the focus on the national/transnational limits the methodological and conceptual tools available to analyze post-1989 China's social conditions alongside hectic economic development. The CCP government has been enchanted with the pedagogical function of film and TV, two forms of media that have the potential to reach a mass audience. Although film and TV productions are now profiteering industries under nation-wide commercialization and marketization, to ignore the political aspect of these two industries does not do justice to their complex political and commercial operation mechanisms.

A few works have departed from the dominant national/transnational approach. A particular concern has been the amount of "freedom" that TV programs enjoy and the level of public participation in these programs. These issues are of interest due to the fact that TV production is historically and currently conceived as situated somewhere between propaganda and commercialization, even though the Chinese government continues to deepen its economic reform. In TV studies, Miao Di situates TV drama between propaganda and commercials; Chris Berry discusses the possibility of the documentary TV channel as a public space; Yin Hong reviewes the significance of ideology in TV drama; Bai Ruoyun emphasizes the Party-state's proactive participation in media restructuring and commercialization.[14] As for film, several chapters of Ying Zhu

[14] Miao Di, "Between Propaganda and Commercials: Chinese television today," in *Changing media, changing China*, ed. Susan Shirk, 91-114 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Chris Berry, "Shanghai Television's Documentary Channel: Chinese television as Public space," in *TV China*, ed. Ying Zhu and Chris Berry, 71-89 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). Yin Hong, "Meaning, Production, Consumption: The History and Reality of Television Drama in China," trans. Michael Keane and Bai Jiannu, in *Media in China: Consumption, Content and Crisis*, ed. Stephanie Donald, Michael Keane and Yin Hong, 28-40 (London; New York: Routledge, 2002). Bai Ruoyun, "Media

and Stanley Rosen's edited volume called our attention back to film's interwoven relationship with the Party and institutional supervision by the state.[15] Rui Zhang's monograph uses the cinema of Feng Xiaogang as an example to illustrate the ways in which directors navigate and negotiate censorship to produce social commentary in profit-oriented maneuvers. I appreciate their efforts in surveying the political aspect of screen products. However, I believe that a more detailed close reading is needed to explore cultural workers and their works that please the state and also, consciously or not, displease the Party, if we are to understand state-individual interactions. A systematic study on the ways in which the state participates in film and TV production policy will shed light on the complexity of the concept "popular" and will provide an angle from which we can investigate state-individual power dynamics. Zhong Xueping argues that "the emergence of and rapid growth in the production of television drama can be seen as having functioned as a cultural site where contemporary social-economic issues are addressed and different cultural legacies and ideological views transmitted and contested."[16] I agree with her viewpoint that TV dramas implicate the state, the market, Chinese intellectuals, and different social groups, and believe that analysis of identified zhuxuanlü productions and state criticized/banned material will provide a more salient illustration of state-individual interactions. Therefore, I propose to examine how the state controls artistic expressions while simultaneously opening up space for competing

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Commercialization, Entertainment, and the Party-state: The Political Economy of Contemporary Chinese Television Entertainment Culture," *Global Media Journal* 4, no. 6 (2005): article no. 12.

[15] See Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen eds., *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

[16] Zhong Xueping, *Mainstream Culture Refocused: Television Drama, Society, and the Production of Meaning in Reform-Era China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 12.

ideologies by sponsoring zhuxuanlü production and sustaining cultural policy, i.e. censorship, that restricts screen production. I will briefly review the June Fourth tragedy, which arguably intensified the state's control on cultural products since the 1990s, before I introduce zhuxuanlü productions, censorship, and the socialist spirit.

The June Fourth Event and the Spiritual Turn

Twenty years after the 1989 events in the Tiananmen Square, it remains taboo to discuss the June Fourth Tragedy in any mass media within China. The CCP has not confirmed an official evaluation yet, but the tragedy has been regarded a threat to the regime because it stands as an example of the rupture of the CCP's ability to represent the desires of the people. Although the mass movement was suppressed, the CCP has been trying to prevent the occurrence of similar mass organized by citizens who have nonconformist political views or who hold a critical stance on the state ideology or the reigning regime. To avoid the rise of dissenting political subjectivity, the CCP cultivates party loyalty by pushing a socialist spirit in film, TV, and other media. I will review exactly what angered the Party leaders at that time of the Tiananmen Incident and what triggered the tragedy, which, in turn, pushed the promotion of Party patriotism as the core of the socialist spirit.

On April 15, 1989, students gathered in Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of the purged reformist Party General Secretary, Hu Yaobang. The mourning of their heroic reformist leader turned into a student rally, where students simultaneously vented their discontent regarding corruption and demanded democratic reform. Students were joined by workers and Beijing citizens who voiced concerns about inflation and social injustice. The mourning was turned into a social movement that requested changes to the status quo, and it spread to cities all over the country. Protesters requested dialogue with the

government. The CCP had divergent views on the movement, which were apparent in the ideological split between the conservative camp including Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng, and the reformist group represented by Zhao Ziyang. Zhao proposed proclaiming that protestors were patriotic, and believed that communication with students would achieve a peaceful end to the events in Tiananmen Square. Zhao was put under house arrest until his death in 2005 for his dissenting standpoint. Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping regarded the act of protest as "anti-Party" and "anti-socialism." On April 26, 1989, the editorial in *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), the CCP's mouthpiece, defined the movement as intentional political "turmoil" that threatened the regime, triggering further demonstrations and provoked hunger strikes, which started on May 13.

Tiananmen Square was occupied by tens of thousands of local students, ordinary citizens, and demonstrators from all over China. The occupation of the Square prevented important political activities, such as the welcoming of Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Representatives of international media, who arrived in Beijing to cover the meeting between leaders of the two communist nations, focused on the demonstration instead. The CCP considered this shift of focus hugely injurious to China's international reputation, and launched a curfew in Beijing on May 20th.[17] To eliminate any political threat from protesters, the CCP ordered a military crackdown at the dawn of June Fourth, which resulted in an unspecified numbers of casualties. After more than twenty years, the CCP still refuses to reveal any information, and continues trying to silence voices decrying the event.

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[17] Zhang Wanshu, *Lishi de da baozha: "Liusi" shijian quanjing shilu* 歷史的大爆炸:「六四」事件全景實錄[The great explosion of history: the panoramic record of the "June Fourth Event"], (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxan gongsi, 2009), 232.

Zhuxuanlü, Censorship, and the Socialist Spirit

As I have been referring to the Chinese term "zhuxuanlü," it is necessary for me to clarify its theoretical conceptions. A brief account of the state's cultural policies of zhuxuanlü and censorship and the making of the socialist spirit will equip readers with the understanding of the socio-political environment within which the creative film and TV industries are situated, and will familiarize them with the background and qualities of the socialist spirit. Although marketization and privatization of mass media industry has been a visible trend in the PRC, the state maintains an active presence in cultural products, especially those designed to reach a mass audience. Believing in the ideological function of film and TV drama, the state has been keeping an eye on mass representation, through administrative organs and sponsorship of productions that convey hegemonic ideology on the screen. The need for administrative control results in a censorship system that assigns the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (thereafter SARFT) to serve as the major organ of screening and monitoring TV and film products, while the need for propagation of ideology results in the production of zhuxuanlü film and TV drama. zhuxuanlü products promote discourse on state-approved spiritual and behavioral qualities that an ideal Chinese subject should possess, which I call the socialist spirit.

Zhuxuanlü film and TV refers to a specific mode of production which results in a series of cultural maneuvers that fulfill the Party leaders' call for certain propagandistic functions.[18] The term zhuxuanlü, literally "main melody" or leitmotif, is borrowed from a

[18] In my dissertation, I will focus on screen culture, leaving a more distinctive genre—literary production—behind. For current scholarship on zhuxuanlü novels, see for example, Liu Fusheng, *Lishi de fuqiao: shiji zhi jiao "zhuxuanlü" xiaoshuo yanjiu* [歷史的浮橋：世紀之交 "主旅律" 小說研究 Pontoon bridge of history: A research on "zhuxuanlü" fiction at the turn of the century] (Kaifeng Shi: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2005); and Xie Jinsheng, *Zhuanxing qi zhuxuanlü xiaoshuo yanjiu: yi xiandaihua wei shijiao* [轉型期主旋律小說研究 A research on zhuxuanlü fiction in the transformation era] (Ha'erbin Shi: Heilongjiang renmin

musical term originating from the German word "leitmotiv," meaning a recurring theme associated with a particular person, place, or idea. In the Chinese context, it was first introduced in the movie industry at a national conference held by officials of the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television and film studio heads in 1987.[19] It first referred to films that could "invigorate national spirit and national pride and encourage Chinese people to construct the 'Four Modernizations," that demonstrated a "spirit of creation," and that had high quality and contained "positive and healthy content."[20] To support this mode of production, the CCP central committee approved the establishment of a special committee supervising the production of films and television dramas based on major revolutionary historical events.[21] After the 1989 Tian'anmen Event, zhuxuanlü production was launched on a large scale.[22] In 1993, Jiang Zemin, then President of the PRC, defined zhxuanlü's functions as advocating four ideologies and spirits (思想與精

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chubanshe, 2005).

[19] Wu Suling 吳素玲, *Zhongguo dianshiju fazhan shigang* 中國電視劇發展史綱 (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe 北京廣播學院出版社, 1997), 274.

[20] Liu Cheng, "Dui 1989 nian gushipian chuangzuo de huigu" 對 1989 年故事片創作的回顧[Review of production of feature films of 1989], *Zhongguo dianying nianjian* 1990 中國電影年鑑[China film year book], 18-24. quoted in Rui Zhang, *The Cinema of Feng Xiaogang* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 35.

[21] Zhang Yingjin, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 240.

[22] Zhang Yingjin suggested three reasons for the rise of zhuxuanlü film in the 1990s: first, quoting Chris Berry, he points out the state re-educates the population and instills the spirit of nationalism via zhuxuanlü film; second, to celebrate the anniversary of the PRC, some zhuxuanlü productions are also called *xianli pian*(獻禮片); third, studios and individual directors participated in the production to accumulate political capital. See Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 285. After the tragic1989 summer, zhuxuanlü production emerged along with another cultural trend—the commercialization and professionalization of cultural productions, creating a tension-fraught atmosphere in Chinese cultural scenes of the 1990s. See Zha Jianying, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers Are Transforming a Culture* (New York: New Press, 1995), 4.

神), putting patriotism in front of collectivism and socialism.[23] During the 1990s, zhuxuanlü film's ideological pressure intensified, and productions that endorsed state policy and supported Party propaganda burgeoned. Many of these productions portrayed revolutionary history with significant subjects (重大革命歷史題材), including grand history of Chinese revolution and Party leadership.[24] Entering the 2000s, on-screen subject matters became both more diverse and more mundane, to the extent that zhuxuanlü productions appeared more as a mere entertainment. This is the phenomenon that encouraged scholars to focus on TV and film as a profitable industry, as mentioned above. Therefore, if defined in simple terms, zhuxuanlü might be considered "positive depictions of lives or stories of China and Chinese people."[25] SARFT also adapted the concept of zhuxuanlü to distinguish TV programs that promote state ideology from popular (*tongsu* 通俗) TV dramas that were considered more standardized, entertaining, and commercialized.[26]

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[23] The four ideologies and spirits (*sixiang yu jingshen*) are: 1) ideologies and spirits of patriotism, collectivism, and socialism; 2) ideologies and spirits of Reforms and Openings, and modernizations; 3) ideologies and spirits of ethnic unity, social progress, the people's happiness; 4) ideologies and spirits of obtaining a good life with honesty and human labor. "倡導一切有利於發提愛國主義, 集體主義, 社會主義的思想和精神, 大力倡導一切有利於改革開放和現代化建設的思想和精神, 大力倡導一切有利於民族團結, 社會進步, 人民幸福的思想和精神, 大力倡導一切用誠實勞動爭取美好生活的思想和精神." See Wu Suling, *Zhongguo dianshiju fazhan shigang* 中國電視劇發展史綱[The Historical Outline of Television Drama in China] (Beijing Shi: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 1997), 215.

[24] Rui Zhang, *The Cinema of Feng Xiaogang: Commercialization and Censorship in Chinese Cinema After 1989* (Aberdeen, Hong Kong: Hong Kong university press, 2008), 36.

[25] Rui Zhang, *The Cinema of Feng Xiaogang*, 9.

[26] Bai Xiaoyi 白小易, *Xin yujing zhong de Zhongguo dianshiju chuangzuo* 新語境中的中國電視劇創作 [The Creation of Chinese TV Series in the New Context] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe 中國電視出版社, 2007),154-6

There are arguably three angles from which to identify a zhuxuanlü production, namely from its production input, dominant themes/ideology, and screening/distribution/state approval; each of these aspects manifests in different forms. The state's production support includes financial sponsorship or production conveniences, and sometimes the state's organ directly participates in production. *Pingjin zhanyi* (Pingjin Battle, 1992) is an example of a film with heavy state investment, depicting the historically significant moment at which the Party defeated the Kuomintang.[27] As I mentioned above, thematic issues include significant historical moments for the CCP or biographical portrait of Party leaders. However, the purpose of embodying or propagating "politically correct" ideology are more important, as this mode of film production aims first at patriotism, then collectivism and socialism, as Jiang Zemin commanded. Therefore the Party strictly oversees *how* Party history and leaders are reconstructed. *Pingjin Battle* also exemplifies how filmic narratives reconstruct moments in CCP history. Many TV dramas depict Party leaders or historically significant moments. One key example is *Kaiguo lingxiu Mao Zedong* (開國領袖毛澤東, Mao Zedong, the founding leader, 1999).

Lastly, zhuxuanlü productions receive the state's support in distribution and exhibition, and are frequent recipients of national awards. In this way, the state is able to assure that zhuxuanlü products reach a large audience and domesticate filmmakers, encouraging them to join the team. To aid film distribution or exhibition, the Chinese government issues documents to government-owned institutions, enterprises, work units, schools, and universities, providing members with tickets to zhuxuanlü films for the

[27] However, the state numerical investments are hard to trace, see Rui Zhang's explanation, 37.

purpose of political study or free entertainment, or organize audiences to go to theaters to watch these films.[28] The film *Ren Changxia*, depicting a selfless Party official, is one such example; universities organized staff and students to watch the film as an activity of political study. The screening of a zhuxuanlü TV drama to audience members is relatively easier to control, as the governing entities need only broadcast it during prime-time on Central China Television channels and disallow screening of non-zhuxuanlü productions during the same timeslot on satellite channels.[29] Such arrangements ensure that zhuxuanlü productions enjoy the most privileged screening time, creating a higher viewing rate. Both the film and TV industry's distinguished national awards are controlled by SARFT—the Huabiao Awards (華表獎) and the Feitian Awards (飛天獎) respectively, both of which are commonly known as government awards. zhuxuanlü productions may also receive Wu Ge Yi Gongcheng Awards (五個一工程獎), which are distributed by the CCP Propaganda Department. These awards bespeak the state's dedication to screen products that please the state ideology.[30]

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[28] Rui Zhang, *Cinema of Feng Xiaogang*, 38, and Wendy Su, "To Be or Not To Be?—China's Cultural Policy and Counterhegemony Strategy Toward Global Hollywood from 1994 to 2000," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 3, no. 1(2010): 46

[29] Zhang Lin and Xu Lin, "Qianxi woguo guangdian zongju dianshi jianguan xianzhuang" [淺析我國廣電總局電視監管現狀 A brief explanation of SARFT's current monitor over television], Qingnian jizhe, http://qnjz.dzwww.com/gdst/201203/t20120306_6966694.htm (accessed Mar 27, 2012).

[30] But since the state ideology keeps changing, whether or not a film wins the endorsement of the state is contingent and historically specific. For example, the TV drama *Qianshou* (牽手 Holding hands) won a Feitian Award in 1999 but was suspected not to be considered a zhuxuanlü product in mid-2000, as the state ideology values social harmony while the TV drama depicts an extra-marital affair. See Ji Xiuping, " Shichang jizhi xia de 'zhuxuanlü' zuoping" [zhuxuanlü works under the market mechanism 市場機制下的"主旋律"主品], in *Toushi Zhongguo yingshi shichang* [Examining Chinese Film and TV Market 透視中國影視市場], chief ed. Chen Xiaochun, 402 (Beijing, Zhongguo guangbo chubanshe, 2002).

Although the study of zhuxuanlü can provide an angle from which to understand the ways in which the Chinese state's penetrating socialist force on the screen attempts to regulate people's subjectivity and construct an ideal Chinese subject, it is probably this propagandistic mission of zhuxuanlü that renders it less exciting to English-language scholarship compared to films produced by directors who allegedly belong to the "fifth generation" or the "sixth generation."[31] Yomi Braester's recent claim that "'main melody' films are doctrinaire and often wooden; they do not allow for multiple views or inner contradictions, and the communist cause always ends up as the correct and heroic stance" proves that simplistic and dismissive accounts of zhuxuanlü narrative remains valid in current scholarship.[32] Reductive views of zhuxuanlü film aside, there is no doubt that, in the screen industries, the state is a dominant force. zhuxuanlü has made up a significant proportion of film production throughout much of Chinese film history, particularly before the intensification of marketization. Therefore, scholars' reconstruction of the history of Chinese cinema tends not to lose sight of such a hegemonic production mode.[33] Despite the importance of zhuxuanlü to Chinese film

[31] To name a few of these films: Zhang Yimou's ealier works in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Red Sorghum* (1987) and *To Live* (1992), Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (1993), Jia Zhangke's "Hometown trilogy" (*Xiao Wu*,1998; *Zhantai* [Platform], 2000; Ren Xiaoyao [Unknown pleasures], 2002). Research on zhuxuanlü's predecessors, left-wing films, seems to be relatively richer and more prominent. See, for example Chen Huangmei, *Zhongguo zuoyi dianying shi* 中國左派電影史(History of Chinese Left-wing Film) (Beijing: China Cinema Press. 1990), Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), and Vivian Shen, *The Origins of Left-wing Cinema in China, 1932-37* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[32] Yomi Braester, "Contemporary Mainstream PRC Cinema," in *The Chinese Cinema Book*, ed. Song-Hwee Lim, Julian Ward, 181 (London: British Film Institute, 2011). Braester's reductive view may be also explained by his selected pool of zhuxuanlü films, as he limited zhuxuanlü films to those depicting revolutionary history with significant subjects.

[33] For example, Yin Hong, and Yan Ling, *Xin Zhongguo dianying shi, 1949-2000* 新中國電影史[A history of Chinese cinema, 1949-2000] (Changsha Shi: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 154-167; and Zhang Yingjin's *Chinese National Cinema*, 240, 285-6.

history, a detailed analysis of zhuxuanlü film has been rare until very recently, when some dissertations and articles began to closely examine the narrative form of zhuxuanlü and the presense of polysemic reading positions.[34] I believe a more rigorous investigation of zhuxuanlü narratives, by evaluating the effectiveness of such propagandist works and investigating audience response, will provide us with a more nuanced understanding of interactions between the state, filmmakers, and the spectator. To broaden the scope of zhuxuanlü production studies not only enables us to better understand the state's flexibility in co-opting commercial elements in order to downplay, if not disguise, its propagandistic purpose; it also allows us to perceive how popular culture in the PRC is a multi-layered site of ideological contention because of the state's direct and indirect participation.

Censorship is a relatively easier concept to understand compared to zhuxuanlü. Current censorship is an official mechanism to manage screen products before and during production, exhibition, and distribution.[35] According to SARFT, an executive branch under the State Council of the PRC, every TV drama has to be produced by a production unit that has acquired a TV program production and an operation permit, and each TV production has to apply for a shooting permit before the production commences by submitting a detailed screen script to SARFT's relative subdivisions and branches.

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[34] For example, Yu Hongmei, "The Politics of Image: Chinese Cinema in the Context of Globalization" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2008); Shen Yipeng, "The State Goes Pop: Orientalism in Grief over the Yellow River," *Southeast Review of Asian Studies Volume* 32 (2010): 68-83.

[35] For details on how censorship worked in the republican era, please see Zhiwei Xiao, "Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship during the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, ed. Sheldon Lu, 35-58 (Honolulu, HI : University of Hawaii Press, 1997); and see also Laikwan Pang for CCP's changing censorship policy, "The State Against Ghosts: A Genealogy of China's Film Censorship Policy," *Screen* 52, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 461-476.

SARFT has the rights to request revisions before deciding whether to issue a shooting permit. Upon completion of the shooting, the TV production unit has to submit the final TV drama product in order to obtain a distribution permit before it can be aired. Again, SARFT has the rights to request adjustments of the narrative.[36] Lastly, if SARFT, the Propaganda Department of the PRC, or the State Council sees the broadcast unfit, they have the power to interrupt broadcast. Film production has to undergo a comparable process. Film production units have to submit a film synopsis to SARFT with relevant applications to acquire a shooting permit; if the permit is granted, production can then legally begin. The final film product will have to be approved by SARFT before obtaining a screening permit.[37] Again, a film screening in movie theatres remains subject to the state's intervention.[38] To be brief, SARFT guards against any "bad" or "unhealthy" content in TV drama before its production and broadcast. Films that are to be screened publicly in the PRC, particularly in theatres, are also subject to official evaluation.[39]

Under the backdrop of state censorship and the concern of market returns, screen productions waver between increasing market efficiency (i.e. popularity and revenue) and disseminating state ideology. By this, I do not mean that they completely sacrifice one for another. Rather, no matter what topic or narrative a film or TV drama aims to feature, it

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[36] For detailed censorship processes, please refer to the State Administration of Radio, Film, Television (thereafter SARFT), "Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju ling [Ordinance of SARFT 國家廣播電影電視總局令], SARFT, http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2003/10/21/20070920161659520454.html (accessed April, 6, 2012).

[37] Ibid.

[38] For example, the screening permit of the film *Lost in Beijing* was revoked during its screening in theatres. For details, please see my discussion in Chapter Two.

[39] However, there are grey areas for filmmaking. The advancement and popularization of recording technology allows more and more independent individuals to engage in unsupervised film production.

has to pass the censorship system; hence, it cannot ignore state ideology. At the same time, to successfully promote state ideology, zhuxuanlü should attract as many viewers as possible. TV directors and producers have already admitted that ignoring popularity has created problems for zhuxuanlü productions in the past, and have started to address artistic values, popularity, and ideology.[40] For those productions that aim at profitability, the priority is to present commercial elements while keeping alert to the requirements for passing the censorship standard. From this angle, I see that the differences between zhuxuanlü and commercial productions lie in the state's ideological priority order as it pertains to their production agenda. This also applies to the film industry.

So, what does zhuxuanlü promote to viewers on the screen? Are there any particular qualities that the state advances? I suggest the term "socialist spirit" to understand the qualities that a state-endorsed "good" character embodies. Although I propose the use of this umbrella term to capture the qualities that the CCP advocates, I do not intend to give a fixed, monolithic, and exhaustive definition of the socialist spirit. In fact, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to do so because of its fluid, flexible, changeable, and elusive nature. Given the scope of this dissertation, I endeavor to pin down the socialist spirit as it is manifested in three realms: the economic, the sexual, and the political. In general, the socialist spirit embodies Party patriotism along with various morally and ethically superior qualities. Among all ideal qualities, the promotion of Party patriotism occupies the most central position, and other superior virtues are used to advance Party patriotism, i.e. the socialist spirit attempts to uphold the Party's legitimacy

[40] Ji Xiuping, "Shichang jizhi xia de 'zhuxuanlü' zuopin" 市場機制下的"主旋律"作品[zhuxuanlü works under market mechanism], in *Toushi Zhongguo yingshi shichang* 透視中國影視市場 (Examining Chinese film and TV market), chief ed. Chen Xiaochun (Beijing, Zhongguo guangbo chubanshe, 2002).

and the state's stability. Since the ultimate purpose is to draw as large a portion of the public's support as possible, it draws from diverse sources to lays its moral foundation, including socialist legacies of the revolutionary era, philosophical thought (such as [neo] Confucian ideas), and any other ideological concept that serves its purposes. In particular, the economic subject embodying the socialist spirit embraces altruism and self-sacrifices; the sexual subject embodying the socialist spirit maintains a long marriage and sexual faithfulness; and lastly, the political subject practices the socialist spirit of submission to the greater good.

These good qualities of the socialist spirit do not come out of nowhere. The contemporary rhetoric of the socialist spirit is rooted in (neo) Confucian virtues and conduct, as well as the socialist legacy. The socialist spirit evolves in response to the state's political needs, and absorbs and selects elements that the state sees fit and useful for its political regime. It begins with the end of the revolutionary era and came into being through various governmental campaigns that promoted superior morality and ethics.[41] I call this claim of moral and ethical superiority and orthodoxy the "socialist spirit" instead of the term "revolutionary spirit"[42] coined by Wendy Larson because I believe that the state desires and claims its legitimacy based on a "socialist" rather than

[41] During the 1980s, the government launched various campaigns that promoted "new" or "socialist" lifestyles and socialist construction with a scope that ranges from personal hygiene, all kinds of etiquettes, value systems, to, of course, political ideology. Again, loving and supporting the Party was at the center of these campaigns. For details and examples of these campaigns, please see Anhui sheng "wu si san" huodong weiyuanhui, *Shenghuo fangshi yu jingshen wenming* [生活方式與精神文明 Lifestyles and spiritual civilizations] (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1985); and Gong qing tuan (China), *Wu jiang si mei shouce* [五講四美手冊 The handbook of five emphases and four beauties] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1983).

[42] Wendy Larson uses the 1995 film *Postman* (dir. He Jianjun) to propose that the revolutionary spirit of righting what is wrong persists in contemporary Chinese culture. See her book *From Ah Q to Lei Feng* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

"revolutionary" character. I use this term to describe the state's official discourse which promotes the legitimacy and stability of the regime by relegating revolution as belonging to the past.[43] I also propose that the socialist spirit works with the goal of creating a centripetal force to draw support to the Party-state by positioning the "west" as a threat to China via ideological and cultural fields, by demonstrating the spiritual vulnerability of the Chinese people, and emphasizing the domestic superiority of the socialist spirit.[44] This discourse of "China under threat" sounds familiar from the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in the early 1980s, which took place not long after the Opening-up Policy and promoted the elimination of capitalist lifestyles in order to prevent spiritual pollution.[45]

The socialist spirit works through selective appropriation of useful materials that serve its political purpose, particularly employing and promoting exemplary models who are either members or advocates of the Party. In this way, the Party is associated with virtuous conduct, even when that conduct is based on the once heavily condemned (neo) Confucian virtues. The state has been launching campaigns to turn local exemplary Party members into national heroes for the purpose of establishing the Party's benevolent

[43] I agree with the Novelist Yu Hua's idea that the Chinese government currently fears democracy less than revolution, as revolution may imply political instability or even a change of regime. However, Yu also sees political uprisings to be high possible. See Yu Hua's speech on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYArZoJfWV4 (accessed Mar 23, 2012).

[44] For example, Prime Minister Hu Jintao recently proclaimed that cultural products have been the battlefield of ideological struggles, and focal areas of hostile international forces' long-term infiltration; therefore China should develop its own cultural productions to meet local Chinese citizens demands as well as to bolster the international influence of Chinese culture. See Edward Wong, "China's President Lashes Out at Western Culture," *New York Times*, Jan 3, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/world/asia/chinas-president-pushes-back-against-western-culture.html (accessed Mar 23, 2012).

[45] For the Campaign's manifestation in literary field, please refer to Wendy Larson, "Realism, Modernism, and the Anti-'Spiritual Pollution' Campaign in China," *Modern China* 15, no. 1 (Jan 1989, 37-71); and Charles J Alber, *Embracing the Lie: Ding Ling and the Politics of Literature in the People's Republic of China* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 200, 235-251.

image. For example, the state current recognized Ren Changxia, a female Police Chief who died while serving the country, as a national model.[46] Previous exemplary models include the People's Liberation Army solder, Xu Honggang, who risked his safety to save a woman,[47] and of course, the socialist hero Lei Feng, whose story has been frequently recycled to promote altruism in a neo-liberal era during which individual gain rules.[48] These campaigns represent the state's effort to associate superior morality with the Party

The socialist spirit also reinvents (neo) Confucian doctrines or classics to reinvigorate socialist ideas and to draw support for the Party-state. "The Socialist Concepts on Honors and Disgraces" (社會主義榮辱觀), advanced by Prime Minister Hu Jintao in 2006, illustrate a socialist appropriation of Confucian ideas. The value system, also known as "Eight Honors and Eight Shames" (八榮八恥), implicitly contains Confucian ideas, particularly emphasis on faithfulness and sincerity,[49] and implicitly

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[46] Zhu Yu, "Zhongyang zhengfawei fachu kaizhan xiang Ren Changxia tongzhi xuexi de tongzhi" [Notice issued by Political and Legislative Affairs Committee of the CCP: Learn from Ren Changxia 中央政法委發出開展向任長霞同志學習的通知], Xinhuanet, http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-06/13/content_1523135.htm (accessed April 6, 2012).

[47] Dawn Einwalter, "Selflessness and Self-interest: Public Morality and the Xu Honggang Campaign," in *Journal of Contemporary China* 7, no. 12 (1998): 257-270.

[48] Wu Wencong and Feng Zhiwei, "Lei Feng Continues to Lead by Heroic example," *China Daily*, Mar 05, 2012, http://english.people.com.cn/90882/7747507.html (accessed Mar 23, 2012); and Peter Mattis, "Another Lei Feng Revival: Making Maoism Safe for China," Jamestown Fouccation, Mar 2, 2012. http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39091&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=004f169fa675b5370f16042eebf39216 (accessed Mar 23, 2012).

[49] The "Eight Honors and Eight Shames" (八榮八恥), sets up eight pairs of rights and wrongs or do's and don'ts:[49]

-- Love the country; do it no harm (以熱愛祖國為榮、以危害祖國為恥)
-- Serve the people; never betray them (以服務人民為榮、以背離人民為恥)
-- Follow science; discard superstition (以崇尚科學為榮、以愚昧無知為恥)
-- Be diligent, not indolent (以辛勤勞動為榮、以好逸惡勞為恥)
-- Be united, help each other; make no gains at other's expense (以團結互助為榮、以損人利己為恥)
-- Be honest and trustworthy; do not sacrifice ethics for profit (以誠實守信為榮、以見利忘義為恥)
-- Be disciplined and law-abiding, not chaotic and lawless(以遵紀守法為榮、以違法亂紀為恥)

promotes the image of a modern, patriotic, superior Confucian man. These moral qualities are considered ideal socialist qualities, as they have been publicized as the "socialist core value system" and are regarded as the moral and ideological foundations of the "harmonious socialist society" promoted at the Sixth Plenum of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2006. This discourse of socialist moral qualities constructs patriotism as the first ideal quality of its citizens, followed by other personal traits including honesty, selflessness, and diligence. The focus of these social campaigns resonates with the skeptical stance of the Communist Party, which was initially concerned that the Economic Reforms launched in the coastal regions in the early 1980s would bring capitalist ideas and lifestyles to corrupt people and adulterate the purity of communism.[50]

I find these intricate power dynamics in popular culture useful in understanding the social conditions in contemporary China, particularly after the year 1989. My analysis of representation of subjectivities in the following chapters will show that although the market is more open, and Chinese people seem to have freedom to pursue their individual desires, there is still state control over what is produced and screened for Chinese

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-- Live plainly, work hard; do not wallow in luxuries and pleasures (以艱苦奮鬥為榮、以驕奢淫逸為恥)

Hu announced this set of values during the tenth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中國人民政治協商會議), aiming to establish moral guidelines to measure work, conduct, and attitude of the Communist Party cadres as well as the rest of the general public. The fifth and the sixth pair advance the Confucian virtues of faithfulness and sincerity. In *Confucian Analects*, the master emphasized to "hold faithfulness and sincerity as first principles" (主忠信) and "in intercourse with others, to be strictly sincere" (與人忠). Confucius distinguished the superior man from the mean man by his focus, concluding that "the mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain" (君子喻於義, 小心喻於利). See Book I Xue Er(學而第一), Book XIII Zi Lu (子路第十三), and Book IV Li Ren (裏仁第四), *Confucius Analects*, in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 141, 271, 170.

[50] For the different perspectives of the party leaders on Economic Reforms, see Zhao Ziyang, *Gaige Licheng* [改革歷程 The secret journal of Zhao Ziyang] (Hong Kong: New Century Press, 2009), 120.

audiences. Scholarship has attempted to theorize the changes in everyday life in the post-revolutionary era and the post-New Era; however, it has yet to identify the reinvigorating socialist force that seeks to shape the proper Chinese subject.

The term "Post-New Era" contrasts with the "New Era." The "New Era" refers to a period beginning from the economic reforms in the late 1970s through the late 1980s, during which the state allowed heated debates about China's cultural, economic, and political situation. The Tiananmen Incident in 1989 marked the beginning of the "Post-New Era." However, the term Post-New Era involves an obscure definition of "newness" that lacks a historically specific reference. One of the common points of difference between the post-socialist and the post-modern is the loss of a grand narrative. In China studies, post-socialism is often associated with post-modernism precisely because of the similarity of the breakdown of the grand narrative, as Lyotard suggests.[51] Zhang Xudong, Tang Xiaobing, and Sheldon Lu agree on categorizing reform China in the 1980s as a "modern China" because of the impetus to reconstruct a new subjectivity after the death of Mao. They also agree on conceptualizing China in the 1990s as the post-modern era.[52] The term "post-socialist" adds a flavor of localism as it inherently refers to places where the socio-economic mode has been "socialist," in contrast to the ahistorical term "modern." Scholars who embrace the term "post-socialist" also share an understanding of a loss of socialist vision. Scholarship promoting the concept of the "post-socialist"

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[51] Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[52] See Zhang Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema (*Durham [N.C.] : Duke University Press, 1997); *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Tang Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: the Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2000); and Sheldon Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity(*Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

celebrates the disintegration of the socialist vision by pushing the timeline as early as possible,[53] and remains indifferent to the contrasts between the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, scholars have called our attention to Chinese desire, markets, and consumption, re-conceptualizing the "neo-liberal" and "modern" as China deepens its economic reforms and engages in more global contact. Some scholars describe China in "neo-liberal" terms and emphasize the influence of the market forces in contemporary China, while others more cautiously point to the Chinese government's ongoing controlling measures.[54]

[53] One of Arif Dirlik's definitions of "post-socialism" is a historical situation where "socialism has lost its coherence as a metatheory of politics because of the attenuation of the socialist vision in its historical unfolding." Pickowicz dates post-socialism to midway through the Cultural Revolution, as there was a "massive disillusionment with socialism among true believers and ideological agnostics" although it mostly flourished in the 1980s. Paul Pickowicz, "Huang Jianxin and the Notion of Postsocialism," in *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, ed. Nick Brown, et al, 62 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). However, Chris Berry pushes the post-socialist/post-modern line up to the end of the Cultural Revolution, finding a significant marker in the end of the grand Maoist narrative of proletarian cultural reform. Chris Berry, *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution After the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[54] Lisa Rofel suggests that China is currently transforming into a neo-liberal state whose commencement was marked by the first Post-Mao soap opera aired in China, *Yearnings (Kewang, 1990),* which teaches people the art of longing. The state, in its neo-liberal experiments, creates and tolerates various subject positions, including those of gays and women, to construct a "desiring China" in which expressing yearning is part of a cosmopolitan human nature. However, her anthropological approach ignores the state's control over the pursuit of desire in the screen industries and on the screen, leading her to conclude that China's ongoing experimental project creates multiple uneven neo-liberal subjects. Lisa Rofel, "Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics," in *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 31-64. In a similar vein, Jason McGrath, in his 2008 monograph, *Post-Socialist Modernity*, magnifies the state's retreat from other forces, in his case, the market and its ability to create a new cultural landscape. Premising his argument on the concept of capital modernity, through the study of commercial fiction and films, McGrath contends that the central cultural logic of China at the turn of the twenty-first century "is largely consistent with the fundamental dynamics of capitalist modernity itself." Therefore, he proposes the term "post-socialist modernity" in describing contemporary Chinese culture. Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 6-7. When introducing diverse practices of neoliberalism over the world, geographer and social theorist, David Harvey describes China's conflicting economic and political systems as "neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics," given that China allows more inflow of capital on one hand, and maintains its strict control on the other. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 151.

Although the above scholarship is cognizant of drastic changes of subjectivity occurring in China, it fails to focus on the investigation of the competing forces between the proliferation of new forms of subjectivity and the state's attempts to regulate them in cultural productions in post-1989 China. Scholarship of "post-socialist"/"post-modern" assists us in observing a decline of faith in socialism, yet fails to show how the nation-state dedicates resources to the project of reinvigorating socialist values and sustaining its legacy and authority. A detailed elaboration on what aspects of social and political life are under the Chinese government's strict control is desirable to help develop a fuller picture of contemporary China after 1989. Scholarship on desire and consumption produce an overly democratic neo-liberal vision of people freely expressing their desire and making profits in the market. Despite the fact that desire currently has license to burgeon, I argue that there are certain forms that are specifically allowed to shape citizens' subjectivity while others are not: while the state may tolerate certain forms of subjectivity, it simultaneously continues to monitor and check their growth via censorship mechanisms on the screen and a revival of socialist moralities and ethics. I am tempted to use "late socialism" to describe the situation, as the term points out the persistently strong state participation in economic and social realm in present-day China.[55] While my project is not intended to engage in rectification of names, I frame my dissertation title as "post-1989" to highlight political subjectivity as an important component of my project while also recognizing the significant effects of the Tiananmen Event in shaping the current Party-state's attitudes towards politically dissenting subjectivity. This will also shed light on the ways in which my dissertation will contribute to the understanding of the Chinese

[55] Jeffrey C Kinkley, *Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China: The Return of the Political Novel* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), 8-9.

government's tolerance and control over people's desire beginning in the 1990s, as well as the political economy of Chinese popular culture. Because of the sifting and frequently dissonant mixture of government and market forces at play in the current ideological and culture fields, I will interchangeably use the terms post-socialist, postmodern, and neo-liberal according to their appropriateness in context. For instance, if a certain part of my analysis focuses on the emergence of a particular kind of subjectivity and its relationship to China's current phase of economic development, I may employ the term neo-liberal to describe China's economic conditions.

How Far Can We Go: Cultural Policy as Reproductive Power & Screen Products as a Site of Institutional and Ideological Contestation

My dissertation employs institutional and textual approaches to analyze state-sponsored and state-criticized/rejected films and TV dramas in order to complicate the understanding of popular culture in the PRC and unpack the complexity of state-individual interactions. Here, "individuals" refers to cultural workers in the film and TV industries, as well as the viewers. The viewers are cultural and educated elites (film critics, TV critics), and literate people who have expressed their interpretations of screen products via certain types of media. I study, first, the ways in which cultural policies, i.e. zhuxuanlü and censorship, affect the landscape of screen industries and shape the narrative of film and TV drama; and second, how viewers respond to different ideologies. Providing in-depth textual analysis in order to understand competing ideologies manifested on the screen, and affirming the agency and subjectivity of cultural workers or intellectuals who work in the screen industries, I subscribe to Foucault's proposal of

power as reproductive rather than repressive in the interpretation of screen production.[56] Although censorship systems seem restrictive in what kinds of subjectivity can be depicted, by analyzing state-criticized cultural workers/screen products, I argue in Foucauldian terms that such a power system generates resistance that negotiates with censorship strategically. I also illustrate how cultural workers tailor a narrative that may otherwise upset the censorship bureau in order to obtain a filming permit and a screening permit, but maintain its critical ability to reveal undesirable subjectivity and social problems.

In questioning the stereotype that zhuxuanlü films have no inner contradictions and studying the viewer's responses, I employ Stuart Hall's theorization of audience studies, which suggests sign as polysemic, and the existence of different reading positions of sign. In analyzing televisual signs, Hall proposes that a viewer may decode signs through dominant/preferred readings, a negotiated reading position, or an oppositional reading position.[57] Preferred readings have "the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them, and have themselves become institutionalized; the second reading position "contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements," acknowledging the legitimacy of the embedded hegemonic definitions while creating a more negotiated application that suits the decoder's own context; the third one refers to a viewer who understands hegemonic orders completely but chooses to decode them in an entirely contrary way.[58] This analytical tool helps us to explore how successful zhuxuanlü

[56] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 194.

[57] Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Birmingham [England]: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973), 16-8.

[58] Ibid, 13, 17, 18.

productions are involved in reproducing hegemony, or the state's orders, and can be used to examine zhuxuanlü's narrative for possible contesting value systems and to study the various available audience responses. These two approaches will help us to understand interactions between the state and cultural elites/workers, as well as the relationship between the viewer and state-approved screen products.

The question of "how far can we go," the title of my dissertation, is woven through the textual analyses of the three following chapters. Containing four layers of meanings, the question leads us to contemplate the multi-faceted nature of state-individual interactions. My close readings in Chapter Two to Four endeavor to answer the first three layers of the question and set the stage for my Conclusion to offer a bold speculation on the fourth. The "we" in the questions does not refer to one single entity but to various bodies and structure within society. By reading the following dimensions of the questions, my readers should be able to acquire a sense of the changing references of the "we." I will first list the questions and then explain them one by one: 1) to what extent are subjectivity and desire freely depicted on the screen? 2) to what extent is censorship able to control the representation of subjectivity and desire? 3) to what extent is the socialist spirit able to produce Chinese citizens who are submissive into submission, loyalty, or even Party-patriotism? 4) How much further can state power sustain itself?

The first layer of the question asks about the ways in which and the extent to which the economic, sexual, and political subject can be depicted on the screen given the fact that the state guards against certain screen productions. Although the disintegration of the sublime figure seems to lead to the free pursuit of desire in reality as well as on the screen, the creative environment under state censorship urges us to ask to what extent

various forms of subjectivity are allowed to be depicted. The three following chapters will discuss how the censorship works in criticizing, revising, and banning films that portray three forms of subjectivity on the screen and argue that the state does not completely allow market operations and cultural elites to produce screen products on their own. Fortunately, my investigation of power structure does not consist of only one single dimension; I go further to query the extent to which the state censorship is effective in controlling screen productions. My close readings of screen products that have received unfavorable reviews from the state show that these products exhibit social commentary through skillful artistic creations that passed the censorship organ. Nevertheless, I do not mean to imply that the state uses repressive systems alone to control screen products and subjectivity; it also actively participates in the discourse on ideal forms of subjectivity by creating or supporting zhuxuanlü films that are filled with protagonists who embody the socialist spirit. To examine the effectiveness of zhuxuanlü films and the socialist spirit, I also read against the grain and detect negotiated reading positions within zhuxuanlü films. After discussing the effectiveness of the state power as reflected in zhuxuanlü and state-disfavored productions, my concluding chapter positively speculates on the sustainability of the Chinese state power, as I will show in my three chapters that effective power rejuvenates and reproduces itself.

I situate various screen products in several spectrums. Instead of dichotomizing the popular and the state, I strive to complicate the current understanding of popular culture in the PRC through the window of film and TV drama. I argue that film and TV drama exhibit an interrelated and interdependent relationship between the market/cultural products and the state. As I mentioned above, market efficiency and the state do not

eliminate each other, but their significance in each screen production is weighted differently. For zhuxuanlü productions, the purpose of serving state ideology may occupy a more significant role, but creators still cannot afford to lose viewers' interest, given that the the political mission of a zhuxuanlü production will probably miscarry if it fails to attract an audience, even though the government commands its units and subsidiaries to screen it for their affiliates.[59] Therefore, popular elements and market viability remain important considerations in production. In fact, current zhuxuanlü production also operates in a commercial mode to prevent investment loss.[60] Nevertheless, it is inadequate to point out the commercial operation of zhuxuanlü productions. What is the significance of political propaganda without considering its significance to the popular culture, and more importantly, its implication to the political economy of popular culture when it now hides behind a commercial mask. Moreover, the presence of the censorship system renders the concept of "popular" more troubled. While some screen products may be more profit-oriented and aim more at commercial success, they cannot lose sight of the necessity of satisfying, if not pleasing, the censoring bureau. Therefore, considering popular culture as a mere profit-making venture or seeing it as totally separated from the state understates the composite structure of popular culture that consists of contesting ideologies. Therefore, I propose locating popular cultural products along two spectrums that measure the extent of popularity and the level of state approval.

[59] By saying this, I do not mean that a warmly received film will automatically succeed in instilling political ideology either.

[60] Yomi Braester, "Contemporary Mainstream PRC Cinema," in *The Chinese Cinema Book*, ed. Song-Hwee Lim, Julian Ward, 181 (London: British Film Institute, 2011).

To illustrate the two spectra with visual clarity, I employ the following figure to highlight the heterogeneous nature of popular culture. Despite the fact that the illustration below is admittedly problematic and imperfect, I choose to preserve this endeavor, as it is useful in integrating several spectrums that I explain in this dissertation. I will situate my selected texts in Figure 1.

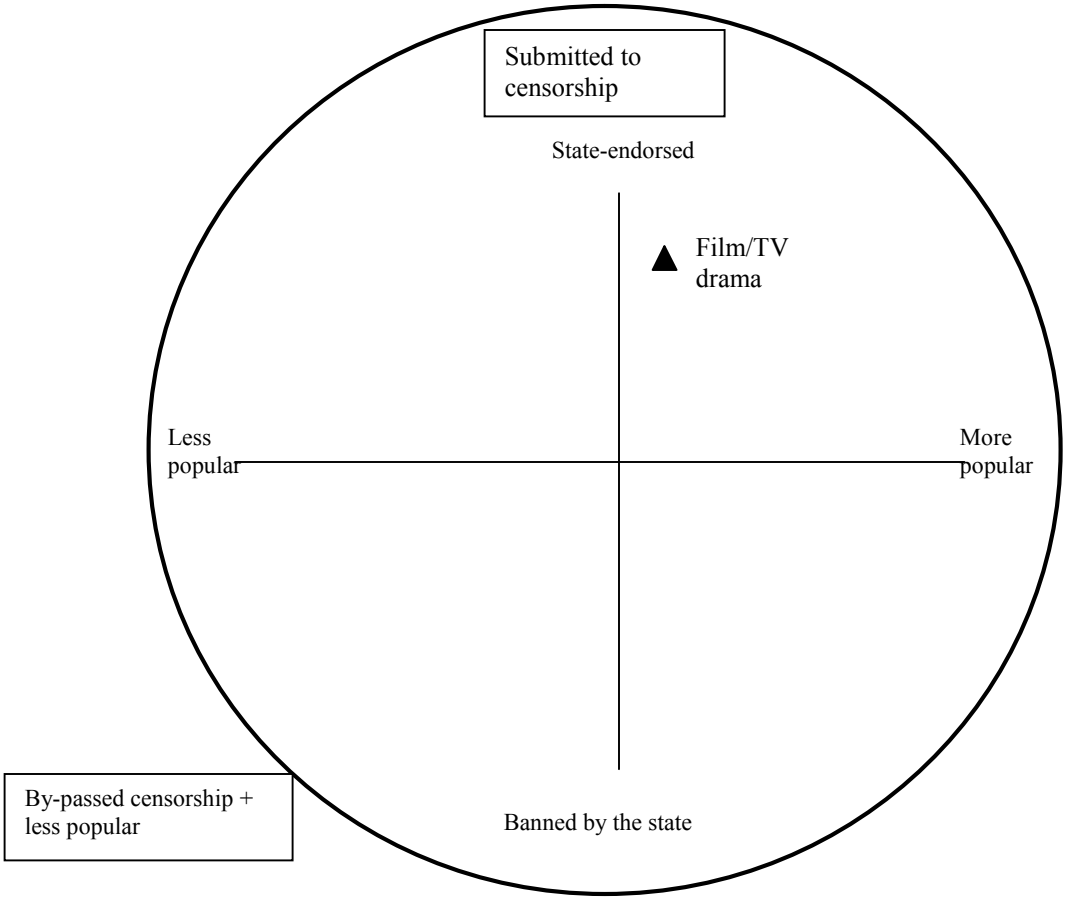

Figure 1. An illustration of the popular and the state approval spectrums.

In my particularly usage, the x-axis represents the extent of commercialization/market-driven popularity, and a potential market size; the further to the right a film/TV drama is located, the more popularity/the larger the potential market it has. The y-axis stands for

the level of state approval. Similarly, the higher a screen product is situated, the stronger state approval a film/TV drama enjoys, and the more likely that it is a zhuxuanlü product. Having said that, since my study is by no means a statistical study of the number of people who have seen my selected texts,[61] the x-axis and y-axis do not represent accurate numbers of audience members or the potential size of market or the extent of commercialization. Rather I see this figure as a scale that combines two spectrums—one that measures film/TV drama based on market-driven popularity and the other based on the level of state approval—and displays a single film/TV drama's position vis-à-vis the state and commercialization, as well as its relative correlation to other screen products. I juxtapose my selected texts on the scale of popularity, attempting to point out cultural policies that may influence their location on the scale, and explicating the power dynamics between popular culture and the state. I will also highlight different senses the word "market" indicates when I analyze a particular film and when I locate screen products along the spectrums.

Structure of the Dissertation

I narrowed my project to include only films and TV dramas in which one of the three new forms of subjectivity drives the narrative: the economic, the sexual, and the political. These screen products provide a context within which I can evaluate the disintegration of the sublime subject proposed by Wang Ban, and also open my investigation of the question "how far can we go." They inform us of subtle strategies that cultural workers

[61] And if it aimed that way, it would be practically impossible to measure the exact number of viewers of a screen product, given the diverse channels for seeing a film or TV drama. For example, there are mainland websites showing TV and films such as Tudou (www.tudou.com) and pirated copies in the market. These viewing modes render it difficult to conduct any statistical research measuring numerical viewing rates of screen products.

employ to creatively pass censorship, as well as intriguing yet subtle state-individual interactions. Wang Ban proposes the concept "sublime figure" to understand the subject during the revolutionary era as one whose libidinal desires were elevated and transformed into political passion.[62] In other words, Wang's analysis fuses sexuality and self-interest with political collectivity/revolution.[63] However, this model is insufficeint after the end of the revolutionary era due to the fact that personal aspirations started to resurface with the introduction of Economic Reforms and the "Open Door Policy" of 1978. Individuals' mundane pursuits are especially vibrant after the 1989 crackdown silenced intellectual debates on politics. To understand the contrast between the current proliferation of new forms of subjectivity and the "sublime figure," the three following chapters will investigate how the three major subjectivities of the "sublime figure"—sexuality, selflessness, and politics, disintegrate, secularize, and take form in post-1989 China on the screen, without losing sight the state's regulations. I also aim to find out whether or not the state allows equal freedom to the proliferations of the three forms of subjectivity on the screen through comparison. In other words, while the sublime figure disintegrates into individual subjects who pursue desires and pleasures that are different from the revolutionary ideal, is there any form of subjectivity that the state discourages from proliferating through depictions on the screen? Although I delineate three forms of subjectivity, I do not mean that a subject is characterized by one single force; rather, any

[62] Wang Ban, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in the Twentieth-century China (*Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997). Laikwan Pang, in analyzing the Leftist Cinema Movement in the 1930s, also illustrates that sexuality is sublimated or purified to serve political goals. See Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 99.

[63] Chris Berry holds another view about the elevated relationship between romantic love and politics. He argues that didactic concerns have subordinated romantic love. See Chris Berry, *Postsocialist Cinema in post-Mao China: the Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 116.

subject formation is shaped and conditioned by various simultaneous factors and contexts. My purpose for isolating one particular form of subjectivity in each chapter is to magnify and focus on their current forms of appearance on the screen in order to contrast them with their older sublime forms.

Chapter One discusses the representation of the economic subject in film. I argue that ruthless profiteers play a part in a larger global moral crisis, and that both the Chinese government and filmmakers are worried about ruthless profiteers as a social problem. The two parties tackle this issue in two distinctive modes on the screen: the former constructs selfless economic subjects as exemplary models for Chinese citizens, while the latter reveals economic disparity and social injustice. These two distinctive representational modes form and uncover internal power dynamic within the country: the state encourages/rewards the mode that glorifies good characters who act against social problems, and discourages/punishes the critical mode that questions distorted humanity and dramatizes social darkness. This chapter analyzes the state's reactions to these two representational modes and argues that the state disallows critical realism because it discloses social problems that the state would otherwise conceal. Meanwhile, I study the ways in which filmmakers negotiate with the state's regulation on sensitive issues in order to screen the film publicly for local Chinese people, emphasizing filmmakers' creative agency, and answering my questions of how far we can go with the examples of representation of the economic subject.

I analyze three zhuxuanlü films—*Ren Changxia*, *Days Without Lei Feng*, and *Kong Fansen*—that promote a selfless economic subject who sacrifices personal interests in order to benefit others. Through portraying the selfless protagonist's sacrifice of

individual benefits and family because of their altruistic service to the people, *Ren Changxia* and *Kong Fansen* construct selfless Party officials in order to maintain the Party's moral superiority. How, it is precisely this sacrificial act that offers a negotiated reading position and questions the harm done to one's own family when the committed Party official puts the family behind. These two films also allow us to consider whether or not an ideal economic subject is defined by gender differences. *Days Without Lei Feng* illustrates the ways in which the state correlates the emergence of selfish, ruthless profiteers to capitalism while simultaneously upholding the socialist spirit of selflessness. I also study three filmic responses to the moral crisis by filmmakers who are more independent from the state production studio: *Lost in Beijing*, *Blind Shaft*, and *Blind Mountain. Lost in Beijing* warns against the intrusion of monetary considerations into the domestic space by portraying an ambiguous transaction involving a child. This film's international and mainland versions provide a unique insight into state-filmmaker negotiation and how the state dislikes global and local showcasing of particular kinds of economic conditions in China. I supplement the analysis of *Lost in Beijing* with discussion of *Blind Shaft* and *Blind Mountain*, as these two films provide yet another angle from which to understand cultural workers' tactics and negotiations with both the state's regulation and international film festivals. The director of the "blind-film" series, Li Yang, emphasized sex as the key content in *Blind Shaft* in order to make its DVD release successful, and he intentionally filmed two different endings to *Blind Mountain,* with one paying tribute the state organ while the other makes an ironic statement about the impotence of the police.

Chapter Two investigates the extremes to which portrayals of "good" and "bad" sexual subjects can go. I discuss the private issue of sex through its representation on the domestic screen—TV. Before my selected text, *Golden Marriage*, appeared on the screen, there were many TV dramas depicting divorce, marital affairs, and other kinds of marital crisis. I argue that *Golden Marriage* constructs exemplary sexual subjects who adhere to three boundaries to counteract marital disharmony in twenty-first-century China. I discuss how the TV drama portrays sex outside of marriage as negative and ruthless, conforming to orthodox sexual discourse at the end. My examination also questions the effectiveness of the sexual socialist spirit by paying attention to the internal contradictions of a narrative that claims to portray an ideal marriage, and how the TV drama relies on commercial elements of sex to attract viewers although it supports SARFT's Anti-Vulgarity Campaign.

On the other hand, *Narrow Dwelling* is a typical TV drama celebrating a heterodox sexual relationship. It attracts the state's criticism, proving that the sexual subject who pursues free sexual desire is disallowed to be shown freely on the screen. Two protagonists in *Narrow Dwelling* engage in an extra-marital affair, violating the three boundaries constructed and observed in *Golden Marriage*. Depicting a salaried urban female who becomes both an unfaithful fiancé and a mistress because of financial pressure, the narrative resonates with contemporary debates on sex, marriage, and relationships in the PRC. *Narrow Dwelling* illustrates two layers of censorship and their weaknesses in controlling audience response. The elicited controversies about the extra-marital affairs prove that the censorship system is incapable of detecting what kinds and what magnitude of reactions and sentiments will result from the screening of a TV drama.

I argue that the morally conformist ending of *Narrow Dwelling* is a gesture of self-censorship. Nonetheless, it fails to shape viewers' conceptualizations of materialism versus love. Although I situate *Narrow Dwelling* on the opposite side of *Golden Marriage*, when locating *Narrow Dwelling* on the coordinate system, I am aware of its self-censorship gesture and how its submission to the censorship system was required in the first place in order for it to become a commercial success on the Mainland.

The focus of Chapter Three is the representation of political subjectivity. I research what the state regards as an ideal political subjectivity, and ask whether it is acceptable to screen an alternative or dissenting political subjectivity, especially after the Tian'anmen Event. I argue that the so-called Chinese blockbuster *Hero* belongs to the zhuxuanlü mode of production in which a patriotic subject sacrifices himself for the greater good. *Hero* is an oft-discussed film; therefore, I begin by revisiting the current scholarship and suggest that, for all its richness, it fails to identify intellectuals or cultural elites as the targeted object of *Hero*'s interpellation. I provide in-depth close-readings of several scenes that figuratively and literally characterize *Hero*'s protagonists as intellectuals, and more importantly, render them ideal political subjects who sacrifice their own lives for the greater good. *Hero* can also help us to understand the actively flexible and selective regeneration of the socialist spirit, as it displays (neo) Confucianism, a once heavily criticized tradition, being skillfully interwoven into the submissive political subjectivity. I then turn to ask the question of the extent to which viewers accept this political aspect of the socialist spirit by introducing the hot debates provoked by the socialist spirit embodied by *Hero*'s protagonists.

The second part of Chapter Three identifies a political and cultural paradigm that conflates political and sexual taboos that appear to be unacceptable to the state. I argue that, although the state officially forbids any expression of dissenting political subjectivity, as displayed by the June Fourth Event, an alternative political subjectivity that negotiates with state power or withdraws from whole-heartedly supporting the current regime remains present in films produced underground (without applying to SARFT for official production permit) or outside of the PRC. Closely reading the narratives and analyzing changing significations of the association of homosexual desire and dissenting political subjectivity, I examine *East Palace, West Palace*, *Lan Yu*, and *Butterfly*, the former two of which were produced underground in the PRC, and the last of which was produced in a special administrative region. I propose that the sexual taboo is initially a disguise for expression of political taboo, but is gradually being appropriated by the homosexual subject to affirm a local homosexual identity.

I end this dissertation by mapping all the analyzed films on the coordinate system of the popular and the zhuxuanlü so that we have a better sense of the screen products' position on the scales of the popularity and state endorsement. After analyzing zhuxuanlü representations of the three subjectivities as well as responses of the audiences, censorship system, and Party leaders towards to the state criticized or banned productions, and commenting on the effectiveness and purpose of the socialist spirit and the state's censorship system, I argue that these two state mechanisms exist to generate Party-patriotism. At last, I reflect on limitations of my project and suggest some issues for further research.

CHAPTER II

SELF-SACRIFICING PARTY OFFICIALS VS. RUTHLESS PROFITEERS

It appears absurd and contradictory for socialist subjects to pursue personal economic gain. However, if we investigate representations in which the economic subject is situated in contemporary China, we will find nuances within the emergence of economic subjectivity. This chapter discusses both an ideal form of economic subjectivity that embraces the socialist spirit of non-self-benefitting (不利己 *bu li ji*), or anti-egoism, and the opposite ideal, which reflects a willingness to do anything to benefit oneself. Although the nation-state engages in economic development and encourages/tolerates the personal pursuit of economic desire as a form of participation within the existing structure of economic modernization, there is a hierarchy among economic subjects. The most ideal form of economic subjectivity remains one that embraces the socialist spirit of self-sacrifice and serving the people. In other words, one must embrace the socialist spirit and depreciate one's own gain while disdaining self-centeredness, particularly within the financial realm. The ideal economic subject, according to the state, is not the one making the most money, but the one who does not work for personal profits, but rather, sacrifices himself for the work to which he is devoted—serving the people. In this case, work in service of the people is also, of course, in service to the Party.

On the other hand, there are ruthless profiteers driven by selfish economic motivations, working in opposition to the socialist spirit and benefiting at the expense of others. They forfeit a stranger's life or even their own family bonds for the sake of personal monetarily benefit. Despite the fact that the state allows its citizens to pursue profits and wealth through market operations, this by no means implies that individuals

are licensed to freely pursue economic desire. The state's orthodox discourse condemns the form of subjectivity that accepts earning profit through cold-blooded plots, setting up a boundary as to what is morally and socially acceptable. In order to enrich understanding of economic subjectivity, one needs to be aware of its interaction with gender and class in shaping economic subjects' selfless sacrifices or inhuman acts, the position it holds within the patriarchal structure, its influence on concepts of femininity, and the gendered predicaments it produces. Coincidentally, both good and bad economic subjectivities deleteriously impact the family.

In this chapter, I focus mainly on two cinematic texts, each of which will be supplemented by two films in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the ways economic subjectivities play out in different genders and classes. The first film, *Ren Changxia*, is a zhuxuanlü production depicting a female Party official who lends her name to the show's eponymous title. Ren Changxia selflessly devotes herself to working and serving the people to the extreme that she sacrifices her own family and dies serving her country. I believe that because the protagonist, Ren Changxia, is an embodiment of the socialist spirit, the nation-state turned this regional heroine of Henan Province into a national heroine so that every citizen, and particularly Party officials, can learn from her. Moreover, her character serves the ultimate purpose of legitimizing the Party's authority. Ren Changxia not only forsakes her comfortable lifestyle, health, and safety for the people, but also relinquishes her familial and filial duties. I maintain that the greater good (the Party) displaces parents and family and becomes the first and foremost recipient of filial passions and acts.

Analysis of *Ren Changxia* is followed by examination of two more zhuxuanlü films, *Days Without Lei Feng* and *Kong Fansen*. The first movie provides an answer to the question of why the state continues to need revolutionary figures in a so-called neo-liberal phase of economic production. The state, despite interior corruption and selfishness, establishes Party members' probity by imputing capitalism for moral decline, and identifies capitalistic greed as a threat to the socialist spirit. The film, *Kong Fansen,* helps us determine whether or not there are gender differences between good economic subjects. This film presents a male sacrificing cadre, Kong Fansen, who is committed to work akin to that carried out by Ren Changxia. He ignores his own family's needs and filial duties while working for the Party and the people. Given that the state approved both Ren Changxia and Kong Fansen as exemplary idols of the country, gender equality seems to be suggested. I contend that the state expects Party officials of both genders to possess a homogeneous work capacity that grows out of the genderless socialist spirit, while simultaneously enforcing female inferiority at work. Finally, I will explore alternative spaces within these films and discuss the effectiveness of these zhuxuanlü films in achieving their intended effects among audiences.

As Chinese citizens become more conscious of financial benefit (*li*) and the urge to acquire money, how do people of different genders and different classes respond? What are they willing to sacrifice for economic survival and in order to obtain affluence? How have the concepts of self, family, and community changed accordingly? These questions lead me to my second major focus—*Lost in Beijing*, a state-criticized film, which portrays a shocking form of economic subjectivity through the images of a ruthless profiteer who destroys family bonds and affection. Its plot illustrates the market logic that

exploits morality, ethics, and family affection. Contrasting to zhuxuanlü representations, which portray, good, upper-class Party officials who embrace the greater good, *Lost in Beijing* reveals impoverished lower class migrant workers who voluntarily undertake whatever means they can to earn money. Women, particularly those with low education levels, are vulnerable to objectification and eroticization within the global waves. They are subjected to patriarchal and capital exploitation: some become tools of patriarchal figures for eliciting profits, while some enter into prostitution and turn themselves into both the entrepreneur and the commodity. *Lost in Beijing*, which depicts a ruthless economic subject and the underside of contemporary China, critiques the cannibalistic state ideology of globalization and sympathizes with the victims of China's economic growth. The differences between the international version and the mainland version of *Lost in Beijing* dovetail with the state's control of representation of economic subjectivity.

I then turn to two of the films in Li Yang's "blind" series, *Blind Shaft* and *Blind Mountain,* to further discuss interactions between the self, family, and community, the body politics of economic subjects, as well as the nuanced politics of representation. Through portrayals of two villainous coal miners, *Blind Shaft* demonstrates a selfish contemporary economic subject who sacrifices the social family (greater good) for the biological family (smaller good). It also indicates a (de-)sexualizing of politics within China's censorship system, where the darker side of society is interwoven with and intentionally overshadowed by blatant sexual appeal. *Blind Mountain* is a sad narrative that presents a terrifying picture of women being trafficked for their reproductive bodies. However, it also exemplifies the ways in which a state-criticized film depicting ruthless

subjectivity and its victims can be changed into a state-pleasing, publicly screened narrative that passed censorship guidelines.

I maintain that both zhuxuanlü and independent productions are local responses to a global, moral emergency. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman identifies a global moral crisis as one where strangers are seen as threats, attacked, and killed in liquid modernity; it is a term he coins to describe economic globalization processes in which the boundaries of society and culture become more and more permeable.[1] In undergoing drastic social and economic changes, China also confronts moral catastrophes as people emerge as desperate economic subjects craving financial security. Such subjects will sell or destroy human flesh for profit, be it that of their own body or of someone else's. The state sponsors and endorses zhuxuanlü productions to help create exemplary economic subjects who remain loyal to the self-sacrificing socialist spirit. Other directors, on the other hand, tackle the social underside with a critical realist approach that reveals cruel profiteering acts. Although these two modes of production seem parallel, Arif Dirlik's concept of "critical localism" reminds us of the politics behind local oppression. Instead of merely pointing to the "local" as a site for working out "alternative public spheres" and "alternative social formations," Dirlik argues that the "local" is a site of both promise and predicament. The local embodies political and cultural manipulation given the issues of power involved.[2] In China's resistance to moral uncertainty, the Party's discourse points to global forces as a threat to China's superior morality and ethics as embodied by

[1] Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 8.

[2] The use of the term "alternative public spheres" is from Giroux, quoted in Arif Dirlik, "The Global in the Local," in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. Rob Wilson, Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 28.

the Party's socialist spirit. Such discourse erases the Party's vested interests in constructing the socialist spirit as a form of propaganda that serves the political agenda of consolidating the Party's empire and authority. It also conceals the state's hegemonic power over artistic aspirations that depart from glorifying the state and contest the state ideology of development.

The term "economic" in this chapter stands for the Chinese word *li* (利) which contains two meanings and serves as both noun and verb. As a noun, *li* is monetary profits (*yingli* 盈利); as a verb, it is to benefit someone in tangible or intangible terms (the *li* as in *li ren* 利人 and *li ji* 利己, to benefit others or oneself). I will discuss how an ideal economic subject works not for monetary gain, but instead, for others' benefits (*li ren* 利人) at the expense of his/her own money, time, family, and even life. On the contrary, selfish economic subjectivity benefits one's own (*li ji* 利己) by making as much as money as possible regardless of injury to others (*sun ren* 損人).

Ren Changxia as a National Model: Local Heroine for the State's Appropriation

The tragic death of Ren Changxia triggered huge mourning in the city in which she served. Later, it attracted the central government's attention and turned her into a national heroine and exemplary model. There is a TV drama, one film, several local operas, and various books based on her life and achievements during her service as the police chief of Dengfeng City, home to the Shaolin Temple, in Henan Province. Who exactly is Ren Changxia?

Ren Changxia (1964-2004) was born in Zhengzhou City, the capital of Henan Province, and was assigned to work at the Zhengzhou Police Station (*gong'an ju*) after graduating from the People's Police School of Henan (*Henan renmin jingcha xuexiao*) in

1993. From that time on, her outstanding behavior won her numerous awards including the National Award of Excellent Young Experts (*Quanguo qingnian gangwei nengshou*) from the Chinese Communist Youth League and the Department of Labor and Human Resources in 1995; the National Award of Excellent People's Police from the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC in 1996; the Award of Outstanding Women in Zhengzhou City from the Propaganda Department of Zhengzhou City in 1998; the National Award of Outstanding Women from the All-China Women's Federation (*Quanguo funü lianhehui*) in 2002, etc. In April 2001, she was promoted to Police Chief in Dengfeng City, a county-level city in Zhengzhou with a population of 650,000. There, she served as the first female Police Chief in the Henan Province until she later died in a car accident.

The workplaces that earned her local and national awards were limited to two cities in Henan, Zhengzhou and Dengfeng, but her heroic death turned her into a national legend and an icon of selflessness. As a deceased Communist Party member, she was highly praised for her self-sacrificing spirit of serving the people in the memorial biographies, TV drama and film that were named after her and based on her life. Her memorial materials were officially published not only in Henan but also the capital city and Shanghai through the official network. For instance, *Yingxiong nü gong'an juzhang Ren Changxiang chuanqi* (The Legend of Ren Changxia—The Heroic Female Police Chief) and *Gong'an juzhang de bangyan: Ren Changxia* (Ren Changxia—A Model Police Chief) were published by Henan renmin chubanshe (Henan People's Publishing House) in Zhengzhou. Ren's deeds were even recorded in *Xiang Ren Changxia tongzhi xuexie* (To Learn from Comrade Ren Changxia) by the Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe (CCP History Publishing House) in Beijing as an interpellation to learn from Ren;

another publication in Beijing *Ren Changxia de gushi* (The Story of Ren Changxia), was published by Renmin chubanshe (People's Publishing House). The fad of Ren Changxia also spread to Shanghai: edited by the Propaganda Department of Zhengzhou City, Shanghai published *Xinbei—yingxiong Ren Changxia* (Stele in the Heart—the Hero Ren Changxia).[3] These publications represent the Party's efforts to nationally circulate the story of a local selfless figure. This circulation media, of course, included two of the most popular media forms since the Maoist era, which amplified and visualized images—namely film and television.

The film *Ren Changxia* was co-produced by the CCP's Propaganda Department, the Propaganda Department of Public Security of the PRC, the Propaganda Department of the All-China Women's Federation, the Propaganda Department of Henan Province, the Propaganda Department of Zhengzhou, and the Changchun Film Studio, the original film studio in China, which produced numerous propaganda films including *Bai mao nü* (the White-haired Girl, 1951) and *Yingxiong ernü* (Heroic Sons and Daughters, 1964). Production of the TV version of Ren Changxia was also initiated by this official propaganda department. The Propaganda Department of Public Security of the PRC invited the CCP's Propaganda Department and the Center of China TV Drama Production, a unit directly under SARFT, to produce the TV drama.[4] The official network

[3] See Zhao Fuhai, *Yingxiong nü gong'an juzhang Ren Changxia chuanqi* 英雄女公安局長任長霞傳奇[The legend of Ren Changxia— the heroic female police chief] (Henan renmin chubanshe, 2005); Rong Xin, Liu Congde, ed., *Gong'an juzhang de bangyan: Ren Changxia* 公安局長的榜樣：任長霞[Ren Changxia—the model of Police Chief] (Henan renmin chubanshe. 2004); Xiang Ren Changxia tongzhi xuexie bianxie zu, *Xiang Ren Changxia tongzhi xuexie* 向任長霞同志學習 [To learn from comrade Ren Changxia] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2004); Yu Pei, Ning Li, ed., *Ren Changxia de gushi* 任長霞的故事 [The story of Ren Changxia] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2004); Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei Xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei: Yingxiong Ren Changxia* 心碑：英雄任長霞 [Stele in the heart—the hero Ren Changxia] (Shanghai Shi: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2004).

[4] Peng Yaochun, "Xin shiji Zhongguo jingcha yingxiang zhi biaozhixing shuangbi—dianying *Ren*

of its organizers and producers prove that the film and the TV drama are part of the state's propaganda, promoting a spirit of selflessness as the most important aspect of socialist economic strength.

The series of national circulations and interpellations of Party members and Chinese citizens, in general, extracts and empties the meaning of "Ren Changxia;" the name now becomes a descriptive signifier standing for a mode of conduct and work attitude that sacrifices self interest for the people. *Ren Changxia shi gong'an juzhang* (Ren Changxia mode of Police Chief) became a set expression to celebrate any Police Chief who excelled at developing investigation tactics and willingly exhibited self-sacrifice. For example, Liu Litao, a Police Chief in Jiangsu Province; Li Junbiao, a Police Chief in Yunnan Province; and Xi Shangxin, a Police Chief in Gansu Province were all labeled as *Ren Changxia shi gong'an juzhang* in different official and related Chinese journals introducing their achievements.[5] The phrase *ren changxia* has been appropriated by the state and has become an expression used to advance the selfless spirit, and has turned into an icon of the CCP's superior morality.

Premier Wen Jiabao's instruction states the superficial motivation for learning Ren's model: to learn from Ren and serve the people;[6] however, this is by no means the

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Changxia yu dianshiju *Ren Changxia* bijiao" 新世紀中國員警影像之標誌情雙璧—電影《任長霞》與電視劇《任長霞》比較[Two symbolic jades of the image of the China's Police in the new century—a comparison between the film *Ren Changxia* and the TV drama *Ren Changxia*], *Jiangsu jingguan xueyuan xuebao*[Journal of Jiangsu Police Officer College] 2(2008): 196-200.

[5] Li Mingjie, Wang Xiaoqiu, "Liu Litao Ren Changxia shi de gong'an juzhang" 劉麗濤任長霞式的公安局長[Liu Litao Police Chief of Ren Changxia mode], *Zhonghua ernu* [Sons and Daughters in China] 3 (2008): 58-61; Ma Fang, Tao Yongwei, "Zuo renmin zhongcheng de baohushen"做人民忠誠的保護神[To be a loyal guardian angel of the people], *Dang de jianshe* [Constuctions of the Party] 5 (2008) : 28-29 ; Zhang Ruidong, Lu Chunlan, Li Xuewen, "Honghe lijian puo changkong" 紅河利劍破長空 [Red river/ Sharp sword cut through the sky], *Shidai fengcai* [Graciousness of the Time] 2 (2006): F36-38.

[6] Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei*, preface.

ultimate reason for promoting Ren Changxia. Investment in Ren's image reveals the utilitarianism of political agenda. The hidden agenda is to propagandize the superior morality of the CCP and its members, thus creating (false) hope for the current corrupted political system and cultivating patriotism. Serving people is not the goal but the means by which to achieve political support of the people, which drives zhuxuanlü productions. The comments of Ren Changxia's senior, Li Minqing, reveal this layer of politics: "Ren's capacity was not the best, and the reason for putting forth so much effort in promoting her was her ability to gain people's support."[7] It implies that in promoting morality, the primary goal is not to set up an exemplary model for fellow citizens, but to gain people's support for the current political system. It also means that serving the people is not *the* lone means of achieving moral superiority; on the contrary, any means that can earn support for the Party is useful, including creating economic prosperity on top of serving the people. This idea also resonates through Wen Jiaobao's last sentence of his instruction for learning from Ren: to contribute your part for the greater good in stabilizing reforms and developments.[8] We can also trace this logic to Deng Xiaoping's flexible attitude towards economic modes of production: "No matter whether black or white in color, a good cat is one that catches mice." Applying this logic to 21st century China, we can understand this sentence as no matter what the variety, it is good as long as it draws support for the Party, and thus, consolidates Party hegemony.

[7] Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei Xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei*, 49.

[8] Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei Xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei*, preface.

Screening a Sacrificing Economic Subject in Ren Changxia

What are Ren Changxia's good qualities? Or what exactly do these memorial materials promote about Ren Changxia? They highlight two sides of the same coin of her heroic achievements. The first one illustrates her accomplishments in fighting crime and her ability to investigate as the Chief of Police; the second one emphasizes the personal and familial sacrifices she made to fulfill her duties. The underlying motivation behind these two aspects is "to serve the people." On top of this, her female gender is simultaneously highlighted and blurred. On the one hand, the materials emphasize her biological sex, but also underline her superior genderless work ability. The materials emphasize her gendered social role as a mother and a wife, but also emphasize her inability to fulfill these social duties as representative of a highly admirable, exemplary sacrifice. As a selfless economic subject, the Ren Changxia depicted on the screen and in books does not work for the gains or her family; instead, she incurs personal loss, as she sacrifices herself to serve the people.

Even though the TV drama and the film, both entitiled *Ren Changxia*, visualize the conflict between the self and the greater good when serving the people, different visual forms shape dissimilar foci of the contents. As a visual form, television drama allows for more details and a broader temporal span to be shown on the TV screen. The twenty-one-episode series presents Ren Changxia's prematurely-ended three-year appointment in Dengfeng, her challenges in leading male police officers when initially reporting as the first female Police Chief in Henan Province, her achievements in fighting both old and new crime and arresting criminals, her frequent visits to villages and her concern for crime victims, as well as the demands and complaints from her family

because of her lack of attention. The 140-min film, *Ren Changxia,* concentrates on the last thirty-six hours of Ren's life, dramatizing her self-sacrificing spirit. It presents us with a fragment of Ren's life, in which she works both day and night to scrutinize two cases, while at the same time, she is approached by all kinds of people: angry workers, a longing old woman, thankful villagers, and her ill-attended family. I focus on the film version as a comparative text with *Lost in Beijing* out of consideration for similarity of genres, but I will also refer to other materials on Ren when needed. I believe it is far more appropriate to compare the same visual forms to help understand the mechanism the state uses to promote films that depict ideal subjects and regulate those that depict less than ideal subjects.

The ways that *Ren Changxia* depicts a sacrificing Party official suggest that an ideal selfless economic subject is the one who embraces the socialist spirit of "serving the people" and works always for the sake of people's good, but never for personal gain. Not to mention the gain, Ren Changxia's devotion to serving the people causes her to renounce a comfortable lifestyle and exposes her to potential physical harm. The film uses a documentary mode to reenact the accelerated rhythm of her work: through commuting from one place to another in a car, the sense that she keeps in motion establishes her busy schedule. During her non-stop trips, she receives phone calls from various parties while working on multiple cases at the same time. Another trope that constantly reminds us of her self-sacrifice is food. Through her conversations with colleagues and ordinary people, the audience is repeatedly reminded that she has been skipping meals and rest to work. During an investigation of a road crime, even though the family she is visiting invites her to stay and drink some water, she instead rushes out

when finished with her work. On two other occasions, we see her skip lunch and breakfast in order to travel to various places to resolve people's conflicts and to report to her senior. Although she has been working for a whole day and is physically exhausted, she holds meetings until one in the morning and stays up all night to decipher clues to help solve cases. Then, at four in the morning, she calls for yet another meeting before we see the dawn of a new day and see that she is again skipping breakfast.

Ren Changxia's behavior of skipping meals and her sleep depravation are not motivated by an entrepreneurial spirit, but by a socialist spirit that is discursively constructed as simultaneously countered and threatened by corruption and egoism within a Chinese context that currently warmly welcomes global capital. It may sound reasonable to argue that an entrepreneur works days and nights to make money, so skipping meals and sleep is not uncommon. Ren's reason to work, however, is not for profits, like that of a greedy individual, but for the people. As stated by political theorist C. B. Macpherson, a possessive individual "is human in his capacity as proprietor of his own person; his humanity does depend on his freedom from any but self-interested contractual relations with others; his society consists of a series of market relations."[9] Ren's self-devotion and support of her fellow citizens sharply differentiate her from an economically-motivated individual who bases relationships with people on contracts or self-interest. Despite her position at the police station, which does provide chances to acquire money via bribes, her insistence on serving the people and her socialist spirit work ethics prevents her from taking money at the expense of social and legal justice. According to the state, the socialist spirit of self-sacrifice of Party officials has been

[9] C B Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarenton Press, 1964), 271, 272.

eroded and even replaced by egoism and mammonism under the new economic system; thus the state deliberately reinvigorates the socialist spirit as a response to the by-products of the global capital flow.[10] This admittance indicates that the contemporary economic subjectivity of the Chinese, including that of Party members, has become one of avaricious individualism and entrepreneurship, which turns their work into a profitable operation. The relationship between Party officials and citizens is based on market relations. The state's counteraction of this so-called corruption of the socialist spirit, I argue, is also intended, perhaps more significantly, to restore the Party's prestige, and thus, regain the people's support in the face of Chinese people's exposure to alternative political systems as China continues to join the global market.

Zhuxuanlü productions that focus on selfless officials like *Ren Changxia* attempt to affirm the socialist spirit and the Party's superiority. Ren Changxia continues to uphold her socialist beliefs and rejects bribes from Niu Dong, a rich and powerful villain in the film who attempts to offer her a huge amount of money to bail him out of illegal crimes. Because of the arrest, she is regularly threatened by Niu Dong's gang. Her younger brother had been kidnapped by Niu Dong's group at an earlier point in time, and Ren Changxia later receives threats to kidnap her son. She risks her life and her family for her loyalty to her job, to the Party, and to the people, suggesting that the ideal worker in the socialist era is not a possessive individual, but a serving worker who breaks the sentimental boundaries between the self (the private or smaller self) and others (the

[10] See Renmin gongpu de bangyang bianjizu, *Renmin gongpu de bangyang: Kong Fansen* 人民公僕的榜樣：孔繁森[The role model of civil servants: Kong Fansen] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhoang yang dangxiao chubanshe, 1995), 2; and Zhang Jiaxiang, Yu Peiling, ed., *Renmin de gongpu Jiao Yulu* 人民的公僕焦裕祿 **[**Civil servant of the people: Jiao Yulu] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1990), 8.

public or greater self). This ideal worker is one who can accept others' happiness as their own.

Ren Changxia forsakes not only her own personal health and safety, but also her family life. Since she ignores her own needs, it is easy to imagine that she puts work before her family; yet what is intriguing is that she, by no means, trivializes the orthodox Confucian value—filial piety. On the contrary, she maintains a high filial standard. How can it be the case that she is too occupied to attend to her parents but also respects filial piety? This leads to a paradoxical lack of fulfillment, but likewise, to the (re)-establishment of the values of filial piety. On one hand, family duty and affective bonding is pushed to the side by the continual sacrifice of a subject who is serving his/her country; but filial piety is still upheld. The object of such filial passion is displaced from the biological family members to members of the communal family. In other words, the selfless economic subject is separated from her own family structure to effectively serve the communal family duties.

Ren Changxia's husband evaluated her as a failed daughter, failed wife, and failed mother based on how little time she spent with the family.[11] Her conflict between serving the family and the people is fully revealed through the postponement of a family photograph. The tension between spending time on taking a family photo and fulfilling work duties is set up at the beginning of the narrative and runs through seventy percent of the film length. As the film commences, Ren Changxia calls her family in Zhengzhou city to cancel a scheduled family photo session that she previously promised to attend in celebration of her father's birthday. She cancelled it because of her work on a murder

[11] Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei Xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei*, 53.

case. Due to these repeated cancellations, Changxia's mother decides to have the whole family, including Ren's paralyzed father, travel to Dengzhou to reach Ren and have the family photo taken there. Unfortunately, even though they arrive in the city of Dengfeng, they still have to wait till late evening to see their daughter, who is extremely busy with two important cases. At the photography studio, upon hearing that Ren maintains a close relationship with the photographer's family despite the fact that she is too preoccupied to visit her biological parents, Ren Changxia's mother tearfully criticizes Ren for her frequent absences and inattention to her own parents.

Putting work as a top priority, and its resulting conflict, is a dominant theme throughout *Ren Chanxia*. The TV drama dramatizes this conflict by focusing on her father's sickness and her inability to attend to her parents. Changxia is unable to make time to see her father even though he is hospitalized; this "uncaring" attitude angers her younger sister,resulting in complaints about Changxia's lack of responsibility to her parents and her lack of remorse at leaving the duty of her father's care to her husband. The conflict is resolved by showing Ren Changxia's long overdue visit to the hospital, at which time she herself is hurt and has not taken a shower for over twenty days because of a long investigation. In the memorial book *Xin Bei*, Ren Changxia's sister recalled Ren Changxia's failure in accompanying her son to surgery not long before Ren's death.[12] The lone reason for her absence from family events is work. However, it is this sacrificing spirit that earns Ren the state's recognition, suggesting that an ideal, selfless economic subject is required to subordinate familial duties to the greater good.

[12] Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei Xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei*, 101.

Although we see the subordination or inferiority of family to serving the people or the Party-state, Ren Changxia is portrayed as an agent of filial piety actively fixing familial problems—problems of other people's families, not her own. Let's revisit the scene of Ren Changxia's family taking their family photo. Upon hearing the criticism of Changxia's mother, the photographer immediately explains that Ren's numerous visits are motivated by Changxia's desire to maintain the family's integrity and persuade the photographer's parents not to divorce so that the elderly will have a stable life in their older years. Changxia describes her acts as *ti tianxia ernu jin xiao* (替天下兒女盡孝), or fulfilling filial piety for all sons and daughters under heaven. Melodramatically, Changxia's mother then feels happy again after realizing that her daughter is far from unfilial, but on the contrary, is extremely active in advancing filial piety. Here, Changxia sacrifices her own personal leisure and service to her own small family for the good of all families under heaven, displaying filial piety to the collective. Individuals are called to serve the community, leaving their own individual families unattended but still upholding filial piety in the sense that serving workers turn the societal structure into a communal family structure. It sounds consistent with the Party's revolutionary rhetoric that one eliminates individual desire and becomes a part of the collective. The importance of sacrifice for the collective good has remained a part of the CCP's prominent rhetoric, even though the revolutionary era has ended. Premier Wen Jiabao penned on the preface of a book promoting Ren's good deeds his desire to call upon people to *guquan daju*(顧全大局) or to contribute their part to maintain China's prosperity.[13] However, is

[13] Zhonggong Dengfeng Shiwei Xuanchuanbu, *Xinbei*.

subordination of the family of a selfless economic subject indeed revolutionary in China's context, and how?

Ren Changxia's unattended filial duties to her parents conflict with Confucian values of filial piety. In the *Xiao Jing*, Confucius states that filial piety is the root of all virtue and explains the beginning and the end of filial piety like this: "Seeing that our body, with hair and skin, is derived from our parents, we should not allow it to be injured in any way, this is the beginning of filiality. We develop our own personality and practice the Way so as to perpetuate our name for future generations and to give glory to our parents. This is the end of filiality. Thus begun in the service of our parents, continued in the service of the prince, filiality is completed in the building up of our character."[14] This teaching explains that the process of cultivating filial piety commences with parents and ends with parents, even though serving the ruler is a part of it. In other words, one's parents must be the first recipients of filial acts. Afterwards, an individual can transition to serving the ruler, the final motivation for which should be glorying one's parents. Mencius' discussion of family ethics also started with one's own family: "Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families; treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families, and you can roll the Empire on your palm."[15] Although Mencius supported the idea of treating others' elderly with the same reverence one shows to one's own, the first recipient is still one's own family.

[14] Mary Leila Makra, trans., Paul K.T. Sih, ed., *The Hsiao ching* [The classic of filial piety] (New York: St. John's University, 1961), 3.

[15] D.C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* Book 1 Part A (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2003), 19.

When it comes to the CCP's rhetoric, regardless if it is in the context of the revolutionary era or in neo-liberal China, the ideal revolutionary or communist worker of the state should focus on the latter part alone—to serve the greater good, be it community or the ruler, leaving the family behind. During the revolutionary era, a popular revolutionary song contained the line "Neither my mother nor my father is dearer than Chairman Mao;" in present-day China, as presented in *Ren Changxia*, the collective rhetoric obscures filial piety to parents and filial duties come after public service. This teaching assimilates Confucius' saying in *Xiao Jing* that "The filial piety with which the superior man serves his parents may be transferred as loyalty to the ruler,"[16] but differs in the way that the CCP highlights the contributions that people should make for the collective or the Party leader. The state reverses the process of filial piety, if not uprooting it, abstracting the foundation of filial acts to parents, and encouraging individuals into a collective societal structure. The greater good successfully displaces parents and family and becomes the first and foremost recipient of filial passions and acts.[17]

Screening Discourses of Socialist Party-Patriotism

The motif of the selfless economic subject sacrificing his own interests—both physical and monetary—and family life, too, is by no means unprecedented. In fact, it is inherited and evolved from previous "red classic" films, which propagandize heroic Communist Party members who die in revolution or in the process of building socialism,

[16] Text Project, http://ctext.org/xiao-jing (accessed Jan 13, 2012).

[17] For the conflict of Confucianism and CCP, I refrain from evaluating which is taking a winning side. Rather, I suggest CCP runs on Confucian rhetoric of filial piety to gain support on the one hand and Confucianism is defeated on the other hand, because it is exactly because of its deep rootedness in Chinese culture that it is adapted for revolutionary rhetoric.

such as Lei Feng (1940-1962), Jiao Yulu (1922-1964), and Kong Fansen (1944-1994). This also includes the Canadian communist hero, doctor Norman Bethune (1890-1939), who came to China and sided with the CCP during the dawn of the second Sino-Japanese War. Each of these heroes was recognized in film and/or television and became an exemplary model after death.

The reason for the (re-) occurrence of these canonized exemplary models in film and television arguably varies within different contexts. For example, film and TV drama presenting Lei Feng (1940-1962) and his deeds appear in 1963, 1979, 1996 and 2011, crossing the span of nearly forty years. The film *Lei Feng* (1963) commemorates his selfless contribution to volunteerism and communism immediately after his death in 1962; *Lei Feng zhi ge* (The Song of Lei Feng, 1979), produced at the dusk of the Cultural Revolution, re-affirms communism and depicts its followers as serving the people and lending a helping hand following a ten-year period of violence and social instability. In the 1990s, under the backdrop of the handover of Hong Kong and the economic success subsequent to the deepening of economic reforms, we saw the re-focus of revolution in an historical epic on the screen reminding Chinese citizens of China's past humiliation in comparison to its current power. The films *Shaonian Lei Feng* (Lei Feng's childhood, 1996) and *Likai Lei Feng de rizi* (Days without Lei Feng, 1996) recycle the heroic image of Lei Feng, emphasize the CCP's achievements in building a new China, and outline the conflicts between the spirit of Lei Feng—the selfless subjectivity—and the selfish economic subjectivity emerging during the period of the Economic Reforms. One decade into the new millennium, revolutionary figures perform on the screen anew, marking the sixtieth anniversary of the PRC in 2009 and the ninetieth anniversary of the CCP in 2011.

Now Lei Feng is not limited to the big screen, but also appears on the small screen, in an animation, *Lei Feng de gushi* (The Story of Lei Feng) and in a TV drama, *Lei Feng,* which aired in 2010 and 2011 respectively. These facts suggest that revolutionary figures have become recurring subject matter in film and TV production, and more significantly, that the re-appearance of exemplary revolutionary heroes is closely related to China's political and economic developmental course. Far from resting in peace since the end of the revolutionary era, they, at times, act as supporting characters, if not props, on the CCP's moral performance stage as needed. Why does the Party-state, which supports capitalistic economic development, continue to utilize revolutionary/communist figures that embody communist rhetoric and the socialist spirit?

The reason lies in the intention to construct and sustain the discourse of capitalism as the source of corruption, and socialism as resistant to corruption. If we scrutinize the CCP's orthodox discourse as seen in such narratives as *Days Without Lei Feng*, we will understand that the official discourse attributes capitalism to moral decline, appropriates and re-invents the people's ideal personality and morality as the socialist spirit, and reiterates Lei Feng's spirit as a form of cultural resistance to encroachment and threats of capitalism. Scenes from this movie boldly confront the negative effects of economic reforms and calls for restoration of Lei Feng's spirit. I will now analyze *Days Without Lei Feng* and use it to analyze the state's orthodox discourse concerning the conflicts and contrasts between socialism and capitalism.

The state-endorsed film *Days Without Lei Feng* (1996) illustrates the official discourse and rhetoric of the socialist spirit.[18] Directed by Lei Xianhe, a politically

[18] The film script is expanded into a novel published with the same name which also includes production features of the film and interviews with Qiao Anshan. See Wang Xingdong and Chen Baoguang*, Likai Lei*

engaged filmmaker and frequent winner of awards given by the Chinese government, the film won the Outstanding Feature Film Award at the Huabiao Ceremony in 1996.[19] *Days Without Lei Feng* portrays Lei Feng's classmate, Qiao Anshan, and his experience of practicing Lei Feng's spirit. Lei Feng only appears in the beginning of the film and dies in the first seven minutes of the one-and-a-half-hour movie, leaving the focus of the narrative on his classmate, Qiao Anshan, who is responsible for the loss of Lei's life in a small accident. The prototype of the protagonist Qiao Anshan is based on a real historical figure with the same name Qiao Anshan, who was in the same class as Lei Feng in the People's Liberation Army.

The story is set in the present, but most of the narrative presents viewers with flashbacks of four pieces of Qiao Anshan's memories about Lei Feng and his experiences of keeping Lei Feng's spirit alive. After the opening credits, the film starts in the cinematic present, as we hear Qiao Anshan's voice addressing Lei Feng and we see an about-to-retire Qiao Anshan sweeping Lei Feng's tomb and monument during the Qingming Festival of 1996. Qian Anshan's narrative is a series of recollections that depicts four stories to the viewers; each story is separated by Qiao Anshan's narrative and a subtitle introducing the temporal setting. The first story, set in 1962, is shot in black and white and portrays Lei Feng's death and Qiao Anshan's feelings of guilt: while backing up a truck, Qiao Anshan accidentally knocks down a nearby clothing rod which then strikes Lei Feng's head, causing his death a few hours later. From then on, Qiao Anshan lives in guilt and sorrow, but he also insists on embodying Lei Feng's spirit in his own

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Feng de rizi (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1997).

[19] Lei Xianhe is currently member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

life—regarding others' difficulty as one's own difficulty, trying to always offer help. This spirit weaves through the following three stories, in which Qiao Anshan faces challenges but finally wins out when he exemplifies Lei Feng's spirit.

In the second story, which takes place in 1978, Qiao Anshan offends his supervisor at work when he refuses to comply with the supervisor's orders and instead drives a woman in labor to the hospital. He saves the woman's life and that of her baby, giving a good example of what Lei Feng's spirit was like to other students. The third flashback dates back to 1988 and highlights conflicts between Lei Feng's social values and capitalistic logic. Qiao Anshan saves an old man hit by a car by taking him to the hospital, but, in return, is blamed for the accident and blackmailed by the old man's family. The last story narrates Qiao Anshan's final trip as a truck driver, in 1995, prior to his retirement. The dilemma he faces is whether to help people or not, given that there are many fraudulent people on the roads in contemporary China who are out to rob delivery trucks. When he needs help, he encounters greedy people who will not aid him without payment, but eventually, a group of students voluntarily help to restart his truck. This voluntary spirit moves his son to follow in Lei Feng's footsteps.

The temporal structure in the film illustrates a highly selective and political outcome. The second story jumps right to 1978, skipping the chaotic ten years of social instability and arriving exactly at the year the Economic Reforms began. It is under the sweeping Economic Reforms such as privatization and marketization that we see characters fail to offer communal assistance and thus misbehave. Qiao Anshan's supervisor illustrates the first example of selfish misconduct of the film: he attempts to abuse his power and provide convenience for his own family at the expense of social

order and equality, rendering government workers a privileged class. Even though he is accused of violating the company's rule, Qiao is later appreciated by his manager for his hard work. This misdemeanor is merely a rehearsal for a bigger challenge yet to come for Qiao, who embodies Lei Feng's socialist spirit. In fact, all the challenges Qiao Anshan will face in carrying on Lei Feng's spirit take place after the Economic Reform, suggesting that evils come along only after the re-introduction of the capitalist, socio-economic system. Although the association of evil and capitalism is a preferred reading, it does not entirely eliminate the possibility that evil took root before the Economic Reforms. Its discursive formation also draws our attention to two aspects of the socialist rhetoric regarding economic subjectivity: capitalism brings evil and such evil threatens the purity of the socialist spirit.

The evil of capitalism and its threat to socialist morality is dramatized through the third flashback in 1988, in which Qiao Anshan is accused by the Liang family of injuring their father in a car accident, when in fact, it is he who saves their father by taking him to the hospital. The Liang family demands RMB 4,000 for compensation and medical expenses, amplifying human selfishness and greed for money under the "new" money-oriented context. Through the words of Qiao Anshan's son, the "market economy" corrupts people and eliminates Lei Feng's spirit in this way: everyone is learning how to earn money, but no one is learning to exhibit Lei Feng's spirit; whoever values Lei Feng's spirit is viewed as foolish; and people are afraid of suffering from loss (*chikui*). In one scene, Qiao Anshan's wife confronts the Liang family, suggesting that her husband's righteous act is a good manifestation of the Lei Fei spirit. The Liang family rejects Lei Feng's relevance to the accident, since all they want is monetary compensation. Qiao

Anshan then imputes money-orientation to the loss of Lei Feng's spirit and views it as a canker of moral decadence. Such socialist rhetoric demonizes the market economy as the volatile economic landscape that drives the Liang family to become financially hungry opportunists, while pushing Qiao Anshan's son to consider his father's helping hand as meddlesome and courting disaster. The Liang family's wickedness illustrates rhetorical strategies of the socialist spirit: siding and dichotomizing Lei Feng's spirit with morality and capitalism with moral decadence respectively. The encroachment of capitalism threatens and endangers Lei Feng's spirit, and thus, morality, and the threat may be so powerful that it creates an extreme where Lei Feng's spirit will never co-exist with the market economy. *Li*, be it profits or benefits, seems to be a horrible virus that corrodes socialist integrity.

Days Without Lei Feng also reveals the co-opting and strategic parts of the construction process of building the socialist spirit—the moral representative of the CCP—as the ideal selfless personality. While the socialist spirit in the economic sense remains simply as the abstention of oneself from any *li*, profits or benefits, as illustrated in the promotion of the selfless Ren Changxia, it is far from being a fixed entity with finite definitions and recognizable qualities. It both absorbs and appropriates good human qualities and reinvents them as manifestations of the socialist spirit. Before the PRC was established, Mao Zedong commended Norman Bethune, the Canadian communist doctor who came to China and assisted the CCP, for his spirit of *hao bu li ji, zhuan men li ren*, to especially benefit others, but absolutely not oneself.[20] When Lei Feng was famously

[20]Mao Zedong, Wei renmin fuwu; jinian Bai Qiu'en; Yugong yishan[Serve the people; in memory of Norman Bethune; the foolish old man who removed the mountains] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1972).

promoted for "devoting his finite life to the infinite project of serving the people,"[21] the CCP reclaimed these qualities as a good branch of the socialist spirit such that an individual never overshadows but should always add to the Party's glory. In addition, the CCP further selects good qualities according to its needs. In fact, Lei Feng's aspirations included much more than just to "offer help," and also involved spreading communism, as illustrated in the film *Lei Feng* (1963). However, no one currently mentions or emphasizes communism's role in conquering capitalism and reducing Lei Feng's spirit into a mere gratuitous helping hand, as shown in *Days Without Lei Feng*. As for the rhetoric in this movie, in addition to Lei Feng's spirit to which Qiao Anshan repeatedly refers, *liangxin* (conscience 良心) and *gongdao* (justice 公道) are two words that are commonly used to question unfairness and the Liang family's deceit. Positioning Lei Feng's spirit within the realm of universal values like *conscience* and *justice*, the film incorporates good qualities that are easily understood and re-invents them as part of the socialist spirit.

Homogeneous Gender at Work

Ren Changxia centers on a female economic subject, but in reality, there are very few propagandistic films featuring females. The dominant figure is usually male. Are there any gender differences between ideal male and female sacrificing economic figures? This question leads me to the zhuxuanlü film, *Kong Fansen* (1995), a film produced after the death of Kong Fansen (1944-1994), a historical communist cadre who, like Ren Changxia, also died while serving his country. I choose this historical figure and the film produced about him because his devotion to career and the resulting conflicts between

[21] As seen in the 1962 film *Lei Feng*.

family and work are surprisingly equivalent to elements in the Ren Changxia story. In addition, comparing *Kong Fansen* with *Jiao Yulu* (1990), another zhuxuanlü film that features a male sacrificing CCP cadre, shows that *Kong Fansen* focuses more on dramatized conflicts between the self (family) and the collective (serving the people). A comparison of *Ren Changxia* and *Kong Fansen* will illustrate that the Party requests economic subjects of both genders to perform equally well at work, while at the same time, underlines and re-iterates the discourse of the female's "inherent"/"natural" biological inferiority.

Kong Fansen earned his posthumous reputation by sacrificing and contributing to Tibet's economic development. The film *Kong Fansen* re-constructs his second appointment in Tibet. It represents just one of the Chinese government's ways of promoting the campaign "Learning from Kong Fansen," which included publications of memorial books about Kong Fansen and the screening of *Kong Fansen* to citizens.[22] Originally a CCP cadre in Liaocheng, a city in Shandong where he was born and grew up, Kong Fansen left his family and home city behind twice to work in Tibet. He first went to Tibet in 1979 to serve as the Deputy Secretary in Gamba County for three years before returning to Shandong. In 1988, the Chinese government re-appointed him to Tibet, where he worked as the Deputy Mayor of Lhasa. In 1992, the government assigned him to be the Party Secretary of Ngari Prefecture, an even more remote Tibetan region well known for its harsh conditions and nicknamed the "Roof of the World" because it sits

[22] Memorial publications on Kong Fansen are many, for example, Xing Zhidi, Liu Jimeng, ed., *Kong Fansen jiazhiguan yanjiu* 孔繁森價值觀研究[Research on Kong Fansen's value systems] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1998); Renmin gongpu de bangyang bianjizu[Editing group of the book], *Renmin gongpu de bangyang: Kong Fansen* 人民公僕的榜樣：孔繁森; Ma Jun, *Lingdao ganbu de kaimu Kong Fansen* 領導幹部的楷模孔繁森[An exemplary model of leading cadres: Kong Fansen](Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2006), and so on.

4,500 meters above sea level. Even though he had an elderly mother and young children to attend to, he stayed in Tibet until his death in 1994, ten years before Ren Changxia's fatal road accident. The film *Kong Fansen* was directed by Chen Guoxing, who is famous for making the transition from producing commercially-oriented films to zhuxuanlü films in the 1990s. He went on to win the 1995 Best Feature Film Award at the Huabiao Ceremony and the Five-Achievement Award (*Wu yi jiang*) given by the CCP's Propaganda Department. The film *Kong Fansen* features Kong Fansen's life and work after he moved to Ngari Prefecture, during which time he had no direct communication with his sick wife and elderly mother. Lacking oxygen and money and confronting snowstorms, he promotes good will towards the CCP government through his visits to poor Tibetan families and schools, diplomatic visits to a Buddhist temple and a well-respected monk, and supervision and support of the clean-up of a huge snowstorm that caused disastrous damage to human life and property. His committed, hard work moved other CCP cadres, who had previously requested transfer, to stay in Tibet. The film also interweaves the conflicts between his work and family; his wife's life is threatened by a serious sickness, but he refuses to go to the hospital until he finishes his work. In the movie, *Kong Fansen,* his demise is announced with the presentation of a subtitle informing audiences of his death via car accident against a backdrop of the visual image of a vehicle running over a limitless desert, which then shifts to a background of tombs overlooking a calm and beautiful lake.

As with Ren Changxia, the promotion of the story of Kong Fansen advances another set of economic values in a system that greatly differs from capitalism. Kong exchanges comfort for suffering: he values others' benefit (the greater good) and

diminishes his and his family's suffering (the smaller self). First and foremost, far from gaining financial profit, Kong Fansen, in fact, pays for work in his own financial story. Kong Fansen's first diplomatic visit in the film is to a poorly-equipped elementary school on top of a snow-covered mountain. We first see a wide shot featuring a pure white knee-deep snow and Kong Fansen and his teammates appearing from the lower right of the screen, each leading a horse, limping as they climb up the snowy mountain. The camera then switches to a medium shot, focusing on Kong Fansen as he approaches the center of the screen. We hear him panting and asking why the school is built so high up on a remote mountain. This particular scene portrays Kong's caring nature through an image of traveling and experiencing the hardships of Tibetans, instead of one where he simply gives orders in a cozy office as an aloof Party secretary. The use of natural lighting to film a classroom accentuates the humble conditions of the cottage school. The scene reveals why Kong Fansen sympathizes with the female teacher he interviews, who claims that teachers at the school have not received their salary for months. He immediately donates his monthly stipend to the teachers and thanks them for teaching in such harsh conditions. According to memorial books written about Kong Fansen, because his financial generosity to others oft-times emptied his own pocket, not only was he unable to send money home to support his own family, but he ignored his physical health and sold blood to support his contributions to his work.[23]

Thus, another common theme shared by the two socialist subjects, Kong Fansen and Ren Changxia, is the sacrifice of familial duty. The conflict between familial duty

[23]This is frequently cited in books paying tribute to Kong Fansen, for instance, see Ma Jun, *Lingdao ganbu de kaimu Kong Fansen* 領導幹部的楷模孔繁森 [An exemplary model of leading cadres: Kong Fansen], 104.

and work duty is dramatized in the sequence where Kong's wife and elder daughter arrive in Lhasa to seek the husband and father from whom they have been separated since his second appointment in Tibet. While the daughter, Lingling, finally reaches her father on the phone and informs him that her mother is in critical condition and has to undergo a surgery to save her life, Kong refuses to return to Lhasa from Ngari, and instead, chooses to lead a rescue team to deliver relief materials to victims of a snowstorm. For several days, Lingling had been telegramming Kong, urging him to come and broken-heartedly claiming that she would no longer regard him as her father if he continued to delay. This is when Kong acts like a cold-blooded father and husband who cares nothing for his own family, only his work. Even his co-worker criticize him by saying, "I have seen a Party secretary [who works so hard] like you, but I have never seen an [iron-hearted] husband like you." His determination to work for the people exceeds general expectations of a Party official to a huge extent, especially when he fails to care for his wife and parent.

The fact that both the protagonists in *Kong Fansen* and *Ren Changxia* sacrifice tangible monetary gain and intangible family values suggests an ideal genderless worker. Wendy Larson, who analyzes the film, *The Postman*, argues that Maoist emphasis of non-gender-specific labor gradually receded in the post-Mao era; yet work has become highly gendered and man occupies the position of the residual revolutionary hero who rights social wrongs.[24] This observation, is useful to a certain degree in understanding gender hierarchy; however, it compresses our understanding of complex interactions between gender and class, as Larson excludes discussions of orthodox discourse on the work performance of ideal sacrificing images of political elites. From the zhuxuanlü films *Ren*

[24] Wendy Larson, *From Ah Q to Leifeng* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 211.

Changxia, and *Kong Fansen*, we learn that ideal images of Party members, highly acclaimed exemplary models from which the government urges people in general, and Party members in particular, to follow suit, hardly display any gender difference at work: both Ren Changxia and Kong Fansen prioritize serving other people before familial duties such as parenting and offering reverence to their own parents. It seems to celebrate the notion that both genders, when given job opportunities, are able to become exemplary models of the country; and that being heroic is not reserved for men, as women who sacrifice and serve the nation will also be so recognized. While the state's professed belief in the importance of outstanding performance overwrites gender differences and centers on genderless work outcomes, it simultaneously highlights gendered labor input, thereby covertly imposing a gender hierarchy in a form that differs from that which Larson's proposes. The film *Ren Changxia,* along with other discursive formations shaping the historical heroic figure of Ren Changxia, implies an anxiety concerning gender equality or female superiority. These cultural products add up to a hierarchy that subordinates women.

The film *Ren Changxia* barely emphasizes Ren's feminine gender, and if we see any reference to or expression of her biological sex, it is first encoded as a weakness and possible hindrance to work, and later enacted as a neutral sign of political benevolence. Hindrance to work and political benevolence both measure a sacrificing subject's work ability instead of showing gendered personhood. With the exception of the first scene after the opening credits, which highlights Ren Changxia's gender by showing her wearing lipstick while putting on her police uniform, the only reference to her biological gender appears when she associates her shedding of tears over crime scenes and for

victims' families with the fact that she is a woman. She explains her behavior by saying, "Women can't hold tears," and continues to comment, "I sometimes feel I am not qualified to be Police Chief. I am a woman and women sometimes get sentimental." Her senior criticizes her by saying: "You shouldn't cry in front of your team. Don't ever think that it is legitimate to cry because of your gender." These lines associate sentiments with women and weakness, highlighting it as a sign of femininity. Among other co-workers, regardless of their rank, Ren is the only person to cry over a victim's unfortunate circumstances, marking her difference as the lone female police officer in the film. However, this difference is linked to an inferior position within a gender hierarchy. Showing sentiment is associated with weakness; and a woman, even though she is portrayed to be more susceptible to feelings in the film, is forbidden to show her sentiments/femininity at work, as it raises anxiety concerning her work ability. Femininity, or gender difference, has to remain unexposed in order for women to compete with men. Paradoxically, expression of sentiments by no means exclusively feminine; it has turned into a sign of political capital, particularly in the political arena where it earns government officials reputations for having empathy for the people's suffering. China's current Premier, Wen Jiabao, has repeatedly appeared on the television screen sobbing about causalities of natural disasters or large-scale accidents. The allegedly pronounced sign of gender difference in *Ren Changxia*, therefore, remains gender neutral to a certain extent. However, it suggests that a good quality of a political leader is sensitivity to fellow citizens' suffering and hardship. Political leaders, such as Ren Changxia, seem to be better able to serve the people when they are able to feel the peoples' needs.

The reason for assigning an inadequate gender sign—crying—to underscore Ren's femininity is perhaps based on an anxiety that women could surpass men in their work performance. My question here consists of two parts: first, why point out her femininity if an ideal economic subject is to be genderless; and secondly, why assign an inadequate sign to signify her femininity. On one hand, the film, through Ren's voice, asserts that by being a woman, and therefore, sentimental, Ren is incompetent in her position as Police Chief, constructing a conceptualization of female inferiority. Changxia's juniors at the Dengfeng Police station question Ren's ability upon hearing that she, the soon-to-be Police Chief, is a woman.[25] As Changxia excels in her position, her work performance is undoubtedly outstanding. Ren's odd confession that "women are sentimental and are thus inferior" is implicative of a patriarchal anxiety over female excellence that needs to be soothed. However, the film *Ren Changxia* is designed to construct a devoted, selfless economic subject who functions proficiently within her position. Therefore, womanhood, or femininity, which can be imagined as inferior or weak, has to be suppressed. Thus, when we come to a place where a feminine attribute is needed to relieve the anxiety of excellent female performance, an inadequate feminine sign—crying—is employed.

Zhuxuanlü productions portray the Party as the moral leader, and thus to possess the mandate to rule China; yet, there remains space for reading against the grain within the narrative and within the perspective of audience response. Both the films *Ren Changxia* and *Kong Fansen* leave room for an ambiguous attitude, if not disapproval, towards sacrificing one's family when the subject chooses the greater good over

[25] Ge Fei, Niu Bocheng, et al., *Ren Changxia*(Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 2005), 36, 50; Also Yu Pei, Ning Li, ed., *Ren Changxia de gushi* 任長霞的故事[The story of Ren Changxia], 14.

immediate family members. After Ren Changxia's death, we see her father, paraplegic and suffering from Alzheimer's, alone and contemplating where Ren has gone and why she never comes to visit him. Ren's family lies to him, saying that Changxia has joined the international police to work for world peace. Here, the image of an aged, sick father missing his beloved daughter invites sympathy, and consequently, questions the value of such a sacrifice.[26] Kong Fansen's wife, though seriously ill, is deprived of her husband's company during her time of need because he values the communal family more than his kinship family. The story's plot reveals the hurt that is imposed on the family as the state's approved economic subject relinquishes his immediate kinship duties.

In addition, although these zhuxuanlü films acclaim the state's merits by underlining its outstanding members, the party officials' willingness to sacrifice may seem contingent at best, and not solely Party-motivated. For instance, Kong Fansen's urgency to rid Tibet of poverty and natural hazards may be rooted in his unspoken identification with the poor, as he himself comes from a destitute background. After he secured funding from the central government to develop Tibet, he gives a speech to the Tibetans in which he recalls a childhood memory of his mother's inability to buy him food. He cites this early experience as the root of his determination to end poverty for everyone. As for Ren Changxia, who practiced martial arts in her youth, becoming a police officer had been a longtime dream since childhood. It seems that, although both Ren Changxia and Kong Fansen may have been exposed to state apparatus that caused

[26] Although *Ren Changxia* opens up such an ambiguous space for a negotiated reading against the value to sacrifice oneself, the ending of the film closes such a space by portraying a carefree Ren Changxia surrounded by a field of beautiful yellow canola flowers, suggesting she enjoys a good afterlife for her sacrifice. These two scenes offer us evidence to show that conflicting ideologies are present in a zhuxualü production.

them to become state-patriots, their childhood experiences shaped their personalities and contributed to their individual commitment to helping their fellow citizens.

Ultimately, in the absence of data on viewers' responses, whether or not viewers of zhuxuanlü films accept the sacrificing Party office depicted on the screen and become supportive of the regime they represent remains an unknown. While it is impossible for me to completely rule out such a possibility, I am offering an alternative understanding here. A classmate of mine who worked at a university publishing house told me that she and her coworkers were given the opportunity to watch the movie *Ren Changxia* for free as a part of a political educational experience. For some, the film viewing provided a chance for people to socialize and gossip. After watching *Ren Changxia*, viewers had to discuss topics, such as whether or not the film had changed their impression of Party officials, or whether or not they were prompted to join the Party, etc. My classmate claimed that she experienced a feeling of indifference toward the film: she did not believe that such a hyper-sacrificing Party official could exist, but wished such a person did live to improve the world we live in. The audience was conscious that the film depicting Ren's noble life was a fictional product, despite the fact that they were aware of an individual named Ren Changxia who did actually live and die, and also despite the fact that the screening organ claimed faithfulness to Ren Changxia's authentic life.

Ruthless Profiteers and *Lost in Beijing* as Critical Realism

Local response to social change and money-oriented attitudes, brought about by global capitalism, are by no means unique to the state-sponsored filmic affirmation of positive figures. It can also be found in independent cinematic productions produced by various directors whose work first circulated in the international art-house before inhabiting

movie theatres (occasionally) in their homeland. One such production is *Lost in Beijing,* directed by the young female filmmaker Li Yu (1973—) who previously directed the first feature film on lesbianism—*Fish and Elephant* (Jinnian xiatian, 2001)—in Mainland China. Li Yu, a former program host at CCTV, entered the filmmaking industry by shooting documentaries in the mid-1990s. Up to the present, she has directed four feature films: in addition to *Fish and Elephant* and *Lost in Beijing*, there are *Dam Street* (Hongyan, 2005) and *Buddha Mountain* (Guanyin shan, 2011). Each of these films won awards at various international film festivals and helped Li achieve worldwide recognition.[27] They share a unifying theme of a woman's predicament in contemporary China.

Keeping the main attention on women but refocusing slightly on revealing social problems, the film *Lost in Beijing*, focuses on migrant workers' powerlessness and their appetite for money in a violently changing society that promotes both urbanism and accumulation of wealth. Both zhuxuanlü and independent film productions tackle the issue of the long-starved economic subject's extreme desire for financial gain;[28] they, however, approach such social issues with somewhat different axes of representation.

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[27] Her feature film debut won the Elvira Notari prize at the Venice Film Festival in 2001; her second picture captured the C.I.C.A.E (Confederation Internationale Des Cinemas D'Art et D'Essai) Award in Venice anew and the Golden Lotus Award from the Deauville Asian Film Festival in 2006; *Lost in Beijing*'s screenplay garnered her and the film's producer Fang Li Honorable Mention at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2007, and the film was nominated for Golden Berlin Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Best Film at the Bangkok International Film Festival; most recently, *Buddha Mountain* won the Award for Best Artistic Contribution at the 23rd Tokyo International Film Festival.

[28] There is no an agreed umbrella term capturing alternative film production and film culture in contemporary China. For the nuances of different terms for these productions, see Paul G. Pickowicz, "Social and Political Dynamics of Underground Filmmaking in China," in *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, ed. Paul Pickowicz and Zhang Yingjin, 1-22(Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). For my cases here, I use the term "independent production" instead of "underground" because the former includes productions that negotiate with Party-state but does not necessarily infer "illegal" or "without" the state's notice as the latter may associate.

Whereas state-sponsored films depict positive, exemplary figures primarily as sacrificing subjects who do not care about their own tangible and intangible interests (smaller self) and prioritize people's needs (greater self), independent film productions portray negative images of ruthless profiteers who acquire wealth for their own fortune (sometimes including family) at the expense of other people's families, well-being, or even life. In *Ren Changxia*, we see an upper class Party-member whose femininity becomes diminished as a by-product of her work in order to meet her career needs; yet in contrast, in *Lost in Beijing*, migrant workers' sexed and eroticized female bodies are sold at work for money. This contrast calls for an investigation into class and social differences. Depicting women migrant workers as powerless, sexualized, and mute, *Lost in Beijing* teases out their victimizer—the corrupt economic subjects who are enchanted, trapped, and shaped by global capital waves and the state's ideology of development and urban expansion while exploring the social and moral implications of China's economic escalation and its accompanying growing gap of wealth.

Lost in Beijing, a film that is both realistic and dramatic, might be understood as a serious display of realism in which moral disarray is exaggerated to the point of near absurdity. Since the story is based on everyday social problems, it stiumulated controversy and was banned by SARFT. Critical independent productions depicting the inhuman profiteer are historically grounded in the bleak reality and social reconfiguration that Mainland China is confusedly wresting with. The economic reforms, opening up space for aspirations of wealth, together with the exacerbated speed of economic development under the state ideology of "joining the global orbit" in the 1990s, have shaped a new form of economic subjectivity—one that pursues economic success and

perceives becoming rich as glorious.[29] During the revolutionary era, the honored social class were the proletarians; in global China, wealth took the place of a revolutionary career, re-emerging as the premiere measurement of social success.

With the private marketing of state enterprises and the retreat of various kinds of social welfare (such as housing and medical care), the quest for money began to be experienced by people in all walks of life. The flood of foreign investment and the establishment of privately-owned enterprise have expanded the market economy and created job opportunities and new professions for those who were willing to go into business, (known as "jumping into the sea" 下海 *xiahai*) to make huge profits as private entrepreneurs or senior/managerial Chinese employees in foreign firms. Although becoming a business person may be seen as morally weak or low-cultured in some circles, the fact that some cadres chose to stay in the state-owned sector offered no guarantee of economic satisfaction.[30] Many cadres grasped opportunities to tap into the pool of wealth through the convenience of their political capital or state policies.[31] Corruption within the Party-state, according to the official discourse we discussed above, was caused by

[29] Orville Schell, *To Get Rich is Glorious: China in the Eighties* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

[30] In theorizing social-stratification in post-socialist China, Carolyn Hsu conducted interviews in northern Harbin in the late 1990's and observed that Harbin residents continued to interpret urban workplaces through Mao's propagation: work options are either "inside" the state work unit or "outside" the state work unit; those who remain in the work unit contribute to the collective good while those who go "outside" have low education level, weak morality, and poor family background. See Carolyn Hsu, *Creating Market Socialism: How Ordinary People Are Shaping class and Status in China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 16-19.

[31] David Goodman argues that "China's new rich are not readily separable from the Party-state as a social, political, or even economic force," for instance, it is not uncommon for close family members of the CCP members become business people. See David Goodman and Xiaowei Zang, "The New Rich in China: the Dimensions of Social Change," in *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives*, ed. David Goodman (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 6; and David Goodman, "Why China Has No New Middle Class: Cadres, Managers and Entrepreneurs," in *The New Rich in China,* 35-6.

materialism and money worship imported by capitalism, thus debasing socialist purity. Such an association between capitalism and corruption is socially and discursively constructed, particularly to uphold the Party-state's mythic value of moral superiority and segregate any connection between the CCP's "indigenous" socialism and moral degradation. The filming of economically sacrificing subjects belongs to one of many kinds of strategies that construct an ideal economic subject that can serve the people.

The aspiration of attaining wealth might be greater at the grassroots level. Among the urban poor, migrant workers not only face pressures from poverty but also contend with discrimination by native urban residents. The uneven rural-urban development and the great income gap between the developing countryside and the more developed city created a huge, floating population composed of poor people who, desperate to extricate themselves from poor living conditions and poverty, find themselves enchanted by urbanism's promise of wealth. In 2006, migrant workers, individuals from rural households employed outside of their home district, numbered 131 million.[32] A majority of the floating population possesses an agricultural household registration, yet the essential reason for moving to cities is to find better employment with a higher income.[33]

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[32] See National Bureau of Statistics of China, "Communiqué on Major Data of the second National Agricultural Census of China (No. 5), National Bureau or Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/gjtjj_en_detail.jsp?searchword=+migrant+worker&channelid=9528&record=7 (accessed Jan 14, 2012). This number takes into consideration the rural migrant workers alone. According to the statistics in 2010, the total number of migrant workers hit 242 million, while the migrant workers employed outside their province reached 153 million, see National Bureau of Statistics of China, "Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2010 National Economic and Social Development," National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/gjtjj_en_detail.jsp?searchword=migrant+workers&channelid=9528&record=1 (accessed Jan 14, 2012).

[33] Nearly seventy percent of the floating population is registered as peasants in their households, and the reason why half of the floating population moves is for the purpose of employment and business, see Guojia tongjiju renkou he jiu yu tongjisi, ed., 2007 *Zhongguo renkou* 中國人口 [2007 China population] (Beijing Shi: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2008), 107-9. Wenshu Gao and Russell Smyth argue that expectations about future incomes is the reason why rural migrants continue to flock to cities where they

As almost ninety percent of migrant workers possess an educational level equal to junior secondary school or below;[34] their lack of professional qualifications and skills limit them to blue-collar or menial occupations, often in manufacturing or sales sectors.[35] Among all the Chinese cities, Beijing is one of the most attractive regions to the floating population, hosting about ten percent of all migrant workers. In fact, migrant workers made up more than one fourth of the total Beijing population in 2007.[36] The dream of becoming rich keeps these workers in the city, but what access do they have to future prosperity when they possess no professional knowledge? In order to acquire money, what are they willing to do and sell and how does it change their social and familial relations?

Li Yu's *Lost in Beijing* addresses these issues through a morally ambivalent transaction involving a child and two migrant couples in contemporary Beijing. The economically-deprived couple, An Kun and Liu Pingguo, engage in manual labor. While

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work in the so-called "Three D jobs" (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning jobs). See Wenshu Gao and Russell Smyth, "What Keeps China's Migrant Working Going? Expectations and Happiness Among China's Floating Population." *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy* 16, no. 2(2011):163-182. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the per-capita disposable income of urban households was three times higher than that of rural households, gearing an aspiration for a better life in the urban areas; see National Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2007," National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/gjtjj_en_detail.jsp?searchword=+migrant+worker&channelid=9528&record=8 (accessed Jan 15, 2012).

[34] According to statistics in 2006, see National Bureau of Statistics of China, "Communiqué on Major Data of the Second National Agricultural Census of China (No. 5)," National Bureau of Statistics of China, http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/newsandcomingevents/t20080303_402465584.htm (accessed Feb 07, 2012).

[35] For example, the male and female interviewees in an article appeared on *Beijing Review* were a cabinet installer and a salesperson at a department store respectively. Although the city life and their working conditions were not utopian, and they were of low socio-economic status and felt that they are labeled as second-class citizens because of their identity as migrant workers, they remain determined to become urban citizens and settle down in the city. See Yin Pumin, "A Beautiful Dream," *Beijing Review*, Jun 18, 2010, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/print/txt/2010-06/18/content_280181.htm (accessed Jan 15, 2012).

[36] The floating population in Beijing totally contributes 27% of Beijing population. Guojia tongjiju renkou he jiu yu tongjisi, ed., 2007 *Zhongguo renkou* [2007 China population] (Beijing Shi: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2008), 113-116.

working as a masseuse at the Golden Basin Foot Parlor, an intoxicated Liu Pingguo is raped by her Cantonese boss, Lin Dong. Her window cleaner husband, An Kun, witnesses the rape through the glass while he is suspended up in the air cleaning windows. He demands compensation for his mental distress from Lin Dong, but is denied and evicted from the parlor; in revenge, he later engages in an affair with Dong's wife, Wang Mei. Pingguo then finds herself pregnant, but is uncertain of the baby's parentage. An Kun then devises a money-making scheme: if the baby's biological father is Lin Dong, he will sell the child to Lin Dong. Because his wife is infertile and he longs for offspring, Dong agrees to the purchase price of RMB 120,000. After Pingguo gives birth, An Kun changes the baby's blood type on the birth certificate behind his wife's back and sells his son to Lin Dong. Dong is overjoyed by the belief that he has a son. According to An Kun and Lin Dong's contract, Pingguo will act as the baby's nanny in Dong's household for six months after which Dong's family will cut off all connections with Pingguo, as if Lin Dong and Wang Mei had conceived the child. However, An Kun eventually becomes jealous of Lin Dong's fatherhood and kidnaps the baby. The truth about the infant's biological father is finally revealed to the other three protagonists after the police catch An Kun with the kidnapped baby and demand a DNA test. At this point, both An Kun and Lin Dong want the baby. At the end of the film, Pingguo takes the RMB 120,000 and her child and leaves without a trace.

In this open-ended film, exchange value replaces legal justice as a new ethical code. Cui Shuqin analyzes Li Yu's trilogy as a vehicle for discussing female sexuality from the perspective of a female director and women's cinema, but criticizes *Lost in Beijing* as fatally flawed and void of critical power concerning a woman's agency over

her sexuality and body in comparison to Li's two previous works.[37] The assumption that Li Yu's trilogy centers only around female sexuality and that a female director's production must contain progressive feminist ideas ignores the possibility that the cinematic issue at stake could be the larger socio-economic context represented in the film, a context in which women (and men) reach an impasse. Li may be more concerned with the way in which hectic economic development and urbanism lead to a money-driven subjectivity and push the unsecured, working lower class to reduce morality and legal justiceto a market value. Pingguo is the victim of Lin Dong's rape and should be protected by the law; however, instead of actually suing him, she merely threatens him with a lawsuit in order to keep her job, which is her sole means of making a living. Feeling humiliated and legally powerless, her angry husband, An Kun, seeks monetary compensation totalling RMB 20,000 for his "emotional distress" but fails to collect any remuneration from Lin Dong or his wife.

Both Pingguo and An Kun's behavior seem ridiculous and an affront to morality and justice. Marshall Bauman's interpretation of Marx's nihilism explains the reason for such behavior. Bauman states that "any imaginable mode of human conduct becomes morally permissible the moment it becomes economically possible, becomes 'valuable;' anything goes if it pays."[38] We then understand that it is the rape's economic value that puts the act of rape on the market, not in the courtroom. *Lost in Beijing* suggests that money has replaced justice in contemporary urban Beijing. As such, it contrasts

[37] Cui Shuqin, "Searching for Female Sexuality and Negotiating with Feminism: Li Yu's Film Trilogy," in *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts*, ed. Wang Lingzhen, 225-6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[38] Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 111.

significantly with another film about justice—*The Story of Qiu Ju* (秋菊打官司 dir. Zhang Yimou, 1992)—which illustrates a persistent pursuit of justice or *shuofa* in a rural setting in China. These differing approaches to justice offer us a glimpse of the ways filmic representation has responded to the changing ethical codes in China over the past two decades. In *The Story of Qiu Ju,* Qiu Ju and her husband Qinglai perceive an apology from the village chief, who violated Qinglai by kicking him, as more significant than financial compensation, and they were willing to forsake their rights to indemnity based on the chief's apology. Here in *Lost in Beijing*, An Kun seeks justice by requesting monetary recompense. This suggests that market values significantly outweigh the importance of the law that Jiang Zemin developed at the 15th National Party Congress in 1997, rendering Jiang's slogan of governing the country with law a parody.[39]

Lost in Beijing examines the magnitude of commercialization in everyday life and the meaning of affective bonds in a highly market-driven China. Kinship seems to lead to unavoidable human bonding; as Rey Chow argues, family is at the very core of Chinese sentimentalism such that even murderers like those in the film *Blind Shaft,* (dir. Li Yang, 2003) experience emotional attachment to the biological family.[40] The film *Blind Shaft* portrays two migrant workers who will do anything, including committing murder, to support their son. Conversely, Li Yu's film proposes a somewhat reversed causal relationship: migrant workers may do anything to achieve the ultimate goal of earning

[39] Jiang emphasized that "ruling the country by law is the basic strategy employed by the Party" or *yi fa zhi guo shi dang lingdao renmin zhili guojia de jiben fanglue* 以法治國是當領導人民治理國家的方略. English translation quoted from Richard Baum, "The Fifteenth National Party Congress: Jiang Takes Command?" *The China Quarterly* 154 (Mar 1997): footnote 17, 147.

[40] Rey Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 176. I will also scrutinize *Blind Shaft* to provide a complementary understanding of inhuman profiteers in the following section.

money, including selling their biological son. Not only do social relations and legal justice now bear a price tag, but so does intimate life, or in this case, kinship. An Kun, an economically deprived subject, turns into an opportunistic, ruthless profiteer selling his paternity and his biological son for a windfall. In one particular scene An Kun views the positive results of Pingguo's pregnancy test, and immediately denies being the father of the baby. However, he orders Pingguo not to abort the embryo because he sees it as "a chance from the heaven," a key to wealth. He then informs Lin Dong of the news and proceeds to bargain with him concerning the transfer of the baby.

The bargaining scene best illustrates the ways An Kun and Lin Dong turn a child into a mere commodity. The bargain occurs on a grey rooftop of a building where An Kun cleans the windows. The dialogue starts with a close up on Lin Dong drawing a sketch of a person on the cement floor while asking for the blood types of Pingguo and An Kun. Lin Dong suggests that if he proves to be the biological father, he will offer RMB $10,000. An Kun disagrees claiming that,

> "It's not right… I don't think we can do it like this. Earlier you denied you had …um my wife, so you refused to pay me. This is one issue. Now you want this child. That's a different issue. There are two separate issues…You didn't even want to pay me before because you denied you ever had…my wife. Since you want this child now, you have therefore admitted you screwed my wife so you must pay me 10,000 first, no, 20,000 for my emotional distress."

An Kun's speech reveals an absurd logic concerning the child after claiming that the deal is not right. Rather than pointing out Lin Dong's perception of a child as a commodity, he disputes the price. He has already forgotten the mainstream morals and ethics involved in the birth of a baby. During this conversation, the camera constantly shifts right and left, providing detailed views of the speaking character's face, intensifying the tension. The close-ups on both the characters seem to magnify An Kun's greed and calculation and Lin Dong's anxiety over closing the deal. After an unknown woman steps into the scene,

the camera shifts to a two shot, bringing out both An Kun and Lin Dong's frustration over not coming to an agreement. The unknown woman serves as a painstaking reminder to An Kun and Lin Dong of what their actions really signify—bartering for a human life, not a commodity. At one point, An Kun begins thinking the transaction is no longer significant despite his attempts to convince Lin Dong to pay an additional 20,000, proclaiming that a child is worth more than just money, when he realizes the unknown woman has disappeared from the rooftop. Both men fear that the woman has jumped off the building, adding a touch of irony to their ruthless transactions: they dread a possible suicide, yet their cult of commodity blinds them from seeing that they are treating a renegotiation of human lives and familial bonds like an ordinary monetary transaction. Despite all that happens, they eventually sign a contract based on An Kun's terms—Lin agrees to pay RMB 20,000 as a first payment for An Kun's emotional distress. Further supporting their "partnership," Lin will buy the baby at a cost of RMB 100,000 if he is the biological father. During the nine month pregnancy, both men are anxious to find out the paternity of the baby: Lin Dong, who craves offspring, is worried that he will end up without the product/baby; conversely, An Kun seems ambivalent, jealous of the possibility that Lin Dong may possess the child but also excited by the possibility of earning a large sum of money.

An Kun turns into a heartless profiteer who, in the end, sells his paternity rights and his biological son for a windfall. Following Pingguo's labor, An Kun's economic ventures encounter a twist and intensify as he alone holds the answer to the overdue question of who fathered the child, with a birth certificate that includes the baby's blood type. Looking at the birth certificate, An Kun smiles for a few seconds then returns to the

doctor, where he lies, begs, and bribes him to change the blood type so that it matches Lin Dong's and enables him to complete the deal. His smile may indicate his joy of becoming a father or it could be pride in his victory in the sperm war with Lin Dong, but the market value of his paternity—RMB 100,000—instantly replaces his instant joy of his paternity. He decides to sell. The money-driven economic subject sees the intimate family issue of reproduction as another means of economic production where familial bonds are commodities ready for sale. Such a portrayal provides a realistic allegory of family life as a commodity, to the extreme point that even an individual's own product of reproduction is sold on the commercial market. It also extends the research of historian Eli Zaretsky and sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild concerning personal/intimate life in capitalism by offering a prophetic vision of a mutual constitution and re-configuration of the family and the economy.[41]

Arguing that the organization of production in capitalist society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is predicated upon the expansion of personal life and a gendered division of tasks, Eli Zaresky suggests that the family developed into a private haven from routine capitalistic exploitation, and through which the housewife's responsibilities were alienated from economic production. She is now responsible for the maintenance of the emotional and psychological realms of personal relations. In this sense, family as a part of personal life is sacred, pure, and separate from mundane production.[42] Yet, Hochschild proposes that in late twentieth century United States, family bonds grew

[41] Eli Zarestky, *Capitalism, the Family & Personal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); and Arlie Rusell Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[42] Eli Zarestky, *Capitalism, the Family & Personal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 24, 29, 61.

looser, or perhaps shifted, as the boundary between profane and sacred changed and may have even reversed such that work had become more like home/sacred and home had become more like work/profane. As the number of women entering the workforce multiplied during the twentieth century and working hours were lengthened, the work of caring for family members was contracted out to people from less developed countries and became a global commodity.[43] *Lost in Beijing* depicts a hyper-commercialized family structure that significantly contrasts with Zaresky's family that separates home life and the struggle for material wealth. An Kun's selling of his son is worse than the "care deficit" that emerged in the United States as a result of women's entry into the labor force. Zygmunt Bauman, calling for ethics in a liquid-modern setting, would probably find *Lost in Beijing* more shocking than American reality shows that serve as a public rehearsal for the concept of disposability of humans due to the film's portrayal of the process of selling of one's own son and forfeiting an intimate blood bond for economic self-interest. *Lost in Beijing* more bluntly expresses the dehumanizing effect of the consumer market than *Survivor,* a reality program in which competitors betray strangers in order to win the game.[44] From Bauman's perspective, not only are ethics disappearing in interactions between strangers, but also in intimate life amid family members.

Through depicting the ruthless profiteer An Kun's active and aggressive participation in the wealth scramble game, the film weaves complex interactions between classes and genders. Moreover, it accentuates, exposes, and sympathizes with the dominated, sexualized economic roles of women and their perceived inferiority in the

[43] Arlie Rusell Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1, 9, 198.

[44] Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* 56.

gender hierarchy, both in the public and private spheres. While neither An Kun nor Pingguo has professional knowledge with which to combat poverty, their genders determine their individual, yet differing ways that they can participate in the new economic order. Even in urban areas where there are more job opportunities, labor is sexually designated. Males sell physical strength to earn their bread and butter, while women are expected to exploit their "natural" biological capital to sustain themselves. Workplaces that accept women as economic subjects and laborers exploit and eroticize the female body. As a foot masseuse, Pingguo experiences such conditions, as she has to tolerate her clients' harassments to keep her job.

The hyper commercialized economic order storms its way into the family, and the private space even exists for a price; such market value conspiring with a patriarchal family structure tends to strip away a female's subjectivity. The patriarchal power of the husband dominating the wife violently possesses Pingguo's body and her reproductive capabilities. A gender hierarchy allowing male domination and possession of one's wife enables the money-minded An Kun to become a capitalist who commercializes Pingguo's procreation. He then alienates her child from her, reducing her to the level of an exploited worker within the intimate realm of pregnancy. An Kun asserts his patriarchal ascendancy over Pingguo with rape after witnessing her having intercourse with Lin Dong. Likewise, when An Kun and Lin Dong sign their contract, they render Pingguo mute and submissive, as if she were a mechanical production tool. In this transaction involving a baby, the intimate relationships between the couple, An Kun and Pingguo, turns into an economic relationship between capitalists and workers. Holding the birth certificate in hand, An Kun's patriarchal power conspires with economic desire and

determines to sell the baby and Pingguo's rights of maternity. This absurd story, if read as an allegory of China's economic development, predicts that inhuman conduct of individuals who exploit surplus value will lose affective bonding within the family; if read as a realistic and sympathetic representation of women from poor families, it depicts women's double exploitation: at work, they are eroticized, and in the family, they are oppressed, betrayed, and reduced to tools that generate money for the financially starved patriarchal figure.

That gender and class interweave to shape the economic subject is further suggested by characterizations of Pingguo's good friend and co-worker, Xiao Mei. Compared to Pingguo, who is unwittingly betrayed by her husband and is helplessly trapped into selling her baby if Lin Dong fathered it, Xiao Mei has an even more miserable life. While Pingguo almost loses her genetic son, Xiao Mei ends up losing her life to the city's darkness. The narrative of Xiao Mei is a short subplot, which lasts only nine minutes out of the one hundred and thirteen minutes of total running time; yet, it encapsulates the problem of women's vulnerability to violence and crimes.

Originally foot masseuse working towards the goal of buying a house in her rural hometown, Xiao Mei is fired for physically harming a client even though she was simply rebuffing his harassing advances. She continues to fall deeper into the impersonal nightmare for young and un/under-educated women, becoming a *sanpei xiaojie* or KTV bar companion/hostess and ultimately a prostitute.[45] Instead of condemning poor women

[45] *Sanpei xiaojie* 三陪小姐, literally, "girls who accompany men in three ways" refers to KTV bar companions or hostesses who provide services that typically include drinking, singing, dancing, playing games, flirting, chatting, and caressing. See Tiantian Zheng, "Anti-Trafficking Campaign and Karaoke Bar Hostesses in China," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies* 5 (Summer 2008): 75. Although the term *sanpei xiao* sometimes is associated with sexual services, Xiao Mei initially does not offer sexual service. In addition to appearing in filmic representations, *sanpei xiaojie* also are protagonists on the TV, for research on these cultural forms, see Julie Hackenbracht's master thesis, "Small Screen

working in such an industry for the sake of quick money, the film *Lost in Beijing* provides a sympathetic perspective on the motivation behind their "decadent" choice of such a career. Before Lin Dong rapes Pingguo, we see Xiao Mei whispering to Pingguo about her wish to buy an apartment in her rural hometown. Her motivation, to own a shelter by working in a sexually-charged parlor is humble and is common for a considerable number of people from the lower-class. Her protest against sexual harassment, however, costs her a job, and ultimately her dream of earning money, but leaves her dignity and purity intact. It is only afterwards that she learns that it is her body that is marketable; this revelation leads her to become a *sanpei* (三陪) and later a prostitute. The film dexterously expresses sympathy for Xiao Mei's character through diegetic music in the scene where Xiao Mei is playing her mobile phone's ringtone to An Kun. The ringtone is a popular song called *Piaoyao* (飄搖Drifting), the subject of which is a loss of romance that renders the first-person narrator "I" a rootless weed. Xiao Mei, smoking heavily, sings along with the clearly audible ringtone lyric: "I drift and drift, I totter and totter, as if a rootless weed" and verbalizes "I miss my mom." This heavy-hearted portrayal of Xiao Mei adds weight to the film's compassion for those who struggle in an alienating urban setting in their attempt at forging a better life. This song also serves as a rehearsed elegy for Xiao Mei, for this is the last scene in which we see her alive; in the next scene Xiao Mei appears as a cold, dead body lying in a mortuary, most likely having been robbed and killed by a "john". Unfortunately, she had uprooted herself from her "native soil" but dies without taking root in Beijing.

China: An Exploration of Contemporary Social Issues as Depicted in Chinese TV Dramas," University of Oregon, 2009.

Through Xiao Mei's gradual decline, the film discusses the cannibalistic aspect of China's modernization. Xiao Mei's descent into the urban mire is suggested via the changes in her appearance; her looks transition from plain and pure to sexually inviting. The last time we see her alive, her heavy make-up, including sharp red lipstick and outrageous fake eyelashes, together with her sexy outfits that reveal her cleavage, mark her erotic occupation and sexual availability. Affirming Charles Baudelaire as a genius of lyrical poetry in nineteenth-century Paris, Walter Benjamin argues that in Baudelaire's allegorical poems, the prostitute synthesizes "form and content;" in other words, she is "seller and commodity in one" in sunken Paris.[46] As an embodiment of commodification, the prostitute is a key figure in Baudelaire's allegory because, over time, she is susceptible to declining favor, physical disintegration and eventual ruinous impoverishment.[47] The modern face and unprecedented material abundance of Paris immersed in deep capitalism reminded Baudelaire of ruins; this dialectic way of seeing allowed Walter Benjamin to use the image of ruin as an emblem of constant movement and the fragility of capitalist culture.[48] Historical development, urbanism and progress, through Benjamin's lens, are all marching towards destruction and ruin. The more cosmetics the prostitute puts on, the lower her market value and the closer to ruin she becomes as a commodity. Xiao Mei's short life as a prostitute not only serves as an allegory for the destruction wrought by China's capitalist development, but also offers a

[46] See Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 335; and Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in High Capitalism* (London: NLB, 1973), 171.

[47] Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin, Critical Constellations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 209.

[48] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 164, 179.

critique of China's ruthless urban growth. The state ideology of accumulating wealth popularizes the dream of personal possessions. Nevertheless, the state may deny the fact that women from humble backgrounds are vulnerable to the dark side of society, another face of the cannibalistic monster called "modernization."

The theme of Xiao Mei's story—women's corruption and the darker side of modernization—displeased the censorship bureau. Though the production team submitted the unapproved version of *Lost in Beijing*, containing fifteen additional minutes, to the Berlin Film Festival and circulated it in the international film market, the Xiao Mei subplot was ultimately cut out of the officially approved PRC version in order to obtain a public screening permit. In the approved mainland version, Xiao Mei disappears after drinking with Pingguo and never shows up again. This seems to say that she is simply a meaningless narrative bridge, providing a cause for Pingguo's intoxication and subsequent rape, setting in motion the entanglement of two migrant couples; once her function is fulfilled, her character is discarded. In fact, the deleted scenes delineating her decadent behavior and death are representative of the fates of multitudes of women migrant workers whose lives exist outside the spotlight of China's growing economic legend on the international stage. It serves as a reminder to audiences that not all parties benefit from the transforming economy. Xiao Mei's narrative presents a darker picture of modernization, one that exposes citizens who are left behind and even destroyed by rapid economic growth. In other words, the "cleaned" up version excludes Xiao Mei's depravity and death, eliminating the film's critique of the corrupting power of money within the city.

The deletion of Xiao Mei's narrative also brings out an important issue of the various ways different local filmic representations are treated in the local Chinese market, despite the fact that they address the same issue of a money-driven economic subjectivity. While zhuxuanlü films portraying good characters win national awards, independent productions exposing the darker side of society are criticized, told to cut inappropriate scenes, or rejected from public screening by SARFT. This situation implies that there is a hierarchy that determines what kinds of filmic representations are better or more acceptable according to the state in the PRC. *Lost in Beijing* presents an unusual case of censorship in that it first successfully obtained a screening permit after five different rounds of negotiation with SARFT. Though the sixth re-submission was a version that left out fifteen minutes, the film's permit was revoked by the same bureau one month after its official public release, requiring the addition of a forced ending to public screenings. In regards to Xiao Mei's story and issues of economic subjectivity, what is left behind in the officially approved version, and what is officially considered too indecent to show? A further comparison of the approved international version will shed light on these questions.

There are four major alterations in the officially approved version: the deletion of Xiao Mei's narrative, the elimination of prominent geographical references, a simplification of characters, and reductions/deletions of sexual scenes. Each of these leads us to nuances amid the larger theme of economic subjectivity related to sex, gender, and social commentary. The elimination of Beijing and its landmarks are attempts to downplay the relationship between Beijing, once the center of revolution and now the engine of capitalistic operations, and a hotbed of evils where a cruel and inhuman

economic atmosphere is forming. One elimination of prominent geographical references is closely related to Xiao Mei's plot. In the scene where Xiao Mei and Pingguo consume alcohol at a restaurant, the references to Beijing are intentionally deleted. In the international version, Xiao Mei puzzles over prosperous Beijing's inhospitality to a plebeian like herself. However, in the "cleaned up" mainland version, reference to the political center of China is replaced by a neutral, abstract space called "the world." A few lines later, the conversation about characters' lengths of stay in Beijing and slang expression that they have learned was also excised. This excerpt not only hides the identities of some migrant workers, but also implies social and economic disparity in the vast geographic space of China, complicating popular notions of China's burgeoning financial system and its global image as an engine of wealth. Geographical references including images of Tiananmen Square are also excluded in the censored version. Tiananmen Square originally appears in two long montages: one features moving images of different kinds of infrastructure and architecture signifying the transformation of urban space, and fragments of lives of Chinese citizens from all walks of life, emphasizing a passage of time and changes within the five protagonists. In the censored version, the gate of Tiananmen Square on which Mao Zedong's portrait hangs, one of the most recognizable landmarks of Beijing, is cut out from the first montage rolling along with the opening credits. The camera first establishes the montage from Lin Dong's point of view by showing him driving, then shifts to the road ahead and moving street scenes on both sides of the road, showing high-rises, flyovers, construction sites and cranes, all signifying progress and urban development. The use of fast motion in this montage portrays Beijing's hectic capitalistic development and construction, creating the dizzying

feeling of being surrounded by hectic transformations. Mao Zedong's portrait in the Tiananmen Square embodies memories of revolutions and communism; and to cut out Mao Zedong's portrait from this montage diminishes the contrast between the current economic mode and the revolutionary era. Thus, it reduces tension and sarcasm regarding the Party's empty promise of a socialist utopia.

Simplifications of the economic subjects' characterizations are arguably associated with the CCP's orthodox requirements of clear-cut character distinctions. During the socialist era, the state regulated binary characterizations on the big screen, meaning that characters had to be either be politically bad or politically good.[49] The major narrative of *Lost in Beijing* portrays an immoral transaction between "bad" economic subjects; yet, there are subtle details that offer more multi-faceted depictions of these same subjects in the international version. Such ambivalent descriptions of protagonists are unacceptable to SARFT. According to the CCP's criteria, the capitalist as an economic subject exploits labor and thus should become a strictly "bad" character; however, Lin Dong is shown treating sex workers fairly in the unapproved version. In the hotel room scene, a prostitute tells Lin Dong that he is short RMB 200 for her service while he yells into the phone to An Kun, who is attempting to blackmail him for RMB 20,000. The international version maintains the ending of this scene, in which Lin Dong calls back the prostitute as she prepares to leave. He pays her full wages and claims, "I'm not the kind of guy [who takes advantage of others]." The deletion of this subtle plot development simplifies Lin Dong's characterization such that he conforms to a stereotype

[49] Yin Hong and Ling Yan, *Xin Zhongguo dianyingshi* 新中國電影史[Film history of new China] (Changsha Shi: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 26.

of a selfish, libidinous capitalist, preventing more complex manifestations of a "bad" economic subject.

The most controversial issue surrounding *Lost in Beijing* strangely lies less in the moral ambivalence of the economic subjects than in the presence of sexual scenes. The movie finally passed censorship after editors agreed to shorten or cut out several major sex scenes. However, SARFT's countermand of the permit, after the film had already been screened for a month, cast doubt on the initial decision and was suspected of being made based on a political agenda.[50] According to the Regulations of Film Script Filing and Film Management, any scenes that contain obscene, erotic, philistine, or vulgar content including promiscuity, rape, prostitution, sex acts, sex perverts, or sex organs are to be excised.[51] Thus, the shortening of An Kun and Pingguo's sex scene from two and a half minutes to forty seconds was an obvious gesture of compliance with the state policy. While the cutting of this scene seems to suggest that it is the sexual acts that are forbidden to the public, the fact that SARFT ultimately revoked the screening permit suggests it is the representation of these economic subjects per se that is intolerable to the state.

The banning of *Lost of Beijng* also offers us another insight into China's censorship system. Although SARFT claims that the treatment of sex scenes is a reason

[50] The punishments also include a prohibition of the producer Fang Li from film production for two years, disqualification of Laurel Films from participation in the film industry for two years, criticisms of other involved film production companies and investors, and also the directors and actors; see SARFT, "Guodian zongju guanyu chuli *Pingguo* weigui wenti de qingkuan tongbao" 廣電總局關於處理《蘋果》違規問題的情況通報[SARFT's report on violations of *Lost in Beijing*], SARFT, http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2008/01/03/20080103170651960259.html (accessed Jan16, 2012).

[51] SARFT, "Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju ling (di 52 hao)" 國家廣播電影電視總局令(第五十二道)[Ordinance of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (no. 52)], SARFT, http://www.sarft.gov.cn/articles/2006/06/22/20070924091945340310.html (accessed Jan 16, 2012).

for punishment, there are other clues indicating a possibility that it is negative representation itself that irritates high-ranking officials of SARFT.[52] The deputy head of the Film Management Department of SARFT criticized *Lost in Beijing* as an insulting portrayal of the era.[53] The particular portrayal most likely does not refer to the sex between An Kun and Pingguo because marital sex is anything but insulting. What the film may indeed be guilty of insulting is the collective face of the CCP's officials through negative portrayal of economic subjects that tends to expose a darker picture of China's modernization. It is also noteworthy that the film's screening period spread to the year 2008, the year in which the Olympic Games were hosted in China. During that time, the state attempted to create a positive impression as the official host of the Olympics. In spite of the fact that Li Yu, the director, defended the film by emphasizing that it is a realistic story (真實的故事*zhenshi de gushi*) and, likewise, Pingguo is a realistic figure (真實人物*zhenshi renwu*),[54] some Chinese film critics denied that such realism is desirable. Rather, these critics sanction films that glorify both humanity and society, or China, in this case.[55] The state rewards socialist realism, a realism that serves and

[52] The three reasons that SARFT stated for the cancellation of the permit are 1) the uncensored version of the film was submitted to the Berlin Film Festival without permission, 2) the deleted sex scenes circulated on the internet, and 3) the film's promotions are inappropriate and unhealthy. See SARFT, "Guodian zongju guanyu chuli 'Pingguo' weigui wenti de qingkuan tongbao" 廣電總局處理《蘋果》違規的問題情況通報 [SARFT's report on violations of *Lost in Beijing*], SARFT, http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2008/01/03/20080103170651960259.html (accessed Jan16, 2012). Even though *Lost in Beijing* is banned, Ang Lee's film *Lust Caution* which was in theatre almost the same time was not banned. Such comparison can serve another interesting research topic.

[53] Lu Xiaoxian, " *Pingguo* bei jin: jie se yi, jie ying nan" 《蘋果》被禁：戒色易, 戒癮難[*Lost in Beijing* is banned: easy is to abstain from lust, difficult to abstain from addictions], *Jiakechong* [Lifestyle culture] 2(2008): 66-7.

[54] Ge Suosuo, "Li Yu: Zhenshi zuo you liliang" 李玉：真實最有力量[Li Yu: Reality is the most powerful], *Shijie dianying zhi xhuang*[Screen] 1 (2008): 66-9.

[55] Yulinmufeng, "*Mangshan* dao *Pingguo* de zaodong" 《盲山》到《蘋果》的躁動[Restlessness of *Blind*

eulogizes a government that labels itself a socialist state, while punishing critical realism for exposing the darker sides of society. Regardless of whether *Lost in Beijing* is a film that uses obscene sexual scenes as gimmicks, SARFT's prohibition dovetails with another layer of control of economic subjects: this time it is control over the filmmakers. Chinese articles echoed SARFT's objectives that films involving sexual or erotic elements were vulgar, economically-driven and challenged the bottom line of morality.[56] It implies that explicit sexual connotations or images harm the film industry and, consequently, are immoral. This point of view concerning what good films and good filmmakers should look like to pass censorship and please the state explicitly spell out what economic subjects should act like on and off-screen in the film industry. Although the censorship system seems powerful enough to control what its citizens are able to see, the contradictory act concerning *Lost in Beijing* reveals that it is far from omniscient. Its function is to predict and eliminate, with a limited reservoir of resources, what may potentially spark effects that jeopardize the state and socio-political stability, but it is also impossible for SARFT to control an audience's (both political leaders and citizens) sentiments upon seeing visual productions.

Disposable Body and (Re-)Productive Body as Commodities

Lost in Beijing is by far the lone example of an independent production portraying a self-centered and money-driven economic subject that encountered opposition from censors. Such motif was earlier developed by a male director, Li Yang, (1959-) whose

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Mountain and *Lost in Beijing*], *Dianying huakan* [Film pictorial] 2(2008): 31.

[56] Wang Hongchang, "Cong *Pingguo* yu *Se Jie* kan dangqian Zhongguo dianying zhong de xing 'xushi'" 從《蘋果》與《色戒》看當前中國電影中的性「敍事」[Looking at the "narration" of sex in contemporary Chinese film through *Lost in Beijing* and *Lust, Caution*], *Dianying pingjie* 電影評介[Movie review] 7 (2008): 27-8.

series of "blind" films adds a complementary perspective in understanding the ruthless profiteer from the lower class, as they are set in a remote rural region. These films further our understanding of the interaction between gender and inhuman economic subjects, as well as the ways filmmakers/cultural elites use sex and pleasing elements as a camouflage to pass censorship. Li Yang's internationally renowned film, *Mang Jing*, (Blind shaft, 2003) received a different treatment by SARFT in comparison to *Lost in Beijing*. Acknowledging that the subject matter was overly sensitive, Li Yang did not even submit the script to the government for review given that the film did not stand a chance for public screening in the PRC. Yet, surprisingly the government allowed the film's DVD release at the end of 2003.[57] The second "blind" film, *Mang shan*, (Blind mountain, 2007) obtained a screening sanction under the condition of insertion of positive plots about the Chinese police in the mainland version, despite its presentation of human trafficking and rape in a rural village. Here, Li Yang could have paid particular attention to economic subjects in the lower social strata—both the victims and their villainous defrauders—in the changing economic structures in response to his own unfortunate childhood; his father was imprisoned and died during the Cultural Revolution for being branded an "unrevolutionary" actor.[58]

While a part of the floating population has crowded the city, some migrants have spread into remote areas, working at dangerous sites where they were rewarded with relatively higher wages. Coal mining is one of the industries that offer job opportunities, but risk workers' lives due to the unsafe nature of excavating coal hundreds of meters

[57] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images* (New York, Columbia Press, 2005), 226, 210.

[58] Li Jianmin, "'Heiren' Li Yang" 黑人李楊["Black Person" Li Yang], *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* [China News Weekly] 9 (2003): 64-5.

underground. On top of that, unfortunately, private coalmines are deregulated and oft-times illegal, with inadequate or no safety measures. The owners of such mines may use bribes to cover up accidents and prevent legal investigations so as to continue their business.[59] The living conditions and tragedies at such work sites are concerns of both literary and filmic representations. Liu Qingbang's (1951-) novella *Shenmu* (神木Sacred Wood) is one such example. Working in coal fields for a period of nine years during his youth, Liu Qingbang is committed to setting his novels in his personal workplace and village.

Loosely adapted from *Shenmu,* which won the 2002 Lao She Wenxue Jiang (Lao She Literature Award), *Blind Shaft* revolves around two villains executing their con to earn money by killing co-workers at unregulated coalmines. Li Yang's first feature film, unheard of to people outside of the Chinese film industry, defeated Zhang Yimou's extravagantly budgeted *Yingxiong* (Hero, 2002) among others, to win the Silver Bear Award at the 2003 Berlin Film Festival. Although not a documentary like Li's previous three productions, *Blind Shaft* adheres to a very realistic mode. Set in coalmine, the film features two cold-blooded migrant workers from the village dispatching other floating laborers. The villains, Song Jinming and Tang Zhaoyang, manage to convince a stranger who is seeking employment to pretend to be one of their relatives and bring him to work as a coalminer. They kill the "relative" underground and stage a mine accident to swindle compensation from the mine owner. In order to prevent news of the accident from reaching the public or the police, the mine owner pays RMB 30,000 for the loss of human life, and then, before burning the body, makes Song and Tang sign an agreement which

[59] The director Li Yang, researching coal mines before filming, concluded that virtually all coal mines are illegal operations. See Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images*, 219.

states that the coalmine takes no responsibility for the death. They proceed to send the money back to their rural family and then target their next victim in a town where migrant workers gather to await recruitment. This time, Tang chooses a sixteen-year-old youth, Yuan Fengming, who quit school to earn money to support his younger sister's education. Song initially refuses to kill the young man, but is later persuaded by Tang, who reminds him of the importance of earning money for their own sons. They then arrive in another remote coalmine town, where Song and Yuan masquerade as uncle and nephew. As the days pass, Song is moved by Yuan's kindness and naivety, but Tang is desperate to make quick, easy money again. At the critical moment, Song hesitates instead of acting out what they had plotted. Consequently, he is attacked by Tang, who believes that he has become too soft-hearted to kill because of Yuan's influence. As Tang and Song assail each other, the young boy manages to escape and save his own life, whereas the murderers are buried in the shaft due to an "accident" of their own making. Now Song and Yuan's roles are reversed; Yuan is offered RMB 30,000 compensation by his employer for the loss of a family member.

This suspenseful yet realistic narrative portrays cruel profiteers from two different classes who perceive human beings as a mere means to acquire income: the coal tycoons and migrant workers. For the coal mine owners, laborers are merely underground spades or drills in flesh who are willing to accept an amount of payment far lower than their products' exchange value. As one of the mine owners states "China lacks everything, but not humans." Thus employers are able to hire millions of floating laborers at low rates. Despite accidents that take lives, employers do not seem to feel guilty or sad, and do not care about emotional distress to co-workers or feel sympathy for a human life lost. The

first thing a coal mine owner does in the film after such an accident is block all the entrances/exits of the mining field to ensure no one leaks the news or contacts the police, and then secondly, disposes of his "broken instrument," or employee's corpse, to prevent police investigation. Not surprisingly, this profit-oriented logic also bewitches proletarians. Tang Zhaoyang and Song Jinming, without any capital, invest in a high-stake scam and take advantage of an ample supply of human lives. Haiyan Lee argues that the Chinese people were initially heartfelt subjects before they became modern patriotic subjects of the state.[60] In contemporary China, transforming from a socialist subject to a capitalistic subject seems to be detached from evolution: one is free from feeling for people based on native place affiliations; instead, feelings may be exclusively preserved for family members, as Rey Chow maintains.[61] Nevertheless, as I illustrate above, *Lost in Beijing* calls for a revision of Chow's interpretation of Chinese kinship, as it leads us to reflect solely on capital, the extreme power of which may defeat everything, including Chinese family ties. Comparing *Blind Shaft* with zhuxuanlü films like *Ren Changxia* or *Kong Fansen* as an allegory of community formation provides us with a clearer picture of how changes in economic structure shape the mutating perceptions of self, family, and community in post-socialist China. The portrayal of economic subjects such as Song Jinming and Tang Zhaoyang, who kill for their own family's benefits, is in stark contrast to Ren Changxia, or other outstanding filmic Party cadres, who see the

[60] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950.* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[61] Rey Chow sees *Blind Shaft* as an allegory of an unconcealment of species differentiation—that people kill strangers and preserve their own group survival; see Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films*, 178.

whole community as their family, therefore serving *da jia* (大家, the social family/greater good) at the expense of their *xiao jia* (小家, biological family/lesser good).

The readings of Wang Ban and Tom Zaniello help us understand China's dark social reality under the context of capitalistic globalization: Wang reads *Blind Shaft*'s documentary mode as a means of unraveling the chronic cancer of capitalist production in China while Tom Zaniello includes *Blind Shaft* under the umbrella category of cinema of globalization.[62] However, they are not informative in helping us understand China's elusive screen culture of censorship and the entanglement of sex and politics. Although the reason for the state's attitude shift from disapproval to semi-approval (DVD release) stays concealed, we are able to glimpse the modifications made to accommodate the state's censorship or the director/production team's self-protection for release. The alternations are few; yet they bring out the interesting issue of the (de-)sexualization of social commentary. The DVD poster shown in international film festivals is one that features three miners, Song, Tang, and Yuan, against the backdrop of a bleak coal field; however, in order to downplay the role of coal mining in the film, an alternative sexualized poster was used in the mainland which portrays a man and a woman's naked bodies embracing, suggests to audiences that the film's focus lies in sexual appeal.[63] Although the majority of the film presents no direct criticism of the state or the Chinese government, it does unreservedly visualize poverty and cruel murders, the very underside of economic reform and the state's hegemonic modernization. Shifting (if not entirely

[62] Tom Zaniello, *The Cinema of Globalization: A Guide to Films about the New Economic Order* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2007), 43. Wang Ban, "Documentary as Haunting of the Real: the Logic of Capital *in Blind Shaft*." *Asian Cinema* 16, no. 1(2005): 4-15.

[63] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images* (New York, Columbia University, 2005), 551, footnote 1.

covering up), the attention from social criticism to sexual voyeurism, the film's focus seems to be sexual exploitation rather than social exploitation. Here, political elements are intentionally sexualized to avoid explicit references to the sensitive issue of unsafe coal mining perpetuated through corruption of Party officials.[64] However, DVDs buyers who pay money to gratify a sexual impulse may find themselves disappointed due to the limited number of sexual scenes and scant nudity in the film, particularly if they purchase the sanitized version on the mainland. Although the poster cover is erotic, the film content is sexually sanitized. Scenes that expose two prostitutes' nipples while the women are servicing their patrons are cut out.

A sexually and politically provocative reference receives ambiguous treatment in the film's mainland version. The scenes in which Tang and Song seek sexual services at a karaoke bar after their first murder contains a contemporary parody of a revolutionary song, *Socialism is Good*. While Tang and Song are in the middle of singing the orthodox revolutionary lyrics, "Socialism is good, Socialism is good, In a socialist country, The people have high status, The reactionaries were overthrown, The imperialists fled with tails between their legs, The whole nation was united, Bringing an upsurge for the building of socialism," they are introduced by the prostitutes to a revised set of lyrics that satirizes the hypocritical operation of Chinese socialism. The parodic lyrics go "The reactionaries were never overthrown. The capitalists returned with the U.S. dollar, Liberating all Chinese, bringing the sexual orgasm of socialism." Here, sexual expression epitomizes the liberation of all previously suppressed desires during the revolutionary era

[64] I do not think that it is commercial concerns that account for such a change. Even though it is impossible to completely eliminate such a possibility, the regional differences remain a significant factor. Why is it that China that demands such tailoring of content? If sex is so appealing, why is it less appealing than politics for citizens of other nationalities?

and simultaneously denotes the prostitutes' sexual invitation. The treatment of this part hints at a trace of self-censorship or a commanded gloss-over that implicitly highlights social satire. The DVD version released in the PRC deletes the lines about Chinese liberation and the sexual climax of socialism. While we are uncertain whether it is sex or socialism that indeed incites the lines' excision, the deletion of these two phrases but not the entire satirical song demonstrates that it is the parallel of sex and socialism that disturbs social harmony, for it adulterates socialism with secular sexual needs. In addition, the satirical version of the song *Socialism is Good* is not fully comprehensible to all Chinese audiences because the protagonists speak the Henan dialect throughout the film, and the subtitles vanish at the very moment the prostitutes sing "The reactionaries were never overthrown. The capitalists returned with the U.S. dollar." Such an ambiguous arrangement preserves part of the satirical message but makes it more obscure.

While sexual and the political overtones intertwine, the body is the site where the two themes materialize. *Blind Shaft* reflects on the meaning of the gendered body of and to poverty-stricken subjects. For the money-minded economic subjects, the body signals two highly gendered and sexualized sources of income. Tang and Song's villainous murders show a regard for male migrant workers as potential targets, a disposable human resource that brings them once-and-for-all income. The living body serves as a container for a life that is to be taken to earn quick money. As a result, Tang and Song generally remain detached from the men they kill; and see them merely as some-body. Right after they receive compensation from a mine owner in the beginning of the film, we see them talking about their lack of interest in knowing the name of the individual they just killed. An unknown man's life gains value in the moment he turns from a living body to a dead

body. A woman's body, on the other hand, is a durable, productive tool that is capable of generating a stream of future income. Tang and Song, teasing prostitutes at a brothel, vocalize their view on the female body as a vehicle capable of making money: as long as women spread their legs, they can make hundreds of RMB. The biological, sexual difference is economically significant. Instead of being killed for a one-time fixed price, a woman's body, when sold in prostitution, repeatedly yields profits. Like Xiao Mei in *Lost in Beijing*, the prostitute Song picks for his "nephew" Fengming before they kill him, Xiao Hong, presents herself as both the capitalist and commodity. Neither does *Blind Shaft* portray a prostitute, Xiao Hong in this case, negatively or as morally decadent. When we see her mailing money at a post office, we learn that she is not just another floating laborer, but also a good young woman, perhaps a filial daughter, who sells her body to support her rural family. The film, while filled with details of cruel assassinations, also contains unspoken sympathy for socially marginal groups who struggle to earn a living.

Xiao Hong is relatively more fortunate than the female protagonist in Li Yang's second "blind" film—*Blind Mountain*, considering the fact that she enters prostitution by will and enjoys its financial benefits. The female protagonist in *Blind Mountain* is sold and raped. Ruthless economic subjects see the female body as not only productive, but re-productive in rural villages where women are the property of men, valued only for the functionality of their wombs. Set in the 1990s, *Blind Mountain* depicts its female protagonist being kidnapped and sold to a remote village in Northern China where female villagers are scarce. Such filmic representation shows how an inhuman profiteer, or human trafficker in this case, finds financial value in a woman's womb and body rather

than in her education level or intellect. The film opens by introducing the viewer to an unemployed college student named Bai Xuemei, who is travelling with an obliging couple to a scenic, yet remote mountain village to trade Chinese herbs, hoping to earn money to pay off the debts her family incurred for her education and to support her younger brother's studies. However, it is immediately revealed that the two kind strangers are human traffickers who drug her, steal her identification and money, and sell her to a middle-aged pig farmer for RMB 7,000. The farmer, Huang Degui rapes her, then beats and chains her after her attempted escapes. She later realizes there are many purchased wives in the village, none of whom have succeeded in escaping, as all of the villagers collaborate to block the only way to town. Some women have become mothers and have given up running away for the sake of personal freedom, while some were so seriously abused that they are lame. After attempting suicide and prostituting herself to collect money to run away, Xuemei fails to flee due to the village's tight surveillance network and cold-blooded, cowardly patriarchal outsiders who yield to a malevolent mob hunting for her. She gives birth to a baby boy, but her will to gain freedom is never extinguished. Aided by a small neighboring child, her rescue letter finally reaches her father, who comes to save her. The film's two versions offer two distinct commentaries about the police in order to cater to mainland China and to the international market: one optimistic and one pessimistic.

By comparing *Blind Mountain* to *Blind Shaft,* we encounter a disturbing, terrifying, and saddening picture of a struggling China as represented by the massive patriarchal oppression of women. Just as women think that education will enhance their qualifications, help them to climb the social ladder, and thus provide financial security

for their families, they continue to fall prey to insensitive human traffickers who view their bodies as re-productive products for a patriarchal market hungry for wombs and sexual slaves. Disillusioned by her experience with the capital logic of money's effect on outsiders, Xuemei recognizes that she needs money to motivate helping hands, and that the sole money-generating tool in her possession is her body. She prostitutes herself to a villager and earns the money she needs to escape. She almost succeeds in her attempt and would have been reunited with her family had a police officer acted with more compassion. Indeed, all patriarchal figures in the film treat women as chattel with two movable legs. Not surprisingly, the indifferent police officer is cut from the PRC version of the film to avoid the possibility of vilifying the police and triggering anti-state sentiments.

Merely removing negative portrayal of a state organ does not make the film's narrative optimistic enough to please censorship. The replacement of the tragic ending shown in overseas markets with a heroic police rescue act proved a successful tactic to render *Blind Mountain* acceptable for public screening in the PRC. The overseas version not only shows more nudity during Xuemei's rape, but also features a violent confrontation pitting Xuemei and her father against Huang Degui and his family. When Degui attempts to hide Xuemei from the police, Xuemei's father endeavors to stop him and is badly beaten. Frustrated and outraged, Xuemei picks up the cleaver we have seen her use in previous scenes and chops Degui. Silent and without depiction of blood or death, the films ends with a short focus on Xuemei's face, revealing a blank, but relieved expression. When this violent sequence starts, she and her father are surrounded by a mob of villagers; and the ending of the film leaves us in the dark as to what will happen to

them; what we are certain of is that the police fail to set her free. On the other hand, the mainland version turns into propaganda for the Chinese Police. The police, who are previously driven away by villagers, return and rescue her and other trafficked women. The film ends with a dark background and words stating that the Chinese Police have been fighting human trafficking, saving plenty of female victims, and have arrested human traffickers. This significant change marks a compromise made to delight censorship and the state apparatus. The police execute justice, and ruthless economic subjects are punished. The darker side of society can only be revealed to the public once the state's power and authority have been reaffirmed.

Conclusion: The State as Savior to Evils of Capitalism

Both *zhuxuanlü* and independent productions are China's local responses to moral and ethical corruption. The socialist spirit promoted by the state shapes an exemplary model of economic subjectivity that emphasizes self-sacrifice or sacrifice of the smaller good for the greater good. The discussed films suggest that the ultimate purpose of portraying morally and ethically superior Party officials is to consolidate the power of the regime. Independent productions depict selfish, money-driven economic subjects who sacrifice others to benefit themselves; and the deletion of scenes or banning of the discussed films imply that the state controls representations of people's pursuit of wealth, as they potentially reveal the darker side of a contemporary Chinese society which, according to the state, is otherwise a bastion of progress and prosperity, proudly striding forward toward global leadership.

Zhuxuanlü films present self-sacrificing Party officials who serve the people not out of economic gain but because of their socialist spirit. The protagonists Ren Changxia

and Kong Fansen relinquish their health, family, and money to work for the country. *Days Without Lei Feng*, with its highly selective temporal structure, presents to us an orthodox discourse that ascribes moral corruption to money-minded subjectivity and suggests that the socialist spirit is being threatened by market logic. *Ren Changxia* and *Kong Fansen* also illustrate displacement of filial piety, in which the protagonists prefer to attend to communal duties instead of familial duties, thereby constructing the state's moral authority. The socialist spirit equates people with the greater good; consequently, a biological family is the smaller good. The selfless economic subjects, Kong Fansen and Ren Changxia, fulfill their public duties but not their private ones. Although the narratives supposedly glorify such heroic, self-sacrificing figures, it also depicts the loneliness and helplessness of their neglected family members, leaving us to reflect on an emptiness within the family and an example of affective bonding taken away by the state. Moreover, economic subjects are gender and class sensitive despite the fact that the self-sacrificing socialist spirit of Party officials requests homogeneous work output such that both genders have to sacrifice their social roles in the family to serve the people as illustrated in *Ren Changxia* and *Kong Fansen*. In the film *Ren Changxia,* women's sentimentalism is emphasized as a weakness and a sign of inferiority in the workplace, implying an inherit gender hierarchy that simultaneously indicates anxiety over women's success and requests women to suppress their "weakness" as an embodiment of the socialist spirit.

The ambiguous deletion of film sequences and prohibition of films that contain cold-blooded economic subjects remind us of the question: In what ways do filmmakers execute their agency and subjectivity and insert a critical voice in films that aim to pass

censorship? I have illustrated that representations of bad economic subjects are associated with nudity and sex scenes that oft-times render women as objects, if not victims, of ruthless profiteering activities.

Lost in Beijing depicts an inhuman migrant worker from the lower class who is willing to sell his biological son for profit, turning his paternity and familial affection into commodities. The film also examines women's economic subjectivity and quandaries. Because they lack professional skills, Pingguo and Xiao Mei engage in eroticized work to earn a living. Unlike Ren Changxia, whose gender is physically minimized to allow her to fit into her service career, Xiao Mei has to prostitute her body, her sole capital, on the market. The prostitution of Xiao Mei offers both an allegorical reading of China's modernization and a literal reading of women's predicaments in a hectic time of economic growth. Allegorically, Xiao Mei's prostitute image, through the Benjaminian lens, symbolizes China's urban development and progress that marches toward destruction and ruin. Literally, the portrayal of Xiao Mei's decadence and death shows the film's visual compassion toward women from humble origins who dream of a better life through the modernization project, but receive little or no benefit from it. *Lost in Beijing*'s screening permit was voided and the film was banned from public viewing due to the government's conclusion that obscene scenes were circulating illegally. However, such an excuse does not dissolve a person's doubt regarding the real reason behind cancellation, which was possibly out of political consideration, as the film portrays so much of the darker side of society.

Blind Shaft and *Blind Mountain* supplement our understanding of the reverse logic of serving and feeling for the nuclear family, as well as censorship of economic

subjectivity and social critique. People at the grassroots level keenly feel the need for financial security, as the state no longer provides social welfare to its citizens. As illustrated by Tang Zhaoyang and Song Jinming, who kill strangers for money in order to support their families, cruel and inhuman profiteers prioritize their own families before the greater good of the community under the new economic order. *Blind Shaft* also visualizes how money-minded economic subjects perceive sexual bodies in a different light: the male body is a once-and-for-all opportunity for making profit, while the female body is relatively durable and productive in its possibility of multiple prostitutions and a stream of future income. The fact that *Blind Shaft* was not publicly screened is possibly associated with its sensitive issues of illegal mining and cruel murders. However, the DVD release is suggestive of a paradoxical entanglement of sex and political taboos. Whereas sensitive taboos displease the state and are not approved for public screening, the focus of social critique is strategically diverted or diluted by sexualizing the film during promotion in the PRC. In other words, sex, perhaps, is a passable disguise for political and/or social critique. *Blind Mountain* supports *Blind Shaft,* and both depict cruel economic subjects, i.e. human traffickers, selling female bodies that once again highlight the female economic subject's vulnerability in an economic venture. The ending of the mainland version of *Blind Mountain* reveals a practical survival tactic used by film producers who intend to reveal forms of economic subjectivity divorced from the socialist spirit. To successfully acquire a screening permit, the mainland version of *Blind Mountain* chooses a closure that favorably depicts the Police, a significant state organ that maintains political stability, while shifting the focus of the narrative to the state

power in executing justice. In this way, the narrative becomes a mouthpiece of the state and not an irritating exposure of social darkness.

Finally, when examined together, these discussed films reveal that an individual's economic subjectivity is configured by the ability to feel for others: if they are able to feel for others, they tend not to harm others for money. The socialist spirit engenders an affective subjectivity, such that Party officials such as Ren Changxia and Kong Fansen can empathize with and then prioritize people's needs, which, in turn, drive them to be selfless economic subjects, earn them a good reputation, and render them exemplary models for their compatriots. Expression of feelings, however, is subject to political annexation and used as a political tool for gaining citizens' support, as illustrated by Premier Wen Jiabao's political performance and of course the films *Kong Fansen* and *Ren Changxia* per se. While China's political leaders seem to use sentiment to express their concern for and condolences toward their fellow citizens, authenticity of feelings is to be evaluated through government's policies. Bad economic subjectivity, for example, like that of An Kun and Tang Zhaoyang, limits its feelings to oneself or to the immediate family, and thus, stays indifferent to harming others. Conversely, provided that inhuman profiteers could change their scope of feelings, they may no longer see others as strangers but as communal members they refuse to hurt. The process of turning into a communal family requires a common ground. When Song and Tang shared a common ground of supporting their own nuclear families, Song agrees to harm Yuan because Yuan was a stranger to their bonding group; yet, when he begins to share a common belief in education with Yuan, he perceives Yuan as a closer communal member than Tang, resulting in his hesitation to commit unspeakable acts of cruelty.

CHAPTER III

SOCIALIST MARRIAGE FIDELITY AND SEXUAL BOUNDARIES VS. TRANSGRESSIVE LICENTIOUS DESIRE

After discussing the impact of the (non)profit-driven subject on the self, family, and community, now I turn to the investigation of changes in domestic dynamics. I will examine the current landscape of sexual subjectivity on the TV screen as a point of departure from which to understand how sexual desire, family, and marriage have been transforming along with China's neo-liberal advances. In this chapter, I study two TV dramas, the zhuxuanlü production *Jinhun* (金婚 Golden marriage, 2007) and the state-criticized *Woju* (蜗居 Narrow dwelling, 2009), in order to understand the extent to which the pursuit of sexual desire is allowed on the screen and to what ends sexual desire is pursued after the disassociation of sexual impulse and political engagement. I argue that *Golden Marriage* is the state's attempt to promote the sexual morality of the socialist spirit by advancing sexual fidelity, curbing excessive sexual desire, and stabilizing family structure both on-screen and off-screen; and that *Narrow Dwelling* is a more commercial production that reveals disastrous licentious desire that transgresses marriage boundaries and stands in stark contrast to socialist sexual morality, thus inciting governmental condemnation and controversial public debates.

To analyze *Golden Marriage* as a zhuxuanlü production, I first briefly review the depictions of sexual infidelity and marital crises before *Golden Marriage* in relation to real-world changes in marriage behavior in order to introduce the televisual and social background against which *Golden Marriage* appears on the screen. I identify three boundaries that *Golden Marriage's* narrative set up for the state-approved ideal sexual

subject, namely motivation, length, and institution. *Golden Marriage* portrays a married couple whose sexual motivation is established on pure feelings and nothing else, whose marriage lasts longer than half a century, and whose sexual life abides by the PRC's Marriage Law—the state's institutionalization of sex. In addition, the TV drama also reprimands and domesticates the unruly sexual subject whose sexual subjectivity is the opposite of that of the ideal sexual subject. However, because the TV industry is currently more commercialized and no longer directly a top-down ideological vehicle, I also scrutinize *Golden Marriage's* narrative to see how it attracts an audience by straddling the line between the market mechanism and SARFT's campaign to sanitize the screen. Furthermore, I pay attention to the extent to which the narrative is able to mute all other kinds of negotiated and/or alternative discourses of marriage and extra-marital affairs so as to purely promote the hegemonic state ideology in which an ideal, faithful subject has a long marriage. Lastly, I will also inquire into the ways in which the sexual socialist spirit works for the political socialist spirit, thus contributing to the political regime. Through these lines of inquiry, we can better understand how the state intertwines and intervenes in conceptions of sex, marriage, and family at the cultural level. By doing so, we also improve our knowledge of how the socialist spirit manifests itself in a sexual way.

I then turn the discussion to *Narrow Dwelling,* a contrasting example portraying excessive sexual desire that develops into an illicit extra-marital affair between a young woman and a middle-aged Party official. These two protagonists, Haizao and Song Siming, are "bad" subjects transgressing the three boundaries established by the Marriage Law and approved by the state. The TV drama not only introduces us to an illegitimate

sexual relationship but also magnifies the participants' explicit sexual pleasure, thus drawing heavy criticism from SARFT. I propose that the re-emergence of mistresses and the pursuit of individual sexual desire are associated with the current nation-building project, and that the on-screen mistress finds her prototype in reality. In addition to providing us an example that centers on the free pursuit of desire, the text *Narrow Dwelling* also offers us a point of departure from which to dissect state/individual interactions through censorship, self-censorship, and audience response. I read the moral ending of *Narrow Dwelling* as a sign of self-censorship, undertaken in order to pass the TV censorship system and obtain a broadcast permit. On one level, although *Narrow Dwelling's* scandalous depictions go far beyond what SARFT would prefer to screen, its narrative remains subservient to an orthodox moral standard and curbs the radical heterodox pleasures that it once celebrated in the middle of the narrative, meaning that censorship has successfully guarded certain moral values to a certain extent. Yet, on another level, the ending hardly succeeds in correcting viewers' identification with Haizao's choice in becoming a mistress for the sake of a better life: viewers express their own concerns regarding sex, love, and marriage on the Internet, and some have even rewritten the drama's ending, transforming the conclusion into one that satisfies their own imaginary of Haizao and Song Siming.

Golden Marriage: Zhuxuanlü TV Drama Representing Model Sexual Subjects

I argue that though the disintegration of the sublime figure leads to the pursuit of sexual pleasure, the state remains active in curbing this phenomenon by creating faithful sexual subjects in service of establishing a harmonious society and eliminating social instability in familial structure. Therefore, even though on-screen and off-screen sexual subjects

appear to have more freedom to embrace their secular sexual pleasure per se, without sublimating sexuality into politics, the state attempts to shape people's off-screen sexual subjectivity by creating an on-screen exemplary sexual subject and encouraging the institutionalization of sexuality in the form of marriage. Before I delve into a close reading of *Golden Marriage*, I will first juxtapose the creation and broadcast of *Golden Marriage* against those of its predecessors and discuss the larger landscape of marriage and relationships in contemporary China.

Following the changing social structures and a retreat of the state's control over people's public and private lives, China experienced a drastic rise in the divorce rate. The 2003 new Marriage Register Regulation (*hunyin dengji tiaoli* 婚姻登記條例) rendered couples less dependent on the state's approval for marriage and divorce. To file a divorce, individuals are no longer required to obtain a recommendation letter from their work unit, villagers' committee (*cunmin weiyuanhui* 村民委員會) or residents' committee (*jumin weiyuanhui* 居民委員會).[1] From 1995 to 2000, the divorce rate rose 9%, while from 2000 to 2005, the rate surged by 41%. In 2008, the number of divorce cases stood at 1.71 per thousand residents.[2] Beginning from 2004, when SARFT issued a regulation removing crime-themed TV programs from primetime programming,[3] the marriage-romance genre (婚戀劇 *hunlian ju*) has taken center-stage. Along with marriage-romance,

[1] Wu Xiaocheng 吳小成 ed, *Hunyinfa shiyong yu shenpan shiwu* 婚姻法適用與審判實務[Applications and practical issues of Marriage Law] (Beijing: Zhongguo fazhi chubanshe, 2008), 257.

[2] Figures from Zhonghua Renmin Gonghe Guo Minzheng Bu 中華人民共和國民政部, *Zhongguo minzheng tongji nianjian*2009 中國民政統計年鑒 (China Civil affairs' Statistical Yearbook) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongjishe Chubanshe 中國統計社出版社, 2009), 76.

[3] Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai, "Introduction," in *TV Drama in China*, ed. Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai, 8 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008).

marital crisis, including divorce, extra-marital affairs, and infidelity, has become a prominent sub-topic on the TV screen.

In fact, television dramas discussing marital crises, especially relationships involving extra-marital affairs (*hun wai lian* 婚外戀) or the third party/the other woman (*di sanzhe* 第三者) that results in divorce or break up, have been appearing with increasing regularity since the 1990s. Early in 1998, the popular TV drama *Qian shou* (Holding Hands 牽手) set a new precedent by no longer demonizing the third party, instead depicting her as pure and innocent. Since then, extramarital partners have become increasingly common on the small screen. Along with *Holding Hands*, some other well-received dramas involving a mistress include: *Zhongguo shi lihun* (Chinese-styled divorce, 2004 中國式離婚), *Jiehun shinian*, (Ten years of Marriage 結婚十年, 2003), *Lailai wangwang* (Coming and going 來來往往, 1998), *Rang ai zuo zhu* (Love comes first 讓愛作主, 2000), *Zou guo xingfu* (Walking with happiness 走過幸福, 2003), *Cuo'ai* (Wrong love 錯愛, 2006), and *Zhongnian jihua* (Middle-aged plans 中年計畫, 2006).[4] Works mentioning divorce are also common: *Banlu fuqi* (Halfway Couples 半路夫妻, 2005), *Shiyue huaitai* (Ten months of pregnancy, 2005), *Xin jiehun shidai* (New Age of Marriage 新結婚時代, 2005), and *Lihun jinxing shi* (In the process of divorce, 2005).

However, the state and SARFT have criticized this trend on the TV screen. SARFT promulgated a temporary regulation of content censorship of television dramas on May 29, 2006, restricting themes and plots shown on-screen, and ordering deletion of

[4] Jason McGrath's theory of "cinema of infidelity" also applies in TV dramas in which it is the male character who has an extra-marital affair in urban settings. See Jason Mcgrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008), 100.

topics that are "obscene" (*yinhui* 淫穢), "erotic" (*seqing* 色情), "vulgar" (*yongsu* 庸俗), and "unrefined" (*diji* 低級). These concepts are highly associated with on-screen representations of love and romance, and plots involving subversive sexual concepts such as pre-marital pregnancy(未婚先孕), extra-marital affairs(婚外戀), openness to sex(性開放), sexual freedom(性自由), and direct and indirect implications of sex were all deemed worthy of these negative labels.[5] This defense of marital harmony through TV sanitization was probably meant to pave the way for the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2007, which pushed forward the high-profile theme of "building a harmonious society." Cultural critiques even claimed that detailed portrayals of the third party or extra-marital affairs would negatively impact social harmony and stability.[6] In October of the same year, SARFT held a "Working Conference of Anti-vulgarity on Chinese Radio and TV" (抵制低俗之風) to "purify" the small screen of vulgar and kitschy elements—particularly sex. [7] The Deputy Director of SARFT stressed TV's role in promoting only "healthy concepts" of family, romance, and marriage, and

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[5] SARFT, "Guojia guangbo dianshi zongju guangyu yinfa 'Dianshiju neiroung shencha zhanxing guiding 國家廣播電影電視總局關於印發《電視劇內容審查暫行規定》的通知 [Notice on "Temporary regulations of the content censorship of TV drama" issued by SARFT], SARFT, http://www.chinasarft.gov.cn/articles/2006/05/30/20091217145313220574.html (accessed Feb 23, 2012).

[6] Yu Zhu 餘姝, "Daoyan Zheng Xiaolong: kanduo le 'hunwailian'lLaobaixing ye bu shufu"導演鄭曉龍:看多了 "婚外戀"老百姓也不舒服," *Yangcheng wanbao*, August 27, 2008. http://www2.ycwb.com/big5/misc/2006-08/27/content_1193493.htm (accessed Feb 24, 2012).

[7] See Wang Lanzhu 王蘭柱 chief ed., *Zhongguo dianshi shoushi nianjian2007* 中國電視收視年鑒 (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue Chubanshe 中國傳媒大學出版社, 2007), 93.

instructed TV programs to terminate the sale, implication, or discussion of the topic of sex.[8]

Constructing an ideal couple in popular culture is the state's defense mechanism against the contemporary phenomena of extra-marital affairs and divorce. The state has added legal boundaries to the private sphere. Perceiving extra-marital affairs as a cause for the breakdown of marriage and disintegration of family,[9] the state added Article Four to the Marriage Law in 2001, stating that "husband and wife shall be loyal to each other and respect each other" and turning fidelity into a legal issue. However, with the divorce rate increasing since the late 1990s, and especially after the enactment of the simplified divorce procedure in 2003, the instability of familial structure still alarms the state. Under such a socio-historical context, *Golden Marriage*, emphasizing the integrity of family, is arguably the state's cultural attempt to promote socialist spirit through measured depictions of sexuality.

It was under the context of a rising divorce rate and increasing number of representations of "unhealthy" sex and marital crises on the TV screen that we encounter the 50-episode TV drama *Golden Marriage*. This drama depicts a fifty-year marriage, celebrates a lasting and faithful relationship, and lashes out at sex acts that transgress institutionalized sex. In the following, I will discuss the ways in which *Golden Marriage* constructs an ideal marriage and sexual subject while criticizing sex acts deemed improper according to SARFT's standard. Although I argue that *Golden Marriage* is a

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[8] Hu Zhanfan 胡占凡, "Clarify Requirements and Do Well All the Work for the Year 2007 in Resisting Low and Vulgar Tastes." *China Radio & TV Academic Journal 2007,* no. 5 (2007): 8-10.

[9] See Wu Changzhen ed, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo hunyin fa jianghua* 中華人民共和國婚姻法講話 [Talk on Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China](Beijing : Zhong yang wen xian chubanshe, 2001), 85.

zhuxuanlü production, I aim to better understand multiple decoding possibilities of the TV drama by paying attention to the narrative's heterogeneous nature and ambiguities in its attitudes towards sex. I will also highlight the constant fights between the *Golden Marriage's* ideal couple in order to question the meaning of an ideal marriage. Moreover, I will analyze how *Golden Marriage* uses sex to popularize the ideas of an ideal sexual subject and long-lasting marriage, querying the ambiguous definition of "vulgarity" and examining the ways in which the TV drama portrays sex in a way that garners acclaim and avoids criticism.

Featuring an annalistic style, each episode of *Golden Marriage* displays one year of the quotidian life of the couple, Tong Zhi and Wen Li, against the historical backdrop of a period of time ranging from 1956 to 2005. Through the course of the series, the couple meets, falls in love, gets married, raises four children, and finally arrives at their golden wedding celebration. Tong Zhi, a factory engineer, belongs to the worker class, while Wen Li, an elementary school teacher with bourgeois taste, belongs to the intellectual class. Their class differences lead to continuous fights over aesthetics, family life, and work ethic. They experience starvation, poverty, criticism, and illness, but still find their marriage to be a happy one, in that they care for and love each other. Their marriage is at risk when Tong Zhi falls in love with a co-worker, but Tong Zhi keeps his love for Wen Li in mind, and the couple is able to save their relationship. I argue that the construction of an exemplary long marriage on the screen is intended to quell a growing trend of infidelity and divorce. Meanwhile, it echoes the state's current call for social harmony by promoting sexual morality of the socialist spirit, which contributes to the development of a faithful, monogamist, sexual subject.

I read *Golden Marriage* as a zhuxuanlü production due to its production background and the governmental awards it received. *Golden Marriage*'s production unit—Beijing Television Art Center, the first TV drama production unit in China—is state-owned. Its director, Zheng Xiaolong, also served as production director of the Beijing TV Art Center. Thirteen years before *Golden Marriage*, he directed another well-received zhuxuanlü TV drama, *Beijingren zai Niuyue* (Beijingers in New York 北京人在紐約). Zheng was in good standing with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and received support through his affiliation, which allowed him to obtain financial aid from the bank to produce *Beijingers in New York*.[10] Zheng Xiaolong claimed that watching too many TV dramas about divorce and extra-marital affairs would upset audiences, so he intended to produce a TV drama that focused on a long marriage.[11] Zheng's assertion implies that television dramas have a direct impact on viewers; indirectly suggesting that his goal was to create a long marriage on-screen in order to influence/correct real life situations. *Golden Marriage* garnered first prize at the *Feitian jiang* (Apsaras Awards 飛天獎), which are organized by SARFT and are therefore widely perceived as a state award in China. It also took top honors at other awards ceremonies and earned the following at the Golden Eagle Awards: The Award for Excellent TV Drama (Long drama serial) and the *Wu yi jiang* (Five-Achievement Award 五一獎). The fact that the Five-Achievement Award is organized by the Propaganda Department of the CCP further

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[10] See Sheldon Lu, "Soap Opera in China: The Transnational Politics of Visuality, Sexuality, and Masculinity." *Cinema Journal* 40, no.1 (2000): 31-32.

[11] Yu Zhu 餘姝, "Daoyan Zheng Xiaolong: kanduo le 'hunwailian'lLaobaixing ye bu shufu"導演鄭曉龍: 看多了 "婚外戀"老百姓也不舒服," *Yangcheng wanbao*, August 27, 2008. http://www2.ycwb.com/big5/misc/2006-08/27/content_1193493.htm (accessed Feb 24, 2012).

convinces us that *Golden Marriage* is ideologically compliant with and pleasing to the state.

Although it has a pedagogical mission, the TV drama is far from insipid or dogmatic. *Golden Marriage*, meant to popularize the idea of a long marriage, maintains humorous sexual connotations. It also achieved a high viewing rate throughout China.[12] To further promote the TV drama and meet a potentially commercial demand, *Golden Marriage*'s scriptwriter revised the script and published it in a novel form in 2007. *Golden Marriage* achieved canonical status when its past popularity motivated the same director and scriptwriter to cooperate again to produce a sequel called *Jinhun fengyu qing* (Golden marriage two or Golden marriage: love in the storm 金婚風雨情), which was first aired in 2010.

I argue that Tong Zhi and Wen Li represent an attempt by the state to create role models who save themselves for marriage, have no physical relationships outside of marriage, and work through both difficult and good times to make their love last for fifty years. This pair of exemplary models not only illustrates how to be sexually faithful citizens who abide the Marriage Law that the state uses to manage its people's private life; it also adheres to the three types of boundaries that an ideal sexual subject should simultaneously observe: motivational, institutional, and temporal. The first two dimensions are derived from the Marriage Law, and the last one is arguably associated with the state's slogan of building a harmonious society.

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[12] Wang Lanzhu 王蘭柱 chief ed., *Zhongguo dianshi shoushi nianjian 2008* 中國電視收視年鑒[China TV rating yearbook](Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe 中國傳媒大學出版社, 2009), 124.

Institutionalizing marriage does not necessarily require a mechanically restrictive rule; in fact, according to Tong Zhi and Wen Li, love or feelings (*ganqing*) is the most important motivation for marriage. An institutionalized love relationship, i.e. marriage, is the best manifestation of sexual desire according to the state. The critical factor that enables Wen Li to accept Tong Zhi is their common perspective on feelings; both of them put love at the center of their marriage. Their dating takes place in episode one, which is set in 1956, not long after the CCP launched the anti-feudal Marriage Law Campaign which promoted free love over arranged marriage. The TV drama constantly reminds audiences that Tong Zhi and Wen Li's relationship is based on feelings (*ganqing*) and not sex. To demonstrate the concept of contemporary love, Wen Li once quotes Engels, stating that "a marriage without love is immoral." Tong Zhi, when questioned about his decision to marry Wen Li, says that he believes that the most important motivation for marriage is feelings. [13]Tong Zhi and Wen Li are legally married; their marriage fulfills the General Provisions of the Marriage Law. Article Two of the Law states that "A marriage system based on the free choice of partners, on monogamy and on equality between man and woman shall be applied."[14] As I analyzed here, Tong Zhi and Wen Li fall in love and get married willingly.

Temporality is the third dimension required to construct an ideal sexual subject who is already in a legal marriage based on free love. Tong Zhi and Wen Li spent fifty

[13] Free love was seen as a weapon to attack feudalism from the May Fourth period in 1910-20s up through the Marriage Campaign in the 1950s. Intellectuals and modernists in the early republican era did not see marriage itself as an oppressive institution, but vehemently opposed arranged marriage. Therefore, the critical point in China at that time was to highlight free love and feelings.

[14] Translation see China, *Law of Succession of the People's Republic of China; Law of the People's Republic of China; Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*[中華人民共和國繼承法, 中華人民共和國收養法, 中國人民共和國婚姻法] (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2002), 79.

years together, experiencing various reform movements and raising four children. They support each other in coping with the political climate of the day, and are rewarded for their endurance with a golden marriage at the end of the TV drama. They manage to survive the unsettling era of the Anti-rightist campaigns in the fifties, poverty and starvation due to the Sino-Soviet Split in the early sixties, and the Cultural Revolution. These difficult times allow them to show care and support for each other, deepening their love. In episode six, which depicts days during the Great Leap Forward, they stay united in their fight against hunger and poverty. Tong Zhi and Wen Li try to save the little amount of rice they have for each other; but the rice goes bad at last because neither one of them will eat the other's portion. During this long-term marriage, the (female) sexual subject transforms into a dutiful daughter-in-law, suggesting that an ideal sexual subject has to fulfill other social and familial roles. The ideal sexual subject not only takes care of the object of affection, but also the household and other family members. *Golden Marriage* suggests that the ideal sexual subject, in order to maintain a long marriage, has to overcome obstacles and run the household devotedly. The TV drama invests in Wen Li's change from an individualistic sexual subject into a well-rounded, dutiful daughter-in-law. Beginning from when she meets her mother-in-law, she realizes that love does not involve only two parties, but also involves taking care of the household and serving her mother-in-law. According to her mother-in-law, she is arbitrary, willful, and incapable of doing house chores before marriage, but changes gradually yet significantly after marriage. Wen Li goes from not knowing how to cook to becoming the family's chef, and from arguing with her mother-in-law to playing the role of a caring daughter-in-law. In this way, the ideal (female) sexual subject that *Golden Marriage* portrays is one who

effectively runs a household after marriage. When a married sexual subject couple grows old, they remain supportive of each other in the face of sickness. Care and support to each other are ideal attributes that a pair of married sexual couple should possess, as suggested in the exemplary models of Tong Zhi and Wen Li; however, there is one more criterion that defines an ideal sexual subject—maintaining these qualities until death. This idea is clearly illustrated in the ways Tong Zhi and Wen Li, now in their sixties, define love—love is "still staying together in old age." Here, we can observe that the state approved discourse defines an ideal sexual subject as one who falls in love of their own free will and forms a legal marriage for a life. This expression of solidarity contrasts with the increasing divorce rate in real-world contemporary China and promotes a stable family structure.

The key traits of an ideal sexual subject are sexual purity before marriage and sexual fidelity within an institutionalized marriage. From an orthodox perspective embodied by the state, sexual intimacy has to be institutionally constrained in a legal marriage, and a legal marriage has to mean literally "till death do us part." Tong Zhi and Wen Li remain pure until their wedding night. In Episode one, as Wen Li's mother tries to explain to Wen Li what sexual intimacy means before her wedding, Wen Li emphasizes Tong Zhi's honesty (*laoshi* 老實) and the fact that there has been no sexual activity between them (*shenme dou meiyou* 什麼都沒有). Even Tong Zhi admits his lack of carnal knowledge to his newly-wed wife on their wedding night. These characterizations of the couple promote the confinement of sexual desire within legal marriage and create two pure, ideal sexual subjects who abide by the law.

After Tong Zhi and Wen Li become a legal couple, they remain physically faithful to each other for fifty years. Although both parties are loyal to each other, *Golden Marriage* suggests a gender difference in that it emphasizes the man's part in resisting temptations. Tong Zhi faces sexual temptation from two different women during his marriage, but stays faithful. The first temptation comes from his former co-worker, Fang Zhuoya, who complains to him about her unhappy marriage and attempts to establish an intimate relationship with him in both the third and fifteenth episodes. Tong Zhi rejects her without any hesitation. The second temptation is almost irresistible and nearly develops into a corporeal affair. Tong Zhi meets a young co-worker, Li Tianjiao, in a remote factory. Li shares his work ethic and ideals. They maintain only a Platonic bond, even though other characters assume that they are romantically involved. Tong Zhi describes their connection as spiritual and pure, and does not want to damage his family's integrity. He even withdraws his hand from Li's when she sees him off at the train station. After knowing each other for twelve years, their hands do not come into contact until their third reunion. The method they use to keep in contact demonstrates their spiritual bond: during the third period of time that they were employed in the same factory, they shared their romantic feelings merely by listening to the same music while on the phone, without talking. Unlike extra-marital affairs involving sexual intimacy, Tong Zhi's feelings for Li Tianjiao stay idealistically pure. His characterization advocates sex only within marriage, so his emotional attachment to Li Tianjiao does not seduce him into adultery. Tong Zhi's physical fidelity supports the Marriage Law. The latest version of the Law, amended on April 28, 2001, was modified in response to a new love and romance trend in contemporary China characterized by an increasing number of extra-

marital affairs. According to the Law, love affairs outside marriage (*hunwaiqing* 婚外情) violate Article Four of the Marriage Law, which states that "Husband and wife shall be loyal to each other and respect each other;" yet, violators are merely subject to moral or administrative punishment by work-units, not legal penalty. [15]

This cultural imagination resonates with the state's view that love and feelings are moral issues that are hard to legalize; however, it follows the principle of loyalty and portrays Tong Zhi as a physically and legally faithful husband who allow transgressions of abstract feelings but not carnal desire. Tong Zhi, thus, stays legitimately as the moral leader who restrains his sexual desire and never physically betrays his wife. Tong Zhi's characterization illustrates proper adherence to the new Marriage Law enacted in 2001, which ambiguously tolerates extra-marital affairs that do not involve sexual intercourse. During the lawmaking process, the regulation and legality of extra-marital affairs became controversial. Those who oppose criminalizing extra-martial affairs believe that feelings or romance lies outside of the law or regard infidelity as a strictly moral issue. The new law finally promulgated an instructive article stating that "Husband and wife shall be loyal to each other and respect each other;" and "loyal" here, according to the official explanation, mainly refers to physical loyalty, meaning that a married individual should

[15] See China, *Law of Succession of the People's Republic of China; Law of the People's Republic of China; Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*[中華人民共和國繼承法, 中華人民共和國收養法, 中國人民共和國婚姻法] (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2002), 79; and 法律出版社法規中心編 ed, *Hunyinfa quancheng jingjie* 婚姻法全程精解[Succinct exposition of Marriage Law] (Beijing: Law Press China, 2008), 2.

never have extra-marital intercourse.[16] Hence, Tong Zhi's platonic feelings for Li Tianjiao do not violate the legal definition of "loyal."

In addition to the promotion of a faithful marriage, *Golden Marriage*'s negative portrayals of sex acts are indicative of the Anti-vulgarity Campaign at work. *Golden Marriage* is an exemplary advocate for denouncing "vulgarity" on the screen. As mentioned above, Tong Zhi and Li Tianjiao are never physically involved and vaguely conform to the sexual virtue of fidelity, one of the "healthy" concepts that the Campaign advanced with regards to marriage, romance, and family. Through Tong Zhi and Wen Li's perspective, *Golden Marriage* frowns upon what SARFT disfavors—unruly sex. Wen Li, before her second daughter's marriage, disdainfully suspects that her daughter is no longer a virgin, and laments that females of the younger generation no longer maintain their purity before marriage as she had. Her comment suggests that her sexual conduct belongs to a higher moral standard, that is in decline. Their third daughter, Duoduo, is rebellious and sexually promiscuous. Her reckless attitudes towards sex result in two pre-marital pregnancies and subsequent abortions. As a result, even when she begins to conform to orthodox family structure and sexual mores in later episodes, her health dissipates and she has difficulties in finding a husband. As a complementary character to Duoduo, her brother, Dabao, enjoys sex with limitless condoms. The number of condoms found in his suitcase surprises Tong Zhi and Wen Li, leading to a father-son talk.

Upset by his son's addiction to casual sex and romantic flings, Tong Zhi initiates a talk with Dabao in episode forty-four. The father condemns the son for not knowing

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[16] Translation from *Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China*, 79. For official interpretation of the article, please see Wu Changzhen ed, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo hunyin fa jianghua* 中華人民共和國婚姻法講話[Talk on Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China](Beijing : Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001), 87.

about love and just having casual sex with those for whom he does not have feelings (*ganqing*); clearly, the father sees his son's sexual behaviors as irresponsible. The son shares that his generation separates sex from love and embraces the consumption of sex as a means by which to satisfy libidinal desire. He goes on to proclaim that he would prefer to be a "happy pig" than a pained philosopher like his father. The "happy pig" and the "pained philosopher" form a contrast because of their divergent values towards physical pleasure: the former pursues instant satisfaction of desire while the latter constrains desire and maintain high moral standards. Dabao's identification with a "happy pig" dovetails with an inclination towards deregulation of sexual relationships, and for materialism in general, in contemporary China. This father-son talk distinguishes two values of sexual morality: the traditional/ higher moral standard as represented by the father figure, and the "modern"/ lower moral standard symbolized by the son. Putting these two perspectives on sex in a father-son dialogue, and favoring the father's while downplaying the son's, *Golden Marriage* upholds inseparable ties between sex and love, requires one's attitude towards this relationship to be serious and responsible, and disapproves of sex without love as animalistic and irresponsible. Although "unhealthy" concepts of sex make their presence known in this zhuxuanlü product, the construction of the character, Dabao, merely functions as a foil to Tong Zhi and Wen Li's lasting love and fidelity. The purpose of Dabao's presence is not to revolt against "traditional" sexual morality, but to show how it is possible to right what is wrong through Dabao's transformation from a playboy to a faithful husband, who, like his sister, ultimately affirms sexual orthodoxy.

The production of a zhuxuanlü TV drama walks a fine line to serve the state and avoid violation of regulations while also entertaining the audience through inclusion of popular themes. Even though the production team of *Golden Marriage* set a pedagogical goal to promote orthodox, long, and healthy marriages while avoiding vulgar and unrefined content in accordance with the anti-vulgarity campaign, *Golden Marriage* is full of sexual connotations. I argue that the purpose of such an arrangement is to ensure both commercial and pedagogical success. After all, only popular content will be able to attract an audience and allow for the widespread dissemination of the ideology of long marriage. Therefore, the question of how to portray sex positively on the screen without violating the anti-vulgarity campaign became vital for *Golden Marriage*'s production team, as they had to handle sensitive topics with care. The final product of these constraints depicts humorous sex between a married couple. The "married couple" and "jokes" are necessary frames for the portrayal of sex because the former maintains legality and social stability while the latter entertain the viewer without "contaminating" the screen. In the following, I will first demonstrate the presence of obscene jokes in the drama despite the state's attempts to purify the television screen of sexual "adulteration." Freud argues that the purpose of a joke is to incite pleasure, and that an obscene joke works by exposing sex and satisfying the libido.[17] Borrowing Freud's concept to analyze TV drama, we can understand that obscene jokes on the screen attract viewers by providing viewers with sexual pleasure. Freud contends that civilization represses our

[17] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1960), 114-5, and 119.

psyche and prevents us from laughing at undisguised obscenity;[18] I extend such a proposition and examine the ways in which *Golden Marriage* uses sex jokes to attract viewers while promoting "healthy" sexual concepts and conforming to the requirements of the Anti-Vulgarity Campaign. In other words, although *Golden Marriage* aims to set an exemplary model on sex and marriage, it employs sexual jokes to popularize its narrative and disseminate concepts of "healthy" sexual practices.

Sexual drive figures prominently in portrayals of Tong Zhi's married life. However, in this context, the obscenity somehow appears to be more refined or acceptable because it encourages laughter. For example, on the second day following his wedding, Tong Zhi's best friend, Da Zhuang, publicly asks him how many times he had sex with his new bride. Tong Zhi is annoyed and casually replies "six times," even though the TV viewers know that he did not succeed due to the couple's sexual ignorance. However Da Zhuang gives Tong Zhi the nickname of "Six Times Tong" (Tong Liuci). Over the years, the two best friends continue to tease each other concerning their sexual potency. Another obscene joke takes place in episode forty-one when the Tong couple, now in their sixties, realizes that their second son-in-law suffers from sexual impotency after recovering from testicular cancer. Tong Zhi and his wife visit every medical practitioner they can to find an antidote for their son-in-law. One doctor misunderstands and suspects that Tong Zhi is the impotent patient and embarrasses him by teasing him for having sexual desires at the age of sixty-five. This scene and the laughter it causes are enjoyable because they allow viewers to enjoy the repressed pleasure of sex in a socially acceptable manner.

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[18] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 120.

Golden Marriage not only implies sex in jokes, but also explicitly portrays sexual intimacy. The fact that such portrayal receives no criticism from the state suggests that sex acts are acceptable on the screen provided that they are within a legal marriage and are depicted in a humorous manner. Among the frequent sex scenes between Tong Zhi and Wen Li, the one during the Cultural Revolution in episode twelve is particularly hilarious. Set in an out-of-town hostel room, the husband breaks the wooden bed by rocking it too hard while being intimate with Wen Li. This is an obvious portrayal of a sexual act, in which television viewers see Tong Zhi lying on top of his wife and rocking the bed. This absurd scene also reveals Tong Zhi's strong sexual impulses because it takes place during his business trip in Tianjin; even though he is on a business trip, he still attempts to have sex with his wife. In Freud's terms, the laughable sex scene exposes and satisfies the television viewers' libidos.[19] However, the breaking of the bed smothers the scene's erotic connotation and turns the representation of sex into an absurd joke. Explicit sexual intimacy also embarrasses the couple after they realize that Tong Zhi's mother, who sleeps next to their bedroom, can hear clearly every sound that they make in bed. The husband immediately has a soundproof wall built between the two bedrooms and believes the mother will no longer hear their pleasurable moments. Nevertheless, in the next episode, we see that the mother is still able to hear them and uses cotton as earplugs so that she can fall asleep.

Although *Golden Marriage* is structured with a hegemonic purpose of screening and promoting an ideal sexual subject and marriage, its narrative allows for negotiated reading positions. Despite the fact that director Zheng claimed to produce a harmonious

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[19] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 119.

family without divorce in *Golden Marriage*, and that Tong Zhi and Wen Li's marriage is long lasting, their relationship is far from perfect given the fact that constant quarrels and an ambiguous extra-marital affair are central to their married life and jeopardize their marital harmony. Given the fact that *Golden Marriage* won so many state awards, it leaves a space for us to question whether an ideal marriage is a nominal one that never ends with divorce even if it is full of rage, complaints, suspicions, and arguments. This conceptualization of marriage sarcastically suggests that the state claims social harmony based on the nominal status and eventual outcome of a marriage, despite the big and small conflicts that have happened or the presence of undercurrents that almost break the marriage bond. It is parallel to the state's political stance, which emphasizes harmony but mutes and cover up dissident voices.

In the TV drama, Tong Zhi and Wen Li's disputes originate from differences in aesthetic tastes, education, and class background. Tong Zhi, a factory worker, sees his wife's high hygienic standard as mysophobic. Whenever Tong Zhi is exhausted from work and only wants to sleep right after getting home, Wen Li orders him to wash up. Both parties feel annoyed and angry and thus repeatedly argue over this issue. Another source of dispute is the relationship between Tong's mother and Wen Li. In Episode 5, the mother-in-law first meets the daughter-in-law. She picks on Wen Li for her inadequate cooking skills and her concept of gender equality. In another scene in Episode 18, Wen Li criticizes the mother-in-law's practice of feeding the little grandson with her mouth as unhygienic. This fight worsens the husband-wife relationship to the extent that Wen Li returns to her natal family and Tong Zhi relocates to work in a remote factory. Their arguments appear in almost every episode in the first half of the TV drama, and

their marriage crisis finally comes to a head in the middle of the whole narrative, from Episodes 26 to 33, in which husband and wife live separately and obtain a permit from their work unit (*danwei*) to apply for a divorce. Tong Zhi's mother successfully thwarts the divorce, so that the couple persists into the second half of the narrative and concentrates more on their children instead of their own conflicts. Still, they have subtle quarrels over how to manage their grown-up children. In short, the whole narrative contains non-stop fighting between the couple.

While *Golden Marriage* attempts to portray a pair of physically loyal spouses who resist temptations as Tong Zhi does when he chooses to maintain a mere spiritual bond with Li Tianjiao, it does not vehemently criticize the third woman. It follows the trend set by *Holding Hands*, depicting the other woman in a positive light. Li Tianjiao's characterization does not fall into either of the binary "good" or "bad" categories. She is tender and understanding, which makes her different from the stereotypical fierce third party who requests money or forces the man to divorce his wife. In fact, she is never overtly called "the third party" in any of the episodes. This term only appears when the Tong couple worries that their eldest daughter is becoming the third party when dating a to-be-divorced man. Instead, Li Tianjiao is a pitiable character who is prevented from staying with the one she loves by Tong Zhi's marriage. After her second meeting with Tong Zhi, she marries a man she does not love and spends her marriage separated from her husband. Besides, as I mentioned above, she never engages in physical romance with Tong Zhi, which characterizes her as a pure character who longs for spiritual satisfaction rather than sexual consumption. Other characters treat her well, even though they are acquainted with her romantic feelings for Tong Zhi. The co-workers in the factories

where she and Tong Zhi work eventually learn about their romantic attachment but do not discriminate against her. She is so talented at engineering that she has always achieved a higher rank each time Tong Zhi reunites with her. She is even doing international business when they last meet in the drama. Thus, her good ending—being rewarded with a successful career rather than punished—discloses the narrative's ambiguous attitude towards a "third party."

As seen from *Golden Marriage*, state approved sexual subjects clearly possess sexual morality, but they also show other qualities of the socialist spirit, particularly Party-patriotism. This leads me to ponder whether a sexually loyal subject who is not a Party advocate will be as highly approved as *Golden Marriage's* protagonists are. This question is particularly important in reference to a character like Tong Zhi, who occupies the moral leader position as I analyzed above. In the following, I turn to examine how *Golden Marriage* attributes faithfulness in sexuality to socialist values, as well as the ways in which the economic and patriotic side of the socialist spirit accompanies the sexual morality and fidelity issues at the heart of the drama.

Golden Marriage depends on nostalgia in order to construct good, faithful characters that embody the socialist spirit that requires them to contain desire. To start, the narrative during the revolutionary era is a nostalgic gesture that suggests that the celebrated contemporary virtues—especially fidelity—are rooted in the revolutionary past, cultivated by the Party and the socialist spirit. The TV drama associates endurance of socio-economic hardships with a long and faithful relationship. The nostalgic sentiments gain political capital for the TV drama and the Party. In her research on post-communist Soviet cultural phenomena, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia was

prominent in the 1990s in popular culture all over the word and that "nostalgia became a defense mechanism against the accelerated rhythm of change and the economic shock therapy."[20] *Golden Marriage* restores the sexual fidelity of the revolutionary past. The reference to an ideal couple rooted in the past is an attempt to pit itself against the contemporary problematic marriage. Boym proposes the concept of "restorative nostalgia" to explain a tendency to "rebuild the lost home" and believes that "rebuilding the lost home" is about rebuilding the truth.[21] The TV drama situates the "origin" of a faithful marriage in the 1950s—the socialist era during which the Party just commenced to build a new China and promulgated the first Marriage Law in 1950. Tong Zhi and Wen Li meet in the 1950s; their love and marriage in the new China, according to Wen Li's mother, is like living a sweet life in a honey jar. If the aim of creating a model of a long and faithful marriage and sexual subjects on the screen is to regulate excessive desire in everyday life, the narrative background could have been in any historical setting, as long as the sexual subjects living in it are faithful. However, the TV drama intentionally sets the leading couple's story in the 1950s. The arrangement of breeding sexual virtue in the materially-lacking period is intended to credit the socialist era in contrast to a contemporary society in which materials flood and "contaminate" the socialist spirit, and particularly sexual moralities. This also suggests that the return to the native "origin" –the socialist spirit—is the remedy for the current marital crisis brought by opening up policy. In this way, the "home" for a virtuous sexual subject is established, and the Party-state is legitimated because the mythic socialist "origin" is the source of virtue to which we have

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[20] Svetlana Boym, *Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 64.

[21] Svetlana Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

to return. In other words, the popular TV production associates the good sexual subject with an idealized socialist past, in which Chinese citizens purportedly upheld moral virtues.

Tong Zhi and Wen Li's sexual virtues and nostalgic yearnings tie into economic and political conduct of the socialist spirit. Virtuous sexual subjects' politically "correct" stance is another possible reason why *Golden Marriage*, though containing sexual depictions, is still given national awards.

Besides situating the sexual subjects in the first half century of the People's Republic of China (PRC), *Golden Marriage* also depicts the characters legitimizing the Party's power and living through history with the patriotic socialist spirit. The legal marital status of Tong Zhi and Wen Li bespeaks their submission to the Party's legal system; in other words, the legal system pronounces their proper rights to have sex, both legally and morally. The dominant reading of the narrative praises institutionalized marriage for bringing pleasant sex, while sex outside marriage appears worrisome. Tong Zhi and Wen Li are ideal spouses, and their children's sex life have them worried: their eldest daughter is suspected of destroying his boyfriend's family, as she dates a married man who lied about being divorced; Wen Li suspects that her second daughter has lost her virginity before marriage; Tong Zhi is upset because his only son engages in casual sex. This positive depiction of the main couple's disciplined sex dovetails with Foucault's viewpoint on family and sexuality. Foucault argues that the family interweaves the law and pleasure of sexuality; it also lends permanent support to

sexuality.[22] Through the Foucaldian lens, sexual pleasure is allowed within the legal boundary. In this light, *Golden Marriage* celebrates and recognizes the state's power in regulating sex and in providing a foundation for sex through the pleasant sex of Tong Zhi and his wife. This positive portrayal of the state power also explains why sexual depictions are acceptable on the screen, despite the fact that the Anti-Vulgarity campaign was in full force when the drama was aired. Sexual depictions in *Golden Marriage* illustrate that even though the state's censorship board formally criticizes and attempts to eliminates erotic scenes on the screen, it sometimes co-opts images and dialogue related to sexual pleasure, provided that these elements lend support to the law, and thus, the Party-state. At the same time, the effort to re-construct and re-legitimize the law is a gesture to legitimize the CCP.

The affirmation of the Party-state and the state power is particularly obvious if we consider that sections of historical events are presented in *Golden Marriage*. The producer of *Golden Marriage*, Zao Ping, claims that the production is a republican history of the New China, and some critics follows suit and eulogize it as truly representing the home-country's fifty years of transformation.[23] What kind of Chinese "history" is "truly" depicted? The way China's history is imagined in this collective work explains the politics of historical representation. Restorative nostalgia can apply not only to a construction of sexual virtues, but also to a rebuilding of the political past. The TV

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[22] Michael Foucault, *History of Sexuality: the Will to Knowledge Vol 1* (London: Penguin, 1998), 108. I thank Prof. Peng Yun at the 59th Mid-West Conference on Asian Studies for suggesting this reference to Foucault in order to better explain the power relationship between the law, sexual freedom, and family.

[23] Zao Ping, "Gongming shi meiyou guojie de"共鳴是沒有國界的[Resonance is boundaryless]in *Dangdai Dianshi* 當代電視 [Contemporary TV], 2008 vol 11; and He Mingxia, "Dianshiju *Jinhun* de xushi tedian" 電視劇《金婚》的敍事特點, *Dianying wenxue* 電影文學[Movie Literature] 21 (2008): 91.

drama constructs history in a (de)politicized way that focuses on the everyday life of commoners; for the couple, as both sexual and political subjects, the agonizing past cements virtues of endurance and integrity instead of producing pain. During the economic hardship, the couple's way of living through mass movements requires them to contain their own desire without voicing a complaint about the situation: they starve and try to live as frugally as possible in order to survive (*guorizi* 過日子). The drama's representation of the Cultural Revolution neutralizes pertinent violence during the mass movement. Michael Berry argues that it is "centrifugal trauma" of the Cultural Revolution that remains in popular conceptions of that historical moment, as shown in the TV drama *Wuye Yangguang* (Midnight Sunlight).[24] The Cultural Revolution has remained a painful memory and historical moments in Berry's selected text, but *Golden Marriage* not only not visualizes possible painful memories, it focuses on the joyful memories of the Cultural Revolution. Tong Zhi's friend, Da Zhuang, enjoys the national alliance activity (*dachuanlian* 大串聯) of the Cultural Revolution, an exchange among Red Guards who are able to enjoy free travel around the country with comrades to promote revolutionary ideas. As an elementary student, Tong Zhi's daughter also likes the Cultural Revolution, since the school is shut down. In addition to an indirect portrayal of political backdrops, the TV drama also directly characterizes patriotism and loyalty to the Party-state.

Another obvious example that shows Tong Zhi's patriotism is his conversation with his friend, Da Zhuang, on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which takes

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[24] Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 289, 297.

place in episode forty-eight. SARS, a highly contagious virus, spread through China in early 2003, and led to the quarantine of suspicious patients. Chinese citizens wore masks in public areas in order to prevent infection. The TV drama continues to chronicle Tong Zhi's normal family life against the remarkable background of that year. In the beginning of that episode, Tong Zhi and his friend glorify the CCP's efforts in dealing with such a medical and social crisis:

> Tong Zhi: It's been the ninth day that no one has died. It's lucky that the epidemic took place in the current times. Had it happened in the past, it would have cost lots of lives. After all, the CCP is good.
> Da Zhuang: Of course, the CCP is the best. When there are natural or man-made disasters, the CCP mobilizes the whole nation to the rescue, including the Liberation Army.
> Tong Zhi: That's true. If we tell the younger generation that the CCP is good or the Liberation Army is good, they'll think we're repeating propaganda slogans. For me, it could be good to have a big challenge so that they could know the CCP is good.

Comparisons with other discourses reveal Tong Zhi's nationalistic tone and *Golden Marriage*'s agenda in reconstructing a patriotic collective memory of SARS. Dissident discourses on China are available locally and internationally. In the beginning stage of the epidemic, Zhong Nanshan, director of the Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Diseases in south China's Guangdong Province, publicly questioned the official stance on the number of deaths and the possibility of outbreak throughout China. His dissident medical observations and discoveries on the cause of SARS legendarily turned him into a hero in curing SARS and earned him national awards.[25] Internationally, the World Health Organization has expressed its distrust of China's official death toll figure and suspicions

[25]Ye Yi, *Zhong Nanshan zhuan* 鍾南山傳[The life of Zhong Nanshan] (Beijing: Zuojia Chubanshe, 2010), 75-81.

regarding China's cover-ups on the outbreaks.[26] Comparing Tong Zhi's dialogue with those of local and international medical experts, we can see that *Golden Marriage* tries to construct a patriotic collective memory of historical events and glorify the Party's efforts in protecting its citizens.

Tong Zhi's sexual socialist spirit is tied to economic socialist virtues. In the portion of the TV drama featuring the 1990's, capitalism becomes a popular concept and trendy capitalist terms like "foreign investments" and "entrepreneurship" abound. Tong Zhi, however, teases people for the ways in which capitalism changes them. His friend, Da Zhuang, wants to step into a business venture and make money by buying stocks. Tong Zhi remains socialist, and comments to Da Zhuang in this way: "You've changed a lot. Now you talk about money and money all day long. I'm retired but I'm still in good condition. I still want to contribute to the country." Though the nation has entered a "post-socialist" era, Tong Zhi's values and moral judgment remain in line with those popular during the revolutionary era, in that he despises money and capital and values selfless contribution to the nation. His socialist values regarding money are also illustrated in his quarrel with his son, who owns a company. Tong Zhi accuses his son of dishonest entrepreneurship. Characterizing Tong Zhi as ignorant about or too "socialist" to catch up with China's capitalist "progress" is a way of imagining an ideal sexual subject who is inseparable from other realms of socialist morality.

Narrow Dwelling: Excessive Sexual Desire on the Market

Despite the fact that SARFT once rigidly warned against "unhealthy" sexual depictions and promoted sanitization of the screen (which gave rise to the production of dramas like

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[26] Hannah Beech, Susan Jakes, Huang Yong, "Hiding the Patients," *Time Magazine*, April 28, 2003, 23.

Golden Marriage), the warning proved transient. TV dramas depicting extra-marital affairs and sexual openness re-appeared not long after SARFT's campaign. In November 2009, *Narrow Dwelling* was first broadcast on a Shanghai TV channel and went viral immediately. Netizens, focusing on the on-screen extra-marital affair, regarded *Narrow Dwelling* as "the most obscene TV drama in history," "very obscene and very 'bone-baring'" (很黃很露骨).[27] In the following, I delve into discussing some of the "bad" sexual subjectivity and "bad" sexual relationships that caused state and party representatives to pay particularly close attention to the drama, and also illustrate that it is the market that links up "bad" sexual subjectivity with real estate. Real estate and sex are both commodities in the market; commodification of sex and sexual pleasure upset the ideal sexual subject image. This investigation gives insight into some types of contemporary sexual subjectivity that are considered "bad" in a neo-liberal market.

Narrow Dwelling, a big hit among Chinese TV viewers, was adapted from a popular novel with the same Chinese title, written by Liuliu, a Singapore-based Chinese female writer in her late thirties who left China in 1999.[28] Women's dilemmas in modern-day society, such as family and work, have been the concerns of Liuliu's previous works. *Shuangmian jiao* (Double-sided tape, 2005), originally an online novel and later formally published, together with *Wang Gui yu An Na* (Wang Gui and An Na, 2003), were both adapted into TV dramas of the same names by male director Teng Huatao. The actress

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[27] See for example, Xunwang, "Shishang zui yindang de dianshiju 史上最淫蕩的電視劇[The most licentious TV drama in history]," *Gansu Daily*, Nov 26, 2009, http://comment.gansudaily.com.cn/system/2009/11/26/011366740.shtml (accessed Mar 20, 2012); and Chen Xiangjiao, "*Woju* yishi hen dadan, taici hen yintang 《蝸居意識很大膽, 台詞很淫蕩》[*Narrow Dwelling* is bold in sensitivity and lascivious in lines], Chinanews, http://www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2009/11-19/1973421.shtml (accessed Mar 20, 2012).

[28] Liuliu, *Woju* [A romance of house] (Wuhan Shi: Changjiang wenji chubanshe).

Hai Qing, who plays Haiping in *Narrow Dwelling*, was also cast as the female lead in the other two adapted TV dramas. *Narrow Dwelling* was first released in 2009, and its high viewing rate in mainland China encouraged Taiwan and Hong Kong broadcasting companies to air it on their local channels. Its popularity on the small screen further pushed its adaptation into another genre—a stage play.

Narrow Dwelling stirred up huge echoes in society. What elements in the story made it such a big hit in China? Depicting one of the hottest issues in contemporary China, extravagant real estate prices, *Narrow Dwelling* the TV drama, and also the term "woju" (literally snail dwelling, or to live like a snail) became so popular that they caught the attention of the Premier Wen Jiabao, who adopted the term "narrow dwelling" (蝸居) to refer to over-crowded living conditions in an interview session on October 27, 2010.[29] The term was also selected as one of the most popular terms in 2009 by the State Language Affairs Commission.[30] However, before the TV drama and its associated term were used by Wen Jiabao to express his concern regarding pitiful, narrow dwellings, they stood for obscenity and negative social effects in the eyes of another Party official, the Department Head of the Television Program Management (Dianshiju Guanlisi), SARFT. On December 9, 2009, Li Jingsheng commented that the television program had negative effects on society and attracted viewers with sex, obscene jokes, corruption, and

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[29] Xinhuanet, "Wen Jiabao tan fangjia: Wo zhidao suowei 'woju' de ziwei" 溫家寶談房價：我知道所謂"蝸居"的滋味" [Wen Jiabao talked about property prices: I know the feelings of so called 'woju'], http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-02/27/content_13062569.htm, accessed on April, 20, 2011.

[30] National Language Resource Monitoring and Research Center, "2009 niandu Zhongguo zhuliu meiti shida liuxingyu fabu" [2009 年度中國主流媒體十大流行語發佈 Press release of the ten most popular words in mainstream media in China 2009], Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, http://202.205.177.9/edoas/website18/24/info1262243317978824.htm (accessed April, 20, 2011).

scandals.[31] His criticism mainly concerned erotic elements, and he defined the television program as vulgar. In other words, the Party-state criticized characters who emphasize sexual pleasure on the screen as "bad" sexual subjects.

The 35-episode TV drama *Narrow Dwelling* has a complex narrative structure weaving together white-collar workers, blue-collar workers, property market tycoons, and Party officials into a complicated network of relations. It pivots around the lives of three women in a fictional, contemporary, neo-liberal Chinese city, Jiangzhou, which is experiencing furious property market development. Haiping and her husband Su Chun are unable to afford an apartment in the city, and thus, have to send their new-born baby back to Haiping's rural home to stay with her grandmother. Haizao, Haiping's little sister, becomes a mistress of Song Siming, a married Party official with a teenage daughter. Li nainai (Grandma Li) squats on her own property and requests a bigger apartment for relocation. These three women are tragic characters who desire more than their normal capacity can usually achieve. As a result, they all experience either pain or punishment.

For the sake of illustrating my argument regarding sexual subjectivity on the screen, in this chapter, I will focus on the little sister's affair with Song Siming and their "bad" sexual subjectivities, which violate the three boundaries observed by the ideal sexual subject. *Narrow Dwelling*, depicting an extra-marital affair between a corrupt official and a poor girl, is a paradigmatic tale of sexual subjects' free sexual consumption. The affair speaks to the operation of a free sexual market, in which people can freely seek

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[31] "*Woju* bei pi le ge hen de"《蝸居》被批了個狠的[*Narrow Dwelling* was seriously criticized], *Southern Metropolis Daily*, Dec 12, 2009; Zhu Meihong 朱美虹, "Guangdian Zongju mingnian qi xianzhi weishi dianshiju bozhu shijian Woju bei pi shehui yingxiang disu" 廣電總局明年起限制衛視電視劇播出時長《蝸居》被批社會影響低俗 [SARFT limited time for airing TV drama on satellite TV channel from next year Narrow Dwelling was criticized as vulgar], *Xinwen chenbao*, Dec 12, 2009, http://xwcb.eastday.com/c/20091212/u1a667888.html (accessed Apr 16, 2012).

sexual pleasure through buying and selling. Though the drama's setting is the fictional city Jiangzhou, plentiful details (including the appearance of Huangpu River night scenes and scenes of characters graduating from Fudan University) hint that the fictional city is actually a stand-in for Shanghai. The narrative explores the tropes of extra-marital affairs and excessive sexual desire. In order to assist her older sister, twenty-four-year-old Haizao borrows money from Song Siming, a married mid-aged Party official. Song Siming then gradually makes Haizao his mistress. The narrative develops along with the maturation of Haizao and Song Siming's affair, which begins and ripens with material and sexual exchange. As it develops, Haizao and her older sister obtain more and more luxuries and other financial aid from Song. As the affair matures, its participants become increasingly unscrupulous, leading Haizao's fiancée to break up with her. The story ends with Haiping's reunification with her little daughter in the city, Haizao's miscarriage and permanent infertility, and Song Siming's death.

The three criteria for "good sexual subjects"—institution, motivation, and temporality—are also applicable in analyzing and defining "bad sexual subjects," but the focus here is the way in which sexual subjects violate these criteria through the pursuit of desire. First and foremost, this new form of subjectivity allows the pursuit of sexual desire without the necessity of retaining proper sexual and social roles, and it may even transgress the Party-state's legal regulations. Extra-marital affairs dramatize the kind of sexual transgression that one may conduct: in order to follow sexual instinct, married sexual subjects, who are required by the Marriage Law to stay faithful to their spouses, transgress the legal sexual boundary. Haizao and Song Siming's unrestrained sexual

bonding respects no boundary of marriage. Their affair transgresses the legal limitations that bind Song and his sexual desire within his marriage and family.

In the beginning of the TV drama, Song Siming observes the institutional boundary drawn by his legal marriage and is satisfied with his nuclear family composed of a wife and a daughter. As the story goes on, he avails himself of the sexual market as a sexual predator at the expense of his proper role as a married husband and father by seducing and becoming involved in an extra-marital affair with Haizao. Eventually, he even lets his sexual pursuits take precedence over his familial responsibilities. There is a big contrast between the situations before and after he indulges in his affair. He initially cares for his daughter and concerns himself with her safety; after taking on a mistress, he even forgets his daughter's birthday, leading to complaints about his frequent absence from home. Similarly, Haizao originally has a stable relationship with her live-in boyfriend, whom she plans to marry the following year. Haizao also becomes a "bad" sexual subject who lets her desire flood over the original sexual boundary formed with her boyfriend. Even though Haizao is not legally married, a monogamist moral discourse limits her sexual availability to others. Eventually, through her infidelity, she betrays her boyfriend and transgresses the monogamist moral boundary. She not only jeopardizes their relationship, but also hoodwinks her boyfriend into thinking she is working instead of having an affair. Both Song Siming and Haizao are unfaithful sexual subjects, with one violating the legal monogamy system and both transgressing the bounds of moral monogamy.

In fact, Song Siming and Haizao's desire in *Narrow Dwelling* operates through the mechanism of market logic rather than crediting the Party-state, and thus, receives no

state accolade. The TV drama focuses on Song Siming as a successful Party official venturing into the market for young, attractive women. Song's position as a mayor's secretary with an important position in the Party attracts his friends and business counterparts to bribe him. His official and economic power make him comparable to a capable buyer in a neo-liberal market, even in the sexual realm. Song is able to satisfy his sexual desire with or without paying. His business partners actively offer him night life and other kinds of "leisure activities," but he initially restrains his sexual desire and refuses their invitations. After he meets Haizao, Song's sexual desire is no longer within the legal boundary, but rather, on the market. He seduces Haizao during her time of difficulty and develops a material-sexual bond with her. In the market economy, sex is obtainable without submitting to the Party-state law; the legal system and the invisible hand controlling the family and law—in this specific context, the CCP—becomes void. The sexual transgression also signifies an override of the Party-state law. In other words, the neo-liberal logic represented by excessive sexual desire conquers the moral and legal view of state pronounced marriage.

Excessive desire drives married individuals to become dissolute in sex and leads to the impossibility of long-term commitment and physical faithfulness, thus violating the temporal requirement of an ideal sexual subject. Bad sexual subjects, transgressing institutionalized marriage, are willing to forsake a previously long-established, stable relationship for the chance to realize their desire. Hence, Song Siming betrays a long marriage in order to satisfy his desire for Haizao. Unlike the couple in *Golden Marriage*, neither Song Siming nor Haizao is able to maintain physical loyalty to their original partner. Song Siming is formerly a faithful husband and responsible father. His wife

believes that he can be a life-long partner and expects to spend the rest of her life with him. To her disappointment, Song Siming prefers a woman who is younger and more sexually attractive than she is, as her youthfulness declines after years of devotedly raising their daughter and completing household chores. Haizao, a fresh and energetic college graduate, satisfies his sexual requests far better than his wife does, and therefore, wins his heart. Unlike Tong Zhi in *Golden Marriage,* who insists on physical loyalty to his wife even while in love with a younger co-worker, Song Siming's uncontrolled physical desire ruins the officially-approved relationship of a long marriage. On the other hand, Haizao's relationship with her boyfriend is financially contingent. The couple lives in a very frugal way, not even willing to spend money on ice-cream or other small pleasures. The boyfriend's refusal to lend his savings to Haizao's sister upsets their harmonious relationship and indirectly pushes her to Song. Haizao becomes attached to Song because he gives her easy access to financial resources and physical pleasure. The bad sexual subject forsakes fidelity for sexual desire and material wealth at the moment when he or she faces difficulties and conflicts. Bad sexual subjects' relationships are transient instead of eternal. Even though the reasons for breakups in everyday life are not exactly the same as in *Narrow Dwelling*, the TV drama captures the essence of fragile relationships in contemporary China.

In the sexual market, the motivation for sexual consumption is individual sexual fulfillment, a carnal and naked desire that can never be sublimated. Compared to a sublime subject, a worldly sexual subject perceives sexual pleasure as the ultimate goal. Song's motivation in wooing Haizao is simply his unrestrained sexual desire following their first encounter at a business dinner. He has no intention of achieving a sublime goal

or even reproducing. The TV drama reveals that his strong desire for Haizao surprises him and makes him feel like an impulsive youngster. He has no intention of containing his sexual desire or developing sentimental feelings, but rather, approaches his sexual object when his desire accumulates. The TV drama shows that his sexual advances are initially rejected by his wife, as she is too preoccupied with her daughter's studies. Afterwards, he completely turns to his illicit relationship with Haizao for his sexual satisfaction, as Haizao also has a strong libido. Similarly, Song Siming's peer group are divorced and/or rich men among whom it is quite normal to pick up young and beautiful girls as company (*ban'er* 伴兒) in order to stand out in social gatherings, instead of bringing their middle-aged wives.

Song Siming realizes his sexual desire not through marriage but through market price. Sex on the market requires no legalization to materialize consummation; instead, materialism is the means by which one can realize sexual consumption. The buyer offers material goods in exchange for sex. In *Narrow Dwelling*, Song Siming acknowledges his ability to pay for what he wants. In explaining his situation to Haizao, he promises to offer material comfort but not marriage. In other words, the means by which sexual subjects consume their desire in the market is through economic gifts, without submission to the legal marriage advocated by the Party-state. Song approaches Haizao in a business setting and seduces her with material objects. He does not bring their sexual relationship to fruition through any sublime idea like love, nor does he legalize it through marriage, since he already has a wife; instead, he provides material and financial aid. After he agrees to loan Haizao RMB 60,000 to pay off her sister's debt, his libido impels him to have drunken sex with her. The material wealth he provides her becomes more

lavish as his sexual desire builds. He first offers her delicacies, then cash and credit cards, and finally, an apartment.

Haizao's motivations for becoming a mistress are initially financial support, and later, addiction to the superior sexual skills of her illicit lover, which lead to her abandon her feelings for her fiancée, Xiao Bei. She needs money to assist her older sister in paying off the debt accrued from attempting to buy an apartment, so she accepts the money offer that she has previously rejected after acknowledging the sexual request behind it. Haizao's very first sexual service to Song is provided unwillingly after she receives RMB 60,000 in order to repay her brother-in-law's debt originated from an illegal loan for their long-desired apartment. Haiping takes care of her younger sister like a mother; after all, she has taken care of Haizao since childhood. She offers her younger sister pocket money and clothes, and even washes Haizao's clothes during her college years. Therefore, a deep sisterly bond drives Haizao to betray her boyfriend and sell her sexual services for an amount which is approximately sixteen times her salary to settle her older sister's debt. Song Siming and Haizao's sexual and material exchanges grow deeper as their affair ripens. As a rich and capable buyer, Song Siming is able to buy what he desires since his targeted sexual partner is in financial need. In other words, their affair is a form of sexual consumption. Beginning from their sexual encounter, Haizao is gradually corrupted by an extravagant lifestyle supported by Song Siming's financial power.

In addition to material availability, Haizao also enjoys sexual gratification through the sexual bonding experience. Song's superior sexual skills fulfill her strong sexual desire. During the course of their affair, she praises Song's long and powerful organ. Despite her initial reluctance, Haizao gradually indulges in the carnal pleasure

offered by skillful Song Siming, while her level of satisfaction with her boyfriend is unknown to viewers. In fact, the series generally features the young couple's daily activities, such as cooking, window shopping, strolling, and joking, rather than their sexual intimacy. If we refer back to the text from which the show was adapted—a popular novel—we can have a better understanding of Haizao's physical preferences for Song. In the novel, Haizao does not understand orgasm until she has sex with Song. After her sexual encounter with Song, she experiences unprecedented feelings of ecstasy and realizes that she has wasted more than one year trying to achieve pleasure with her boyfriend.[32] Two scenes especially highlight her sexual subjectivity. The first one depicts her hidden desire being revealed in a personality test, which she desperately denies when discussing it with her boyfriend. However, she experiences no embarrassment when expressing her wants to Song; in fact, she often initiates sex with him. In another scene, Haizao asks Song to rape her, requests sex despite her pregnancy, and even suggests a "nine soft (pushes) one hard (thrust)" penetration technique (九浅一深). These scenes underline her sexual attachment to Song and her attempts at exhausting carnal pleasure, both of which lead to her final punishment at the end. She misunderstands the gender difference in sexual expression and is an active agent in the affair, thinking that the era of neo-liberal consumption allows both contemporary genders to indulge in sexual consumption for sexual satisfaction without care.

Portrayals of Song Siming and Haizao's decadent pleasures and explicit (露骨 *lugu*) dialogues indeed seem contradictory to the qualities of an ideal sexual subject, and

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[32]Liuliu, *Woju* 蝸居[Narrow Dwelling] (Wuhan Shi: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2007), 99. Since the focus of my study is not a comparison between the adapted text and the TV drama, I will only introduce the novel when it is helpful in offering more background information on the narrative.

perhaps explain SARFT's criticisms. Here I analyze how the narrative creates ambiguous moral messages about being a mistress and how it captures contemporary changes in sex, marriage, and relationships in the contemporary Chinese context.

Haizao's sister, Haiping, is sexually faithful to her husband; however, she is also not a moral leader. Her perverted desire to stay in an apartment in the city twists her into a shrew and a miser. More importantly, the older sister has an ambivalent attitude towards Haizao's affair. For example, after she learns that Song is the one who helps her obtain money, she conspires with Haizao and enables her to cheat on her boyfriend by making up excuses for her absence and forbidding her husband from telling the truth to the boyfriend. She even comments that Haizao should have gotten to know Song Siming earlier because he provides solutions to a conflict at work. The fact that she switches between naming the affair an "alternative path" (*di er tiao lu* 第二條路) and a "back-door way" (*pangmenzuodao* 旁門左道) to happiness reveals her moral ambivalence towards such infidelity. The only character who embraces sexual faithfulness and clearly opposes extra-marital affairs is Haizao's mother. The mother, who grew up in the revolutionary era, condemns Song Siming and regards extra-marital affairs as a "wrong path." The socialist mother further denies Haizao's attachment to Song as an aspiration for love, which is a general relationship criterion celebrated in *Golden Marriage*. Instead, she sees it as mystification through commodities. Nevertheless, contrary to the zhuxuanlü formula of depicting moral leaders as leading characters, the mother here is only a minor character who is old and powerless to turn her daughters into moral figures.

Haizao's sexual morality is arguably associated with the changing agenda of nation-building projects. Growing up in the post-socialist era during which economic

development replaced revolution as the dominant aspect of the state's agenda, Haizao acquires a value system towards love and sex that is different from her mother's, which took shape during the revolutionary era. There is a rupture between current discursive constructions of feelings, fidelity, and marriage and those of previous historical periods. Criteria for an ideal male partner and its possible resultant happiness has now transformed with the changing economic paradigm of nation building projects. Haizao and her mother's standards of an ideal male partner and their opinions on fidelity are informed by the nation-building projects to which they were exposed while growing up. The previous generation as represented by the sisters' mother, which grew up in the socialist revolutionary era, denied possession of capital as an index for happiness. The mother also denies Song as a potential ideal lover. The differences between the evaluations of Song dovetail with perceptions of the government from the viewpoint of different generations. The mother perceives Song as a servant of the people (*gongjia de ren* 公家的人) and his assistance to Haiping and Haizao is taken for granted rather than seen as a special favor for which to be grateful. This attitude reflects her perception of the government as leading a socialist state that represents and serves the people. In 1944, Mao Zedong promoted the communist ideal "to serve the people" as the ultimate work ethic of the Party, which epitomizes a socialist and revolutionary value system.[33] However, the sisters' view of Song as rich, successful, and omnipotent underlies their recognition of the state as a mediator, or even a successful player in the neo-liberal market economy in the new century. The socialist mother further denies Haizao's attachment to Song as an aspiration of love, and instead, as a form of enchantment with

[33] Mao Zedong, *Serve the People; In Memory of Norman Bethune; The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains* (Beijing: Shangwu yingshuguan, 1972), 2-9.

the commodities that Song can offer. The mother's criterion for an ideal lover is tied to personhood (*benren*) instead of ability to allow for material consumption. My point here is not to judge whether an accumulation of money is a good or bad criterion in choosing a lover, but to point out how the changing aspirations for love and happiness are shaped by distinct social contexts as engendered by leading state ideologies.

In the first seventeen years of the PRC, desirable men were those who greatly contributed to revolution, as indicated in the song lyrics produced during that period: "But, you want me to marry you? You lack a medal on your shirt."[34] The preference for a revolutionary medal reveals that revolutionary consciousness infiltrated private social spaces, even love and marriage. In fact, having criteria for love is not a brand new concept. The May Fourth period saw the emergence of free love and offered a particular social context for development of the criteria for love. In 1923, the case of Chen Shujun choosing a professor over her fiancé elicited vivid debates over "morality" and love.[35] Zhang Jingsheng defended her by stating the four rules of love (*aiqing dingze*) and explaining that it was wise to choose one possessing stronger physical attributes and more knowledge.[36] Reading Haizao against the previous two women looking for an ideal man, we can see that criteria for an ideal sexual partner change in relation to the larger social context. Perhaps we can go further to say that though women in different times measure an ideal man differently, they are always utilitarian in their choices. They tend to

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[34] Wen Jie, "Zhongguo guniang," 種瓜姑娘[The melon-planting Girl] in *Tianshan Muge* 天山牧歌 [Pastoral Songs of the Tian Mountain](Beijing: Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1958), 32-3. I cite the translation by Jianmei Liu, see *Revolution Plus Love*, 162.

[35] See Hiayan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 142-51.

[36] Ibid, 143.

desire "successful" men who have attributes that can enhance women's social status, be it through success in revolution or through neo-liberal adventures. The conflict between the mother and the daughter over the choice of an ideal man originates from the changing discourses constructed in different eras. In other words, women choose those who have enough social capital to bring them an easier life, and social capital changes from revolutionary heroism to accumulation of wealth. Haizao's pursuit of an ideal sexual partner surpasses that of her predecessors in the sense that she ignores or transgresses marriage boundaries, and is willing to become a mistress in reform-era China.

Haizao and Song Siming's affair coincides with an off-screen reality in which men who benefit from this drastic economic structural change have easy access to women. Haizao's sexual submission to Song Siming particularly exposes younger women's moral ambivalence, as well as the quandaries of economically-modest men. Her affair with a married man suggests that younger women are willing to sell their natural capital—the body—to bail themselves out of their financial difficulties in the new economic order. The salaried Xiao Bei is unwittingly betrayed and becomes a passive victim of Haizao's infidelity, while the rich Song Siming, who collects bribes and takes advantage of his official position, gains privileged access to women. For an idler like Haizao or other women who desire a comfortable life, Song's economic power, qualifies him to be a preferred lover over a proletarian such as Xiao Bei, regardless of his marital status. This plot point suggests that men who are not opportunists in a money-oriented society will have their masculinity stripped from them and will become the ultimate losers in the new economic order. Economically disenfranchised men lose in the competition for women; wealthy men or opportunists win out in the scramble for both material possessions and

women. Keeping one or several mistresses is currently so common among rich men and officials that they consider the activity comparable to playing golf.[37] Infidelity on the television screen resonates with depictions in other forms of media. Jason McGrath, who researches filmic representation, argues that in this so-called 'cinema of infidelity', mistresses of successful men in an economic venture during the reform era are 'the ultimate accessories' for the new urban lifestyle.[38]

Unfaithful sexual subjects and mistresses are not completely fictional characters; they are representations of the everyday life experience in reform-era China. In the 2000s, China saw a growing preference among members of the young generation for serving as the mistress of a financially powerful man. On 15 October 2009, an article appearing in *Zhangjiang Daily* garnered great attention and stirred up a heated debate on the internet. The piece ruminated on whether or not the White-Haired Girl, a debtor, should marry Huang Shiren, the rich but corrupt creditor.[39] The author reported that a college student in Wuhan aspired to marry a modern version of Huang Shiren for the sake of his wealth, revealing changing cultural and economic values regarding ideal sexual partnerships and marriage. Some responses to the article, which appeared online, even express enthusiasm

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[37] Dan Levin, "China's New Wealth Spurs a Market for Mistresses," *New York Times*, August 9, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/10/world/asia/10mistress.html?_r=1 (accessed August 11, 2011).

[38] Jason Mcgrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008), 100.

[39] "Wuhan 'Jiushihou' Nvdaxuesheng qiguai: Baimaonv weihe bu jia 'youqinren'Huang Shiren" 武漢"90後"女大學生奇怪: 白毛女為何不嫁"有錢人"黃世仁 [Female student born in the 90s puzzled: Why Baimaonü not marry to "rich man" Huang Shiren], *Changjiang ribao*, Oct 15, 2009, http://cjmp.cnhan.com/cjrb/html/2009-10/15/content_2071542.htm (accessed Jan 15, 2011). The story White-Haired Girl is originally a folk story and later became widely known because of the film version (1951) and the ballet version (1965) produced during the revolutionary-era China. The story outline depicts the difficulties faced by a poor girl. Her father, a penniless peasant, is forced to sell her into a creditor's family to offset the family debts. Her beauty attracts the young creditor who later rapes her. She later escapes from being sold again and hides into a cave without knowing that her hair has become white. She is later saved by her former lover who led the revolutionary army, and her hair turns black again.

about the prospect of being Huang Shiren's mistress for the sake of a better life.[40] During the revolutionary era, Huang Shiren epitomized the kind of feudal suppression that was to be condemned and eliminated; currently, a wealthy party is to be embraced and admired. Based on such debates, it seems that many contemporary Chinese women now scorn the practice of pursuing men with revolutionary consciousness as was popular in the revolutionary era, and even reject the humanist goal of celebrating free love. The focus has shifted to wealth. Young women in the first decade of the twenty-first century discussed whether the White Hair Girl should marry Huang Shiren in this way: "If a modern Huang Shiren lives in a wealthy environment, he could look dashing and refined. Moreover, he is rich, why wouldn't we marry him? It doesn't matter if he's a little bit old."[41] Extricating him from the revolutionary context, the current interpretation of the character Huang Shiren suggests the contemporary discourse about marriage and relationships. The amount of wealth has become a measure for an ideal man, regardless of his marital status. The socialist discourse against feudal polygamy transformed and was superseded by the pursuit of happiness as defined by economic success. The defeat of Huang Shiren in the revolutionary era reflects class struggle for the quest of peasants' freedom, but currently, the White Hair Girl's material gain is the priority. However, this does not mean that class is no longer important; to the contrary, class still occupies a

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[40] "Jiushihou zishu: wo dang 'ernai' zhende hen xingfu" 90 後自述：我當"二奶" 真的很幸福 [An account of born-in-the-90s: Being a mistress is happy], http://club.china.com/data/thread/26154311/2713/63/36/8_1.html (accessed on April 20, 2011).

[41] The Chinese original saying is: "如果黃世仁生活在現代, 家庭環境優越, 可能是個外表瀟灑、很風雅的人。加上有錢, 為什麼不能嫁給他呢?即便是年紀大一點也不要緊," "Wuhan 'Jiushihou' Nvdaxuesheng qiguai: Baimaonv weihe bu jia 'youqinren'Huang Shiren" 武漢"90 後"女大學生奇怪: 白毛女為何不嫁"有錢人"黃世仁 [Female student born in the 90s puzzled: Why Baimaonv not married to "rich man" Huang Shiren], *Changjiang ribao*, Oct 15, 2009, http://cjmp.cnhan.com/cjrb/html/2009-10/15/content_2071542.htm (accessed Jan 15, 2011).

significant role in the contemporary milieu. Grabbing a modern, rich Huang Shiren as a companion, if not a husband, still promises freedom—free access to consumption and material wealth. The suppressed figure of a concubine in socialist discourse has recently been transformed into a happy mistress who can find shelter without worrying about mortgage payments. One of the reasons for such submission to materialism is apparent in Haiping and her husband's critique of the current developmentalism in the city: people ridicule the poor, not the prostitute (笑貧不笑娼 *xiao pin bu xiao chang*), meaning that those who fail to grasp wealth in the time of rampant Economic Reform are more abject than an enterprising but amoral prostitute. Their observation is verified by the aforementioned online forum discussions arguing the benefits of serving rich men.

To contain its moral transgression of depicting a happy "professional mistress" who enjoys material access, *Narrow Dwelling*'s ending conforms to a moral discourse that punishes unfaithful subjects. This is possibly a gesture to pass the censorship system, which emphasizes sanitization of the screen. Now I inspect the narrative closure during Episodes Thirty to Thirty-Five, which ends with a moral lesson for the contemporary mistress. Haizao and Song's affair violates monogamist morality and legal codes on marriage; hence, the lovers are punished. The adultery does not actually represent a criminal act until the couple's cohabitation. The affair becomes illegal when Song offers an apartment to Haizao and maintains a sexual relationship with her. Updated Article Three of the Marriage Law prohibits married individuals from "cohabit[ing] with another person of the opposite sex," and according to Article Forty-six, if cohabitation with another spouse leads to divorce, "the unerring party shall have the right to claim

compensation."[42] To conform to the state legal system and orthodox moral codes, *Narrow Dwelling* ends with Haizao's miscarriage and the removal of her uterus, and Song's death in a car accident on the way to the hospital. Such a conclusion starkly contrasts with the characters' previous happy sexual journey. The annihilation of the embryo seems necessary for the maintenance of orthodox morality, as it signifies a failure of both the adulterers' bonding and the fruit of Song's excessive sexual desire. Taking away Haizao's reproductive ability is a harsh and significant punishment because it indicates a possibility that Haizao has a smaller chance of finding a husband in the future, as the concept of having a (male) child to continue the family line remains important in Mainland China. To render the moral lesson more explicit and eliminate the possibility that Haizao could continue on as a shameless woman who sees no wrong in her actions, the ending also portrays Haizao showing regret for the adultery. In the last episode, Haizao arrives at enlightenment and recognizes her unfaithful adventure as an enchantment of commodity, which resulted in losing Xiao Bei, a man who once truly loved her. Such "enlightenment" admits that the previous pursuit of sexual freedom and commodities was futile and destructive. Therefore, though excessive desire and exchanging sex for materials may appear to be legitimate or appealing during the course of the narrative, the closing scenes reprimand characters, particularly women, for their illegitimate sex and decadence. Haizao's conformist ending suggests that women are not encouraged to pursue sexual consumption or expressions, for it upsets traditional women's virtues and will cause regret in the near future. However, there remains an interesting gendered difference between Song Siming and Haizao's punishments.

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[42] *Law of Succession, Adoption Law, and Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2002): 79, 99.

Although Song dies on the screen, his expiration seems to be an execution of social justice rather than castigation for his infidelity, carried out because he is a corrupted, scheming official. He shows no regret for his extra-marital affair before his death.

However, such narrative closure does not guarantee effective containment of the heated debates about love, sexuality, and gender in contemporary China stirred up by Song Siming and Haizao's affair. Viewers' diverse stances inform us that moral values and standards are being re-configured in the contemporary Chinese context such that Chinese citizens come to hold conflicting views about affairs and mistresses. Haizao's decision and indulgence in being a mistress and her pursuit of sexual pleasure especially aroused controversies. Even though the idea of being a mistress for the sake of gaining material wealth has spread among the younger generation, the concept of the woman taking part in an affair is still frowned upon. Some viewers admire Song Siming for his money, power, and romantic attributes and express their willingness to fall for him; others denounce Haizao for being extremely sordid (*tai jian le*) and a bitch (*biaozi*). On the contrary, Song's meek and forgiving wife is generally praised for her patience and support for her husband. Although Song betrays his wife and rapes her when she protests Song's infidelity, his wife still forgives him and remains submissive. She collects money for her husband in order to save him from a court case. In the scene where Song's wife offers him money from selling houses in order to enable him to return all the bribes in due course, viewers approved of the wife's tolerance, mercy, and forgiveness. Such comments reveal the current popular imagination of a virtuous wife or women. If such an ideal image is completely eroded away by "modern" utilitarian relationships or equal

gender status, viewers would not have expressed appreciation for such a tolerant and submissive characterization.

The ambiguous discourse on love, mistresses, Song Siming, Xiao Bei, and Haizao are also central in news reports and discussion forums. Among innumerable online discussions, the entry of Xiaoxiaowenbo, an alleged seventeen-year-old female student from Heilongjiang, summarizes the dilemma women are facing when choosing a lover/sexual partner in a social context in which the attitude of looking-toward money (向錢看 *xiang qian kan*) has become a dominant value. Expressing her appreciation for the actor, Zhang Jiayi's skills in playing Song Siming, she highlighted her confusion about love in this way,

> …[I] am angry about Haizao's infidelity, find Xiao Bei's tolerance hopeless, am attracted to Song Siming's gentleness. Definitely, every woman's mind contains a Song Siming: he is gentle, reliable, and cultivated. How can a woman ever resist such a man like him? But I have to say, no matter how open-minded the society has become, a mistress will still be despised and destroyed by scandals. The betrayal and infidelity of such an attractive man, after all, violate ethics and morality, and should be criticized. In this vein, my feelings go indeterminately between Song Siming and Xiao Bei…After watching *Narrow Dwelling*, I'm even thinking whether I want Xiao Bei or Song Siming. In the past, I desired a lover like Xiao Bei. We don't have to be rich as long as we're together. We don't need extravagance as long as we're in love. But nowadays love has become impractical. Passionate feelings will be eroded when we try to meet our ends. Perhaps the saying "everything goes wrong for the poor couple" is right (貧賤夫妻百事哀 *pinjian fuqi bai shi ai*). Maybe I want a man like Song Siming. [*Narrow Dwelling*'s] ending made me sad. Although I hated Haizao very much when I was in the middle of the narrative, I sincerely pitied her at the end. After serious consideration, I found that such an ending is necessary to uphold morality…However, extra-marital affairs and the other woman (第三者 *di san zhe*), sadly, indeed exist…[43]

Xiaoxiaowenbo's confession explains why Song Siming is widely popular although he betrays his wife and family: he is gentle, and more importantly, rich. Despite the fact that

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[43] Xiaoxiaowenbo (小小文博), "Kanwan *Woju*, ganshou henduo, zhongdu hen shen" [看完蝸居,感受很多,中毒很深 After watching *Narrow Dwelling*, many feelings, seriously addicted], Baidu, http://tieba.baidu.com/p/1408972174?pn=1 (accessed Feb 28, 2012).

Xiaoxiaowenbo points to Song Siming's gentleness as the reason for his status as every woman's dream man, it is far from the ultimate reason, as an economically-humble man can also possess these qualities. The more significant reason lies later in the paragraph when she raised the question of whether or not love can be sustained in poverty. Therefore, the motivation of choosing a man alike Song Siming lies in a financial concern, and wealth is the key characteristic that Song possesses.

Xiaoxiaowenbo's personal reflection on an ideal sexual partner drew support and recognition. Another netizen, self-identified as a thirty-one-year-old woman from Guangdong, expressed that she would also pick Song Siming if she were to choose between him and Xiao Bei. Xiaoju Jessica explained that "love becomes hopeless when caught in reality (現實 *xianshi*). You cannot sustain love with water alone, you also need bread."[44] Putting love in a clichéd dichotomous analogy, Xiaoju Jessica referred to Xiao Bei as water (passion/ideals) and Song Siming as bread (means for survival), implying that the ability to offer material access makes a man preferable to others, and women have to bear this "enlightenment" in mind. Xiaoxiaowenbo replied to Xiaoju Jessica by affirming that the majority of women would make the same choice in a materialistic world.

Narrow Dwelling's moral ending not only captured the attention of Xiaoxiaobowen; it also incited viewers who enjoy watching Song Siming and Haizao's affair to rewrite the tragic ending. Dissatisfied with the TV ending, which conforms to normative moral standards by separating an illicit couple through death, a fan created another ending that saves Song from death after the car accident and allows him to

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[44] Xiaoju(小菊) Jessica, ibid., http://tieba.baidu.com/p/1408972174 (accessed Feb 27, 2012).

reunite with Haizao.[45] This Internet entry received over one hundred and fifty replies, and almost all of them preferred and appreciated this ending. These netizens regarded Haizao and Song's relationship as legitimate love, and praised Song's deep feelings for Haizao. Though admitting that Haizao is "the other woman" (第三者 *di san zhe*), one of the replies went so far to recognize the extra-marital love as sublime (這種愛情是崇愛的 *zhe zhong aiqing shi chonggao de*).[46] These replies indicate that these viewers are aware of Song Siming's marital status, but they find a transgressive relationship or an extra-marital affair acceptable as long as it involves true love. However, one of the replies, attacked the revised ending and its respondents from a moral standpoint. Netizen 110.6.253 reprimanded the new ending and its advocates as insane and opined that their attitude, in fact, supports those who impose pain on others and destroy their family.[47] Confronting online discussions listing ten reasons to love Song Siming,[48] this "moral" response belongs to one of the voices urging women to choose the "right" path. For example, a netizen with the pseudonym Xiaomonuyiran reminded young women of the pain and consequences of becoming the other woman: being an underground lover (地下

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[45] The netizen wiriter is self-identified as Tongzizhuo, "Gaixie *Woju* jieju jiran bu xihuan jiu gai le"改寫《蝸居》結局既然不喜歡就改了 [Rewriting *Narrow Dwelling*'s ending, change it as (I) don't like it], Baidu, http://tieba.baidu.com/p/690289712?pn=1(accessed Feb 27, 2012).

[46] Netizen "60.2.14" replied to Tongzizhuo, see Baidu, http://tieba.baidu.com/p/690289712?pn=5(accessed Feb 27, 2012).

[47] Netizen "110.6.253" replied to Tongzizhuo, see Baidu, http://tieba.baidu.com/p/690289712?pn=4(accessed Feb 27, 2012).

[48] Feiwen shaonü, "Weishenme ai shang Song Siming Haizao xuanze Song Siming de shi da liyo"為什麼愛上宋思明 海藻選擇宋思明的十大理由 [Why fall for Song Siming Ten reasons for Haizao to choose Song Siming], Huashang luntan, http://bbs.hsw.cn/read-htm-tid-1168875-page-1.html (accessed Feb 27, 2012).

情人 *dixia qingren*), not being able to form a family, having to please the married master. Xiaomonuyiran, therefore, suggests that we should endorse freedom in the private life but condemn irresponsible private life.[49] Zhang Jiayi, the actor who played Song Siming, also encouraged real women to select a sexual partner who is reliable, more like Su Chun in the TV drama, instead of choosing one akin to Song Siming. He also advised women to earn their own benefits rather than taking a short cut to a cozy life, like the one Haizao had taken.[50]

These intense debates hint at a continuous reconfiguration and conflicting ideologies of love and marriage. A few years before *Narrow Dwelling*'s broadcast, we saw debates about women's proper gender and social role in reform-era China alongside the airing of the TV drama *Kaojin ni, wennuan wo* (靠近你溫暖我 Close to you, make me warm, 2006) which features both an androgynous career woman and a tender "other woman."[51] The discussion evolved around whether an ideal woman should be balanced seems to reach a fever pitch when online articles proposed that women should act like a *baigujing* (white bone demon 白骨精) at work and a *hulijing* (fox fairy 狐狸精) at

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[49] Xiao muonu yiran, "You *Woju* Song Siming renwu xiangxiang yinfa de hunwaiqing sikao" 由《蝸居》宋思明人物形象引發的婚外情思考[Reflections on extra-marital affair provoked by the characterization of *Narrow Dwelling*'s Song Siming], 360doc, http://www.360doc.com/content/10/0627/19/1921399_35603630.shtml (accessed Feb 27, 2012).

[50] Chen Xing, "Zhang Jiayi changtan *Woju* Song Siming: zhezhong nanren kaobuzhu" 張嘉譯暢談《蝸居》宋思明：這種男人靠不住[Zhang Jiayi's free talk on *Narrow Dwelling*'s Song Siming: This type of men is unreliable], Renmin Wang, Dec 29, 20009, http://ent.people.com.cn/GB/42075/81374/10472004.html (accessed Feb 27, 2012).

[51] Julie Hackenbracht, "Small Screen China: An Exploration of Contemporary Social Issues as Depicted in Chinese TV Dramas" (Master's thesis, University of Oregon, 2009).

home.[52] The term *baigujin*, made famous in the Ming masterwork *Journey to the West*, here means "white collar" (白領), "backboned" (骨幹), and "elite" (精英), while the term *hulijing*, which originally refers to an evil fox spirit, means a tender woman (溫柔小女子 *wenrou xiao nüzi*) who can easily attract men with her beauty and grace. *Narrow Dwelling*'s role as a big hit turned the focus of debates about women to the legitimacy of becoming a mistress of rich men for financial security. The terms *xiaosan* (mistress 小三) or *ernai* (mistress 二奶) have received more discussion since then, and these two words connote significations that are far more morally transgressive than the contemporary *hulijing* and *baigujing* suggest, as the former indicates crossing the legal boundary of marriage.

Although I have shown off-screen opinions that support sexual/marital transgression, I reserve the possibility that the stardom of Zhang Jiayi and Li Nian, the actress who played Haizao, help to beautify an extra-marital affair on the screen, causing its viewing advocates to see less/no wrong in the illicit relationship. Zhang Jiayi's appearance is attractive and Li Nian looks innocent. If Song Siming were played by an actor who is culturally considered ugly, such as the small-eyed, buck-toothed Lin Yongjian, who played Da Zhuang in *Golden Marriage*, Song's sexual advances and passionate acts on behalf of Haizao may have seemed repugnant rather than romantic. In the same vein, Li Nian looks pure and innocent, rendering Haizao's character simple-minded instead of sophisticated, the kind of person who rarely aims to become a mistress.

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[52]Xiaofeng chanyue, "Zai wai zuo baigujing, zai jia zuo yaojing" 在外做白骨精，在家做妖精 [White bone demon in the public, fox fairy at home], Sinablog, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48ef666b010007oj.html (accessed Feb 27, 2012).

The audience's response is a sign of a fissure in censorship's ineffectiveness, if not an indication of its failure. After reviewing these audience responses, we can observe that although *Narrow Dwelling*'s moral ending may be a sign of self-censorship or a smart way to pass censorship that targets radical representations of sex and love, the spectator's response is uncontrollable. Maybe these uncontrollable or unpredictable responses are important reasons for the Department Head of the Television Program Management (Dianshiju Guanlisi), Li Jingsheng's public criticism of *Narrow Dwelling*, which might be seen as an attempt to curb discussions on immoral issues. Li's criticism successfully made a gesture of disapproval to TV stations, which, as a result, turned down their promotion and broadcast of *Narrow Dwelling*. Yet it outraged certain audiences enough that they wrongly accused Li of owning extravagant residences.[53] Thus, I argue that the censorship system faces an impossible mission because, although it endeavors to scan for bad elements in narratives and demands revision or prohibits production when it sees necessary, it can never predict and contain audience response.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the three boundaries for an ideal sexual subject as depicted in the zhuxuanlü production *Golden Marriage.* Tong Zhi and Wen Li maintain a long marriage regardless of the political situation, wealth, and health status, and refrain from physical infidelity during their fifty years of marriage. *Golden Marriage*, as I have illustrated above, is arguably a screen product in response to precedents that depict "unhealthy" sex and marriage concepts, the anti-vulgarity campaign, as well as the state

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[53] Xinmin wanbao, "Guangdian zongju sizhang piping *Woju* zao renrou wangyou zhangguanlidan" 廣電總局司長批評《蝸居》遭人肉 網友張冠李戴 [The department head of SARFT who criticized *Narrow Dwelling* got a thorough background check, netizens were mistaken], Renmin Wang, http://media.people.com.cn/GB/40606/10579717.html (accessed Feb 17, 2012).

ideology of building a harmonious society. While praising faithful sexual subjects, the narrative also frowns upon on "bad" sexual subjects who happen to be members of the younger generation growing up in reform-era China and who engage in casual sex and even experience pre-marital pregnancy. Despite the fact that *Golden Marriage* was produced under the backdrop of the anti-vulgarity campaign, which opposed sexual implications on the screen, *Golden Marriage* makes use of market logic and renders its ideology palatable to its viewers, both avoiding direct confrontation with the campaign and pleasing pop culture consumers by portraying sex in a humorous ways. In this way, zhuxuanlü production relies on commercial elements to entertain and make it commercially successful so that it has an opportunity to spread its politically-motivated message. Furthermore, although the fact that *Golden Marriage* received state awards exemplifies the approving stance of the state towards the narrative depicting Tong Zhi and Wen Li's relationship, the narrative contains ambiguous space for a negotiated reading in regard to an ideal marriage. Tong Zhi and Wen Li have continuous fights and quarrels to the extent that the number of days they have been married equals the number of days they have been fighting. This is suggestive that an ideal marriage is a nominal, superficial marriage that has never been dissolved through divorce, regardless of actual disharmony. Tong Zhi's sexual fidelity is associated with his patriotism to the Party, suggesting that those who follow the Party's line possess higher sexual and economic morality. Tong's morality is favorably compared to that of his son, who pursues economic gains through illegal means and practices casual sex. This association between Party patriotism and sexual fidelity contributes to the superior moral image of the Party-state.

I have also examined Haizao and Song Siming's illicit sexual affair in *Narrow Dwelling*. Their affair is founded on sexual indulgence based not on sentiments and care for each other, but merely on the pursuit of sexual gratification and financial security. Their conditional relationship contrasts with that of *Golden Marriage*'s faithful couple, who survive through political, social, and fidelity crises. Haizao and Song Siming's affair exemplifies the actions of unfaithful subjects, as both parties betray their legitimate sexual partners in falling for each other. The affair violates the three boundaries of the state's ideal sexual relationship—motivation, length, and institution. Haizao's motivations for persuing a relationship with Song are first financial need, and then recognition of his superior sexual skills, while Song desires to release his desire for a sexual object. The couple's sexual relationship lies outside of the institution of marriage, as Song is married and has a daughter. Such an affair ignores, if not defies, the state's legal regulation of love and sex, causing a marital crisis that the state regards as a form of social disharmony. *Narrow Dwelling*'s narrative may seem dramatic for its imaginary of a poor girl meeting a rich and powerful Party official who solves all of her financial difficulties. However, it resonates with viewers' experience in reality. I have provided evidence from newspapers and the Internet that Haizao's characterization is historically informed and is solidly based on the characters of real women in contemporary neo-liberal cities in China. Haizao's decadent indulgence in sex and material wealth sparked widespread debates among viewers on morality and sexual relationships. It may explain why Li Jingsheng complained that *Narrow Dwelling*'s obscene narrative reduced the quality of TV programs. I have also explained how the moral ending of the drama could be interpreted as a sign of self-censorship, but viewers' conflicting perceptions of being a

mistress, their disapproval of the moralistic ending, as well as a re-writing of *Narrow Dwelling*'s conclusion prove to us that reader response is lively and creative enough to evade official prediction, censorship, and containment. Perhaps reader response is the core component that can effectively resist or at least negotiate hegemonic ideology in popular culture.

In short, the restrictive creative environments in which *Golden Marriage* and *Narrow Dwelling* were created, as well as official and viewers' responses, provide us answers to the question of "how far we can go" when representing sexual subjects on the screen. First, we can see that cultural workers who intentionally please the state produce pieces that correspond to the state's contemporary socio-political call. In this case, they produce works that are in line with the state ideology of building a harmonious society. *Golden Marriage* is such a zhuxuanlü product that creates faithful sexual subjects to counteract familial and marital instability on- and off-screen. SARFT's anti-vulgarity campaign also imposes constraints on improper sexual depictions in order to mold healthy productions. In other words, there is a limited space for portrayals of sexual subjectivity on the screen. Nevertheless, Tong Zhi and Wen Li's fights cast doubts on the effectiveness of the couple's ideal sexual image, meaning that the sexual socialist spirit embodied by Tong Zhi and Wen Li does not necessarily convince people of a seamless ideal marriage. Thus, there are limitations on the ideal sexual socialist spirit. *Narrow Dwelling*'s explicit sexual explorations of an extra-marital affair prove to us that sexual representations can go further than the state's restraints suggest, and that restraints are, in fact, ephemeral or even loose. At the same time, however, I am not suggesting that radical sexual subjectivity encounters no limits or that the censorship is completely

ineffective in guarding against any "undesirable" screen products. *Narrow Dwelling*'s moral ending simultaneously marks partial success of the censorship system and the production team's dexterous handling of radical representations that surpass censorship limits. To have Haizao regret her sexual affair and be punished with infertility is a form of self-censorship that reigns in radical sexual subjectivity, but it may also be a conscious gesture to conform to the state's orthodox morality in order to bring Haizao's sexual adventure on the screen. In addition, audience response can go far more beyond state-approved morality as embodied by the censorship system that screens improper and "unhealthy" concepts of sex, love, and relationships.

CHAPTER IV

PARTY PATRIOTISM VS. POLITICAL DISSENT AND TRANSGRESSIVE SEXUAL DESIRE

There are various forms of subjectivity that are not permitted to surface in post-1989, neo-liberal China. The most forbidden form is alternative political subjectivity, which is connected to a less forbidden but still taboo subjectivity—a subjectivity that is marked by homosexual desire. Conversely, patriotic subjectivity is the form of partisanship that is most often promoted. It is noteworthy that it is in the socialist spirit in which this sublime subjectivity is embraced here, as a spirit referring to sacrifice of the individual for the greater good (which requires patriotic submission to the ruling Party). This chapter investigates the phenomenon of promoting Party patriotism, including the banning of dissenting political and homosexual subjectivity as represented in films. My focus will be the socialist spirit, which was promoted after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident.

In this chapter, I will analyze one Chinese blockbuster that promotes the notion of self-sacrifice and three additional films that depict challenges to state power. The so-called first Chinese blockbuster, *Hero* (dir. Zhang Yimou, 2001), shows its protagonist's transformation from one of the most dangerous dissidents to one of the most understanding confidants (知己 *zhiji*) of a tyrannical emperor. The protagonist, Nameless, forfeits a life as a completely committed assassin to become a martyr. I reason that *Hero* is a zhuxuanlü in which the heroic figure, Nameless, is an embodiment of the eminent socialist spirit with its emphasis on self-sacrifice and submission to the greater good. This disciplining purpose, I maintain, targets intellectuals, or more broadly, cultural elites whose work is capable of reaching mass audiences. The appropriation of neo-Confucian

ideas into the rhetoric of socialist spirit implies that there is no fixed ideology within this spirit; rather, any ideology useful in consolidating the CCP power in a historically-specific context will be promoted regardless of its previous encounters with the CCP. Furthermore, the submission to an obviously embodied figure is a ritual that symbolizes the deep-rooted political stance of individual leader worship. The leader, whether an emperor or a proletarian hero, occupies a sublime position that ultimately represents the imagined nation. Such an arrangement is parallel to the political strategy that equates the Party with the nation. If citizens love their country, they love the Party, and vice versa. Refusal to love the Party is interpreted as a betrayal of one's country.[1] Finally, I maintain that the commercialization of zhuxuanlü is a political manoeuvre that offers a popularized version of state ideology to its viewers.

The other three feature films that I have selected to analyze in this chapter are *East Palace*, *West Palace* (東宮西宮), *Lan Yu* (藍宇), and *Butterfly* (蝴蝶), each of which contains potentially subversive elements that challenge state power. The common feature that draws them together is their association of politically dissenting ideas with another tabooed subject—homosexuality. I maintain that the sexual and political taboos portrayed are interwoven within the present political and cultural milieu and therefore demonstrate a specific kind of Chineseness. These films suggest that the state allows only particular kinds of desires to break the surface, while others are denied a place in Chinese society in a post-socialist, neo-liberal context. A state-approved Chinese subject is one who is patriotic and heterosexual. *East Palace, West Palace* marks the emergence of this

[1] Even if Nameless would execute his original plan, which is to assassin the King of Qin, the value of loyalty to his country is still protected. According to the film's logic, it is worth sacrificing one's own life to assassinate the one who destroys one's home state.

trope after the1989 tragedy. It features a revisionist image of interactions between the ruling entity and its subjects. It is not necessarily the ruling entity that controls or occupies an active position in a leader-subject relationship. Such a relationship is played out in the narrative of a male homosexual who seduces a police officer who, in turn, interrogates the homosexual about his obscene acts. The homosexual, upon being arrested, reverses his structurally and superficially passive role as an arrestee into an active instigator of homoerotic sadomasochism.

Lan Yu portrays a tragic historical episode featuring an unconventional political vision and yearning for change that reached its peak in 1989—the June Fourth Tiananmen Incident. This incident involved the violent quelling of an anti-political riot, and still has not been officially addressed by the CCP. Through a parallel storyline, this direct "challenge" to the state is conceived as having its roots in a homosexual relationship in which a rich entrepreneur in Beijing buys sexual services from and eventually captivates Lan Yu, a male student involved in the Tiananment Incident. I contend that the male student's memory concerning his political pursuits does not change even though he goes on to develop a professional career rather than continuing as a political activist. The use of flashback to recall the entrepreneur's unforgettable memory of Lan Yu, his homosexual love, and the political tragedy, implies that the June Fourth memory will not be erased, but will stay in the minds of those involved forever.

The idea of a parallel between homosexuality and political insubordination leads me to another film that portrays lesbian relationships, *Butterfly*. I argue that the June Fourth memory became a localized recollection that created a geographical identity unique to Hong Kong within the depiction of homosexual relationships. The film's

significance lies not only in its positive lesbian images but also in a misappropriation of political events as a mark of local homosexual identities, implying that a homosexual relationship is not merely a political allegory or disguise but is crucial subject matter in itself. The film also adds another dimension complicating the identity of specifically "Chinese" lesbians and gays.

Hero: A Zhuxuanlü Blockbuster

The state's political partisanship idealistically emphasizes that one should forgo personal interests for the sake of the greater good. *Hero*'s story is a simple one, but the narrative becomes complicated due to twists in both the commentary and the characters' perception. The story revolves around one main concept: to kill or not to kill. Simply, the story is one telling of the assassin Nameless' attempt to kill the King of Qin; however, at the critical moment of the assassination, Nameless gives up and lets the king take his life. Within this narrative, the assassination plot is by no means the focus. Instead, it focuses on the narrative past—how Nameless, once a victorious soldier of the Qin state, was called on to help the Qin king eliminate three of the most wanted assassins: Sky, Broken Sword, and Snow. Nameless recalls his victories over the three assassins, and many of their fighting scenes occupy the screen in a lengthy narration.

The Qin King sees through Nameless' plot. The King speculates that Nameless is the ultimate assassin who wins the trust of Sky, Broken Sword, and Snow, causing them to surrender their weapons and fake their own deaths. Nameless ultimately admits to his identity as *the* assassin and reconstructs the true history of being persuaded by Broken Sword not to kill the King. Nameless agrees with Broken Sword that the King will go on to unify several states and form a peaceful empire; thus, he gives up his plan of

assassination and lets the King execute him. Originally a political dissident who attempts to terminate the political regime of the King, Nameless unexpectedly transforms into a martyr who dies for the sake of the King's ambitions of unification. Reading *Hero* as a zhuxuanlü production, I contend that the narrative celebrates a kind of political subjectivity that submits to the larger good and relinquishes individual desire. The spirit of socialism manifests itself within a political realm that subjects support, thereby rescuing the state from crisis.

I place the movie *Hero* within a zhuxuanlü framework even though there are different ideas involved in its creation. To illustrate the many fruitful academic conversations the film invited, I will group its interpretations into three categories according to their approaches, disciplines, and issues: film studies, political/nationalist studies, and gender studies. Such divisions do not suggest impermeable boundaries between categories; instead, these categories tend to overlap, infiltrate, and illuminate each other. The first one situates *Hero* within the Chinese film industry, and is basically concerned with its significance in terms of film history and reception. For example, Gary Xu argues that *Hero* is the first Chinese blockbuster to wake up the Chinese to the concept of whole-heartedly protecting a movie product from piracy.[2] Haizhou Wang and Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley propose that *Hero* is a rewriting of a Chinese martial arts film.[3] Secondly, political and nationalist readings debate concerns involving state, ideology, government, political reception, and national culture. While Wendy Larson argues that

[2] See Gary Xu, *Sinascape: Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 25-46.

[3] Haizhou Wang and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, "*Hero*: Rewriting the Chinese Martial Arts Film Genre," in *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of* Hero, ed. Gary D Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T Rawnsley (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 90-105.

Hero is an investigation into the viability of culturalism, a mandate that each nation needs a set of distinct cultural practices, ideas and forms that inspire nationalism, and that Zhang Yimou underpins culturalism and proposes that only direct cultivation of political, economic and military power is able to gain global recognition for a nation, many other scholars are convinced of the film's fascist and totalitarian message.[4] Larson's thesis may sound different from the interpretation of fascism, but I find continuity between these two perspectives: the failure of culturalism to gain global recognition may well serve as a potential pre-condition of the rise of fascism or even totalitarianism. The last approach uses gender theory to investigate femininity, masculinity, and the type of gendered stardom that is represented in *Hero*. Louise Edwards and Kam Louie offer pertinent interpretations of masculinity and femininity in *Hero*.[5]

I frame *Hero* in a zhuxuanlü context, and believe it illuminates the interaction between politics, economy, and film. Evidence that supports *Hero's* status as a zhuxuanlü includes the state's strong support for it and its warm reception. Strong support can be inferred when funding sources and conveniences are offered by the state. Scholars have contended that *Hero* is the first Hollywood-style blockbuster in China by presenting such evidence as *Hero*'s international funding and distribution network and its internationally

[4] Wendy Larson, "Zhang Yimou's *Hero*: Dismantling the Myth of Cultural Power," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2, no.3 (2008):181-196; and "On Zhang Yimou's *Hero*: Counter-response," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 3 no. 1(2009): 89-91. One of the many critics and scholars who see *Hero* in support of state ideology and totalitarianism in general is Nick Kaldis, "A Brief Response to Wendy Larson's 'Zhang Yimou's *Hero*: Dismantling the Myth of Cultural Power,'" *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*3, no.1(2009): 83-88. I will analyze other critics in the later section that focuses on reactions to the film.

[5] Louise Edwards, "Twenty-first Century Women Warriors: Variations on a Traditional Theme," in *Global Chinese Cinema*, 65-77; Kam Louie, "The King, the Musician and the Village Idiot: Images of manhood," in *Global Chinese Cinema*, 53-62.

famous cast.[6] That does not mean that the film operates solely on a commercial basis. In fact, I reason that the official support was a critical precondition in developing such large-scale investment in the film. *Hero* is a commodity that weds official ideology and commercial operation. Its ideology is covered up by the economic production mode and promotion strategies. A big blockbuster like *Hero* is jointly funded by both Chinese and western capital, and for that reason, the film has to cater to western audiences' sentiments.[7] Such an argument is valuable in understanding filmic elements deployed to cater to western ideals, but at the same time, trivializes filmic elements positioned to please the Chinese state. After all, it is the Chinese government that both provides funding to Zhang Yimou and maintains a highly unique censorship system. Since Zhang Yimou's previous film, *To Live*, was banned from public screening in China, it is impossible to claim that Zhang Yimou does not understand the state's powerful censorship system. Zhang also fully acknowledged his commercial goals in further developing his filming career; it seems very logical that he would first abide by the rules for movie production in China.[8] Therefore, in order to triumph in China, *Hero* has to please or satisfy its national legal censorship system. Seeing *Hero* as a zhuxuanlü production, we can take into account China's film industry without forgetting the state's role in producing and promoting films. Even the Liberation Army contributed to *Hero's* production success. Nine hundred and fifty members of the Liberation Army were cast as

[6] For example, see Gary Xu's *Sinascpe* and Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 195.

[7] Anthony Fung and Joseph M. Chan, "Towards a Global Blockbuster: the Political Economy of *Hero*'s Nationalism," in *Global Chinese Cinema*, 198-211.

[8] HD, "Shen Bing zhuanfang Zhang Yimou—"Yingxiong" yiwai de huati" 沈冰專訪張藝謀—"英雄"以外的話題[Shen Bing interviewed Zhang Yimou—Topics outside of *Hero*], *Dianying wenxue* no. 2 (2003).

the fearful Qin army in *Hero*.[9] *Hero*'s anti-piracy protection also gained support from the state, which helped to strictly enforce copyright law and prevent suspicious or possible copyright infringement.[10]

The state's warm reception also proves that *Hero* is a zhuxuanlü production. *Hero* premiered in Beijing in the Great Hall of the People on Dec 14, 2002. The Great Hall holds the National People's Congress, the highest reigning state body according to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. Premiering *Hero* in a venue that is highly political speaks to the state's recognition of the film. In addition to that, *Hero* was also a big winner at the Huabiao Awards, which are known nationally for the state's leading role in the award selection. The award presentation is hosted annually by SARFT. The major criterion for winning this award used to be "political correctness" instead of box office or artistic achievement. *Hero* became a big winner at the Huabiao Award Ceremony in 2003, winning three awards including the Outstanding Achievement Award, which is an unprecedented category. In contrast, Chen Kaige's similarly-themed period piece, *The Emperor and The Assassin* also premiered in the Great Hall of the People, but was severely criticized and did not receive any national awards. The reason for this may lie in the difference between the decisions the assassins made in the films' different narratives.

[9] Jiang Feng, Lin Jinbo, Ma Pengkong, *Zhang Yimou dianying zuopin: yingxiong zhizuo quan jilu* 張藝謀電影作品英雄製作全紀錄[The Making of *Hero*] (Taibei Shi: Lia jing chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2002), no pagination.

[10] For a detail description of anti-piracy measures, see Gary Xu, *Sinascape*, 25-46.

There are three films, including *Hero,* featuring stories of the assassination of the Qin King made by directors of the so-called "Fifth Generation" between the years 1996 and 2001. *Hero* portrays the most uncommon assassin among the three, in that he abandons his mission and surrenders his life. This unusual characterization of Nameless is significant because it shows the political vision that *Hero* constructs throughout the most revisionist version of the assassination. That vision includes the idea that sacrifice of one's self for the state is ultimately ideal, even in the face of a moral conflict concerning whether to serve the interest of the smaller self or the greater good. I will first briefly introduce Hero's two precedents in order to highlight the ways in which *Hero* is different from them, particularly in the portrayal of political subjectivity. Zhou Xiaowen's *Qin Song* (秦頌 The Emperor's Shadow, 1996) adapts Gao Jianli's assassination recorded in the *Shiji* and emphasizes what I label "persistent resistance." Elaborating on the *Shiji*'s short description of Gao Jianli, Zhou dramatizes the struggle between the Qin king and Gao that develops into an gradually intensifying conflict involving country, family, love, and sex. To get revenge against the Qin king for enslaving him and branding him on his forehead, Gao Jianli develops an illicit affair with the king's daughter, who is already betrothed to a Qin general in exchange for the general's loyalty. The first sign of discontent and resistance is Gao's personal hunger strike. The Qin king arrests him and orders him to serve as a musician following the Qin army, which is in the process of brutally conquering his home country—the Yan state. The second act of protest is Gao's engraving of "Ying (the family name of the Qin king) will die and his empire divide" on a large rock subsequent to seeing many Yan prisoners' miserable lives in slavery. The

participation of the king's daughter in protest also dramatizes resistance against the king. The princess falls for Gao and refuses to wed her fiancé. Gao continues to protest the princess' marriage with more forbidden sexual intercourse; when caught, he is blinded by the king as punishment. The king's daughter then commits suicide on her wedding night. Gao's last affront to the king's power is played out when he attacks the king with a *qin* at a ceremony, thereby getting revenge for his discontent and grief over both his personal loss of love and the communal death of his fellow Yan people. The various levels of different characters' rebellious acts accentuate the film's focus, which is persistent resistance to the king's authoritarianism.

Two years after the release of *The Emperor's Shadow* came the October 8, 1998 premier of Chen Kaige's *Jing Ke ci Qinwang* (荊軻刺秦王 The Emperor and the Assassin) at the Great Hall of the People. *The Emperor and the Assassin* visualizes a very famous episode in history, where the prince of the Yan state hires Jing Ke to assassinate Ying Zheng, the King of Qin. This film portrays what I call "enlightened resistance" to corrupt government, wherein the protagonists, Lady Zhao and Jing Ke gradually take an antagonistic position against the Qin king, after coming to understand the atrocities he committed and feel disillusionment over his empty promise of peace. Lady Zhao, Ying Zheng's lover whom he met when he was a hostage in her native state of Zhao, initially believes Ying Zheng's claim that he conquered other states to end the war that had persisted between them for 550 years. In order to help Ying Zheng achieve such a grandiose goal, she cuts her own face, creating an excuse to provoke a war between the Yan state and Qin state. However, she is later disillusioned when Ying Zheng breaks his promise to spare the children of her home state. She believes that killing Ying Zheng is

the only way to bring peace to all people. Jing Ke, a professional assassin is oddly depicted in this film as fostering the desire to quit killing. He does not agree to participate in the assassination until the final twenty minutes of the film, when he learns that the Qin army is burying the children of Zhao alive. Changes that begin to occur in the protagonists' attitudes towards the assassination of the melancholy, hysterical, and cold-blooded Ying Zheng signal their on-going disillusionment and enlightened rebellion. Lady Zhao's betrayal of the Qin king and her conversion to a life of assassination is especially ironic and powerful in revealing the king's cruelty—once a lover and a strong believer in the king's wishes to end wars, she now wants the king to die. Focusing on various characters' transformation into dissidents of the Qin State, the film exposes a wishful thinking for peace and emphasizes the process of enlightened resistance to corrupt government.

Zhang's portrayal of assassination in *Hero* stages a more idealistic political subjectivity. What, however, is this ideal? Undeniably, it is not a subject who resists or attempts to eliminate state power, or wishes to harm the ruler who embodies the state. Instead, it is the ideal of sacrificing a smaller self-interest—such as avenging one's homeland—for the greater good—a grandiose promise of yet-to-be-realized peace. According to the documentary film on the production of *Hero*, *Yuan Qi* (*Cause*, dir. Gan Lu, 2002), Zhang Yimou persuaded Jet Li to dramatize *Hero* by emphasizing that the fighting scenes were not scripted with selfish personal revenge in mind (as is common in other martial arts films), but instead, under the premise of fighting for a greater good. Indeed, *Hero* is different. It includes martial arts fighting; yet, the context is not positioned in a hardly ambiguous *jianghu* (the martial arts world), but in a political arena.

If we compare *Hero* with an immediate global martial arts hit, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, the theme develops in a way that is completely different. The latter displays a swordswoman's rebellion against familial duties and social codes for the sake of her individual freedom.[11] Swordsmen in *Hero* engage in fighting for their homeland, showing themselves to be political subjects rather than morally ambiguous swordsmen, choosing a stance between narrow loyalty to homeland and an imagined imperial peace *tianxia* (literally, all under heaven).

Nameless and Broken Sword willingly sacrifice life and love for their political ideal. At an earlier point of time, Broken Sword had promised his lover, Snow, daughter of a general of the Zhao state, that he would kill the king of Qin to avenge her father and her homeland. Broken Sword mastered an extraordinary martial arts skill, which could enable him to kill the king. However, he let the king live after his sword was already on the king's neck. When Nameless seeks Broken Sword and Snow's assistance in assassinating the king, Broken Sword convinces Nameless not to carry out the assassination, thus betraying Snow one more time. Facing an enraged and devastated Snow, he explains that he must give up the act of assassination for the sake of *tianxia*. He values a greater good, *tianxia*, or the alleviation of all other peoples' suffering, above his much smaller self-interest—his promise to Snow. He would rather bear the pain of betrayal and loss of his lover than continue to kill other people. The theme of the personal moral goals versus the greater good is present in this global blockbuster that aims to

[11] See, for example, Kenneth Chan's discussion on *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*'s feminist possibilities, "The Global Return of the *Wu Xia Pian* (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie): Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*," *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 4 (2004): 3-17.

attain a global audience; akin to previous propagandistic works, the greater good/ revolution defeats self/love.

Nameless' struggle between the self/smaller good and the greater good is more controversial. The motivation for his attempted assassination is revenge for his homeland, not his own benefit. Having grown up in the Qin State and pretending to be a Qin soldier, Nameless is actually a Zhao orphan who has trained to be a powerful swordsman for ten years in order to avenge his homeland. His vision is indeed heroic and unselfish; he is ready to sacrifice himself for the loyalty of his people and homeland. Nameless, however, faces a moral tug-of-war as Broken Sword proposes an even greater reason for sparing the Qin king—peace for all people. To spare the king means to betray his people from the Zhao state; to kill the king wars among the seven states to continue, creating more casualties. In the end, Nameless believes that "the pain of an individual is nothing when compared to all people's suffering," and the Qin king is one who is capable of unifying the seven states and bringing about peace for all people. In other words, to take revenge for one state is a selfish wish compared to creating peace for all the people in seven states. Therefore, Nameless gives up at the very moment he is to take the King's life and sacrifices himself for all people by sparing the Qin king instead of meting out justice for the people from his homeland alone by killing the king. Though set in a fictional version of the distant past, Nameless' self-sacrifice exemplifies the socialist spirit in that although one may face moral conflicts, a greater good and submission to the state should be more desirable and seen as the biggest priority.

The political message is obvious in *Hero*; ideally, the message is bestowed on viewers from all walks of life. Who and what social categories are useful and important

in generating and disseminating propaganda for the state? Or, in the same light, whose work is potentially able to disseminate the protesting voice and rally dissidents? I suggest that intellectuals or cultural producers whose labor is (potentially) capable of reaching mass audiences are the social categories that the state aims to control and appropriate, such that they will work for the state instead of against it, promote its messages rather than threatening its power or "adulterating" its glory. Figuratively and literally speaking, *Hero* illustrates such a call for the submissive political subjectivity of intellectuals/cultural elites.

In fact, the CCP is known to discipline intellectuals through campaigns identifying "political correctness." Intellectuals repeatedly become the CCP's targets for suspicion and "re-education." During the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950's and early 1960's, an official anti-intellectual ideology circulated among local people through cultural products like the movie *Third Sister Liu*.[12] During the Maoist era, the CCP used two approaches to tame intellectuals for their own use. The first one placed institutional constraints on intellectuals and made them work in administrative units. The second approach "re-educated" them through political activities attempting to ensure that they had the "correct" political subjectivity, which embraced Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.[13] Since the 1990's, the party-state's use of marketing has spread to literature and mass media so that literature, films, and television dramas have aimed more at making commercial profits instead of undertaking mere pedagogical missions. For example, Chi

[12] Eddy U, "Third Sister Liu and the Making of the Intellectual in Socialist China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010):57-83.

[13] Sheldon Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity* (Standord, Stanford University Press, 2001), 33.

Li, one of the many writers who have written scripts for recent TV dramas, exemplifies how intellectuals/cultural elites became cultural workers in the market.[14] However, this does not mean politics completely retreats from literature, cultural commodities, or a person's daily life. There are still legal censorship and punishment systems used to control the subject matter that is produced. Financial seduction also exists as a soft means to lure cultural workers into producing "politically-correct" products for the market. This assures propagation of the party's main socialist political spirit, which involves legitimization of the CCP's dictatorship and patriotism to the party. This socialist political spirit is spread, or, at minimum, not questioned in the cultural products that come disguised as a form of entertainment for consumption in contemporary China.

How does *Hero* figuratively and literally illustrate a disciplined political ideal such as the subjectivity of intellectuals? Broken Sword philosophically and aesthetically bears the image of a writing intellectual. On the surface, Broken Sword was the only skilled assassin who was capable of hurting the king of Qin before Nameless proposed another assassination. However, he is not only a swordsman possessing phenomenal martial arts skills, but also a cultural elite who practices calligraphy. He embodies the attributes of both *wen* (refinement and gentility) and *wu* (martial masculinity). Calligraphy/writing belongs to the *wen* category, but Broken Sword uses a sword, which is a tool of violence and a weapon of *wu,* to write *tianxia* as he tries to convince Nameless to abandon his assassination plot. Chen and Rawnsley, while discussing this scene, emphasize the representation of a sword as both violent and peaceful; I, however,

[14] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 59-94.

refocus the scene to the image of the calligrapher/writing intellectual.[15] Visually, this scene mirrors a previous one featuring Broken Sword writing the character *jian* with a brush nearly as tall as he is, implying the same function and significance of brushes (or currently pens) as is applied to swords: writing tools can be used to attack or make peace. Both scenes use slow motion to track and display the movements of Broken Sword, with his white and red robes fluttering in the wind, creating two beautifully and elegantly-written performances. Using long and medium shots to magnify the writing act, the writer's bodily movement, and the writing environment, the two scenes also share close-up shots of the writer's hands and the writing tools—a brush and a sword. According to Nameless, Broken Sword's writing style and the power of his strokes reveal his strength and *qi* (spirit), which are the results of his cultivation in calligraphy and swordsmanship.

More importantly, what Broken Sword writes discloses the writer/swordsman's political conscience, if not vision. Although written with a sword, the characters *tianxia* exemplify Broken Sword's wish for world peace. Through this act of meditative calligraphy, Broken Sword is inspired to reconcile peace and violence. He uses a lethal martial skill, with which he was successful in hurting the king, symbolizing that the source of power to kill the king or fracture the Qin's governmental and political ambitions to conquer other states comes from writing. Nevertheless, he chooses to spare the king because he realizes that war is a means to ultimate peace. Had he not been enlightened to "peace," his powerful force that was inspired by writing would have taken the king's life and ruined his plan for unification for a greater empire. Again, if he has not

[15] Xiaoming Chen and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsely, "On *Tianxia* ('all under heaven') in Zhang Yimou's *Hero*," in Gary D Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T Rawnsley ed., *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of* Hero (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 86.

convinced Nameless with his writing (he writes his message instead of uttering it), a powerful Nameless would have assassinated the King. Writing and the concept of disseminating ideas through writing occupies a non-negligible role in *Hero*. Writing, or the works of other cultural producers, represents the collapse of the intellectual as critic of state power and the intellectual as a willing and useful political ally. As seen from *Hero*, the political ideal represents powerful intellectuals and other cultural elites as a body that serves the ruling entity and the state.

Hero and its director, Zhang Yimou, literally illustrate a form of compliance to politics within the body of cultural workers in the film industry. In order to be popular in China, *Hero* has had to please or satisfy its domestic legal censorship system. Defining *Hero* as a zhuxuanlü production, we can understand China's film industry without forgetting the state's role in producing and promoting films. The business-minded Zhang Yimou understood this unspoken rule in the film industry and befriended the state. *Yige dou buneng shao* (Not One Less, 1999) arguably signaled his return to national interest and was officially well-received in China, along with *Wode fuqin muqin* (1999); both films were winners of national awards at the Golden Rooster Awards and Hundred Flowers Awards. Recently, we saw Zhang earn a profitable chance to design the opening ceremony at the Beijing Olympic Games.

Although the extent to which Zhang has been truly tamed by the state is questionable, it is still obvious that he is a successful, skillful player in the Chinese film industry, which straddles the line between commerce and state regulation. Directly addressing the question of censorship in mainland China, Zhang expressed his view this way: "…any director in China knows in their heart how far they can go and how much

they can say… The question now isn't whether you're good at balancing things: it's a must. It's a reality you have to face."[16] Well aware of his limitations in filmmaking, Zhang undoubtedly knows the rules and plays the game successfully by cooperating with the system. Not every film by Zhang Yimou after *Hero* belongs to the zhuxuanlü category, but we do not see his films getting into trouble with public screenings. His case illustrates an ideal political partisanship of cultural workers: they will benefit if they embrace the socialist spirit, which, in turn, leads them to be more patriotic and glorify the party-state; to a lesser degree, they put their political engagement aside meanwhile engaging in commercial activities for themselves instead of stirring up conflict with the state. They must keep in mind that there is a state apparatus that censors their work, and the outcome must be "politically correct." Those whose work contains dissenting ideas are subject to various kinds of punishment.[17]

Confucian Ideas and the Socialist Spirit

The controversial decision to abandon a life of assassination invites vivid interpretations laced with Confucian ideas. The questions are: whether or not Confucian ideas were revived in contemporary China and whether or not Confucian ideology plays a role in the characters' decision-making. It is arguably less important to identity which schools of tradition are promoted than to discuss the contribution of this phenomenon to our understanding of the socialist spirit. Using Confucianism as a point of departure, I argue

[16] "Zhang Yimou Interview," *Time Magazine*: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,610119,00.html#ixzz1Oi0u6915 (accessed on June 13, 2011).

[17] Liu Xiaobo is a a recent example whose work upsets the state for his efforts in promoting human rights in China and participation in writing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He was sentenced to eleven years of imprisonment in 2009 for "inciting subversion of state power."

that the CCP and socialist spirit actively appropriate ideas that are beneficial to the regime and ideological legacy. I propose that the CCP's attitude towards Confucianism has been ambivalent, celebrating Confucian ideas and values that support its rule, denouncing those elements that undermine its influence. The Party actively selects and appropriates useful Confucian codes that contribute to the popularization and enrichment of the socialist spirit and continue the Party's superiority and legitimacy. In the following, I will analyze the Confucian elements in *Hero* and provide historical evidence to show that Confucianism has been used as a tool in the struggle for political power during the revolutionary era and as a source of patriotism at the core of the socialist spirit even after the Tiananmen Incident. I will then discuss the ways the CCP uses Confucianism as a global display of Chinese culture at the turn of the twenty-first century in order to manifest its global power status.

Chris Berry argues that Nameless values subservience to the ruler more than an individual desire to take revenge, and thus advances Confucian codes in contemporary cinema. Conversely, Rawnsley juxtaposes *Hero's* narrative with the historical period of Warring States and proposes that *Hero* challenge the social morality of Confucianism.[18] Neo-Confucian codes help us to reconcile these divergent understandings. According to Berry and Farquhar, the common factor is submission to the ruler, or submission to the Legalist codes as proposed by Rawnsley. Moreover, the common bottom line is submission. *Hero*'s overall message connects well with Neo-Confucian political subjectivity originating in the Ming Dynasty. After all, Mencius justified the killing of

[18] See Chris Berry, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 164; and Gary D Rawnsley, "The Political Narrative(s) of *Hero*," in *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of* Hero, ed. Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 20-1.

the ruthless King of Zhou as merely killing a *fu*. In James Legge's translation, *fu* is a "mere fellow" so hence, the act of killing a common man is not "putting a sovereign to death."[19] D.C. Lau's translation suggests even more acceptance of the brutal act to the King of Zhou; it calls the king an "outcast," so the killing is no more than a "punishment," not a "regicide." Hu Shaohua argues that the Mencian justification of rebellion resulted in Ming Taizu, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, removing all images of Mencius from Confucian temples.[20] My goal is not to investigate the specific schools of Confucianism that *Hero* suggests, but the act of appropriation itself, which, I contend, is not for the sake of sincerely promoting any thoughts or traditions, but similar to legalism, is only intended to stabilize the current regime. Scholarship which focuses merely on the development of Confucianism in China without paying attention to the intricate relationship between the Party and Confucianism misses out on the dynamics between philosophy and politics.

Daniel Bell, a political science professor at Tsinghua University, enthusiastically predicts that the CCP will adapt more and more Confucian ideas, to the extent that the CCP might be relabeled as the Chinese Confucian Party in the next couple of decades.[21] Conversely, Hu Shaohua predicts that even though many Chinese currently take comfort from and pride in Confucianism as China has become more powerful, the real influence of Confucianism is declining, and capitalism and communism are

[19] "King Hui of Liang Part 2, Chapter 8," in "*The Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge, vol. 2 of *The Chinese Classics* (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1998), 167. For D.C. Lau's translation, see *Mencius* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), 43.

[20] Hu Shaohua, "Confucianism and Contemporary Chinese Politics," *Politics and Policy* 35, no.1 (2007): 149.

[21] Daniel Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 12.

becoming more influential.[22] Daniel Bell is too optimistic about Confucian influence to consider that the development of Confucianism relies on the CCP's attitudes towards Confucian ideas. It is not a wholesale embracing of Confucianism in contemporary China but the CCP's selection process of relevance, which appropriates and tames beneficial elements from outside communism into its own use.[23] John Makeham, who has researched the development of Confucianism in mainland China, trivializes political influence in the development of Confucianism and proposes that Confucianism is an organic body that grows from intellectual cross-fertilization and rivalry between China and Taiwan.[24] Such trivialization is rooted in his methodology of research: his study excludes discussion of anti-Confucian movements during the revolutionary era. If we ponder the relationship between China's larger socio-political relationships and the waxing and waning of Confucianism during the rule of the CCP regime, we can then better understand the interactions between the Party's uses of traditional thought, such as Confucianism, in contemporary politics.

Confucianism appeared as a target of attack during the Cultural Revolution. However, there were still ambiguities in the relationship between the Party and the thousand-year-old values in the early 1960s. Even though the CCP was famous for rebelling against "traditional" ideas during the revolutionary era, the relationship between CCP and Confucianism has been fluid. Scholarship in the field of political science

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[22] Hu Shaohua, "Confucianism and Contemporary Chinese Politics," 150-1.

[23] I am inspired by John Fiske's phrase on popular culture "socially located criteria of relevance" to explain the CCP's selection process of relevance, see John Fiske, "Popular Culture," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1995), 327.

[24] John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2008), 6.

identifies a modest "Confucian Revival" in the early 1960s under the CCP regime at that time, and argued that such a revival had political import. Peter Moody, a scholar in Political Science, perceives this revival as an esoteric critique to the Maoist Great Leap Forward policies; Merle Goldman, a scholar in History, recognizes adoption of Confucian values of harmony as a measure to stabilize and unify the regime after the Great Leap Forward.[25] By the same token, attack on Confucian ideas became Mao's political capital to mobilize support during the "Destroy the Four Olds Campaign" (1966-67). Confucian ideas, among others, were labeled as "old" ideas, which had to be eradicated by the Mao's Red Guards who swore to smash the "old world" and sweep away "old" ideas. Seven years later, another wave of Anti-Confucianism Campaigns (1973-74) emerged and the "Criticize Lin (Biao), Criticize Confucius" Campaign was launched by the regime. Merle Goldman argues that purposes of this campaign were ambiguous and proposed that Confucianism once again was employed as an empty political sign to further political debates.

The core of the socialist spirit—Party patriotism—emerged from Confucian patriotism after the 1989 Tiananmen Incident. Facing social ills and political threats that coincided with rapid economic growth, the CCP seized useful Confucian ideas and incorporated them into the socialist spirit to maintain the superiority of socialist morality and political stability. The appropriation of Confucian values appeared to express official support for Confucian revival. One of the obvious examples was the Party's funding of a national project called "Studies on Modern Neo-Confucian Thought" under the seventh

[25] Peter Moody, "The New Anti-Confucian Campaign in China: the First Round," *Asian Survey* 14, no. 4 (1974): 313. Merle Goldman, "China's Anti-Confucian Campaign 1973-74," *The China Quarterly*, no. 63 (1975): 435-462.

five-year plan (1986-90).[26] The Confucian value that the Party enthusiastically embraced was, according to Wang Jing, "the hierarchy of social structure consolidated first by the absolute subjugation of the subjects to the Emperor, which reinforced the Party's mandate."[27] After the June Fourth Event, the government intensified the promotion of patriotism with a focus on love for socialism, with an interim economic turn towards communism announced in 1987[28] in order to recover from the "turmoil" and to prevent similar challenges of the Party-state from happening anew. Here, the emphasis on a socialist spirit started to emerge.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the government continued to fund activities that, on the surface, related to Confucianism, and quietly appropriated Confucian values to promote a socialist spirit with a kernel of Party patriotism and morality. In 1994, the CCP Central Committee promulgated "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu yinfa 'aiguo zhuyi jaioyu shishi'" (The Notice on 'Compendium of Implementing Patriotic Education'" 中共中央關於印發《愛國主義教育實施綱要》的通知) with an emphasis on patriotism and socialism, forming a core component of the socialist spirit. According to the notice, the revival of various kinds of "traditions, including morality and culture, is one of the methods to disseminate patriotism." Confucianism, being one of the Chinese "traditions," thus received legitimacy as a value to be "revived" and renewed funding under the

[26] For the Party's participation in Confucian revival, see Yang Bingzhang, *Zhongguo dalu dangdai wenhua bianqian* 中國大陸當代文化變遷[Cultural Changes in Contemporary Mainland China], (Taipei shi: Guiguan tushu gufen youxian gongsi, 1991). For the overall picture of Confucian development in the 80s-90s, see John Makeham, *Lost Soul: "Confucianism" in Contemporary Chinese Academic Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2008), 42-98.

[27] Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 69.

[28] Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever*, 2.

national eighth five-year plan (1991-95) was put aside for the research project on Neo-Confucian thought, that had been started five years earlier. The agenda behind the Party's use of Confucianism as a remedy for its imagined "morality problems" was explicitly revealed in a speech by Gu Mu, (former CCP Politburo member and former deputy premier of the State Council) at a conference held by the Chinese Confucius Foundation in commemoration of the 2545th anniversary of Confucius' birth. The Party emphasized Confucian scholars' responsibilities to disseminate Confucian thought, to cultivate the people, and to assist in solving social problems, in addition to raising the quality of research.[29] Confucianism or Confucian ideas began to be promoted as a form of traditional virtue for healing social problems and boosting Party patriotism, not for its own unique qualities.

The recent mysterious erection and subsequent disappearance of a 9.5-meter bronze Confucius statue, outside the National Museum of China near Tiananmen Square, further illustrates the oscillating attitude of the CCP towards Confucian values. On Jan 11, 2011, the statue of Confucius was unveiled at a ceremony where the museum dean commented that the museum "bears deep cultural and political significance" and that the statue would ultimately become "another eye-catching landmark" in Beijing.[30] The statue, however, disappeared from the open area and was moved inside the museum on April 21, after being in the public eye for only 100 days.[31] The original location of the statue

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[29] Gu Mu, "Kongzi danchen 2345 zhounian jinian dahuishang zhici"孔子誕辰 2345 週年紀念大會上致辭 [Speech at the Celebration Meeting of the 2345th Anniversary of Confucius], quoted in Makeham, *Lost Soul*, 65.

[30] Zhu Linyong , "Confucius Stands Tall Near Tiananmen," *China Daily,* Jan 13, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-01/13/content_11841761.htm (accessed Sept 28, 2011).

[31]"Tiananmen guangchang Kongzi xiang bairi zhi lai qu" 天安門廣場孔子像百日之"來""去 [The One

implied political affection for Confucius, as it was situated near a political landmark—Tiananmen Square. However, its sudden disappearance seemed to implicitly signal split opinions on the act of putting a likeness of Confucius in the heart of Beijing—the Tian'anmen Squaure where hangs the picture of Mao Zedong, who had attacked Confucianism.

Although *Hero* is a contemporary commercial film produced in a "socialist" country, its depiction of submission to a figure who represents and embodies peace for all under heaven is a deep-rooted ritual of political leader worship. Such ideology in *Hero* merges the idea that leader worship as promoted by the socialist spirit and complete submission to contemporary political leadership are not much different from the acts of deference that were formerly performed on behalf of an emperor. Nameless projects all his hope for common people on the Qin king, as if the king represents the only hope for world peace in the face of continuous war. Such logic repeats an "emperor-country" relationship. Abstract, transcendental qualities like peace, prosperity, and life are embodied in a specific political figure who in return embodies the stability and prosperity of a country. Such representation of political ideology in present-day China reveals the socialist spirit behind this propagandistic apparatus: if citizens long for prosperity, stability or any good for their country, then they need to look up to the sole current political leader—the Party. The Party slips in and displaces the country as the recipients of its people's patriotic love. In return, the Party promises a good life through "socialism" such that "socialism" is equated with the good life, and the Party is equated with "socialism." This system mutually consolidates the authoritative power. The Party then

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Hundred Days of Confucius' Statue at the Tian'anmen Square], http://www.chinapressusa.com/2011-04/26/content_824733.htm (accessed Sept 28, 2011).

becomes a symbol of the country and a non-detachable part of the country. This state ideology and the deep-rooted concept of leader worship create a binary opposition—either you love the Party and the country or you do not love the Party or the country.

Regardless whether or not Nameless kills the Qin king, he carries out an act of patriotism. If he kills the king, then he is loyal to his home country. If he spares the King, he may be deemed more selfless as he sacrifices local interests to a larger and more abstract, yet to be attained ideal. The first case exemplifies absolute patriotism to his fellow people, while the latter substantiates loyalty to a yet-to-become nation. It seems that people are compelled to be governed by their "nation" and to be cultivated into patriotic subjects who will fight to protect or even die for the honor of their country.

From a Local Hero to a Global Hero

The ups and (mostly) downs of certain useful Confucian ideas during the revolutionary era were not subjects of philosophical or academic debates, but political chips in the power struggle within the CCP. The contemporary promotion of Confucian traditions extracts patriotism from Confucianism for the purpose of promoting socialism. In other words, the attitude towards Confucianism is not necessarily one-sided, but can be utilitarian depending on Confucianism's usefulness to particular political agendas. At the same time, Confucianism or other "traditional" ideas do not necessarily die because of the dominance of the CCP or capitalism. Certain Confucian ideas are able to be adapted and regenerated to serve the goals of a "new" era, as long as they can dance along with political intervention. The socialist spirit does not have fixed attributes. It is flexible and adaptable in its use of elements that are helpful in constituting patriotic subjects.

Confucianism became an empty siginifier with great cultural resonance that gets revived and redefined as it meets the specific needs of the current political/ideological campaign.

Hero, mingling socialist patriotism with Confucian ideas, is not an isolated product, nor is it a product only for local use. Film, among other mass media, has been seen by the Party as a local propaganda tool that can promote a political agenda. The production of *Hero* reveals Party patriotism, which advances a political subjectivity that is loyal to the Party. The significance of *Hero*'s success is not limited to its role as local propaganda, but also in its value as part of a global goodwill campaign. The box office success of *Hero*, the first Chinese blockbuster, is not limited to China. The film's global success has signaled the international success of Chinese cinema in general, as it demonstrated that, in international markets, Chinese cinema could transcend limited screenings in art-house theatres and at film festivals.[32] Such a triumph is not only economic but also political. China's emergence as a global power causes the country to seek goodwill among other super powers.

Hero, regarded as the first Chinese commercial blockbuster, was aimed at both the international market and the Oscar Awards. It can be seen as a form of soft power, displaying China's magnificent, ancient culture to the world with the help of Confucian ideas and the already popular martial arts genre. China's power to promote its image as a peaceful superpower is reliant not only on the development of commercial films but also on a promotion of language and culture. The establishment of Confucius Institutes around the world illustrates the Chinese government's effort in promoting "traditional" Chinese

[32] Before *Hero* was screened in the USA in 2004, the worldwide box office had exceeded $100 million in December 2003, covering the estimated budget of $30 million. See IMDB, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0299977/ (accessed Sept, 27, 2011).

culture. According to the official statistics through 2010, since the first opening of a Confucius Institute in South Korea in 2004, the number of Institutes has grown to 322 across ninety-six countries/regions.[33] Although the official objectives of the initial establishment of the Institutes were to promote the Chinese language, cultural exchange, and various business activities, they do not stop researchers from exploring the Institute's political purposes of "attempting to win hearts and minds."[34] At the 17th National Congress of the CCP in 2007, Hu Jintao made soft power evident as a critical national development for enhancing both local socialist cultural creativity and international competitiveness.[35] Situated in a socio-political context where the Party pursues socialist loyalty to themselves and a peaceful emergence onto the world stage, the film *Hero* embodies a socialist spirit to its local audiences, and likewise, functions as a form of soft power to its international viewers.

Reactions to a Sacrificing Political Subjectivity

How did intellectuals, cultural elites, and the educated of the world react to *Hero's* stark political message of submission to a higher form of centralized political power? In actuality, there is no singular response to this political message because attitudes vary both temporally and spatially. I can identify a changing trend among Chinese film critics. Focus is shifting from severe criticism of *Hero*'s political submission to eulogy in support of its victories in the international film market and its economic returns. The film

[33] Statistics from Hanban official website: http://www.hanban.edu.cn/hb/node_7446.htm, accessed June8, 2011.

[34] James F. Paradise, "China and International Harmony: The Role of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Beijing's Soft Power," in *Asian Survey* 49, No. 4 (July/August 2009): 649.

[35] See his speech at http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/24/content_6938568_6.htm, accessed on June 8, 2011.

critics' changing focus is parallel to the preoccupation of the Chinese government over the past twenty years: channeling different people, particularly intellectuals and cultural elites' attention from politics to economics. Even though the state's tight control over citizens' daily life seems to have retreated in a post-revolutionary era during which Chinese citizens engage in economic development and capital pursuit, political messages are still present. They are simply more frequently disguised as a form of entertainment or perhaps as a form of an economically productive activity.

How did director Zhang Yimou respond to his expedient choice to sacrifice local interests to centralized authority as he represented it in *Hero*? Zhang walks a subtle line between promoting politics and avoiding politics. When persuading Jet Li to act in *Hero*, Zhang explained the film's characterizations. He emphasized the sublime atmosphere of *Hero*, how the characters fought for a larger meaning of life instead of fighting for self-interest or revenge-taking.[36] The sublime element he once supported was subdued after the screening. Zhang repeatedly emphasized his hope that the audience would remember various fighting spectacles in the film, such as the one in which two females dressed in red fight as if they are dancing in a yellow forest, turning the pursuit of aesthetics into his protective armor in the face of interrogations about his political motivation.[37] As a reputable cultural elite, Zhang is ambiguous about the submissive political message he delivers through his movie. His intention was to remind his viewers that the political subjectivity that was the movie's core component was not what he wanted his audience to

[36] See Gan Lu, Li Rui dir., *Yuan qi: Zhang Yimou "Yingxiong" paishe shimu* 緣起:張藝謀 "英雄" 拍攝實幕[Cause], 2002. See also Lin Shaofeng ed., *Shijue yingxiong* 視覺英雄[The Films by Zhang Yimou] (Beijing Shi: Zhongguo guangbao dianshi chubanshe, 2005), 27.

[37] Lin Shaofeng, *Shijue yingxiong*, 26.

take away with them. By bringing this out to his viewers, it is an indication of his reservation regarding such a call for total submission. Indeed, his previous works from the 1980s and early 1990s, including *Red Sorghum* and *The Story of Qiu Ju*, are well-known for cultural reflection (反思 *fansi*) through artistic innovations, and have been well received by elite film critics. How did critics view the change in Zhang's filmic representation from reflections on patriarchal power to a (re-)establishment of a patriarchal dynastic structure interpellating its submissive subjects? This leads me to investigate the responses of other cultural elites from both the Chinese speaking and the English speaking worlds.

Reactions of intellectuals in both academia and in the mass media suggest that there is both explicit and implicit resistance toward the concept of submissive political subjectivity to an authoritarian ruler. Explicit resistance refers to criticisms that directly condemn *Hero*'s narrative as surrendering to hegemonic or authoritative power. Evans Chan, an American-based Hong Kong film director, comments that "the impulse behind the film can be called fascist," and "the film is reinscribing an authoritarian old order."[38] J. Hoberman goes further to criticize the film as "a paean to authoritarianism" and a "glorification of ruthless leadership and self-sacrifice on the altar of national greatness."[39] Hao Jian, a Chinese film critic, points outs that *Hero* is Zhang's effort to expose himself in regard to authority, exposing both his fear and worship of authority.[40] Some voices

[38] Evans Chan, "Zhang Yimou's Hero: The Temptations of Fascism," in *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity and Diaspora*, ed. Tan See-kam, et. al., 263-277 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

[39] J. Hoberman, "Review of *Hero*," quotedd in Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen*, 167.

[40] Hao Jian, "Shei chengjiu le Zhang Yimou" 誰成就了張藝謀[Who Made Zhang Yimou Successful], *Nanfeng Chuang* 南風窗[Window of the Southerly Breeze] 15, Aug 2004, 85.

from the Mainland also expressed disapproval of the sublime theme of sacrificing an individual for a greater good, regarding this logic as non-reflective, non-democratic, and non-individualist with an inclination for despotism.[41] With the exception of Wang Yuli, these interpretations examine Nameless' self-sacrifice to the king of Qin as a metaphor for the contemporary political requirements of Chinese citizens.

What marks implicit resistance? Implicit resistance is a reserved discontent towards *Hero's* treatment of the king of Qin with an emphasis on visual spectacle. This departs from explicit resistance, which straightforwardly disparages the concept of self-sacrifice or submission to the greater good. Implicit resistance uses abstract rhetoric involving "humanist spirit" or "deeper meaning," and its attitude is cautiously neutral, so much so that readers may have problems identifying its critical stance. Film critics often keep a cautiously neutral stance and are delicate in specifying what they want to see in Zhang's film. They generalize their disappointment towards *Hero's* lack of a humanitistic spirit to reveal the darker side of contemporary Chinese society or a concern about socially marginal groups.[42] The Deputy Head of the Institute of Chinese Culture and the Chinese Academy of Arts perceived *Hero* as a pedagogical tool, and thus, expected "deeper meanings" but was upset to find only shallow scenes.[43] This point of view does not explicitly articulate what brings about "deeper meanings" but implicitly resonates with the above viewpoints, which seek a humanistic spirit. Another major dissatisfaction

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[41] Wang Yuli, "Gudian beiju de xiandai yanyi"古典悲劇的現代演繹 [Contemporary Interpretation of a Classic Tragedy] *Xiezuo* 寫作[Writing]09(2004):13.

[42] Luo Yijun, penned by Jin Yan, "Zhang Yimou yu Zhongguo dianying yantaohui jishi" 張藝謀與中國電影研討會紀實[Record of Seminar on Zhang Yimou and Chinese Cinema], *Yishu pinglun* 藝術評論[Arts Criticism]12 (2004): 48.

[43] Fang Lili, penned by Jin Yan, see ibid., 50.

with Zhang targets his distortion of history, which valorizes the king of Qin as positive and heroic.[44] This response is a reserved version of active resistance, which identifies the king of Qin with the CCP, leaving its criticism at a textual and historical level without going into depth or getting involved with a contemporary political context. Nonetheless, it, can still offer a politically relevant reflection on submission to tyranny and self-sacrifice for an abstract, greater good. Implicitly resistant criticism points out the commercialization of Zhang's film as a symptom of the director's effort in supporting the CCP's current agenda of replacing politics with economics. His film no longer offers a space of critical enquiry into culture or politics, but an entertainment site for gaining capital.

Explicit and implicit resistance are diluted/counteracted by mediators and proponents who divert attention from ideology to economic efficiency, avoiding political interpretation or discussion of mere artistic pursuit, and instead, highlighting *Hero*'s economic achievement. Film critics instruct viewers on how to appreciate *Hero*—to read it as a commercial product, and thus, for its commercial value instead of as a piece of art or having "deeper meanings." Some encourage readers to take Zhang's claim of *Hero* being a commercial film more seriously, assessing the film through commercial logic, learning from American viewers who take film viewing as a form of pure entertainment and forget everything after they exit the movie theatre.[45] Some criticize Chinese intellectuals for being stubborn and holding on to an "elite" taste, which regards film only

[44] Fang Lili, "You Zhang Yimou yingpian yinqi de wenhua fansi" 由張藝謀影片引起的文化反思[Cultural Reflections caused by Zhang Yimou's films], *Yishu pinglun* 藝術評論[Arts Criticism]10 (2004): 39.

[45] E Beijia, "Zongkan 'Yingxiong' yangtian san wen" 重看 "英雄" 仰天三問[Rewatching *Hero*: Three Rhetorical Enquiries], *Dianying* 電影[Film]10(2004): 45.

as a pedagogical tool and not a piece of amusement, and hence, accuse Zhang Yimou of betraying an intellectual tradition.[46] Ignoring the pertinent ideological message at the end of the movie, these critics pretend that there is an absolute absence of ideology in *Hero* and feel that it is old-fashioned to request something deeper from a film. They seem to fall into a trap that leads the public to talk about money but not politics or history. Accordingly, film critics glorified the economic benefits *Hero* brought to China, eulogizing it as a "commercial legacy," "the first Chinese commercial *dapian*(大片)" holding its own against the threat of Hollywood movies.[47] Commercial success channels the critics' attention from Zhang's failure as a compassionate spirit to his success as the first commercial director who could save the Chinese film industry, create an almost transparent ideology, and conceal an explicit interpellation of the political aspect of socialist spirit.[48]

Having examined *Hero*'s portrayal of Broken Sword as a willingly submissive intellectual and the burning debates that the film ignited, I question whether there is room left for cultural worker's own agency in the face of the state's exclusive domestication or appropriation of critical cultural workers into its own use. To restate, this inquiry

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[46] Shen Rui, "Wei Zhang Yimou er bian" 為張藝謀二辯[Two Defenses for Zhang Yimou], *Yishu pinglun* 藝術評論[Arts Criticism]10(2004): 42.

[47] See Shuang Die, "Yingxiong Zhang Yimou" 英雄張藝謀[Hero Zhang Yimou], *Xin Xibu* 新西部 [New West Region]3(2003):23; and also Wu Yajun, "Guochan 'dapian' shangye xing yu yishu xing de duowei fansi—cong 'Yingxiong' dao 'Chibi'" 國產大片商業性與藝術性的多維反思—從 "英雄" 到 "赤壁" [Multi-dimensional Reflections of Commercial and Artistic Values in Chinese Blockbuster's—from *Hero* to Red Cliff], *Sichuan Wenhua Chanye Zhiye Xueyuan xuebao* 四川文化產業職業學院學報[Magazine of Sichuan Cultural Industry and Vocational College]2 (2009):10.

[48] Even though the explicit politically submissive subjectivity is explicit, scholarship is still able to find subversive space and discuss a dissent critique to tyranny, see for example, Ming Lee Jenny Suen, "Against Orientalism and Utopian Nostalgia: Competing Discursive Constructions of Chinese Empire in Zhang Yimou's *Hero*" (M.A. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2006).

considers the effectiveness of state power over human agency, as manifested in commercial zhuxuanlü production. I wonder whether the writing spectacles of Broken Sword are self-referential or even ironic in regard to Zhang Yimou's own maneuvers, which serve the state's ideological needs. As the belief in the necessity "to live" and "to balance" occupies a core position in Zhang's films/career/life philosophy, perhaps the minimal condition for resistance is to live, or to continue one's own filming career. Then, to befriend the market and the state seems necessary. This, in turn, brings Zhang more fame and wealth than mere survival, while his films can now contain critique and be nationally screened. It remains vaguely possible to read that, by making the submission of Broken Sword and Nameless so outrageous, Zhang is consciously making a comment on intellectuals' submission to state hegemony and provoking criticism from the audience.

East Palace West Palace: The Awakening of Political Desire

While the socialist spirit celebrated in *zhuxuanlü* actively renews and appropriates useful elements to sustain its legitimacy, even those which were once condemned and abandoned, films with dissenting voices utilize another kind of social taboo—homosexuality—to visually contest the state. *Hero* constructs an ideal political subjectivity and rationalizes Party-state hegemony. However, as the Chinese government increasingly pushes forward neo-liberal reforms after the June-Fourth Event, some films present an alternative form of political subjectivity that deviates from the self-sacrificing subject advanced by zhuxuanlü. The strained political atmosphere during the 90s turned dissenting voices into figurative forms, particularly in the medium of film. It is not uncommon to see different filmmakers use tabooed homosexuality as a vehicle to explore an alternative state-individual relationship, one that imagines and empowers a active

participatory individual. Whereas I illustrate how the films *East Palace, West Palace*, *Lan Yu*, and *Butterfly* articulate political dissidence through sexual dissidence, I also pay attention to the internal, interchangeable active-passive position between the allegory and the allegorized. I argue that while some independent mainland directors see homosexual subjects as an allegory and political dissidents as the allegorized, some Hong Kong directors turn the active-passive relation around and present the June Fourth Event as an affirmation of a local sexual identity.

We can first see the wedding of politically dissenting voices and homosexuality in Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (1996). This is the first feature film that Zhang Yuan directed that was globally distributed, and thus, reached a relatively wide international audience.[49] Zhang Yuan's previous work, *Beijing Bastard* (a feature film) and *The Square* (a documentary) were only screened in international film festivals. He had been working outside the official studio system until he started to want to share his films with Chinese audiences. To accomplish this, he had to be patient and cooperate with the censors in order to obtain his first official license to release *Guonian Huijia* (過年回家 Seventeen Years, 1999) in Chinese theatres. *East Palace, West Palace* and Zhang's previous works have never been publicly screened in any theatre in China. Zhang's previous films focus on marginal social groups such as rock-n-roll singers and the mentally-disabled. Putting *East Palace, West Palace* in Zhang's filmography, we can find that Zhang sees homosexuals as one of many socially marginal groups. His interest in and concern for "underprivileged groups" led him to Wang Xiaobo's (1952-1997)

[49] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 150.

novella "Si shui rou qing (似水柔情)" from which *East Palace, West Palace* is adapted. Wang published his works during 1992-1997 and since his first piece, "Huangjin shidai"(The Golden Age) (which is set during the Cultural Revolution), was published, he has attracted many Chinese readers in the mainland.[50] Even though *East Palace, West Palace*'s subject matter includes homosexuality and was screened underground at the First Beijing Queer Film Festival in 2001,[51] if we consider the scriptwriters' political concerns and textual evidence of a gay male seducing a policeman—an embodiment of state power—we can interpret *East Palace, West Palace* as an alternative political expression just as much as an attempt at gay-rights promotion. Even the director admitted that homosexuality is just a shadow of the deeper story, as the film is more about the relationship between power and sex.[52]

The narrative portrays a revisionist perspective on the relationship between the governing entity and the governed through a homoerotic encounter between a policeman and a gay male. The leading protagonists are Xiao Shi, a self-identified heterosexual police officer (*gong'an*) stationed at a police station in a park in Beijing, and Ah Lan, a gay male cruising in the same park that Xiao Shi patrols. On their first encounter, Ah Lan is one of a group of gay arrestees whom Xiao Shi escorts to the police station; Ah Lan,

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[50] Sebastian Veg contends that Wang's sudden decision to publish his writings in the 1990s is directly related to the Watershed of 1989 and was an attempt to reinvent the role of intellectuals in speaking out about problems of the superposition of power relations and the failure to form a monolithic block capable of opposing state power. Veg, "Wang Xiaobo and the No Longer Silent Majority," in *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre*, ed. Jean-Philippe Béja (New York: Routledge, 2011), 86-94.

[51] Cui Zi'en, "Duli Zhongguo dianying zhong de tongxiang xiangai" 獨立中國電影中的同性相愛—關於首屆同性戀電影節[Homosexual Love in Independent Chinese Movies—On the First Queer Film Festival], *Dianying Pingjie* 電影評介[Movie Review]4(2002): no pagination.

[52] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images*, 151.

however, ignores his unfavorable situation and reverses the active-passive relationship of the arrestor and arrestee: he actively kisses Xiaoshi on his face and runs away, leaving behind a shocked Xiao Shi staring at his back. Then Ah Lan mails a book that he has written to Xiao Shi, addressing Xiao Shi as his lover. Their second encounter takes place as Xiao Shi patrols the park and catches Ah Lan making out with another man. He arrests Ah Lan and brings him to the police station. At the police station, Xiao Shi asks questions about Ah Lan's sexual experience. Ah Lan starts telling him "stories," resembling Scheherazade in *Arabian Nights,* who narrates multi-layered, entertaining stories to the king so that she would not be killed at dawn the next day. Similar to the enchanted Persian king, Xiao Shi, is attracted to stories of Ah Lan's sexual experiences with his high school classmate, an elementary school teacher, and a tall stranger who uses cigarettes to burn his chest. After more than ten stories, the police officer forces Ah Lan to cross-dress, kisses him, and brings him to an abandoned apartment where they enjoy sexual intimacy. The film ends with Ah Lan's interrogation of Xiao Shi's sexual orientation after Xiao Shi splashes him with a hose.

Allegorical Reading of Power Relations

In this homoerotic interrogation/encounter, the active/passive roles of the policeman and the arrestee become reversed. On the surface, the policeman possesses authoritative legal power and represents the state through law enforcement. He seems to actively arrest and interrogate "sexual criminals" at the park, as he did with Ah Lan. The harassment and arrest of gay men is based on Chinese law. Homosexuality has been increasingly associated with the term "hooliganism" since this label was introduced in Criminal Law in 1979, even though it was not explicitly listed as a form of criminal

action until a specific reference to the crime of hooliganism was made in 1997.[53] The umbrella term "hooliganism" gave the police authority that rendered them active agents in harassment of homosexuals. However, if we consider the whole process of the arrest in *East Palace, West Palace*, we see that the balance of power is completely overturned. I contend that the arrest is part of Ah Lan's plot to seduce Xiao Shi, as it gives Ah Lan the opportunity he needs to approach Xiao Shi, and in turn, transforms the public police station into an area for exhibition of private homoerotic desire.

The scene in which Ah Lan kisses Xiao Shi confirms Ah Lan's arrest to be a seduction plot. In that particular scene, the camera uses a bird's-eye view to depict Xiao Shi wandering through the trees, and then concentrates on his upper body in the frame just when he leans against a trunk and gazes straight ahead. Next, taken from his point of reference, we see a long shot placing the entrance of the police station in the middle of the frame with other parts of the building covered by tall trees and bushes. Following this scene comes a sequence in which Xiao Shi receives a book from Ah Lan during the day and proceeds to arrest him at night. Although we do not know if these events happened on the same day, the consecutive sequence of Ah Lan's gaze, book mailing, and arrest suggests an approximate occurrence. This sequence should be highlighted because it is marked as the prelude to the arrest and reveals Ah Lan's agency in approaching his targeted policeman. The way he gazes at the police station gives a hint to viewers that he is preoccupied with something. His behavior in the following sequence of events, including sending Xiao Shi a book and being arrested, seem to logically suggest that he is acting out what he has planned earlier. Likewise, any average citizen would not want

[53] Travis Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba, Tongzhi, and Golden Boy* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 154-5.

harassment from the police, especially if that citizen is a gay man who is subject to an accusation of being involved in "hooliganism." However, Ah Lan does the opposite: he not only does not stay away from the police, but also gives a book to a policeman and addresses Xiao Shi as his lover. It is obvious he desires the policeman and wants further (sexual) contact with him. Moreover, when Ah Lan is arrested, he tells Xiao Shi that he has wanted to be arrested by the police since his childhood, and consequently, turns himself in.

The interactions at the police station also illustrate that it is the arrestee, Ah Lan, who dominates during the interrogation. Superficially, the interrogator, Xiao Shi, has the upper hand, in that he has power to pursue questioning of Ah Lan's homosexual experiences for his own knowledge and pleasure. In fact, Ah Lan goes further by telling factual stories that Xiao Shi does not enquire about. For instance, when Xiao Shi asks what Ah Lan does in the park and with whom he associates, Ah Lan first replies directly to the question and then goes on to recall that he was once forcibly hospitalized to try to cure his homosexuality. Xiao Shi lets him finish but adds the comment, "I didn't ask for that." This signals that when given the position to speak, the "passive" arrestee is actually able to become active in telling what he wants to tell instead of merely confessing or answering questions.

Furthermore, Ah Lan's storytelling is a process of seducing Xiao Shi and getting what he wants. Ah Lan, occupying a weaker position as an arrested citizen, is not empowered to give instructions to the policeman, but by telling stories, he is able to mobilize Xiao Shi to do what he wants him to do. Ah Lan's captivating narration about the past shares similarities with J. L. Austin's speech act as he puts himself actively in the

present.[54] Xiao Shi projects himself onto Ah Lan's previous lovers and imitates their abuse of Ah Lan. For example, while we are watching a scene depicting Ah Lan's being slapped by his former lover, the shot immediately cuts to the present scene where Xiao Shi is also slapping Ah Lan and then asks him if that is the way his former lover hit him. Ah Lan successfully seduces Xiao Shi at the end of the film. Ah Lan appears to be sexually fulfilled when Xiao Shi splashes him with a hose, which is consistent with Song Hwee Lim's interpretation of the act as symbolic of a "golden shower" in gay sadomasochistic subculture.[55]

The arrestee's seduction of a police officer can be seen as an allegory of a political dissident's challenge to the state's power. The military crackdown in 1989 was a violent execution of state power over students, intellectuals, and common people whose political subjectivity diverged from the state ideology. Superficially, the active control demonstrated in the crackdown silenced of all citizens' discontentment towards the government. Nevertheless, it did not mean the new, dissenting form of subjectivity was completely destroyed; instead, this subjectivity has used alternative ways to voice opposition to the state. *East Palace West Palace* uses a tabloid sexual identity to challenge state power. Xiao Shi's identification with normative heterosexuality drives him to ridicule and criminalize "deviant" sexual practices such as homosexuality and transvestism. Ah Lan, similar to a political dissident, is vulnerable to state regulation because of non-normative subjectivity.

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[54] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).
[55] Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 95.

The reversed roles of the police officer and the arrestee and the success of seduction represent artists-intellectuals' dissenting voices and subversion of state power, excluding the military. The state apparatus in artists-intellectuals' production *East Palace, West Palace* turns into an object of desire, the power of which is subtly and unwittingly disintegrated or ousted. Chris Berry proposes that both Zhang Yuan, whose films reveal social marginal groups, and homosexuals are social outcasts due to their non-acceptance by the state. The difficulties Zhang Yuan faces in "access to public discourse" are identical to those faced by all who are "generalized across Chinese society today."[56] Among these "generalized" individuals, those who are discontented with the state are the first and foremost to be regarded as the state's enemy. Up until now, the 1989 Tiananmen Event has not been officially addressed or directly depicted in Mainland Chinese media due to lack of approval from the state censorship system. *East Palace, West Palace* arguably marks the emergence of invented visual challenges to the state's power in film production after the 1989 tragedy.

How does the gay male/artist-cum-intellectual articulate alternative subjectivity as an expression to subvert state power? I do not completely agree with Song Hwee Lim's suggestion that Ah Lan's use of femininity as expressed through transvestism and masochism is a transforming and potentially subversive force;[57] rather, it is pseudo-submission that unknowingly swaps the power relationship between the dominating power/policeman and the dominated political dissident/arrestee. To submit or to be dominated may be interpreted as feminine, while domination may be seen as masculine;

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[56] Chris Berry, "*East Palace, West Palace*: Staging Gay Life in China," *Jump Cut* 42(1998): 85.

[57] Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades*, 98.

yet, submission does not equal femininity in a political context. Intellectuals might have become disillusioned with political idealism and realized the oppressiveness and cruelty of authoritative power after they experienced or witnessed the killings in Tiananmen Square. It is therefore understandable for intellectuals to temporarily retreat to a submissive role, but still insist on voicing their alternative political ideas. Even *East Palace, West Palace,* which portrays Ah Lan's successful seduction, begins with Ah Lan in a pseudo-submissive arrestee position. The more important question lies in whether artists-cum-intellectuals are truly submissive to state power and state ideology or whether they are guilty of simply masquerading. This question is nearly impossible to answer because wording is open to interpretation. Furthermore, the concept of impermeable power relations is problematic. This is why even Zhang Yimou's *Hero* and Zhang's "official" turn are open to both positive and negative criticism.

Spatial Manifestation of Power Subversion

East Palace, West Palace spatially materializes the subversion of political power and refutes the submissive role of the artist-intellectual. The cityscape in Beijing introduces symbols of power and delineates the space that belongs to the powerful in opposition to the space that belongs to the common people. In other words, certain spaces are political centers only, while others are sites for common people. The spatial design manifests power relations as well as potential subversion of such power hierarchy.

The police station in the park represents a physical, visible presence at the center of state power. This, in turn, represents control of order such that the execution of power remains centrifugal. The geographical location of the police station in the park makes it appear as a Panopticon, where the observer is at its center, the inspection house, and the

observed are located around the perimeter. However, in the scene where Ah Lan is looking at the police station, the Panopticon's structure seems reversed. Its citizens, located outside the police station, or on the perimeter, actually return the inspecting gaze. The police officer inside the police station becomes the observed, the object of a sexual gaze. The police station's symbolism is completely reassigned, and it becomes a site of homoerotic desire when Ah Lan uses it for his own purposes, as he steadily succeeds in seducing Xiao Shi. At the beginning of his sexualized "confession," Ah Lan's excitement regarding his sexual "crimes" upsets Xiao Shi and "adulterates" the police station's sanctity as a symbol of state power. Xiao Shi thus curses and yells at Ah Lan, saying, "You're crazy! Where do you think you are? Cool down!" However, towards the end of the film, it is Xiao Shi who takes the initiative and participates in homoerotic acts. It is Xiao Shi who loses control of himself under Ah Lan's seduction and ceases to regard the police station as a sacred site when he rips off Ah Lan's clothes and forces him to cross-dress. Ah Lan's seduction and Xiao Shi's loss of control reassign symbolic meanings to the police station--it is a site of seduction and circulation of homoerotic desire, and no longer a spatial manifestation of state power and control of order.

The film also explores power relations through visibility and space. It also proposes that the invisible artists-intellectuals' body is used to lure the visible governing "body" and later displace its power. During Ah Lan's narration of his sexual experiences, we often hear his disembodied voice narrating his "stories" while the camera shows only close-ups of Xiao Shi's face that reveal the pleasure he derives from hearing homosexual depictions. Sometimes the film shows the shadow of Ah Lan behind a screen, while Xiao Shi stands outside of the screen interrogating and listening, visible to the viewers. Ah

Lan's pseudo-submission and invisible body gradually entice the heterosexual police officer into homoerotic intimacy with Ah Lan at the police station—the heart of the power. This suggests that pseudo-submission and invisibility of artists/intellectuals are the possible means to voice anti-normative political or sexual orientations when state power seems to dominate the country.

East Palace, West Palace dovetails the association of sexual and political taboos. The difficulties in articulating politically dissenting voices are mirrored in the experiences of sexual "deviants," and through this means, challenge of state power is expressed. The homosexual seduction of the police officer figuratively materializes the dissidents' subversion of normative state control over "forbidden" desire. Pseudo submission and invisibility put in the socio-political context of 1990s China suggest possible tactics by which intellectuals can be heard during a politically threatening time.

Lan Yu: Integration of Dissenting Sexual and Political Subjectivity

The dissident political subjectivity in *Lan Yu* also overlaps with rebellious sexual desire. The political subjectivity depicted in *Lan Yu* that challenges the state ideology is the same ideology that supported the mass student movement in 1989. *Lan Yu* combines a political subjectivity that directly requests changes of the ruling party and a dissenting sexual subjectivity. *Lan Yu* (2001) is adapted from an anonymously written online novel named *Beijing gushi*, (Beijing Story). *Lan Yu* portrays homosexuality and the June Fourth Event, and it has never been publicly screened in China. Shooting of the movie in Beijing was also carried out without official permission. The proposal of an illegal movie shoot and the original novel's abundant obscenity initially dissuaded the director Stanley Kwan—the first openly gay Hong Kong director, whose work is famous due to its feminine

sensibility—from directing it when the mainland producer Zhang Yongning first invited him. Kwan eventually agreed when he found similarities between his own gay relationship and the one depicted in the novel.[58]

Lan Yu depicts its eponymous leading character as being both politically and sexually deviant from what the Party promotes and delineates as normative. Lan Yu, an impoverished university student studying architecture in Beijing, sells his first sexual encounter for 1,000 RMB to remedy his destitution. This is the circumstance under which he meets Chen Handong, a successful businessman whose family members have intimate ties with the Party. Lan Yu falls in love with Handong, who sees sex only as a game and gives Lan Yu many material gifts, including money, clothes, a vehicle, and an apartment. Their relationship experiences various ups and downs, surviving through two separations. The first break up happens when Lan Yu discovers that Handong is having an affair with another young man. Their relationship resumes with a passionate hug after Handong desperately rushes to Tiananmen Square to find Lan Yu after he is informed by his brother-in-law, who works for the government, that the Party will evacuate the square. Their relationship ends once more when Handong decides to marry a career woman. They meet by chance several years later, at which time Handong is divorced and Lan Yu has another partner. Their desire for each other is sparked again. Not long after, Handong is detained for illegal economic activities. Lan Yu sells the apartment that Handong had given him prior to his marriage in order to save his lover from imprisonment. Their separations and reunions span ten years, but unfortunately, not long after Handong finally

[58] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images*, 453.

admits his love for Lan Yu, their relationship ends permanently with Lan Yu's accidental death at a construction site.

Integration of Political and Sexual Taboos

Lan Yu's character melds dissenting sexual and political subjectivity, and the narrative of *Lan Yu* presents us with the interweaving of a homosexual relationship and a taboo political event. This narrative is told from Handong's perspective and develops as he reveals memories about the endearing lover whom he lost. Thus the narrative's center is Lan Yu, who is a social outcast. Lan Yu participates in the June Fourth Event, and likewise, participates in same-sex acts; more importantly, he embraces these two memories and internalizes them in the process of his identity formation. Very early on, Lan Yu's student status is underlined by Handong's assistant, who pimps for him. His student status in Beijing foreshadows his participation in the June Fourth Event, as the eventwas also known as a democratic student movement. That same innocent student image also contributed to Handong's attraction and decision to spend 1,000 RMB to buy Lan Yu's first night with him.

Lan Yu remains loyal to both his homosexuality and political identities.[59] Even after Handong and Lan Yu terminate their relationship for the second time due to Handong's decision to enter into a heterosexual marriage and pursue parenthood, Lan Yu, contrary to Handong's expectations, remains loyal to his same-sex preference rather than complying with the Confucian values of marriage and family. Lan Yu's financial assistance in saving Handong from imprisonment several years after Handong's

[59] This loyalty contrasts with the main character in Hong Ying's fictional *Summer Betrayal*. *Summer Betrayal* takes place after the June Fourth event and follows the main character as she commits a double betrayal of both her government and her boyfriend. See Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 309.

abandonment of their relationship also proves that he is a loyal partner. However, his subject position is not limited to his unwavering sexual subjectivity, but also includes his political engagement. Lan Yu joins the student democracy movement on the morning of June Fourth, which I will discuss shortly. Lan Yu worked as an architect, did not promote his own political career, and, likewise, should have been immersed in his long overdue sexual relationship with Handong by the end of the film. Even though they lived together as a couple after Handong survives his political crisis, Lan Yu's political subjectivity continues to maintain a parallel role with his sexual subjectivity in defining his selfhood long after the summer of 1989. Handong asks Lan Yu to sing him a song as they visit a beautiful snow-covered park. The first and only song he is able to remember is the Internationale (*Guoji ge*), or the anthem of international communism, which is a politically poignant song bearing different implications in historically specific contexts. In China, it initially carried a communist revolutionary meaning for the CCP, but was then adapted to signify both democracy and freedom by student demonstrators who gathered in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in the summer of 1989.[60] As Handong complains about the choice of song, Lan Yu states that it was the only song that he remembers how to sing. Afterwards, with Handong's prompting, Lan Yu then starts to sing a love song that symbolizes their relationship. The profound recall of the Internationale confirmed his primary identity as a dissenting citizen who still maintained hope for democracy, and this recollection came prior to his memory of their love song.

[60] For example, Feng Congde mentioned several times in his memoir on the June Fourth that the International Anthem along with the Chinese National Anthem was repeatedly broadcast to demonstrators at the Tian'anmen Square to boost morale. See Feng Congde, *Liusi riji:guangchang shangde gongheguo* [六四日記:廣場上的共和國 A Journal of Tiananmen] (Taipei: Ziyou Wenhua Chubanshe and Chenhong Shuju, 2009), 173, 357.

The integration of the roles of sexual and political outcast does not exclusively manifest itself in the protagonist Lan Yu, but also can be furthered in the reconciliation of Handong and Lan Yu's sexual relationship. The June Fourth Event plays an important role in the mediation and the continuation of their broken relationship. Lan Yu and Handong remain separated for several months after Lan Yu witnesses Handong's affair with another man and realizes that Handong seeks casual sex rather than a long term, serious relationship. The news that Lan Yu is participating in the dangerous student democratic movement in Tiananmen Square acts as a catalyst, forcing Handong to analyze and reflect on his passions for Lan Yu. His worries force him to confront his attachment for Lan Yu and compel him to search for Lan Yu in the square, despite the potential dangers implied by the word "evacuation" and the actual peril Handong encounters on the way. If Lan Yu had not been in great danger, Handong may not have been able to realize and admit his passion for him, keeping their relationship indefinitely suspended. Lan Yu also becomes accepting of Handong's casual sexual practices after that traumatic night because he believes that Handong has real feelings for him. The political crisis affirms their primary loyalty to each other.

Homosexual Subjects and the June Fourth Tragedy

The narrative regarding the June Fourth Event is expressed by means of the reunion of a homosexual couple, and through Lan Yu's loyalty to his homosexual identity even after his break up with his lover. *Lan Yu* paints the June Fourth Event with both suspense and fragmented information. The date and time are not clearly specified until the event is over. The geographical location is indirectly mentioned in a sequence in which Handong complains about the delayed repair of his air-conditioner due to labor

strikes in the capital, such that audiences are given hints that it is summer time. The passage of time in *Lan Yu* is implicit and is expressed through characters' dialogues and clothing. The June Fourth Event is also introduced in this subtle way. The eve of the Event takes place right after the sequence in which Lan Yu and Handong break up for the first time, in which Lan Yu is still wearing a wool jacket and a scarf, indicating that the break up happens in the winter. However, the next scene suggests the arrival of summer, with Handong boisterously complaining about the high temperature and a delay in repairing his office's air-conditioner. While *Lan Yu* does not illustrate demonstrations, we hear loud noises and sirens in the background and see Handong looking out the window as he attempts to determine the source of the noise. Through these scenes, the presence of instability and violence is suggested. That the violence comes from the government is implied by Handong's brother-in-law, who brings him secret news. He tells Handong that the government will evacuate the square when darkness approaches, and that he should keep any friends or acquaintances from going there. This confidential conversation suggests the date to be June 3rd. Although demonstrations and social instability are invisible on the screen, characters' conversations and background noises create a tense atmosphere on the hot day prior to June Fourth.

The depiction of the June Fourth morning is transient and covert. The initial scene that suggests the immediate June Fourth violence lasts for less than two minutes, but Stanley Kwan's film language constructs a chaotic, panicky, and violent atmosphere that is highly charged. The sequence starts with Handong, fidgeting and confused upon hearing the news about the square and Lan Yu's presence there. After looking at clothes that he had given to Lan Yu, his attachment to Lan Yu is confirmed. He decides to seek

out Lan Yu at the square. Stanley Kwan first depicts the violence from Handong's point of view as he drives to the square to look for Lan Yu. Hearing continuous gunfire, which suggests to him that there are possible injuries, Handong sees large numbers of people fleeing from the square on bikes and wounded individuals carried in bike carts. The angle of the camera transfers from one that is parallel to Handong's eyesight, showing bikers' images below the shoulders, to a lower angle, which positions the camera on bikers' legs and spinning wheels, so that the viewers are not presented with fleeing individuals' faces or expressions.

Stanley Kwan uses fast motion to exaggerate the fast moving, spinning wheels, and thus, constructs desperate and strained scenes of escape from violence. Kwan shifts to slow motion to bring the viewers' attention to several individuals running while pushing a bicycle cart with wounded on it, emphasizing that the escapees are unarmed, hurt and maltreated, without any advanced support. The majority of the fleeing people bearing unidentifiable faces wear white shirts and dark pants, creating a sense of a unified mass in the fast-moving images. Such scenes expose the ugliness of violence against ordinary people. Subsequently, the film switches back to a third-person point-of-view to focus on the reunion of Handong with a horrified Lan Yu, who has survived the life-and-death tragedy. The violent trauma experienced by these people now transfers from faceless bikers to an individual—Lan Yu—whose memory will from that time on be ingrained with June Fourth's traumatic effects, as seen in the aforementioned scene where Handong asks him to sing a song.

Handong searches for Lan Yu in vain, falling asleep in his car. He waits in front of Lan Yu's dormitory and is later roused by Lan Yu, who shows up beside his car.

Stanley Kwan emphasizes their nearly-impossible encounter and their passionate and tight embrace in order to show Handong's deep emotion for Lan Yu; more importantly, Handong's agitated and relieved expressions and Lan Yu's expressionless face unite images of how catastrophic and dangerous it was on the square and how miraculous it is for him to have survived a military attack. Lan Yu's hysterical crying in Handong's arms visually supports the government's cold-blooded shooting of unarmed students. The Event is finally played out while we hear a voice similar to a TV broadcaster announcing, "At 4:30 in the morning, the Fourth of June…" The images, announcement of the location, and the date given all add up to the June Fourth Massacre in 1989.

Memory: I Will Always Remember

Lan Yu's entire narrative, excluding the last three minutes, is actually a retelling from Handong's memory. At the same time that Lan Yu's subjectivity is shaped by both political and sexual consciousness, the June Fourth Event also play a significant role in Lan Yu and Handong's relationship. Memories of Lan Yu would inevitably include both his patience and true love for Handong and his distinctiveness as a participant in and a survivor of the June Fourth Event. *Lan Yu's* first dialogue went like this: "Since you left that morning, I've thought of you every day. It's as if you're always with me." Handong's voice-over on a black screen inconspicuously marks the commencement of a double flashback, indicating that no memories including Lan Yu and their non-hetero-normative love have been forgotten, including the June Fourth Event.

This vivid memory is constructed via simple flashback devices. As we hear the voice-over, we are not aware that Lan Yu's departure actually refers to his death, since the first layer of the flashback immediately following Handong's voice-over portrays the

morning that Lan Yu leaves the house while Handong is still sleeping. Before this frame ends, it is suggesed that Lan Yu leaves for work after he shaves and dresses. Following the sound of the door shutting, the movie jumps into the next sequence and second layer of the flashback right as the first scene ends. The next sequence opens with six seconds of black and white filming before switching back to color. This short black and white period sufficiently suggests to the viewer that the temporal structure is shifting to the past and leaving the morning scenes behind. Such an arrangement purposefully trivializes the first level of the flashback and successfully leads viewers to understand that the morning scene happens in the filmic present, while the black-and-white scene is situated in the past. The death and the reminder of the double-layered temporal structures do not reveal themselves until nearly the end of the movie, when Handong's voice-over seems to echo the commentary that initiated the entire narrative. His remarks start as he drives past the construction site where his treasured lover accidentally lost his life. Handong not only shares his longing for Lan Yu, but by stating, "For years, Beijing has been the same. There is construction going on everywhere, buildings are torn down and re-built," he emphasize the fact that Lan Yu has been gone for years by this time. As we hear Handong's voice and we once again see the morning scene from the beginning of the narrative, we realize that the chronological love story that is depicted on the screen is, in essence, Handong's memory.

Envisioning the morning scene as if it belongs to the present moment suggests that the past, the conjoined memory of Lan Yu and the spirit of the June Fourth event, has not perished for Handong. Even though Lan Yu's life has ended and the Event is over, the memories are still having effects on people who recall many citizens crying for their

lost political ideals while singing the Internationale in June of 1989. Perry Link argues that ethical issues arise when different parties, i.e. perpetrators, victims, and innocent bystanders, have different recollections of the June Fourth event, since memory is subjected to unconscious distortions as a result of varying values and interests.[61] For Handong, the memory of the Event will always be attached to his innocent lover who sang the Internationale and rushed into his arms for a passionate embrace after his escape from the violence of that night. The June Fourth night may have registered even deeper in Lan Yu's memory. As previously discussed, the song he sings upon Handong's request signifies that the past event still shadows him, shaping his citizenship as a gay male with an alternative political subjectivity. The center of attention of Handong's June Fourth memories are arguably shaped by Stanley Kwan's perception of what the Event meant to the two lovers. Kwan regards the Event as mere background, focusing on the lovers' reconciliation and Handong's commitment to Lan Yu.[62] Nevertheless, down-playing the importance of the June Fourth Event does not effectively deny the unconscious presence of this significant historical event in people's memories, since Kwan has admitted that his movies unconsciously contain subtle references to politically-charged events, such as the Hong Kong handover and Deng Xiaoping's funeral, even though he feels that he is not politically active.[63] However, for the screenwriter, Jimmy Ngai (Wei Shao'en), who

[61] Perry Link, "June Fourth: Memory and Ethics," in *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre*, ed. Jean-Philippe Béja (New York: Routledge, 2011), 14.

[62] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images*, 454.

[63] Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images*, 448.

belongs to the "victims" group (according to Perry Link's categorization) because of his presence in Beijing on June Fourth, the Event is a military crack down.[64]

Similarly, literary memories of the June Fourth event represent divergent values and interests with specific focal points. One student leader of the student movement, Feng Congde, emphasizes the demonstration's request for democratization and its non-political nature, while an official of the Xinhua News Agency, Zhang Wanshu, defines the summer demonstration as a political event by recording demonstrators' politically-loaded slogans such as "Down with Li Peng" or "Down with Deng Xiaoping."[65] My analysis argues that the representation of the June Fourth tragedy has become associated with the expression of transgressive sexual desire, particularly homosexual desire, as both tropes take on the shared meaning of resistance to political repression. The films that I explore suggest that the state only allows specific forms of desire to surface, while others are repressed, even within the neo-liberal context.

Although *Lan Yu* is one of the few films that suggest the direct association of the June Fourth Event with homosexuality, this cross-media adaptation from online novel to film reveals the limits of film's political critique. Despite my above analysis of *Lan Yu*'s visual presentation of the June Fourth Event, the portrayal is more implicit and reserved than that in the adapted online novel. In the online novel, the time and date of the Event is explicitly spelled out before the June Fourth Event started. The last line of Chapter Seven of the online novel, prophesying the next chapter, reads "That was an unusual year, to me

[64] "*Lan Yu/* Guan Jinpeng fangtan lu" 藍宇/關錦鵬訪談錄[Lan Yu/Stanley Kwan Interview Record], *Dianying wenxue* 電影文學[Film Literature] 1(2002): 51.

[65] See Feng Congde, *Liusi riji*, and Zhang Wanshu, *Lishi de da baozha*, 235.

and to the whole country."[66] Chapter Eight then starts with a record of the date such that the chapter reads like a diary, documenting the death of Handong's father.[67] The first line of Chapter Nine reaffirms the last line of Chapter Seven by stating "That was indeed an unsettled year" followed by a date of April fifteen on which Lan Yu told Handong that boycotting of classes and a hunger strike had started. The novel then goes on to depict Handong and Lan Yu's political discussion on whether studying (maintaining the status-quo) or engaging in a hunger strike (resistance) is better for the country. Lan Yu even criticizes Handong for lacking a sense of urgency(憂患意識). Unlike the film, which recalls the date after the Event is over, the date June Third is clearly stated in the middle of the chapter.

Afterwards, Handong and Lan Yu find each other at the chaotic daybreak of the June Fourth. Lan Yu exclaimed, "it was fascist, it was bastardly!" and began to describe causalities and his survival of gun fire.[68] These conversations are missing in the film, which instead, magnifies the reunion of Handong and Lan Yu through a slow-motion hug showed two times, once focusing on Handong's hugging arms and once focusing on Lan Yu's emotionless face, followed by Lan Yu's howl while in Handong's embrace. Stanley Kwan's claim that he positions the June Fourth as the background of Lan Yu and Handong's same-sex reconciliation may explain the elimination of the original political critique in the novel. However, Kwan's claim is not entirely convincing to me. If Kwan is to explore same-sex love more than political critique, he could have included Handong's

[66] Beijing tongzhi, *Beijing gushi* 北京故事 [Beijing story], Yifan shuku, http://www.shuku.net:8080/novels/beijing/beijing07.html (accessed Apr 22, 2012).

[67] Ibid., http://www.shuku.net:8080/novels/beijing/beijing08.html(accessed Apr 22, 2012).

[68] Ibid., http://www.shuku.net:8080/novels/beijing/beijing09.html (accessed Apr 22, 2012).

search and admittance of his homosexual identity from the novel. The elimination of Handong's unequivocal admittance of his *tongxinglian* (homosexual) identity is suggestive that Kwan refrains from confronting sexual identity on the screen. Therefore, these changes in adaptation lead me to wonder whether film as a medium and commercial product imposes more representation constraints than the online novel. This possibility of anonymity for *Lan Yu*'s writer and the impossibility of complete censorship on the Internet arguably contribute to freer expressions in the virtual reality. Conversely, Stanley Kwan is an established director, and his career in the film industry may render him cognizant of the rules of the game, causing him to practice self-censorship when filming such a sensitive subject.

East Palace, West Palace, and *Lan Yu* associate political taboos with homosexuality as a demonstration of a specific way of Chineseness. A state-approved Chinese subject is one who is patriotic to the Party and heterosexual. Although some researchers suggest that gay communities are emerging and the state is deregulating private matters, homosexuals seem to still be relegated to an inferior sexual citizenship. Lisa Rofel argues that being gay in China symbolically represents a new kind of humanity that marks cosmopolitanism, neo-liberalism, and globalization of popular culture;[69] yet, homosexuals are only permitted to express their desire as economic participants, or, in other words, as gay consumers. The state only regards them as proper Chinese subjects when they comply with neo-liberal nation-building projects, but does not consider them as such when they try to express themselves as legitimate Chinese sexual beings. For example, the state banned the first Mr. Gay China Pageant (彩虹先生)

[69] Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

which was scheduled to be held on Jan 15, 2010. The winner of this pageant would have competed for the title of Mr. Gay World at a pageant in Norway in February, 2010. While Cui Zi'en, an openly gay director, professor, and homosexual activist based in Beijing, may not emphasize the association of sexual and political taboos on the screen, he does realize that the state treats homosexuals in the same way they treat political dissidents, which is why the treatment of "queer" films is similar to that of "dissident" films. In the eyes of officials, both groups are classified as "enemies of the state." For Cui, queerness has dissolved the concept of "nation."[70] Although not trying to subvert the regime, the transnational dimensions of queerness ignore the boundaries of the nation and shape another kind of citizenship—queer citizenship. In this sense, it illuminates more rules of Party-patriotism within the socialist spirit: one must love the boundaries of a nation that is delineated and embodied by the Party.

Besides being interpreted as a political allegory and suggesting that both subject positions are equal as victims, is there another way to understand the relationship between sexual "deviants" and political "dissidents"? How do films that represent homosexuals respond to the ideological comparison of two nonconforming groups that are both unpleasing to the state? This question leads the discussion to another film with a homosexual theme—*Butterfly*—and points out that the film director added a June Fourth reference purposefully to create and confirm a local lesbian identity.

Hu Die: Remembering the June Fourth Event, Confirming a Hong Kong Lesbian Identity

I have concluded that *East Palace, West Palace,* and *Lan Yu* are two movies that mark respectively the beginning of the association of homosexuality and political dissent, and

[70]Cui Zi'en, "The Communist International of Queer Film," trans. Petrus Liu, *positions: east asia culture critique* 18, no.2 (2010): 419, 421.

the maturity of the association. Now I will explore an inverted circumstance, wherein homosexual films use the trope of political resistance to confirm local sexual identities. The Hong Kong film, *Hu Die* (Butterfly), uses memories of the June Fourth event to affirm a local lesbian identity in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's female to female homoerotic films have been subject to the male gaze and a termination of female-female erotic relationship. Female to female intimacy is a subject that has been accused of pleasing male viewers and labeled a double exploitation of the female body.[71] This accusation is simply another form of male dominance over females, as conversely, gay male desire is sought out and lauded in 1990's films. Zhou Huashan criticizes the casting of a beautiful actress in *Swordsman 2* (*Xiao'ao Jianghu*, 1992) as a self-castrated character, because such a casting choice discourages potential gay readings.[72] Zhou's interpretation trivializes, if not eliminates, possible lesbian readings on the screen. Helen Leung contends that female same-sex desire in Chinese film is commonly expressed in a nostalgic mode.[73] Expanding on Leung's argument, Fran Martin maintains that female to female desire once occupied a core position in mainstream culture, but it eventually faded into the past and is now only represented in reminiscences.[74] However, the most current films featuring self-identified lesbian

[71] For example, one of the earliest films containing homoerotic intimacy, *Ainu* (Intimate Confessions Of a Chinese Courtesan, 1971) portrays its protagonist being forced to become a courtesan and pretending to be in love with the female owner of the brothel to survive, and thus, is arguably exposing a naked female body for viewers instead of creating a self-identified lesbian subject on the screen.

[72] Chou Wah-shan, *Tongzhi lun* [On Tongzhi] (Hong Kong: Tongzhi yanjiu she, 1995), 297-318.

[73] Helen Leung, "Queerscapes in Contemporary Hong Kong Cinema." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9, no.2 (Fall, 2001): 434-5. For example, *Intimates* (dir. Zhang Zhiliang, 1997) shows an old woman yearning for another woman with whom she has been in love since they were young.

[74] Fran Martin, *Backward Glances: Contemporary Chinese Cultures and the Female Homoerotic Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

subjects open up a new cinematic space for lesbian desire, and the film *Butterfly* (2004) arguably also upholds the local design of a self-identified lesbian subject as "Chinese" homosexual subjects continue to become more visible.

While we see more films being produced based on the stories of "Chinese" homosexual subjects, there is also a trend that has evolved to localize the experience of same-sex desire, particularly as seen in representation of female same-sex desire. The year 2001 saw the so-called first Chinese film featuring a lesbian relationship, *Jinnian xiatian* (今年夏天 Fish and elephant), by Li Yu, which is set in mainland China, followed by *Butterfly* (蝴蝶) in 2004, and Taiwanese productions *Ciqing* (刺青 Spider Lilies, 2007) and *Piaolang qingchun* (漂浪青春 Drifting Flowers, 2008) by Zero Chou. These productions rely on native city experiences in Beijing (a Beijing zoo), Hong Kong (demonstrations supporting the June Fourth Event), and Taiwan (the 9/21 Earthquake in 1999) respectively, to characterize and mark self-identified lesbian subjects. Fran Martin contends that the political elements in *Butterfly* illustrate Andrew Gross's observation of the tendency in1990's Hong Kong cinema for "(homo) sexual freedom" to be produced as a synecdoche of political freedom in the face of Hong Kong's political uncertainty leading up to 1997.[75] However, *Butterfly* reverses the theme of homosexual resistance being appropriated as a site of political resistance such that political events are used to affirm local experience and geo-political identity of queer subjects. Although the June Fourth Event did not happen in Hong Kong, there has been a tight link between protesters in Beijing and Hong Kong, and the latter were known to feel a profound sympathetic pain and sense of violation. The June Fourth event became a traumatic citywide experience in

[75] Fran Martin, *Backward Glances*, 251, footnote 17.

Hong Kong, where citizens witnessed the Event through the mass media. *Butterfly* recorded the experiences of lesbian participants whose same-sex desire and memories are interwoven into the June Fourth Event to highlight its regional lesbian identity.

Confirming Lesbian Identity: From Self-repression to Self-acceptance

Based on a 1994 lesbian novella "*Hudie de jihao*" (蝴蝶的記號 The Mark of Butterfly) by Taiwainese writer Chen Xue, the film *Butterfly* (2004) is directed by one of the very few Hong Kong female directors, Yan Yan Mak. Since the 1990s, Chen Xue's work has been identified as queer Taiwanese literature for her female-female homoerotic depictions.[76] Yan Yan Mak also started her career in the 1990s by shooting independent films and videos. *Butterfly*, Mak's second feature film, was screened in film festivals overseas and was chosen as the opening film at the Venice Film Festival Critics Week and the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film Festival of 2004. Its protagonist, a thirty-year-old female named Hu Die (literally "butterfly"), is a high school teacher living as a married heterosexual woman with an infant baby. However, her superficially normative life starts to collapse when she encounters a young woman, Xiao Ye, who rouses Hu Die's homosexual desires and memories of a past homosexual school romance. Hu Die has a flashback of the relationship with her high school classmate, Zhenzhen. Viewers see that the relationship was interrupted and terminated through Hu Die's family's intervention; Hu Die's mother caught the couple lying in bed together and threatened her daughter with death if she did not end the relationship. Hu Die loses contact with

[76] Chu We-cheng recognized Chen Xue together with Chi Ta-wei and Lucifer Hung Ling as representatives of the beginning of queer literature in 1990s Taiwan. See Chu, *Taiwan tongzhi xiaoshuo xuan* 台灣同志小說選[Selections of Taiwan Tongzhi Fiction] (Taipei: Eryu Wenhua, 2005), 28. Fran Martin suggests Chen Xue's novel inflects the figuration of the relationship between *jia* and *tongixnglian* and a decentering of "Euro-Western" queer theory, see Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 119-140.

Zhenzhen until a later point in time when she finally tracks her down in Macau and discovers that she has become a nun. Regret over her lost love, the pain of seeing one of her students attempt suicide because she failed to protect a lesbian student couple from violent separation, and the recognition of her own lack of response to her husband's love all encourage Hu Die to recognize her own homoerotic feelings and divorce her husband.

Simultaneously similar to and dissimilar from *Lan Yu*, *Butterfly* also illustrates a past homosexual relationship and is visually aided through the use of flashback memory, yet the lesbian desires in the latter film also project into the future. The main character, Hu Die, decides to begin a new lesbian relationship in the present temporal structure instead of keeping her homoerotic desire fossilized in the past as Handong does in *Lan Yu.* The developmental structure of the current lesbian relationship between Hu Die and Xiao Ye is similar to the one of the past between Hu Die and Zhenzhen. In both female-female relationships, Hu Die's same-sex preference is awakened by the advances of another female; both the relationships face challenges because of Hu Die's need to fulfill her familial duties: to be a good daughter in the former liaison and a virtuous wife and mother in the latter. Significant divergence lies in the outcome of each relationship: Hu Die evolves from rejecting her homosexual desires into embracing and accepting her homosexual identity.

To clarify the shift of temporal structures between the past and the present, a younger Hu Die's participation in a homosexual relationship during the late 1980's is re-enacted. Her partner, Zhenzhen, is a political activist during the June Fourth period. Tze-lan Sang proposes that female-female same sex love in school, or the "female homoerotic

school romance," is a prominent motif in Chinese novels of the 1920s;[77] Hu Die's first lesbian relationship is similar to this trope. Zhenzhen is a classmate who approaches and befriends Hu Die, and soon after, expresses her erotic desire for her. The film features explicit kissing scenes as well as bedroom scenes between the couple to highlight lesbian desire. The two young women live together and maintain their relationship for three years until Hu Die's family becomes aware of their romantic connection and intervenes.

Hu Die's love for her mother and submission to Confucian principles forces her to suppress her same-sex desires. Hu Die's mother threatens her daughter with death if she does not leave Zhezhen after she catches the couple lying on the bed wearing only their undergarments. As a result of the intensity of the mother-daughter bond, Hu Die chooses her mother over Zhenzhen. Her mother is an insecure woman who frequently suspects that her husband is cheating on her. We learn from Hu Die's childhood flashback that her mother once tried to commit suicide with Hu Die. From the moment her mother expresses her disapproval of her lesbian relationship, Hu Die obeys diligently; whenever her mother calls her, she immediately goes to her mother's house even if she happens to be with Zhenzhen. After her father slaps her in punishment for her involvement in a same-sex relationship, Hu Die goes to her mother's home and reluctantly agrees to repress her homosexual desires. She stops seeing Zhenzhen and begins dating members of the opposite sex. A woman has to be obedient to patriarchal power in all stages of her life. Although the film is set in contemporary Hong Kong, these values still persist. Hu Die loses contact with Zhenzhen until she is in her last year of college, at which time she finds out that Zhenzhen has already become a nun.

[77] Tze-lan Sang, *Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 129.

Hu Die's second lesbian relationship also faces many challenges from family members and from the shame of not being able to live up as a proper Chinese woman. Despite Hu Die's attempts to repress her homoerotic desires, this time, she chooses to accept and confront her heterosexuality rather than try to restrain her feelings and closet herself within a mainstream family structure. In order to comply with her parents' expectations after the forceful termination of her first unsuccessful lesbian relationship, Hu Die passes in a heterosexual society who dates men, and at a later point, weds her husband, Ming, and gives birth to a baby girl. In this way, she forms a typical heterosexual family and performs as a virtuous wife. Yet, the moment she meets Xiao Ye, she can no longer extinguish her homosexual desires; instead, she begins to feel the same emotions she felt when she was with Zhenzhen in the past. This same-sex impulse is visually represented by insertions of super-8 mm shots into 35 mm high definition filming. A super-8 mm camera produces greater color contrast and coarser images. The first flashback of her past relationship with Zhenzhen is filmed with a super-8 mm camera, which clearly introduces the viewers to another temporal construct through contrast with the visual style cultivated in the filmic present. Thereafter, Hu Die's flashbacks concerning Zhenzhen appear in super-8 mm images. However, the inserted images from a super-8 mm camera provide an intensified color scheme that suggests the intensity of her same-sex desire. Recalling a past lesbian relationship implies that Hu Die has not eliminated same-sex desire. On Hu Die's first meeting with Zhenzhen at the beginning of *Butterfly*, there are two shots from a super-8 mm camera inserted into the scene, each focusing on Hu Die and Zhenzhen respectively. Such filmic arrangement using a flashback to a scene where Zhenzhen approaches Hu Die demonstrates first that

Xiao Ye reminds Hu Die of a past memory, secondly that there is a repressed same-sex desire embedded in the memory, and finally, that Hu Die is developing homoerotic feelings for Xiao Ye.

The film recounts the changes Hu Die undergoes in her journey of accepting her homosexual desires and letting them define her sexual identity. This time, the heterosexual, patriarchal challenge comes from her husband, who first rejects her sexual identity as a lesbian, and then attempts to hold on to her by allowing her to have homosexual relationships as long as she stays married to him. Finally he forces her to forgo legal custody of their daughter after Hu Die requests a divorce. The first time Hu Die admits her same-sex affair to her husband, he regards the love between two women as a sickness and insists that she has been cured and should have no more inclinations towards same-sex love. In this scene, Hu Die no longer accepts the heterosexual norms enforced by her family, and consequently accepts her desires, bravely names herself a lesbian (using the English word "lesbian") and proclaims that she has never been "cured." Hu Die not only self-identifies as a woman who loves another woman, but she also maintains a lesbian identity by rejecting her husband's suggestion to remain married while having a same-sex affair, as she sees this as an alternative plot to closet her within a heterosexual domain of governance. The film challenges the heteronormative mindset to the extent that Hu Die asks to maintain custody of her baby, as a lesbian couple raising a baby would be a progressive and pioneering element in filmic representation of the topic of homosexuality. In addition to proving her own acceptance of same-sex desire, Hu Die's determination to divorce Ming and request custody also speaks to her determination to confront heterosexuality and obtain release and acceptance from her heterosexual

family structure. The film's last scene delivers an optimistic vision by depicting Hu Die and Xiao Ye embracing each other on a bright sunny day. A seated Hu Die kicks her feet at the edge of a balcony. This action acts as a metaphor for the flapping wings of a butterfly (with resonates with her Chinese name) and symbolizes freedom.

The film recounts the story in the present, but the tale of a failed lesbian relationship in the past is equally important, as it contains a considerable number of detailed depictions of Hong Kong's citizens' responses to the June Fourth Event. I maintain that weaving the memory of the June Fourth event into the construction of a lesbian identity is a gesture addressing geo-politics of "Chinese" lesbian/gay identities. "Chinese homosexual" is a contested term, especially when we attempt to include mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Cui Zi'en regards Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu* as a partly-Chinese *tongzhi* film in the first Beijing Queer Film Festival.[78] Such division and definition underline a strong consciousness of a regional difference between homosexuals in Hong Kong and on the mainland. Aside from the politics of naming, I contend that the June Fourth event functions as a traumatic experience that shapes the representation of the Hong Kong lesbian identity.

In the past century, the politics of naming has reflected a national and regional identity. Homosexuality has been as a transnational issue since the introduction of sexology into China during the early Republican era. At that time, various translations of the term "homosexuality," or naming of same-sex desire or homoeroticism, contained deceptive interests in defining heterosexual desire so as to interpret and regulate local

[78] Cui Zi'en, "The Communist International of Queer Film," trans. Petrus Liu*, positions: east asia culture critique*18, no.2 (2010): 421.

practices.[79] Chinese lesbian/gay identity also reflects regional politics. In the past two decades, language and naming has become a major trope that marks the politics of Chinese homosexual identity as simultaneously regionally specific and nationally circulated. At the 1989 Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Festival, "Lesbian and gay" were both translated as "tongzhi," which literally means "of the same intent" or "comrade."[80] The term has also circulated and gained popularity in mainland China from the 1990's to present time. Tellingly, Cui Zi'en's 2009 documentary, makes use of this term, and is entitled *Zhi tongzhi* (誌同志 Queer China). Meanwhile, a trans-literal term of the English word "queer," *ku'er* (酷兒), started to take root in Taiwan in the 1990's.

In *Butterfly,* scriptwriter and director Yan Yan Mak purposefully replaces the cultural and geo-political backdrop of 1990's Taiwan used in "The Mark of the Butterfly" with a 1989 Hong Kong setting. Under Chen Xue's pen, Taiwan's labor movement occupies only two sentences in the novella. In Hu Die's memory, Zhenzhen "came to be known as a labor movement activist," "suddenly engaged in social movement, who spent a long time staying in factories and working with female laborers," "organizing labor unions and participating in demonstrations."[81] Yan Yan Mak's adaptation not only substitutes Hong Kong's traumatic June Fourth experience for Taiwan's labor movement, but also details and magnifies Zhenzhen's political participation. Yan Yan Mak's landscapes confirm a unique Hong Kong experience in the summer of 1989, recreating a

[79] See Sang, *Emerging Lesbian*, 99-126.

[80] Chou Wahshan, *Hou zhimin tongzhi* [Post-Colonial Tongzhi](Hong Kong: Xianggang tongzhi yanjiu she,1997), 360.

[81] Chen Xue, "The Mark of Butterfly," in *Hudie* (Taibei Xian Zhonghe Shi: INK yinke chuban youxian gongsi, 2005), 61.

collective visual memory for Hong Kong citizens in general, and for lesbian beings such as Hu Die and Zhenzhen in particular.[82] Hong Kong's participation in the June Fourth Event included making donations to the on-site demonstrators and aiding many political refugees flee to foreign countries. Hong Kong's support of the 1989 summer demonstrations marked a sharp contrast to the political vision of the CCP, and the televised violence was deeply engrained in Hong Kong's collective memory such that Hong Kong citizens participate in a commemoration on the June Fourth date every year.[83]

In five flashbacks, Yan Yan Mak, meticulously embeds the chaotic 1989 summer into Hu Die's memory, connecting it with her failed lesbian love. Even though Zhenzhen's participation in Hong Kong's social movements supporting mainland political dissidents once alienated her from Hu Die, the June Fourth movement and subsequent strikes for freedom not only strengthen the lesbian relationship at the end but also becomes an isolated part of both Hu Die's lesbian memories and her present day identity. The first flashback records the first stage of the June Fourth movement, where young Zhenzhen and Hu Die jointly hang a banner for the seventieth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement (1919). However, the increased weightiness of the June Fourth crisis also contributes to the crisis in their relationship. As Zhenzhen's involvement in social activism grows deeper, Hu Die feels more alienated from her. At the same time Hu

[82] Yan Yan Mak admitted that she injected her own memory of Hong Kong in the 1980s in the film. See "Buneng fei jiu bushi hudie le"不能飛就不是蝴蝶了[It's not *Butterfly* if it can't fly] *City Entertainment* (Hong Kong)655(2004): 34.

[83] Students demonstrators in the Tian'anmen Square called for Hong Kong's support in May 1989, see Zhang Liang ed., *Zhongguo "Liu Si" zhenxiang* 中國「六四」真相[*June Fourth: The True Story*], (Hong Kong: Mingjing chubanshe, 2001), 255. For the rescue of fugitive democrats and commemoration of the June Fourth tragedy, see Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo, *Competing Chinese Political Visions* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger Security International, 2010), 23-43. Lo argues that Hong Kong's vision for democracy is competing with Beijing's one party dictatorship and is a model for China's democratization.

Die is busy comforting her mother, who is suspicious of her husband's unfaithfulness. In one scene, Hu Die recalls seeing Zhenzhen participate in demonstrations that supported mainland students in Beijing in their request to release political dissidents such as Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan. In this scene, Hu Die is a witness for Zhenzhen and also for Hong Kong's citizens' political passion and failed political intervention. From Zhenzhen's point of view, the camera zooms in on her TV set, depicting the confrontations between the Liberation Army, Beijing citizens, and demonstrating students; here, Hong Kong's collective painful experience of the June Fourth violence through televised images is emphasized. Although Zhenzhen's political engagement ends in disillusionment, she recognizes Hu Die's emotional support. The tragedy strengthens the bond between the two young women until their love faces the ultimate challenge from Hu Die's family.

The June Fourth memory is significant, as it is an important part of Hu Die's first lesbian relationship. These connected memories eventually motivate her to pursue her same-sex desire in the film's present. *Butterfly* portrays past and present homoerotic desires as parallel structures, in that patterns of the past relationship resemble those of the present one. In other words, the commencement of the present lesbian love affair parallels the flashback to the beginning of the past relationship. The film incorporates the memory of a relationship crisis associated with the June Fourth crisis into two lesbian relationship crises in the present moment. Hu Die's decision to sever her homoerotic bond with Xiao Ye, followed by Hu Die's lesbian student's attempted suicide because of the forced separation from her lover mark two lesbian crises in the present temporal structure.

Butterfly illustrates the use of the June Fourth tragedy to affirm a Hong Kong lesbian's identity and contest the term "Chinese" homosexual. The June Fourth tragedy strengthens Hu Die's past lesbian relationship. In return, the homosexual memory empowers Hu Die to mark a local identity. Although Yan Yan Mak dedicates this film to women's same-sex desires and intimate experiences instead of engaging in political engineering, *Butterfly* not only reveals that the June Fourth Event has been engrained in Hong Kong's collective memory, but also inherits and continues an ambiguous interwoven entanglement.

Conclusion

The films discussed in this paper reflect the hypothesis that devotion to the greater good and to the Party are at the very core of the socialist spirit. In displaying various desires, my analyzed films and the censorship system reveal the state's attitudes towards people's pursuit of personal desire. Through Chinese film production and the burgeoning of the film market, both outstanding films and marginal films that receive the state's special attention inform us of the ideological tug-of-war in contemporary China.

Hero, a zhuxuanlü production, with its message of submission aimed at intellectuals, highlights the most important part of the socialist spirit. Intellectuals and their work, which are capable of rallying mass audiences, can be tools to serve the state's interest or can be a threat to state power. Therefore, the state is desperate to co-opt skillful cultural elites and intellectual labor for its own use. *Hero*'s call for political submission to a strong central government is generally directed at its viewers, but is most particularly directed at intellectuals. Broken Sword exemplifies an "ideal" political subject. His extraordinary skills in both martial arts and calligraphy empower him to kill

the king, but instead, he chooses to spare the ruler. The power of an intellectual's influence is realized in Nameless' duplicated abandonment of assassination. The productive question in investigating the abandonment of assassination is not related to whether it is a Confucian manifestation, but whether it implicates the socialist spirit—the strategy of the state is to shape patriotic and submissive political subjectivity. The socialist spirit is flexible enough to select, absorb, and appropriate elements for its domestic and global usage, regardless of whether the elements were at one time condemned. The commercialization of *zhuxuanlü* production is a means to popularize the state ideology. Even though some film critics criticizes sharply the film's fascist/authoritarian messages, *Hero*'s commercial encoding lends an excuse to refute any political intentions and creates an ambiguous ending, enabling an open-ended interpretation.

The prohibition of publicly screened films that contain politically dissents raises our awareness to the state's official forbiddance of public discussion of political dissent, especially in mass media. I have argued that filmmakers hint the struggle for freedom to pursue same-sex desires to the struggle for democratic self-expression.

East Palace, West Palace challenges state power through a gay male's seduction of a police officer. The political dissident's desire manifests itself as a disintegration of the police officer's controlling power and self-identification as a "normative" heterosexual. The interrogation process reveals that Ah Lan indeed controls the dynamics of the conversation: he is able to narrate that "stories" that he wanted to tell and subtly skip Xiao Shi's questions; yet more significantly, he uses his "stories" as a means to seduce Xiao Shi into performing homoerotic acts. Ah Lan also turns a public police

station into a private space for his own personal seduction. His act of seduction inside the police station changes the police station's symbolic meaning from a center of state power to a site of circulation of homoerotic desire. The spatial meaning of cruising at the park and being inside the police station also bears a symbolic meaning in terms of the dynamics of power. The police station symbolizes the practice of the state spreading its centrifugal surveillance over all citizens. However, in facilitating Ah Lan's pursuit of his homosexual desire from outside to inside, the police station signifies people's centripetal force in realizing their personal desire. Ah Lan's arrest and his disembodied voice seem to suggest a pseudo-submission, as well as the invisibility of intellectuals and their tactics of political resistance in the 1990s.

Lan Yu integrates both political and sexual taboos as illustrated through its protagonist's roles as a student participant in the June Fourth Event and as a gay male. Lan Yu is loyal to his political subjectivity and sexual subjectivity until his death. The film uses flashback mode to recall Handong's memories of Lan Yu. Such narration suggests that the death of Lan Yu and the end of the June Fourth movement not only fail to terminate social dissent, but create an unforgettable memory. The association of homosexuality and political dissent articulates the suppressed conditions of homosexual subjects. The state does not recognize homosexual desire as an appropriate form of conduct; therefore, filmic representations of homosexuality are not yet officially allowed onscreen. Although there are more and more "Chinese" queer films being created, we simultaneously see an emergence of regional homosexual identity. *Butterfly* uses the June Fourth memory to confirm a Hong Kong lesbian identity, as this event has become part of this city's identity and a motivation for democracy. Hu Die and Zhenzhen's failed lesbian

relationship intertwines with the June Fourth memory, forming a modern lesbian identity for Hu Die that encourages her to recognize her lesbian desires. This film suggests that homosexuality is not merely a channel for the politically dissident, but an active longing which strives to voice its sexual identity through political events.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

How Far Have We Gone

I have researched representations of three forms of subjectivity in order to understand which forms the state encourages and which forms the state discourages. When analyzing selected narratives in which different geopolitical audiences are targeted, I have paid attention to the ways in which the cultural policies of zhuxuanlü and censorship, as well as negotiations of cultural workers/elites, have shaped the current form and content of the screen products. I conclude that screen products on the market are a site of ideological contestation where the cultural policies of zhuxuanlü and censorship, cultural workers, and the viewer form a complex power exchange network in which power and agency is executed, affirmed, reclaimed, yet also restrained or even stripped off by other components. Although the state, in managing cultural policies, has the structural supremacy in attempting to manipulate ideology in screen products, its cultural policies are by no means omnipotent or boundless. My three main chapters have illustrated that cultural workers and viewers are active participants in the production and interpretation of cultural products in general and screen products in particular, and they have provided answers to the question of "How far can we go?" that I posed in the Introduction.

In my introduction, I have raised the question of "how far can we go," which contains four layers of mearnings: 1) to what extent are subjectivity and desire freely depicted on the screen? 2) to what extent is censorship able to control the representation of subjectivity and desire? 3) to what extent is the socialist spirit able to produce Chinese citizens who are submissive into submission, loyalty, or even Party-patriotism? 4) How

much further can state power sustain itself? Now, my working answers are as follows. The presence of state-driven zhuxuanlü productions, a censorship system, and self censorship proves that there are no absolutely free expressions of the three form of subjectivity. Depictions of "bad" subjectivity that displeases the state and fail to display a bright and rosy picture of a contemporary China that is socialist and modern, even for the purpose of social critique, are often banned from being screened. Another possible case is that producers of these screen productions, who are cognizant of the high possibility of disapproval, will modify their narrative to cater to the censor or simply ignore censorship and target at international market alone. My selected films that portray "bad" sexual, economic, and political subjectivity are *Lost in Beijing*, *Blind Mountain*, *Blind Shaft*, *Narrow Dwelling*, *East Palace, West Palace*, *Lan Yu*, and *Butterfly*. The two versions of *Lost in Beijing* clearly demonstrate that filmmakers are making a way to provide social critique on the emergent money-oriented attitude and socio- economic inequality in urban China via an absurd yet realistically possible transaction, although the sanitized version was later prohibited from public screening. The director of *Blind Mountain* and *Blind Shaft*, Li Yang, exemplified another way of strategically negotiating with the state—to collaborate and glorify certain state organs, in his case, the police, so that his film obtains a public screening opportunity. The case of *Narrow Dwelling* simultaneously showed the limits of censorship. The punishment dealt to the protagonist, Haizao, is arguably a gesture of self-censorship, showing both the effectiveness of censorship in ultimately curbing the representation of immoral sexual relationships and cultural workers' tactics in passing censorship. More interestingly, *Narrow Dwelling* demonstrates the impossibility of controlling people's responses. Even if we read the removal of Haizao's uterus as a

piece of evidence proving the censorship's success in shaping the end of the narrative and restoring moral order, viewers' online discussions and re-writings of *Narrow Dwelling*'s ending attest to the fact that viewers are actively participating in the interpretation of the TV drama. Audience response is arguably the most uncontrollable aspect of consumption of screen prdocuts, regardless of the state's intervention and cultural workers' mediation. *Blind Shaft*, *East Palace, West Palace*, and *Lan Yu* gave us examples of filmmakers who preferred to make underground films, as they intentionally bypassed censorship and proceeded with filming without a filming permit, showing one of the censorship system's loopholes. *Butterfly*, the only example among my selected pool of screen products that was not produced geographically in the PRC, has proven to us that the official moratorium on representation of the June Fourth Event on the screen has a geographical limit, and the June Fourth Event has become an aspect of local identity for some Hong Kong citizens.

Just as censorship is not ubiquitous or uniform, the socialist spirit also has limited reach. Intended to construct Party-patriotism and consolidate political legitimacy, the discourse of socialist spirit prioritizes submission to the Party-state, and is supplemented by moral and ethical supremacy of socialist values. For example, *Days Without Lei Feng* blames capitalism for contaminating Chinese people's morality. The superficial narratives of my selected films, *Ren Changxia*, *Kong Fansen*, *Golden Marriage*, and *Hero,* seem to act as ideological vehicles for the socialist spirit. However, by using the analytical tool of Stuart Hall's various reading positions, I have elucidated the ways in which these zhuxuanlü films and TV drama contain internal contradictions, and that viewers can have a variety of unintended reactions to the orchestrated socialist spirit in

the superficial narratives of zhuxuanlü products. The narratives of *Ren Changxia* and *Kong Fansen* consist of an oppositional reading to the socialist spirit of self-sacrificing. My classmate's suspcision of the existence of a self-sacrficing figure like Ren Changxia also suggests a negotiated reading in which Ren Changxia's selflessness is admirable, but the film fails to convince viewers of the existence of such an altruist in reality. *Golden Marriage*'s narrative, which promotes long marriage, implicitly leads the spectator to question whether or not a marriage ridden with fights and platonic infidelity is an ideal love relationship. The global blockbuster *Hero* provoked continuous debates over its explicit and implicit ideology of self-sacrifice and submission to the greater good, or *tianxia*. I have argued that while the film directs its interpellation of submission to intellectuals, its spectacular scenes entice contemplation on whether or not Broken Sword's writing spectacles are sarcastic to submissive intellectuals and provoke criticisms intentionally. My answer to the last sub-question of "How much further can state power sustain itself?" is speculatively based on Foucault's conceptualization of power, which I mentioned in the Introduction. I evaluate the sustainability of the current state power, arguing that as long as it remains productive in generating and accommodating resistance, it will remain effective. In other words, I believe that if it tolerates more politically dissenting voices, the CCP will be able to sustain the rule longer.

Locating Film and TV Drama along the Spectrum of the Popular

After analyzing my selected films, I am now able to provide information on the complex dynamics between the popular and the state by mapping selected films/TV dramas on the

combined scale that I proposed in the Introduction. We can see the distribution of discussed films/TV dramas in Figure 2.

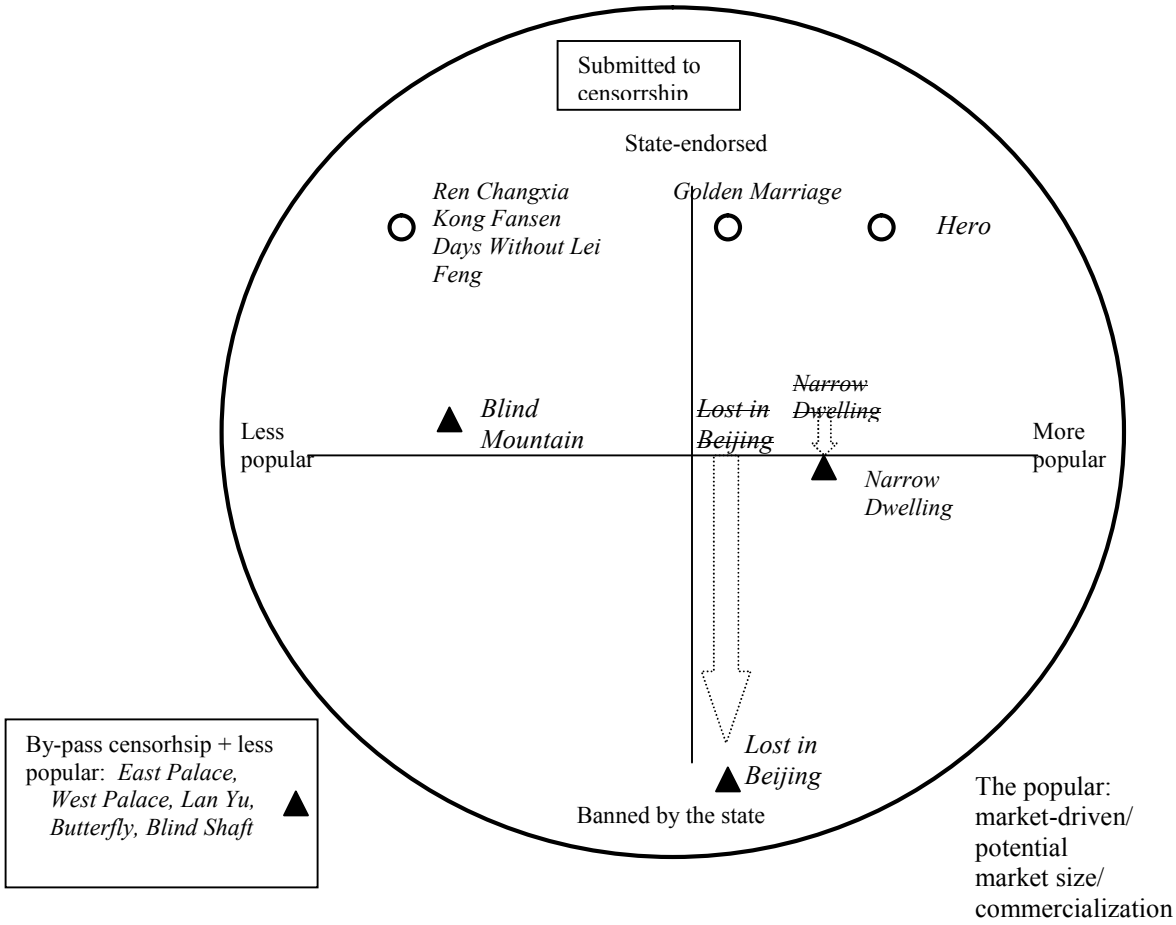

Figure 2. An illustration of the popular and the state approval spectrums with specific examples.

○ =zhuxuanlü productions; ▲=state-criticized/state banned

Although imperfect and incomprehensive, this illustration helps me to visualize the spectrums of the popular I have explained throughout this research. The y-axis indicates the spectrum of state approval: it indicates the level of state approval a screen product

receives from the state, if submitted to the censorship bureau, the higher a screen product is located along the y-axis, the more approval it receives from the state, and the higher possibility it is a zhuxuanlü production. The x-axis represents the spectrum of the popular. My conception of the popular is multifaceted and heterogeneous, including the extent of commercialization, the extent of market-driven popularity, and the size of a potential viewership. When I position one of my analyzed screen product on the right half plane of the figure, it indicates that it is more popular than others in my study, and is more market-driven, more commercialized, and aimed more at generating profit, which, in turn, relies on a larger potential market size. Here, the concept of market is multi-faceted, as some films aim at domestic Chinese audience, some target the international film festival circuit, and some target both domestic and global audiences. I will explain how different market compositions influence a screen product's position along the x-axis. The placement of screen productions along the x-axis and the y-axis does not aim to reflect exact or proportionate numbers of market size but a distribution of correlation among various popular screen products.

I locate *Ren Changxia*, *Kong Fansen*, *Days Without Leifeng*, *Golden Marriage*, and *Hero* high up along the y-axis to show that these zhuxuanlü productions obtained high state endorsement, to the extent that some are state-produced, financially state-supported, or enjoy state-facilitated production, as I have demonstrated. What I would like to point out is that as the state deepens its market reform, zhuxuanlü also becomes more popular by including more commercially catering elements (e.g. internationally famous actors/actresses) or becoming more market-driven. Therefore, I place *Ren Changxia*, *Kong Fansen*, *Days Without Leifeng* in the upper left quadrant and *Hero*

farther in the upper right, while *Golden Marriage* is in the middle, indicating that *Ren Changxia*, *Kong Fansen*, *Days Without Leifeng* aim more at ideological pedagogy than commercial profit, and are thus less market-driven. Although the government commonly issues exhibition documents to its work-units and affiliated sectors, guaranteeing a certain (if unknown) level of viewership, I put them in the upper left quadrant to show its relationship with two other screen products that aim at a broader viewership—*Golden Marriage*, a TV drama shown during prime-time period; and *Hero*, a global blockbuster. *Golden Marriage*, I argue, enjoys a much higher popularity because of the high percentage of TV set ownership in China, and more importantly, the government's mandate to broadcast zhuxuanlü TV drama during prime-time period. The fact that there is a sequel to *Golden Marriage* also proves its commercial success and larger market size. I put *Hero* to the right of *Golden Marriage* for its market strategy and its aim of reaching not only a domestic audience but also global moviegoers.

The task of locating non-zhuxuanlü screen products is more challenging, but such a challenge reveals the multifarious and heterogeneous nature of the popular. *Narrow Dwelling* is the easiest to locate because of its profit-driven production, which results in its high popularity. I place it slightly to the right of *Golden Marriage*, i.e. a higher value on the popular axis, due to its cross-regional popularity in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as reflected by its airing in these two regions. *Narrow Dwelling*'s downwards movement indicates the state's more critical attitude towards it after Li Jingsheng's criticism. However, it remains distant from being state-disapproved because the TV drama was still on air but with a lower promotion profile. *Lost in Beijing*'s significant drop from the middle of the state approval spectrum to the bottom demonstrates that it first obtained

state approval (a screening permit) but ultimately met with disapproval (banned from public screening). I locate it to the right of *Ren Changxia*, *Kong Fansen*, and *Days without Leifeng* to indicate its market-oriented intent, both domestically before banning and internationally. China's domestic popularity or potential market size of *Blind Mountain*, *Blind Shaft*, and the group of *East Palace*, *West Palace*, *Lan Yu*, and *Butterfly* are harder to pin down because *Blind Mountain* has had a very limited public screening in Mainland China while the others have not been screened at all. However, they are all located on the left plane, meaning that they are of lower market-oriented popularity and cater more to art-house film festivals. I put *Blind Mountain* inside the circle, as the state-pleasing version has passed censorship, and the other four outside of the circle because they were not sent to the censorship bureau. However, had the film makers submitted the films for censoring, they probably would not have obtained screening permits because of their critical portrayals of the bad economic subject and the June Fourth Event.[1] Thus, I put them right outside of the lower left quadrant in order to imply the state's potential disapproval. The location of *Lan Yu* is currently to the left of *Blind Mountain*, meaning that it has a smaller potential market size in the PRC because it has never been publicly screened in theatres with the exception of its appearance in the First Beijing Queer Film Festival as mentioned in Chapter Four.[2]

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[1] Although Jason McGrath, quoting Chris Berry, reminds us of the fact that some alleged, "banned" films have never been near a censor. I suspect that filmmakers of these films are aware of the censoring bureau's standards and are able to predict that their films are not pleasant to the state. See Jason McGrath, "The Urban Generation: Underground and Independent Films from the PRC," in *The Chinese Cinema Book*, ed. Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward, 169 (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[2] However, if we compare its worldwide potential market, *Lan Yu* should be relocated to the right of *Blind Mountain*, keeping its position on the x-axis, because *Lan Yu* performed better at the box office. Lan Yu's total worldwide box office sales are $ 116,325, while *Blind Mountain* has $36, 615. See Box Office Mojo http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=lanyu.htm and http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=blindmountain.htm (accessed Apr 19, 2012). According to Box

My purpose of constructing this division of popular culture is to demonstrate that the concept of popular is not monolithic, but versatile. Market and the state are not in binary positions; instead, it is possible that the state uses market as a camouflage to orchestrate transmission of state ideology. We will have to stay aware of the popularization of state ideology in alleged commercial popular products, as any commercial production is subject to state censorship and intervention. The above figure also displays a spectrum that tells us that the state is eager and anxious to promote a proper political subjectivity through commercialization or popularization. *Hero*, a commercially successful film, is arguably a distinctly zhuxuanlü narrative promoting submission to a greater good and expressing China's cultural soft power. Its immensely commercial production mode may function to draw viewers' attention to the success of the Chinese film industry both locally and globally by downplaying its political agenda. This situation is also apparent in the creation of *Jianguo daye* (建國大業 The founding of the Republic, 2009) and *Jiandang weiye* (建黨偉業 The founding of a Party/Beginning of a Great Revival, 2011), which cast exceptionally famous actors and actresses to play important historical figures in order to attract audiences and pass as popular products instead of zhuxuanlü. A classmate of mine from the Mainland who was aware of the film's political intent expressed that she was interested in seeing the films not out of a motivation to learning the PRC or the CCP's grand history, but to see super stars. I see this phenomenon as parallel to the economic and political conditions in China, in that some viewers are aware of the PRC's political control but do not see it as a major

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Office Mojo, *Lost in Beijing* has worldwide box office sales of $1,350,967, confirming its current placement in the more popular quadrant in the figure. See http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=lostinbeijing.htm (accessed Apr 19, 2012).

concern as long as there is a "free" market that allows them to have fun and enjoy the trappings of increased wealth. Similarly, the fact that portrayals of politically dissenting subjects are less likely to be screened publicly is suggestive that representations of the politically dissenting subject seem to be intolerable to the state. This disapproved political subject has become associated with homosexuality and negative depictions of China's society, which might be seen as indicative of the CCP's mal-governance and contradictory to the rosy picture that the CCP would like its people and China watchers to see.

Socialist Spirit as Pale Centripetal Force and Censorship as Negative Sentiment Detector

After undertaking an academic journey that visits the socialist spirit and film and TV censorship, I conclude that the Chinese state sees the socialist spirit as a necessary soft-core, politically-centripetal force, which displays moral superiority to its citizens in order to gain their support for its regime; and that the censorship system functions as a hard-core suppressive power structure that inspects narratives and eliminates those that potentially kindle negative sentiments towards the state's governance in order to prevent centrifugal force.

The socialist spirit is a signal of the residual belief in the Mandate of Heaven, but the spirit' effectiveness is doubtful. The fact that zhuxuanlü film and TV tend to associate good qualities, altruism, and sexual fidelity with Party officials or citizens who support the Party suggests that the Party values moral superiority as a source of political legitimacy. The Party established its regime based on anti-feudalism and the pursuit of modernity; yet, such belief in moral superiority resembles that of imperial China—the Mandate of Heaven that establishes the emperor's ruling legitimacy based on his conduct.

The Party's emphasis on morality is indicative of the continuity of the Mandate. The socialist spirit epitomizes such a continuity, in that it manifests virtuous conduct in serving others, maintaining sexual fidelity, and, of course, displaying extreme, self-sacrificing patriotism for the sake of the greater good or all under heaven. In short, the socialist spirit attempts to generate centripetal force, drawing people's support towards the state. However, as I illustrated in my chapters, the zhuxuanlü narratives do not effectively convince its audience. First, at least some members of the audience do not believe in the existence of an individual who possesses the ideal socialist spirit; some viewers regarded the protagonist of *Ren Changxia* as an impossible, unrealistic figure. Second, the narrative of zhuxuanlü film itself may contain contradictory elements that undermine the hegemonic theme the zhuxuanlü seeks to disseminate, such as the non-stop fighting in *Golden Marriage* and the elaborate scenes in *Hero*.

Censorship, a screening system dedicated to identifying and eliminating undesirable elements from screen products, seems like a repressive apparatus; yet it is by no means capable of having full control over its screened products. It cannot possibly prevent the existence of multiple reading positions, and it cannot control or predict the audience responses that arise through these multiple reading positions. The state's persistent belief in the capability of mass media, particularly TV and film, in mobilizing the masses and in making its viewers believe depictions on the screen to be reality drives the state's attempts to ensure that what is to be screened carries no negative images of the Party-state that might express an imperfect socio-political reality. In other words, the state assumes the audience as naïve, passive recipients of the ideologies manifest through sight and sound. As a result, the state uses the mechanism of censorship to detect

negative portrayals of the Party and the state while appointing the the socialist spirit in zhuxualu productions as its champion. What are the problems or consequences of having negative portrayals of the state screened all over the country? The main problem is the massive resulting centrifugal effect. Acording to the state's logic, if negative perceptions and sentiments towards social injustice, economic disparities, or even the state itself—the system which tolerates if not generates these social problems-- predominantly occupy the screen, viewers will adopt these perceptions accordingly. The greater the viewership, the more discontentedness may accumulate. Once these sentiments turn into political energy, the mass will threaten the regime through an undermining centrifugal force, chipping away at the state's legitimacy. Therefore, censorship is a detector for negative sentiments, watching over possible discontents a screen product may arouse. However, censorship is based only on prophecy, and is not omnipotent in predicting what kinds of energy a screen product will generate and accumulate. The example of *Narrow Dwelling* shows that censorship cannot always detect all possible audience responses before a TV drama is broadcast. Only after *Narrow Dwelling* ignited viewers' massive debates on romance, and perhaps more importantly, provided a platform for discussion of discontent towards housing prices, did SARFT attempt to censure the TV drama. Although a narrative may initially look harmless to social stability, audience response may prove otherwise. Therefore, unexpected audience response proves that censorship is not an omnipotent detector of narrative subversiveness.

Areas for Further Research

Unfortunately, due to constraints in space and time, my project does not touch on screen censorship in Hong Kong after its handover. There has been no lack of attention to either

commercial or avant-garde Hong Kong cinema; scholarly attention has been scant on censorship in Hong Kong, however.[3] My investigation into the state's censorship system and popular culture in mainland China leads my attention to cultural circulation between Hong Kong and the mainland since the 1997 handover. I would like to explore, first, how Hong Kong cinema, known as transnational, is becoming increasingly national as cross-border cooperation with the mainland accelerates, second, how this phenomenon affects the cultural identities of Hong Kong and Chinese cinemas, and finally, how film makers impose self-censorship in order to enter the mainland market.

Also, because it is limited to the focus on zhuxuanlü and censorship as the shared common ground between TV and film, my dissertation leaves behind a rich and less traveled area—cross-fertilization between TV and film. A few more aspects legitimize film and TV dramas under the rubric of screen culture, such as their shared producers, stardom, and marketing. In Mainland China, it is common for playwrights and directors to cross the boundary between TV and film industry. Wang Shuo (1958—) nearly simultaneously wrote scripts for and participated in film and TV productions. For example, his active engagement in fou film scripts in 1988 rendered the year 1988 "Wang Shuo film year" (王朔電影年 Wang Shuo dianying nian).[4] At about the same time, he also produced scripts for several widely popular TV dramas, including the famous *Kewang* (Yearnings, 1990), *Bianji bu de gushi* (編輯部的故事 The stories in the editorial

[3] A recent study to fill this gap is Kenny Ng's article on censorship in postwar Hong Kong. See Ng, "Inhibition VS. Exhibition: Political Censorship of Chinese and Foreign Cinemas in Postwar Hong Kong," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2, no. 1 (2008): 23-35.

[4] The four films are *Yiban shi huoyan, yiban shi haishui* (一半是火焰, 一半是海水 Half flame, half brine, dir. Xiang Gang, 1989,), *Wan zhu* (頑主 The trouble shooters, dir. Mi Jiashan, 1989), *Lun hui* (輪回 Samsara, dir.Huang Jianxin, 1988), and Da chuanqi (大喘氣 A Gasp, dir. Ye Daying, 1988)

office, 1991).[5] Similarly, one of the few female directors Li Shaohong (1955—) also crossed the boundary between the two forms of media by first directing films such as *Hong fen* (紅粉, 1994) before directing some well-known TV pieces including *Da ming gong ci* (大明宮詞, 1998) and *Juzi hong le* (橘子紅了, 2002). Director Feng Xiaogang's carreer path is alike: he first directed TV drama before taking up film directing as his major career, then became a famous director of box-office-winning *hesui pian* (賀歲片 new year film) such as *Jiafang yifang* (甲方乙方 The dream factory , 1997), *Tianxia wuzei* (天下無賊 A world without thieves, 2004), *Fei cheng wu rao* 1 & 2(非誠勿擾 1, 2 If you are the one 1 & 2, 2008, 2010).

Stardom is relatively less explored in western scholarship compared to genre and auteur studies in Chinese cinema.[6] The importance of researching stars is that they "embody multiple meanings that encapsulate the private and public, the ordinary and extraordinary, off-screen and on-screen personas, as well as the individual within the contemporary world."[7] Hong Kong actors/ acresses circulate in both the film and TV industries, for instance, Stephen Chow and Chow Yun Fat started their screen career on the TV, not in the movie theatre: they both attended training courses offered by Television Broadcasts. The former set his *moleitou* (無厘頭 *wulitou*, nonsense) style of comedy in the TV drama *Gaishi haoxia* (蓋世豪俠 The final combat, 1989) and founded

[5] Chen Xudong, *Dangdai Zhongguo yingshi wenhua yanjiu* 當代中國影視文化研究 [Contemporary cultural studies of film and TV], (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004).

[6] Mary Farquhar and Yingjin Zhang, "Introduction: Chinese Stars," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2, no. 2 (2008): 85.

[7] Ibid., 86.

his image of master of comedy in film after he dedicated himself to Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s. In the Hong Kong film and TV industries, Cho Yun Fat's role of Xu Wenjiang in the Hong Kong TV drama *Shanghai tan* (上海灘 1980) pushed his career in the TV industry to its peak. Since the late 1980s, he has devoted himself to developing his film career, and his role in John Woo's *Diexue shuangxiong* (喋血雙雄 The killer, 1989) paved both his and Woo's way to Hollywood success in the late 1990s. Another direction to explore is transnational cultural circulation and consumption of Chinese TV drama, which may lead us to understand the formation of both transnational Chinese and even Asian identity.[8] One such an example is the Taiwanese TV drama revolving around the historical figure Bao Zheng or *Bao Qingtian* (包青天 Bao, the clear sky) which gripped first the Taiwan population in 1993, then that of Hong Kong, and later that of Mainland China. Both Taiwan and Mainland China continued production of new episodes for the TV drama since its first broadcast. The latest production of *Bao Qingtian* was produced in the PRC in 2008, proving its persistent popularity there. Cultural circulation also includes the travel of stardom, as we have seen Chinese films employing actors/actresses from Korea and Japan.

Further research in these areas may help us to a better understanding of the conceptualizations of the screen culture in which both TV and film have increasingly become an ordinary source of spectacle. It is important to acknowledge that the current screen culture primarily refers to the film screen and secondly to the TV screen, and that

[8] For example, Hsiu-Chuang Deppman has discussed the transnational cultural and social significance of the popular Taiwanese drama *Liuxing huayuan* 流星花園[Meteor Garden], See Deppman, "Made in Taiwan: An Analysis of *Meteor Garden* as an East Asian Idol Drama," in *TV China*, ed. Ying Zhu and Chris Berry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 90-110.

such a biased scope and methodology will result in blindness to smaller screens and new media. I believe that a sincere enthusiasm for the "popular" and a thorough understanding of the everyday life of Chinese people, particularly citizens of the PRC, require us to investigate a rich area of different kinds of screens that fill up people's leisure time and allow for people's participation.

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