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**Biopolitics and Cinema: Practices, Representations, and the Moulding of the  
Socialist Subject in China, 1949-1966**

A Dissertation Presented

by

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Recent studies of cinema in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany have questioned the dichotomy of propaganda and entertainment. They reveal contradictions produced by cinema, as well as inconsistencies between the political intent and the actual effect of cultural practices. These revisionist studies not only reconstruct a complex picture of cultural industry under unusual socio-historical conditions, but also reveal the internal dynamics and the ideological fragmentation within those politically centralized states. This dissertation joins these studies by revisiting mass culture under Maoism. In particular, it examines the role that cinema played in the Chinese Communist Party's project of transforming its citizenry into socialist subjects in the years between 1949 and 1966.

During these formative years of the People's Republic of China, the CCP was mainly concerned with the questions of how to build a new body politic and how to govern the Chinese populace effectively. The Party called for the remoulding of Chinese citizens into socialist subjects -- productive builders of socialism who were sound in body and mind.

This dissertation focuses on three areas where the Party's biopolitics intersected with its cinematic programs. First, it investigates the transformative power of sports and physical culture in remoulding individuals into competitive and collaborative socialist laborers. It contemplates how the sports film created cinematic attractions that provoked Chinese audiences into engaging in sports and exercise. Second, it juxtaposes the ethnological project of Ethnic Classification and the ethnic minority film in order to explore the use of diversified ethnicities in the CCP's remoulding project. Third, it

analyzes the construction of the most effective “model people” (*mofan*), the socialist Red Star in Chinese cinema.

These cases illuminate respectively, the physical, the emotional, and the symbolic dimension of the socialist subject. Taken together, they reveal that Chinese socialist cinema was instrumental in creating knowledge that was constitutive of self-reflective socialist conduct and ethics. This study suggests that a top-down approach to the study of Mao’s China is insufficient. Through a careful investigation of film and spectatorship, this dissertation reveals that Chinese nation building in the Mao era relied heavily on the reciprocal relationship between the state’s social engineering and the individual’s self-transformation.

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### **Biopolitics, Cinema, and the Socialist Subject (1949-1966)**

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of Chinese modernity in an area where biopolitics and cinema intersected in Mao's China. In particular, it examines the role that cinema played in the Chinese Communist Party's project of forming socialist subjects in the years between 1949 and 1966.

To write about Chinese modernity is to assert that modernity assumes diverse local forms in different historical contexts. In recent years sociology, anthropology, as well as cultural and media studies have created a few new concepts such as "other modernities," "alternative modernities," and "multiple modernities" to account for socio-culturally specific modernities that are located outside the Euro-American center.<sup>1</sup> While these conceptions attempt to evade a Eurocentric perspective and acknowledge the synchronicity of different temporalities of modernity across territorial boundaries, proposing these modernities as "other" or "alternative" calls into question the original or primary modernity and runs the risk of neglecting the dialectics of modernity.

Drawing upon Marshall Berman's broad vision of modernity, I use "Chinese modernity" to indicate the all-encompassing experience of modern life introduced by Chinese modernization projects in the fields of the legal, the political, the economic, the social, and the cultural. Especially, I focus on how people become at once subject and object of Chinese modernization.

Chinese modernity, as Arif Dirlik claims, has demonstrated crucial aspects of Third World modernity since the early twentieth century. First, Chinese modernity is "a

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<sup>1</sup> See Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, *Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003; For detailed discussions of alternative modernity and the Chinese revolution, see Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and Their Western Contemporaries*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

product of the same forces of capitalist modernization that have produced modernity in Europe.” China’s encounter with colonial powers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century evoked a strong sentiment of cultural humiliation and the anguish of backwardness.<sup>2</sup> These sentiments as well as China’s subsequent pursuit of national salvation and modernization were a result of a European modernity that “forced all others into its orbit.”<sup>3</sup> Second, the complexity of Chinese modernity comes into focus on the issue of nationalism, which at once serves “as an agent of modernization and of resisting and overcoming modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Dirlik’s analysis suggests that Chinese modernity is deeply embedded within the unfolding of global capitalism. It also reveals the powerful dynamism inherent to modernity -- modernity has the capability of producing its own contradictory or even destructive force. Chinese modernity in the mid-twentieth century continued to manifest characteristics of the so-called Third World modernity. The Chinese socialist modernization which blended nation-building with socialism in Mao’s China not only aimed to surmount capitalist modernization initiated by the Chinese Nationalist government of the Republic of China (ROC, 1911- ). It also intended to reassert China’s central position in the world and lend momentum to the international cause of decolonization during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The feeling of backwardness precisely indicated that for Chinese intellectuals modernization was happening elsewhere and Chinese modernization lay in the future. The sense of humiliation was a powerful public feeling that shaped Chinese nationalism and modern Chinese identity in the early twentieth century. See Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: the making of modern Chinese identity, 1895-1937*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.116.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Guided by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the CCP’s domestic and international missions were interwoven. The Party’s ambition to change the international outlook of China helped legitimize its socialist modernization at home and provided momentum for mass mobilization. See Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.6-10.

Central to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) socialist modernization was a biopolitical project that intended to transform Chinese citizens into desired socialist subjects. Since the Mao era covers nearly three decades (1949-1976), I limit my study of socialist subject formation to the years between 1949 and 1966, a period that extends from the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the eve of the Cultural Revolution. This periodization does not just follow the common practice of the Chinese official historiography of the PRC which designates this sub-period of the Mao era as the Seventeen Years. It also takes into consideration that building socialist citizenry was of great importance for the CCP's governance of the country during these formative years of the PRC. When the CCP came to power in 1949, it took over from the Nationalist government a vast expanse of territory inhabited by an ethnically diverse Chinese population. Yet, the Party was stranded in a grim geopolitical situation. The remnants of the Nationalist army still occupied much of South China, as well as many of the provinces and outlying dependencies in the West and Northwest.<sup>6</sup> During the 1950s, border crises in both the Taiwan Strait and Sino-Indian border erupted. Thus, the major political challenge that the CCP faced was how to govern and make use of its multi-ethnic population to defend national security and to build a modern multi-national socialist nation. In the meantime, to distinguish the PRC from the allegedly "capitalist and corrupted" and thus "old" Republican China, the CCP launched a series of socialist campaigns including Land Reform, Agricultural Collectivization, the Great Leap Forward,<sup>7</sup> and the Socialist Education Movement. Institutional transformations introduced

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, New York: The Free Press, 1999.65.

<sup>7</sup> The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) was a socioeconomic reform that aimed to rapidly transform mainland China from a primarily agrarian society into a modern industrialized communist society. The great leap refers to a great leap into a communist utopia.

by these reforms initiated a simultaneous process of dis-embedding and re-embedding social subjects.<sup>8</sup> While institutional transformations cast out established social identities from their original social contexts, they also provided material condition and resources for individuals to negotiate their new identity options. Above all, socialist modernization entailed and facilitated the formation of socialist subjects.

By socialist subject, I mean actual persons with socialist subjectivity. To be sure, the term is a retroactive construct. Its historical equivalent is the phrase “new socialist persons” or “new persons,” which prevailed during the Seventeen Years. The connotation of new persons has changed over time in accordance with ever-evolving material conditions and political demands. Nevertheless, they were the agents of socialist modernization. During the Seventeen Years, new persons, as envisioned by the CCP, were emancipated people who not only mastered their own fate, but also decided the country’s destiny; they were patriots who embraced such socialist values as collectivity, proletarian solidarity, gender equality, and conscientious attitudes toward work; they were productive socialist builders who were healthy in body and sound in mind. The CCP’s use of the phrase “new persons” reveals their belief that the socialist project had a humanistic dimension, that is, socialism would provide favorable historical and material condition for human beings to be “reborn,” to become independent free men, and to develop their potential. In this dissertation, I use the term “socialist subject” in order to emphasize the process of subjectification: how individuals became recipients of and actors within the multiple powers that transformed them into the desired “new socialist persons.”

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<sup>8</sup> For the interconnection of modernization and the formation of self-identity, see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

The CCP had a clear vision of how to form “new socialist persons” for the benefit of the new China. In his famous speech entitled “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,” Mao Zedong explicitly suggested a “remoulding” project.

In the building of a socialist society, everyone needs remoulding – the exploiters as well as the working people. ... The remoulding of the exploiters is essentially different from that of the working people, and the two must not be confused. The working class remoulds the whole society in class struggle and in the struggle against nature, and in the process, it remoulds itself. It must ceaselessly learn in the course of work, gradually overcome its shortcomings and never stop doing so. ... For myself, I used to have all sorts of non-Marxist ideas, and it was only later that I embraced Marxism. I learned a little Marxism from books and took the first steps in remoulding my ideology, but it was mainly through taking part in class struggle over the years that I came to be remoulded.”<sup>9</sup> (February 17, 1957)

The rhetoric of “remoulding” which is pervasive in the above-mentioned speech discloses Mao’s idiosyncratic pragmatism. The metaphor “remoulding” presupposes that individuals, like any other objects subjected to remoulding, are malleable. It also suggests that desired socialist subjects conform to certain norms set up by the “mould.” Despite Mao’s rather mechanical view of how socialist subjects should be shaped, what was operative in the practice of remoulding was biopower. According to Michel Foucault, biopower is a power that brings life and its mechanisms into the realm of political economy. It disciplines the body and regulates the population.<sup>10</sup> The exercise of biopower in the CCP’s remoulding project manifested itself in the following two aspects.

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<sup>9</sup>Mao Zedong 毛泽东, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People” 关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 5 毛泽东选集第五卷, Beijing: People’s Press 北京:人民出版社, 1977, 382. For English translation of the article, see [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_58.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm) (Accessed April 1, 2008)

<sup>10</sup> According to Foucault, biopower develops in two interconnected forms, an anatomo-politics of the human body and a biopolitics of the population. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books, 1990. 139.

First, it attended to issues of health and longevity in order to ensure a steady supply of able workers for socialist construction (chapter 1). Second, it generated normative habits and conducts in order to optimize the productivity of the individual in socialist construction (chapters 1, 2 and 3). In actuality, not only did the CCP utilize demographic statistics and Gross Domestic Product per capita as important criteria to evaluate the advancement of socialist China, it also set up model people (*mofan* 模范) in all walks of life to showcase a meaningful way of living.

The questions that Mao left open are the specific techniques of remoulding that shaped individuals into standardized socialist persons. Here, it is necessary to introduce two political categories, “the people” and “the enemies of the people,” for they invited different techniques of remoulding and embodied different ways of relating to the socialist norm. In September 1949, the PRC’s provisional constitution *the Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference* stipulated that, “The state power of the People’s Republic of China belongs to the people (*renmin* 人民).”<sup>11</sup> The legislator used “the people” specifically to refer to “workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie, and a number of awakened democratic personages who used to be affiliated with the reactionary class.”<sup>12</sup> The same constitution deliberately used another term, “the Chinese national” (*guomin* 国民) in stipulations that only concerned duties and obligations.<sup>13</sup> The 1954 constitution of the PRC reaffirmed that the

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<sup>11</sup> Article 12, *Common Program*, September 29, 1949. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-12/15/content\\_2336979.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-12/15/content_2336979.htm) (Retrieved March 8, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> Zhou Enlai 周恩来, “Characteristics of *the Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference*” 人民政协共同纲领草案的特点, in *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai* 周恩来选集上卷, Beijing: People’s Press, 1980. 366-371.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, Article 8 of Common Program stipulates, “All Chinese nationals of the People’s Republic of China have the duty to protect the country, abide by law, observe labor discipline, take care of public

people (*renmin*) formed the legitimate basis of all powers. The first and second articles of the constitution stipulated that “The People’s Republic of China is a socialist state under the People’s democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants. All powers of the People’s Republic of China belong to the people (*renmin*).”<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that “the people” is scarcely a democratic notion. It is an abstract political concept that differs from the loosely defined term “the Chinese national” and the legal concept of “Chinese citizen.” According to the CCP, the meaning of “the people” varies in different periods of modern China. At the early stage of building socialism in China, “the classes, strata and social groups which favor, support and work for the cause of socialist construction all come within the category of *the people*, while the social forces and groups which resist the socialist revolution and are hostile to or sabotage socialist construction are all *enemies of the people*.”<sup>15</sup> [Italics mine] The fact that the CCP’s exertion of political sovereignty produced “the enemies of the people,” or citizens without political rights, exemplifies what Giorgio Agamben calls the sovereign exception and demonstrates that biopolitical power formed the basis of the CCP’s rule.<sup>16</sup> Instead of sequestering “the enemies of the people” from the political realm, the CCP intended to reintegrate them into the new body politic. The production of “the people” and its opposite justified the need for the Party to adopt technologies and techniques to manage different parts of its citizenry accordingly.

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property, perform military service and pay taxes.” Here, “Chinese national” is almost interchangeable with “Chinese citizen.” The latter term did not appear in any legal documents until 1954.

<sup>14</sup> Article 1, 2, *The Constitution of the People’s Republic of China*, September 20, 1954.

<http://www.rzrd.gov.cn/rdgz/flfg/xianf/xianf-40.htm> (Retrieved March 8, 2008)

<sup>15</sup> Mao, “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,” 364.

<sup>16</sup> According to Agamben, the force of sovereign exception operates according to the logic of inclusive exclusion. In the case of the PRC, the enemies of the people was included in the People’s democratic dictatorship precisely by virtue of being excluded. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Remoulding “the enemies of the people” demands techniques of domination and coercion. This remoulding is a process of pressing wo/man into the mould and incessantly pounding her/him into the standardized shape. In contrast, remoulding “the people” into good socialists is mainly a process that woman or man adapts to the mould through self-modification and reformation. This remoulding involves what Foucault calls “governmentality,” the art or practice of government.<sup>17</sup> The Foucauldian notion of governmentality is useful because it stresses the multiplicity of forces dispersed in the process of social regulation.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the CCP built a highly centralized state should not preclude us from examining how a more diffusive power exercised itself through routine practices of cultural institutions and complemented the Party’s sovereign power in shaping appropriate thought and conduct.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, practices of government do not necessarily stand over or against the individual, but in fact can empower the individual in shaping self-reflective modes of conduct. This understanding is instrumental to understanding the complexity of the CCP’s project of building socialist subjects.

My dissertation argues that Chinese socialist cinema functioned as a governmental apparatus that contributed to forming socialist subjects during the Seventeen Years.

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault describes governmentality as “the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics” that allow the exercise of power, which “has as its target population, as its principle form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.” See Michel Foucault, Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Many scholars have employed Foucault’s notion of governmentality to examine social regulation in (neo)liberal states in which practices of government have become less dependent on political institutions of the state than on plural techniques that ensure governing at a distance. See ed. Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer, and Cameron McCarthy, *Foucault, Cultural Studies and Governmentality*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> I acknowledge that Maoist state controlled cultural institutions at the levels of policy making and production quotas. However, routine practices of these institutions still allowed different forms of power to exercise themselves on the individual.

Sponsored and tightly controlled by the CCP, Chinese socialist cinema was a modernized institution that the CCP could proudly present as an achievement of China's socialist modernization. Compared to Republican cinema (1911-1949), this cinema was a new cinema that aimed to "serve the people," particularly, workers, peasants and soldiers. From 1949 to 1966, the Chinese film industry produced about 777 films, including feature films, animated films, and documentaries.<sup>20</sup> Most of these films depicted new subject matters including revolutionary history, new socialist countryside, and industrial construction; these films also constructed brand new screen characters -- proletarian heroes and heroines. In the meantime, film distribution and exhibition facilities rapidly developed. In addition to movie theaters in urban areas, an increasing number of film clubs were established in factories. Moreover, mobile projection teams brought films to a wide audience in the countryside, the remote mountain areas, and the frontier regions. By the end of 1958, the number of exhibition units (including movie theaters, film clubs, and mobile exhibition teams) in China reached 125,000, nearly 19.5 times the number in 1949.<sup>21</sup>

What fundamentally distinguishes Chinese socialist cinema from its predecessor is that the "new" cinema allowed the exercise of governmental power over the audience and modeled them into good socialists who would have the ethic, intellectual, and physical capacities to build socialism. To understand how requires situating cinema within the larger nation-building project of the CCP. In fact, the Party not only claimed cinema as an important instrument to propagate its policy and ideology, but also regarded it as an

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<sup>20</sup> Chen Shan 陈山, "Red Fruit: Genres in Cinema of the Seventeen Years" 红色的果实: "十七年" 电影中的类型化倾向, *Film Art* 电影艺术 no.5 (2003): 24-28.

<sup>21</sup> "The Exhibition Network in the First Ten Years of the New China" 新中国电影放映网的十年, *Film Exhibition* 电影放映, no.18 (1959):1-8.

integral part of the People's Cause which would lead to the realization of socialism. In addition, cinema was important for the CCP's modernization project because it continuously reflected the ongoing socialist construction in China and created the social imaginary of the new nation. Hence, the major challenge that Chinese socialist cinema encountered was not how to produce films with unique aesthetics or entertainment value in order to generate high profit, but rather, how to respond effectively to the changing political needs of the state and mobilize the masses to engage in socialist construction.

To explore Chinese socialist cinema as a governmental apparatus, it is also necessary to conceptualize it as a social space where a visual event takes place and proper modes of social and political participation are modeled and cultivated. Because of the above-mentioned infrastructure improvement in film distribution and exhibition during the Seventeen Years, cinema became more accessible to Chinese audiences than ever. The very act of movie-going as a form of participation in socialist cultural life was encouraged as an appropriate mode of civil conduct. Cinema also provided a space for multi-ethnic people to participate in building a common socialist culture as well as creating a new multi-national community. Moreover, cinema was a social space where model film workers in the areas of filmmaking, performance, distribution, and exhibition emerged. Seen in this light, cinema produced and nurtured new social relations both at work and in leisure.

Following Nicholas Mirzoeff's argument on visual culture as "visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology,"<sup>22</sup> I view Chinese socialist cinema as such an event that ultimately leave long-lasting effect on people. Therefore, while closely examining specific filmic

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<sup>22</sup> See Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Routledge: New York, 1999, 3.

texts, my analysis of Chinese socialist cinema also pays attention to how particular film practices intersected with other discourses in guiding the audience to understand films in a particular way which became constitutive to their self-transformation. What happened at the interface between audience and cinema deserves attention. It contests the idea that the intended message of propagandistic films could be automatically or transparently transmitted to the audience. In actuality, in order to effectively propagate the CCP's political message, Chinese socialist cinema strived to be both didactic and entertaining for a populace with relatively low literacy. This practice ironically resulted in contradictions inherent to cinematic representation in feature films. An unexpected mixture of traditional discourses and tropes, as well as new socialist messages and icons opened up the possibility of multiple interpretations. However, the Chinese film industry devised a variety of practices to help the audience get the right message. For instance, pamphlets of film synopsis and film reviews were distributed to the audience. In an effort to tailor film experience to different audiences, film projectionists spoke local dialects or ethnic languages and even adopted various forms of folk art (folk song, folk opera, etc.) to introduce a film before the film screening and to comment on the film during the screening so that the audience would correctly "appreciate" the film. After each film screening, seminars or discussion groups were organized to reinforce the intended political message.<sup>23</sup> These practices made cinema a unique visual event in which the viewer/commentator became an important producer of the meaning of films. Meanwhile, these customary practices made the audience internalize a certain way of seeing, perceiving, and understanding. Conceptualizing cinema as a visual event also enables us to consider the way that audiences could make use of their participatory

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<sup>23</sup> "The Exhibition Network in the First Ten Years of the New China," 4.

experience in cinema -- playing bits in films, watching and discussing about films – to remould themselves into good socialists.

Each of the following chapters pairs a particular biopolitical measure with a specific case study of Chinese socialist cinema to investigate how they were deployed together to form the socialist subject. Chapter One of my dissertation investigates the transformative power of sports and physical culture in remoulding individuals into competitive and collaborative socialist laborers. The CCP's political campaign "Promote Physical Culture and Sports, Improve the People's Constitution" aimed to cultivate a habitual practice in everyday life and to build socialist workers who were sound in body and mind. The sports film in Chinese socialist cinema not only constituted and propagated the official discourse of the New Physical Culture, but also created vernacular cinematic attractions that provoked the audience into engaging in sports and exercise. This chapter analyzes two sports films produced in socialist China: *Woman Basketball Player No.5* and *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li*. I choose these films for their prominence, popularity, and artistic innovations. I situate them within Chinese film tradition, and consider their dialogic relation to Hong Kong cinema and Soviet cinema in order to shed light on their unique socio-political function.

In Chapter Two, I ask the question of what use were the diversified ethnicities for the CCP to govern the Chinese populace in a socialist state. While the ethnological project of Ethnic Classification managed to convert the Chinese population into a statistical amalgam of diverse ethnicities, the Party's cinematic program, the ethnic minority film, was crucial to propagating the notion of a multi-national unified nation and inciting common people to transcend their own ethnic identity to form a socialist fraternal

bond with others. Through analyzing films *Flames on the Border* and *Daji and Her Fathers*, this chapter discloses contradictions within cultural practices under Maoism. The national minority film highlighted the artificiality of ethnicity/nationality, and it thus contradicted the so-called scientific findings of the Ethnic Classification Project. In addition, this genre film revealed that the building of a homogeneous socialist identity in Mao's China relied on the flourishing of heterogeneous ethnic identity as well as on the cultivating of socialist fraternal feeling.

The third chapter of my dissertation adopts a deconstructionist strategy to question whether the mould that models others has certitude, immobility, and essence. It examines the making of the most effective model person during the Seventeen Years, a particular Red Star in Chinese socialist cinema named Zhang Ruifang. The Red Star is a film star who embodied a model person both onscreen and off screen. My analysis of Zhang's stardom foregrounds the intersection of various cultural traditions, such as pre-modern Chinese visual culture, Soviet film culture, and theatrical performance. In particular, this chapter argues for the importance of the Stanislavski Method to the making of the Red Star. As Zhang's case illustrates, the Red Star at once served as a model for the masses and was subject to remodeling by the socialist ideology.

These three chapters illuminate respectively, the physical, the emotional, and the symbolic dimension of the socialist subject. The first chapter takes the issue of one's relation to the self. Chapter Two concerns one's relation to others in a horizontal structure of socialist fraternity. The last chapter addresses one's relation to the model. Taken together, they reveal that Chinese socialist cinema was instrumental in creating knowledge that was constitutive of self-reflective socialist conduct and ethics.

Chinese cinema of the Seventeen Years period was an artistically innovative, politically engaged, and entertaining cinema in the heyday of socialist China. There are many ways to approach cinema under politically centralized states. Some dismiss such a cinema simply as the mouthpiece of those so-called “totalitarian” regimes, and hence regard it unworthy of critical investigation. Others employ cinema as a microscope to study modern politics, and in particular, the mechanism of propaganda. For example, Richard Taylor’s and David Welch’s early works on film propaganda in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany are concerned with these questions: How do films reflect the official ideology, and how does cinema fit in the institutional organization of propaganda, function as a psycho-technology, and influence public opinion?<sup>24</sup> Still others focus on recovering the aesthetic value of propagandistic films in the context of international film-making.<sup>25</sup>

In recent years, revisionist works in political sciences have rejected the traditional view of a “totalitarian” society. These works propose a more critical model that emphasizes the internal dynamics and the ideological fragmentation within highly politicized societies. Concurrently, recent studies of cinema in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany have questioned the dichotomy of propaganda and entertainment. They reveal contradictions produced by cinema, as well as inconsistencies between the political intent and the actual effect of cultural practices. These revisionist studies not only reconstruct a complex picture of cultural industry under unusual socio-historical conditions, but also reveal the internal dynamics and the ideological fragmentation within those politically

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1979; David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

<sup>25</sup> David Gillespie, *Early Soviet Cinema: Innovation, Ideology and Propaganda*. London: Wallflower Press, 2000.

centralized states. Works including *Inside the Film Factory: New Approaches to Russian and Soviet Cinema*, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and Its Afterlife*, and *Re-Viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943* have lent me valuable methodologies in my study of Chinese cinema under Maoism.

This dissertation joins the above-mentioned revisionist works by contesting the boundaries between politics and culture, propaganda and entertainment. In the context of Mao's China, the dichotomy of propaganda and entertainment seemed particularly problematic in Mao's China. The word "propaganda" has its own genealogy, and its meaning is highly contested. In today's Western democracies, "propaganda" assumes negative connotations such as manipulative persuasion, intimidation, and deception. The Chinese term for propaganda, *xuanchuan*, corresponds more closely to the original neutral meaning of "propaganda" in early modern Europe: that is, the systematic propagation of beliefs, values, or practices, with overtones of propagating orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> In Mao's China, propaganda was not only a public activity, but also an enterprise integral to socialist modernization. The Chinese Communist Party's cultural program further blurred the distinction between propaganda and entertainment. The directive "literature and arts should serve the people" required the production of socialist art that both educates and entertains the masses, particularly, workers, peasants, and soldiers. This cultural program revealed the CCP's strong belief: properly created and used, literature and arts could form desired citizens. Without attending to a specific political project that cinema engages and concrete powers that it allows to exercise, the term "propaganda film" would remain an empty phrase.

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<sup>26</sup> Toby Clark has a brief introduction of the genealogy of the word "propaganda." See Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: The Political Image in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.7.

This project also contributes to China studies by researching a historical period that has suffered scholarly neglect. It questions a “top-down” approach to the study of Mao’s China. Through a careful investigation of film text, film culture, and spectatorship, this dissertation reveals that Chinese nation building in the Mao era relied heavily on the reciprocal relationship between the state’s social engineering and the individual’s self-transformation.

## Playing Sports the Revolutionary Way: The Cinema of Vernacular Attractions

夫中国 – 东方之病夫也, 其麻木不仁久矣。然病根之深, 自中日交战后, 地球各国, 始悉其虚实也。

-- 《时务报》1896

China, the sick man of the East, has been apathetic for long time. However, it was not until the Sino-Japanese war that all countries in the world began to know how severe its illness is.

-- Current Affairs, 1896<sup>27</sup>

发展体育运动, 增强人民体质

-- 毛泽东 1952

Promote Physical Culture and Sports, Improve the People's Constitution

-- Mao Zedong 1952

For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who had just come to power in 1949, building a new nation demanded first and foremost a steady supply of strong and healthy laborers. The Party's care for the human body as an economic resource was closely linked to its mobilization of *everybody* into participating in a new political campaign, the New Physical Culture Movement (xin tiyu yundong 新体育运动), during the Seventeen Years.

In 1952, Mao Zedong calligraphed the slogan "Promote Physical Culture and Sports, Improve the People's Constitution" for the All-China Athletic Federation (ACAF 中华全国体育总会).<sup>28</sup> At once a personal and a public expression, this slogan revealed Mao's persistent interest in sport and physical culture. It served as a directive for the

<sup>27</sup>This is a direct quotation from an article originally published in *Annual of London Academies* 伦敦学校岁报 in 1896. The article was reprinted in *News of Current Affairs* in the same year. See Wang Zhi 汪智, *Twentieth Century China - The Volume of Sports and Health* 二十世纪中国 – 体育卫生卷, Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Chubanshe 兰州:甘肃人民出版社, 2000. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Wang Qihui 王其慧. *History of Sports in China and Other Countries* 中外体育史, Wuhan: Hubei People's Press 武汉: 湖北人民出版社, 1988, 223.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to develop physical culture, or tiyu (体育) in the People's Republic of China and indicated the importance of mass fitness to the new nation. Mao's slogan also echoed a speech delivered by Zhu De<sup>29</sup> in the inaugural meeting of the ACAF in October 1949: "Physical culture and sports must serve the people. Physical culture and sports should make our people physically fit and spiritually happy, so that they can take on the arduous task of building a new China."<sup>30</sup> Together they elucidated an overarching principle for the New Physical Culture Movement in Mao's China: advocating the People's Physical Culture. They also suggested the importance of personal physical endeavor to building a strong socialist nation.

Situated within twentieth-century China, the discourses above were a variation of the grand narrative of tiyu, which highlighted the close relationship between the body, the nation, and Chinese modernization. Their focus on tiyu's transformational power in constructing socialist subjects has a specific history. In order to understand how the discourse of tiyu transformed itself from the late nineteenth century to the Mao era (1949-1976), I will first introduce early discourses of tiyu in China, and then examine revolutionary discourses of tiyu in relation to the New Physical Culture Movement.

A loan word from Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, tiyu in Chinese means "physical education," "sports and exercises," "body cultivation," or "physical culture."<sup>31</sup> In general, tiyu indicates the totality of physical activities. However, this all-encompassing term specifically denotes Western-style sports such as track and field, ball games, and

<sup>29</sup> Zhu De (1886-1976) was the vice chairman of the PRC. He served as the first honorary chairperson of the All-China Athletic Federation.

<sup>30</sup> Li Xiumei 李秀梅, *A Concise History of Sport and Physical Culture in the People's Republic of China* 中华人民共和国体育史简编, Beijing: Beijing Sports Press 北京: 北京体育出版社, 2001, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Loosely speaking, tiyu is similar to the German term Körperkultur. For etymology of this word, see Andrew Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. 6, 16.

gymnastics. It thus stands in contrast to wushu (武术, literally, military arts), a synonym for the indigenous mode of physical activities which includes archery, wrestling, fencing, and a variety of activities revolving around handling clubs, spears and swords.

The early public discourses of tiyu and the institutionalization of tiyu were integral parts of China's anti-colonial movement as well as political reform at the turn of the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century, following Great Britain, other colonial powers including Japan began using the phrase "China, the sick man of the East" to ridicule a country that had been successively defeated in two Opium Wars (1840 and 1844) as well as the Sino-Japanese War (1895). Comparing a weak country to a frail body, this figurative speech flaunted the colonial powers' superiority, crystallized colonial observers' self-affirming knowledge about the Other, and brought scientific rationality to the fore. Rather than feminizing the nation, this rhetoric did not hesitate to emasculate China by subjecting it to a medical gaze. Coupled the prevalence of social Darwinism, the implied binary opposition between the wholesome and the sick conveniently justified the colonial powers' involvement in China.

Late Qing<sup>32</sup> intellectual-reformers soon translated, quoted, and appropriated this phrase to awaken Chinese people to the crisis of the nation and to advocate their political propositions. For instance, in his 1895 essay "On the Source of Strength," Yan Fu<sup>33</sup> proposes a gradual self-strengthening reform rather than radical revolution for his country, considering "the severity of China's illness." He prescribes "enhancing people's physical strength, enlightening people's thoughts, and updating people's morality" (鼓民力, 开民智, 新民德) as a remedy intended to rejuvenate the nation and ensure the survival of

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<sup>32</sup> The Qing dynasty (1644 -1911) is the last imperial dynasty in Chinese history.

<sup>33</sup> Yan Fu (1854 - 1921), a translator of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* and Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

China in a new world system.<sup>34</sup> For Liang Qichao, a leading figure of the Constitution Reform Movement in 1898, physical prowess occupied an important position in his ideal of modern citizens. In an essay entitled “On the New People,” Liang claims that physical prowess, moral force, and intellectual strength are the three fundamental qualities that differentiate the “people of a nation” from the “people of a tribe.” These qualities provide a foundation for reforms in politics, science and technology.<sup>35</sup>

Through appropriating colonial rhetoric, late Qing intellectuals promoted national awareness of the body, propelled Chinese people to cure China’s disease through personal physical endeavor, and generated more discourses on the physique and physical education. In early twentieth-century Chinese journalism, claims such as “the people of our nation are weary and spiritless, our bodies are emaciated by disease”<sup>36</sup> commonly served as a premise for propagating physical education all over the nation. In 1917, a young Mao Zedong published “A Study of Physical Education” in the influential journal *New Youth*. In this essay, Mao pragmatically advocated physical education through explaining the utility of physical education, suggesting various methods of exercise, and offering advice on proper exercise regimen. In order to motivate the public to exercise, he underscored the interconnection of the physical, the intellectual, and the moral. As he writes, “it is the body that contains knowledge and houses virtue. [...] Physical education really occupies the first place in our lives. When the body is strong, then one can advance

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<sup>34</sup> Yan Fu 严复, “On the Source of Strength” 原强 reprinted in Ding Shouhe 丁守和 ed, *Thoughts of Enlightenment in Modern China* 中国近代启蒙思潮, Beijing: Social Science Press 北京: 社会科学出版社, 1999. 165-175.

<sup>35</sup> Liang Qichao 梁启超, “On New People” 新民说, *Xinmin Congbao* 新民丛报, (February 2, 1902): 8-10.

<sup>36</sup> Qiwu [Xu Yibing], “Warning Educational World” 警告教育界, *The Circle of Physical Culture* 体育界 1 (April 20, 1909): 1-2.

speedily in knowledge and morality, and reap far-reaching advantages.”<sup>37</sup> Mao’s view on the relationship between the physical, the intellectual, and the moral would provide an epistemological foundation for the New Physical Culture Movement decades later.

The correlation between the body and the nation also figured in modern Chinese literature. The best examples are Lu Xun’s well-known short stories, *Diary of a Madman* (1918), *Medicine* (1919), and *A True Story of Ah Q* (1921). Recurring images and themes in these texts, such as dismembered bodies, grotesque bodies, and ludicrous fascination with the spectacle of decapitation, are indispensable textual components for Lu Xun’s relentless critique of the pitiable yet pathetic “national character” (国民性). Underlying a cold and distrustful authorial voice is Lu Xun’s persistent yearning for an improved Chinese people, sound in mind and body.

The emerging Chinese intellectual discourses of the body in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were important in two ways. First, they signaled the body, or more precisely, physical fitness, as a common denominator for modernization. As a consequence, corporal representations, both physical and symbolic, became increasingly important for the nation in getting a foothold in the modern global order. Second, these discourses revealed that the encounter between China and its colonial aggressors not only affected the way in which Chinese people perceived themselves, but also set up a pro-masculine model for Chinese modernization: they proposed a sick man’s self-rejuvenation.

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<sup>37</sup> Twenty-eight-stroke student 二十八画生[Mao Zedong], “A Study of Physical Culture” 体育之研究, *New Youth* 新青年 (April 1907) 3, no.2, reprinted *Reflecting on New Youth* 回眸〈新青年〉. Zhang Baoming and Wang Zongjiang 张宝明 王宗江, eds. Zhengzhou: Henan Arts and Literature Press 郑州: 河南文艺出版社, 1997. 329-335. “Twenty-eight strokes” indicates the number of strokes required to write the three characters Mao Zedong.

Beyond the intellectual realm, *tiyu*, as a modern bodily discipline, was rapidly institutionalized and spread all over China.<sup>38</sup> The Qing government incorporated physical education into its military modernization. In 1875, the Nanjing Military Academy instituted the first physical education program, where military calisthenics was taught and directed by German and Japanese instructors.<sup>39</sup> Many other military schools, including the Tianjian Naval Academy under the patronage of Li Hongzhang,<sup>40</sup> followed this practice. Western missionaries first introduced non-military physical education into major cities around 1888, and then spread it across China through local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) centers.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Chinese students who had studied abroad started their own physical training schools to train physical educators.<sup>42</sup> From 1904 to 1917, twenty one physical education academies sprang up all over China with programs ranging from calisthenics, games, fencing, ethics, physical education theory, physiology, to medical theory.<sup>43</sup>

In many ways, *tiyu* became a symbol of modernity in China. First of all, *tiyu* was an iconoclastic social practice. It challenged an entrenched Confucian value, namely, “revere the literary and despise the martial,” by valuing movement over stasis. Second, not only did modern physical education introduce the Chinese people to new modes of training, measuring, displaying, and using the body, it also promoted new social values

<sup>38</sup> According to Morris, the modern physical culture introduced to China in the late nineteenth century was a decisive break from indigenous modes of physical endeavor. See Morris, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), a chief minister and diplomat of the late Qing government, championed the Self-Strengthening Movement.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Kolatch, *Sports, Politics, and Ideology in China*, Middle Village: Jonathan David Publishers, 1972. 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> Some of these schools offered military training for oppositional forces to the late Qing government, and served as a cover of their political activities. For instance, Xu Fulin and his colleagues preached revolution in the Chinese Calisthenics School, and contributed to the downfall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. See Kolatch, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Table “Sampling of Qing-Era Physical Education Training Schools,” Morris, 11.

such as cooperation, sportsmanship, self-mastery, and competition. The Qing government's effort to institute tiyu was continued by the Chinese Nationalist government in the Republic of China (1919-1949). They further developed tiyu by passing legislation that reformed the education system, establishing international athletic relations, and holding national athletic meets. In the 1930s and 1940s, developing tiyu was an essential means for the Chinese Nationalist Party (GMD) to promote national unification and national defense.

Given the fact that physical culture was instrumental in transforming both individuals and the nation, the CCP spared no effort in advocating physical culture in the newly established People's Republic. It legislated to ensure an important position for physical culture. *The Common Program* stipulated "advocating the people's physical culture."<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the party founded new administrative organizations for sports. In October 1949, the All-China Athletic Federation was formed out of the China National Amateur Athletic Federation, a Republican administrative organization under the GMD.<sup>45</sup> Three years later, the State Physical Culture and Sports Commission of China (SPCSC) replaced the All-China Athletic Federation as the executive organization to promote fitness and health. Between 1953 and 1956, the SPCSC organized 75 national sports meets, eight times the total number of national sports competitions held in Republican China. Among these sports meets the largest event was the national industrial workers' sports tournament, in which 1.2 million workers participated.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the Communist government built a large number of public gymnasiums and stadiums in

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<sup>44</sup> Article 48 of *The Common Program*. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-12/07/content\\_2304465.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-12/07/content_2304465.htm) (accessed January 5, 2008)

<sup>45</sup> Li, *A Concise History of Sport and Physical Culture in the People's Republic of China*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Shirley Reekie. "Mass Fitness," in James Riordan and Robin Jones eds., *Sport and Physical Education in China*, London: E & FN Spon, 1999, 244.

provinces, cities and counties to create an environment beneficial to all levels of sports games as well as to mass recreation. It also founded all levels of physical training schools in order to meet the needs of professional athletes, amateur sportsmen, children and teens.

All of these remarkable changes were integral parts of the New Physical Culture Movement, one of the numerous socialist campaigns bent on building a new China in the Mao era. Since this movement intended to promote the People's Physical Culture and improve mass fitness, the denotation of *tiyu* in daily usage expanded from its narrow definition, "modern/Western physical culture," to its broadest sense, the "totality of physical activities."<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps, among all social campaigns that were launched by the party during the Mao era, the New Physical Culture best exemplified the intricate relationship between the old and the new, between the past and the present. The CCP advocated the New Physical Culture in the PRC as an anticipation of a cultural and historical rupture. This "new" was premised upon a selectively defined tradition. For the Chinese communist government, the tradition was not the traditional Chinese physical culture. Rather, it was a three-decade Nationalist *tiyu* (modern physical culture). In addition, the CCP's demarcation between the old and the new physical culture was based on an ideologically-oriented assumption: the physical culture in the Republic of China (ROC), due to its association with bourgeois ideology, was an old and backward physical culture; the PRC's physical culture, informed by socialist ideology, was a new and progressive one. In fact, the old and the new are not clearly cut. According to Andrew Morris, the PRC's physical culture

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, in 1953 an impressive national folk exercise demonstration was held by ethnic minority groups. See Guo Hongwei 郭宏伟, et al. eds. *Splendid Physical Culture and Sports in the New China* 辉煌的新中国体育. Hunan: Hunan Press 湖南: 湖南出版社, 1997.

shared structural similarities with the ROC's physical culture.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, there existed a conceptual continuity of the Nationalists' understanding of physical culture and that of the Communists. As Morris observes, "the connections between the modern, competitive nation-state and a self-disciplining, healthy populace were not in the broad range of categories that the CCP sought to change with their grand revolution."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this grand narrative of sports and physical education has perpetuated from the late imperial China, through Republican China, and into contemporary Chinese society.

The fact that the New Physical Culture carried forward the legacy of the Red Physical Culture (红色体育) further problematizes the CCP's claim that its physical culture drastically departed from that in the past. The Red Physical Culture refers to a military-sports-centered physical culture that was developed from 1928 to 1945 in the communist revolutionary base areas. Compared with the official and formal physical culture that was directed by the Chinese Nationalist Party at the time, the Red Physical Culture was underdeveloped. However, this particular physical culture was of great importance for the CCP. It was essential for boosting military morale and preserving the combative spirit during a period when the CCP had to struggle for its own survival. It was also instrumental for the CCP to create a political community. As the Red Physical Culture was largely composed of extensive and informal physical education programs, it attracted a large number of common people who were not acquainted with professional athletics. In this respect, it became an efficient means of mass mobilization. Moreover, the CCP skillfully used rhetoric to position the Red Physical Culture as ideologically

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<sup>48</sup> According to Andrew Morris, some of the PRC's sports organizations grew out of ROC's administrative organizations of sports. The PRC also followed the ROC's practices, such as, incorporating physical culture into education system and developing international athletic relation.

<sup>49</sup> Morris, 237.

progressive, and as a polar opposition to the Nationalist's "feudal, bourgeois, treaty-port urban athletic culture."<sup>50</sup> This vision of tiyu as an educational, emancipatory, and integrative practice serving the revolutionary cause continued into the Mao era.

Structural similarities and conceptual continuities between the PRC's New Physical Culture and its precursors should not preclude an examination of the concrete tactics and strategies that were employed in the propagation of the New Physical Culture. More often than not, these tactics, flexibly adjusted to different circumstances, cultivated new habits through practices, which were crucial to the emergence of new social beings. In addition to the above-mentioned institutional constructions, the CCP consciously used its rhetorical power to position and propagate the New Physical Culture.

In reality, the CCP adeptly deployed different media in its propagation of the New Physical Culture. When the ACAF founded its journal *New Physical Culture* (新体育) in 1950, the journal's editorial directive proposed "advocating the People's physical culture and sports."<sup>51</sup> The journal published news stories of sporting events in the PRC, featured photographs of folk exercises, introduced athletics in other communist countries, and set up such columns as "exchange of pedagogies of physical education," "short stories," and "science of exercises and physiology." In 1957, the CCP established an English-language journal *Chinese Sports* as a major venue to publicize the achievements of the New Physical Culture internationally. In addition to print media, radio broadcasting was a crucial player in popularizing the New Physical Culture for three reasons. First, wireless signals were less subjected to geographic restrictions -- than other media. Second, even at a time when transistor radio was a luxury commodity for common

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>51</sup> *Xin Tiyu* was published from 1950 until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. It was the most influential and popular sports magazine in the PRC from 1949 to 1966.

Chinese people,<sup>52</sup> the Chinese government had loudspeakers installed in schools, factories, military bases, and communes to reach a broader audience. Third, the SPCSC created, choreographed, and revised *guangbocao* (广播操 calisthenics set to broadcast music) during the 1950s.<sup>53</sup> With the promotion and spread of broadcasting calisthenics as a major form of daily exercises all over the country, radio broadcasting became indispensable to the New Physical Culture.

Last but not least, the CCP employed cinema to propagate the New Physical Culture. From 1956 to 1965 major state studios, such as Shanghai Haiyan Film Studio, Beijing Film Studio, and Changchun Film Studio, steadily produced no fewer than nine sports feature films. These films capture a wide scope of the New Physical Culture, ranging from physical education of amateur athletes, children and teens, sports fandom, to the mass mobilization for physical exercises -- as evidenced by such film titles as *Two Young Soccer Teams* (两个小足球队, 1956), *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* (女篮 5 号, 1957), *Incidents on the Playground* (球场风波, 1957), and *Soccer Fans* (球迷, 1962). The same period also saw the production of newsreels covering individual sports and sport meets.<sup>54</sup> All these films created widely recognizable new icons and images of the New Physical Culture, and thus built an aesthetic dimension to the physical culture. More importantly, they serve as evidence that visuality began to play a prominent role in the formation and circulation of the social discourse of *tiyu* in modern China.

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<sup>52</sup> In March 1958, China successfully manufactured its first transistor radio in Shanghai. See "A History of Shanghai Radio Industry." [http://bbs.leowood.net/web/leowood/forum/forum\\_read.asp?id=3968864&page=1&property=0&ClassID=0](http://bbs.leowood.net/web/leowood/forum/forum_read.asp?id=3968864&page=1&property=0&ClassID=0) (Accessed April 14, 2007)

<sup>53</sup> Li, 2.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, *Calisthenics* 健美体操, a newsreel that recorded Qi Yufang's 戚玉芳 performance, produced by Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio in 1962.

## Sports and Cinema

Since the invention of modern visual technology of cinema, sports have been a favored subject for cinema pioneers to explore the technological potential of cinema. Human bodies in motion, and athletic movements in particular, prominently figured in early cinematic experiments. This was in part because live physical actions rendered good raw material for exploring new visual possibilities and freed images from being frozen fragments of memory. Filming human bodies in motion was also related to cinema pioneers' scientific interests. For instance, both Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey believed that physical movements objectively recorded by the camera would allow them to conduct physiological, anthropological, and ethnographical studies. In the years between 1879 and 1886, Muybridge and Marey took sequence photos of athletic activities and experimented with them to animate reality.<sup>55</sup> Around 1880, with the aid of his own "zoopraxiscope," Muybridge was able to project photo sequences and produce optical illusions of continuous body motions. Not until Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope went public, however, did film exhibition turn such "scientific documentations" into entertainment.<sup>56</sup> Kinesthesia was featured onscreen and

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<sup>55</sup> Some plates from Eadweard Muybridge's series *Attitudes of Animals in Motion* are entitled as "Athlete Standing, Leaps," "Athlete, Backwards Somersault," and "Athlete Running." In 1886, Etienne-Jules Marey took series of photographs of Mr. Charles Franck running. Gendered bodily movements are noticeable in both photographers' pictures. While women's movement are casual and moderate, such as throwing a scarf over the shoulder, throwing kisses, men's movements are usually kinetic and muscular, such as hurdling, wresting, and boxing. See plates reprinted in Phillip Prodger, *Time Stands Still - Muybridge and the Instantaneous Photography Movement*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> In April 1914, Thomas Edison showed a wrestling match and body builder Eugene Sandow as the subjects, among others, for public viewing.

experienced by the spectators, constituting a basic aesthetics of early cinema, or what Tom Gunning has termed “the aesthetics of astonishment.”<sup>57</sup>

In the course of the twentieth century, sports continued to inspire filmmakers all over the world to explore the potential of film medium. With the development of innovative cinematography and sophisticated editing techniques, cinema did more than simply record sports activities and events. It disclosed the beauty of athletics, dramatized the human spirit behind athletics, and even aesthetically politicized sports. In his stunning futuristic documentary *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), Dziga Vertov recorded rhythmic physical activities of Soviet workers, including sports, to contrast healthy and fulfilling proletarian life with superficial and empty bourgeois life. At the same time, through its variable camera speeds, cinema as a visual machine or the kino-eye responded to and synchronized with the tempo of human life in socialist society. In Nazi Germany, Riefenstahl availed herself of adequate equipment, including automatic cameras, aircraft, and balloons, to film the 1936 Berlin Olympics.<sup>58</sup> Her bold experiment with shots, diverse camera angles and movement, as well as editing techniques, resulted in *Olympia* (1938), a documentary that mythologizes the contemporary German nation, valorizes the superiority of the Aryans, and created a Fascist aesthetics of strength. Not only did cinema document sports events, it also integrated sports into fictional narratives. In particular, Hollywood has churned out sports films for decades. Sport is of interest to filmmakers, as Aaron Baker suggests, because it is hardly apolitical and serves as an area

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<sup>57</sup> Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator,” in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen eds., *Film Theory and Criticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 818-832.

<sup>58</sup> David Gunston, “Leni Riefenstahl,” *Film Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1960): 4 -19.

in which “the contesting process of defining social identities” regarding class, race, gender, and sexuality is defined.<sup>59</sup>

A combined interest in filming sports to create modern visual spectacle and to shape desired social identity characterizes sports feature films in Chinese socialist cinema. Because of their specific narrative strategies, these films not only had a strong appeal to mass audiences, but also exemplified how the discourse of *tiyu* transformed in order to fashion new social beings for the socialist China. Since the sports film intended to both educate the audience on the meaning of the New Physical Culture as well as provoke them into engaging in sports, it served as an archetype of Chinese socialist cinema. Hence, it is necessary to study the sports film to understand how Chinese socialist cinema moulded its audiences in the sense that it reshaped their minds and aroused them to undertake the targeted action.

Sports feature films, to be more precise, *tiyu ticaï yingpian* in Chinese, is the type of film with *tiyu* as its subject matter. The term “*ticaï*” (subject matter 题材) was the fundamental classificatory principle and industrial discourse of genre in Chinese socialist cinema during the Seventeen Years. This conceptualization of genre was a socio-historically specific one. In the new China, although Mao Zedong’s proposition “Arts and literature should serve the people” functioned as the overarching principle for artistic and literary production, what puzzled many artists was the question “what to write?” In other words, what were the appropriate and most needed subject matters? Heated debates over this subject developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The common view of “*ticaï*” held that subject matters were neither neutral nor value free. Instead, subject

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<sup>59</sup> Aaron Baker, *Contesting Identities; Sports in American Film*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

matters were the meaningful and valuable issues that the artist extracted from the life he was observing and experiencing.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, subject matters were ideologically filtered topics that aimed to reflect various aspects of life in socialist China. “Subject matter” soon became an analytical tool for filmmakers to conceive and make films, and for critics to group and criticize films. Popular subject matters during the Seventeen Years were the so-called “major subject matters” (重大题材) such as revolutionary wars (革命斗争题材), industrial construction (工业题材), and agricultural development (农业题材). This particular conceptualization of genre departs from the usual understanding of genre in Hollywood cinema. While the latter ties genre film to the profit-driven studio system and implies a high/low brow distinction between art film and genre film, the former stresses the ideological appropriateness, negates the distinction between high and low art, and implies that socialist cinema overall should be instructive and entertaining.

In practice, genre production in Chinese socialist cinema was more a product of the government’s central planning than the studios’ voluntary industrial strategies. The film bureau under the Ministry of Culture decided on the quota of specific genre films, and suggested certain “subject matters” for film production in accordance with political needs. Despite this unique way of conceptualizing genre in Chinese socialist cinema, genre films, or films with specific subject matters, evolved and mutated through repetition and variation. They played with audience recognition and expectation. Producing genre film was in fact an effective governmental technique. It persistently instructed the audience in the same political message through various entertaining means.

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<sup>60</sup> “The Question of Subject Matter” 题材问题 –文艺报专论, *Film Literature* 电影文学, 1961, no.6: 2-5.

The rise of the Chinese sports film (tiyu pian) during the Seventeen Years was by no means accidental. It resulted from the relaxation of the CCP's policy on arts and literature, the filmmaker's pursuit of modernizing cinema, and the escalating campaigns of the New Physical Culture. The years between 1956 and 1965 turned out to be a particularly favorable period for sports film production for several reasons. In 1959, the CCP launched the Hundreds Flowers Campaign under the slogan "Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend" to solicit various views on ongoing social problems. This created a relatively liberal environment for art production and criticism. Outspoken film critics disclosed that Chinese socialist cinema was constrained by its obsession with major subject matters. Formulaic and simplistic depictions of the life of workers, peasants, and soldiers made many films dull and uninteresting, and consequently lost a large number of the audience. As a writer by the name Ge Yun wrote, even though factory cadres assisted movie theater staffs in mobilizing workers to watch the film *Unlimited Potential* (无穷的潜力), many workers were reluctant to do so. They said, "We have heard enough speeches in meetings, why should we purchase a ticket to listen to lectures?"<sup>61</sup> A possible remedy, suggested Ge Yun, was to expand subject matters to cover the lives of intellectuals, students, and even the national bourgeoisie. After all, what was central to a cinema that served the people was not the subject being depicted, but the following: Was the ideological message the film imparted in accordance with the people's interest? Did the people love and appreciate film?<sup>62</sup> In the same year, China held its first National Games and first National Workers Sports Meet. In addition to demonstrating achievements of the New Physical Culture, these events were mass

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<sup>61</sup> Ge Yun 戈云, "On the Great Potential of Film Subjects" 简谈电影题材的广阔性, *Chinese Cinema 中国电影*, no.4 (1957): 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

festivals in the new state. They attracted physical participation and attention, as well as exciting general interest in sports and exercise. In a way, physical culture and sports provided what Chinese socialist cinema lacked most at the time: large audiences.

Filming physical culture and sports was not only necessary for Chinese filmmakers to respond to current socio-political campaign, it was also instrumental in modernizing Chinese cinema. Seen from the perspective of Chinese national cinema, the sports film was an innovative, yet self-censored response of the PRC's filmmakers to an old film genre, the martial arts film (*wuxia pian*) -- which occupied a dominant position in Republican cinema.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, there were approximately 300 martial arts films. A single example can illustrate the popularity of the martial arts film among Chinese audiences. A 1928 martial arts film, *Burning the Temple of Red Lotus*, generated 17 sequels within three years in Shanghai, then the center of the Chinese film industry.<sup>63</sup> Based on popular martial arts novels, martial arts films mainly featured swordplay and highlighted such traditional virtues as righteousness and loyalty. To appeal to the film audience in a highly competitive market, martial arts films often utilized novel technology to create spectacular and supernatural effects. To a large degree, the Shanghai based martial arts film manifested a good mixture of traditional Chinese culture, modern technology, and highly professionalized industrial strategies. The CCP took the martial arts film to task for its ideological backwardness, especially its association with feudalism and vulgar commercialism. Therefore, the production center of martial arts films moved from Shanghai to Hong Kong after 1949. For filmmakers who stayed in

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<sup>63</sup> Chen Mo 陈墨, *Daoguang Xiaying Meng Tai Qi: Zhongguo Wuxia Dianying Lun* 刀光剑影蒙太奇: 中国武侠电影论, Beijing: Chinese Film Press 北京: 中国电影出版社, 1996.

mainland China, tiyu, because of its energizing and liberating spirit, rendered a far more appropriate subject matter than martial arts for the new Chinese cinema. To a certain extent, the sports film retained the cinematic appeal of physical movement that had been essential to the martial arts film. More important, it assumed a modern look and transmitted sensation of uplift.

To suggest that the sports film was important to modernizing Chinese cinema, I also mean to say that this type of film was crucial in exploring the artistic and political potential of Chinese socialist cinema. In the mid-1950s, Chinese audiences grew tired of simplistically didactic films, even though these films represented the formerly underrepresented characters of workers, peasants, and soldiers on screen. To revitalize Chinese socialist cinema, interesting films had to be made in order to attract the audience back into movie theaters -- and hence better educate them. At the time, Chinese filmmakers and critics began to realize that it was important to experiment with new subject matter and film form in order to make effective socialist cinema. In addition to engaging in the aforementioned discussions of tical, they published articles on specific characteristics of film medium and translated Soviet film theories, - including Sergei Eisenstein's works on montage, - in order to address the crisis of the new Chinese cinema.<sup>64</sup> Tiyu was an interesting and novel subject matter that enabled Chinese filmmakers to again excite its audiences.

Since the Chinese conceptualization of genre as subject matter mainly addressed socially and culturally recognized issues instead of formal similarity among films, filmmakers had the liberty to incorporate all sorts of visual spectacles, such as, the

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<sup>64</sup> In 1958, the film magazine *Chinese Cinema* published an article entitled "A few questions of montage" 蒙太奇艺术的几个问题 which explained and illustrated Eisensteinian montage theory. In 1962, China Film Press published *Selected Essays of Sergei Eisenstein* 爱森斯坦论文选集.

modern architecture of sports schools and physical training, into sports films as well as to try out various film styles and techniques. Compared with contemporary Chinese films, the sports film distinguished itself by presenting a wide scope of everyday attractions in socialist China. For instance, set against the backdrop of amateur sports schools in urban areas, *Woman Basketball Player No.5* (1957), *Spring and Autumn on the Water* (1959), *Ice-skating Sisters* (1959), and *Girl Divers* (1964) offered an insider's perspective on the lives of contemporary athletes. Other films such as *Incidents on the Play Ground* (1957), *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li* (1962), and *Soccer Fans* (1962) depicted sports and exercise as a major activity undertaken in workers' leisure time. Still other sports films, including *Two Young Soccer Teams* (1956) and *A Young Soccer Team* (1965), concentrated on extracurricular physical activity programs in high schools and showcased the joyful and energetic life of teenagers in socialist China. Because tiyu indicates the totality of physical activities, the sports film covered multiple aspects of physical culture and sports. Unlike its Western counterpart, Chinese sports film does not organize its characters, themes, and set-ups around particular sports such as basketball and boxing. Although individual sports, basketball and soccer, for instance, are important building blocks for some Chinese sports films, there exist no such subgenres as basketball films or soccer films. Instead of individual sports, the socialist ideal in the New Physical Culture unified Chinese sports films.

The sports film also provided a testing ground for Chinese filmmakers to explore their personal film styles. An actor-turned-director Liu Qiong,<sup>65</sup> after his return from

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<sup>65</sup> A famous actor in 1930s' Shanghai, Liu Qiong left mainland China for Hong Kong in 1947. During his stay in Hong Kong, he acted in films including *The Soul of China* 国魂 (1948) and *The Fiery Phoenix* 火凤凰 (1950), and directed films such as *The Insulted and Injured* 豪门孽债 (1950) and *A Bachelor is Born* 方

Hong Kong to mainland China, chose to direct *Two Young Soccer Teams* as his first feature film in the new state. Xie Jin, a talented young director, made his name with *Woman Basketball Player No.5* in 1957, and then toyed with elements of comedy in his 1962 film *Big Li, Young Li and Old Li*.

Most importantly, the sports film is emblematic of Chinese socialist cinema at its best. It is the cinema of vernacular attractions. My use of the term “attraction” follows Eisenstein’s understanding of attraction as he elucidates in his early essays “Montage of Attractions” (1923) and “The Montage of Film Attractions” (1924). The Eisensteinian attraction is a synthesis of science and art. Attraction not just refers to being aesthetically attractive. It also means a magnetic force of attraction, which produces physical and psychological responses in the audience. As Eisenstein writes, an attraction is “any demonstrable fact that is known and proven to exercise a definite effect on the attention and emotions of the audience and that, combined with others, possesses the characteristic of concentrating the audience’s emotions in any direction dictated by the production’s purpose.”<sup>66</sup> In his theater and film practice, Eisenstein aimed to use an attraction to produce “a sensual or psychological impact”<sup>67</sup> and to throw “blows to the consciousness and emotions of the audience.”<sup>68</sup> Since the late 1980s, Eisenstein’s theory of the montage of attractions has become a driving force in advancing American film criticism. Theorized by Eisenstein as an aesthetic subversion to the conventions of bourgeois realism, “the montage of attractions” lends Tom Gunning an analytical tool to studying

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帽子 (1952). In 1952, after being evicted by the Hong Kong government for his leftist activities, Liu Qiong returned to the mainland China, then the People’s Republic of China.

<sup>66</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, “The Montage of Film Attractions,” in Catherine Fowler ed., *The European Cinema Reader*. London: Routledge, 2002, 25-33.

<sup>67</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage of Attractions,” *The Drama Review: TDR* 18, no.1 (March 1974):77-85.

<sup>68</sup> Eisenstein, “The Montage of Film Attractions.”

early cinema.<sup>69</sup> In addition, the bodily responsiveness question that Eisenstein addressed in his “Attractions” essays blazed new path for film scholars to reconceptualize film genre and to study the affect of documentary film.<sup>70</sup>

In essence, Chinese socialist cinema is no different from the cinema envisioned by Eisenstein. It aims to attract the masses, shape their opinion, and mould their behavior. It also distances itself from Hollywood cinema for it mainly functions as an illusionist device for entertainment. Moreover, Mao’s view on *tiyu*, specifically, the interconnection between the physical, the moral, and the intellectual, provides an epistemological foundation for the Chinese experiment with the Eisensteinian cinema of attractions, a cinema that transforms the conscious through exciting bodily responses and exercising emotional influences.

However, Chinese socialist cinema differs from the Eisensteinian cinema of attractions in that it does not intend to agitate the masses and to launch a new revolution. Rather, it aims to shape the audience into productive builders of socialism. Hence, I use “vernacular attractions” to distinguish the mechanism of Chinese socialist cinema from that of Eisensteinian films. By using the word “attractions,” I stress that the cinema’s effect on the audience is an indispensable component of Chinese socialist cinema. By using “vernacular,” I emphasize that Chinese socialist cinema produces attractions not through an aesthetic subversion, but through making use of all available resources in popular culture and drawing on sensibilities and values cultivated by that culture.

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<sup>69</sup> The aesthetic of attraction, argues Gunning, distinguishes early cinema from the classic Hollywood cinema, for the latter absorbs the spectator into an empathetic narrative whereas the former directly addresses the spectator, solicits the viewer’s highly conscious awareness of his act of looking. See Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator.”

<sup>70</sup> Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen eds., *Film Theory and Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 701-715; Jane M. Gaines, “Radical Attractions: The Uprising of ’34,” *Wide Angle* 21, no.2 (March 1999): 100-119.

Fundamentally, the cinema of vernacular attractions is able to glue the audience to film screen and affect them emotionally, physically, and ideologically. Instead of being a cinema of agitation and alignment, this cinema entertains, binds, and sublimates the audience.

Among sports films in Chinese socialist cinema, Xin Jin's two films exemplify what I have termed as the cinema of vernacular attractions and thus deserve particular attention. *Woman Basketball Player No.5* has become the exemplar sports film and one of the classics of the PRC's cinema over years. As a prototype of Chinese sports film, it weaves patriotic messages with stories of individuals' self-transformation. *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li*, a film that brilliantly portrays physical movement as an attraction, most explicitly and entertainingly propagates sports and exercise for the masses. To better understand how these two films mould the audience, I will first examine a 1961 sports film *Beauty Parade* made in colonial Hong Kong<sup>71</sup> to provide a point of comparison.

### ***Beauty Parade / Queen of Sports***

*Beauty Parade* is the English title of the Mandarin-language film *Tiyu Huanghou* 体育皇后 (the Chinese title literally means Queen of Sports) produced by one of the major Hong Kong film studios, MP&GI (国际电影懋业).<sup>72</sup> These two distinct titles reveal industrial strategies that were crucial to the success of MP&GI in Southeast Asian film market and indicate various trans-regional and trans-national connections in Hong Kong cinema.

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<sup>71</sup> Hong Kong was under British colonial rule for most of the twentieth century.

<sup>72</sup> In 1955 Loke Wan Tho's 陆运涛 Singapore-based Cathay Organization bought the financially troubled Yonghua studio in Hong Kong. In the following year, Loke formed Motion Picture & General Investment Co Ltd (MP & GI) out of Yonghua. MP&GI was later renamed as Cathay Organization (HK). See Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*. London: British Film Institute, 2001. 73.

The film studio MP&GI was a part of the vertically integrated movie empire established by Loke Wan Tho, an ethnic Chinese Malaysian business tycoon.<sup>73</sup> From the mid-1950s to mid-1960s, Loke's empire stretched from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, to Hong Kong, and thus provided MP&GI films a large audience base in Southeast Asia. In the meantime, the Nationalist-Communist Civil War in the years between 1945 and 1949 as well as the subsequent Communist rise to power contributed to a large influx of mainland Chinese population to the British-controlled Hong Kong. This migratory wave of mainland Chinese not only brought film talents but also supplied a large number of Mandarin-speaking audiences to Hong Kong cinema. It is no surprise that Mandarin-language film production rapidly developed during the 1950s and competed against Cantonese-language cinema - which had previously dominated the local film market. The two rival studios, MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, played a decisive role in adding a Mandarin accent to Hong Kong cinema.<sup>74</sup> Whereas the Shaw Brothers excelled in producing tearful romantic melodramas and historical epics, MP&GI distinguished itself by making sleekly, glamorous musicals, comedies, and urban romances that showcase modern fashions.

For many audiences, the English film title *Beauty Parade* promises the spectacle of a modern cultural event in Hong Kong, the beauty pageant. Since its inception in 1946, the beauty pageant has provided a special occasion for fashion shows. It in fact creates different divisions of wear such as “evening dress” and “casual wear” for all contestants

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<sup>73</sup> Huang Ailing 黄爱玲 and Guo Jingning 郭静宁, “Preface” 前言 in Guo Jingning ed., *A Complete Collection of Hong Kong Cinema* vol.5 香港影片大全第五卷, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive 香港电影资料馆, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> MP&GI also produced Cantonese films. However, Mandarin-language films occupied a large portion of the studio's production.

to compete in different categories.<sup>75</sup> Thus, such a title not only titillates male fantasy for modern beauties, but it also draws female audiences who are informed about new fashions. In fact, the film has nothing to do with the beauty pageant. It tells the story of a country girl, Sue, being sent to the city to study in a westernized women's middle school. Since she dresses unfashionably and has a poor academic performance, Sue is at first a target of bullying by other students. Gradually she wins respectability and popularity through her achievements in sport -- especially, her outstanding performance in an inter-school basketball match. The film nevertheless set a fashion trend for young girls by showcasing a stylish two-piece sailor top school uniform and tennis a pantdress. It also introduced audiences to a modern school life: women students study subjects including English and biology, as well as take part in sports activities. But they also have to take home economics class in order to be good homemakers someday.

Although the title *Beauty Parade* is somewhat misleading, it demonstrates well MP&GI's concern with "being modern" and manifests its marketing strategy to attract a broad Southeast Asian audience. Functioning in a socio-economic system that drastically differed from that of mainland China, MP&GI set as its goal to modernize the entertainment business and introduce a modern lifestyle to Southeast Asians. In the 1950s and 1960s, a period in which "the Cold War division between Freedom and Communism was rampant and the North-South divide was clear-cut," U.S. popular culture and lifestyle "represented the culture of modernity and the power of capitalism"

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<sup>75</sup> The Hong Kong local television station, TVB, started to host annual Miss Hong Kong pageants in 1973. However, the Hong Kong beauty pageant sponsored by wealthy individuals well preceded this event. The first beauty pageant was held in the Ritz Garden nightclub in 1946. It continued into the 1950s. See Valeria Steele, John S. Major. *China Chic: East Meets West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 160.

for Southeast Asians and Hong Kong residents.<sup>76</sup> Being modern simply meant Americanization. Participating in beauty pageants, attending Westernized schools, or being fashionable were various means by which Hong Kong people incorporated an American lifestyle into their everyday practice, and hence distinguished themselves from others. Blending Western and Chinese sensibilities, *Beauty Parade* created a dream world of modern capitalist culture for an as yet underdeveloped Hong Kong middle-class. As a film studio that aspired to be modern, MP&GI followed the Hollywood model in organizing its administrative structure and operation -- and particularly in creating a star system.

The film *Beauty Parade* is in fact a star vehicle for Ding Hao 丁皓, one of the female stars under contract to MP&GI. Born in Macau in 1939, Ding grew up in various parts of mainland China. Her unusually good command of Mandarin won her admittance into the Mandarin-language acting class of MP&GI in 1955.<sup>77</sup> The acting classes of MP&GI not only trained capable actors. It also typecast them to cater for the needs of different audiences. Take Ding and her fellow trainee Su Feng for instance. Su Feng was typecast into a gentle and quiet young lady, Ding Hao a naughty and vivacious girl. A year later, Ding had her screen debut as a swordswoman in *Green Hills and Jade Valleys* 青山翠谷 (dir. Yue Feng, 1956).

Perhaps, the Chinese film title *Tiyu Huanghou* (Queen of Sports) can better indicate the continuity of Ding's film persona that was first fostered in her acting classes and later consolidated in films such as *Little Darling* 小情人 (dir. Tao Qin, 1958) and *The Greatest Civil War on Earth* 南北和 (dir. Wang Tianlin, 1961). Directed by Tang Huang,

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<sup>76</sup> Poshek Fu, "Modernity, Disaporic Capital, and 1950's Hong Kong Mandarin Cinema," *Jump Cut*, no.49 (Spring 2007) <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/Poshek/> (Accessed April 20, 2008)

<sup>77</sup> See Lead Actor's Biography, special feature in the DVD *Beauty Parade*.

*Tiyu Huanghou* invites audiences to expect a story about a female sports star as well as a sporty movie star. Tailored for the tall, lively, and good-looking Ding Hao, the film creates a modern Cinderella story – a sweet country girl turns into a sports star in the middle school despite her classmates’ pranks, and later wins the heart of a handsome city boy. By setting the story first in countryside and then in the city, the film allows Ding to exhibit her wide range of acting skills. She is first a dutiful daughter and an able country girl, then a clumsy and timid student in a Westernized school, and finally a charming sports star beloved by students and teachers.

The title *Tiyu Huanghou* is easily reminiscent of a 1934 film of the same title produced in Shanghai, the center of Chinese film industry at the time. Directed by Sun Yu,<sup>78</sup> the 1934 *Queen of Sports* 体育皇后 is a beautiful black and white film.<sup>79</sup> It tells the story of an innocent and athletic village girl, Lin Yin, arriving in Shanghai to attend a female athletic school. She wins her athletic stardom after breaking records in sprinting. Praised by the press, chased by a swarm of male admirers, and lured by the temptations of the metropolis, Lin Yin soon indulges in dating, dancing, and western fashion, -- and neglects her athletic training. In the meantime, a group of fellow athletes scheme to seize the title of “Queen of Sports” from her at any cost in a primary sports competition in the

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<sup>78</sup> Sun Yu (1900-1990), a Western-trained Chinese film director, is one of famous auteurs in Chinese cinema. After earning a B.A. in literature at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Sun Yu continued his graduate studies at New York Institute of Photography and Columbia University in photography and filmmaking.

<sup>79</sup> Although it is acknowledged as the forerunner of Chinese sports film, discussions about and screenings of *Queen of Sports* are usually situated within the framework of auteur criticism. For instance, it was shown in a special screening “A Tribute to Sun Yu” in the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro, Italy in 1984. On the occasion of the centenary of Chinese cinema, it was listed in a retrospective program to celebrate “Chinese Poet Director Sun Yu,” in the 29<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong International Film Festival in 2005. More often than not, *Queen of Sports* is the least discussed film among Sun’s oeuvre. In an article published in a leading Chinese film journal *Film Art* 电影艺术, an author analyzes nearly all Sun Yu’s pre-1949 films but *Queen of Sports*. See Liu Ying 刘荧, “On Artistic Characteristics of Sun Yun’s Films” 论孙瑜电影的艺术特征, *Film Art* 电影艺术, no.1 (January 1990): 80-107.

Far-Eastern Championship Games. At the end of the story, witnessing a classmate die in a grueling race, Lin Yin is disillusioned about an individual championship title, and resolves to pursue the true spirit of sports, that is, as her coach once says, “rather than having a few heroes, improving every individual’s constitution and popularizing *tiyu* in the whole society.”

Parallels between the Hong Kong and the Shanghai *Queen of Sports* goes beyond their shared Chinese title and similar settings. The Shanghai film *Queen of Sports* is also a star vehicle for its leading actress, Li Lili. A former vaudeville performer, Li had the quality of liveliness that was rare among 1930s’ Shanghai female stars. At the time, movie fans fondly called Li as a *tiyu mingxing*, literally, a sportive star. As Li recalls in an interview, she often rode her bicycle to school carrying a tennis racket, and frequented the Hongkou district swimming pool.<sup>80</sup> Shuttling between the film studio and the swimming pool, Li projected a modern lifestyle which departed from traditional Chinese life during this time. In addition to her particular talent and penchant for sports, what distinguished Li Lili from other Shanghai film stars in the 1930s is her wholesome physicality. A comparison between Li Lili and her contemporary movie star Ruan Lingyu is sufficient to illustrate this point. With her delicate physicality, her touch of sadness, and her nuanced performances, Ruan successfully played traditionally virtuous women. Publicity photos of Ruan show her dressed in Chinese long gowns with a melancholic facial expression. In contrast, Li often played innocent and spirited girls whose bodies were scantily clad. Her public photos manifested a corresponding interest in exhibiting her vigorous body. Far different from the delicate and frail heroines in

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<sup>80</sup> Li Lili, 黎莉莉, *A Miscellany of Memory, Remembrance, and Image* 行云流水篇-- 回忆,追念,影存. Beijing: China Film Press 北京: 中国电影出版社, 2001.

traditional Chinese poetry and novels,<sup>81</sup> Li was a well-known spokesperson of *jianmei nüxing* (健美女性 physically fit and healthy women) whose attractiveness resides in their physical fitness and energetic spirit. Tailored for Li Lili, the screen role of 1934 *Queen of Sports* showcased her lively performance, and particularly presented her wholesome physicality as a spectacle. Early into the film, the audience sees the protagonist's obese uncle and plump aunt. Their physical excess forms a comic contrast with the protagonist's fit athletic body. The popularity of Li Lili in 1930s China indicated the recognition of a new physicality as a form of power, a power that subverts the traditional social values. It also suggested a popular yearning for fashioning a corporeal surface and an increasing marketability of a desired physicality.

Because of above-mentioned commonalities in film practice, the Shanghai connection in the Hong Kong film *Tiyu Huanghou* is all too evident. This trans-regional connection enabled MP&GI to attract Mandarin-speaking audiences who just migrated to Hong Kong. What differentiates the Hong Kong version from its precedent is that it dispensed with any political implication of *tiyu* and critique of commercial culture -- which is essential to the Shanghai version.

In the 1934 *Queen of Sports*, the representation of physicality and physical regiment has a great deal to do with the ongoing New Life Movement launched by the Chinese Nationalist Party at the time.<sup>82</sup> In this political movement, the Nationalists

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<sup>81</sup> Examples of fragile and delicate female characters abound in Chinese literature. In the popular nineteenth century Chinese novel *Dream of Red Chamber*, the female protagonist Lin Daiyu is a fragile beauty. Even in Lu Xun's modern Chinese short story "Regrets for the Past," the female character Juan Sheng is strong in her rebellious will but delicate in her physicality. Female stars in 1930s Shanghai cinema, for example, Ruan Linyu and Lin Chuchu, who often play suffering women, had the similar physical appeal as traditional Chinese beauties.

<sup>82</sup> Responding to military threats from both Japanese imperial power and the Chinese communists, the Nationalist Party launched the New Life movement in 1934 in the hopes of transforming people's lives and rejuvenating the nation. Many scholars have pointed out that this political movement has a complex

championed Confucian teachings of “propriety, justice, honesty and honor” 礼义廉耻 as core principles to propagate self-sacrifice, austerity, and to reject western liberalism. Meanwhile, they highly rationalized everyday life and implemented specific regulations regarding transportation, education, and decorum.<sup>83</sup> Not surprisingly, Sun Yu’s film has the following sequence visually elaborating on the ideal new life: as the morning bell rings, a roomful of women athletes simultaneously bounce up and uniformly perform wake-up calisthenics on their beds. Hugged by their body-fitting tank tops and sweat pants, they move their arms and legs in accordance to a precise pattern. Then the camera traces this group of women athletes taking a shower, washing their faces, and brushing their teeth. At the end of the sequence, the camera zooms in on the shining-white teeth of the protagonist. Through valorizing female athletes’ physical and hygienic practices in an exhibitionist manner, this sequence extols a self-disciplined life, and corresponds to the common Nationalist rhetoric, that is, sports and hygiene contribute to the development of individual physical constitution and to the transforming of people’s daily life.<sup>84</sup> Undeniably, the sequence also affirms the Nationalists’ utopian vision of the purified strong bodies for a strong nation. Supporting the Nationalist’s New Life Movement, Sun Yu’s *Queen of Sports* levels criticisms against commercial culture. The film attributes the protagonist’s temporary fall to the temptation of urban consumerism

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ideological foundation, which includes elements of Sun Yat-sen thought, Confucianism, Christianity, and Fascism. See Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China Under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974, 66-70; Arif Dirlik, “The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,” *JAS* 34: no.4 (August 1975): 979.

<sup>83</sup> Xiao Jizong 萧继宗, “Preface,” *Primary Sources of the New Life Movement*. Revolutionary Documents No. 68 革命文献第68辑 新生活运动史料. Taipei: Taiwan 台北:台湾, 1975.

<sup>84</sup> Among a series of books on the New Life Movement published during 1934 to 1944, several attested to the intersection between the New Life Movement and physical culture, for example, *New Life and Public Hygiene* 新生活与公共卫生, *New Life and Health* 新生活与健康, *New Life and Eugenics* 新生活与优生. In addition, the Nationalist government stipulated the movement of purgation and propriety as one of the regular and important tasks. See Xiao, *Primary Sources of the New Life Movement*.

and hedonism. It pits the individual's pursuit of fame, a byproduct of urban commercialism, against the true spirit of tiyu -- strengthening the body in order to save the country.

In contrast, the 1961 Hong Kong film *Tiyu Huanghou* has a far more optimistic and affirmative depiction of individual talent. Seemingly, Sue's talent in sports wins her school honor and herself popularity. The film's celebration of the magic power of the "Queen of Sports" not only consolidates Ding Hao's stardom, but also glosses over the acute conflicts between urbanization and idyllic countryside life, or possible confrontations between migrants and local residents.

### ***Woman Basketball Player No.5 : Political Melodrama***

Unlike *Beauty Parade* which embraces capitalist modernity, the PRC's sports films disseminated the CCP's discourse of tiyu and produced a different kind of attraction for its proletarian audience. These films instructed the political significance of tiyu and encouraged people to discard traditional biases and actively take part in sports and exercise for the nation. The first full-fledged sports film in Chinese socialist cinema was *Woman Basketball Player No.5*, directed by Xie Jin in 1957. Upon its release, this film received domestic and international acclaim.<sup>85</sup> Over the years, it has become one of most memorable films in the history of PRC cinema and prompted Xie Jin to make a quasi-sequel *Woman Soccer Player No.9* in 2000.

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<sup>85</sup> Circulated among the socialist countries, this film garnered several international awards. For instance, it won the Silver Prize at the Sixth International Film Festival of the World Youth Gathering held in Moscow in 1957. It then secured the Silver Hat Award at the International Film Week in Mexico in 1958. In September 1957, it was selected as a Chinese film to be exhibited in the "Week of Asian Cinema" in Beijing.

The film *Woman Basketball Player No.5* tells the story of a young woman basketball player's individual transformation from a wayward and self-centered athlete into a disciplined and resolute team player. Two interwoven narrative trajectories are evident in the film. One trajectory concentrates on the life of the young basketball player No. 5, Lin Xiaojie, in a sports school in the new China. Xiaojie is a gifted yet conceited woman athlete. She often thinks of herself as the decisive factor in the team's success in winning sports competitions. Nonetheless, she is undetermined at pursuing a career path as a professional athlete -- partly because her family pressures her to become a college student, and partly because of her own prejudice against tiyu. A newly appointed middle-aged male coach for the women's basketball team, Tian Zhenhua, soon discovers Xiaojie's talent and limitations. With a more dramatic twist, he further finds that she is the daughter of his girl friend in the past. Thereafter, this surrogate father figure spares no effort to educate her on the meaning of athletics in the New China. The other trajectory, mainly composed of flash backs, tells an unconsummated love story between two athletes in the old China, Tian Zhenhua and Xiaojie's mother. Coach Tian then was a young upright basketball player in a sports club run by the Lin family. At that time Lin Jie -- like her daughter -- was player No. 5 in the women's basketball team. Their genuine love was surreptitiously thwarted by Lin's father and her suitor, after Tian refused to follow his will to intentionally lose a basketball game to an American team. The couple then lost contact with each other. These two narratives converge at a symbolic family reunion in the present where all internal and external obstacles to Xiaojie's growth into a good athlete are overcome. The film ends with a farewell scene at the airport where Xiaojie, along with other players, is about to leave China to compete overseas.

Compared to previous sports film such as *Two Young Soccer Teams* (1956)<sup>86</sup> and *An Incident on the Playground* (1957),<sup>87</sup> *Woman Basketball Player No.5* offers fresh visual attractions. First, renowned cinematographers Huang Shaofen<sup>88</sup> and Shen Xilin successfully applied color technique and made *Player No.5* the first color sports film in Chinese socialist cinema. The bright color complements the subject matter of tiyu, and creates feelings of warmth and liveliness.<sup>89</sup> Second, the director Xie Jin cast non-professional actors, real-life basketball players and college students, as young woman basketball players, and assigned veteran actors to play athletes of the old generation. The simple and natural acting of non-professional actors and the mature and poignant performances delivered by professional actors both shine in their own way. Third, although the film was by no means intended to be a star vehicle for female actors, it concentrated on depicting female athletes. This not only helped construct the most recognizable icons of the New Physical Culture, it also set a trend of portraying female athletes in Chinese sports films -- as is evidenced by such film titles as *Ice-skating Sisters* 冰上姐妹 (dir. Wu Zhaodi, 1959), *Girl Divers* 女跳水队员 (dir. Liu Guoquan, 1964), and *Women Volleyball Players* 排球之花 (dir. Lu Jianhua, 1980).

Instead of invoking uneasiness about transgressing gender norms, the privileged depiction of athletic women in Chinese socialist cinema may very well create a vicarious attraction to an audience familiar with preexisting texts and discourses of swordswomen.

<sup>86</sup> The film tells the story of three teenager friends actively take part in extracurricular sports.

<sup>87</sup> This comedy tells the story of how a few young workers in a Medical Appliances Company overcome obstacles posed by their sedate office director and organize workers' physical activities in a formerly deserted playground.

<sup>88</sup> The first Chinese color film is an opera film *Everlasting Regret* 生死恨, directed by Fei Mu in 1948. Huang Shaofen 黄绍芬 was the cinematography director for that film.

<sup>89</sup> See Yuan Ye 原野, "Woman Basketball Player No.5: A Heartrending Chinese Color Film" 女篮5号 - 一部动人心弦的国产彩色影片, *Chinese Workers* 中国工人 no.16 (1957):31.

In Chinese popular culture, women who harness extraordinary, sometimes even supernatural, physical skills abound in poems, folktales, fictions, and operas in pre-modern China.<sup>90</sup> Well exposed to such popular and folk cultures, the Chinese audience was at ease with the high visibility of sportswomen onscreen. In addition, the prominent visual representation of female athletes has its social referent. Studies of the history of Chinese sports show that unlike the Western tradition in sports, sports and physical activities have never been a “male preserve” in China.<sup>91</sup> It has been quite acceptable for women to engage in traditional physical activities and play sports. Furthermore, women with physical skills did not pose the threat of transgressing the normative gender boundary as they might have elsewhere, because the gender issue has often been submerged by issues such as class and nationalism. For instance, under the influence of Confucianism, the literati class in pre-modern China held a bias against physical endeavors and relegated such practices as low-class activities, because of their close association with manual work. In the early twentieth century, since modern sports were introduced to China as a Western cultural form, the male/female polarization was overshadowed by the traditional/modern polarization. In the Mao era, the CCP particularly encouraged women to get involved with sports and exercise. Tiyu, as an emancipatory force, helped women to achieve gender equality. Moreover, the link between a strong person and a strong nation was at the forefront of popular consciousness.

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<sup>90</sup> For example, the best-known narrative poem, “Mulan Ci,” tells the story of how Hua Mulan disguises herself into a body and then joins the army in order to relieve her aged father from the obligation of military service. In Beijing opera, a conventional type of character, “wu dan,” refers to women with marvelous physical skill.

<sup>91</sup> See Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995. 224-226. James Riordan and Dong Jinxia, “Chinese Women and Sport,” in James Riordan and Robin Jones eds., *Sport and Physical Education in China*. London: Spon Press, 1999. 171-174.

Women's participation in tiyu in socialist China was both indicative of the much improved social status of women and of their integration into socialist modernization.

Visual attractions associated with sports can also be hazardous. As Xie Jin's contemporary, a well-known film critic Luo Yijun, wrote,

*Woman Basketball Player No. 5* is a film with sports and physical activities as its subject matter. This type of film is inclined to be more entertaining than other [genre] films. However, it is also more susceptible to bad influences. One of the important reasons that bourgeois Rightists ferociously attack the "worker-peasant-soldier direction" and object to regulating the quota of subject matters is that they know films with such subject matters can easily sell their thoughts, distort socialist life, and publicize vulgar capitalist taste.<sup>92</sup>

《女篮 5 号》是一部以体育活动为题材的影片。这种题材本身更富于娱乐性，但也更容易遭受不良倾向的袭击。资产阶级右派之所以那么猛烈地攻击工农兵方向、反对题材比例，重要的原因之一可能是这类题材更便于贩卖他们的私货，歪曲我们的社会生活，宣扬资产阶级庸俗低级的艺术趣味。但《女篮 5 号》的编导却是采取了严肃的态度，运用这样的题材表现出深刻的思想内容，这是 1957 年电影创作中一个可喜的收获。

However, what distinguishes *Woman Basketball Player No.5* from other films seeking to get the audience back to movie theaters, suggests Luo, is that "the screenwriter-director of *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* adopted a serious attitude. He used this subject matter to convey profound thoughts."<sup>93</sup>

The didactic lesson that *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* instructs through its two narrative trajectories is clear: whereas the old tiyu in Republican China is a profit-driven business without any moral improvement, the new tiyu is a socialist enterprise that defends the national honor and cultivates ethically sound athletes. Such a contrast or juxtaposition of the old and the new society/culture is not original to the film. This structure first appeared in the 1950 film *White Haired-Girl* and soon became a common

<sup>92</sup> Yijun 艺军, "On *Woman Basketball Player No.5*" 评《女篮 5 号》 *Newspaper on Arts and Literature* 文艺报 no.2 (1958).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

narrative strategy in many films across different genres during the Seventeen Years. Within the sports film category, *Seasons on Water* 水上春秋 (dir. Xie Tian), a film made two years after *Woman Basketball Player No.5*, uses practically the same narrative pattern and conveys the same political message. *Seasons on Water* portrays the different lives of swimmers from two generations within a Chinese family. In the old China, the father, then a young fisherman, surprisingly surpasses foreign swimmers in a swimming contest. However, after winning the championship, he is beaten up by thugs hired by foreign gamblers who lost a bet. Later on, his patriotic efforts are repeatedly foiled. In the new China, the father, now a coach in a sports school, devotes himself to cultivating good swimmers, including his son. Under favorable training conditions, the son eventually breaks a breaststroke swimming world record and wins honor for the country. *Seasons on Water* was soon to be forgotten while *Woman Basketball Player No.5* has remained a Chinese film classic.

Apparently, ideological messages alone cannot account for a film's appeal. Crucial to understanding the film *Woman Basketball Player No.5* is the question of how the director utilized film to hold emotional sway over the masses in order to influence them ideologically. A truly refreshing aspect of the film is the combination of a touching love story in the subplot with the changing status of tiyu in China. This combination, which introduces into the film a heightened emotionalism, is an articulation of Chinese melodrama that can be traced back to the late seventeen-century traditional music drama *The Peach Blossom Fan* 桃花扇.<sup>94</sup> Here, Christine Gledhill's notion of melodrama as a modality, rather than a structural code of genre, is particularly useful in examining the

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<sup>94</sup> It is one of the highest achievements of Chuanqi, a particular type of Chinese music drama.

connection between Xie Jin's film and Chinese cultural tradition. According to Gledhill, melodrama as a modality is understood as "a culturally conditioned mode of perception and aesthetic articulation."<sup>95</sup> This conceptualization allows a reading of melodrama as a diachronic and pan-generic phenomenon, and further opens up possibilities of analyzing melodramatic sensation of films in different cinematic and cultural traditions.

The entanglement of the public and the private, politics and love have been an object of melodramatic representation over three centuries in China. The early example is *The Peach Blossom Fan* written by Kong Shangren in 1699. This play recounts the demise of the Ming dynasty during the years 1643-46 by focusing on the love story of two actual personages of the time, a Ming loyalist Hou Fangyu and a talented courtesan Li Xiangjun. The fan, which is first given by Hou to Li as a betrothal pledge, and then painted with peach blossom in Li's own blood, attests to Li's devotion to love and brings out a set of attitudes in late Ming politics and cultural life that contributed to the downfall of the late Ming. *The Peach Blossom Fan* is a very affective play. As some of Kong's contemporaries comment, "Where the play records actual events, one is seized with emotion. Where emotion becomes exhausted, one suddenly sees the Way."<sup>96</sup> Reading the climatic scene where a Taoist priest forces the lovers apart forever to become a monk and a nun, some readers write down their responses, "Now crying, now laughing, fearing that the root of sadness cannot be pulled out. Chang the Taoist gives three hearty laughs.

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<sup>95</sup> Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in Gledhill and Linda Williams eds, *Reinventing Film Studies*, London: Arnold Press, 2000. 225. Rather than reifying melodrama as a genre that targets women, revisionist works on melodrama see it a response to the rise of modern capitalism and particularly emphasize its appetite for action-based sensationalism. See Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

<sup>96</sup> Lynn A. Struve, "History and *the Peach Blossom Fan*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 2, no.1 (Jan., 1980), 55-72.

From this point, Heaven and Earth become tranquil.”<sup>97</sup> By projecting past actuality into an imaginary world, the play incites collective memory and exercises a sense of immediate and personal participation. Moreover, the play uses the pathos experienced by the lovers to demonstrate contradictory forces of history and utilizes moral polarization to interpret historical events. All these are important melodramatic elements of *The Peach Blossom Fan*. Since the play depicts the inevitable tragedy of a great dynasty’s demise, it produces a paradoxical psychological response: the play elicits strong emotions yet discourages over-involvement in sensation and emotion. In the end, the play produces an effect of catharsis: it helps the audience to cope with the otherwise unbearable reality.

Chinese melodrama, as is set by *The Peach Blossom Fan*, is a perception of history from the perspective of fluctuating romance as well as an articulation of historical contradiction through moral polarization. It apparently leaps centuries and media, and finds its expression in Xie Jin’s film *Woman Basketball Player No.5*. What is remarkable about the film is that Xie Jin adds an official ideological spin to the popular melodramatic imagination. The lovers, Tian Zhenhua and Lin Jie, are pulled apart by intrigues and lies. These intrigues and lies clearly illustrate the old tiyu in the way which the CCP reconstructed it. Take a flashback sequence for example: compelled by circumstances, Lin Jie pawns her jewelry and Tian’s gold medal from the Far East Sports Games in order to pay hospitalization expenses for Tian. The evil suitor of Lin redeemed the gold medal and then gives it to Boss Lin, who treats basketball players in his sports club as mere money-generating devices. When Boss Lin shows up in the hospital with the medal and money, he falsely claims that his daughter wanted to give the medal back to Tian and insinuates that she would marry someone else soon. Heartbroken, Tian takes off the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 67.

engagement ring and asks Boss Lin to return it to Lin Jie. In this way, the film not only depicts tiyu in Republican China as a commercialized business that only benefits capitalists. It also enacts a battle between good and evil.

The permutation of Chinese melodrama, as manifested in *Woman Basketball Player No.5*, also includes the use of the family as a trope in popularizing the official ideology and in reconciling the discrepancy between the visual prominence of female athletes and a rather passive narrative function they occupy. Rather than stressing domesticity, the trope of family in the Chinese melodramatic imagination brings out Confucian values, including the importance of patriarchal order and family union. The trope of the family that is latent in the film lends it the persuasiveness of official ideology, propelling the film narrative, and grabbing the audience's attention.

Take the depiction of the young player No.5, Lin Xiaojie for instance. Xiaojie is a talented yet immature athlete. She lacks self-discipline and seeks spotlight. She weavers between pursuing sports and going to college. In short, she is relegated to the position of a candidate waiting to be enlightened about the socialist cause. Her imperfection necessitates the raising of her consciousness by her male coach. In other words, despite the fact that female athletes are celebrated as incarnations of the New Physical Culture, their positions as self-directed agents of action are undermined.

Within the film narrative, the collective endeavor of young women basketball players to rectify Xiaojie's wayward behaviors turns futile. It is Coach Tian's recount of his personal experience which fuses the nationalist feelings of sports and individual pathos that eventually enlightens Xiaojie to the importance of sports. In a meeting with all women basketball players, Coach Tian tells the following story:

When I was young, I knew an athlete who represented his country in an international competition. But foreigners *laughed* at him. They thought it was funny that the Chinese “Sick Man of East Asia” was going to take part in a *sports* competition. Reporters wanted him to take off his shirt so they could take pictures of him bare-chested. At the time he didn’t get it, but later he realized that they weren’t insulting him, they were insulting our country, our people. . . . He won a championship for China. [Coach Tian is holding a medal in his hand. . . . He puts the medal on his desk.] But the China of those days had no use for that. . . . To survive, he sold out. He went to work for a team owner to play ball and make advertisements. He was no better than a performing animal in a circus. [ . . . ] Now he is the coach of a girls’ basketball team. And he isn’t doing such a good job. . . . Things are different for your generation. Every second, every moment of your lives is blessed. But some of you don’t understand how precious your good fortune is.<sup>98</sup>

As soon as the coach finishes his words, Xiaojie’s eyes are welled with tears. Here, the masculine political discourse of tiyu is skillfully weaved into a paternal figure’s first-person narration and appears all the more convincing and affective.

Another obstacle that prevents Xiaojie from devoting herself to sports is cleared after her mother gives her approval to pursue sports. This occurs after the reunion of Lin Jie and Tian Zhenhua. When Lin Jie happens to hear Tian’s passionate speech about sports, she realizes that her former lover remains the same admirable person. When they converse with each other, she finds out that their separation was caused by sordid intrigues in the past, and thus clears her misunderstanding of Tian and changes her unfavorable opinion of pursuing sports.

What Xie Jin first explored in *Woman Basketball Player No.5* later evolves into his signature style: a political melodrama that equates socialist revolutionary ethics with Confucian ethics, which is recognizable by common people.<sup>99</sup> The emotional power of

<sup>98</sup> For translation of the entire film script, visit <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/moran.htm>

<sup>99</sup> Yin Hong 尹鸿, “Xie Jin and His Model of Political Melodrama – With a Comment on Xie Jin’s Film Productions in the 1990s” 谢晋和他的政治/伦理情节剧模式 – 兼及谢晋 90 年代的电影创作, in *Film Critiques by Yin Hong* 尹鸿影视时评, Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2002. 187-208. What is

the political melodrama climaxes in a scene near the end of *Woman Basketball Player No.5* in which Xie Jin's masterful use of montage achieves the effect of what Eisenstein calls the "synchronization of senses."<sup>100</sup> This scene depicts the farewell ceremony for athletes who will soon leave China to compete overseas. As Lin Jie hurriedly enters the auditorium where the ceremony is held, the solemn Chinese national anthem "March of the Volunteers" just starts. As the national anthem begins to crescendo, Lin Jie sees assembled athletes dressed in bright red sportswear standing by the Chinese national-flag. Identifying with Lin's gaze, a medium shot that pans right to left shows athletes in the first row one by one. Golden national emblems stitched on bright red sportswear appear exceptionally eye-catching. Then Lin's gaze pauses on Coach Tian. His face is clearly flushed with excitement. The visual and the aural now form a vertical correspondence to reveal a strong nationalist feeling. When the camera draws back to Lin Jie, a melodic music replaces the national anthem leisurely. A series of events in the past start to flash in front of her eyes: a young Tian showing her the right way to throw the ball into the basket; a sweet moment shared by the lovers; Tian knocked down by thugs after the Chinese basketball team defeated its foreign opponent. A storm of applause suddenly jolts Lin Jie awake. Majestic background music blares. Now she sees many cheerful young female athletes decorating Coach Tian with their medals. The scene ends with Lin Jie extending her congratulations to Coach Tian. The entire scene can be seen as a polyphonic montage as various segments of the scene interweave different themes into a unified political idea: physical culture and sports strengthen and develop the nation. In

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commonly referred to as the Xie Jin model of filmmaking represents the achievements of a whole cinematic generation.

<sup>100</sup> Sergei M. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. 1975. 69-112.

addition, various emotions shown in those segments, including excitement, pathos, national pride and joy, together contribute to producing an uplifting feeling -- a feeling that urges one to participate in the New Physical Culture for the promising new socialist nation.

### ***Big Li, Young Li and Old Li: The Montage of Attractions***

Xie Jin's second sports film *Big Li, Young Li and Old Li* illuminates another important aspect of the New Physical Culture, namely, promoting mass sport and improving mass fitness. Taking place in a meat-processing factory, the film revolves around Big Li's effort to propagate mass sports activities among workers, regardless of their age or gender. It exhibits a particular mode of attraction that does not tap on emotion but draws on vaudeville.

Here, the notion of "mass sports" needs clarification. In the West, mass sports refer to large scale professional games that draw a large number of spectators. As American historian and cultural critic Lewis Mumford stated in 1934, "one may define [mass sports] as those forms of organized play in which the spectator is more important than the player, and in which a good part of the meaning is lost when the game is played for itself."<sup>101</sup> Mumford further defined mass sports primarily as spectacles, emphasizing the importance of spectators in constructing the social meaning of mass sports. Today, Mumford's view on mass sports is still pertinent. Mass sports have drawn spectators on a grander scale, thanks to the construction and expansion of stadiums, the convenience of long distance transportation, as well as television and internet broadcasting. Moreover,

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<sup>101</sup> Mumford, Lewis, "sport and the 'Bitch-goddess,'" *Technics and Civilization*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1934. 303.

with an increasing use of mass media in planning, producing and reproducing sports events, mass sports are even greater spectacles in the sense that they have become mediated spectacles, targeted for mass entertainment and consumption.<sup>102</sup> In fact, mass sports have become an entire industry, including sport tie-ins such as clothing lines and toys, TV channels, books, magazines, and etc. In Mao's China, however, mass sport referred to sports and exercise popularized for and practiced by the masses in their working units, schools and various organizations. It was the opposite of professional sports; and it differed greatly from spectator or consumption-based mass sports in Western culture.

Different from the majority of sports films of its time, *Big Li, Young Li and Old Li* focuses on the conflict between the love and distaste for physical exercise, instead of the tension between individualism and collectivism. Considering that the film was made in 1963, it is clear that this new thematic focus on mass sport in the sports film was a response to an urgent societal demand for fitness and even for a steady supply of workers. In the preceding three years, natural disasters and severe famine on the mainland had heavily afflicted the Chinese people. Consequently, the development of sports and exercise drastically slowed down. As the economic situation stabilized and living conditions gradually recovered in 1962, mass fitness became a major concern for the Party and an essential component of rejuvenating sports and exercise. Thus, while the sports film continued to be made in the early 1960s, nationalistic and patriotic discourse linking individual athletes to the national cause became subdued.

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<sup>102</sup> It is indispensable to think about the role that media plays in the communications of sports. Recent scholarships on sports and society well manifest this trend. See Lawrence A Wenner, *Media, Sports, and Society*, London: Sage Publications, 1989; Bradley Schultz, *Sports Media: Reporting, Producing, and Planning*, Focal Press, 2005.

The film title suggests a possible family lineage and kinship among Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li. Thus, these three characters may represent a larger Chinese populace. Moreover, the film employs generational differences to map out the complex interrelations among “the residual, the emergent and the dominant” within the New Physical Culture. According to Raymond Williams, “the dominant” is the hegemonic meanings and values in current culture; “the residual” refers to the distilled residues of the lived experience of a community that are still active in the present cultural process; and “the emergent” are new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship that are continually being created yet not fully articulated.<sup>103</sup> These concepts call attention to fissures in the New Physical Culture and remind one that even a social campaign launched by the authoritarian state still involves a constant negotiation of contesting cultural forces. Addressing the residual, the emergent, and the dominant cultural forces in the New Physical Culture, *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li* creates various characters with which the audience can easily identify, and thus functions as an important tool in persuading the audience into participating in mass sports.

Within the film narrative, Young Li is a hot-tempered and restless sports activist. His colleague, Big Li, is a middle-aged man poor in health. Due to a lack of exercise, his rheumatism accurately predicts the weather. Hence, he is nicknamed “weather station.” Old Li is the father of Young Li and the head of a factory workshop. He stubbornly refuses to take part in sports and exercise because, to him, it seems frivolous and inappropriate for his age, and a distraction from socialist production. These excuses are simply disguises of a residual element from the past, the entrenched Confucian notion of revering the literary and despising the martial. Repeatedly, Old Li foils Young Li’s

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<sup>103</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. 128-135.

attempts to organize an exercise regimen for the workers. Old Li's ally, an obese worker nicknamed "Hercules," is another stubborn opponent of physical activities. Only after Big Li becomes the organizer of the workers' sports activities and promotes mass sports with unflagging patience and moderate means do Old Li and Hercules begin to take interest in sports and exercises.

Distinctive to Chinese sports films, *Big Li, Old Li, and Young Li* reflects upon the breadth of media technologies involved in propagating the New Physical culture. Visual indexes of these media technologies abound in the film, including radio broadcasting and propaganda posters. The film references these technologies in order to disseminate the official vision of physical culture, propel individuals to enhance their awareness of physical fitness, and encourage them to adopt preferred attitude toward exercise. The use of these media not only constitutes the film's narrative, but also lends the viewer some ideas of persuasion techniques. A good example is the sequence where Big Li and his son use propaganda posters to persuade their wife/mother into getting involved in exercises.

Big Li's wife, Xiu Mei, is reluctant to do exercises simply because she feels it is inappropriate to her as a mother of five children and as a hardworking worker. In order to change Xiu Mei's attitude and excite her interest in sports and exercise, Big Li bought several wall posters of athletic women in a bookstore. Once he returns home, he hangs them up. Point-of-view shots call attention to two posters. The first one features woman cyclists. Its caption reads, "A good hand at production and a top-notch player in sports." Visually and textually, this poster pinpoints an ideal social role for woman in public space. Its failure to address the conflict between women's domestic roles and their public

roles weakens its persuasive power for Xiu Mei. The second poster is the one that Big Li's third son suggests that he hang on the wall. It shows a woman tying her shoelaces with her son standing nearby. The caption reads, "Mother goes to do exercise!" When Xiu Mei steps into the room, the camera, identifying with her gaze, zooms in on this poster until it fills the whole frame. Thereby, the message of the propaganda poster, as the boy's unspoken words, becomes an integral part of the film narrative.

Seeing Xiu Mei still unconvinced by the posters, Big Li begins to read a piece of news to her. The news goes, "Wu Xiangmei, a young woman worker and mother of three kids has won fourth place in a recent National Women's Bicycle Competition." Big Li says to his wife, "She has even become a national athlete. This is really amazing!" To address Xiu Mei's dilemma, Big Li continues to read the following paragraph, "By doing exercise, she not only keeps herself fit, but also works more efficiently. Recently she has been elected as a model worker." The official message of *tiyu* is clear: Playing sports and doing exercise are not detrimental to socialist work. Instead, they help one become a competitive and productive socialist worker. However, this message now disguises itself as news. It also becomes the husband's concern for his wife. As Big Li reveals his intention to Xiu Mei, "All [that I have done] is for your good sake. If you know how to ride bicycle, it would be more convenient for you to go to work."

Though mass sports denote communal activities, *Big Li, Young Li and Old Li* does not delve into issues such as membership in the community. Neither does the film focus on developing individual characters. Instead, with an underlying concern for fitness, the film highlights the pleasure found in and the benefits derived from exercising one's body.

How can this sports film, which lacks individual heroes with invincible physical skills, attract the audience and further prompt them to engage in physical activities? Different from Chinese martial arts films whose spectacular attractions are derived from either choreographed martial movements or the actor's marvelous physical feats, *Big Li*, *Young Li*, and *Old Li*'s attractions come from the director's brilliant appropriation of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions."

Eisenstein first conceived "montage of attractions" in his theatrical experiment in the hope of freeing the theater from being an illusionist representation, or a product of traditional, bourgeois culture. As he writes, montage of attractions is "free montage of arbitrarily selected independent (also outside of the given composition and the plot links of the characters) effects (attractions) but with a view to establishing a certain final thematic effect."<sup>104</sup> In theatrical practice, Eisenstein turned what had formerly been considered secondary and ornamental, such as the use of clowns, into primary in order to induce dynamic energy and produce an instant effective attraction. This instant attraction calls the audience's attention to pure theatricality, and thus negates the conventional, illusionist theater. In essence, the conception of "montage of attractions" illuminates that the attraction of "surface" can be a subversive force to the traditional representational-narrative theater.

Eisenstein's early theory of the "montage of attractions" proved a greater appeal than his more mature theory of intellectual montage to Chinese filmmakers and critics. There are some specific historical reasons. Eisenstein's masterpiece *October*, for instance, best illustrates his innovative experiments of intellectual montage, a film form informed by the Hegelian dialectic. In this film, Eisenstein uses the "collision" of

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<sup>104</sup> Eisenstein, "Montage of Attractions," 79.

unrelated shots to agitate the audience and provoke them to reach a political argument. In reality, these formal innovations may have frustrated audiences. Highly influenced by Soviet authority's criticisms of Eisenstein's "intellectual cinema," Chinese intellectuals were well aware of excessive "formalist mistakes" that Eisenstein made, including "substituting images with abstract concepts," making "abstruse puzzles," and the "anti-realist tendency."<sup>105</sup> When introducing and translating Eisenstein's film theories, they intentionally left out Eisenstein's essays on intellectual cinema.<sup>106</sup> Such cautions against excessive formalism led Chinese filmmakers to seek much less radical means to create a cinema of attractions for the masses.

Not surprisingly, Chinese filmmakers turned to Eisenstein's early works for inspiration. They showed great interest in the theatrical techniques of vaudeville that Eisenstein stressed in his essay "montage of attractions." The Chinese translation of Eisenstein's essay "Montage of Attractions" in fact adopted "Montage of Vaudeville" (杂耍蒙太奇) as its title.<sup>107</sup> In film practice, Chinese filmmakers demonstrated their own understanding of "montage of attractions." They employed the techniques of vaudeville to complement the film narrative and excite dynamic energy, -- which is far from Eisenstein's original conception: using vaudeville to produce eccentric effect and to alienate the audience from the illusionist narrative. The film *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li* is a good illustration.

<sup>105</sup> Textbooks of Soviet cinema written in the Stalin era reflected such criticisms. When these books were translated into Chinese, these views continued to influence Chinese filmmakers. See Yu Hong 俞虹, "Intellectual Cinema: the Cornerstone of the Edifice of Eisenstein's Film Theory" 理性电影-爱森斯坦电影理论大厦的第一块基石, *World Cinema* 世界电影 no.6 (1988): 93-112.

<sup>106</sup> *Selected Essays of Eisenstein* is a Chinese translation of the book under the same title edited by С.М.Эйзенштейн 尤列涅夫. However, the Chinese versions did not collect any articles on intellectual cinema. See *Selected Essays of Eisenstein* 爱森斯坦论文选集, trans. Wei Bianshi, et al. 魏边实 Beijing: China Film Press 北京: 中国电影出版社, 1962.

<sup>107</sup> See Yu Hong, "Intellectual Cinema," 98.

Compared to *Woman Basketball Player No.5*, the attractions of *Big Li*, *Young Li*, and *Old Li* are closely linked with the aesthetics of vaudeville, namely, enthralling audiences with theatricality, variety, and virtuosity. For instance, the physiques of major characters form comic contrast to each other. In the meantime, these obese, athletic, and skinny body types serve the ideological goal of the film in that they remind the audience of the importance of exercising one's body.

In *Big Li*, *Young Li*, and *Old Li*, the montage of attractions is at once a self-contained theatrical segment that directs attention to the body or bodily performance and constitutes the building blocks of the film narrative. The sequence in which Big Li leads his fellow workers to do work-break exercise, *guangbocao* (calisthenics set to broadcast music), is a good case in point. Showing *guangbocao* was the director's calculated choice, for it not only responded to the political need to promote mass sports, but also was emblematic of the worker fitness movement at the time.<sup>108</sup> First choreographed by the State Physical Education and Sports Commission of China (SPESC) in November 1951, *guangbocao* was an easy-to-learn calisthenics that exercises all body parts including muscles and joints to enhance metabolism and improve constitution. To popularize *guangbocao*, the SPESC made several revisions and updates and promoted it through national administration bodies.<sup>109</sup>

This sequence in *Big Li*, *Young Li*, and *Old Li* has its peculiar charm. It starts with a close-up shot of a loudspeaker blaring *guangbocao* music. While standing in the playground, factory workers, the infirmary doctor, and the barber begin to exchange

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<sup>108</sup> According to Shirley Reekie's research, from 1949 to 1979, there were more than twenty sports associations for state employees with 36,000 branches and more than 4 million members. See Shirley Reekie, "Mass Fitness" in James Riordan and Robin Jones eds., *Sport and Physical Education in China*, London: Routledge, 1999. 244.

<sup>109</sup> The SPESC designed different versions of *guangbocao* targeted to children and adults.

words of doubt about Big Li's capability. As Big Li starts demonstrating *guangbocao*, workers gradually pick up the moves. In contrast to athletic Xiao Li who is earnest and a fast-learner, "Hercules" reluctantly lifts his arms and clumsily moves his body to the wrong direction, a direction always opposite to Xiao Li's. Just as workers begin to compliment Big Li's flawless movements and earnestly follow his demonstration, the sequence adds burlesque twists to Big Li's actions. Since Big Li learned *guangbocao* from a shop girl the night before, he mistakes the girl's throwing back her two long braids as a move within *guangbocao* and passes it to his fellow workers. When demonstrating the next section of *guangbocao*, Big Li lifts his knee and then hold the knee with his hands – these simple moves are in fact moves in children's *guangbocao*, which Big Li unwittingly picked up from his son.

Instead of presenting uniformed, rhythmic, and precise bodily movements, the above-mentioned sequence uses incongruous bodily movements and burlesque acts to produce an effect of kinetic energy. The playground where factory workers practice *guangbocao* suddenly becomes a space full of spectacle and fun. The sequence is a self-sufficient attraction because of the spectacle it presents and the energy it elicits. Integral to the film narrative, it is also a turning point where previously disinterested Big Li becomes an ardent sports activist, an unexpected result of being selected by Old Li and Hercules as the head of factory sports club.

*Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li* also turns different techniques of propagating mass sports into the montage of attractions and comment on the effect that such attractions produce. The episode in which Young Li follows Big Li and uses posters to persuade Old Li is an excellent montage of attractions. When Old Li reaches home, he waves his

hand, but soon discovers that what greets him back is a door poster that features a sturdy girl wearing a big smile and waving her hand. When he opens the door, a muscular male runner jumps into his sight. He closes the door, and sees another poster showing an agile female gymnast. Soon Old Li finds him surrounded by a roomful of posters showing sportive characters. Irritated, he sits down and pours himself a cup of tea. Immediately, he sees the image of a girl holding a basketball printed on the teapot. Taking up a fan on the desk, Old Li tries to cool himself down. When he waves the fan, an illusion of motion starts: the gymnast, a picture that is sewn into the fan, seems to start dancing. When Old Li finally sees this image, he is totally annoyed and cannot do anything but go to bed. Much fascination of this sequence comes from those ornamental sports posters as well as the responses that they induce in Old Li. With various themes and different characters, these posters not only present themselves as a visual attraction, but also represent a wide range of achievements in the socialist tiyu. Chaotically scattered all over the room, these posters produce burlesque effect, but do not appeal to Big Li. However, physical and psychological responses that result from these visual pressures are evident. Old Li impatiently paces around the room, waves his fan, and even has an urge to spank Xiao Li. Miscalculated, Xiaoli's using posters does not achieve the intended goal, but push Old Li to the opposite of movements and exercises -- passively lying on the bed.

The above episode is echoed by another scene where Big Li invites Old Li and Hercules to the Center of Sports and Recreation. The Center of Sports of Reaction has the typical vaudeville setting. As major characters, Big Li, Young Li, Old Li and Hercules walk in and out of different rooms in the center, the film exhibits a variety of

mass sport competitions and activities, including ping-pong, wrestling, calisthenics, weightlifting, and Tai-ji quan.<sup>110</sup> Within the film narrative, variety and virtuosity become major attractions for these characters. After watching several sports, Old Li finally finds himself attracted to Tai-ji quan. The stubborn sports opponent, Hercules, is excited about heavyweight lifting. As soon as the heavy weight sportsman lifts the barbell overhead, Hercules gives a big applause to his virtuosity. Watching a wrestling competition, Xiao Li is so engaged that he clenches his girlfriend's hand as if he is wrestling with his opponent. This scene itself is another appealing segment that highlights spectacular bodily performances and invites the viewer to be an engaged participants in sports.

Overall, *Big Li, Young Li, and Old Li* employs a unique means to propagate sports and exercise. The film practice of montage of vaudeville reveals and relies on the Chinese conceptualization of subject, that is, a holistic entity of the physical, the intellectual, and the moral. Sports and exercise are not merely bodily techniques that one brings upon himself. They are an essential step in cultivating physically fit and ethically sound socialist subjects. Similar, a film that affects the audience physically can potentially have a great impact on the audience's ideological-orientation.

## **Conclusion**

As a constituent as well as a product of the New Physical Culture Movement, discourses of tiyu, whether circulated in print or on screen, reveal a new implication of “strengthening the body for the nation.” In early twentieth century China, strengthening the body was essential to rescuing and rejuvenating the nation; in Mao's China, playing sports was intended to mould citizens into good socialist beings. Together with physical

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<sup>110</sup> Tai ji quan is a slow-paced traditional physical activity.

practices, the discourse of tiyu at this time became a regulatory force for forming these socialist subjects. Through adopting a preferred attitude toward physical action, learning a set of physical skills, and acquiring knowledge of the New Physical Culture, one could reform oneself into a competitive, productive socialist worker who embraces the spirit of collectivism.

The sports film produced during the Seventeen Years was a modernized genre in Chinese socialist cinema. It propelled the development of the New Physical Culture Movement and intensified the existing trends of adopting physical practices as habitual practices in everyday life. It perpetuated the CCP's vision of the New Physical Culture by teaching the audience two lessons. First, the New Physical Culture cultivates athletes who are sound in body and mind. Second, participating in sports and physical culture is crucial for mass fitness. Playing sports helps construct healthy, competitive, and productive socialist workers. The sports film not only externalized the intended interiorization of adopting physical practices. By utilizing traditional and popular sensibilities, devices, and techniques, it provoked the audience into participating in the New Physical Culture.

## Building a Multi-National Nation: Performing Ethnicity on a Socialist Stage

国家之本，在于人民。合汉、满、蒙、回、藏诸地为一国，即和汉、满、蒙、回、藏为一人。是曰民族统一。

--孙中山 1912

The foundation of a nation is its people. Integrating the territories of the Han, the Manchu, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Tibetans into one state would also unify the Han, the Manchu, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Tibetans into one people. This is the unity of nation.

--Sun Zongshan 1912<sup>111</sup>

我们要诚心诚意地积极帮助少数民族发展经济建设和文化建设。……我们必须搞好汉族和少数民族的关系，巩固各民族的团结，来共同建设伟大的社会主义祖国。

--毛泽东 1956

We must sincerely and actively help the minority nationalities develop their economy and culture. ...We must foster good relations between Han Chinese and the minority nationalities and strengthen the unity of all nationalities in a common endeavor to build our great socialist motherland.

--Mao Zedong 1956<sup>112</sup>

The CCP's project of constructing socialist subjects went far beyond transforming the physical dimensions of Chinese citizens. It also involved reconstituting China's multi-ethnic peoples into a single socialist citizenry. The Party's political calculus of subjects not only calls attention to the dialectic of multiplicity and singularity, pluralism

<sup>111</sup> Sun Zongshan, also known as Sun Yat-sen, is seen as the Father of the Republic of China. See Sun Zongshan 孙中山, "Declaration of the Provisional President"临时大总统宣言书, *The Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan* 孙中山全集, vol.2, 2. Beijing: Zhonghua Shu Ju, 1982.

<sup>112</sup> Mao Zedong, "On the Ten Major Relationships" 论十大关系, in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol.5 毛泽东选集第五卷, Beijing: People's Press 北京人民出版社.

and universalism. It also poses the questions of how the Party conceived, produced, and mobilized collective identities such as ethnicity and what was the extent and composite of collectivity at the time when collectivism prevailed.

With respect to denominating and producing a collective identity, nation, race and ethnicity often prove to be useful concepts. Additionally, discourses of nation, race, and ethnicity are inextricably intertwined. In Raymond Williams' *Keywords*, "nation" is defined in terms of race. Not only did "nation" strongly suggest racial grouping in the early usage of this English word, but also the awareness of nation as a racial unit and the concomitant claims of national rights likewise contributed to the political formation of the nation-state.<sup>113</sup> In a slightly different way, Etienne Balibar proposes that the constitution of the people as a fictively ethnic unity is indispensable to furnishing specificities to the otherwise abstract idea of the nation, a political entity, and that the production of ethnic unity relies heavily on the supposedly immanent racial qualities to be found in people.<sup>114</sup> Anti-colonial movements on the global scale, intra-national anti-racist movements, and their derivative discourses further call attention to what Balibar suggests as the reciprocal relationship between nationalism and racism.<sup>115</sup>

As social groupings, nation, race, and ethnicity overlap. As analytical categories, they create certain theoretical confusions. The relationship between the concepts of race and ethnicity is highly contested. Some sociologists claim that ethnicity is an overarching term that subsumes race.<sup>116</sup> Others intend to maintain the distinction

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<sup>113</sup> Raymond Williams. *Keywords*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

<sup>114</sup> Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, New York: Verso, 1988, 96.

<sup>115</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> This view echoed by Paul Gilroy, John Lie, and Orlando Patterson for a different reason. These scholars challenge the distinction between race and ethnicity mainly because they regard these practices as vain and mistaken attempts to subdivide humankind.

between ethnicity and race while at the same time conceding that they overlap in some circumstances. As Stephen Cornell and Douglas Harmann suggest, ethnic groups are predicated upon such notions as an imputed common origin, shared historical experiences, and symbolic identity markers. Racial groups, meanwhile, are mainly defined by presumed physical and biological differences. However, the boundary between ethnicity and race is not clear-cut, for some alleged ethnic markers are not free from physical associations.<sup>117</sup> Still other sociologists contend that race and ethnicity are two analytically distinct categories. For instance, Immanuel Wallerstein suggests that race and ethnicity are based on different cleavages and units in the capitalist world-system. Race is predicated on a core-periphery split at the systematic level while ethnicity is premised upon an affinity that “mythically predates the current economic and political scene”; race is an “international status-group,” which goes beyond constraints of phenotype and becomes “an international class category,”<sup>118</sup> while ethnicity contains a “solidarity overriding those defined in class or ideological terms.”<sup>119</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva justifies the distinction between race and ethnicity by historicizing these two concepts. He asserts that race is the product of colonial encounters dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, whereas ethnicity is connected to nation-state formation in the late eighteenth century. He further distinguishes between the two by foregrounding the issues of power relations and social belonging. Specifically, race is to be seen as imposed from the outside by hegemonic groups as a rationale for excluding groups. In

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<sup>117</sup> For example, Max Weber calls ethnic groups “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both, or because of memories of colonization or migration.” See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1978, 389.

<sup>118</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, 199.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

contrast, ethnicity is a result of a group's voluntary endeavor to claim their distinctiveness.<sup>120</sup> Despite diverse theoretical approaches, analytical accounts of nation, race and ethnicity fundamentally concern conceptualizing differences and similarities between and within social groups, as well as the political implication of such conceptualizations at both national and international levels, and at a specific historic moment.

Strangely, although there was no lack of discourses of nation, race, and ethnicity in the context of China, these concepts seldom provided a framework for analyzing the collective experiences of state-building in China. Moreover, considering the persistent misassumption that China is a state composed of an ethnically homogenous population,<sup>121</sup> an examination of how nation, race, and ethnicity jointly shape and mark certain social imaginaries of the nation-state is imperative. One may argue that there exist distinctive discourses of nation, race, and ethnicity in China. Nevertheless, all three of these concepts are constitutive to the Chinese discourse of *minzu* (民族).<sup>122</sup> Composed of *min* (people) and *zu* (lineage), the compound word “*minzu*” is a highly slippery term. Functioning as a dominant organizing concept in social groupings and a key theme of collective identity in China, it evokes a range of different meanings, such as “people,” “nation,” “nationality,” “ethnicity,” “ethos,” and so on.

<sup>120</sup> See Peter Kivisto, *Multiculturalism in a Global Society*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. 15.

<sup>121</sup> Eric Hobsbawm's remark in *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* also reconfirms this mistaken assumption. He lists China, Korea, and Japan as a few of the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 66.

<sup>122</sup> It is contestable that these three concepts hold theoretical validity as distinctive analytical categories. For example, Frank Dikötter attempts to construct the genealogy of the racial discourse in China in his book *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). Criticisms of the work hold that Dikötter ignores the difference between Western notion of race and Chinese cultural constructs of *zu*, *zhong*, and *minzu*, and treats many Chinese cultural discourses as racist discourses indiscreetly. In addition to the imposition of Western theories of race to the Chinese context, the problem could also be the assumption that race is a useful distinctive category to analyze Chinese multi-culturalism.

Even though physical attributes factor in demarcating diverse *minzu* such as Man 蛮, Yi 夷, Di 狄, and Rong 戎,<sup>123</sup> biological differences are far less important than socio-cultural divergences in configuring the traditional Han-centric Chinese ethnic universe. Specifically, the Han Chinese who constituted a majority of the Chinese population claimed social, cultural and economic superiority. The “Han civilizing project” further consolidated the Han’s centrality by relegating non-Han ethnic groups to the position of ethnic minorities, to the periphery of Confucian civilization, and to the margin of the feudal Chinese empire.<sup>124</sup> Due to the uneven social, cultural and political power relations between Han and non-Han ethnic groups, this center/periphery dichotomy was produced, reinforced, and perpetuated throughout Imperial China. To a certain degree, Han-ethnocentrism, a vision of a hierarchical structure of different ethnic groups, informed the imperial rulers’ statecraft in governing ethnically diverse people spread out over an immense territory.

It was not until the turn of the twentieth century, when the colonial powers encroached on China, that the discourse of *minzu* underwent dramatic historical permutation and became increasingly important to building a modern China. Emerging intellectual interests in the Western theory of race and renewed social interests in Han-ethnocentrism formed the two foci of the discursive practice of *minzu*, which provided much incentive for China’s anti-colonial movements and republican revolution. Social anxieties over whether China could keep its political and cultural autonomy most

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<sup>123</sup> These are specific Chinese names for the various regional tribe groups. All these names connote “barbarians.”

<sup>124</sup> According to Stevan Harrell, ethnic minorities were an effect of a civilizing project initiated by the Han. Stevan Harrell, *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.

tellingly revealed themselves in questions formulated in terms of racial preservation and ethnic essence.

It is noticeable that with the introduction of Western medical theories and social Darwinism, the Western theory of race became an important theme in public discourses in late nineteenth-century China.<sup>125</sup> In addition to emphasizing the dual meaning of race as both type and lineage, late Qing intellectuals adeptly appropriated the evolutionary narrative of human races to alarm the Chinese populace of the potential loss of the country and the subsequent extinction of the Chinese nation, thereby exciting anti-colonial movements that aimed to “save the country and preserve the race” (救国保种).<sup>126</sup> By interpreting China’s encounter with the colonial powers as a part of the broader struggle between races rather than as a confrontation between different political-economic systems, these emerging racial discourses introduced the Chinese populace to a world-system that departed widely from the sinocentric universe. In the meantime, these discourses suggested that the enterprise of nation-building was implicated in the production of knowledge about racialized subjects from the start.

Chinese intellectuals’ increasingly heightened racial awareness also enabled them to reconfigure China’s independence movement as a part of a regional effort to counter global unevenness, and to seek political alliances within the same race. For instance, in a speech made in Japan in 1895, the well-known Chinese nationalist Sun Yat-sen deployed

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<sup>125</sup> Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Huang zunxian, and Yan Fu had various accounts on race, which were scattered in their political propositions of pan-Asianism and internal political reforms. For their specific accounts of race, see Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*.

<sup>126</sup> John Fitzgerald argues that the potential loss of the country, which is linked to the model of linear progress, implied a far greater threat than the downfall of a dynasty in Chinese dynastic circles. While the people survive the death of a particular dynasty, the loss of China to colonial powers summoned up morbid fears of genocide. See John Fitzgerald, “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no.33. 1995, 75-104. See also Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*.

the rhetoric of the yellow race to advocate his republican revolution in China. In particular, he emphasized an affective bond of East Asian nations that was derived from their common experience of racial humiliation by Western colonialists. “[The Chinese revolution] is to help the Asian yellow race and to make a contribution to universal humanism. ... [It] is to save four hundred million Chinese people, to wipe out a humiliation imposed on the yellow race in the East Asia, and to recover and protect peace and humanity in the world.” (为亚洲黄种, 为世界人道而尽力 .....拯救中国四亿苍生, 雪除亚东黄种人的耻辱, 恢复和维护世界的和平和人道。)<sup>127</sup> Though it is not uncommon that the sense of racial distinctiveness and solidarity fueled many nationalist movements in the world, it is unique that the Chinese nationalist cause relied so heavily on racial identification on a transnational scale. Undoubtedly, such identification propelled China’s anti-colonial movements forward and helped create a sophisticated sense of the relationship between the global and the national.

However, building a modern China involved not merely striving for national independence. It also called for the overthrow of a perennial imperial system and especially Manchu rule. As Rebecca Karl suggests, Chinese nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century consolidated itself through a narrowing process in which “a global expansive or internationalist moment of identification (1895-1905)” gradually reduced to “a conceptualization of racial-ethnic revolution in pursuit of state power (1905-1911).”<sup>128</sup>

A popular nationalist slogan “Expelling barbarians, Restoring *Zhonghua*” (驱除鞑虏, 恢复

<sup>127</sup> See Shang Minxuan 尚明轩, “Theory and Practice of Sun Zhongshan’s Thoughts on Reviving Asia” 孙中山的振兴亚洲思想与实践, in Xu Wanmin 徐万民 ed. *Anthology of Studies on Sun Zhongshan* 孙中山研究论集: 纪念辛亥革命九十年, Beijing: Beijing Library Press 北京:北京图书馆出版社, 2001. 242

<sup>128</sup> Karl, Rebecca E. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 3.

中华)<sup>129</sup> most succinctly summarized this conceptualization of racial-ethnic revolution. The phrase itself was explicitly Han-ethnocentric in both geographical and racial/ethnic senses. Strictly speaking, “barbarians” referred to the Manchu, a non-Han ethnic group who originated from northeast China and were the ruler of the Qing Empire.<sup>130</sup> Broadly speaking, this derogatory term referred to people who were outside of Confucian culture. In contrast, “*zhonghua*” (中华) indicated both the region originally inhabited by the Han Chinese and the people who belong to the Sino-linguistic and cultural community.<sup>131</sup> Premised upon the continuity and purity of the Han Chinese, *zhonghua* functioned as an authentic collective identity that counteracted the Others - Manchu rulers and colonial powers. By translating a modern political agenda into a familiar ethno-revolution, the discourses produced strong sentiments among the Han Chinese, and hence effectively mobilized the populace to initiate republican revolution. A racial-ethno revolution that attempted to reinstate the political power relations among the Han, the Manchu, and colonialists produced still more knowledge about modern national subjects.

The issue of *minzu* continued to assume urgency after the founding of the Republic of China (ROC) in 1911. Han-ethnocentrism that was powerful enough to topple the

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<sup>129</sup> This was first stipulated in the program of Xing Zhong Hui 兴中会 (Revive China Society) in 1894, and then stipulated as a primary principle of Tong Meng Hui in 1905. Both Xing Zhong Hui and Tong Meng Hui 同盟会 were revolutionary societies that aimed to overthrow the Qing government. See Sun Zhongshan, *Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan* vol.1, 孙中山全集第一卷, Beijing: Zhonghua Press 北京: 中华书局, 20, 232.

<sup>130</sup> When Xing Zhong Hui and Tong Meng Hui were founded, the word barbarian mainly referred to the Manchu, as Sun elaborated in the following, “today’s Manchu were originally barbarians outside of the Middle Kingdom. ... When the Middle Kingdom was in crisis, they came all the way from the borderland. They destroyed our kingdom, took over our government, enslaved Han Chinese, and killed millions of people who wouldn’t follow their order. ... Han Chinese had our own nation for 260 years. ... Our righteous army will overthrow the Manchu government and restore our sovereign rights.” See Sun, *Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan*, 232.

<sup>131</sup> The signification of this term changed over time. Sun’s use of *zhonghua* before the 1911 revolution was in line with Zhu Yuanzhang’s use of the term in his anti-Mongol rebellions. See Chen Liankai 陈连开, “An interpretation of Zhonghua Minzu” 中华民族解, *Academic Journal of Central South Minzu Institute*, 中南民族学院学报 no.5 (1992): 39-46.

Manchu regime was no longer appropriate and practical in governing a multi-ethnic nation-state and in implementing republicanism in China. On the one hand, the disintegration of the Qing Empire posed the great threat of losing territories populated by ethnic minorities to colonial powers. On the other hand, the modern notion of sovereignty demanded that politicians pay attention to the owner of sovereignty – the people. In 1912, Sun Yet-sen advocated the “Coexistence of Five Ethnic Groups” (*wu zu gong he*) in his presidential speech. He said, “The foundation of a nation is its people. Integrating the territories of the Han, the Manchu, the Mongol, the Hui, and the Tibetans into one nation would also unify the Han, the Manchu, the Mongol, the Hui and the Tibetans into one people. This is the unity of nation.”<sup>132</sup> This well-known political proposition regarding China’s five ethnic groups provided the political foundation for the GMD nationalist government to carry out its republican agendas. It also marked China’s transition from an old imperial dynasty into a modern nation. As Benedict Anderson points out, a dynastic realm relies on allegiance to sustain its governance; therefore, commonalities among the peoples it rules are insignificant. However, for a nation-state, the unity of a people plays an important role in drawing the borders that define the territory of the state.<sup>133</sup>

Just as the discourse of *minzu* at the turn of the twentieth century illustrated that nation and ethnicity constantly informed each other, the discourse of *minzu* continued to transform itself as it facilitated the Chinese Communist Party’s nation-building project nearly half a century later. What is remarkable is that the CCP deployed practices and

<sup>132</sup> Sun Zongshan 孙中山, “Declaration of the Provisional President”临时大总统宣言书, *The Complete Works of Sun Zhongshan* vol.2, 孙中山全集第二卷, Beijing: Zhonghua Press 北京:中华书局, 1982. 2.

<sup>133</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, New York: Verso.1983, 19-22.

the discourse of *minzu* to anticipate a modern socialist nation and a new Chinese citizenry that could negotiate their intra-national, national, and international subject positions.

### **Reconfiguring the Ethnic Landscape: From Ethnicity to Nationality**

In contrast to the Chinese Nationalist Party which proclaimed the equality of the five ethnic groups, the Chinese Communist Party actively sought to change the popular perception of *minzu* and even the ethnic landscape in China. In 1953, the CCP started a monumental project of ethnic classification (*minzu zhibie* 民族识别) in order to identify and designate *minzu* that were economically, geographically, or culturally distinct from the Han majority population.<sup>134</sup> According to the official account, ethnic classification was based on the historical and contemporary reality of China. It followed scientific principles of identification and took into account the people's own ethnic consciousness. In particular, Joseph Stalin's analysis of nationality, as outlined in his essay "Marxism and the National Question," provided Chinese ethnographers and social scientists with a set of criteria for ethnic classification. That is to say, common territory, common language, common economic ties, and psychological nature served as the four factors that determined the existence of a *minzu*, or in Marxist terminology, nationality.

Here, the shift in the signification of *minzu* is worth noting. According to Frank Dikötter, three different interpretative communities advanced disparate views of *minzu* in the Republican era. The Chinese nationalist government regarded *minzu* as race-nation; social scientists at the time mainly understood *minzu* as ethnicity; and the CCP interpreted *minzu* as nationality. With the CCP's coming to power in 1949, the Marxist view of *minzu*, with its territorial, social, and political implications, began to gain

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<sup>134</sup> <http://www.china.org.cn/ch-book/shaoshu/shaoshu1.htm> (retrieved on August 3, 2007)

dominance.<sup>135</sup> As the prevailing socialist ideology provided an important interpretive frame for coding and classifying *minzu*, evolutionary theory and socialist teleology further justified the historical scaling of *minzu* in China. In accordance with its mode of production, such as primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist or socialist, each *minzu* was attributed to a specific historical stage in a universal linear history.<sup>136</sup> Theoretically, the socialist discourse of *minzu* countered the Han-centered ethno-cultural discourse, and dismantled the traditional ethno-universe, for it promised all nationalities that they would march together on the road to socialism, disregarding their current social, cultural, and economic status. In practice, such a discourse facilitated the formation of a new hierarchy among *minzu*, as socialist ideology replaced Confucianism as the measure of new cultural centrality.

The results of the Ethnic Classification Project were impressive. Within a year, the Chinese government identified and recognized 38 minority nationalities.<sup>137</sup> In the same year, the CCP promulgated the Constitution of the PRC which set up terms of equality, unity, and mutual assistance among all nationalities.<sup>138</sup> By 1964, the state had acknowledged another 15 minority nationalities. In 1965 and 1979, two more were

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<sup>135</sup> For instance, socialist ideology had great impact on both the Ethnic Classification Project and scholastic debates on lexicographic problems of *minzu* in the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, the word *minzu* was widely used in translations of Marx, Engels and Stalin. It appeared to translate the German words nation, volk, and völkerschaft as well as the Russian terms natsia, narod and narodnost. Chinese scholars finally agreed upon employing *minzu* in all cases and acknowledged that *minzu* embraced a biological as well as political meaning. For detailed discussion of terminological inquiry of *minzu*, see Dikötter, Frank. 108-109.

<sup>136</sup> Stevan Harrell, *Culture Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995. 23.

<sup>137</sup> According to official account, non-Han ethnic groups were referred to as minority nationalities because their population size was rather small. See Huang Guanxue 黄光学, *Nationalities in Contemporary China* 当代中国的民族工作, Beijing 北京: Contemporary China Press 当代中国出版社, 1993. 2.

<sup>138</sup> The Article 3 of the Constitution reads: China is a unified multi-national nation. All nationalities are equal. Acts involving discrimination, oppression, and splitting the unity of the various nationalities shall be prohibited. All national minorities shall have freedom to develop their dialects and languages, to preserve or reform their traditions and customs. Regional autonomy shall be exercised in areas where national minorities concentrated. All autonomous regions are inseparable parts of the PRC. <http://www.cctv.com/specials/1999two-meetings/xianfa/x10.html> (Accessed October 4, 2007)

added. Hence, the project shaped the configuration of the Chinese ethnic landscape that has persisted to date: 55 minority nationalities and the Han. Although ethnic minorities made up a mere six percent of the total Chinese population, they inhabited nearly sixty percent of the land area, mostly in strategic, resource-rich border regions to the north, south and west.<sup>139</sup> Subsequent to the launch of the classification project, the state regulated *minzu* identity as an obligatory ascribed status. In identification cards or household registry certificates, all Chinese citizens were required to register themselves not as Chinese but as Han, Hui, Manchurians, or any of the other stipulated nationalities.<sup>140</sup> To institutionalize ethnic differences, the Chinese government also built autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties for minorities where political and developmental campaigns that were in accordance with “the historic stage” of particular *minzu* were implemented. In addition, the Party encouraged the election of ethnic minority members at various levels of its political system to ensure the democratic representation of nationalities.

Anthropologists and historians who specialize in Chinese minority nationalities studies have pointed out that scientific discourse was crucial to defining *minzu*. However, the consistency between scientific narratives and practices was questionable. Anthropologist Dru Gladney has unraveled such a contradiction within the ethnic classification system by studying individual ethnic groups. For instance, he points out that the Hui classification, one of the largest national minorities in China, does not fit

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<sup>139</sup> Han is the dominant nationality in China and was about 94 percent of the Chinese population in the 1950s and 1960s. See Mao Zedong’s 1956 talk, “On the Ten Major Relationships” 论十大关系.

<sup>140</sup> See Stevan Harrell and Dru Gladney’s works on Chinese ethnicity. Members of national minorities enjoyed certain exclusive privileges, including having permission to have more than one child, obtaining entrance to university, and having access to local political office, special economic assistance, and tax-relief programs.

Stalin's schema of nationality. Widely dispersed all over China, the Hui distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups by their common practice of Islam, instead of a common territory, a common language, or a common economy. Gladney also takes issue with the seemingly objective quantification of *minzu*. Considering the fact that only 55 nationalities among four hundred groups applying for national minority status were recognized by the state, Gladney criticizes the categorical reductionism of Stalin's nationality policy to which the CCP adhered.<sup>141</sup>

In his recent study, Thomas Shawn Mullaney examines the scientific accuracy of the ethnic classification through examining the relationship between the production of ethnic taxonomy and the construction of social identity. Drawing upon Charles Taylor's insight into the essential link between self identity and its orienting framework, Mullaney pays special attention to the interaction between the production of ethnic taxonomy and the creation of social identity. As a revisionist study of the Ethnic Classification Project, Mullaney's work reevaluates Chinese social scientists' contribution to the production of ethnic taxonomy in the Republican era. He proposes that the epistemological, ontological, and methodological framework of 1953 ethnic classification "was not an invention of the PRC period, but was rather the outcome of a complex set of historical relationships between early Chinese ethnologists, state authorities, and Communist theorists in the late Republican period."<sup>142</sup> In the meantime, he points out the drastic difference between ethnic categorization projects in the Republican era and the Mao era. Whereas the former was limited to scholarly circles and estranged from a disapproving GMD state, the latter

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<sup>141</sup> Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, Harvard University Asia Center, 1996. 67.

<sup>142</sup> Thomas Shawn Mullaney, Dissertation, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification and Scientific Statecraft in Modern China, 1928-1954*, Columbia University, 2005. 35

was integrated into the CCP's state-building enterprise.<sup>143</sup> Hence, Mullaney suggests, the scientific accuracy of ethnic classification should be considered within a context where taxonomic frameworks intersected the CCP's social engineering. For instance, Chinese ethnologists' taxonomic framework offered a menu of identity options and helped orient the creation of national identities; the state has been attempting to transform the Chinese ethnic landscape to emulate the findings of the Ethnic Classification. Consequently, the Chinese state made ethnologists' taxonomic theories appear scientifically accurate.<sup>144</sup> Overall, Mullaney's project stresses the importance of "naming" in the construction of ethnicity. It suggests that the production of ethnic taxonomy, when combined with different social forces, became a creative force in shaping new social identities in the PRC. In so doing, it demonstrates the two foci of current ethnic studies: how ethnicity is produced, and what ethnicity does for the society.

While in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century an essential idea of Chineseness, or what Balibar calls "fictive ethnicity," motivated nationalist movement to safeguard China's cultural and political autonomy, the PRC's Ethnic Classification Project clearly deconstructed the myth of a unified and monolithic Chinese identity and departed from the former nation-building model. What anthropological and historical studies have left out is this question: Why did the rapid diversification of ethnicity become the driving force of socialist modernization in China? What mattered here was not the exact number of ethnicities that the Chinese government declared, but the political project that the presence of diversified ethnicities legitimized and facilitated. The Ethnic Identification Project was important in part because it created new social identities, but

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. 33

also because it was a particular kind of biopolitics in the PRC. It administered human life and produced a certain knowledge of one's relation to others through labeling, classifying, quantifying, and even attributing historical temporalities to human bodies. It is worth noting that diversifying ethnicities was to promote neither multiculturalism nor ethnic pluralism. The distinction between multiculturalism and pluralism, as American ethnic studies suggest, is clear. Whereas ethnic pluralism celebrates plurality of ethnic and cultural forms by passing through them appreciatively, multiculturalism concerns material specificities of different constituencies of a multicultural society including the unevenly distributed power and resources, and considers the fissures, tensions, and even contradictory demands of multiple cultures.<sup>145</sup> I suggest that the diversification of ethnicities was of significance to China's socialist modernization, because the structural change in China's ethnic order helped justify the Party's socialist project: transforming China into a modern multi-national socialist nation.

The Party's fascination with multiple nationalities itself was an interesting fact. This fascination on the one hand indicated a specific conceptualization of the nation that sought structural similarity between China and its socialist counterparts and thus rode the political trend of socialist states during the Cold War period. Apparently, the multi-national structure in countries such as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia provided immediate examples. By resorting to the form of a multi-national nation, the CCP aimed to win for China recognition as a modern nation from its political alliances. On the other hand, such a fascination was in line with the Marxist view of historical development. Given that socialism aspires to

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<sup>145</sup> See David Palumbo-Liu, "Introduction," *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

emancipate all human beings, nationality is merely a transitional stage for mature socialist societies which would ultimately nullify ethnic and national boundaries. Equally significant is that the multi-national structure propels not only the formation of egalitarian citizenship but also the creation of socialist beings who can negotiate their intra-national identity (*minzu*), national identity (being Chinese), and supra-national identity (socialist person).

In actuality, building a multi-national socialist China was a project that was quite different from the nation-building enterprise of the Soviet Union and its likes. Since the Soviet Union was a composite of republics that had distinct ethnic and territorial borders as well as historical pasts, building a multi-national Soviet state involved negotiating conflicting national interests between sub-nations, as well as harnessing, containing and channeling potentially disruptive expressions of nationality.<sup>146</sup> In the meantime, as recent studies of Soviet nationality policy have suggested, the issue of nationality was tied to the Soviet state's peculiar mode of colonization. Through facilitating the national-territorial delimitations and fostering national-cultural distinctions within the context of a unified state, Soviet nationality policy justified the state's effort to implement a colonial-type economy and administrative structure which stressed extreme centralization and "international" division of labor. Thus, whereas Western colonial powers defined themselves in opposition to their colonial peripheries, the Soviet Union created a presumably non-imperialist colonization by "defining itself as the sum of its parts" and

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<sup>146</sup> Brubaker, Rogers, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 28-29. For other accounts of national identity formation in the Soviet Union, see Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001.

linking its own interests to its population's rapid national-cultural development.<sup>147</sup> In contrast, building a multi-national nation for China was not an imperative for resolving historical sub-national conflicts, but rather a modernization project driven by utopian dreams of a multicultural future. Fundamentally, this project had two fronts: creating a unified national identity among multi-national peoples, and constructing a common socialist identity. Both aspects are predicated upon flourishing nationalities, yet both aim to overcome nationality differences. Considering the fact that the communist revolution mainly took place in "inner" China and not the frontier regions,<sup>148</sup> building a multi-national unified China required the CCP to legitimize its rule over the vast extent of China's territory. The effective way to achieve this was not by direct coercion but by seeking to win the consent of the ethnically diverse Chinese populace. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the CCP deployed various cultural practices to disseminate the official discourse of *minzu* and to propagate the hegemonic vision of a multi-national socialist China.

Aside from the institutionalization of ethnicities, re-defining inter-ethnic relations and creating new feelings and perceptions of a multi-national China were all crucial components of discursive practices of ethnicity in China. To reach a wide audience, the Party resorted to multimedia cultural practices to cultivate a popular awareness of the multi-ethnic configuration of China and its significance to national sovereignty. The official message of *minzu* was aurally delivered and visually presented. As early as in May 22, 1950, China National Radio (中国中央广播电台) started broadcasting

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<sup>147</sup> Francine Hirsch. "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities." *The Russian Review* 59 (April 2000): 201-206.

<sup>148</sup> George Moseley, "China's Fresh Approach to the National Minority Question," *The China Quarterly*, 1965: No. 24, 15-27.

programs in Tibetan, and programs in Mongolian, Korean, Zhuang, and Kazakh went on air shortly after.<sup>149</sup> These programs reported on the contemporary life of minority nationalities, propagated the Party's nationality policies, and informed the audience of the Party's stance on issues pertaining to China's borderlands. Besides serving minority nationality listeners, multi-lingual programs aurally registered ethnic heterogeneity in China.

In March 1955, Nationalities Publishing House 民族出版社 founded a monthly magazine *Nationality Pictorial* 民族画报 and published it in six national languages, including Mandarin Chinese (Han yu), Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygurs, Korean and Kazakh.<sup>150</sup> Featuring a series of photo-reportages such as "Introduction to Nationalities" 民族介绍 and "In the Big Family of Our Motherland" 在祖国的大家庭里, the magazine popularized officially sanctioned ethnological knowledge, introduced political, economic and cultural developments of minority nationalities, and propagated equality and solidarity between and among nationalities. In particular, journalistic photos that captured beautiful landscapes of minority regions and spirited minority laborers were of great importance to shaping a new imagining of a multi-national China. Aside from documenting and verifying the existence of diverse nationalities, these photos, which were already a mediated product of lived reality, presented an enticing picture of the happy life that was defined by ethnic pluralism and hard work in socialist China. They also activated cognitive mapping, a way in which different nationalities could comprehend their position in the geographic totality.

<sup>149</sup> Ed. Lin Qing 林青, *Broadcasting and Television History of China's Minority Nationalities* 中国少数民族广播电视发展史, Beijing 北京: Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press 北京广播学院, 2000.

<sup>150</sup> "National Pictorial Went Into Print," 民族画报创刊, *News Report from Xinhua News Agency* 新华社新闻稿, March 17, 1955.

Moreover, the Chinese government was well aware of the importance of ethnic languages and cultures to authenticating the existence of minority nationalities. The state sponsored scholarly efforts to excavate, collect, and study the cultural heritages of minority nationalities. Local governments established literary magazines such as *The Grassland*, *Tianshan*, and *Tibetan Literature* to encourage literary production by minority writers. Minority writers, who either wrote out of an urge or under official pressure to authenticate their ethnic lives, produced an exceptionally large number of works.<sup>151</sup>

Among all cultural practices, the CCP's cinematic program of building a multi-national China deserves special attention. Anderson defines nation as an imagined community and notes that mass print media enabled readers to imagine the nation in a particular style. In his words, these fellow-readers "formed, in their secular, particularly, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community."<sup>152</sup> Different from the print media, cinema created and projected an imagined community of multinational peoples onscreen. In addition, film-related activities convened ethnically diverse people together to form a physical community of multinational peoples. Taking into consideration the specificity of cinema as a visual technology, cinema cultivated a different style of imagining: bound by their participatory experience, people collectively and affectively imagined the nation.

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<sup>151</sup> From 1956 to early 1960s, the Association of Chinese Writers initiated discussions and research of the development of national minority literature. During the same period, this state-sponsored organization actively recruited national minority writers. See Tian Li 天粒, "The Literature of China's Minority Nationalities in Fifty Years" 清点少数民族文学五十年, *Nationality Solidarity* 民族团结 no.10 (1999): 45-47.

<sup>152</sup> Anderson, 44.

Though it was much neglected in pre-1949 Chinese cinema,<sup>153</sup> minority nationalities became a sought-after subject in Chinese socialist cinema. Filmmakers in the PRC experimented with it in documentaries, animation, the opera film, and the feature film.<sup>154</sup> The achievements of the national minority film (*shaoshu minzu tici yingpian*), a genre film that revolves around minority nationalities, are particularly impressive. In the years between 1950 and 1965, major Chinese film studios produced about 45 national minority films that covered various minority nationalities including the Bai, the Miao, the Mongols, the Uygurs, and the Tibetans. Due to its distinct audiovisual characteristics and diverse narrative patterns, the national minority film held great appeal for film audiences. Compared to the actual number of its production, the immense popularity that the national minority film enjoyed within China seemed disproportional.<sup>155</sup> In the international film circuit, the national minority film also gained a warm reception and garnered several awards from the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival and the Moscow's Asian and African Film Festival.<sup>156</sup> Its popularity aside, the national minority film provides a good site for examining the contradiction between the social and cultural practices with respect to the nationality issue. While the national minority film called attention to diversified ethnicities and provided a model of socialist

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<sup>153</sup> In the Republic of China, in addition to a few documentaries, there were only two features of ethnic minorities: *Storm on the Border* 塞上风云 (dir. Ying Yunwei, 1940), *Hualian Harbor* 花莲港 (dir. He Feiguang, 1948).

<sup>154</sup> For instance, *A Happy Passage to Tibet* 通往拉萨的幸福道路 (1954) and *Millions of Serfs Stand Up* 百万农奴站起来 (1960) are documentaries that celebrated Tibetans' new life in the PRC; *Heroic Sisters on the Grassland* 草原英雄小姐妹 (1964) is an animated film that targeted children; *Red Sun over Ke Shan* 柯山红日 (1960) is an opera film about revolutionary history of the Tibetans.

<sup>155</sup> Paul Clark. *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.95.

<sup>156</sup> For instance, *The Victory of the Inner Mongolian People* (内蒙人民的胜利, 又名内蒙春光) won the Best Screenplay Award in 1952's Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. Yang Likun 杨丽坤, the leading actress in *Five Golden Flowers* 五朵金花, won a Silver Eagle Award for Actress in 1960's Moscow Asian and African Film Festival.

subjectivity defined by ethnic fraternities, it opened itself up to potential deviation and subversions from the Party's ideological construct of nationality.

### **The National Minority Film**

Subsumed under the CCP's nation-building enterprise, the cinematic program of nationalities in the Seventeen Years was a propagandistic project. Intent on creating consent for the Party's vision of *minzu*, the production of national minority films nevertheless had to negotiate the interests of the Party, the filmmaker, and the audience. Central to the CCP's nationality policy was discarding Han ethnocentrism, promoting a horizontal and fraternal relationship among nationalities, and encouraging minority nationalities to develop themselves into a single "modern nationality" on the road to socialism. Accordingly, the Chinese government took measures to protect the rights of minority cultures, including preserving ethnic languages and customs, and protecting the religious liberty of minority nationalities. It also adopted appropriate strategies to unite members of minority nationalities, including the upper class. In general, the Party's lenient nationality policies and unfamiliarity with actual socio-cultural conditions of minority nationalities left room for Chinese filmmakers to pursue artistic experimentation and to capture the audience interest. Consequently, in producing national minority films, directors liberally mixed elements from romance, comedy, musicals and thrillers, and hence created an excitement that was uncommon in other major genres in Chinese socialist cinema.

The fact that national minority films were a designated genre among films that were produced for and screened on National Day anniversaries (国庆献礼片), and that

film administrators provided generous financial and personnel support to such film productions, further explained the boom of national minority films in 1959 and 1964: the PRC's tenth and fifteenth anniversaries respectively. In turn, the national minority film helped constitute a repertoire of symbols, rhetoric, and sound which were essential to commemorative practices. The important role that the national minority film played in staging a new China reveals that this group of films was less concerned with individual nationality than with producing a multi-national China.

Overall, the national minority film produced during the Seventeen Years displays a variety of themes. Films such as *Hasen and Jiamila* (哈森和加米拉, 1955), *The Love Song of Lusheng* (芦笙恋歌, 1957), *Dai Doctor* (摩雅傣, 1960), and *Serfs* (农奴, 1963) concentrate on disclosing the oppression that minority nationalities suffered from primitive/feudal socio-political systems and the rule of the GMD government. Other films, instead of dwelling on minority nationalities' sufferings in their historical past, tell heroic stories of their participation in and contribution to China's national liberation. Set against the backdrop of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), *The Detachment of the Hui* (回民支队, 1959), *Sparks from Afar* (远方星火, 1961), and *Jindalai Flowers* (冰雪金达莱, 1963) construct a particular narrative of China's revolutionary past in which minority nationalities played a significant role. Still other films focus on potential threats that would split the nation, and depict the Han and the national minorities' mutual efforts to offset reactionaries' espionage and sabotage activities in China's border regions. These films include *Mysterious Companions* (神秘的旅伴, 1955), *Flames on the Border* (边寨烽火, 1957) and *Guest from Ice Mountain* (冰山上的来客, 1962). There is also a large number of national minority films portraying national minority peoples' socialist

undertakings in connection with political movements such as the Great Leap Forward and People's Commune. Among these films, *Morning Song of the Grassland* (草原晨曲, 1959), *Five Golden Flowers* (五朵金花, 1959), *Daji and Her Fathers* (达吉和她的父亲, 1961) and *The Red Flower of Tianshan* (天山的红花, 1964) are the most memorable ones. In addition, a small number of national minority films are adaptations of well-known minority folktales or myths. Taken as a whole, the national minority film provided a panorama of the history and presence of the national minorities, as they fit into the trajectory of Chinese modernization.

Despite being called “national minority films,” these films have little in common with films made by and for socially marginalized groups. Unlike race movies in the silent era of Hollywood,<sup>157</sup> national minority films did not intend to challenge the hegemonic ideology of normative subjects through defamiliarizing or questioning the conventional cinema, nor did they aim to promote an acute localized ethnic/racial consciousness and construct an autonomous ethnic/racial community. Instead, most national minority films were scripted and directed by Han Chinese. They served the purpose of consolidating the prevailing socialist ideology of nationality. Situated within the mainstream Chinese cinema, the national minority film was mainly concerned with using the story of an individual nationality to impart a lesson on multi-national solidarity to both Han and minority nationalities audiences.

Studies of national minority films have concentrated on two interlocking issues: the appeal of this genre film and the representation of ethnic others. Paul Clark, in his study of film genres in Chinese socialist cinema, pinpoints a few distinctive characteristics of

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<sup>157</sup> Jean M. Gains, *Fire & Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

the genre, such as exotic sceneries, the spectacle of dancing and singing, and the normally avoided subjects in other major genres, most notably, love stories. He further identifies two subgenres and attributes their characteristics to the specificity of the geographic areas that these films depict: films set in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, a “hard” area, more often emphasize class conflict and foreign espionage; films set in subtropical southwest China, a “soft” area, feature more love stories.<sup>158</sup> In short, Clark maintains that the national minority provides exotic attractions that are comparable to Chinese audiences’ first exposure to cinema, an exotic Western viewing apparatus.<sup>159</sup>

With expanded analytical models such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism, and post-colonialism incorporated into film studies, film scholars have demonstrated an increasing interest in addressing issues of differences, including gender, race, and ethnicity. In particular, studies of national minority films in the late 1980s and 1990s found a new direction by engaging Edward Said’s influential work *Orientalism*.<sup>160</sup> According to Said’s argument, Orientalism is a Western discursive project that unfolds in the process of narrating and creating its object, the Orient. Based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the East and the West, Orientalism strategically produces the West in contrast to its mysterious, exotic, and ineffable Oriental Other, and thus reinforces the Western hegemony over the East.<sup>161</sup> Though

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> First screened in a teahouse in China in 1896, cinema was not only a popular entertainment but also an exotic apparatus, a Western invention, for the Chinese. Considering this cross-cultural encounter and culturally specific reception context, Paul Clark implies that “the exotic” rather than early cinema’s exhibitionist aesthetics primarily account for cinema’s appeal to Chinese audiences. See Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 94.

<sup>160</sup> See Chris Berry, “‘Race’: Chinese Film and the Politics of Nationalism,” *Cinema Journal* 31, no.2 (Winter 1992): 45-58; Esther Yau. “Is China the End of Hermeneutics? Or Political and Cultural Usage of Non-Han Women in Mainland Chinese Films,” *Discourse* 11, no.2 (1989):115-136.

<sup>161</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

many have criticized the historical and theoretical simplifications of Said's theory,<sup>162</sup> it nonetheless provides a powerful paradigm for scholars to study the representation of ethnic minorities in China.<sup>163</sup> Drawing upon Said's original observation that aspects of the Oriental were interpreted and integrated into nationalistic and ethnocentric formulation of Western knowledge, Esther Yau suggests that the national minority film manifests the Han Chinese' Othering practice. Through marginalizing minority cultures and creating the exotic, these films produced knowledge of the dominant Han Chinese. She writes that although non-Han personnel, including consultants, interpreters, and performers joined film productions, "Han control measures were omnipresent in every film: Han performers played national minorities' roles; slogans written in the Chinese language appeared in the scenes; a male Han cadre present in every story judged political and folk matters; and the government's agendas informed the narrative strategies."<sup>164</sup> In his study of the production of minority discourses in China, Yingjin Zhang offers a similar argument. He notes that despite the high visibility of the minority nationalities in this genre film, minority nationalities are depicted as naïve and backward people who remain to be educated and liberated by outsiders - the enlightened and progressive Han Chinese. Through subjugating national minorities to an object position, the national

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<sup>162</sup> For example, Homi Bhabha and members of the Subaltern Studies Group criticized Said's Orientalism for totalizing European history and for failing to reconcile its universal tendency with its Foucauldian framework. Bhabha proposes to use an in-between position of practice and negotiation to counter the binary opposition of the West and the East. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. See also Gyan Prakash, "Orientalism Now," *History and Theory* 34, no. 3 (1995): 199-212.

<sup>163</sup> Said's theory has many ramifications for studies of modern Chinese literature and culture. Formulations such as "self-orientalization" (Xiaobing Tang), "Occidentalism" (Xiaomei Chen), "Self-Orientalization" (Arif Dirlik) and "internal Orientalism" (Louisa Schein) expand the concept of Orientalism into a dialectical one so as to shed light on the complex process of identity formation in China.

<sup>164</sup> Yau. 118.

minority film creates an unmistakable Han-centered viewing position, and therefore reinforces Han cultural hegemony.<sup>165</sup>

These Saidean critiques surely call attention to power dynamics embedded in the representation of the national minorities in Chinese socialist cinema. However, they are also problematic for several reasons. First, they run the risk of asserting ethnicity as a product of textual effect and downplay the CCP's political endeavor to construct ethnicity. In addition, by granting priority to the representation of minority nationalities, Saidean critiques ignore possibilities that historically situated film reception may accept, reproduce, alter, appropriate, or overthrow the intended message that national minority films aim to deliver. Second, the application of the binary opposition of Western Self and Oriental Other to the Chinese context neglects the local knowledge production of ethnicity in China. In fact, the notion of brother nationalities, as proposed by the CCP, clearly offered an alternative to the Self/Other binarism in understanding ethnic differences. The binary opposition of the Han as active observer and the minority nationalities as passive object presupposes a distinct ethnic border and presumes that identification with a certain ethnic category characterizes the viewing experience of the national minority film. Third, what is more problematic is that these studies neglect the importance of the semantic shift within the Chinese term "*minzu*" and its associated conceptualization of ethnic relations in China. Hence, Saidean analyses fall short in accounting for how cinema contributed to historically specific socialist modernization. It is necessary to ask whether Saidean readings would lead to an insight on the cinematic interpellation of socialist subjects who could transcend their ethnic boundaries, or lead to

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<sup>165</sup> Zhang Yingjin, "From 'Minority Film' to 'Minority Discourse': Questions of Nationhood and Ethnicity in Chinese Cinema." *Cinema Journal* 36, no.3 (1997): 73-90.

an understanding of how the Han Chinese discursively created the minority nationalities as an object, thus producing their own identity.

Chris Berry and Mary Farquar's recent study of the national minority film provides a revisionist reading. They argue that representations of national minorities are "syncretic and performative productions of the intersection of the self-and-Other model with other local discourses of cultural and ethnic difference."<sup>166</sup> According to their observation, residual cultural elements such as Han ethno-centrism -- where China was the center of civilization bestowing generosity on its supplicants -- and Confucianism, surface in and even structure film narratives. For instance, the film narrative of the Han communists emancipating serfs and restoring their human dignity demonstrates a pattern of "simultaneous Han Chinese and socialist self-styled benevolence."<sup>167</sup> The new egalitarian metaphor of brother nationalities is constantly framed within the patriarchal image of family where the Han is the elder brother and minority nationalities are younger brothers. Taking into account the negotiation of older and newer concepts of ethnic identity in China, Berry and Farquar's analysis avoids the reductionism of Orientalist critiques and averts further confining the minority nationalities to a marginalized and victimized position. Largely focusing on the representation of minority nationalities, however, Berry and Farquar leave the issue of spectatorship unattended.

My study of the national minority film focuses on exploring how cinema models the fraternity of citizenship and elicits the fraternal emotions that are crucial to constituting socialist subjectivity. In particular, I focus on the spectatorial experience of the national minority film. I regard what previous studies referred to as "the Han-centered viewing

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<sup>166</sup> Chris Berry and Mary Farquar, *China On Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 174.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

position” as a problematic formulation of spectatorship for two reasons. First, it points to a false belief that the national minority film created an ethnic norm and encouraged identification either along ethnic line or with a certain ethnic category. As I will show in my case study of national minority films in the next section, the national minority film by no means intended to create any norm of ethnic identity. With the film narrative unfolding, this genre film simultaneously constructs and dissolves ethnic differences. Second, to privilege “the Han-centered viewing position” obscures the more complex spectatorial experience of the national minority film, including the multi-layered sensory experiences and emotional responses. Overall, the fallacy of privileging a Han-centered spectatorial position indicates that the Lacanian-Althusserian model of spectatorship<sup>168</sup> is insufficient or even inappropriate to account for the ideological effect of the national minority film.

Dominant film theories of spectatorship, which are either based on psychoanalytic theory and the apparatus theory or informed by cultural studies theory of spectatorship, are fundamentally deterministic. The former, namely, the Lacanian-Althusserian model of spectatorship, stresses that cinema interpellates the spectator into a certain position either by the apparatus’ powerful mechanism and effects or through identification. The latter emphasizes the viewer as active and resisting consumers of films to counter the notion of the passive spectator.<sup>169</sup> Judith Mayne offers a useful critique on these theories of spectatorship. She notes, “Both positions ascribe an unqualified power to the text on

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<sup>168</sup> See Christian Metz, “From the Imaginary Signifier: Identification, Mirror,” Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

<sup>169</sup> Judith Mayne contrasts Raymond Bellour and the *Camera Obscura* approach with Stuart Hall and cultural studies approach exemplified by John Fiske. The feminist film theorist such as bell hooks and queer theorists, through taking consideration of race and sexuality, have further developed and complicated Hall’s model of decoding media texts.

the one hand and socially defined readers/viewers on the other. The problem in each case is that the activity of making meaning is assumed to be the domain of one single source – either the cinematic apparatus, or the socially contextualized viewer. To be sure, variations are allowed in either case, but they are never significant enough to challenge the basic determinism of the model in question.”<sup>170</sup>

The cognitive theory of film spectatorship, first proposed by David Bordwell and recently developed by Noël Carroll and Greg Smith, offers an alternative model of spectatorship. It seeks a more nuanced analysis of spectatorial experience and attends to how various audio-visual stimuli cue spectator activity and response. Drawing upon cognitive philosophy, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and in particular, the discovery of the complex interrelationship between bodily states and thought processes, recent cognitive theories validate the necessity of examining how film narrative and stylistic devices evoke and structure emotion.<sup>171</sup> Instead of reducing the spectator’s diverse emotional responses to film to the narrow concept of pleasure, the cognitive approach, with its emphasis on sub-processing, allows investigations of the audience’s engagement with film in ways that are alternative to identification. This approach is useful for studying the national minority film, particularly, the genre’s role in cultivating and eliciting fraternal emotion. As social psychologists inform us, culturally specific emotions serve social functions. They help individuals to occupy roles within society.

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<sup>170</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship*, New York: Routledge, 1994. 94.

<sup>171</sup> See Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters – Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith eds. *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1999. Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Sometimes, they are specific roles that individuals should inhabit.<sup>172</sup> Hence, it is reasonable to infer that certain emotions evoked by the national minority film were constructive in shaping the audience's subjectivity.

In what follows, I will examine two particular films, *Flames on the Border Village* (1957) and *Daji and Her Fathers* (1961), to illustrate that spectatorship is the site where the constitution of socialist subjectivity is possible. Thematic and stylistic significance aside, both films foreground the intricacies and internal tensions in the construction of ethnicity. While acknowledging that these films accommodate various pleasures, including voyeuristic, participatory, and surrogate ones, I will focus on exploring how certain narrative and stylistic devices cue the spectator to cognitively transcend his/her own ethnic identity and fuse himself/herself into the structure of fraternity.

### ***Flames on the Border* : Cross-Ethnic Performance and Fraternal Citizenship**

Directed by Lin Nong in 1957, *Flames on the Border* is an important yet understudied national minority film. It tells the story of the Jingpo people in China's southwest border area and their relationship with newly arrived Han communists -- People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers. In particular, the film revolves around Duolong, a young Jingpo villager, who harbors deep prejudice against the Han. It depicts several confrontations between Duolong and Han communist soldiers. Believing the rumor that the PLA intends to exploit Jingpo villagers, Duolong thwarts the PLA's mobilization of Jingpo villagers to build an irrigation reservoir. Later, because a hidden Chinese Nationalist (GMD) spy sets an innocent PLA army doctor up by poisoning

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<sup>172</sup> James R. Averill, "A Constructivist View of Emotion," in *Emotion: Theory, Research, and Experience*, vol.1, Robert Plutchik and Henry Kellerman ed., New York: Academic Press, 1980, 305-39.

Duolong's son, the outraged Duolong seeks revenge against the doctor. After his failed attempt, he swims across a border river and falls into the hands of the GMD remnants. Taking advantage of his resentment against the PLA, the GMD members instigate Duolong to sabotage the PLA. When Duolong sneaks back to the border village, he is amazed by the newly built reservoir and terraced fields and surprised by the fact that his son is still alive and healthy. Touched by the PLA's benevolence and regretting his wrongdoing, Duolong assists the PLA by luring the GMD remnants into an ambush. After several twists and turns, the Jingpo villagers and the PLA clear up the misunderstanding between them and cooperate in defending the new China and engaging in socialist construction. The film ends with a scene where the Jingpo villagers and communist soldiers joyfully celebrate the opening ceremony of the reservoir, an unmistakable symbol of industrialized agriculture in this remote region. A couplet on the gate to the ceremony site delivers a clear political message: "All brother nationalities unite closely, Work hard to build a happy new life."

Upon its release, the film became popular with Chinese audiences all over the country. Like many other national minority films, *Flames of War* uses Mandarin instead of the local national language to reach a wider audience. With the development of public transportation in minority autonomous regions and various distribution and exhibition practices, minority audiences were able to access regular film screenings. To make the national minority film understandable for minority audiences, film studios sometimes dubbed dialogues in national languages, such as Mongolian, Korean and Tibetan.<sup>173</sup> It is unclear whether *Flames on the Border* was dubbed in the Jingpo language ever.

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<sup>10</sup> See Duan Rui 端瑞, "People Who Translate Ethnic Language Films" 协助译制民族语影片的人们, *Masses Cinema*, no.9 (1957): 36.

Nonetheless, the film was well received in the minority region. A movie theater in Mang Shi 芒市, a small town at the border between China and Burma where the Jingpo people live, screened the film nine times in succession with good audience attendance.<sup>174</sup>

In many ways, *Flames on the Border* is characteristic of the national minority film. For example, the film used on-location shooting, a common practice for this particular genre production. Shot in color, the film displays the grandeur of rugged landscape unique to the Jingpo minority region. Thematically, it promotes the unification of the Han and its brother nationalities in the new China. In particular, the film addresses urgent nationality issues in the early years of the PRC: consolidating multi-national solidarity, eliminating any remaining enemies, and protecting national frontiers.

The narrative of *Flames on the Border* resonates with many earlier national minority films. The film's subplot, focusing on Duolong and Manuo's love, intertwines with the main plot which depicts "enlightened" Jingpo people and Han communists fighting espionage activities side by side. As early as in 1954, a young Tibetan viewer wrote a letter to the magazine *Masses Cinema* and complained about the triteness of similar plots. He said,

My hometown is in Ganzi [Sichuan province]. ... [Before the liberation] there were no movies for us to watch. Now we can see movies every week. ...I have seen over 300 movies in a couple of years since the liberation. They include movies depicting Tibetan life such as *Gold and Silver Sandbank*, *Dawn over Meng River*, and movies portraying Mongolian and Miao peoples, including *Victorious People of Inner Mongolia*, *People of the Grasslands*, and *The Horse Caravan*. We especially welcome these films. However, I always feel that stories [about minority nationalities] are too similar. Other folks also comment: "Isn't there anything else besides tribe-fighting and spy-spotting?" I think that minority peoples' lives are is rich and colorful. Why can't we adapt poetic folktales and myths into films? Why can't

<sup>174</sup>Liu Jienong 刘介农 "Flames of War in a Border Village is a Film with Fundamental Defects" 《边寨烽火》是一部有根本缺陷的电影, *Literature of Borderland* 边疆文学, no.3 (1959):64-68.

we depict the minority peoples' new life? We are looking forward to watching national minority films with new content.<sup>175</sup>

我的家乡在甘孜。... 以前我们看不上电影，现在我们每礼拜都能看到。几年来我一共看了三百多部影片。其中有描写藏族人民生活的如《金银滩》《猛河的黎明》也有描写蒙族和苗族人民生活的如《内蒙人民的胜利》《草原上的人们》《山间铃响马帮来》等等。这些影片特别受到我们的欢迎；但是我总觉得这些影片的内容太类同了。有些人也这样说，少数民族的地区，除了调解打冤家和捉特务外就没有别的可写的吗？我认为少数民族的生活是丰富多彩的，难道那些优美动人的富有诗意的民间故事和传说就不能改编成电影吗？少数民族的新生活就不可以反映吗？我们渴望能看到这些新的内容的影片。

The impact of audience response on the general development of the genre is hard to measure. Nevertheless, this Tibetan's comment is noteworthy. It reveals that the national minority film, disregarding the specific nationality in depiction, proved to be appealing to minority audiences. However, it also suggests that the production of the national minority film was somewhat detached from daily life and cultural heritage with which minority audiences were familiar. For minority audiences, watching national minority films, in particular, seeing the presence of minority nationalities could be an empowering experience. In addition to feeling empowered, their enjoyment of this type of film was related to their generic knowledge.

The reason that *Flames on the Border* still grieved Chinese audiences despite its conventional plot is that it creates a distinctive minority character, Duolong, a man of valor and vigor. In the film, Duolong outshines other characters, including the PLA political officer and his many comrades. Conventionally depicted as the liberator, the protector, and the guide for minority nationalities on the path to socialism, the PLA officers are dull stock characters. In contrast, Duolong is a sympathetic character with complex personality. He loves his wife, yet he sometimes behaves roughly with her; he is candid yet gullible; he is courageous, but acts impetuously. A viewer praised the

<sup>175</sup> Luosan Zeren 洛桑泽仁, "Why Do Films Always Present Tribe Fighting?" 为什么老是打冤家? , *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.3 (1954): 28.

film's credible construction of a minority character, instead of presenting him as an exotic novelty.<sup>176</sup> A Jingpo audience commended, "Duolong's personality is very much like that of the Jingpo people."<sup>177</sup>

It is worth mentioning that Da Qi,<sup>178</sup> a young Han Chinese actor of stalwart build and robust physique, compellingly performs this minority character and delivers a certain ethnic aura. In fact, Da Qi's outstanding screen debut performance as Duolong won him a Young Artist award at the 11<sup>th</sup> Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 1959. Evidently, the representation of the minority nationalities was fundamentally a question of performing ethnicity. Here, I shift the critical anchoring of the national minority film from questions of representation to those of performance and spectatorship in order to foreground the multi-valency of ethnic iconicity and explore the implication of such screen performances within a larger political discourse of nationality.<sup>179</sup>

In the national minority film, cross-ethnic performance was a common practice.<sup>180</sup> It is worth mentioning that this practice was not exclusive to the Han Chinese actor. A famous, yet most neglected example of cross-ethnic performance is the case of Yang Likun 杨丽坤, a Yi actress, who made her name by playing a lovely Bai character in *Five*

<sup>176</sup> Fengzhi 封植, "A Film Full of Local Color of Borderland: On Flames of War in a Border Village" 一部富有边疆色彩的影片-评《边寨烽火》, *Chinese Cinema* 中国电影 no.9 (1958):56-58.

<sup>177</sup> Bai Jingcheng 白景晟, "Discussion on *Flames on the Border* by Teachers and Students from Institute for Nationalities" 民族学院师生谈《边寨烽火》, *Chinese Cinema* no. 9 (1958): 59.

<sup>178</sup> Da Qi 达奇 is the stage name of Qi Fujun 齐福君.

<sup>179</sup> This shift is informed by recent works on ethnicity and cinema. See Charles Musser, "Ethnicity, Role-Playing, and American Film Comedy: From *Chinese Laundry Scene* to *Whoopie* (1894-1930)" in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed. Lester D. Friedman, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 39-81. See also Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

<sup>180</sup> There are cases where minority actors play their own ethnic roles. For example, Mongolian actors played major roles in the PRC's first national minority film *The Victory of Inner Mongolian People* 内蒙人民的胜利. In 1954, Kazakhs actors played title roles in a film about Kazakh people's life, *Hasen and Jimila* 哈森和加米拉. In 1963, a Tibetan young man who was a non-professional actor had an excellent performance as the protagonist in the film *Serf*. This type of casting enhances realistic effect. However, it by no means renders any particular film more ethnic.

*Golden Flowers*. In many national minority films, Han Chinese actors took major ethnic roles. For example, a well-known Han Chinese actress Qin Yi 秦怡 played the role of a Dai woman in *Dai Doctor*; Song Xuejuan 宋雪娟 played a Jingpo girl in *Love Song of Lusheng*; and Wang Xiaotang 王晓棠 played Da Qi's counterpart, Manuo, in *Flames on the Border*. What is ironic is that the national minority film employed cross-ethnic performance along with many other means that aimed to highlight ethnic authenticity, including the careful use of *mise-en-scène*. Without denying the unequal power relation between the Han and the minority nationalities that lay underneath the cinematic program of China's multi-nationalities, I suggest several reasons to account for this practice. First, cross-ethnic performance served a specific economic purpose. Since very few members of the minority nationalities had received film training either before or after 1949, assigning relatively experienced Han Chinese actors to play ethnic roles was an efficient means to speed up genre production. Second, cross-ethnic casting would not harm the credibility of minority character in films, since physical attributes of diverse nationalities in China are not prominently distinguishable. The fact that many minority nationalities are newly recognized and invented opens creative space for performing certain ethnicities. In turn, screen performance further reveals that nationality is performative, an effect of reiterated acting. Third, cross-ethnic performance, in actuality, required and facilitated communication between the Han Chinese and the minority nationalities. "Behind the Scene" articles on national minority films often recorded many non-cinematic activities that involved Han Chinese actors and minority peoples as an important part of the experience of on-location shooting. For instance, Han Chinese actors worked and lived

with local minority peoples to learn their ethnic language and customs; minority peoples offered assistance in translation, setting the scene, and performing as extras.<sup>181</sup>

Cross-ethnic performance is by no means unique to Chinese socialist cinema. Similar practices abound in Hollywood cinema.<sup>182</sup> Situated within a wider system of political and representational discourses in American film, cross-ethnic performance in Hollywood cinema exploits stereotyping. It exaggerates or reflects mannerisms and qualities that are associated with certain ethnic groups. Whether it takes the form of ethnic masquerade or ethnic passing, cross-ethnic performance plays with the boundary of identity categories and highlights the artificiality of ethnicity. The ramifications of this practice are widely divergent. Cross-ethnic performance could either reinforce ethnic divides by perpetuating ethnic stereotypes or serve an assimilationist purpose by showing the possibility of effacing ethnicity and reshaping the self. While cross-ethnic performance sometimes opens space for forming a particular Diaspora subjectivity,<sup>183</sup> it could also incite and reinforce nationalistic sentiments.<sup>184</sup>

Examinations of cross-ethnic performance informed by gender studies and performance studies have highlighted the radical potential of such a practice in subverting

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<sup>181</sup> See Li Ming and Xia Tian 李明、夏天, "Shooting *Gold and Silver Sandbank* in Northwest Grasslands," 在西北草原拍《金银滩》, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.14 (1952):10-12; Gong Wen 工文, "Notes on On-Location Shooting of *Dai Doctor*" 《摩雅傩》外景随记, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.4 (1960): 25.

<sup>182</sup> Cross-racial performances such as blackface and yellowface are important practices in Hollywood. Since race and ethnicity have different political implications in the US context, I only consider cross-ethnic performances in Hollywood cinema for the sake of comparison.

<sup>183</sup> For example, Philip Ahn's Oriental masquerade provides a good example that cross-ethnic performance works to conceal the actor's Americanness, and consequently has an alienating effect. Charles Musser's study of early comedy illustrates that cross-ethnic performance helps Americanize immigrants. Peter Feng's study of cross-ethnic casting of Asian American roles suggests that such a practice is conducive to forming Asian American subjectivity. See Peter X. Feng, *Screening Asian Americans*, Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

<sup>184</sup> The most recent example is the Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi's performance as a Japanese Geisha in Rob Marshall's 2005 film, *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Because of Japan's atrocity in China during the WWII, Chinese audiences were angered by the fact Zhang performs a Japanese geisha, a disreputable role.

prescribed and normative identities.<sup>185</sup> Another way of looking at cross-ethnic performance is to see how it creates differentiated spectatorial positions and facilitates community making. In addressing racial and sexual passing, Amy Robinson formulates the comprehensive mechanism of passing as “a triangular theater of identity,” that requires three major participants: the passer, the dupe (one who cannot see through passing), and the in-group clairvoyant (one who can see through passing and discerns its artificiality). She notes, “The moment of passing in drag is always a moment of collaboration. It is precisely the silence of the third term (the literate member of the in-group) that establishes the conditions for the successful pass. The perverse pleasure of duping the dupe, which transforms a painful scenario of collaboration into an occasion to make and remake community, is always and already a qualified pleasure.”<sup>186</sup> In Robinson’s model, a politics of optics is instrumental to understanding identity. In the case of passing, this politics includes the visibility of the apparatus of passing and the optic censorship exercised by the in-group. The visible functions as the vehicle of knowledge and determines different spectatorial positions. Cross-ethnic performance in Chinese socialist cinema offers a different paradigm. It is not a cultural performance of preferred ethnic identity, but an institutional practice endorsed by the socialist ideology. It also intends to be transparent in order to cue the spectator to overcome his/her own ethnic specificity.

In *Flames on the Border*, Da Qi wears turbans, carries a long sword, drinks liquor from bamboo tubes, and dances folk dances. These visual markers help define Da Qi/Duolong’s Jingpo identity onscreen. They also reveal that the popular understanding

<sup>185</sup> See works by Judith Butler, Valerie Smith, and Michael Rogin.

<sup>186</sup> Amy Robinson, “It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interests,” *Critical Inquiry* 20, no.4 (Summer 1994): 716, 736.

of ethnicity in the PRC operated through an economy of optics. Since physical differences between China's diverse nationalities are not prominent and biological essentialism was never part of the CCP's discourse of nationality, the intelligibility of a certain ethnicity heavily relies on the visual representation of superfluous things, such as clothing, hairpieces, habitual or religious practices. The cinematic depiction of Duolong clearly sets him apart from the Han Chinese army officer who wears a military uniform, carries a firearm, and draws the blueprint of the irrigation reservoir. These depictions link certain traits to the Han (advanced / civilized / rational) and to minorities (backward / primitive / emotional), and therefore support the official discourse of *minzu*, particularly the socio-historical differences between the Han and minority nationalities.

Although the national minority film visually creates compelling ethnic iconography, the soundscape of this genre reveals the contradiction inherent to the construction of ethnicity. Sound in the national minority film does more than appear as a background behind the image and the suturing of images together. It orients the audience's expectations and influences perception. For instance, accompanying the opening credit of *Flames on the Border* and the image of palm tree leaves trembling in wind, the background music starts with fast-paced tumultuous martial music and then gradually eases into melodic and outlandish folk music. Preceding the film narrative, the sound fleshes out the image, provides its own narrative, creates an emotive space, and guides the audience to expect a story about the minority nationalities. The rich acoustic realm of *Flames on the Border* suggests that film experience is not entirely a visual one, but an experience with multi-sensory involvement. In addition, the national minority film commonly employs distinctive audio codes such as minority folk music and folk song to

create ethnic ambience, to supplement the visual code in enhancing the effect of verisimilitude. However, the use of Mandarin in dialogues disrupts the illusion of ethnic authenticity.

With regard to cross-ethnic performance, visually Da Qi can easily pass as a member of a minority nationality, aurally his impeccable Mandarin betrays his identity to multi-lingual Chinese audiences. Even in a few musical numbers with a strong ethnic flavor, which are integrated into the film narrative, Da Qi sings love songs in Mandarin. The use of the so-called common speech, Mandarin, in the national minority film had its specific ideological function. It aurally promoted national unification; it also normalized ethnic subjects into political subjects.<sup>187</sup> For multi-lingual Chinese audiences, aside from their prior knowledge of the actor's offscreen identity, their knowledge of linguistic differences enabled them to discern diegetic rupture. The discrepancy between the visual and the aural in *Flames on the Border* indicates the textual normalization of the clairvoyant position, a position that the actual audience also assumed.

This discrepancy also cues the audience to rationalize semantic messages from such audio-visual codes. The blend of the familiar and unfamiliar in ethnic iconicity easily induces an uncanny feeling in the spectator and opens an inter-subjective realm. For the cognitive spectator, cross-ethnic performance simultaneously renders "differences of nationality" visible and reveals a possible merger of different nationalities. In the meantime, the spectator's recognition of cross-ethnic performance creates a critical distance necessary for him/her not to be interpellated into any fixed ethnic position, but to overcome his/her own ethnicity to identify with Duolong, whose action advances the film

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<sup>187</sup> In contrast, recent national minority films, such as *Silent Holy Stone* (dir. Wan Ma Cai Dan, 2005) use ethnic actors and ethnic languages.

narrative. Familiarity with the official discourse of *minzu* may influence the spectator's processing of audio-visual codes and lead him/her to realize the structural significance of ethnicity in the film narrative. Just as in the official discourse of a multi-national nation, the importance of any given minority nationality does not lie in its ethnic distinctiveness but in its position in the newly promoted horizontal ethnic order. Perhaps, with exception of the Han, the big brother, all other nationalities were interchangeable. The facts that the stories of minority nationalities were similar, as observed by the above-mentioned Tibetan audience, and that ethnic roles were accessible to people of diverse ethnic backgrounds evidence this point. If performing the minority nationalities enabled the actor to take on a new perspective from the brother nationalities and experience trans-ethnic unity with his/her onscreen surrogate, then the recognition of cross-ethnic performance established an imagined community between the audience and the actor through a shared knowledge of the fraternity of nationalities in socialist China.

The way that the cross-ethnic performance onscreen cues the spectator to respond has its parallel in the film narrative. Constructing ethnic boundaries is to deconstruct them, and *Flames on the Border* makes it clear that the ethnic border is porous. Gedang, the GMD spy, who takes a Jingpo name and adopts Jingpo people's demeanors, is a Han Chinese indeed. Ethnicity, which is easily worn and removed, is no longer the determinant of community-making in the new China. While the film dismisses any ethnic norm, it does set up the norm of identity: one must be a patriotic socialist. Within the film narrative, geo-political border crossing is far more threatening and alarming than ethnic border crossing. When Duolong comes back to his village from the other side of the border river, his arm already bears a tattoo that reads, "Oppose the Chinese

Communists and Resist the Soviet Union.” This bodily inscription attests to his territorial border crossing and spells out his political membership. Its message also reminds the audience of the grim geopolitical situation that China faces, and in particular, its border security during the Cold War.<sup>188</sup> The incident of Duolong’s transgression successfully deflects the viewer’s attention from ethnic conflict to the issues of border security and political reconfiguration. However, the film’s negotiation of the Party’s interest and the audience’s taste generates textual friction. Although the film intends to suggest that political orientation rather than ethnic affiliation is the driving force in community building, it presents Duolong’s change of position as less a result of his developed political consciousness than as an emotional reaction to the benevolence of the Han communists (they save his son and pardon his wrongdoing).

The ending of *Flames on the Border* further directs the spectator’s attention from the question of the authenticity of individual ethnicity to the importance of the fraternity of nationalities. This fraternity is desirable because it not only liberates the minority nationalities from oppression and elevates their social status, but also promises them higher productivity and improved livelihood. As the scene of the jubilant inauguration of the irrigational system indicates, with the help of the Han Chinese, the minority nationality could develop itself into a modern nationality and advance on the path to socialism. What is remarkable is that the scene lures the spectator into positioning himself/herself within the political order of fraternal nationalities. A paean to the Party, which accompanies several sequences of ethnic dance, guides the spectator to interpret the visual appeal as the minority nationality’s expression of their belonging to the new

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<sup>188</sup> In the early 1950s, with the assistance of the U.S., the GMD had a clear political agenda in “reclaiming the mainland China.”

political order instead of the Han Chinese's exoticization of ethnic others. A few close-up shots of several characters who take turns in leading the chorus deserve attention. These shots not only suggest the elevated status of ordinary folks in the new society but also reveal their inner pride. An odd juxtaposition of two close-ups -- one being a Jingpo woman and the other a non-diegetic character, an old Han Chinese man -- visually creates a horizontal relation between nationalities. It also indicates that this horizontal community of nationalities is extensible and open-ended, and signals the spectator to insert himself/herself into this horizontal community.

### ***Daji and Her Fathers: Fraternal Emotion and Cross-ethnic Identification***

*Flames on the Border* imparts an important lesson: forming the fraternity of nationalities is crucial to ensuring national unity and territorial integration. From a different angle, Wang Jiayi's 1962 film *Daji and Her Fathers* explores the emotional bond among nationalities that is essential to forming socialist fraternity. Drawing on the then prevailing official slogan "All brother nationalities live in one socialist family," the film ingeniously uses a story of family reunion to address the issue of multi-nationality. Set in the Yi Minority Autonomous Region in the late 1950s, the film weaves together two storylines taking place in the past and present. One storyline concentrates on the Han Chinese's support of minority nationalities in their socialist construction. It follows the Han Chinese engineer Ren Bingqing and his colleagues, who come to a commune in the Liangshan Yi Minority Region in the southwest of China. In the process of working with local people to develop a hydroelectric project, Engineer Ren becomes well acquainted with the commune leader Mahe and his daughter Daji, a diligent and warm-

hearted young commune cadre. The other storyline traces the past of all three major characters, Ren, Mahe, and Daji. Despite ethnic differences, they all live a wretched life and suffer from the class exploitation that the CCP promises to erase. Accidentally, Ren discovers that Daji is his long-lost daughter, who was abducted by the Yi slave owners thirteen years ago. Mahe, then a slave, rescued Daji and brought her up like his own child. The discovery causes a dilemma for all three people involved. In particular, paternal love competes with fraternal love and friendship. In the end, out of her deep love for the Yi people, Daji persuades Ren to stay and live with her and Mahe so that they can build a new socialist Yi region together. The film thus closes with a happy reunion of Daji and her two fathers in a symbolic union of all nationalities in one family. The political message is clear: The old society tears apart families; the new society reunites family members and builds a new multi-national family. Despite its didactic message, *Daji and Her Fathers* was popular among Chinese audiences because of its unusual humanistic dimension.

Similar to *Flames on the Border*, *Daji and Her Fathers* employs various audio-visual codes, including clothing with colorful embroidery and group dance accompanied by reeds and other music instruments, to construct the Yi ethnicity in the film. However, narrative inconsistencies surrounding ethnicity are marked. On the one hand, the film highlights the constructed nature of ethnicity by staging the play of ethnicity. In a memorable scene involving role-play, Xiao Wang, a Han woman technician, and Daji exchange their attires to play each other's role. Several Yi girls happily help Xiao Wang to put on a colorful Yi dress and adornments. Then they jokingly ask Engineer Ren to let Xiao Wang stay with them, because she really looks like one of them. Daji, who now

wears dark blue worker's clothes, "appears" like a Han girl to Engineer Ren. As an act of friendship, this role-playing nevertheless brings attention to the artificiality and interchangeability of ethnicity. The film also suggests that ethnicity is contingent and situational.<sup>189</sup> Its narrative demonstrates that Daji has a deep love for the Yi people and implies that Daji chooses to adopt the Yi ethnic identity. On the other hand, the film indicates that each person possesses an "authentic" ethnicity. At the end of the above-mentioned scene, Daji reveals her true Han ethnicity to Engineer Ren, who is obviously deceived by her "appearance." In other words, the film capitalizes on the essentialist idea of ethnicity to tell a coherent story of father-daughter reunion.

However, to highlight ethnic differences is ultimately to introduce socialist fraternity that transcends ethnic boundaries. What is distinctive in the film is that it foregrounds conflicting emotions and elicits multi-layered cross-ethnic identification. The film achieves this by creating a class-based narrative of history for all nationalities. Not exclusive to *Daji and Her Fathers*, picturing the past of minority nationalities as a history of class struggle is the central theme of other 1960s national minority films including *Dai Doctor* (1961), *Anaerhan* (1962), *Serfs* (1963), and *Jingpo Girls* (1965). This emergent thematic concern was a response to current socio-political conditions. As China's border crises subsided and the socialist reform expanded in the late 1950s and early 1960s,<sup>190</sup> it was increasingly important for the CCP to foster cross-ethnic recognition and incorporate the minority nationalities into the socialist work force. Thus, inventing a shared history for the Han and the minority nationalities assumed both

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<sup>189</sup> Joane Nagel has a good argument about the contingency of ethnicity. For her, ethnicity is constructed through individual selection and reaction to external forces. Joane Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture," *Social Problems*, 1994, no.41, 152-176.

<sup>190</sup> For example, the Taiwan Strait crises of 1954 and 1958 and the Sino-India conflict of 1959.

political and economic significance. Unlike many other national minority films, *Daji and Her Fathers* stages compassionate cross-ethnic identification that is evoked by the recognition of a common past. It also explores the role that cross-ethnic identification plays in shaping new social relations and forming new material practices.

Within the film narrative, the histories of the Han and the minority nationality form a dialogic relation. Both address violence engendered by unjust socio-economic relations. Both are affective for they take the form of personal memory and inscribe themselves somatically. Early in the film, when the newly arrived Han Chinese workers and Yi villagers gather at Daji's home, Engineer Ren briefly mentions his past as a poor mason in the old China. To a group of young people, he says, "The Han bureaucrats and landlords were like heavy stones pressed upon poor people. The poor folk were often charged as rebels for no reason, not to mention that they were insufficiently fed and clad. Once put in the jail, handcuffs and fetters..." This narration touches Daji and triggers Mahe's memory of his own past. Mahe shows the Han visitors the "wooden shoes" that Yi slave-owners used to constrain his mobility. The so-called "wooden shoes" are actually one heavy piece of wood with two foot-shaped holes to which fetters are attached. This device is an exotic tool of imprisonment that testifies to the slave owner's inhumanity. It also functions as a fetish of suffering. To demonstrate how this device works, Daji puts her feet into the "shoes." Adopting a light tone, she explains to the visitors, "Once you put your feet into the shoes, you couldn't move a bit. My father wore it for thirty years." She then puts on a dark, patched-up overcoat that Mahe used to wear. A reaction shot shows Ren and his young assistant with grave expressions. Standing next to Daji, Mahe says that he keeps this old overcoat as a reminder for the young people:

“We need to remind children of the bitterness in the past, so that they would appreciate the sweetness of the present.” Within this scene, the exchange of class-based narratives of history effectively evokes empathy in both the Han and the Yi audiences. Storytelling and performance transform history into transmittable and valid social knowledge, which orients young people’s perception of the past and the present.

The scene mentioned above opens itself to plural interpretations. First, the spectator can easily discern the film’s intertextual connection with other filmic texts. The class-based narrative of history and the very acts of remembering history in this scene echoes many popular socialist films that center on proletarian class struggle, such as *The White-Haired Girl*, and *The Red Detachment of Women*.<sup>191</sup> Intertextuality is not only a textual strategy that celebrates the openness of the filmic text. It also functions at the social level. Within this scene, social practices employed by the Han and the minority nationality are intertextual in that they inform and activate each other and generate interpretations of their historical pasts. By rejecting closure and univocality, intertextuality cues the spectator to associate the film with other filmic texts, to disregard ethnic specificities, and to recognize the interconnectedness of the Han and minority nationalities.

Second, the spectator may realize that political ventriloquism operates within the scene. As Mahe says, “We need to remind children of the bitterness in the past, so that they would appreciate the sweetness of the present.” His words is a clear variation on the Party’s official slogan, “remembering the bitterness in the past and reflecting on the

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<sup>191</sup> Li Yimin suggests that the national minority film models after *The White-Haired Girl*, a Han folk story, which was first adapted into opera in 1945 and then into a popular in 1950. “Cultural Characters of the National Cinema during the Seventeen Years” 十七年民族电影的文化性格, *Film Production* 电影创作 no.1 (1997): 69-73

sweetness in the present.” The scene attempts to foreground the voice of previously voiceless minority nationality in order to show that the oppressed can now master their fates in the new China. The paradox is that this scene brings attention to the fact that national minorities, who enjoyed a much-improved social status in the new China, did not own their own voice yet. Mahe’s voice is a result of the Party’s ventriloquist act. The political ventriloquism that is central to this scene demands the spectator’s collaboration in order to sustain the illusion, for any successful ventriloquism is illusion without deception.<sup>192</sup> Hence, the recognition of political ventriloquism enables the spectator to engage the film with a certain critical distance. This recognition is important to orienting the spectator’s interpretation of the film. It prepares the spectator to anticipate and imagine what the minority people would do or say as the film narrative progresses; it may also weaken the didactic power of the national minority film. Like the first reading, the second interpretation downplays the importance of individual ethnicity.

While rationalized interpretations of the scene may diverge widely, the emotional orientation that the scene signals to the spectator is clear. Reaction shots of the Han and the Yi characters’ passionate expressions induce the spectator to engage these emotional moments. To feel the characters’ compassion and to feel with them are what the scene excites in the spectator. Such emotional engagements complement the spectator’s cognitive processing of the film narrative. As cognitive theory maintains, emotions are a structured complement to cognitive processes. Instead of interfering with rationality, emotions “are functional tendencies that motivate us toward goals and that are

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<sup>192</sup> David Goldblatt, *Art and Ventriloquism*, New York: Routledge, 2006, xi.

shaped by our situational expectations.”<sup>193</sup> The spectator’s emotional engagement with the film may lead them to negotiate diegetic ruptures.

The compassion that binds the Han and the Yi nationalities together in the present also has its historical roots. The film employs flashbacks to visualize the comparability of the Han and the Yi’s past suffering and to set an example for compassion. The flashback that depicts Daji’s wretched childhood and proletarian solidarity is a case in point. Shot in dim lighting, this flashback brings back a grim past and creates a chilly atmosphere. The slave-owners’ cruelty stands in sharp contrast to lower-class people’s compassion. After abducting Daji, the Yi slave-owners enslave the little girl, torture her, and then abandon her in the snow-covered woods. Mahe, then a young slave, often helps and protects the girl. When the girl is abandoned, he is determined to save her at any cost. However, his restrained mobility poses the biggest obstacle. The sequence of Mahe breaking the fetter is particularly effective. The camera pans from left to right showing a few slaves who are chained together until it pauses on Mahe’s angered and anxious face. This horizontal camera movement creates a visual metaphor of fraternal relationship among the slaves. The next shot shows a fraternal action: a fellow slave tries hard to loosen the fetters which are attached to Mahe’s “wooden shoes.” Another slave sees Mahe’s bleeding foot, which is captured by a close-up shot. A reaction shot shows his saddened face. This series of shots cue the spectator to identify with the insignificant and anonymous slave/spectator to witness Mahe’s suffering. Compassion, as Lauren Berlant notes, implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers.<sup>194</sup> By inviting the

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<sup>193</sup> Ed S. Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*, trans. Barbra Fasting, Mahwah: Erlbaum, 1996. 43-47.

<sup>194</sup> Lauren Gail Berlant, *Compassion: the Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, 2004. Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, New York: Routledge, 2004. 1.

spectator to see the (diegetic) spectator seeing the sufferer, this sequence not only signals compassion as the emotion proper but also extends fraternity from characters to the spectator. The sequence ends with a shot of Mahe's unfettered feet. Nevertheless, fraternal action continues until Mahe saves little Daji. This flashback scene does more than clarify Daji's original ethnic identity and early life. It reveals that besides a vertical father-daughter relationship, there exists an un-gendered fraternity between Daji and Mahe. In Daji's words, Mahe is "a father who is dearer than her birth father." In Engineer Ren's words, "blood and tears bind Mahe and Daji together. This bond is stronger than the relationship between father and daughter."

Emotions are intentional and functional. The compassion that the film foregrounds is the fraternal emotion between the proletariat who suffer from class exploitation. It gives rise to cross-ethnic recognition, and heightens an awareness of common class identity. Socialist compassion also provides an ethic vision. It motivates characters to act selflessly; it orients people's action in favor of consolidating proletarian solidarity. The emotional predicament that the two fathers confront is quite compelling. Should one claim/keep the daughter and disregard his brother's feeling? Fraternal emotion seemingly overpowers paternal love. After confirming that Daji is his daughter, Engineer Ren decides to keep this secret to himself, for he does not want to hurt Mahe, his "good class brother." His decision is also related to his vision of a new socialist Yi region. As he says to Mahe, "Daji has been in the Liangshan region for thirteen years. She is also a cadre in the commune. She should stay here and work hard to build a better Liangshan." In the case of Mahe, his paternal urge gives in to his compassion: Engineer Ren is a good Han brother who supports the Yi people's socialist construction. Daji should stay with

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him. The happy ending of two fathers and one daughter uniting is certainly a deliberated decision that takes into account the film's ideological objective and the audience's psychological needs.

As my analysis shows, the film's intertextuality, narrative pattern, and stylistic devices create an associative model for the spectator to experience the film. Rather than locking the spectator into a certain position, this film excites compassion in the spectator. The spectator's emotional engagement with the film allows him/her to overcome ethnic differences, to feel for and with characters, to imagine himself/herself as a part of an extendable horizontal fraternity, and to seek proletarian solidarity in actual life.

Because of its emotional sway, *Daji and Her Fathers* was probably effective in propagating the Party's idea of building a multi-national socialist nation. Heated debates about the film in the early 1960s attested to its popularity, and revealed contradictory film receptions. Some reviewers affirmed the film's artistic and ideological achievements. They praised the film for the way it "connects the fate of Daji and her fathers with class struggle, with the history of nationalities, and with the destiny of the state."<sup>195</sup> Others attacked the film for it did not reflect the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of a socialist China. Specifically, the latter criticized the film from two perspectives: First, thematically, the film valorized universal humanity, focused on the destiny of individuals, and ignored specific social milieu and historical context. For instance, although the conflict between Daji and her fathers was caused by class contradiction and ethnic alienation, the film suggested that the individual's noble character and abstract love, instead of social factors, was the solution to this conflict." Second, in terms of characters, the film failed to

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<sup>195</sup>Dai Jiaofu 带绶幅, *A Red Flower in Cinema – Daji and Her Fathers* 电影丛中一朵红花 – 喜读〈达吉和她的父亲〉, *Film Literature* 电影文学 no.2 (1961): 74 – 77.

produce “typical characters under typical circumstances.” Hence, the film’s three characters were not able to demonstrate the general tendencies of the age.<sup>196</sup> In other words, the film failed to depict the typical traits of the new China.

The contesting film reception, which was largely based on different Marxian readings of *Daji and Her Fathers*, sheds light on the predominant mode of spectatorial engagement with the national minority film during the Seventeen Years. Chinese audiences in the 1960s were highly sensitive political spectators. In contrast to the Saidean argument that the national minority film was an Othering practice and produced a Han-centered viewing position, these film criticisms suggest that historically situated actual audiences were very well aware of the political significance of this genre film. For these actual audiences, the national minority film was about what kind of relationship among nationalities should exist, rather than about the truthful representation of the national minorities. For them, successful national minority films could reveal the essence of socialist China. In turn, like other socialist films, the national minority did not aim to produce inert spectators who were absorbed by exotic spectacles, but to create active spectators who would form appropriate social relations with others and take proper actions in actual life.

## **Conclusion**

As I have shown in this chapter, inventing diverse nationalities and transforming the discourse of *minzu* was of great political significance to the CCP in building a modern socialist nation. Identifying ethnicities was a biopolitical measure for the Party to govern

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<sup>196</sup> Discussions on *Daji and Her Fathers* by the Literary Circle in Chongqing 重庆市文学界对〈达吉和她的父亲〉的讨论, *Xinhua Monthly* 新华月报 no.3 (1962):127-129.

China's populace. While it legitimized the Party's ambition to build a multi-national socialist nation, the diversification of ethnicities required the CCP to adopt a new statecraft that differed from imperial rule to govern an ethnically diverse populace. It was through promoting the Marxian discourse of *minzu*, or nationality, that the Party prescribed the socialist path and fashioned the socialist identity for China's multi-ethnic people. The flourishing of nationalities not only helped define the PRC as a state governed by the people but also provided a precondition for creating socialist subjects, who would transcend any ethnic/national boundary and live in proletarian solidarity.

Crucial to promoting the new consciousness of a multi-national nation and creating consent of the Party's rule was the CCP's multimedia practice of creating nationalities. In particular, the Party's cinematic program complemented and contradicted its social practice of ethnic classification. Through circulating intelligible audio-visual signs, the national minority film supplemented the official discourse of *minzu* by creating a familiar iconography of minority nationalities and enhancing the visibility of multi-national ingredients of the Chinese citizenship. On the other hand, inconsistencies and contradictions inherent to the national minority film revealed that ethnicity was an artificial construction rather than a scientifically identifiable object.

Overall, the national minority film is of emotive and ideological significance. Instead of promoting autonomous ethnic consciousness or creating normative ethnic identity, this genre film popularized the notion of nationality and propagated socialist fraternity among nationalities. Specific narrative patterns and stylistic devices in this genre film excited fraternal emotions in the spectator and asked them to transcend their own ethnic identity to form a socialist fraternal bond with others. Despite contesting

receptions, national minority films pointed to an emotional dimension of the CCP's ideal citizens: good citizens are compassionate socialists.

## Modelling the Ideal Socialist: the Red Star on the Silver Screen

你们是全中华民族的模范人物，是推动各方面人民事业胜利前进的骨干，是人民政府的可靠支柱和人民政府联系广大群众的桥梁。

You are models for the whole Chinese nation, activists propelling the people's cause forward to triumph in all spheres of endeavor, a firm pillar of support to the People's Government and a bridge linking the People's Government with the masses.

-- Mao Zedong 1950<sup>197</sup>

In addition to various practices mentioned in previous chapters, propagating the socialist ideal of the New Person was an indispensable practice through which the Chinese Communist Party attempted to reform its citizens in the new China. Yet, the gap between the theoretical notion and the actual construction of the new socialist person seems insurmountable. In reality, however, it was diminutive because the concept of the New Person was elastic. Due to its dialectical relationship with the modernization of socialist China, the new socialist person designated not a fixed subject position, but a position that corresponded to contemporary material condition and political demand.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Speech delivered at the National Conferences of Combat Heroes and of Model Workers in Industry, Agriculture and the Army (September 25, 1950). See Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol.5 毛泽东选集第五卷. Beijing: People's Press 北京:人民出版社, 1977, 30-31.

<sup>198</sup> Until the late 1990s, the New Socialist Person was an important concept for Chinese intellectuals to explore in asking what the ideal person should be and how to represent this ideal person. See Hu Ke 胡可,

The CCP always found and promoted the social embodiment of the new socialist person - model people (mofan renwu 模范人物) at different stages of socialist modernization.

As early as the 1950s, numerous model people emerged from various social realms including industry, agriculture, and the military. According to the CCP, model people were people who possessed an advanced political consciousness, struggled for the socialist cause, and strived for the interest of the masses. In news reports, model people's exemplary deeds ranged from the protection of public property to the innovation of new methods in order to improve production efficiency. The CCP spared no effort in making these model people "public figures" and called for the masses to learn from them. For instance, the central and provincial government held conferences to commend model workers, peasants and soldiers; the state published books and articles and broadcast news of model people to disseminate their exemplary deeds;<sup>199</sup> institutions organized visits with model people so that the masses could directly consult these "advanced elements."

The Party pointed out that the significance of model people lay in their functionality in the entire social structure. As Mao Zedong stated in the epigraphic quote, model people, as activists devoted to the socialist cause, set up good examples for the ordinary people. As the advanced elements among the masses, they were the people the Party could count on. Ultimately, they were the link between the Party and the masses. In this light, model people occupied the center of the entire social structure.

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"On Representations of the New Socialist Person in Spoken Drama" 谈话剧中的社会主义新人形象, *Literary Theory and Criticism* 文艺理论与批评 no.3 (1992): 7-11; Miao Zuobing 苗作斌, "The New Socialist Person and the Modernization of Man" 社会主义新人和人的现代化, *Scientific Socialism* 科学社会主义, no.6 (1988):76-80.

<sup>199</sup> For instance, both published in 1951, *Model New Teachers* 模范新教师 and *Admirable Sons and Daughters of the Nation—Exemplary Deeds of Communists* 祖国优秀儿女--共产党员的模范事迹 are books that eulogize model peoples. Throughout the 1950s, news reports from Xinhua News Agency featured a number of articles praising model people and model working units.

For sociologists who study model people, they mainly serve as a testimony to social changes in China.<sup>200</sup> What these interpretations have ignored is the importance of model people as the embodiment of the ideal socialist. There are two levels of embodiment at work. First, in line with the common understanding, model people are the personification of an abstract idea, the socialist ideal of the New Person. Second, model people with their extraordinary deeds call attention to the question of embodiment, meaning the bodily aspects of socialist subjectivity.

Aside from actual model people, there existed a rich repertoire of cinematic representations of model people in 1950s and 1960s' China. The so-called "artistic documentary films" (艺术纪录片) were pseudo-feature films that were adapted from true stories of actual model people.<sup>201</sup> A 1963 feature film *Lei Feng* 雷锋 (dir. Dong Zhaoqi 董兆琪, 1963) was a timely production to commemorate the exemplary socialist soldier Lei Feng. Some other feature films created a number of fictional socialist models. These memorable characters include the warm-hearted and cheerful policeman Ma Tianmin (*My Day Off* 今天我休息, dir. Lu Ren 鲁韧, 1959), and the exuberant and selfless peasant woman Li Shuangshuang (*Li Shuangshuang* 李双双, dir. Lu Ren 鲁韧, 1962). Chinese socialist cinema also produced a unique type of model people: the Red Star. By the "Red Star," I refer to film stars who embodied the ideal socialist person both onscreen and off screen.

If model people, as the CCP envisioned, were the center of the Chinese nation and helped shape the masses into desired citizens, then the question arises: did this center

<sup>200</sup> One such study, also possibly the earliest English scholarship on model people, is "Young Women Leaders in China," by Mary Sheridan. *Signs* 1, no.2 (Autumn 1976): 59-88.

<sup>201</sup> The most famous example is Xie Jin's 1958 film *Huang Baomei* 黄宝妹. The title character is a model worker in the textile industry.

have certitude, immobility, and essence? The Red Star provides insight into this question. In this chapter, I use a case study of Zhang Ruifang, a particular Red Star, to explore stardom in Chinese socialist cinema as well as the mechanism of modeling that was crucial to the construction of socialist subjects.

### **Problematizing “the Star”**

From the 1970s onward, with the re-evaluation of popular culture and theoretical shifts in film studies, stardom has become an important subject in cultural and cinema studies. The study of stardom offers us the possibility of examining the cinematic process -- as the movie star ties production, film and spectator together. It also allows us to explore how star-making is organized and understood in a certain society, and more importantly, how a society produces certain notions of personhood through its star-making.<sup>202</sup> Within Chinese cinema, a few film stars unfailingly excite scholarly interest, because they are not only iconic national figures but also serve as a site where discourses of nation and modernity blend. For instance, the tragic silent-movie star Ruan Linyu in 1930s' metropolitan Shanghai is an allegory of China trapped between semi-colonialism, semi-feudalism, and capitalism.<sup>203</sup> She was a symbol, agent, and victim of Chinese modernity.<sup>204</sup> For another example, the muscular transnational film star, Bruce Lee, not only reinvigorated Hong Kong martial arts cinema through fusing patriotic messages with his dazzling performance of martial arts, but also excited Chinese cultural nationalism

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<sup>202</sup> See Christine Gledhill, *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, Routledge, 1991; Richard Dyer, *Stars*, British Film Institute, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition., 2008; Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Routledge 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2003; Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production and Popular Identities*, Wallflower Press, 2000;

<sup>203</sup> See Cui Shuqin, *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.

<sup>204</sup> See Kristine Harris, “The New Women Incident,” in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, 277-302.

worldwide. As for Gong Li -- the best-known Chinese star in today's global cinema market -- her international stardom, concomitant with the popularity of the Fifth Generation films, both capitalized on the essentialist idea of Chineseness and symbolized China's struggle in the globalizing marketplace.<sup>205</sup>

In contrast, film stars in Chinese socialist cinema have gone unnoticed, even though they were iconic figures at the stage of socialist modernization and they constituted mass culture in the Mao era. The uneven topology of star studies in Chinese cinema manifests an unquestioned assumption: movie stars are by-products of industrial practices of Hollywood and the like. This unevenness also indicates uneasiness toward detaching the star from an analytical framework of commercial culture. The importance of the study of stardom in Chinese socialist cinema cannot be overstated. Such studies are useful to understanding how both a film industry and a film culture seek an alternative path from the one set out by Hollywood. In addition, stardom encapsulates issues such as the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of individualism and collectivism in the socialist state and the dynamic relationship between the public figure and the masses.

During the Mao era, Zhang Ruifang 张瑞芳 (b.1918- ) was a well-known actor in Chinese socialist cinema, especially for her onscreen persona as the progressive woman activist who kept abreast with the times.<sup>206</sup> Throughout the 1950s, Zhang was cast for major positive female roles, as a woman militia leader in a classic revolutionary film

<sup>205</sup> Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

<sup>206</sup> Like many renowned Chinese film actors in Mao's China, Zhang had had rich performing experience in spoken drama (Western drama) before she entered the film world. During the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) she actively performed in street dramas such as *Putting Down Your Whip*, and in about twenty stage dramas in Chongqing including *Beijingers* 北京人 and *Qu Yuan* 屈原. Her stage characters are gentle, sophisticated, and tragic women. Zhang had her screen debut in Sun Yun's 孙瑜 1941 film *Ablution of Fire* 火的洗礼. As she recalls, she played rather clumsily the character a repentant female spy sent by the Nationalist Party to sabotage an arsenal factory. See Zhang Ruifang 张瑞芳, *Unforgettable Yesterday* 难以忘怀的昨日. Shanghai: Xue Lin Publisher 上海: 学林出版社, 1998.

*Conquer South, Victory North* 南征北战 (dir. Cheng Yin 成荫 and Tang Xiaodan 汤晓丹, 1951), as an underground female communist in a biopic *Nie Er* 聂耳 (dir. Zhen Junli 郑君里, 1959), and as an urban housewife who actively participates in a Mutual Aid Team in *Everywhere is Spring* 万紫千红总是春 (dir. Shen Fu 沈复, 1959). All these films demonstrate a great effort to commemorate the glorious cause and wise leadership of the CCP at phases of revolutionary struggle and socialist construction. However, Zhang was best-known for her title role in the rural film *Li Shuangshuang* 李双双 (dir. Lu Ren 鲁韧, 1962).

Adapted from Li Zhun's 李准 novella *The True Story of Li Shuangshuang* 李双双小传, the film tells the story of a young peasant couple in a people's commune. Li Shuangshuang, the wife, is presented as a model commune member, is forthright in character, selfless at heart, and quick in unmasking others' selfish thoughts. Her husband Sun Xiwang, a mild character who has patriarchal habits and conservative attitudes, often feels embarrassed by Shuangshuang's activism and holds her back from taking public responsibilities. After several mini-dramas of quarrels and splits between the peasant couple, the film ends with the couple's reunion. Xiwang, sincerely convinced of Shuangshuang's merits, reconciles with his wife, learns from her, and develops into a good commune member. In this film, Zhang established her most famous screen persona: the new peasant woman of the socialist countryside. Produced by Haiyan Studio (a branch of Shanghai Film Studios), *Li Shuangshuang* was a phenomenal success upon its release. The film enjoyed nationwide distribution and a relatively long theatrical run.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>207</sup> In February 1951, the Chinese government built a national Film Management Company, under the Film Bureau, to take charge of film distribution all over the country. This organization made decisions regarding the proportion of foreign films to Chinese films in movie theaters, rental rates, and types of films meriting screening. Political criterion was held as the primary standard in making decisions. This centralized film

As a movie theater staff member in Shanghai recalled, during the period when *Li Shuangshuang* was screened, the movie theater arranged extra screenings at noon for the general public as well as special screenings for students to meet the needs of the urban audience.<sup>208</sup> Soon Chinese audiences began to identify Zhang Ruifang endearingly as Li Shuangshuang. Zhang's stardom peaked in 1963, when she won the Best Actress Award of One Hundred Flowers, a readers' choice award sponsored by the film magazine, *Masses Cinema*.<sup>209</sup>

Yet, to call Zhang a star is problematic. During the Seventeen Years when the socialist ideology prevailed, the very word "star" fell out of fashion in everyday speech. "Star" carried a spectrum of connotations: corrupted lifestyles, loftiness, individualism, and liberalism, all of which originated from the same source -- capitalism. Specific to cinema, "star" immediately evoked images of glamorous and fashionable movie stars in Hollywood as well as in the cosmopolitan Shanghai of the pre-Liberation days. They were among the most sensual symbols of commercial culture.

It comes as no surprise, in this light, that movie actors/actresses, even the outstanding ones, along with film directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers, and other personnel in Chinese socialist cinema shared one common designation: "the film

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distribution practice led to the gradual disappearance of Hollywood films in Chinese film market and the decrease of Soviet feature films. See Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, 35-36.

<sup>208</sup> Zhou Tao records the exhibition of *Li Shuangshuang* in the Huaihai Movie Theatre located in downtown Shanghai at the end of 1962 in "During the Days When *Li Shuangshuang* Released —A Diary of a Staff in the Movie Theater" (在上映《李双双》的日子里——一个影院工作人员的日记), *Masses Cinema* 大众电影, no.1 (1963):15.

<sup>209</sup> The Hundred Flowers Awards were the most distinguished film awards in Mao's China and have been influential until the 1980s. After the Prime Minister Zhou Enlai proposed The Hundred Flowers Awards to strengthen the connection between the masses and cinema, the film magazine *Masses Cinema* started to host Hundred Flowers Awards competition in 1962. In 1963, *Masses Cinema* attracted over 180,000 public votes for the second competition of Hundred Flower Awards. See "One Hundred Eighty Thousand Audiences Cast Votes, The Hundred Flower Film Awards Announce the Results" 十八万多观众踊跃参加投票评选, 第二届国产片“百花奖”评奖揭晓, *Wenhui Bao Index* 文汇报索引 no.5 (1963):15.

worker.” This appellation may bluntly call our attention to the fact that stars are primarily laborers, who utilize natural attributes, gifts, and acquired crafts to perform or to work. After all, it is through this particular form of work that stars produce value, and mainly exchange value. Not only do their acting and their images attract the investment of capital and propel the flow of currency, their names also become symbolic capital circulated among audiences. Nevertheless, the CCP’s naming outstanding actors as film workers demonstrated a particular socialist ethic, namely, to work is glorious. Socialists believe that work cultivates proletarian consciousness and defines class boundary. By this logic, stellar actors are appealing and admirable not because they possess mysterious and ethereal qualities, but because they are self-supporting and accomplished workers, to whom the masses can relate. Moreover, the designation of film workers reveals a deep-seated egalitarian concern in socialism, which helps re-conceptualize the relation between the star and the spectator. To say the least, intimate camaraderie between the star and the spectator is favored over spectators’ craze for the star.

In fact, Zhang was a film worker of the “People’s Cinema,” a new Chinese cinema that the CCP aimed to build. The term “People’s Cinema” not only affirmed the Party’s general policy on literature and arts that they should serve workers, peasants and soldiers; it also highlighted a strong bond between the PRC’s cinema and a minor tradition within Chinese cinema -- the Yan’an Film Group in the pre-1949 Communist revolutionary base area.<sup>210</sup> Subsumed under the Headquarters of the Political Department in Yan’an, the Yan’an Film Group produced a fair number of documentaries concerning major social

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<sup>210</sup> Chen Jihua traces the origin of People’s Cinema to the foundation of the Yan’an Film Group in 1938. See *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* 中国电影发展史, Beijing: China Film Press 北京:中国电影出版社. 1963. In late 1930s and 1940s, “People’s Cinema” differentiated itself from cinemas in both the KMT occupied areas and the Japanese occupied areas.

and political events such as *Unite Production with Battle* 团结与战斗结合起来 and *The Seventh Plenary Meeting of the Chinese Communist Party* 中国共产党第七次全体大会. To popularize proletarian culture and communist ideology, the Yan'an Film Group created an innovative film exhibition practice: mobile projection. Carrying simple projection equipment, mobile projection teams went into the remote and deserted rural areas on foot where they screened documentaries produced by the Yan'an Film Group and some Soviet films to the local people. In short, these production and exhibition practices helped bridge the gap between the masses and art. In the PRC, this minor cinematic tradition became increasingly important, for it provided a prescription for the CCP in building a new Chinese cinema of the people and for the people. Moreover, "People's Cinema" manifested the CCP's determination to counteract what it characterized as the "old and degenerate" Republican cinema tradition. Immediately after the founding of the People's Republic, the Party concentrated its leadership in cinema. It gradually converted and merged private film production companies into state-run film studios. It founded the Film Bureau under the Ministry of Culture to censor film production, to regulate domestic film production and distribution quota, and to develop cultural exchanges with other socialist cinemas. The CCP's reformation of the old cinema assumed such great political urgency and significance that a catchphrase with a heavy military flavor, "the battlefield of the People's Cinema" (人民电影战线), became a favorite headline in film journals and newspapers in early 1950s.<sup>211</sup> This hard-fought and sweeping battle against the old cinema unfolded in different arenas including film production, film distribution, and film exhibition.

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<sup>211</sup> For example, "At the Battlefield of People's Cinema in Our Country, Introducing Domestic Film Productions in 1952" 在我国人民电影战线上 1952 年全国各种影片生产情况介绍, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.1 (1952): 16.

The film star culture, as a site where the spectator's engagement with film is predominant, and hence film's impact on social life most tangible, naturally became an important battleground of "People's Cinema." Chinese film star culture in Republican China was similar to that of Hollywood. To varying degrees, comprehensive film magazines carried coverage of film stars and sponsored public polls on "movie queens" or "movie kings." A fair number of magazines thrived solely by marketing stars. Famous fanzines, such as, *Stars Pictorial* (明星画报 1925), *Commemorative Album of Movie Queen* (电影皇后胡蝶纪念册 1933), *Star Family* (明星家庭 1934), *Star Feature* (明星特写 1937), *Movie Star Collection* (影星专辑 1941), and *Fan Club* (影迷俱乐部 1949), created an industry of desire that assumed many forms. Sometimes, these magazines produced fetish desire of movie stars. At other times, they encouraged the desire to look or act like the star. At still other times, they even aroused the desire for the Western lifestyle with which the star was associated. Well aware of print culture's role in perpetuating memorable star images, breeding the idolization of individuals, and generating frivolous behaviors,<sup>212</sup> the Party purged movie magazines which were popular in Republican China, including *Qingqing Cinema* (青青电影).<sup>213</sup> New film magazines that aimed to cultivate a healthy and elevating taste in film audiences quickly sprouted. Now they adopted strong nationalistic titles such as *Masses Cinema* (大众电影), *People's Cinema* (人民电影), and *Chinese Cinema* (中国电影).<sup>214</sup>

<sup>212</sup> For print culture's role in cultivating film culture in Republican China, see Leo Ou-fan Lee's "The Urban Milieu of Shanghai Cinema, 1930-40: Some Explorations of Film Audience, Film Culture, and Narrative Conventions," in Yingjin Zhang ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

<sup>213</sup> This film magazine had a large circulation in the 1940s. It hosted several polls on Movie Queen and Movie King. In one of these polls, the actor Liu Qiong was elected as Movie King of 1940.

<sup>214</sup> *Chinese Cinema* later changed into *Film Art*.

In addition to reforming print culture, the CCP deployed former movie stars' personal accounts to repudiate Republican film star culture. Take Shuangguan Yunzhu's case, for instance. In an article published in an early 1950s' issue of *Masses Cinema*, Shangguan reflects on her ten-year acting career and elaborates on the detrimental effect of the old film star culture. She recalls,

My interest [in performance] motivated me to choose acting as my profession. Why did I have such an *interest*? To be honest, all sorts of things that surrounded "stars" attracted me greatly. I yearned for a luminous halo hung round "stars"; I admired "stars" for they lived a comfortable life. Therefore, during the first few years after I became an actress, my lifestyle and my consciousness were made star-like. I sought ease and comfort; I was proud and vain; I ignored discipline ... I aimed to be like those "big stars" who had already made their names. My whole mind was set on distinguishing myself from others. When it came to casting, I desired only to play protagonists -- the beautiful, prominent, and shining characters. Later on, I changed a bit. I was glad to play protagonists, but also willing to play negative characters. I was happy to play young characters, and was ok with playing old ones. Why? In a word, I wanted to showcase my talent and to be a person out of the ordinary.

我的开始从事戏剧工作，最基本的原因，不过是为了“爱好”。[...]至于问我为什么会有这种“爱好”的呢？那说句老实话，当初的所谓“明星”们的种种，实在是大大的吸引了我。我向往着“明星”头衔的光荣，我羡慕着“明星”生活的舒适。所以我初进戏剧圈子的几年里，我的生活作风，思想意识，的确曾经“明星”化了些的。讲究享受，骄傲虚荣，自由散漫.....把那些当时成了名的“大明星”们做着目标，一心一意想做得不落人后，出人头地，因此演戏时希望当主角，当漂亮的突出的动人的主角。后来变了些，当主角固然高兴，做反动也很愿意，年轻的更好，年老的也喜欢。为什么呢？一句话无非是为了显本领，要不同凡俗。<sup>215</sup>

The connection between film star and individualism is apparent. The film star was a product of individualism and even further nurtured individualism. The fact that this article was published in the widely circulated popular film magazine reminds us that Shangguan's self-reflection was a social performance that had a textual formula and an intended audience. Hence, Shangguan's recount of her past is important not because it

<sup>215</sup> Shangguan Yunzhu 上官云珠, "Ten Years of Being an Actress" (演员生活十年), *Masses Cinema* no.15 (1950):12.

reveals what she truly thought and acted, but in that it personalized the official vision of the old film culture.

Moreover, the Party encouraged former movies stars to use self-criticisms as a tool in remoulding themselves. In Mao's China, self-criticism referred to a public act of engaging in self-examination and discovering one's errors. Self-criticism campaigns were periodically launched and took the forms of group discussion, public speeches, and writing. In essence, self-criticism was one of many governmental techniques that the CCP encouraged people to adopt for the sake of self-transformation. Through incessantly dissecting one's innermost thoughts in the light of the socialist ideology, self-criticism was supposed to help each individual to attain reflective knowledge about the self and to transform himself/herself into a good socialist being. Whether in oral speech or written text, self-criticism had its formulaic convention. It had the first person narration as the mark of its enunciation and it had a salient confessional style. It usually started with a self-reflection on one's misdeeds and undesirable thoughts in the past; it reached a climax when one rationalized the cause of his or her errors; and it ended with a resonant and upbeat coda when one promised to adopt an advanced political consciousness in order to guide one's conduct and thoughts in the future.

Political progressive actors who had made remarkable contributions to leftist films before the liberation also had to adopt self-criticism to "discover and reveal their shallow thoughts." Bai Yang is a good case in point. Before 1949, Bai Yang had starred in many well-known leftist films including *Spring River Flows East* 一江春水向东流 (dir. Cai Chusheng and Zheng Junli, 1947). In 1952, she wrote an article entitled "Learning from the Beginning, Starting from Scratch" (从头学起, 从头做起) for *Masses Cinema*. The title

of the article manifests her determination to remould herself. The article itself is composed utterly in a self-critical fashion. Bai Yan first criticizes herself for being conceited about her achievements in the days of pre-liberation, and then dissects her individualist thought. “I thought that I had played enough oppressed characters before liberation. After liberation, I longed for playing characters of heroes, which was, in fact, to gratify my own feverish sentiment and to enrich myself with fame and fortune. I haven’t thought about whether unreformed petite-bourgeois actors possess the quality of heroes and have a deep understanding of these characters.”<sup>216</sup> What mattered indeed was not what one revealed in his/her writings or speeches, but that one embraced self-criticism or put on a social performance of self-criticism. In reality, it was not easy for people to accept this remoulding technique. Bai Yang was no exception. As she writes,

I have another serious shortcoming: I can neither speak of nor think about criticism and self-criticism. I care much about my “face,” and have petite-bourgeois sentimentalism. I would not criticize others because I am afraid of hurting other people’s sense of self-respect. Or, to be more precise, I am afraid that others would in turn criticize me and hurt my self-esteem. Even if I have some issues, I did not discuss them with comrades and leaders. Instead, I only had faith in myself. ... As a result, I have behaved like a guest in the big family of our nation. I lacked the pride and vigor that revolutionary cadres should possess.

我的另一个严重缺点是：批评和自我批评在我心里口里都展不开：我存在着浓厚的小资产阶级的面子、温情主义。我从来不愿批评别人，怕伤害了别人的自尊心 – 其实是怕别人反过来批评自己，伤害了自己的自尊心。有了问题，也不和同志们、领导上去商量，只相信自己的力量。... 这样的结果，在伟大的祖国大家庭里，形成我在作客，缺乏革命干部主人翁的自豪精神和奋勇的蓬勃气概。

By confessing her various “mistakes” in public, Bai assumed the socialist subject-position and did what was deemed proper for that position. Her writing even suggests self-criticism as a self-empowering technique, which would make bold, confident, and

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<sup>216</sup> Bai Yang 白杨, “Learning from the Beginning, Starting from Scratch” (从头学起, 从头做起), *Masses Cinema*, no.8/9 (1952): 40.

proud “masters of the nation”(国家主人翁). Taking into account Bai Yang’s earlier reluctance to engage in self-criticism, her writing already demonstrates the result of self-modification.

Political intervention in film star culture was hardly a phenomenon exclusive to China: similar practices exist in many politically centralized regimes. However, in the process of forming Chinese socialist cinema, this political intervention led to a particular question: how did the CCP legitimize stars without engendering the once prevalent notion of “subjective individuality?” At the core of this question was the alteration of the signifying process of the star. The Party’s orchestrated symposiums and workshops, as well as exchanges among socialist cinemas all intended to introduce and consolidate new interpretive strategies of film stars. These strategies reframed the question of “the star” within the larger question of how individuals grapple with social and historical forces.

In addition, the film star culture in Mao’s China should not be isolated from its international interpretive community. In fact, during the 1950s film exchanges between China and its socialist allies were active.<sup>217</sup> Due to the state-regulated distribution and exhibition practices, the Chinese film industry put restraints on screenings of Hollywood films while it introduced an increasing number of Italian Neo-realist films, as well as socialist films from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and North Korea to Chinese audience.<sup>218</sup> Since the CCP championed Soviet cinema as the model of socialist cinema,<sup>219</sup> exchanges between China and the Soviet Union, at both levels of film

<sup>217</sup> For studies Chinese experience of Soviet films, see Tina Mai Chen, “Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s,” *Cultural Critique* 58 (Fall 2004):82-114.

<sup>218</sup> One important venue for these exchanges was the Moscow Film Festival.

<sup>219</sup> See Zhang Junxiang’s 张峻祥 article “Learning from the Soviet Union, Defending Socialist Cinema”更好地学习苏联, 保卫社会主义的电影事业, *Chinese Cinema* 中国电影, no.11/12 (1957): 8-14.

exchange and personnel visits, were particularly prominent. According to the statistics revealed by the film magazine *Chinese Cinema*, about 2,000,000 Chinese people watched Soviet films in 1956.<sup>220</sup> Not only did Soviet films such as *Chapayev*, *The Young Guard*, and *Village Teacher* become Chinese audiences' favorites, Soviet superstars, for instance, Sergei Bondarchuk (who starred in *The Young Guard*), Vera Maretskaya (the leading actress in *The Village Teacher*), and Boris Andreyev (who starred in *The Fall of Berlin*) became household names.<sup>221</sup>

In the meantime, Chinese film journals such as *International Cinema*, *Chinese Cinema*, and *Masses Cinema* actively introduced Soviet film culture, including its critical discourses regarding stars. As introduced in Chinese translations of Soviet critical essays and editorials, the Soviet state proposed “people’s actors” as an analytical category and as the highest acknowledgement of outstanding actors. Contrary to Western discourses on stars which mainly draw attention to actors’ idiosyncratic charisma, Soviet discourses of “people’s actors” highlighted actors’ political functions, historical roles, and social responsibilities. For example, an editorial from *Newspaper of Soviet Arts* elucidates,

In our country, actors have become citizens’ artists, social activists, and masses’ educators. Actors are people who are able to evaluate the arts and the representation of life from the perspective of the state.... Soviet actors are first and foremost people who have [political] ideas, who can deeply and correctly understand the task that our people are facing.<sup>222</sup>

演员在我国已经成为公民的艺术家、社会活动家、群众的教育家，和能以国家的立场来评价艺术与生活的显现的人。..... 苏联演员- 这首先就是有思想、有头脑，深刻而准确地懂得我们的人民所面临的任务的人。

<sup>220</sup> Sha Lang 沙浪, “Soviet Cinema and Chinese Audiences” 苏联电影和中国观众, *Chinese Cinema* 中国电影, 1957: no.11/12.

<sup>221</sup> See *Masses Cinema*, no.3, no.12 (1954)

<sup>222</sup> See the Chinese translation of this editorial, “Sublime Missions of Soviet Actors” 苏联演员的崇高使命, *Film Art* 电影艺术, 1952:no.2.

Corresponding to these discourses was the practice of the state conferring on actors titles such as “Soviet People’s Actor” and “Meritorious Actor.”<sup>223</sup> Overall, the Soviet experience provided a formula for the burgeoning Chinese socialist cinema. In particular, the Soviet discourses and practices that established People’s Actors as vanguards of socialist causes -- instead of antagonists of collective interests -- offered a paradigm for the film star culture in socialist China.

Because of above-mentioned reasons, I use the term “Red Star” to refer to Zhang Ruifang, a star who assumed a great significance in propelling socialist movements during the Seventeen Years.

### **Star Image**

There are two kinds of star images: flesh and blood images of the actor assuming diverse material forms, and mental images of the star shaped by various discursive practices. The former type of star image includes films, film posters, publicity photos, and public appearances. The latter is constructed by journalistic and critical discourses, everyday speech about the actor, as well as many other ways of using the star image in popular culture. While the former often calls attention to the film industry’s input in making the star, the latter indicates the audience’s active role in both creating the star and making sense of the star. In the past twenty years, Richard Dyer and Jackie Stacey have made a great effort to bridge the major gap in research on stars, namely, the role of the audience. Whether it is Dyer’s discursive analysis of how different audiences read ethnic stars or Stacey’s ethnographic research of the British female spectator’s understanding of

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<sup>223</sup> See “How Many Kinds of Honorable Titles that Soviet Film Actors Can Have” 苏联电影演员的荣誉称号有几种, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.7 (1957):33.

Hollywood stars in the 1940s and 1950s, their works demonstrate that the meaning of stars is in part contingent upon the audience's interaction with stars as media texts as well as the star's socio-historical context.<sup>224</sup> Meanwhile, recent media studies of audiences, and in particular of fandom, also offer exciting new directions. These studies examine the audience's inventive use of stars to form distinctive communities, to seek alternative modes of consumption,<sup>225</sup> and to subvert reified hierarchical social orders. They inform us of the importance of audiences as producers in reproducing and reinventing star's images and the relevant discourses.

Considering the socio-historical context, Chinese audiences in the Mao era hardly formed an autonomous interpretive community. Audiences' responses to film and stars were highly visible in newspapers, magazines and journals. However, these responses were mediated by the then popular socio-political discourses and selected in accordance with the editorial directive of specific state media. Thus, it is necessary to situate an examination of the making of the Red Star within a wider management of propaganda and cultural production in socialist China.

Zhang's star image as a model socialist person was stabilized over the course of the years 1962 and 1963, as her publicity image was visually modified and subsidiary discourses accrued. In June 1962, three months before the release of *Li Shuangshuang*, the film magazine *Shanghai Cinema* published publicity pictures of the film. These included a half page of downsized black and white film stills of *Li Shuangshuang*, and a

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<sup>224</sup> See Richard Dyer's analyses of Paul Robeson and Judy Garland in *Heavenly Bodies*, New York: Routledge, 1986. Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*, New York: Routledge, 1994.

<sup>225</sup> Henry Jenkins, John Fiske, and Matt Hill's works on fan culture problematize the assumption of the passivity of the audience and highlight fan productivity in relation to fan's identity formation. See Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, London: Routledge, 1992; John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in Lisa A. Lewis ed. *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, London: Routledge, 1992; Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*, London: Routledge, 2002.

photo-collage set against a watercolor backdrop of a serene countryside. The former, accompanied by brief captions, highlighted the film's major episodes and delineated a simple storyline from the film. The latter, with its bright color and full-scale size, accentuated the film's leading male and female actors, who appeared as their screen roles.<sup>226</sup>

The centerfold is composed of two large tinted color photos of the protagonists of the film: Xiwang (played by Zhong Xinghuo) and Shuangshuang (played by Zhang Ruifang). The left side features the right profile of Xiwang, who is attentively playing a flute. The depiction of Xiwang is so detailed that wrinkles in his forehead and the folds of his off-white peasant garment are clearly visible. Yet his image is dwarfed by an even bigger portrait of Shuangshuang, which nearly occupies the entire right half of the centerfold. In the lower left corner of the watercolor, a small image of the couple and their daughter is superimposed onto the portrait of Xiwang. Roughly covering about two thirds of the left side of the centerfold, this image conveys a peaceful feeling. Xiwang and Shuangshuang sit side by side. Xiwang holds their only daughter sound asleep in his arms, whereas Shuangshuang affectionately looks over her husband's shoulder at the daughter. The centerfold's composition sets off the visual importance of the two leading performers and opens up different interpretations of the relation among each part of the painting.<sup>227</sup> Smooth ink strokes in the background watercolor and bright color tones in the photo-collage cast the two characters in a romantic light.

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<sup>226</sup> This intention is reinforced by the caption on the lower right corner of this centerfold, which introduces major actors and actresses and their respective roles.

<sup>227</sup> The perspective system is a method of representing three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface so as to produce the same impression of distance and relative size as that perceived by the human eye. It is governed by the aesthetical principle of verisimilitude. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999.38-39.

Due to its formalist features and thematic concern, this picture is evocative of traditional Chinese folk painting. More importantly, it draws attention to a particular kind of femininity imagined within folk tradition. The tinted color photo of Shuangshuang well illustrates this point. In her portrait, the pink flower patterned shirt, softened facial outline, bashful smile, and flushed cheekbones, which are commonly used formalist elements in Chinese folk painting of female characters, serve as visual cues of the feminine quality of Shuangshuang. Overall, Shuangshuang's image is sedentary. Resting her chin in her right hand, Shuangshuang wears a carefree smile. Her bangs rest serenely on her forehead, and her eyes seem to express sincere longing for the happy days to come. She is pretty yet passive. The visual prominence of the portrait almost magnifies such passiveness. The image of Shuangshuang is also a domesticated one. The composition of the entire watercolor suggests that Shuangshuang is a tender wife and a loving mother. Although there is something ambivalent in Shuangshuang's bashful smile and evasive gaze, such ambivalence opens up the possibility of interpreting the intention of her gaze. Since the portrait of Shuangshuang is positioned on the right side, one may suggest that she is indirectly yet lovingly looking at her husband, who is to her left. One may also argue that she is simply contemplating her happy family life. Hence, her gaze directs the viewer's attention to her mental picture, the foreground image of the happy family to her lower left. In either interpretation, Shuangshuang's social role is defined by her domesticity.

The simple presence of the small foreground image gives the entire painting an unconventional look, for it clearly breaks the spatial and temporal unity. Despite its unconventional structure, the painting conforms to the traditional idea of women. The

pattern of male/active and female/passive in the entire painting is unmistakable. Portraits of Xiwang/playing flute and Shuangshuang/being contemplative form such a contrast. In the foreground image, this pattern recurs: Xiwang is holding the daughter and Shuangshuang is simply casting a loving gaze. If this small image is supposed to portray what is in Shuangshuang's mind, then her internalization of the role that the traditional society has assigned to women is obvious. Evidently, passivity and domesticity, as connoted in the static image of Shuangshuang, reinforce each other and heighten the character's femininity. Heavily influenced by the artistic conventions of the folk painting, the tainted color photo creates a feminine figure, they also introduce ethic dimensions of femininity: being natural, nurturing, down-to-earth, and traditional.

There is no doubt that Chinese folk art lends essential conceptual ideas and formalist expressions to the publicity picture of *Li Shuangshuang*. Affinities between these two different art forms are apparent: both address the same rural audience; both focus on rural subject matters. The use of popular folk art certainly helps prepare audiences for this relatively new film genre, regulates viewers' expectation of *Li Shuangshuang*, and facilitates the popularization of the film. Disparities between the painting and the film are also obvious. Whereas the film is black and white, the painting is rich in color. In addition, the content of the watercolor is utterly non-diegetic. None of the constitutive segments of the painting appear in the film *Li Shuangshuang*; and characters in the film never assume the same posture as depicted in the painting. Although the latter point would not be readily apparent to readers/audiences who had not yet seen the film, what is clear is that the painting demands that readers/audiences give full attention to the actors, especially, Zhang Ruifang.

Ironically, although Zhang's publicity was framed within the publicity of the film, it heavily relied on what contradicts her screen persona. The image of the highly conventional and anonymous woman in the watercolor provides a good point of reference to understand the drastic change in the construction of Zhang's star image within that one year.

In June 1963, immediately after Zhang won the Best Actress award, the fifth and sixth issues of *Masses Cinema* published the most famous and widely circulated publicity picture of Zhang Ruifang on its cover: a painted color portrait of Zhang as her screen role Li Shuangshuang.<sup>228</sup> This painting presents us with a neatly dressed peasant woman wearing a beaming smile and sun-burnt complexion. With her right hand lifted up near her open mouth, and with her eyes looking diagonally out of the frame, Zhang Ruifang/Li Shuangshuang seems to be calling out for her companions in the distance. Far different from the above-mentioned idyllic watercolor, the portrait is filled with dynamism, at the levels of both composition and feeling. With Zhang's face positioned in the diagonal axis of the frame, this low angle portrait avoids the conventional and static front view portrait of a single character. Corresponding to composition, details of the portrait diminish the figure's feminine qualities and instead emphasize her strength, energy, and spirit. A blue and white check patterned garment, the northern woman's hairstyle, the healthily sun-tanned complexion, the clear facial outline, the thick and black eyebrows, and the bright eyes beaming with enthusiasm all help to transform a tender and loving woman into a determined and energetic socialist activist. Dispensing with any meaningful background, including supplementary characters and countryside landscape,

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<sup>228</sup> In the 1990s, when *Li Shuangshuang*, like many other classic Chinese films, was reproduced into the VCD (compact video disk) format, this image appeared as the VCD cover.

makes the image more prominent, and suggests that the public space where the peasant woman plays an active role is vast and infinite. With its quasi-realist depiction, bright color schemes, and masculinization of the female character, this cover picture highlights distinctive physicality and action of Ruifang/Shuangshuang: she is a woman activist. The picture thus created a memorable icon of the new socialist person. It also presaged the dominant aesthetics in revolutionary visual culture, an aesthetics that aimed to bring proletarian heroes to great visual prominence.<sup>229</sup>

The choice of painting as the medium of Zhang's publicity pictures was a strategic one, at both the political and aesthetic levels. The use of this traditional visual technology countered the common use of photography, an imported technology, in publicizing stars in pre-1949 Republican cinema. While sleek photographs of glamorous stars created a spectacle of the modern and called to mind what could be considered outlandish, paintings invoked a long tradition of how the Chinese populace visualized the world, and particularly evoked feelings of familiarity in the masses. In this sense, using painting in publicity images was a political gesture of promoting the national. Here, the national is less a territorial marker than a mode of modernization that acknowledges and manipulates established conventions in order to evoke the feeling of unity. Moreover, unbounded by limits of mechanical recording, painting allowed artists much room for subjective intervention. It enabled them to respond to socio-political demands promptly, and it allowed them to materialize what could be imagined.

The transition from the idyllic folk painting to the socialist realist picture of Zhang was clear evidence of the propagandistic construction of Zhang's stardom as an

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<sup>229</sup> Jiang Qing's implementation of the principle of "Three Prominence" in the Cultural Revolution was the high point of this aesthetics.

exemplary woman socialist. Yet, the very process of the stabilization of Zhang's stardom betrays contesting ideas contained within the reception of *Li Shuangshuang* and complicates the construction of her stardom.

### **Modelling the Red Star: The Stanislavski Method**

Immediately after the film's phenomenal success, the press showed an immense interest in exploring the significance of the character Shuangshuang as well as Zhang Ruifang's performance. In the winter of 1962, *Masses Cinema* magazine sponsored two symposia on *Li Shuangshuang* which would invite discussions of the film in general and comments on Zhang Ruifang's performance in particular. Participants, most of whom were film and drama actors, reached a consensus that the cheerful, exuberant, and principled commune member Shuangshuang distinguished the film *Li Shuangshuang* from its contemporaries, and thus "brought the rural film to a higher level."<sup>230</sup>

Indeed, Zhang's popularity had much to do with the rise of a novel genre in Chinese socialist cinema -- the rural film. Her name has been associated with this genre ever since the release of *Li Shuangshuang*. The rural film features life in the contemporary countryside as its subject matter. With optimistic, energetic, and cheerful peasants as its central characters, the rural film not only introduced new characters to the silver screen, but also revised the representational codification of peasants as poor, wretched, and suffering folks in pre-1949 performing arts and literature. In the meantime, the rural film tailored its narrative to the current socialist movement, such as the collectivization

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<sup>230</sup> In 1962, *Masses Cinema* sponsored two symposiums: one is on the film, the other on the performing arts of the film. See Yu Jin 于今, "A New Harvest in Rural Films – A Symposium on the Film *Li Shuangshuang*" 反映农村生活影片的新收获- 记影片“李双双”座谈会, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.11 (1962):6-7.

movement and the Great Leap Forward. To render political messages comprehensible to the mass of spectators, the rural film boldly explored artistic possibilities. Its concentrated visual representation of village life, its incorporation of many indigenous aesthetic preferences and forms of entertainment,<sup>231</sup> and its self-explanatory plot made the rural film a big attraction for a peasant audience.

The Seventeen Years saw a large production of rural films, including *The Spring of Two Families* 两家春 (dir. Qu Baiyin 瞿白音 and Xu Bingduo 许秉铎, 1951), *Blooming Flowers and Full Moon* 花好月圆 (dir. Guo Wei 郭维, 1958), *Young People of Our Village* 我们村里的年轻人 (dir. Su Li 苏里, 1959), *The Broad Road* 康庄大道 (dir. Wang Yan 王炎, 1959), *The Withered Tree Revives* 枯木逢春 (dir. Zheng Junli 郑君里, 1961), and *A Young Generation* 年青的一代 (dir. Zhao Ming 赵明, 1965). *Li Shuangshuang* distinguished itself by its unique angle and set off an important generic characteristic of rural films: using focused depictions of peasant women to register social change in the countryside. Subsequent to *Li Shuangshuang*, rural films such as *In the Wild Mountains* 野山 (1985), *Ju Dou* 菊豆 (1990), and *Women from the Lake of Scented Souls* 香魂女 (1992) all employed vivid representations of peasant woman to shed light on “different visions of becoming modern that bestirred a predominantly agrarian nation in the second half of the twentieth century.”<sup>232</sup>

The character Li Shuangshuang, which won Zhang a large following audience, was the most distinctive female character in rural films at the time. The *Masses Cinema* symposium participants commented, “Shuangshuang’s distinctive character is an

<sup>231</sup> This goes two ways. After the film’s success, *Li Shuangshuang* was adapted into various forms of local entertainment, including Ping Tan 评弹, Yu Ju 豫剧, and Hua Gu Xi 花鼓戏.

<sup>232</sup> Tang, Xiaobing, “Rural Women and Social Change in New China Cinema”, *Position* 11, no.3 (Winter 2003):647-674.

emerging new character. Such a character does not drop from sky. It grows out of traditional character of toiling masses.”<sup>233</sup> Shuangshuang is outspoken, bold, and vigorous. However, with her distinctive character, she defends collective interest instead of individual interest. In general, they praised Shuangshuang’s admirable qualities. She never flinches from confronting her husband; she boldly fights against feudalism and individualism with which her husband is associated. These made her a “lofty and lovely” character. In short, the significance of the character Shuangshuang is twofold: she is a brand new character in Chinese cinema; she is also the “typical character that embodies the Zeitgeist.”<sup>234</sup>

Such ideologically-centered responses fell prey to a homogenous interpretive pattern and failed to unravel any distinctive characteristics of the cinematic model heroine. Ironically, without attending to the specificity of film art, the generalized comments on how Shuangshuang served as the model person in the new society made this character the most conventional one. Arguments that resorted to the binary opposition between individualism and collectivism in order to explain the film’s popularity hardly distinguish the movie from others, given the fact that *Li Shuangshuang* was one of many 1950s and 1960s’ rural films that addressed the same conflict.<sup>235</sup> In addition, these responses glossed over the discrepancy within the official discourse on socialist arts, not to mention the difference between the CCP’s political intent and the masses’ interest.

<sup>233</sup> “A New Harvest in Rural Films – A Symposium on the Film *Li Shuangshuang*,” 6.

<sup>234</sup> Huang Zongying 黄宗英, “Happily Watch *Li Shuangshuang*” 喜看李双双, *Newspaper of Arts* 文艺报, no.11 (1962):7.

<sup>235</sup> For example, *Young People of Our Village*

Perhaps peasant audiences' plain words more pertinently explained the appeal of the character Shuangshuang. As two staff writers of *Masses Cinema* recorded, one commune member had the following comment on the film *Li Shuangshuang*, "I have watched the film once, but I want to watch it again. Why? The film is authentic. The characters are lifelike, and the story is about things that we have experienced. So it is very pleasant to watch."<sup>236</sup> Apparently, it was the "lifelikeness," rather than "loftiness," of the character that caught audiences' attention and won their hearts. In other words, the representation of the character, which was deeply rooted in life and assumed vitality, attracted the audience. In fact, discussions of Zhang's performance ran parallel to investigations of the character Shuangshuang. It was commonly maintained that Zhang breathed life into her role. If in the original novella Shuangshuang is a lofty and lovely literary figure, then Zhang Ruifang's performance onscreen vitalized her as a vivid character among the masses and makes her an unforgettable highlight, emblazoned on audiences' minds.

Lifelikeness and vividness are both central ideas in a Chinese critical term, *xingxiang xing* (形象性, vividness of image). I suggest that only through the lens of *xingxiang xing* can we understand contradictions and complexities that are intrinsic to the stabilization of Zhang's stardom. A complex and ambiguous term itself, *xingxiang xing* is not only closely attached to traditional Chinese aesthetics, but intimately associated with the Chinese appropriation of the Stanislavski System, a systematic performing method which was created by Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski. In what follows,

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<sup>236</sup> Chao Yu, Jing Nan 朝玉, 竞男, "Peasants Love Li Shuangshuang" 农民喜欢李双双, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.11 (1962): 30.

I will first discuss the influence of *xingxiang xing* on Zhang's performance, and then turn to how Chinese cinema, and Zhang in particular, appropriated the Stanislavski method.

As a compound word, *xingxiang xing* 形象性 is comprised of *xingxiang* (image or figure) and *xing* (-ness). In general, it means the vividness of image. Originating from the criticism of visual art in pre-modern China, *xingxiang* (formal image) is a term that represents the outward appearances of objects or physical conditions of things and events. It is the opposite of *yixiang* (idea-image). Despite the dichotomy between formal resemblance and spiritual resemblance in Chinese art tradition, formal resemblance did not take on pejorative connotations. The master painter of the Jin dynasty, Gui Kaizhi 顾恺之, recommended "using formal resemblance to impart spiritual resemblance."<sup>237</sup> His view set a central idea in Chinese aesthetic thought: it proposed a dialectical relationship between formal resemblance and spiritual resemblance.<sup>238</sup> *Xiangxiang xing* bears great significance to and poses a big challenge for performing arts, for acting is an art that uses external forms to reveal and create substance.

*Xingxiang xing* became an important artistic criterion for socialist arts in China shortly before the production of *Li Shuangshuang*. The early 1960s saw the CCP loosening its political control -- a move in response to the late 1950s' radical social movements. Correspondingly, in the realm of literature and arts, the Party reaffirmed the importance of diverse thought and artistic creation. In the film industry, reacting to the massive and crude film production in the Great Leap Forward Movement, the issue of artistic quality assumed particular significance. In the 1961 conference on feature film

<sup>237</sup> *Selected Materials on the History of Chinese Aesthetics* 中国美学史资料选, Beijing: Zhonghua Bookstore 北京中华书局, 1991, 175.

<sup>238</sup> For mimetic theory in Chinese aesthetics, see Ming Dong Gu, "Mimetic Theory in Chinese Literary Thought," *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 403-424.

production, the Prime Minister Zhou Enlai called for “emancipating the mind” and “combining entertainment with instruction” in the socialist arts. The Vice Minister of Culture Xia Yan specifically emphasized improving the artistic aspects of film as a remedy to rejuvenate Chinese cinema. After addressing the existing problems in film production, including low artistic quality, limited subject matters, and repetitive styles, Xia Yan pointed out the differences between art and politics: while politics is usually quite dry and rigid, the arts have a particular characteristic, *xingxiang xing* (形象性). “Literature and arts should not start from ideas. They must employ *xingxiang* to convey themes....Literature and arts must entail authentic and vivid depiction of characters, events and situations to convey ideas.”<sup>239</sup>

Responding to the new directive on Chinese cinema, the film *Li Shuangshuang* deployed multiple techniques, including stylistic conventions to create truthful and vivid representations of rural life and to attract audiences. Apparently, *xingxiang xing* (vividness of image) finds its manifestation in the film’s authentic depiction of commune life. The meticulous design of northern peasants’ clothing and hairstyle, the local language, on-location shooting, the humanistic depiction of characters and their conflicts all helped enhance the credibility of the country life represented onscreen. In the meantime, theatricality also constituted *xingxiang xing*. A conspicuous example was the use of Henan local opera music along with opening and closing credits to frame the film narrative. The music, with its fluctuating melodies, aggrandized festivity and joyfulness, created local ambience.

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<sup>239</sup> Xia Yan 夏衍, “Improve Our Film Art to a New Level” 把我国电影艺术提高到一个更新的水平, *Red Flag* 红旗 no.19 (1961): 5-17.

Considering the close relationship between image/figure and the conceptualization of *xingxiang xing*, it is easy to note that the character Li Shuangshuang itself attests to a high degree of theatricality. Shuangshuang is the single most memorable positive character in the film in terms of socialist ideology. Her distinctiveness is reminiscent of characters in Chinese operas, who are distinguished, identifiable, yet lack psychological complexity. Throughout the film, Shuangshuang is an able and affectionate wife, a selfless commune member and later a determined woman cadre. However, her various subjective positions never overshadow her unique and almost one-dimensional personality: bold, determinate, frank, and selfless. This theatricality that lurks beneath the cinematic representation undoubtedly contributed to the film's popularity among the masses.

What best encapsulates the complexity of *xingxiang xing* is a film sequence of the commune election. It illustrates that *xingxiang xing*'s potential to effectively convey official ideology heavily relies on its investment in presenting a traditional value system. Thus, a sequence, considered as an authentic and vivid depiction of commune life, offers diverse spectatorial pleasures. In the meantime, it exemplifies Zhang Ruifang's superb performance, a good mixture of traditional theatrical performance with the Stanislavsky System.

The sequence starts with a medium shot of the old commune secretary holding a little notebook in his hand. He explains that every commune member will get one such notebook. It records each commune member's work points, which ensures each one gets his/her fair share of the yearly income of the commune in accordance with his/her labor performance. As the camera zooms out, the audience sees that the commune secretary is

addressing a group of commune members who sit on the ground in a circle. A reaction shot, which intercepts the old secretary's words, shows two female commune members' excitement at the news, one of whom is Shuangshuang. After the old secretary calls for the nomination of a person to take charge of tracking the work points, commune members begin to exchange words and soon realize that a qualified person should not only be impartial, but also "know how to read and how to calculate on an abacus." The quick-witted Shuangshuang immediately nominates Guiying, a high school graduate, who sits next to her. The girl is too shy to take up the responsibility. Her father, who knows the stake that the position involves, quickly stands up. He claims that the girl is too immature for the position and shifts the responsibility onto Xiwang. For him, the person who takes this job should be the one who gets along with everyone. Xiwang is just the right person not only because Xiwang himself is so amiable that he has never quarreled with anybody, but also because Xiwang's family, since the generation of his grandfather, has been reputed for their good-heartedness. The chief of the commune seconds the nomination and praises Xiwang for being both good-tempered and knowledgeable.

Hearing that his folks assent to the nomination, Xiwang, who almost hides himself in the back row, finally has to come forward and stand in front of commune members to give his thoughts. He tactfully declines the nomination by offering a series of excuses, for instance, he knows neither "foreign numbers" (Arabic numbers) nor how to use an abacus. In addition, since tracking work points directly relates to the interest of each family, he won't dare to take up such a great duty. While Xiwang is making various excuses, Shuangshuang, sitting among the folks, anxiously asks her husband whether

Xiwang is really incapable of doing the job. Soon Shuangshuang's facial expression has changed. The camera swiftly pans leftward, following Shuangshuang's quick steps toward Xiwang. The subsequent medium shot of the couple nicely juxtaposes them. With a beaming countenance, Shuangshuang proudly speaks in a loud voice, "Folks, he knows how to calculate. Last fall when we got our bonuses, he did calculations at home for a whole night. He added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided quite deftly! Also, he can write those foreign numbers. I know how to write them because he has taught me."

At her side, Xiwang, knitting his eyebrows, fretfully looks away from the crowd and then refutes his wife's words. Shuangshuang, having returned to her place in the crowd, asserts that what she has said is true and complains about her husband, "When you are pulled, you won't move; when you are whipped, you will go backwards. I just don't like your kind of person." Hearing Shuangshuang's words, commune members break into laughter. Seeing Xiwang's reluctance, an old commune member purposefully nominates Shuangshuang to be the bookkeeper. With the thought that he should not appear weaker than his wife, Xiwang finally accepts the offer. This again elicits loud laughter from the crowd. Toward the end of this sequence, the newly elected bookkeepers, Guiying and Xiwang, start to distribute notebooks among commune members. When Xiwang lifts his head from his work, he sees Shuangshuang lovingly looking at him in the distance. There is a mixture of expectation, affection, and admiration in her eyes. Xiwang's response is equally complex. A seemingly resentful look cannot suppress his gratitude and innermost happiness. Seeing her husband's reaction, a big grin surfaces Shuangshuang's face. Clearly, the couple has a tacit understanding of each other.

The above-mentioned sequence attains a high degree of *xingxiang xing* because it contains rich local flavors and the actors' vivid performance. More important is that it illustrates a visual event in which commune members act as collective spectators of both the public election and the young couple. If, as claimed, the film truthfully depicts peasants life, then the spectatorial pleasure that commune members experience within the diegesis is instructive of the actual viewing experience of spectators who are outside of the film. Considering the impossibility of retrieving or rescuing genuine audience responses from the public media at the time -- for they were more or less mediated by the official discourse -- the significance of this sequence is far more prominent. As an encoded viewing event, it allows us to explore the discrepancy between the official account and the peasant audience's experience of viewing the film.

The official discourse reinforced the idea that the contradiction between Shuangshuang and Xiwang represents the difference between the progressive and the regressive and that the audience's visual pleasure is derived from witnessing the triumph of collectivism over the "backward" feudalist thought. However, as the sequence illustrates, it is the subtle traditionalism which underlies the dynamic between the timid Xiwang and his bold wife that helps create "lifelikeness" and induces the audience's visual pleasure. Several times, Xiwang's tricks, Shuangshuang's disclosure of the familial secret, and the couple's bickering reveal the authenticity of life, and even evoke laughter. In addition, the traditional patriarchal paradigm remains an effective means to the socialist end. Whether a strategic appropriation on the part of the old commune member or an entrenched belief on the part of Xiwang, this thought urges Xiwang to take social responsibility. Nevertheless, by displacing peasants' attachment to the tradition

and lived experience with a socialist political orientation, official accounts reduced the audience's complex viewing experience into a simplistic juxtaposition of political positions.

The same sequence also reveals Zhang Ruifang's virtuosity. With the aid of distinct physical gestures and dramatic facial expressions, she plays a spirited woman activist in the public sphere. Using stillness and subtle expressions, she is a tender and affectionate wife before Xiwang. The transition between enacting these emotional extremities seems natural and effortless. Noticeably, Zhang's nuanced performance is dissected and framed by the cinematic apparatus. Specific lighting and shots not only render her performance more visible but also enhance its effect. In his study of Chinese socialist films, Paul Clark surmises, "the delight of some audiences in *Li Shuangshuang* perhaps [is] derived more from admiration for a skilled theatrical performance than from any concern for authenticity of setting."<sup>240</sup> Clark perceptively points out that Zhang's performance is part and parcel to the pleasure of the film text. What is equally important is that Zhang's performance becomes an attraction in social discourse.

Many professional actors marveled at Zhang's natural and realistic film acting in *Li Shuangshuang*. Whether Shuangshuang is quarrelling with a self-centered commune member in public or bickering with Xiwang, Zhang accurately and appropriately portrays her character in accordance with different situations. Zhang's colleagues further explored why Zhang was capable of such a compelling performance. Huang Zongying's comment crystallizes the general view on this issue. In her view, Zhang's performing style was closely linked with her self-cultivation, world outlook, artistic training, life experience,

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<sup>240</sup> Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Cultural and Politics Since 1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 107.

and her attitudes toward people and matters. Zhang was such a warm-hearted, candid, determined and selfless person in real life that she could transcend her class background as an intellectual, and naturally and skillfully play the peasant character. As Huang observes, “[Ruifang] did not just hold onto her professional work. Whenever the Party needed her, she spared no effort to work for the Party’s cause.”<sup>241</sup> These words demonstrated the most salient feature of the star discourse in socialist China -- it highlighted the star’s socialist subjectivity. Rather than delineating ethereal qualities of the star, discussions of the star framed the actor’s superb performing skill within his/her various social roles and political responsibilities, and ultimately make him/her a model person with both admirable skills and respectable socialist ethics.

Huang further affirms Zhang’s realistic performing style by delineating the process involved.

Ruifang performs in a simple way. When you watch her performance, you feel that she doesn’t use much technique. In actuality, as soon as she gets the film script, she actively enters her role. The spirit of the role attaches itself to her. In daily life, you can detect subtle changes in her mood and spirit. In her behaviors and manners, you find traces of the character. Through experiencing real life and attending numerous rehearsals, she fuses herself and the character into one. This actress’s charm does not come from showing herself off, but from immersing herself in the character.

瑞芳演戏非常朴实。你看她的戏，好像她完全没有使用什么演技。虽然她是一拿到剧本，就积极地进入角色，角色的魂魄也附体于她。在日常生活中你也能觉察她细微的精神状态的改变。在她的举止动作中也能看到角色的影子。通过深入生活和排练，她把自己和角色完全熔铸在一起。这个演员的魅力不是通过自我，而是毫无保留地通过角色性格迸发出光彩来。<sup>242</sup>

As Huang observes, self-transformation, rather than the spontaneous overflow of emotion, contributed to Zhang Ruifang’s vivid depiction of her character. Huang’s comment was significant not merely as a professional observation. It was emblematic to a set of

<sup>241</sup> Huang, “Happily Watch Li Shuangshuang.”

<sup>242</sup> Huang, “Happily Watch *Li Shuangshuang*.”

interpretive strategies used in the film star culture in the new China, which counteracted discursive patterns in the commercially oriented star culture of Republican China. The analytical vocabularies that permeates her comment -- such as the fusion of actors and characters, and experiencing life -- is reminiscent of the Stanislavski System, an approach to acting developed by the Russian theater director Konstantin Stanislavski.<sup>243</sup>

Examination of the Chinese appropriation of the Stanislavski System is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the Red Star. The System not only enabled Zhang to render outstanding onscreen performance, but also proved to be a regulatory force that melded her into a model socialist.

The System created by Konstantin Stanislavski lays out a set of rules that help actors to achieve natural and complex acting.<sup>244</sup> The term “system” not only identifies what the actor does when s/he plays correctly, but also indicates acting as *process* rather than imitation. Central to the System are the following concepts. First, Stanislavski differentiates formalist acting from realistic acting. He dismisses formalist acting as imitative performance and promotes realistic acting as truly theatrical and artistic. Stanislavski emphasizes that to achieve realistic acting the actor should experience his/her part. Second, Stanislavski holds that psycho-physical techniques are basic elements in acting. He proposes psycho-physical techniques as effective ways to help the actor to merge her/himself with their character, and in the end to best embody the character. Specifically, “the inner work of an actor consists in perfecting a psychological

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<sup>243</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski began to conceive the System in 1906. After the Soviet Revolution, Stanislavski received Lenin’s personal support.

<sup>244</sup> The Stanislavski System was not meant to be rigid precepts that disciples should religiously follow. Stanislavski writes, “My life’s object has been to get as near as I can to the so-called ‘System,’ i.e., to the nature of creation.” *Sobranie Sochinenii* (Collected Works), vol.3, 309. See also Jane Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2000, 101.

technique which will enable him to put himself, when the need arises, in the creative state, which invites the coming of inspiration. The external work of an actor consists in preparing his bodily apparatus to express the role physically and to translate his inner life into stage terms.”<sup>245</sup> In the early twentieth-century, the Stanislavski System was a great contribution to the theater art. It revived Russian realism and made theater more accessible to ordinary Russian people. It also ensured creative work on stage by assuring that, through painstaking and rigorous training, actors could reveal the essence of their roles with astonishing creativity.

Konstantin Stanislavski’s popularity in the socialist China was not accidental. Shared political allegiance to communism paved the way for cultural exchange between China and the Soviet Union. In particular, the socialist leader Vladimir Lenin’s personal support for Stanislavski made this Russian director an appropriate candidate for Chinese artists to emulate. Moreover, Stanislavski’s inclination towards realism coincided with the then prevailing Marxian notion of realism in China -- which ascribed the historical truth to typical characters in typical circumstances.<sup>246</sup>

Since it was introduced to China in the late 1930s, the Stanislavski System has generated passion in Chinese spoken drama production, drama performance, and drama theory exploration.<sup>247</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, the System was the major inspiration for Chinese dramatists to modernize and nationalize Chinese spoken drama. Indirectly, it

<sup>245</sup> Jane Benedetti. *Stanislavski: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 75.

<sup>246</sup> When differentiating realism from naturalism, Stanislavski comments, “Realism in art is the method which helps to select only the typical from life.” Nikolai M. Gorchakov, *Stanislavski Directs*, New York: Minerva Press, 1954.

<sup>247</sup> From the late 1930s through the 1940s, drama and film directors, such as Zheng Junli 郑君里, Zhang Min 章泯 translated parts of Stanislavsky’s *An Actor’s Work on Himself*, and the drama critic Qu Baiyin translated *My Life in Art*. In the late 1940s, Chinese drama director Jia Juyin applied the Stanislavsky System to his directing of three Chinese dramas in Beijing, including *Night Lodging* and *Dragon Beard Ditch*. See Tong Daoming 童道明, “Jiao Juyin and Stanislavsky” 焦菊隐和斯坦尼斯拉夫斯基, *Study of Literature and Art* 文艺研究, 1992: no.5, 87-95.

exerted great influence on Chinese cinema, due to the overlap of personnel in both drama and film circles. Quite a few film actors who were also veteran drama actors brought relatively sophisticated and realistic performance to the silver screen, especially in the post civil war (1945-1949) left-wing cinema.<sup>248</sup> The 1950s and early 1960s saw a renewed interest in translating and introducing Stanislavski's works, with a stronger intensity and a wider scope. In 1952, the Beijing People's Art Theater was modelled after the Moscow Art Theater with which Stanislavski had close interaction. In 1955 and 1956, the journal *Film Art Translation Series* (电影艺术译丛) ran a column named "Study the Stanislavski System" (学习斯坦尼斯拉夫斯基体系). The column constantly carried Chinese translations of Soviet essays on the Stanislavski System, including several articles by Stanislavski's collaborator, the Russian playwright Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. More impressively, by 1963 the Chinese film press had published the first four volumes of *The Collected Works of Stanislavski*, which include *An Actor's Self-Cultivation* (演员自我修养 Part I & II) and *Creating a Role*.<sup>249</sup> In the meantime, film actors actively applied the System in practice. Zhang Ruifang's performance in *Li Shuangshuang* is an example. She brilliantly chose to speak in a loud voice and to emit infectious laughter as physical expressions for her forthright character; she accurately enacted northern peasants' chores; she also delicately handled a spectrum of emotions ranging from pride and courage to attentiveness and tenderness. The cinematic apparatus, with lighting and close-ups, rightly captured the nuance of her expressions and enhanced the effect of her performance.

<sup>248</sup> These actors include Jin Shan, Zhao Dan, Lan Ma, Bai Yang, and Zhang Ruifang.

<sup>249</sup> *An Actor's Work on Himself*, Part I 斯坦尼斯拉夫斯基全集第二卷: 演员自我修养第一部, Trans. Lin Ling 林陵, Si Mintu 司敏徒, Beijing: China Film Press, 1959; *An Actor's Work on Himself*, Part II 演员自我修养第二部, Trans. Zheng Xuelai 郑雪来, Beijing: China Film Press, 1961; *Creating a Role* 演员创造角色, Trans. Zheng Xuelai 郑雪来, Beijing: China Film Press, 1963.

However, the trans-cultural practice of the Stanislavski System in China was never a pure and transparent transmission of the Russian system. It was entangled with various artistic and social missions, and was infused with Chinese artists creative readings. Most prominently, Chinese practitioners overlooked the Stanislavski's deep affirmation of individuality which undergirds his theory of psycho-physical techniques, in particular, emotion memory and physical action. According to Stanislavski, in preparing for a role, an actor should evoke his own experiences and memories to find equivalent feelings experienced by the characters. If the intellect inhibits the enticement of emotion, an actor should use his own body, which is the most immediately available asset, to simulate imagination and the unconscious. The intertwined process of using emotion memory and physical action eventually yields external physical expressions that accord with the inner essence of the role.<sup>250</sup> Apparently, whether it is his quasi-Freudian theory of the emotion memory as a vast reservoir of authentic experience or the notion of the actor's body as the conditioned instrument, both techniques predicated upon the authenticity and reliability of individual experience. Simply put, Stanislavski's affirmation of individuality lies in his belief that an actor can exercise his intuitive power to create a role, and that an actor can train himself into a great artist through conscious and rigorous training. More evidently, this affirmation manifests itself in Stanislavski's ultimate goal of creating the System, namely, creating a structure within which the individual can express his creativity.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Jane Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, 85-96.

<sup>251</sup> The true purpose of the Stanislavski System is to approximate the nature of creation, as he claims, "There is no 'System.' There is only nature. My life's object has been to get as near as I can to the so-called 'System,' i.e., to the nature of creation." In addition, psycho-techniques may not be regarded as the essence of the System, as Stanislavski says, "the first aspect of the method is to get the unconscious to work. The second is, once it starts, to leave it alone." See Jane Benedetti, 309.

For Chinese practitioners in the 1950s and 1960s, the significance of the Stanislavski System went far beyond just offering a pragmatic method for realistic acting. It provided a discursive pattern for performance critique, as well as a rationale for socialist subjectivity formation. The latter was indicated by the Chinese translations of the original Russian titles of Stanislavski's works. *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experience* and *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Physical Characterization* in Russian became *An Actor's Self-Cultivation* (演员自我修养) Part I and Part II in Chinese.<sup>252</sup> This translation practice effaced concrete performing techniques and the importance of creativity. Subsequently, a rather moralistic message took over: improving acting craft entails moral cultivation. Critiques of Zhang's performance revealed the same tendency: examinations of her performance were intertwined with compliments about her lofty character. Discourses surrounding Zhang's stardom evaded explorations of her private life, including her divorce and second marriage, despite the centrality of the peasant couple's marriage life to the film narrative. Instead, these discourses showed intense interest in exploring the connection between the model heroine and Zhang Ruifang. It was generally held that Zhang's strong sense of responsibility and advanced political awareness not only facilitated her compelling performance as Shuangshuang, but also made her one of the model people, like Shuangshuang, in real life.

What is more revealing about the Chinese appropriation of the Stanislavski System is that the actors' artistic pursuit of Stanislavskian performance proved to be a regulatory force in transforming actors into their characters: the heroes of the new socialist state.

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<sup>252</sup> Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2000, 77. In English, these two titles were translated into "An Actor Prepares," and "Building a Character" respectively.

The System not only ruled stage, but also regulated individuals. What Stanislavski proposes, “the fusion of actor and character,” is particularly central to this regulatory process. In Stanislavski’s theory, the fusion occurs when the actor learns how to align his psyche with the imagined psyche of the dramatic character. Once the actor attains this fusion, not only does he make the spectator forget that he has a lived identity other than the character; he also creates the conditions from which intuitive creativity can flow. For Stanislavski, the actor’s merging with his character is crucial to healing the rift between the actor as human being and as performer -- and consequently, to creating realistic and affective performance on stage.

In the Russian context, the concept of “the fusion of actor and character” was significant because it propelled actors to perfect their performing skills; in the Chinese context, it was significant primarily because it became a driving force for actors to engage in self-transformation in accordance with socialist ideology. To be more precise, Chinese actors’ pursuit of professional perfection accidentally collaborated with the Party’s effort to build ideal socialist subjects.

Zhang Ruifang’s reflection on her performance, which details the process through which she studied the character, experienced the character, and played the character, sheds light on such a self-transformation. She observed that Chinese actors in the PRC were confronted with a challenge: how would they perform brand new characters in the socialist state? Although actors worked diligently, their performances appeared rigid, and lacked rhythm and liveliness. The fundamental reasons for this were that actors could neither present nor embody the thoughts, feelings, and essences of the heroes of the

new socialist state.<sup>253</sup> In acting, they had so little communication with their counterparts that they could only deliver formalistic performances.<sup>254</sup> Remedies to such poor acting were to be found in the “collective study of film script” and through “experiencing the part.” Through these methods, Zhang related her own performing experience.

On several occasions, Zhang Ruifang introduced the “collective study of film script” in the pre-production stage as a new and efficient working method in Chinese cinema. Unlike actors in Republican China, most of whom studied their characters individually in isolation, Zhang explained, in the PRC actors together with the rest of the film crew analyzed screenplays, discussed their conceptions of characters, and exchanged their experiences. In so doing, the actors gained a deep understanding of his or her character as well as inspiration. Speaking from her own experience, Zhang claimed that “relying on the collective has proved to be a much more efficient way than studying industriously by oneself.”<sup>255</sup> Her words make it clear that although filmmaking in general is a collaborative work in nature, each single stage of socialist filmmaking is filled with the collective spirit. Collectivity ensures the adequate use of intellectual resources, expedites communication, and improves production efficiency. Collectivity also impacts individuals. As Zhang pointed out, working in the collective helped actors to experience and later perform new characters in socialist China. In fact, fostering collective spirit was a precondition for actors to play brand new characters, the ideal socialists.

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<sup>253</sup> Zhang Ruifang, “Thoughts on Playing *Li Shuangshuang*” 扮演李双双的几点体会, *Film Art* 电影艺术 no.2 (1963): 14-29.

<sup>254</sup> Zhang Ruifang and Zhao Yunru, “Three Correspondences between Zhang Ruifang and Zhao Yunru” 张瑞芳赵韞如书简三则, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.3 (1963):50-52.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

In terms of forgetting oneself, the socialist ideology of collectivism and Stanislavski's "art of experiencing the part" are congruous. Distinctive to the System, acting is not understood as pure exhibition of techniques or skillful imitation of experience, but as "experiencing the part" -- as creating and conveying a sense of being. Zhang's ideal performance is clearly Stanislavskian. When contemplating her acting experience in *Li Shuangshuang*, Zhang said,

I wish to pursue such a spiritual state: my own mental outlook can reveal the character's mental attitude. I should feel the character is in me. I can use her eyes to see, her logic to think. I can play episodes that are not penned down in the screenplay. I always believe that the actor's mental attitude can be molded. ... Playing different roles is similar to attending different schools and getting on with different classmates. By immersing ourselves in different life ambiances, consciously and attentively observing, experiencing, and approximating, we can have our temperament changed toward that of the character. Therefore, I particularly approve of the idea that we should finalize the location where filming takes place first. This way, the environment in which the character lives can gradually exert influence on the actor.

我是想追求那样一种精神状态：人物总的精神面貌，能通过我的精神状态表现出来。我感到角色在我的身上，我可以毫不含糊的用她的眼睛去看，用她的逻辑去想，我可以立刻演剧本上没有写的。我总觉得演员的精神状态应当是可塑的 ... 演不同的戏，等于上不同的学校，和不同的同学相处。在不同的生活气氛里受感受，加上意识的细致的观察体验和主动靠拢，就可以使自己的精神气质，朝向人物起着变化。因此我是特别同意先出外景，让演员本身先在角色所处的环境气氛里多熏陶熏陶。<sup>256</sup>

Zhang's faith in the fusion of the actor and character, as well as the constructiveness of the actor's temperament, in a way, echoes Stanislavski's view that the actor needs to cultivate herself/himself into a superbly conditioned instrument in order to create eloquent lifelikeness on the stage. Yet, unlike American followers of the Stanislavski System -- the method acting school -- Zhang, along with her fellow film workers, downplays the role that the unconscious plays in "experiencing the part." The unconscious is, perhaps, too unreliable for Chinese practitioners. Contaminated by

<sup>256</sup> Zhang, "Thoughts on Playing Li Shuangshuang."

historical debris, how can the unconscious lend support to actors performing workers, peasants and soldiers in the new China?

Despite her belief in the necessity of the actor's restructuring oneself, Zhang's understanding of the premise of "experiencing the part" obviously differs from Stanislavski's. Based on a conception of universal human nature and a deep affirmation of individuality, the Stanislavski System holds that the actor's personal experience provides the actor a sufficient arsenal for her/him to perform the character, her/his fellow humankind. For Chinese actors who just became film workers in the newly established PRC, one lesson that they had learned was that as history marched, a new subject emerged. Since the gap between an actual actor and his/her character, the ideal socialist person, is so wide, Zhang believed that transforming oneself is the precondition for experiencing the part. What she suggested, through "immersing ourselves in different ambiances" was a pragmatic way through which actors could attain such transformation. In fact, during the Seventeen Years, it was common that actors went to countryside or to factories to "experience life" (体验生活) before playing their parts. Zhang was no exception. As she recalled, experiencing life in the countryside was instrumental to her performance of Shuangshuang, a typical character in new circumstances. In Lin County Henan Province, where the filmmaking took place, she worked in the field with peasants, made friends with them, and tried to find traces of Shuangshuang among them.<sup>257</sup> Together with reading literary works on rural life as well as the screenplay of *Li Shuangshuang*, these experiences helped her to visualize Shuangshuang, particularly her appearance and disposition, and later to play this part. Zhang also emphasized that experiencing life should be a long term practice instead of a sporadic one. As for herself,

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

only through long term communication with workers/peasants did she change her thoughts and feelings, and feel more connected with the masses.<sup>258</sup>

The particular practice of going down to the masses to experience life introduced new sensory events to actors and familiarized them with workers/peasants' life. Actors had the opportunity to learn new gestures, grimaces, and other physical movements for performance. By immersing themselves in the new life they also found new visualization techniques. More important was this practice's potential for transforming the actor. As Zhang implied, this long-term practice helped actors to forge new habits -- such as social routines -- and develop a new perception of one's being-in-relationship with others and the environment. It was at the depth of habit that the unconscious was rewritten by the socialist culture, and consequently, a radical change in perception and disposition was effected. In other words, different from Stanislavski's notion that the actor should imbue himself with the character, Chinese practitioners held that the actor's self-transformation was the precondition for his vivid depiction of the character, both in form and in spirit.

In fact, the actor's performance and self-transformation were hardly two disparate processes. Zhang Ruifang stressed the interconnectedness of these two aspects in her comment on Chinese actors' film acting. On the one hand, as she pointed out, "actors' own thoughts and feelings, experience of life, and artistic cultivation played an important role in their creation of characters. Particularly, actors' political levels as well as their thoughts and feelings determined [the success] of their creation of new persons." Therefore, she proposed that the actor should approximate the new socialist person in actual life in order to play the socialist hero onscreen. On the other hand, she emphasized that Chinese actors should believe in their own experience and their capability of

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

constructing distinct and vivid new socialist persons, on the grounds that they had already made incessant progress and developed many new elements in themselves through the Party's long term education and a series of revolutionary campaigns.<sup>259</sup> Clearly, performance was no longer just a matter of an actor's bringing out his creativity in representing his character, nor was it a problem-solving process involving the tension between the actor as human being and as a professional. Instead, performance onscreen converged with social performance in real life, thus blurring the distinction between the representational and the actual. Consequently, the actor's embodiment of the character is at once the question of representation and the question of experiencing one's capacity to do the right thing in the socialist state.

Zhang's off screen performances, including exchanging her experiences with fellow film workers and imparting her understanding of playing new characters in Chinese cinema, was equally impressive as her onscreen performance. Whether onscreen or off screen, Zhang's conscious and consistent effort to meld herself into the model socialist was striking and instructive. This effort was a practice of reiteration, with the performer's psychological and physical involvements. Not only did this reiteration reflect Zhang's professionalism, it also became the normative force which made Zhang a good socialist. Seen in this light, there was hardly any distinction between Zhang as a superb performer and Zhang as an ideal socialist person.

Suffice it to say, through circulating various accounts of Zhang and her performance, the state media stabilized Zhang's star image as an admirable model socialist, or an "agent of history." Although the dissolution of inconsistency and contradictions is not unusual to the invention of the star image in general, the effacement

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

of the discrepancy between traditional virtues and socialist activism in Zhang's case was a result of the CCP's propagandistic construct -- instead of audiences' negotiation of contested discourses. The state media's intentional suppression of heterogeneous discourses surrounding Zhang also revealed the Party's need to project and eventually to construct a stable identity for its citizens.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have related the CCP's social practice of "model people" to the "Red Star" in Chinese socialist cinema. The Red Star, because of its visual prominence and because it was attached to various (extra)cinematic narratives, was perhaps the most effective way to make "model people" during the Seventeen Years. Adopting a perspective that acknowledged the dialogic relations within a national cinema, and between social mobilization and cultural production, I examined the construction of the Red Star -- Zhang Ruifang. Zhang's case questions a conventional understanding of the female star, that is, the female star, as the extension of her body onscreen, is the object of fetish desire but not the subject of identification. As the Red Star, Zhang embodied socialist values both onscreen and offscreen. She attracted national attention and set off a vigorous mass campaign of "Learning from Shuangshuang, Catching up with Shuangshuang" (学双双, 赶双双).<sup>260</sup> In a word, she helped shape the masses into good socialists. Nevertheless, the Red Star illustrates that the model that moulds the masses is constantly subject to remodeling by the socialist ideology.

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<sup>260</sup>Masses Cinema Editor 大众电影编者, "A Great Example of Mass Line in Cinema" 电影群众路线的生动体现, *Masses Cinema* 大众电影 no.2 (1964): 5.

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