MASCULINITY AND THE NATION:
FILM NARRATIVES OF THE NATION IN 1930s
AND 1980s CHINA

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Contents

Chapter Five
Rites of Passage: Masculinity, Resistance, and the Questioning of Institutional Power
Waves Washing Sand **(1936) and** *One and Eight* **(1983)**

Abstract

This thesis compares Chinese films from the 1930s and 1980s to understand representations of Chinese masculinities in the two periods of rapid modernisation and nation-building. It encompasses three research topics. First, we discuss masculinity constructed responding to support Chinese nationalism. In Chapter One, Chinese modernity is manifested as an overwhelming sentiment for national salvation triggered by a history of imperialist invasion. The ideal Chinese masculinity therefore is revealed as doubly rebellious, both against corrupt authorities and traditions as well as against imperial powers. The films analysed are *Big Road* (1934) and *Red Sorghum* (1987). In Chapter Two, close readings of *Wolf Hill* (1936) and *Evening Bell* (1988) unravel a war metaphor, discovering an emerging masculine archetype assisting the formation of Chinese national identity.

Second, we address male and female subjectivities as an expression of democratic consciousness. Examined within the framework of an imagined, modern public sphere, the films reflect competing views and stances towards democracy, a core part of the modern nation state. Chapter Three introduces Jürgen Habermas' notion of a bourgeois public sphere, where enlightenment attempts by males prevail. *Crossroads* (1937) and *The Trouble Shooters* (1988) are examined. In Chapter Four, a kind of female masculinity reflects a radical democratic stance, indicating a subversion of current political order. The central films are *The New Woman* (1935) and *The Price of Madness* (1988).

The third theme of the thesis examines how masculinity serves individual identity contesting the ideology of the modern nation. In the last chapter, through close readings of *Waves Washing Sand* (1936) *and One and Eight* (1983), using the anthropological concept of the rite

of passage, marginalised masculinity is discussed in combination with the questioning of

sovereign power.

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Introduction

The opening ceremony of Beijing 2008 Olympic Games was a visual extravaganza exhibiting a Chinese cultural heritage from thousands of years. To begin the ceremony, two thousand and eight male percussionists formed two giant squares lit in a sea of lights piercing the darkness. Collectively, they beat out the sixty-second countdown in a dramatic manner. These vigorous young men were later seen in silver costumes, their hair in a buzz cut, a vertical red line on the forehead, and a red collar over a vertical red line down their fronts. A solemn mood prevailed as these men performed primeval dances, all motions executed at the same pace, while making a stunning drumbeat. Climaxes were created when the performers all beat their *fou* drums, and yelled together the Confucian phase: "Friends have come from afar, how happy we are!"(*You peng zi yuanfang lai, bu yi le hu!*) This men's performance was the first impression of the entire ceremony, bestowing an image of a powerful and masculine China welcoming the world.

The performance was a result of lengthy preparation, but at the same time it was drawn from an imagination sustained by generations. The chief director of the ceremony, renowned fifth-generation film director Zhang Yimou was behind the macho feat. The bravado performance bears a remarkable resemblance to many scenes in his films, including the international blockbuster *Hero*. In over a hundred years of contemporary Chinese films, China has frequently been imagined on screen, despite the films' dramatically different cultural and political concerns. In many ways, the cinematic image of China incorporated the twentieth-century Chinese desire for a national revival.

Issues related to both Chinese nation-building and gender construction have sparked great

interest in the field of Chinese film studies. However, compared with the number of academic achievements in feminist studies and related cultural interpretations, Chinese masculinity is not an established area of study. Even less has been said about the kind of image on film of a strong nation expressed through unyielding masculinities at the Olympic opening. This thesis will compare Chinese films from the 1930s and 1980s to understand representations of Chinese masculinities in the two periods of rapid modernisation and nation-building.

Masculinity, Nation and Film

Throughout the body of masculinity literature, the essence of masculinity puzzled early academic studies. Scholars have attempted to define "true masculinity" since the 1950s, best represented by a kind of "male role" supported by sex role theory.[1] Though overwhelmingly influential for over twenty years (and helping to illustrate conventional gender order), sex role theory was latter bitterly criticised for its stress on social constrains, which also distracted the "real masculinity experience".[2] Even in recent years, some scholars still dwell on prescribed male roles in some nations, which potentially conflict with people's psychological identification.

Along with the fierce attack on patriarchy, the essence of masculinity was once reconsidered

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[1] Based on biological differences between the male and the female, the sex role theory adopted a functional perspective defining different gender roles, and masculinity was considered to be a set of behaviours, attributes and attitudes gaining social and cultural satisfactions. There are numbers of academic works contributed to the discussion of sex role theory: Parsons, T. and Bales, R.F.,*Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, New York: The Free Press, 1955; Komarovsky, M., "Functional Analysis of Sex Roles", *American Sociological Review*, 1950,15, p. 508-516; Goffman, H., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959., Hartley, R. E., "Sex Role Pressures and the Socialization of the Male Child", *Psychological Reports*, 1959,5, p. 457-468; Hacker, H. M., "The New Burdens of Masculinity", *Marriage and Family Living*, 1957,3, p. 227-233

[2] Fasteau, Marc Feigen, *The Male Machine*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974; Farrell, Warren, *The Liberated Men*, New York: Bantam, 1975; Pleck, Joseph, *The Myth of Masculinity*, Cambridge, Mass.:MIT Press,1981; David, D. S. and Brannon, Robert, eds., *The Male Sex Role,* London:Addison-Wesley, 1976; Pleck ,Joseph and Sawyer, Jack, eds., *Men and Masculinity*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall,1974, etc.

to be myth-originated, but limited in scope due to its regional colour.[3] Nevertheless, the mystical interpretation of masculinity enlightened studies combining masculinity, race and collective unconsciousness, which is still of some use in exploring masculinities of national and cultural significance. After all, during decades of discussion, it is now widely recognised that masculinity is neither fixed nor universal, but characterised by considerable fluidity over time and space.

A major turn happened in the 1980s, when the term "power" was introduced to masculinity studies. Most significantly, R.W. Connell differentiated between masculinities on the basis of their social status and ethnic origin (middle-class masculinity vs work-class masculinity; white masculinity vs black masculinity; heterosexual masculinity vs homosexual masculinity, etc), and adopted a dynamic view describing their interrelationships. He argued that a particular masculinity is always in relation to others and could only be identified by its interrelationships embodied by dominance, subordination, compliance or marginalisation.

Sociological analysis stimulated many academic explorations, with scholars arguing for the plurality and fluidity of masculinities, criticising hegemonic masculinity (white heterosexual masculinity as Connell argued) for its uneven power. As a whole, intense cultural and political criticism was integrated into a group of writings which targeted patriarchy and other power relations.[4] Gender identity was revisited, and regarded as an important measure for modern individuality and society. As Michael Kimmel argued: "[G]ender has joined race and class in our understanding of the foundations of an individual's identity. Gender, we now

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[3] Based on neo-Jungian archetype theory, poet Robert Bly believed that masculinities lie in people's deep unconsciousness, which could be traced from historical myths and rituals.

[4] Brittan, A., *Masculinity and Power*, New York: Blackwell, 1989; R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power,* Cambridge: Polity, 1987; Hearn, J., *The Gender of Oppression: Men, Masculinity and the Critique of Marxism*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1987; Kaufman, Michael, ed., *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change*. Toronto ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Kimmel, Michael S., ed., *Changing Men:New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1987, etc.

know, is one of the axes around which social life is organized."[5] Moreover, some scholars extended their view to international circumstances, where imperialism and globalisation were investigated. And finally, masculinity was connected to modernity and used to measure the formation of modernity in different regions.[6]

Upon its publication, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* exerted a wide influence on the academic world.[7] There are key arguments in the book that have hugely affected the field of gender and masculinity studies. Butler proposes a theory of performative identity, where gender is understood as a "becoming" rather than a state of being:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.[8]

Butler's performative gender theory views gender as constructed, rather than either gender or sex being an 'abiding substance.' Her central argument includes the idea that "a heterosexual, heterosexist culture establishes the coherence of those categories in order to perpetuate and maintain…the dominant order in which men and women are required or even forced to be heterosexual."[9] Through gender performativity, Butler reveals a heterosexual matrix produced and sustained within the existing power structure, where women are legitimately oppressed. Homosexuality is argued to be subversive. Butler calls for subversive actions, by parodic performances such as drag or cross-dressing, and "the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities," to "disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and

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[5] Kimmel, Michael S. and Aronson, Amy, eds., *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historican Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2004, p. xv
[6] "Masculinity is central to the modernity project with its emphasis on rationality, reason and scientific progress." in Haywood, Chris, *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research, and Social Practice*, Philadelphia, Pa.: Open University, 2003, p. 12
[7] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990
[8] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1999, 2nd, p. 214
[9] Sara Salih, *Judith Butler*, London; New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 49

occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame."[10]

All these arguments by Butler, however, are based on a gender identity constructed "within language and discourse," where by she denies a "self-evident and fixed" identity. She even dismisses the subject as a pre-existing entity:

> Crucially, Butler is not suggesting that gender identity is a performance, since that would presuppose the existence of a subject or an actor who is doing that performance. Butler refutes this notion by claiming that the performance pre-exists the performer, and this counter-intuitive, apparently impossible argument has led many readers to confuse performativity with performance.[11]

This stance has consequently caused the idea of a subversion conditioned by discourse, which Sara Salih finds problematic: "[I]f subversion itself is conditioned and constrained by discourse, then how can well tell it is subversion at all?"[12] Among many supporters who find "potential for political subversion in theories that consistently affirm the value of destabilizing and deconstructing the terms by which subjects and identities are constituted," there are other critics who pinpoint Butler's "neglect of the material and the political," and even "quietism (i.e. passivity), nihilism, and 'killing off' the subject…"[13]

This thesis welcomes Butler's idea of gender constructed within discourse, but needs to acknowledge that there is little of use in her theory for the discussion of films against the historical background of 1930s and 1980s China. The reasons are two-fold: first, the backdrop of China's modern conquest in both periods provoked intellectual discourses that embraced the idea of a modern subject, in the name of the liberation of individuality. This subject demonstrated rebellion against Chinese traditional values and ethics and was all along a challenge to the older political structure. In this thesis, therefore, not only is the subject specified, but also it carries a definite political intention, which does not fit with Butler's idea

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[10] Judith Butler, 1999, p. 32
[11] Sara Salih, p. 10-11
[12] Sara Salih, p. 66
[13] Sara Salih, p. 11

of subversion. Second, in this thesis, homosexuality is not adequately understood as a mode of subversion, as Butler proposed. This is mainly because the dominance of males was not questioned within the intellectual discourses, and heterosexual males dominate the demand for social and political transformation. So, in the films discussed in this thesis, which were all made by male directors, even the most striking female intimacy doesn't suggest homosexuality or subversion. This is also why this thesis somehow shows a degree of heteronormativity during discussions of films.

Butler's *Gender Trouble* is also viewed as an important founding text of queer theory, which further inspired studies on female masculinity. But it is Judith Halberstam who contributes the first full-length study of female masculinity. According to Halberstam, her research is based on two propositions:

> The first claim is that women have made their own unique contributions to what we call modern masculinity, and these contributions tend to go completely unnoticed in gender scholarship. The second claim is that what we recognize as female masculinity is actually a multiplicity of masculinities, indeed a proliferation of masculinities, and the more we identify the various forms of female masculinity, the more they multiply.[14]

Halberstam consequently argues that female masculinity sheds some light on how masculinity is constructed and that it is at odds with "social structures that wed masculinity to maleness and to power and domination." Although Halberstam almost exclusively focuses on queer female masculinity, which she deems is the form "at its most threatening," she still acknowledges that "heterosexual female masculinity menaces gender conformity in its own way." Halberstam's address of female masculinity helps to reveal resistance to existing male dominance in film texts in this thesis.

In the field of film studies, there has been some interest directed towards gender and

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[14] Judith, Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 46

masculinity. As early as in 1977, Joan Mellen exemplified the connection between film representations and the construction of gender relations. She pinpointed the mystical masculinity fabrications in Hollywood cinema which had promoted the conventional heterosexual gender order, projecting the violent male ideal throughout American history. Although clearly from a feminist perspective, this study managed to connect gender presentation with national imagination.

Among many research efforts, Susan Jeffords in particular explores masculine presentation in relation to the formation of national identity.[15] Based on historian George Mosse's investigations into the link between nationalism, sexuality and visibility, Jeffords argues that "A nation exists, in other words, as something to be seen. In such a case, examining one of the chief distributors of images in this country—Hollywood films—offers clues about the construction of American national identity." She focuses on American films in the 1980s, when President Reagan significantly encouraged the rise of nationalism, and further discusses the huge impact of the political climate in stimulating powerful masculine presentations.

Throughout Jeffords' arguments, the role of identification is crucial and is largely based on the idealised presentations of "hard bodies" like Rambo. In other words, masculine presentations here work as cultural signifiers, inviting viewers' self-perception as well as cultural recognition. Up untill now, there have been studies that follow this trajectory, examining nation, race and gender within profound ideological changes.[16]

Since the publication of Steve Neale's "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and

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[15] Jeffords, Susan, *Hard Bodies:Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994
[16] See, for example, Chopra-Gant, Mike, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar American Masculinity, Family and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir,* London: I. B. Tauris, 2006

Mainstream Cinema", a major turn has occurred in the interpretation of cinematic representation of masculinity.[17] Unlike Laura Mulvey's influential arguments on "visual pleasure" offered by female images subject to patriarchal spectatorship, Neale suggests that gender identification is not singular (female viewer identifies with female image; male viewer identifies with male image), but always "multiple, fluid", "at points contradictory", and not even consistent. The male body, as he indicates, can also be the profound site of voyeuristic pleasure and even the object of an "erotic gaze". These arguments started a discussion concerning masculinity as a kind of spectacle and later developed into the psychoanalysis of stardom in popular cinema.[18] More importantly, Neale made further enquiries into male movie stars as "powerful ideal egos" as Mulvey had argued. He appealed for more investigations into the inner world of masculinity, which may contain anxiety and mystery.

Yvonne Tasker further explores the body as spectacular in Hollywood action movies, underlining the pivotal role of the body:

> The American action cinema is defined by the spectacular visual display that it offers to its audiences, a display within which the body of the hero or heroine functions as a central term.[19]

Using the term "muscular cinema," which she believes "inflects and redefines already existing cinematic and cultural discourses of race, class and sexuality,"[20] Tasker discusses a wide range of issues related to the operation of masculinity within power structure. These include marginalised female heroines in classic Hollywood movies, as well as display of the bodies of black heroes, which is vastly different from the star image of white masculinity. But Tasker also notes that action cinema could not be equated to simple political positioning,

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[17] Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," in Cohan, Steven; Hark, Ina Rae, eds., *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 9-20
[18] Dennis Bingham, *Acting Male: Masculinities in the Films of James Stewart, Jack Nicholson, and Clint Eastwood,* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994, etc.
[19] Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1993
[20] Yvonne Tasker, p. 5

and that the meanings of bodies on screen are intricate and constantly shifting. For example, Tasker complicates the connection between masculinity and nationalism in her reading of the *Rambo* films:

> The all-American nationalism so much discussed in relation to the *Rambo* films-Rambo as a 'pin-up for the president'-is also strangely oppositional and absent, articulating a love of nation which is based on a complex relationship to America.[21]

Also, through discussions of films like *Thelma and Louise*, Tasker uncovers a rebellion against the dominant, male-centered ideology, as a contrast to the female role in classic action movies.

All this scholarship provides theoretical frameworks, as well as core concepts, for this thesis to dwell on.

Masculinity and Modern China

Great complexity arises when we examine Chinese national sentiment and masculinity constructions initiated early last century. On the one hand, China's long battle against imperialist invasion encouraged a masculinity of resistance from the grassroots level. On the other hand, China's modern thrust was largely spurred by Western enlightenment thought, which incurred a whole package of new, individual values and modern assumptions about Chinese masculinity. These two aspects (resistance and enlightenment) signaled changes from China's past in terms of masculine ideals, which this thesis will discuss.

Subject to overwhelming Confucian ideologies in pre-modern China, the construction of masculinity has been regarded as different from the West's. It was generally accepted that gender relations in pre-modern China were a kind of symbol reflecting social hierarchy, and

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[21] Yvonne Tasker, p. 99

Confucian sexuality was highly constrained in terms of its subordination to other social and moral codes.[22] In this regard, some scholars argued for "soft" masculinity in relation to Chinese traditional power.[23] Some others investigated a kind of "male bond", which was supposedly more acceptable in Chinese history, where the male/female dichotomy was not really distinctive.[24] Further, scholars have explored the importance of Confucian family values, which regulated rigid gender relations and prescribed male roles, and was further enforced by legal violence.[25] In terms of dynamics between masculinity and femininity, Chinese *yin-yang* ideology suggests fluidity. As Martin Huang pinpoints, Chinese masculinity is always alert to the corrupting *yin* (female principle), so much so that a real hero (*haohan*) is never supposed to be anywhere near a woman in popular literature like *Water Margins* (*Shuihu zhuan*).[26] Kam Louie conceptualised two historically consistent Chinese masculine archetypes different from the *yin-yang* binary.[27] He delineates a history of *wen* and *wu* masculinities from ancient sages to working class in contemporary China, including Chinese global diasporas. The theoretical terms he used (*wen* "scholar" and *wu* "warrior"), however, were still Confucian ideas, with profound implications of feudal hierarchy that seem vague when applied to modern constructions of masculinity. To an extent, this exposed the ideological gap between pre-modern and modern China, at the same time testifying to the limitation of Confucian thoughts in a circumstance of rampant modernisation.

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[22] Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N.Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 26

[23] Kam Louie and Morris Low, eds., *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, Routledge, 2003

[24] See Marinus J. Meijer, "Homosexual Offenses in Ch'ing Law,"*T'oung Pao* 71, 1985, 115; Louise Edwards, "Gender Imperative in *Honglou Meng*: Jia Baoyu's Bisexuality", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles and Reviews* 12,1990, 69-81; Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Homosexual Tradition in China,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Vivien W. Ng, "Homosexuality and the State in Late Imperial China", in Martin Bauml Duberman et al. ed., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991, pp. 86-87; Matthew H. Sommer, "The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China: Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma", *Modern China*, 23, 2, (1997), 140-180

[25] Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N.Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002

[26] Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006

[27] Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002

Different research interests and approaches are revealed in studies of the modern era (before and since the collapse of the Chinese empire) and are involved in Chinese gender and masculinity studies.[28] A striking feature is that most studies in the field refer to the notion of 'modern nation' or nation-building. Frank Dikötter's *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* connects medical discourse with modern aspirations during that period, identifying some burgeoning ideas about the nation and future society.[29] Dikötter picks out two new notions, "womanhood" and "youth". The former was a cultural sign relating to gender transformations, and the latter could be viewed as a major aspect of the advent of individuality in China. He also examines Chinese sexuality as serving the needs of improving the Chinese race, indicating a kind of ethnic nationalism.[30] Also in 1995, Susan Brownell's *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* explores discourses of Chinese body culture around the 1980s, in which she exercises a sporting metaphor to understand Chinese nationalism: "[W]hat is first verbally expressed to a person by a voice of authority (in this case, a coach) may, through repetition, become an almost unconscious principle that shapes her movements."[31] State, class and gender are three major aspects discussed. Brownell's efforts are echoed by another book: *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, in which Andrew Morris delineates the origin and

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[28] Limited by research scope, feminist related issues are not main concerns of this thesis. But there have been significant numbers of women-focused studies connected to Chinese modernity and nation building. Just to name a few: Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; Tani Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993; "Transformations of Gender in Modern China," in M. M. Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 261-77; Susan Brownell, "Gender and Nationalism in China at the Turn of the Millennium," in T. White, ed., *China Briefing 1997-1999*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000, pp. 195-232

[29] Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995

[30] Dikötter especially examines Chinese race issues in another book: *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, London: C. Hurst, 1992

[31] Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 12

developments of modern *tiyu* (physical education) during the 1920s and 1930s. Morris reveals the pivotal role of this concept in Chinese nation building, which combines the desires of empowering the nation and cultivating modern citizens for the future.[32]

Concerning film and literature, masculinity scholarship has shown more interest in a spirit of cultural and political critique amid the modern demands of Chinese nationhood. As early as the mid-1980s, Paul Clark identified powerful masculinity presentations in some fifth-generation films, and related it to a unique cultural attitude. "Clark refers to the film *One and Eight* as 'directly masculine in its harshness of landscape, bluntness of characters, and directness of visual form."[33] His 2005 book, *Reinventing China*, reveals the spiritual journey of nation building echoed by the fifth-generation's film making experiences.[34] Clark also stresses "male chauvinism" in the film *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*, 1987), which worked as a model of "archetypical masculinity" amid rebellious youth culture in 1980s China. *Red Sorghum,* which has been examined by many other scholars, is deemed, with its bold masculine representations, to be both indigenous and national.[35] As Wang Yuejin contended, in search of the "real man" in the cultural fever of the 1980s, "*Red Sorghum* is a cinematic milestone that proposes a powerful Chinese version of masculinity as a means of cultural critique."[36] Some researchers, focusing on the concept of "national cinema", also demonstrate a significant gender focus to interpret a "Chineseness" in terms of modernity and national identity. [37] The 2006 book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* has a chapter on Chinese

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[32] Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

[33] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 217

[34] Paul Clark, *Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005

[35] Wang Yuejin, "Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and Desire" in Kuoshu, Harry H., ed., *Celluloid China: cinematic encounters with culture and society*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002, pp. 251-275; Zhang Yingjin, "Ideology of the Body in Red Sorghum: National Allegory, National Roots, and Third Cinema", *East-West Film Journal*, 4, 2, (June 1990), 38-51

[36] Wang Yuejin, p. 257

[37] Such as a book edited by Sheldon Lu which devotes one third of its contribution to gender related issues:

masculinity, entitled "How Should Chinese Men Act?" Through works by Jackie Chan, John

Woo, and Zhang Yimou, the chapter aims to "reveal the variety, contest, and dynamic debate

around masculine mores and national identity that have most resonance with Chinese and

international audiences today." [38]

Some new notions like gender identity and male subjectivity were also mentioned along with

increasing attention to the connection between Chinese gender and the nation. Zhong

Xueping's *Masculinity Besieged: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese*

Literature of the Late Twentieth Century is the only book-length study exploring Chinese

masculinities in the modern era.[39] Through close literary examination and a comprehensive

psychoanalytical approach, Zhong investigated the efforts to create a strong male subjectivity

throughout the 1980s, with frequent references to the formation of national identity and

Chinese cultural roots. Zhong suggests that the desire for a strong male identity owes much to

China's quest for modernity since 1949. In the 1980s, however, with the collapse of old

ideologies, the trend of seeking new male (cultural) identity becomes evident. Zhong mapped

an indigenous cultural background for Chinese masculinity studies, pointing out the close ties

between Chinese nation, modernity and Chinese gender construction. Nevertheless, the

central topic of the book is "masculinity besieged", which is not well developed with any

explicated reasoning: "the book is not primarily about Chinese masculinity (or masculinities

for that matter) itself or how and why it has been besieged; rather, it is about anxieties about

masculinity and Chinese national identity as articulated by Chinese intellectuals in recent

Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu,ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997
[38] Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, eds., *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006
[39] Zhong, Xueping, *Masculinity Besieged: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century*, Durham: Duke Universiy Press, 2000

decades."[40] In other words, the book does not project the actual construction of Chinese masculinity in the 1980s, but left more questions for further investigation: the changing images of males in different political climates, and the internal tension between masculinity and modernity are especially worthy of investigation. Besides, the book limited its discussions to Chinese intellectuals and writers, leaving much space for future studies.

In 2005, a collection of masculinity studies focusing on Hong Kong cinema mapped new directions in the field.[41] The book features cultural and political readings of Hong Kong film representations, acknowledging a struggling Hong Kong or Chinese identity amid a "wide array of masculinities". It also draws attention to more theoretical issues like hegemonic masculinity, gay sexuality and the dissolution of subjectivity.

In addition to the above research concerning Chinese masculinity, there are feminist studies that address Chinese men indirectly. Take for example, the 1999 book *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China,* a collection of works debating the existence or feasibility of a women's public sphere. It deems the Chinese social sphere to be patriarchal despite decades of political campaigning, mostly by men, advocating women's liberation in China. In her 2004 book *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, Tani Barlow reflects on the 'female subject' which had been proposed and constantly revised, mainly by men, throughout the history of modern China:

> From the 1920s, when 'the woman question' took genuine pride of place on the popular intellectual agenda, to the patriotic, instrumental recasting of women in the Communist Revolution's development discourse in the 1940s and 1950s, to the highly publicized and plaintive regrouping of social science feminism and gendered justice movements in post-Mao intellectual circles, feminist currents in critical theory have continuously effloresced into the general domain of intellectual life.[42]

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[40] Wang, Yiyan, review of Zhong's book in *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, June 2002, 268

[41] Pang Laikwan and Wong Day, eds., *Masculinities and Hong Kong Cinema*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005

[42] Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, p. 3

Barlow views the Chinese woman as "first and foremost a trope in the discourses of masculinist Western-inspired realist fiction."[43] The suffering of Chinese women in representation, she argued, is only there to vent male frustration at not being able to right the wrongs in a society desperately needing change. These concerns expressed by feminist scholars encourage this thesis to investigate further a Chinese intellectual discourse which is fundamentally masculine.

Other books of interest include in-depth discussions concerning core political debates and concepts about Chinese nation-building. For example, Hu Jubin's *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949* reveals an overwhelming Chinese nationalism throughout the history of Chinese filmmaking.[44] He regards "cinema as both the reflection of Chinese nationalism and a medium for the reinforcement and reproduction of that nationalism," which he examines "as a site where different versions of nationalism were expressed and contested."[45] Hu's assertion that Chinese cinema has played a crucial role in Chinese nation-building is also one of the central arguments this thesis tries to present.

Also concerned with Chinese nation-building, the concept of public space is scrutinised in Stephanie Donald's *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China.* The book asserts the function of Chinese film culture in creating "moments of publicness" despite the unique Chinese political system differing from its Western counterpart.[46] In her analysis of films like *The Blue Kite, Yellow Earth* and many others, Donald acknowledges the symbolic imagery offered through films in terms of narrating the present and the political, and

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[43] Tani Barlow, p. 54
[44] Hu Jubin, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; London: Eurospan, 2003
[45] Hu Jubin, p. 19
[46] Stephanie Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000

correspondingly the active role of audiences ready to share and appreciate this imagery. Her

arguments provide a crucial theoretical backdrop for my discussion of films in Chapter Three,

where Habermas's concept of the public sphere is employed.

All the above research, in particular that concerning the modern era, inspired the attempt by

this thesis to examine Chinese masculinity in relation to the modern Chinese agenda,

especially nation-building. No intention is involved to assert definite association between

Chinese modernity and masculinity, but this thesis is obliged to emphasise the similar intense

cultural and political contents associated with these two issues. Around the beginning of the

twentieth century, Western thought brought the idea of a modern nation: "the Chinese

adoption of Enlightenment History as their own and [the nation] pursues its inseparability

from the project of creating a national subject evolving to modernity."[47] The notion of a

modern nation state immediately prompted a wide range of issues being debated for decades.

Two broad intentions among these debates were to reform China into a modernised, strong

nation against imperialist invasion, at some stage comparable to the Western mode, and to

empower the Chinese people in terms of personal liberation and revitalisation.[48] Concerning

the latter, sexuality was at the heart of the debates, posing great challenges to the traditional

gender order where a woman's body was a cultural taboo. As shown in the above research,

the nation and gender issues were linked in many narratives of Chinese enlightenment

thought.

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[47] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 25

[48] Opinions were diverse concerning the issue of the nation's reform. Fundamentally, there were mixed opinions about the ideological basis for the proposed modern nation: "The complex intellectual relations among these four may be represented by seeing K'ang and T'an as drawing most deeply upon native roots for their philosophical synthesis, by contrast with the Western inspired Social Darwinism of Yen Fu and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao." Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 19. Concerning the body-related discourses, a direct reason was to defeat the notorious "sick men of east Asia," a phrase developed by the West.

To understand masculinity construction in a context of Chinese nation building, related intellectual discourses are crucially important. As a relatively new stratum in Chinese society, the modern Chinese intellectual was initially a product of profound social transformation. Chinese intellectuals were the main advocates of the nation's reform, including the new culture and political system; meanwhile they themselves were involved in and representatives of transforming Chinese masculinity. In various ways, "the study of intellectual history in modern China is tantamount to the study of intellectuals involved in the major political issues of their time."[49]

With the collapse of the Chinese imperial order, Chinese men faced unprecedented challenges. First, there was no longer a civil service examination for Chinese men to seek political engagement. Consequently many men's career prospects became uncertain. Second, the patriarchal system which had lasted for thousands of years found no basis in the highly promoted new culture, and men's privilege in terms of family ethics was threatened. Third, a challenge was presented by the imperialist invasion, which established the pattern of the West vs East where Chinese masculinity was endangered by colonisation or, in other words, marginalisation in a global context.

At some point, the sentiment of Chinese national revival interacts with the rebuilding self-image of Chinese intellectuals through discourses on the new culture, modern nation and more:

> we can see that this discourse was clearly a case of self-empowerment of a new group of educated elite who created a new self-image of their own importance precisely at the time when the traditional channels of political advancement (in particular, the civil service examination) were no longer available.[50]

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[49] Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, p. 4
[50] Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, p. 4

This thesis attempts to identify the specific patterns of this interaction revealed amid intellectual discourses, through cinematic analysis. However, there are a few aspects requiring special attention. First, the nation as the modern subject is always the core of consideration. Enlightenment thought, which induced the sentiment for modern Chinese nation building, included establishing a new democratic sphere. They are both advocated and reflected in the film representations discussed here. In many ways, the nature of masculinity construction since early last century provided key references to understanding the attempt to establish China as a national, modern subject. As Christian Haywood commented, "Masculinity is central to the modernity project with its emphasis on rationality, reason and scientific progress."[51] Second, in terms of film representations, the new individual values, along with the sentiment for cultivating modern Chinese citizenship, negotiated with a much needed national identity amid discourses aimed at seeking national survival. "Masculinity (and femininity) has long served as a crucial social marker of individual identity"[52], which will account for a special kind of Chinese nationalism characterised by loyalty and resistance. As a whole, however, the focus of this thesis is on illustrating how a modern China, a utopia-like creation at some points, is imagined through masculinity representations amid contemporary intellectual discourses.

The 1930s and 1980s

The reason for targeting films from the 1930s and 1980s is twofold. First, these two decades featured unprecedented debates on issues of Chinese nation building, democracy and individuality, which are core elements in the modern Chinese agenda. Second, both the 1930s and 1980s signaled major changes in the filmmaking tradition, responding to a sense of

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[51] Chris Haywood, *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research, and Social Practice*, Philadelphia, Pa.: Open University, 2003, p. 12

[52] Stephen Whitehead and Frank J.Barrett, eds., *The Masculinities Reader*, Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2001, p. 61

urgency posed by national and international circumstances, when films served a more far-reaching cultural and political critique than had been the case in the respective previous decades. Consequently, compared with other periods, the 1930s and 1980s demonstrate the clearest connection between masculine representation and nation-building sentiment.

As agreed by many scholars: "[T]he dominance of the May Fourth discourse has imposed a set of value systems and interpretive frameworks on later generations of Chinese intellectuals."[53] May Fourth as a modern intellectual legacy rivals the Confucian tradition in many ways. According to Prasenjit Duara, the entire history of China was rewritten in an enlightenment mode:

> By the early twentieth century, Chinese history came to be written in the Enlightenment mode. The historian Liang Qichao was perhaps the first to write the history of China in the narrative of the Enlightenment. He made it clear that a people could not become a nation without a History in the linear mode.[54]

> This history involves not only reading in a dynamic of progress to modernity, but also a reverse project of recovering the primordial subject, of rejoining the present to the past through some essentializing strategy. [55]

This view of history has dominated discourses of Chinese nation building and modernity ever since, but not without challenges from Confucian thought and other ancient wisdom.[56]

Comparatively, the 1910s and 1920s were dominated by radical and bold intellectual discourses of a modern nation state from various ideological bases. Core concepts like science and democracy were generally accepted and urgently advocated in the intellectual circles. From the time the war broke out in 1937 until 1949, the focus of attention was on war

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[53] Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, p. 5
[54] Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing history from the nation: questioning narratives of modern China*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 33
[55] Prasenjit Duara, p. 25
[56] The "national essence" scholars, represented by Wu Mi, for example, were dedicated to keeping Chinese traditional culture alive.

and the vast destruction it caused. The May Fourth style intellectual debates subsided, with

little sign of new intellectual trends. From 1949 until the end of the 1970s, the building of a

new China was exclusively dominated by Communist discourses, politics not being debatable.

As for the decades from the 1980s, commercialisation became the new focus of interest,

without major intellectual debates on issues like democracy or political reform.

It was in the 1930s, even though patriotic sentiments were much more emphasised than ideas

of the modern nation-state, that intellectuals were directly voicing their concerns over

political issues, exhibiting great complexity and diversity. Furthermore, disappointments

among intellectuals caused by increasing government dictatorship further stepped up the

demand for a revolutionary imperative on top of everything else:

> For the May Fourth intellectuals, instilling the patriotic sentiment of national survival
> became a more pressing issue than dealing with the technical problems of nation-
> building, which were left to the politicians and other professionals under the
> Guomindang regime. As the Guomingdang government became increasingly
> authoritarian in the 1930s, however, most intellectuals became radicalized as opponents
> of the state, which they deemed corrupt, ineffectual, and a continuation of the
> precarious warlord government. Their sense of urgency and disillusionment soon led to
> a revolutionary imperative calling for total change in place of the reformist agendas
> first initiated by their predecessors in the late Qing.[57]

The shift of focus from advocating a modern agenda to tackling pressing imperialist

aggression, according to Jerome B. Grieder, incorporated a sudden transition of intellectual

discourse in terms of both its contents and significance.[58] On the one hand, some elite

intellectuals joined left-wing campaigns due to their lack of confidence in the Nationalist

government. But Communist ideas, imposing self-reform to suit revolutionary needs more

than anything else, did not benefit much from the decline of their rival. On the other hand, the

voice of intellectuals was to a degree suppressed by the government and ironically by the

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[57] Goldman, Merle and Lee, Leo Ou-Fan, p. 6-7
[58] Grieder, Jerome B., *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History*, New York: Free Press, 1981, p. 337

constitution which endorsed state power rather than regulating it. Intellectuals lost the political weight they had shown in previous decades.

This mounting tension between the intellectuals and the government, as well as a sense of disorientation among intellectuals, accelerated the diversity of opinions about the modern nation state among many other symptoms of cultural and political pluralism in the 1930s.

Primarily, the vision of the modern nation state was replaced by multiple political perspectives. The urgency of war circumstances resulted in an emerging radical, left-wing political stance leading to the revolutionary sentiment for a proletarian nation. Meanwhile, the vigorous pursuit of modernity since May Fourth turned to more careful considerations on more technical aspects of the modern nation state.[59] There were also scholars like Hu Shi who presented his own vision of an ideal government:

> In the 1920s, no one had been more adamant than Hu in calling for 'a government with a plan': none had been more anxious than he to dissociate liberalism from the laissez-faire principle of classical liberal thought. Now, however, he constructed his case against 'new-style dictatorship' around a proposal for what he called 'government by no-action' (*wu-wei chengchih*). The idea has its origins in the primordial epoch of Chinese thought. Each of the principle 'schools' of early Chinese political thought interpreted in its own manner the paradoxical notion that 'through non-action, nothing is left undone' (*wu-wei erh wu pu-wei*).[60]

Hence multiple versions of the proposed future nation coexisted with the liberal democratic ideas that had appeared around May Fourth and earlier.

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[59] "The reformers of the early years of the century, and many of the spokesmen of the New Culture in the late teens and twenties, took the whole phenomenon of social, cultural, and political modernity as their study, and were unembarrassed in offering their opinions across an astonishing range of issues. By the late 1920s and the 1930s, however, there was a growing number of intellectual specialists educated to survey China's predicament more narrowly from the perspective of particular disciplines: as sociologists, economists, anthropologists, critical historians, and students of law and of political theory." Jerome B.Grieder, p. 341

[60] Jerome B.Grieder, p. 347

Second, core issues like democracy caused unprecedented debate.[61] Scholars who advocated

democracy had to fight hard against overwhelming cries that, more than anything, China

needed a government with centralised power.

Third, the role of intellectuals amid national salvation became questionable and was

sometimes threatened under increasing governmental dictatorship. Meanwhile in the left

camp, intellectuals were faced with self-education to integrate with a proletarian public. In

both cases, private opinions were denied importance, and intellectuals struggled to maintain

their individuality which was highly valued during the May Fourth era. The whole notion of a

private realm hinted at by elite intellectuals was even disappearing:

> 'Between the public and the private realm there is a natural distinction,' Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei
> asserted in 1919, defending the values of the new thought against its critics. Set against
> the traditions of a political culture which had never made room for private culture in
> public life, any more than the emerging revolutionary ideologies of the 1920s and
> 1930s were inclined to do, this commonplace distinction constituted a startling
> challenge.[62]

Remarkably, the above complexities in terms of culture and politics shown in 1930s China

can be approximately matched or in some cases were further developed in 1980s China.

Along with the ending of the Cultural Revolution and consequently relaxed control over

intellectual activities, the 1980s witnessed a return of a more pluralistic cultural environment,

seen also in the early twentieth century.[63] Arguments were boldly raised against political

orthodoxy since 1949.

> In the 1980s, even on sensitive political issues such as Chinese culture versus Western
> culture, authoritarianism versus democracy, and the rule of law versus the rule of man,

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[61] For example, Grieder noted some extreme comments advocating a strong government rather than democracy
in journals like *The Eastern Miscellany* and *The Independent Critic*: "'We need a government with centralized
powers that can produce the best talent that is efficient and competent,' wrote one contributor; a government, in
the words of another, that is able to 'sweep away yesterday's planless, unorganized, anarchic conditions, and
implant social, economic, and political controls that are organized and planned.' Or, as a third bluntly put it,
'What China needs is a capable and principled dictatorship.'" Jerome B.Grieder, p. 345
[62] Jerome B. Grieder, p. 341
[63] Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, p. 500

there were wide-ranging debates without the imposition of an orthodox or official view. Relatively open discourse on politics as well as on culture took place in mainstream party newspapers, journals, academic forums, professional meetings, films, theater, and periodically on national television in the 1980s. [64]

Meanwhile, the economic reform and opening up policy after 1978 brought China back to the international arena. In the 1930s China encountered direct imperialist invasion; in the 1980s China was forced into a globalised situation with confronting challenges. This time nationwide anxiety was also overwhelming, for China had to find its position in the world market of cultures, ideas and economics. Throughout the 1980s, many Chinese were eager to retrieve their loss of youth and opportunities, struggling for a new and powerful country. On the other hand, after "ten years of chaos" (the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976), a need for cultural reconfiguration was also prominent, through which Chinese hoped to rebuild China's national identity. In the mid-1980s, roots-seeking literature (*xungen wenxue*) caused more reflections on Chinese culture as a whole, which added to the new cultural trend redefining what it meant to be Chinese.

On the whole, the relaxation of government control contributed to revived debates on issues prohibited in the previous decades. Issues debated in the 1930s were at the core of intellectual discourses in the 1980s. First, the Chinese modern agenda resumed, but coexisted with increasing attention to traditional Chinese cultural roots, as mentioned above. Second, democracy was brought up once again, along with debates on diminishing government power.[65] Third, along with economic reform, the private realm became more visible in the

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[64] Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, p. 501
[65] "In the late 1980s, the intellectual circles' discussion of democracy resulted in a redefinition of the concept of society and its relationship with the state. The growing importance given to society was directly connected with the shift of focus from class struggle to contradictions among the people; the change of the people from a social class concept to a largely all-inclusive concept almost identical to society; and the change of the state's functional focus from dictatorship to the managing of public affairs." Ding Yijiang, "The Conceptual Evolution of Democracy in Intellectual Circles' Rethinking of State and Society" in Zhao Suisheng,ed., *China and Democracy: the Prospect for a Democratic China*, p. 111

economic field, paralleled by advocating for individuality in literary circles and beyond.

Equally in the 1930s and 1980s, the diversity of intellectual discourses relating to the core of Chinese nation building on the one hand, and to the cultivating of modern citizens on the other, were incorporated with a sense of national urgency posed by the international situation. This combination fashioned a stimulating environment to probe the complexity and dynamics between Chinese masculinity construction and nation-building. As part of this cultural climate, the Chinese film industry gained prosperity in these two periods, and showed major concern regarding issues discussed above.

According to Hu Jubin: "Chinese cinema not only reflected nationalist ideologies and movements in Chinese society, but also actively participated in debates surrounding issues relating to the 'Chinese nation'."[66] This statement is especially true of both the 1930s and 1980s. In the flourishing 1930s films which made a turn to the left, a collective national identity (in many cases combined with class struggle) was the strongest conviction represented. Pang Laikwan discerned a special male quality within this national sentiment: Many of these Chinese left-wing melodramas discussed overtly 'masculine issues,' like the nation and brotherhood, with a high emotional pitch. This male sentimentalism, so obviously observed in this cinema, reflected as much the emotional stamp of male spectators as the strong identification of the filmmakers with their films.[67]

In 1980s China, the film industry also signalled a break with the past, with the turn to broad cultural and political critiques concerning the nation. As Paul Clark argues:

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[66] Hu Jubin, p. 4
[67] Pang Laikwan, *Building a New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. p. 86

At the turn of the 1980s Chinese film directly reflected the concerns and problems of the nation as a whole to an extent not seen since the late 1940s. Many of the new films, like contemporary short stories and plays, were set in the Cultural Revolution, or explained their characters' current difficulties by reference to those years.[68]

And as mentioned earlier, Clark also identified a kind of masculine culture represented in some fifth-generation films, some of which are to be discussed as major examples in this thesis. All these parallels convinced me to compare films from the 1930s and 1980s and to explore the subtle yet distinct connection between Chinese masculinity and the nation which has evolved since early last century.

On the whole, films made in the 1930s and 1980s projected a time of change, with China's modern agenda firmly in the backdrop. A good number of films from these two periods were critical of Chinese cultural and politics, complicated by an overwhelming national sentiment. The ten films selected for this thesis are representative of these features, but with special emphasis on some form of male power while each presenting their respective aspirational vision for the future nation. This choice of films reflects the attempt made in this thesis to reveal two major factors dominating films from these two decades, especially by those directors who engaged in debates in the intellectual circles. The first is the admirable common aspiration for cultural and political transformation; the second is the extensive reliance on male subjectivity, which largely shaped discourses of nation-building and issues like democracy.

One more thing that needs to be noted, however, is that the common theme of masculinity and nation continues the norm of male domination. Consequently, there is a certain degree of heteronormativity. Arguably, this is caused by the strength of male culture and the

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[68] Paul Clark, p. 154

questionable presence of femininity, as noted by Dai Jinhua:

> The causes of women's hardship lie not only in the fact that they have no
> language of their own, and therefore must constantly struggle under the
> yoke of male culture and language, but also in the fact that contemporary
> Chinese women have gradually lost the qualities that made them female ---lost
> the discourse of femaleness.[69]

With all these factors in perspective, the thesis strives to offer a glimpse into Chinese

masculinity construction in the 1930s and 1980s, the heyday of China's modern debates since

the early last century.

Analytical Framework

As scholars have pointed out, most progressive films in 1930s China are not exactly

reflections of a May Fourth spirit. On the contrary, they demonstrate more intentional

deliberations on class struggle and proletarian inclinations. This thesis generally agrees with

these arguments, but strives to identify diversified aspirations regarding the image of a

modern nation state beneath the efforts of engaging left-wing political discourses. In

particular, intentionally and unintentionally chosen images by the directors will be analysed

in terms of their deeper cultural implications. The deeper structure of the films will be

derived responding to key notions of nation building and Chinese masculinity construction.

With emphasis on different aspects in each chapter, a relatively complete picture of

masculinity and the nation is intended.

As to the 1980s, current scholarship agrees on the unconventional representations of the fifth-

generation films, which employ metaphorical representations to compose grand national

tropes. With regard to the film database for this thesis, their actual process of coding new

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[69] Dai Jinhua, "Invisible Women: Contemporary Chinese Cinema and Women's Film," *Positions*, vol.3, 1, Spring, 1995, p. 258

concepts and ideologies in film narratives will be the focus. A comparative study of these 1980s and 1930s films will reveal remarkable similarity as well as the developments of core notions regarding Chinese nation and masculinity.

The thesis is structured around three main research topics. The first theme of the thesis examines masculine representations and male ideals constructed responding to support Chinese nationalism seen in 1930s and 1980s China. "The ideological manifestation of Chinese modernity was nationalism." [70] Chinese modernity was manifested as an overwhelming sentiment for national salvation triggered by a history of imperialist invasion. The aspired-to Chinese masculinity therefore is revealed as doubly rebellious, against corrupt authorities and traditions as well as against imperialist powers. Meanwhile, the future nation is imagined as a community led by powerful males with shared memory and heritage. Benedict Anderson's definition of 'nation' is widely quoted: "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." [71] This "political community" is deeply embedded in national cultural roots and enforced by modern print media, like newspapers and novels. [72] Accordingly, film representations of exemplary masculinity endorsed the shared sentiment for Chinese nationalism.

In these first two chapters, two different types of male archetypes are revealed and hence two versions of the future nation presented. In Chapter One, there is a reconsideration of Chinese culture through exhibitions of bold and vigorous male archetypes dwarfing the ancient idea of

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[70] Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, p. 6

[71] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed., London and New York: Verso, 1991, p. 6

[72] "These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousnesses in three distinct ways. First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. …Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation. …Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed., London and New York: Verso, 1991, pp. 44-5

a Chinese scholar. "No masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations. …Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered."[73] This new male archetype signals profound challenges to Chinese traditional gender relations. Through close readings of the films *Big Road* (1934) and *Red Sorghum* (1987), Chapter One examines issues including a new ideology of the male body, female gaze and modern individuality to reveal a rebellious stance towards the conventional Chinese gender hierarchy as well as politics. Meanwhile, a refreshed image of the Chinese nation is celebrated through utopia-like tight communities, which conduct carnival celebrations of an ideal life and defend their land against foreign invasion with their own blood.

In Chapter Two, paying more attention to the phenomenon of building national consciousness, an emerging masculine archetype reflects the formation of Chinese national identity. Ross Poole comments: "Nationalism comes on the scene when the idea that a people is constituted as a political community through a shared cultural identity enters political discourse, and a large (enough) number of people come to believe that this identity takes priority over others."[74] Taking on the issue of national identity, male archetypes in this chapter are bound by self-appointed political responsibilities. Tough decisions are made to compromise personal interests while presenting the collective spirit. Through close readings of *Wolf Hill* (1936) and *Evening Bell* (1988), Chapter Two unravels a war metaphor regarding the rise of Chinese nationalism amid tough international circumstances. Due to their different historical backgrounds, however, in these two films the nation is imagined differently: *Wolf Hill* presents proposed national independence, but *Evening Bell* draws on universal humanity to interpret a new Chinese nationalism.

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[73] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005,p. 71
[74] Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity,* London: Routledge, 1999, p. 32

The second theme of the thesis addresses male and female subjectivities as an expression of democratic consciousness. Mainly discussed within the framework of an imagined, modern public sphere, related film analysis reflects competing views and stances towards democracy, a core part of the modern nation state. On the one hand, Jürgen Habermas' notion of a public sphere is introduced to identify fundamental elements of a bourgeois space, where enlightenment attempts by males prevail. On the other hand, female masculinity endorsed by a radical democratic stance indicates a subversion of current order, not only of corrupt authorities as discussed in Chapter One, but also subverting the domination of men past and present.

Chapter Three focuses on the adventure of rebellious youth in a climate of burgeoning urban culture. Male subjectivities are recognised and granted power in guiding public discourses. Through close readings of *Crossroads* (1937) and *The Trouble Shooters* (1988), the chapter identifies a shared Enlightenment sentiment which is highly idealised, despite dramatically different social circumstances.

Chapter Four casts a feminist view on democratic consciousness. The male gaze, sexual violence, and even marriage are examined for their implications of male domination over women. In the public domain, pornography is interpreted as discrimination towards the female body. Through close readings of *The New Woman* (1935) and *The Price of Madness* (1988), the chapter introduces female subjectivity through the psychoanalytic concept of mirror identification, and also through a feminist version of masculine ideals.

The third theme of the thesis examines how masculinity serves as an individual identity

contesting the ideology of the modern nation machine.[75] As R.W. Connell argues, a particular

masculinity is always in relation to others and can be identified by its interrelationships

embodied by dominance, subordination, compliance or marginalisation.[76] Through close

readings of *Waves Washing Sand* (1936) and *One and Eight* (1983), Chapter Five addresses

the issue of marginalised masculinity involved in a symbolic power struggle with the national

machine. It uses a different point of view in terms of the modern nation state. As mentioned

earlier, traditional ideology coexisted with the ideology of the modern nation state in 1930s

and 1980s intellectual discourse. Some Daoist ideas actually appear in both discussed films.

The negotiation between a sovereign power and individual rights seen in this chapter

indicates challenges posed to a totalitarian state, which are actually dominant throughout

Chinese history:

> The Chinese tradition of political speculation does not naturally encompass the concept
> of limited government—the notion, that is, that the government can be at the same time
> essential and yet less than all powerful. …The philosophical Taoist denied the
> relevance of government entirely, viewing it as an artificial hindrance to the natural and
> spontaneous workings of the Way.

> But the view that the government is merely an agency of the community, exercising
> necessary functions but not in itself to be mistaken for the ends which it serves or
> invested with a transcendent personality—for this view there was no precedent, no
> cultural resonance, however faint.[77]

The chapter adopts the anthropological concept of the rite of passage, where marginalised

masculinity is discussed in combination with the questioning of a sovereign power.

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[75] As Michael Kimmel argues: "[G]ender has joined race and class in our understanding of the foundations of an individual's identity." In Michael S. Kimmel, and Amy Aronson, eds., *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historican Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2004, p. xv
[76] R. W.Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005
[77] Jerome B.Grieder, p. 348

Chapter One

Revitalising the Body and Nation:

Masculine Representations as Cultural Critique

Big Road (1934) and *Red Sorghum* (1987)

This chapter examines an emerging masculine archetype amid intense modern public discourse in the 1930s and 1980s, when the Chinese nation as an "imagined community" was widely discussed in intellectual circles. Drawing on the theoretical knowledge of modern Western masculine ideals resonating with the development of nationhood and nationalism, this chapter investigates the relations between the desire for a revitalised Chinese nation and representations of masculinity.

In this chapter, a close reading of the films *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum* highlights the concept of body, which is used to manifest a connection between masculinity and the nation. First, a common body metaphor seen in both films is pointed out, related to a body culture in the decades the films were made, projecting traumatic Chinese national history as a whole. Second, a new body ideology seen in both films is examined to indicate high aspirations for a national change. Controversial representations of the male body and female gaze are argued as promoting individual values, which were advocated for modern Chinese nation building. Third, rebellious actions in both films are enforced by resistant male and female bodies, which challenge corrupt authorities, defy gender stratifications and reject the old China. Fourth, utopian sentiments in both films are revealed through impressive bodily performance in ritual, celebration, and carnival, where the future nation is envisioned through an idealised small community. Finally, by incorporating a profound Chinese nationalism, these two films launched different cultural critiques, which will be interrogated mainly on the basis of their distinct appreciation of Chinese cultural roots.

1. The Body as National Symbol: Representations and Social Discourses

This section traces the intellectual debates on gender and body in early modern China, linking the Chinese culture of the body to the imaginary national revitalisation in the 1930s and 1980s. In examining these two films, a body metaphor is uncovered which re-enacts China's traumatic national history and calls for changes.

A. The Politics of Gender Construction: Nation-Building Discourses

Alongside the proliferation of modern publications in the early twentieth century, burgeoning public discourses on gender issues attracted wide attention throughout China.[78] There were at least three reasons for this phenomenon. One was the global spread of Western scientific and medical knowledge, largely based on the physiological rediscovery of human bodies. The second was the intellectuals' advocacy of women's liberation as a means of subverting feudal codes and advancing Chinese civilisation. The third was military defeat by the West and the concurrent fears that the Chinese race was becoming weak. From its start, gender was inherent to the ethos of Chinese national revival.

Western scholarship has shown considerable interest in the intersection between gender constructions and nation-building in China. Frank Dikötter's *Sex, Culture, and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican*

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[78] Gender and nation were dominated the avant-courier periodicals of the time. As early as 1915, *Funü Zazhi* (Women's Magazine) published articles like "*Xing de xisheng yu jiefang*" (The sacrifice and liberation of sex), bringing to light the concept sex as an object of cultural and social debate. Overall, the magazine advocated women's education and health in a bid to improve Chinese race. Another magazine, *Nüzi shijie* (Women's World, 1904) expressed the same concern. Overwhelmingly, "the body" became a key word addressing issues concerning gender and nation. Meanwhile, athletic prowess is promoted in a bid to rejuvenate Chinese culture. Mao Zedong personally participated in the debate. In "*Tiyu zhi yanjiu*" (A study of physical culture) in a journal called *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) in April 1917, Mao criticised the neglect of physical training in Chinese traditional education.

Period (University of Hawai'i Press, 1995) links modern medical discourses to constructions of Chinese nationhood, in which he identifies some burgeoning ideas concerning "womanhood" and "youth" in the vital formation of the future society. A redefinition of Chinese women stresses their centrality as "mother of the next generation", and that is associated with modern Chinese masculinities which could prepare China for a brighter future. In another book, Dikötter views Chinese sexuality as improving the Chinese race, by promoting a kind of indigenous nationalism.[79]

Susan Brownell comments on a kind of body culture during China's social transformation in the 1980s:

> If we step back a bit, however, in the midst of these changes it is possible to see a rather enduring characteristic of Chinese body culture, a tendency that I call, following Kleinmans (1985) and Sun Lung-kee (1983), 'somatization.' This refers to the way in which social tensions are often expressed in a bodily idiom, so that calls for their resolution often centre on healing and strengthening the body. Because of this tendency, body culture occupies an important place within Chinese culture as a whole.[80]

In retrospect, both the 1930s and 1980s featured a resurgence of interest in body culture and an inspirational modern agenda. In the late 1920s and 1930s, along with nationwide cultural campaigns such as the "Nationalist Literature and Art Movement", "Military Spiritual Education", "Honouring Confucius and Studying the Classics" and "New Life Movement", the KMT government launched a series of national games to advocate physical culture. In *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Andrew Morris recounts a historical moment:

> On April 1, 1930, Chiang Kai-shek, chairman of the National Government, stood before a body of 1627 national-class athletes on the grass field of the Zhejiang Provincial Stadium in Hangzhou. In his role as honorary chairman of the Fourth National Games, Chiang declared, '…The Chinese nation's population of four hundred million and vast territory are unrivalled in the entire world. But the Chinese nation's

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[79] Dikötter examines Chinese race issues in *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, London: C. Hurst, 1992
[80] Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 22

status in the world, its international ranking, is not even third class. This is our Chinese nation's greatest shame. And the reason is that our national physique (*minzu tizhi*) is weak, causing people of other nations not to take us seriously…'[81]

According to Chiang, the "national physique" had a vital role in national revival.

Not only had the Nationalist government gone to great lengths to intensify the national campaign; at the other end of the ideological spectrum, the Red Army also promoted the ideal. According to Morris: "sports and physical culture were spread throughout the Red Army by means of the 'Club'(*julebu*) and 'Lenin Room'(*Liening shi*) systems, which administered educational, cultural, and recreational programs within the army." [82] Mao Zedong and Zhu De were loyal advocates of physical education.

In the 1980s, when the Chinese modern agenda adopted economic reforms, the rigid sex taboos during the Cultural Revolution were relaxed.[83] Military-style clothes were replaced by modern fashion. Both male and female bodies became sites of expression, identification and even consumption. As Brownell argues:

> In the 1980s another transformation got under way. There was a move away from the militaristic communist body culture toward consumer culture. This was expressed in the popular movements of body-building and 'old people's disco.' These movements took place outside of the state sports system, reflecting an impetus for change that came more from the grassroots level than from the state.

Meanwhile, however, the tie between body and the nation remained evident:

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[81] Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004, p. 100

[82] Andrew D. Morris, p. 127

[83] There are great complexities in terms of sexual discourse after 1949. As noted by Zhong Xueping: "Although political oppression has played a crucial role in the recent history of Chinese sexuality, sufficient attention needs to be given to how or in what ways that role has been played. …I suggest that the CCP's desexualisation practices should be understood as a construct in that the practices functioned as normative materializes within a particular historical context …to echo Evans, the CCP's discursive regulation of sexuality, has also shaped Chinese sexuality. … In fact, if sex/uality was taboo during the Cultural Revolution, its existence was preserved in that negativity that, ironically, became the guarantor for the 'purity' of issues of sexuality in the Chinese critical discourse of the 1980s." in Zhong Xueping, *Masculinity Besieged?: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 59-60

> [I]n the 1980s, sports victories were said to destroy the insulting label 'sick man of East Asia,' which had gained mythic proportions in people's minds. …This link of sports, the military, and national salvation persisted until recently, reflecting the militaristic nature of communist body culture as a whole. [84]

To conclude, the concept of the body was closely linked to the advent of modern culture in contemporary China. In the 1930s, a strong modern nation was imagined nationwide through a renewed body culture. In the 1980s, the new national sentiment aroused by economic reform coincided with the easing of sexual taboos that had dominated during the Cultural Revolution. Either way, a push for a body revolution was derived from intense cultural advocacy, aiming to elevate the international status of China. The two films examined here are both situated within the kind of body culture, and promote inspirational masculine ideals based upon a new ideology of the body. Through these films, a new future of the nation is envisioned and even redefined.

B. Flesh and Blood: *Big Road* vs. *Red Sorghum*

Both *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum* metaphorically retell national history by using impressive representations of male bodies. For the former, a national crisis is translated into celebrations and sublimations of youthful bodies; for the latter, the fairytale of "the sedan bearer" reflects the nation's past and future by configuring primitive bodies and passions.

Big Road is a vocal expression of young men's strength and fantasy. The film starts with powerful songs incorporating bold body representations, and scenes of muscular young males working on a building site. A similar scene appears halfway through the film and then at the end, comprising an energetic and patriotic theme. The six male protagonists are Jin Ge, who has gone through family tragedy, Xiao Luo, who fancies driving a modern road roller, Lao Zhang, who is determined but taciturn, Zheng Jun, a university graduate, and Zhang Da, a

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[84] Susan Brownell, p. 22

womaniser. Despite their hard work, all five workers are fired for causing trouble. Later a monkey-faced youth (not a worker) who had stolen food out of hunger joins the group. Jin Ge, the leader of the group, suggests that they go to the countryside, where they can help to build a highway for the army.

By building the big road all six young men not only fill their days with useful work, but also they meet two girls: Mo Li, a drum singer-turned-waitress, and Ding Xiang, who helps her father in his teahouse. A celebratory mood marks their gathering at the end of a long day; they drink tea, sing songs and tease each other. Despite sour memories of the past, they have boundless energy: swimming nude in the river and showing off their muscular bodies. A secret date between Ding Xiang and Xiao Luo is interrupted by the others, and Zhang Da tries to sneak a peek at Mo Li's calves. Meanwhile, these youths never defer to authority. When a section manager provokes Ding Xiang, he is immediately made to twirl around and is ridiculed. The two girls are also unconventional: Mo Li confides to Ding Xiang about her passions for all six young men. Immediately after, Mo Li sees the six swimming naked in the river.

The celebratory mood comes to a sudden end with the Japanese invasion. When everyone else wants to flee, Jin Ge insists that they stand firm and defend their nation. One day, Jin Ge and his peers are tricked to go to a dinner by their bosses, where they are told to stop building the big road. After they refuse, they are beaten and thrown into a cellar. Mo Li and Ding Xiang help Jin Ge and his brothers break out of the jail. As a result, they defeat traitors and bring them to justice.

The end of the film sees all six young men, with the courageous Mo Li, determined to finish

building the big road before the Japanese come. As soon as the road is finished, the building site is turned into a battlefield and they are all killed. Mo Li and Jin Ge die holding hands. In Ding Xiang's vision, however, all seven come back to life and continue their work.

Like *Big Road*, *Red Sorghum* is packed with energy and power, but in a slightly different narrative mode. The film features a voice-over of the grandson of two protagonists: Jiu'er and "my grandpa" (known as the chief sedan bearer). The voice-over is bland in contrast to the storyline. The film begins with a close up of Jiu'er's face and faint traditional wedding music. With little sign of celebration, the bride is dressed, covered with a red veil and put into a sedan. Inside the sedan, Jiu'er tears off her veil, even though this is a sign of bad luck. She peeks through the curtains, gazing at the sedan bearer's muscular back. Not long after the sedan bearer speaks to her, the other sedan bearers talk about Jiu'er's arranged marriage. They note that in exchange for a mule, Jiu'er was going to marry a leper, Li Datou, the owner of a distillery in Shibali Po. Jiu'er is clearly annoyed but keeps silent. The chief sedan bearer ("my grandpa"), however, decides to perform the local custom of *dianjiao* (tossing the sedan). The sedan-tossing scene is infused with boundless energy, as the sedan bearers jump and sing in the dusty landscape. On hearing Jiu'er's weeping, the sedan bearers soon stop.

As the sedan proceeds through a plot of wild sorghum, they encounter a bandit. Jiu'er is not alarmed. Using eye contact, she encourages the sedan bearers to fight the bandit. On her wedding night, Jiu'er defends her virginity with a pair of scissors which she had brought with her. Three days later, on her way to her parents' home, Jiu'er welcomes the sedan bearer's reappearance and they make love in the sun-filled, wild sorghum field.

By the time Jiu'er returns to Shibali Po, however, the leper has died mysteriously. Jiu'er

takes over the distillery and advocates shared ownership with her staff. Then the film becomes joyful: people cleaning, splashing sorghum wine, and playing. Several days later, the sedan bearer returns, drunk and determined to claim Jiu'er. In a rage, Jiu'er drives him out and has him thrown in a big vat, where he is kept for three days. He then learns that Jiu'er had been kidnapped by Zhu Sanpao, a local bandit, and has just been released. He immediately seeks revenge. He is relieved to learn that Zhu Sanpao had not raped Jiu'er.

All members are celebrating worship of the wine god, when the sedan bearer comes again. He urinates in several jars of wine and cleans the slag to show off his strength. In public he carries Jiu-er home, and starts living with her. Uncle Luohan, the head worker of the distillery, leaves to join the Communist guerrillas, but he brings good news to Jiu'er: the fouled wine becomes the best wine ever made, and is called *Shibali Hong* (Shibali Red).

Nine years on, the Japanese have invaded. They make people trample the sorghum field and replace it with a big road for their trucks. In front of all the villages, Uncle Luohan is flayed alive. Urged on by Jiu'er, the villagers attack the Japanese trucks. A second wine god worship is performed, filled with wrath and dignity.

When the Japanese trucks come, however, their mines fail to detonate. In an extraordinary scene, people carry bombs with their bodies, charge towards the Japanese trucks, and hurl themselves at the enemy. Two Japanese trucks are destroyed, at the price of many Chinese lives. Jiu'er dies carrying food for the fighters. Right after the battle, a solar eclipse happens, as the sedan bearer and his son stand beside her body.

Despite different storylines, both films begin with a collective celebration, filled with

constructive energy and masculine power. During the second half, invaders come to threaten the nation and test the courage and strength of the Chinese people. The invasion of the rural setting evokes China's historic vulnerability. Meanwhile, the national resistance is symbolised by resilient images of the male body.

Body and nation have a natural connection in these two films. Three layers concerning representational male bodies can be discerned. First, both films feature youthful bodies in the spirit of imagined national unity. In *Big Road*, the scene of young men working together on a building site suggests the building of a nation. In *Red Sorghum,* scenes of celebration feature powerful male bodies, which map a collective imaginative space. The nation is subject to a mythical construction with admirable utopian sentiments. In both cases male unity encourages the construction or reconstruction of Chinese nationhood.

Second, the attack on male bodies symbolises national tragedy. The scarred or mutilated body appears in the second part of each film. In *Big Road*, a male body is flogged for defending the construction of the big road. In *Red Sorghum*, Uncle Luohan is skinned alive for his anti-Japanese activities. In both cases, the nation's misery is enacted by the scarred male body. An allegory of China's national suffering is thus created.

The next stage shows the final sublimation of the body with the earth (indispensable to the nation). Both films end with clashes between Chinese people and the Japanese army or its surrogates with the same tragic result. In *Big Road* all six young men are killed in the air raid; in *Red Sorghum* few survive the final fight. This sublimation of bodies is evident in the closing scene of *Big Road*: in Ding Xiang's vision, the six young men and Mo Li are restored to life and continue to fight. In *Red Sorghum*, an eclipse follows Jiu'er's death, which

encourages imagination of the great beyond. The spirits of the dead will remain with the nation, which is the ultimate dedication.

The body (especially the male body) becomes a metaphor for Chinese national history, for the raw vitality in the midst of national crisis. This has drawn up a blueprint of a cinematic China in both films. The rest of this chapter will examine the revitalisation of the body and the nation in both films, in regard to the new man, identity, self-emancipation, and the new community.

2. Libido as the Desired Macho Power: The Sexualised Body

Based on close readings of two selected sequences from *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*, this section explores the similar controversial body ideology shown in both films. Male nudity, the all-powerful body type, and the daring female gaze are all revealed as free spirits challenging the image of an old nation. The concept of individuality is then introduced to explain the sexual connotation in these films, linking the libidinal to the construction of a new masculine archetype. This archetype exemplifies a new male identity which calls upon modern individual values, envisions the future society, and represents cinematic visions of a revitalised China.

A. Sexualising the Body: The Male Body and Female Gaze[85]

In the 1930s and 1980s, there were lively cultural debates over masculine archetypes, femininity, sexuality and nudity.[86] *Red Sorghum* and *Big Road* feature the most powerful

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[85] The female gaze noted here is not opposed to the male gaze conceptualised by Laura Mulvey, which is a critique of male visual pleasure inscribed in Hollywood films. Female gaze here is visually in the film representation, subverting traditional gender codes.

[86] In the 1930s, discussions solely on the definitions of "man" and "woman" were not at all rare. They were found in gender related magazines like *Nüzi Yuekan* (Women's Monthly), *Nan Pengyou* (Boy Friend), *Nüshen*

representations of male bodies, and challenge social taboos.

Big Road presents a controversial scene by the river, featuring all six young males swimming naked. In addition, the two girls watch. The sequence starts with a river in the valley seen in long shot, where six young men are playing in the water. Some of them rest on rocks, while others are just walking and jumping between them. The next shot is a long shot filming a boy swimming in the rapid river, followed by a middle shot of another boy playing in the swift currents. Then the camera cuts to a long shot of the full river view again, where a boy on a rock is applauding another boy who has just emerged from the water and walking towards the camera, both in the far distance. These scenes are tastefully composed. Burly arms and torsos are the focus of representation, while full exposure only occurs in long shot or from behind. Immediately after that, the appearance of two girls brings a comic element. Upon arriving at a cliff overlooking the river, the shy Ding Xiang stands back, while the bolder Mo Li steps forward. Then there are a couple of intercuts. Mo Li is waving her arms cheerfully on the cliff, followed by a shot in which the boys dive into the water. Mo Li laughs with her arms around her waist, and the boys float their heads to the surface and wave their arms to make Mo Li go away. Finally, the girls claim victory by inviting the boys to dinner. The scene ends with the boys threatening to shame the girls by emerging from the water, grabbing their clothes and running up the hill to consume watermelons.

Red Sorghum is more restrained: half naked male bodies in ragged clothes are shown, but there is no nudity. The sexual tension, however, is much more obvious and deliberate. The narrative starts with Jiu'er in a close up shot, when she is angry at the arranged wedding,

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(*Goddess*) and *Nüsheng* (Voice of Women), in casual readings like *Shanhai jing* (Classics of Mountain and Sea) and publications of social criticisms like *Shehui Yuebao* (Social Monthly). In the 1980s, there was a resurgence of the same kind of magazines rarely seen after 1949. *Jiating Yisheng* (Family Doctor) was popular among those concerning more private matters like sex and relationships.

tearing off her bridal veil. Then she looks around herself in the wedding sedan. Following her

point of view, the camera scans the sedan, when a man's naked back flashes as the sedan

curtain is lifted. Immediately, the camera cuts back to Jiu'er, whose eyes have turned to an

admiring look. Then the scene cuts to a shot of the dusty road, where those sedan bearers'

feet are bouncing in a row. Again the sedan curtain is lifted, followed by an even more

intense look of Jiu'er in a close up. After that, the camera cuts back to Jiu'er's vantage point:

a man's bronzed back is fully exposed to the sun. Right after, the camera shows the sedan

bearer from the front: the man is bareheaded, his upper body slightly swinging with the

sedan. Immediately, the scene is back to Jiu'er again, and with the camera pushed closer, her

eyes betraying admiration. A while after, Jiu'er lowers her eyes, then lifts her eyes to look,

her lips slightly open. The sedan bearer then scolds her: "Hey, girl in the sedan, don't peek

like that! Talk to your brothers here! "

As a complex concept in traditional Chinese cosmology, the body configures the self and

human desires. An entire history could be written on the Chinese conceptualization of the

body.[87] The body and human desire remained taboo in Chinese traditional discourses even

after 1949. Even in the thriving body culture of the 1930s and 1980s, when the traditional

discourse diminished, nudity was still targeted by film censorship.

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[87]Among many ancient sages, Yang Zhu and Laozi stressed "valuing the body" (*guishen*), viewing the body as the ultimate end which originated a whole package of morals and ethics. There is, however, a philosophical twist to this concept: in discourses of both Confucius and Laozi, the body is inclusive of both physical and mental dimensions (the body and heart or spirit). In this respect, there is no preference indicated between the physical body and spirit. When it comes to Mencius, his famous motto "to sacrifice the body to fulfil righteousness" (*sheshen quyi*) is clearly leaning towards the latter. However, it is clear that the body as a core concept in Confucian thoughts is fundamental to Mencius. Meanwhile, human desires obliged within the body are never decriminalised or neglected in discourses of these ancient sages. Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty is widely blamed for excoriating the human body and its desires. His stricture to "maintain justice and diminish human desire" (*cun tianli, mie renyu*) dominated Chinese traditional morality for thousands of years. As a whole, despite bursts of defiance and protests from controversial intellectuals and marginalised social minorities, which stimulated anecdotes from time to time, the body, especially human desire, was never to be openly discussed in Chinese feudal discourses. Some scholars have acknowledged the trends of secretive, risqué literature in the late Ming, resonating with burgeoning commercial culture in a modern sense. Even so, it was the early twentieth century that the body and sex became topics of public debate, owing to the welcome circulation of Western scientific knowledge.

Despite these taboos, both film sequences stress the ontology of the body. Not only is the body no longer rated second for its ingrained connotation of human desire, but also nudity triumphs, casting the vote for cultural change. Traditional family ethics and social morality, which depended on rigid control over the body and sexuality, are attacked. The male body is connected to a modern transformation in three ways. First, in both films, the camera gives the naked (or half-naked) body a strong presence. The male body is represented as powerful and bold. It is also revealed as the recipient of a gaze, a new kind of aesthetic appreciation and cultural speculation. In a way, the camera in both cases grants a rebirth of the male body. In *Big Road*, bathing in the river symbolises a fresh start and the washing away of the ideological obstructions of the past. *Red Sorghum* also has a sequence featuring people splashing red sorghum wine on each other, immersed in the joy of a fresh start. This rebirth represents a new ideology of the human body, reconsidering the entire history of social constraints. Chinese traditional values are under scrutiny, while the future and potential of the male body are unlimited.

Second, the human body is directly acknowledged and legitimised as a source of human desire. In both sequences the male body becomes a sensual object under a female gaze. In *Big Road*, Mo Li faces the naked male bodies boldly, creating sexual tension and the deployment of the male body by female sexuality. In *Red Sorghum*, the entire sequence takes place around Jiu'er. In the closed space of a bridal sedan, Jiu'er explores her curiosity about men. Close up shots of her face and what she sees are frequently used, as her appreciation of the male body intensifies.

Third, male sexuality is the response to the female gaze. In both sequences, the male body is

visible to men themselves. In *Red Sorghum*, the sedan bearer knows that he is being stared at, and tries to flirt with Jiu'er. When this fails, he initiates the sedan tossing. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, the sequence represents a diversion of male sexuality. In *Big Road*, the boys confront Mo Li's gaze, and run naked towards the two girls. Even though it is only implied, male sexuality is fulfilled here. Pang Laikwan argues that the sexual tension in *Big Road* is connotative:

> The gaze of the women invites the men into the realm of sexuality, a crucial step for the boys to reach manhood. … A river seems to be the ideal place for this important ritual to take place. This is particularly clear in the scene in *The Highway* [*Big Road*] where the men leave their initial shyness and rush forward to embrace the women. As I have pointed out, at the top of the hill the men break a watermelon brought by the girls and share it with each other, suggesting quite candidly men's penetration and breakage of women's virginity.[88]

As a whole, male bodies in both films are praised both for their strength and energy, and sexualised in opposition to traditional gender codes. This is a forceful assertion of a new ideology of the body in its own right.

Examined against their cultural contexts, this new ideology of the body was tied to reconsiderations of Chinese masculinity along with China's exposure to the rest of the world. There was always a Westernised Other behind these representations. In the 1930s, articles about "the beauty of masculinity" (*nanxing mei*) appeared in some magazines, and some of the articles were written by women. In most of those articles, Hollywood body types were favourably compared to their Chinese counterparts.[89] In *Big Road,* representations of the male body certainly adjust the image of the Chinese man and encouraged the construction of Chinese ideals of masculinity. In 1985, a young woman addressed her concern over the lack

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[88] Pang Laikwan, *Building a New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, p. 104
[89] Take for example: "*Nanxingmei yu nüxingmei*" (The Male Beauty and the Female Beauty), *Dianying Yuekan* (Film Monthly), 1930, 3, p. 46; "*Nanxingmei de jubu youdian*" (Some Advantages of Male Beauty), *Yi Sheng* (Voice of Art), 1936, 2(3), p. 29; Chen Yifeng, "*Nanxing reli de daibiaozhe*" (The Representatives of Male Power), *Dianying Yuekan* (Film Monthly), 1932, 15, p. 5

of masculine features in contemporary Chinese culture, directly spurred by the stardom of Japan's Ken Takakura in China. A nationwide debate was generated by Sha Yexin's 1986 play *Seeking a Real Man*. [90] As can be imagined, the film *Red Sorghum* was well received for its raw passion and Chinese masculinity. The desired male body arguably mirrors the nationwide anxiety over Chinese masculinity in an increasingly globalised cultural context.

In both films, the male body is a metaphor for the nation. Consequently, the sexualised male body has implications for the nation. This chapter argues that the sexualised body reflects the imagining of revitalising the Chinese nation against the Westernised Other. The following discussion will refer to a Western theoretical framework, starting with an investigation of the meanings of the sexualised male body.

B. Men as Individuals: The Potency of the Modern Citizen

To explain why sexuality is highlighted in the representations of the male body, the imported concept of "individuality" is a place to begin. According to Foucault, individuality is sexually defined:

> It is through sex—in fact, an imaginary point determined by the deployment of sexuality—that each individual has to pass in order to have access to his own intelligibility (seeing that it is both the hidden aspect and the generative principle of meaning), to the whole of his body (since it is a real and threatened part of it, while symbolically constituting the whole), to his identity (since it joins the force of drive to the singularity of a history). [91]

From this perspective, the wholeness of "self" is possible only when sexuality is acknowledged in one's own body and intelligence. The admission of sexuality could be viewed as one starting point for one's individual identity construction.

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[90] *Xunzhao nanzihan* (Seeking a Real Man) is a stage play directed by Lei Guohua, scripted by Sha Yexin. The play addresses the issue of masculine ideals through a girls' troublesome journey looking for a boyfriend. The play was a great success in Shanghai, Wuxi and Suzhou. There are special interviews and discussion concerning the play in *Film Biweekly* (Hong Kong), 1988, 9, no.248

[91] Michel Foucault, translated from the French by Robert Hurley, *The History of Sexuality*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 155-156

In a Western theoretical framework, the construction of masculinity is based on the development of this modern "self". As R. W. Connell points out:

> All societies have cultural accounts of gender, but not all have the concept 'masculinity'. In its modern usage the term assumes that one's behavior results from the type of person one is….In that sense it is built on the conception of individuality that developed in early-modern Europe with the growth of colonial empires and capitalist economic relations…[92]

In other words, the concept of masculinity can be understood as a byproduct of the emergence of individuality. This connection between individuality and masculinity is true in both films.

In *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*, the breaking of sexual taboos is a means of self-autonomy. As can be seen in both films, the male body is liberated from social and cultural constraints, entailing a new recognition of the "self". Full control of the body is granted, a fresh start celebrated: either through the bathing scene or the scene with the sorghum wine. Signaling this sense of newness, conventional images are abandoned and the burden of Chinese ethics disappears. People are informed and inspired by the freedom to be whatever they want to be. In these moments of creativity, the construction of a new Chinese masculinity begins.

The men in these films are depicted above all as individuals. *Big Road* certainly set a high standard of male beauty, but none of the six men resemble each other. Jin Ge's confidence is evident in his high nose and radiant smile; Xiao Luo has eyes full of sparkling imagination; and Lao Zhang's determination is shown in his muscular body and firm gaze. In *Red Sorghum*, traditional male beauty is abandoned. Most of the male characters are distinctively unattractive. In both films, they are presented as individuals before their other qualities

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[92] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 67-68

become apparent. This reflects the modern ideology behind individuality. As Alexandra

Howson suggests:

> A second aspect of the civilizing process is a change in consciousness such that people have become much more aware over time of themselves as individuals (a process called 'individualization'). …Concomitantly, people become more aware of both their own and other bodies as separate, demarcated entities. Consequently the boundaries between my/your body and ways of maintaining them become increasingly important. For instance, physical space provides a mechanism that ensures individual bodies are held at a discrete distance from each other.[93]

With the body in the spotlight, both films delineate the desired new masculinity as

"demarcated entities".

Even more revealingly, men are desirable subjects in the celebration of individual freedom.

In other words, a new masculine identity represents a potent individuality. In both films, men

vastly outnumber women. In *Big Road*, there are six main male characters, and dozens of

secondary male characters, but two main female characters and a couple of maids in

supporting roles. In *Red Sorghum*, there is only one female character (a maid) in addition to

Jiu'er. Naturally, these two films endorse a new kind of masculine culture: not self-effacing

scholars, but confident and sexually powerful individuals. All these images challenge earlier

male stereotypes. In the 1920s, the "gifted youth and beautiful girl" (*caizi jiaren*) were

popular characters in Chinese films. Until the end of the Cultural Revolution, "heroes" with

little individualised emotion dominated cinema's screens.

This overlap between individuality and the construction of masculinity in both films arguably

reflects a version of masculine China. First, the notion of individuality, upon which men's

liberation is based, connotes male privilege. According to some feminist critics, ideas like

"civil society", "the individual" and "the public" are inherently patriarchal. As Carole

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[93] Alexandra Howson, *The Body in Society: An Introduction,* Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, in association with Blackwell Pub., 2004, p. 73

Pateman argues, in the proposed civil society the notion of 'self' is implicitly masculine.[94] From this perspective, the social contract theory which forms the basis of ideas about civil society privileged men's political rights over women's. This rationale partly explains the circumstance in China: men and women were not automatically equal under the term "individual" in public discourses early in the last century. The word "individual" naturally referred to males. When a woman was involved, she was called a "new woman". Furthermore, while "new woman" was a fashionable term in the early twentieth century, the liberation of women was mostly propagated by elite, male intellectuals.

Secondly, in both the 1930s and 1980s, the threat of the Westernised Other created nationwide anxiety over China's future. This raised concern for both modern change and a strong Chinese race. Under these circumstances, China needed major reconstruction to restore its confidence to become a more civilised society. The construction of Chinese masculinity in a modern sense was easily connected to these nationalist aspirations.

Apart from the humiliation and anger caused by foreign invasion, the 1930s were an era that was obsessed with creating modern citizens. Masculinity was reconsidered, and new role models were invented to complement the modern imagery of the nation. Terms such as youth, "new woman" and modern workers, were all new concepts for members of a civilised society. Director Sun Yu was the most provocative in depicting a world of ideals. He acknowledged his deliberate creation of idealised characters:

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[94] "Political theorists present the familiar account of the creation of civil society as a universal realm that (at least potentially) includes everyone and of the origins of political right in the sense of the authority of government in the liberal state, or Rousseau's participatory polity. But this is not the 'original' political right. There is silence about the part of the story which reveals that the social contract is a fraternal pact that constitutes civil society as a patriarchal or masculine order. To uncover the latter, it is necessary to begin to tell the repressed story of the genesis of patriarchal political right which men exercise over women. " in Carole Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract" in Rachel Adams and David Savran, eds., *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002, pp. 119-134

Based on the relatively simple story of *Big Road*, I developed the theme of anti-imperialism which is tough but overwhelmingly confident. I mainly described a group of young road workers, such as Jin Ge and Lao Zhang, who are representatives of workers with absolute confidence about the future.[95]

When Mo Li expresses her "love" for all six young men, she is expressing Sun Yu's passion. According to Sun Yu, they are all lovely and energetic, perfectly suited to the modern, new nation.

In the social and cultural transformation of the 1980s, the desire for change was tremendous. As in the 1930s, new words and concepts circulated. They were all connected with reconstruction of the nation: "the reformer", "the individual unit" (*geti hu*) and even "the new era". People were also eager to define themselves as "the new generation". Reflecting this trend, both literature and film were filled with controversial characters.[96] Most of the male and female figures were labeled as "new", hinting that they had a future in the modern nation under construction. In contrast to older archetypes constrained by their absolute dedication to the Communist revolution, these new paradigms prepared for a nation that was heading in a different direction.

Several scholars have noted the libidinal content in *Big Road*. Chris Berry argues that for audiences there is a sublimation of sexual desires in favour of national sentiment:

Desire is aroused in regard to an object but never realized....It is on the basis of this overall trajectory that I want to argue that *Big Road* is a sublimative text. Specifically, it attempts to arouse revolutionary ardor in its audience by the arousal of libidinal drives and their redirection towards the object of revolution.[97]

Pang Laikwan makes a similar argument: "However, in Sun Yu's *The Highway*, sexual urges

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[95] Sun Yu, "*Wo de daibiaozuo* Dalu" (My representative work *Big Road*) in Sun Yu, *Dalu zhi ge* (Song of the Big Road), Taipei: Yuan Liu Publishing, 1990, p. 129

[96] These included Gao Jialin in *Ren Sheng* (Life), Li Xiangnan in *Xin Xing* (The New Star), and Sha Ou in *Sha Ou* (The Drive to Win)

[97] Chris Berry, "The Sublimative Text: Sex and Revolution in *Big Road*," *East-West Film Journal*, 1988, (June), p. 79

are not avoided but indeed fulfilled through political participation, although the libidinal is ultimately satisfied in a destructive way through death."[98] Sublimation or not, the libidinal content in *Big Road* is crucial in the way in which the nation is imagined. In other words, there is a fantasy interrelating sexuality with national revival. In addition, the sexual connotations of Red *Sorghum* have been exhaustively examined.[99] The connection between sex and the nation is commonplace. The construction of masculinity in both films is characterised by the male potency, which expresses the national quest for a potent Chinese race and nation. Individuality is tied to with a new male identity and the construction of masculinity endorses nation-building sentiment.

This renewed interest in Chinese masculinity signaled broad aspirations for social change, including the desire for the reinvention of the nation. In a bigger picture, the desired masculinity of these two films was part of a kind of "citizen cultivation schedule" that incorporated a grand blueprint for a strong and modern China.

3. Rebellion as the Expression of Autonomy: Transgression

The rebellious body seen in both films is a rejection of reactionary social power relations. First, transgressions conducted through the male body are in blatant defiance to corrupt authorities. Second, gender order as a symbol of traditional social order is challenged by bold and controversial representations of the female body.

A. Transgression: Subjection of the Masculine Body

In both films, highly intensified representations of both the rebellious male body and the

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[98] Pang Laikwan, p. 101
[99] Such as Wang Yuejin, "*Red Sorghum:* Mixing Memory and Desire" in Harry H. Kuoshu, ed., *Celluloid China: cinematic encounters with culture and society,* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002, pp. 251-275

controversial female body signal a breaking of social and cinematic conventions. Antiquated social codes and corrupt authority represented the old China, which is under constant challenge from the new men and women. This is just another way in which China is imagined in terms of fundamental transformations of values and ideologies.

The construction of modern masculinity was based on the essence of individuality, which is connected to modern ideologies relating to independence, rationality and self-knowledge. This masculinity differentiates a new way of thinking and acting. The traditional social stratification was questioned, especially the suppression of the female body. Personal freedom, especially marriage choice was rated more highly than arranged marriage. For example, in the 1930s, marriage was still largely decided by the patriarch; in the three decades before 1980s, marriage was politically interfered with in many cases. When this is translated into film representations, both "my grandpa" and Jin Ge go beyond contemporary social or moral imperatives and share a kind of revenge complex. In particular, bodily representations demonstrate transgressions against the dominant authority, and a reconstructing of the social and gender order.

In *Red Sorghum*, the transgression of the body is highlighted by illicit sex between Jiu'er and "my grandpa". The wild sorghum fields become a mythical site that is free of rules. There is also a sequence in which the sedan bearer declares his relationship with Jiu'er. The invasion starts with noises outside Jiu'er's house, where the sedan bearer tries to barge in. When the door is bumped open, the sedan bearer falls to the ground with his luggage all over the place. Surrounded by the distillery workers and with drunken steps, he is still boasting of his intimacy with Jiu'er. He climbs onto a chair and falls. When Luohan dissuades him from marching into Jiu'er's place, the sedan bearer bursts into a rage. "I sleep here! From today on

I sleep in this room! This is my room!" When reminded that the house belongs to "the boss",

the sedan bearer makes another speech: "Who is the boss? Is it Li Datou? I am not afraid of

him even if he is alive! … She is my wife, mine! In the sorghum field she said she likes

me…"

While this episode is funny, especially when Jiu'er beats the sedan bearer with a broom and

has him thrown into a vat, it is also meaningful. The sedan bearer not only stands by his raw

passion and unlawful action, but also challenges "the boss" face to face. His fully sexualised

body is juxtaposed against the unseen corrupt, dead body of the leper Li Datou. This

composes a structure of control and rebellion: Li Datou was in charge of the distillery and

had power over Jiu'er's body, despite his disease. Li Datou hires the sedan bearer who

desires to take Li's bride. It is never made clear that the sedan bearer kills Li Datou to save

Jiu'er from a miserable marriage, but the fact that he claims Jiu'er as his wife is a serious

transgression.

Metaphorically, this transgression reflects a deeper power structure amid social

transformation. As Foucault put it, "the body is also directly involved in a political field;

power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it,

force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs."[100] In addition to its

biological basis, the body is given political significations in the presence of a system of social

power. In this case, there is at least a two-dimensional power struggle. First, there is the

struggle over the suppression of the female body under patriarchy. As the victim of arranged

marriage, Jiu'er's adultery is a defiance of her parents and husband, and essentially against

patriarchy. Her body is used to express the aspiration for female autonomy. Second, there is

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[100] Michel Foucault, "The Political Investment of the Body", in Mariam Fraser, and Monica Greco, eds., *The Body: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 100, from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979)

the rebellion against corrupt authority. The sedan bearer's implied killing of Li Datou is not morally condemned. Instead, after Li's death, a public celebration is held. The tensions of power struggle are defused by the elimination of the rotten body, a symbol of degraded authority.

Theoretical references aside, the body was a consistent metaphor of gender politics in ZhangYimou's works. For example, his films *Judou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* both involve a man's impotence underlined by the love affairs of a young spouse or wife. Rather than condemn infidelity, both films show great sympathy for repressed passion and highlight the cruelty of prosecuting and killing those who disobey. The body in these films is politically invested to reveal the struggle underneath the superficial order and the façade of social normality.

In *Big Road*, there are also rebellious actions of bodily concern, even though they seem milder and more humorous than those in *Red Sorghum*. Unlike the obvious patriarchal figures in *Red Sorghum*, *Big Road* only shows a couple of local leaders acting against these young people. Nevertheless, there are also beatings and violence that are characteristic of a power struggle. As mentioned in the first section, all six men were tortured for their refusal to yield to traitors. However, that scene is preceded by another one that also shows defiance. During a cheerful gathering of young people in the tea house, one of the bosses suddenly comes in. People tolerate his arrogance until he offends Ding Xiang by touching her face. Jin Ge politely asks if the boss has ever enjoyed a flight. When the boss shakes his head, he pulls the boss by the shoulder and twirls him around. Encouraged, all the other males join in. The boss is spun around like a top. In the end, a superimposition of a small jet plane twirling adds to the comic effect.

While different from the transgression in *Red Sorghum*, there are similarities in this sequence. First, suppression of the female body is the reason behind the incident. The boss assumes that he has every right to take advantage of working-class girls like Ding Xiang, but he is punished for offending her. Second, the authority figure is not only challenged but also physically violated. The boss is pulled from his pedestal and nearly faints. He metaphorically loses his power and becomes a victim of rebellion.

In both *Red Sorghum* and *Big Road* the transgression is not a major plot element (in *Red Sorghum* it is intentionally glossed over), but rather performative, as far as masculinity construction is concerned. The bodily transgression underlines the power struggles beneath the contemporary social order. In a sense, the transgression presented annuls the "subjected" or "docile" bodies, claiming a much desired autonomy as the basic right of individuals.[101]

B. The Female Body: Liberations from the Old Gender Norm

The female body receives paramount attention in both films. No nudity or physical violence is involved, but the films convey a fundamentally different attitude towards the body politics of gender. As Chris Shilling argues, "There are many oppressive aspects to the construction of bodies in line with gender stereotypes."[102] Apart from biological differences, the social formation of gender differences creates ideal versions of the male and female body, which is largely enforced by dominant social discourses. This discourse of gender difference helps to enforce male privilege: "In the case of gender, … how dominant conceptualization of

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[101] "The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies." in Michel Foucault, "The Political Investment of the Body", p. 104

[102] Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, London: Sage, 1993, p. 111

masculinity and femininity can become embodied through social practices. However, this embodiment can itself serve to *justify and legitimize the original social categories* in ways which oppress women as 'the weaker sex.'"[103]

In Chinese historical discourses, the female body was under severe restrictions. The binding of feet is a notorious example of these restrictions. In the early twentieth century, foot binding was still practiced in some parts of China. By the 1980s, gender inequality was still debated in the public sphere, and female infants were being abandoned under the one-child policy. Against these gloomy backgrounds, the two films discussed here are highly progressive in their extraordinary presentations of the female body.

The director Sun Yu in the 1930s was accused of being obsessed with women's legs. His many films indeed celebrated strong and healthy female bodies. Li Lili, the leading actress in his film *Queen of Sports* (*Tiyu huanghou*, 1934), is always seen in shorts, her athletic legs boldly displayed. In *Big Road*, Mo Li (played by L Lili) also appears in shorts once, and she not only displays her legs, but behaves in other unconventional ways. For example, she and Ding Xiang privately declare their feelings for the young workers. Unlike most girls, however, Mo Li is anything but demure. She carries Ding Xiang in her arms, and kisses Ding Xiang from time to time. When the two girls are sitting together in a single chair, Ding Xiang whispers: "Mo Li, you tell me, gently, who do you love?" Mo Li laughs, putting her arms behind her head, and says: "Gently? Why? I'd rather speak loudly! I love all of them!"

Compared to *Big Road*, the female body in *Red Sorghum* is less eye catching. Jiu'er is always wearing loose red blouses. Jiu'er is radiant on camera, especially under golden sunlight.

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[103] Chris Shilling, p. 112

Right after having sex in the wild sorghum field, Jiu'er rides a donkey. She is captured in a middle shot from a low angle, her face red under the low sun, her earrings dangling. Accompanying these shots, the sedan bearer sings off screen: "Sister, bravely go forward, don't turn back!" This is followed by an extremely long shot of the waves in the sorghum field, which extends to the horizon, dyed in stunning colours. Jiu'er looks like a goddess in the dazzling sun.

Both female protagonists share many features which were rare for their time. First, they both dominate the screen. In *Big Road*, Mo Li appraises every man, and claims to "love them all." In *Red Sorghum*, it is Jiu'er rather than the sedan bearer who occupies the screen, supported by a song dedicated to her. The sedan bearer, in contrast, is only able to conceal himself in the sorghum field. Within the two films filled with macho power, these two sequences are worth contemplating. They convey a message other than performative masculine ideals. At least, the dominant position of female characters on screen metaphorically refers to the hopeful transformation in gender relations: women are not passive or obedient, but masters of their own desires.

Second, both female protagonists are assumed to possess mysterious qualities. Mo Li holds Ding Xiang just like a man, her robust legs granting her extraordinary and mysterious vigor. She also boldly declares her love. Jiu'er is filmed once in a low angle shot, her golden silhouette caught by a close-up. This, intensified by the colour of the sorghum fields, makes Jiu'er look rather mysterious too. Mo Li and Jiu'er are not stereotypically feminised. The more unconventional they are, the more they challenge dominant discourses. These representations reverse the social formation of the gendered body. They break every rule of the gender code.

At the same time, the young males encourage the controversial female body. In *Big Road*, Mo Li is fascinated by the young males. In *Red Sorghum*, the sedan bearer's song encourages Jiu'er's bravery and confidence. In short, men and women are acting together, which feels like a deliberate reconstruction of the gender order. No matter where the rebellious male body or the controversial female body are, they are both transgressive to traditional gender discourses.

Gender relations in China incorporate multiple perspectives from cosmology, ethics and anthropology.[104] In addition, sex relations in traditional China reflect the social hierarchy; Confucian sexuality was highly constrained in terms of its subordination to other social and moral codes.[105] This confirms the validity of the "gendered body" in the Chinese context. That is to say, deliberately glorifying the female body or minimising gender differences are defiant acts against Chinese gender codes. The breaking of gender codes and sexual taboos can be viewed as a defiance of Chinese tradition. The phrase "gender politics" could be used here: these representations not only transform femininity and masculinity, but they also challenge the core political discourses. Accordingly, the nation is no longer confined to its past traditions, but is open to the imagination.

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[104] See, for example, Charles Human, and Wang Wu, *The Yin-Yang: The Chinese Way of Love*, London: Tandem, 1971; R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1974; Alison H. Black, "Gender and Cosmology in Chinese Correlative Thinking," in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed., Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman, Boston: Beacon, 1986, pp. 166-95; T'ien, Ju-k'ang. *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.1988; Louise Edwards, "Jiao Baoyu and Essential Feminine Purity", *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*1988-9, 20-1:36-37; Charlotte Furth, "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China", *Late Imperial China* 9.2 December 1988, p. 1-31; Keith Keith McMahon, "A Case for Confusion Sexuality: The Eighteenth-century Novel *Yeou Puyan*", *Late Imperial China* 1988, 9, no. 2:32-53

[105] Susan Brownell, and Jeffrey N Wasserstrom., eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 26

4. Utopia as the Imagined Community: Myth of the Nation

The body politics spurred by the liberation of individuality challenged gender stratifications in both the 1930s and 1980s, stirring imagining of the transformation of the old China. This section will focus on visual images in our two films that bring forward mythical projections of the future nation. First, the nation is imagined as an idyllic community, best represented by a small group of men. Second, based on this sense of community, elements of a utopia such as public ownership will be investigated.

A. The Imagined Community: Rituals and Carnivals

In *Red Sorghum*, there are two major collective appearances of male characters, both involving the ritual of wine god worship. The first happens right after Jiu'er's recovery from kidnapping, when she joyfully inspects the winery for the first time. The second time is held for the sake of plotting revenge against the Japanese, after Uncle Luohan is skinned alive by the imperialist invaders. Despite their dramatically different contexts, both rituals are remarkably similar in terms of the mystical air and the spirit of unyielding masculinity. The pattern and setting are identical, except that the second occasion is decorated with burning fire and in a darker tone. As a whole, the ceremony is rather solemn and intense.

In the first wine god worship, with a shout, "Worship the wine god!" the camera tilts gradually to reveal an ancient portrait of the wine god on the wall. This is followed by a middle shot packed with two rows of half-naked men, each man holding up a bowl. The scene is set in a mysterious dusk light, smoke rising behind these men. Then the scene cuts to Jiu'er, who is fascinated by what she sees. After a couple of seconds, the scene is back to the men, who raise their bowls high above their heads and silently lower them to their chests.

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Looking into the wine, Uncle Luohan begins to sing. The whole group follows suit, expressing their strength, pride and joy. The lyrics of the song are of particular indigenous colour and have the strength of masculine personality.

If you drink our wine,

You'll breathe well and you won't cough.

If you drink our wine,

You'll be well and your mouth won't smell bad.

If you drink our wine,

You won't kow-tow to the emperor.

After a while, the camera cuts to a middle shot from the back, filming the men's muscular shoulders heaving as they sing. Then the camera concentrates on three of them and scans the rows. After a shot from the side, we return to a front shot of the men, who have just finished the song and are gulping the wine. At the peak of excitement, they throw the bowls on the ground and burst into laughter.

The sequence deliberately effaced differences among people. Most shots are filled with half naked bodies, not of individuals. They stand shoulder to shoulder, singing in unison. They all sing of the wine god with reverence and directness. The viewers are visually reminded of the presence of a community. This small group lives in the same place, running the wine business under the leadership of Jiu'er, and shares their respected wine god heritage. This is the definition of "community".[106] The wine god worship simply maps out and consolidates this

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[106] "The concept of community has been one of the widest and most frequently used in social science. At the same time a precise definition of the term has proved elusive. Among the more renowned attempts remains that of Robert Redfield (1960:4), who identified four key qualities in community: a smallness of social scale; a homogeneity of activities and states of mind of members; a self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and through time; and a consciousness of distinctiveness." Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*: *The Key Concepts,* New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 60

community.

In *Big Road*, collective appearances of men are everywhere, and there is also a ritualistic scene. The controversial river bathing scene has all the implications of a ritual. Firstly, images of the naked body in water could be easily connected to a symbolic rebirth. Secondly, all members commune with nature in the presence of a female gaze, which implies the attaining of manhood. When all six young men rise from the water and run towards two young girls, they symbolically embark on a new chapter in their lives. Just like in *Red Sorghum*, *Big Road* establishes a tight community based upon a small piece of land where building a road (rather than wine making) is the collective economic activity. The implied ceremony is held among all the male members at the core of the community whose shared experiences and emotions matter to all.

The collective appearance of male bodies in both films is symbolic of an imagined community, in which people embrace the same way of life. Secondary to the imagined community in the films is how this community is imagined. In both cases, the vitality of this community is shown through the bodily carnivals. In *Red Sorghum*, there is a hearty celebration which mixes the wine, bodies and everything else. The scene starts with a close shot of red wine being sprayed into the air, followed by a middle shot of Jiu'er, who is laughing behind a rain of wine. Soon the scene cuts to a man's back. He is playing a shovelling game with others. The camera then cuts to another man, who has just been showered by red wine. Laughter is heard while the man runs off screen, followed by a couple of other people and plenty of wine drops are in the air. Then the camera scans the courtyard, filming people chasing each other. Needless to say, this visualises the carnival through celebration, laugher and transgressive bodily conduct.

In *Big Road*, there is also a sequence filled with energy, immersed in the air of carnival. In the tea house after a day's work all six young men are sitting around a table. Ding Xiang brings tea to Xiaoluo, but she has trouble giving it to him: every man wants some. So Ding Xiang speaks: "You are really bad. There is no sugar in the tea… " In the next shot, Mo Li has joined Ding Xiang and she grabs the cup from her. Tasting the tea, Mo Li shakes her head saying: "Not sweet." Then she hands the cup to Ding Xiang, who does the same. Suddenly, Mo Li tries a third time, raises the cup, and rolls her eyes, saying: "Now it is really sweet!" In a long shot, Mo Li places the cup on the table and all the young men grab at it. In no time, the table is surrounded by young men. A moment later, one of them has climbed over the others, leaving the two girls laughing and applauding.

The infectious laughter seen in both sequences is noteworthy. In discussing the carnival, Mikhail Bakhtin acknowledges the political implications of carnival laughter: "In Bakhtin's analysis of early modern culture, carnival laughter is a highly subversive element of folk culture that liberates people from the prevailing official truth. In carnival, authorities are 'uncrowned' and mocked, power relations are reversed, the world is inside out and upside down. "[107] The laughter examined here bears a significant political connotation. In *Red Sorghum*, the laughter is connected with the celebration of Li Datou's death, with the implication of overthrowing corrupt authority. In *Big Road*, the sequence happens immediately after Jin Ge confronted a local chief who had been mistreating workers. The laughter can also be viewed as a celebration of flouting authority.

Second, in both cases, the carnival spirit is connected to the language of the body. During the

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[107] Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. 9

celebrations, people are nudging and teasing each other and ignoring the rules. There are no

personal boundaries and plenty of transgressions of the gender code. In *Red Sorghum*, wine is

spilled, and people cannot tell each other apart. Even Jiu'er boldly offends. In *Big Road*, the

young men grab the cup of tea which both Mo Li and Ding Xiang have tasted. This implies

that the two girls are to be kissed.

According to Bakhtin, the combination of bodies and carnivals can have serious cultural

meanings:

> Bakhtin focused on particular occasions in social existence when control of the body is
> ritually abandoned: carnivals, fairs, occasions, festivals, masquerades, banquets and
> spectacles all enact challenges to the established order of things, in the form of ritual
> inversion. In the course of a carnival men would dress as women, paupers would be
> crowned kings, peasants would abuse nobles, and everyone would swear, curse, sing,
> and most importantly, laugh. In this momentary suspension of the customary rules of
> social conduct, the body invaded the social scene as its most conspicuous actor,
> unrivalled in performing distortion and exaggeration ― in other words, in the task of
> turning the world upside-down.[108]

Metaphorically speaking, the sequences discussed here reflect the "momentary suspension of

the customary rules," when people forget about gender roles, social and economic status and

other identifiers. They are destructive of conventional social values.

In retrospect, the rituals discussed earlier are inversions of dominant discourses. In *Red

Sorghum*, the wine god worship is full of regional colour and folk elements. It is miles away

from Confucian orthodoxy or political social discourses. In *Big Road*, the naked male body

challenges sexual taboos and reverses the restriction on the body. Seen from the opposite

point of view, these rituals are actually reinvented or fabricated to replace long-established

traditions. In other words, behind chaos, those moments of "turning the world upside-down"

evoke the spirit of creation and construction for the future. This creative moment is similar to

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[108] "Bodies and Social (Dis)order," an introduction for Part Two, in Mariam Fraser, and Monica Greco, eds., *The Body: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 69-70

what Bakhtin has called the "other side" of the world. As he argued, amid the carnival, "thought and speech had to be placed under such conditions that the world could expose its other side: the side that was hidden, that nobody talked about, that did not fit the words and forms of the prevailing philosophy."[109]

To conclude, the imaginary community in both films is granted extraordinary vigor and creativity, where the body is politically implicative. Tradition is suspended as carnival prevails. The next step is to find out where this community is going and what it means to the way China is imagined.

B. Democratic Utopia: Public Utility and Equal Rights

This part discerns utopian elements in the imaginary community depicted in both films. Firstly, both carnivals are connected with public ownership. Secondly, there are numerous utopian features in both films, which may not be fully fledged but are highly proactive.

In *Big Road*, the chaotic carnival ends in a joyful reconciliation. Finally, the boys stop fighting as each of them has got a piece of the broken cup. As the camera moves closer, those pieces are put together, forming a new cup. Then the camera cuts back to the boys, who laugh more heartily than ever. In *Red Sorghum,* a conversation between Jiu'er and Uncle Luohan marks the end of the wine sprinkling. Beside Jiu'er, Luohan picks up a bunch of keys from a bowl and says: "These keys have been washed by the wine three times." Jiu'er doesn't stop sprinkling the wine while she answers him: "My assets are also yours. Just keep it!" In both cases, public ownership is the happy ending. People enjoy equal rights since there are no rules. Moreover, this goal comes through the reinvention of rituals, the celebration of a tight

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[109] M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans., Hélène Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 271

community and the destructive carnival. All these would encourage audiences to imagine a revolution and a utopia.

The film texts contain many other utopian contents. In *Red Sorghum*, the small group of people live far from rest of the world, in harmony with nature. They seem to have gone back to a primeval utopia. In *Big Road*, a private date between Ding Xiang and Xiaoluo is interrupted by his friends. The collective spirit is evident in terms of sharing the most private moment. Finally, both *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*, depict a feminist utopia. There is no absolute division between male and female roles. At the end of *Big Road*, Mo Li works alongside the men. Throughout *Red Sorghum*, Jiu'er has managed the winery, and called for revenge against the Japanese. These utopian notions are somewhat fragmentary. There is no clear economic, social or cultural utopia. They seem more like random ideas driven by lofty sentiment, mythically imagining the future nation.

The two films are adaptations of fictional works. Sun Yu admitted that "To look for 'reality' in *Big Road* is likely a fruitless approach."[110] The novel *Red Sorghum* is a famously creative rewriting of the nation's past. Director Zhang Yimou acknowledged his admiration for the free spirit in the novel and did everything he could to recreate it on screen. None of the utopian sentiments are based on real-life experience, but are an illusory projection of an aspired-for future. This is how China is imagined in the historical circumstances of the 1930s and 1980s. The next part will investigate the ideas behind the utopias.

5. "China as Youth": Aspirations and Reflections

Based on the utopian imagination shown in both films, this part describes a critical

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[110] Sun Yu, "*Guanyu dalu*"(Concerning *Big Road*), *Wenyi Dianying* (Art Films), 1935, 3, p. 17

nationalism that is concerned with the nation's future. The two films are connected to intellectual discourses in the different decades, linking masculinity to the nation from the perspective of a cultural critique. The cultural critique will be described in terms of the changing cultural climate in China of the1930s and the 1980s. In particular, modernity and Chinese cultural roots are regarded differently in the two films; the same aspirations for a powerful nation are shown to be incorporated through altering the imagining of the Chinese nation over fifty years.

A. Nationalism: Reinventing the Nation

Instead of a finalised version of utopia, the lives presented in the films are imaginings based on a profound nationalism. A revolutionary nationalism is the driving force behind all the inspirational representations discussed here. According to Anthony Smith, "nationalism may be described as the myth of historical renovation…Nationalism is a vision of the future which restores to man his 'essence', his basic pattern of living and being, which was once his undisputed birthright."[111] In retrospect, both *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum* are about a "pattern of living and being": whether idealised men or women, the sexualised body or the new values embraced by individuals, they are all crucial for a modern person to define and redefine himself or herself. In particular, the idealised masculinity receives paramount attention from both films, practically linking personal liberation with an imagined national revitalisation. As shown in the previous discussion, the vigorous male body exemplifies the way China has been envisioned in the social sphere across fifty years.

Taking this further, this nationalism incorporates defining cultural aspects crucial to the process of nation building. In many ways, based on their cultural climates, both films have

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[111] Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism,* London, Duckworth, 1971, p. 22

cultural critiques that combine reflections on the present and future prospects of China's entry into the international arena. According to Paul Clark, during the 1980s China was redefined in the light of imported new ideas as well as indigenous cultural roots:

> An opening to the rest of the world also raised issues of national character and identity. The new-style literature and art, along with the availability of translations of foreign works and ways of interpreting the world, reflected an effort to redefine notions of China, its society and its cultural inheritance.[112]

In the 1930s, similar sentiments were transforming the Chinese nation. Modern discourses were competing with Confucian-derived ideologies to form the basis for a modern nation.

Understandably, both films arouse the sentiment for national union against a threatening Westernised Other. In both *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*, honour, bravery and patriotism are central to the plot. Male protagonists collectively fight bullies, bandits, traitors and invaders. In other words, along with an inspirational new male identity, there is an appeal for a new national identity. The construction of Chinese masculinity is a metaphorical reconstruction of the Chinese nation. All these resonate with Western nationalism. As Joanne Nagel put it, "Masculinity and nationalism articulate well with one another and the modern form of Western masculinity emerged at about the same time and place as modern nationalism."[113]

The directors of both films responded to cultural debates in their eras, and their films were revolutionary cultural texts. In his study of fifth-generation directors, Paul Clark discusses the subjective experiences imposed by historical events, as a way of understanding the films in their cultural context. The book's title *Reinventing China*, reveals the mechanics of nation-building reflected in the imaginative filmic projections of this group of artists. In one way or

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[112] Paul Clark, *Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005, p. 2
[113] Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism - Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations" in Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, eds., *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader,* New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 116

another, the fifth generation reconstructed imagined spheres to encourage unprecedented social and cultural critiques. In the 1930s, the national cinema movement was famously a voice of propaganda for the Chinese revolution. Sun Yu himself was viewed as a progressive director despite what his left-wing critics called his overactive imagination. Only through Sun's imagination, however, is the vision of the future nation vividly projected.

Taken together, both films attempt to empower the nation with their versions of a new cultural map. These maps are not based on the pride of existing national power, or on narrowly defined nationalism. They display a soul-searching effort to redefine the nation as well as themselves, revitalising the nation in flesh and blood. As many Western scholars have agreed: "Identity, purity, regeneration, the 'enemy', historical roots, self-emancipation, building the 'new man' and the 'new community', collective sovereignty and participation—these are some of the themes that recur endlessly in the literature of nationalism." [114]

B. Rejuvenating Chinese Culture: Modern Discourses versus Cultural Roots

Both films are dedicated to a masculine archetype, which incorporates a similar package of new notions that enables China to attend to its modern agenda: individuality, the new male identity, emancipation from traditional gender codes, deconstructing the gendered body, and an imagined community full of utopian aspirations. Despite these remarkable parallels in the bid to rejuvenate Chinese culture in two decades half a century apart, there is one major difference: their cultural stance which shifted with the spread of globalisation.

The two films are situated within the modern discourse in the two periods. The concepts

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[114] Anthony D. Smith, pp. 21-22

related to masculinity and the body are all essential to the proposed Chinese modern agenda. Despite acknowledging this premise, the two films exemplify contrasting cultural stances. While *Big Road* is optimistic about modernity, *Red Sorghum* is more ambivalent about the modern. In *Big Road*, masculinity construction is symbolised by the building of a big road. As the central setting in the film, the big road has the connotation of freedom, according to Sun Yu: "The big road symbolises a broad way of freedom and liberation."[115] Always seen on a building site, the young male workers work hard and sing lustily the "Song of the Road Builders". Their muscular bodies are given undivided attention. Audiences are constantly reminded of their fervent hopes in the presence of the sound effects and song, the masculine bodies and the lyrics about freedom and liberation. This connects the big road with masculinity construction through impressive images. Second, at the beginning of the film, the building of the road is portrayed by mountains being dynamited. With the symbolism of revolution and liberation, this sequence is masculinised by being combined with a male chorus. Third, in building the big road, a road roller is admired by Xiao Luo, as a modern machine. Symbolically, the machine delineates a path for China: the men build a highway (the symbol of hope) with the road roller (a symbol of revolutionary modern industry).Through Xiao Luo's imagination, the three elements of road, masculinity and modernity achieve harmony. Ultimately, they compose a picture of masculinity in service of the salvation of the nation.

Just like the big road in the film *Big Road*, wild sorghum fields characterise *Red Sorghum*. The symbol of red sorghum as a free spirit had been pointed out by director Zhang Yimou in his article "Praising the Life, Advocating Creation."[116] More intriguing, the link between

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[115] Sun Yu, *Dalu zhi ge* (Song of the Big Road), Taipei: Yuanliu Publishing, 1990, p. 128

[116] Luo Xueying, "*Zansong shengming, chongshang chuangzao—Zhang Yimou tan* Hong gaoliang *de chuangzo tihui* " (Praising life, advocating creativity—Zhang Yimou's talk on the making of *Red Sorghum*), *Dianying yishu cankao ziliao* (Film Art References), 1988, 4, p. 35

masculinity construction and the symbolism of red sorghum is clear. First, the red sorghum, known as a wild field, is the very site where the sedan bearer and Jiu'er first make love. The golden sorghum is the perfect metaphor for everything connected to masculinity: the power of manhood, the defiance of gender codes, and passion. Second, during the first wine god worship, as well as the much celebrated wine splashing, a masculine community with the connotation of a utopia is established. Finally, during the second wine god worship, sorghum wine fuels the men's courage and determination to fight the Japanese. Through these images, viewers can read a version of China: inspired by the wild and free spirit (red sorghum and sorghum wine), men are seeking and defending their utopia.

In displaying masculinity, *Big Road* exploits modern images with a forward-looking imagination. Strength and power are the main thrust; young blood is incorporated with the much admired modern machine. "Sun's films were criticized for being too utopian and idealistic."[117] In *Red Sorghum*, however, there is an imagined primitive world. All the powerful male images are reinforced by their natural vitality which is anti-civilization. In addition to the strong presence of wild sorghum, there is an implicit hatred of modern machinery. The final clash in the film sees all the villagers attacking the big Japanese armoured truck, using their bodies to destroy it.

Despite the two films' reliance on modern notions, they take different approaches to modernity. Sun Yu's films show some dissatisfaction with the modern city, and in *Big Road*, young men leave the city for the countryside. All of these coexist with Sun's active vision of a fully modernised nation. After fifty years of nation building, however, *Red Sorghum* shows more awareness of Chinese cultural roots: "Unlike Chen [Kaige]'s early films, Zhang's *Red*

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[117] Zhang Yingjin, *Chinese National Cinema*, New York and London: Routledge, 2004, p. 106

Sorghum proceeds in the other direction of historical reflection. Narrating a legendary, action-packed tale of a heroic past, the film reaches deep into the roots of China and attempts to rehabilitate and establish a new subjectivity of the Chinese nation. "[118]

The different opinions about modernity only express the same cultural critique adopted by both directors. In other words, the imaginary masculine world is a way to initiate cultural change. In *Big Road*, the masculine archetype is established through a critique of obsolete ideologies from the 1930s. In *Red Sorghum*, however, more is expected of social change and from cultural reflection: "Zhang Yimou captured in his film the optimism of 1987-88 about China's future and the prospects for political reform. But he also presented a world 'before the fall,' in which civilisational philosophies such as Confucianism, Marxism or Communism had no place. In this world people live, not by rules imposed from outside, but by their own instincts and wit. The only rules, such as the lusty ritual offering to the God of Wine, are of these people's own making, not insisted on by outside organisations. "[119]

As a result, in their attempts to rejuvenate Chinese culture, the two films went in divergent directions. Ironically, this is further evidence of the overwhelming nationalism in both films. According to Anthony Smith, nationalism cannot be narrowly defined as modern or not, but is a sweeping force in its own right. "It is not a mechanical linking of past to future in the chain of generations, not an evolution of the traditional into the modern. It is an attack on tradition and modernity alike."[120]

The way the nation was imagined in *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum* relied on a reinvention of

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[118] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997, p. 108
[119] Paul Clark, p. 170
[120] Anthony D. Smith, p. 22

the idea of the body. Both films use metaphor and fantasy about the male body to provide a formula for a modern Chinese nation. At least three aspects are involved in the imagining the nation. First, if the body was deemed the source of national prowess in the 1930s and 1980s, the male body here was coupled with new concepts crucial to Chinese modern discourses. In particular, the contemporary debates on sexuality and on the new emphasis on the individual helped forge the new masculine identities seen in the two films. Second, rebellion as an expression of national autonomy is embedded in the representations of revolt, in particular, the social formation of the gendered body is challenged and discarded. Third, the utopian version of the nation involves a carnival of the body. Together, the imaginative nation building process is infused with youthful energy, profound struggle and revolutionary passion by reinventing the male, Chinese body.

Chapter Two

Nationalism as Political Correctness:

Sublimations of Masculinity

Wolf Hill **(1936) and** *Evening Bell* **(1988)**

This chapter also interrogates the politics of nationalism that encompasses altering perceptions of Chinese masculinity in terms of film representations. In contrast with masculine archetypes resonating with modern discourses as discussed previously, this chapter focuses mainly on political dimensions of masculinity construction, driven mostly by differentiated discourses on Chinese nationalism in the 1930s and 1980s.

War is considered a major context of national identity, along with changing courses of masculinity representations. Accordingly, three aspects are to be addressed. First, both selected films are deployed around an imagined imperial invasion, which is a metaphor for the building of nationhood. As a result, the desired masculinity construction shifts away from the critical cultural sphere as discussed previously, but primarily to deliver ethnic anxiety. Second, the unique masculine archetype discerned in both cases is designed to symbolise national unity, where a new interpretation of political correctness is achieved, but sexuality as well as individuality are subdued. Third, differentiations between the two films are made behind the proposed national unity: for *Wolf Hill*, national liberation is the driving force of an ethnic nationalism; in *Evening Bell*, world humanism takes charge, inducing a more civic version of nationalism. Either way, a powerful male leads the way through a new path toward the future.

1. Nation and the Other: Ethnic Anxiety

This part revolves around war narratives seen in the two selected films, which comprise allegories of forming national identities. First, I will give a brief account of the story lines for both films; in both cases, the Chinese nation is threatened by a metaphorical imperial other. Second, the war metaphor will be addressed further through graphic representations of death and ultimate destruction, involving profound ethnic anxiety and aspiring masculinity at the core of the film interpretations.

A. War Discourses: Ethnic Anxiety

War formed a great part of contemporary Chinese history from early last century until 1949. In addition to the traumatic memories attached to this, war underlined ethnic differences between the Chinese nation and the imperial other. Accordingly, there were surges of nationalist movements, among which the issue of national identity arose.

In the 1930s, in particular, Japanese invasion was a cruel reality for every Chinese. Since the war broke out in 1931, loss of land, home, and life were daily experiences. The war was tearing China apart, but at the same time urging a union of Chinese people nationwide. Patriotic appeals were seen in newspapers, journals, even popular magazines. Albeit closely monitored by the KMT government, *huajü* (spoken drama) were popular among progressive youths, urging people to take action against the Japanese invaders. Well-known writers like Lu Xun went to great lengths in criticising the lack of courage and collectivism in the Chinese national character. A public discourse of national liberation was taking shape, triggering a kind of national consciousness rarely sighted before.

When it comes to the 1980s, even though war itself was more of a remote history, the

discourse of war still lived in the minds of the Chinese public. In the preceding three decades, war, including government propaganda, television and film representations, had been firmly connected to the myth of Chinese nation building. With China's open policy, however, the dominant discourse of war no longer was sufficient. In particular, the spread of Western war classics boosted the antiwar trend of thought among Chinese intellectuals. There were voices claiming universal connections among human beings, and the cruelty of war began to be recognised and condemned.

The two films selected for this chapter reflected the sentiments witnessed in the respective periods, and they both compose a major metaphor on nation, war, and masculinity. *Wolf Hill* was directed by Fei Mu in 1936. It tells a wolf parable that hints at a national crisis. The film starts with talk between a girl, Xiaoyu, and her father, who are victims of wolf attacks in the village. Xiaoyu's little brother was snatched by a wolf; consequently, her mother died from extreme grief. The sour memory is connected to reality when a wolf howls in the distance, and Xiaoyu expresses her anger about timid hunters.

In the village, people are divided about wolf hunting. Lao Zhang, who later develops feelings for Xaoyu, has been stalking wolves alone without much success. Zhao'er, on the other hand, is absolutely against Zhang's hunting. In the tea house, Zhao delivers a speech: "We should never hunt wolves! … As long as you don't bother them, they won't hurt you … The harder you try to fight them, the more they will come …"

Two incidents accentuate the differences among the villagers. One is the death of Xiaoyu's father, who is attacked by a group of wolves the day he lends his boat to Zhang and Xiaoyu. The other is the death of a hunter, Daliu's son, who is bitten by a wolf cornered by Lao Zhang.

Anger is building among some people, while others become even more terrified. Finally, in a raging storm, Zhang steps into the tea house where Zhao'er is blaming Lao Zhang for both deaths. Decisively, Zhang makes his voice heard over Zhao'er's. He admits making mistakes in the past and calls upon the villagers to join in a collective fight against the wolves.

At the final stage of the film, there are parallel shots showing everyone preparing for the war against the wolves, followed by group images of people hunting for wolves. The closing scene features a chorus led by Xiaoyu, with people singing and marching behind a line of wolf bodies hanging upside down.

Evening Bell was directed by the fifth-generation director Wu Ziniu in 1988. The film starts with a horrific sequences showing the defeated Japanese army committing mass suicide. Then, scenes of victory lead to a focus on a platoon of the Chinese liberation army, who share their joy with the public and remove mines planted during the war. Soon after, a postwar battlefield is shown, with dead bodies everywhere. After burying the sacrificed Chinese soldiers, the platoon leader decides to cover the Japanese bodies with soil. A bearded soldier, however, expresses his disagreement by throwing a heavy stone on the new Japanese burial site.

The bleak postwar image is unfolded further as a small group of the Chinese army climbs a hill, seeing new tombs and signs of mourning all over the mountains. Small figures clothed in white are crying at new tombs, and a man is standing on top of a slope scattering joss paper. After this, the army group settles on a plot of grass and their inner voices are heard: they all are victims of the Japanese invasion, losing their families to the war.

As a turning point of the entire film, a dying Japanese soldier is discovered who claims that there still are another 32 Japanese dying of hunger. These Japanese turn out to be an armed escort for a magazine, who have been living in a cave and do not know the war is over. Out of humanitarian sympathy, the platoon leader promises food for the entire Japanese troop. The leader of the Japanese side, however, rages at the Japanese soldier who passed the message on and executes him (he does not actually die as revealed in later developments). Only after a face-to-face confrontation between the Chinese platoon leader and the Japanese leader is an agreement finalised for the Japanese side to accept food and surrender.

Just when the Chinese offer sympathy and show great generosity providing food for their former enemy, another shocking discovery is made: there are two remaining Chinese people in the cave, who are not counted among the thirty-two. One dying Chinese tells an even more shocking truth: one Chinese has been eaten by Japanese. Anger explodes within the Chinese side and gunshots are fired, but they only hit the hillsides.

After all this drama, the Japanese spend their last day in the cave. They bathe collectively in the moonlight, singing in chorus. The next morning, as the Japanese soldiers file out in order, the Japanese leader commits suicide. All the bombs have been primed to explode, but the Chinese platoon leader rushes into the cave and saves a Japanese soldier just before the explosion. This is the soldier who passed on the message. In the closing scene, the platoon leader emerges, carrying the Japanese soldier on his shoulders.

Wolf Hill depicts the process whereby people become mobilised to defeat wolves. The story includes fear, anger, and the tragic loss of loved ones triggering the grand onset of collective efforts, a clear reference to the anti-Japanese struggle. On the other hand, *EveningBell* depicts

the postwar scene in a spirit of universal fraternity. The story centers on a platoon of the Chinese army who become the salvation of Japanese soldiers after the surrender of the emperor.

While the two films reflect different sentiments toward war, there are similarities between them. Above all, there is a war trope involving deep-seated ethnic anxiety. In particular, ethnic differences occupy the core of reflection on war. In *Wolf Hill*, the metaphor of hunting wolves underlines the irresolvable differences and conflicts between Chinese people and Japanese invaders, accounting for the pivotal role of a coherent national identity. Ethnic anxiety becomes the ultimate drive igniting the war for national independence. The director of *Wolf Hill* denied any symbolism in his film, but the delayed release of the film due to censorship tells everything. The use of the wolf metaphor in *Wolf Hill* was clearly due to the forbidden usage of war under the KMT government. Actually, *Wolf Hill* is based on two film scripts, both of which previously were denied production by the censors. One is called The *Xinhun zhi ye* (Wedding Night); the other is called *Younian Zhongguo* (Young China). Both scripts took a stand about the fight against the Japanese invasion. Resorting to a wolf metaphor in *Wolf* testifies to the director's continued efforts at encouraging anti-imperial invasion sentiment from the grass-roots level.

In *Evening Bell*, the war is a thing of the past, and the postwar scene is constructed as a fable of the arduous beginning of recovery. There are overwhelming obstacles from both sides. As victims of foreign invasion, the Chinese have to accept catastrophic losses; for the defeated Japanese side, the pride of Yamato is utterly destroyed. This is another point when national unity is natural. Individual identity is primarily an ethnic one and ethnic differences cannot be overlooked. There was no actual Japanese invasion in 1980s China, but there were newly

surfacing issues along with China's opening to the West. *Evening Bell* responded to national

sentiment in a different way from *Wolf Hill*, but it is clear that both films were based on an

overwhelming national anguish. The next section will discuss the bleak images in both films,

uncovering the war myth that serves the rise of national identity.

B. Dead Bodies: the National Metaphor

Big Road and *Red Sorghum* both end with clashes between Chinese people and the Japanese

army, arousing a profound nationalism accompanying the imagined revitalisation of the

Chinese nation. In this chapter, the war backgrounds are spotlighted further by graphic

representations of violence and death, where Chinese masculinity braces for even more

challenges and expectations. Chinese national identity became the right declaration, which is

most plausible in a war situation: "Like other ethnic identities, national identities are

constituted in relation to *others*: the very idea of the nation presupposes that there are other

nations, or at least other peoples, who are not members of the nation."[121]

In Chapter One, the destruction of an idealised community leaves both films open-ended: In

Big Road, the only survivor, Dingxiang, sees in an illusion that her fellows all rise from the

earth and cheerfully continue their work. In *Red Sorghum*, despite the death of many people

including Jiu'er, "my grandpa" survives. He stands still like a statue, his hands holding his

little son, a symbol of the future. In both cases, the destruction is followed by a renewed

energy for the future, which is basically undefined. In this chapter, the starting point of both

films is the destruction of normal life in the past, involving personal pain as well as national

shame on a large scale. The future is unforeseen as elements are clashing. In *Wolf Hill*, the

wolves are becoming more malicious by the day, but people in the village are still arguing

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[121] Thomas Eriksen, "Ethnicity and Nationalism" in Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, eds., *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 138

about whether or not to fight them; in *Evening Bell*, the war is over, but minefields are everywhere (both in reality and symbolically) while people are celebrating victory. In certain ways, the endings of both films in Chapter One and the beginnings of the two films in this chapter both point to uncertainty about the future, which is mostly impelled by catastrophic losses in the past and new circumstances in the making. This strengthened sense of uncertainty leads to more speculation about the role of Chinese masculinity in terms of national salvation, along with varying social discourses in their respective decades.

Before addressing the issue of masculinity construction in *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell*, it is important to have a closer look at some gloomy images in the two films, which establish the main key of each film.

In *Wolf Hill*, the funeral of Xiaoyu's father concentrates all the elements required for sorrow. There are collective appearances of people under lit candles and smoke, tears in their eyes and the sound of weeping, as well as an outrageous wolf howl triggering people's tremendous fury. Lao Zhang and some other hunters are shown in turn in individual shots, all gripped by profound outrage. Three times, the girl Xiaoyu is seen in a close-up shot from the side, her face trembling and eyes rolling under the mourning veil. At the peak of the wolf howl, she furiously tears off the veil. Another sequence shows Xiaoyu paying tribute at her father's tomb. It happens just before the collective fight against the wolves, enforcing Xiaoyu's accelerating anger. These gloomy representations of death and mourning underline the depth of destruction, reminding us of the nation's tragic situation. Those people wrecked by pain and anger resemble the Chinese public in a harrowing state.

In *Evening Bell*, there is a sequence in a similar tone. A small team of Chinese soldiers climb

up a hill and soon find themselves surrounded everywhere by joss papers. From their point of view, the continuous sweep of brown mountains makes a stunning image. A tiny figure of a man scattering joss paper can be clearly recognised. Then, the platoon leader is seen in a close-up shot, his face filled with sorrow and astonishment. The platoon of Chinese soldiers sees more as they settle on a plot of grassland and contemplate two tiny figures all in white crying loudly at a new tomb. The entire sequence is accompanied by gloomy music.

More subtly, the sequence from *Evening Bell* visualises the tormented nation. War already was a remote memory for people in the 1980s, persisting only in mainstream representations for educational purposes. The post-war scene in the film, however, is not exactly as heroic as projected in the media. It reveals a universe of true and ultimate destruction through bleak images related to death.

Under wartime circumstances, the bleak images in both these sequences arouse definitive resistance. In many ways, the war signals a crucial moment in a nation's history. "According to many nationalist myths, the nation is born, or arises, from a painful rite of passage where it has to fight its adversaries …"[122] Metaphorically, the image of death in these two films waves a resolute farewell to the past, pointing to the path of rebirth.

On the whole, both films see the nationalist complex set in a war context, leading to a concept of the nation as a matter of collective identity. This is seen to have a huge impact on the aspiring male archetypes in both cases. Accompanying this trend in both films, men play a vital role in pulling people together, and men in war is the perfect metaphor for the rise of national consciousness. Chinese masculinity stands as the symbol of national resistance as

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[122] Thomas Eriksen, p. 139

well as the rightful voice against evil. Broadly, both films deliver a trope of the birth of national identity in struggle against the imagined imperial other.

2. One Voice over Others: Political Correctness

This part acknowledges the crucial role of aspiring masculinity at a time of national crisis. The war setting in both films favours a masculine hero leading a public striving for a bright future for the nation. The masculine archetype exemplifies extraordinary male power that the nation needs in difficult circumstances.

A. Masculinity as National Emblem: Resistance

The war discourses in 1930s and 1980s China indicated a distinctive masculine nature, which would have been endorsed by Western scholarship: "[T]he 'microculture' of masculinity in everyday life articulates very well with the demands of nationalism, particularly its militaristic side."[123] "The military is a prime candidate for the study of masculinity …"[124]

In the 1930s, the KMT government launched its official version of aspiring masculinity in a militaristic style. A journal called *Tough Men* (*Hao nan'er*) featured photos from the military front, taking pride in the masculine representations of the army. Meanwhile, traditional values like *zhong* (loyalty) were heavily publicised, catering especially for the campaign aimed at serving the nation. In the 1980s, there also were abundant mainstream military representations. Xie Jin's influential film *Wreaths at the Foot of the Mountain* (*Gaoshan xia de huahuan*) embraced the classic interrelation between masculinity and the nation: the more

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[123] Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism – Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations " in Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, eds., *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader,* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 119

[124] Whitehead, Stephen and Barrett, Frank J., eds., *The Masculinities Reader*, Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2001, p. 77

loyal a man serving the nation, the more masculine he is.

Belonging to critical modern discourses, our two films demonstrate a different viewpoint from concurrent official propaganda. Above all, an exemplary masculinity appoints itself to occupy the core of the metaphorical national struggle, delivering a different version of nationalism from the official one. Furthermore, both male protagonists render a combination of idealised masculinity and national salvation. Arguably, these efforts remodel the desired masculinity as a powerful national emblem, reinterpreting political correctness with its own political message. The following discussion will focus on some changes to male archetypes under war circumstances, as compared to Chapter One. Here, the formation of national identity is presented as the right choice of political declaration.

First, the image of male figures in both cases acquires a more mythic quality compared with the male archetype in Chapter One. In *Wolf Hill*, the opening sequence is particularly revealing: the establishing shot is set in twilight, where a tiny view of a man's back is barely discernable among the hills and trees. Then, it fades into a closer shot, where a burly man is shown standing at the top of a rock, holding his rifle and scouting around. Immediately after, there is point of view editing: a suspicious shape in the murky slopes where a wolf is turning away its head. Then, in a slightly low angle, the camera is reframed to a medium shot of the man, whose head is set against the sky. The man shades his eyes with his hand, still watching. Throughout this sequence, the wolf's howl is frequently heard.

The camera work underlines the man as the guardian of the vast land beneath him. Low angle shots as well as the iconic gesture of holding a rifle both accentuate a wholly admirable male figure. Comparatively, in *Big Road*, even though Jin Ge is the spiritual leader of the group, he

is only human and optimistic.

In *Evening Bell*, the closing scene features the extraordinary presence of the male protagonist, the platoon leader. Three times, he emerges over the horizon carrying a Japanese soldier on his shoulders. The scene is in slow pace immersed in a misty tone, while the figure gradually is coming into focus. Following that, the platoon leader is seen in a closer shot, occupying most of the screen. Then a smile is seen to light up his tanned face which is still covered with ash. The sequence is accompanied by heroic music.

In this sequence, the male figure's rising from horizon indicates a serious cinematic effort, also a defining moment for masculinity construction in the film. The camera angle, the shooting spot, as well as the rhythm all coordinate to create the miracle-like occurrence. According to the film context, the platoon leader enters the cave when the explosion occurs. Both the Chinese and Japanese soldiers are stunned by the noise, looking back. For audiences, the tension achieves a climax at the explosion scene, through the long and anxious wait after it. Practically, the appearance of the platoon leader unites the emotional state of all parties. The message for peace as well as the victory of masculinity triumph through the image of a Chinese man carrying a Japanese soldier.[125]

Comparing the two sequences from *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell*, these two male figures both are represented in relation to a large group of people. In *Wolf Hill*, Lao Zhang is the sole figure in the sequence, but the whole village is under his vigilant look-out. In *Evening Bell*, the platoon leader's phenomenal appearance, as mentioned above, acquires magical power over the viewing public. In both cases, the male figure becomes idolised. Comparatively, in

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[125]According to the photographer of the film, the final blast is specially designed to be phenomenal, to arouse deep reflection about the war. And the crew were annoyed that they had to add another blast scene at an earlier stage in the film, as ordered by censors.

Big Road and *Red Sorghum*, neither Jin nor my grandpa enjoys this privilege. Jin proposes struggle on several occasions, but he is never distinguished for any other reason; my grandpa, on the other hand, listens to Jiu'er when she proposes attacking Japanese trucks.

Second, in addition to the idealised or glorified male figure in both films, the voices of both male protagonists overwhelm others'. In *Wolf Hill*, there is a sequence in which a group of hunters proclaim their frustrations. Lao Liu speaks in pain: "Just because of this [the wolf], we hunters are looked down on by other people! In fact, every time we come to the mountains, we can never find rabbits and roes, because they have all been eaten by the wolves! We have no reason to hunt now!" Off-screen, Lao Zhang replies with confidence: "Wait for a chance; we can fight back!" Lao Zhang is interrupted by a man speaking in anger and frustration: "Wait! Wait! Wait! Wait till all the wolves come! How can we deal with them? Just us! " But Zhang immediately fights back, forcefully remarking on screen: "What's the use of talking like that! We should think of something and fight them! Otherwise, our village will be taken by the wolves!" Amid this conversation, Zhang's is the voice of determination and will power, casting hope over anxiety and frustration.

In *Evening Bell*, watched by the entire platoon, the platoon leader calmly discourages an angry Chinese soldier who disagrees with the burying of the Japanese bodies. After the platoon leader's gentle order, "You might also cover them with some ash," tensions build within the Chinese group. But anger is consumed without compromising the task. Shots alternate between the Chinese soldiers who are helping to bury those Japanese corpses and a half-naked man who just sits nearby bearing an expression of depression and anger. Suddenly, the half-naked man stands up and walks straight to the burial site, and throws a big rock to the ground. The next shot is a close-up following the rock falling heavily on the burial site,

stirring up clouds of dust.

The function of the half-naked man is two-fold on this occasion: first, his stubborn protest attests to the emotional struggle of this task, highlighting the platoon leader's leadership; second, the masculinity shown in this case is reflected in the platoon's discipline rather than in the powerful body and sensuality represented by the half-naked man, who is a lot like characters in *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*.

On the whole, both films' sequences underline a determined male voice in a tough situation, somehow reminiscent of national heroes propagandised in the mainstream media. But these two male protagonists are voicing concerns for the public rather than the official ideology. *Wolf Hill* was made to encourage national resistance on the basis of a consolidated Chinese people, which was prohibited by the KMT government; *Evening Bell* expresses a humanitarian view of world peace yet to be approved by the then official censorship. Fundamentally, the male voice in both films is endorsed by a different version of Chinese nationalism than that seen in mainstream media, which the rest of this chapter will demonstrate. The pattern of a struggling hero against adversaries is shown in both films, and is to be discussed next.

B. Ultimate Resistance: Establishing Male Power

As conflicts develop, both films establish a pattern of face-to-face confrontations between men. Parallel editing is frequently used to maximise the sense of conflict, asserting the power of masculinity. Practically, the male protagonists in both films embody the righteousness of ultimate resistance.

In *Wolf Hill*, the confrontation is between Lao Zhang, the hunter, and Zhao Er, who gives a demagogic speech at the beginning of the film. Zhao Er speaks again later in the film, directly targeting Lao Zhang as the one making things worse: "I've told you a long time ago: we should never hunt the wolves. … Lao Zhang kills one wolf, and two wolves come … Lao Liu's son wouldn't have died if Lao Zhang hadn't fired the gun … All in all, the child is dead because of Lao Zhang!"

Parallel editing shows Zhang approaching the house and stopping at the door, when Zhao continues to attack Lao Zhang: "Who can hunt 40 wolves! Let me tell you: Lao Zhang is hunting the wolf, because he is vain! He wants us to call him a hero!" Immediately Zhang is seen in a close-up shot, his brows knitting together. Accompanying Zhang's entering the door, is the sharp voice of Zhao Er: "The reason Lao Zhang shot two wolves in a row is because of Li's daughter (Xiao Yu)!"

Tension grows as Lao Zhang suddenly steps in. Disregarding the fuss caused among his audience, Zhang walks straight to the center of the room and forcefully declares: "Do you believe what he said?" A brief face to face confrontation between Zhang and Zhao is shown before Zhang continues: "Since there are wolves in the village, we get to fight them! If we don't hunt, there is no need for hunters!" Painfully, Zhang changes tone: "I have to admit that I've made mistakes. We didn't have a strategy and we didn't plan. It is easy to deal with one or two wolves, but we can't deal with a group of wolves! … " Finally, Lao Zhang concludes his speech in a close-up shot: "The most important thing is that we should pull together!"

Similarly, in *Evening Bell*, masculinity plays an important part during face to face confrontations. As in *Wolf Hill*, this confrontation is magnified by presenting two men's

bodies as well as facial language, featuring parallel editing between the pair. After sharing food with the Japanese captives, the Chinese soldiers uncover the truth that two Chinese are still in Japanese hands, and one has been eaten. This is exactly when the platoon leader rages and confronts the Japanese general who is still hiding in the cave.

Staggering from the cave trying to keep his decorum, the Japanese general finally faces up to the platoon leader, gun barrels shown behind the Japanese general between rocks. The platoon leader is shown in a close-up shot, commanding: "Release the two Chinese, now!" Then close-up shots rapidly alternate between the two parties, until the platoon leader loses his temper and shouts: "Give me those people, now!" The two Chinese are finally released, black and blue all over their skinny bodies. Barely containing himself, the platoon leader faces the Japanese general for the second time: "Now you should surrender." The Japanese general counters: "What if I am not going to," but the platoon leader trumps him by taking off his cap saying: "That would be great…." After a short silence, the camera cuts to a sunset scene when the Japanese finally replies slowly: "I'll think about it …" Immediately the camera cuts to a close-up of the platoon leader, who says firmly: "See you tomorrow morning." When the platoon leader leaves the scene, there is another shot in which the sun has almost sunk.

Parallel editing plays a big role in both sequences shown above, which underlines the rising presence of masculine power. In both cases, close-up shots alternate between the diehard attitude and the determined masculinity when the hero overwhelms the villain. Especially in *Evening Bell*, the facial muscles are highlighted to show the subtle changes of attitude. Finally, the victory of masculinity is acknowledged by changing positions either physically or spiritually. In *Wolf Hill*, Lao Zhang occupies the centre screen and takes on his leadership by

calling for ultimate resistance. In *Evening Bell*, the platoon leader commands the final

surrender as the Japanese commander loses the justification for his position.

These two sequences also set the standard for right and wrong politically. In *Wolf Hill*, Lao

Zhang confronts all negative words and points out a method, justifying the war against the

wolves. In *Evening Bell*, the platoon comes to face the Japanese general who has never

admitted the failure of the war, practically the last obstacle to peace as well as humanity. The

symbolic sunset suggests the Japanese general's ultimate fate as a Japanese militarist. At the

final stage of the confrontation, the platoon leader terminates the imperial dream, and points

to the right way forward: a final reconciliation with enemies and a future of world peace.

Practically, the male protagonists of both films are regarded as role models, and a new

political correctness is set accordingly with the absence of official ideology. For a start, both

protagonists appoint themselves to a special role representing collective interests, authorising

their independent views: in *Wolf Hill*, Lao Zhang is not an official wolf hero, but he

voluntarily steps up, guarding the village; in *Evening Bell*, the platoon leader shows

remarkable compassion to the defeated Japanese soldiers, bearing the spirit of fraternity for

all humankind. Secondarily, just because both protagonists are self-appointed, standing by

their own beliefs, they can be easily differentiated from more conventional, even uptight

figures in mainstream medium. They are both committed to a sense of rightness, true

rightness derived from the nation's needs rather than from orders from superiors.

Ultimately, male power become absolute and supreme when compared with *Big Road* and

Red Sorghum. Visually and vocally, the main male character conquers all: he is no longer the

resilient individual who takes pride in autonomy and liberation, but the big hero who

undertakes mighty responsibilities (metaphorically national salvation in both cases). The result of this is nevertheless twofold: first, the performative male body is no longer present, the individual world is subdued where men adapt themselves painfully to meet the challenge; second, a strong collective identity is immanent.

3. For the National Cause: The Sublimation of Masculinity

This part compares the aspiring masculinity discussed so far with the male archetypes seen in Chapter One in their changing attitudes toward new, individualist values. Chasing a collective identity sees profound pain caused when people sacrifice their personal pursuits. Two aspects of the issue are addressed: first, the male body is subdued in comparison to Chapter One, which symbolises a constraint on individuality; second, the private space is collapsed in both cases and actually discarded for the noble, national interest.

A. Mind over Body: Masculinity as Discipline

In Chapter One, the new body ideology lightens up a new way of living where men act on their instincts, flaunting male power wherever they can. In this chapter, there are obvious adaptations to constraint and discipline. In *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell*, the male protagonist demonstrates great endurance in adverse circumstances, remodelling the bodily defined masculine archetypes seen in Chapter One.

In *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell*, both male protagonists are embodied by their unusual rationality, which is not clouded by fear or sadness. In *Wolf Hill*, Lao Zhang is blamed for two deaths in the village, for which he never got the chance to defend himself. His continued hunting for wolves wins him the status of a lonely hero. He learns the lesson that he needs to fight harder against his burning fury toward wolves. Finally, as mentioned earlier, he uses an

inspirational speech reconciling disputes among the people. Lao Zhang never at any time used his body as a source of power, even though he is still the most muscular male in the group. Rather, it is the mind's power that finally wins him support. In *Evening Bell*, the platoon leader is always in his uniform and in deep contemplation. His body is not the focus of film representations; instead, his wise and worldly face is frequently captured by close-up shots.

Interestingly, though, there is nudity in *Evening Bell*, just not the platoon leader. There is a half-naked man on the Chinese side who protests against an order to bury dead Japanese soldiers. The half-naked man definitely would remind the audience of those sedan bearers in *Red Sorghum*, who are vigorous, quick to anger, and with full hearts for their family and homeland. His male body is a symbol against regulation of any kind. The platoon leader, on the other hand, remains silent most of the time; he is strong, decisive and tolerant. He has his eyes set on somewhere beyond the gloomy reality. Ultimately, it is the silent platoon leader who takes control.

Also, before their surrender, all the Japanese soldiers are seen bathing collectively in the moonlight, singing in chorus. Compared with the bathing scene in *Big Road* and nudity in *Red Sorghum*, these images reveal themselves to have dramatically different connotations. It is no longer the signal of the birth of the new, but the ending of a nasty episode. The next morning, the Japanese general commits suicide and the rest of the Japanese soldiers become captives. In many ways, the bathing scene here symbolises starting with a clean slate.

 In both cases, the body no longer is appraised for its passion and power, but connected with excessive sentiment, even sin. The converse meaning concerning the body in both films

avoids the raw masculine qualities seen in *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*, but identities starts a different version of aspiring Chinese masculinity.

B. Compromised Individuality: The Concealed Private World

In Chapter One, the new body ideology brings about new values like individuality, challenging traditional gender assumptions which have lasted for thousands of years. In this chapter, the shying away from the body is not a step back to the old norms of gender hierarchy. Rather, it reflects a struggle between the liberation of individuality and the overwhelming national agenda. As shown in both *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell*, there are traces of individual indulgence and respect shown for personal feelings, which however give way to a sublime feeling of national unity—a political correctness endorsed by Chinese nationalism.

In *Wolf Hill*, there is one sequence indicating Lao Zhang's falling for the girl Xiaoyu. Zhang is shown entering his own room, leaning his rifle against a table and throwing his hat on a cabinet. In his seat, seemingly lost in thought, Lao Zhang tidies his face with a hand and lifts a foot to his knee when a smile lights up his face. Then the scene changes to a lake view, where a fishing boat is floating in the water. Soon, the camera cuts back, gradually getting closer to Zhang, until Zhang's face is framed in a close-up shot. A smile on his face is seen to become deeper and sweeter at the voice-over of Xiao Yu (the daughter of the fisherman) rises: "I've never seen such a blind hunter as you are! Why not buy a ship and a net and I will teach you to go fishing! "

As for the girl Xiaoyu, there is more elaboration of her adolescent psychology. On one occasion, Xiao Yu is seen sitting on her bed, gently leaning on her arms. Accompanied by dream-like music, she is totally immersed in her own thoughts, her face saturated in a smile.

After Xiaoyu's father approves her secret love, there is a revealing sequence on the girl's vision for her future. The sequence is accompanied with dreamy music, showing a window from the outside. Inside the window, there is a married young woman doing embroidery with her mother in-law. In the next shot, Xiao Yu's back is shown as she walks to the window. She is seen to stroll past a tree, and gently seizes a tree trunk beside her. And then Xiaoyu is seen to stand below the window, peeking admiringly at the young woman from a point-of-view angle. Then, there are two intercuts between Xiao Yu and the young woman; each time the camera is pushed closer. Finally, Xiao Yu's face is shown lighting up with joy and happiness. Xiao Yu holds her face with both hands, totally immersed in her own dream.

After this, the setting changes to a mountainous field. Xiao Yu is seen to slowly walking up the hill. When she arrives at the top of the hill, she stands there smiling, and sways slightly as she thinks of something. Happily she throws a stick and sits on the earth, comfortably stretching her arms to hold her knees. Then there is point of view editing: pine trees in moonlight, swinging in a gentle wind. Afterwards, the darkness fades while Xiao Yu is still smiling. In the next shot, which is an extremely long shot, day dawns and Xiao Yu is still sitting there. Slowly, the camera leaves her and moves up and left, until a small figure is seen standing at the top of a hill, holding a rifle: it is Lao Zhang.

In both sequences, the natural attraction between a young man and woman, especially the longing for a happy and peaceful life, is beyond words. These sequences are reminiscent of the romance between Dingxiang and Xiaoluo in *Big Road*, but the ending is not as romantic. Not only that, but the relationship between Xiao Yu and Lao Zhang suffers a sudden end due to the death of Xiao Yu's father. In addition, both of them face condemnation from the visible

and invisible public. In Zhao Er's words, Xiao Yu and Lao Zhang are boating for fun so that her father has to switch to the overland route, ending up encountering the wolves. In the later development of the film, Lao Zhang and Xiao Yu are more integrated with the rest of the public, their feelings for each other are never shown.

In *Evening Bell*, by the same token, there are traces of a cherished private world compared with heroic mainstream films. There is a sequence in which the platoon of Chinese soldiers recall their personal losses after viewing the tragic postwar scenes. Voice-overs of individuals in turn incorporate singular shots. One young Chinese soldier is seen deeply affected by the new tombs across the mountains, his voice-over revealing his inner world: "So many widows are left behind. If I'd marry someone in future, I'll find a widow." An older soldier is seen smoking as his voice-over says: "My wife is nine years younger than me; she should be 33 now. We haven't had babies. After I come back, we should have a baby. It's time for a baby! " Accompanying his voice-over, however, there is a flashback revealing the tragic death of his wife: a woman is hung on a tree in front of a house. Then a middle-aged man's anguished face is shown. His voice-over runs: "My wife jumped in a well, only to be dragged out and raped by Japanese soldiers. Fuck! Why couldn't we kill all those captives! " A simultaneous flashback shows his wife being dragged by Japanese soldiers, thrown behind a fence. Finally, the platoon leader is shown in a different manner. Members of the platoon look to the platoon leader, who is shown from the side in a close-up shot, keeping still like a stone. A young soldier's voice narrates: "All his family are dead. It's been eight years. He's never cried in front of us. " The sequence ends with a silhouette of all these Chinese soldiers in gentle sunlight.

The sequence above is laden with personal trauma, mostly about the tragic separation of

husbands and wives. It repeats the theme of fruitless love in *Wolf Hill*, which makes the two films comparable in their deep concern with the disintegrated private sphere. Public and private spheres will be discussed mainly in Chapter Three, but here the significance of the private sphere has been shown in the opposite way: rather than being the starting point of an imagined democratic sphere, as will be discussed, the private sphere here is sending a mixed message. On the one hand, people's individual lives are in perspective and respected; on the other hand, every single traumatic picture is a reading of tragic personal lives before the resolving of the national crisis: the private world has to be discarded for a collective revolution.

Furthermore, as shown in *Evening Bell*, the platoon leader is denied the chance of speaking out about his feelings. Instead, he has been the voice of the entire group. Above all, everything is political under the banner of a unified front. As far as the issue of masculinity construction is concerned, there is a genuine sublimation process, abandoning personal content. Masculinity becomes a symbol of majestic national union. With similar tastes for masculine archetypes, and the same efforts made toward rendering collective morale, nevertheless, the two films show two very different versions of Chinese nationalism across fifty years, as will be discussed next.

4. Shared Experience and Group Identity: The Revolution

Under the same banner of enabling group identity, this part discusses different sentiments seen in the two films owing to changing historical circumstance between the 1930s and the 1980s. In *Wolf Hill*, national struggle is high on the agenda and empowers revolution sentiments. In *Evening Bell*, universal humanity takes control when the nation faces modern change. Contrasting cinematic techniques seen in the two films will be the main measure to

address this issue.

A. *Wolf Hill*: The Rhythm of Revolution

In *Wolf Hill*, visual representations of the public are incorporated with revolutionary sentiments, reflecting the aspiration for a collective identity. After Zhang's emotional appeal, reconciliation among the people is gradually achieved. The film also enters a stage of pounding rhythm compared with the fragmented tension seen before, with parallel editing creating an atmosphere of collective struggle. A group of wolves is seen viciously running. They are shown from different angles with the same threatening effect. Then people are seen from various perspectives of time and space, showing a great amount of anxiety: a few people are holding their rifles tightly, hiding behind windows and doors; a couple are standing against the wall, holding each other's hands; a hunter, Lao Liu's face shows deep anger and pain; an old lady prays with sincerity; several other people are watching through a corner of the curtain. They all seem to be holding their breath.

Then Lao Zhang is seen holding his rifle, looking outside his home intensely. Quickly the camera cuts to a front shot, in which Lao Zhang aims at something and is about to shoot, but suddenly he drops his gun in frustration. He scratches his hair, face and neck in anguish. Then Lao Zhang is seen to raise his head, his face filled with hatred. He begins to press his hands together fiercely. Suddenly, the camera cuts to a dog running, immediately followed by a close-up of Lao Zhang's anguished face. Then there is another shot of two dogs barking madly, immediately followed by Lao Zhang's angry face from another angle.

In a medium shot from the side, Xiao Yu is seen leaning against a door, accompanied by gloomy music. The camera steadily moves closer, until her face is framed in a close-up shot.

In extreme anger, Xiao Yu's face seems motionless. Then the scene fades out and changes to another scene: Xiao Yu is seen from the front. She is standing against the wall, holding both hands against it. As the camera moves closer to her, Xiaoyu's chest is seen rising up and down dramatically. Again her face is shown in a close-up shot, with fierce anger in her eyes. Then Xiao Yu is seen sitting on her bed, breathing heavily and tightly holding a rifle. Once again, the camera moves closer, but this time it does not stop at her face. It frames her brows and eyes in an extreme close-up shot. Xiao Yu's eyes are rolling in outrage.

The moment finally comes for people to act together. Lao Liu (who has just lost his son to a cornered wolf) rushes into Lao Zhang's room and walks toward Lao Zhang step by step. Lao Zhang spontaneously steps back. At the climax of the tension, Lao Liu suddenly grabs Lao Zhang's hand: "What are you waiting for!" In extreme shock and excitement, Lao Zhang holds Lao Liu's hand tightly and then quickly picks up his rifle. The film is now in the mode of a revolution: rapid shots are edited together filming people taking guns down from the wall.

The above representations are carefully managed to indicate rebellious sentiment stimulating collective determination. A rhythm of struggle or revolution is deliberately composed. Strikingly, there are abundant expressive close-up shots capturing the inner tension of the main characters: for Lao Zhang, the current of his emotions is revealed in his forceful arms. The two dogs barking and struggling in the yard are a reflection of his burning fury. For Xiaoyu, her accumulated anger is accentuated by three close-ups from different angles, accompanied by intense music. All of these close-up shots are filmed in relatively slow pace, magnifying her individual pain.

The close-up shot was one of the most important techniques used by Soviet director Sergei

Eisenstein. For him, close-up shots find subjective expression through careful selection of a fragment or a frame from the objective world, enabling "merging of depiction and image." The close-up also was one of Eisenstein's core techniques for his alleged "tendentious montage," which bridges communication between film and its audiences.[126] The close-up shots in *Wolf Hill* function well in showing purpose, and anger evolving in the fierce resistance.

Incorporating the use of close-up shots, the rapid parallel editing develops a fast rhythm showing people's collective movement. At a blistering pace, the people are shown rushing out from their individual homes, gathering at the battlefield, and fighting against wolves. Dramatic music suggests the coming of a revolutionary moment. People are seen in extremely long shots in which they march in rows, rifles on shoulders.

On the whole, *Wolf Hill* is not only a trope reflecting national crisis, it also engages the audience with new revolutionary perceptions. The rhythm of the film clearly points to a path of collective struggle. Identification from the audience is encouraged, Chinese nationalism as a profound ethnic anxiety is firmly in perspective.

B. *Evening Bell*: The Shared Experience

Evening Bell uses different cinematic compositions from *Wolf Hill*, and the theme of universal humanity replaces the sense of urgent national crisis. As will be discussed next, amid the spirit of fraternity, food-sharing experiences are highlighted, where the Chinese and Japanese sides establish common ground, recovering humanity.

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[126] Jean Antoine-Dunne with Paula Quigley, eds., *The Montage Principle: Eisenstein in New Cultural and Critical Contexts*, Amsterdam; New York, Rodopi, 2004. p.61

Sharing food is understood as a noble gesture considering the post-war scarcity of food. At an early stage in the film, Chinese voluntarily contribute their scarce food to the much-loved Chinese soldiers. Later in the film, however, the platoon leader promises to supply food to the thirty-two Japanese soldiers who are trapped within a magazine. The film indicates the subtle emotions caused by this. In a close-up shot, the platoon leader's face looks very serious as his hands are busy with something off screen. Suddenly, he stops and a sense of hesitation appears on his face. There follows a point of view shot: one of his hands is holding two eggs. Then the camera cuts to what is already on the ground: a cloth with all kinds of food such as carrots, persimmon buns, steamed bread. A moment later, those two eggs are seen placed in the cloth.

More emotion is seen as Japanese soldiers come to consume the food. The episode can be divided into three stages according to the subtle interaction between the two parties. The first stage features vigilant behavior from both sides. It starts with a long shot, in which the Japanese soldiers are seen staggering forward. The camera pulls back slowly, showing that they have all formed a circle centered on their section chief. Opposite them, the Chinese platoon leader is watching. A Chinese soldier is aiming his rifle at these Japanese soldiers off-screen. Back to the Japanese side, as a Japanese command is heard (probably 'sit'). The Japanese soldiers all sit in a disciplined manner. They are tense and motionless.

The second stage sees a dramatic change triggered by food sharing. On hearing another order from the section chief, the Japanese soldiers suddenly lose their manners and grab food wildly. There is a close-up shot of a Japanese soldier holding food with shaking hands, eyes filled with tears. Another shot shows two Japanese eating ravenously. Then all kinds of gestures are shown: holding and eating food and noises of eating heard. Among these

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Japanese, only the section chief keeps his manners, chewing slowly and holding his chin high. On the Chinese side, the platoon leader is still watching. A close-up shot catches a young Chinese soldier, whose face indicates a sense of sympathy, followed by point of view editing: a close-up shot of a Japanese soldier's mouth chewing eagerly. Gradually, the Japanese soldiers slow down, which is noticed by the platoon leader as well as by the Japanese general, who is still in hiding.

In the third stage of this sequence, the tensions between the hostile parties ease and other human emotions take over. A middle-aged Chinese soldier is moved by the scene and carefully digs something out from his clothes. After silent permission from the platoon, the Chinese soldier throws a piece of meat into the collection of food. Within seconds, a Japanese soldier grabs the meat. Instead of eating it, however, he passes to another soldier. The meat is passed one by one until it stops at the Japanese section chief.

The above sequence demonstrates subtle changes of emotion in the light of awakening common humanity. At an early stage in the film, food is deemed as a special device showing the emotional bond between the Chinese people and their army. The silent passing of food from the hands of local people to the Chinese army platoon is an expression of allegiance and dedication between the two parties. When the platoon is about to pass on the food to the Japanese side, it becomes a touching issue, much more than simply sharing food in a time of scarcity.

The three stages of interaction between the Chinese and Japanese sides demonstrate a transition from hatred triggered by war to fraternity inscribed in noble humanity. It starts with hostility, but soon compassion takes full control. As an ultimate display of compassion, a

Chinese soldier devotes his last reserve of food (meat), which is ultimately from the Chinese people. In other words, food, the symbol of allegiance and devotion during war time, is passed on from the victims of war to their enemies. This arrangement effaces any division between Chinese and Japanese, the two political and ethnic camps.

The sharing experience between the Chinese and Japanese soldiers establishes a common ground of universal humanity. The traumatised Chinese and the barely surviving Japanese are both recognized as victims (human beings) of war crimes. Naturally, the focus of the film is no longer hatred toward enemies, but a condemnation of war itself. Meanwhile, it conveys a message of universal unity and world peace.

The common humanity seen in the food sharing experience intensifies in the last sequence of the film, following the final surrender of the Japanese army. Seen in the images of a warm morning sun, the Chinese soldiers are walking confidently toward the camera, occupying a large part of the left of the screen. In the right part of the screen, the last several rows of surrendered Japanese soldiers have just walked off screen. The next shot is from the opposite position, in which Chinese soldiers are seen from behind. Suddenly, however, loud explosions make them stop. Immediately, the scene cuts to the cave, combining even louder noises, smoke and flames everywhere. This causes both the Chinese and Japanese to stand still: in the distance, the Japanese procession has stopped; in the middle of the screen, several Chinese soldiers are motionless too, seen from the back. Then the Chinese soldiers are seen in a front shot, in which they silently turn their faces in a direction off screen. Following their gaze, we see an empty land with withered and yellow grasses.

Amazingly, however, a vague figure gradually fades in, steadily moving forward. This starts

the extraordinary representations of the platoon leader emerging over the horizon carrying a Japanese soldier, as mentioned earlier. But here we should pay more attention to the collective response to this grand presence. After the platoon leader appears for the first time, the camera cuts, in a long shot, to the Japanese procession where all of them look back silently. After the platoon leader appears for the second time, the Chinese soldiers as well as the Japanese procession are seen in the distance, all of them are like dark shadows. In his third appearance, the platoon leader is followed by a shot of the Chinese soldiers.

The sequence features a deliberate arrangement of space in terms of incorporating both the Chinese and Japanese sides. The two groups are mostly seen in one picture and finally integrated into one by looking in the same direction, suggesting a unified spirit. The sense of unity can be specified at least from three aspects. First, the sequence is a collective appearance of both Chinese and Japanese sides, in a peaceful mood more than anything. Judged by the overall presentation, the hatred and anger between them has been sublimated by a silent mutual understanding. Second, the victory against stubborn militarism could not be better presented by any other images: the platoon leader has saved a Japanese soldier and is carrying him on his own back. Third, the platoon leader who becomes a symbol of Chinese masculinity acts out the role of reconciliation when he physically combines the interests of both parties in this way.

On the whole, the image of groups of people is just as important in *Evening Bell* as in *Wolf Hill,* but the message conveyed is utterly different. If *Wolf Hill* promotes collective struggle by accentuating differences, *Evening Bell* tries to efface division and establish common ground among different political camps and ethnic groups. Either way, a grand national identity is forged through a traumatic national memory. With respect to different political

correctness addressed, there are actually two different versions of Chinese nationalism are shown in these films.

5. A Product of Nation-Building: The Politics of Chinese Nationalism

This part refers to the two films' intellectual discourses, where Chinese nationalism is revisited in the light of national politics. Broadly, both films belong to a kind of enlightenment effort in terms of arousing national consciousness. As will be discussed, the nation is imagined very differently in the two cases owning to profound changes across fifty years.

A. The Nation vs Individuals: Intellectual Discourse and Nationalist Enlightenment

In Chapter One, vigorous masculine archetypes in both *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum* emerged from intellectual discourses about the assertion of a modern Chinese agenda in the two periods. In this chapter, new more political features are assigned to masculinity construction. First, both films reflect more nationalist related sentiment due to push to strengthen national identity in the emerging international context. Second, as far as masculine archetypes are concerned, political commitment is essential in both cases.

Nationalism is drawn from the cultural aspects discussed in the previous chapter; here however, the political drive predominates. To be more specific, the new self, highlighted by modern values, is now tackling unprecedented difficulties in an urgent national agenda. This happens under threats of foreign force. The 1930s was the darkest time in terms of deteriorating national crisis, accumulated national shame and disastrous military defeat. In the 1980s, there were fresh memories of catastrophic losses during the Cultural Revolution, urging nationwide efforts into pursuing new goals among competing economics in an

international arena. Under these circumstances, the nation needed a new definition requiring every effort from the public, political commitments overweighing many other factors. Both *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell* are exemplary in configuring national identity through sublime, modern individuals. Take for example, new values seen in other chapters, such as the much cherished private sphere. These remain in perspective in both films, but there are telling conflicts between individual and common interests.

First of all, the war setting is a metaphor of fundamental change for the nation as well as for individuals. The national trauma is composed fundamentally of individual pain; the gloomy pictures of earlier experience are filled with sorrow drawn from personal experience. To serve the needs of the nation, however, personal interests give way to collective commitment. As shown in both films, the tragic loss of the private world is accentuated but finally decentralised, and the most urgent issue for both films is to resolve internal differences. In *Wolf Hill*, the urge for change is translated into soul searching efforts to identify deep seated problems from the perspective of national character. All problems obstructing the progress of collective struggle are identified, including people's selfishness, fear, and lack of collaboration. In *Evening Bell*, the platoon of the Chinese army is required to help the enemy despite their own traumatic personal losses caused by the war. Politically, it is the matter of the national interest being highlighted while personal pursuits are subdued. Second, centrally positioned male archetypes in both films exemplify a profound Chinese nationalism. These male figures bear mysterious power and strength, exercising profound influence on the mass public. Symbolically, their sense of political correctness holds the right solution, conquering the final hurdle to the victory of Chinese nationalism.

As far as the political dimension of nationalism is concerned, John Breuilly states that "The

term 'nationalism' is used to refer to political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such actions with nationalist arguments."[127] Even though his argument is positioned on a Western background only, it applies also to Chinese nationalism. Fundamentally, the profound nationalism seen in both films addresses national politics, but not in collaboration with official ideology, like many mainstream films, but by asserting their independent views and a sentiment for change.

In reality, both films played a part in contemporary political discourses for change. *Wolf Hill* is regarded as the foundation film of "national defence cinema" (*guofang dianying*) in a wave of anti-Japanese films in the 1930s. The so-called "national defense cinema" is not defined by genres or artistic pursuits; rather, it is strictly about the theme of national salvation. A simple purpose of all these films is to motivate the public to take action against Japanese invasion.[128] From the middle to later 1930s, numerous films were made to represent the deteriorating national crisis, featuring vicious images of invaders and heroic struggles as well as division among Chinese. Portraying a unified struggle against the Japanese, however, was under severe censorship by the KMT movement, since the government was not encouraging anti-Japanese sentiment.

Evening Bell, in the 1980s presented a new understanding of war concerning common humanity, which had been rare previously. Before the 1980s, war related films were mostly propaganda promoting heroic struggles liberating China. Wu Ziniu took the initiative of exploring the war issue from a humanist perspective. But his ambitious 1985 project *Dove Tree* (*Gezi shu*), about the Vietnam War, was never released, so he took up the filming of

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[127] Breuilly, John, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 3
[128] Laikwan Pang, *Building a New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, p. 59-62

Evening Bell with a similar concern. The film was only released after serious revisions, yet its interpretation of the war still found disfavour with some officials.

On the whole, these two films invest mighty political responsibility in the male protagonist, presenting an alternative version of war discourse and an indigenous construction of Chinese nationalism. Fundamentally, all these have something to do with the nation-building sentiment in 1930s and 1980s China. In both cases, the nation is imagined as a unified entity against imperial forces, so that a strong masculinity under absolute power is needed with total devotion to the nation.

B. Divergence: From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism

Despite presenting a similar kind of aspirational Chinese masculinity featuring national sentiments, the two films demonstrate telling differences. Above all, the cinematic rhythms of these two films contrast. War, featured in some most characteristic scenes in both films, plays dramatically different roles in terms of the emotional development of the two films. With regard to masculinity and war, this section indicates a differentiated ideology of nationalism in these two films, reflecting changing intellectual discourses across fifty years.

Wolf Hill features fast-paced parallel editing, creating a rhythm of revolution. Great tension is created and accumulated as the film progresses. Incorporating the rapid parallel editing, the frequent use of close-ups helps to magnify people's utmost pain and struggle (such as the episode showing the inner world of Xiaoyu). All these aspects remind audiences of Eisenstein's characteristic scenes representing mass struggle against oppression. In stark contrast, *Evening Bell* is uses slow and heavy mode with frequent long takes. The time span of individual shots is close to the rhythms of real life, and cuts between shots more fluent. In

representing post-war destruction, long takes in slow mode are used to show new tombs dotted among stunning mountains. In the use of close-up shots, facial expressions of protagonists are never exaggerated, but are somehow static. These techniques result in reducing authorial subjectivity to a minimum. Actually, director Wu Ziniu once acknowledged his debt to 1960s Soviet director Tarkovsky, who used rigid control over subjective involvement in creating cinematic effects.[129]

In *Wolf Hill*, especially the latter part of the film, the fighting spirit is readily visible through parallel editing at a fast pace. In *Evening Bell*, on the other hand, there are questioning tones and deep-layered reflections. Compared with *Wolf Hill*, *Evening Bell* avoids a dominant voice; rather, it seeks to probe into people's inner universe. In a way, the transition from a provocative to an interrogative approach seen in these two films is comparable to the distinction between two prominent Russian directors mentioned earlier:

> Tarkovsky feels that an interrogatory approach is the most valuable path for the progression of the cinema, where the art form challenges ideas and concepts and where the viewer plays an integral role in the process of creating meanings. This is a predetermined movement away from the didacticism of montage theories as personified by fellow Russians Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Verto et al., a style which he regards as manipulatory, verging on the homiletic.[130]

In opposition to the strong words and dramatic representations in *Wolf Hill*, *Evening Bell* implicitly condemns war and even invites audiences to participate in this condemnation. Its first shot is a close-up of a machine gun pointing straight at the camera. In a chilling manner, a final roll call is conducted among the defeated Japanese army. A phalanx of Japanese soldiers is deadly silent. Suddenly, chilling noises are heard, immediately followed by a scene

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[129] Tarkovsky "is a vociferous proponent of the long take; holding the camera on a scene for long enough reveals a fundamental essence of truthfulness in the shot." Terence McSweeney, "'Sculpting the Time Image': An Exploration of Tarkovsky's Film Theory from a Deleuzian Perspective" in Gunnlaugur A.Jónsson and Thorkell Á. Óttarsson, eds., *Through the Mirror: Reflections on the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006, p.80
[130] Terence McSweeney, p.80

showing a tilted jerrycan, behind which a Japanese soldier is pouring petrol over the

shoulders of another soldier. The petrol pours on these Japanese soldiers: their heads,

shoulder, backs. When noises subside, a dove becomes the sole focus. Her legs are tied with a

piece of long scrip with the names and home town of these Japanese soldiers. The dove flies

into the blue sky. Then the scene cuts to an extremely long shot from a high angle, where all

of these Japanese soldiers are looking up to the sky, their faces full of longing and solemnity.

All of a sudden, gunshots are heard and the scene cuts to a soldier opening fire on those

Japanese soldiers off screen. The next shot shows flames everywhere. As gunshots continue,

flames fill the screen and unsettling music rises. Then the scene reframes to a long shot in

which flames shoot high in the air and spread out. Unrecognisable human figures are rolling

about and struggling. Then, for almost one minute, the flames are shown from different

angles and distances, the music accompanying these shots throughout.

In the above sequence, there are at least three layers of connotative meanings beyond simple

narrative. First, the machine gun pointing to the camera establishes the opposition between

the gun, a symbol of the violent war, and all human beings, including the defeated Japanese

and the film's audience. This arrangement drags the audiences into the forefront of conflict,

making it a real party as well as the judge of the situation. Second, the deaths represents

directly the time span and graphic details, such as a whole minute of burning fire, asserting

the reality of war and establishing the audiences as witnesses. Third, the image of a dove,

usually a symbol for peace, is connected to the message of death, which inspires audiences to

reflect on the true nature of war: war is senseless killing and ultimately self-destruction.

Compared with the radical promotion of a collective struggle in *Wolf Hill*, this sequence

calmly presents an inhuman situation and makes audiences the subject approaching the film.

The different approaches adopted by these two films are indebted to the differing historical

backgrounds, and the role of war in respective social discourses.

Next, the credit sequence in *Evening*, which also appears at the end of the film, will be the examined to illustrate the changing intellectual discourses on war and Chinese nationalism across fifty years. It is a gorgeous dusk setting with an enormous golden sun. In a close-up shot, an axe is seen chopping at a wooden post. Shortly there is a reframing to a long shot, in which the sky is wine red and a man's black shadow appears. The man is wielding his axe at the base of a wooden structure. After a while, the camera pulls back, and the wood structure is seen in an extreme long shot. The structure can now be recognised as a look-out tower, positioned against a sinking sun. The man is still chopping. After another several seconds, the camera pulls back further, everything looks much smaller. As the sky grows darker and the sun is already below the horizon, the sound of chopping continues.

At the end of the film, this sequence reappears and continues. The wooden structure finally collapses along with the sinking sun. Elaborate as they are, the sequences explicitly convey an anti-war message. The tower, not in accordance with any Chinese style construction by the look of it, is reminiscent of war-time temporary structures. It is also associated with a sinking sun which has appeared before when the Japanese general accepts surrender, and is easily deemed a symbol of Japanese militarism. The man chopping at the structure coincides throughout with representations of masculine power confronting inhuman militarism, an allegory which is also easy to follow.

However, this ending is not what was planned by the film crew. A subtle change was made as required by the censor: in its original form, the chopping goes on without the wooden structure falling. This small alteration, however, revises the fundamental message embedded

in the sequence. The ending now suggests a clear-cut victory of one party conquering another, which is similar in spirit to the ending of *Wolf*. In that film, the bodies of the wolves are hung where people are celebrating collectively.

In retrospect, the continuing chopping in the original ending of *Evening Bell* expresses a different point of view as far as war and the nation are concerned. First, the ending of war can no longer be considered as an end of inhuman disasters. The wooden structure symbolises more of a universal aggressive spirit than specifically the Japanese invasion. The war may be over, but the tower still standing suggests that this evil spirit remains, demanding continued efforts to resist it worldwide.

Second, the clear-cut national boundaries felt in *Wolf Hill* are somehow blurred in the 1980s film. Since *Wolf Hill* advocates struggle to defend the nation, it entails a natural emphasis on national territory. The nation is primarily imagined as an independent country against a threatening other. The small village under the shadow of wolf attack is a trope for the Chinese people seeking autonomy. Meanwhile, the ethnic differences are highlighted by the contrasting rhetoric between the wolf and human beings. Thus the nation is defined by a united identity as well as by the political endeavor which is the core of a Chinese nationalism.

But in the original ending of *Evening Bell*, the strong Chinese nationalism is no longer confined to a physical territory and ethnic terms; rather, the nation shows much wider acceptance to outsiders. The defeated Japanese soldiers are mostly motionless, and thus largely victimised. These Japanese also get to share food with Chinese, stressing the importance of mutual understanding among human beings. The national sentiment seen in *Evening* is no longer restricted by common descent and historical heritage. Rather, the nation

is imagined as generous and forgiving, anticipating a new future.

In many ways, fifty years after *Wolf Hill* was filmed, *Evening Bell* is silently proposing a new version of Chinese nationalism, undoing the strict politics of patriotism since the last imperialist invasion. With respect paid to the tragic loss during war, with the same strength of Chinese nationalism embraced, the film endorses the concept of world peace in a modern, international context.

In comparison to young blood indulging in modern aspirations for the nation as well as self, as seen in the previous chapter, men in this chapter symbolise ethnic anxiety in the political sphere: they predominantly endorse Chinese nationalism against the imperialist other. The issue of national identity first is raised to push forward a revolutionary makeover, involving soul searching efforts redefining aspirational Chinese masculinity. Profound adaptations are made to conventional political correctness: on one hand, Chinese masculinity is more highly valued in war, turning into a national emblem against the imperialist other. On the other hand, in stark contrast to previous chapters, individual values are subdued and private space collapses in the world of masculinity constructions. While this transformation adds to a political dimension to masculinity construction, an independent stance is still maintained compared with official ideology. Differing from masculine heroes in contemporary mainstream media, who were mostly portrayed as loyalist, men in these two films are self-appointed to pioneering positions. Lao Zhang in *Wolf Hill* tries to arouse national liberation from the grass roots, which was prohibited by the KMT government. The platoon leader in *Evening Bell* was also ahead of his time in terms of introducing common humanity to the political discourses of war. These are new men in old, wartime circumstances.

Chapter Three

Male Subjectivities:

The Idealisation of the Democratic Public Sphere

***Crossroads* (1937) and *The Trouble Shooters* (1988)**

This chapter explores male subjectivities that encompass primordial democratic consciousness in both 1930s and 1980s China. Drawing on the conceptualisation of notions of the public sphere and public space, this chapter acknowledges the politics of constructing an imagined modern democratic sphere through film representations. In both *Crossroads* (1937) and *The Trouble Shooters* (1988), male protagonists adopt the role of torch bearer in the vibrant urban sphere, working toward a newly defined social justice. Asserting a new male subjectivity evolved with the imaginary public good, providing a training ground for Chinese democracy.

The chapter starts with a brief account of debates on the existence of a Chinese public sphere in the field of China studies, introducing the notion of the public sphere amid the democratic aspirations of 1930s and 1980s China. We will then introduce the notion of public space, where the male protagonists put on a provocative performance of a democratic quest. Key aspects of these two notions hold vital clues for this chapter's interpretation of the two selected films. First, we investigate the burgeoning urban development depicted in both films, as a new cultural space that invites change. Both films' male protagonists are alert to upsetting reality and assuming the task of enlightenment. Second, we discuss the intimacy between the sexes seen in both films by comparing these representations of the male and female bodies with those presented in Chapter One. The notion of the private sphere is

advanced to indicate a cultural resolution; that is, the differentiation between the private and the public in Habermas's terms. Third, we examine the concept of the public sphere represented by the new cultural sphere: the modern-style press in *Crossroads* and the fashion show in *The Trouble Shooters* are viewed as a public forum being imagined. Fourth, we look at the parade of rebellious youth, where a political public space gets established based upon tentative public opinion. Finally, seeking a "middle ground" is highlighted as an essence of both films, with reference to respective intellectual discourses. Following this, the reason for an imagined public sphere is explored further. It is viewed as prefiguring democratic politics in 1930s and 1980s China, although the issue of male subjectivities raises the issue of the limitations of the imagined public sphere.

1. Public Sphere: Narration and Speculation

This section introduces the notion of the public sphere and its impact on Chinese studies, paying particular attention to the theoretical assumptions of a Chinese public sphere. The bourgeois public sphere does not fully apply to Chinese circumstances, but indispensable amid demands for Chinese democracy. Two selected films are examined regarding Chinese youth culture and urban development, which are critical elements to prepare for a new Chinese urban sphere.

A. A Possible Chinese Public Sphere

Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere revolves around three key aspects. First, it considers the premise of a market. Second, it distinguishes between the private and the public response to the increasing self-sufficiency of capitalism. Third, it addresses the dynamics between an autonomous public sphere (ideally established by the gentry stratum, regulated by reason, and open to all) and state power. As Habermas noted:

The public sphere as a functional element in the political realm was given the normative status of an organ for the self-articulation of civil society with a state authority corresponding to its needs. The social precondition for this 'developed' bourgeois public sphere was a market that, tending to be liberalized, made affairs in the sphere of social reproduction as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatization of civil society. Under absolutism, the latter's establishment as a private realm was conceivable at first only in the privative sense that social relationships were stripped of their quasi-public character. The political functions, both judicial and administrative, were consolidated into public authority.[131]

While Habermas strictly limits his analysis to a specific epoch[132], he notes a variant of the public sphere in his introduction to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*:

[O]ur investigation is limited to the structure and function of the liberal mode of bourgeois public sphere, to its emergence and transformation. Thus it refers to those features of a historical constellation that attained dominance and leaves aside the plebeian public sphere as a variant that in a sense was suppressed in the historical process.[133]

This partial recognition of the plebeian public sphere has sparked an extensive search by global academics for the public sphere.

In China studies, debates continue on the actual existence of a public sphere in China. For some scholars, the concept is traced back to late imperial China, when substantial social and cultural autonomy was identified and local elites were seen to be actively involved. In his article "The Public Sphere in Modern China", William T. Rowe takes on the issue involving current scholarship on the Chinese use of *gong*, which "like the Western 'public' has always been seen most simply as the opposite of 'private' (*si*)."[134] Rowe examines China historians'

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[131] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* Cambridge:Polity, 1989, p. 74

[132] "We conceive bourgeois public sphere as a category that is typical of an epoch. It cannot be abstracted from the unique developmental history of that 'civil society' originating in the European High Middle Ages; nor can it be transferred, ideal typically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations. Just as we try to show, for instance, that one can properly speak of public opinion in a precise sense only with regard to late-seventeenth-century Great Britain and eighteenth-century France, we treat public sphere in general as a historical category." Jürgen Habermas, 1989, p. xvii-xviii

[133] Jürgen Habermas, p. xviii

[134] William T. Rowe, "The Public Sphere in Modern China", *Modern China*, July 1990, pp. 309-329

work, such as Hao Chang's study of Liang Qichao (1971), Mary Backus Rankin's *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China* (1986), Prasenjit Duara's observation of "public domain" (1988), and David Strand's work on the expanding public sphere in urban China in the 1920s (1990). The word *gong*, Rowe concludes, "took on an expanded range of meanings in the realm of social management during the late nineteenth century [and] seems likely to have contributed to the more seditious range of meanings it began to accrue in the realm of articulated public opinion and demands for popular sovereignty."[135] Coinciding with this effort to apply the concept of a public sphere to Chinese circumstances, several other publications have examined the autonomous public sphere in specific regions across Chinese history.[136]

In its April 1993 issue, the journal *Modern China* hosted a six-article forum examining the rising debates on the issue of the Chinese public sphere. Frederic Wakeman disapproves of previous efforts as mechanical applications of Habermas's model, concluding that "Western social scientists who … still wished to identify elements of civil society in post-Maoist China either had to locate them in movements instead of institutions...or else argue that there had reappeared, within the interstices of China's market reforms, pre-existing elements of civil society present long before the rise of the Leninist state."[137]

Responding to controversies, Rowe switches to a more cautious approach. He tries to "break down this amorphous concept into more manageable components, looking in turn at a number of institutions and notions that have been suggested by others as constituent elements in the

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[135] William T. Rowe, p. 324

[136] Mary Backus Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China:Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911*, Stanford: Stanford University Press,1986; William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*,Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984; William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

[137] Frederic Wakeman, "The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate: Western Reflections on Chinese Political Culture" in *Modern China*, April 1993, p. 113

formation of civil society, and asking in each case whether they can be said to have been

present in indigenous form in Qing China."[138] Nevertheless, he refuses to endorse a general

conceptualisation of the Chinese public sphere.

The focus of these debates is the difficulty of applying a Western term to Chinese

circumstances. Others scholars who contributed to the article series all expressed similar

concerns and advanced their own respective theoretical solutions.[139] Concluding the series,

Philip C. C. Huang proposed a new notion of the "third realm" to resolve the problem:

> Contrary to the vision of the public sphere/civil society models, actual sociopolitical
> change in China has really never come from any lasting assertion of societal autonomy
> against the state, but rather from the workings out of state-society relations in the third
> realm. The content and logic of that realm, more than an ideal projected from Western
> experience, is what urgently demands our creative attention and research.[140]

Despite varying approaches, there is one element common among all these researchers: they

all discern the tension between idealistically positive public spheres and their lack of

legitimacy in actual terms. More often than not, the "fully self-sustained entity" is

questionable:

> Going back to Habermas's description of the emergence of the public sphere in the
> West, it should be apparent that there exists little basis in China - culturally,
> sociologically, intellectually, or economically—for the emergence of civil society in the
> Western sense, that is, for an independent 'public opinion' to establish the legitimate
> right to supervise the state. It seems more likely that a variety of intermediary entities
> (one cannot call them associations because they are neither voluntary nor, in most

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[138] William T. Rowe, "The Problem of 'Civil Society' in Late Imperial China," in *Modern China*, April 1993, p. 143

[139] Mary Backus Rankin, "Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere"; Richard Madsen, "The Public Sphere, Civil Society and Moral Community: A Research Agenda for Contemporary China Studies"; Heath B. Chamberlain, "On the Search for Civil Society in China" in *Modern China*, April 1993. Among these articles, Mary Rankin concludes: "Controversies over whether China ever had a public sphere or a civil society arise not only from differing interpretations of state-societal relations, but also from the difficulties of rethinking these Western concepts in Chinese contexts. One set of small, but provocative, issues is almost terminological. There is a lack of appropriate English-language words to describe some of the socially based activities" (p. 178). The three scholars also come up new approaches analysing the issue: Rankin concentrates on multiple varieties of Chinese public spheres; Madsen sees the issue from the perspective of the Habermas ideal, Chamberlain draws on the idea of civil society rather than public sphere.

[140] Philip C.C. Huang , "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China?:The Third Realm between State and Society" in *Modern China*, April 1993, p. 238

instances, nongovernmental) will emerge, but that they themselves will be of both state and society.[141]

All these perspectives, however, testify to scholars' continued efforts to identify the emergence of a Chinese public sphere. This is especially the case with timeframes around the 1930s and 1980s. In his book *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*, David Strand devoted an entire chapter to "Citizens in a New Public Sphere", in which he discusses related issues ranging from new cultural spaces to mass assembly in 1920s Beijing.[142] Despite identifying substantial obstacles to an emerging public sphere, Strand sees a political future:

> Tens of thousands of Beijing residents in the streets protesting imperialism did not mean that the city was in a state of disorder. On the other hand, the efflorescence of mass and group politics meant that citywide politics was no longer the exclusive preserve of elite mediation and governmental institutions. Citizenship gave townspeople a license to practice politics, which, once issued, could not easily be revoked, even by militarists and ideologues.[143]

During the 1980s, market reform was identified as an opportunity to transform the Chinese social and political spheres.[144] As Joseph Fewsmith acknowledged, there is a "tentative re-emergence of a public sphere".

In her book *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China,* Donald's symbolic public space may shed some light on these unresolved arguments, as she comments:

> Little attention had been paid to the notion of the symbolic in the study of contemporary Chinese society and politics. Interesting work on civil society has been done in terms of historical or contemporary case studies…These scholars are working

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[141] Joseph Fewsmith "The Dengist reforms in historical perspective" in Brantly Womack, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 47-48.
[142] David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
[143] David Strand, p. 197
[144] To name a few relevant works, Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; Brantly Womack, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Gordon White, Jude Howell, and Shang Xiaoyuan, *In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Change in Contemporary China*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

within, and against, an idealized concept of civil society. It is extremely unlikely to emerge in the current political landscape. They therefore couch their conclusions in negative comparisons with the implicit Western example. I suggest that we are asking the wrong question, or rather, that the question needs to be reworked before being applied to China. Film studies are often divided between general theories and area focus…I have translated my interest with civil society into a concern with symbolic public space and the idea of a political imaginary. These have become the basic ideas with which I have inflected theories developed in film analysis. I have attempted to offer politicized interpretations, without forcing the entire text or body of texts into an ideological paradigm, which does not respect the integrity and difference of each film.[145]

Donald's arguments points to a new way of comprehending the Chinese public sphere with regard to Chinese cinema. It provides this chapter with a practical approach beyond a mimicked description of Habermas's notion of the public sphere. This chapter will develop its argument in two steps: first, it will follow Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere to bring forward democratic ideas represented in film texts; second, it will move to the notion of public space to further explore the political implications embedded in the imagining of a Chinese public sphere.

The sections that follow will start with a discussion of two films set in the burgeoning urban sphere of 1930s and 1980s China, drawing attention to elements reminiscent of forming a public sphere in Habermas' terms. These include the new urban sphere represented by a variety of new urban spaces (which are primarily designed for public use) resulting from rapid industrialisation and commercialisation, the private sphere underlined by intimate sexual relations as opposed to activities in the public sphere, and youths distinguished by their concerns for the public good and their attempts to initiate public discussion. Admittedly, these elements are not exactly what Habermas has pointed out as the total privatisation of civil society, nor are they formal institutions of the democratic public sphere as opposed to state power. Nevertheless, there are plenty of investments surrounding the private domain,

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[145] Donald, p. 144

which was previously monitored by higher-ups (clan or official), and concerns for the public, which was exclusively supervised by the authorities. A modern democratic sphere is imagined through youthful adventures in the city, as the two films unfold.

B. From *Crossroads* to *The Trouble Shooters*: Youth and the City

Crossroads centres on Lao Zhao, a young unemployed graduate from the university, who has lofty aspirations despite poor living conditions in the city. Zhao shares his ups and downs with three friends—Ah Tang, Liu Dage, and Xiao Xu—who are also university graduates seeking employment. The female protagonist, Miss Yang, who later dates Zhao, adds to the romantic twists of Zhao's life through a series of comic coincidences.

The film starts with the depressed youth Xu wandering beside the Huangpu River. Zhao prevents Xu's suicide attempt. Xu then decides to sell his diploma to finance a trip back home away from the misery of the city. Seeing Xu off, Zhao finds himself at a loose end. He urges himself, however, not to give up and writes a pile of letters seeking employment. While Zhao is out job hunting, a young lady, Miss Yang, moves into the room next to Zhao's. Having just graduated herself, Yang works in a textile factory as a staff instructor.

Eventually, Zhao's efforts pay off.   Zhao's employment at the *Da Jiang News* comes as a huge surprise, and Zhao and his friends are in a mood to celebrate. Encouraged by Liu Dage, Zhao salutes his imaginary readers and swears he will speak for the public. Zhao then works diligently every night, which is why he never gets to meet Miss Yang, who works during the day. Interestingly, Zhao and Yang have had closer contact than they could have imagined: Yang's bed is soaked as a result of Zhao's intruding clothesline (a bamboo pole), and Zhao's photos are knocked off the wall by Yang's nailing. One of Zhao's shirts is marked with ink,

later transformed into a pig cartoon, as a result of Yang's throwing it back across the top of the dividing wall between the two apartments. Meanwhile, Zhao and Yang frequently see each other on the tram, where they develop a secret admiration without knowing they are next-door neighbours.

One incident changes everything. On one of his field trips gathering material for a report, Zhao and his friend Ah Tang encounter Yang and save her from a man's harassment. Yang immediately recognises the pig cartoon on Zhao's shirt, but Ah Tang still bluffs about Zhao's modern apartment. Resisting her desire to burst out laughing and without exposing her true identity, Yang agrees to be Zhao's interviewee representing disadvantaged female workers. Zhao and Yang's relationship takes on a new level after their interview in the park. Yang even dreams of Zhao and imagines herself kissing him in a scene similar to French films or illustrations of *La dame aux camellias* (*Chahuanü*).

Losing her job in the factory, however, Yang has to make everything clear to Zhao. They kiss for real after this. Failing to convince Yang to stay (because she desires to be independent) Zhao is depressed and falls ill. Now living in the countryside, Yang becomes worried that she has not seen any of Zhao's articles in the newspaper for several days. She sends her friends to check on him. Zhao expresses his feelings in response and sends Yang's friend to bring her back.

Soon after that, Zhao receives a letter from the press informing him that he has also lost his job. Devastated and filled with extreme anger, Zhao packs his bags and leaves with his friend Ah Tang. They meet Yang and her friend on their way, but now everything is different. Together they read about the death of Xu, who was finally successful in committing suicide.

They realise everything cannot go on like this, resolve to stick together to create a better future for themselves and stride off together shoulder to shoulder.

The Trouble Shooters tells the story of a youth named Yu Guan who establishes a new business, the Three T Company, along with his friends Yang Zhong and Ma Qing. The signboard "TTT" designates the company's motto: T is the first consonant of and sounds like *ti,* which means to do something for someone. The company is willing to be scapegoats for all people's troubles. The business is customised to serve the growing urban population during rapid commercialisation, and experiences both ups and downs.

The film starts with a typical business day. Yang Zhong is out on the street interacting with customer Liu Meiping, whose boyfriend could not keep his date because of a work emergency. Meanwhile, in an ordinary city apartment, a middle-aged woman is enjoying Ma Qing's company, who helps her to rehearse her dispute over the lack of intimacy with her always-absent husband. In the Three T Company office, Yu Guan is dealing with a second-rate writer who is eager to obtain any kind of reassuring award. Later, another customer wants to slap Yu Guan's face because he feels so frustrated that he has never had the chance to do something so spontaneous.

Planning for the award ceremony for the under-achieving writer is moving forward with the help of Yu's girlfriend. It turns out to be a farce: none of the invited writers show up, so Yu Guan drags everyone available to fill the crowd. The prizes for every surrogate writer, a range of crocks, are awarded along with comic music. Regardless, inspirational moments are created by an accompanying fashion show. Models take to the stage wearing the latest fashions, followed by all sorts of figures from across Chinese history: Red Guards, landlords,

Cao Cao in the costumes of the Beijing opera, and so on. At last, with the rhythm of rock and roll music, all the figures dance together joyfully. After the event, everybody seems very happy. Yu and his girlfriend Xiao Lu are shown in bed the next morning.

Problems appear as time goes by. Yuan and his friends face more and more pressure. Yu's father comes to warn them to do things properly and a morality teacher criticises them implicitly in a television lecture. The writer to whom they offered a reassuring award sues them for false pretences. In addition, an old granny for whom they have been caring suddenly jumps out the window when they take a short break from the days and nights of serving her. Finally, the company is ordered to close.

These obstructions only make Yu and his friends more rebellious. On a rare day at home, Yu scoffs at his father for being old-fashioned. On the streets, where the trio encounter the moral educator, Ma Qing tricks him into waiting for a young girl for a non-existent date. On the "Voluntary Day of Three T Company", these youths offer provocative advice to the public. Such advice includes how to cope with police when you are caught breaching traffic rules; how to deal with a wife's overwhelming sexual demands; and how to influence an official without using a bribe. Yu separates from his girlfriend, who has always urged him to get further education. At last, on the very day the company must shut down, all of them are out on the streets in a reckless mood. They are looking for trouble and want to beat someone up. At this point, the rock and roll music rises, featuring a rock singer shouting hysterically. In the film's final sequence, Yu and the others come out of their office, which has now been leased to someone else. In the morning sun, however, they can't believe their eyes: there is a long, seemingly endless queue at their office door, all seeking help.

On a narrative level, both films are centred on youthful adventures in the city. A combination of two brand-new elements is represented: the youth issue and thriving urban developments. In China, "youth" is a relatively modern concept barely heard of before the twentieth century. The concept of youth was developed and propagated amongst intense cultural debates about assigning a modern agenda for the Chinese nation. From the very beginning, the concept was connected to the new culture, as when Chen Duxiu famously named the ground-breaking journal *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) in 1915. The May Fourth incident in 1919 further demonstrated revolutionary ideas conceived in the youth movement. In the following decades, youth presented itself as a distinct cultural group engaging with modern education and controversial values. Youth was by definition a fresh force that signaled social and cultural transformation. As Dikötter put it "'Youth' was also turned into a powerful symbol of regeneration, vitality and commitment to modernity: it was invented as standing for reason, progress and science.…Based on the popular theory of recapitulation, 'youth' was seen as the birth of the individual".[146]

With the deteriorating national crisis in the 1930s, the concept of youth was integrated further into the notion of nation building. The unprecedented scale of debates on the youth problem stirred the educational public. Youth-related journals and magazines emerged in large numbers, stirring public discourse.[147] Open discussions on the youth problem covered topics of acute social concern: youth education, youth psychology, youth careers, youth and revolution, youth behaviour, youth and love, youth physiology, and even youth suicide. While youth was mainly presented as a complicated social problem requiring caution, the

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[146] Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995, p. 147

[147] In the 1930s, youth titled magazines were numerous, such as *Qingnian Jie* (Youth Field), *Qingnian You* (Youth Companion), *Qingnian Jinbu* (Youth Progress), *Qingnian Shijie* (Youth World), *Qingchun Yuekan* (Youth Monthly), *Shanghai Qingnian* (*Shanghai* Youth), *Qingnian Zhanxian* (Youth Battlefront), *Qingnian Pinglun* (Youth Review), *Shehui yu Qingnian* (Society and Youth), *Qingnian yu Zhanzheng* (Youth and War), *Qingnian* (Youth), *Nü Qingnian Yuekan* (Young Women Monthly), *Dongbei Qingnian* (North East Youth)

discussions also reflected popular attitudes at the time: youth was considered to be the nation's future and crucial to the nation-building process.

In the 1980s, youth reappeared as a modern and distinct social group after the era of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. Since 1949, the youth culture presented itself as a challenge to traditional values and the political agenda. In the 1980s, the youth writer Wang Shuo represented this trend through his series of novels featuring rebellious youths, giving voice to satirical topicality. At the same time, the concept of pure entertainment entered Chinese households through the popularity of television. Youth played a key role, introducing international fashions and new entertainment, such as disco dancing. These caused a public stir and the much-debated youth problem in the 1980s reflected a change of scene for Chinese nation building.

Arguably, youth were the advocates for new culture in both the 1930s and 1980s. Both films reference this directly: Zhao in *Crossroads* fights for oppressed female workers as a reporter, rightly positioned in "the public sphere's preeminent institution, the press".[148] Yu and his colleagues, on the other hand, in the 1980s are able to do all sorts of things they are never supposed to do: they reward a second-rate writer and offer controversial advice to the public. A sense of imaginary success pervades both films, which secures temporary elite status for the male protagonists. On a practical level, youth in these films are leading a new way of living and thinking, immensely involved in the imagining of a Chinese public sphere.

2. Good Morning, Metropolis: Men's Urban Dwelling

Since its initial introduction in the early twentieth century in China, the concept of 'youth'

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[148] Jürgen Habermas, p.181

refs exclusively to young men (unless otherwise specified). 'Youth' represents a new version of Chinese masculinity given a modern flavour and individuality. In this section, youth evolves with urban modernity despite the negativity of commercialisation, condemned in both the 1930s and 1980s. On the one hand, urban space can accommodate controversial youth activities prohibited in Chinese tradition; on the other, pro-democratic ideas are sparked as youth seeks to identify and enlighten the urban public. This section focuses on the positive and creative energy these two films share, through inspiring youth subjectivities, and establishing men's dominant position in the imagining of a Chinese public sphere.

A. Urban Dwelling: City and Commercialisation

Both *Crossroads* and *The Trouble Shooters* feature city scenes before their actors appear. *Crossroads* begins with a surprisingly empty scene in the most flourishing section of 1930s Shanghai. Accompanied by tense Western music, a bird's eye view shot presents a large portion of a crossroads on a slight slant. Traffic is flowing, composed of modern cars and bicycles. Over this city view, four giant Chinese characters *shizi jietou* (crossroads) fill the screen, under the slightly smaller name of its producer: Mingxing Film Studio. Shortly after the crew lists begin to roll, the camera cuts to a close-up scene of a modern building, with the structure's windows in focus. The camera is set at a sharp angle, moving steadily upward. After the top of the building appears, the shot quickly cuts to another modern building, moving steadily upward as before. Similar shots continue, lasting for almost one minute. Thereafter, the camera pans along the Huangpu River, showing modern buildings and a piece of sky crossed by tram power lines. Finally, we cut back to the first shot: the giant crossroads.

The first shot of *The Trouble Shooters* is in a traffic-filled street, with vigorous pop music adding a special rhythm to the scene: several trucks and motorcycles are seen from behind,

ready to move through the smoggy city air. Soon the scene cuts to another traffic shot, showing a wider street with more motor vehicles, some of them moving fast. Shortly after, the camera shows several modern buildings beneath a blue sky, as a male voice starts singing rock and roll lyrics: "Once I dreamed of modern city life, but now I don't know what to say…High buildings are more and more by the day…" Along with these lyrics, the camera cuts between several mirror-glass skyscrapers in close shots, in which the viewer can recognise reflections of a construction site clearly. Soon after, a real construction site is seen in a grey tone, peopled with small figures of workers. With an accelerating rhythm, the singer shouts out "Life here isn't easy!" and a set of rapid shots flash through more city scenery: traffic, crowds, and individual people, including a pair of boorish peasants framed in a medium shot, looking confused. Then the camera settles for quite a while on a policeman, who is seen at a crossroads, busily directing traffic.

When the song reaches its second verse, the crowds become the scene's clear focus, and the lyrics shout out the same concern: "Sitting in a restaurant with a friend, pop songs are flowing from the cassette. You are thinking of this while saying that people are all wearing masks….heiya..heiya… What should I say…?" Along with the song, the camera strikes a similar rhythm of shots, and youth images create a sense of clutter and disorder. For example, a long shot shows a couple of youths wildly dancing disco on a balcony; a couple of close-ups single out a young man wandering in the crowds; a leering young man leans against a fence with a close-up highlighting tattoos on his leg; and finally a youth with long, curly hair, suddenly looks backwards, full of bewilderment. In between, there are more shots showing social phenomena: under an employment billboard, several young girls are waiting numbly; in a middle shot, a foreign girl shows her t-shirt to people around her; it features Chinese characters on the front that say "Foreign Devil" (*Yang guizi*) and on the back "I Have No

Foreign Currency" (*Meiyou waihuiquan*). At last, the opening sequence rests once again on the policeman, who is seen from the back directing traffic with great energy and precision.

The two films' opening sequences are quite similar: high rise buildings, road traffic, and people. But their ways of representing this content tells different stories. In *Crossroads*, the camera angle is unsettling and extraordinary: the giant crossroad is seen from a bird's eye view, and the high-rise buildings are filmed from oblique angles. Accompanying the unsettling Western music is the frequent and reiterated presence of these metropolitan elements. The film techniques used here seem to impersonate a person's nervous sensations: he overlooks the city, trying to grasp the essence of this urban space. He is trapped in what he investigates, like a man lost in a cement forest, struggling to find his way out. By the end of the sequence, in which the sky is shown crossed by tram lines, the whole nature of space has changed according to the demands of the metropolis.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, in contrast, the majority of shots are on the same level and closer, immersed in the city's smoggy air. City life as reality is not at all mysterious, but absorbed in chaotic confusion, where a sense of anxiety overflows with the clamour of pop music. Rock and roll music and documentary-style representations complement one another, highlighting the kind of disorder built upon the energy and diversity that city life offers. From one perspective, the city scenery is full of energy and mobility, as presented in the traffic accompanied by the music and images of high buildings under construction. From another perspective, multiple images of the grotesque create a sense of disorder and conflict: youths, boorish peasants, and even foreigners are all too busy to find peace. Among the crowds, the image of a policeman is somehow humorous. Despite his diligent efforts, he does not help bring order to the situation.

The same dominance of city scenery and the heightened tensions in the two sequences is to

an extent a reflection of reality in 1930s and 1980s China. In the 1930s, urban modernity in

cities such as Shanghai had reached its maturity: "By the early 1930s, an entire imaginary of

urban modernity was being constructed in the pages of *Liangyou huabao*."[149] In the eyes of

native Chinese, however, this imported modernity was foreign and threatening. Leo Ou-Fan

Lee pinpointed this in his remarks on high-rise buildings of Shanghai:

> As a visible sign of the rise of industrial capitalism, these skyscrapers could also be
> regarded as the most intrusive addition to the Shanghai landscape, as they not only
> towered over the residential buildings in the old section of the city (mostly two- or
> three-story structures) but also offered a sharp contrast to the general principles of
> Chinese architecture, in which height was never a crucial factor, especially in the case
> of domestic architecture. No wonder they elicited responses of heightened emotion: in
> cartoons, sketches, and films, the skyscraper is portrayed as showcasing socioeconomic
> inequality─ the high and the low, the rich and the poor.[150]

Coinciding with Lee's comments, Chinese films of the 1930s featured images of a corrupting

metropolis. In their respective film representations, directors such as Sun Yu, Cai Chusheng,

and Fei Mu all presented city imagery from modern Shanghai with a sense of condemnation.

In general, as far as its dominant portrayal is concerned, urban modernity worked as a sign of

an imperialist other, which was largely negative.

In the 1980s, however, urban development was a daily reality aspired to by the entire Chinese

nation. Among the enthusiasm and excitement, however, rapid commercialisation created

significant anxieties. People were frustrated by rising interpersonal competition, insatiable

desire, and, in particular, the anxiety of finding one's new position in city life. As director Mi

Jiashan acknowledged, the driving idea behind *The Trouble Shooters* is the conflict between

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[149] Leo Ou-fan Lee *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*,
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.75
[150] Leo Ou-fan Lee, p. 12

the city and its inhabitants.[151]

Despite their different spirits, the two opening sequences contain the same typical symptoms of embracing change. Both entail a pattern of disorder imposed by unfamiliar cultural elements. Evidently, urban modernity (symbolised by high-rise buildings)—or in other words the free spirit of commercialisation—overrides everything else. Amid the confusion created, however, the sense of crisis includes a spirit of interrogation: as shown in the bird's-eye view in *Crossroads* and the dedicated policeman in *The Trouble Shooters*. More than anything else, however, enormous personal sentiments are invested in the city scenery represented.

As mentioned, the precondition for Habermas's notion of the public sphere is a free market, which "made affairs in the sphere of social reproduction as much as possible a matter of private people left to themselves and so finally completed the privatization of civil society".[152] It is a sphere that primarily hosts individual interests and opinions. With this in mind, the opening sequences of both films convey the message of personal involvement in a transforming social sphere. The city scenery may just be the backdrop for forming a new cultural sphere. This theme will be explored further in the next section.

B. Localism: Asserting Youth Subjectivities

In *Crossroads*, Zhao and his friends are all university graduates despite their disadvantageous economic status. Miss Yang is also well educated. Driven by their thirst for new things, these young graduates have a distinctly modern flavour compared with others. An obvious example is their common interest in novel, foreign artefacts. For example, when Zhao is stressed by Xu's leaving, he is cheered up by a Mickey Mouse toy. When Yang first arrives in Shanghai,

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[151] Wang Yunzhen, "*Fang Mi Jiashan tan* Wanzhu (On *The Trouble Shooters*: An Interview with Mi Jiashan)", *Dianying yishu* (Film Art), 1989, 5
[152] Jürgen Habermas, p. 74

a foreign doll is in her luggage. These details, minor as they are, indicate a new living experience these youth cherish.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, the trio are not well educated. They claim they never think at all, scoffing at the pretentious cultural elite. This, however, is only a gesture of rebellion. In fact, Yang Zhong wins over the girl, Liu Meiping, by flaunting his knowledge of modern philosophers. Indeed, all three of them can discuss philosophy. Their controversial business venture is distinctly driven by a new worldview, which is based on an understanding of commercialised relations among people.

In both films, youthful subjectivities enable new perspectives about life and living, clearly shown in the modern space that the city offers. The modern city is used as the backdrop to unfold the stories in these two films. More impressively shown is the extent to which the city space penetrates the daily reality of these young people. From at least two perspectives, the city is transformed into an autonomous space. First, the city is connected to subjective hope and youthful aspirations, as shown in remarkable morning scenes. Second, the urban space becomes a crucial element of the new lifestyle these young people are enjoying.

In *Crossroads*, morning scenes are seen more than once, appearing mainly as snapshots. One is represented before Miss Yang goes to work. The scene is a low-angle shot, with the top part of a ship seen under the sky. Accompanying the sound of the ship's horn, smoke rises above the ship. The second morning scene is a long shot of the Huangpu river, where the sun is flashing on the river.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, a short morning sequence is presented before the main protagonist,

Yu Guan, and his girlfriend are presented together. The sequence starts with wine-red sky, in which the giant sun is half hidden behind the black silhouette of a construction site. The shot is kept still for almost 20 seconds. Then suddenly, the scene is alive with the street at dawn, with dozens of bicycle wheels flying along the road. The camera cuts to a higher part of the bicycles, showing people riding toward the camera and leaving the dawn behind them.

The morning scenes in both films add new meanings to the city landscape. As the start of a new day, morning is always connected to thoughts such as hope, aspiration, and a rosy future. The ship's morning horn in *Crossroads* and flying bicycles in *The Trouble Shooters* contribute to a promising and hopeful perspective on city life. Morning signals a new working day full of possibilities. City people carry admirable energy, which transforms into the sense of freedom: there is joy in creating a future with one's own hands. The city is no longer threatening because everything assumes a fresh start—in the spirit of creation, the city is beautiful here. This alone differentiates these films from the negative images of city life seen in other films made in the same periods.

In both films the young live in this urban space; in other words, the city offers a whole new life style for these young people. In *Crossroads*, most of the film was shot in urban contexts such as traffic-laden streets, trams and modern parks. An exception is those scenes shot in the tiny apartment and the office. Urban facilities, such as dance halls and luxurious clubs, which could cause negative impressions about the city, are absent in *Crossroads*. Every encounter between Zhao and Yang relates to urban space: their romance starts on the tram, with the shaking car accounting for their first physical contact. Later, the reporter Zhao interviews Miss Yang in a modern-style park, which is actually a modern-style date between the pair. In a modern park, family ethics and taboos between men and women do not exist. The pair sits

together on a bench, chatting about the past and future. Without any sense of abnormality, this scene merely belongs to the new lifestyle that a city such as Shanghai offers. In this sense, the image of the city is not only positive, but is a whole new space offering a new kind of culture.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, busy streets, buses, a train, coffee shops, a theme park, and Tian'anmen Square are all represented. Further, it is difficult to think of something from the new fashions of the 1980s that does not appear on screen. As with *Crossroads*, almost every major plot development relates to urban space: members of the Three T Company are seen in the most fashionable places, they drink coffee with the girl Liu Meiping; they play newly introduced games such as bumper cars, and they present awards at a modern fashion show. The date between Yu and his girlfriend also exemplifies this concept: they meet on the street, chat in a subway car, and part company in a theme park. These modern spaces witness the new ways youth are living, also offering the foremost opportunities for these same youth to reinvent the city and themselves.

In the above representations, the modern education these youths have received enables a new understanding of urban living, beyond the negativity of commercialisation. Fundamentally, a new relationship with the social sphere is produced. The youth are no longer obliged to follow the traditional way of living (as is seen in other characters such as Zhao's colleague, who does not understand why Zhao works so hard), and they are fascinated by the boundless possibilities that lie before them. Their new knowledge activates a new way of living and defines who they are. According to Donald Eugene Hall:

> Subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control….How does our understanding of knowledge relate to, impact, and/or constrain our understanding of our

own existence?[153]

In simpler words: how does one's *knowing* define one's *living and being*? In both films, youth

subjectivities are exemplary; their newly acquired knowledge is transmitted into the

imagining of new urban space. Coupled with the emergence of youthful subjectivities is the

sense of youth autonomy. This might be one of the reasons driving what Rowe discovered in

nineteenth century Hankou: city dwellers in Hankou no longer viewed themselves as

outsiders, but identified themselves as local.[154] Youth in both films are represented as the

indigenous creators of a new cultural sphere. Although youth in both films are by no means

property owners, they do lead the way in embracing the new cultural space. They are among

the first to enjoy "the freedom of autonomous human beings".[155]

3. The Private and Public: Men as Public Individuals

This section analyses how the public sphere imagined on two fronts to incorporate growing

youth subjectivities. On one hand, youth subjectivities originate in the private sphere, as the

individual is established as the subject of his personal matters. On the other hand, modern

knowledge and ideas, which enable youth subjectivities in the first place, trigger youths'

enlightenment attempts in the imagined public sphere and challenge social hierarchy in many

ways.

A. Intimate Space: Men as Private People

As noted, the city space not only accommodates youthful aspirations, but also hosts major

transformations in terms of social and cultural values. In Habermas's conceptualization of the

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[153] Donald Eugene Hall, *Subjectivity*, New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 3-4
[154] William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.
[155] Jürgen Habermas, p. 125

bourgeois public sphere, even before a public sphere actually forms in the political realm, subjectivity is already formed in a private sphere. He notes, "To be sure, before the public sphere explicitly assumed political functions in the tension-charged field of state-society relations, the subjectivity originating in the intimate sphere of the conjugal family created, so to speak, its own public".[156]

"The conjugal family" is not present in the two selected films, because no actual family bonds exist among the youths. Nevertheless, in both films, a special kind of tension arises related to the intimacy between men and women and a sense of privacy in the private sphere. Arguably, the tension shown in both films suggests efforts to break with social conventions, establishing the primacy of subjectivity by taking the most private matters into their own hands.

A most revealing sequence is presented in *Crossroads*, which is elegant but bold. Miss Yang dreams when she dozes off reading a foreign book, *La Dame aux Camélias* (*Chahuanü*). In her dream, Yang is in a romantic setting decorated with a paper moon and flowers. She is swinging leisurely in a gorgeous nineteenth century Western dress. A man enters from a Chinese-style moon door. It is Zhao. Zhao sweeps his Western cape about him and soon approaches Yang. In a tighter shot, Zhao is close to Yang and is gently swinging her with a passionate smile on his face.

Gradually, the scene fades and the camera cuts to another scene: Zhang and Yang enter a Western-style room with French doors. Gracefully, Yang settles herself on a chaise longue, stretching her hand out to Zhao. Zhao carefully helps her lean back on the chair and bows to

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[156] Jürgen Habermas, p. 29

her afterward. Then Zhao sits right next to Yang. When the camera moves closer, Yang takes

a flower from her breast and hands it to Zhao, exuding tenderness and love. Zhao gently

looks at Yang while smelling the flower. The camera then cuts to an even closer shot, centring

on Yang's face and shoulders; she is breathing nervously. Excitedly Zhao is approaching

Yang's lips and is about to kiss her, but Yang smiles at him bashfully and turns her face away.

This suspended kiss occurs again later in the film. After Miss Yang loses her job because the

factory closes, she makes everything clear to Zhao in his tiny apartment. On hearing the news,

Zhao performs a series of rebellious acts. He knocks down the wall between their apartments,

shouting: "We should fight. We are all the same, we are both suffering!" Then, he simply

embraces Yang and begins to kiss her boldly.

The Trouble Shooters, while not mainly about romance, also features a controversial sex-

related sequence. It is a morning in a tiny apartment. Yu and his girl friend are sitting up in

bed. With her legs bathed in the morning sun, the girl is talking intimately with Yu. A moment

later, Yu gets up, half-naked, and begins picking up his clothes. Then, his girlfriend walks

over to him. She is about to say something, but sighs and gives up, saying: "Fine, I'd better

not say." A moment later, she says gently: "I know you don't need my help...That's all. Come

whenever you like."

Both films present couples cohabitating outside marriage, which was new in the 1930s and

the 1980s. In *Crossroads*, Zhao and Yang practically share the same space despite a thin wall

between them. Indeed, passing objects and suggestive notes back and forth over the top of the

wall indicates their intimacy, although there is no suggestion of actual sex between the two.

At last, the two tiny rooms merge into one. In *The Trouble Shooters*, Yu and his girlfriend

share a bed.

These intimate sequences are somehow different from the controversy and passion in the two films discussed in Chapter One. In *Red Sorghum* and *Big Road*, the daring representations of the male body and female gaze are praised for their exceptional vitality and they boost national morale in a controversial way. Here, however, enjoying privacy is much more prevalent. All these sequences occur in closed spaces compared with the natural settings in *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum*. The intimacy between man and woman is no longer metaphorical, but closer to daily reality. The publicly celebrated sexuality described in Chapter One has been transformed here into a private matter between individuals.

More strikingly, the private sphere shown in both cases indicates more autonomy than anything else. In the dream sequence in *Crossroads*, both Zhao and Yang willingly indulge themselves in the romantic ambience, and the kiss claims the freedom of love. In *The Trouble Shooters*, Yu and his girl friend have premarital sexual relations, disregarding conventional family ethics and social taboos.

Sexuality here is a symbol of privacy that is worth repeating. Privacy is esteemed as a basic human right according to Habermas: "A second set of basic rights concerned the individual's status as a free human being, grounded in the intimate sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family"[157] In the light of Habermas's conceptualisation of the bourgeois public sphere, which "was a public sphere constituted by private people,"[158] these sequences indicate that an appropriate proportion of private deeds are needed to begin addressing the formation of a public sphere. Noteworthy is the fact that a concern for private matters is not the main issue

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[157] Jürgen Habermas, p. 83
[158] Jürgen Habermas, p. 30

in both films. Rather, as will be discussed next, much more emphasis is placed on public

matters being addressed by these "private people".

B. The Imaginary Public: Newspapers versus Fashion Show

In both films, the public is an even more important theme than the private. The imagined

public sphere, mainly represented through modern venues, is compatible with the notion of

the bourgeois public sphere. According to Habermas:

> The 'town' was the life center of civil society not only economically; in cultural-
> political contrast to the court, it designated especially an early public sphere in the
> world of letters whose institutions were the coffee house, the *salons*, and the
> *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies). The heirs of the humanistic-aristocratic society, in
> their encounter with the bourgeois intellectuals (through sociable discussions that
> quickly developed into public criticism), built a bridge between the remains of a
> collapsing form of publicity (the courtly one) and the precursor of a new one: the
> bourgeois public sphere.[159]

This is to say, the public sphere was initially a sort of free exchange of opinions concerning

general ideologies such as literature, culture, and such. Urban spaces such as coffee shops

were viewed as the public sphere's primary institutions. In both films, not bounded by *salons*

and coffee shops, more serious social and cultural discussions take place in open arenas. In

Crossroads, for example, the new-style press plays a big part in Zhao's seeking justice; in

The Trouble Shooters, the fashion show deliberately causes critical cultural thinking among

film audiences.

In *Crossroads*, Zhao is employed by *Dajiang Press*, a modern-style newspaper that bears

little indication of having a political stance. Centred on the press, Zhao's subjectivities and

his imagining of the public sphere emerge. Before taking up the position as a proof-reader

(later a reporter), Zhao visits his friends Ah Tang and Da Ger with excitement. In addition to

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[159] Jürgen Habermas, p. 30

a jubilant celebration, Da Ger's talk somehow shifts the entire scene to the mood of a new adventure. Almost solemnly, Da Ger speaks to Zhao in a heated tone: "Congratulations to our king without a crown, and here's wishing you first dare to say and dare to do, and don't make a fool of the public. Second, don't speak for official power. Third, always take the position of the ordinary public!"

The phrase "the public" appears twice in this short speech, even though there are no direct representations of this idea in the film. In other words, "the public," which is somehow imagined in the film, grants crucial significance to Zhao's job. Unmistakably, Zhao is not simply taking a job, but shoulders the responsibility to "work as a mouthpiece for the public!" Meanwhile, the notion of "official power" in opposition to "the public" precisely places Zhao in the middle. In terms of Habermas's public sphere, Zhao "assumes a central place" between the "official power" and "the public".

Directly after the visit with his friends, Zhao returns to his place and gives himself a makeover in a comic mood. He puts on his only suit, tucks in his overlong tie, tears a tail from his shirt to make a decorative handkerchief for his jacket pocket, and smears his canvas running shoes with black shoeshine to look like leather. After looking into the mirror several times, he heads off to his new position. This change in appearance before taking the job clearly indicates Zhao's changing social status: taking on an upper class look symbolically upgrades him to membership of an imagined elite, who can act upon cultural enlightenment or construct a public sphere in Habermas's terms. Indeed, the press becomes the centre of Zhao's work and life: a proposed public sphere is the result of Zhao's hard work. In this spirit, the attempt to establish a democratic sphere beyond authority is evident. Arguably, an imagined public sphere is central to the film's aspirations for youth.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, a major event is the "Three-T Literary Awards". As organisers of this event, Yu and his mates create a magic sphere beyond official ideological control. Because none of the invited famous writers attends, Yu and his fellows are forced to perform like famous writers in front of the large audience; this grants them temporary membership of the cultural elite. Central to this event, furthermore, is the controversial fashion show, which reflects a remarkably free spirit.

The sequence starts with a full-on shot of a red banner: "The Three-T Literary Awards". Just below the banner, a three-tiered stage fills the screen. At the far end of the stage, two tiny figures are turning somersaults toward the camera, both wearing Beijing opera costumes. At the same time, from each side of the stage, two modern models walk on. Following the contrary appearance of the Beijing opera pair wrestling while the models are posing, a crowd flows in, their different appearance highlighted. There are closer shots showing the models' colourful dresses, high heels, and calves on the white stage. There is also a range of shots showing a row of Beijing opera generals, followed by some archetypical gifted scholars and beautiful ladies in opera costumes. Next, a long shot shows an early twentieth century landlord walking and laughing with his concubine. Switching to another side of the stage, some models are still seen walking. Then, out of nowhere, propaganda flyers begin flying above these models' heads, followed by a May Fourth 1919 student couple. In a long shot shown immediately afterward, however, a peasant with a towel knotted on his head looks confused. Thereafter, a procession of different kinds of people are seen one after another: a 1950s girl student in overalls, two Republican soldiers marching, two 1960s Red Guards with red armbands, two contemporary male and female body builders, a policeman, and rock and roll kids dancing. Eventually, all these different sorts of people are mixed together.

After a short interval back stage, the show continues. Back on the stage, a model's back is captured from top to toe, her elegant long skirt glowing in the light. Then, however, the Republican landlord appears again, but this time he is shaking his head at what he is seeing: young women in revealing clothes. The scene cuts to a Beijing opera general, who is so offended by the sight that he covers his eyes with his sleeve. A Red Guard, however, confronts him and drives him away abruptly. Then, there is an encounter between the peasant and landlord with his concubine, who spit at one another. After that, Guomindang nationalist generals are seen being confronted by Red Army soldiers. Finally, a man appears in the costume of a Chinese president from the early 1910s.

Next, another interval back stage is shown. Returning to the stage, however, the tone of the music changes and people begin to dance to a rock rhythm. Rock'n roll kids and urban youths are seen first; the peasant is watching and does not know how to act. The landlord and his concubine begin to dance easily. Soon after, the peasant is dancing, dragged in by several contemporary urban youths. Soon the peasant dances crazily. An old scholar is shown, who cannot bear what he sees and almost faints. A Red Guard drags a man in a general's opera costume, swirling around with him. Shortly after, the general begins to enjoy the dance. Then, there are sequences of reconciliation: the peasant and the landlord dance together; the Nationalist generals are head-to-head with the Red Army soldiers, including a new Fourth Army soldier and a contemporary policeman. The Beijing opera figures are happily swinging their hips, and even the old scholar is dancing with the female body builders.

This fashion-show sequence is divided by the two back stage intervals into three distinct sections. The first section features all sorts of figures taking over the floor; the second section

stages the conflicts; and the third stage is the final reconciliation among the figures. In this simple way, the complexity of struggles and conflicting values from twentieth-century Chinese history are shown. Most dramatic of all, the transformations among the three divisions are driven by the modern force as represented by the models, rock'n roll kids, and new faces from the 1980s. Finally, the entire stage is crazy with the rhythm of rock and roll music, expressing the destruction of Chinese tradition lasting for thousands of years. Here, modern urban culture is represented as a sweeping force that is both revolutionary and fearsome, pointing to an unseen but positive future in the making.

Metaphorically, the sequence opens a whole new sphere of cultural discussion: it magically accommodates all individuals despite their gender, social status, historical placement, or anything else. Any sense of order has waned. In front of the audience—in other words in front of the viewing public—a reconsideration of Chinese history is proposed and celebrated. Combined with the temporary elite status that Yu and his mates assume, this fashion show is an allegory of cultural enlightenment. The core of this enlightenment is the free and equal exchange of ideas.

As in *Crossroads*, this sequence is essentially the temporary cultural elite communicating with the symbolic public (the audience at the fashion show). This again fits with Habermas's argument about "bourgeois representations":

> Wherever the public established itself institutionally as a stable group of discussants, it did not equate itself with the public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name, perhaps even as its educator—the new form of bourgeois representation. The public of the first generation, even when it constituted itself as a specific circle of persons, was conscious of being part of a larger public. Potentially it was always also a publicist body, as its discussions did not need to remain internal to it but could be directed at the outside world…[160]

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[160] Jürgen Habermas, p. 37

Both sequences reflect a similar pattern of elite cultural enlightenment based on imagined elite status and an imaginary public. The consciousness of an existing public and a publicly shared sphere has been established, even though it is only on a limited scale and in a metaphorical way.

One more common element among these two films is the striking aspirations of the young men, who are most willing to be "the public of the first generation". In *Crossroads*, Zhao's symbolic inauguration in his job is certainly passionate. In *The Trouble Shooters*, the trio's controversial fashion show is also developed in a fervent mood. Youthful subjectivities are thus further developed and explored. These subjectivities are coupled with clearer ideological goals compared with the subjectivities presented in the last section. Arguably, these subjectivities are governed by new disciplines and directed to the imagined public. As Nick Mansfield suggests:

> Heidegger claimed that Western philosophy since Descartes had understood the fundamental nature of the human interaction with the world in terms of a consistent, self-identical and coherent entity called the subject. This entity processed its experience into knowledge, and its hypothetical goal was the maximisation of its self-consciousness. In return, this subjectivity was seen as governed by some essential faculty or capacity—reason, perhaps, or simply thought, enlightenment, even imagination and love have been chosen over time as the core, defining attribute of the subject. This selection of a single essential element of subjectivity as its lodestone must be seen, of course, as recognition that interior life is complicated and amorphous, and full of surprises and accidents as much as it is of the accumulation of enlightenment and meaning. Something had to be chosen as the essence of subjectivity to stabilise its immense dynamism, to recover something that must be before, inside or above the endless flux.[161]

Subjectivity tends to be governed by a "single essential element" such as enlightenment, reason, or love. In the case of both films, these subjectivities are defined by fervently pursuing enlightenment. This enlightenment should be differentiated from the pure cultural

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[161] Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the self from Freud to Haraway*, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p. 177

enlightenment associated with May Fourth, which depended on two abstract terms: science and democracy. Here, enlightenment has more concrete meanings amid the overwhelming urge to build (or rebuild) the nation. These film sequences are constructive representations of a nation's hoped-for political future: enabling a new order where the public can participate actively. In other words, a real democratic sphere is imagined where social hierarchy and official ideology comes under scrutiny. Admittedly, however, this is merely a new political perspective, not institutionalized or even formalised in any way. In other words, it reflects Habermas's ideas of ordinary people's will for political participation, but not exactly an accomplished public sphere. Thus, the notion of the public sphere may not fully reveal the implication embedded in those representations. This is exactly why the next section will use a related but different notion of public space to further the discussion.

4. Public Sphere and the State: Subjectivities as Political Statement

This section dwells on the notion of public space as mentioned in the early part of the thesis. It presents representations of an imagined alliance between youthful subjectivities and public interests. On at least two levels the public is informed of their basic rights. On the one hand, youth take a critical political stance identifying a troubled public, relating people's personal circumstances to individual human rights. On the other hand, rebellious youths take on the street to convey the message of political freedom, defending their rights as civil citizens.

A. Public Spaces: the Public Communion and Political Imaginary

In *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China,* Stephanie Donald expresses concerns over the limitation of the Habermasian notion of public sphere:

> The links between the private and public spheres, as opposed to the administrative, functional, and systemic spheres of the bureaucracy and the economy, are such that Habermas presents modernity as defined by two complementary but discrete

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institutional modes, the splitting off from the material of the symbolic.

> The problem with this is that, although Habermas acknowledges that mutual interests and dependencies mean that the spheres are not in fact perfectly discrete, he does not say that money and power, as social media, are absolutely transferable, from one sphere to the other, and across institutional modes. Power and political influence flow from the economic advantages and symbolics capital that is available to those with time enough to engage in public activity in the material world.[162]

Donald's argument, echoed by many other scholars, questions the fundamental fairness of people's access to the public sphere:"Habermas assumes agency, on the part of the communicating public person, and ignores those who have no equivalent agency."[163] Due to the concerns above, and with regard to the distinctive Chinese context, as mentioned in the early part of this thesis, Donald proposes her use of the concept of public space:

> The concept of public space is not new, and it is developing fast. It is now central to disciplines that were once far removed from one another. Philosophy and geography have been brought together to produce an adequate intellectual space in which to discuss space as a criterion and phenomenon of the public...I take it as a premise in this book that psychic space is necessary for a shared imaginary.[164]

> What we describe as physical space is part and product of the pattern of our human actions in mind and body.[165]

Donald's attention to symbolic space results in her critical observation of the "public imaginary" represented in films. Through this, she discovers tensions between the film as "public imaginary" and "images of an ideal of reality favored by the State." Donald believes this conflict in representation resulted in a sort of cultural debate which constantly returns:

> [L]ived experience and the public imaginary are exactly and identically described by the policies of the State and the ideology of the Party. Research into social disorder, whether ostensibly political, criminal, or economic, offers powerful critiques of the notion that State ideology has the same control over the public imaginary of contemporary China as it has maintained over the institutional formations of public life. Cultural and symbolic forms of 'disorder' provide a symptomatic reading of contemporary Chinese consciousness.

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[162] Donald, p. 96
[163] Donald, p. 95
[164] Donald, p. ix
[165] Donald, p. x

The recognition of the contemporary in these texts does not necessarily provoke radical interventions in the spheres of *real politik* or in indications of social unrest. Yet the arguments around the effects of visual texts on the spectator is a question that constantly returns in any debate that links the cultural and the political.[166]

In particular, Donald acknowledges the active participation of audiences which validates "moments of publicness that give symbolic weight to the history, memories, and psychic organization of particular groups of people."[167]

So, when a film problematizes previous, or supposedly current, political, or social mores by an ironically long take—*Yellow Earth*—or through flirtations with Hollywood genres—*Stage Sisters*—there are (at least) three expectations in play. First, the texts suppose that there is a contemporary spectatorship able and ready to enjoy the irony; second, that these spectators are sufficiently intimate with convention and shared histories to appreciate the *difference* on offer; and third, that the act of spectatorship is an act of public communion with connotations for the political imaginary of the *polis*.[168]

She thus concludes that "[f]ilm has the capacity to produce virtual public space. ...the activity of spectatorship can move beyond the cognitive to the political."[169]

In the light of Donald's address of virtual public space, there is more to be said about both films discussed in this chapter. The following discussion will show that protagonists enter public space in different ways, and form virtual alliances with the public. These public spaces direct audiences from an imagined public sphere to social reality.

The tension between what is inscribed by the dominant ideology and what motivates the audiences is visualised in *Crossroads* (this is what Donald has argued as tensions between the film as "public imaginary" and "images of an ideal of reality favored by the State"), through actual representations of the modern printed medium: a montage shows newspapers rolling

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166 Donald, p. 142-3
167 Donald, p. 28
168 Donald, p. 29
169 Donald, p. 142

off machines when Zhao is working. Some of the headlines can be read, having to do with youth suicide, for example, and working and living conditions of female workers. The rolling newspaper here connects the film to its expected audiences, where "an act of public communion" is invited. Unmistakably, youth and woman are singled out as victims of social inequality and oppression, which has actual representations in the film. Zhao's friend Xu is a model of problem youth in real life: he flees the city because he is homesick, and then eventually commits suicide. Zhao's relationship with Miss Yang is also double-sided: Yang is not only his girlfriend, but also the interviewee for the subject of oppressed women workers. These representations signify conflicts between new ideas and social conventions, while questioning the current gender order. Together, these representations raise the question of seeking the rights of equality never granted under old ideologies. So Zhao clearly becomes representative of audiences identifying critical social issues and conflicts. It is no longer the imagined public sphere we were discussing earlier. It is now the public space as established through film representations that is of interest.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, a similar kind of tension between official ideology and interests of the public is visually represented. This is best reflected in a sequence that can be named after the slogan on a banner in the scene: "Three T Company Voluntary Day". This event involves face-to-face consultations between members of the Three T Company and the public. Many thorny problems of daily life are dealt with in rather unexpected ways. For example, Yang Zhong advises a youth who is troubled by sexual urges, saying: "Don't go to bed too early. Not until you are totally worn out. Keep your underpants loose. Buy two metal balls. Play with them when you have nothing to do. Get up early and run 10 to 20 *li* (half kilometre) every day. Don't put photos of film stars up in your room. Once that kind of feeling comes, think about crocodiles." In another scene, Yu Guan suggests how to deal with an annoying

official: "Go to his home. Talk with him sincerely and kindly. Don't take cookies or something like that. That's too worldly and not necessarily useful. Just bring your bedding, as if you are going home. Eat when they eat, sleep when they sleep." Intriguing talk such as this fills this amusing sequence: how to deal with police when you are caught breaching traffic rules, how to handle a wife's overwhelming sexual demands, and so on.

Visually set in a public space, the street, the sequence above represents an alliance between the protagonists and ordinary people (easily identified as the public, including the vast audiences). The symbolic meaning of the public space in Donald's terms is also strong: there is clear intention to invite audiences to join the unconventional discussion of virtually everything. Even the most private matters, like sexual urges, are covered with little sense of shame. Private matters are openly discussed, because they are considered to be natural and legitimate concerns for every human being. This asserts a provocative stance that was relatively new in the 1980s, where audiences are told to enjoy the rights to which they are entitled.

Both sequences from the two films direct attention to social realities on and off the screen, creating "moments of publicness" as Donald has pinpointed. These representations are mostly based on soaring youth subjectivities coupled with a sense of rebellion against authority. As is seen in both films, officials do not have the public interest at heart, which is contrary to mainstream representations at the time. In *Crossroads*, Zhao mentions the word *guanjia* (official) in a speech before taking his job at the newspaper, which does not serve the public. Zhao wants to serve the public and save them from oppression and inequality. In *The Trouble Shooters*, unconventional solutions seriously undermine the authority of the dominant ideology. The best example is Yu Guan's suggestion of how to deal with a difficult official;

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indeed, his advice mocks the cadre's tendency to adhere to unreasonable rules.

All of these examples indicate the political dimension of youth subjectivities, which come together with concerns over human rights. Among the various roles subjectivity plays in human history, one type is of particular importance for forming a civil society. Nick Mansfield addressed individuals as political-legal subjects in terms of political rights and obligations:

> [T]here is the political-legal subject. In various ways, the laws and constitutions that define the limits of our social interaction, and ostensibly embody our most respectable values, understand us as recipients of, and actors within, fixed codes and powers: we are subject of and to the monarch, the State and the law. In theory, in liberal democratic societies at least, this sort of subjectivity demands our honest citizenship and respects our individual rights. Because of this reciprocal obligation, we 'enter into' or at least 'agree to' what Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) first called a 'social contract' which asks certain responsibilities of us, and guarantees us certain freedoms in return.[170]

In retrospect, the subjectivity demonstrated by these youths has the recognisable function of promoting "honest citizenship" and official respect for individual rights. The next part will show more rebellious acts by youths, where the physical public space hosts actions of actual political intent.

B. Parades: Claiming Civil Rights

As the film progresses, viewers see a sharp downturn of fortunes for the protagonists when the youth suddenly hit rock bottom, awakening from their imagined mission of public enlightenment. Direct rebellion against authority is triggered, as well as performed in the film, through their symbolic occupation of one public space: the street. This part examines dramatic representations of defiant youths including a small scale parade: on one occasion, the youth in both films are seen walking in the street full of pride, to make their presence felt.

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[170] Nick Mansfield, p. 4

In Crossroads, Zhao receives an unexpected letter from work while he is sick in bed, being attended by his friend Ah Tang. In part, the letter says: "Due to the over-staffing of the newspaper, we regret to inform you that we cannot keep your position any longer. Here is a little money…" For a moment, Zhao and Ah Tang silently look at each other in disbelief and dismay. Then Zhao begins to murmur something in frustration. Suddenly, he jumps up and starts rolling up his bedding. Ah Tang anxiously shouts, "What are you doing, Lao Zhao?" Zhao continues packing and throws out a few words: "What am I doing?! Going away! What am I doing?!" Ah Tang: "But they [Yang and her friend] are coming…" Zhao: "Coming?! We can't make a living… How can we talk about love…" Ah Tang: "Then where are we going?" Zhao stops and looks at Ah Tang: "Into the world!" They immediately fall about laughing.

In The Trouble Shooters, the image of rebellious youth is presented more consistently. The tension between father and son and between moral educator and reckless youth appears repeatedly. Yu Guan's father berates him for his lack of discipline and goals. There are several confrontations between the moral educator and the three youths. One particular occasion is presented on television, when an educator appears on screen, lecturing about proper values on campus. The threesome suddenly realises that the man on television is mimicking a dialogue they had with him days earlier. He is scolding them as degenerate youths. Only then does the trio see themselves through the eyes of the moral educator, who represents the official ideology. Standing in front of the television, the three youths are like criminals publicly accused in a courtroom. This sudden blow, however, results in even more rebellion. The three stare at the television furiously as Ma Qing snarls, "From that day, I knew he was a bastard!"

Finally, the moment comes when youths takes to the streets.

In *Crossroads*, Zhao and his friend go out into the street right after receiving the news that Zhao has been sacked. Coincidentally, Miss Yang and her friend are on their way to meet Zhao. Instead of a happy reunion upstairs in Zhao's tiny place, all four of them are in the street feeling the pain of joblessness. Furthermore, together they learn the bad news about Xiao Xu. After a letter and a newspaper is exchanged between Zhao and Yang, all of their attention is drawn to the newspaper. A point of view construction reveals a news title: "University graduate jumps into river", along with a photo of Xiao Xu. When the camera focuses back on the youth, their faces are filled with sorrow. They are then shown in a range of low-angle, close-up shots, in which they talk with each other: Zhao: "Xiao Xu is too pitiful." Ah Tang: "We should all act like Da Ger. Xiao Xu was too weak. " Zhao: "We now either live like Xiao Xu or we act like Da Ger." Yang: "Where shall we go?" Yang's friend: "We should keep going. The world won't have too many people because of just four of us." Zhao: "It's not the first time we've lost a job. And it's not unusual to feel hungry. Let's go!" Ah Tang: "Yes! As long as we have courage, just like Da Ger [in earlier developments, it was suggested that Da Ger had participated in national salvation fighting]. We can always carry on." Finally, the four walk in the street toward the camera, shoulder to shoulder. The camera turns and pictures them from a low angle walking away, making them appear strong and resolute. The film's last shot is of them merging into the city scene among the high buildings.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, the street sequence immediately follows a conversation among the three youths, reflecting another similarity with *Crossroads*. Tension mounts as the sequence unfolds. Throwing themselves on the floor, the threesome is in a setting characterised by contrasting lighting effects. With shadows and highlights playing across their bodies,

emotions are running high. Their faces are obscured behind a wooden crosspiece, making their outraged voices the only way we can perceive their vented frustration. Yu: "I want to hit people. I damn well want to." Yang Zhong: "If I didn't remind myself that hurting people will result in jail and medical compensation, especially those old people who would be like to be another father for me [if they are hurt], I would slap them." Ma Qing: "Hang on… Don't we three have enough trouble? " Yu: "I would definitely do that....Don't try to stop me. Otherwise, we'll beat each other!" Ma: "But aren't we just like brothers?" Yang: "Why should brothers hurt each other?" Ma: "Here's an idea. We go out and find fault with other people. If they annoy us, we'll beat them. " Yang: "That's much more reasonable." Yu: "Let's go!!"

With the rock and roll music suddenly rising the threesome walk in the street insolently, pushing aside several reckless youngsters. Shortly afterward, with the yell of a male voice, live rock and roll appears on screen. A man with long curly hair is yelling on stage, wearing a green top over his strong chest. He shakes the microphone stand, jumping from one side to the other. With his performance on the soundtrack, documentary footage of street scenes, similar to that at the start of the film, unfolds: a couple is quarrelling on the street; a peasant is gazing at a giant poster, which contains the huge bare legs of a model; and so on.

Three parallels are noticeable in the two films' sequences described above. First, there is a group discussion among the youth before they parade in the street. Each voices his or her opinions and concerns, and they finally make a collective decision. There is no dominance during the discussions, and their own logic rather than status determines the final outcome.

In terms of filmic representations, there are some unusual perspectives in both cases. In

Crossroads, the camera work is extraordinary compared with any other sequence in the film. Close-up shots of faces and frequent low-angle shots compose a strong representation of presumably marginalised figures. If we remember the bird's eye shot at the beginning of the film, these youths are actually looking down on the entire city landscape. In *The Trouble Shooters*, the lighting effects are extraordinary. Shadows and highlighted spots compose a metaphor of right and wrong, representing the flaring up of a collective desire for dignity and justice.

Second, the way these youths parade in the street is full of rebellion. Based on the decisions they have just made, the youth are determined to break with the past. They no longer hope to reconcile with anything, but want their presence felt. Their subjectivities soar and become a driving force for defiant acts. In *Crossroads*, the four youth march forward shoulder to shoulder, disregarding any obstacles. Considering the background of 1930s China, a collective struggle is suggested through these representations. In *The Trouble Shooters*, the rock and roll music in the opening sequence recurs. This time, the singer is seen on stage, performing his act of rebellion. This also suggests tradition is subverted: in 1980s China, rock and roll challenged the conventional.

Third, in these two sequences, these youth literally return to the public space to claim their rights that have been projected previously in imaginary form. According to the general principles of a civil society, every citizen is entitled to his or her political rights. As Habermas noted:

> [T]he function of the public sphere were clearly spelled out in the law. A set of basic rights concerned the sphere of the public engaged in rational-critical debate (freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly and association, etc.) and the political function of private people in this public sphere (right of petition, equality

of vote, etc.).[171]

In both films, youths parade in the street with rebellious conduct and high aspirations, which they feel deeply. This qualifies as a free expression of opinion. In addition, visually, they are much like political paraders on a small scale. In a metaphorical way, these youth are claiming their rights as modern citizens in the public space. From free discussion to public opinion (their collective resolution to go on); from a critical stance to making their presence felt; and from returning to the public to appeal to authority, the two sequences exemplify a mode of democracy.

5. Male Subjectivities: The Chinese Idealisation of the Public Sphere

As a conclusion, this section return to the notion of the "imagined public sphere" to explore concurrent democratic discussions in1930s and 1980s China. The "public sphere" as an idealised version of democracy has been examined in its historical significance in China. The essence of the two films is indicated as imagining the establishment of a middle ground between the public and authority; that is, the "imagined public sphere" becomes a proactive element for promoting democracy amid Chinese nation building. From the perspective of gender, youthful subjectivities are seen as exclusive male subjectivities, which further demonstrates a masculine China as discussed in previous chapters.

A. Democratic Cultural Enlightenment: Filmic Representations as Cultural Discourse

One remaining issue in this chapter is the terminology of the "imagined public sphere" as opposed to Habermas's bourgeois public sphere. As mentioned, the two film representations

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[171] Habermas noted, "… A second set of basic rights concerned the individual's status as a free human being, grounded in the intimate sphere of the patriarchal conjugal family (personal freedom, inviolability of the home, etc.). The third set of basic rights concerned the transactions of the private owners of property in the sphere of civil society (equality before the law, protection of private property, etc.)" p. 83

discussed so far concern will and imagination rather than the actual social formation of a democratic public sphere.

Both films unfold a series of youthful adventures in modern cities. The image of the city in these two films complicates contemporary understandings of a modern city in 1930s and 1980s China. The negative impacts of commercialisation are presented clearly in the opening sequences, but these are overshadowed in the two films by images of the positivity of youthful subjectivities. In the urban sphere, where the spirit of free exchange is prevalent, a rising awareness of autonomy is among the various trends of thought. In particular, youth in both films typify this phenomenon. They themselves are "private people" who value individuality and privacy. Yet, they are also absorbed in temporary social commitments, which involve an imaginary democratic sphere similar to Habermas's bourgeois public sphere.

In *Crossroads*, Zhao as a modern youth finds a job in a modern-style press, where he identifies numerous social issues and strives to encourage public discussion. From the outset of his commitment, he has an imagined "public" in mind. Later, after he loses his job, Zhao's critical stance is shown as he walks in the streets with his friends, making their rebellious presence felt. In *The Trouble Shooters*, Yu and his friends run a private business that specialises in resolving thorny issues for the public, often going against the pressure of the dominant ideology. Evidently, in both films, youth are in the middle, between two parties. One party is the public, which in *Crossroads* is a concept raised by one of Zhao's friends, and in *The Trouble Shooters* is shown by people and voices representing the public. The other party is authority, which in *Crossroads* remains unseen, but clearly pressures Zhao and his friends. In *The Trouble Shooters* some figures directly voice official opinion, such as Yu's father and the moral educator.

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This middle ground occupied by youthful subjectivities is the essence of the two films, but

appears fictional and imagined. Although the protagonists in both films work only

temporarily at their dream jobs, they attempt to serve ideals of justice based on equality and

reason. These effects constitute an ideal place to resolve social issues in ways other than

official ways. This is exactly the function of a public sphere, as Habermas asserted: "The

constitutional state as a bourgeois state established the public sphere in the political realm as

an organ of the state so as to ensure institutionally the connection between law and public

opinion."[172]

Ultimately, the public sphere, or a similar kind of democratic space, is imagined as ideal in

both films. Considering these two films amidst their respective historical backgrounds, the

imagined public sphere had an actual social reality. According to Leo Ou-fan Lee, nationhood

and the public sphere cannot be viewed separately by mid-century China:

> In my view this was precisely what constituted the intellectual problematic for China at
> the turn of the century, when the intellectuals and writers sought to imagine a new
> community (*chun*) of the nation (*minzu* or *guojia* but not yet *minzuguojia*) as they tried
> to define a new reading public. They attempted to draw the broad contours of a new
> vision of China and disseminate such a vision to their audience, the newly emergent
> public consisting largely of newspaper and journal readers and students in the new
> schools and colleges. But such a vision remained a vision—an imagined, often visually
> based evocation of a Chinese 'new world'—not a cogent intellectual discourse or
> political system. In other words, this visionary imagination preceded the efforts of
> nation-building and institutionalization. [173]

"A new community" mentioned by Leo Ou-fan Lee was more of a broad imagining of a

modern sphere than any specific cultural or political statement. It connected Chinese

nationalism or nationhood with new ideas such as democracy, but remained largely undefined.

The emerging reading public, as a crucial part of Habermas's public sphere, strove to

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[172] Jürgen Habermas, p. 81
[173] Leo Ou-fan Lee, p. 46

accommodate a public forum for free discussions within the framework of Chinese national salvation. Their enthusiasm bubbled over into an imagining of a modern and democratic nation, but waned in clarifying these ideas on an institutional level. In *Crossroads*, Zhao is unaware of what he really wants to do, as he says to Xiao Xu one day, but intuitively he knows that he should speak for the public. This testifies to the imagined public sphere in the film.

Other reasons underlie the obscurity of the public sphere in *Crossroads*. Democracy was an imported concept given great significance in early twentieth-century China. Amid the overwhelming national crisis of the 1930s, nevertheless, the concept was debated for its feasibility in China. As Zhao Suisheng notes:

> A discussion on whether China needed a democracy or a dictatorship was thus provoked in the 1930s. This debate illuminated the disillusionment of those Chinese intellectuals with democracy.
>
> The criticisms of democracy by Chinese intellectuals were cast mostly from a utilitarian point of view. Under the slogan 'rich nation, strong army' (*fuguo qiangbing*), what these people sought was an effective government. They feared that the inauguration of democratic rule at that time would weaken the nation and worsen the condition of instability. From this perspective, these Chinese intellectuals demanded an enlightened despotism.[174]

The conflicts between demanding democracy with the desire for a strong nation are mirrored in the ending of *Crossroads*. As mentioned, four youths stride in the street, attempting to claim their rights of demonstration. Meanwhile, however, they resolve to follow Da Ger, who participated in national salvation, and to disregard personal interests altogether. Ultimately, the revolution to liberate the nation is deemed the reality, while their pursuit of a democratic sphere for the public is being imagined.

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[174] Zhao Suisheng, "A Tragedy of History: China's Search for Democracy in the Twentieth Century" in Zhao Suisheng, ed., *China and Democracy: The Prospect for a Democratic China,* New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 41

In the 1980s, reform in China was high on the agenda, and the government made efforts to

purposefully change government functions:

> In the late 1980s, the intellectual circles' discussion of democracy resulted in a redefinition of the concept of society and its relationship with the state. The growing importance given to society was directly connected with the shift of focus from class struggle to contradictions among the people; the change of the people from a social class concept to a largely all-inclusive concept almost identical to society; and the change of the state's functional focus from dictatorship to the managing of public affairs.[175]

Meanwhile, public spaces originated from intellectual circles in different forms. As Gu Xin

argued, four types of non-governmental organisations were established in the 1980s,

assuming a middle ground between the state and the public:

> To do that, four ideal-typical patterns in terms of the roles of either state or society, or both, in the formation of intellectual public spaces and in terms of the structuring of their relations with the state can be presented here: (1) State-generated and establishment. In this pattern, intellectual-power elite within the state establish some official or semi-official institutions, and attempt to operate them as a transmission belt, serving the party-state. (2) Society-originated and establishment. By this model, non-governmental intellectual activists form their own organizations in society, and later they enter into the establishment, making their own organizations as a part of the establishment. (3) Autonomous from the state. In this type, non-governmental intellectuals have their own organizations in society, but later they, intentionally or unintentionally, do not enter into the establishment and only maintain a lukewarm relationship with the party-state. Failing to be integrated with the establishment, the organizations they establish seem to be, to a considerable extent, independent of or autonomous from the party-state. (4) Confrontational with the state. This pattern characterizes the public space for dissident intellectuals, who keep a position of confrontation with, or opposition to, the party-state.[176]

On the whole, however, these organisations were fragmented and exerted limited influence to

1980s China:

> The confrontation of Chinese intellectuals with the party-state was neither a coherent nor a mainstream phenomenon. The Chinese intellectual life was mainly characterized as the cautious and careful development of their own independence within the plurally channeled and frequently changing institutions and organizations. The

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[175] Ding Yijiang, "The Conceptual Evolution of Democracy in Intellectual Circles' Rethinking of State and Society" in Zhao, Suisheng, p.111

[176] Gu Xin, "Plural Institutionalism and the Emergence of Intellectual Public Spaces in Contemporary China: Four relational Patterns and Four Organizational Forms" *Journal of Contemporary China,* Volume 7, Issue 18, July 1998, p. 276

institutionalization of intellectual public spaces was developed in a moderate manner.[177]

In *The Trouble Shooters*, the demand for democracy is shown when the youth break away from excessive intervention from above. The main force promoting the public sphere, however, is not composed of intellectuals as might be expected, but instead by entrepreneurs such as Yu Guan. This arrangement carries at least two implications. On the one hand, it reflected the growth of small enterprises in the 1980s, which stepped up their demand for administrative autonomy. On the other hand, this arrangement reflected a type of disbelief in an intellectually centered public sphere. In retrospect, intellectuals are constantly mocked in the film, such as the second-rate writer, the hypocritical doctor, and others. Yu Guan and his friends, the main advocates of a public sphere, are reluctant to be educated by convention. Ultimately, this arrangement takes a stance against the tradition of elite cultural enlightenment in China, revealing the youth's version of the public sphere that is truly revolutionary, yet it remains imagined, as we see in the controversial fashion show.

Finally, the "imagined public sphere" seen in both films is still a reflection of real democratic demand, an actual political stance in 1930s and 1980s China, despite the lack of an institutionalised public sphere in Habermas' terms. As we have discussed earlier, this "imagined public sphere" succeeds in forging a virtual public space, where audiences share "moments of publicness" to be informed of their civil rights.

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B. Male Subjectivities: The Chinese Idealisation of the Public Sphere

In sum, along with asserting subjectivities in both films, an imagined public sphere is delineated. Imagined social enlightenment is depicted to inspire the forming public opinion.

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[177] Gu Xin, p. 276

This feature has been discussed in terms of Habermas's description of the stages in the rise of the bourgeois public sphere. Nevertheless, Habermas's theory of the bourgeois public sphere is not without limitations. One major challenge concerns the limited form of the bourgeois public sphere. As mentioned, private people (mainly the bourgeoisie), as opposed to the "real public," represented the public sphere from the onset of its formation. This makes questionable an authentic public sphere that is accessible to all.

Furthermore, when gender issues are considered, some feminist critics have found the concept of a public sphere to be masculinist. According to Nancy Fraser, "We can no longer assume that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere was simply an unrealized utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule."[178] Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere is in line with the hegemonic gender order, which is fundamentally partial. This argument cannot be taken into full account for these two films, but it resonates with the idea of a masculinised nation mentioned in Chapter One. In other words, the imagined Chinese public sphere does bear the imprint of strong male subjectivities.

In both films, the imagined public sphere is delimited largely by male subjectivities. The male protagonists enjoy the privilege of taking control, and are shown constructing an imagined public sphere. The female characters, to an extent, cater to the male subjectivities. In *Crossroads*, the relationship between Zhao and Miss Yang is complicated from a gender perspective. Yang is an independent, modern woman. She has a job, lives on her own, and she even teases her male neighbor. She would rather leave Zhao and stay independent after losing her job. These qualities give her "new woman" status in the 1930s context. On the other hand,

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[178] Nancy Fraser, p. 116

Yang many times plays the role of female victim. As an interviewee for Zhao's report, Yang is a representative of suffering female workers. In the park scene when Zhao interviews Yang, which can be viewed as a substitute date between the pair, Yang essentially shows the vulnerable side of her femininity. Also noticeable is the episode when Yang is harassed by a street urchin and is rescued by Zhao and his friend.

In *The Trouble Shooters*, at least two types of women are recognisable. One is Yu's girlfriend, who basically takes control in her relationships. She is a career woman and capable of giving Yu advice. She even tries to transform Yu into the type of man she wants. The other female type is the client named Liu Meiping, who falls victim to a hypocrite, a doctor who abandons her after premarital sex. During her dealings with members of the Three T Company, she demonstrates exaggerated admiration for Yang Zhong, whom she thinks is full of wisdom. This emphasises her inherent weakness.

In both cases, the assertive male subjectivity is reinforced by female inadequacy. In spite of the increasing visibility of the "new woman", which significantly undermines the symbolic order of male hegemony, male subjectivity is still a major aspiration behind constructing the ideal democratic space. To exemplify the power of male subjectivity, however, it is crucial to showcase adequate male subjects. In both cases, the imagined public sphere collapses for various reasons, such that an alternative must be found to secure male mastery. The weak side of femininity shown in these two films facilitates this need. As Kaja Silverman noted:

> '[E]xemplary' male subjectivity cannot be thought apart from ideology, not only because ideology holds out the mirror within which that subjectivity is constructed, but because the later depends upon a kind of collective make-believe in the commensurability of penis and phallus. … our 'dominant function' or ideological 'reality' solicits our faith above all else in the unity of the family, and the adequacy of the male subject.[179]

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[179] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 15-16

In this regard, the power of the male subject is inscribed in contemporary ideology. In both cases, male mastery registers on two levels. First, the imagined public sphere represents the call for a democratic sphere in China, which is a part of nation-building effort. Second, the renewed male subjectivity is seen when configuring such a sphere, which complicates the situation of the Chinese gender revolution across fifty years.

Leaving these gender issues aside, both films are admirable efforts in raising the hope for democracy amid the nation-building process. Some crucial components of Habermas's concept of the public sphere are thus presented without much theoretical deliberation. A borrowed sentence may designate the significance: these films "provide the training ground for what were to become a future society's norms of political equality."[180] In contrast to this macho public sphere, female subjectivities contrasting with this male subjectivity will be discussed in Chapter Four, taking the form of a female masculinity that contests the hegemonic gender consciousness.

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[180] Craig J. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, p. 424

Chapter Four

Women's Revenge:

Male Violence vs Female Masculinity

The New Woman (1935) and *The Price of Madness* (1988)

In the previous chapter, the imagined version of the Chinese public sphere is characterised by prevailing male subjectivities, featuring men exhibiting cultural enlightenment. As a consequent account of the democratic sphere, this chapter addresses the issue of female masculinity in both 1930s and 1980s China. The chapter involves heated cultural debates on "modern women" centered on a struggle to identify female subjectivity. We reexamine basic social norms such as gender relations from a feminist perspective. The chapter acknowledges democratic value that is no longer attached to the imaginative world created by men, but is rather endorsed by the call for gender equality, fighting against any new forms of male dominance.

This chapter starts with a continued account of the alleged masculine nature of the public sphere, linking the "New Woman" phenomena reflected in *The New Woman* and *The Price of Madness*. Second, drawing on deliberate representations of male spectatorship, the chapter discusses a deeper consciousness of male dominance, relating political readings of contemporary publications highlighted by both films. Resistance against male dominance is tested through reflections on controversial gender issues seen in these two films: a destruction of a "new woman" fantasy represented in *The New Woman* and a publicly contested rape case in *The Price of Madness*. Further, marriage is presented as naturalised male domination in both cases. Third, for the first time in this thesis, the chapter addresses masculinity seen from

a women's perspective. The male body becomes a symbol of sexual domination in the two films, embodied by projections of desexualised men who are desired by women. Fourth, drawing on Lacan's mirror stage, this chapter discusses female subjectivity through similar mirror sequences seen in both films. The issue of female masculinity is introduced. Finally, this chapter interprets failed male-rescue seen by both male directors as further promoting gender equality. Representations of revolutionary women, either visually or metaphorically, refer to intense debates on gender and democracy in the 1930s and 1980s.

1. The Public Sphere as Gendered: The Other Voice

This part briefly discusses Chinese modern gender discourses since the early twentieth century, identifying the "modern woman" as a debatable issue amongst male-centred public spheres in the nation. Two selected films will be analysed according to their unique feminine perspectives, responding to a surge of gender-related awareness in 1930s and 1980s China.

A. "New Woman" Discourses: The Gender Issue

According to R. W. Connell's interpretations of hegemonic masculinity, the legitimacy of patriarchy is a result of cultural practice:

> The concept of 'hegemony', deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.[181]

The cultural practice of hegemonic masculinity can be extended to common locations like work spaces and even streets, constituting a network of gender politics. According to Carole

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[181] R. W. Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity" in Whitehead, Stephen, Barrett, Frank J., ed., *The Masculinities Reader*, Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 38-39

Pateman, civil society is not really a "universal realm" as political theorists have argued. "There is silence about the part of the story which reveals that the social contract is a fraternal pact that constitutes civil society as a patriarchal or masculine order."[182] In the case of China, a long history of male domination results from a system which lasted for thousands of years. Traditional gender relations have faced major challenges since the early twentieth century, when the school of enlightenment arrived in China. In the first instance, women were given much more credit for their roles in nurturing the next generation. Amid the speculation that a better qualified mother means a greater global competitive advantage for the nation, women's education was promoted. Educational periodicals like *Funü Zazhi* (Woman's Magazine) began to address issues like women's health as well as mental development. Also, as mentioned in Chapter One, articles like "*Xing de xisheng yu jiefang*" (The sacrifice and liberation of sex) brought gender issues into the public spotlight.

In the 1930s, images of a modern woman became much more evident, thanks to flourishing modern magazines. Women in trendy fashions appeared in display advertisements, conveying the message of a modern lifestyle. Female movie stars were also part of the urban scene. However, for many the idea of the new woman was viewed with suspicion, heavily debated in various cultural spheres. For example, some pointed to the so-called disadvantages of women receiving higher education, claiming that some modern women were no longer faithfully carrying out family duties. There were also personal tragedies concerning the enormous pressure on the independent new woman. The film *The New Woman* referred specifically to this issue. First, the film reflected the real-life experience of a writer and actress named Ai Xia. Second, the lead actress Ruan Lingyu committed suicide shortly after the release of the film. Both were criticised for their way of life and used suicide as the

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[182] Carole Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract" in Rachel Adams and David Savran, eds., *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002, p.119

ultimate way of protesting against discrimination and gossip.

After 1949, even though the old patriarchal system had officially collapsed, academic

discourses contributed less than ever to women's rights from a gender perspective. According

to Harriet Evans, amid tightened control over social discourses, the image of the controversial

new woman disappeared in the crowd:

> The pre-Cultural Revolution discourse on sexuality brought to the official vision of ideologically correct behaviour a code of normative sexual and gender expectations legitimized by so-called scientific authority.[183]

> The social, moral and sexual requirements of the new Marriage Law … established the immediate context for the 1950s discourse of sexuality. … However, the law was premised on a naturalized and hierarchical view of gender relations that, by definition, limited the extent of the challenge that women could launch against the patriarchal system.[184]

In the 1980s, according to Evans, a surge of sex-related awareness accompanied rapid social

change. And somehow they were linked with issues reiterated from the 1930s:

> The entry of the commercial market into the production of recent discussions has imposed its own agenda on representations of sexuality. A rhetoric of 'privatization' has replaced the former insistence on the social significance of 'affairs of the heart'. Although still produced under official or semi-official auspices, representations of sexuality no longer subscribe to a unitary set of codes; sex has become an issue of debate and contestation, responsive to consumer interests and defying official attempts to regulate and control. Whether in advertising, biographical, fictional or documentary accounts, the gendered positions associated with being a woman do not seem to fit into any neat category, let alone one that is rooted in supposedly scientific arguments about sexual harmony and balance. [185]

Thanks to renewed commercial interests and relaxed control over sexual discourse, the

female body is now readily visible in various media, just as it was in some modern

publications in the 1930s.

In both the 1930s and 1980s, the public sphere as a gendered social space received much

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[183] Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949*, Continuum: New York, 1997, p. 3
[184] Harriet Evans, p. 6
[185] Harriet Evans, p. 9

attention, owing to a cultural surge of sexual awareness. In some ways, this awareness conflicted with the dominant form of gender discourse. Nevertheless, such Chinese feminist awareness never matured enough to threaten the dominant view. As discussed in the last chapter, the imagined democratic sphere did include more independent women, but male subjectivity still overwhelmed female voices. In this chapter, the two selected films both present a woman's perspective, but they each appear to take a radical and irrational feminist stance. In addition, both directors are men, which renders the alleged female subjectivity less authentic.

Ultimately, the issue of gender inequality is prevalent in the two decades. Both film texts are based on the premise of harmful hegemonic masculinity, which imposes sexual violence on women. Gender politics is thus put in perspective: to understand the whole complex of social values as gendered, both private and public spheres accommodate naturalised male domination over women. On these bases, a new version of masculinity is constructed—utterly different from the male archetypes discussed previously in this thesis. Female subjectivity, on the other hand, constructed impressive representations in its quest for equality and autonomy. It even led the way to a version of female masculinity, as we shall see.

B. *The New Woman* and *The Price of Madness*: Imitating Women's Perspective

The two films to be examined are *The New Woman* (*Xin nüxing*), directed by Cai Chusheng in 1935, and *The Price of Madness* (*Fengkuang de daijia*), directed by Zhou Xiaowen in 1988. *The New Woman* is centered on a female protagonist, Wei Ming, who runs away from her hometown after a failed, free-choice marriage. To experiment with her new identity as an independent modern woman, Wei becomes a music teacher and a writer in Shanghai. As a single career woman, however, Wei constantly encounters sexual harassment. Mr. Wang is the

most notorious example. As a shareholder in the private school Wei works for, Wang takes every opportunity to attempt to seduce Wei. After being rejected many times, he finally drives Wei out of the school. Pressured by financial difficulty, and needing to send her dying daughter to the hospital, Wei is compelled to work for a brothel. To her surprise, her client turns out to be Wang. Angry and humiliated, Wei flees the scene. She tries to commit suicide after her daughter dies. After being rescued and comforted by friends, Wei tries to live and fight, but she is just too weak to survive.

The Price of Madness is centered on two sisters who live on their own. The younger sister Lanlan, who is still in her early teens, is raped one night on her way home. The elder sister Qingqing, who works as a midwife in a hospital, is devastated by the crime. She is determined to avenge Lanlan, despite the ongoing police inquiry. Two men help Qingqing out of sympathy. One is Qingqing's boyfriend Li Changwei, who is the owner of a bookstore. The other man is a senior police officer who retires shortly after the rape case. Qingqing's determined search for the criminal proves fruitless, as does the police investigation. On the day the criminal and his brother (who also live together on their own) are about to flee town, the retired police officer cracks the case just in time. Before the police can arrest the suspect, Qingqing confronts him and initiates a furious fight. Her boyfriend is fatally injured, and she becomes a captive. Finally, the retired policeman captures the suspect in a tower, ignoring orders as well as the rules. Qingqing, however, cannot contain herself and kicks the suspect off the building to his death.

One common feature of both films is the dominant female focus, in contrast with many other Chinese films from the same periods. The story, the motivation and even the filmic narrative are all from a woman's perspective. Basically, both films feature a similar structure: a woman

trying to survive in the city, on a journey gone terribly wrong owing to vicious male desire. The female protagonists receive help from respectable men. But even the sympathetic men cannot save the protagonist from a tragic ending. This basic structure alone reverses many narrative traditions in male-dominated film, rendering the two films comparable in terms of their unique gender perspective.

As discussed in previous chapters, there is considerable idealism involved in defining the pattern of masculinity as serving the nation. No matter what is imagined concerning a powerful Chinese race or a democratic public sphere, men have a monopoly on the drive and power. Women do serve as important allies, which shows a certain impact of feminist thought in mainstream films. Ultimately, however, masculinity and machismo override every challenge in the various spheres represented. In this chapter, on the other hand, the male body is first defined by physical violence toward the female, and negativity is paired with male pride. In both *The New Woman* and *The Price of Madness*, either a failed seduction or a rape is the root cause of every development of the narrative, a fact that gains profound symbolism as the stories unfold. Thus the whole social sphere is gendered so that women are constantly being exploited by men. Just as Wei in *The New Woman* is forced to face Wang as her sexual client even while she fights tooth and nail against his sexual harassment, so too in *The Price of Madness*, the innocent teenage girl Lanlan becomes a victim of brutal male desire.

This new perspective brings to light the enormous gender-specific tension in the changing social climate of 1930s and 1980s China. It also indicates exactly where a new female subjectivity stands. If the notion of "public" in the previous chapter signals a democratic message that everyone is born equal, the strong female subjectivity in these films also carries a message of gender equality. As will be seen in the following discussion, both films show

their challenge to male-dominated society from the very start.

2. Refusal to Marry: The Politics of Gender Relations

This part discusses the critical stance toward the patriarchal gender order that is adopted by both films. It first addresses male voyeurism, which is presented in a sarcastic manner and extends to vicious patriarchal spectatorship in modern publications. It then ponders the consequences of women's refusal to marry. Both female protagonists dismiss marriage as an enforcement of male dominance.

A. The Female Body in the Public Eye: Patriarchal Spectatorship

Laura Mulvey's pioneering argument concerning the male gaze has been somewhat suppressed in recent gender debates, but her main point remains compelling on a rational level.[186] It informs a framework of dominating patriarchal consciousness in film representations. In the field of Chinese film studies, there have been considerable efforts made to endorse the presence of the 'male gaze' in Mulvey's terms. Apart from the prevailing patriarchal consciousness, attention has been drawn to a deeper cultural awareness in the unique Chinese context. For example, scholarship has regarded a sort of internalised otherness in some representations of Chinese women:

> Unlike contemporary women writers who adapted gender narrative as a means of national resistance and of maintaining the autonomy of Chinese culture, Fifth Generation filmmakers chose a kind of cultural surrender and a self imposed "internal exile" in their own land. They internalized the threatening perspective of the Western Other, and from this alien perspective objectified the Chinese national experience and the lessons learned from history.[187]

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[186] "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness." in Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in Constance Penley, ed., *Feminism and Film Theory*, New York: Routledge; London: BFI, 1988, p. 62

[187] Dai Jinhua, 1995, p. 268-9

In some other cases, the issue of female subjectivity has been raised and has been noted as being full of complexity. This will be discussed in the later parts of this thesis.

Here, however, for these two films, what is primarily worth stressing is that the deliberate display of the female body is intercut representations of a repellent male gaze, which highlights the inferior position of the female body and automatically compels the audiences to take a critical stance.

The opening scene of *The Price of Madness* conveys a precise message. The scene is spotlighted in a shining, delicately coloured beam, as the camera tilts down from the high narrow window of a public bath. Dreamy music gently unfolds while the uplifted limbs of a young girl are gradually presented. Laughter is shared by two young girls, the elder sister caressingly bathing her little sister. In a range of middle shots for around two minutes, the two girls are happily bathing and teasing each other, their naked bodies gleaming in misty pink air. In the midst of this scene, the younger girl becomes a grown-up: she cries at her first menstruation. Immediately following these shots, however, a young male (the eventual rapist) is seen in a close-up shot from a totally different space. With a stoney expression on his face, he is holding a telescope to his eyes, watching.

The above sequences present the adolescent girl in her natural youth and innocence, contrasted by the young male full of aggressive instincts. Edited together, they reconstruct the story of original sin. If the poetic presence of female bodies marks a space similar to paradise, the eyes behind the telescope are coded with danger and desire. It constitutes a metaphor for voyeurism on two fronts. On the one hand, the male viewer, who is not actually watching the bathhouse, has the purpose and potential of sabotaging female innocence. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of bathhouse and telescope mocks a world catering to male desire. It

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confirms the women's position as objects, a position which renders them liable to be threatened and undermined at any moment.

In comparison, similarly-themed sequences in *The New Woman* are much more acute. They replicate the classic male gaze as defined by Laura Mulvey. A shot reverse-shot is performed early on in the film, showing Mr. Wang peeking lecherously at Wei's calves. Throughout the entire film, Wei's photos are subjected to the male gaze on numerous occasions. Her book is accepted for publication only after her photos have been looked at appreciatively. In the final stage of the film, one of Wei's photos is torn up by Mr. Wang, who tramples on rose petals. Yet again, the image of the new woman is endangered by malicious male desires.

Patriarchal spectatorship is not limited to male desire in both films. It also involves modern print culture, in which this vicious gaze expands. In *The Price of Madness*, the rapist is a fan of pornographic magazines. The market for magazines of this kind is revealed by a lengthy tracking shot: as Qingqing strolls to her boyfriend's book store, she encounters a series of billboards featuring erotic paintings of women's bodies, as well as provocative slogans like "Take off your gauzy skirt". As for *The New Woman*, newspapers intrude into the private life of Wei Ming. In one sequence, a journalist is lucky enough to be able to report on location about Wei's suicide. In a rapid series of subsequent shots, newsboys are filled with excitement announcing the breaking news: "Female writer Wei Ming commits suicide!" Most devastatingly, the dying Wei Ming reads in bed a report about her own suicide.

All these scenes symbolise how male voyeurism is fed and extended by modern media. Notwithstanding our use of the word "modern" here, the publications represented in both films are saturated with old-school, patriarchal consciousness: the female body is exploited

by pornography to satisfy male desires; the idea of a female writer as an iconic modern woman becomes a sensationlist story to gossip about. From a feminist perspective, these representations inform the public sphere as a gendered and political space in which women are robbed of any respect and still treated as objects for men's pleasure.

Notably, modern publications as described in this chapter play a dramatically different role compared with the newspapers in *Crossroads*. The media in these two films pointedly question the public sphere imagined in Chapter Three. As an indication of the mounting tension, Qingqing destroys a stall selling popular magazines. This act brings the socially defined power relationship into focus, foreshadowing the accelerating conflicts between man and woman. A war is looming in terms of gender politics.

B. Power Relations: The Symbolism of Rape

The outbreak of war between man and woman is directly triggered by the male torment imposed on the female body. As mentioned earlier, these two films are centred either on an actual rape or an intended rape, and in both cases the female body is visually assaulted. In both films, rape is represented more as mental rather than physical trauma.

In *The Price of Madness*, the teenage girl Lanlan's suffering is intertwined with her sister's experience of viewing it. The mental pain Qingqing endures outweighs the physical pain Lanlan receives. In a sequence following Lanlan's rape, Lanlan's scream leads to a close-up shot of her lying in pain on an examination table, breathing rapidly and shaking her head. The camera then switches to Qingqing, whose resentful expression is barely recognisable in the murky air. Following this, a reframe from the side brings us the whole picture: Lanlan is being examined by a couple of busy hands, while Qingqing is left to watch in anguish,

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holding one of Lanlan's hands. Finally, Qingqing is seen sitting beside Lanlan in a standard front shot, almost unable to restrain her fury.

The sequence starts with Lanlan's suffering, but ends with Qingqing's rage. The focus of representation shifts from Lanlan to Qingqing, from pain to anger: as a victim of violence, Lanlan barely comprehends her situation except for the unbearable pain. As the witness of the crime, and also a modern woman with dignity, Qingqing is not only outraged but also humiliated by the senseless rape.

This situation of collective trauma of the two sisters is very similar to a sequence in the film *The New Woman*. When Wei is dressed as a procuress, her sister is filmed several times: a middle shot shows her looking helplessly at Wei through the glass of a closed door; a close-up shot of her face wet with tears, and a standard shot showing her painfully throwing herself against the wall.

In both *The Price of Madness* and *The New Woman*, rape is full of symbolic connotations. The 1980s film is not limited by realistic representations of the suffering victim, but rather points to wider gender implications. At the beginning of the film, a woman's face and legs are seen covered in sweat and blood during her delivery of a baby, and the audience hears agonised screams. On another occasion (actually a clip from another film), a woman screams dramatically while she is naked in the bath, the shadow of danger showing in her eyes. These sequences are not logically connected, but a common theme runs throughout: women's fear and suffering are predetermined since man's sexual aggression is everywhere. In short, the rape case is only a symbol of man's sexual violence over woman—whether other instances, such as women's suffering in giving birth, are taken for granted or not.

In *The New Woman*, Wei is not an actual victim of a rape case, but her position as a victim of sexual violence is shown in at least two aspects. First, the entire film is centred on Mr Wang plotting to get her in bed. Second, Wei is trapped by the brothel deal in which Mr. Wang becomes her client. Hence, Wei's victim status is valid throughout the entire film. The idea of Wei being hopelessly trapped by vicious male desire outweighs any actual physical abuse. In this way, Wei's suffering is symbolic of gender inequality and represents the collective trauma of all women.

Both films also bluntly accuse the traditional form of marriage of oppressing women. In *The Price of Madness*, Qingqing's phobia regarding a committed relationship is characterised by her talk with colleagues: marriage only makes sexual violence more convenient. In *The New Woman*, Wei Ming's unusually radical attitude toward marriage is reflected in a metaphorical dance scene. The sequence shifts quickly between a dancing couple and Wei Ming as the absorbed viewer. It is a merry dance that turns ugly when the man pushes the woman to the floor, cruelly whipping her. Soon after, the female dancer changes into a stripped dress, with her feet chained as if she were a prisoner. As the climax of the sequence, the female dancer falls on the floor in a high angle shot, looking up miserably. Immediately, however, it is Wei who is in the dancer's dress, her horrified face highlighted in a close-up shot.

The above sequence clearly represents Wei's view of a woman's inferior position in marriage. Physically abused and enslaved by her lawful husband, she is imprisoned in wedlock. This is exactly what Wei Ming foresees and fears. Shortly after the dance sequence, Wei scoffs at Mr. Wang's proposal of marriage: "I've heard enough of this! Marriage! What could marriage offer me? 'A partner for life? ' It's a slave for life!" Interestingly, Wei's refusal to marry

persists even after her financial situation deteriorates and her daughter is dying of pneumonia. Mr. Wang, who is actually the force behind Wei's predicament, comes to see Wei yet again with a diamond ring to propose. Obsessed by the thought of losing her daughter, Wei grabs the ring anxiously and asks Wang how much it is worth. Even then, after painful consideration, Wei still rejects him: "I will never get married. I can't be a slave for life! Not only am I not in the mood for love now, but I will never love a man like you!"

The female protagonists in both films recognise marriage (or love) as a convenient excuse for men to dominate women. And sex, with the full implication of male intrusion, predetermines women's inferior position. In *The New Woman*, Wei's refusal of marriage induces her to accept the brothel arrangement. Miserably she remarks: "Fine! Let me be a slave for just one night!" Wei Ming is equating marriage and sexual abuse as the same thing. Qingqing in the *The Price of Madness* adopts the same approach: "Wu Yujuan [playing Qingqing] avoids and refuses Xie Yuan's [playing Li Changwei] love. Due to simplicity and stubbornness, she thinks that Xie Yuan and Chang Rong [playing the rapist] are the same kind."[188] Both female protagonists are to some extent declaring a battle between men and women. They defend their autonomy over their bodies, as well as their quest to become free spirits.

It is not surprising, therefore, that both films feature a spirited struggle against all men. In *The New Woman*, the dance scene mentioned above ends in a dramatic way: just like a miracle, the female dancer finally stands up, getting rid of the chains on her hands and feet. Proudly and joyfully, she marches forward. In *The Price of Madness*, Qingqing decides to photograph every single male driver she can find, because the suspect drove a car from the crime scene. This makes her the enemy of a huge group of males. She is caught once by a

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[188] Chai Xiaofeng, *Zhou Xiaowen: Xiaowen ye fengkuang* (Zhou Xiaowen: Xiaowen is also Mad), Changsha: *Hunan Wenyi Chubanshe* (Hunan Literary Publishing House), 1996.p. 311

group of furious male drivers. Even though these representations are somewhat extreme, they convey an invincible message here: women are no longer passive victims of male domination; they are now angry and ready to fight back.

3. Desexualising Masculinity: The Man Women Want

This section contemplates two contrasting male types shown in both films responding to women's struggle. The first type is the male villain displaying sexual aggression towards women, typically possessing greedy eyes or a robust body. The second type is a skinny and restrained man, tending to hold democratic values. This type removes the core role of male strength and sexual aggression from masculine ideals, reflecting a female version of a desexualised good man.

A. The Politics of Male Bodies: Desexualising Masculinity

As a common feature of both films, the male body is no longer a touchstone for the new ideology of masculinity as seen in Chapter One. Instead, the overall meaning of male bodies represents vicious male power. In both films, the villain possesses either muscles or accentuated sexuality, while the desirable masculinity implied by the narrative is non-sexual.

The villains in both films are sexually aggressive. In *The New Woman*, the lechery of Mr. Wang and many other males is constantly highlighted. Not only is there Mr. Wang's consistent sexual harassment of Wei, but a male journalist is seen taking advantage of Wei's financial difficulty. His grating male narcissism is emphasised for maximum effect when he looks at himself in the mirror and kisses Wei immediately afterwards. The boss of a publishing house is seen in a close-up shot when he is gazing at Wei's photo. All these males have greedy eyes, and they collectively define a stereotype of what is most detested by

women—the male gaze.

In *The Price of Madness*, the rapist is not necessarily a stereotypical villain. His youthful male energy and his reckless impulses are not always connected to the dark side. Rather, his body is flattered by a range of shots when he is doing exercises. In the first shot he is doing chin-ups, with the muscles in his shoulders and arms popping out and his legs stretching high above the camera. The second shot lingers over his muscular shoulders, filmed from the back. In the third shot, he performs a sit-up breathing heavily and raising his upper body closely toward the camera. In the fourth shot, he is seen from the side of his bed, his powerful arms rapidly lifting barbells. In the fifth shot, his arms are lifting a pair of dumbbells alternately.

The young man's buoyant energy is combined with a rather simple mind. After committing the crime, he is put in home detention by his elder brother. A particular sequence best indicates what is in his mind: the young male is seen in bed with his legs stretching to the wall, his mouth agap in a scream. He clasps his head, pushes away his brother and continues to scream: "I am dying of pain! I am going to explode! My head has already exploded! …" Then he rolls off the bed and crawls on the floor, yelling again loudly. Turning away from his brother again, he finally reaches the door, pulling it open forcefully and breathing eagerly: "Let me breathe, let me…" Again he is detained and forced to sit against the door, so that his brother can calm him down. After this dramatic sequence, however, a long shot leads to a peaceful city night, and then turns back to the criminal, who is finally allowed onto the balcony. As the camera moves closer to him, the criminal suddenly asks: "Brother, how good it would be if there were no distinctions between men and women... How great if men could fly……"

These scenes delineate an ordinary young man tormented by his own desires. The muscular male body here is hardly a source of power and inspiration, as mentioned in Chapter One. Instead, it is dangerous, senseless and even blind. As mentioned earlier, the young man is fascinated with pornographic magazines, which feed his sexual obsession. The male body represented here is accentuated by its sexual aggression against women.

Both films portray male desire as being a means to dominate women. In *The New Woman*, the three men with greedy eyes represent a power system controlled by the male libido, which fixates on systemic exploitation and oppression of women. In *The Price of Madness*, the young man's desire is twisted by pornography. He never admits his crime, and simply ignores women's feelings. In both films, male desire embodies an extended patriarchal consciousness beyond marriage. This informs the desexualised masculinity that will be discussed next.

B. Practising Gender Equality: Democratic Masculinity

In stark contrast to the villains discussed above, both films also feature skinny young males positively received by female protagonists. In many ways, they comprise a distinct type of masculine ideal that is diametrically opposed to those discussed in previous chapters.

This new masculine archetype typically takes an independent stance from authority. All the "good" males in the films adopt progressive values ahead of their time. Lacking the physical ability to be menacing, these men are exempted from the uneven physical power relationship between the sexes. Instead, they demonstrate remarkably pro-feminist inclinations. Any sexual desire is well concealed, and they show respect for the unconventional, modern woman. In fact, they fight side by side with women, sharing the struggle against unfair social realities.

Once sex is eliminated from the game of masculinity, there are some interesting results. First, sexually aggressive males are no longer in control of relationships. These men show incredible restraint. In *The New Woman*, Jin Haitao is a young intellectual and a good friend of Wei. He helps Wei publish her book, constantly encouraging her to be an independent woman. On one occasion, however, Wei gets cold feet after expressing her feelings to Jin. She is seen in a depressed mood: she sits and painfully bows her head at a piano, her arm feebly leaning on it. Slowly, she turns her head to Jin, her eyes full of sadness and disbelief. The next shot is from her point of view, where Jin is seen from a low angle, looking dignified and deadly serious. He bends his head and gently touches a bunch of flowers, but moves away from it suddenly. Then the camera moves back to Wei, closer to her grieving yet hopeful face. Immediately Jin is filmed to appear bigger and stronger. A close-up of Wei's face follows, where she knits her brows and draws a few painful breaths. Immediately afterwards, Jin is also seen in close-up, his eyes looking straight ahead. Finally, the tension eases and Wei is immersed in total disappointment. She painfully raises one of her hands to her heart and asks: "I don't understand you. Why are you always like an ice mountain?" Moved and looking back with compassion, Jin answers: "Because I am fearful that something is going to burn. Sometimes passion itself can be consumed by fire! "

The implication of this sequence is two-fold. From one aspect, Wei embraces the modern style of free love which no traditional women could ever imagine. She fully exposes her feelings and almost cries out her quest. Against the background of a still-rigid gender order, Wei's quest is iconic of new women. This is more than anything else a resistance to male domination. From another aspect, Jin tries to constrain himself regardless of his feelings. The flower he turns away from is an obvious metaphor for his painful choice between love and a

sense of responsibility to honour the iconic new woman. To respect female autonomy, he can never let sex (as both female protagonists perceive it) ruin a precious friendship that is based upon a rarely seen equality between man and woman.

The stance of the pro-feminist Jin is achieved at the price of him denying his male sexuality. Sexuality is emphasised in the male villains, as discussed above, but in Jin's case, masculinity is constructed without the slightest touch of the male body. This masculinity is intentionally desexualised from the outset. Instead, Jin's masculine quality is seen in his dislike of social pleasure (he refuses to dance with Wei and says it is corrupting), his criticising of his boss, and his preference for the proletarian woman. In a stance of resistance, Jin keeps his distance from the higher class and dominant ideology.

In *The Price of Madness*, there is a similar story. Li Changwei has been pursuing Qingqing for a while, but he never believes he can actually win her. To people who criticise Qingqing for going crazy, he says: "I just like her stubbornness." Li is not characterised as a social democrat, but he is reserved about his attitude to authority, just like Jin. He even dares to joke acidly to an official browsing in his book store. In addition, a retired police officer goes out of his way to help the two sisters. He too is not the obedient type. Later he voluntarily works on Qingqing's case, as an independent investigator, and finally cracks it. Both these men are presented as passionate yet restrained, living by their own principles.

To a large extent, the democratic male exists in response to the feminist vision of gender relationships, and is inspired by the goal of a gender revolution. Gender equality can be discerned in both cases on at least two fronts. First, the male type desired by these modern women retreats from the struggle for dominance, letting women taking control. Second, these

democratic males show defiance or distance from authority, avoiding discourses that oppress women. These male types support women's version of events, hinting at a rising female subjectivity on the horizon. That subjectivity will be discussed next.

4. Women in the Mirror: The Issue of Female Masculinity

This part addresses female subjectivity and female masculinity in relation to a proposed gender revolution in both films. First, drawing on Lacan's concept of mirror identification, it analyses mirror sequences in both films to identify a struggling but illusionary female subjectivity. Second, it highlights an unusual female masculinity that directly takes on male domination.

A. Mirror Identification: Female Subjectivity

The application of psychoanalysis to Chinese cinema not uncommonly addresses the issue of female subjectivity. Mulvey's analysis of the male gaze, as mentioned earlier, evoked further explorations of patriarchal settings. Cui Shuqin, for example, pinpoints a resistant gesture to this kind of male gaze:

> In Zhang Yimou's *Ju Dou*, the male protagonist's constant peering at the female character through a peephole reminds us immediately of Laura Mulvey's concept of the gaze: pleasure in looking as an essential cinematic structure in which the pattern of active/male and passive/female replicates the imbalance of power in gender relations. When *Ju Dou* returns the male gaze with her bruised body, however, she denies pleasure to the voyeur and leaves him with a tremendous psychological disturbance.[189]

The disturbance noted here, which implies the desire for a female subjectivity, suggests that the very notion of female subjectivity is never a clear-cut pattern. In her analysis of *The New Woman*, Kristine Harris stresses the binary nature of representations of female subjectivity:

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[189] Cui Shuqin, *Women through the Lens*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003, p. 120.

> [C]inematically, the denunciative subject of the film is full of complex ambiguities. Cai constructed the *New Woman* as equivocally split between word and image, speech and silence, class and gender, subject and trope [190]

As to the 1980s, Kaplan examines the desire for a similar female subjectivity in feminist films:

> In the 80s, however, Chinese women educated precisely in such values sensed something lacking: they wanted a subjectivity we had identified as linked to bourgeois capitalism and to a modernism that we attempting to move beyond. [191]

Both Harris's and Kaplan's observations echoes Dai Jinhua's feminist concern with the Chinese new woman. In *Emerging from the Historical Horizon (Fuchu lishi dibiao)*, Dai noted that "The influence of Nora to women in the May Forth Movement is an especially noteworthy cultural phenomenon,"[192] suggesting that Nora became the mirror stage of the Chinese new woman. In particular, in discussing a novel by the female writer Lin Shuhua, *Temple of Flowers* (*Hua zhi si*), Dai uses the notion of mirror identification to reveal a gap between the desired image of the Chinese new woman, mainly as it appeared in intellectual discourses, and women in reality:

> First, Yan Qian, the "I" in the letter, claiming to be an unacquainted female without a name, presents herself in the appearance of an "other." This differentiation is made by the writer of the letter, "I", who deems this as the only way to express her soul and make it visible to her husband. In other words, only through identifying with the position of the "other", can Yan Qian assure, identify, and even regain her position of a self-identified woman in her relationship with the husband. This other who becomes "I" is Yan Qian's specular image. Yan Qian identifies with this image, turns this image into "I", and discovers the meaning of "I." Arguably, this process symbolically closes gaps within women's disintegrated world. Second, examining the texts from another perspective, this specular image, or discourses of "others," makes us see the gap between the then popular assumption of a woman and what women really were.[193]

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[190] Kristine Harris, "*The New Woman* Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai" in Lu, Sheldon H., ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, p. 297

[191] E. Ann Kaplan, "Problematizing cross-cultural analysis: the case of women in the recent Chinese cinema" in Chris Berry, ed., *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema,* London:British Film Institute, 1991, p. 151

[192] Dai Jinhua and Meng Yue, *Emerging from the Historical Horizon (Fuchu lishi dibiao),* Henan renmin chubanshe, 1989, p. 12. Nora is the central figure in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, who bravely leaves home seek her independence.

[193] Dai Jinhua, 1989, p. 93-94

Inspired by Dai's use of Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, this thesis tries to examine the complicated female subjectivity in both films through actual representations of mirror images.

Both films, while presenting stories of women's suffering, also feature representations of women in the mirror. They are scattered throughout the films, appearing mainly at certain turning points. In *The New Woman*, Wei's several encounters with men end with three mirror sequences, each of which signals a different stage in her life. The first one is Wei's happy conversation with her male friend Jin Haitao, when Wei tries to send a message of love. The second is when Wei is frustrated at losing her job and an annoying journalist unexpectedly kisses her; these scenes are caught in a mirror. The third one happens before Wei is forced into the brothel arrangement, as she is being dressed. In *The Price of Madness,* the first mirror sequence happens when Qingqing suddenly realises her feelings for Li Changwei. The second happens before and after Qingqing is assaulted by a crowd supporting parents who have lost their new born baby boy.

Intentionally or not, these mirror sequences are unique platforms upon which to showcase the complexity involved in female images in their respective timeframes. Lacan's mirror stage provides a theoretical foundation for explaining these complexities associated with the female subjectivity. First, a mirror image is a completed form of one's reflection of the "self". Second, it is a distanced image that inevitably embodies otherness while the original self tries to reconstitute itself as a "whole".

Regarding the first aspect, Lacan's mirror stage provides a theoretical foundation:

> The mirror stage is organized around a fundamental experience of identification in the course of which the child becomes master of his own body image. The child's primary identification with this image promotes the structuring of the 'I' and puts an end to that singular aspect of psychic experience that Lacan calls *the fantasy of the fragmented*

body.[194]

Initially concerning "anatomical incompleteness of the pyramidal system in infants and their imperfect powers of physical coordination during the early months of life," the mirror stage later develops into a theory of the subject. This subject, with all of its complexities, relies on comprehension of the image of the I, or self. The mirror sequences in both films, where women are positioned in front of a mirror, construct a metaphor of seeking subjectivity. In *The New Woman*, the first mirror sequence occurs in the middle of Wei's conversation with Jin. Wei comes to a mirror to look at herself, then goes back to Jin, with an expectant smile on her face. There are quite a few comic moments to illustrate Wei's anticipation: when Jin pulls at Wei's arm, Wei feels a spark of excitement but becomes extremely disappointed when she realises that he is just trying to look at her watch. Here, Wei's satisfaction with her mirror reflection, her affection for Jin and her expectation for a loving relationship all come together, which establishes her subjectivity. In *The Price of Madness*, Qingqing's newfound feelings for Li Changwei are also faithfully recorded by a close-up shot of her face and eyes, which happens just before she gazes into a mirror. On the whole, women who view themselves in a mirror are self-aware; they are closely connected to their own desires, as well as their changing attitude towards men. These mirror sequences pose a fundamental challenge to the

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[194] Joël Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan: the Unconscious Structured like a Language*, Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1997, p. 95; "The child's experience in the mirror stage is divided into three fundamental periods that mark the progressive conquest of his body image. At first, it is as if the child perceives the image of his body in the mirror as a real being, one that he tries to approach or take hold of. This phrase of the experience, in other words, indicates an *initial confusion between self and other*, a confusion amply confirmed by the stereotyped relations he has with other children. These relations unequivocally confirm that it is primarily through the other that he experiences himself and orients himself at first. …If this first period of the mirror stage clearly reveals the child's subjection to the imaginary register, the second constitutes a decisive step in the process of identification. The child is surreptitiously led to discover that the other in the mirror is not a real being, but only an image. He no longer tries to grab hold of it, and, what is more, his behaviour in general indicates that he now knows how to distinguish the image of the other from the reality of the other. The third period transforms the first two into a dialectic, not only because the child becomes certain that the mirror reflection is an image, but above all because he acquires the conviction that this image is his own. In re-cognizing himself through the image, he is able to reassemble the scattered, fragmented body into a unified totality, the representation of his own body. The body image is therefore a structuring factor in the formation of the subject's identity, since it is through this image that he achieves his primal identification." pp. 95-96

conventional gender pattern, for they grant women—instead of men—the dominating and subjective position of desire as far as a loving relationship is concerned.

Such female subjectivity is associated with narcissism as that which happens in the process of the mirror stage. In *The Price of Madness*, Qingqing is looking at her reflection in the mirror while the camera moves steadily closer to her. Her facial expression is thus magnified, her narcissistic look fully exposed to the camera. We can see her carefully fondling her long hair and viewing her neck with clear appreciation. The sequence takes almost twenty seconds. In *The New Woman*, Wei is not so overtly narcissistic. Still, she arranges her hair in front of the mirror with evident self-satisfaction.

To fully understand this narcissism requires both theoretical and historical ideas. In theory, narcissism initiates "the unity of the subject", for "This image [the mirror image] is identical for the entirety of the subject's mechanisms and gives his *Umwelt* its form, in as much as he is man and not horse." [195] As a consequence, when women look at themselves in the mirror, they are at the same time seeking validation of their subjectivities, or self-recognition, in a patriarchal world.

When we apply this narcissism to the social discourse of women's liberation, mirror images gain wider social implications. In the social context of the 1930s, a defining moment for the modern woman, the visual image of woman is of particular importance. It was a changing world led by a fashion revolution. The new image of a modern woman could be viewed in an array of popular magazines. In stark contrast to conservative dress, the new styles flatter the

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[195] Jacques Lacan, "First of all, there is, in fact, a narcissism connected with the corporeal image. It makes up the unity of the subject, and we see it projecting itself in a thousand different ways, up to and including what we can call the imaginary source of symbolism, which is what links symbolism to feeling, to the *Selbstgfühl*, which the human being, the *Mensch*, has of his own body." in Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I- Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 125

female body and display its health and sexuality. These photos deal another major blow to traditional values by showing women flashing full-toothed smiles. Wei is exemplary of this new fashion. When Wei looks at herself in the mirror, the self-recognition includes identification with the image of a new woman. She is observing an ideal version of herself, one that exists not only for the enjoyment of a man, but also emphasises her new identity.

A similar shift in the representation of the modern woman occurred in the 1980s, immediately following the lifting of sex taboos after Cultural Revolution. At that point, modern fashion was no longer enough to express the quest for women's liberation. Instead, Qingqing's image is clearly focused on her youthful and elegant body. Metaphorically, the autonomy of her entire body and soul is on the agenda. This female subjectivity is even stronger than Wei's in the 1930s.

These mirror sequences indicate that women's roles in the gender discourse is ready for change. Women now have the power to view rather than be viewed, and they are recognised as individuals with subjectivity. The external image of a woman ensures her position in a man's world. Wei not only embraces free love and her own beliefs, but also works in the public sphere as a single mother. She is a product of modern values, pursuing her identity as a new woman. Qingqing is a naturally a modern woman who questions women's inferior social status from the very beginning. Her extreme hatred of the rapist attests to her aggressive feminist stance. Her narcissism is part of her desire to assert her subjectivity. All these are in stark contrast to traditional gender discourse, which had been aggressively denounced by elite reformist intellectuals since the early twentieth century. In other words, the reconstruction of gender relations, though not finalised, is informed by the specular image in the mirror.

The mirror image, however, comes inscribed with otherness:

> But although the mirror phase symbolizes the 'preformation' of the 'I', it presupposes by its fundamental nature the destiny of the 'I' as alienated in the imaginary dimension. The re-cognition of the self in the mirror image is accomplished—for optical reasons—through indications that are exterior and symmetrically inverted. At the same time, therefore, the very unity of the body takes form as exterior to the self and inverted. And so this re-cognition in itself prefigures, for the subject who is in the process of acquiring his identity, the nature of his imaginary alienation and the beginning of the chronic misrecognition that will characterize all his future relations with himself. [196]

The process by which the infant begins to acquire its function as subject is in "primordial form," and "prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restore to it."[197] The infant as a subject is preconditioned to objectification by "the other". Similarly, the female acquires subjectivity through mirror identification, but she also can contract objectification. Her mastery over the imaginary can be interrupted at any time: "Lacan, Copjec explains, saw a potential screen in every mirror, which is to say, a potential disruption of the subject's sense of mastery. If the mirror is a screen, then the subject does not have mastery over the visual field. "[198] In other words, once the subject identifies with a viewer and she looks at herself through the eyes of others, her mastery over the image is ultimately damaged.

In the latter part of both films, Wei and Qingqing go through precisely this process of seeing themselves through the eyes of others. They are no longer in a position of mastery as previously shown. In *The New Woman*, after refusing the third proposal from Mr. Wang, Wei is trapped by financial woes, and fears failing to save her sick daughter. Desperate, she yields to a brothel arrangement. In her own words, she "would rather be a slave for one night, better

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[196]Joël Dor, p. 97

[197]Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function" in *Écrits*: *The first complete edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006, p. 76

[198]Hilary Neroni, "Jane Campion's Jouissance: Holy Smoke and Feminist Film Theory" in Todd McGowan & Sheila Kunkle eds., *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, New York: Other Press, 2004, p. 211

than be a slave for life!" The latter option is the marriage proposed by Mr. Wang. Subsequently, there is a mirror scene: Wei is sitting in front of a dresser, so that the old procuress can arrange her hair. In contrast to the previous mirror scene, Wei no longer is alight with delightful anticipation. Now she looks helplessly at herself in the mirror, being dressed up like a doll. Quickly the scene cuts to her sister watching her from the side, also shedding tears. The parallel editing between Wei and her sister underscores the painful process of looking and being looked at.

In *The Price of Madness*, a mirror scene occurs after nurse Qingqing's failure to save a newborn boy. In her office, Qingqing tries to calm down by splashing tap water on her face. She then walks to a mirror on the wall, looking at herself, motionless. All of a sudden an angry crowd barges in. Quickly, they rush towards her. Qingqing is under violent attack. Fists and people's angry faces are caught in close shots, as Qingqing is pushed around. The riot lasts more than twenty seconds. Afterwards, Qingqing is filmed in a close-up shot, with a line of blood streaming out of her nose. Silently she turns around to look at herself in the mirror again. With indescribable sorrow, Qingqing draws a moustache around her mouth using her own fresh blood. Finally, she opens her mouth and bares her teeth to the mirror. With her teeth soaked in blood, she resembles a blood-stained tiger.

In both films, the function of the mirror changes along with the changing contexts. For both Wei and Qingqing the mirror serves as a screen that reflects others' power to view them as objects, rather than allowing them to view themselves as subjects. When Wei accepts the defeat of her autonomy (by being a prostitute for one night), the mirror image becomes a cruel reminder of failed female subjectivity. This time, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she sees herself as the object of sexual violation. Thus she is alienated from her female

subjectivity, and yields to male desire. This has profound implications for male hegemony. In *The Price of Madness*, the manner in which Qingqing looks at herself is no longer narcissistic. Instead, Qingqing disfigures herself in the mirror, using her own blood. This emphasises a sense of otherness in the mirror image. She has been the object of a violent attack, which is triggered by anger at losing a baby boy. As indicated earlier, if it was a baby girl who had died, the crowd might not have punished her. As a result, when Qinging looks at herself in the mirror, she recognises herself as a victim of unequal gender relations. In both films, the glory of female subjectivity gives way to a strong sense of otherness in the wake of women's continued oppressed social status.

The later two mirror sequences do more than reflect this failure of women's subjectivity. Now, both film sequences have moved into the public sphere. There are dramatic changes of scene signalling the move from a private to a public domain. This indicates a shift in focus from women's self-recognition to the suppression of female subjectivity in the public consciousness. In *The New Woman*, there are actually three women in the scene: Wei, as the archetype of a so-called new woman, her sister, a traditional Chinese woman who suffers along with Wei, and the old woman who prepares Wei for the brothel arrangement, thus perpetuating the male-dominated sexual hierarchy. In *The Price of Madness*, there are exactly three counterparts: Qingqing as the modern woman trying to take control of her own life; her colleague, who is more conservative but still at Qingqing's side; and an old woman who has just lost her grandson and is physically attacking Qingqing. These supporting characters indicate how public consciousness can interfere with a woman's world. Some women are so used to the patriarchal order, they even help men prey on other women.

Ultimately, Lacan's concept of the mirror stage foretells the collision between the subject and

its mastery. The mirror identification shows "something it has yet to become: an integrated unity." [199] "The mirror stage also introduces a temporal structure into subjectivity. The mirror image anticipates the motor control and unity the child has yet to attain. "[200] As Lacan argued: "This is what I insist upon in my theory of the mirror stage—the sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery"[201] In both films, the described mirror sequences portray "the image of the future".

In *The New Woman*, there is a difference between Wei and the accepted public assumptions of what a woman should look like. What Wei represents is more of an icon of the modern woman, a reinvention of female sexuality fuelled by a new urban culture. As for Qingqing, her confidence in her own body (she is seen in a nightgown or naked constantly throughout the film) challenged many Chinese viewers, causing some controversy among audiences at the time.[202] In both cases, the images initially reflected in the mirror are progressive and from the female's own perspective.

However, both initially positive images in the mirror are impinged upon by men. In *The New Woman*, Wei's self-appraisal in the mirror is abruptly interrupted by a shot of Mr. Wang— who is not even at the same scene—dressing in front of a mirror. In the case of *The Price of*

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[199] "The mirror phase or stage is held to be a structural or structuring moment in the development of human infant. …A child who cannot yet speak and who has yet to acquire full motor control glimpses a unified or unitary image. It thus identifies with an image that is by definition unreal and which shows it something it has yet to become: an integrated unity. Typically, the child greets the reflection with great jubilation, but its initial self-perception is inevitably grounded in the perception of an other (in this case a reflection), and the structural ground is prepared for latter identifications through the assimilation of properties of the other. For Lacan, this exemplifies the subject's fatal tendency to identify with the ego or, in other words, the mirror image. The mirror image is often referred to by Lacan as a *leurre*, a term meaning 'illusion' but also the decoy or lure used by a hunter or a wildfowler. " David Macey, Introduction to *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 1994, p. xvii
[200] David Macey, p. xx
[201] Jacques Lacan, p. 79
[202] In the magazine *Dianying Pingjie* (Film Critic) alone, there are many comments about naked images through 1988 to 1989. *The Price of Madness* is often cited for its naked scenes.

Madness, Qingqing goes to the mirror after her boyfriend leaves. Before she can see herself, the image of her boyfriend departing is reflected in the mirror.

In both cases, reflections of men in the mirror clash with women's. In *The New Woman*, Mr. Wang shows much more bravado when dressing than Wei does, which to some extent cancels out Wei's self-satisfaction in her own reflection. In *The Price of Madness*, even though Qingqing's boyfriend shows no interest in the mirror, his image supercedes that of Qingqing's. Literally, his image becomes the precondition of Qingqing's mirror identification. Most interestingly, the motivation for both women to be looking at themselves in the mirror is men they wish to please. All these reveal the premature nature of women's mirror identification. Overshadowed by men's subjectivities (that is, by male domination), female subjectivity can only be a long-term goal. So a differentiation has to be made between the aspiration of female subjectivity and its actual achievement. In other words, if discerned but not fulfilled, female subjectivity can only testify to a fictional and fleeting self-mastery over the female body.

B. Woman Warrior: The Female Masculinity

The premature nature of female subjectivity coincides with an extreme form of female subjectivity seen in both films: female masculinity. A female masculinity overshadows "man's masculinity" in many ways.

First, masculine women are granted impressive representations in both films. In *New Woman*, Ah Ying is a colleague of Wei's, but seems to be much more proletarian and resolute. At least on two occasions, she is portrayed in a rather extraordinary manner. One scene is magnified by camera work. An encounter between Wei and Ah Ying is framed in a long shot around a street corner. Few details of their conversation are shown, and then Ah Ying leaves. As she

walks away, her shadow is seen on the wall. The shadow becomes bigger and bigger until it

fills the whole screen. In contrast, Wei is just a tiny figure on the corner. The shadow

represents Ah Ying's powerful spirit in her ordinary body. Director Cai Chusheng

acknowledged this special shot more than twenty years later.[203]

The other occasion is shown is a fighting scene between Ah Ying and Mr. Wang. When Wang

comes looking for trouble with Wei, Ah Ying fights ferociously for her friend. The fight is a

straightforward win for Ah Ying. First, she throws Wang into a corner. After they tussle for a

while, we see in a close-up that she punches Wang in the face and knocks him down.

In *The Price of Madness*, Qingqing also behaves in a masculine manner. As mentioned above,

she destroys Li's magazine stall in a fury. Later, she fights the rapist like a female action hero.

Not only does she pounce on the criminal at her first instinct, but she also clings to a car that

the criminal is driving. She hangs on the outside of the speeding car travelling through streets.

The rapist has to drag her into the vehicle to avoid attracting attention.

First of all, these representations conflicts with Kam Louie's conceptualisation of *wen* and *wu*

as exclusive to Chinese men, and "establishes all men as powerful and all women as

powerless." According to Louie, "*Wen* is generally understood to refer to those genteel,

refined qualities that were associated with literary and artistic pursuits of the classical

scholars," while "*Wu* is therefore a concept which embodies the power of military strength

but also the wisdom to know when and when not to deploy it."[204] Louie also suggests that a

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[203]Cai Chusheng, "*Sanbajie zhong yi* Xin nüxing" (The memory of *New Woman* during international working women's day), *Dianying Yishu* (Film Art), 1960, 3, pp. 77-81
[204] Louie, Kam, Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 14

balance between *wen* and *wu* makes a superb male leader.[205] Here, the female protagonists demonstrate physical strength that outstrips men, and, as will be discussed later, Ah Ying shows her leadership during a parade exclusively composed of women. These could all be viewed as *wu* qualities, and women are certainly more powerful than men in this case. In retrospect, Mo Li and Jiu'er in Chapter One are at times stronger than men: Mo Li rescues all male protagonists from imprisonment using strategy, and she is seen working shoulder to shoulder with male workers. Jiu'er proposes reforms of the winery, and she is the leader all along. Naturally, these women are bearers of male qualities, even qualities of a leader - the highest standard to judge masculinity.

Secondly, these representations challenge the assumption that biological differences separate masculinity and femininity. According to traditional understanding, masculinity is constructed with the male body: "True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body."[206] But there have been theoretical debates that argue otherwise, using the term "female masculinity".

Judith Halberstam clarifies the authentic masculinity of women:

> I claim that far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing. But what we understand as heroic masculinity has been produced by and across both male and female bodies. [207]

According to Halberstam, female masculinity is a "proliferation" of masculinity with its own history. The reason it has been long neglected and obscured is that the concept of masculinity

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[205] "Traditionally, it was perceived that a balance between the two styles of masculinity should be achieved for the ideal continued successful and long-term national and self management." Louie, p. 15

[206] R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005, 2nd ed., p. 45

[207] Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 1

"conjures up notions of power and legitimacy" which have been granted as a male privilege. Hence, to acknowledge female masculinity is to point to "ideological motivations and … the complex social structures that wed masculinity to maleness and to power and domination."[208] Halberstam further points out that even male rebellion, apparently subversive, does not necessarily pose a threat to social structures until "rebellion ceases to be white middle-class male rebellion (individualized and localized within the lone male or even generalized into the boy gang) and becomes class rebellion or race rebellion, when a very different threat emerges."[209]

Halberstam's address of female masculinity, as opposed to privileged masculinity (the white middle-class masculinity in a Western society), reveals the suppressed status of women and the social constraints on female resistance. Meanwhile, she exposes the truth that white middle-class male rebellion does not threaten the existing social structure which sustains gender hierarchy.

These arguments shed some light on discussions of gender and masculinity in this thesis. On the one hand, in both *The New Woman* and *The Price of Madness*, women are seen to fall victim to vicious male desire, suppressed under the gendered social sphere as well as the legitimate form of a proposed marriage. On the other hand, previous chapters do indicate the existence of rebellious males, who fight against either obsolete political power or imperial invasion, or both, provoking social changes to transform China. In the intervening time, however, we find traces of male pride endorsed by a strong male subjectivity, complemented by the admiring female gaze (the kind of female gaze discussed in Chapter One, but even without the gaze, the male protagonist is highly regarded in all previously discussed films).

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[208] Halberstam, 1998, p. 2
[209] Halberstam, 1998, p. 5

These all suspiciously lean towards replacing the old gender hierarchy with a new kind of male domination.

So the significance of presenting female masculinity becomes evident in this chapter: it questions not only the old gender hierarchy, but also women's position in the proposed social transformation. The female body is granted extraordinary power, in order to declare the contesting masculinities unreal and fragile.

In these two films, female masculinity is employed to directly challenge the doctrine of gender relations. By using images of masculine women, the films dismiss the traditionally inscribed obligations and demolish the myth of a patriarchal order. Once women are no longer the ones being dominated, beaten and suppressed, they rise to overthrow male power. In the next section, the discussion centers on how female masculinity is positioned more broadly as being profoundly significant for democratic discourses in China.

5. The Failed Male Rescue: Reversing the "Man and Nation" Narrative

This section discusses how the women's revolution is understood as a means of further promoting democracy by both male directors. On the one hand, the imagined democratic public sphere seen in the last chapter is undermined by the failure of men to rescue women in both films. Gender equality is outlined as a core issue for Chinese democracy. On the other hand, women are connected to national sentiment more than ever and this influences the role of Chinese women in their society.

A. The Failed Male Rescue: Fragmented Masculine Narrative

In these two films, occurrences of female masculinity coincide with the failure of men to

rescue women. The latter scenario of rescue has been a vital sign of the strength of masculinity as it appears in representations across Western and Chinese films. Here, however, prideful men and masculinity fail to get the job done. On the contrary, it is the women who show more masculine qualities by entering men's territory.

In *The New Woman*, Jin Haitao finally comes to help Wei from losing her daughter, but it is already too late. Jin had failed to show up when Wei was fighting Wang for the first and last times. Instead, the heroic Ah Ying becomes the real rescuer. In *The Price of Madness*, the final stage of the film highlights Qingqing's increasingly frantic quest for revenge, even as the retired policeman grows alarmed at her determination. As a consequence, he manages to crack the case but fails to prevent her from killing the rapist. When the classic role of a man coming to the rescue is taken over by extraordinary females, male dominance is subverted. Not only has the old patriarchal consciousness, embedded for thousands of years, been challenged, but the man's superior position in the imagined Chinese public sphere is undermined by female activism. This attests to the inadequacy of the masculine public sphere described in Chapter Three.

Despite the implicit feminist message, the two films were directed by males. Neither director, Cai Chusheng or Zhou Xiaowen, was labelled feminist at the time. They were simply caught in the midst of intense social debates. In other words, these two films are not directly based on female life experiences, yet they tackle feminism as a thorny social issue. As many scholars have noted, women's liberation has been seen as a core issue defining the social revolution in China. The reason has now become clearer: not only did gender reform change the face of the Chinese family structure, but it also put democracy on the modern agenda. Women's liberation is intertwined with hopes of a new, democratic China. As the previous

chapters have indicated, this message came from young male intellectuals who had a dream of the ideal nation.

B. Imagined Political Functions: Proletarian Women vs Female Prisoner

The dream of women's liberation is passionately constructed in the closing scene in *The New Woman,* where there is a spectacular mass march of only women. It is also portrayed as a noble failure, as seen in the last shots of *The Price of Madness,* in which Qingqing becomes a criminal. In both cases, the roles of women have powerful political impacts as never before, which in effect reverse the man-dominated discourses for the nation.

Throughout *The New Woman*, the political message is obvious. Contrasting representations of the corrupt Shanghai upper class and the noble working poor are prominent. As an obvious example, the dance hall sequence of Wei Ming and Mr. Wang is edited together with some street shots reflecting the hard life of ordinary people. While the musical script of *Taohua Jiang* ("Peach-blossom River," with the cover featuring a sketch of a naked woman) is thumbed by a patron in the dance hall, people in stylish dress (including Wei and Mr. Wang) begin to dance.

Immediately after that, however, the scene cuts to Wei's friend Ah Ying, with a furious face. She is at school, teaching young girls to sing inspiring new songs, one of them being a new version of *Taohua Jiang*. Shortly afterwards, the screen splits diagonally, with the upper left part continuing to show the teacher and class and the larger, bottom part unfolding a sequence of Shanghai city scenes: first, a view of the Huangpu River with colonial buildings on its banks; then a closer shot of the tops of colonial buildings from below; then, a quick scan of a street with moving traffic and people walking; back to the river where modern ships are

moored in a row, and finally, a full-screen shot of the lion sculptures (symbol of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank), repeated after another full shot of a giant ship.[210] Then scenes begin to mingle: the smoke of the ships, a bridge and lamp posts, dissolving into a sea of people in the street moving forward, seen from a bird's eye view.

A similar sequence unfolds soon afterwards. It starts with a close-up of a giant clock on a tower building at two o'clock sharp. As one hand of the clock moves, however, the face of the clock fades into a scene in the dance hall: elegant girls and well-dressed men are drinking together, followed by a scene in a textile mill where weary female workers toil. Then the scene moves back to the clock, which is now at three. Again, the scene shifts to the dance hall, and a middle shot of dancing high heels is shown—immediately followed by a middle shot of labourers' legs stiffly moving. Then the clock is at four. Another set of contrasting shots follow: one showing men and women dancing, the other filming labourers whose bodies are bent in effort.

Neither sequence has any connection with the main plot. Nevertheless, in at least three ways they strike a chord for the rest of the film. First, they starkly contrast the lives of the rich and poor. Class difference was a fairly progressive concept in the 1930s and the comparison between high heels and the working poor is obviously a left-leaning statement. Second, the sequences include several images that capture the emotion of revolutionary sentiment. The marching in the first sequence, for example, invokes the vision of a mobilised China. Third, there is a connection between women and the image of a suffering nation. Ah Ying's furious face and the large group of girl students represent the pain and anger of all women. As indicated early in the film, women are represented as victims suppressed by a strict gender

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[210] The lions were at the eastward to the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank and were symbols of Western imperial power to most Shanghainese.

order as well as by male violence. Their resistance is fuelled by rejection of male domination and hopes for female autonomy. Here, however, women's struggle is combined with class differences and the future of the nation: ardent songs sung by women are the background music for the brief presentation of the Shanghai working class.

Women's revolution is represented by even more striking representations. The closing scene of *The New Woman* shows the aftermath of Wei's death: huge crowds of women are marching in the streets, with Ah Ying in the front row. A newspaper containing Wei's story is thrown out of the window of Mr. Wang's car and picked up by women passing by. After a quick look, however, they resolutely throw it away. The newspaper ends up being trampled by hundreds of women marching on.

The trampled newspaper is itself a metaphor for obsolete values contaminating the public sphere, in which patriarchal spectatorship is extended and women's suffering is sustained despite ongoing social transformation. The women's rejection of the newspaper is a sign of their awakening. It may indicate their refusal to identify with Wei, the iconic modern woman emerging along with the thriving urban culture. The term 'new woman' is here subject to new interpretations: Wei and her story should stay in the past, and the future belongs to those women who continue to resolutely defy dominant male power. It is fair to say that Ah Ying with her exaggerated female masculinity represents the call for change. Female masculinity in *The New Woman* is an indication of resistance, a signal for change and a symbol of gender equality.

The Price of Madness features a puzzling ending to many audiences: even after the suspect is cornered by the police, Qingqing still kicks him off the high building. The young man dies

instantly. Just before he does, two close-ups in turn show he and Qingqing staring in deadly fashion at each other—these intense looks seem to mingle outrage and hatred with, surprisingly, mutual attraction.

As noted by the director, Qingqing's behaviour is spurred not only by the rape case, but also by her twisted perceptions of men.[211] The final confrontation between Qingqing and the rapist can be seen as a pure primeval struggle, beyond any judgement or rules. Director Zhou Xiaowen has stated he wanted a very special moment between Qingqing and the rapist: the bitter hatred they display in their gazes is as strong as the passion between lovers. Somehow the director blurs the boundary between hatred and love. Neither the criminal nor Qingqing is morally judged; what is under scrutiny is morality itself. What makes Qingqing act so crazily and what made the young man commit his crime? Both Qingqing and her enemy are victims.

Qingqing's last deadly kick at the young man ultimately exposes her distrust of rules, making her also an outlaw. Had Qingqing lived in the 1930s, she would have already stood for change. This final episode in Qingqing's revenge could refer to the call for cultural and political change in the 1980s, which explains her desperate stubbornness. In a way, Qingqing is expecting a revolution: a subversion of male domination and achievement of absolute gender equality.

Women's resistance accounts for every movement in this chapter: from the establishment of female subjectivity to the denial of patriarchal spectatorship, from fighting against sexual violence to the refusal of marriage, from forging female masculinity to a version of women's liberation. Women's resistance in many ways complements the construction of male

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[211] Fang Zhou, "*Zhou Xiaowen koushu 'fengkuang' de dianying shidan*" (Zhou Xiaowen's account on the period of mad films), *Dazhong Dianying* (Popular Films), 2007, no.21, pp. 42-45

archetypes, which completes the picture of a Chinese democratic ideal.

Chapter Five

Rites of Passage:

Masculinity, Resistance, and the Questioning of Institutional Power

Waves Washing Sand **(1936) and** ***One and Eight*** **(1983)**

The previous chapters addressed masculinity constructions occurring amid the nation-building sentiments seen in 1930s and 1980s China. There were far-reaching cultural and political critiques, triggered by a profound nationalism, as seen in Chapters One and Two. There were also imagined democratic spaces either that subscribed to masculine subjectivity or that were characterised by feminist subversion, as seen in Chapters Three and Four. Countering the overwhelming nationalist aspirations seen in previous chapters, this chapter discusses two films that indicate concerns over intensified struggle between individuals and institutional power, a prominent form of the modern state.

More specifically, both *Waves Washing Sand* and *One and Eight* feature controversial masculine representations in a stance of resistance. Both entail a portrayal of prisoners and outlaws against mainstream representations in their respective decades. The journey of masculinity construction negotiates with, as well as challenges, political suppression. A stance that is marginal to mainstream politics is maintained, as male protagonists are banished from normal life.

Arnold van Gennep's concept of the rites of passage offers a fundamental framework for investigating resistant masculinities, considering that both protagonists in this chapter undergo the trajectory of forced separation from society, endure torment, and make efforts to

be reincorporated back into society. According to van Gennep, "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another."[212] Rite of passage stands for "[A]ll the ceremonial pattern which accompanies a passage from one situation to another" and that rite is composed of three phases noted as "rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation."[213] Van Gennep's concept is widely used to define a young man's acquisition of adulthood or manhood.

The two films discussed in this chapter echo the essential pattern of van Gennep's concept, showing a tortuous path of masculinity construction in both cases, but then going beyond that concept at the end: both protagonists respect a certain degree of autonomy as opposed to desiring a complete unison, their masculinity is thus established even before their reincorporation into society. This deep structure of a male journey develops into a metaphorical spiritual path for Chinese intellectuals seeking a stance of independence, quite different from the fierce nationalism, nation-building sentiments in particular, displayed in previous chapters.

This chapter explores four stages of masculinity construction in light of the rites of passage concept. First, the situation of isolation featured in both films is illustrated through the use of mise-en-scène, which disconnects both protagonists from their past experiences as well as their identities. Rules are suspended, and the male protagonists' spiritual autonomy signals a new beginning. In the second stage, both protagonists endure intense violence, as they seek to regain past identities, a stance of determined resistance that can withstand great challenge. A new masculinity endorsed by political duty is thus introduced, as the deeper political implications of a resistant masculinity surface. In both films, the nation as a highly

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[212] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* trans., Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, pp. 2-3
[213] Arnold van Gennep, p. 10

institutionalised structure is seen as a barrier to accessing one's true masculinity, and conflicts intensify between officials and outlaws. In the third stage, before reincorporation, a great complexity appears. The power struggle is demonstrated through dramatic changes of position in which the outlaws take charge and are portrayed as heroes. Both men then acquire their masculinity before going back to their previous communities. Finally, the stage of incorporation is obstructed in both cases when an independent voice undermines political progress. This interrupted male journey leads to a political reading of the two films concerning the spiritual dilemma of Chinese intellectuals. For this thesis, both films refer to social discourse in the respective decades and complete the men's narration regarding the nation.

1. Rites of Passage: The Journey

This section delivers the main storylines of two selected films, finding the marginalisation of their two protagonists to be a form of masculinity construction in light of the notion of rites of passage. The van Gennep concept is overtaken by a resistant stance that is seen in both cases, which to an extent disregards the final stage of "reincorporation" and opens up a new way of interpreting the Chinese nation, state, and intellectual discourse.

A. The Story: Men in Exile

One and Eight (*Yige he bage*), directed by Zhang Junzhao in 1983, is known as the first collective creation of the fifth-generation of Chinese filmmakers. The film is adapted from a long poem (published in 1957) with the same title by the poet, Guo Xiaochuan. Based on the simple storyline of a mistreated political commissioner named Wang, who mixes up with eight real criminals, the film unfolds like a scroll of raw masculinities in a stance of resistance. The film was censored for positive representations of prisoners, despite being

acclaimed for its artistry from a few critics. Filmed in 1936 by the director Wu Yonggang, *Waves Washing Sand* (*Lang tao sha*) tells a story that seems at first glance to have nothing to do with the urgent agenda of national salvation against Japanese invasion: the calamitous experience of the sailor Ah Long after he accidentally kills a man. The film narrates the substantive interactions between Ah Long and a policeman that also accentuate the complexity of human nature, but also obscure the boundary between right and wrong. Upon release, *Waves* was attacked by left-wing critics for its insensibility to class struggle and Chinese national revolution. The unwelcome release of these two films suggests that the male journey in both cases was different from that in mainstream discourses.

In *One and Eight*, Wang is thrown into prison for all the wrong reasons; he has been working undercover for years, until his entire team is betrayed and arrested. With timely help from a comrade, he is the only one lucky enough to have escaped execution. On his way to rejoin the main force, Wang seeks recognition from a small platoon led by section chief Xu and hopes to return to his duties. Without any proof of his true identity, however, Wang is thrown into a temporary prison and chained to eight other suspects: three gang members, three runaways from the army, and a man charged with well poisoning and being a spy. In effect, Wang is detached from his army (his community) and separated from his past experience. However, separation only strengthens Wang's longing for recognition and starts his journey to complete himself. He confronts marginalisation of different kinds. In prison, Wang's speaking out for the vulnerable and withstanding physical violence win himself immediate respect from among the other prisoners; meanwhile, Wang keeps protesting his innocence even though he is rejected again and again. Finally, the platoon encounters a group of Japanese soldiers, and Wang gets a chance to assert his leadership. After section chief Xu is injured, Wang leads six other suspects to fight fearlessly against the Japanese, and breaks through the enemy lines.

The last scene of the film shows Wang heading toward the main force with section chief Xu on his shoulders. His comrade, one of the other prisoners, then leaves on his own journey, choosing to live unconstrained while promising to do only good deeds for the people from now on.

In *Waves Washing Sand,* the protagonist, Ah Long, is a sailor who returns home only to find himself an outcast. The neighbours are surprised at his reappearance; he is supposed to have drowned during a storm, and his wife is now living with another man. In a rage, Ah Long accidentally bashes that man to death and then starts his own real personal journey. Like Wang in *One and Eight*, Ah Long is driven by his cherished memory and his sense of duty, in this case as a father. Ah Long's separation triggers a long struggle to return home. As a fugitive, Ah Long lives on the margins and is pursued by the police. As a determined police officer hunts him, Ah Long shows remarkable strength and intelligence during the pursuit. He finally escapes to sea and works on a steamship. The turning point comes when Ah Long encounters the police officer on the ship's deck. Right before Ah Long can be arrested, both he and the police officer are washed away to a lonely island in a shipwreck. Ah Long seizes a gun, as he rescues the exhausted police officer, and takes full control of the situation.

On this lonely island, both men are burdened by their longing for home, and they almost become friends. Nevertheless, their final chance to be rescued is ruined by the police officer's ruthless ambition. He knocks Ah Long out in order to make an arrest right after they sight a ship. The ship sails away unaware of the two men. Later we see them once more, but as two skeletons lying on the beach.

On the whole, both films are deployed around marginalised men who are fighting their way

back, and both use a similar structure of separation, transition, and incorporation to express

Arnold van Gennep's concept of rites of passage. This arrangement suggests an arduous

journey of masculinity construction in both cases, which also entails making a break from

expressly established masculinity as discussed in the previous chapters. Drawing on the

concept of rites of passage, this chapter thus centres its discussion on the strong implications

that arise from the male journey as seen in a Chinese political context.

B. Rites: Masculinity in Perspective

In investigating human rituals, Arnold van Gennep develops the concept of "rites of passage"

as ceremonies "accompanying an individual's 'life crises'." [214] Van Gennep examines the

ceremonies for birth, adulthood, wedding, funeral, etc, categorising these general rites or

rituals as three types: rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation. Funerals,

for example, are composed mostly of rites of separation. Van Gennep also found within the

three types of rites the major elements for each rite that involve a similar pattern of separation,

transition, and incorporation (or aggregation).

Van Gennep formulated the influential concept of rites of passage in his analysis of aboriginal

rituals on young males' acquiring of adulthood as:

> In some tribes the novice is considered dead… It lasts for a fairly long time and
> consists of a physical and mental weakening which is undoubtedly intended to make
> him lose all recollections of his childhood existence. Then follows the positive part:
> instruction in tribal law and a gradual education as the novice witnesses totem
> ceremonies, recitations of myths, etc. The final act is a religious ceremony …which
> makes the novice forever identical with the adult members. ... [215]

Van Gennep's concept exemplified three essential stages of the male journey. First, young

males are considered to be "dead," forced to leave their family to complete the rite of

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[214] Solon Kimball, "Introduction" in van Gennep, *Rite of Passage*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,1909,
translated and republished in *1960* by University of Chicago Press, p. vii
[215] van Gennep, p. 81

separation. Second, they experience physical and mental stress, undergoing a significant

stressful transition period to break with the past. Third, they are accepted as adults after

observing and participating in an essential religious ceremony in the adult world. As will be

discussed next, in the two films selected for this chapter, both male protagonists undergo a

similar trajectory in the first two stages: they are forced into separation and tortured in

various ways to break with the past. In the third stage, however, both protagonists encounter

disruption in their planned incorporation into their previous communities. The reason for this

disruption will be highlighted for its political implications in later analysis.

Beyond that, van Gennep exerted a wider impact on cultural and political studies with two

major findings related to his concept of the rites of passage. First, he stressed a certain degree

of autonomy that was acquired by individuals during the stage of transition. Second, van

Gennep underscored "the relationship between actual spatial passage and the change in social

position".[216]

More specifically, van Gennep highlighted a special stage called transition, endorsing the two

findings above, referred to as "liminality". "Van Gennep saw transition rites as 'liminal',

while rites of separation were 'preliminal', and rites of incorporation were 'postliminal.' " [217]

The liminal stage was a secluded state, a zone of non-identity in the socio-cultural life.

Conversely, however, it is a phase beyond the reach of routines and normality. This special

liminal state has been put to effective use in many instances of cultural analysis. The most

famous application of van Gennep's concept relates to Victor Witter Turner's arguments

about anti-structure in a state of marginality.[218] "Liminality, which Turner sees as by far the

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[216] Arnold van Gennep, p. ix-x
[217] Alan Barnard & Jonathan Spencer, *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London; New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 489
[218] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, Harmondsworth:Penguin,1974

most important phase, involves a prolonged period in which the participant is both literally and symbolically marginalised."[219] A variety of institutions and practices that can range from churches to hippies is identified as a condition of "sacred marginality", whose nature is "characterised by something of the anti-structural, the transitional, and processual, the creative and re-formative, the reversing, resistant and rebellious." [220] For this chapter, the concept of liminality serves as a vital tool to address a state of non-identity both male protagonists share, and in result their rebellious journey against political persecution which is issued through the institutional power.

Arnold van Gennep's concept also underlines the potential changes associated with the state of liminality in terms of social transformation:

> Van Gennep, with others, accepted the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane; in fact, this is a central concept for understanding the transitional stage in which an individual or group finds itself from time to time. The sacred is not an absolute value but one relative to the situation. The person who enters a status at variance with the one previously held becomes 'sacred' to the others who remain in the profane state. It is this new condition which calls for rites eventually incorporating the individual into the group and returning him to the customary routines of life. These changes may be dangerous, and at least, they are upsetting to the life of the group and the individual. The transitional period is met with rites of passage which cushions the disturbance. In one sense all life is transition, with rhythmic periods of quiescence and heightened activity.[221]

Specifically, van Gennep takes a dynamic view of the state of liminality as not being an absolute value, but rather a new condition. Conflicts are destined once the participant in the 'sacred' is allowed to re-enter his previous group. That is when rites of passage play their roles best to ease the disturbance. The change in social position for the participant is expected to be the positive result of the whole process. In Turner's interpretation from the perspective of a social structure analysis, liminality directly results in social critique: "They (those who

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[219] Alan Barnard & Jonathan Spencer, p. 491
[220] Nigel Rapport & Joanna Overing, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: the Key Concepts,* London;   New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 234
[221] Solon Kimball, p. viii-ix

are in the condition of 'sacred marginality') stripped themselves of normative everyday identities and refrained from normal practices in order to achieve vantage-points from which the social structure could be critiqued and reformed."[222] This change in social position is also materialised in the two films discussed in this chapter. As will be revealed later, both male protagonists seize the control of power, asserting a resistant masculinity. The power transition sheds light on an implied social critique shared by both films, as well as an alternative future envisioned as opposed to the ideas of modern nation state in the 1930s and1980s.

As a whole, in the light of van Gennep's conception of rites of passage, both films exhibit the parallel pattern of a male journey in the first instance. First, both protagonists are forced into separations that then initiate the journey that reasserts their masculine identities. Wang was clearly defined by his duty as a political instructor (his image and overall representations perfectly match the ideal of a determined Communist); Ah Long was characterised as a caring father. Upon separation from their respective communities, both men are no longer who they once were. They demonstrate a greater spirit of autonomy and start their journey to seek or renew their masculine identity. Second, both are marginalised in harsh environments, but then assert their manhood by withstanding opposition. To some extent, both Wang and Ah Long are exiled, but they also both stick to their male natures and thus succeed. Wang defies physical violence and political rejection; Ah Long renders the policeman and his dog a joke.

Third, both men intend to go back to their past communities with improved status. Wang becomes the leader in battling the Japanese after section chief Xu is injured. Ah Long, on the other hand, seizes the gun and takes control of both men's lives. Both are recognised as equal by members of their previous communities, even before their final incorporation. In *One and*

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[222] Nigel Rapport & Joanna Overing, p. 234

Eight, Wang is seen going back to the main force, now a true comrade of the section chief Xu; in *Wave Washes Sand*, even though Ah Long fails to go back literally, he is no longer a fugitive, but rather a man in command, now standing with the policeman shoulder to shoulder.

During the male journey process that takes place in both films, there are two remarkable aspects highlighted that echo the two findings of van Gennep. First, a spirit of independence disregarding rules brings out macho qualities in both men. After a forced separation from their respective communities, both protagonists are positioned in nature, thereby establishing their male power against the political suppression they experienced. Second, their change in spatial position brings with it a fundamental change in status; the man previously in charge fails, and both Wang and Ah Long assume a dominant position.

These two aspects are shared by these marginalised male figures, suggesting strongly a state of "sacred marginality" in Turner's phrase. Both male protagonists are either fugitives or prisoners, rejected from social normality and suffering from being in a state of non-identity. Their regained masculinity is essentially "anti-structural" and "re-formative", challenging the leaderships from their previous communities and thereby effecting a dramatic transition to power. All these radical challenges to the existing power structure offer a hint of discontent with status quo and a desire for change, therefore a perspective of social critique.

One more thing to add, however, is an understanding of the final disruption of the passage rites seen in both cases. Instead of a smooth transition to their previous communities with masculinity construction being accomplished, both protagonists establish their power positions before returning and then show a degree of detachment from their previous community. In *Waves*, Ah Long laughs when he loses the last chance to be rescued; in *One*

and Eight instructor Wang turns an admiring look on one of his battling fellows, the suspect with thick eyebrows, who chooses to live unconstrained. These disruptions not only strengthen the call for social critique, which praises the way of living in the natural world rather than in social structure, but also challenges the sentiment for a modern nation which includes an ideally effective government, as seen in the mainstream political discourses taking place in 1930s and 1980s China.

In both films, a resistant masculinity is recognisable alongside the completion of rites of passage, suffering marginalisation and suppression while still managing to challenge the mainstream discourses. Based on the extraordinarily journeys of masculinity construction, this chapter relates these passages to discourses on the nation in 1930s and 1980s China. This discussion adds further complexity to the picture of Chinese nationalism, but moves ever closer to the reality, the truth about Chinese male intellectuals.

2. Marginalisation: Separation and Criminalisation

This section examines the start of the male journey in both films by observing the rites of separation in the two films' use of mise-en-scène, composition and props in particular. It first addresses a strengthening of marginality as shown through transformative space in both cases. Then it includes nature, a common element found in both films, to indicate a state of liminality where different sets of rules are formulated outside of social normality.

A. Separation: The Politics of Mise-en-Scène

In both films, the ritual of separation is clearly represented even before the main narrative begins. In *One and Eight*, instructor Wang is thrown into prison at the very beginning of the film, and thus he is visually represented as being separated from his community, his past, and

his identity. In *Waves Washing Sand*, Ah Long is forced to leave his home. He too is seen as being cut off from his daughter and family life. The analysis below centres on the use of mise-en-scène in both cases to manifest the rites of separation.

One and Eight starts with a pictorial synopsis of the main storyline where all the characters are shown in still photographs along with tense, heroic sounding music. The narrative then commences in a murky tone in a closed space. Despite poor visibility, two narratives happen simultaneously. A man's bronzed limb emerges from the right side of the screen, followed by his bare head and cold eyes, as he is initiating a jail break. In a voiceover, Wang's footsteps along with his repeated protests are heard: "Comrade, I am not a… I am telling you…please let me go! I have to make it clear to the party leader! " The next shots swiftly cut between a closed door and shadows moving furtively inside the prison. All of a sudden, the noise and the picture merge. Wang's voice is interrupted by the noise of the door being opened and Wang himself is shoved inside the prison. Then there is absolute silence, as Wang desperately puts his hands on the door. When Wang finally turns back, where his point of view is confronted by a sequence showing the prisoners: two middle shots capture a couple of eyes looking coldly back at him, a tilt shot filming a shadow of a man sitting, and a close-up of someone's stern face.

The sense of separation is three-fold in this simple sequence. First, filmed in relative darkness, the closed space is separated from the world of light (the widely accepted allegory for truth and hope). Wang's stepping into the darkness symbolises his innocence at being wrongly questioned. Second, Wang's protesting voice is overwhelmed by the noise of the door. His right to speak out is stolen, leaving Wang voiceless about his past. Third, and most obviously, Wang himself is shoved physically through the door. The door is the boundary between the

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lawful and the prosecuted and thus the cruellest reminder of Wang's separation from his identity. Far removed from his solemn duty, he is now a prisoner. The enclosed world is filled with hostile eyes to reveal a vicious environment, further enhancing the sense of marginality.

At the start of *Waves Washing Sand,* Ah Long's sense of separation is shown in his inner voice at the sight of a pair of shoes he previously bought for his daughter. Ah Long has fled home and wandered the streets for quite a while. Suddenly, an idea occurs to him, and he digs something from his pockets–a small pair of shoes. Ah Long's facial expression tenses as he holds the shoes tightly, moving them close to his chest. Then Ah Long's deep voice starts in voice-over: "Ah Long! My poor girl! She must be so frightened! … I must go back to see her!"

The pair of shoes is a reminder of Ah Long's past identity. They represent a caring father, but also indicate a separation forced by the police hunt. As an important prop, the function of the pair of shoes is similar to the door in *One and Eight*: The shoes connect to and at the same time deny the protagonist's original masculine identity. Although a fugitive, Ah Long is still attached to his duty as a father, and the shoes denote his physical but not his emotional separation from his daughter.

In each film, the male protagonist experiences a sudden disconnection from the past. Especially, they are both persecuted by the institutional order and robbed of their socially defined masculine identities. After being presumed to be outlaws, however, they can escape from social normality. In other words, that very separation demolishes the rules and regulations of their social world, in effect returning them to the primal world of nature.

B. Liminality: Nature vs Imprisonment

Both films feature the overwhelming presence of nature, which introduces the second point of departure in this discussion: both alternate between showing imprisoned, isolated, man-made space and vast, boundless landscapes. In *One and Eight*, a dry well serves as a prison for instructor Wang and the other eight culprits. Later, the setting changes to a deserted land, where a battle starts and the prisoners become fighters. In *Waves Washing Sand*, Ah Long switches to a ship on the vast sea, but then is finally stranded on a desert island.

The first time that Wang is exposed to the daylight is full of much meaning. In a bird's-eye view, Wang and the eight others are seen as confined within an empty well. For at least ten seconds, the scene remains a freeze frame. Then there is a low angle shot from the bottom of the well, pointing upwards to a patrolling guard. After, the camera moves vertically, scanning the grooved walls of the well and down to the darkness that is underground. In the murk, the camera pauses on a man's face, which is hardly recognisable. Then another couple of seconds passes without any movement. Accompanying the entire sequence is an innocent song sung by children.

The sense of imprisonment is clear in this sequence; the patrolling guard adds to the aura of repression from political power. The slow movement of the camera and the murky light underground reinforce both the sense of heaviness and gloom. As for the vertical movement of the camera, it simply points to the long and narrow path going back, metaphorically to the men's former communities. In stark contrast, the nursery rhyme disrupts the sombre mood and implies a return to an innocent world, making people ask, is this nostalgia for the past? Or is this song a concealed aspiration?

Later in the film, a sense of nature becomes overwhelming. Once the platoon starts to withdraw, Wang and the eight other suspects are released in a vast stretch of land, mountainous and desert. In addition, the sky becomes a central element representing nature. The camera films the group of suspects against the sky, now chained by a rope. One by one, there are close-ups of these individuals—political instructor Wang, the big man, the heavy browed man……The shots are all taken from a low angle, making the heads of the characters seem monumental against the empty blue sky. On another occasion, when the youngest suspect stops to drink some water, the whole chained group also must stop. Another set of individual shots follows. The camera turns to film the faces, again set against the blue sky. These low angle close-ups not only abandon the previous visual confinement (the blind well), but also grant all nine individuals an unconventional representation. They are explicitly glorified, outlined against the blue sky to offer profound cultural implications.

According to traditional Chinese thinking, the sky is the highest level of the world and represents the ultimate judge of human morality. There is also a saying, "sky, earth, human" (*tian di ren,* known as *sancai* or the three powers) which refers to an ideal human society that is in harmony with the universe. In this context, when a human being is positioned against the sky, he is shown as brave enough to face up to ultimate justice. Understandably, in many Chinese war films produced after 1949, the sky is a favourite element that is often shown when a hero has been sacrificed. Here, however, all nine suspects are granted this same hero's privilege while still alive. The sky represents an unexpected undermining of mainstream discourse.

In *Waves Washing Sand,* Ah Long is also framed in a closed space in the early part of the films. He is more seen in exile than as a prisoner. As a consequence, tracking shots are the

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most frequently used technique to stress a sense of confinement. Right after the manslaughter (Ah Long bashes and accidentally kills the man, who has lived with Ah Long's wife), Ah Long is seen in a tracking shot, walking down the road, but only from the right side of the screen to the left. With the camera moving closer, Ah Long still wanders, slightly ahead of the tracking camera. Then there is another shot toward evening where Ah Long emerges from the right side, again walking toward the left of the screen. All these sequences construct a theme of repeated walking with little change in background. Edited together, they point more than anything else to a sense of endless entrapment and loneliness.

In another sequence, Ah Long's cornered status is even more clearly revealed. After a few lucky escapes from the policeman and his dog, he is pursued by a public hue and cry. Bulletins featuring his face are circulated in the town, shown as a shot full of flying posters. Shortly afterwards, in a low-angle tracking shot taken from the front, Ah Long walks slowly, tiredness written on his dishevelled face. Superimposed in the middle of the screen are the words, "Reward: four hundred dollars". Then the scene cuts to a close- up of Ah Long's plodding feet moving forward, the movement largely cancelled as it is keeping the same pace with the tracking camera.

Like Wang in *One and Eight,* however, Ah Long finally escapes from his confinement in the town and switches to a ship at sea and later to the island. Nature then becomes the central element of the mise-en-scène; the sea and the island are now the most prominent presence. Most interestingly, just like Wang in *One and Eight*, Ah Long is seen in a low-angle shot when he wanders on the island for the first time. A tracking shot from the side catches sight of Ah Long's legs moving on the sand. The shot does not change for about twenty seconds. Then the camera is in front, filming Ah Long's face in a low-angle shot: he looks weary and

confused. As Ah Long shields his eyes with his hand, the scene cuts to his personal point of view. There are rocks all around with nothing but waves crashing on them. Then the camera cuts back to Ah Long for a second time, followed by another point of view shot. There are rocks, sand and the sea, but nothing else. With Ah Long looking around, the camera slowly scans the site, but still, there is nothing here but the deserted, natural seashore.

As in *One and Eight*, the alteration of space here has profound cultural implications. The sea and island are by themselves a visual version of the idiom, "the ends of the earth" (*tianya haijiao*, literally sky edge, sea horn, or cape). The island symbolises a world situated far away from social normality, where Ah Long is the only human being. He too is not subject here to moral judgment except from the highest authority, the sky. In a way, these representations also exempt Ah Long from any mainstream social discourse.

When comparing these two films, the alteration of space—in *Waves* from a small town to the lonely island and in *One* from a temporary prison to nature—leads to the same end. After the rites of separation, where institutional power forces both Wang and Ah Long into confinement, both are finally able to return to nature. The first point about nature is its exemption from human tenets and regulations. It can be said that nature here functions as liminality, a state of autonomy where a better or even an ideal social condition is expected and can be formulated. Nature facilitates the construction of masculinities, as discussed in the following sections.

3. Withstanding Violence: Initiating a Power Struggle

There is a second stage of the standard rite of passage when male protagonists are faced with different forms of challenges. Two layers of violence are examined accordingly: first, there is

physical violence and psychological torment, which puts the strength and courage of the two men to the test. Second, institutional prosecution, as represented by a man in charge, is a masculinity that embodies the dominant social order. In the intervening time, both protagonists demonstrate stiff resistance to their restrained status quo, thus asserting their renewed masculinity.

A. Persecution and Violence: Mounting Resistance

As mentioned earlier, separation starts the journey to masculinity construction in both films. Rites of transition, on the other hand, as the second stage of acquiring manhood, demand tough situations that stimulate revolutionary changes. According to Julie Peteet, marginalisation utilised as a crucial transition can involve excessive physical violence. Through examining the experience of young Palestinian males under Israeli occupation, Julie Peteet singles out physical violence as a discernible cause for young males to reach manhood. She identifies "a logic of sequences [which is] apparent in the transformative process of physical violence." [223] Namely, the detachment before the violence (separation), the marginality is "fraught with dangers" (transition) and "the re-entry into normal social life" (incorporation). As a consequence of withstanding such violence, a young male attests to his masculine self amidst the enormous respect he gains when he returns to his original community.

In both films, beating or spiritual torture is filmed equally intensely. In *One and Eight,* instructor Wang is caught in a fist fight and wins immediate respect among the prisoners. In *Waves Washing the Sand*, Ah Long is tormented both physically and mentally by an endless police pursuit. The male protagonists' traumatic experiences eventually lead to their obtaining

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[223] Julie Peteet, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A Cultural Politics of Violence" in Adams, Rachel and Savran, David, eds., *The Masculinity Studies Reader,* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002, p. 325

actual male power.

One and Eight also features graphic details of a vicious beating. As a newcomer who is bold enough to report an attempted jailbreak, Wang is attacked shortly after being imprisoned. In a closed space, the blind well, Wang is surrounded by five angry men. At the start, Wang receives a punch right to the chest and immediately falls with a groan. A hail of fists and feet join in to beat him, and he is pushed back down to the ground and can hardly move. Shakily, Wang still manages to stand up; a low-angle shot here captures his bruised face. He is immediately punched back to the ground. Once again, Wang stands up, but he is beaten to the ground one more time still. A man leans down to check Wang, belligerently asking: "Do you still dare?" Unexpectedly, Wang spits at him.

As the central figure of the fight, Wang's endurance of this violence is the striking feature of the entire sequence. He never fights back and standing up once again justifies the words "withstanding violence". The brutality is graphic, which only attests to Wang's tough character. As an immediate outcome, Wang's masculinity is recognised by a leader of the mob, who finally speaks up to end the fight: "Okay, that's enough! This guy has guts!" In this way, the transformative process outlined by Julie Peteet works a transformation through the recognition of Wang's maleness. However, this recognition of Wang's masculinity is no longer based on values related to his own community. Among these outlaws, it is not political rightness that matters, but instead one's toughness and defiance that count. As mentioned earlier, within the rites of separation, Wang has stepped into a different space, both practically and virtually. It is a more primitive world that ignores rules and regulations. A political instructor in the past, the first lesson Wang must learn is to rely on his physical strength. This experience is now incorporated into his masculinity in the making.

In *Waves Washing Sand,* representations of physical violence are not as explicit as those in *One and Eight*. Yet Ah Long too is "fraught with dangers"; he is repeatedly attacked by a police dog. In addition, Ah Long's trauma is twofold. Not only does the police pursuit exhaust him; fear and memories also haunt him. On many occasions, superimposition is used to probe Ah Long's inner world. When sitting in a restaurant alone, Ah Long looks up miserably, glancing to his left. Following his line of sight, the scene cuts to an illusory image of his daughter, who is smiling at him and about to talk. Immediately after, however, his daughter disappears, and an illusory policeman stands there laughing.

Afterwards, Ah Long secures a job on a ship. He suddenly stops work when he again sees the illusory policeman before throwing a shovel of coal into the furnace. Then the shot cuts to the burning fire where a superimposition of the policeman looks at him, laughing loudly. While resting on the deck, Ah Long still sees his daughter. A closer shot showing the sea flowing quickly by the ship. The camera then cuts back to Ah Long, who looks even lonelier. Then an illusory image of his daughter appears, followed by a long shot of the broad sea again. The shot moves back to Ah Long, who turns his back slowly and goes below decks. Finally, there is another shot of the waves. All along, this sequence is accompanied by sentimental music to add to the nostalgic feeling.

These three occasions (in the restaurant, at the furnace and on deck) are intertwined with changes of time and space to point to Ah Long's spiritual exile. The sea especially symbolises isolation in both time and space. The illusory images incorporate the passage of time, creating a sense of incurable loneliness. The deck scene feels like a torment that is lasting forever. The image of Ah Long's daughter is set between two shots of flowing water, with the first closer

and the second far away, the sequence evokes a mirage that keeps slipping away. In this sequence Ah Long is completely cut off from his past experience, becoming a man left only with memories as well as loneliness. In a way, Ah Long is positioned to feel the universal pain of separation and ponder the kindness and enmity of all mankind. This arrangement is consistent with the philosophical touch evident in the film, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In their respective ways, both Wang and Ah Long are adjusting to new challenges and new rules, reinventing themselves, as they could never have imagined in the past. As the first sign of transformation, they both begin to question orthodoxy and take a resistant stance toward their persecution.

In *One and Eight*, a post-battle scene collectively witnessed ignites a fuse. The sequence starts after the army and prisoners enter a site filled with rubble and dead bodies. Slowly scanning the tragic scene, the camera films the characters obviously now in deep shock. There are rows of soldiers standing, with lowered heads. Then there is a close shot of Wang standing in the middle, sorrow on his face. The other suspects are also seen in medium shots. All are presented in absolute silence and in a murky tone, as swirling smoke obscures the viewer's vision. Suddenly, a sharp scream rises, and a man in torn clothing shakily emerges from behind a mud wall with abandoned equipment and burning fires all around. The man leans against the wall, looks around in terror, and then throws himself onto a mound. He screams frantically. The camera follows the man running madly in front of the soldiers and screams "All killed! They are all killed!" The man is seen running across the broad landscape under the vast sky until his figure becomes a tiny spot. After this, the camera silently cuts back to Wang and a couple of the others still in the gloom. A soldier abruptly shoves Wang,

yelling at him: "You still have the guts to look? All these are because of what you were doing

for the Japanese! Traitor! " Immediately the camera moves closer to Wang, his face now

twisted from shame and anger. All of a sudden, Wang explodes. He breaks loose and

struggles through the crowd, yelling: "Let me go!... Let me go! …"

For the first time, Wang overtly breaks military rules and acts on his real emotions. The

restraint that political instructor Wang would have normally shown gives way to an extreme

expression of shame and anger. Wang has gone one step farther away from his old self and

one step closer to his natural instincts. As a clear indication of male power, his strength as

shown during the struggle in the prison has added to the gesture of his rebellion towards

political persecution.

In *Waves*, Ah Long's rejection of his plight is more vocal and explicit. After days of isolation

on the island, he is tormented by the thought that he is going to die. In other words, he is

forced to contemplate at eternal human theme, the problem of life and death. In his unique

way, Ah Long brings his anxiety clearly to light. After a subjective shot that features

superimposition where illusory city scenes overlap the waves, Ah Long finally breaks. In a

medium shot, Ah Long presses his head into his hands, his face twisted. Reframed in a long

shot, Ah Long begins to yell in pain, "Why do we have to die? We are human! We have wives

and children! We want to live!" He raises his arms into the air, holds his head in despair, and

then throws himself down on the sand in abstract grief.

Reading these lines against the context, the implications of Ah Long's cry are very clear.

"Why are we here to die? Why we are not treated as human beings? Why are we separated

from our wives and children? We want to live because we don't deserve to die!" Ah Long

blames the endless pursuit of him by the policeman for his miserable situation, which is of course reinforced by social power. Ah Long takes a stance of resistance toward institutional power. Ironically, later in the film, when Ah Long does get a chance to live, the police pursuit of him ruins everything.

The metaphorical meaning of the representations of these outlaws is striking in both films. Both men are seen as having an honourable cause despite their political status as people who are prosecuted. For Wang, the post-battle sequence is packed with bleak images in a murky tone, wherein the national tragedy is unfolding. Wang's resistance is triggered by his noble dignity as a Chinese. For Ah Long, his love for his family makes him a good person despite his wrongdoing.

In terms of film representation, both Wang and Ah Long are allowed to communicate with the audiences directly. They both express their pain and anger and reveal themselves. In other words, audiences are expected to understand and even identify with these outlaws. People can see themselves in different ways; everyone is living constrained in one way or another, comparable to a state of imprisonment. By the same token, these stories are also parables for all human beings. Seen from this perspective, both films are actually not just about criminals, but also about the difficulties faced by ordinary people who are morally good. Both films provide a unique perspective on the nature of rules. Political rules which might incur injustice are under scrutiny here.

No matter what the circumstances, both protagonists succeed in their transition to resistance and take a step forward in their journey to assert their masculinity. Their stance of resistance is actually rooted in their confidence and in who they are. Instructor Wang always protests

his innocence and honours his duty as a political instructor even when he is treated as a criminal. Ah Long's constant avoidance of the police hunt has only one explanation, He is hoping to return home as a father. Arguably, both men take resistance as the only way of embracing an identity that has suddenly been taken from them. In a way, the negotiation between honoured masculinity and institutional power has begun, which we will explore in depth in the next section.

B. The Two-Man Story: Policemen and Outlaws

As mentioned earlier, in both films the rites of separation are imposed by the social order, marking a rigid division between state agents and outlaws. In *One and Eight*, instructor Wang is detained by section chief Xu who takes on the position of power. In *Waves Washing Sand*, Ah Long as a fugitive offender is pursued by a policeman. In these actions are metaphorical power struggles between state agents and outlaws, which are dramatized in the two films.

In terms of the main storyline of each film, *One and Eight* expresses the narrative between two men: Wang and section chief Xu, although there are only three actual and direct confrontations between Wang and the man who holds his fate. All three occasions are trials with no new direction taken as a result. The first trial occurs outdoors with a huge haystack occupying half the screen. Both Wang and Xu are filmed from a distance, but their talk can be discerned and heard clearly. Xu insists on a witness for Wang to prove his true identity, while Wang cannot give him a single name since all his colleagues have been betrayed and executed. The setting is maintained throughout the talk, and half of the time Wang is positioned in the middle of the screen, his head lowered.

The second trial happens during a dark night with dramatic lighting and sound effects. With

only the top part of his body visible, Wang enters the room in murky darkness, his face lit only by candlelight. The scene cuts to Xu, who is sitting there in the darkness, only his arms exposed to the light. Then the camera moves back on Wang, whose face is filled with sorrow, his lips moving but slightly. Finally the camera returns to Xu from the side where he is sitting silently in a corner behind a lamp. At this moment, background noises from outside arise, in stark contrast to the deadly silence within the room.

The third confrontation between Wang and Xu happens in a hilly space where a traitor has just been executed. It is time for a final decision. Either Wang and the rest of the suspects will be executed, or they can live and become part of the team that is breaking away from an encircling enemy. The two men are again in murky darkness, but their inner conflicts become vocal through voice-overs. Xu still hesitates in trusting Wang. Wang is worried that further delay will cost the army more lives. Finally and resolutely, Wang takes the initiative. Slowly, he walks to a cliff that is just meters away and turns to face Xu, his inner voice continuing. "Section chief, there's no time for hesitation now! For the sake of the army, it [his sacrifice] is worthwhile! " With teary eyes, Wang voices his final will. "I know there is a shortage of bullets in our army. Save my bullet to kill more Japanese! After our victory, please let the party investigate whether I was a traitor or not! " Immediately after Wang's words, however, the voice-over of section chief Xu is heard. "To sacrifice himself for the good of the army, this is not something that an enemy could do." Xu resolves now to incorporate all the suspects within the army.

These three occasions or "trials" share the common theme of a clash, not just of opinion, but also of image and sound, and all exhibit a contest of male power. As a whole, Xu is the one who takes control of the situation and is calm, but stubborn. Wang, on the other hand, goes to

great lengths to protest his innocence. The two men's confrontation accentuates the dynamics between a power-holder and a rebel, which then escalates and transforms the usual order. There is a gradual increase of tension that creates a climax, and then the turning point comes, and the tension is resolved when Wang's exemplary character wins over Xu.

Individually, the three encounters prioritise different artistic aspects of these films and address the theme of contestation. The first occasion is deployed around space, the second occasion is about lighting, and the third is about voices. As mentioned earlier, during the first confrontation, Wang is positioned in the middle of the screen, his movements covering the majority of the space. Xu, on the other hand, is limited to a corner, squatting rather than standing most of the time. This particular arrangement grants Wang full demonstration of his masculine power. Wang's courage and clear conscience are best demonstrated in his rapid walking back and forth. During the second confrontation, Wang's face is fully exposed to the light despite the darkness around him, and sincerity is written in his eyes. Xu, on the other hand, is immersed in darkness, and his face is barely discernable. Once again, Wang is privileged and allowed to present his manly countenance, full of dignity. In the third confrontation, the majority of the voice-over belongs to Wang. He is even able to express out loud his loyalty to the party. When heroic music rises along with his words, Wang has transformed himself into a real hero. Together, all three confrontations accomplish the masculinity construction of Wang through use of candour and integrity. Despite Xu forcefully being in control throughout, his political power is nevertheless undermined by Wang's show of such honourable masculinity.

In *Waves*, institutional power is shown through the presentation of the two men's rivalry. During the lengthy pursuit, there are three face-to-face confrontations between Ah Long and

the policeman. The first occurs when Ah Long goes home to see his daughter, only to run foul of the police. The policeman unleashes the police dog to attack Ah Long, who is lucky to escape. The second confrontation happens when the policeman is hunting Ah Long in the streets. The policeman shoots at Ah Long, and the dog nips at his heels. Ah Long manages to jump into the water and flee. The third incident is on the deck of the ship on which Ah Long is working. Purely by chance, the policeman asks for a light and suddenly recognises Ah Long. Just as the policeman prepares to arrest him, however, the shipwreck occurs.

In contrast with *One of Eight*, however, Ah Long here is more victimised than masculinised. The central image for all three confrontations is a set of handcuffs hanging on the policeman's belt. Each time the policeman is about to arrest Ah Long, audiences are shown the flashing cuffs. Additionally Ah Long's narrow escape each time only accentuates his marginalised status. One thing is made clear as well throughout the pursuit: Ah Long is always displayed in the shadows despite his strength and intelligence.

A picture of the on-going power struggle is presented in both films as dominant masculinity in the form of state agents and marginalised masculinity in the form of outlaws. In other words, the politics of masculinity is revealed through seeing the power struggles between these two men. This focus reminds us of R.W. Connell's argument on contesting masculinities in a bid to maintain a patriarchal ideology. According to Connell, governments and the military are masculine by their very nature.[224] The dominant discourse reflects the incorporation of both systems to maintain and safeguard social normality, patriarchy being one of its fundamentals. Connell also pinpoints power struggles between masculinities:

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[224] "The state, for instance, is a masculine institution. … The overwhelming majority of top office-holders are men because there is a gender configuring of recruitment and promotion, a gender configuring of internal division of labour and system of control, a gender configuring of policymaking, practical routines and ways of mobilizing pleasure and consent. " R. W. Connell, p. 73

> The concept of 'hegemony', deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamics by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.[225]

Section chief Xu in *One and Eight* and the policeman in *Waves* can be seen as symbolic representatives of the dominant discourse with Wang and Ah Long positioned at the receiving end of this domination. Only here, the gender order is replaced by a more discursive power struggle:

> What masculinism does is to highlight the ideological dimensions and possibilities within masculinity as dominant practice(s) in given settings. Similarly, for poststructuralist theorists, the concept of masculinism can also be retained as a theoretical tool. But only with one important proviso: the ideological framework and assumptions must give way to a discursive understanding of power. Thus masculinism becomes a dominant discourse rather than a dominant ideology.[226]

In adopting this perspective, man-to-man confrontation is closely connected to a contesting of social discourses where different social and cultural visions collide. Despite different points of emphasis, both films illustrate the power struggle between different versions of masculinity. They both highlight the collision between the discourse of a resistant masculinity and the dominant social discourse.

Echoing the arguments above, the representations of both persecutors in these films are not characterised by their individual qualities, but rather by their uniforms and the duties which reflect their institutional roles. The two films have great similarity in costume design, despite the fifty years in time that lies between them. The uniforms worn by the persecutors are in contrast to the ragged traditional clothing or even the half-naked bodies of the outlaws.

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[225] R. W. Connell, p. 77
[226] Stephen Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*, Malden, MA; Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers;Polity, 2002, p. 98

In *Waves*, the first appearance of the policeman is actually jocular. A dog's face first appears on the screen, and then the camera steadily moves upwards, in turn filming handcuffs clipped at a man's waist, a uniform and tie where a hand is scrabbling, and a close-up of a man's face with a skewed hat and a lit cigarette. The camera lingers on the man's face, filming his knotted brows and rolling eyes. It is like a classic caricature captured live. The dog and the handcuffs are a mockery of the policeman's cruelty. According to the main storyline, the policeman is a man fully bound by his duties: not only does he never give up on pursuing Ah Long, he also ruins the last chance of survival by arresting Ah Long the minute he sees a ship. Even he, however, has a moment of conscience after he ends up on the desert island. Deprived of his gun and away from his station, he and Ah Long become friends. That is to say, his real nature as a human being finally surfaces. By this means, his imprisoned mind is exposed, and underneath his uniform and handcuffs, he is simply an ordinary man with a good soul. In its very particular way, *Waves* creates a parable. As the policeman pursues the outlaw, the policeman also becomes spiritually imprisoned.

One and Eight, on the other hand, seems to be a retelling of the story of the policeman and the outlaw. Wang is detained by section chief Xu, but in reality, section chief Xu is more constrained by regulations and military laws. Slightly different from the policeman in *Waves*, however, Xu evinces a degree of struggle with his duties. There is one sequence in which Xu vainly seeks directions from his higher-ups, thereby showing his struggles clearly. This sequence is precisely composed of five shots in addition to an episode in which Wang's innocence candidly is talked about among Wang's fellow prisoners.

The first shot is set in a deserted landscape where Xu is walking forward at a good pace,

directly in front of the camera. The second shot is of Xu slowly walking backwards, on the left side of the screen. His voice-over seems uncertain, saying that the connection with the outside world (the higher-ups) is completely cut off, and he is hesitant about how to handle Wang's case. In the third shot, Xu is sitting alone in the top right corner of the screen. The fourth shot is an extreme close-up of Xu's gun, held in his own hands. In the fifth shot, Xu is still playing with his gun, while the young female nurse pleads for Wang's innocence.

The above sequence exemplifies Xu's confinement because of military regulations. His image is trapped in the camera frame no matter which position he is in. When he is heading to the political department, his physical position in the middle is consistent and similar to his beliefs in justice. In the following two shots, however, he is at the edge, at the left, at the far right. Both positions highlight his spiritual struggle. Is he able to break the rules and release Wang? Finally, the two shots of the gun are metaphors of the struggle between institutional order and humanity. Should he obey the rules, or should he listen to his own conscience?

Both films choose to highlight the constraining aspect felt by state agents. Masculinity had been stereotyped since the 1950s, when political correctness was the highest standard, but these images here reverse the standard masculinity representations. Men in uniform who should be the most glorified and powerful figures are outshone by half-naked bodies, and regulations are undermined by natural instincts. Together with the glorified image of outlaws discussed here, the two films also raise fundamental issues, which are in effect at odds with the mainstream discourse.

4. Before Reincorporation: Constructions of Masculinities

Taking a slightly different approach from Julie Peteet's emphasis on the importance of

returning to the previous community in completing certain rites, this part demonstrates the enactment of masculine power even before the start of rites of incorporation. Before going back to their respective communities and showing off their scars to their associates, both men in the films overturn institutional persecution and seize symbolic power in the form of a gun. Such a dramatic turn not only assures both men of their masculinity, but also underscores their call for change.

A. Guns: Subverting Power Relations

In *One and Eight,* a gun appears on the screen on a number of occasions. The function of this key prop, however, is dramatically different each time it appears. One important instance is Xu's silent inquiry of Wang, in the second confrontation between the pair discussed earlier. Among the few things in a bright light is a gun. When Xu is cloaked in darkness sitting beside a lamp, a gun on the table is the only object seen in full light. Wang's lit face is an indication of candour and fearlessness, while the lit gun is a signal of danger and threat. On a more abstract level, the gun is a symbol of power.

This same gun, when played with by Xu, however, signals a vital transition of power in another sequence. After the fire fight with the Japanese starts, there are a lot of injuries on the Chinese side, including Xu himself. In this situation, Xu agrees to let the captive suspects join the battle. Immediately, Wang exhibits his leadership by resolutely giving battle tasks to his fellow suspects. In stark contrast, the injured Xu is helpless. Gathering all his strength, however, Xu instructs the nurse to hand his gun over to Wang. While the handover of the gun is treated naturally and somehow expected, the act still reminds us of the ritual of power transition. As mentioned earlier, van Gennep identifies the kind of "relationship between

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actual spatial passage and the change in social position."[227] More than anything else, the gun handover signals the victory of Wang's masculinity and at the same time, the subversion and removal of obsolete political power.

Immediately after the gun handover, the battle scene takes on a different form. The battle is revived through an extraordinary display of masculine power: just after Wang and his fellow suspects are released, a slow-motion sequence occurs that is packed with heroic spirit. Along with Wang's hearty shout of "Chinese people! Follow me!" and accompanied by a deep chorus on the accompanying soundtrack, Wang and the suspects rush in a line out of the door of a ruined building. They are filmed by a front-on, telescopic-lensed camera, which effectively exaggerates their body and facial movements. After a quick glance at the close fighting between the Chinese and the Japanese soldiers, the camera returns with even more visual power directly to Wang and his mates. They are dashing across a burning yard, carrying all sorts of extraordinary weapons. Wang is holding a rifle, while the others are holding knives, pieces of door frames, and even bricks. Then there is a series of shots of just individuals. Wang stands under the sky, firing his rifle fiercely; and in heavy smoke, a half-naked captive exerts his full strength in throwing a grenade. Two other suspects are shooting at the enemy with great determination. Packed with this heroic spirit, the sequence transforms these outlaws in the manner of masculinity construction. They all become fighters and thus become national heroes.

As a key prop, the gun in *Waves* is also deployed between the policeman and Ah Long. Having been held at gunpoint during the police hunt, Ah Long on the desert island seizes the gun after he rescues the policeman from drowning. When the policeman wakes up, he is at

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[227] Arnold van Gennep, p. ix-x

the point of Ah Long's gun. Even more clearly than in *One*, the gun here symbolises and actually determines life and death, as well as which side has power. By seizing the gun, Ah Long has metaphorically achieved his own transition to a totally different social position. After this transition of power, however, the power struggle comes to an abrupt end. Ah Long puts the gun aside, and both men become friends. In other words, just like the outlaws in *One*, Ah Long transforms himself and thus demonstrates his noble masculinity. He even hands over the remaining water that he has to slake the policeman's thirst.

On the whole, the transition of power here indicates a construction of masculinity, a triumph of resistant masculinity. Meanwhile, however, this construction of masculinity undermines the opposing masculinity of the policeman in *Waves* and Xu in *One*, who represent dominant discourses. Dramatic power transition reverses the favoured masculinity, as it does for the social stratification. The dominant discourse is challenged, with a new direction implied. As will be discussed next, the call for change is well expressed through the cinematographic techniques adopted by both films.

B. Transition: From Night to Day

In *One and Eight*, a sequence at the beginning of the film captures nothing but the transition of lighting from earth to sky, from murky darkness to brilliant sunlight. In *Waves Washing Sand*, there is also a sequence that is totally dominated by a dramatic transition of lighting. In a dark night, Ah Long is overcome by his longing for home when he sees visions of the city and crowds. The next few shots show Ah Long in rapidly shifting scenes between night and day. Finally, the scene transforms and becomes daylight when a ship emerges on the horizon. Both sequences could be read symbolically as an array of connotations. The contrast between black and white, brightness and darkness, can be used to express the male protagonists'

perceptions and predicaments. These elements influence masculinity constructions as well to convey broad messages.

In *One and Eight*, the sequence is abstract, but full of symbolism. It is a vertical dolly shot of nothing but earth and sky. The camera starts from the ground in a murky light with a deep heroic song rising simultaneously. Gradually the camera scans the earth and sky, as the shot becomes brighter and brighter. Finally the shot reaches the sun and shows its rays shining steadily in a grey-blue sky.

Two key elements of this sequence are the transition from darkness to brightness and the movement from low to high. Both are a clear reference to Wang's difficult journey to finally being recognised for who he really is. The whole cinematic process perfectly fits a spiritual evolution, indeed an actual rite of passage. The unusual degree of vertical movement of the camera magnifies the power from underground, or in other words a power emanating from those who are struggling at the bottom of society. It suggests revolutionary changes forced by social injustice, and in the case of Wang his struggle to restore his innocence. This camera work reminds us of the theme of rehabilitation (*pingfan*) that was reiterated in public discourse after the Cultural Revolution. Understandably, the sequence goes beyond masculinity constructions, presenting a demand of a changing world, a new world that reverses a man-made disaster where people are no longer wrongly prosecuted.

Darkness and brightness in these films can be viewed as a transition between the past and the future, which is symbolically comparable to the transition from night to day in *Waves*. Night represents the pain and desperation in the past, and day is the hopeful future. Using the metaphor of movement from night to day shows a hidden world that is discovered and then

recognised, indeed forecasting a world in transformation.

The transition between night and day is more natural in *Waves* where it is basically an indication of the passage of time, also represented as cruel and confusing in Ah Long's final days. As mentioned, the transitions between night and day are rather rapid. Often, one shot is filmed at night when Ah Long is in pain holding his face. The next shot might just be waves shown in daylight. Then night shots follow. Adding to that confusion, superimposition of scenes of Ah Long's hometown reflects Ah Long's subjective views. Shortly afterwards, a filter is used to show the ship becoming gradually in focus and emerging from the horizon. The sequence alternates between night and day, illusion and disillusion. These images run in circles and deconstruct the conception of time, order, and common sense, creating a space that resembles a primeval chaos.

Waves takes a dramatically different direction from *One*, which points to remote antiquity, when no such things as social order or private interests were in place; rather than to the future, where a well-structured modern nation state of people is forced to climb the social ladder. The reason for this direction may lie in the written foreword on the screen at the start of the film: "A good person can commit crime in a tragic incident. A faithful policeman will always pursue his fugitive. When they both face the line of life and death, however, they can abandon hostility and develop a noble friendship. Nevertheless, once interests are threatened and desires are remembered, they return to hostility. This sort of tragedy has happened forever among human beings. " In this brief statement, an interest-driven society takes all the blame for hatred and killing. In accordance with this same idea, seeking out the primitive margins of society can often be the best way to criticise social practice. In the film, such space is in effect the only place where hatred dissolves and the constructions of masculinity

are enabled.

Even though the two films are very different in their treatment of ideal cultural space, they do have one thing in common. They are both distanced from society, and both aspire to change. For both Wang and Ah Long, there are thorny issues that involve their original communities, in which the resistant masculinity they have presented finds no place. Thus it is pertinent to examine both protagonists' problematic returns to their former communities and refer to contemporary public discourses in 1930s and 1980s China.

5. Disruption of the Rite of Passage: Failed Incorporation

Approaching the end of their journey to reconnect with the past community (or identity as in the case of *Waves*),—in Gennepian terms, the phase of incorporation—disruptions occur in both cases. This failure of incorporation indicates that there are serious conflicts between the protagonists and their former social domains. In other words, an irresolvable situation results in a final separation beyond the rites of passage, thus illustrating the political ambiguity present in both endings when responding to modern nation-state discourses in their respective decades.

A. Farewell, My Friend: Problematic Incorporation

In *One and Eight*, instructor Wang bids farewells to his comrade in arms (once a suspect) who expresses full respect for the Communist Party, but would rather live unconstrained by it. Seeing him off almost admiringly, both instructor Wang and section chief Xu show in their eyes their feeling of loss. Here is exactly how it happens: on one knee, the suspect with thick eyebrows lifts his rifle high above his head with both hands. He speaks bluntly to Wang and Xu, who are utterly surprised. "Please forgive me! I'd…better scram now!" Framed in a

close- up shot, Wang speaks to him with sincerity in his eyes. "The facts and I will both speak for you." Then the camera moves back to the man with thick brows, who is then filmed in a low angle shot:

> *Please let me call you the most venerable name in our trade. Big brother! I am a rough man, making a living wandering from place to place half my life. I am used to living in the wild. I have deep respect for the Eighth Route Army and the Communist Party! But I cannot obey your rules. If I couldn't make it, and I did something wrong, I would disappoint you and the dead brothers!*

Then the scene is reframed in a long shot in which the thick-browed man continues:

> *Please believe me! Now I swear to you under the sky! From now on, first, I won't offend the people; second, I won't treat the Eighth Route Army as enemies; third, I will fight the Japanese to the very end!*

With a complicated expression in his eyes, Wang silently accepts the gun, and the suspect turns his back and walks away.

For a few seconds, the camera returns to Wang and Xu in a medium shot, in which Xu struggles to stand. Together, they look in the direction where the thick-browed man has headed. The camera then cuts between the man walking away and Wang and Xu who have complex expressions on their faces. At last, the camera catches up with the thick- browed man who slows down and stops. In a close-up, he slowly turns and looks backwards. Seen from his point of view, Wang and Xu lean against each other and become tiny figures in the distance. This is the final shot of the film.

Two intriguing film techniques are applied here in an unusual way. A low-angle shot, for example, is offered to show the man with thick eyebrows who is actually a gang member. As we have seen, low-angle shots usually present monumental and noble characters to deliver their power and dominance. Bluntly, the man declines Wang's invitation to join the army, claiming he is not ready to give up his freedom. Wang and Xu, on the other hand, become

passive observers of the entire sequence. In addition, the last shot is taken from the perspective of the suspect with thick eyebrows and lets both Wang and Xu become tiny figures. All these shots make the former prisoner the subject of this sequence, thus undermining Wang's absolute superiority in terms of masculine power. The suspect with the thick eyebrows not only upsets Wang's incorporation through the completion of the rites; he also disturbs the credibility of the whole process. Wang and Xu's going back to their former position as army officers becomes less glorious and even more doubtful. Will Wang be able to maintain his resistant masculinity when, unlike the suspect, he sticks to rules and regulations?

Waves Washing Sand answers this question. The equivalent sequence in *Waves* can be viewed as an illusionary incorporation, even though it is seen from the perspective of the policeman. Just when Ah Long is stunned at the sight of a passing ship, the policeman is suddenly distracted by his professional commitment. He imagines himself standing on the deck, enjoying his glorious victory. He smiles at the applause and hears the cheers from huge crowd, while Ah Long is chained and humiliated. Encouraged by this fantasy, the policeman knocks Ah Long down with a rock. The policeman is not doing good here, but he is fulfilling his duty. (In the case of *One,* supposing that the suspect with thick eyebrows commits a crime in the future, Wang and Xu who will have by now returned to their positions of power would probably do the same as the policeman did in *Waves*.) Finally, the ship slips away, and both Ah Long and the policeman are stranded on the island forever. Instead of being devastated, they burst into hearty laughter. As Ah Long says, "Nothing is more equal than death."

If *One* casts doubts on the male journey of incorporation back into society by showing the possibility of an alternative future, *Waves* denies that incorporation all together.   Either way, the rites of incorporation are questioned rather than being automatic and challenged rather

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than being followed. Meanwhile, the focus has shifted from the rites of passage to the protagonists' relations with their original community, relations which are open to interpretation in both films. Before assessing these political implications, we shall review the final shots in both films.

The closing scene of *One* actually constructs an image of equal status between individuals. For the first time, Wang and Xu are filmed shoulder to shoulder, and they have to lean against each other to stand up due to Xu's injury. The picture effaces every difference previously inscribed between state agents and outlaws. Uniforms and guns are gone or damaged, the conflicting attitudes have been dropped, and the sense of struggle against each other has disappeared. The two men now together compose a moment of comradeship with no conflict apparent between them. Seen from the eyes of the thick- browed man in the distance, the pair looks like they are standing on a desert island cut off from the rest of the world.

In *Waves*, the closing scene is largely a repeat of the opening scene. Two skeletons are handcuffed together on the sands, accompanied by gloomy music. The sight actually conveys a message of absolute equality. The two skeletons are eternally bound by their man-made handcuffs, which are a symbol of shared political oppression. The two sequences are similar in terms of presenting the equality between individuals and condemning political intervention, mirroring Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*.

> It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less'. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of he ritual elders.
> … …
> In other words, each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to

structure and communitas, and to states and transitions.[228]

Communitas here is defined as individuals' emancipation from social constraints in the form of "anti-structure", embracing ritual camaraderie. Even though Turner's arguments have been criticised as not relevant in certain circumstances, their impact on anthropology and cultural studies remains significant.[229] As far as these two sequences are concerned, the representations do fit Turner's interpretations. In both cases, the protagonists are lingering at the edge of liminality, and they both reach a place not possible in normal social circumstances. In *One and Eight*, Wang has accomplished his torturous journey, dissolved the differences among the criminals as well as with the officials, and acquired his own resistant masculinity. In *Waves*, Ah Long and the policeman stay in a state of liminality forever where they can be two equal individuals who share everything. The two skeletons also can be viewed as a symbol of both Ah Long and the policeman's ultimate refusal to adhere to the limitations of the human world. In this regard, both sequences establish the image of a special *communitas* with no secular rules applied and reject undue social stratifications.

According to Turner, *communitas* has its own role to play in social transformation. As mentioned earlier, van Gennep's concept of the rites of passage is based upon his understandings of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. "Sacred" designates an entirely different order as opposed to "profane," the objects, beliefs and events of the ordinary world. Individuals returning from rites of passage are bearers of certain "sacred" qualities and can cause interruption and even adjustment in the "profane" group. This dichotomy parallels Turner's analysis of social positions:

> Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost

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[228] Victor Turner, pp. 82-83
[229] John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: the Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, London; New York: Routledge, 1990

everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy,' possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency.

… …

[I]n *rites de passage*, men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas. What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. [230]

In truth, social changes originate through repetitive processes integrating the "sacred" and the "profane." In converse, the "profane" is constantly exposed to the "sacred" through liminality, marginality and inferiority. As two basic modes of being, the "sacred" and the "profane" mediate in human history in this dialectic. Referring to these terms in the two films, a message for change can be identified in both. In *One and Eight*, Wang and Xu's admiring gaze at the thick-browed suspect suggests a willingness to remain in the status of liminality. In *Waves*, the end in death has vast implications. Death is a vital step in rebirth as seen from the perspective of regeneration. "Van Gennep saw 'regeneration' as a law of life and of the universe; the energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent and must be renewed at intervals. For him, this regeneration is accomplished in the social world by the rites of passage [that are] given expression in the rites of death and rebirth. "[231] The two skeletons thus signify a singular stage on the way to a better and more ideal world.

As a whole, a call for change and the aspiration to achieve a better world are implied in both endings. The next section situates these two films within their respective historical backgrounds to explore alternative versions of Chinese nation-building. Basically, we resort to ancient philosophy and humanity against a progressive view of history and ideas of a modern nation state.

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[230] Victor Turner, pp. 115-116
[231] Solon Kimball, p. viii

B. Questioning the Modern Nation State: An Alternative Discourse

The previous chapters have all indicated a remarkable coincidence between gender identities and national aspirations. In Chapter One, male bodies are coherently connected with the image of a powerful nation standing against foreign invasion. In Chapter Two, sexuality yields to national unity, where a distinct masculinity stands as a national emblem. In Chapter Three, emerging male subjectivities embrace a version of Chinese democracy, where an imagined public sphere is vividly represented. In Chapter Four, female masculinity is accentuated to introduce gender equality amid national reform. In this chapter, however, the nation appears more than anything else as a political institution. Meanwhile, a communitas which is outside the mainstream social structure can be identified. For the first time, masculinity is seen to act against dominant national interests and to value personal freedom more than political commitment. This choice is actually not as rare in film representations; rather, it mirrors the long journey of Chinese intellectuals in the twentieth century.

As mentioned in the Introduction, masculinity constructions in modern China have been impacted by an array of cultural and political factors. As a whole, national resistance and the aspirations to have a powerful modern nation have weighed heavily against the liberation of individuality. Still, we should not forget that the 1930s and 1980s shared in the aftermath of extreme political tensions. The so called "white terror" against the left from the 1920s to the 1930s, as well as the Cultural Revolution lasting from the 1960s to the 1970s, were recent memories for these respective film directors. Especially in the case of the political instructor Wang in *One*, his loss of identity and suffering from physical violence are typical of the experience of those who were persecuted during the ten years of political tension in each respective decade.

Amid propagandising for a national cinema in the 1930s, during which film look on the task of promoting national consciousness (including a class struggle in the case of the underground Communist movement), several films reflected on traumatised lives derived from distorted institutional power. *The Goddess* (*Shennü*, 1934) by Wu Yonggang was the first daring attempt at acclaiming a prostitute for her moral values. It presents a woman with a child who ends up killing the man who keeps abusing her. *Plunder of Peach and Plum* (*Tao li jie*, 1934) examines how an aspiring young graduate sinks into theft. Both films point the finger at society, showing deep concern about such marginalised people who commit crimes after their lives are ruined by powerful villains and social injustice. In the 1980s, a number of films depicted criminal incidents, as well as ordinary people who are criminalised. These ranged from the fifth-generation film, *The Last Day of Winter* (*Zuihou yige dongri*, 1986), to the fourth-generation classic, *Hibiscus Town* (*Furong zhen*, 1987), and include even mainstream films like *Juvenile Delinquents* (*Shaonian fan,* 1985).

Doubts about the abuse of power, including political persecution as shown in the above films undermined the credibility of a rigid power system. This lack of confidence in institutional power helps explain the extraordinary resistant masculinity seen in both *One and Eight* and *Waves Washing Sand,* which is marginal to the mainstream of social politics, but closer to a Western version of manhood: "Manhood in the American context is ultimately individualistic, and therefore, an adult man should be detached from his prior brothers to become independent."[232] Both films pay full respect to a masculinity construction that rejected political intervention. They even unconsciously designed a route to manhood similar to the rites of passage practiced in the Western world.

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[232]Pang Laikwan, *Building a New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p. 105

The questioning of the power system by these two films suggests a different point of view in terms of nation-building aspirations. The image of a modern nation is not clear in these two films. Rather, the sense of communitas, as shown in both endings, points to ancient history, even a primitive world existing without the influence of politics. In a way, both of these films resort to a spirit of leaving public life, which is traceable historically back to Lao Zi.

Throughout Chinese history, there has been a tradition of seclusion (retreating from public life) along with the social intervention tradition endorsed by Confucianism. By and large, Chinese intellectuals have observed the doctrine of "In success, commit oneself to the welfare of the society; in adversity, maintain one's own integrity" (*Da ze Jian ji tianxia, qiong ze du shan qishen*). A great number of Chinese intellectuals went into seclusion after abandoning or failing to enter politics, in this case a position in imperial service. They sometimes wielded considerable cultural influence through their academic achievements. Starting from Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, this spirit stayed alive for thousands of years, even maintaining a presence across the decades following 1949. Ancient sages like Qu Yuan (340- 278 BC), Tao Yuanming (365-427), Han Yu (768-824) and Su Shi (1037-1101) all experienced exile or seclusion and produced influential works.

When distance from politics is generally maintained, seclusion can also serve as a special kind of political expression. One extreme example is the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*Zhulin qixian*) in the Wei and Jin Dynasty (220-589), who were an intellectual group taking a political stance. The modern literary giant, Lu Xun (1881-1936), had deep admiration for their rebellious spirit.[233]

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[233] "Lu Xun was like Ji Kang, one of his few Chinese heroes, the Third Century leader of 'The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove,' Ji Kang who, by his own confession, was 'always criticizing King Tan and King Wu and denigrating the Duke of Zhou and Confucius,…'" Pusey, James Reeve, *Lu Xun and Evolution*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998, p. 107

In the case of *Waves Washing Sand* and *One and Eight*, the representations reminiscent of communitas suggest aspirations to freedom of political expression. On its release in 1936, *Waves* was criticised as "completely lacking 'the smell of gunpowder and the smell of blood.'" Writing in the 1960s, Cheng Jihua "also regarded the film as 'propaganda for a nihilist concept of history. It indicates that class revolution and national revolution are meaningless.'"[234] As mentioned earlier, this kind of critique largely results from the idea that people hurt each other through conflicts of interest, a statement made by the director at the beginning of the film.

Nevertheless, *Waves* may not be as anti-national as was suggested by its critics. After all, Wu Yonggang joined the left-wing camp under the united front of the China Film Culture Society (*Zhongguo dianying wenhua xiehui*). The film did nothing to argue against nation building. What it actually did was cast doubt on the over emphasis on political struggle at the cost of humanity, an extreme leftist view of history and the nation. Also the film draws much more from ancient wisdom than it does from ideas about the modern nation including strengthening institutional power. *Waves* keeps its distance from contemporary politics, while maintaining a critical view of aspirations for a modern nation.

One and Eight also was criticised because of its controversial presentation of prisoners, an aspect that contributed to its troubled release.[235] Disoregarding political doctrines is just as

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[234] Hu Jubin, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003. p. 106

[235] "The Film *One and Eight* Finally Receives Permission for Distribution" (*Yingpian* Yige he bage *zhongyu tongguo faxing le*), *Dianying pingjie* (Film Critiques), 1985, 2, p. 11; Bai Xiaoding, "From *One and Eight* to *Arc Light*: An Interview with Zhang Junzhao and Xiao Feng" (*Cong* Yige he bage *dao* Huguang:*fang Zhang Junzhao, Xiao Feng*) (to be continued), *Dianying yishu* (Film Art), 1989, 1, p. 29-35; Bai Xiaoding, "From *One and Eight* to *Arc Light*: An Interview with Zhang Junzhao and Xiao Feng" (*Cong* Yige he bage *dao* Huguang:*fang Zhang Junzhao, Xiao Feng*) (to be continued), *Dianying yishu* (Film Art)1989, 2, p. 20-23

evident throughout the film as it is in the dramatic story presented in *Waves*. As the director, Zhang Junzhao, recounted, "We didn't think that much. In the past [films] were full of political connotations (*zaidao*), so we just reacted against it. "[236] This refusal to join the mainstream discourse indicated a similar cultural and political stance that of *Waves*. It is also worth mentioning that *One and Eight* features just as much of an emphasis on the importance of shared humanity as *Waves*. Zhang Junzhao acknowledged their deliberate deployment of common humanity on several extreme occasions in the story. For example they consciously designed heroic deaths for all the prisoners who embraced noble nationalism.[237]

As a whole, both films take into account two different realms, namely, the links between marginal humanity and the dominant political world, and the links between anti-structure and social structure in Turner's terms. The films seek a balance in these pairs. Humanity is used as a tool, just like Turner's "sacred marginality," in order to reflect on contemporary institutions, and in the case of these two films, also the modern nation state. Masculinity construction is independent of national sentiment, and this construction is where acquired gender identity is differentiated from one's national identity. Eventually, both films point to an imagined world that moves beyond the nation state, namely, a *communitas,* which is metaphorically a world outside politics or the social structure. With a fundamentally different ideological basis than the modern nation-state, the two films create a fantasy of autonomy and independence. They facilitate a distinct cultural discourse, which resorts to humanity as a whole, in a bid to be different from overwhelming political agendas.

Despite the fifty years between these two films, they show remarkable similarity in terms of their construction of a resistant masculinity. This journey of masculinity construction also

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[236] Bai Xiaoding, 1989, 1, p. 30
[237] Bai Xiaoding, 1989, 1, p. 30

demonstrates there is a pattern of separation, transition and incorporation comparable to the concept of "rites of passage" in both Western and non-Western worlds. Both films feature a male protagonist who experiences separation from his past community and identity, suffers excruciating marginality, and is determined to achieve incorporation through a return to his previous community. Both films add to the rites concept, as each male protagonist subverts authority and takes command of power. Instead of seeking recognition by mere incorporation, they establish a different set of rules outside their contemporary social stratification. In the end, both incorporations are disrupted, and neither is included in the film's representations. Both films, however, strongly echo the concept and purpose of the rites of passage in acquiring manhood, but then reinvent them to fit contemporary Chinese circumstances. Both films also use the journey to manhood to express specific concerns about social injustice worsened by excessive political power. As a consequence, both films make multi-layered reflection possible and worthwhile. They cherish humanity while at the same managing to keep a distance from the overwhelming mainstream political discourse.

Afterword

This thesis has discussed a number of distinct masculine archetypes as well as male and female subjectivities in the ten central films. These were dealt with as follows: Chapter One examined *Big Road* (1934) and *Red Sorghum* (1987). It related representations of the all-powerful male body to cultural and political critiques employed by both films, discovering a deep-rooted Chinese nationalism and a utopian vision of China as a modern nation. Chapter Two discussed *Wolf Hill* (1936) and *Evening Bell* (1988), and investigated an emerging masculine archetype which remodels the national hero among the national salvation sentiment shown in both films. A redefined political correctness that was found was analysed in opposition to mainstream political discourses. Chapter Three looked at *Crossroads* (1937) and *The Trouble Shooters* (1988). It explored assertive male subjectivities aiming for democracy, regarding an imagined Chinese public sphere depicted in both films. Chapter Four was a sequential account of female subjectivity through close-readings of *The New Woman* (1935) and *The Price of Madness* (1988). It investigated a female masculinity shared by both films which dismisses gender inequality amid democratic requests. Chapter Five reversed the view of nationalism by examining marginalised masculinity, bringing to light reflections on political persecution by the national machine found in both films. *Waves Washing Sand* (1936) and *One and Eight* (1983) were the main focus.

In this study, masculinity construction presents itself as a rebellion against convention, a devotion to both individual liberation and critical political engagement. It coincides with China's striving for modernity since early last century, and calls for political transformation and democracy. In both the 1930s and 1980s, masculinity construction was more likely

designed as a national project, propelled by intellectual discourses. This feature has resulted in the way masculinity was presented in these films compared with films from other periods. First, there is the pattern of men serving the nation, which suggests political engagement, but all male protagonists maintain a stance that is independent, if not critical, of authority. In the decades after 1930s, the independent stance was compromised by political loyalty, and was not by any means critical, especially after 1949. In the decades after the 1980s, there was more indifference to politics, without the whole-hearted engagement with debates concerning the nation. Secondly, these masculine ideals defend Chinese national identity but in most cases embrace Western notions. Even in Chapter Five, where we find a return to Chinese traditional values, the male protagonists are still modern individuals. In other periods, like the 1940s and 1990s, there was more presence of tradition and even reflections on China's path to modernity. As to the periods from the 1950s to the 1970s, Capitalism along with its ideology was rejected. Third, amid discourses of masculinity, women are not immune from being masculinised in some way. But they are not like the asexualised women of the Cultural Revolution; instead, they are resolute rebels against the gender hierarchy, aiming arrows at both the old gender norms and the new male dominance. They present a female masculinity not seen in other periods. Overall, masculine representations in these films present the image of a China aspiring to masculinity.

As a whole, this thesis emphasises the unusual connections between representations of Chinese masculinity and enlightenment attempts which strove to shape Chinese culture and politics since earlier last century. Great complexity has been revealed in individual chapters, but there are still a few important points left to be made.

At first, ten films in this project may not seem a large enough number to draw conclusions. It

is impossible, however, to include more since the approach of this thesis is close reading. With special attention to the deep structure revealed in the films discussed, this research focuses more on the quality of probing than on the quantity of films. More films like the following could have been included had a different approach been adopted.

Like *Big Road* and *Red Sorghum* in Chapter One, there are films from the same time that feature rebellious male and female bodies in a spirit of Chinese cultural critique. The 1930s films *Queen of Sports* (*Tiyu huanghou*, 1934) and *Wild Rose* (*Ye meigui*, 1932) show unconventional and youthful female bodies (both female protagonists wear shorts), who disregard traditional body taboos. The 1980s films *The Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984) and *Old Well* (*Laojing*, 1986) both feature men's collective dance sequences, revealing hidden vitality within the Chinese male body.

Like *Wolf Hill* and *Evening Bell* in Chapter Two, there are other films in the two periods that pair masculinity with Chinese national identity. The 1930s film *Soaring Aspiration* (*Zhuangzhi lingyun*, 1936) tells a story of people collectively defending their homeland. Shunzi, the young male leader of the final battle, however, never gets the chance to marry his foster sister Hei'niu, whom he dearly loves. This is similar to the unfulfilled romance in *Wolf Hill*, with the same theme of collective resistance. The 1980s film *Dove Tree* (*Gezi shu*, 1985) reverses mainstream war narratives, similar to what we see in *Evening Bell*, where Chinese soldiers share their emotions with a Vietnamese nurse.[238] In both *Dove Tree* and *Evening Bell*, a universal humanity suggests a refreshed Chinese nationalism.

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[238] "Dove Tree presents the experiences of a squad of a dozen young Chinese border guards who have been cut off from their main unit, in the course of a single day, from sunrise to sunset. Four of the soldiers encounter a Vietnamese nurse. Surrounded by a thick fog and the forest, the five from the two countries find a common humanity. The nurse attends to the wounds of the soldiers and they talk of their pasts, youthful hopes, and fears." Paul Clark, *Reinventing China: A Generation and Its Films*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005, p. 94

There are also films in the 1930s and 1980s that are characterised by urban and youth themes, reinforcing the arguments presented concerning *Crossroads* and *The Trouble Shooters* in Chapter Three. *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, 1937), for example, features even more glowing city shots, in which skyscrapers and other modern structures are viewed at a threatening angle. The male protagonists Chen and Wang, despite being pictured at the bottom of society, embrace new ideas just like the youth in *Crossroads*. They are readers of modern-style newspapers, their resistance (planning to take legal action and later elopement) being inspired by articles in newspapers. If we remember Zhao in *Crossroads* who contributes to the *Da Jiang* newspaper as a reporter, we see a complete pattern of educating the public in the public sphere: Zhao is the advocate of new thought, and the youths in *Street Angel* are representatives of readers. *Samsara* (*Lunhui*, 1988) and *Out of Breath* (*Da chuanqi*, 1988) are both set in cities and filled with youthful anxiety amid rapid commercialisation. Both male protagonists are reckless businessmen who disregard the rules. They are not prescribing solutions to troubled citizens, like Yu Guan in *The Trouble Shooters*, but they do have their own way of living. Their rebellious gestures win over women, who help them create their private sphere. Their refusal to accept social conventions implies their demand for a real public sphere to accommodate their aspirations as individuals.

Appearing at approximately the same time that *The New Woman* and *The Price of Madness*, there are films that could be cited in Chapter Four. On the one hand, there are films reflecting the "New Woman" phenomenon and related gender debates. *Three Modern Women* (*Sange modeng nüxing*, 1932), *The Goddess* (*Shennü*, 1934) and *Woman Demon Human* (*Ren gui qing*, 1987) all discuss women's struggle with their prescribed gender role, in which they are either exploited or suppressed. On the other hand, these films acknowledge women's protests,

which include violence or unusual masculine behavior: in *Three Modern Women* Zhong Shuying motivates workers to strike; in *The Goddess* the prostitute kills the villain; in *Woman Demon Human* Qiuyun devotes her whole career to playing the Zhongkui (the figure of an ugly monster to scare off ghosts) role on stage, through which her femininity is concealed. These stories are comparable to the female masculinity shown in *The New Woman* and *The Price of Madness*.

For Chapter Five, there are also films that could augment the discussion of *Waves Washing Sand* and *One and Eight*. *Plunder of Peach and Plum* (*Tao li jie*, 1934) touches on the issue of marginalised masculinity by showing how an aspiring young graduate sinks into theft. *The Last Day of Winter* (*Zuihou yige dongri*, 1986) gives a glimpse of prison life through the eyes of three visitors to a remote work farm. Both films echo the theme of ordinary people committing crimes and whose lives destroyed amid social injustice. Likewise, works like *Return to Nature* (*Dao ziran qu*, 1936), *The Herdsman* (*Muma ren*, 1982) and *Border Town* (*Biancheng*, 1984) are all set in remote locations where social rules are suspended. This arrangement reminds us of the isolated spaces in *Waves Washing Sand* and *One and Eight*, where the concept of *communitas* was discussed. The above-mentioned films are still a small part of the potential film base relating to Chinese masculinity and intense national sentiments. They cannot be exhaustively listed here and must await future exploration.

A second limitation of this study is that the period from the 1940s to 1970s is not discussed here. This period might reveal very different trends in terms of masculinity and the nation. A few examples of masculine figures which have influenced Chinese audiences over the years will illustrate developments between our two decades. In the 1940s, along with the Japanese invasion, the enlightenment content seen in the present thesis had been subdued in many

cases. The classic *Spring in A Small Town* (*Xiaocheng zhi chun*, 1948) features two contrasting male types, representing Chinese tradition and modern prospects: Dai Liyan is a sick Chinese man who is confined in his partly-ruined Chinese-style house, and Zhang Zhichen is Dai's schoolmate who is now a handsome doctor practising Western medicine. The two men's reunion in Dai's house creates a love triangle involving Dai's wife Yuwen. Yuwen, despite being oppressed by her loveless marriage with Dai, and despite her passion for Zhang who was her teenage sweetheart, constrains herself eventually. This ending suggests an acceptance of Chinese traditional values and a return to family ethics, which is quite a contrast to the modern aspirations and demand for change we have seen in this thesis.

Films made after 1949, politically motivated to forge an image of new China, feature the most glorified national heroes without much deep-seated cultural and political reflection. These heroes are mostly one-dimensional figures without family or sexual relations, solely devoted to their mission. There are always extreme or legendary qualities associated with the heroes. Lei Feng, for example, is a household name and portrayed as a larger-than-life figure. *Lei Feng* (1964), *Leifeng Marches On* (*Lei Feng zai qianjin*, 1977) and *Song of Lei Feng* (*Lei Feng zhi ge*, 1979) show him as a fully dedicated soldier doing good deeds whenever he can. His achievement lies in his willingness to devote every minute of his life to building socialism. His famous *dingzi jingshen* (nail spirit) and his darning socks, which appear a rather feminine act, are full of symbolism in imagining a socialist hero.

Yang Zirong, on the other hand, is presented as a truly masculine figure to be admired by all Chinese. In the modern Beijing opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weihushan*, 1970), Yang infiltrates the enemy camp and gains the trust of Zuoshandiao, the head of a gang of bandits. Yang, despite coming close to being exposed several times, accomplishes his

impossible mission and wins a precious opportunity for the main Communist force to succeed. Beyond his legendary intelligence, bravery and loyalty, Yang shows none of the complexity of the men striving for a new nation and a new culture, which we have discussed in this thesis.

Masculinity representations in relation to nation building underwent some changes in the 1990s and after. The subject of man and nation addressed in this thesis seemed to disappear. In many films, men are no longer placed at the centre of events nor do they experience emotions of a nationalist kind. They either care little about the world outside themselves, or they are constantly frustrated by their failure at being real heroes.

For example, *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, 1994) features Ma Xiaojun, a youth reaching adulthood during the Cultural Revolution. But Ma is not like the inspirational youth in *Crossroads* and *The Trouble Shooters*, nor do his rites of passage (the separation from parents, violence and awakening sexual impulses) have anything to do with national politics. Ma and his playmates celebrate their youth ignoring arguably the most traumatic political movement in Chinese history. Ma's experience represents a contrast to the national sentiment discussed in this thesis.

Xiao Wu (*Xiaowu*, 1998) is about a small-town drifter, who is labelled as a thief. Unlike Ma Xiaojun in *In the Heat of the Sun*, Xiaowu's wandering about in the small town is associated with depression. His playmates of older times and his former girlfriend only add to his sense of delusion. All Xiaowu's frustration is not a result of his petty crime, but because Xiaowu adheres to his own moral code in a rapidly changing world. At the end Xiaowu chained is to a pole in the street, more like a dog than a human being. On the whole, Xiaowu is more like a normal person, marginalised and suppressed, just like other characters the director Jia

Zhangke has created in his later films, including *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiao yao*, 2002), *Platform* (*Zhantai*, 2000), *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004), *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*, 2006). In fact, almost every character in Jia Zhangke's films is presented as decentred, far from national politics in contemporary China. This is a sharp contrast to the committed intellectual aspirations discussed in this thesis.

The Missing Gun (*Xun qiang*, 2002) created a more hero-like figure in Ma Shan, despite his frustrating life as a local policeman. Ma Shan's missing gun poses a major threat to the small town. Desperate to recover the gun, Ma suspects it has been purposely seized to be used in a crime. Struggling to go through every detail in his life, frustrated by people's misunderstanding, and devastated by the fact that his former girlfriend has been murdered and he himself is deemed a suspect, Ma fights hard and eventually cracks the case. The moment he confronts the criminal, however, Ma realises that the only way to avoid more casualties in the village is to take the two remaining bullets himself. Ma forces the criminal to open fire on him, and he manages to chain the suspect and himself together. The film recognises Ma Shan as a hero only at the final moment of his life, which is a paradox in itself: Ma has to die to be set free and become a real hero. The male figures we discussed in this thesis are more or less granted hero status, but *The Missing Gun* seems to deny the possibility of being a hero altogether.

In *Gimme Kudos* (*Qiuqiu ni biaoyang wo*, 2005) protagonist Yang Hongqi is an ordinary worker with one simple wish: to be praised in the newspaper for his good deed. Yang saves a young girl from the hands of a rapist and strives to get recognised. He, however, cannot verify his good deed since the girl denies the incident happened. A reporter, Gu Guoge, conducts an investigation and unravels the mystery of Yang's determination: Yang's father,

Yang Shengli,was a role model in the 1960s and has a dying wish to see his own son be honoured in some way. Yang Hongqi is finally mentioned in the newspaper, but only after his father's death and at the price of the young girl's promising future being ruined. The film positions the often overlooked concept of honour in the ever-changing, highly commercialised and indifferent urban space, when it seems misplaced, Yang Hongqi is no longer a hero as his father was in the past, but is suppressed in making his voice heard and ridiculed for his political faith. If *The Missing Gun* announces the death of the hero, *Gimme Kudos* reveals that even the thought of being a hero, especially a socialist hero, is out-dated and laughable. The film deconstructs the stereotyped socialist hero, not in the way of praising the construction of masculinity versus tradition as we saw in the 1980s films, but by ridiculing the desire to be a hero in contemporary China.

Finally, let us conclude by placing the two decades of the 1930s and 1980s into the one-hundred-year experience of Chinese modernity. Admittedly, the two decades are different in their roles in preparing China for its modern agenda. The 1930s was characterised by war; modern national organisation reflected Western political systems; newly established national industry was dominated by four big families with government connections; modernity in cities like Shanghai was of a clearly colonial nature. Amid this mode of nation-building, however, the 1930s saw significant growth in left-wing thought against the increasingly corrupt Nationalist government. Most 1930s films discussed in this thesis convey progressive messages (about class struggle, for example) along with enlightened ideas like individualism and democracy.

By the 1940s, after eight years of Anti-Japanese War and four years of civil war, left-wing politics had claimed the victory of socialism in China. Notably, however, intellectual

discourses after 1949 immediately swung towards the centre, but they prompted a leftist reaction, seen in the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957 and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

In socio-economic terms, the 1980s were very different from the 1930s, with economic reform after 1978 that saw the dismantling of the planned economy. The nation was at peace and economic growth was the main goal; the socialist revolution over decades had established a full national apparatus; private enterprise had burgeoned thanks to economic reform and opening-up policies; urban development boomed as the government attracted foreign investment. The intellectual discourse in the 1980s was also very different from that of the 1930s, combining optimistic and pessimistic views about Chinese modernity, and largely ignoring left-wing theory like class struggle. As Wang Hui argues:

> During the 1980s, intellectual critiques focused on a reevaluation of Chinese socialism, which was generally denounced as antimodern in its very methods. In reality, though, the clarification of thinking came from the elucidation of social questions. For intellectuals, modernization was on the one hand a search for wealth and power along the path to the establishment of a modern nation-state; on the other hand, it was the process of reevaluating their society and tradition against the yardstick of Western society and its cultures and values.[239]

With these differences in perspective, the common theme that brings the two decades together in this thesis is even clearer: the passionate imagining of a strong and even masculine China in its grand revival. Arguably, the May Fourth movement gave the 1980s regained intellectual strength, and had also fuelled the left-wing political movement in the 1930s.

This intellectual spirit of political and intellectual innovation and aspiration faded soon after 1989, or, put in positive terms, was transformed into other forms of thought.

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[239] Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, edited by Theodore Huters, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 144

The reasons and consequences are worth contemplating. First, the dramatic change in the cultural and political climate after 1989 dislocated Chinese intellectuals, mainly male, from the centre of the cultural and political campaign. In particular, pro-democratic intellectuals experienced major frustration after the failure of the June Fourth Movement. Many withdrew from activism and pursued other interests. Wang Hui notes the role change of Chinese intellectuals after the 1989 Tiananmen incident:

> [s]ome have turned to the pursuit of traditional values; some, to appeals to the spirit of humanism; some, to a self-conscious sense of professional responsibility; and some have called for a renewal of the sense of the intellectuals' mission. On the one hand, these different and contradictory efforts have allowed Chinese intellectuals to maintain their critical and moral condemnation of contemporary society; on the other hand, these very attitudes have become the basis for their own social reorientation. Intellectuals during the 1980s saw themselves as cultural heroes and trendsetters;1990s intellectuals are urgently seeking new ways of adapting.[240]

Second, the passion for cultural and political change shown in the 1980s was subdued during the intensified commercialisation in the 1990s. The changed political climate in the 1990s did not impact on economic prosperity, which became the central focus of national life.[241]

Increasing globalisation has contributed to a contradictory picture in China. On the one hand, with the spread of the internet, global sharing of technology and information, China embraced global trends. Seeing youths strolling in the street with dyed hair, and skyscrapers being erected everywhere, one may wonder whether China could be dissolved into a global economy without national characteristic. As Fredric Jameson argues:

> I believe that globalisation is a communicational concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings. We have a sense that there are denser and more extensive communicational networks all over the world today, networks that are on the one hand, the result of remarkable innovations in communicational technologies of all kinds, and on the other have as their foundation the tendentially greater degree of modernisation in all the countries of the world, or at least in their big cities, which includes the implantation of such technologies.[242]

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[240] Wang Hui, p. 144
[241] Wang Hui, p. 141-42
[242] Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue" in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi,

On the other hand, patriotic parades in China and demonstrations abroad remind people of

growing Chinese nationalism amid the process of globalisation. Indeed, as Françoise Mengin

points out, "far from merging nation-states into a borderless world, into one single economy,

globalization is part and parcel of state formation process."[243] This nationalism, however, is

different from what we saw in the 1930s and 1980s, lacking the radical critical stance and

utopian imagining of China of those two crucial decades.

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eds., *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 55
[243] Françoise Mengin, ed., *Cyber China: Reshaping National Identities in the Age of Information*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 1

Filmography

The Big Road (大路 *Dalu*)
Director: Sun Yu
Screenplay: Sun Yu
Production: Lianhua Film Company
Leading Actors: Jin Yan, Li Lili
Release Date: 1934

Border Town (边城 *Biancheng*)
Director: Ling Zifeng
Screenplay: Li Junpei, Yao Yun
Production: Beijing Film Studio
Leading Actors: Feng Han Yuan, Dai Na, Liu Kui, Liu Hanpu
Release Date: 1984

Crossroads (十字街头 *Shizi jietou*)
Director: Shen Xiling
Screenplay: Shen Xiling
Production: Mingxing Film Company
Leading Actors: Zhao Dan, Bai Yang
Release Date: 1937

Dove Tree (鸽子树 *Gezi shu*)
Director: Wu Ziniu
Screenplay: Ye Nan
Production: Xiaoxiang Film Studio
Leading Actors: Lao Lin, Shen Junyi
Production Date: 1985 (never released)

The Drive to Win (沙鸥 *Sha'ou*)
Director: Zhang Nuanxin
Screenplay; Zhang Nuanxin, Li Tuo
Production: Youth Film Studio of Beijing Film Academy
Leading Actors: Chang Shanshan
Release Date: 1981

Evening Bell (晚钟 *Wanzhong*)
Director: Wu Ziniu
Screenplay:Wu Ziniu, Wang Yifei
Production: August First Film Studio
Leading Actors: Tao Zeru
Release Date: 1988

Gimme Kudos (求求你，表扬我 *Qiuqiu ni biaoyang wo*)
Director: Huang Jianxin

Screenplay: Huang Xin, Yi Fan
Production: Beijing Forbidden City Film Corporation Limited, Taihe Film Investment Corporation Limited, Beijing Kuaile Xinsheng Cultural Dissemination Corporation Limited, Beijing Bona Cultural Exchange Corporation Limited
Leading Actors: Wang Zhiwen, Fan Wei
Release Date: 2005

The Goddess (神女 *Shennü*)
Director: Wu Yonggang
Screenplay: Wu Yonggang
Production: Lianhua Film Company
Leading Actors: Ruan Lingyu
Release Date: 1934

The Herdsman (牧马人 *Muma ren*)
Director: Xie Jin
Screenplay: Li Zhun
Production: Shanghai Film Studio
Leading Actors: Zhu Shimao, Cong Shan
Release Date: 1982

In the Heat of the Sun (阳光灿烂的日子 *Yangguang canlan de rizi*)
Director: Jiang Wen
Screenplay: Jiang Wen, Wang Shuo
Production: China Film Co-production Corporation, Dragon Film International
Leading Actors: Xia Yu, Ning Jing
Release Date: 1994

The Last Day of Winter (最后一个冬日 *Zuihou yige dongri*)
Director: Wu Ziniu
Screenplay: Qiao Xuezhu
Production: Xiaoxiang Film Studio
Leading Actors: Tao Zeru, Li Ling, Yu Meng
Release Date: 1986

Masters of Mischief (顽主 *Wanzhu*)
Director: Mi Jiashan
Screenplay: Wang Shuo, Mi Jiashan
Production: Emei Film Studio
Leading actors: Zhang Guoli, Ge You, Liang Tian
Release Date: 1988

The Missing Gun (寻枪 *Xun qiang*)
Director: Lu Chuan
Screenplay: Lu Chuan
Production: China Film Group Corporation, Huayi Brothers Advertising, Taihe Film Investment Corporation Limited, Columbia Tristar Film
Leading Actors: Jiang Wen, Wu Yujuan, Ning Jing
Release Date: 2002

The New Woman (新女性 *Xin nüxing*)
Director: Cai Chusheng
Screenplay: Sun Shiyi
Production: Lianhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Ruan Lingyu, Zheng Junli
Release Date: 1935

Old Well (老井 *Laojing*)
Director: Wu Tianming
Screenplay: Zheng Yi
Production: Xi'an Film Studio
Leading Actors: Zhang Yimou, Niu Xingli, Lü Liping
Release Date: 1986

One and Eight (一个和八个 *Yige he bage*)
Director: Zhang Junzhao
Screenplay: Wang Jicheng, Zhang Ziliang
Production: Guangxi Film studio
Leading Actors: Tao Zeru, Chen Daoming
Release Date: 1983

Out of Breath (大喘气 *Da chuanqi*)
Director: Ye Daying
Screenplay: Zhang Qian Ye Daying, Wang Shuo
Production: Shenzhen Film Studio
Leading Actors: Xie Yuan, Cai Hongxiang, Zhang Yanli
Release Date: 1988

Platform (站台 *Zhantai*)
Director: Jia Zhangke
Screenplay: Jia Zhangke
Production: TMark, Office Kitano, Hu Tong Communications, Bandai Entertainment Inc., Artcam International, Primer Plano Film Group Video S.A., Primer Plano Film Group S.A., Empire Pictures, Artificial Eye, Ad Vitam
Leading Actors: Wang Hongwei
Release Date: 2000

Plunder of Peach and Plum (桃李劫 *Tao li jie*)
Director: Ying Yunwei
Screenplay: Yuan Muzhi, Ying Yunwei
Production: Diantong Film Corporation
Leading Actors: Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo'er
Release Date: 1934

The Price of Madness (疯狂的代价 *Fengkuang de daijia*)
Director: Zhou Xiaowen
Screenplay: Zhou Xiaowen, Lu Wei

Production: Xi'an Film Studio
Leading Actors: Wu Yujuan, Xie Yuan
Release Date: 1988

Queen of Sports (体育皇后 *Tiyu huanghou*)
Director: Sun Yu
Screenplay: Sun Yu
Production: Lianhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Li Lili
Release Date: 1934

Red Sorghum (红高粱 *Hong gaoliang*)
Director: Zhang Yimou
Screenplay: Chen Jianyu, Zhu Wei, Mo Yan
Production: Xi'an Film Studio
Leading Actors: Gong Li, Jiang Wen
Release Date: 1987

Return to Nature (到自然去 *Dao ziran qu*)
Director: Sun Yu
Screenplay: Sun Yu
Production: Lianhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Jin Yan, Li Lili
Release Date: 1936

Samsara (轮回 *Lunhui*)
Director: Huang Jianxin
Screenplay: Wang Shuo
Production: Xi'an Film Studio
Leading Actors: Lei Han, Tan Xiaoyan
Release Date: 1988

Still Life (三峡好人 *Sanxia haoren*)
Director: Jia Zhangke
Screenplay: Jia Zhangke
Production: Xstream Pictures, Shanghai Film Studio
Leading Actors: Zhao Tao, Wang Hongwei
Release Date: 2006

Street Angel (马路天使 *Malu tianshi*)
Director: Yuan Muzhi
Screenplay: Yuan Muzhi
Production: Mingxing Film Studio
Leading Actors: Zhao Dan, Zhou Xuan
Release Date: 1937

Soaring Aspiration (壮志凌云 *Zhuangzhi lingyun*)
Director: Wu Yonggang
Screenplay: Wu Yonggang, Jiang Hai, Li Tian, Ping Mian, Fan Peikui

Production: Xinhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Jin Yan, Wang Renmei
Release Date: 1936

Three Modern Women (三个摩登女性 *Sange modeng nüxing*)
Director: Bu Wancang
Screenplay: Tian Han
Production: Lianhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Ruan Lingyu, Chen Yanyan, Li Zhuozhuo, Jin Yan
Release Date: 1932

Unknown Pleasures (任逍遥 *Ren xiao yao*)
Director: Jia Zhangke
Screenplay: Jia Zhangke
Production: EPictures, Hu Tong Communications, Lumen Films, Office Kitano, TMark, Artificial Eye, Ad Vitam, Bitters End, Filmmuseum Distributie, New Yorker Films, Office Kitano
Leading Actors: Wang Hongwei, Zhao Tao
Release Date: 2002

Waves Washing the Sand (浪淘沙 *Lang tao sha*)
Director: Wu Yonggang
Screenplay: Wu Yonggang
Production: Lianhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Jin Yan, Zhang Zhizhi
Release Date: 1936

Wild Rose (野玫瑰 *Ye meigui*)
Director: Sun Yu
Screenplay: Sun Yu
Production: Lianhua Film Studio
Leading Actors: Wang Renmei, Jin Yan
Release Date: 1932

Wolf Hill (狼山喋血记 *Langshan diexieji*)
Director: Fei Mu
Screenplay: Shen Fu, Fei Mu
Production: Zhang Yi, Li Lili
Leading Actors: Lianhua Film Studio
Release Date: 1936

Woman Demon Human (人鬼情 *Ren gui qing*)
Director: Huang Shuqin
Screenplay: Huang Shuqin, Li Ziyu, Song Yuexun
Production: Shanghai Film Studio
Leading Actors: Pei Yanling
Release Date: 1987

The World (世界 *Shijie*)
Director: Jia Zhangke
Screenplay: Jia Zhangke
Production: Shanghai Film Studio, Hong Kong Xinghui Corporation Limited
Leading Actors: Zhao Tao
Release Date: 2004

Xiao Wu (小武 *Xiaowu*)
Director: Jia Zhangke, Wang Hongwei, Hao Hongjian, Zuo Baitao
Screenplay: Jia Zhangke
Production: Hu Tong Communications, Radiant Advertising Company
Leading Actors: Wang Hongwei
Release Date: 1998

The Yellow Earth (黄土地 *Huang tudi*)
Director: Chen Kaige
Screenplay: Zhang Ziliang, Chen Kaige
Production: Guangxi Film Studio
Leading Actors: Wang Xueqi, Xue Bai
Release Date: 1984

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