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Performing the Revolution:
Socialist Realism and Its Heterogeneity
in the Model Performances

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Studies,
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Abstract

This study investigates heterogeneity in the representation of the theme of revolution in the model performances (样板戏) within the aesthetic framework of Socialist Realism. This thesis argues that understanding the theme of revolution in the model performances should be, first and foremost, mediated by Socialist Realism, which involves heterogeneous discourses that contaminate the purity of ideology. Through a rigorous critique of Socialist Realism, this study offers an aesthetic approach to the socialist culture of the Maoist era.

Four grand aesthetic trajectories of Socialist Realism are explored with regard to the representation of revolution: a) the representation of reality in the modern Peking opera Shajiabang, b) the trope of light in the Peking opera The Red Lantern, c) temporality, or the representation of “the present” in the Peking opera Song of the Dragon River and d) optimism, and the visuality of the female body in the socialist ballets The White-haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women.

These heterogeneous discourses are shown to be closely conflated with the essential tenets of Socialist Realism, and as such to eventually contaminate and transform them. They manifest themselves in various ways, ranging from jianghu ambience in Shajiabang, a Confucian mode of affection in The Red Lantern, the temporality of the past in Song of the Dragon River, to uncanny visuality in the two socialist ballets. Since the theme of revolution in all these works is mediated by the aesthetic of Socialist Realism, the ideology of revolution is thus diluted and subject to other, heterogeneous, aesthetic doctrines. The theme of revolution represented in the model performances appears plural, unstable, and, more importantly, impure. This examination of Socialist Realism and its heterogeneity, as manifested in the model performances, sheds new light on the complexity and ambiguity of Maoist culture and furthers our reflection on its revolutionary legacy.
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Introduction

In 1986, one decade after the Cultural Revolution (CR, 1966-1976), an aria from *The Red Lantern* was staged as part of the CCTV’s New Year Spring Gala, one of the most prestigious and significant pageants co-opted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This event is generally acknowledged as marking a resurgence of the model performances *(样板戏)* after the CR by the media, memoirs and academic writing in mainland China. In the 1980s, it provoked fierce discussion among the intelligentsia on the legitimacy of the model performances. For most elite commentators, once victims in the CR and now rehabilitated, the model performances represented memories of horror and violence during the CR. Others argued that discussion of the model performances should be separated from the political terrors of the decade.

This fissure reveals that the topic of the model performances remains full of tensions and controversies in the post-CR era. Indeed, the discrepancies among different views of the model performances have been substantially magnified since the 1990s, when China began to embrace wholesale commercialization, globalization, and (partial)

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1 The term “样板戏” is usually translated as “model operas” or “model works.” Though the former translation is popular, it fails to include genres of performance other than Peking Opera (ballets, symphonies, and two musical works). The latter translation is inclusive, but it cannot specify the theatrical nature of these works. This thesis adopts Paul Clark’s inclusive and accurate translation, “model performances.” See Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.


3 See Deng Wenhua, “Yangbanxi yanjiu sishinian” (Studies of the model performances over the past 40 years), *Shehui kexue zhanxian* (Social Science Front), no.6 (2006), 101-105.
depoliticization. Economic reform has contributed to a new form of popularization of
the model performances. They are in vogue again, becoming a form of commodity for
entertainment and nostalgia. Various forms can be found in video shops, karaoke
pubs, on internet platforms, TV or radio programs and so on.⁴ What complicates
discussion of the model performances against this background are the increasingly
diversified intellectual camps that have emerged in response to China’s socio-
economic transformation. Two main camps, “new-leftists” and “neo-liberals,” whose
debates took place both inside and outside China, have made a significant
contribution to the cultural scene in mainland China since the 1990s. The question of
how to reassess the Maoist legacy, the “red classics” and socialist cultural practices in
general, has become a heated topic, which influences studies of socialist culture both
in China and overseas. A growing body of scholarship with either a left- or right-
leaning proclivity regarding Maoist culture has been produced, of which one of the
central issues under exploration has been the nature of the revolutionary legacy of the
“red classics.”⁵

⁴ Kang Liu, “Popular culture and the culture of the masses in contemporary China,” Boundary 2
24, no.3 (1997), 99-122.
⁵ See, for instance, Ban Wang, and Lu Jie, eds., China and New Left Visions: Political and
Cultural Interventions, Lanham: Lexington Books; Xudong Zhang, ed., Whither China?
Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002; Arif Dirlik,
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(Debates on the post-ism in the 1990s), Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998; Kang Liu,
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Guo Jian, “Resisting modernity in contemporary China: The Cultural Revolution and
postmodernism,” Modern China 25, no. 3 (1999), 343-376; Kang Liu, and Xiaobing Tang, eds.,
By contrast, this study argues that simply addressing the CR and the creative works produced under its auspices from a left- or right-leaning paradigm does not enable a nuanced examination of socialist culture, which engages issues of heterogeneity. As socialist culture in China was regulated under the aesthetic principle called Socialist Realism (SR), the heterogeneity in question resides in the impossibility of SR itself, which involves heterogeneous elements in its textual representation and which considerably transforms the nature of socialist culture. Focusing on the model performances produced during the CR, this study investigates the representation of the theme of revolution in these theatrical works. Regarded as the highest cultural achievement and correct expression of revolution (革命) by the CCP during the CR, the model performances represented the ultimate expression of SR. The term “revolution,” meaning class struggle/warfare (阶级斗争), demonstrates the essence of the model performances defined by the ideological agenda of the CR. This thesis argues that the concept of revolution in the model performances has been, first and foremost, mediated by SR. By examining several major performances, the representation of revolution will be approached within the general aesthetic framework of SR. Through a rigorous critique of SR in China, this study will offer an aesthetic approach to the revolutionary legacy of Maoist culture.

The Model Performances, Revolution, and SR

The model performances comprised a number of theatrical works that dominated the cultural scene of the CR. They included various theatrical art forms ranging from

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modern Peking operas, ballets, and symphonies through to piano concertos.
Commissioned and supervised by Jiang Qing (1914-1991), the wife of Mao Zedong (1893-1976), the model performances were rigidly sanctioned and widely promoted during the decade. As an instrument of propaganda and a means of entertainment, they were viewed by the CCP of the time as model expressions of the Party spirit.

Two rounds of model performances were created in two different periods. The first group, which was produced between 1962 and 1966, included five modern Peking operas, The Red Lantern (《红灯记》), Shajiabang (《沙家浜》), Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (《智取威虎山》), Raid on the White Tiger Regiment (《奇袭白虎团》), and On the Docks (《海港》); two ballets, The Red Detachment of Women (《红色娘子军》) and The White-haired Girl (《白毛女》); and a symphony, Shajiabang. All these works were subjected to incessant modification and were finalized in the early 1970s. The second group was produced from 1968 to 1976. The important works of this group included: the modern Peking operas Fighting on the Plains (《平原作战》), Song of the Dragon River (《龙江颂》), Boulder Bay (《磐石湾》), Red Cloud Mountain (《红云岗》), The Red Detachment of Women, and Azalea Mountain (《杜鹃山》); two ballets, Sons and Daughters of the Grassland (《草原儿女》) and Ode to Yimeng (《沂蒙颂》); two musical works, the Peking Opera The Red Lantern sung with piano accompaniment and the piano concerto The Yellow River (《黄河》); and a symphony, Taking Tiger Mountain by
From 1969 to 1976, most of the model performances were made into films and disseminated across the country.

Revolution is the only subject matter of the model performances. In reality, the full name of these theatrical works is “revolutionary model performances (革命样板戏).”

In Marxism, revolution means class struggle/warfare between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, and between the peasant and landlord. The definition of class struggle was largely reinvented in China in order to adapt to its particular socio-economic conditions as well as its political practice, and therefore was contingent on different periods. The concepts such as “proletariat,” “ruling class,” and “bourgeoisie” and their applications were so unstable and slippery that they were more subject to the ideological and political needs to justify a socialist course than a truthful reflection of the socio-political reality. In the CR, for instance, the proletariat generally consisted of the workers, peasants and soldiers, while the class enemy could refer to the potential enemies that threatened and sabotaged the socialist construction (the landlord, the bourgeoisie, foreign imperialism, the rightists, the revisionists, etc.). More important still is not the real socio-economic basis of the “class struggle,” but its ideological significance in defining a socialist regime. Despite its slippery definition, class struggle has been the main theme of literature and art in China’s SR

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6 See Chu Lan, “Jiangju geming shinian” (A review of the ten-year Peking opera revolution), Geming yangbanxi lunwenji (Collected essays on the model performances), vol.1, Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976, p.11; also see Dai Jiafang, Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu: Jiang Qing, yangbanxi ji neimu (A history of the model performances: Jiang Qing, the model performances, and the inside story), Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1995, pp.189-190.

7 To commemorate the 25th anniversary of Mao Zedong’s Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art (The Yan’an Talks), People’s Daily on 24 May 1967 reported that “eight revolutionary model performances were staged at the same time in Beijing.”
since 1949, and the aesthetic representation of this theme in a sense has tangibly constructed what revolution could and should be.

In 1962, Mao Zedong proclaimed the slogan “Never forget class struggle (千万不要忘记阶级革命).” This ideology was highlighted in an unprecedented manner during the CR. The artistic and literary policy of the time, accordingly emphasized the significance of class standpoint to a new height in *Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing* (《林彪同志委托江青同志召开的部队文艺工作座谈会纪要》, 1966), the regulative norm and baseline for literature and art of the CR. In the *Forum Summary*, Jiang Qing claims that the literature and art of the previous sixteen years (1949-1965) are characterized by struggles between two lines, that of the proletarian class and the black line of the bourgeoisie. In criticizing black-line literary and artistic views, Jiang Qing reinstates the spirit of the *Yan’an Talks* that life as well as class struggle reflected in artworks “can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.”

In this way, revolution is the only subject matter in the model performances.

Specifically, the model performances represent two forms of class struggle, the armed struggle (武装斗争) and class struggle in peacetime. The former draws on the CCP’s

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9 “Forum Summary,” p.15.
liberation history, such as the second civil war (1927-1937) in *Azalea Mountain*, the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) in *Shajiabang* and *The Red Lantern*, the third civil war (1945-1949) in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea (1950-1953) in *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*. The works that represent the near-contemporary class struggle in daily life are comparatively few, namely the three modern Peking operas: *On the Docks*, *Song of the Dragon River* and *Boulder Bay*, and a ballet, *Sons and Daughters of the Grassland*. Even the process of artistic creation is regarded as a form of fierce class struggle in real life, as the authoritative voice of the CCP states: “The creation of the revolutionary model performances is not only an issue of making one or two performances, but a fierce [proletarian] class struggle.” Modernizing the (Peking opera) theatre amidst the creation of the model performances is also viewed as a form of revolution, as Jiang Qing writes:

> Led by the Central Committee of the Party, headed by Chairman Mao, and armed with Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-tung’s [Zedong’s] thought, literary and art workers engaged in revolutionizing Peking opera have launched a heroic and tenacious offensive against the literature and art of the feudal class, the bourgeoisie and the modern revisionists. Under the irresistible impact of this offensive, Peking opera, formerly the most stubborn of strongholds, has been radically revolutionized, both in ideology and in form, which has started a revolutionary change in literary and art circles.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Chu Lan, “Zhongguo geming lishi de zhuangli huajuan: Tan geming yangbanxi de chengjiu he yiyi” (The spectacular picture of China’s revolutionary history: On the achievements and significance of the revolutionary model performances), In *Geming yangbanxi lunwenji*, vol.1, p.2.

\(^{11}\) “Forum Summary,” p.12.
All these aspects of class struggle displayed in artistic representation and creation are mediated by SR, which, as a regulative guideline and aesthetic principle, offers a range of measures, including aesthetic expression, (institutional) regulative methods, social functions and so on, to control and standardize artistic and literary productions. Launched in 1934 in the Soviet Union as a method of literary and artistic creation and criticism, SR can be summarized as follows:

It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic representation of reality must (or should) be combined with the task of ideologically remaking and training the labouring people in the spirit of socialism.  

This brief definition captures the intrinsic tension in the aesthetic ideal of SR, as Ban Wang observes: “This [above] statement contains two key elements that would lead to controversies: historical particularity and ideological generality.” C. Vaughan James also notes that: “The method [of SR] necessitates generalization and typification, since a work of art is realistic only if it combines true to life, concrete reflection of reality with penetration into the depths of its meaning.” As will be shown in the thesis, this dialogic relationship between particularity and generality, or of

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concreteness and abstractness, to a great extent determines the aesthetic ideals of SR in representations of reality, history, temporality, and so forth.15

Mao Zedong’s *Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art* (《在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话》, 1942) established a framework for SR in the Chinese context, which was confirmed in 1949 and enforced until the mid-1980s. Comparative studies have shown that the content and arguments of the *Yan’an Talks* are largely within the Marxist-Leninism theoretical framework of the Soviet Union, though referred to by the slightly different term of “proletarian realism.”16 The difficulty in discussions of SR in part lies in the fact that it is not a pure concept of aesthetics as quoted above, but it is also a set of cultural policies and regulations implemented by the Party. Following the USSR, the *Yan’an Talks* adopts a strong political intervention in implementing SR. Literature and art are designated as a form of institutionalized, ideological propaganda monopolized by the Party. In the *Yan’an Talks*, first and foremost, the nature of class is defined as the fundamental essence of all art, as an often-quoted statement in the *Yan’an Talks* explains:

15 Peter Button has theoretically addressed this issue. He convincingly points out the close relationship between German Romanticism and Socialist Realism. See Peter Button, *Configurations of the Real in Chinese Literary and Aesthetic Modernity*, Leiden: Brill, 2009.
In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics.\(^{17}\)

Class standpoint determines SR as a new culture. Mao writes: “China’s new culture at the present stage is an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal culture of the masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat.”\(^{18}\) This standpoint of class also determines that the task of literature and art is propaganda, namely to educate the masses (workers, peasants and soldiers), and to raise their awareness of class consciousness.\(^{19}\) Beyond these restrictions, the strongest political intervention comes from a totalitarian, societal apparatus that controls and institutionalizes all the cultural establishments and institutions, and leaves no room for artists and artistic activities outside the system, as Merle Goldman describes:

Borrowing from the Soviet example, the Party paid the salaries and assumed responsibility for the living and working conditions of the intellectuals. Each professional group and each discipline was organized into a Party-controlled association. For example, the creative artists were incorporated into the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles. Within the federation, each discipline had its own organization, such as the Chinese Writers Union or the Chinese Stage Artists Union. The Chinese Writers Union had branches in all the

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., p.76.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., pp.76-77.
provinces and major cities. The central office in Peking appointed the directors in the province s and the editorial boards of the literary magazines. A similar pattern was followed in the other disciplines and professions…Thus the Party quickly imposed organizational control.20

Artists must be subordinate to the Party’s regulations and be a significant part of the system.21 Artists and writers are regarded as a “cultural army” at the cultural front 22 and re-calibrating their worldview according to the broad masses and the Party spirit become a crucial way to reform their thinking. The totalitarian apparatus of the time not only organized and censored every cultural practice, but, most importantly, largely preempted and monopolized the final say on the correct way to create and interpret both artworks and cultural policies.23 The volatility of cultural policies and practices during the Maoist era, in fact, were largely affected by and dependent on the complicated factional struggles at the top-level of the CCP. This significantly affects the interpretation of the development of SR in China.

22 Ibid., p.69.
SR and 2RR

The development of SR in China from 1949 to 1976 shows increasing political intervention and a strong impulse to return to the “genuine” definition of SR. Based on cultural policies and the different terms for SR, previous scholarship has outlined three phases in the development of SR:

(1) From the 1930s to 1953, SR, including both theory and creative works, was systematically introduced into China, and was institutionalized as the literary and artistic guideline of the CCP. In 1933, SR was formally introduced to China. In 1942, Mao used the term “proletarian realism” to designate SR in the Yan’an Talks. In 1949, as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established, the Yan’an Talks was set as the policy for literature and art at the first National Congress of Chinese Literature and Art Workers.

(2) From 1953 to January 1958, political intervention in implementing the aesthetic standards of SR increased. The term “SR” was officially used at the second National Congress of Chinese Literature and Art Workers held in 1953, at which Zhou Enlai, Premier of the PRC, proclaimed that “SR is the highest guideline of creation and criticism for literature and art.”

(3) In 1958, the “Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism”, or “Revolutionary Realism plus Revolutionary Romanticism” (2RR/革命现实主义加革命浪漫主义/两结合) was proclaimed, which lasted through the

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24 Kuang Xinnian, “Shehui zhi xian zhi xian zhuyi zai Zhongguo” (Socialist Realism in China), Wenyilun yupiping (Literary Theory and Criticism), no.5(2014),75.
CR until 1987. In 1958, Mao first announced 2RR, which was interchangeable with the term SR from 1958 to 1960. In 1960, 2RR was officially confirmed at the third National Congress of Chinese Literature and Art Workers, replacing SR as the literary and artistic guideline. During the CR, 2RR was the only legitimate guideline and SR was no longer used. From 1976 to 1987, 2RR was phased out as China adopted the open-door policy.  

While this policy-based approach provides an overview of the development of SR in China, it nevertheless over-emphasizes the differences and ruptures between each stage, especially between SR and 2RR, and therefore obscures the continuity of textual quality from the 1950s to the 1970s. With regard to the relationship between SR and the model performances, two issues deserve our attention: the question of continuity between SR (1949-1958) and 2RR (1958-1976) and in regard to the relationship between the model performances and SR, whether the period of the CR is under 2RR (and therefore under SR).

The schema outlined above, based primarily on policy-reading as well as different terms for SR, would necessarily lead to the impression that SR was abandoned after 1958. Many scholars have noticed that some of the terms for SR are in fact interchangeable. Huang Huizhen, for instance, writes that: “When SR was formally introduced in China in 1933, it was put into practice on a broad scale. Despite its various names such as New Realism (新写实主义/新现实主义), Revolutionary Realism, Proletarian Realism, Realism of Socialism and so on, its meaning was confined to that of Soviet SR.”26 As to the term 2RR, many scholars have pointed out that the term 2RR should be placed into the historical context of the 1958 Sino-Soviet split, and that 2RR was more or less an alternative official term for SR, while the substance of SR remained.27

Specifically, the difficulty with understanding the continuity between SR and 2RR lies in how to interpret the term “Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism” (2RR). With regard to the naming, Chen Shunxin writes in her monograph Socialist Realism: “2RR was used to formally elevate ‘revolutionary romanticism,’ which was secondary before, to the same status as ‘revolutionary realism.’ However, 2RR in reality was basically equivalent to SR.”28 In addition, the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism is not a new invention. In 1933 when Zhou Yang formally introduced SR to China, the

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26 Huang Huizhen, Zuoyi pipan jingshen de duanjie: 40niandai Yang Kui wenxue sixiang de lishi yanjiu ((Inheriting the leftist spirit of critique: A historical study of Yang Kui’s literature and thought in the 1940s), Taipei: Xiwei zixun, p.377.
27 See, for instance, Chen Shunxin, Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi lilun zai zhongguo de jieshou yu zhuanyuan, p.330-331.
28 Ibid., p.321.
title of his essay, “On Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism” (《关于社会主义的现实主义与革命的浪漫主义》), had initiated such an expression. In the 1940s, Mao also proposed the slogan: “Anti-Japanese realism and revolutionary romanticism.” It is noteworthy that in the 1940s, the term “revolutionary/anti-Japanese realism” was synonymous with “socialist realism.”

The meaning of “Revolutionary Romanticism” in 2RR is crucial to an understanding of the relationship between SR and 2RR. The fact is that (revolutionary) romanticism was originally an integrated part of Soviet SR, as C. Vaughan James notes:

An important element in revolutionary activity is *revolutionary romanticism*, and this too must find its place in socialist art. In fact, Socialist Realism embodies the ‘pathos’ of the creation of a new society and of the vision that urges people on. This is not idle dreaming but a vision of the future based on an understanding of reality and the progresses of development. Such a fusion of realist portrayal of life with revolutionary romanticism is one of the most important innovatory features of the method.  

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31 C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, p.91. See also Leonid Heller, “A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories,” in Thomas Lahusen, and Evgeny
Revolutionary romanticism, too, had been emphasized throughout China’s adoption and discussion of SR. Similar to Soviet SR, it was viewed as an integrated part of SR, referring to the ideal and ideological aspect of SR. Since there was no official definition of 2RR, the understanding of 2RR among the literary intelligentsia of the time involved stressing old topics raised in the 1940s and 1950s, such as infusing the future communist ideals into the present, creating artworks on a higher plane, and shaping heroic figures. Revolutionary romanticism, in turn, referred not to the Western “bourgeois” literary movement in the 19th century, but to the abstract, ideal dimension of Socialism, as Guo Moruo, a prominent authoritative voice of the time, summarized: “…romanticism, filled with the idea of Marxism-Leninism, gives a soul to realism. This is what we need today: a combination of revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism…”

Thus, 2RR is first and foremost a continuation of SR, and carries with it an emphasis on the idealistic dimension of SR. Drawing extensively on cultural policy documents, Lan Yang summarizes four characteristics that show how “2RR inherited and developed the tenets of SR.” They include (1) “2RR emphasizes idealism”; (2) “2RR emphasizes the Marxist world outlook of writers and the ideological

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34 Lan Yang, Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution, p.18.
utilitarianism of literature and art”; 36 (3) “2RR emphasizes tendentiousness in literary and artistic zhenshi [真实] (truth or truthfulness);” 37 and (4) “2RR emphasizes idealized heroic characters.” 38 These four features are precisely the basic aesthetic elements of SR. In fact, the representative practices that are usually characterized as 2RR during that period rely on the creation of the new folk songs, 39 but which are strongly resonant with the slogan of “national style” in SR. Both Lenin and Stalin had emphasized the assimilation of indigenous resources, 40 and this method had been adapted by the CCP since the 1940s. 41 In short, I argue that 2RR in reality calls for a more genuine expression of SR through an emphasis on the idealistic and abstract dimensions of SR, and that 2RR embodies the essential aesthetic spirit of SR, namely the combination of generality (Revolutionary Romanticism) and particularity (Revolutionary Realism).

Now let us turn to the question, in regard to the relationship between the model performances and SR, as to whether the period of the CR is under 2RR (and therefore under SR). In the policy-based approach in mainland China, the CR period, which is assumed under 2RR, is situated in an ambiguous place. The period of CR is often excluded from 2RR, even though 2RR is specifically cited as literary and artistic policy, as Jiang Qing states in the Forum Summary: “As for method, we must

36 Ibid., p.19.
37 Ibid., p.19.
38 Ibid., pp.19-20.
39 The campaign of creating new folk songs was officially initiated by Mao Zedong in 1958.
40 “National in form and socialist in content” was one of the most prominent slogans in the Soviet Union; see Greg Castillo, “Soviet Orientalism: Socialist Realism and built tradition,” Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review 8 no.2 (1997), 32-47.
41 See Chen Shunxin, Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi lilun, p.324.
combine [R]evolutionary [R]éalism with [R]evolutionary [R]omanticism in our creative work, and must not adopt bourgeois critical realism or bourgeois romanticism.”

In 1980s mainland China the CR was officially criticized, and in textbooks of literary history the literature and art of the CR were simply omitted or repudiated as an aberrant period under the ultra-leftist cultural policy led by the Gang of Four (四人幫). The 1990s witnessed growing attention to the artworks of the CR resulting from increasing depoliticization. Yet in textbooks of contemporary literary history, the period of 2RR still ends right before the CR, and the CR period is singled out under rubrics such as “Cultural Revolution Literature.”

The terror of the CR and official repudiation of the CR since the 1980s have greatly affected the periodization of literary history, in which the two periods, that of the seventeen years (1949-1966) and that of the CR (1966-1976), are separated. Beyond these political factors, the rhetoric of cultural policy displayed in Jiang Qing’s *Forum Summary* also plays a significant role in this periodization. In this document, Jiang Qing condemns the cultural productions and regulatory framework of the previous sixteen years (1949-1965) as a black line of revisionism and capitalism led by Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Yang, and calls for a return to Mao’s *Yan’an Talks*. Eight forms of expression from the previous sixteen years are denounced, while class standpoint and the spirit of the *Yan’an Talks* are reaffirmed. This form of condemnation, while

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42 “Forum Summary,” p.15.
43 Hong Zicheng, *History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, p.203. In a sense, Hong seldom theoretically engages with the framework of either SR or 2RR, and therefore ignores the ontological continuity between them.
44 They were, respectively, the Vice President of China and the Vice Secretary of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CCP at the time.
adopts the rhetoric of two opposing lines, namely that of socialism and capitalism, is nothing new, as its tone and rhetoric can be easily found in preceding campaigns of criticism since the establishment of the PRC.45

As the model performances are regarded as the correct, model of artistic expression in the Forum Summary, its three most prominent principles of creation are generally viewed by literary historians as inventions of the CR that are disassociated from SR (and thus 2RR). These principles are: “the theory of the fundamental task (根本任务),” “the three prominences (三突出),” and “prioritizing subject matter and theme” (主题先行论).46 “The theory of the fundamental task,” advocated by Jiang Qing in the Forum Summary, sets the fundamental task for literature and art as shaping the heroic characters of the soldiers, peasants and workers. In this way, the “three prominences” specifies how heroic characters should be represented. It requires that: “among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters; among the main characters, give prominence to the central character.”47 “Prioritizing subject matter and theme”


47 Quoted from Lan Yang, Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution, p.29. The “three prominences” is based on an essay by Yu Huiyong (于会泳, 1925-1977). See, Yu Huiyong, “Rang wenyijie yongyuan chengwei xuanchuan Mao Zedong Sixiang de zhendi” (Let the literary and art
means that the subject-matter and theme are decisive factors and should be set before any artistic creation.\textsuperscript{48}

However, these principles are all encompassed within SR. Creating a heroic image is one of the most common patterns in SR and had been emphasized throughout the 17 years after 1949.\textsuperscript{49} The “three prominences” can be viewed as a mechanical way of strengthening the image of the hero in operatic expression, which confirms the teleological, idealistic nature of SR. The theory of “prioritizing subject matter and theme” expresses the formulaic and idealistic attributes of SR as well as its intrinsic political intervention employed to fulfill its propaganda ends. All these methods of creation reflect the increasing institutional intervention in the CR that was used to guarantee the standard expression of SR. As Hui Yanbing writes in his volume on the model performances: “Close examination reveals that the creative methods of the model performances are no more than a thorough synthesis of the experience from the period of ‘seventeen-year literature’.”\textsuperscript{50} The aesthetic spirit of SR had not been violated in the CR, but was rigorously emphasized and the significance of Mao’s \textit{Yan’an Talks} and other core documents by Mao written before the CR were stressed.\textsuperscript{51} In addition, the tenets of SR such as the Marxist-Leninist worldview, circles become the everlasting propaganda field for Mao Zedong Thought), in Hong Zicheng, ed., \textit{Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi shiliao xuan:(1945-1999)}, Wuchang: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2002, pp.716-723.

\textsuperscript{48} “Forum Summary,” p.11.


\textsuperscript{50} Hui Yanbing, “\textit{Yangbanxi” yanjiu}, p.70.

\textsuperscript{51} These documents are: “One New Democracy (《新民主主义论》),” “Letter to the Yenan [Yan’an] Peking opera Theatre After Seeing ‘Driven to Join the Liangshan Mountain Rebels ’(《看了<逼上梁山>以后写给延安剧院的信》),” “On the Correct Handling of
antagonistic class struggle, faithful representation, the creation of a national style, revolutionary optimism and so on, were centralized. Based on these developments, the cultural policy of the CR in a sense called for a thorough fulfillment of 2RR by vehemently implementing an idealized, formulaic expression of SR with heightened political and institutional interventions.

Despite the tensions and controversies surrounding the literary policies of SR in China, a more stable picture of SR in textual practice has been identified. A large number of scholars have noticed the obvious continuation between the two periods, namely the seventeen-year period (1949-1966) and the period of the CR (1966-1976). Paul Clark, for instance, observes that most of the prominent model performances have their antecedents in the seventeen-year period in terms of themes or art styles. In film studies, Chris Berry considers the cinema between 1949 and 1976 as a didactic paradigm with institutional and textual stability, though it has certain variations. In art history, the CR period is considered as a mature period of Maoist art. In reviewing the novels produced during the 1950s and 1960s, Yu Daizong suggests the

Contradictions Among the People (《关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题》),” and “Speech at the Chinese Communist Party’s National Conference on Propaganda Work (《在中国共产党全国宣传会议上的讲话》),” see “Forum Summary,” p.11.


inadequacy of merely using literary policy to survey texts, since a unified appearance in terms of ideology, theme and narrative is conspicuous in the novels produced during the Maoist era.  

An increasing number of scholars in mainland China have also paid attention to the continuum of artworks produced from the 1950s to the 1970s. In his 1993 monograph on China’s SR, Li Yang places the period of the CR into the final stage of SR and views the CR period as the ultimate, symbolic, abstract expression of SR.  

Parallel with Li Yang’s approach, in Hilary Chung and Tommy McClellan’s comparative study of SR in China and the USSR, the period of CR is seen as the ultimate expression of SR.  

This thesis strategically places the model performances into the grand aesthetic framework of SR, and focuses more on their aesthetic ideals and textual practice. As the model performances are considered as the ultimate expression of SR in terms of aesthetic representation, it is effective to explore the representation of the theme of revolution in SR and its issues of heterogeneity. This does not mean overlooking the political and institutional inventions of the CCP. On the contrary, it is precisely the stable institutionalized system that sustains such an aesthetic continuity over the Maoist era.


The Heterogeneity of SR

The inconsistency between textual practice and cultural policy discussed above, in a sense, implies the heterogeneity in SR practice. Nevertheless, the fundamental heterogeneity resides in the impossibility of the aesthetic ideal of SR itself, which is the focus of this thesis. In general, SR possesses certain signature features, such as a highly formulaic, repeatable, and teleological structure, a Marxist-Leninist worldview, progressive materialistic historicism, optimism, heroic biography, Party-spirit indoctrination, emphasis on (realist and historical) truth, and so on. In textual practice, many patterns are discernable, including a Manichean dualism, ritualism, and symbolism, among others.

Katerina Clark offers a comprehensive and theoretical account of SR novels produced in the Soviet Union. Taking an anthropological approach, she considers that the SR novels have an extra-literary, ritual function, serving “as the official repository of state myths.” These novels are formulaic, resting on canonical exemplars, similar to religious hagiography, and dominated by a single master plot. Elsewhere, she provides a concrete summarization of the formulaic structure of SR:

Essentially, the socialist realist “novel” is grounded in something comparable to the medieval worldview. In the case of much medieval literature, this entailed a horizontal dimension in which a Manichaean struggle between the forces of good and of evil was closely tied to a vertical, scripturally inspired dimension,

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59 Ibid., pp.xi-5.
producing a constant interaction between supernatural and natural forces, with events unfolding in historical time presented as instantiations of those greater events described in Scripture. In socialist realist literature, the corresponding text guiding the vertical dimension is the Marxist-Leninist (and during the Stalin period, Stalinist) account of history—what will be represented here as History.60

Katerina Clark’s summarization provides a helpful starting point to explore the fundamental heterogeneity in SR. As a grand teleology-oriented aesthetic along with totalitarian enforcement, SR is structured and centered on a logos (i.e. the Party spirit, a Marxist-Leninist worldview, Socialism, and so on) by unifying all texts, images, words and signifiers and discourses in a single direction. Could this teleology-oriented aesthetic be possible? What if the signifier in SR fails to be confined to the signified? What if the central logos fails to stabilize the text and thus introduces deconstructive heterogeneity from the inside out, rendering the imposed, bounded ideals as well as their associated interpretations invalid? In surveying SR novels in Soviet Union, Robin defines SR as “an impossible aesthetic.” She points out that the goal of creating a literature open only to one interpretation could never be realized because language itself is always open to multiple interpretations.61 In essence, the heterogeneity in SR is not limited to language. As this thesis will show, heterogeneity is prevalent in the (visual, verbal, filmic and theatrical) texts produced under SR.


The openness of the text propels this thesis into an exploration of heterogeneity in the model performances. When the representation of class struggle becomes the only telos of all the performances, can the theatrical or filmic text fulfill this goal? What is the heterogeneity in this mandated theme? How does the heterogeneity work in a specific context?

**Recent Scholarship on Heterogeneity**

Despite the seemingly formative, hegemonic features of SR, recent scholarship has provided invaluable readings of socialist works in regard to heterogeneity in Maoist culture. In the 1990s, Xiaobing Tang advocated a “reinterpretative (再解读)” approach to SR. Reinterpretation, as he defines it, is a “deconstruction of the historicized [socialist] texts.” He reminds us, though, that reinterpretation is an act of paradox, and that the possibility of this act is based on the different context of a growing market economy in the post-CR period in China and this latter reveals a vanishing socialist socio-economic foundation that once constituted the socialist period. The eponymous volume *Reinterpretation*, first published in 1993, comprises a set of essays by contributors with various approaches. It can be viewed as indicative of an ongoing re-understanding of SR in the post-CR era. Many contributors in this volume like Li Yang, and Huang Ziping have engaged in this endeavor of “reinterpretation” in significant ways and have produced influential scholarship

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63 Ibid., pp.16-17.
besides the essays which appear in this volume (see discussion below). In their contributions, Chen Sihe and Meng Yue notice various conflicting and interacting discourses within socialist works. Chen Sihe identifies how three contesting discourses (folkloric, intellectual and political) coexist in socialist works from the 1950s to the 1970s. He concludes that the folkloric spirit, though much more obscure compared to the political discourse, largely shapes the aesthetic merit of these works. Li Yang and Huang Ziping’s interpretations of literature produced in the seventeen-year period (1949-1966) show heterogeneity and fissures within texts. They all contribute to discovering the underlying, heterogeneous discourses within SR, and yet a number of factors compromise this endeavor.

In the first instance, the discussions primarily focus on the period of “seventeen-year literature” and overlook works produced in the period of the CR. The model performances are not systematically or seriously dealt with. This again places the period of the CR in an ambiguous position in the development of SR in China. Secondly, the ideals, tenets and aesthetics of SR have not been methodologically and thoroughly investigated, and the general framework established in the Soviet Union has been neglected. This results in an over-emphasis on the distinctiveness and uniqueness of socialist culture produced in China. As the ontological constituents of


SR are dismissed, the deconstructive effort is undermined. The question of how the heterogeneity in socialist culture ontologically impacts SR remains obscure, and the occasional mention of heterogeneity simply reiterates the recognizable spirit of SR itself. Last but not least, a left-leaning disposition, though only overtly manifested on the back cover, limits an understanding of heterogeneity in socialist culture, because the heterogeneity these discussants discover in fact makes Maoist culture too ambiguous to be reclaimed in a leftist paradigm.

Two volumes by Li Yang and Huang Ziping, which are part of the “reinterpretation wave,” help us to understand the complexity of creative work in the Maoist era. In his Reinterpretation of the Chinese Literary Classics from the 1950s to the 1970s (《50-70年代中国文学经典再解读》), which is a development of his 1993 monograph on SR, Li Yang offers eight readings of works produced under SR. Contrary to the view popularly held in the 1980s in mainland China’s literary studies community that the works produced in the three decades (1950s-1970s) are “monolithic,” or what rightists might call “literature and art of the peasants or feudalism,” Li suggests that there lie in these works a repressed discourse of “modernity,” a radical, post-colonial counter-discourse to western modernity.66 While Li provides a nuanced picture of socialist creative works in China, showing how (traditional) heterogeneous elements enmesh with these works, he seldom discusses the role of SR in a strictly aesthetic sense, especially its role in contributing to the modernity he identifies. I argue that both the discourses of modernity (deriving from Marxist humanism) and “feudalism” (coming from traditional culture and practice) in China’s socialist creative works are introduced and mediated by the paradoxical aesthetic ideals of SR, which embody the

66 Li Yang, Kangzheng de suming zhilu, p.314.
spirit of modern humanity (e.g. the progressive, linear temporality, modern
technology) as well as traditional heterogeneity. Therefore the impossibility of SR
involves the heterogeneity that comes from its failure to maintain either its “modern”
or its “traditional” appearance.

Huang Ziping’s Narrations in the “Chalk Circle” (《灰阑”中的叙述》) considers
a genre which he calls the “revolutionary historical novel” (革命历史小说) produced
between the 1950s and 1970s. As a sub-genre of SR, the revolutionary historical
novel is inspired by vernacular narrative in its configuration of the revolutionary
history of the CCP. Huang investigates how this genre is produced and the nature of
the dynamic historical forces underneath its surface. Huang reveals the way that
diverse indigenous elements such as religious rhetoric and vernacular narrative
interact with ideological discourse. Despite this, Huang does not deal directly with the
tenets of SR, which in his text are diluted into cultural discourses of either modernity
or ideology. Since the way these heterogeneous elements interact with SR is not
discussed, the distinctiveness of the “revolutionary historical novel” is over-
emphasized and this genre’s connection to and repetition of SR is not recognized.

In addition to this wave of reinterpretation, recent years have witnessed a growing
scholarly interest in the study of the model performances. Four book-length texts are
pertinent to the thesis. They are: The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History by Paul
Clark, Maoist Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural
Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China by Xiaomei Chen, and A
Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture by Barbara
Mittler. Paul Clark’s work offers a continuous trajectory of cultural productions since 1949, which debunks the notion of a drastic disruption between the CR period and the previous seventeen years as mentioned above. Rosemary Roberts, Xiaomei Chen and Barbara Mittler offer some close textual readings of the model performances. They reclaim visuality, sexuality, pleasure and aesthetic experiences in the model performances and provide more complex and challenging accounts of cultural production under SR. However, reflecting the trend of reinterpretation, they neglect the general framework of SR and therefore fail to address the intricate relationship between SR and its heterogeneity. Moreover, the ideology and its textual representation and transformation in the performances are not included in these discussions.

In general, two sources of heterogeneity in China’s application of SR are identified in the afore-mentioned scholarship. Firstly, the implementation of “national style” (民族风格), which can be summarized as “national in form and socialist in content,” has introduced the native resources that SR fails to contain. This thesis argues that this practice generates inherently self-deconstructive forces in SR that ultimately threaten and defeat its ends. Resorting to folkloric tradition and indigenous cultures is significantly encouraged by SR. Following the practice of the Soviet Union, Mao’s *The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War* (《中国共产党在民族战争中的地位》, 1938) initiates this practice. It advances a combination of internationalist and socialist content and national form, creating “the fresh, lively

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67 The variations of this slogan include “Make the foreign serve China (洋为中用),” and “Use the past to serve the present (古为今用).” See Chu Lan, “Jiangju geming shinian,” p.756.
Chinese style and spirit which the common people of China love.” 68 In On New Democracy (《新民主主义论》, 1940), Mao states “national in form and new-democratic in content — such is our new culture today.”69 The notion of national form, along with its contents, be it internationalist, democratic or socialist,70 opens a floodgate to native resources such as Confucianism, Daoism, traditional thinking and conventional art forms. How these resources affect the whole agenda of SR is largely under-explored. Fokkema, for instance, has noticed that it is somewhat paradoxical to separate form and content in the method of “national style,” yet he has not furthered his investigation into the consequences of such a method.71 The first, second and third chapters in this thesis will explore this form of homogeneity.

Secondly, the application of modern technology, audio-visual in particular, has introduced uncontrollable heterogeneous effects. During the CR, the theatrical works, along with their film versions, assumed a prominent status.72 The general perception of the mechanisms at play in the creative works of the time, such as “the three prominences,” “[heroes are] tall, big, and perfect (高大全),” and “[enemies are] false, ugly, and evil (假丑恶),” is mainly defined by the nature of visuality in the theatrical and film works. As visuality is not easily subsumed into ideological hegemony, it

69 Ibid., p.381.
71 See D.W. Fokkema, Literary Doctrine in China and Soviet Influence, pp.5-6.
potentially challenges the political discourse. This aspect of heterogeneity is mainly addressed in the last chapter of the thesis and as most of the theatrical works were made into films, the thesis also explores the filmic heterogeneity where relevant.

Framework

This study closely addresses the issue of heterogeneity in SR. It investigates how the theme of revolution is represented in the model performances and how heterogeneity is at work in their textual representation. Through a close textual reading of five model performances, four grand aesthetic trajectories of SR which deal with the theme of revolution are explored. They include a) the representation of reality, b) the trope of light, c) temporality, or the representation of “the present,” and d) optimism, and the visuality of the female body in socialist ballets. These four dimensions represent four important aesthetic constituents of SR, and will be specifically examined in each chapter.

The first chapter takes up the issue of the representation of reality in SR. Tendentiousness in reality (真实) is a paramount doctrine of SR. SR acknowledges the realist tradition of the 19th century, but it adapts realism into an ideological and political agenda. According to general SR doctrine, reality in creative works should contain both “historical particularity and ideological generality,” empirical concreteness and abstract idealness. To understand how reality is represented, this chapter offers a reading of the modern Peking opera Shajibang. It examines an ambience I refer to as jianghu (江湖), which engulfs, contaminates and transforms the

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putative socialist reality and ideology. As a discourse that was once popular in tradition, *jianghu* ambience provides a generic template which conflates with SR in the representation of the real. It can conveniently satisfy both the empirical and ideal aspects of reality required by SR, yet by so doing inevitably displaces the ideology of revolution. How the *jianghu* ambience is involuntarily appropriated and conflated with the general doctrine of SR is explored.

The second chapter investigates the rhetoric of light in China’s SR by examining the modern Peking opera *The Red Lantern*. In SR, the Party and socialist spirit is structured into a form of light rhetoric. Socialist works were characterized by an overabundance of the trope of light and red is specified as a positive and central color. The Manichean, dualistic value system in SR (good/evil, positive/negative) are valorized by the binary effect of light (bright/dark, red/black). Drawing on Derridean affection theory, this chapter investigates the meaning of the light emanating from a secret token, namely the red lantern in the opera, and discovers heterogeneous Confucian discourse in the trope of light. This chapter argues that light is not only a color, but also a form of affective experience. The chapter not only discusses the meaning of “redness,” but explores issues such as class affection, and revolutionary passion and sacrifice in SR.

The third and fourth chapters discuss the psychology of revolution in the model performances. The third chapter explores the temporality of revolution by exploring the revolutionary melancholia in *Song of the Dragon River*. The issue of configuring a temporality of the present had been one of the tasks required of the model performances. In general, SR demands that the representation of the present should
embody the future-oriented, transcendental spirit of materialist historicism. As to the literary and artistic policy of the CR, the wartime exigency called for an immediate presentation of the socialist reality of here and now, which, as Jiang Qing stated, was threatened by capitalism revisionism. Yet an insufficiency in reflecting present-day revolution is noticeable in the model performances. By examining the modern Peking opera *Song of the Dragon River*, this chapter shows that the representation of the temporality of the present is disturbed by the heterogeneous temporality of “the past,” and a sentiment of melancholia haunts the opera. This chapter addresses the diverse forms of the melancholia manifested in the opera.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the visual heterogeneity in SR. In reworking the Freudian concept of the uncanny, this chapter focuses on the visuality of the two socialist ballets: *The White-haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment of Women*. Revolutionary optimism (革命乐观主义) is one of the salient features of SR in dealing with violence. This chapter examines the suffering spectacles of the female protagonists in the two performances, where female bodies are exhibited and exposed as a testimony to the atrocities of the old society. The violent scenes are presented in detail despite being literally forbidden. The chapter concentrates on the ambivalent doubling of what is forbidden to be seen and yet is presented on-stage, which challenges the socialist visual norm of optimism. In a sense, the representation mechanism of the uncanniness provides an approach to understand how visual heterogeneity interplays with the doctrines of SR. It also offers a way to address the noticeable issue of desire the two ballets engage.

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74 See “Forum Summary.”
The four chapters primarily explore the aesthetic dimension of SR, adopting an interdisciplinary approach when necessary. Other forms of text beside theatrical or filmic texts are also analyzed where relevant, yet the relationship between SR and its heterogeneity remain central to this analysis. Focusing on the implications of my study for the reconsideration of Maoist culture, a brief Epilogue provides an overview of the thesis.
Chapter One

A Revolutionary Utopia of “Rivers and Lakes”: The Jianghu Ambience in Shajiabang

The term “Realism” in SR carries a two-fold meaning, which requires both empirical actuality and ideological truth. The general doctrine of SR captures this double goal:

Socialist Realism is the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism. It demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism. 

The socialist realist approach to reality, as defined in this paragraph, involves an unreconciled dynamic between “historical particularity and ideological generality.”

Drawing on Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s interpretation of literary theory in German Romanticism, Peter Button uses the term “eidaesthetics” to understand this two-fold reality. He contends that SR inherits the effort of German Romanticism to achieve an idealist absolute through art. The term “eidaesthetics”

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1 See Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society*, p.157.
summarizes an aesthetic fusion of empiricism and idealization, of figurativeness and abstractness in SR.\(^4\)

The representation of reality in cultural productions under SR in China has shown this dynamic. On the one hand, realist concerns are emphasized. The concrete actualities, such as period, location, warfare, brigade, and the real person and/or events the work is based on, are a necessity in the grand epochal settings of such works. Constantly resorting to rhetoric such as drawing on documentary stories or news reports, setting out from life and so on becomes a ritual in the introduction and promotion of these works. On the other hand, an idealistic, higher form of reality is also imposed on the work, in which all empirical realities have to be subjugated to the “ideological remaking” and embodiment of the “spirit of socialism.”\(^5\) We can see this tension in the *Forum Summary*. On the one hand, it demands of artists “experience from real life accumulated over a long period of time”; on the other, it stresses that “life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be…more universal than actual everyday life.”\(^6\)

This chapter addresses the representation of (historical) reality in the modern Peking opera *Shajiabang* (《沙家浜》). Through a close reading of the opera, this chapter explores a heterogeneous discourse I refer to as *jianghu* (江湖) ambience, which engulfs, contaminates and transforms the putative socialist reality and ideology in *Shajiabang*. As a discourse that was once popular in tradition, *jianghu* ambience


\(^6\) “Forum Summary,” p.15.
provides a generic template which conflates with SR in the representation of socialist reality and utopia, though such a convenience threatens to undermine its own purpose. The ways in which jianghu ambience is involuntarily appropriated and how it is conflated with the general doctrines of SR are explored. Three aspects of the jianghu ambience are examined: the gangland setting of the opera, the underground battle style and yin-yang cosmology. Scene Four of the opera is singled out for scrutiny. By introducing Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum, the chapter also attempts to theorize the reality presented in the opera. I argue that the idealized expression of SR in Shajiabang is considerably sustained by the heterogeneous jianghu ambience.

Adapted from the Shanghai opera Sparks amid the Reeds (《芦荡火种》) created in 1958, Shajiabang took form in Peking opera in 1963. The script was finalized in 1970, and appeared on celluloid in 1971. Literally “marsh village of the Shas,” Shajiabang is located on the banks of Yangcheng Lake (阳澄湖) in Jiangsu Province. The opera is set in the autumn of 1939 amid the Japanese invasion. After fierce fighting against the Japanese, Guo Jianguang (郭建光), the New Fourth Army political instructor, retreats with eighteen sick and wounded soldiers to Shajiabang, where they receive good care from Granny Sha (沙奶奶) and other villagers. Hu Chuankui (胡传魁) and Diao Deyi (刁德一), officials of the Loyal and Just National Salvation Army (LJNSA) led by the Kuomintang (KMT), take refuge within the Japanese army. They search in Shajiabang for the New Fourth Army men. Sister Aqing (阿庆嫂), the CCP branch secretary and underground liaison worker, runs the Spring teahouse (春来茶馆) in Shajiabang as a cover. When the soldiers are hiding in the marshes of Yangcheng Lake, Sister Aqing successfully protects them from the
enemies’ patrol. With the help of the villagers, the New Fourth Army soldiers use the
time to recover from sickness and wounds. They regain contact with the outside
world, defeat the KMT force, and liberate Shajiabang.

Official readings of the opera mainly came from the Party journal *Red Flag* (红旗),
the mouthpiece of Jiang Qing’s clique. In their praise, *Shajiabang* was a model of the
correct expression of the Party spirit in its glorification of the image of heroes,
emphasizing the armed struggle over the underground struggle, and stressing the
intimate relationship between the CCP army and the masses. Recent documents,
however, show a more complex picture that contradicts these claims. In 1991, one of
the main script writers Wang Zengqi (汪曾祺, 1920-1997) wrote in his memoir: “In
Scene Four ‘A Battle of Wits,’ Sister Aqing’s long aria ‘My stove is built for
business, My kettle doesn’t ask where the water comes from... ’ had almost been cut
by Jiang Qing. She said this was ‘jianghu vernacular’ (江湖口), ‘too much
vernacular!’” What claims the reader’s attention here is the glaring term “jianghu
vernacular” (or *jianghu* taste/accent). How could this term, with all its associations
that were customarily branded as the “old” and “feudal” heritage that the CR intended
to eradicate, apparently coexist with the highly sanitized model performance? In fact,
the aesthetic merits of *Shajiabang*, which are identified by both the Party and the
post-CR scholars, heavily rely on the controversial Scene Four and its *jianghu*-related
taste. Indeed, I argue that *jianghu* discourse, which is not simply limited to the lines
identified by Jiang Qing, permeates the whole opera. Wang Zengqi’s response to

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8 See, for example, Chen Sihe, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue guanjianci shijiang*, 2002, p.151.
Jiang Qing’s criticism is even more interesting: “I felt it was difficult to correct, and thus stealthily saved the lines.” Such “stealth” mentioned by Wang is basically impossible, as Jiang Qing in theory had to approve every single word of the scripts in the early 1970s. Rather, Wang’s account implies a tacit agreement from Jiang Qing in the inclusion of jianghu discourse.

Another account that echoes this anecdote comes from an interview with Zhao Yanxia (赵燕侠, 1928- ), the former leading actress of the opera. She recalled that when finalizing the script of the orchestral version of Shajiabang in 1965, Jiang Qing insisted on deleting Scene Four, for the reason that there were so many enemies [and thus jianghu vernacular] in it. Judging from the finalized script published in Red Flag in 1970, Scene Four remains intact, including its sensitive jianghu accent. Zhao’s account further confirms Jiang Qing’s ambiguous, if not anxious, attitude toward Scene Four. On the one hand, the “jianghu vernacular,” coupled with its forbidden pleasure and aesthetic interest, could win the mass audience over. On the other, it displays the “old heritage” which the cultural policy of the time openly denounced. Not only do the lines or scene named by Jiang Qing embody typical jianghu taste, but this chapter will argue that jianghu discourse in fact substantially underlines the whole opera in its representation of revolutionary reality and utopia.

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9 Ibid., p.126.
10 See Phoenix TV, Fengyu yangbanxi: Shajiabang (The vicissitude of the model performances: Shajiabang), available http://www.56.com/w16/play_album-aid-2472336_vid-MzU0ODk0NA.html (last accessed 15 March 2015).
11 See the finalized Peking Opera script “Shajiabang,” revised collectively by Beijing Jiangjutuan (Peking Opera Troupe of Beijing), Hongqi (Red Flag), no.6 (1970), 16-23.
Defining *Jianghu*

The term *jianghu* is not limited to its popular meaning as the setting of the martial arts genre. I consider *jianghu* and *jianghu* ambience as a discourse that includes multiple, interconnected meanings and elements within traditional cultural practices. These meanings include 1) a utopian space/world, 2) landscapes or landscape painting, 3) a form of generic, martial arts narrative, 4) vagrant society and its ethos and practices, 5) *yin-yang* cosmology, and so on. As *Shajiabang* is a theatrical work, it is effective in adopting the inclusive term *jianghu*, which is environmental or space-related, to investigate the representation of reality and utopia.

A geographical term, *jianghu* literally means “landscape of rivers and lakes.” It refers to the Yangtze River and Dongting Lake in ancient Chinese. The etymology can be traced back to the work of Zhuangzi (庄子, ca. 369-286 BC). In Zhuangzi’s writing, *jianghu* represents a virtual and authentic natural milieu that transcends the mundane world. It is a spiritual retreat and a carefree utopia for the self-exiling sages and recluses in pursuit of *dao* (道). Moreover, Zhuangzi’s *jianghu* is not necessarily the real landscape, but a virtual, theatrical natural setting. Such fictional space is synonymous with other landscapes in his work such as remote forests, deep mountains, a primeval universe, and endless wilderness. In general they are presented as an original environment filled with *qi* (气), the materialized essence of *dao*. 
These landscapes in Zhuangzi’s *jianghu* world find their visual expression in landscape paintings,\(^\text{12}\) especially the intellectual ink wash paintings initiated by Wang Wei (王维, ca. 699-759) in the mid-Tang dynasty (618-907) and which matured in the Song dynasty (960-1279).\(^\text{13}\) Similar to Zhuangzi’s *jianghu*, the intellectual landscape paintings present a natural space for scholar-officials to express their spiritual freedom, serving as a hetero-topia to the orthodox court culture.\(^\text{14}\)

The *yin-yang* principle, a cosmological and aesthetic principle, dominates the *jianghu* landscapes.\(^\text{15}\) *Yin* and *yang* are considered as two opposite and inter-dependent forces that form the whole Universe (太极). While they are not specified as set objects, *yin* tends to refer to objects of femininity, while *yang* to objects of masculinity. They appear as a pair, opposing and yet complementary to each other. Such a pair could be real/virtual (实/虚), being/not-being(有/无), strong/weak(刚/柔) and so on. As a pivotal cosmology in Chinese thought, the *yin-yang* principle underlines all forms of cultural practice, ranging from visual arts to narratives, from performance to daily ritual.


With all these ontological bearings, *jianghu* has emerged as the background of a popular genre, the martial arts (武侠) narrative since the Tang legends (唐传奇).

Martial arts narrative features outlawed, chivalrous heroes in a *jianghu* world. This genre dates back to the pre-Qin period, and keeps evolving through Tang legends, storytellers’ prompt-books of the Song (宋话本), Yuan operas (元曲), to Ming and Qing novels (明清小说). Peking opera is a new stage of the evolution.

Chen Pinyuan points out that the *Biographies of Knights-Errant* (《侠客列传》) in *Records of the Grand Historian* (《史记》by Sima Qian (ca. 145—90 BC)) basically set the groundwork for the formulaic characteristics for the heroic images in the *jianghu* world, as Sima Qian remarks:

> As for the gallant citizens [侠], although they do not always do what is right, their word can be trusted. They keep all their promises, honour all their pledges, and hasten to rescue those in distress regardless of their own safety. They risk their lives without boasting, not stooping to speak of their good deeds.

Besides the formulaic heroic characters, another salient feature of the generic martial arts narrative (or *jianghu* narrative) is its entanglement with historical narrative. The earliest records of knights-errant were self-proclaimed as a form of historical writing,

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framed in a form of historiography (史传). Scholars have noticed how the obsession with history characterizes the nature of the jianghu narrative, as Andrew Plaks summarizes:

……the question of how to define the narrative category in Chinese literature eventually boils down to whether or not there did exist within the traditional civilization a sense of the inherent commensurability of its two major forms: historiography and fiction. . .

In a sense, jianghu narrative combines historiography and fiction: it stylistically inscribes the legend of heroic characters into an alleged historical narrative. Justification in the opening lines as real historical records is a ritual for this narrative genre where specific dynasty, location and personalities are given as solid references to history. In this way, both SR and the jianghu narrative emphasize realist (concrete actuality) as well as idealistic (e.g. formulaic, fictional, generic, utopian) representation, though the philosophical premises of the two are different. The former largely depends on the realist tradition of the West while the latter depends on a yin-yang cosmology, as will be explained below.

In the development of the jianghu narrative, there are two points that deserve our attention, jianghu, as a milieu, and the reconciliation of official ideology and popular

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sentiment. The jianghu milieu not only provides a backdrop for the martial arts narrative, but offers a horizon of utopian imagination to transcend one’s mundane existence. Wang Xuetai has identified the intimate relationship between the creation of the jianghu narrative and the growth of the vagrant class since the Song dynasty. He points out that in the Song and Yuan dynasties, with the over-supply of civil servants, a number of intellectuals were relegated to occupations in popular art. Prominent works such as The Water Margin, The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Heroes in the Sui and Tang Dynasties were shaped by this vagrant spirit.\(^{20}\) Folklore, tales and other popular cultures were assimilated into the jianghu narrative in the process. Opera became an important medium used to disseminate vagrant culture, and to celebrate the communities of outlaws.\(^ {21}\) The portrayal of secret societies in The Water Margin and The Romance of the Three Kingdoms spawned a secret-society fever in the Ming and Qing dynasties, which, in turn, enriched the jianghu narrative and its creation.\(^ {22}\)

The reconciliation of official ideology and popular sentiment since The Water Margin bespeaks the coming exploitation of the jianghu narrative by the CCP. The Water Margin (《水浒传》) by Shi Nai’an (ca.1296-1372) is regarded as the pioneer and prototype of the modern martial arts novels. It depicts how 108 knights-errant, based in the outcast Liangshan Marsh, finally accept the amnesty offered by the emperor, as a way to exemplify the (Confucian) virtue of loyalty. This symbolizes how the outcast space of jianghu is subsumed into the orthodox ideology of Confucianism in ancient

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., pp. 321-326.

\(^{22}\) Chen Pinyuan, Qiangu wenren xiakemeng, p.71.
society. In this way, the righteousness (道义) among the knights-errant, which was once a key value to justify their worthiness, now can only be justified by the highest sovereignty, the emperor.

**Jianghu in the Model Performances**

Jianghu and jianghu-related discourse were objects of open denunciation in the CR.

Martial arts novels were banned from the late 1940s through 1970s, whilst the genre reached new heights in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In August 1975, Mao Zedong initiated a campaign to criticize *The Water Margin*. The target was Song Jiang, the leader of Liangshan rebels, who, in Mao’s view, commits to the doctrines of Confucianism and only fights against corrupt officials but not against the emperor. The jianghu ethos in this novel was denigrated as “feudal morality and slave philosophy under the hypocritical guise of ‘loyalty and righteousness’ (忠义).”

Despite the rigid censorship, the generic influence of jianghu discourse is by no means phased out in the model performances. Most performances are adapted from the works of the seventeen years after 1949, in particular from a genre generally called the revolutionary popular novel (革命通俗小说). A plethora of scholars have noticed that the origins of this genre can be traced back to ancient Chinese martial arts.

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24. Song Jiang’s crime is “capitulation” (招安). In *The Water Margin*, after his submission to the Emperor, Song Jiang and his followers fight the rebels led by Fang La. In Mao’s view, Song Jiang represents the ruling class and revisionism.

25. Han Ningxuan, “*Pipan Shuihu zhong de ‘jianghu yiqi’*” (Criticizing the jianghu morality in *The Water Margin*), *Wen shi zhe*, (Journal of Literature, History and Philosophy), no.4 (1975), 28. However, it was difficult to separate artistic activity from political campaigns in the CCP. The real target was Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping rather than the character Song Jiang.
narratives. Li Yang’s reading of the novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (《林海雪原》, 1955), which was later adapted to become the modern Peking opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (《智取威虎山》), convincingly identifies influences from the martial arts narrative, particularly *The Water Margin* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in terms of narrative strategy and the shaping of heroic imagery.²⁷

David Wang also briefly mentions in passing the influences of the late Qing chivalric novel on the modern revolutionary novels after 1949. He points out how the vagrant class is recycled by the CCP’s propaganda machine:

> Just as the domestication of men- and women-at-arms into imperial watchdogs constitutes the major theme of the late Qing chivalric and court-case novel, so the taming of male and female rebels/revolutionaries into ideological robots becomes the gist of modern revolutionary novels from the 1920s to the 1960s.²⁸

A sociological study further endorses the interaction between social reality and the creation of *jianghu* narrative, as Wang Xuetai remarks: “When the mythic and aesthetic effect of *jianghu* bandits and heroes from the writers is removed, what the reader can see are the outlawed, brave and aggressive vagrants.”²⁹ In a sense, the close interactions between reality and fiction in the *jianghu* genre open up a new

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²⁶ Huang Ziping, “Huilan” zhong de xushu; Li Yang, 50-70 niandai Zhongguo wenxue jingdian jiedu; and Li Yang, Kangzheng suming zhifu.

²⁷ Li Yang, 50-70 niandai Zhongguo wenxue jingdian jiedu, p.5.


approach to understand the relationship between what is on-stage and what is off-stage (see below). Despite the afore-mentioned scholarship, an in-depth study of the presence of jianghu discourse in the model performances, particularly in terms of the theatrical expression and its interplay with SR, is lacking. The next section will attempt to fill this gap.

The Shajia Gangland and Its Locality

The setting of Shajiabang, though allegedly located in a real place and drawn from a real event, is engulfed by jianghu ambience. The whole milieu is implicitly or explicitly presented as a dysfunctional gangland where heroes and villains are expected. The revolutionary utopia is substantially constructed through this jianghu ambience. This section explores the locality of the Shajiabang, which, as an outcast space, is appropriated into a base for a socialist community. Both the community of the CCP and its enemies are built according to the jianghu ethos. All these forces and their leading characters in the gangland are presented in the light of the discursive, generic principle of jianghu, which reinforces the legendary atmosphere surrounding Shajiabang.

To guarantee the quality of reality in SR, “setting out from life,” “plunging into the thick of life and do a good job of investigation and study” are compulsory requirements for artists before creation. The script-writing of Shajiabang, according to Wang Zengqi’s memoir, did not really enforce this doctrine. The writing troupe of Shajiabang actually sat in the Summer Palace (颐和园) in Beijing and imagined a

30 “Forum Summary,” p.16.
story set in southern China. Elsewhere, Wang Zengqi complains about the obvious formality of this tenet, remarking that “The so-called ‘setting out from life’ was basically a joke…” Wang’s accounts call into question the reality presented in the opera. Indeed, close examination reveals that it is rather jianghu discourse that plays an important role in the general ambient setting of the opera.

As a provincial village, the marginality of Shajiabang seemingly dovetails with typical SR in an environmental setting, where the far-flung location intentionally serves to glorify the center. Nevertheless, the marginality of Shajiabang can also be geared to shape a remote, outcast space rather than to glorify the political center, be it Yan’an or the local center of the time, which is not specified in the opera. Though the Socialist-realist practice of citing historical reality is preserved, this obsession with reality also meets the customary format of the jianghu narrative, which can turn the actuality into a form of generic representation. The title ‘Shajiabang’ (Village of the Shas), named after a patriarchal clan surnamed Sha (沙), is such a generic product. Certainly, Granny Sha in Shajiabang was a matriarch of the village, such as Mother Jia (贾母) in The Dream of the Red Chamber (《红楼梦》, by Cao Xueqin, ca.1715–1763), who is empowered by her dead husband, surnamed Jia. Places named after a patriarchal clan are commonplace in vernacular fiction. The Village of the Zhus (祝家庄) in the episode from The Water Margin entitled Conquering the Village of the Zhus Three Times (《三打祝家庄》) is a notable example. In 1944 Mao had urged the Yan’an Peking Opera College to adapt this story into a modern Peking opera after

31 Dai Jiafang, Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu, p.53.
32 Wang Zengqi, Shuoxi, p.92.
viewing the adaption of *Driven to Join the Liangshan Rebels* (《逼上梁山》), another story from *The Water Margin*. Frequently citing examples from *The Water Margin* or *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to illustrate principles of Marxism is a conspicuous feature of Mao’s writing, and the opera title Shajiabang, in this way, implicitly echoes the native (or jianghu) embodiment of Marxism.

The utopian atmosphere of the great Communist family and the affection between villagers and soldiers, are paradoxically configured as a big family (of a new Sha clan). This conjures up the formation of a jianghu secret society that is built upon a form of virtual blood relationship. Liu Ping identifies the virtual blood relationship as a principal form of organization in jianghu communities. It consists of a vertical master-apprentice relationship, corresponding to the father-son relationship, and a horizontal fraternity relationship, corresponding to that of brothers and sisters. In this sense, the Sha region, as a virtual, extended family, acquires a certain locality that makes it somewhat independent from the political center of Yan’an. Guo Jianguang’s aria “Not One Inch of Our Fair Land Will We Surrender” informs the audience that the place of Shajiabang even embodies the fate of the state, and thus further decenters the political status of Yan’an.

The virtual blood relationship among the villagers not only consolidates the ideal, socialist community into a family, but turns the entire revolutionary agenda into a family melodrama. The opera presents a grand family reunion: Granny Sha, a mother

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who suffers the loss of sons in the old society, adopts the sick and wounded army men as her sons. In turn, she is adopted as mother by the army men. Guo Jianguang sings: “You treat our comrades like your own sons, nurse us with the best care. You never stop mending and washing our clothes, and cook us three fine meals a day with fish and shrimps.” This implies that the army men, who are left behind by headquarters, find a new mother and home in the village of the Shas. Therefore, they perform more than their military duty in helping the villagers do tasks such as harvesting.

Like most of the model performances, revolutionary passion is fuelled by a patriarchal, familial blood debt rather than an enmity fuelled by class standpoint. Granny Sha’s sons were killed by Diao Deyi’s father. As “children” of Granny Sha, the soldiers have an obligation to take revenge on Diao Deyi. Traditional Confucian virtues, such as benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, filial piety that once dominated the operatic stages and were denigrated by the CR in the process of modernizing the Peking opera, recur in Shajiabang. Benevolence and righteousness are demonstrated by familial affection (亲) among soldiers and villagers, loyalty by following the CCP and Mao’s leadership, and filial piety by the soldiers’ enactment of revenge for Granny Sha.

Feasts in the model performances are usually a negative illustration of the enemy’s carnality and decadence. They appear in climatic scenes in The Red Lantern, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, and The Red Detachment of Women. However, feasting

36 Shachiapang [Shajiabang], revised collectively by the Peking Opera Troupe of Peking [Beijing], Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972, p.8.
has a positive didactic meaning in the establishment of affection when it is shown in
the context of the Shas. In Scene Five, featuring the camaraderie of the New Fourth
Army community when they are trapped in the reeds, a rice cake, the only food left, is
shared by the leader Guo Jianguang with the other soldiers. In Scene Two, fish, crabs,
shrimps, rice crusts and cakes are served. To show the solidarity of the Sha
community, a festive, quasi-carnival atmosphere is brought about by the feast. The
scene is filled with warm smiles, supporting laughter and light-toned hues. It loosely
resonates with the ritually-practiced scenario of “drinking wine in big bowls, eating
meat in large chunks” (大碗喝酒, 大块吃肉) in the ideal jianghu community. 38 With
all these elements, the utopian atmosphere of the Sha community is presented as a
secret society, one of the meanings of the term jianghu. By the same token, jianghu
ambience emphatically contextualizes the societal and historical condition of
Shajiabang as well as the banditry of the “enemies”.

Parallel with the common pattern in martial arts narratives, Shajiabang is set at the
juncture of societal disorder, the Japanese invasion. 39 The village is plunged into
anarchy. It suffers severely from at least three forces, the Japanese, the KMT, and
local bandits. The enemy’s forces are merged into the puppet LJNSA. This account is
inconsistent with the historical actuality that the LJNSA shared the same goals and
efforts as the CCP in fighting against the Japanese invaders. To deal with this
historical fact, the opera follows the generic norm of the jianghu narrative, by which
the enemies are all subject to denunciation as the ultimate righteousness is authorized

38 See, for instance, Zhang Peiheng, and Luo Yuming, eds., Zhongguo wenxueshi (A history of
39 See Chen Pinyuan, Qiangu wenren xiakemeng. pp.3-4.
by the highest sovereignty, the CCP. This clear-cut morality of good/evil conflates effortlessly with the good/evil binarism in SR. Yet unlike the moral indoctrination in The Water Margin, which was initiated by vagrant intellectuals, in the case of Shajiabang the moral injection is via direct, top-down control.

Following the jianghu narrative, the three evil forces in Shajiabang are caricatured into gangs. Two characters represent these forces: the first is the Commander, Hu Chuankui and the second is Diao Deyi. The customary emphasis of SR on drawing the character from real life sounds hollow here. These two characters are largely stylized according to the vocal and performance conventions of traditional Peking opera. They have nothing to do with the reality, as one of the memoranda shows:

According to script writer Wen Mu, Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi are fictional figures that cannot be traced back to real persons in reality. Hu has a 胡搞 (mucking around) personality, so he is surnamed 胡 (mucking), just as Diao Deyi has a 刁滑 (insidious) personality and is thus surnamed 刁 (crooked). 40

The two characters are designed as a pair of clowns with contrasting features: Diao is tall, thin and sophisticated, while Hu is short, obese and naive. This implicitly goes against the general seriousness of SR. Heavy jianghu touches are placed on the characters’ gang background. This once again sidelines the theme of class struggle, and turns it into a form of entertainment.

40 Wang Hongliang, “Shajiabang beihou de zhenshi lishi” (Stories behind Shajiabang), Baokan huicui (Collected Essays), no.1(2008),15.
Hu Chuankui typifies the *jianghu* gangster instead of the class enemy. He used to be the head of the regional bandits, but now turns his gang over to the puppet LJNSA when anti-Japanese struggle is the unstoppable trend. He attaches his gang both to Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) in the open and to the Japanese in secret. Yet Hu’s philosophy belongs to neither of these sides. His opportunist philosophy represents the *jianghu* strategy of seeking the bigger force as an umbrella and maximizing the interests of the gang. This makes Hu fall out of the categories of class enemy such as the bourgeois class or landlord. He is, after all, an old-styled bandit leader who is wrapped in modern political vocabularies.

His *jianghu* worldview not only strengthens the comic dimension of the opera, but draws the heroine Sister Aqing into the *jianghu* protocol of brotherhood that involuntarily stains her purity. Once a vagrant, Hu starts his career raising troops. In the process, Sister Aqing saves him from capture by Japanese army by hiding him in a water vat in the teahouse. For that, he sings: “I shall always be grateful to you for saving my life. As a believer in brotherhood [*江湖义气*], I must repay you some day.” 41 His entrance in the opera singing these words frames the whole era and the world inside his *jianghu* perspective: “In troubled times heroes spring up everywhere. Any man with a few guns can be a chief; I get along by keeping in with three sides: Chiang Kai-shek, the Japanese and secret societies.” 42 In terms of Peking opera, he performs a painted face role (*净*), a forceful role with a strong character, direct, simple and rough. Generally, enemies are portrayed as short, fat, or retarded in the

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41 *Shachiapang*, p.19.
42 Ibid., p.10.
model performances, and the character of Hu is such a product. Nevertheless, his role in a sense produces a comic effect, which is predominantly revealed in the battle of wits in Scene Four.

Diao Deyi’s character is also shaped from the jianghu worldview of Hu Chuan Kui, as Hu remarks him: “I may be a dragon here, but I’ll be no match for you, a snake in its old haunts (地头蛇).” A son of the local landlord, he left to study in Japan when Sister Aqing came to the village. Now he is the chief of staff of the puppet army. Singing and acting in an “old gentleman” (老生) role in the opera, Diao represents the old-fashioned, pedantic, intellectual country gentlemen in the modern era who, like Hu Chuan Kui, adds a certain comic effect to the opera.

Shajiabang, as an arena, is set according to the martial arts narrative, in which all forces, be they heroes or enemies, are designed as outsiders in the village. This follows the jianghu narrative device called “coincidence” (巧). The major players in the opera are viewed as the higher and legendary powers that are beyond the mundane (local) world. Such a design to a certain extent reaffirms Shajia village as a vagrant-plagued gangland. Even Diao Deyi, albeit a native villager, is designated as a returnee who has been outside for years, and is subject to the authority outside the village. His henchmen Diao Xiaosan (刁小三) and Lieutenant Liu (刘副官) are portrayed as typical recruited vagrants.

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The CCP is also shown as an outsider in Shajiabang, an organization without a specific headquarters. At the beginning of the opera, Sister Aqing and her allies are informed of the arrival of the New Fourth Army men from somewhere unspecific. Sister Aqing, too, is from somewhere unknown. The character of Sister Aqing is said to be based on a woman named Chen Ermei (陈二妹), who, as a CCP underground worker and local resident, ran a teahouse with her husband for a living.  

In *Shajiabang*, Sister Aqing is presented differently as a mysterious figure. Her husband is not in the village. She indirectly informs the audience that he is on business elsewhere: “someone saw him trading in Shanghai. He said he wouldn’t come back and see me till he’d made something of himself.” In Scene One, we are told that he is also an undercover agent of the CCP. These renditions should not be understood as a suppression of personal life, as identified as a salient feature in the model performances, but as a means to mystify her legendary flair. Her female image is also reminiscent of the role of the landlady (老板娘) with a pugnacious personality such as Sun Erniang (孙二娘) in *The Water Margin*. Similar to the enemies, she is an outsider in Shajiabang, and the teahouse is run only as a cover, rather than as a means of livelihood. Sister Aqing’s vagrant life and unclear past echo that of the wandering gallant in the *jianghu* narrative. Far more importantly, though, is that her image symbolizes the power of salvation that is beyond daily life and is only possessed by heroes/heroines. Her exotic background and her performance in the battle of wits in Scene Four conjure up a charismatic leader like Zhu Geliang (诸葛亮) in *Romance of Wu*.

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45 *Shachiapang*, p.17.
the Three Kingdoms, who can even summon the natural world with his knowledge of the yin-yang cosmology that fills the jianghu world.

As all the major forces in the opera come from outside the village, the local villagers are staged either as regular people or as members attached to a larger political faction. They are all presented as passive. This is inconsistent with the quotation of Mao Zedong shown at the beginning of the operatic film, which pronounces: “The revolutionary struggle is a struggle of the masses. Only by mobilizing the masses can we initiate the struggle; only by relying on the masses can we start the struggle.” Nevertheless, the gangland setting of Shajiabang reveals the fact that the jianghu world is a world of heroes and villains only.

The Battle Style: Underground Struggle or Armed Struggle

Interpretative activity is, according to Peter Button, the integral part of SR that perfects the ideal that the creative work aims to reach. However, such an activity in the model performances does not necessarily abide by this tenet of SR. Interpretative activity is incessantly affected by the factional struggles inside the CCP, which usually turn the theatrical works into a form of political weapon. The struggle between the two ways of presenting the idea of battle (the “underground struggle” and the “armed struggle”) in the creation of Shajiabang provides a chance to look at the tension between the jianghu battle scene setting and the interpretative imposition by the CCP. This struggle not only reveals the interaction of the off-stage and the on-stage in the creation of jianghu narrative, but shows the overriding significance of jianghu style in the representation of the battle.

46 See Peter Button, Configurations of the Real, pp.1-39.
Shajiabang had undergone several major changes in terms of shaping the image of the positive hero. The original storyline was claimed by the CCP to be a revolutionary memoir entitled Blood-stained Names: Record of Thirty-six Wounded Soldiers by Cui Zuofu, though such a claim is a form of rhetoric showing the realist tendency. In the late 1950s, Wen Mu, from the Shanghai Opera Troupe “adapted” this story into Shanghai opera, and named it Green Water and Red Flag (《碧水红旗》). After public performances in 1960, the name was changed to Sparks amid the Reeds. When Sparks amid the Reeds was adapted into a Peking opera, it was named The Underground Liaison Worker. This version failed to live up to Jiang Qing’s expectations. Peng Zhen (彭真), then secretary of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, and his cohorts took over the opera and changed its name back to Sparks amid the Reeds. The opera was reported to have achieved a “great success.”

In 1964, after viewing Sparks amid the Reeds, Mao Zedong was unhappy with the ending of the opera. He instructed that the underground struggle should be presented as a dominant means to victory: “The music employed to shape the heroic imagery of the soldiers is not strong enough; the ending of the opera should be the armed struggle. Now the ending looks like a farce...” Mao’s other instructions included strengthening the scenes about the relationship between the wounded soldiers and the

47 Dai Jiafang, Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu, pp.51-58.
masses, and, most importantly, changing the opera’s name to Shajiabang, as Mao commented: “How can a spark grow into a prairie fire in the watery reed marshes? In addition, at that time the Anti-Japanese War was no longer a spark, but a flame.”49 In the CCP’s official historical accounts, the military line of underground struggle was led by Liu Shaoqi whereas the line of open armed struggle was led by Mao Zedong. The most prominent media of the time, which were controlled by Jiang Qing, including People’s Daily and Red Flag, all published articles embroidering the (class) struggle between these two military lines led by Mao and Liu in the creation process of the opera.50 As Peng Zhen, who belonged to Liu’s faction, had promoted the underground-struggle in Spark among the Reeds, he was accused of political incorrectness. This section is not going to delve further into the political motivations behind the scenes during the creation of the opera, but to emphasize the aesthetic significance of the underground struggle in jianghu terms. This aesthetic sense of the underground battle style not only crucially builds the main battle scenes in Shajiabang, but, it can be argued, offers a new understanding of jianghu practice in terms of the factional struggle involved in the opera’s creation.

Underground struggle is a dominant and recurring theme in the model performances. In Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, the leading actor Yang Zirong disguises

49 Dai Jiafang, Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu, pp. 56-57. “A sign of spark can start a prairie fire” (《星星之火，可以燎原》) is a letter from Mao Zedong to Lin Biao on 5 January 1930.
himself as a bandit. The contact between Yang and a bandit in *jianghu* slang is imitated and mocked time and again in post-CR fiction.\(^{51}\) *The Red Detachment of Women* also features the leading hero Hong Changqing playing an overseas Chinese merchant at the enemy’s birthday feast. The whole storyline of *The Red Lantern*, in fact, rests on the underground struggle, despite the interpretations imposed by the CCP at the time claiming the opposite.

The significance of underground struggle lies in its relationship to the art of fighting in martial arts/*jianghu* narrative. The title of Scene Four (*A Battle of Wits* (智斗)) reveals a distinctive popular *jianghu* device. As the battle of wits refers to victory by words and wits instead of forces, it features flexible diplomatic skills in response to the changing conditions without using explicit violence. Related to wit (智) is the strategy (计), which we can see in the title of Scene Five: Imparting the Strategy (授计). The term “strategy” is neither a positive nor a negative word in *jianghu* terms, as manifested by the popular motto “the victor becomes king” (胜者为王): winning is the ultimate end that can justify any (immoral) means, and therefore “strategy” is a pragmatic means to success without any moral concerns.

François Jullien acutely observes that: “If there is a basic principle in ancient Chinese books on the arts of war, it is to avoid any direct confrontation”.\(^{52}\) Success in battle depends on controlling and predicting the whole situation, rather than on the strength

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of armies or advantages in weaponry. Therefore, a head-to-head battle, or open armed conflict, is not favored. Jullien remarks that the best strategist at war in Chinese culture is the one who can predict the trend of the unfolding situation and defeat the enemy before his/her strategy has developed. Using few to conquer many, which involves adopting strategy, wit, and skillful arrangements, is an acceptable and respectable way to win. This is true of the model performances Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy and Raid on the White Tiger Regiment, where people can find a sense of pride in the words “[wise] strategy” (智取) and “[skilful] raid” (奇袭) in their titles. Jullien further points out that this strategy of avoidance, as the gist of Chinese strategy, had a great influence on Mao Zedong’s arts of (partisan) war. The prominence of picaresque, underground and partisan dramaturgy in China’s SR and in the CCP historical narrative, along with its strategic deployment of deception, sneak attacks, and disguises, demonstrates the aesthetic interest of jianghu battle style both in the real and in fiction.

Resting victory on underground struggle easily fell into disrepute for some winners, as indicated by the word “farce” used by Mao Zedong in his comment on an early version of the Shajiabang opera. Highlighting armed struggle is an act of rewriting history, which in a jianghu sense is a privilege that the victor can enjoy. Following Mao’s instruction, the major revisions of Shajiabang include replacing Sister Aqing with the soldier leader Guo Jianguang as the central character, increasing Guo’s arias and changing the ending of the opera to a head-on battle led by Guo. Nevertheless, all these failed to change the impression that Sister Aqing still outshines Guo Jianguang in the opera. She carries no shame at being an underground fighter. The last scene, in

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53 Ibid., p.29.
which the army prevails over the enemy in a face-to-face confrontation, may seem “fake” for most critics, yet I argue that this change is irrelevant to any question of “authenticity” or “reality” because glorifying the power of heroes is also part of jianghu practice. From an off-stage perspective, the act of rewriting history in the creation of the opera pertains to the category of underground battle as well, which avoids direct confrontation based on historical facts, but indirectly registers history into a form of generic, artistic representation and therefore rewrites it. As Chen Sihe points out, these changes and rewriting result in two types of heroes in this opera: one is the resourceful heroine Sister Aqing, the other is the chivalric hero Guo Jianguang. The latter, albeit less convincingly shaped and generally dismissed as a supporting role, represents a form of reclusive hero in jianghu narrative that only shows up at the last, crucial moment.

Factional struggles aside, the alleged tension between the underground strategy and open armed struggle is irrelevant to the effect of the opera as a whole. For Jiang Qing, the real problem might be not the contradiction between the underground and armed struggles, but the tension between the embedded jianghu elements and ideological purity. On the one hand, the CCP leaders knew that they could massively benefit from incorporating aspects of the traditional heritage into their propaganda in response to the call for a “national style.” On the other, the CCP was anxious about its inability to separate its “new culture” from the old heritage.

55Chen Sihe agrees that there are two heroes on-stage in Shajiabang: Chen Sihe, Zhongguo dangdai wenxue guanjianci shijiang, p.154.
Scene Four, the Landscape of “Rivers and Lakes”

Taking Scene Four as a case study, this section attempts to investigate how *jianghu* ambience deeply penetrates the opera in various interrelated aspects where the environmental and atmospheric setting is central. Scene Four is the most crucial scene in the performance, as it is the first time that the three forces (of good and evil) meet at the Spring teahouse, and it heralds the CCP’s victory before the subsequent head-on confrontation. It is also a scene about which the attitudes of Jiang Qing and the CCP were ambiguous. Clearly they were proud of it, enshrining it as an exemplar of the successful transformation of “old” Peking opera; the trio sung by Sister Aqing, Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi in this scene was regarded as one of the classic sequences of the model performances. Yet at the same time there was an element of caution, as the underlying discourse of *jianghu* could threaten the opera’s ideological purity.

Figure 1  Spring teahouse in Shajiabang
Environmentally, the jianghu discourse sustains the setting of this scene. Half-encompassed by the landscape backdrop of “rivers and lakes,” the Spring teahouse is located on the bank of Yangcheng Lake (Figure 1). As a whole, the stage setting accentuates a wintry gray hue. The wooden architecture, stools and desks, the shady locust tree and the drab attire—all harmoniously fade into a backdrop of marshy swamp, forming the typical, watery scenery of the southern region of the Yangtze River (Figure 2). The dimly-lit stage suggests that the village is overshadowed by the invaders. However, this color scheme resonates with the time-honored ink wash landscape paintings on silk, the visual presentation of jianghu in ancient China. The fact that the New Fourth Army men are lurking in the backdrop of marshes further affirms the jianghu ambience, as such remote, dangerous places as marshes and mountains are where outlaws or sages hide. Liangshan Marsh in The Water Margin, where the rebels are based, is such a milieu.
Landscape painting and screens, which enhance the representation of the main characters, are crucial to the opera. In Scene Seven, there is also a real landscape painting on the central wall, in the hall of Diao Deyi’s house. It represents the invisible forces (like a landscape painting imbued with qi), with which Diao is associated. It is no coincidence that both the teahouse and Diao Deyi’s house share a similar landscape background. Wu Hung has pointed out that screens, backdrops or framed pictures are both a painting and an image-bearing object. In the history of Chinese painting, the landscape screen as a background enabled the painters to integrate the human figure into that background. The landscape screen gradually became a subject in painting that helped to present the inner characteristics of human images. Wu Hung writes that: “[f]rom ancient times, screens presented pictorial images; the painted scenes were often related to their owner’s moral cultivation…The screen thus embodied common social values…” Therefore, the character and the landscape background on-stage are inseparable. Sister Aqing’s actions in this scene, too, are largely affected by the backdrop, as are Diao Deyi’s actions.

The Spring teahouse, as a common cultural symbol, shares an intimate jianghu connection. Like the marshes concealing the soldiers, the Spring teahouse is equally a cover, where essence is veiled (by mist or by qi). A customary location in jianghu narrative where a number of forces accidentally converge, the teahouse turns into a generic arena for martial arts rather than for class struggle. In the beginning of Scene Four, the teahouse opens after a three-day “mopping-up” raid on Shajiabang. It seems unaffected or unscratched by the raid. Like the gangland of Shajiabang, the teahouse

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is neutral and de-politicized. As a result, it can accommodate various interests, groups and discourses, *jianghu* discourses and ideological indoctrinations included. Once a public space for idle talk, the cultural practice of the teahouse offers a quasi-public space that eschews any political censorship. Wang Zengqi remarked in an autobiographical essay that a sign was hung in the teahouse he used to visit in wartime, reading “Do not discuss political issues of state (勿谈国事).”\(^{57}\) This common sign is emblematic of the inclusiveness of the teahouse. Yet in this way the teahouse becomes a war zone, a space of exchanges and negotiations. In modern Chinese literature, the play *Teahouse* (《茶馆》, 1957) by Lao She (1899-1966) is a vivid example. The political transition of three periods—the late Qing, the early Republic of China and the victory of the Anti-Japanese War—are presented through idle talk among customers in a Beijing teahouse.

In this light, the *jianghu* environment in the teahouse provides a free space to escape censorship and ideological rigor. Elements such as *jianghu* slang, practices, customs, and battle styles saturate the scene, the political detachment of which largely suspends the oppressive, ideological discourse. As Sister Aqing puts it:

> My stove is built for business. My kettle doesn’t ask where the water comes from. My tables are used by travelers from everywhere; whoever comes here is a customer, and I have to be pleasant to him; I greet all comers with a smile.

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And once out of sight, out of mind. When the customer leaves, the tea grows cold.\(^{58}\)

\textit{Jianghu} rules are the only protocol in the teahouse. Sister Aqing sings: “So I must observe the code of the brotherhood (义气)"\(^ {59}\) and “There is no question of giving anyone special care.”\(^ {60}\) The \textit{jianghu} slang, identified by Jiang Qing as “\textit{jianghu} vernacular,” is an essential way to communicate. Actually \textit{jianghu} vernacular is the most distinctive linguistic style used in the teahouse. Sister Aqing is good at using \textit{jianghu} idioms, offering many more than Jiang Qing identified, including: “you have the heart of a statesman, big enough to hold a boat (您宰相肚里能撑船),”\(^ {61}\) “put somebody on the spot behind his back (背地里给人穿小鞋),”\(^ {62}\) “you’re a big tree with deep roots. I am looking forward to your help (我有心背靠大树好乘凉).”\(^ {63}\)

To succeed, Sister Aqing has also to use \textit{jianghu} protocol to negotiate with the enemies. In fact, the CCP takes advantage of the neutrality of the teahouse, which not only offers a chance to spy out military information about the enemy, but also wins time for the next move. Sister Aqing is disguised as a smart business person, who is ebullient, considerate, and well-spoken. Her undercover role plays on the \textit{yin} (feminine, dark) side where she is a good fit. Respecting face is a skill used to survive.

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\(^{58}\) \textit{Shachiapang}, p.20.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., p.19.  
\(^{60}\) \textit{Shachiapang}, p.20.  
\(^{62}\) \textit{Shachiapang}, p.15; \textit{Bada yangbanxi}, p.148. This idiom is closely associated with the underground-battle strategy.  
\(^{63}\) \textit{Shachiapang}, p.17 ;\textit{Bada yangbanxi}, p.154.
At the outset of Scene Four, knowing that Diao Xiaosan has indeed stolen the village girl’s package, Sister Aqing pretends nothing has happened. She flatly addresses the girl: “He did not want your bundle,” then to Diao Xiaosan in the presence of his commander Lieutenant Liu “You just played with her, didn’t you?” By doing so, she protects both Diao Xiaosan and his leader from losing face. She can present a proper face, both in front of enemies and allies, as Paul Clark notes:

The contrast is clarified between the coolness and apparent propriety she shows, as host of the teahouse, when she outwitted the puppet troops, and her genuine warmth in her relationships, as an underground Communist Party member, with the other villagers and the New Fourth Army men.64

The underground struggle, in other words, is the face (surface or appearances) at play. The teahouse, like the face of Sister Aqing, hides the real thinking, and offers a surface without essence. It blurs the line between the white (白) and the dark (黑), or yin and yang, both of which Sister Aqing can play well. This surface also dissolves the seriousness of class struggle into a generic game.

Specifically, Sister Aqing’s victory is earned by words. This kind of heroism can be traced to the lobbyist heroes in Intrigues of the Warring States (《战国策》) from two thousand years ago. The sequence in this scene where Sister Aqing deals with the enemies is composed of three parts. The first part features how Sister Aqing tackles the minions of the KMT, Diao Xiaosan and Lieutenant Liu, which is a preliminary test of her skills. The second part begins with Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi’s arrival

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64 Paul Clark, The Chinese Cultural Revolution, p.33.
and ends with Diao Deyi’s failure to sound out Sister Aqing. This is the first bout between Sister Aqing, Hu and Diao. After a discussion on the new tactics between Diao and Hu, the third part escalates, as Sister Aqing puts it in a pun: “The full flavour of the tea is coming out now.”65 This is the second bout between the three characters. However, the outcome of the battle is actually heralded in the first bout between Sister Aqing, Hu and Diao, which embodies the well-known trio, running from Sister Aqing lighting the cigarette of Hu Chuankui to the laughter of Hu and Diao after Sister sings “there is no question of giving anyone special care.”66

The trio dramatically encapsulates the tensions among Sister Aqing, Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi. A common structure of the traditional folkloric plotline, as identified by Chen Sihe, reoccurs on-stage: One female versus (or flirting with) three men (一女斗三男). Chen writes: “In traditional folklore, one or two men can appear in this structure. If it is a story of choosing true love, there would be a third man, who is a positive male character, usually diligent, brave and handsome.”67 In this structure, Sister Aqing wins over Diao Deyi, who represents the intellectual, by wisdom, while she defeats Hu Chuankui, who represents a powerful man, by courage. Chen Sihe argues that, there lies in the socialist culture of the 1950s and 1960s a latent (folkloric) structure, which is an aesthetic spirit that is different from the intellectual and ideological discourses of SR. This folkloric spirit makes Sister Aqing irreplaceable in Shajiabang, as Chen writes: “The main character can only be this jianghu woman.”68

While Chen’s insight enlightens this study, the “traditional folkloric structure” only

65 *Shachiapang*, p.21.
66 Ibid., p.20.
68 Ibid., p.154.
partly reveals the jianghu ambience in Shajiabang, which runs deeper than the folkloric structure alone.

The Trio: Stage Aside, and the Folkloric Subtext

Jianghu ambience greatly contaminates the CCP’s appropriation of Peking opera into the alleged “national style.” The operatic techniques in this trio embody traditional aesthetics that serve the jianghu interest more than the Party spirit. In particular, the trio harnesses a traditional performing device named beigong (背躬/供, stage aside). This refers to a character confessing (躬/供) to audiences his or her present thinking while unheard by other characters on-stage. Traditionally, the performer “should use a waving sleeve to hide, or walk a few steps away”69 with his or her back to other performers. An interpretation from the CCP by Wang Zengqi puts it this way:

There is a sequence of beigong sung by three people. “Beigong” means every performer is singing their inner thinking at the same time. Though they sing separately, their minds are observing, stimulating and connecting to each other. The vocal feature is managed in the form of a trio. Actually, it is a special trio, or a variation of trio... Several lines of Sister Aqing at the beginning are in allegro, which are sung ahead of the time-beats (板), expressing her acute response. In the last two verses, Diao Deyi sings ahead of the time-beats at “I’ll

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69 Qi Rushan, Guoju yishu huikao (On Chinese opera), Taipei: Chongguang wenyi chubanshe, 1962, p. 607. Famous sequences of beigong in Peking opera include the duets between Yang Yanhui (杨延辉) and Princess Tiejing (铁镜公主) in Yang Silang Visits His Mother (《四郎探母》), and between Song Jiang (宋江) and Yan Xijiao (阎惜娇) in Killing Xi in Oolong Temple (《坐楼刺惜》).
sound her out in a roundabout way.” At the same time, Sister Aqing retreats by using a large melodic-phrase (大腔): “I must watch his every move and not fall into his trap,” manifesting her composure, staunchness and confidence.

Chairman Mao teaches us that depicting negative figures “can only be as foils to the positive figure, and cannot share the same status.” Though the ratio of negative figures to positive figures is two to one in this sequence, Sister Aqing is in the dominant position.70

In this passage, the notion that a positive figure triumphs over negative figures is a somewhat political interpretation. Each figure employs considerable effort to boost the theatricality of the trio. Originally, the scene in *Sparks amid the Reeds* only has a duet between Sister Aqing and Diao Deyi. The addition of Hu Chuankui not only optimizes the folkloric prototype mentioned above, but successfully summarizes the tensions among the three characters through the use of beigong. By comparing the two trios of *Shajiabang* and *Second Visit to the Empress* (《二进宫》, a classic trio in traditional Peking opera), Lu Aihua and Jin Yinfeng note that the musical structure of the trio in both instances retains most of the traditional patterns.71


71 See Lu Aihua, and Ji Yinfeng “Jingju Erjingong Shajiabang sanren duichang changduan de yinyue fenxi” (A musical analysis of two Peking opera trios: Erjingong and Shajiabang), *Zhongguo xiju xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts) 32, no.2 (2011), 105-109. The trio investigated by Lu and Ji runs from Hu’s line “When I started raising troops” to Sister Aqing’s “There’s no question of giving anyone special care.”
The aesthetic device of beigong emphatically strengthens the underground battle style. Performing the function of beigong, this sequence produces a strong comic effect. The lyrics of this sequence belong to both the categories of aria (唱) and dialogue (念) in traditional Peking opera. As Wang Zengqi explains, “[in Peking opera,] arias, which are used to express the present thinking of a character are more literary; while dialogues must be as plain as daily speech.” In addition, arias are the most significant musical component in Peking opera. As arias, the lyrics in this beigong can express the current thought of each character, while as dialogues they form an indirect conversation between the characters. This treatment, as Wang Zengqi states, adds an inter-referentiality to each person’s independent thought. The lyrics of quasi-dialogue bring the inner tension among the characters into the public domain while the individual characters’ secrets are still kept from one other on-stage. The head-on confrontation is still not enacted, and the principle of underground battle is strictly followed. Audiences are the biggest beneficiaries of this theatrical device as they are informed of the whole situation while the individual characters on-stage are not. The word confession (供) [of the characters on-stage] explains the pleasure of the audience, who, with the benefit of omniscient vision, know who the winners and losers are earlier than the characters themselves. Therefore, a battle of wits in this scene belongs to the underground battle style, which is more decisive than the following head-on confrontation in Scenes Nine and Ten that are highlighted by the CCP. This section of beigong in a sense heralds the victory of the whole battle in Shajiabang.

72 Hong Guang, *Pijingzhanji tuichenchuxin.*
The *jianghu* sub-text in this *beigong*, which is a folkloric structure of implicit flirtation as identified by Chen Sihe, provides an excess of pleasure for the viewers. Sister Aqing’s femininity plays a pivotal role in the whole battle of wits. The *beigong* is lent intrigue by an intimate movement by Sister Aqing when she is lighting up a cigarette for Hu Chuankui at the front of the stage (Figure 3). Hu bows down to the flame of the match in Sister Aqing’s hand and steals glances at her face. Diao stands sideways behind, with his back to Sister Aqing, turning his head and watching closely. Sister Aqing is well-aware of the gaze from Diao, vigilantly observing him out of the corner of her eye. Sister Aqing only lights Hu’s cigarette because Diao declined this favour before and she lost face. By this act, she purposely shows her unusual relationship with Hu. This act irritates Diao, who sings: “This woman is quite
out of the ordinary.”\textsuperscript{73} The scene actually presents more than the story it is supposed to tell, and is easily associated with a flirtatious sub-text. This sub-text proceeds as Diao tries to adjust his tactic from defensive to offensive. In the middle of their \textit{beigong}, Diao “thinks a while, then opens his cigarette-case and offers Sister Aqing a cigarette.”\textsuperscript{74} However, Sister Aqing smiles and “declines with a wave of her hand.”\textsuperscript{75} Hu also shouts at Diao: “What’s the idea? She doesn’t smoke.”\textsuperscript{76} Sister Aqing’s “neither humble nor pushy” attitude successfully defeats Diao. As Diao becomes more frustrated and makes a strong innuendo about Sister Aqing’s relationship with the New Fourth Army men, she finally states clearly her attitude that “whoever comes here is a customer…and once out of sight, out of mind…There’s no question of giving anyone special care”\textsuperscript{77} This earns a fit of laughter from both Hu and Diao as a sign of momentary satisfaction. As Hu keeps insisting that she is covering the New Fourth Army men, Sister Aqing pretends to be angry with Hu, saying: “If that’s the case, I shouldn’t have saved you, Commander Hu, for it’s become a handle for gossip.” This can definitely draw support from Hu.

This important sequence represents class struggle in an ambiguous way. Sister Aqing is substantively under the masculine gaze of both Diao and Hu, and can only win them over through the (gender) role set by them. Throughout the process, her (seductive) femininity, represented as a form of wit, is at play. Nevertheless, this form of wit is greatly enabled by a \textit{jianghu} (flirtatious) subtext and it thus perpetuates this

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Shachiapang}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p.19.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p.19.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p.19
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p.20.
implicitly patriarchal formation. Furthermore, Sister Aqing also appeals to the audience as a result of the beigong effect, which encourages viewers’ voyeurism of her femininity. This form of voyeurism will be further investigated in Chapter Four.

The *Yin-yang* Cosmology and Simulacrum

Drawing on the concept of simulacrum outlined by Baudrillard, this section summarizes the *yin-yang* cosmology and its impact on SR in terms of the representation of reality. The modern Peking opera is generally criticized for damaging the space-time structure of traditional Peking opera. The latter is claimed for a nearly empty stage where time and space are unbounded. The typical stage is characterized as one table and two chairs (一桌二椅), where real backdrops, props, costumes are not used. Only the conventional actions or lyrics freely denote space or time on-stage. The modernization of the Peking opera, while introducing the once-unnecessary elements such as backdrops, props and costumes, coupled with the constant references to historical actualities mentioned above, is an outgrowth of the demands of realism by SR. This modernization of Peking opera is generally considered as a negative case:

> The confined traditional stage space inspires the spectator’s unbounded imagination and becomes a potentially limitless space of its abstractness, while the specific space of modern and model opera enriches the visual but also

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78 Scholars such as Kirk Denton, Barbara Mittler and Rosemary Roberts have noticed the *yin-yang* philosophy is embedded in the model performances. However, the relationship between this philosophy and the representation of reality is under-explored. See Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, p 225.
restricts the power of imagination, thus restraining the pantomimic and suggestive aspect of performances.\(^7^9\)

The notion of “unbounded imagination and space on the traditional stage” is somewhat of an exaggeration. Usually in traditional Peking opera the main environment is set, while characters’ acting, singing, or speaking only indicates shifting locations within this main environment. The “limitless” space on-stage is primarily created by arias or pantomimes which are still retained by the modern Peking opera. In Scene Two, for instance, Guo Jianguang can sing “The reeds in full bloom, the paddy so sweet/ Neat rows of willows line the shore”\(^8^0\) even though the backdrop actually does not contain any of these things.

I argue that what matters in this issue of the representation of the space-time structure (and reality) is not an opposition between specific space-time in modern Peking opera and free space-time in old opera, but a \textit{yin-yang} cosmology that both of them share:


> The ideal of roundness in \textit{jingju} [Peking opera] movements, as well as in martial arts, may originate from the circular symbol of two fish (one black and one white) in Chinese philosophy which represents the contradictory forces of yin and yang interacting to produce the Great Ultimate (\textit{taiji}).\(^8^1\)

\(^7^9\) Zhang Ling, “Revolutionary aestheticism and excess: Transformation of the idealized female body in \textit{The Red Lantern} on stage and screen” \textit{New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies} 12, no.1(2010), 75.

\(^8^0\) \textit{Shachiapang}, p.5.

\(^8^1\) Ruru Li, \textit{The Soul of Beijing Opera: Theatrical Creativity and Continuity in the Changing World}, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, p.63.
The *yin-yang* cosmology constitutes the ontological principle of traditional Peking opera. The free space-time pattern in traditional stage opera manifests this cosmology: the opposing *yin-yang* categories (e.g. being/not-being, happening/ending, the real/the virtual) can freely shift and metamorphose into each other. The empty stage is analogous to the Great Ultimate/Universe, which is an unpresentable void before being divided into two complementary components: *yin* and *yang*. The aforementioned interplays between history and fiction, between the real and the virtual in the *jianghu* narrative also follow the *yin-yang* cosmology.

This traditional cosmology is retained in *Shajiabang*. Scene Six, featuring a turning point in battle, shows how the forces of *yin* and *yang* can swap. When the army men are trapped in the marshes, represented as the backdrop of the stage, a *jianghu* doctor (江湖医生), who is the New Fourth Army man Chen Qianming (程谦明) in disguise, visits the teahouse on the front stage. He not only connects the two spaces, that of the backdrop and that of the foreground, but also describes the battle situation in a *yin-yang* paradigm. This is a common device in *jianghu* genres: a prescription (or a riddle) from a doctor or counsellor, packed in a *yin-yang* divinatory message, channeling the whole situation.82 Under the surveillance of the enemies, Chen informs his comrades: “The disease is caused by a blockage in breathing…Let me look at your tongue coating. There’s a fire in the stomach, a symptom of *yin*-deficiency [*阴虚*] resulting from improper diets.”

82 A notable case in point is an abundance of riddles which herald the characters’ fates in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin.
An excess fire in the stomach denotes the oppressed situation whereby the army men are trapped in the marshes. This symptom is registered by Chen into a *yin-yang* paradigm: a *yin*-deficiency. To release the fire (*yang*), the CCP has to increase the energy of *yin*. In *Shajiabang*, *yin* refers to the female (Sister Aqing), the weak (sick and wounded soldiers), water (marshes, hiding), the underground battle strategy, and the background (darkness). *Yang* in *Shajiabang* refers to the male (Diao Deyi and Hu Chuankui), the strong (enemies), fire (exposing), head-on armed battle, and the front stage (brightly lit). It is clear that the enemies are in a *yang* status at first while the CCP is in *yin*. The winning process of the CCP is a conversion from *yin* to *yang*, or using the power of *yin* (increasing the *yin*) to defeat *yang* (enemies) and thus occupy the position of *yang*. The changing colors of Sister Aqing’s clothes throughout the opera from dark blue (*yin*) to burning red (*yang*) vividly demonstrate this conversion. The whole opera, in a sense, is encompassed in a *jianghu* world that is ontologically based on the *yin-yang* cosmology (e.g. dark/white, evil/good, as the inclusive neutrality of the Spring teahouse and the Shajia gangland suggests).

The metaphor of “fire” in the original title *Sparks amid the Reeds* reveals a sense of the *yin-yang* cosmology that is at work. Mao Zedong’s discontent with this title is inevitably associated with that cosmology (“how can a spark grow into a prairie fire in the watery reed marshes?”) The contrast between sparks and reeds, fire and water, is a common binary rhetoric of SR. Yet, Mao’s view necessarily involved the concept of the “incompatibility between fire and water” (水火不容) based on *yin-yang* philosophy.
The *yin-yang* cosmology largely challenges the SR cosmology, particularly in relation to the issue of the representation of reality. Katerina Clark identifies the “Great Time” as the Stalinist cosmology in SR: “The Great Time provides a transcendent reality, and objects and events of the present, profane world acquire their reality and identity only to the extent that they participate in this transcendent reality by imitating a mythical archetype.”\(^{83}\) She also notes the “temporal hierarchy” in successive periods toward realizing The Great Time.\(^{84}\) What she found in fact repeats Karl Löwith and Eric Voegelin’s observations that the eschatological cosmology is rooted in Marxism.\(^{85}\) *Yin-yang* cosmology is not too much concerned with the beginning or end of a linear history, nor the transcendent value such history embodies; *yin-yang* cosmology is circular, rounded, and immanent, so it renders historical reality into a form of unceasing shifting between two opposing forces. This cosmology even threatens the CCP’s ideology, since the winning of the battle could also herald a coming failure.

The *yin-yang* cosmology exerts a great influence on the representation of reality demanded by SR. Certainly, this cosmology, along with the generic *jianghu* narrative, can accommodate both the realist and idealistic aspects of the reality that is required. It can also transcend the actual historical events into a form of highly formulaic,

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\(^{84}\) The temporality of SR will be specifically investigated in Chapter Three in this thesis.

symbolic, allegorical and utopian narrative. As a result, this cosmology turns revolutionary reality as well as utopia into a simulacrum. By simulacrum, I refer to a form of theatrical spectacle based on yin-yang cosmology, which assimilates reality (historical events), encodes them in jianghu terms (e.g. the interactions between yin and yang, the binary morality of good and evil, the generic narrative), and consequently cuts the reality onstage from its real origins. Here I borrow Baudrillard’s discussion to understand this form of simulacrum. In discussing four categories and successive interpretative phases of the image with relation to reality in history, he writes:

- It is the reflection of a profound reality;
- It masks and denatures a profound reality;
- It masks the absence of a profound reality;
- It has no relation to any reality whatsoever;
- It is its own pure simulacrum. 86

For Baudrillard, the first phrase belongs to the order of representation, the second to the order of maleficence, the third to the order of sorcery, and the fourth to the order of simulation. Simulacrum is the exact production of simulation. Despite his poetic description, Baudrillard stresses that the order of simulation is starkly different from representation. Simulation no longer represents reality. It absorbs reality and thus absents reality, and so it covers the fact that reality has vanished, as Baudrillard writes: “Simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and

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the ‘imaginary.’” Simulacrum, as an effect of simulation, is not a reflection or a copy of the real, but a closed system which is only exchanged within itself: it is “an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.” To Baudrillard, “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth; it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.”

By citing Baudrillard, I am not arguing that the concept of jianghu, like artefacts of postmodern society in a Baudrillardian sense, simulates the verisimilitude of reality and thus blurs the boundary between the artificial and the natural, or to overindulge the semiotic foundation of this theory. I acknowledge that the way of representing reality in both Peking opera and generally in SR does not strictly speaking belong to a form of verisimilitude. “Realism” in the doctrine of SR is not a matter of photographic representation, but it concerns the idea that “what is real” is conditioned and constructed by beliefs based on a particular philosophy or cultural tradition, which convinces people that what they see is real. This is the reason why the genre of the novel is privileged in Soviet SR and why the opera genre is highlighted in China’s SR, as the two genres are deemed as proper for reflecting reality in their respective traditions.  My purpose here is to take Baudrillard’s theory to illuminate the simulacrum-related features in the concept of jianghu.

87 Ibid., p.3.
88 Ibid., p.6.
89 Ibid., p.1.
91 Katerina Clark, The Soviet Novel, xiii.
The exchangeability within the jianghu world between yin and yang (e.g. history/fiction, off-stage/on-stage, good/evil) echoes the simulacrum that crosses over the boundaries between the real and unreal, as Robin Wang writes:

This [yin-yang] system of correspondence also encodes the fact that yin-yang is not a substance, thing, or fixed essence, but rather a way of unfolding and coordinating multidimensional relationships that are both complex and changing.  

Similar to SR, the jianghu discourse obsesses with historical actuality in its generic presentation, yet the virtualization of such historical actuality is an open and tacit rule in its narrative. Within its claim of truthfully recording and representing is a radical, virtualized power. It consumes the real history demanded by the creed of SR and encodes the theatre into a generic simulacrum. In this way, the jianghu discourse in fact produces its own reality on its own terms.

To sum up, the representation of (historical) reality in Shajibang is largely transformed by its jianghu ambience. The jianghu ambience satisfies SR requirement for a two-fold reality, one that enacts both a realist and an idealizing tendency. In this way, the theatrical utopian atmosphere on-stage is to a great extent sustained by jianghu ambience. In a sense, the jianghu ambience reveals the failure of the “national

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92 Robin R. Wan, *Yinyang*, p.166.
style” because elements of tradition essentially undermine the purity of the socialist culture, rendering the cultural production under SR ambiguous.
Chapter Two
The Light of The Red Lantern: Class Affection, Family Affection, and Sacrifice

Either literally or visually, socialist creative works are characterized by an overabundance of light-related rhetoric. Enshrined as symbols of truth, light and its kindred objects, the radiant sun, a blazing fire, burning heat, a fiery red flag, a shining Little Red Book (红宝书), raised signs of the hammer and sickle, and so on, all play an overarching role in socialist cultural production. The Manichean, dualistic value system in SR—good/evil, positive/negative or politically correct/reactionary—and the relationship in such dyads as initiative/discipline, spontaneity/consciousness, are valorized by the binary effect of light: bright/dark, visibility/obscurity and red/black. Red is specified as a positive and central color, representing the Party spirit and political consciousness. During the CR, it appears in numerous political terms (e.g. Red Guards (红卫兵), Red Five Categories (红五类), Red Peripheries (红外围), Born-reds (自来红)), the titles of creative works (e.g. The Red Detachment of Women (《红色娘子军》), The Sun is Reddest and Chairman Mao is Dearest (《太阳最红,毛主席最亲》), The East is Red (《东方红》)), and so on.¹ In the

¹ Red Guards refers to Mao’s youth organizations set to fight against old cultures and the Party establishment during the CR: see Guo Jian, Yongyi Song, and Yuan Zhou, Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2006, pp. 239-241; Red Five Categories “refers to people from the families of workers, poor and lower-middle class peasants, revolutionary cadres, revolutionary military personnel, and revolutionary martyrs.”: Historical Dictionary, pp.238-239; Red Peripheries refers to “those students who willingly and actively participated in the campaigns lunched by Red Guards but who were not allowed to join Red Guard organizations because their family backgrounds were not of the hardcore Red Five categories though not of the so-called Black

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same vein, black means political incorrectness, well known political terms named after which include Black Seven Categories (黑七类), Black Five Categories (黑五类), Eight Black Theories (黑八论), Black Hands (黑手), among others.²

The trope of light in SR is adopted strictly, structurally, and symbolically to represent the Party spirit. Wolfgang Holz identifies the stereotypical use of a “carnival of red” as one of the most conspicuous allegories in Soviet painting, remarking that “a simple illusion of ‘socialism in one country’ could be achieved by systematically colouring red everything that was to be semantically connected with socialist ideology in one way or another.”³

The trope of light also involves the subject’s perception of the light, namely the way by which the subject is able to affectively experience the light and understand its meaning. Holz suggests that the ideological allegory of redness can function “to make socialism as an abstract theory palpable to the mass viewer,” as well as revive “a popular linguistic convention whereby red as color [becomes] identifiable with the moral level of the

Five categories, either.”: Historical Dictionary, pp.242-243; Born-reds refers to “anyone from any of the red five categories of families.”: Historical Dictionary, p.20-21; The Red detachment of Women is one of the model performances in the CR. The Sun is Reddest is a song written in 1976 in the wake of Mao’s death; The East is Red is a prominent song in the CR.

² Black Seven Categories refers to “persons who were labelled as landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, Rightists, capitalists, and ‘black gang’ members.” See Historical Dictionary, p.14. Black Five Categories “refers to people who were classified as landlords and rich peasants during the communist-led Land Reform in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, and to those labelled as counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and Rightists in a series of political campaigns after the founding of the PRC.” See Historical Dictionary, pp.13-14. Eight Black Theories refers to eight literary theories criticized by Jiang Qing in the “Forum Summary,” see Historical Dictionary, p.75. Black Hands refers to enemies behind the scheme.

beautiful and thereby the good.” In this way, the ideological truth the light symbolizes is assumed to be spontaneously grasped by the viewer without any mediation. This also characterizes the affective experience of the light (or appropriation of the Party spirit) by the protagonists in SR, who are able to intuitively perceive the essence of the light in a state of epiphany (e.g. joyfully bathing in the sunlight of Mao, a socialist-realist gaze upon the red flag, an act of singing or citing Mao’s quotations).

This chapter undertakes an investigation of the trope of light through a reading of the modern Peking opera The Red Lantern. It examines the manifold meanings of the light emanating from a secret token in the opera, namely, “the red lantern.” Drawing on Derrida’s theory of affection, the trope of light in Soviet SR is traced back to a form of heliotropism in the Western tradition, suggesting its close relationship with the metaphysics of presence. As the light in SR is not only a trope, but a form of affective perception that can be experienced by the subject through the protagonists’ emotions, particularly in a state of auto-affection, this chapter further links the subject’s experience of the light in SR to an affecting mode of “haptic intuitionism,” which is an immediate, intuitive sensory embodiment of the meaning/sense of the light, and is culturally conditioned. As each occasion of auto-affection is conditioned and preceded by hetero-affection, and the light, functioning in the mode of affection, is culturally conditioned and can be subjectively experienced, it is argued that the light of the red lantern can be associated with relational affection in Confucian terms. As such, in The Red Lantern, it serves as a mechanism of hetero-affection enabling a cultural heterogeneity to supplement socialist auto-affection. An examination of the complex relationship between class affection and family affection in the plot structure of the opera enables a comparison with

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4 Ibid., 75.
the traditional Confucian opera *The Orphan of Zhao*, which reveals the significance of family affection in the representation of the rhetoric of light. A reading of the function of the light of the red lantern and its connection to Confucian affection reveals how the Confucian mode of affection conflates with the socialist mode of affection.

**The Light in SR**

The trope of light in SR, along with its dualistic structure and symbolism, is primarily used to express a transcendent Marxist-Leninist worldview. The intimate relationship between the trope of light and *logos* (reason, truth, ideology, God, Party spirit, etc.) has a long history in Western theological-ontological writing, which Derrida refers to as heliotropism. Derrida observes that the metaphor of light, for instance, is harnessed as a supplement in Classical Greek philosophical writings, where the dyadic structure of light is used to represent the truth:

> The very opposition between appearing and disappearing, the whole vocabulary of *phainesthai*, of *aletheia*, and so forth, of day and night, visible and invisible, present and absent, all this is possible only under the sun. And the sun, so far as it gives form to the metaphorical space of philosophy, represents what is natural in philosophical language.  

What is at stake in Derrida’s discussion is the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, for which the trope of the light is a metaphor. In his early essay *Violence and Metaphysics* (1967), Derrida notes that the trope of light emerged in Greco-Platonism,

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Christianity and the Enlightenment, which to him are examples of metaphysical systems.

By viewing the light as a form of violence in its privileging presence over absence, Derrida urges a deconstruction of the closure system of metaphysics. In this sense, the trope of light in SR performs the same function as the metaphysics of presence in its suppression of absent otherness and privileging of the present of the Party spirit.

For Derrida, light is not just a trope or metaphor for logos in the Western tradition, but also a form of visual, affective experience in a (post-)phenomenological sense. Derrida’s deconstructive project has considerably engaged with an interrogation of the bodily experience of light/sense in a state of self-presence and auto-affection. This trajectory begins in Derrida’s reading of Husserl in Speech and Phenomena (1967) and culminates in On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy (2000). In On Touching, Derrida provides a more comprehensive (post-)phenomenological elaboration of the concept of auto-affection. In general, Derrida investigates how bodily senses experience physical phenomena, or how meaning is created by the senses. Derrida agrees with Nancy that each sense (“sight, touch, hearing, taste, smell”) can be reduced to a touching-touched or affecting-affected relationship (seeing-seen, speaking-heard, affecting-affected, etc.). Therefore, the topographical senses are always exposed and subjected to the external affect that precedes any existence of subjectivity. Auto-affection happens at the moment of self-touching, such as hearing oneself speak, seeing oneself see, and so on, and creates a sense of self-reflectivity and self-consciousness. For Derrida, auto-affection, as a form of the phenomenological subjectivity of self-presence, is culturally conditioned, involving a haptic intuitionism in its direct, immediate and spontaneous intuitive embodiment of meaning:

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From Plato to Henri Bergson, from Berkeley or Maine de Biran to Husserl, and beyond them, the same ongoing formal constraint is carried out: certainly there is the well-known hegemony of eidetics, as figure or aspect, and therefore as visible form exposed to a disembodied, incorporeal look. But this supremacy itself does not obey the eye except to the extent that a haptic intuitionism comes to fulfil it, fill it, and still the intentional movement of desire, as a desire for presence.  

In deconstructing the self-sufficiency of auto-affection, Derrida suggests that auto-affection has to open itself to the other, namely hetero-affection: “Let’s first recall that sense, the faculty of sensation—the tactile faculty… with the ineluctable consequence that of itself, it does not sense itself; it does not auto-affect itself without the motion of an exterior object.”

Thus, the issue of auto-affection is also subsumed into a Derridean touching-touched relationship, in which the pure presence of subjectivity has already been touched by externality and otherness. Hetero-affection intrigues and pre-determines auto-affection.

Elsewhere Derrida writes: “the most irreducible hetero-affection inhabits intrinsically the most closed auto-affection.” In his reference to “irreducible hetero-affection,” which is an absolute, untouchable otherness, Derrida intends to point out the possibility of “immediate, spontaneous, direct, intuitive” contact in a ‘touching-touched’ relationship.

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8 Jacques Derrida, On Touching, p.6.
between the self and the other, the finite and the infinite, since “contact does not carry out any fusion or any identification, nor even any immediate contiguity.”\(^{10}\) There is inevitably a différance, a form of (cultural) mediation, in the contact between sense and *logos*, “therefore, there is no pure concept, nor any pure intuition, of course, nor any immediate intuition of the haptical.”\(^{11}\) For Derrida, technology and marks of cultural representation fill such a (space of) différance.\(^{12}\) They are a form of externality that constitutes hetero-affection in a state of auto-affection.

Derrida’s deconstruction of heliotropism and auto-affection prompts a reading of the light in SR. The model performances clearly manifest the heliotropism of SR. In each opera, the sun and its variants are symbols of Mao’s thought and the Party spirit that could be affectively experienced by the protagonists or the audience. The heightened evocativeness of the protagonists is indicative of their strong desire for “redness.” This attests to the fact that the trope of light is not just a metaphor for the Party spirit, but can be corporeally experienced. As socialist heliotropism privileges the presence of *logos*, what then is the absent cultural representation? In the SR protagonist’s state of auto-affection, namely the affective experience of the light, what is the hetero-affection that enables this auto-affection?

In what follows, I take the representation of light in *The Red Lantern* as a case study. I argue that the native cultural representation, the relationship affection of Confucianism in

\(^{10}\) Derrida, *On Touching*, pp.171,119.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p.127.

particular, serves as a form of cultural heterogeneity in the heliotropism of SR. Confucian family affection, as hetero-affection, precedes and makes possible the auto-affection of socialism. By Confucian or Confucianism, I do not mean a holistic system or the ontology of Confucianism, but its family affection and related cultural elements that help to shape the light (mainly the notion of class affection, the structure of the class community) in the opera. In a Derridean sense, auto-affection encompasses a wide range of sentiments such as love, passion, pleasure, hatred, ecstasy, depression and so on. My use of “affection” does not simply refer to “love” (情) in a colloquial sense; rather, I am also concerned with the mode of affection, related cultural elements and rhetorical status, as the “light” in question is not just a trope, but a form of discourse, materiality and affective experience.

Class Affection, or Family Affection

Among the whole set of model performances, The Red Lantern is an apt example to illustrate the trope of light in SR. Before venturing into the light of The Red Lantern, a brief introduction of the opera is necessary. The Red Lantern was adapted from an eponymous Shanghai opera (沪剧) which debuted in the spring of 1963. The latter was drawn from the film There will be Successors (《自有后来人》, 1963), the script of which was written by Shen Mojun (沈默君, 1924-2009). Like Shajiabang, the storyline of the opera involves the underground activities of the CCP during the Japanese Occupation in 1939. Aesthetically, the underground battle is a generic, historic battle style as discussed in the preceding chapter. Similar to Shajiabang, the opera was singled out by Jiang Qing to illustrate the significance of the Maoist armed battle approach, and the truth
of the slogan “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun (枪杆子里面出政权).”

Yet again, as in Shajiabang, the underground battle style blatantly takes over the stage in the opera. Furthermore, the feast scene featuring a battle of wits between the hero and the class enemy resembles that of Shajiabang, and is, in a broad sense, a form of underground battle.

The plot of The Red Lantern is simple, as is the stage design and lighting. The opera features a model revolutionary family, and profound class affection among family members. Li Yuhe (李玉和), a Northeastern switchman and member of the CCP, carries out an underground task to convey a secret telegraph code (密电码) to his comrades. He performs his mission with a red lantern in hand, which is a secret device among the switchmen. Betrayed by one of his colleagues, he is arrested by the Japanese gendarmerie and leaves the task unfinished. Granny Li (李奶奶, Li Yuhe’s mother) then reveals the true family story to Li Tiemei (李铁梅, Li Yuhe’s daughter), namely that they are not blood relatives. Granny Li’s husband and Tiemei’s parents had sacrificed their lives during the Beijing-Hankou railroad strike (京汉铁路大罢工) of 1923. Li Yuhe thus adopted Tiemei, the child of his workmate Brother Chen (陈师兄), as his daughter, and adopted Granny Li, the wife of his master, as his mother. Granny Li also teaches Li Tiemei that the red lantern is a family heirloom, which guides the revolutionary path of the proletariat. After hearing the family story, Tiemei is determined to be a worthy

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13 Zhongguo Jingjutuan Hongdengji Ju (The Red Lantern cast of the China Peking Opera Troupe), “Wei suzao wuchanjieji de yingxiong dianxing er douzheng: Suzao Li Yuhe yingxiongsiangxiang de tihai” (Struggling with shaping the proletarian heroic models: Some thoughts on the creation of the heroic image of Li Yuhe) in Geming yangbanxi lunwenj, vol.1, 1976, p.75.
successor of the revolution. She takes up the red lantern left by her father, and successfully finishes his task.

The trope of light plays a crucial role in the opera. *The Red Lantern* is named after a radiant token—a lamp that emits a dazzling red light. It is a symbolic object that serves a theatrical visual effect. A strong chiaroscuro created by lighting effects echoes the dualistic value system valorized by the red lamp: bright/dim, light/shadow, and red/black. Published stills often place the lantern at the center of the picture, above everyone’s head, held high by the leading protagonists in the opera (Figure 4). As a stand-in for the glowing sun in the general sense of SR, the red lantern represents the ideological truth which the opera tends to proclaim. Since the opera is also an opera of *Bildungsroman*, a recurring theme in SR, the red lantern in turns enlightens the revolutionary spirit of a new generation, represented by Li Tiemei, from a stage of “spontaneity” to one of “consciousness”.

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However, a close reading of the opera reveals that the light of *The Red Lantern* is associated not only with general socialist truth, but with a discourse of Confucianism that is at odds with socialist ideology. In his analysis of the semiotics of the red lantern in this opera, Yomi Braester points out that kindred “codes” (the red lantern, Mao and the sun) center, structure and advance the plot of the opera and generate an aesthetics of dualistic differentiation. In a sense, Braester’s analysis confirms a typical heliotropism that is central but not unique to Maoist culture. More important is Braester’s statement that the signified of the lantern is purloined:
Like the telegraph code, the lantern implies, not a system that facilitates the free exchange of messages and opinions, but rather a structure that upholds the Party’s arbitrary interpretation of all signs…Also the more transparent the mechanism for inscribing meaning it seems, the less conducive it is to the formation of a space in which opinion can be openly circulated, commented upon and reshaped by all participants.\(^\text{15}\)

Braester’s analysis implies an inherent chasm in the heliotropism: the stronger the desire for the transparent presence of the socialist spirit, the weaker and more obscure this presence becomes. The question is, who steals the red lantern? I argue that it is the discourse of Confucianism, particularly its mode of affection, serving as a form of cultural heterogeneity in SR, that purloins the red lantern. In spite of all the general, open and logos-related connotations of heliotropism, the red lantern also possesses a more private and clandestine connotation: it is a family heirloom (传家宝). The latent discourse of Confucianism, together with its cultural variants, blood, family affection, kinship, other relational bonds (关系), and so on, overwhelmingly amalgamates with the socialist logos.

It is important to note that such an amalgamation in China’s SR creates an effect of the Freudian uncanny, whereby it manifests as both familiar and alienating at the same time. As a token, the red lantern paradoxically symbolizes both class affection and family affection in the opera. It is both an exchangeable device between proletarian switchmen, and a family heirloom that can be passed down from one generation to another. The

comradeship of the revolutionary community and the affection of the family institution are metaphorically consolidated in the form of this luminous object. Class affection (阶级感情), as the most prominent Party logos in this opera, therefore, is made inseparable from, or an embodiment of, family affection. This makes it difficult to draw a complete distinction between the discourse of Confucianism and the discourse of Socialism. The two forms of discourse, in a sense, are an otherness to each other. Yet given the conspicuous interpretative imposition and stylistic dominance of SR in the opera, the discourse of Confucianism is under-represented and suppressed. This raises the question as to how auto-affection in socialist heliotropism might be contaminated by the hetero-affection of Confucianism, subjectively or culturally.

The auto-affection in this opera is mainly displayed in the form of class affection. During the CR, class affection was stressed in an unprecedented manner. The emphasis on affection involves a strong yearning for the presence of the socialist spirit, and a way to possess the essence (redness) of the light. Class affection literally referred to a form of feeling among the proletarian class and was generally described as unselfish,\(^\text{16}\) simple,\(^\text{17}\) profound,\(^\text{18}\) strong,\(^\text{19}\) and so on. This over-emphasis on affection among the proletariat will risk emptying out the economics-based theory that defines the proletariat.


\(^{18}\) See Li Song, *Yangbanxi de “zhengzhi meixue”* (The political aesthetic of the model performances), Taipei: Xiwei zixun, 2013, p.109.

\(^{19}\) Fang Yun, *Geming yangbanxi xuexi zhaji* (Notes on the study of the model performances), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974, p.117.
Historically class affection finds its counterpart in the Soviet concept of “friendship of the peoples” (druzhba narodov) introduced into the Soviet Union in 1935. Terry D. Martin points out that the term retains the meaning of brotherhood among the proletariat in Marxism, but most importantly its meaning is gradually reduced to brotherhood in one nation as it is employed into the process of nation-building.\(^{20}\) In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes how the solidarity among the proletariat is radically nation-less, ethnic-less, and even family-less.\(^{21}\) As scholars have shown, what Marx found in the class consciousness and solidarity of the proletariat is “the scope for the development of genuinely social, communal features of human nature.”\(^{22}\) The “genuinely social, communal features” of human nature, which are embodied in proletarian consciousness and solidarity, are directly posited against the (partially affective) alienation resulting from the capitalist mode of industrial production.

Though class affection had no official definition in the CR, it is certain that family affection was bound to be an excluded other of fraternal sentiment in the public sphere. The rhetoric of brotherhood or fraternity is a common slogan pertinent to many a vision of community.\(^{23}\) Beyond this, the enemy, an imagined, excluded other, namely family

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affection, is more crucial, as it largely defines such a community from without. Family affection entails a sense of selfish, private property that is at odds with a Communist ethos. The class worldview of Marxism, too, is implicitly against Confucian familial values. In his reading of The Red Lantern in the CR, Li Yang notes that: “in modern China’s genealogy of knowledge, the identity of class is realized through the negation of the identity based on the [Confucian] blood family.” In this way, Li contends that the traditional identity based on blood ties becomes the otherness of an identity based on class. Therefore, The Red Lantern was regarded as a typical representation of class affection both by the CCP at the time as well as by recent scholarship because of its new expression of the proletarian class via the family of the Lis in the opera. Wang Binbin’s review represents the often-held view that class affection triumphs over family affection during the CR period:

The model performance The Red Lantern, where the three generations in a family are not blood relatives, set a model for a new expression of class affection (阶级情)... It is true that under other circumstances “class affection” is a metaphor, but in The Red Lantern “class affection” is transformed into family affection (骨肉情) in a family form [and therefore it supersedes family affection].

25 Li Yang, 50-70 niandai Zhongguo wenxue jingdian jiedu, p.238.
26 Ibid., pp.238-240.
27 Wang Binbin, “Dangdai wenyi zhong de jiejiqing yu gurouqing” (Class affection and family affection in contemporary literature and art), Dangdai zuojia Pinglun (Review of Contemporary Writers), no.3 (2009), 22.
Wang’s statement, in a sense, repeats the cultural policy of the time by repressing the heterogeneity of family affection. The question is, when class affection is manifested in a family manner, will family affection in turn make class affection impure? I argue that Wang’s statement is a product of the uncanny effect caused by the highly hybridized representation of proletarian affection in the opera.

Haiyan Lee has drawn attention to the hybridity inherent in the revolutionary sentiment of the socialist era. In Revolution of the Heart, Lee outlines a genealogy of love (情), and related sentiments, from 1900 to 1950, summarizing three emerging structures of feeling, including that of the Confucian (in the early 1900s), the Enlightenment (in the 1920s) and the revolutionary (in the 1930s). The Confucian structure of feeling encompasses a “range of values and experience that are critical of Confucian orthodoxy (in the late imperial era) as well as modern romanticism (early 1900s).” While the Confucian celebration of feeling (情) as fundamental to human existence is conspicuous, this feeling of modern formation, as Lee notices, is still confined to Confucianism. The Enlightenment structure of feeling emphasizes an expressivist or physicalist understanding of emotion as well as enlightenment humanism and nationalism, where free love is privileged by the May Fourth experience of emotion. These two structures had been superseded by a hegemonic mode of feeling, namely the revolutionary structure of feeling by the 1930s, resulting in the negation of the Enlightenment structure of feeling while recovering the Confucian structure. The popular creative formula “revolution plus romance” (革命加爱情) sums up such an amalgamation of the individual and collective sentiments, where “love” is applied as a supplement so as to transcend private feeling and engage collective sentiment. Lee

concludes that “the socialist grammar is a synthesis of the Confucian, enlightenment, and revolutionary structures of feeling that have pervaded urban elite discourses in the first half of the twentieth century while incorporating elements of the peasant mode.”

Concerning this conflation, she writes:

As a result, it is a peculiar amalgamation of the regime of authenticity [from the Enlightenment structure of feeling] and the regime of theatricality [from the Confucian structure of feeling]. The regime of authenticity relies on a cultural theory that grounds social and political truths in the heart and is enacted through the representation of feeling.

While I agree with Lee’s account of socialist grammar in terms of its noticeable hybridity, I have reservations regarding the origins and demarcation of the regimes of authenticity and theatricality. In fact, it is difficult to differentiate these two regimes since every feeling belongs to a form of auto-affection, where both the sensations of genuine self-intimacy (authenticity) and performative emotion (theatricality) are required and experienced. Rather, I argue that the hybridity of socialist grammar does not lie in its combination of the regimes of authenticity and theatricality, but in a fold of auto-affection and hetero-affection, where socialist feelings (auto-affection) open up to the heterogeneity (hetero-affection) of Confucianism. This fold of auto-hetero-affection also brings about the possibility of combining private and collective sentiments.

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29 Ibid., p.287.
30 Ibid.
31 Xiaomei Chen also notices the fusion of the modern and traditional values in shaping the family in this opera, yet she does not seem to specify what this traditional value is, and how it interplays and contradicts with the ideology. See Xiaomei Chen, Acting the Right Part: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, pp.128-138.
Class Affection in a Family Framework

The Confucian family framework plays a significant role in the configuration of the revolutionary Li family in The Red Lantern, where class discourse is conflated with the family discourse of the Confucian paradigm. As such, the socialist revolutionary agenda becomes deeply engaged with a mode of Confucian affection. By showing commonalities in the representation of the Confucian discourse of family in the Yuan opera The Orphan of Zhao and The Red Lantern, this section points out the significance of family affection in the way class discourse is presented in The Red Lantern.

Previous scholarship has hardly noticed that the plotline of The Red Lantern, particularly its familial framework, was strongly inspired by The Orphan of Zhao (《赵氏孤儿》) by Ji Junxiang (纪君祥, ?-?), one of the ‘four great tragedies’ in Chinese Yuan Opera (Yuan dynasty, 1271-1368). Based on events recorded in The Chronicle of Zuo (《左传》) and Records of the Grand Historian (《史记》), The Orphan of Zhao is generally regarded as a Confucian tragedy featuring the theme of loyalty. In textbooks of the CCP which adopt a Marxist outlook, this opera is described as a manifestation of the spirit of an “unyielding succession of struggles” (前仆后继), a phrase that also appears in the lyrics of The Red Lantern. In May 1962, when Shen Mojun was a screenwriter in the Changchun Film Studio, one director suggested “a story in which all the family members

33 See, for instance, You Guo’en, Zhongguo wenxueshi dagang (A brief history of Chinese literature), Beijing: Sanlianshudian, 1979, p.205; Li Yuhe sings: “However hard the road of revolution /We must press on in the steps of the glorious dead.”(革命的道路再艰险,前仆后继走向前), The Red Lantern, revised collectively by the China Peking Opera Troup, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1972, p.35.
love each other (很亲) but are not blood relatives (亲人).”

These words inspired Shen Mojun to combine the story of the underground switchmen in the Northeast United Forces with inspiration from *The Orphan of Zhao*. The actuality of the names of characters or places is a somewhat mechanical illustration of the SR tenet of “faithfully representing.” The structural similarities of the two operas, especially their Confucian (mythological) familial frameworks, are more conspicuous than the different historical settings. In fact, paying attention to structure, be it explicitly or implicitly, is a productive approach because of the highly generic and formulaic nature of SR.

*The Orphan of Zhao* is set in the Spring and Autumn period (春秋时期, 770-476 BC). In the state of Jin, there were two subordinates favored by the ruler, Duke Ling. One was Minister Zhao Dun, who was loyal to the Emperor; the other was General Tu An’gu, who was a villain. Tu hated Zhao, and successfully framed him, accusing him of the murder of Duke Ling. Zhao and his clan were slaughtered as punishment. Zhao’s subordinate, Cheng Ying, secretly saved Zhao’s son, though at the cost of his own son’s life. Fifteen years later, Cheng told the truth to his adopted son, who at last took revenge on Tu An’gu.

The structural commonalities of the two operas can be easily identified. Firstly, the original family institution is shattered when the state order is damaged by villains or enemies. The patriarch of the state is killed or threatened, as is the patriarch of the family who is sacrificed for the good of the state. Thus, the revenge of the orphan in the two

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34 Fan Shoushu, “Jiekai Jingju Hongdengji yuanzuozhe zhimi” (Disclosing the enigma of the real scriptwriter of *The Red Lantern*), *Jianghuai wenshi* (Literature and History of Jianghuai), no.4 (2007), 159.

35 Ibid.

operas has implications for both the state and family. Secondly, the revenge team is constructed in the form of a family, a transitional, temporary institution aiming to restore the state and family order. In this way, the family serves as a refuge for the moral virtue (of loyalty) and the power to seek revenge. The younger generation is saved and raised in this reorganized family without any knowledge of their true blood lineage, which is key to maintaining normal familial function, as blood kinship is the only acknowledged form of bonding in the Confucian family.\(^{37}\) Bearing a direct blood relationship with the sacrificed patriarch, the orphan is deemed the one chosen to take revenge. The hatred fueled by the traumatic events experienced by family and state justifies his or her revenge. Finally, the eradication of the evil force implies the restoration of both family and state order.

The Confucian notion that the family and the state have the same structure—the structure of the state is conceived of as an extended family while the nuclear family epitomizes the state (家国同构)—constitutes the plotlines of both The Orphan of Zhao and The Red Lantern. This concept can be demonstrated in several often-cited sayings in Confucianism. As one well-known phrase goes: “There is [good] government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son (君君、臣臣、父父、子子).”\(^{38}\) Correspondingly, the task for the ideal moral person, namely the superior man or scholar-gentry (君子), represented by Li Yuhe in the case of the opera, is self-cultivation, to regulate families, to order states well or rightly govern.

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37 As the true blood lineage is the primarily concern in Confucian value, this is why the practice of adoption is ambiguous and is only the last choice for a traditional family.

states, and to make the whole world tranquil and happy (修身、齐家、治国、平天下).

Another saying goes: “The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the world, first ordered well their own states; wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families; wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their own persons (古之欲明明德于天下者, 先治其国; 欲治其国者, 先齐其家; 欲齐其家者, 先修其身).”39 In the two operas it is not difficult to identify the overlapping frames of family and state, or a state-family nexus in a transitional, temporary family where orphans are raised. The nuclear, ethical and temporary family embodies the political structure of the state, mirroring its fate and situation. The ethics of prince-minister or emperor-officer relationships in the state are built by the extended family ethics of a father-son(successor) relationship. The destruction or prosperity of one will inevitably lead to the same situation for the other.

In this light, the family in the two operas serves as an allegory of the state. In the state, the emperor, his office and status granted by the Mandate of Heaven (天道/天命), is the patriarch of Zhao Dun and Cheng Ying, like the father of sons in a family. In the family, Zhao Dun and Cheng Ying are the patriarchs of Zhao’s son. Zhao’s sacrifice for the emperor is viewed as a sacrifice for the patriarch. The emperor, as father of the state, demands the sons’ unconditional loyalty. This is the reason why Cheng Ying sacrificed his own son, since Zhao Dun was his patriarch. In The Red Lantern, the same ethical hierarchy can be found. In terms of the state, the Mandate of Heaven is replaced with socialism, while the patriarch of the state is replaced by Mao. Inside the reorganized family in The Red Lantern, the hierarchy of granny, father and daughter is built according

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39 Ibid., p.266.
to their ethical ranking and shared surname—Li. The tragedy of the state in the two operas is metaphorically represented by the killing of the familial patriarch. Revolution happens exactly at this juncture of state and family tragedy, which creates a transitional phase when both state and family regime borders are broken and merged into one. A new, surrogate family, the membership of which is tied to quasi-blood kinship, is invented.

It could be argued that there are two main differences in terms of the overlapping of family and state in the two operas. First, in *The Red Lantern*, the revolutionary orphan is a female, while *The Orphan of Zhao* a male; only patrilineal descent is acknowledged in Confucianism. It is true that the social status of women in the model performances has greatly improved, as shown in the work of Rosemary A. Roberts. Jin Guantao argues that behavior associated with many traditional Confucian concepts, such as the patriarchal clan system and male chauvinism in particular, had been significantly reduced by this time, which could account for the seemingly iconoclastic aspect of the CR. However contestable this claim, what I emphasize is a deepening, latent discourse of Confucianism that becomes entangled in a complex SR paradigm. The patriarchal formation remains in the model performances, despite being in a socialist disguise. One line which Tiemei sings in the opera confirms this: “Generation after generation (子孙) we shall fight on…” By articulating these words, she is actually identified with other male successors in the opera. Therefore she assumes the position of “child/descendent” in Confucian terms.

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42 *The Red Lantern*, p. 22.
Admittedly, the notion of the “big family” in describing a socialist community is nothing new. Both Katerina Clark and Suk-Young Kim show that “the great family” is one of the most salient expressions in Stalinist and North Korean SR, where “Soviet society’s leaders became ‘fathers’ (with Stalin as the patriarch); the national heroes, model ‘sons’; the state, a ‘family’ or tribe.”43 Concerning the relationship between the state and the nuclear family in Soviet SR, Katerina Clark observes that the state took priority: “If there was any conflict between the state’s interests and the nuclear family, citizens were urged to jettison their sense of family, based on blood ties, and replace it with a higher one, based on political kinship.”44 This practice was evident before the Stalin era: “…rejection of corrupt blood ties in favor of the higher-order bonds of political community…was commonly held by many generations of Russian radicals before the Stalin era.”45 Katerina Clark suggests that this vertical father-son relationship, as is seemingly represented in the father-child relationship in The Red Lantern, contradicts the fraternity of the proletariat. The father-son relationship was also represented in North Korean SR.46 Suk-Young Kim observes that this form of representation that makes Kim Il-sung (1912–94) a national father is a distinctive Confucian representation.47 I have reservations about Suk-Young Kim’s view, since the shaping of the national father is a practice found in all three nations. I would argue that the distinction between the practices of Soviet SR and those of China and Korea lies in the difference between western heliotropism and Confucianism.

The Soviet representation of the big family is in fact a form of heliotropism. The father-

44 Ibid., p.115.
46 Ibid., pp.129, 223.
son relationship is a symbolic relationship in terms of Party consciousness: the father is emblematic of a source of light, representing the maturity, fullness, and discipline of Party consciousness, while the son, with young, partial and initiative consciousness, moves toward political maturity under the guidance of his “father.” In this hierarchy, the initiative/discipline dichotomy is “itself a variant of the spontaneity/consciousness dichotomy,” a form of the dualist value system of SR.48

The Red Lantern explicitly retains the general father-child relationship of SR, but is latently conflated with a Confucian familial framework, which disassociates class affection from Confucian affection. As the family and the state share the same structure and the family is a symbol of the state, there is no obvious tension between the nuclear family and the state in the opera. On the contrary, the big family, the state, is exemplified in the nuclear family where blood ties are directly and indirectly involved. The nuclear family is central to the stage of The Red Lantern. Below I will also show that (virtual or real) blood ties and family affection are applied to the construction of a proletarian community in The Red Lantern.

The overlapping of the state and family domains is displayed on stage through the crossing of boundaries between the private realm and public realm. In other model performances the enclosed family space is a carefully planned space. As one of the official documents states, “indulgence in the trivialities of home life” is inevitably linked to the “modern revisionism” of bourgeois ideals.49 Xiaobing Tang has pointed out that such interior spaces, usually set as places for ideological remodeling, had aroused a sense

of anxiety in representing daily life in socialist productions since the early 1960s. This form of space involves private affairs that are easily identified as selfishness or over-affection, and anti-revolutionary plots are often set in such locations. Yet *The Red Lantern* is an exception, extensively featuring family affection in the interior of a home. Vast numbers of close-ups and interior scenes of the family in the film version of the opera escaped censorship. Jiang Qing even emphasized the feeling of home, as she instructed: “When Li Yuhe’s family members are coming in and out of the house, they should close the door. It can give the audience a sense of [home] security.”

As the plot and relationships among the characters are simple, the evocative arias expressing family feelings play a significant role in building family sentiment in *The Red Lantern*. Li Yuhe’s “I drink the wine mother gives me at parting,” sung before he is arrested, expressing his filial gratitude to Granny Li, is a prominent case. The lyrics of this passage, voicing his concern about the future of the family, shows that family affection is actually the normative interaction among the proletarian class (Li Yuhe’s family). Compared with the 1963 feature film *There will be Successors*, the personal affection and physical touching between Li Tiemei and Li Yuhe in the opera have obviously decreased. This, unsurprisingly, is affected by the operatic performance style which includes limited physical contact. Yet these features have endured. In Scene Five

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51 Jiang Qing, “Dui Jingju paiyan gongzuo de zhishi[23 May 1964-13 July 1964]” (Instructions on the rehearsals of *The Red Lantern*), In Jiang Qing wenxuan, (Selected works of Jiang Qing), Wuhan: Xinhua dageming weiyuanhui zhengzhibu (Political Propaganda Department of the Xinhua Great Revolutionary Committee), Wuhan, 1967, 3.pp.1-2.

52 *The Red Lantern*, p.18.
[at 00:25:37 into the film version of the opera], with Tiemei kneeling on the ground with her father sitting beside her, their strong family love is impressive. The reason Li Tiemei is shocked upon hearing the family secret that they are not blood relatives is because they live and behave in a “normal” family way. This form of living (or acting) in a family way is what is actually shown on stage despite being called “class affection” by the CCP. In the same scene, Granny Li’s “recounting of the family’s revolutionary history” indicates that the public agenda of revolution has been internalized into a private, family history. The family affection mentioned above should not be considered as an exaggerated exhibition of class affection, or as a showcase of the fact that class affection “is greater” than “family love,” as Li Yuhe sings in Scene Eight. It is a result of a family-state nexus, which effectively envelops private hatred into the national cause of justice, and renders private affection and public enterprise inseparable.

The family-state nexus exerts symbolic force in The Red Lantern, which largely embodies the larger proletarian community into a nuclear family. Such a family-state nexus not only carries a literal expression of the Confucian ideal, but secretly inserts the Confucian father-child relationship into SR family rhetoric. As this nexus represents the core value of Confucianism with respect to the grand relationship between family and state, the father Li Yuhe therefore represents the virtue of the “superior man” in managing the family as well as showing loyalty to the highest sovereignty. Largely for that reason, among the whole set of model performances in 1967, the opera earned the label of national theatre and ranked first, according to the CR literary and artistic guidelines set out in the Forum Summary.\(^5^3\)

In a theatrical sense, the family-state nexus renders the tenet of the “three prominences” unstable. As one of the most important regulative principles, the “three prominences” prescribes that:

Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters; among the main characters, give prominence to the most important character, namely, the central character.\(^{54}\)

The hierarchical structure in the theory of “three prominences” demonstrates an aesthetic ideal of heliotropism in SR. That is, the closer to the source of the light, the higher the

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political consciousness the character has. In this opera, Li Yuhe is assumed to be the central character, Granny Li the second, and Li Tiemei the third (Figure 5). Nevertheless, as the red lantern is passed down from one generation to the next, the degree of political consciousness is in turn in accordance with the family (patriarchal) hierarchy. In addition, the purpose of the stage still featuring the “three prominences” (Figure 5) is certainly undermined as Yi Yuhe’s family appears not as a group of proletarian comrades with different degree of “redness,” but as a family with its own hierarchy and ethics, which sullies their class nature.

**The Red Lantern and Confucian Affection**

As family affection in Confucian terms plays an important part in building class affection, it is imperative to investigate the mode of affection in Confucianism and its role in shaping the light of the red lantern. This section therefore focuses on the light of the red lantern in the opera. The relationship between the mode of affection in Confucianism and the mode of affection in general SR is explored.

The term “affection” has several counterparts in Chinese, translated primarily as 亲, 情, or 感, or their combinations and variants, such as 亲人 (relative), 亲情 (affection among relatives), 感情 (feeling, love), 感动 (affecting or moving), 爱 (love), and so on. In what follows, I will show that connotations of the red light are germane to these words. I do not simply confine this concept of affection to love (情), but more importantly, stress its mode of affection (亲) and its relational nature.
To locate this Confucian mode of affection, I return to the general and often-cited texts in Confucianism concerning the relationship between the senses and the world, the self and the other. By doing so, I aim to effectively address Confucian affection in general.  

Confucius proffers the essence of affection (亲) as a fundamental virtue, as a saying goes: benevolence is the characteristic element of humanity, and the great exercise of it is in loving relatives (仁者，人也，亲亲为大). The two instances of 亲 in this sentence have two different meanings. The first, as a verb, means to love, or to show affection (感 or 情), while the second, as a noun, refers to relatives (亲). Affection (亲) thus has both the meaning of “to show affection” and “loved one”, which basically confines love to the family institution when following the core Confucian virtue of benevolence (仁).  

Affection among the people outside of the family is based in turn on an extended familial affection, as Mencius put it: Treat with the reverence due to age the elders in your own family, so that the elders in the families of others shall be similarly treated; treat with the kindness due to youth the young in your own family, so that the young in the families of others shall be similarly treated (老吾老及天下之老，幼吾幼及天下之幼).  

Furthermore, the degree of affection depends on the closeness to family—if one is closer,  

55 For the significance of the concept of 亲 and its relationship to “affection” (爱) and “benevolence” (仁) in Confucianism, see Li Zehou, Zhongguo gudai sixiang shilun (A history of ancient Chinese thought), Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985, pp. 7-51.  
the affection increases, and vice versa. In this way, Confucian affection is a form of relational affection based on (virtual or real) blood ties. Since Granny Li is the wife of Li Yuhe’s master, they can form a (virtual) mother-son relationship; in the case of Li Yuhe and his liaison men, they are just (virtual) relatives (亲人).

The red lantern in the opera is rich in meaning. Judging from the opera’s title, the red lantern embodies a double nature, both as a sanctified socialist object and as a Confucian emblem. Literally, the title “The Red Lantern” (红灯记) refers to a history of the red lantern, which combines the object “red lantern” (红灯) with the suffix “history” (记). Unlike other model performances, which are mostly named after places or terms that summarize the plotline, this title features a fetishized, sanctified object which distills revolutionary history into materiality. Such an object thus acquires a symbolic meaning, similar to others such as the sun, sickle, and “blood-stained” flag in the typical rhetoric of SR. Yet in the traditional repertoire, an object in the operatic title inevitably entails a sense of connection, such as The Purple Hairpin (《紫钗记》) by Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), where the hairpin is a token for the lovers, a loose pledge that binds the relationship (关系). Too often such tokens are private, secret, handy and small, and so can be readily exchanged and kept close. The red lantern clearly shares such an affective connectedness, as a blood bond that consolidates the Confucian family.

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Specifically the redness of the lantern bears several interlinked meanings, which are all restricted to a kind of family affection. Above all, the red lantern designates a “red, loyal heart,” which means a form of Confucian loyalty to the highest sovereignty, be it the emperor or the CCP. This trope harnesses the affective, sentimental figure of a “heart”. In Scene One Tiemei sings: “They [my uncles, Li Yuhe’s colleagues] are all like my dad/Men with red, loyal hearts”. The men with “red, loyal hearts” are exclusively portrayed and identified as familial relatives. In one of the most prominent passages, Tiemei describes the liaison men and comrades of her father as uncles (表叔). The aria goes: “I’ve more uncles than I can count…[t]hough we call them relatives, we never met before. Yet they are closer to us than our own relatives.” The community is framed in terms of family kinship when Granny Li says to her neighbor: “With the wall between us we’re two families. If we pulled it down, we’d be one.” As to family property, Granny Li remarks warmly: “Don’t say yours or ours. We are one family.” The official version of the English script even misleadingly renders the word “relative” (亲人) into “comrade” (同志). The proletarian work ethic, a master-apprentice relationship between Li Yuhe and Granny Li, is reframed as a hierarchical family order. On the strike night seventeen years prior, Li Yuhe said to Granny Li: “Aunty, from now on, I am your own son (亲儿子), this child is your own granddaughter (亲孙女).” Tiemei also comments about the

60 The Red Lantern, p.5.
61 Ibid., p.5.
62 Ibid., p.15.
63 Ibid., p.16.
64 Ibid., p.7, 8. “亲人” is rendered into “comrade.” For example: “Seeking my comrade in the junk market…”; “Looking around for my comrade.”
65 The Red Lantern, p.21.
comrades: “They [the comrades] are closer to us than our own relatives.”66 In fact, references to the notion of extended family are strewn throughout all the model performances, as well as other socialist works and the official rhetoric of the CR.

The meaning of Confucian relative connection is greatly emphasized through the performance. In Scene Five ‘Recounting the Family’s Revolutionary History,’ Granny Li sets forth the meaning of the red lantern:

For many years this lantern has lighted the way for us poor people, for us workers. Your grandfather used to carry this lantern, and now your dad carries it. You saw what happened last night, child. We can’t do without it at crucial moments. Remember, this red lantern is our family treasure [传家宝].67

Granny Li’s narrative reveals that the red lantern, as a family heirloom, connects three generations in a small family just like blood ties. It also connects the class of “poor people” and “workers” into a larger family. The connotation of kinship in “redness” under certain circumstances, especially when used to describe the relationships among workers, neighbors and the poor, is metaphorical. However, it does concern a real biological heritage. Li Yuhe sings in Scene One, praising Tiemei as a positive root and red seedling (根正苗红): “different trees bear different fruits, different seeds (种) grow different flowers.”68 Since Tiemei is martyr Chen’s biological root/child (一条根), she is deemed

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66 The Red Lantern, p.5.
68 Ibid., p.2.
naturally a chosen successor to the revolution. In Scene Five the aria “A Debt of Blood Must Be Paid with Blood”, sung by Granny Li, makes this point clear. Similar to the motivation for revolution in other model performances such as The White-haired Girl and Shajiabang, the biological blood ties between Tiemei and her true father underpin the drive and legitimacy for revenge, if not for revolution. As an underground, contacting device in the opera, the symbol of the red lantern further reinforces its meaning as secret, pre-determined (virtual) blood lineages.

In this way, the red light of the red lantern means not only class affection, but a form of Confucian relational affection, manifesting as a covenant, a unique liaison, relatives with “red, loyal hearts,” or as a blood bond. The pan-familial affection in The Red Lantern exhibits a fully generalized and popularized Confucian affection, which, I suggest, is a key approach to understanding the representation of class affection and proletarian community.

The importance of Confucian affection placed on the light of the red lantern slightly differs from the light of heliotropism in terms of its mode of affection. First, the former is affection/(quasi-)blood-centered while the latter is consciousness-centered. The former is not grounded in a binary of logos (presence) and non-logos (absence), but on closeness to the family. In this way, the dual value of the heliotropic light becomes more elusive, as it is diffused by the somewhat Confucian topological relational connection that is based on extent of affection according to closeness to the family. Since Confucian affection stresses affection (亲), inner sentiment or biological or quasi-biological blood, rather than sight, reason or logos, the Confucian affective light is somewhat visually obscure.

69 Ibid., p.21.
Furthermore, the Confucian affective light is not simply a vertical father-child relationship, but has a horizontal dimension in the way it connects members outside Li Yuhe’s family, and therefore it is more multi-layered and complicated. The red lantern is not only a lamp symbolizing revolutionary truth, but is also a secret tool used for contacting comrades. As one of the CCP members sings: “looking around for my comrade (亲人), I see the red lantern hanging high to greet me.”\(^7\) It is a connecting device that binds, homogenizing the self and the other into a paradigmatic Confucian community.

With Confucian affection hinging on (virtual) blood ties, the elimination of the differences between self and other, individual and community can be achieved by configuring the revolutionary group into a context of extended family affection, namely a “big, warm class family” (温暖的阶级大家庭). Affection shapes feelings of revolutionary redness into something with family warmth, Confucian ethics and emotional attachment. Affection, in this sense, practically bridges the realms of the private and the public, the family and the state. It does not merely serve as the lubricant among singular individuals in a community, but also establishes a normative and approachable means of interaction and bonding. Moreover, pan-familial affection builds a political community into a virtuous community. The original political idea of fraternity is fused with a moral appeal. The poverty of the proletariat in the opera not only sets out a sense of deprivation, but also strengthens the moral sublime whereby family affection is beyond material comfort. Jin Guantao terms this phenomenon collective moral idealism (集体道德理想主义), which fills the void of individualism or traditional familialism and

\(^7\) *The Red Lantern, p.8.*
turns to the collective family as a surrogate. With popularized affection, the new extended family strikes a balance between selfish individuals and a community of indifference. It creates a collective, metaphorical community of affection to fill the vacuum left by the destruction of the state and family order.

This Confucian affection in a sense reshapes the nature of tragedy in this opera. According to Confucianism, since affection also connects heaven and men (天人合一) it justifies the authoritarianism of the patriarch, who is regarded as the one who connects to the Mandate of Heaven (天道). The tragedy in The Red Lantern, in a Confucian sense, is partly built on the damage and blockage of affection, be it the death of the father (the death of Brother Chen), or the parting of the sovereign (the death of Duke Ling), which makes the action of re-building urgent, even at the cost of tragedy. In this sense, the tragedy in The Red Lantern is defined by the damage to affection and the action to restore it.

Sacrifice, Tragedy and Hetero-affection

Sacrifice is a common trope in SR, which serves as the most subjective form of auto-affection in the appropriation of the socialist spirit. In The Red Lantern, it is hetero-affection, namely a Confucian mode of affection that completes the possibility of auto-affection. An investigation of sacrifice in the opera foregrounds the protagonists’

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72 The philosophical principle comes from Ju Xiangliang Duicelun (On the strategy of recommending able and virtuous men) by Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC).
experience of the light, in which the heterogeneity of Confucianism plays a significant role.

Katerina Clark regards socialist sacrifice as a ritual; she writes:

This death also assists that important function of all conventional Stalinist novels—legitimization. Since the novel seeks to show that members of the present leadership are the only legitimate agents of History, the importance of death-and-rebirth symbolism extends beyond its function of assisting the individual hero’s passage from individual to collective status.\(^73\)

The rite of passage, “the killing of oneself to give birth to the other,” is marked precisely by the finite subject’s affective appropriation of the infinite, given otherness, namely the socialist ideologue. For the hero, “his martyr-like death in revolutionary battle conferred on him something like the ‘grace’ (to use a religious metaphor) of true ‘consciousness’.\(^74\)

As SR is a form of “hagiography” of the hero, his or her sacrifice can be viewed as a corporeal embodiment of the *logos* through the subject’s state of auto-affection.

The sacrifice in *The Red Lantern* retains a degree of such embodiment in terms of merely confirming Li as a hero. Li Yuhe’s major triumphant aria in the face of imminent execution in Scene Eight demonstrates all the virtues a Communist Party member should have. Singing is a form of auto-affection, a performative act in which one touches the depths of self and enables, within oneself, the presence of the socialist ideal. No matter


\(^74\) Ibid., p.86.
how formulaic the lyrics seem, such auto-affection remains a kind of pleasure in the self-singing-and-self-hearing continuum, presenting a quasi-wholeness of subjectivity. Against the background of pine trees that symbolize the soaring spirit and immortality, Li is in chains and has been wounded. He will clearly never surrender his Communist beliefs: “My bones are broken, my flesh is torn, But my will is as firm as steel.”\(^75\) Li Yuhe’s arias directly explain the meaning of his sacrifice. They obviously serve to sanction his heroic status as a Communist martyr.

However, his sacrifice has a stronger relationship with a Confucian community than an actual socialist community. This means that his death does not conform to the passage from individual (leader) to the collective (socialist community) outlined by Katerina Clark. His sacrifice does not assist his status in a kind of collective leadership either, which is a feature in Soviet SR.\(^76\) Ellen R. Judd has argued that the heroic image of Li Yuhe, among a group of heroes in the model performances, is distinctive. She suggests that he has the “‘lowest’ status of any of the main heroic characters viewed from the perspective of an organizational hierarchy.”\(^77\) The Communist hierarchy has little to do with Li Yuhe’s sacrifice. Even the sacrifice itself fails to confer on Li any obvious advancement in his standing in the (socialist) collective. Nor does his death confer on him any real “true consciousness”, which seems to be intrinsically part of Li’s nature long before his death. Nor is his death intended to initiate a community.

\(^{75}\) *The Red Lantern*, p.34.


If his death does have an impact, it is to create a Confucian community of revenge. What makes Li Yuhe’s sacrifice impressive resides in his image as a father of the family/Confucian community. His sacrifice should be placed back in the framework of family and family affection. In other words, Li Yuhe’s death should not be extracted from the community as an individual death, but should be placed back into the affection enacted between himself and his daughter, or between himself and his community (based on virtual blood ties). This entails a mode of revenge based on Confucianism in which revenge is justified by (virtual) blood ties, as described above. In examining the heroic imagery in *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, the novel on which *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* is based, Li Yang points out that “from the family to the state, blood ties serve as the ultimate reason, the basic morality and the nature of human beings [in Confucianism]. Thus when the hero is practicing righteousness (义), he is still the hero of a patriarchal society grounded on blood ties.” Filial piety, either actual or virtual, is fused into the goal of class struggle and becomes the major drive for revolutionary action. Thus Li Yuhe’s sacrifice, to put it more precisely, is his passage from individual (Li Tiemei’s father) to collective status (symbolic father of the whole community), from Li Tiemei’s adopted father to a symbolic “real” father.

In this way, Li Yuhe’s socialist auto-affection is preceded by the hetero-affection of Confucianism. His death, as a ritual, is used to restore a “genuine” father-child affection, and to transform the virtual blood relationship between them to an “authentic” one. Two aspects are involved in such an elevation. Let us first consider the shaping of Li Yuhe’s image as a father. Concerning Li Yuhe’s heroic configuration, Paul Clark has observed that “It was somewhat a masculine aesthetic: broad shouldered and determined, unlike the

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78 Li Yang, 50-70 niandai Zhongguo wenxue jingdian jiedu, p.6.
This masculinity engages in building a public, symbolic image of a father, characterized more by his dignified, stately, solemn, and awe-inspiring manner than by his status in the CCP. The highly conventionalized, operatic performance renders his image into an emblem of a familial patriarch. From the film *There will be Successors* to the opera *The Red Lantern*, Li Yuhe’s image as a symbolic father is strengthened by the stylization (脸谱化) of Peking Opera. He sings and acts the role of a male of middle age and above (老生), which was generally used to present patriarchs in the old repertoire. His face, covered by heavy make-up, lacks any subtlety or nuance, and looks as flat as a stiff mask. The massive postures, towering moves and static gestures on stage, expressing loftiness and firmness, are in tune with the mask-like face. As Zhang Ling remarks “the minimal stage properties help ensure the audience’s attention to the performance itself.” This makes his body and gestures stand out. All these solidify his patriarchal image as a father, which places his sacrifice into the microcosm of the family in Confucianism where the bonds and affection between Li Yuhe and Li Tiemei are central.

Secondly, the red lantern works as an affective connection in the establishment of the father-daughter relationship. Li Tiemei’s successor status is conferred upon her by inheritance of the red lantern, as the family heirloom is generally handed down to family members tied by (virtual or actual) blood. It symbolically legitimates her as a member of a family. Li Yuhe’s sacrifice serves as a ritual-like performance to re-establish their

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80 See Li Yang, *Kangzheng de suming zhilu*, p.305.
81 Zhang Ling, “Revolutionary aestheticism and excess,” p.75.
relationship. At his execution, when he is about to reveal the truth to Li Tiemei, she quickly stops him: “Don’t say it, dad, you are my own father (亲爹).”

Li Yuhe’s death elevates virtual blood ties to the status of “symbolic” blood ties. The covenant of the red lantern further confirms this. This undercurrent runs through three steps. Before Li Yuhe’s arrest, they live like a family, though Li Tiemei is unaware of the truth that they are not blood relatives. Jiang Qing’s instructions on the opera were to show her innocence. On 23 May 1964 she wrote: “…Tiemei doesn’t know the meaning of the red lantern at first. Don’t let her understand too early.” On 31 May 1964 after reviewing the first rehearsal, she instructed: “…She’s just a 17-year old kid. Don’t let her know too much [at first].” This in a way proves the importance of making Tiemei believe in and act according to the blood-defined father-child relationship. When Li Yuhe is captured, Li Tiemei is shocked by the truth about her real parents, which challenges blood bonds. The truth is also the blockage in their father-child affection, a crucial secret that has disturbed Li Yuhe for 17 years. At last, Li Yuhe’s sacrifice and blood disperse her disquiet and hesitation. Her epiphany arias take place on her father’s execution ground, where she sings ‘The red lantern we hold high, and it shines on my father fighting those wild beasts. Generation after generation we shall fight on (子子孙孙)… The words are an indirect reference to one of The Three Articles (老三篇) of Mao Zedong, The Foolish Old Man

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82 The Red Lantern, p.36.
84 Ibid., p.3.
85 The Red Lantern, p.22.
Who Removed the Mountains (《愚公移山》).\(^{86}\) When people deride the old man’s family for removing the mountains, the old man answers: “When I die, my sons will carry on; when they die, there will be my grandsons, and then their sons and grandsons [子孙子孙], on to infinity.”\(^{87}\) In both cases the term for successor is wrapped in a family institution. Armed with the hereditary red lantern, the determination for revenge that Tiemei carries confirms the restoration of father-child affection.

Li Yuhe’s sacrifice is thus a symbolic redemption of the wholeness of the family. It parallels the image of sacrifice in SR as an act of possessing the ideological other. In terms of affection, the inheritance of the lantern by Tiemei provides her with a way to clear the blockage of affection between father and descendent. As an heirloom, the red lantern thus serves as a form of cultural heterogeneity in SR heliotropism, to reestablish the affective ties between two generations in a family.

Through this reading of the trope of light in *The Red Lantern*, a suppressed discourse of Confucianism is revealed. The Confucian family affection presented in the opera completes the class affection of SR. Elements of Confucianism, including its family ethics, relationship with the state, and so on, are conflated with the tenets of SR and as such transform the meaning of the light. This makes the trope of light and the affective

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\(^{86}\) Three Old Pieces refers to Mao’s three essays. They are “In Memory of Norman Bethune (《纪念白求恩》, 1939),” “Serve the People (《为人民服务》, 1944)” and “The Foolish Old Man Who Removes the Mountains (《愚公移山》, 1945).”

experience of the light more complicated and impure since the “redness” of the light can mean both the socialist spirit and family (virtual) blood ties at the same time. Such a hybridity implies a sense of predicament in the representation of revolution. Just as the self-contradiction in such aforementioned terms as the Red Five Categories (红五类) and the Born-reds (自来红), a radical champion of socialist redness in the opera ends up reaffirming Confucian discourse, a form of “feudal residue” which the CR denounced.
Chapter Three

Revolutionary Melancholia: The Temporality of the Past in

Song of the Dragon River

The configuration of the temporality of the present is one of the most significant aesthetic dimensions of SR. In general there is a “temporal model” which requires the creative work not only to reveal its stage in the grand history of progression, but to embody the very essence of the socialist spirit which is fulfilled through this progression.¹ Katerina Clark writes: “In the early thirties, [the authoritative voices of the USSR] recommended that literary works be set in present-day Soviet reality but insisted at the same time that they should include ‘future prospects,’ that they should show how Marxism-Leninism leads out of present-problems and on into Communism.”² The temporality of the present is central, but it is at the same time predicated by the transcendent socialist “Great times,” whereby “the meaning of all present-day reality was derived from its relationship with these mythic times.”³ Evgyen Dobrenko has drawn attention to this seemingly paradoxical, future-oriented aesthetic; according to him the present should include both its particular reality of “here and now” and its transcendent meaning stemming from the progress of history. He notes that “we are here dealing with a specific kind of modality: this is not the future replacing the present, but an attempt to imagine the future as the present…a

³ Ibid., p.40.
radical [SR] aesthetic effort is required to make this transformation of the present convincing.”

Creating a temporality of the present had been the main task of the model performances. The literary and artistic policy of the CR, as Paul Clark observes, witnesses a heightened wartime exigency, which urges all to apprehend and present the correct spirit of the time, which, according to Jiang Qing, is threatened by revisionism.\(^4\) Portraying on-going class struggle in contemporary socialist society amid socialist construction is a mandated theme in CR, as Jiang Qing writes: “We should give the fullest attention to the themes of socialist revolution and socialist construction, and it would be entirely wrong to ignore them.”\(^5\) In addition, the standpoint of “historical materialism,” a future-oriented temporality in SR, is emphasized in the adoption of Peking opera to reflect contemporary life.\(^7\)

This chapter explores the representation of the present in the model performances by examining the film version of the opera *Song of the Dragon River* (《龙江颂》, 1972). It first surveys an intrinsic obsession with the past in the model performances, showing how an insufficiency in the representation of the present characterizes these theatrical works. Drawing on theorization of melancholia from Freud and Derrida,

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\(^5\) “Forum Summary,” pp.11-12.

\(^6\) Ibid., p.14

this chapter then contextualizes the theme of melancholia in the CR and argues that a heterogeneous melancholia, along with its associated temporality and sentiments, are at work in the model performances. The new era presented in the opera is haunted, if not driven, by an absent object, the past. Through a close reading of Song of the Dragon River, this chapter shows how melancholia manifests itself in various ways in the opera and how the temporality in this opera is shaped through valorizing the unrepresentable past into a repeatable, reproductive and controllable discourse.

“The Past” in the Model Performances

The insufficiency in reflecting present-day revolution in the model performances is very noticeable. As most of the performances are adapted from works created in the early 1960s, none of the performances, including the second group produced in the later stage of the CR, depicts the ongoing life of the CR. An obsession with the temporality of the past is one of the salient features of these performances. As we can see, one of the central themes amidst the modernization of Peking opera in the early 1960s was whether it was possible to transform the old opera genre, which is characteristically proper for historical subject matter only, to a genre that was able to reflect contemporary life. Jiang Qing’s speech “On the Revolution of Peking Opera” in July 1964 (at the Forum of Theatrical Workers Participating in the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes) expresses this concern:

We stress operas on revolutionary contemporary themes which reflect real life in the fifteen years since the founding of the Chinese People's Republic and which create images of contemporary revolutionary heroes on our operatic

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8 Hui Yanbing, “Yangbanxi” yanjiu, pp.21-56.
stage. This is our foremost task. Not that we don't want historical operas. Revolutionary historical operas have formed no small proportion of the programme of the present festival. Historical operas portraying the life and struggles of the people before our Party came into being are also needed.\(^9\)

This passage reveals the history-obsessed nature of Peking opera. Justifying history through the opera is an apt example of this; however, as discussed in Chapter One, it entails the risk of turning history into a simulacrum. Li-Ling Hsiao finds that the obsession with the past embedded in traditional opera can be summarized as “the eternal present of the past.”\(^10\) Using the debate in the 1950s and 1960s in mainland China over the correct representation of history in historical drama, Hsiao summarizes three categories in the relationship between drama and history: “first, drama as historical record and the playwright as historian; second, drama as overt commentary on historical events; and third, drama as didactic vehicle for the transmission of ‘exemplary names’ from past times.”\(^11\) Hsiao identifies historical drama as a means of historical recording, a legitimate vehicle of historical expression. As the summarization is drawn from the discussion from the 1950s to 1960s, it also reveals the significance of historical drama and its influence in a socialist regime.\(^12\) At any

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\(^11\) Ibid., p.176.

rate, the obsession with the past in traditional opera implies a historicizing function of this art form, in which the event is archived and justified only when it is registered in this genre of narrative.

In this light, the model performances in fact perform the function of historical drama. By criticizing the representation method of historical drama in the 1950s and 1960s, Jiang Qing proclaimed the modern Peking opera as the correct mode of representation.\textsuperscript{13} Yet this in part reflects an impulse to register a past into opera that both the repudiated historical drama and the model performances share. The modern Peking operas in the model performances do replace the leading characters of “emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties”\textsuperscript{14} on-stage as demanded by Jiang Qing, but fail to conquer the compulsive obsession with the past that the art form of opera bears.

The model performances are imbued with elements of historical drama. Using a past example to allude to the present (借古喻今) is a common device of historical drama.\textsuperscript{15} This practice considerably informs Peng Zhen’s (彭真, 1902-1997) 1965 historical drama $Hai$ $Rui$ $Dismissed$ $from$ $Office$ ($《$海瑞罢官$》$), which was accused of implicitly criticizing Mao and praising Peng Dehuai (彭德怀, 1898-1974) in the 1959

\textsuperscript{13} “Forum Summary,” p.12.
\textsuperscript{14} Jiang Qing, “On the Revolutionary of Peking Opera,” p.2.
\textsuperscript{15} See, for instance, Rudolf Wagner, The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama; Cao Yu, “Caoyu tan zhongguo lishiju” (Cao Yu on Chinese historical drama), in Cao Yu quanji (The collected works of Cao Yu), vol.7, Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, pp.346-347. The fact that historical drama functions as a political allegory in China is common sense.
Lushan conference (庐山会议). The criticism of this drama is usually viewed as a signal for the CR. This approach used in historical drama is retained in the model performances, despite the fact that the events presented in them are too recent to be cited as history. Replacing the underground battle style with the face-to-face battle style in Shajiabang and The Red Lantern as discussed before, for instance, is an act of rewriting the past. It alludes to the then political climate of the CR in which Liu Shaoqi, who led the underground battle before the Liberation (1949), was criticized. The opera Azalea Mountain, produced in the wake of Lin Biao’s (林彪, 1907-1971) downfall in 1971, was viewed as a criticism of Lin’s military line of “privileging weaponry over the Party (枪指挥党).”

Admittedly, with regard to temporality in SR, the creation of a genealogy through rewriting the past is part of the effort to shape a history of progression. This in fact will invite heterogeneity as it involves a gesture of looking back. Yet in the grand context of SR, the dogma of historical progression, as “a Great Time” or a sacred time

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“kairos” derived from Marxism, should not be violated, as it is the very source to justify and homogenize the future-oriented, linear history in SR.¹⁹

What is distinctive concerning the writing of history in the model performances is their strong psychological attachment to the past, which not only serves as a source to justify the present, but threatens the future-oriented temporality of SR as well. The question is, how can an obsession with the past coexist with the temporality of progression demanded by SR? I argue that the tension between two forms of temporality in the model performances evokes a sense of revolutionary melancholia that is caught between the future and the past, or between the present and the past as the present has embodied the temporality of the future. The titular phrase of Hsiao’s work “the eternal present of the past” captures a lingering past that punctures the linear timeline. It coincides with Walter Benjamin’s backward-facing angel, a figural metaphor showing his distrust of Marxist historical materialism: the “storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”²⁰ Chinese SR is not only occupied with how to impose the glamorous past on the pile of debris, but also with how to valorize, stabilize and fix the past into a unified, formulaic and repeatable narrative in order to sustain the present. The futuristic and progressive vistas of socialism are largely held back by elements of melancholia.

Instead of picking up the historicizing function of Peking opera that has been investigated in Chapter One, this chapter studies the representation of the present, post-Liberation (1949 - ) life in *Song of the Dragon River*. Among the prominent modern Peking operas in the model performances, only three, namely *Song of the Dragon River*, *On the Docks*, and *Boulder Bay*, respond directly to the call for a continuous revolution after Liberation that is encapsulated in the 1962 slogan “Never forget class struggle,” which was highlighted in an unprecedented manner during the CR. Both the operas *Song of the Dragon River* and *On the Docks* perform as a reminder of “never forgetting.” They are regarded by the CCP as sister works (姊妹篇): “Drawing on the subject matter of socialist industrial construction, *On the Docks* extols proletarian internationalism; drawing on the subject matter of socialist rural construction, *Song of the Dragon River* highlights praise of proletarian socialist practices.”

Though *Song of the Dragon River* does not directly depict life in the CR, the opera is pivotal to the present discussion of temporality for three reasons. Firstly, it is the opera that deals with class struggle in a socialist society in the wake of the period of socialist transformation (社会主义改造, 1953-1956), in which the private economy was transformed into the national economy and so class struggle in a sense was shifted to the field of ideology, as the economic basis of the bourgeoisie no longer existed. The nature of class struggle in the CR is built on the same economic basis.

Secondly, the opera reflects communal life in the 1960s. Similar to *On the Docks, Song of the Dragon River*, is a rare work in the model performances which takes up the theme of representing the present-day building of socialism demanded by the CR.\(^\text{22}\) Thirdly, the opera presents the recurring theme of “harsh present,” in SR, to which the solution, according to Katerina Clark, is looking to the future.\(^\text{23}\) Thus the temporality of the future is integral to the theme of the opera.

*Song of the Dragon River* is set on Dragon River Brigade land in Fujian province in the spring of 1963 when a drought is plaguing the southeast coast. To save the 90,000 *mu* of fields in the upper reaches of the Nine Dragon River (九龙江) from the drought, the county Communist Party committee decides to build a dam on Dragon River Brigade land, which is located in the lower reaches of the river, and make the river flow back to the dry fields. This means that 300 *mu* of fertile fields belonging to the Brigade would be flooded once the dam was built and the water level raised.

The plot structure follows a goal-obstacle mode: to achieve the ultimate goal of conquering the natural disaster, the heroine Jiang Shuiying (江水英), as Dragon River Brigade Party secretary, has to overcome three obstacles. First, she has to implement the policy of the County Party Committee meeting to build a dam in her brigade. As this will affect the harvest and quota of the brigade, she needs to persuade the brigade members, especially the obdurate Li Zhitian (李志田), the brigade leader, to accept the loss of 300 *mu* of good land. Second, Jiang has to stop brigade members Chang Fu (常富) and Chen Geng (陈更), instigated by class enemy Huang Guozhong (黄国忠),

from burning brushwood in the kiln for sideline income, a means to compensate the loss caused by the dam. Jiang reasons with them that the use of the brushwood to plug the breach in the dam should take priority. Third, as the water is not sufficient to save other communes from drought, Jiang has to persuade the brigade members to open the sluice gate wider. This means that 900 mu of land and homes will be flooded. The harvest of other communes heralds the triumph of the war on drought. With their help, the Brigade makes up its losses and enjoys the final victory.

The most pressing issue for *Song of the Dragon River* is how to represent class warfare in a socialist society, and, in particular, how to channel the sense of emergency the literary and artistic policy of the CR required. Certainly, it was easier for the CCP to narrate pre-liberation history, which could consciously and unconsciously draw from traditional templates and cultural elements such as martial arts, legendary tales, or Confucianism, as discussed in the previous two chapters. In this opera, all the sacrifices through the process are justified by the final, future goal. In the general “harsh present” theme, as Katerina Clark notes, “a way out of ‘harsh present’ is also an important underlying motive of the Stalinist novel, but it situates it in the future instead of looking nostalgically to the past”24 Yet a close reading reveals a paradox between the temporality of the past and the future in this opera. Not only are acts of nostalgic looking back to the past for solutions rife on stage, but they betray a deepening heterogeneous melancholia that disturbs the temporality in SR.

24 Ibid., p.107.
Melancholia and Revolution

In his *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud identifies melancholia as a failed mourning of loss, which, serving as an irreducible otherness, resists being internalized into the subject and thus haunts the ego time and again in later life. He draws a distinction between mourning and melancholia. “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal and so on.” The same influences could produce melancholia, which in Freud’s text is an “over and above” form of mourning that cannot be healed:

Melancholia, therefore, borrows some of its features from mourning, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism. It is on the one hand, like mourning, a reaction to the real loss of a loved object; but over and above this, it is marked by a determinant which is absent in normal mourning or which, if it is present, transforms the latter into pathological mourning.

By “over and above,” Freud means that in the case of melancholia “one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost,” for such an object is “withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the

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26 Ibid., p.250.
loss that is unconscious.” 27 Thus in melancholia the unknown, lost object can only be present in a transformed form as it is ultimately unrepresentable.

“The past” is such a melancholy object in Song of the Dragon River; which is presented in different forms, be it as an object that the socialist-realistic gaze casts onto, the assumed ideological residue of bourgeois and feudal society in the mind, or shared traumatic memories of solidarity. This reveals how the obsessive object, namely “the past”, is unrepresentable. Pertinent here are the accompanying sentiments of self-abasement, self-reproach and self-reviling implied in the symptoms of melancholia. They can pose a threat to self-contained (socialist) subjectivity, as well as to the fullness of the feeling of the present.

If for Freud, melancholia marks a failure of internalizing the loss object into the ego, for Derrida, such a failure resides at the very heart of any mourning. Derrida contends that there is no successful mourning, because there is no stabilized subjectivity, as the loss, the haunting otherness or the alterity, absolutely resists being appropriated into successful mourning.

The possibility of the impossible commands here the whole rhetoric of mourning, and describes the essence of memory. Upon the death of the other we are given to memory, and thus to interiorization, since the other, outside us, is

27 Ibid., p.245.
now nothing. And with the dark light of the nothing, we learn that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory.  

Derrida maintains that any successful mourning is an act of failed mourning, one that is unable to internalize the otherness and leaves the wound wide open. What such a failure suggests is precisely the impossibility of autonomous subjectivity, which, as a symptom of melancholia, lies unstably and endlessly between the self and the other. In this way, the melancholia in the opera not only de-stabilizes the alleged socialist (collective) subjectivity, but also the possibility of a future-oriented temporal mode which relies on the possibility of synthesizing the past (the other) into the autonomous socialist progression (the self).

Historically, sentiments of melancholia are also identified as the ethos of the May Fourth generation – what Leo Ou-fan Lee calls “the romantic generation.” A plethora of writers imitated Baudelaire who was known for his melancholic style. Drawing on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin concludes that melancholia, a sustained sense of loss, captures the ambience of modernity. For Lee, the melancholia/romanticism of the May Fourth era, or later the “decadence” in his *Shanghai Modern*, as the implanted style of modernism, epitomizes the pursuit of modernity in contemporary China.  

The leftward drift since the 1930s, suggests Leo Ou-fan Lee, concluded any sentiment of melancholia or decadence. As Shu-Mei Shih comments:

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[for a Marxist critic] to see personal decadence as a function of moral decay is an efficient means for attacking the Nationalist government whose tolerance of ‘corrupt,’ bourgeois-capitalist leanings is said to have allowed the literature of decadence to come into prominence.”  

Indeed, melancholia for the CCP in the CR was undoubtedly synonymous with bourgeois sentiments, including hesitation, compromise, infirmity, mournfulness, and so on. Mao’s often-cited description of the double character of the national bourgeois class (民族资产阶级) in *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People* (《正确处理人民内部矛盾》, 1957) points out:

[T]he Chinese national bourgeoisie has a dual character. In the period of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, it had both a revolutionary and a conciliationist side to its character. In the period of the socialist revolution, exploitation of the working class for profit constitutes one side of the character of the national bourgeoisie, while its support of the Constitution and its willingness to accept socialist transformation constitute the other.  

Yu Yongze in *Song of Youth* (《青春之歌》, 1958) by Yang Mo (杨沫, 1914-1996) represents a typical image of the bourgeois class of the May Fourth era with his revolutionary melancholia. His weakness, wavering and conservatism in the face of

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revolution lead to his abandonment by the heroine, a symbolic negation that the revolutionary spirit has to overcome. The practices of the proletariat, on the contrary, were tagged by such words as stalwart, unswerving, resolute, sangfroid, steadfast, simultaneous and instantaneous.

Nevertheless, I argue that melancholia remains in socialist China after the 1930s, because melancholia is not only a sentiment or style, but first and foremost a form of temporality that is caught between the past and the present. In what follows, this chapter approaches this socialist melancholia by analyzing transformed mourning objects driven by the unrepresentable “past.” They are the rear-view of the socialist-realist gaze, the activity of re-education and the configuration of the enemy in a socialist society.

The Rear-view of the Socialist-realist Gaze

The socialist-realist gaze, as defined by Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, is a diegetic gaze cast onto the non-diegetic world in response to transcendental otherness, be it the highest leader or a socialist future. Donald writes:

The gaze off screen is a fixed stare out to a horizon, beyond the diegetic world, and apparently also beyond the world of the audience. This gaze is quintessentially anti-individual. It belongs to great leaders, and to representatives of collective action. As a trope of narration, it favors the romance of revolution and a heroic future over the intimacy of personal

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psychology. It is a gaze that cannot be returned, but needs to be shared with the audience if it is not to look ridiculous.\textsuperscript{34}

The gaze involves an interaction between the extra-diegetic dimension and the intra-diegetic dimension, serving as an instance of intra-diegetic embodiment of the extra-diegetic source of meaning. In such an interaction, the extra-diegetic object, namely the vanishing point the gaze casts upon, represents the transcendent authority or ideals that underpin the mundane intra-diegetic world. In this way, the gaze is not only collective, but profoundly related to the presence of socialist spirit, particularly its temporality. Donald adds: “the nature of this gaze is epitomized in Stalin. As leader, he claims knowledge of the future, as well as holding the power to create a meaning for that future, through the manipulation of the past, and control of the present.”\textsuperscript{35} In the moment of the gaze, the socialist spirit is immediately grasped and the stage of the intra-diegetic world in the progressive socialist timeline is revealed. As for the socialist subject, this gaze represents an internalization of socialist ideals from a transcendent “vanishing point,” and therefore helps to create the collective subjectivity.


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.63.
Nevertheless, the socialist-realist gaze in *Song of the Dragon River* is not necessarily filled with the highest leader Mao Zedong or socialist ideals, as scholars would usually assume, but with memories of the past, be it a traumatic wound, the recollections of solidarity and gratitude among comrades, or the retrieval of a model example in the history of warfare. They offer a rear-view, the disciplined hindsight from the past that is intended to be homogenized into the future-oriented temporality, though it will involuntarily undermine the priority of the temporality of the future.

In the opera, socialist-realist gazes appear in every crisis along the plotline. They indifferently impede the accelerating step of the opera, and generate a sense of melancholia by immersing the mood in a past that is disharmonious with the

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emergency of the present. The past as melancholy object is bestowed with the redemptive power that echoes other gazed-upon objects such as Chairmen Mao’s teachings or socialist vistas. Three conspicuous sequences of acts of socialist-realist gaze into the past are all presented in emergencies, namely three major obstacles in *Song of the Dragon River*. They relieve the emergency by immersing the opera into reminiscence, contemplation and a mood of mourning.

The first gaze is located in Scene Two when Jiang Shuiying educates Li Zhitian on the significance of “giving up the lesser to protect the greater (丢帅保车)”37 It is a scene dealing with contradictions among the people (人民内部矛盾), namely between Jiang Shuiying, the Party secretary, and Li Zhitian, the stubborn peasant cadre. After learning that the brigade has to sacrifice their high yield fields, Li Zhitian fails to understand the Party committee’s decision. This is the first obstacle to the dam building project on Dragon River Brigade’s land. After being confronted by Li Zhitian over her oversight of the incurred loss, Jiang Shuiying does not just harangue him. Instead she thoughtfully gazes off screen, replying in a slow, word-by-word and meaningful (意味深长) manner. “The land was reclaimed by our own hands; the crops are cultivated by our own hands. How could I forget?” says she. Long passages of lyrics about past memories of the solidarity they shared in the process of reclamation follow. The soothing, reflective music is attuned to her expressive lines. A lyrical music block (termed 二黄原板) accompanies her singing. Jiang’s act and words of reminiscence galvanize Li Zhitian. He excitedly joins the duet on relishing past tribulation. His act of recollection slowly melts his stubbornness. This sequence

37 “Song of the Dragon River,” *China Reconstructs* 21, no.7(1972),18-23.
ends with Jiang and Li’s collective gaze into the future vista outside the frame. In a
typical sense it is a dialectical gaze, in which every positive and negative step on the
path of the socialist agenda is homogenized into the progressive trajectory. Yet in this
sequence, the lyrics referring to the future prospect are only a vague single short line
referring to the harvest, which are considerably sidelined by a large block of lines
describing what has happened in the past.

In fact, singing the past not only takes over Jiang and Li’s exchanges, it also produces
the sentiment of melancholia that solves the present problem facing the Brigade. The
act of remembering and the pleasure it produces empower Li Zhitian with a collective
identity, which overcomes the hurdle of selfishness in his mind. In a sense, it is the act
of retrieving the past rather than looking to the future that unifies the collective
subjectivity. The activity of singing and gazing, as a form of auto-affection, gives the
subject a feeling of the innermost self, and produces a quasi-stable subjectivity that
can appropriate the otherness of the past. Therefore, it is a reliance on the past that
produces the collective identity in this socialist-realistic gaze.

The second act of socialist-realist gaze appears in the face of the second obstacle, but
performs the same function as the first one. As the brigade members attempt to use
the firewood for the brick kiln, a part of the dam collapses. In this emergency, Jiang
Shuiying has to stop the brigade members, and the class enemy in disguise, from
using the wood for a sideline activity and instead to reserve it for the dam. In this
sequence, the situation is mitigated by the story of grandmother Water-seeker (爬水
妈), and an act of collective gaze by the Brigade members.
As Paul Clark has pointed out, reminiscence by the older generation over bitter encounters with the old society is a common plot design in the model performances:

“‘Their [the central heroes’] colleagues nearly always included a kind, elderly woman, ‘granny’, who is perpetually available with a tearful recollection of the bitter past, a young woman eager to join the revolutionary struggle, and an old man who sometimes wavers in loyalty to the cause until the hero puts him right.”  

The traumatic recollection is also designed to give birth to a new regime in the history of Chinese cinema, as Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar write:

This linear progress often follows the logic of recovery from a wound. In China, a key trope for this relation to the past has been ‘speaking bitterness’ [诉苦]. But the drive to elaborate this logic of the wound as the singular truth of China is undercut by the tendency of different regimes to speak bitterness according to their particular political needs.  

For Berry and Farquhar, “speaking bitterness” involves the very process of nation-building: “In the move to appropriate and participate in modernity, the use of history as part of the effort to transform China into a nation-state was a matter of survival.”

The deployment of a traumatic event as a catalyst for narrative is not exclusive to

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40 Ibid., p.20.
Chinese modernity. The constant re-visitation of psychological wounds characterizes Freudian psychoanalytic symptoms or Blanchot’s writing of disaster in response to Nazi holocaust,\(^{41}\) since the loss in melancholia is such a traumatic event. The disruptive power of the traumatic past that underlines this re-construction of national identity or subjectivity deserves more attention as it is able to shatter any continuity of these entities.

In the opera, the socialist-realist gaze comes with the narration of grandmother Water-seeker’s story, which is loaded with a melancholy tone of “profound emotion” (深厚的感情) and “ardent hope (殷切的期待).” Grandmother Water-seeker’s narrative falls into a dangerous revisitation of the past, as it involves shaping the collective identity and in the process undermines the socialist spirit of the present. Unlike the first appeal to the past, which is a bitter-sweet recollection, this one focuses on traumatic experience in the old society. Yet both of these recollections are a discourse of the unrepresentable past.

Granny’s witness to the past is not only embodied in narrative, but in her body (and confirmed by her name as well). Her earnest seeking of water in the old society led to her blindness, while in the new society she is cured and enjoys easy access to water, thanks to Mao’s leadership. Through the telling of her story of life transformation, the unrepresentable past, as well as her physical blindness, is elevated from

unrepresentable (blindness) to representable (visibility). The older generation’s bitter encounter, though irrelevant to the present emergency faced by the Brigade, teaches the brigade members a lesson of “never forgetting class struggle” and again indirectly solves the problem at the end of granny’s story through a collective socialist-realist gaze that affords them a unified identity. More important than the first act of socialist-realist gaze, this gaze also justifies the new society through granny’s personal story of the past.

In this light, the last gaze in this opera occurs at the last obstacle when Jiang Shuiying attempts to persuade the brigade members to open the sluice gate wider and to sacrifice more land and property. Flashes of memory of the gratitude from the other communes three years earlier are strung together, flowing slowly in the melancholy music block (二黄慢板), representing a mood of contemplation and thus recollecting unified subjectivity. Indulgence in bygone days gathers their gazes. Once more the rear-view mirroring of a single past strengthens them to march forward in the socialist cause.

The three acts of gaze occur at the heart of the three obstacles. They share the same structural function, serving as a solution by looking back to the past. Similar to other common sources of truth, the discourse of the past that fills the acts of gaze in this opera provides the truth for the present-day revolution. A deepening anxiety in the new socialist culture is therefore exposed. The collective gaze is not merely a gesture of casting backward for lessons, but an attempt to valorize the past, a lost and unrepresentable object in a psychological sense, and thus to justify the present. It suggests that the temporality of the present, as well as the future, is insufficient,
unstable and vacuous, and has to be restored time and again through looking back.
The sentiment of melancholia also softens the tempo, bringing profound emotions of mourning, which provide the subject with a certain pause to recollect an identity that is confused in the crisis. The discursive requirement to maintain control over the past in the opera, therefore, is not lost in a trackless waste, but is supposed to be effectively calculated, articulated and recycled.

However, the act of retrieving the past belies the way that great effort is made to valorize of the past, which is in fact unrepresentable and thus is not always successfully conquered and appropriated. Memories and recollection, according to Derrida, are a form of mourning too, which, as in any mourning, fails to internalize the absent otherness into a subject. The embodiment of the past in the socialist-realist gaze thus shows a form of revolutionary melancholia caught between a presentation of now and an obsession with the past. The latter latently weakens the status of the present and generates a form of precarious subjectivity which requires further stabilization in the opera.

**Education and the Example of the Past**

Another form of obsession with the past in *Song of the Dragon River* involves an abundance of education scenes. The act of socialist-realist gaze discussed above can be viewed as an implicit form of education, which reinforces the remembrance of the past into a discourse that can help to stabilize collective subjectivity. Practical acts of education, which are an outward way to raise socialist consciousness and thus conquer hindrances in the revolutionary course, also have to deal with the past. Tools of mind-reform and (re-)education, for example, political meetings, persuasion and
study groups, are presented in the opera and can be understood as an act of policing to promote the correct way to remember the past and never to forget the significance of continuous class struggle. The temporality of the past involved in the sequences of education reveal a further form of revolutionary melancholia in the opera.

The thorny educational issue in *Song of the Dragon River* is how to cope with the tension between the public (公) and the private (私/selfish) in a socialist society.\(^{42}\) It was one of the most important political, moral and educational issues of the time and is integral to the theory of Marxism itself. The commune background, a socialist experiment towards ideal communism against which the opera is set, makes the issue more prominent. As mentioned above, while class struggle loses its economic basis after socialist (economic) transformation, it becomes a war on ideology. According to the CCP’s interpretation, this form of struggle has to do with “the past,” or the past “self.” One official interpretation of the opera comments: “The ideological struggle between Jiang Shuiying and Li Zhitian demonstrates the necessity of continuous battle against a residual mentality of private ownership in people’s minds in the wake of the socialist transformation of the ownership of productive materials.”\(^{43}\) Li Zhitian’s weakness is inextricably linked to his past peasant background before the socialist economic transformation: “the ideology of private ownership nurtured by a thousand years of economic structure is not easily eradicated in his mind.” The class struggle in near-contemporary life presented by the opera, in turn, is a struggle between the old and new ideologies in the mind, which shapes the correct way to remember and forget, as in the following comment:

\(^{42}\) Ding Xuelei, “Longjiang fengge,” p.15.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p.17.
Whenever Li Zhitian’s mindset of departmentalism (本位主义) sparks, class enemy Huang Guozhong immediately fans it, attempting to realize his reactionary goal and defeat the plan of building the dam. This greatly reminds us that the class enemy always uses every means to take advantage of the ideology of private ownership and departmentalism in people’s minds…”

In this way, (re-)education is a method to purify and transform the mind that is affected by the residue of a thousand years of history. It disrupts the future-oriented temporality again as it seeks to solve the problems of a “harsh present” by looking backwards.

Ideological pedagogy in this opera, like the act of socialist-realist gaze, appears at every major obstacle in the course of dam-building. The education scenario first emerges in Scene Two. When Li Zhitian’s mind is renewed by recalling the past with Jiang Shuiying, each brigade study group is also refreshed and quickened by reading Mao’s works. Thus the first hurdle faced by the brigade is overcome. Such educational acts reoccur before the second and third challenges in the process of building the dam.

The ultimate goal in the opera therefore is no less the regeneration of the mind than overcoming the natural drought. As the official commentary explains, “[t]his battle against drought is not just a battle between men and nature, but, more crucially, a

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44 Ibid., p.18.
battle between men of two classes, two lines, and two ideologies.”45 The voluntarism that the changing of a mind could affect the natural world and thus conquer the drought is one of Mao’s trespasses of Marxism.46 A plethora of scholarship has pointed out that Maoist ideology is based on the mind instead of on the solid materialism of Marx.47 A slogan in the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) reads: “However bold people can be, the earth will bear that high a yield (人有多大胆, 地有多高产).” This captures the priority of engineering the mind over that of the material world. In this way, education as surgery of the mind takes precedence over the physical principle of conquering the present drought. The former will finally determine the results of the latter. Being the chief target of re-modification, the temporality of the past and its associated memories, examples and discourses, therefore, are manifested throughout the opera.

Most forms of learning in the opera point to the past, be it learning from the classic works of Mao Zedong (Figure 7), or the past experiences of grandmother Water-seeker. These learning objects are sometimes related to other melancholy activities and moods, such as mourning and commemorating. In the following discussion, melancholia and its associated ambivalence in the activity of education are investigated through a study of Scenes Six and Seven.

Scenes Six and Seven mark a period of slowdown after the dam is completed and before the imminent climax that more sacrifice has to offer. Education takes all sorts of forms, varying from Uncle Ajian teaching Chang Fu the altruistic virtue, to the studying of Mao Zedong’s *In Memory of Norman Bethune* (《纪念白求恩》, 1939), to Jiang Shuiying’s physical sacrifice and the bitter story of grandmother

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Water-seeker. The characters engage in a series of activities of education, such as reviewing, learning, judging and reflecting, and most significantly, memorializing the bygone, correct example specified by Mao Zedong.

In general, learning from the correct example is an effective way to conquer the remnant selfishness of the past, which is why shaping heroic imagery is a way to fulfill the didactic purpose in SR. In these two scenes, the call to remember Norman Bethune (1890-1939), reveals a mood of mourning and melancholia in the process. In focusing on two resurrections of the “spirit of selflessness”—one in the first year after Liberation and one during the CR, Christos Lynteris identifies two conflicting exegeses of the article In Memory of Norman Bethune. He thus suggests two conflicting “technologies of the self” in their respective times: self-cultivation and self-abolition, and in the CR the mode of self-reform was no longer emphasized. Yet the education scene in the opera blurs the line drawn by the Christos Lynteris. What underpins and unifies the two Foucauldian technologies of the self is the surgery on memories of the past, where both self-cultivation and self-abolition had been employed since the Yan’an period. Education is a reminder of the correct representation of the past, an effort to turn the melancholia of the past into a political correctness of mourning, of which Mao’s mourning of Norman Bethune is a model.

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The purpose of education, first and foremost, is a reminder of the call to “never forget,” which is the mandated theme of the operas *Song of the Dragon River* and *On the Docks* representing near-contemporary life. Yet the education scene in the *Song of the Dragon River* reveals the danger and ambiguity inherent in questions of how to remember and how to forget, as the past is not easily fixed into a unified discourse. In the two scenes, education extends to a test of discrimination between correctness and incorrectness. The free floating references to past examples in this test bring something that is more difficult to judge. This deepens the melancholia as it not only looks backward for examples, but invites the inevitability of failure as the past is unrepresentable.

The sickness of Jiang Shuiying provides a chance for education. The test comes when Uncle Ajian (阿坚伯), leader of the fourth production team of the brigade, makes chicken soup for her, and is questioned by the once well-off peasant Chang Fu (常富). The questions are: Does Jiang Shuiying, as a Party cadre, enjoy the privilege of having this chicken soup? Does it entail a sentiment of selfishness that the opera openly denounces? This debate between Uncle Ajian and Chang Fu in Scene Six is obtrusive in the opera.

Before discussing this, an analysis of the ambiguity in the test itself is necessary as it betrays the impossibility of creating a definitive discourse of the past which these education scenes aim for. The sickness of Jiang Shuiying is an event of ambiguity. Sickness, like the blindness of grandmother Water-seeker, embodies Jiang’s physical sacrifice in fighting the drought; she is part of the human wall created to stop the torrent when the dam is breached. Nevertheless, the sickness here suggests a sense of
strategy. The purpose in regard to plot design is to emphasize Jiang’s physical sacrifice, but it involves other traditional references that confuse this purpose.

Physical sickness in Chinese political wisdom is a tacit excuse, a political strategy of withdrawing and lurking in order to observe the situation and preserve power. It performs the same function as the retreat by the wounded soldiers into the reed marshes in *Shajiabang*. The diplomatic term “hiding one’s talents and biding one’s time” (韬光养晦, literally: hiding the brightness and cultivating the darkness) used by Deng Xiaoping summarizes this strategy.\(^51\)

In the education scene, Jiang is hidden inside the house,\(^52\) reticent, as she is weak now, while the correct political discourse is articulated only through the mouth of Uncle Ajian, who, representing the less important cadre, stands outside her house. In this “political strategy,” Uncle Ajian’s words can be interpreted in two ways. First, what Uncle Ajian says represents Jiang’s opinion, especially when he speaks correctly, which means Jiang Shuiying’s previous education of him has succeeded.


\(^{52}\) Though at last the scene shows that Jiang Shuiying is not in the house asleep and she refuses the bowl of soup, what is disruptive in this scene is the defence by the CCP through Uncle Ajian’s mouth of the privilege of the cadre. This obviously contradicts with the CCP’s intention to shape Jiang Shuiying as the legendary Da Yu (大禹). For a discussion of the close relationship between Jiang Shuiying and Da Yu, see Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Theatre*, p.178.
Second, if Uncle Ajian speaks wrongly, it is his own fault, and has nothing to do with Jiang. Jiang is still silent and her attitude unknown.

Such unquenchably suggestive references to something in the past also extend to the signifier of “chicken soup” in this event. The chicken soup is clearly a luxury in the drought. That is why this object is singled out as the central controversy in this scene. The reason for this is vividly explained in this opera, through the mouth of Uncle Ajian:

Chang Fu: …[She] disregards the brigade members’ concerns, sleeping soundly and enjoying chicken soup. What kind of secretary is she? What kind of cadre is she?

Uncle A Jian: …(in rage) Shut up! (controls his anger) what do you know about her? She cares about our commune members’ daily life. To relieve the nation’s burden, she toils day and night, dripping in the field with sickness…

The scene also invokes a contradictory reference to another model performance created before Song of the Dragon River. In Shajiabang, when the soldiers are trapped in the reed marshes, the wounded leader offers the only rice cake to his comrades. The deed obviously contradicts what is presented in Song of the Dragon River. It is the multiple discourses that conflict and interplay with each other that greatly confuse the monologue of education. These discourses hinder the success of the education project and in a way the possibility of retrieving and engineering the past. They compromise

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53 Bada yangbanxi, pp.318-319.
the purpose of education, namely disciplining the correct presentation of memory and
the past.

**Between Friend and Foe**

The intensity and emergency of the class warfare in the CR is reflected in its rhetoric
of dualism: red/black, right/wrong, friend/foe, and so on, as the *Forum Summary*
reinstates the demands by the *Yan’an Talks* that: “life as reflected in works of
literature and art can and ought to be…more intense, more concentrated, more typical,
nearer the ideal…”\(^5^4\) The creation of sharp oppositions between friend and foe is
crucial to represent the temporality of the present. This section explores the dilemma
in drawing a clear line between friend and foe, which results in deferring the
emergency of revolution, and creating a form of melancholia.

Inspired by Carl Schmitt, Michael Dutton points out that Mao Zedong’s 1926 line
“who are our enemies, who are our friends, that is a question germane to the
revolution” has largely shaped the CCP’s history of policy-making.\(^5^5\) This passionate
commitment comes to an excess in the CR where enemies are increasingly fabricated,
devoid of any substance. While I have reservations about his singling out of the CR
period as a distinctive case, Dutton’s incisive conclusion on Mao’s policy-making
urges us to think about the origins of the melancholia in the friend/enemy dichotomy.
I argue that the excess lies not only in the incongruity between reality and policy, or

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\(^5^4\) “Forum Summary,” p.15.

that it exists only in the period of the CR, but also in the impossibility of drawing a clear demarcation between friends and enemies without being mediated by the text, or the aesthetic representation which invites heterogeneity.

In *Song of the Dragon River*, there are two factors that challenge the boundary between friend and foe. Firstly, in a socialist society, after the socialist transformation (1956- ), the creation of enemies is difficult in theory as both friend and foe share the same economic basis. As the bourgeois class disappeared, the clear opposition between hero and foe in creative works may disappear too. Secondly, the obsession with the past also severely undermines the binary demarcation of enemy and friend. As will be elaborated below, both friend and enemy share the same haunting past that needs to be transformed and remodeled. This illustrates how the representation of the past, configured as the otherness of the socialist subject, has a double face: on the one hand, it is malicious and pernicious, containing thousand-year old sediments that can weaken and jeopardize revolutionary resolution, as discussed above; on the other, the past is positive and constructive, and can be appropriated into creating the friend/enemy dichotomy, though this will risk defeating its own purpose. Here, I focus on the making of enemies in *Song of the Dragon River*, to explore both how the policies on the representation of the enemy intersect with each other and fail to reach a unified discourse, and how the temporality of the past in the opera blurs the dualistic demarcation between friend and enemy.

Three “past” documents are pertinent to the representation of the enemy in *Song of the Dragon River*. The first is the *Yan’an Talks* and its companion piece, the *Forum Summary*. Despite its noticeable similarity to the *Yan’an Talks*, the *Forum Summary*,
by reviewing the literary and artistic practices in the seventeen-year era (1949-1966), reiterates the significance of class standpoint required by the *Yan’an Talks*. It criticizes the literary notion and practice of “[focusing on] middle characters” (中间人物) as a black line of revisionism that has abandoned the sharp demarcation between two antagonist classes.\(^{56}\)

The theory of “middle characters” appeared in the early 1960s, contending that in a socialist society people with average Party consciousness make up the majority of the masses and therefore creative works should pay attention to them.\(^{57}\) As middle characters are located in the middle of the spectrum, which spans the attributes of “the advanced” (hero) to those of “the old” (enemy), they violate the absolute boundary between friend and foe. Yet in *Song of the Dragon River*, we can see that Li Zhitian can be readily identified as a middle character. I will return to this point later after discussing the second document.

The second source that affects the creation of enemies is a document listed in the *Forum Summary*, namely Mao Zedong’s 1957 essay *On the Correct Handling*. This essay further refines, if not revises, the binary theories of friend and enemy, emphasizing the new, different forms of contradiction in a socialist society in the wake of socialist transformation. As the economic infrastructure has changed, defining the class struggle accordingly becomes a crucial problem. This document has elicited byzantine interpretations and arguments in scholarship. Pertinent to enemy-\(^{56}\) “Forum Summary,” p.11.

\(^{57}\) See *Wenyibao* bianjibu (Editorial Department of Journal of Literature and Art), “’Xie zhongjian renwu’ shi zhanfanji de wenxue zhuzhang” (“Writing middle characters” is a bourgeois literary statement), in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi shiliao xuan*(1945-1999), pp.605-626.
creating, in terms of being a new literary and artistic guideline, is that this document is implicitly at odds with the *Yan’an Talks* and the *Forum Summary* when it comes to whether the “middle character” is allowed in artistic representation.

In the *On the Correct Handling*, two forms of contradiction are proclaimed. One is the antagonistic contradiction between the enemy and ourselves/the people (敌我矛盾); the other is the non-antagonistic contradiction among the people (人民内部矛盾). How to distinguish the enemy and the people is at stake. Mao prescribes that the boundaries between the two groups are shifting throughout different periods in history. For instance, in the period of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), those classes, the bourgeoisie included, who support anti-Japanese activities are defined as “the people,” and those who do not are “the enemy”. However, in the period of the liberation war (the Third Civil War, 1945-1949), those classes who support the anti-American imperialist activities, the bourgeoisie included, are categorized as “the people.” By the same virtue, in the period of building a socialist society (1949-), “the classes, strata and social groups which favor, support and work for the cause of socialist construction all come within the category of the people, while the social forces and groups which resist the socialist revolution and are hostile to or sabotage socialist construction are all enemies of the people.”

Mao stresses that the difference in treating the two types of contradiction is crucial, and should be specified. The “democratic means”, namely the procedure of “criticize-unite-criticize again” (批评-团结-再批评), is employed to address the contradictions among the people, while the

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only solution to “contradictions between the enemy and ourselves” is to eradicate the enemy.

The definition of enemy and friend (“ourselves” or “the people”) in this document causes more confusion than it solves in the representation of enemy. First and foremost the definition of enemy and friend is no longer class-centered, or materialism-oriented, but empirically focuses on the aim of nation-building, and ultimately on ideology as the economic infrastructure which sustained the bourgeois class has been eradicated. As the key 1966 document that launched the CR makes clear: “Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds and endeavor to stage a come-back.”59 More pernicious here is that the concept of “contradictions among the people” implicitly introduces the notion of “middle characters” that the Forum Summary purposely repudiates. It poses a challenge to the dualistic mode of friend/foe in SR if the creative work focuses too much attention on this contradiction. The difficulty of accommodating the two contradictions besets the opera.

In Song of the Dragon River, two types of contradiction are deliberately carved out. According to the official interpretation, the conflict between Jiang Shuiying and Li Zhitian represents “contradictions among the people,” while the contradiction between the brigade and Huang Guozhong belongs to “contradictions between the

enemy and ourselves.”\textsuperscript{60} In theory, in commune life when all the property is owned by the brigade, the class enemy Huang in fact belongs to the same class as Li Zhitian. As explained above, according to \textit{On the Correct Handling}, the difference between Li Zhitian and Huang Guozhong does not lie in their economic status, but in the ideologies they hold.

Aside from this issue, the other more pressing issue is whether the main conflict-producer throughout the performance, Li Zhitian, is a “middle character.” The revision process of the opera reveals this concern. According to the opera troupe, in previous versions much attention had been paid to Li Zhitian, who, as the main-trouble maker, was in the central spotlight. This obviously risked committing the mistake of privileging the “middle character,” as the same mistake had been made in the earlier version of \textit{On the Docks}, its twin piece.\textsuperscript{61} Great efforts had been made to undermine Li Zhitian’s importance and strengthen Jiang Shuiying’s central position as well as the theme of “class struggle.” Despite these efforts, the conflicts between Jiang and Li still conspicuously obscure the conflict between the brigade and the class enemy Huang Guozhong in the opera. This clearly nullifies the slogan “never forget the class struggle” in which the class struggle, namely between the brigade and Huang, should be given a central place.

The official interpretation tries its best to understate this embarrassment, stating that Li Zhitian, who is used by the class enemy, is the main source of trouble, but not the

\textsuperscript{60} Ding Xuelei, “Longjiang fengge,” pp.17-18.

\textsuperscript{61} Dai Jiafang, \textit{Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu}, pp.192-193.
class enemy himself. Though the explanation is in accord with the *On the Correct Handling*, it only reinforces the character of Li as a middle character when the whole opera places so much attention on the transformation of his mindset because of his peasant background. In *Song of the Dragon River*, it is obvious that the peasants are represented as middle characters. This opera, which Mao praised as an excellent opera for the 800 million peasants, focuses mostly on how to transform the peasant using various strategies including education, learning, persuading, criticizing, and political meetings. According to this Party review, peasants are inferior to the status of the proletariat in terms of revolutionary consciousness.

In focusing on transforming the peasant, the theme of class struggle, which is an antagonist contradiction, is actually sidelined. The existence of the middle character also undermines the rigid dichotomy of friend and enemy. This shows that the friend/foe dichotomy is undercut by past guidelines and discourses. However, the fundamental impossibility of this rigid dichotomy lies in the temporality of the past that both the “friend” and “enemy” are related to. Both the enemy and the middle class are entangled with the past. The enemy is characterized by the resurrection of

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62 The same is true of *On the Docks*, where the theme of class struggle gives way to contradictions among the people. Published critics at the time vainly attempted to use the alternative but politically-correct term “turnabout characters” (转变人物) to refer to Li Zhitian and other similar suspected “middle characters” such as Lei Gang in *Azalea Mountain* and Han Xiaoqiang in *On the Dock*. This in a sense exposes the CCP’s failure to eradicate the “middle characters.” See, for instance, Wang Xiaojia, “Yiqie weile suzaohao wuchanjiejie yingxiongrenwu: Zan gemingyanganxi santuchu de chuangzuoyungze” (All is for the creation of the image of the proletariat heroes: In praise of the “three prominences”), *Guangmingribao* (Guangming Daily), 24 May 1975.

63 Li Song, *Yangbanxi biannianshi*, p.335.

64 Ding Xuelei, “Longjiang fengge,” p.17.
the old mindset. For Li Zhitian, the real enemy is entrenched selfishness, a legacy of an unbearable, thousand years of dominance of the private institutions. For the real class enemy in this opera, it is precisely Huang Guozhong’s past deeds and identity that define his present mindset.

Jiang Shuiying: Zhitian, knowing that we are building the dam to fight the drought, the enemy must be frightened to death. They hate us enormously. They will do everything to ruin this. We comrades have to follow Chairman Mao’s instruction: “Never forget class struggle.”

Li Zhitian: Yes. We have to firmly watch out for the “four elements (四类分子)!”

Jiang Shuiying: And pay attention to the hidden enemies! 65

The “four elements” comprise four categories of people, namely landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, and bad people. They are named after their social identities before 1949. As the opera shows us, Huang Guozhong, originally named Huang Guolu (王国禄), is regarded as a class enemy, and was a minion of the landlord in the old society. He has hidden his real identity for more than ten years in the commune. He fits both the conditions of the “four elements” and “hidden enemies.” 66 It is not hard to see that both friend and enemy are constructed and defined by their past,

65 Bada yangbanxi, p.299.

66 The class enemy Qian Shouwei in On the Docks is different from “ourselves” because he “in every past epoch served as a lackey of American, Japanese invaders, and KMT reactionaries respectively.” When Han Xiaoqiang, representative of the lost younger generation, argues: “That’s the past, not now”, the reply is also about “the past”: “He ostensibly supports socialism, but can’t forget his foreign masters.” See “Haigang” in Bada yangbanxi, p.273.
which not only challenges the temporality of the present of SR, but makes it difficult to separate the friend from the enemy as they share a similar past conditioned by the same “old” society.

The battle with selfishness which derives from the past leads to the third source of enemy-creating: *On the Self-Cultivation of Party Members* (1939) by Liu Shaoqi. Jin Guantao has incisively pointed out that the text provides the baseline for the moral practices of CCP members which it largely drew from the Confucian self-cultivation tradition. Battling the enemy of selfishness and the past is one of the important agendas in the text. Liu wrote:

An immature revolutionary has to go through a long process of revolutionary tempering and self-cultivation, a long process of remoulding, before he can become a mature and seasoned revolutionary who can grasp and skillfully apply the laws of revolution. For in the first place, a comparatively immature revolutionary, born and bred in the old society, carries with him the remnants of the various ideologies of that society (including its prejudices, habits and traditions), and in the second he has not been through a long period of revolutionary activity. ”

Though any reference to Liu is overtly exorcized in the model performances, such as repudiating the underground battle plot led by him in *Shajiabang* and *The Red Lantern*, this opera tacitly employs the old theme dressed in the slogan of “never

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forget.” Such an employment proves once again the indecisive, impure involvement of “the past” that disturbs the clear message the opera aims to channel. Ironically, this further confuses the distinction between friend and enemy, for the theory associated with the biggest capitalist-roader (走资派) in the Party considerably underpins the core subject matter of representing class struggle.69

The melancholia presented in the revolutionary emergency evinces the ambivalent attitude of the model performance in the configuration of “the present.” The revolutionary emergency is deferred and disrupted by constantly referring to the unrepresentable object, the past. This substantially affects the temporality demanded by SR, revealing a psychological symptom that is caught between presenting a future-oriented temporality and its obsession with the past. The rear-view of the socialist-realist gaze reveals how the vanishing point of SR is filled with “the past,” and therefore makes the temporality of the present ambiguous. (Re-)education, as a form of mind-engineering, in a sense, is a battle against the past over how and what to remember and forget. The ambivalence in mind-transformation simply reinforces the undisciplined past that refuses to be unified in a didactic discourse. The shaping of the enemy in the opera exposes the past as an invading otherness that affects the identities of both friends and enemies. The difficulty in demarcating friend and foe defers any immediate action and will ultimately defy the sense of emergency required by the Party. The melancholia presented in this opera involves the failure to shape the unrepresentable past into a unified discourse, in order to police the mind on what/how

to remember and forget. It bears the didactic function of the model performances, where the past could be performed, recited, cited, referred to, narrated and repeated as a transparent, generic and iterable discourse. By so doing, the past and its memory are valorized into a monologue. This monologue is strong reminiscent of what David Ernest Apter and Tony Saich called “discourse community,” which is a discourse simulacrum that has been created since the CCP’s Yan’an period. However, the unrepresentable past is not easily subjugated to a single political end. It invites heterogeneity that is beyond any reconciliation or dialectic treatment. The constant acts of retrieving the past in the opera reveal the magnetic power of absence and loss, which drags the present into an unrepresentable abyss, damages its temporality, and produces the effect of halting melancholia.

Chapter Four

The Uncanny: The Female Body, Violence, and Visuality in the Socialist Ballets

The question of how to represent violence and horror has been one of the most important issues in SR. According to the Forum Summary, scenes of “cruelty” should not be overplayed, as Jiang Qing wrote:

Our works show our arduous struggles and heroic sacrifices, but must also express revolutionary heroism and revolutionary optimism. While depicting the cruelty of war, we must not exaggerate or glorify its horrors. The cruelty of a revolutionary war and revolutionary heroism, the arduousness of the revolutionary struggle and revolutionary optimism [革命乐观主义] constitute a unity of opposites, but we must be clear about which is the principal aspect of the contradiction; otherwise, if we make the wrong emphasis, a bourgeois pacifist trend will emerge.¹

This represents the pervasive, one-dimensional “revolutionary optimism” in socialist creative works, which Jason McGrath calls “Communists Have More Fun!”² Representations of the dark, negative side of socialism are not allowed.³ In most of

¹ “Forum Summary,” pp.15-16.
the model performances, torture scenes of the positive heroes and heroines are highly censored. To simplify the torturing details and to efface the sense of horror, the execution scene of Li Yuhe in The Red Lantern, for instance, is filled with the martyr’s optimistic arias. Yet despite the supposed overt negation of the discourse of horror and violence, uncanniness, aberration and somatic suffering are rife on-stage. In particular, spectacles of female physical suffering and degradation, though encapsulated in the common optimism, are given massive exposure.

This chapter explores the representation of violence suffered by female bodies and its visual heterogeneity and uncanniness through an examination of two socialist ballets, The White-haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women. The uncanniness in the two works involves the visual effect of hybridity, which has long been recognized, as described by Liu Kang:

During a 1996 North American tour, the China Central Ballet repeatedly performed The Red Detachment of Women as its grand finale, which caused post-modern audiences in Los Angeles and New York to marvel at the opera’s innovative multipositionality and hybridity, in which revolutionary ideologies, exotic nativist music and dances of the Li ethnic minority on Hainan Island, and high European styles and modalities coalesce in a neo-Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk.4

Liu Kang captures the visual diversity in the socialist ballets that cannot be simply subjugated to a dominant, ideological logos. Nevertheless, many questions in regard

4 Kang Liu, “Popular culture and the culture of the masses in contemporary China,” 114.
to this heterogeneous visual effect are underexplored. What constitutes such hybridity? What is the representation mechanism of hybridity? How does it function in the representation of violence?

This chapter first addresses the representation mechanism of hybridity within the framework of the Freudian uncanny, reworking it in the light of the Lyotardian theory of the sublime. I argue that the representation of violence follows the representation mechanism of the uncanny, where what should be presented and what should not be seen are strictly mandated. On the one hand, the accompanying written scripts, introductions, ideological *logos*, and the official interpretations of the time both encourage and forbid what is to be seen and what is not in the ballets. On the other hand, the visuality presented in the ballets simply does not comply with the scripts or dramaturgical directives or a single *logos*. This mechanism has exerted considerable influence on interpretations of the two ballets by previous scholarship, where aberrancy in the two operas is obscured. The problems thus are: can the art form of ballet be successfully transformed into a Socialist Realist product with a unified language that the choreography and visual spectacles can express? What if the bodily textuality and the filmic visuality diverge from the *logos* of SR, as dialogues and lines substantially decrease in these works? Heterogeneity in the art form of Peking opera has been investigated in the previous three chapters. This chapter focuses on heterogeneity in the art form of ballet, concentrating on the relationship between the visuality of suffering and the *logos* of SR. The interplay between the explicating texts and the stage spectacles are also highlighted, showing how the body is unable to faithfully perform the texts.
Scenes of the suffering of female protagonists in the two ballets are examined, but with different points of emphasis. In *The White-haired Girl*, the double image of Xi’er (喜儿) as both ghost and goddess, and the abjection which her white hair and degraded existence evoke, were an object of particular exploitation by the CCP. It is argued that the need to neutralize Xi’er’s double image determines the inner dynamics of visuality in this ballet. In *The Red Detachment of Women*, the spectacle of Wu Qinghua’s (吴清华) suffering produces an alienation effect, the uncanniness of which lies in its tension with the visual perfection of optimism in SR. As film was the main medium used to popularize the two ballets, this chapter focuses on the filmic spectacles of violence presented via the camera and the ambiguity this representation contains. In both ballets the visual effect of hybridity is produced by the representation mechanism of the uncanny. As uncanny objects are inevitably associated with sexuality, this chapter also discusses the voyeurism and desire implicit therein. In her “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey has drawn attention to how “patriarchal society has structured the film form” in which female (erotic) images are represented under the male gaze as a source of visual pleasure. As the patriarchal formation remains in the model performances and socialist culture, the representation of female bodies in the ballets therefore offers an approach to look at this once suppressed, unconscious discourse of desire. 

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The Uncanny and Its Visual Effect of Hybridity

This section reworks the concept of uncanny from a Lyotardian framework of sublime, focusing on its representation mechanism. The tensions between representing and repressing in the feeling of uncanny are examined. The hybridity of visibility and invisibility, the familiar and the alien, and its related sexuality are central to this analysis of the two ballets.

In 1919, Freud wrote in his seminal piece that unraveled the concept of the uncanny: “It may be true that the uncanny [unheimlich] is something which is secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition.” The uncanny, defined by Freud, refers to the dynamics inside the feeling: the doubling of familiarity and alienation, and the conflicting forces of repression and restoration. The doubling at play shapes the concept, which takes various forms throughout Freud’s text. In adducing the German etymology of the word uncanny (both the words heimlich and un-heimlich), for instance, Freud strengthens such a duality. These two words, though opposed to each other, actually share the same meaning:

What interests us most in this long extract is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word heimlich [homely] exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, unheimlich [ unhomely]. What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich. (Cf. the quotation from Gutzkow: “We call it ‘unheimlich’; you call it ‘heimlich’.”) In general we are reminded that the word heimlich is not

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unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being
contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar
and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight.\textsuperscript{8}

In stressing the harmonious relationships between two sets of ideas, Freud attempts to
stabilize this seemingly unstable feeling. The representation mechanism within this
feeling, namely the struggles between the two forces of repressing and returning, is
more crucial than what “uncanny” literally denotes. With the benefit of hindsight
today, the plight that the Freudian uncanny presents is enlightened in Lyotard’s
reworking of the Kantian sublime. Scholars such as Prawer, Harold Bloom, Hans-Ties
Lehmann, David Ellison and Elizabeth Wright have associated the concept of the
uncanny with that of the sublime. Harold Bloom categorizes the uncanny as a
negative sublime; Hans-Ties Lehmann makes a comparison between the Kantian
sublime and the uncanny.\textsuperscript{9} Elizabeth Wright notes the force of the Lyotardian
“unpresentable” in the uncanny, yet she does not continue to explore this topic.\textsuperscript{10}

Lyotard’s rereading of the Kantian sublime, in a sense, reveals the forces which
present within the Freudian uncanny. In the third Critique, \textit{The Critique of Judgment}
by Kant, two incongruous faculties of the mind are involved in the aesthetic
experience of the sublime: the imagination and reason. The faculty of imagination,
functioning to produce form and bound by the limit of experience, is enjoined to

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., pp.224-225.
\textsuperscript{9} Anneleen Masschelein, \textit{The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century
\textsuperscript{10} See Elizabeth Wright, \textit{Speaking Desires can be Dangerous: The Poetics of the Unconscious},
present the Idea of reason, which is beyond the imagination’s capability and thus is unpresentable in the very moment of the sublime. Yet, the Idea, as an absolute that cannot find its object in experience, repels and attracts the imagination in this situation. This causes the subject to feel pleasure and pain at the same time. Lyotard emphasizes the incommensurability of the imagination and reason, formulating such a double-bind moment in the phrase “presenting the unpresentable”:

From a conflict in which reflection dismisses both parties with its double “no”: neither of you, neither one nor the other, has any legitimacy to claim what you claim—we move to a conflict in which it credits both of them with a double “yes”: imagination is justified in trying to present the unpresentable and in not being able to succeed; reason is right to demand that it make this vain effort, because reason here is practical and the Idea to be presented is unconditioned causality, freedom, which constitutively requires its present realization but also constitutes the supreme “destination” of the mind. 11

A parallel can be drawn between the Lyotardian sublime and the uncanny within the general framework of Freudian psychoanalysis. Two struggling forces are identified in the uncanny. One is the once-repressing force or the super-ego in Freudian terms, similar to the Idea in the faculty of reason, which forbids the uncanny object to be presented. It is an object that can be perceived but which cannot be presented, due to the amnesia or the forced liquidation enjoined previously by the super-ego. The other

force is the presenting force, similar to the faculty of imagination, which is attracted by the unrepresentable object and tries to endow a form to such an alien object that has been registered in the mind.

The uncanny object thus wavers between visibility and invisibility, the familiar and the alien. On the one hand what is prohibited from being presented is always represented as the set of ideals that the super-ego or reason encourages. Thus the object is “concealed and kept out of sight,” 12 or takes on the appearance of what the super-ego desires. On the other hand what was once repressed is partially presented due to the fading of the super-ego, which invokes a “familiar and agreeable” 13 feeling. The feeling of the uncanny, as a state of mind, captures the discontinuity and vagueness of the object. The visibility of such an object is unstable, marked by a process of presenting and fading at the same time.

In drawing a parallel between the two theories, two protocols are added. Firstly, in the feeling of the uncanny, the clear-cut boundaries between the imagination and reason in a Lyotardian sense are unstable, as the repressing force can be weakened in some cases, which gives the object a chance to reveal itself. The uncanny object thus goes through a process that was once suppressed by the super-ego and now is partially revealed. By partially I refer to the amnesia effect resulting from a long period of prohibition such that the imagination is hardly able to find the proper knowledge to present it. Besides, though the injunction may be withering, the effect remains, which hinders the object from a complete and direct presentation. Samuel Weber points out

13 Ibid., p.224.
that the uncanny is such an object or phenomenon that fails to be captured, which
causes the “crisis of perception and of phenomenality,” and thus the failure of Freud’s
certainty in theoretical description. He writes: “What should have remained concealed
and what has nonetheless, in a certain manner, emerged, engenders the uncanny
because its very appearance eludes perception, its being is not to be had, because it
side-steps and side-tracks and not just Freud—by repeating, doubling, splitting and
reflecting.”\textsuperscript{14} Secondly, the seductive, affective undertone in both feelings of the
sublime and the uncanny is crucial. Though an object is unpresentable, it keeps
affecting and seducing the mind. The object has been registered and perceived in the
mind formlessly, which is the precondition that it can be familiar once it is presented.

The way in which the uncanny object presents can be applied to understand the
ambivalent visual effect created by the hybridity in the two ballets. Numerous erotic
encounters with the two ballets in the CR recounted in fictional and non-fictional
narratives produced in the post-CR period testify to the once-repressed but restored
sexuality inherent in these works. This is because the uncanny object, female bodies
in this case, is first and foremost associated with sexual sentiments in Freud’s
theory.\textsuperscript{15} This chapter focuses on the origins of sexuality in the framework of the
uncanny.

Although the plotlines of \textit{The White-haired Girl} and \textit{The Red Detachment of Women}
are adapted into the format of SR, what distinguishes them among the model
performances is the deliberate exhibition of female bodies and their suffering. In each

\textsuperscript{14} Samuel Weber, “The sideshow, or: Remarks on a canny moment”, \textit{MLN} 88, no.6 (1973), 1331.
\textsuperscript{15} See, for instance, Jason McGrath, “Cultural Revolution model opera films and the realist
tradition in Chinese cinema,” \textit{The Opera Quarterly} 26 (2010), 343-76.
case, the choreography was assumed to script stories of female liberation. Standard written scripts and unanimous explanations, as a form of extra-stage introduction, were published and accompanied the ballets in detail, trying to encourage and control what the viewers should see.\textsuperscript{16} Based on well-known stories with several previous filmic or written versions, both ballets were supposed to be performed with all the supporting background information and “audience foundation.”\textsuperscript{17} These formed a context of \textit{logos} that contains the “dangerous” and “pernicious” visual effects, and creates a standard baseline for what should be presented and perceived, and what should not.

Yet the bodies and their movements on-stage are not easily tamed into coherence with verbal introductions or ideological explanations. The tension between the visual presentation of bodies and the scripted interpretations is salient, which invokes a presentation of the uncanny and generates an effect of hybridity. An important concept in post-colonial studies, hybridity is concerned with inequalities in ethnology, the boundary between hierarchical oppositions such as self and other, majority and minority, white and black, and so on. Hybridity reveals ambivalence and contamination between such hierarchical counterparts. Yet my overriding concern here is less ethnological than the subversive and heterogeneous implications this concept bears. Hybridity, in a sense, is the visual effect produced by the representation of the operation of the uncanny. It denotes a mode of interpretation

\textsuperscript{16} Each model performance was accompanied by a comprehensive, standard script issued by the CCP.

beyond binary thinking, revealing a constant conflict between the imagination and reason, the unconscious and the super-ego. It plays on the ambivalence and contamination of two opposing categories. In hybridity, there is an unending incongruousness between two forces: one is what the CCP encourages to be seen, the other is forbidden from being seen and yet is still presented on stage. In this sense, the term hybridity is an attempt to describe the uncanny object, namely the female image in the model performances, which constantly eludes perception.

The Obscenity of Exposure: Xi’er as Ghost and Goddess

_The White-haired Girl_, which portrays how the protagonist Xi’er is treated as a ghost in the old society and turns into a human being in the new society, seemingly follows the optimism of SR. Yet the doubled image of Xi’er as both ghost and goddess shows the oddity of this ballet that defies the norm of optimism. This section first offers a literature review on Xi’er’s image and points out the limits in previous studies. The representation of Xi’er’s white hair, a stigmatic inheritance from the old society, as well as its sexual connotations and implications, are examined. In particular, the obscenity of visual exposure in the representation of her suffering and degradation is emphasized in my analysis.

The story of “the white-haired girl,” along with its various versions presented in different art forms, is a prominent title in China’s SR. Based on a popular local, folkloric legend, the earliest versions of the story are in forms of reportage and novella that emerged in the early 1940s. The 1945 yang’ge opera version of the

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18 Song Jianhua, “Cong minjian chuanqi dao hongse jingdain: Baimaonü gushi de lishi yanyi” (From a folkloric story to the red classic: The development of _The White-haired Girl_), _Najing_
story, incorporated as part of the core repertoire of SR ever since, was widely promoted by the CCP in the late 1940s and the 1950s. In 1950 the story was adapted into film, becoming one of the most popular films in 1951.\textsuperscript{19} The story was adapted into ballet by the CCP in 1964, and was made into film in 1972.\textsuperscript{20} The ballet version of the story presents a common revenge story in SR. Xi’er, a peasant girl, lives with her widowed father Yang Bailao (杨白劳) in Yangge village (杨各庄) in Hebei province. On the eve of Chinese New Year, a festival for family reunion, Xi’er is waiting for her father at their hut. To hide from the debt collector and landlord Huang Shiren (黄世仁), Yang Bailao has been away for the whole day. Not long after his return, the landlord and his lackeys come for the rent. Knowing that Yang is unable to pay the debt, they kill him and take Xi’er to be Huang’s concubine. With the help of a maid, she flees into the wild mountains. For years she lives in a cave and feeds on the sacrificial offerings in a local temple at night when no one is around. Her hair turns white, from a lack of salt in her diet, as explained by the CCP. Rumors arise that there is a white-haired goddess or ghost in the village. Her previous fiancé Wang Dachun (王大春), who becomes a member of the Eighth Route Army in the wake of the death of Yang Bailao, returns to the village with his troops. They defeat the Japanese invaders and the landlord, and Xi’er is rescued from the mountains. They celebrate victory in the last scene.

Like most of the model performances, the simple plotline in this ballet follows the highly idealized and allegorical story. Yet what lies in this abstraction is the unusual


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
representation of visual perfection, the intensity and quality of which have long been obscured due to the overriding political indoctrination that in a sense regulates what the viewer should see. The visibility of the female body in the ballet is seemingly presented through the lens of political correctness in which all the ambiguity around Xi’er is ignored. The spectacle of Xi’er’s idiosyncratic, uncanny body, her white hair in particular, plays a significant role in the ballet. First and foremost, she is not a typical heroine in any sense of the SR standards. It is easy to understand that her story of liberation largely serves to extol the redemptive power of the CCP, yet this form of eulogy should not overshadow the main task of building heroic images set out by the Forum Summary. Unlike other female characters such as Sister Aqing in Shajiabang and Jiang Shuiying in Song of the Dragon River, who can boast about their heroic deeds, Xi’er’s merit literally lies in her flaunted wound, her uncanny white-hair, rather than in her scanty deeds in fighting against the class enemy. Her physical weakness is massively and necessarily shown in the ballet, despite the efforts of the CCP to strengthen her position compared with earlier non-dance versions of the story. Nevertheless, in weakening the female role in the cause of liberation, the visual violence of displaying the deformed, wounded, and suffering body of a woman is evident. The eponymous, abnormal white hair blatantly testifies to such violence: it is an operatic exhibition, where the symbolic female body part is central. It suggests a traumatic, rather than heroic, legend that can feed audience curiosity about the strangeness of the female body.

Previous scholarship helps to locate the development and differences of Xi’er’s physical image, among the three major versions of The White-haired Girl, the first performed as a yang’ge (秧歌) opera in 1945, the second presented as a film in 1951,
and the third as a ballet drama in the CR. In outlining the thread from the Yan’an period (1935-1947) to the CR (1966-1976), an increasingly idealized, abstract, and simplified development is clear. Several noticeable changes have been made in the ballet version, as Meng Yue notes:

Revision generally took place at two key levels. First, there was a gradual strengthening of Xi’er’s political instincts, so that, for example, the newer Xi’er hated the landlord immediately rather than dreaming of becoming one of his wives. Second, there was a gradual erasure of Xi’er’s body and her sexual situation. In the opera version, realizing that the landlord has lied to her about his marriage, the raped and pregnant Xi’er follows the landlord and deploys her body to demonstrate his perfidy and the crimes of the old order against her. In the film, however, the camera keeps the pregnancy out of sight while it informs the audience of it and subsequently of the birth of Xi’er’s son. Later, the ballet version accelerated the process of disembodiment to the point that scenes of pregnancy and birth disappeared altogether. By this point, the resurgence of the traditional “good woman” ideal and the political imperative meant that any Xi’er worth her salt would rather kill herself than suffer the disgrace of rape and pregnancy. Late-model Xi’ers do not get raped at all: they become mothers but somehow remain virgins. Finally, when Xi’er’s body and sexuality have completely faded from the story the empty conceptual space is marked by the
term “class,” and the political code entirely displaces the sexual code as a functioning part of the story.  

Meng chronicles a thread of Xi’er’s bodily representation in the three versions. A linear development of increasing ideological entrenchment is outlined, climaxing with her absolute purity in the ballet version. Now Xi’er’s political instincts prevent her from any dream of becoming Huang’s wife. Meanwhile, her bodily presence and sexuality are erased: she has not been raped, impregnated and given birth. She thus earns the title of the “proletarian class” prescribed by Jiang Qing. In a sense Meng’s account attests to what the CCP attempted to encourage the audience to see on-stage, a class heroine and political body without sexuality. Yet Meng’s interpretation is no more than a tautology of the artistic policy of the Party. In her account, all the aspects of the spectacle of Xi’er’s bodily presence on-stage, be they the choreographic features or her obtrusive white hair, are implicitly subsumed under ideological sterilization. In this way, the linear relationship between the three versions of The White-haired Girl in terms of a tightening ideological stringency is created, where each stage of the work is an unerring, passive and successful response to, or implementation of, given Party policies.

Both Rosemary Roberts and Xiaomei Chen have noted the salient visual quality of the model performances. Rosemary Roberts argues that sexuality is largely retained in the model performance through various methods, ranging from costume, movement, facial and body features to role assignment. In her downplaying of the ideological

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influences in the model performances, redness, for instance, is singled out for analysis as having erotic implications.22 Yet in terms of the differing depictions of Xi’er’s body in the three versions of The White-haired Girl, The uncanniness of Xi’er’s body and its relationship with the ideology are obscured in Roberts’ account.23

Xiaomei Chen observes the voluptuous visual allure of the model performances.24 Yet the stereotyped androgynous body dominates Chen’s interpretation of the visual allure. Again visual glamour is merely subsumed by ideological ends. Confirming the erasure of Xi’er’s sexuality, Bai Di views the androgynous body as feminist statement:

Xi’er’s previous vulnerability as a woman, a body, disappears…She is not a daughter, not a wife, not a mother, not a sex object, not an object of male desire. Woman as agent means the destruction of an active/passive heterosexual division of labor in the narrative structure of the play. Thus, it “disrupts the preexisting patterns of fascination of pleasure” which have been built upon the sexualizing and victimizing of women. And deconstruction of pleasure is a radical weapon for feminism.25

23 Ibid., p.253.
24 See Xiaomei Chen, Acting the Right Part, p.37.
In confirming the androgynous body of Xi’er, Bai Di indirectly agrees with the CCP’s political discourse of gender equality in this reading and fails to see that in this ballet Xi’er’s body is visually and symbolically victimized. My interest here is the visual uncanniness of Xi’er’s body. This brief literature review shows an inner tension concerning Xi’er’s image, where both political suppression and visual heterogeneity are at play and the latter is usually suppressed by the former, though it occasionally reveals itself. Uncanniness, with its interplay between visibility and invisibility, ideological encouragement and the presentation of transgression, constitute the inner conflict of this scholarship. Martin Ebon’s short introduction to the ballet version of *The White-haired Girl*, “Ghost, Goddess, Revolution,” summarizes the general approaches to the historical development of Xi’er’s image. From the popular legend to the final staging of the story, he argues that Xi’er’s increasingly idealized image witnesses a shifting from a ghost to a goddess. Concerning the final ballet version, he writes: “With the girl no longer lifelike, but a heroine of almost superhuman proportions, she has moved closer to the folkloric tradition of mythology. The heroic myth of the white-haired girl who roams the wild mountainside has transformed her into a Red Goddess with white hair.” Despite this seemingly successful political intervention in the final version, the term “Red Goddess with white hair” used by Martin Ebon is jarring. Similar to the aforementioned scholarship, though Martin Ebon admits that “even [the ballet version] contained a scene that showed the ghostlike, white-haired girl,” he dismisses the folkloric origins of ghost in the ballet

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27 Ibid., p.35.

28 Ibid., p.29.
as irrelevant, as he writes: “elements [of Xi’er’s ghost origins] regarded as deterring from its political message were gradually eliminated.” 29

Here I take Martin Ebon’s view as a point of departure, arguing that the uncanniness of Xi’er’s body lies in Xi’er’s dual image as both ghost and goddess in the ballet. I argue that in terms of visual quality, the art form of the ballet strengthens Xi’er’s double image. The paradox lies precisely in the dilemma of the political imposition upon her visual presentation, which follows the doubling in the feeling of uncanny delineated by Lyotard. On the one hand, her goddess image, signifying more than simply the “good woman” mentioned by Meng or the “Red Goddess” mentioned by Martin Ebon because of its sexual implications, is encouraged and employed by the CCP in shaping her figure as a heroine. Her devious image as a ghost is suppressed or transformed, yet is still largely presented (more than as just “a scene” identified by Martin Ebon) in the performance. The instability of the doubling, both as ghost and goddess, captures ambivalent visual effects that the CCP failed to control.

The “superstitious” provenance of the antecedents of the opera underlies her double image. She conveys a haunting atmosphere that every adaptation attempts to undermine. There are several variations on the legend of the white-haired goddess (白毛仙姑). Despite their differences, they share the same fearful yet admiring attitudes towards this figure. In fact the term “仙姑” is merely a general appellation for spirits, specters or ghosts/gods (鬼神) in the supernatural realm. Somewhat ironical is the fact that the figure of Xi’er in all versions of The White-haired Girl commissioned by the

29 Ibid., p.29.
CCP is specified exclusively and metaphorically as a ghost. A well-known blurb line reads: “The old society treats human beings as ghosts; the new society changes ghosts into human-beings.”30 Here is a common trope in SR, the image of a ghost points to the deformed body as an embodiment of abject existence. Such an appropriation of the image of a ghost by the CCP in a sense conveys something negative, gloomy, and traumatic that is incongruous with the absolute optimism of SR.

In this way, the dilemma lies in the ambivalence of Xi’er’s image as both ghost and goddess at the same time. Her image as the exhibition of a weird wound caused by the old society is massively and unexpectedly played out throughout the ballet. It involves a built-in paradox in the exhibition of suffering in the model performances: to contrast people’s status in the past to that of the present, a ghost-haunted, violence-saturated old society is created, which latently contradicts the propaganda policy of absolute positivity. Moreover, the female is figured as a victim in a double sense, both as a testimony to the atrocities of the old world and as a suffering scapegoat employed in the propaganda. The latter representation of violence is, in a sense, violent in itself.

According to the origin of the Xi’er legend narrated by He Jingzhi (贺敬之, 1924-), the script writer of the yang’ge version of The White-haired Girl, the white-haired spirit (白毛仙姑) was indeed viewed as a ghost/goddess. The legend is set in a village that has been liberated by the Eight Route Army in the Jinchaji (晋察冀/ Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei) area. On the fifteenth (full moon) day of the lunar month, all the villagers fail to attend a regular political meeting. It is said that they all gather in the

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30 See Dai Jiafang, Yangbanxi de fengfengyuyu, p.102.
temple, burning incense and offering up sacrifices to the white-haired spirit. The regional cadre suspects that such a spirit could be a trick of the enemy or a wild animal. He then decides to hunt the spirit in the temple at night. Armed with weapons, he and several villagers hide in the corner of the temple:

…It is midnight. The moonlight comes and goes. With a sudden chilling draft, a white “thing” steps into the temple. In the reduced light one can tell that it is snatching the sacrificial offerings on the altar. The cadre leaps out from the dark as the “thing” is about to leave, shouting: “Who are you, human or ghost?” Frightened, she shrieks abruptly, pouncing on him. He pulls the trigger. She flops on the floor, seemingly injured. Yet she climbs up immediately, dashing out into the dark…³¹

In this passage, what is more crucial is not the actuality of the event, but the villagers’ ambiguous attitude of both horror and admiration toward the spirit. On the one hand, the spirit, as a goddess, can protect and bless the peasant’s agrarian chores, according to He Jingzhi, which inspires their awe of her; on the other, keeping a distance from, and thus being attracted to it, drives the debunking impulse.

The debunking, or exorcising act by the cadre and villagers, in a sense, can be considered as a form of visual exposure. This idea can be viewed in the light of the concept of obscenity which Baudrillard uses in criticizing the over-visibility of the image in postmodern society.

³¹ He Jingzhi, “Baimaonü de chuangzuo” (The creation of The White-haired Girl), Duxietiandi (Reading and Writing), no.5 (2002), 17.
The obscenity itself burns and consumes its object. One sees from up close what one has never seen before...It is all too true, too near to be true. And it is this that is fascinating, this excess of reality, this hyper-reality of things...pornographic voyeurism is not a sexual voyeurism, but a voyeurism of representation and its perdition, a dizziness born of the loss of the scene and the irruption of the obscene.  

In visualizing a legendary figure from the realm of the supernatural, the CCP symbolically attempts to present something that is mysterious and unpresentable, and thus to sanitize scientifically the superstitious into something explainable. This act involves the violence of over-exposure of that which is unpresentable, causing voyeuristic pleasure of a female figure in the name of exorcism, though such an act is a socialist disguise. In addition, this form of exposure is retained in the ballet, reminding people of the fact that Xi’er was/is a ghost. I will return to this point below.

Moving beyond the 1945 yang’ge and 1951 film versions and taking the perspective of the art form of ballet, the bodily exposition and visibility of Xi’er has been intensively increased. The choice of ballet to convey ideology is problematic, as Rosemary Roberts remarks:

Ballet is about bodies on display for the sensual and aesthetic pleasure of the audience. The fact that it uses bare flesh and bodies in form-fitting costumes to

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convey all meaning and create aesthetic enjoyment makes it inherently sensual, and when these bodies are a man and a woman dancing together and touching, connotations of heterosexuality are easily evoked.  

This visibility, too, is ambivalent, which plays on the fact that Xi’er is both a ghost, which is seductive and public, and a goddess who is aloof and untouchable. Being a ghost, she is in white, which is a proper color for a ghost in tradition, meaning mourning, senility, death and the sinister. In this vein, we can speculate that the white color of Xi’er’s hair in all versions evokes the projection of psychological fear. The quasi-scientific explanation from the CCP stating that this color is a result of the lack of salt in her diet is, like the exorcism attempted by the regional cadre in the original story, a counter-response to the impenetrable, mixed feelings of fear and awe. The politically idealized process of Xi’er’s image as a goddess unfortunately contributes to this ambiguous feeling. The erasure of the scenes where she has been raped and impregnated, and has given birth in the ballet guarantees her body, if not political purity, at least freedom from being solely, and symbolically, possessed by the landlord Huang Shiren. This pushes her figure into the public realm.

The mixed feelings, first and foremost, are embodied in and enhanced by her visually attractive stage image. Her female body, particularly her curves, is unreservedly

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exhibited through the costume design.\textsuperscript{35} This overtly debunks the claims by previous scholarship that she has an androgynous body, which is characteristic of most female protagonists in the model performances. Her silky, thin, and light dance costume, tailored for full leaps and gyrations, highlights the contours of Xi’er’s dancing body. The attire of daily-life, props and settings, the dance movements, blending together ballet choreography, folk dance and acrobatics, all bring fantasy into ordinary life. The effect follows the logic of the uncanny that on the one hand the local attire arouses a sense of familiarity, and on the other, the exposition of a dancing torso in Western ballet goes beyond the spectacles that the ideology tries to present. The alienation effect will be explored in the next section.

Her hair, a fetishized object, is central to her image-shaping. In the beginning, the ballet displays her innocence one New Year’s eve through a scene where her father gives her a length of red string for her hair as a present (Figure 8).\textsuperscript{36} Besides showcasing unusual familial affection, the scene underscores both material poverty and Xi’er’s easy-to-please disposition. Behind these overt ends, the \textit{pas de deux} between Xi’er and her father Yang Bailao is presented in a somewhat ambiguous manner. As Xi’er shows Yang a bowl of dumplings prepared for New Year’s Eve, he softly caresses her hair from behind. Xi’er puts the bowl back on the bench. Meanwhile he takes out a two-inch length of red string (二尺红头绳) from his chest pocket. Before showing her the new gift, he spins the string twice with the tips in his hands. A reflective movement, this builds up the innuendo of the acts of fiddling and binding. He then turns around, waving the thread at her. Rejoicing, she jumps to get it.

\textsuperscript{35} For a detailed discussion of the costume, see Rosemary Roberts, \textit{Maoist Theatre}, p.102.

\textsuperscript{36} For a detailed discussion of the hair, see Rosemary Roberts, \textit{Maoist Theatre}, pp.90-92.
Yet he dodges away, surprisingly toying with her and spinning the thread for a second time, encouraging her to try again. This implicates his move towards an act of seduction. She finally reaches for the red string. Ecstatic, she too nips the two ends of the string and holds it above her head, spinning it around. Then she kneels down before her father, letting him bind her hair.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 8 Yang Bailao and Xi’er**

In this sequence, overlying this implicitly incestuous undertone, is Yang Bailao’s more salient assertion of male power over Xi’er, which makes the thread he is playing with more than a simple prop. The binding, whipping, stroking movements with the thread imply the subjection of the female by patriarchal power. The sexual suggestion that Yang’s choreography arouses in a sense strengthens and compensates the viewer’s desire to touch her, especially her hair. Yang’s fetish-driven dance with the
red thread is a metaphor, serving as imagined access to her hair. This scenario serves as a prelude to the sensual obsession with and imaginative possession of the goddess, especially her hair. She is, from the beginning, under the masculine gaze.

Xi’er is gradually reduced from a human being into a ghost, the process of which spans from Scene One to Scene Six. With no exception, this process involves a strong voyeuristic curiosity. The penultimate scene of the ballet, Scene Six, confirms her as a real ghost, with her “wound” in central exhibition on-stage. The visibility of her image as the mysterious, horrifying ghost arouses forbidden pleasure. The Liberation era arrives in Scene Five. The village turns festive, bright, and flushed with warm color. Yet the white-haired girl still lives in the dark cave. Her white, tattered costume marks a strong contrast to the dim, damp setting. The contrast of white and black is inconsistent with that of the usual red and black in SR. The reason for this rarity lies in the fact that her image as a heroine is shown through the image of an unfulfilled ghost.

Scene Six features Xi’er’s head-on confrontation with class enemy Huang Shiren, where her heroic deeds mainly lie. Revenge takes place in the wake of the arrival of the Eight Route Army. This act is assumed to highlight her political spontaneity, indirectly initiated by and echoing the CCP’s purpose, as a heroine fighting the landlord. The scene ambiguously blurs her image as a heroine with a ghost of revenge. The scene starts at night in a thunder storm. Lit by flashes of lightening, Xi’er appears on top of the mountain against the Gothic, heavily clouded sky. A howling symphony accompanies her furious solo “Riding the Fierce Wind, Carrying Thunder and Storm” while she descends from the mountain top as an apparition
ignited by hatred. Her outfits and hair are paler and more tattered, due to years of suffering in the wilderness. All this vehemence shapes her image as a vengeful phantom (厉鬼) driven by a pent-up hatred that seeks to wreak the maximum havoc. The hatred, not only visually but metaphorically, turns her into a ghost, an uncanny (unhomely), proletarian spectre. This curiously resonates with the opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* which reads “a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism.” According to Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, New York: Cosimo, 2009, p.4. Accordingly, the ghost-like proletarian class is characterized by the state of being radical, nation-less, ethnicity-less, and family-less. This home-less spectre metaphorically marks Xi’er’s status. With such absences, her body is no man’s property and consequently maximizes its public nature. Her identity as both a ghost (spectre) and goddess (the proletarian class) overlaps.

The ballet does not play down her fearful features, but surprisingly sensationalizes them. As discussed before, she is deemed to be and exposed as a ghost. Unlike the scientific investigation led by the cadre in the original narrative, in this scene she is superstitiously discovered as a ghost by the landlord. In other words, her revenge is successful in the landlord’s traditional world-view, and reintroduces her image as a phantom. Xi’er and the landlord encounter each other in the temple, whereas the narrative is from the point of view of the landlord Huang Shiren and his lackey Mu Renzhi (穆仁智). Xi’er is exposed in detail twice. Firstly, before Huang and Mu come into the temple, as a ghost consuming sacrificial offerings on the altar. Obviously,

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38 Rosemary Roberts also notices the close relationship between “ghost” and “warrior” but she does not seem to focus on the ideological disruption introduced by this ghost image. See Rosemary Roberts, *Maoist Theatre*, pp.201-203.
how a ghost can consume the sacrificial offerings triggers both people’s curiosity and fear. To avoid the wrath of the ghost, this kind of event usually happens at night and is left only to the imagination. In the visual intrusion of the camera, how Xi’er steals the food in the temple, a kind of degrading behavior, is shown in detail. As a ghost, Xi’er’s bright whiteness in the limelight magnifies the terrifying nature of this event. Her abject existence is mercilessly exposed on stage. Secondly, Xi’er’s uncanny appearance, as the resurrected corpse of Huang’s long-gone concubine in the eyes of the landlord and his lackey, helps her to defeat the enemy. The thunderstorm creates the opportunity for their encounter. Taking shelter from the rain at night in an old, remote temple is a stereotyped prelude for an encounter with ghosts or fox spirits in old Chinese stories. Xi’er’s deformed appearance, both familiar and alien, frightens Huang. Infuriated, Xi’er haunts them around the temple. Terrified, they flinch and hide. To convince them that she is a real ghost, Xi’er even reveals herself behind the slip curtain on the altar, where the ghost and goddess are supposed to be ensconced.

In this sequence, her image as ghost and goddess become one. The violence lies in the visibility of her humiliating existence as a ghost. Xi’er’s abject existence in combination with her white hair, are presented as her heroic deeds in this scene while her traumatic body is visually exploited. The paradox this ballet faces resembles that of *The Red Detachment of Women*, where detailing the physical abuses in the old society, in contrast to the ideal position in the new society, is assigned to the female body.
The Alienation Effects of *The Red Detachment of Women*

In a similar way, the overt exposure of the violence suffered by protagonist Wu Qinghua characterizes *The Red Detachment of Women*. By and large, the ballets are twin pieces where female bodies are singled out as an embodiment of human suffering in the old society. Unlike *The White-haired Girl*, where uncanniness lies in the double image of Xi’er as ghost and goddess, Wu Qinghua’s uncanniness lies in the paradox arising from the alienation effect in her performance and or displacement of suffering. First and foremost, ballet was a foreign art form for the Chinese audience that was officially introduced from the Soviet Union in the 1950s. As highly encoded, and convention-ridden as Peking Opera, ballet involves a sense of foreignness that consists both in its native adaptation and in the audience’s reception. In addition, its visual perfection contributes to the alienation effects. This section explores how the alienation effect is attached to *The Red Detachment of Women*, both in the representation of Wu Qinghua’s suffering and, with reference to the filmic version of the ballet, in the way the camera represents violence.

The ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* is adapted from Xie Jin’s 1961 feature film of the same name. The story is set in Hainan in the 1930s. Wu Qinghua, a bondmaid of landlord Nanbatian (南霸天), is chained in a dungeon after several attempts to escape. With the help of her two fellow female inmates, she flees. Nanbatian orders his henchmen to trace her. After being discovered in a coconut plantation, she is beaten nearly to death by Nanbatian and his followers. While she is left to die in the glade, Red Army cadre Hong Changqing (洪常青) and messenger Xiao Pang (小庞) pass by and save her. Following Hong’s guidance, Wu finds their base and joins the Red Detachment of Women. In her first mission, she is disguised as a bondmaid of
Hong, who plays an overseas merchant. They attend Nanbatian’s birthday feast, yet she fails to control her hatred toward the landlord and attempts to shoot him. This leads to the failure of the whole plot. With Hong and her comrades’ help, Wu’s political consciousness progresses. They finally defeat Nanbatian’s forces and liberate the people.

One of the ambiguities in regard to the representation of Wu Qinghua’s body is the unusual lavishness of scenes of her suffering. Robert Chi has noticed the massive suffering scenes in the 1961 feature film version and their importance to a didactic end. This pattern is retained in the ballet version, though, I argue, it introduces heterogeneous effects that defeat any educational purpose. The torture of her body is conspicuously drawn-out, occupying the first half of the performance. Likewise, her crimson, bright, traditional bondmaid outfit, as a stigma left by the old society, runs through the first half of the show and visually out-shines her soldier uniform in the latter half. The typical advertisement of this ballet usually features her leaping in this red outfit, replacing her uniformed image as an emblem of the “red” woman soldier. The ballet thus again involves the concept of the uncanny in terms of the representation of violence, which produces a paradox in the performance or representation of women’s suffering. The (visual) perfection in the model performances, following an absolute optimism, wraps every blood-shedding scene in glamour. Wu Qinghua is an example of this. This paradox resides in all her scenes of

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suffering: on the one hand, she is designated to suffer according to the script; on the other hand, she maintains her visual charm, or at least is physically unscratched. Though she is delicate, she can illogically suffer more than her physical capacity.

The torture scene is presented in the prologue, which shows the incongruity between visuality and the written script, eliciting an alienation effect. She is locked up in Nanbatian’s dungeon. With her hands tied to a post up above her head, she is standing on her tiptoes on a platform, which makes her the highest, and thus the most prominent, figure among the performers. Against a dim background, her whole torso, tall, slim, young and innocent, is clad in a red, silky, tight shirt and trousers, and is intensely lit. In fact the lead dancer was chosen from the troupe for her visual charm, height and slimness. The written script reads: “She stands with head and chest high, her eyes blazing with hatred.” Her towering, stage image, according to the SR standard, could demonstrate her uncompromising spirit of struggle. The official script tells us more than what the audiences are shown: “Several times she has been caught, brought back, and cruelly beaten.” This extra-stage, verbal introduction, intending to dwell lavishly on her sufferings, contradicts the spectacle on-stage. This spectacle, especially the diverting, distracting effects, suggestions and

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40 For the erotic sensation induced by Wu Qinghua’s body, see, for instance, Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, p.36.
43 Ibid., p.130.
associations vastly outflow and sideline the ideological *logos*. Hogging the strong limelight, she is exhibiting her glowing body as well as her suffering.

The alienation effect actually accompanies her whole performance. This alienation effect generates the uncanniness that the script, including the previous, audience-based story-line, and the *logos* all try to control through what is shown on-stage. Yet the visual spectacle keeps showing us otherwise, preventing the estranged Wu Qinghua from engaging with her character, especially the suffering scenes, and thus reminding audiences of the effect that she is merely performing.

Employing the torture scenes involves an extra-diegetic effect through the conscious use of camera by the CCP. The torture spree continues in Scene One, where the CCP’s ambiguous attitude towards the presentation of violence is revealed. It is late at night, and the coconut glade is well-lit. Wu Qinghua’s blazing scarlet outfit and dancing gestures are singled out in a central spot light. She has just fled from the dungeon. Laosi, Nanbatian’s lackey, and his gang are following. First is a *pas de deux* between Wu and Laosi, representing the fierce struggle between them. Choreographically the intimacy and collaboration between them is resists interpretation into the subject matter of a fight. Bodily contact is easily associated with eroticism for audiences. Similar to the duo between Xi’er and her father, the visual impact strays away from the scripted theme. When Nanbatian appears, the torture escalates. A 1975 translation of the script reads thus:

resistance enrages him. He cruelly presses her temple with the tip of his cane. She is adamant and refuses to bow her head. He strikes her savagely… The TYRANT trembles with rage. He orders his guards to drag CHING-HUA aside. “Beat her to death” he howls. Whip blows are heard….

[the bondmaids dance.]

THE TYRANT decides to make CHING-HUA an example to cow the others. He orders that she be dragged in and beaten to death before their eyes. CHING-HUA REFUSES TO YIELD, She continues to fight courageously as the lackeys rain blows on her with their whips. She struggles, chest high and fists raised, until they beat her unconscious.

LAO SZU announces that she is dead.\textsuperscript{44}

Though the filmic representation of the atrocity is tightly edited in this sequence, it reveals how the CCP intends but fails to control the interaction between the extra-diegetic and intra-diegetic dimensions. On an intra-diegetic level, Wu Qinghua’s penalty, as Nanbatian’s deterrent, is publicly exhibited for the bondmaids and henchmen. It is a Foucauldian public execution that above all appeals to visibility.\textsuperscript{45} The punishment is meant to be seen and thus demonstrates the power of the supreme authoritarian, namely Nanbatian in the opera. Yet on an extra-diegetic level, the general audiences, putatively the workers, farmers and soldiers, are invited to the exhibition as well. The violence thus is not committed by the perpetrator Nanbatian only, but encouraged, though involuntarily, to be seen by the CCP itself.

\textsuperscript{44} The Red Detachment of Women, pp.132-133.

To downplay this extra-diegetic impact and symbolically undermine Nanbatian’s power, the mise-en-scène is meticulously edited to limit the exposure of the violence. As Nanbatian orders Wu Qinghua to “be dragged in and beaten to death before their eyes,” the torture arrives at the point of ecstasy. She has been dragged outside of the camera frame to the right of the stage. The camera then intentionally pans to the left of the stage, revealing only the anxious and quivering bondmaids dancing. Though the spectacle of torture is out of sight, the rhythmic, pummeling thuds from the whipping and beating are clearly overheard. The process is carefully forbidden from the gaze of the audience. It is an act of concealment, and thus defeats the exposure of the execution prescribed by Nanbatian. Focusing on the bondmaids, the camera exerts compassion towards the proletarian class with which the viewers are supposed to identify themselves.

This control of what should and should not be seen indicates consciousness of the camera in faithfully implementing Jiang Qing’s instruction on how to properly present violence. Yet the verisimilitude of the sounds of punishment suggests the CCP’s ambiguous attitude in this. On the one hand, the ballet deliberately, though not coherently and only rarely, hides the blood-letting scene, presenting only sounds and the bondmaids’ responses. The CCP’s concerns can also be found in the alienation effect mentioned above, which detaches the character herself from the naturalistic presentation of the event. Nevertheless, the audio realism betrays these efforts. Similar to the treatment of Nanbatian, the beating sounds, denoting the atrocities of the old society, are a necessity employed by the CCP for didactic or deterrent purposes. A tension runs through the CCP’s plight in representing such violence.
Above all, violence is forbidden to be seen, due to its positivism. Yet violence has to be seen or presented so as to exorcise it. Though blaming the crime on the enemy, the CCP undoubtedly is implicated in the crime. The CCP expressly and publicly flaunts the woman’s wounds in Scene Two, where Wu Qinghua is surrounded by a crowd of peasants and soldiers. “She pulls up her sleeves and reveals the whip marks covered with blood….She tells of the tortures she endured in The TYRANT’s dungeon. She tells how she was nearly beaten to death by THE TYRANT in the coconut grove.”

The CCP’s effort to downplay the scenes of violence in the ballet is in vain. What turns the violence into a game is the alienation effect, which is a form of uncanniness that generates the effect of hybridity. The uncanny object in a sense is a mixed object that bears both familiar and strange features. Though they are in shifting movements, these two opposing categories are theoretically identified in the visual hybridity. One is the strange part that tries to present itself wholly in the face of the fading logos, but cannot completely present itself since the suppression is not completely removed. The other is the familiar part that the super-ego encourages the viewer to see, which also cannot present wholly because of the weakening of the super-ego.

In addition to the hybridity of visibility and invisibility, conspicuous visual hybridity or alienation includes the old and the new, tradition and modernity, east and west, female and male, forbidding and transgression, and so on. The image of Wu Qinghua embodies these conflicting elements. Her modern look as a bondmaid, contrasts with her actual traditional, peasant status. When she becomes a soldier, Wu performs masculine, explosive, compelling dance movements. As a whole, Wu’s eastern female

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46 Ibid., p.137.
body adopts western balletic moves to narrate a story of strength and blood. The alienation effect, as it detaches itself from the theatrical context and extra-stage reference, throws such hybridity into something playful.

The alienation effect seeps into every pore of Wu’s performance, gestures, props, expression and so on. One of the most pronounced alienation features in the ballet is the connection between Wu Qinghua’s body and her costume, namely her fragile, lithe body with the red silk or teal uniforms. Crucially her traditional red gown in combination with a black gun symbolically illustrates this alienation. In Scene Three she is disguised as one of the bondmaids of Hong Changqing, while he plays an important merchant from overseas showing up at Nanbatian’s birthday feast. She is in the same costume as she was as a bondmaid of Nanbatian, yet she is carrying a pistol with a red ribbon. This disguise, without any significant change, deliberately perpetuates her old attire on-stage. Her costume, as a feudal scar, represents the suffering and fragility of her femininity in former times. The costume design emphasizes the way the repressed woman is linked with violent struggle: the tenderness of femininity contrasts with the hardness of weaponry. This joining of weak and strong, feminine and masculine, soft and hard, semantically blends two contrasting components.

All too often, the dancing movements catapult the body and costume out of the scripted plot and context into a contradictory exhibition. This effect is a doubling of the revolutionary character that the ballet seeks to present into a salacious body in a dressing game. The two ideas interact with and devalue each other. From the red maid’s costume to the soldier’s uniform, Wu Qinghua’s costumes evoke a sense of
parodied performance, with a malleable body that can be presented as both that of a
victim and a heroine. In keeping with the sense that she is in a game, Qinghua’s
female image becomes passive, or doll-like, recalling Freud’s reference to the doll as
a source of the uncanny in “The Sandman” by Hoffmann.47

Hybridity, as a visual effect of the uncanny and a place where mutually alienating
elements combine, offers an approach to sexuality, where ideology and eroticism
meet and neither of them can dominate the other. Simply subsuming libidinal force
into the ideological48 would miss the dynamics between them, which follows the logic
of uncanny. An iconic stage still that follows the principle of the “three prominences”
(三突出) illustrates this. Labeled “Changqing pointing the way”(常青指路, Figure
9),49 Wu Qinghua stands on one leg, with another leg parallel to the ground. Held by
Chang Qing, she casts her gaze in the direction to which he is pointing, a typical off-
frame socialist-realistic gaze discussed in the previous chapter. The youth Xiao Pang,
representing the less significant foiling figures or the masses, is pointing to the lofty
otherness in the same direction.

48 Jason McGrath, Xiaomei Chen, and Wang Ban hold this view. See Jason McGrath,
“Communists have more fun!”; Xiaomei Chen, Acting the Right Part, p.37; and Wang Ban, The
Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China, Stanford: Stanford
49 Scholars such as Rosemary Roberts and Xiaomei Chen have discussed the erotic sensation of
this scene from different perspectives. Here I further their investigations through the concept of
the uncanny with a view to address the root of this sensation. See, Rosemary Roberts, Maoist
Theatre, pp.136-137; Xiaomei Chen, Acting the Right Part, p.36.
To illustrate the principle of the “three prominences,” the still successively lines up three figures from right to left: Hong is the nearest person to the lofty ideal, while Wu and the youth are second and third. This scene dramatically arouses unusual erotic associations stressing the fact that the “three prominences” are a hybrid. This picture is inscrutable. The affective relationships between Hong and Wu in an enclosed grove are easily identified. Yet the involvement of Xiao Pang is elusive. It seems that he is a remnant comic character as an indication of loyalty to the 1961 film version on which the ballet was based. In the ballet, he is no more than an extra character in the dance between Hong and Wu, where he is in and out of the frame as a random and even redundant prop. His existence, similar to the off-screen whip-blows, is an anxious response to artistic censorship regarding private affection. Thus his presence actually exercises the CCP’s censorship power in witnessing and guaranteeing Wu and Hong’s
innocence. Yet this witness, representing the people and viewers’ gazes, peering at Wu and Hong from behind, is identified by the audience as part of the scene. The audience in turn shares the private space of Wu and Hong, which entails explicit voyeurism. His role as witness makes the place Xiao Pang is pointing at more elusive. His exclaiming gesture channels a sense of surprise, of a brand-new discovery that may not overlap with what Wu and Hong are fixedly gazing at. This hybridity of the political and the sexual, of leading characters and the masses, is beyond the grip of ideology.

The White-haired Girl presents how the abject female image is exploited by the CCP and how the discourse of violence is suppressed yet manifested involuntarily throughout the ballet. In the suffering scene, The Red Detachment of Women exposes the alienation effects of SR that involve extra-diegetic interventions from the CCP as well as sexuality. Both ballets attest to the visual hybridity produced by the representation mechanism of uncanniness, and witness heterogeneous visual technology that defies the prescribed optimism and transforms it into something ambiguous. The associated hybridity produced by uncanniness can offer an interpretation of sexuality in socialist ballets. The representation mechanism of the

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uncanny offers an approach to visual heterogeneity in SR, in which what is once repressed can return and challenge the prescribed norms.
Epilogue

The four thematic close readings of the model performances in the preceding chapters have shown how heterogeneity is involved in the representation of the theme of revolution, revealing the intrinsic tensions and paradoxes in China’s SR. The heterogeneous discourses concerned are closely conflated with the essential tenets of SR, and as such they eventually contaminate and transform the appearance of SR. They manifest themselves in various ways, ranging from the jianghu ambience, a Confucian mode of affection, through the temporality of the past, to uncanny visuality. Since the theme of revolution in these works is meditated by the aesthetic of SR, the ideology of revolution is thus diluted and subject to the aesthetic doctrines as well as their heterogeneity. The theme of revolution represented in the model performances thus appears plural, unstable, and, more importantly, impure.

Through a rigorous critique of SR in the model performances, my study offers an aesthetic approach to Maoist or socialist culture in China. The assessment of Maoist culture remains an emotionally, morally and politically charged issue in mainland China. For both leftists and new-leftists, China’s socialist culture and its practices are often viewed as an alternative to the bourgeois culture of the West, or at least as a critical counter-discourse to capitalism (with Chinese characteristics). For rightists and neo-rightists, Maoist culture is generally viewed as being without aesthetic merit, a form of dogmatic propaganda where productions are filled with “feudal residues.”  

Despite their obvious differences, both the political standpoints of the left and right

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1 See, for instance, Li Yang, Kangzheng de suming zhilu, p.314.
assume the possibility of a pure ideology of socialism in cultural production. Both sides thus ignore the issues of heterogeneity generated in textual representation.

An aesthetic critique, such as the one adopted by this thesis, affords a sense of neutrality before introducing any external criteria (e.g. leftism, rightism, or humanism) because in socialist culture historical reality, ideology, political ideals and so on have already been mediated by SR in the first place. This aesthetic approach to SR challenges any clear-cut political and moral revaluation. Though only four dimensions of SR are explored in this thesis, its engagement with fundamental aesthetic ideals can further our reflection on the revolutionary legacy as well as the very nature of socialist culture. To conclude the thesis, I return to each thematic reading, concentrating on its implications for the whole set of model performances and socialist culture in general.

Through a reading of *Shajiabang*, Chapter One analyzes how *jianghu* ambience transforms the reality and utopia presented in the opera. However, *Shajiabang* is not alone in drawing on *jianghu* narrative through the adoption of the Peking opera, which, as an art form, is a prominent stage in the development of *jianghu* narrative. Since the majority of the model performances are in the form of Peking opera, a number of celebrated model operas, including *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment, The Red Lantern, Fighting on the Plains, Azalea Mountain* and others are beholden to *jianghu* elements, particularly in terms of the representation of revolutionary (historical) reality. In this way, realism represented through the Peking opera should be understood more as a form of generic reality. Certainly, with its cultural traditions and practices, *jianghu* ambience makes possible
the popularity of the model performances, but it risks turning the reality in the performances into a form of simulacrum that cuts itself from the literal historical event and as such creates a form of aestheticized reality. As we can see, this form of aestheticized reality to a certain degree sustains the myth of reality as well as the utopia of socialism. It produces (and aestheticizes) a reality rather than mirroring the concrete event. As Evgeny Dobrenko incisively comments, “[SR’s] main function amounted not to propaganda, but to the production of reality through its aestheticization.” By citing this, I do not mean to nullify the historical circumstances, but to emphasize the distance between the represented reality and the actual event, though the latter in essence can only be approached through texts.

The *jianghu* elements problematize the adoption of the modern Peking opera mode. As a form of symbolic, mythological representation, Peking opera meets the needs of idealization required by the CR: “life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life.” As such, the fundamental attributes of both Peking opera and SR converge and are played out, and the latter is largely affected by the former. Nevertheless, the adoption fails to contain the heterogeneous cultural and traditional elements in the genre of Peking opera. This calls into question the very assumption of national style (i.e. “national in form and socialist in content”), since both form and content are not readily separated from (or reconciled with) each other. The heterogeneity intrinsic to the art form of Peking opera belongs not just to form, but to content as well. In this way, besides producing

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3 “Forum Summary,” p.15.
an effect of hybridity, the amalgamation of “national form” and “socialist content” proves an aesthetic impossibility. This is true of other similar amalgamations manifested in two prominent slogans: “Make the foreign serve China (洋为中用),” and “Use the past to serve the present (古为今用).” In both cases, the two opposing counterparts (foreign/China, the past/the present) are not necessarily compatible with each other. These inner dilemmas contribute to the self-deconstructive nature of SR, which underlines the representation of the trope of light, temporality, and the use of Western audio-visual technology and art forms, as discussed in Chapters Two to Four.

Through an examination of the trope of light in The Red Lantern, Chapter Two uncovers the repressed family discourse and Confucian mode of affection in the opera. I argue that redness, the emblematic color of socialist revolution, represents not only the socialist spirit but also a form of the Confucian mode of affection, which sometimes refers to family blood (ties) as well. This contradiction within the range of meanings in redness reveals the inner tension of the slogan “Make the foreign serve China.” It shows how the general SR, along with its foreign form of light rhetoric from the West, is paradoxically Sinicized: the logos (light)-centric aesthetic is fused with an affection-centric aesthetic, which effectively connects the family and the state, the private and the collective. Family discourse is prevalent in the model performances and socialist culture, though it is suppressed or labeled as class affection. Shajiabang features a family reunion story while The White-haired Girl shows that Xi’er’s revolutionary passion is ignited by family hatred. Family hatred appears also in Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, Raid on White-Tiger Regiment, Azalea Mountain and other works. The Confucian mode of affection helps to remedy

the emptiness and abstractness of ideology. It is important to note that reflecting the fate of the state through a nuclear family is one of the central themes in traditional opera and jianghu narratives. The Confucian mode of affection in part explains why the experience of the socialist sublime (auto-affection) is impure, as the mode of Confucian affection is at work in the emotion of transcendence. It also explains why theatrical and film works were so prominent during the CR. The performative nature of the theatre and film works, involving acts of singing, acting and emoting, is closely related to the state of auto-affection in which the socialist sublime is experienced.

Chapters Three and Four explore the psychological depths of the model performances. An obsession with the past in the model performances again testifies to the inability of the “national style” to contain the heterogeneous elements that the Peking opera induces. Although the genre of Peking opera is able to fulfill the two-fold reality demanded by SR in an historical narrative, this genre exposes its limitations when it comes to maintaining the modern temporality of materialist historicism. Melancholia, as a symptom, summarizes the intrinsic nostalgia in national style and SR, which is inexorably caught between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. Melancholia also serves as a symptom of the whole set of the model performances, which are unable to wage a radical “cultural revolution” without resorting to and indulging in the sources and inspirations of the past. For those (not least the leftists and new-leftists) who defend Maoist culture and reclaim its criticism of capitalism and imperialism in a post-colonial context, the ambiguity of this culture, or the symptom of melancholia is deliberately minimized. In the same way, for those who denounce socialist culture as “feudal” or as dogmatic, propaganda instruments without any modern merits, the efforts of SR to maintain its modern outlook are
overlooked. The modern aesthetic dimensions in SR include a future-oriented worldview, progressive historicism, realist representation, the adoption of modern technology, and so forth. They can be justified, for instance, by the recent and growing scholarly interest in the artistic achievements exhibited in the modernization of Peking opera in the CR model performances.\(^5\)

Using the representation of violence suffered by the female body as a case study, Chapter Four tackles the representation mechanism of uncanniness and its challenge to the optimism of SR. I argue that the uncanniness, with its dynamic of repression and restoration, offers an approach to understanding the interplay between the literary orthodoxy of SR and its heterogeneity. This representation mechanism can encapsulate the dynamic between what is forbidden and what is encouraged in the model performances. The uncanniness also helps us to understand the hybridity introduced by the contradictory forces inside the literary and artistic doctrines, which include “Make the foreign serve China,” “Use the past to serve the present,” and, above all, “national in form and socialist in content.” This uncanniness can also be seen in the relationship between socialist utopia and the jianghu utopia in Shajiabang, between proletarian discourse and family discourse in The Red Lantern, and in the double temporality of the past and the present in the melancholia presented in Song of

The Dragon River. Even the term “modern Peking opera” itself is indicative of the two conflicting forces of the old and the new at play.

Chapter Four also highlights the significance of visuality in the model performances, which plays a crucial role in popularizing these theatrical works, nearly all of which were made into films. Focusing on the spectacle of the female body, this chapter addresses desire in the opera, showing how the stage is under the masculine gaze. Nevertheless, it is important to add that such heterogeneous visuality is more diverse and not limited to the spectacle of female suffering. The other operas analyzed also engage with visual heterogeneity. The visuality of jianghu ambience, the rear-view of socialist-realist gaze, and the ambiguous light emanating from the red lantern, for instance, display the complexity of visuality in SR, the excessiveness of which altogether challenges a single ideological logos. It could be argued that the hybridity of visuality in the model performances turns Maoist culture into a form of spectacle, which can be easily recycled into discourses of orientalism that is worthy of further investigation.

To sum up, this study shows that even at the height of class struggle, the theme of revolution represented in the model performances was not necessarily rigorous, pure or unified. Two forms of heterogeneity are evident: discourses of tradition, to which the genre of Peking opera is central; and audio-visual technology, to which the excessiveness of visuality is central. These two forms of heterogeneity serve as deconstructive forces in SR. They invariably overflow the restrictions of SR, and challenge the purity of revolutionary ideology.
**Filmography**

*Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuanshan*, dir. Xie Tieli, Beijing Film Studio, 1974)

*Boulder Bay* (*Panshiwan*, dir. Xie Jin and Liang Tingduo, Shanghai Film Studio, 1976)

*Fighting on the Plain* (*Pingyuan zuozhan*, dir. Cui Wei, and Chen Huai’ai, August First Film Studio, 1974)

*Ode to Yimeng* (*Yimeng song*, dir. Li Wenhu, and Jing Muda, August First Film Studio, 1975)

*On the Docks* (*Haigang*, dir. Xie Tieli, and Xie Jin, Beijing Film Studio and Shanghai Film Studio, 1972)

*Raid on White Tiger Regiment* (*Qixi baihutuan*, dir. Su Li, and Wang Yan, Changchun Film Studio, 1972)

*Red Cloud Mountain* (*Hong yungang*, dir. Li Ang, and Li Wenhu, August First Film Studio, 1976)

*Shajiabang* (dir. Wu Zhaodi, Changchun Film Studio, 1971)

*Song of the Dragon River* (*Longjiangsong*, dir. Xie Tieli, Beijing Film Studio, 1972)

*Sons and Daughters of the Grassland* (*Caoyuan ernü*, dir. Fu Jie, Beijing Film Studio, 1975)

*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu Weihushan*, dir. Xie Tieli, Beijing Film Studio, 1969)

*The Red Detachment of Women* [Peking opera](*Hongse niangzijun*, dir. Cheng Yin, August First Film Studio, 1972)

*The Red Detachment of Women* [ballet](*Hongse niangzijun*, dir. Pan Wenzhan, Fu Jie, and Xie Tieli, Beijing Film Studio, 1971)
*The Red Detachment of Women* [feature film](*Hongse niangzijun*, dir. Xie Jin, Tianma Film Studio, 1961)

*The Red Lantern* (*Hongdengji*, dir. Cheng Yin, August First Film Studio, 1970)

*The White-haired Girl* (*Baimaonü*, dir. Sang Hu, Shanghai Film Studio, 1972)

*There will be Successors* (*Ziyou houlairen*, dir. Yu Yanfu, Changchun Film Studio, 1963)
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