AFTER MAO: CINEMA AND CHINESE SOCIETY

A SOCIOCLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHINESE CINEMA (1978-92)

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By

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ABSTRACT

This theses, of primarily a sociological nature, aims to examine the emergence of post-Mao Chinese cinema and its embodied political culture, in responding, or adjusting, to the sweeping and sometimes rather turbulent process of the "open door" reform movement. The transformation of Chinese cinema, as a whole, is an area of relatively minor importance, when compared with other major agenda items on the reform programme (i.e., economic growth, financial and fiscal stability, etc.). Nevertheless, the case of Chinese cinema does provide us with a unique setting and perspective so as to reach a better understanding of the interrelationship of economic development, political evolution and the advent of cultural pluralism in post-Mao China. This study aims, in other words, to show how the economic and political changes are themselves manifested in the changing reality of the Chinese screen.

Author has argued throughout this theses that the emergence of post-Mao Chinese cinema could be seen as a unique process of rehabilitating the notion of "every day life" and "civil society", both of which were heavily suppressed under Mao. This theses has paid special attention to the changing relations of film-makers audience and political authorities in China. The examination of how film censorship works has revealed the complexity of China's political and economic situation and dilemma. Market forces have helped the film-making to be able to sever its ties with the party without seeming politically offensive or provocative. The legitimate and politically favourable "market forces" have made the Chinese film-making equally legitimate to rehabilitate and revive the notion and fundamental elements of human life that a market economy could not survive without.
To my wife Jun and my son Thomas
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AUTHOR’S NOTES ON CHINESE ROMANISATION

As regard to the romanisation of Chinese terms (i.e., names, film titles), I have decided to employ "Ping-Yin" —— China's own standard system, which has become increasingly common in the West. However, there are a few exceptions. For a few historical figures and events in pre-1949 China, I have adopted alternative spellings that are more familiar with to Western readers. For instance, Mao Tse-tung instead of Mao Ze-dong. The footnotes or references retain the system of romanization used by the author or publisher of the book or article cited. Also, I have used the alternative spellings for a few places, i.e., Hong Kong, Macao, and Canton.
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INTRODUCTION
AFTER MAO: THE "OPEN-DOOR" ERA AND THE CHINESE CINEMA

On 9th September 1976, Mao Tse-tung, the supreme leader of the Chinese communist revolution and the founder of the People's Republic of China, died, aged 83, after a long neurological illness. The death of Mao signalled the end of what is commonly called the Mao Era, the most important and the most turbulent political regime in the history of modern China. And his death also removed the last remaining pillar on which the legitimacy of the communist regime rested. So, whither China? what did the future hold for China, the most populous nation and one of the most powerful communist states in the world?

We have witnessed that, for the last fifteen years or so since 1978, much to the surprise and astonishment of both the capitalist West and the former Soviet-centred communist East, China has been enmeshed in an unprecedented programme of economic, political and social reform, in pursuit of its own version of modernisation and socio-political transformation. Under the leadership of Deng Xiao-ping (a veteran communist of Mao's generation, a distinctive political pragmatist and China's defacto political leader since the late 1970s), the proceeding of this sweeping economic and social reform, best known in the West as the "Open Door" era, has been seen as China's second revolution, following China's socialist revolution under Mao (1949-76). However, for such a reform programme, which is nothing less than a fundamental reshaping of Chinese society, to proceed, Deng's leadership has had to redefine and regenerate its new political agenda and ideology by repudiating Mao's ideology of "Class Struggle" and "Continuing Revolution". And, Deng's pragmatism and its marked common sense approach in policy-making, is the direct response and reaction to the catastrophic political and economic consequences of Mao's political utopianism. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Deng's ideas and vision on reform has quickly emerged as the most popular ideology, and now constitutes the backbone of a new social consensus in post-Mao Chinese society.
Let us elaborate a little more here on Deng’s notion of “Open-door” reform. First of all, it is
distinctively economic-oriented, as well economic-determined. And, the key words for his
designated economic revolution could be described as below: De-centralisation, Market
Mechanism and Professionalism in Management. More importantly, what Deng and many of his
reform-minded leaders have intended to experiment with and prove is that, first, a modified or
refined form of authoritarian political system characterised by one-party ruling (i.e., the
leadership of communist party), can successfully transform itself by accommodating and
implementing the western-style market economy and liberal commercialism; Second, they wish
to convince both themselves and their critics that such a politically monolithic system can co­
exist, side by side, with Capitalist economic liberalism; Third, it is Deng’s belief that the political
legitimacy of the party, which has been crumbling in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution,
would be salvaged and further maintained if economic reform (or indeed an economic revolution)
and, in particular a marked improvement of people’s material life, are satisfactorily achieved as
promised. It is right to suggest there was no significant pressure to establish a liberal democracy
of any sort before the eruption of the Democratic Movement in mid-1989 (D. Goodman, 1991:
p1). It is more important to realise that Chinese society, from its political establishment to the
public, has never prepared for or anticipated the liberal democracy of western notion in the first
place. Consequently, on the ideological front, what Deng has been aiming for, or allowing to
happen, is nothing but a more pluralistic, de-politicised society (with a projected degree of
tolerance, choice, openness and civil liberty) but firmly within the remaining authoritarian
framework and one-party political system. Whether this is really achievable or not, and how it
can be achieved, remains intensely debated and yet to be answered. However, what is certain is
that China’s distinctive reform approach, or so-called “Chinese characteristics”, a euphemism
used by the Chinese government in defining its reform style and ethos, has indeed underpinned,
as observed, the troublesome inter-relationship of political transition, economic modernisation
and social-value re-orientation in the post-Mao era. It is worth noting, though, that the dilemma
facing China’s reform, marked by its intensifying clash in political and economic interests, has
also been manifested in its vigorous search for a new cultural identity. My study on the
emergence and development of the post-Mao Chinese cinema is an attempt to manifest and comprehend the dynamics and the socio-political impacts of China's reform movement.

This study, of primarily a sociological nature, aims to examine the emergence of post-Mao Chinese cinema and its embodied socio-political culture in responding, or adjusting, to the sweeping and sometimes rather turbulent process of an unprecedented reform movement. Of course, we realise that the transformation of Chinese cinema, as a whole, is an area of relatively minor importance, when compared with other major agenda items on the reform programme (i.e., economic growth, financial and fiscal stability, technological advancement, agricultural reform and rural poverty, urbanisation, population control, and improvement of people's material life). Nevertheless, the case of Chinese cinema does provide us with a unique setting and perspective so as to reach a better understanding of the interrelationship of economic development, political evolution and the advent of cultural pluralism. This study aims, in other words, to show how the economic and political changes are themselves manifested in the fast changing reality upon the Chinese screen.

As A. Giddens has commented:

The sociological observer can not make social life available as a 'phenomenon' for observation independently of drawing upon his knowledge of it as a resource whereby he constitutes it as a 'topic for investigation'. In this respect, his position is no different from that of any other member of society; 'mutual knowledge' is not a series of corrigible items, but represents the interpretative schemes which both sociologists and laymen use, and must use, to make sense of social activity, i.e. to generate a 'recognisable' characterisation of it. (A. Giddens, 1976: p161)

To a large degree, if seen in a much wider world perspective, this study could serve as a reference to demonstrate China's difficult pursuit of a more democratic society, although not necessarily in the western style. Since the later 1970s, China's experiences in reforming some fundamental elements of its political system and cultural tradition have proved to be more
problematic and unpredictable than was previously thought. Andrew Nathan, one of the leading Sinologists in the United States, made some comparative remarks on the disagreements between the western version of democracy and the Chinese political system:

Our emphasis on individual rights, our tolerance for the expression of conflict and antagonism in politics, our acknowledgement that political process can legitimately be used by individuals and groups to try to force the state to serve their selfish interests, and our system of judicial review are among the ways in which our systems differs from most others in the world. The Chinese system, by contrast, belongs to a large family of socialist and other states that share a philosophy of politics as a realm of harmony rather than antagonism between citizens and the state, of one-party leadership, of the supremacy of the public interest over citizens' rights, and of the power of the state make any laws it deems necessary without judicial contradiction.

(A. Nathan, 1985: p ix)

From the very beginning, the "Open door" scheme has demonstrated clearly its philosophy which is to empower China by utilising and making good use of western technological and scientific advancements without at the same time embracing the concept and practice of western democracy. This study is carried out against this unique background, or rather dilemma, that has been troubling China's modernisation and democratic process. It is worth pointing out that this dilemma is nothing but a reoccurring argument that has deep historical roots. Ever since the concept of democracy was introduced to China at the turn of this century, it has always been perceived as an "ornament of modernity and an asset for rules" (A. Nathan, 1985: xi ). In relating to the subject yet to be explored, I would like to set out three factors, each of which has its own history and all of which largely originated from my observation on the ethos and characteristics of Chinese cinema during the Mao era. All these factors must be taken into account in a sociological analysis of Chinese cinema after Mao.
Firstly, a political factor. Since the late 1970s, the Chinese cinema has been undergoing a long
and sometimes uneasy process of de-politicisation. Such a process of de-politicisation can be
regarded as the prerequisite for the transformation or the rebirth of Chinese cinema. The nature
of communist ruling as a political system always determines, in a fundamental way, its
perception, policies and practices on communications, information and culture issues — the
“Ideological State Apparatus”, to use Althusser’s term. Not surprisingly, the ethos and modes of
Chinese cinema under Mao was, distinctively, identical to those of the former Soviet Union and
the Eastern European block. Under Mao, cinema/film played an important part in the party’s
operation of “ideological apparatus” and the creation of a socialist culture. Because of its
persuasiveness, accessibility and popularity, cinema was perceived and deployed by the party as
one of the most powerful and effective elements of its propaganda machinery, side by side with
party’s news media, for massive mobilisation, ideological indoctrination and as a vehicle for all
political campaigns. What the party was expecting of its propaganda was purely the
manifestation and reinforcement of its political legitimacy, ideological homogeneity in order to
create and govern an authoritarian society. In the light of the devastating consequences of the
Cultural Revolution, Deng was acutely aware that he had to de-politicise the structure and
mentality of Chinese society in ways that would create a greater degree of democracy, freedom
and legality. Only in so doing could popular support for the regime be rebuilt (H. Harding, 1987,
p 172).

Secondly, an economic factor. Cinema, unlike other more ancient or traditional forms of art (i.e.,
literature, poetry, painting or drama), is a unique creation due to its highly industrial, financial
and technological nature. In communist nations, cinema’s industrial and financial nature had
allowed the authorities to maximise its control and regulation of the cinema through economic
means, namely, state-ownership and central planning. The party had not only the power but also
the money to orchestrate and control cinema to its satisfaction or demand. It is also worth
mentioning that the collective (rather than individual) nature of film production also made the
official control and film makers’ self-censorship far more delicate but effective. Meanwhile, in
order to make the operation of cinematic activity, from both the point of view of film-makers
and film viewers, a political one, the cinema was uprooted from its commercial context and denied as a commodity; Audience had, consequently, lost its status as consumers and their rights to exert power and influence towards the output of film-making, and instead they became a passive recipient of state-subsidy in cinema-going and other cultural activities; In same way, film-makers and the film industry were exempted from any financial risk and market pressure. Moreover, with the back-up of the world's biggest population as its potential cinema-going audience, the Chinese film could afford not to worry about worry box office revenues since its monopoly faced no challenge at all, both financially and ideologically. In short, under Mao the effectiveness and penetration of its political control had been achieved through the state-dominination of cultural resources and market. That is basically what the political economy of Mao's Chinese cinema is about. As Lucian Goodmann has argued:

It remains true that the experiences of forty years of socialist society proves that the abolition of exchange and market production in a society with an economy entirely planned by the central authority poses a most serious threat to freedom, equality, tolerance and the great values of the Enlightenment. (L. Goodmann, 1991, p130)

It is hardly surprising that during the 1980s, as the direct result of Deng's vigorous pursuit in a market-centred mechanism in order to reconstruct and enhance the Chinese economy, the colonial cinema industry has, like any other industries, had to, for the first time in the history of the People's Republic, resume its full financial responsibility as an enterprise or industry, and be accountable for its own economic well-being and, ultimately, its survival. As the state subsidies quickly disappeared, the film industry has been further pushed to embark on the unprecedented undertaking of commercialisation.

There is no doubt that this market-led and commercial revolution has noticeably changed the outlook of the film industry, in both its managerial and economic operation. However, what I have found most interesting and significant is the unforeseen political impact of such an economically-motivated process. What I would like to argue unequivocally, throughout this
thesis, is that economic liberalism and market rationales do pose a serious threat as to undermine, discredit and distract the legitimacy upon which communist ideology is based.

Further, while fully recognising their possible defects and undesirable nature, I view strongly the presence of the market-autonomy and commercialism as an alternative but powerful form of liberal force in extricating China from Mao’s political legacy and ideological rigidity. This applies also to the case of Chinese cinema. As the thesis will show, the market and commercial forces, thanks to their apparently apolitical nature, have managed to change, in a gradual but fundamental manner, the political dynamics of Chinese cinema.

Thirdly, a cultural/social factor. The great importance of cinema in the course of the communist revolution and the creation of its new culture has never been better described as it was by Lenin over 60 years ago, who declared that "to us, cinema is the most important among all forms of arts." In my view, over many years, propagandists, filmmakers and audiences have all been fascinated and convinced of the great capacity that cinema could offer: the creation of normality, or to "normalise" social values and the norm of everyday life. In China and elsewhere, such a precious capacity had been long tested and explored in its great mission of creating a new socialist culture and legitimising the concept of everyday life. However, one of the prerequisites for the party to achieve the above goals was to redefine the nature of knowledge by limiting, suppressing or eliminating any knowledge that was perceived to be politically incorrect or ideologically incompatible. Here I want to borrow the term "power-knowledge" from French philosopher Michel Foucault, and I’d like to argue that the power of political control under Mao was, to a significant degree, achieved through its absolute power and monopoly over knowledge. Also, the party monopolised and enjoyed the exclusive prerogative of arbitration and interpretation over the realm of knowledge.

It was through this process that the cinema, the most popular and accessible form of art and entertainment during the Mao era, was politically engineered to normalise the new way of everyday life that communism envisaged. Cinema helped the party to synthesise a "fictional
reality”, conditioned by the monolithic pattern of ideological conformity. Thus, on the screen, the complexity of everyday life knowledge, in its totality, was reduced to no more than a manifestation of the party’s prescribed version of a “new life” (a popular euphemism during Mao’s time), where human thoughts and actions were distinctively classified into two fundamental opposing world outlooks between communism and capitalism. Thus, the notion between right and wrong, moral and immoral, friend and enemy, justice and injustice, self and society, had been redefined accordingly to cater for the totalitarian character of the regime. On the screen, only people thought to be “politically correct” had the rights for a legitimate presence in the name of Socialist New Men, Mao’s terminology for archetypal proletarian revolutionaries. Moreover, it was through the normalisation and “legitimacy” of this image that the dynamics of everyday life and the fundamental nature of human being were distorted and suppressed.

So, the revival of “everyday life” and “common sense” become the essential condition for the rebirth of the Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era. Filmmakers took the advantage of a freer political situation in discrediting the cinematic and anticipated version of life the Party had for years portrayed in order to maintain ideological homogeneity. For the first time, characters on the screen began to lead lives which reflected the norm: a girl’s desire to be pretty was no longer unacceptable, factory workers were no longer forever cheerful and untiring, enemies were no longer easily-duped while being extremely cunning, and heroes or heroines were no longer necessarily puritanical. Everyday life began to take a new shape on the big screen.

Before going any further, what I would like to do here is offer an explication and clarification of some of the basic concepts involved, especially the concepts of “the World of Everyday life” and “Knowledge”, since they will be constituting a foundation for the theoretical framework for this study and, consequently, the critique of post-Mao Chinese cinema. My primary aim in carrying out this study is to develop an understanding of the reconstruction of China’s socio-political reality by demonstrating and interpreting the experiences of Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era.
First, the term or expression of "everyday life". As one of the key concepts, it will appear frequently and also be discussed frequently in the thesis. The expressions "the world of everyday life", "common sense world", "world of daily life" and "life world" all have their origins in *Lebenswelt*, a German word, which suggests the inter-subjective world that everybody in his or her waking consciousness experiences and participates in during his or her daily life. It is the world that the German philosopher and phenomenologist Husserl originally called the world of "natural attitude", which is dominated by our practical interests and the problems at hand. The primary feature of this everyday world is its inter-subjectivity and its social character (R. Bernstein, 1976, p141). However, it was Alfred Schutz, another German philosopher, who had developed a much more sophisticated understanding of inter-subjectivity based on the idea of "lebenswelt" (the life world). I found Schutz's concept and critical analysis of "everyday life" extremely valuable and enlightening in structuring the theoretical or intellectual framework of this study. It is a manifest fact in the everyday world that we constantly engage in common sense interpretation and thinking. For the everyday world in which we find ourselves is at the outset inter-subjective. Schutz argued:

> It is inter-subjective because we live in it as men among other men, bound to them through common influence and work, understand others and being understood by them. It is a world of culture because, from the outset, the world of everyday life is a universe of significance to us, that is, a texture of meaning which we have to interpret in order to find our bearings within it and come to terms with it. (A. Schutz, 1962: Vol. I, p10).

But, what determines the way by which all interpretation of this world is carried out? Schutz believed that it is based on a "stock of previous experiences at hand", another key concept in his critique of "everyday life". He uses this term broadly to include not only knowledge in its general sense but also the beliefs, expectations, rules, rituals, habits and biases by which we interpret the world, our existence and experiences. To a large degree, in my view, what Schutz broadly means
by "everyday life" could be better illustrated by his definition of "social reality". He further argued:

By the term of 'social reality' I wish to be understood the sum total of objects and occurrences within the social cultural world as experienced by common-sense thinking of men living their daily life among their fellow-men, connected with them in manifold relations of interaction. It is the world of cultural objects and social institutions into which we are all born, within which we have to find our bearings, and with which we have to come to terms. From the outset, we the actors on the social scene, experience the world we live in as a world both of nature and culture, not as a private but an inter-subjective one, that is, as a world common to all of us, either actually given or potentially accessible to everyone. (A.Schutz, 1962: Vol. I, p53)

I will elaborate further by clarifying my working definition of everyday life applied in this particular study. While broadly in agreement with Alfred Schutz's analysis of everyday life, I would like to contribute a few new thoughts into this concept, in order to clarify the term, making it applicable to this study within a contemporary Chinese context. In short, this very term of everyday life, in my view, suggests the inter-subjectivity of a basic pattern of human existence, in either anthropological or sociological terms, which is characteristically governed and accommodated by common-sense and other fundamental aspects of human nature. Moreover, this pattern would be experienced and recognised by the majority of the population whom constitute the society they live, or, in another words, the ordinary people. However, it is worth noting the following two points:

(1) For anybody with a basic knowledge or understanding of how societies of a totalitarian nature are to be governed and maintained, it would not be difficult to understand that the reality and perception of everyday life in Mao's time, in essence, were fundamentally a collective entity and experience. In other words, any form or expression of individuality/individualism in these societies would have been suppressed by the over-riding collective, organised force of political
and social beliefs, policies, rituals, language and life-style. Historically, almost all societies with identical experiences of totalitarian rulings, from the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany to People's Republic of China, waged massive and organised schemes to prescribe and materialise a predominantly collective political culture, for the sake of creating a new kind of human being and a corresponding way of "everyday life". Consequently, what individuals could legitimately identify from each other's life was nothing but their received collectively and conformity in practising the behaviours, psychology and values that they were trained to worship and obey. In such a culture, everyday life thus became a pseudo-life, and ultimately a fraud. What I am trying to convey here is that my major aim in this study is to concentrate in particular on the collective nature of "everyday life", in order to establish, hopefully, what could be called a kind of national narrative. Since, in my view, the inter-subjectivity or interpretation of social reality of a particular period would largely been shaped by its immediate past history or experiences, so in this regard this study on post-Mao Chinese cinema and the interpretation of everyday life will also aim to explore and establish some kind of collective characteristics or pattern of the fast changing reality after Mao.

(2) It is understandable, from a sociologist's point of view, that the world of "everyday life", where an individual exists and also one's primary concern or interest lies, is of course, not a theoretical model but a practical complex. A typical facet of "everyday life" is constituted or materialised by various practical activities and concerns (including sometimes seeming trivialities) that characterise the nature and existence of human beings. Such practical routines are basically composed of what is going on in an individual's private as well public life. It is neither a form of "private" knowledge about oneself nor an inference regarding the "purely "private, individualistic or subjective psychological states and experiences of others. Certainly, it would be wrong to assume that the term of "everyday life" suggests fundamentally the experience and representation of merely private spheres or domestic themes or experiences. However, I have to say that societies of different political or cultural systems do differ in approaches in representing and legitimising a received version of what is the everyday life is all about. One of the most important parameters in differentiating the ways by which the everyday life are
represented between societies of different political-cultural traditions is marked by their different concepts in forming and representing the world of "private life". It is worth noting that societies of a totalitarian nature tend to gloss over, or politicise, individuals' private problems or domestic concerns. The end product of such treatment is the deep intrusion of political power into the sphere of private life, therefore the dislocation and extermination of genuine everyday life. (i.e., family, domestic affairs and individual behaviours and other social values).

In this regard, the renewal of the Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era can also be seen as a reversing process in rehabilitating and reviving the sense and normality of "everyday life", that had been withheld from Chinese society for decades. This has added a distinctive social (sociological) dimension, allowing us to observe how the "daily life" is revived and formed as a fictional reality on the screen.

Another important historical factor which should not be overlooked while characterising the formation of Chinese cinema under Mao is the influence of the Soviet cinema and the rise of state dominance in filmmaking, in both ideological and industrial terms. In fact, the Soviet cinema began to exert its influence upon the Chinese cinema as early as the late 1920s. It was hailed as a patron or flagship by China's Left-wing culture movement, both for its proletarian political orientation and aesthetic innovations. However, it is not until the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 that the influence of the Soviet cinema began to claim an institutional right in the formation of Chinese communist cinema, both in terms of industrial structure and aesthetic values. It is right to say that the former was at the time a causal model for the latter. From both administrative and industrial perspectives, the communist cinema in China was largely constructed in the style of Soviet cinema industry. The entire operation of film production, distribution and exhibition was stringently governed by a two-tier control system: namely, the combination of a monopolistic practice of a centrally-planned command economy and a complex network of political censorship.
The political leaderships in both countries were equally enthusiastic in playing their roles as patrons, and sometimes involve themselves in a rather personal manner in the details of a particular production (for instance, scripting). Policy-wise, most of the official regulations regarding China's film industry during the 1950s were transplanted directly from the Soviet Union; Aesthetically, the Soviet films' dominating presence and prestigious position during most of the 1950s (prior to the break-up of relations between the two countries) had made them most accessible and also most important to both Chinese film-makers and audiences. It could be argued that the introduction and popularisation of the Soviet concept of "Socialist Realism" in China had been greatly helped by its unique cinematic representation. It was through the experience, influence and power demonstrated by the Soviet films that China's communist leadership was further convinced of what film can achieve in manipulating public perception and in reinforcing political consensus. During the 1950s the influence of Soviet film-making was so pervasive that the first ever students at China's film academies were taught and supervised using Soviet textbooks, by Soviet scholars and filmmakers. In retrospect, it is equally true that it was the experience and versatility of the Soviet cinema that helped China to fuse some of its own cinematic tradition with the Soviet one. The result was the realisation of some fundamental aesthetic elements which are essential in the making of a totalitarian propaganda cinema.

During the 1950s Chinese cinema experienced a gradual transition of film thematics from rigidly defined party ideology to a considerably more skilful form of socialist propaganda. The Soviet influence over Chinese cinema had not diminished, despite of the disappearance of Soviet films in China, following the all-out ideological confrontation between the two countries in the late 1950s. Interestingly, around two decades later, both China and the Soviet Union were seen to have embarked on their identical missions to reform their mode of film-making by becoming less ideological, more market-led and politically more pluralistic.

Now, before going further to set out the structure and methodology of this thesis, I would like to chart an overview on Mao's legacy, the rise and development of Deng's "Open-door" reform and its socio-political impact. Because, I believe that such background knowledge is a necessity for a better understanding of the transformation of the Chinese cinema.
1.1 OVERVIEW: MAO'S LEGACY AND THE "OPEN DOOR" REFORM

When Mao died in 1976, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that he launched was already ten years old and its socio-economic consequences were devastating. As what was officially called the "ten-year catastrophe" by the post-Mao leadership, the Cultural Revolution had inflicted on China an acute political and economic crisis. In retrospect, despite many hypotheses and speculations on Mao's initiative in launching the Cultural Revolution, it is generally agreed that it was, on the face of it, an ad hoc effort to rekindle the perpetual mission of revolution and ideological struggle that he initiated, but in essence, it was his desperate attempt to cling onto his political power, which, as he believed, had been undermined by some members of the leadership. He commanded the Cultural Revolution as a massive campaign to rally public support, and to purge those who he perceived as the "capitalist readers", including Liu Shao-qi, then the President of the People's Republic, and Deng Xiao-ping, the General Secretary of the party, who was seen ten years later, as a miraculous political survivor, to become China's paramount leader in China's "second revolution", the "open-door" economic reform.

The initial political development after Mao's death was somehow drastic and dramatic. On October 6, within less than a month of Mao's death, the "Gang of Four" (led by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife), an "ultra-leftist" fraction with the Politburo and the driving force of the Cultural Revolution, was arrested in a coup d'état by Hua Guofeng, Mao's appointed heir, with the support of a group of veteran party and military officials. The Cultural Revolution was soon declared as having reach its end. In 1977, the "Gang of Four" was formerly charged with being responsible for the destructive consequences of the Cultural Revolution.

However, the legacy of Mao remained pervasive and largely intact, despite the growing undercurrent of political disillusion or apathy. And, it was the legacy left by Mao which provides, at least, the starting point for understanding the eventual rise of the economic reform. As Harding suggests:
Politically, the nation was torn by an intense struggle for power between those who supported Mao's vision of a continuous struggle to maintain revolutionary purity and those who wanted to redirect the nation's energies in the service of economic modernisation. Millions of China's urban residents, particularly young workers and intellectuals, had been made alienated and angry by the turmoil and hypocrisy of the Cultural Revolution; Economically, China was experiencing declining rates of growth, stagnant levels of consumption, persistent inefficiency, and growing technological obsolescence. (H. Harry, 1987: p12)

And what was increasingly clear was that Mao's political vision of China (mingled with the value of egalitarianism, popularism, utopian sentiments of the communist movement and Chinese feudal tradition) could no longer hold itself as the ideological pillar in the post-Mao Chinese society. Deng Xiao-ping, twice purged by Mao during the Cultural Revolution, was rehabilitated in July 1977 and soon appointed as the Vice Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, the Vice Premier of the State Council, and the Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army. As a known pragmatist, Deng soon set out to mobilise the already disillusioned populace to offer their support to his anticipated reform programme.

Firstly, he decisively called for a critical assessment on the Cultural Revolution and Mao's political legacy, despite strong objections from Mao's loyal followers. He tactically dismissed the notion of "whatever" (whatever Mao said and did should always determine our actions, without any deviation) by initiating a nation-wide public on "seeking truth from facts", and advocated "to adopt Marxism pragmatically to meet China's present situation (Deng Xiaoping: 1984, p51-2). In so doing, Deng successfully projected himself as an liberal politician. Secondly, he orchestrated the undertaking of political rehabilitation for millions of people who were wronged and prosecuted under Mao. This again sent a conciliatory note to a society that had been mauled politically and ideologically. However, it is worth pointing out that Deng's idea of political liberalism has never gone beyond this so as to challenge the legitimacy of communist leadership.
This would have been impermissible. From the very beginning, Deng's reform thinking has shown a peculiar combination of political authoritarianism and economic liberalism.

In December 1978, during the 3rd preliminary session of the 11th Party Congress, the party central committee approved an historic decree. In it, the Cultural Revolution as well as the personal cult of Mao were criticised, and Mao's theory of "class struggle" was now politically dead. Further, more importantly, the Congress declared, the party's ultimate task should be "shifted by concentrating onto China's socialist economic modernisation", and this also signalled the beginning of "open-door" program.

1978-79 is commonly seen as Deng's political honeymoon and also one of the most relaxing and optimistic periods in post-Mao Chinese history. Rural reform, as the first wave of the reform process, began its large-scale experiment in the "household responsibility scheme", which distributed the state-owned land into individual households, liberated the farmers from the failing system of the People's Commune, and revitalised the rural commercial activities. In the cities, the administration of state-owned enterprises began to be deregulated and was given a significant degree of autonomy to enhance its efficiency and competitiveness.

Also in 1979, in order to further combat the remaining resistance among Mao's ideologues against the "Open-door" policy, Deng initiated the "thoughts liberalisation" campaign, and the debate on "practice is the sole criterion of truth". The result was that a favourable atmosphere was created for relatively free intellectual and artistic endeavour; As the ban of western culture was being lifted, expression of cultural pluralism was finally made possible. In the same year, in Beijing, Brecht was staged, Beethoven performed, Impressionism exhibited, and Freud introduced. Hollywood films were again shown in China after an absence of over 35 years.

As a reformer, Deng was fully aware of the necessity for a relaxation of political life and a certain degree of openness. As a veteran communist politician, it is understandable that Deng remain committed to certain fundamental Leninist principles that restrained the scale and depth of
political liberalism that occurred. This is well illustrated in Deng's handling of the "Democracy Wall" movement in 1978. The "Democracy Wall" movement, a form of overt protest, was perhaps the first in post-Mao Chinese history in which a group of politically-minded young workers and students held their regular public forum in front of a large wall at Beijing's Xidan, debating China's democratic future. Wei Jinsheng, a young worker and one of the chief organisers of the movement, was imprisoned for his outspoken criticism of Mao and advocating political modernity, was one of the main organisers of the "Xidan Wall" activities. At first, Deng encouraged and took political advantage of this public pressure for a more explicit repudiation of the Cultural Revolution and greater democracy and legality, to push through his reform program. But, by the early 1979, having further consolidated his political position as the architect of the reform programme, Deng sensed intuitively that any further development of the democratic movement would pose a direct threat to his personal authority and moreover, the "one-party" political system which he now impersonated.

Deng's pragmatic philosophy on China's reform and modernisation could never be better expressed by his motto: It does not matter whether it is a black cat or a white one so long it catches mice. As his idea of reform is predominantly economically-oriented and determined, as Harding pointed out, Deng did realise an economic rationale for some structural change within the central administration and political life. Retaining rigidly Mao's totalitarianism of the past would be in direct conflict with the interests of the economic reform. After a decade of political turbulence of the Cultural Revolution, the continuation of tight organisational and ideological control would make it virtually impossible for scientists to innovate, for technicians to invent, and economists to develop new strategies for development (H. Harding, 1987, p173).

Deng's first step in political reform was reducing and regularising the role of the state, and by so doing to reduce the scope and arbitrariness of political intervention in social, professional and personal life. It is seen as the party's efforts to make a conciliation between the state and society. Second, we saw the separation of state administration from the economy, and expanding opportunities for popular political participation, at both grassroots and national levels (e.g.
through the forms of election, public debate, assembly, intellectual activities and so on). However, the mechanism of political participation or expression on both the form and content remained very limited. Trade unions and social bodies remained in the form of the quasi-political establishment. Mass media, which was exclusively state-owned, was still closely monitored by the Party, and the expression of politically unacceptable opinions was not permitted. Third, there was a successful transition from leadership by Mao-style personality cult to a more dynamic form of collective leadership. By moving away further from Marxist doctrines, these processes redefined the role and content of the official ideology, and provided a new consensus for policy-making in the future.

By 1984, the reform had gathered its momentum and seemed to have achieved the projected goals of the rural reform. The so-called "household responsibility system", a family-based commercial farming system was widely adopted throughout most of rural China. Living conditions were also considerably improved, and the readjustment and restructuring of the nation's industry had already produced the first nation-wide boom of consumption. The output value of industrial and agricultural products was increased rapidly from 563.4 billion Yuan to 920.9 billion in 1983 (The Chronicle of the P. R. China, 1981-84: p489).

In October 1984, it was decided during the 3rd preliminary session of the 12th Party's Congress, that the emphasis of the reform program was to move onto the urban areas. On the agenda, there were three major issues: the vitalisation of the mechanisms of enterprise, the establishment of the market mechanism, and price reform. Meanwhile, private ownership, condemned under Mao, has made a strong and widely welcomed comeback.

Despite the authoritarian nature of Chinese politics in the post-Mao era, we should not overlook one of the most significant developments that has been taking place since the late 1970s, that is: the growing tendency towards the formation of "civil society", in both reality and perception. Under Mao, the concept of civil society was condemned and vilified as a fraud that masked the reality of class conflict. In 1978, the Party's decision to abolish Mao's dogma of "class struggle"
and "politics takes command" becomes a precondition for China's possible destiny towards a civil society.

The core with regard to the making of China as a "civil society" is a fundamental one and that is how the social fabrics, relationships and rules to govern a civilised society could be regenerated. During the 1980s, individualism, and the pursuit of personal interests, once so ideologically forbidden in the old days, became increasingly justified and tolerated. The once politically-admirable comradeship began to be ridiculed, and the organic family, personal and community relations were restored and cherished once more; The expression of intimacy and personal affection are now no longer socially prohibited as they were under Mao, as was divorce. The political abuse of "day-to-day language" (by legitimising and transforming political vocabularies, cliques or jargon into a quasi-daily language) is being rectified, and people are anxious to learn to think and express themselves in a fresh and natural way; Another symbolic change is China's dressing code, and the days that Chinese people ware only unisex uniforms of blue Khaki (a mainly cotton fabric) has gone. All those implicit changes in people's everyday situation would force us to conclude that China has been embarking on its course towards a civil society.

As Gramsci has stated about the civil society:

> What we can do, for this moments, is to fix two major super-structural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organism commonly called private, and that of [political society/or 'the State'. (1971, p12)

Also Cohen provides us a working definition of civil society:

> Let's start with a working definition. We understand " civil society" as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially Voluntary associations), social movements and forms of public communication. (1992, IX)
Here, I would like to highlight in particular the proceeding of "information boom" or "information revolution" in China during the mid-1980s, which I believe, has played a very important part in China's search for a civil society. Information boom, as an officially-advocated euphemism, serves to display China's commitment in re-connecting itself with the outside world, notably the West, after the decades-long isolation, mistrust or hostility. The advent of the "information revolution" has been directly contributing to the rise of "popular culture", which is an integral feature of "civil society".

Since the early 1980s, the influx of western culture, through a variety of means from technology, to the arts, from imported commodities to academic research and tourism, has been a constant source of "enlightenment" in the shaping of the popular culture of "Chinese characteristics". And, the Chinese experience is indeed a special one. In the intellectual sphere, particularly among university students and young academic staff, one can observe an interesting movement of a large scale — the so-called "western-philosophy fever". It may be difficult for people in the West to comprehend why a large numbers of young Chinese are so enthusiastic and fascinated about some leading western philosophers, including Freud, Nietzsche and Jean Paul Sartre. Their theoretical writings, sometimes too obscure and abstract even for western academics, are translated into Chinese, and published as popular best-sellers, with sometimes extremely large circulation. Towards Future, a series aiming to serve as general reading on contemporary western society and thinking, has reportedly almost reached the circulation of 1 million copies for each title. Having faced the acute 'crisis in faith', many disillusioned youngsters, often well-educated, have turned those western philosophers into new icons, in search of spiritual comfort or political inspiration. Naturally, in the party's eyes, this has added fuel to the already intensifying ideological confusion after Mao's departure.

Another important development, stemming and benefiting from the "information revolution", is the reconstruction of China's mass media system. Despite its extremely volatile and sensitive nature, press reform has been struggling to depart from the monolithic mode of "party's media"
and its exclusively political functions as the Party's mouthpiece; Western journalistic values are now partially adopted in journalistic and media education. Audience research, "opinion polls" or TV rating are enthusiastically carried out, despite sometimes the objections or uneasy responses from the party hierarchy.

While the influence and circulation of the party newspapers have been in constant decline, the popular tabloids, commercially-operated, are mushrooming and enjoying an ever increasing readership. These popular tabloids cover a great variety of interests or hobbies (including health, sports, family life, satire and humour, photography, stamp-collecting, gardening, animal-pets and so on, all of which were banned during the Cultural Revolution). It is worth mentioning that the popular tabloids are in their majority subscribed at the expense of individuals rather than that of the government funding that once supported the subscription of party newspapers. Having fiercely challenged by the increasing dominance of popular tabloids, the party newspapers concede that "if you can't beat them, join them" by commercialising but de-politicising their editorial considerations.

The rapid popularisation of television has also changed significantly the landscape of China's mass media. Within merely a decade, TV has become the most popular, pervasive and accessible medium in China today, both in urban and rural areas. The influx of a considerable amount of American and western programs, which may have been seen by left-wing intellectuals in the West as "cultural dumping" or cultural imperialism, is regarded by many Chinese as a crash course in popular culture. Meanwhile, the phenomenal increase in advertising revenue has allowed TV stations in the major cities to establish a relative autonomy which further weakens the party's intervention and arbitration.

In a parallel process, the relaxation and decentralisation taking place in media, cultural, intellectual and social spheres have further exposed Deng's dilemma: Can this piece-meal economic reform be successfully carried out while maintaining, or without affecting, the state's fundamentally authoritarian political structure and legitimacy? The authority's increasing
insecurity and anxiety over this question was a creeping mental force behind the launch of many short-lived ideological campaigns during the 1980s, in order to curb and repress the growing liberal consensus. Between 1981-86, campaigns against "right-wing deviations", "political weakness and laxity", "bourgeois liberalism" and "spiritual pollution" were launched. Since 1987, Deng has sacrificed a number of leading intellectuals and reform-minded leaders to secure the way-out from the eruption of a succession of large-scale social-economic crises, and by so doing to consolidate his political power-base.

From 1986 onwards, China's reform entered the most critical and volatile stage so far. The people were experiencing, in anguish, many unforeseen serious problems and crises. While acknowledging the desirable changes that had been brought by the reform, the people were increasingly dismayed and frustrated by the surging political corruption, social injustice, widening income gap, and the rise of inflation. The social tensions, built up in the preceding years during the course of the reform process, were now mounting.

The most noticeable of the alleged widespread political corruption was what was called the "official profiteering", and through which the political rank and file were able to transfer their political privileges into financial interests and business advantages. A new elite class called the "Princes Ring", a sort of "red aristocracy" which consists solely of children of the high ranking political leadership, was in the making. At the same time, factory workers became increasingly resentful of their perpetual loss of the "iron bowl" (the euphemism for permanent job security under the old system), and the future prospect of being surplus labour or unemployed. Farmers and intellectuals both became disappointed at the party's failure to safeguard, as the Party promised, their economic interests, and to improve their material life; Moreover, the reappearance of serious social evils, including drug-trafficking, prostitution, kidnapping, which had been largely eliminated in the aftermath of the communist victory, magnified the people's grievances towards Deng's regime. There was widespread nostalgia among the mid-aged population and beyond, for life under Mao ---- perceived to be austere but secure and egalitarian.
Between November and December 1986, China witnessed the first massive student demonstration since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Originated in Anhui province, it was quickly echoed by students in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities. The demand that emerged from the students was distinctively political: political democracy is imminently required and vital to the eventual success of China's economic reform. Having taken advantage of the problematic situation at the time, both politically and economically, the party conservatives thus strengthened their political bargaining power, and the protests soon came to an end. In the aftermath of the protests, students encountered a renewed campaign against "bourgeois liberalisation". In early 1987, Hu Yaobang, then the Party's General Secretary and a leading reformer, was forced to resign for his allegedly liberal and sympathetic views towards the students movement. Zhao Ziyang, then the Premier and also a reformer, made Hu's successor.

In 1988, the worsening economic disorder and the rising inflation again put the reform on the line. The opinions on how the reform should be proceeding were badly divided. People, who were politically-oriented and encouraged by what had been taking place in Gorbachev's Soviet Union, maintained that "the most serious drawback of the decade-long Chinese reform is its isolated penetration of economic liberalisation and the much belated political reform. And political democratisation is fundamentally the only solution to China's existing problems (Hua Sheng: 1992, p15); Those, who were politically more realistic, were convinced that market-led economic liberalisation would eventually transform China into a society of liberal democracy, probably marked with some interesting Chinese characteristics. Moreover, they believed that such a transition could only be achieved under a powerful but refined form of "authoritarianism". The theory of "neo-authoritarianism" began to flourish among many young intellectuals associated with the party's leading reformers.

On 15th April 1989, the sudden death of Hu Yaobang, the disgraced former party secretary, sparked off the largest ever student democracy movement in Chinese history, which also marked a turning point in post-Mao Chinese history. For almost two months, the movement, centred at
Beijing's Tiananmen Square, became the focal point of the world. On 4 June, the movement was militarily suppressed by the regime, and hundreds of people were believed to be killed and wounded in Beijing. Zhao Ziyang, the Party's General Secretary, was forced to step down for his sympathetic attitudes of the movement. Deng Xiaoping and the regime was internationally condemned. China was again plunged into international isolation, and the reform programme halted, as an immediate consequence of the international economic sanctions.

In retrospect, the crackdown of the June 4th democracy movement can be seen as the party's desperate last resort in maintaining its political power. For the first time in the history of the People's Republic, the army was ordered to suppress and kill its own fellow citizens. In so doing, Deng, literally, sacrificed all the remaining legitimacy of the Party. As for Deng, there is now no easy way out, apart from continuing and accelerating the economic and market reform in the hope of regaining the public support and restoring its political and moral credibility.

In early 1992, Deng delivered a historic speech during his well-prepared inspection trip in Shenzhen, his brainchild on China's experiment of Capitalism and China's most successful "special economic zone". He emphasised that China should adopt whatever capitalism can offer in order to benefit and empower China's modernisation. Only by doing so, he believed, would the regime be able to survive. Despite the initially very strong political and economic reactions to the events of June 1989, the West, which has been badly hit by the economic recession, has soon readjusted its policy by encouraging a close economic link with China. So far the West, mainly USA, Germany and Japan, have been responding favourably by investing heavily in China, hoping to gain a larger share of China's enormous market potential. In 1992 and 1993, China's GDP growth rates have reached respectively 12.8% and 13.4%. (Beijing Review, 1994: p6-7)

However, the impending departure of Deng, who is at the advanced age of 90, is expected to become another turning point in Chinese history, which would be as equally important as the demise of the Mao era.
1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

I have already explained earlier a number of assumptions which I believe might be important to illustrate the transformation of Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era. The very reason why I have deliberately highlighted the "sociological" approach in the title of this thesis is rather simple. I want to make a point that it provides me with an analytic framework, an emphasis or a particular perspective, enabling me to address and explore the post-Mao Chinese cinema in the way that I think could be the most revealing and enlightening.

The central core in my understanding of a "sociological" approach is, in a simplest term, the emphasis on the aspects of daily life and its interrelations with the research subject, namely, the Chinese cinema in this case. In my view, the rebirth of Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era could be regarded, as I have mentioned earlier, first and foremost, as a cinematic attempt to rehabilitate, restore, reveal and innovate the notion of "daily life" in a distinctive Chinese context. Along this line, I would, in particular, pay attention to those key sociological elements that have contributed to the making of Chinese cinema as a unique and powerful social institution. For instance, the triangular relationships of filmmakers, audiences and the political establishment, the social behaviours of the cinema-going public, and the mechanism of both political and commercial censorship. In other words, this "sociological" approach will be looking into some aspects of the Chinese cinema which might be traditionally overlooked by researchers with some different emphasises, say from "aesthetic" or "cultural" perspectives.

Below is a general introduction to the structure and content of this thesis:

Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction, so as to set out the major assumptions and concerns of this thesis, as well to provide an overall view, on the political-social context of the "open-door" reform in the post-Mao era. Hopefully, it offers some background information or insights towards a better understanding of the post-Mao Chinese society, which would be a necessity to comprehend and rationalise the development of Chinese cinema of the same period.
Chapter 2 aims to chart the historical development of the Chinese cinema since 1896, but with a particular emphasis on the period of the People's Republic (from its founding in 1949 to Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976). With no intention to write a comprehensive mini-history of Chinese cinema, it recounts and analyses the major cinematic events in the different political periods of China's modern history, within a framework of "social history". I will, therefore, try to explain how the interrelationship of filmmakers, the audience and political authority had historically evolved in the light of the turbulent nature of Chinese political development. Also, I would like to address the issue of how the pre-1949 socio-political realities have shaped or at least contributed to, the political and aesthetic identities of the early Chinese cinema. I will argue, in particular, that the emergence of China's communist cinema since 1949, is the continuation of a long and futile process in which Chinese cinema has been searching and justifying its roles and identities in a constantly changing and hostile political-cultural environment. Finally, I refute the assumption that Mao's cinema is entirely the making of communism indoctrination, while divorcing it from some fundamentally important cultural and political attributes from pre-communist history. In so doing, I hope I may be able to reveal something that is vital for our understanding of the Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era. I hope I will do the history justice.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the reconstructing process of China's film industry, prompted by Deng's economic reform and, in particular, the commercialisation program. The analysis will be set against the background of China's own "information revolution", the proliferation and popularisation of electronic media such as TV and VCR (video cassette recorder), and the eventual rise of popular culture. The main purpose of this chapter is to see how the "market" factor and other economic leverages have reshaped the way the industry is run, and eventually changed the outlook of the big screen. I will address respectively the changes which have been taking place within three major sectors: film production, film distribution and film exhibition. In addition, I wish to convey a message that the transition of Chinese cinema, from a purely
ideological apparatus to a financially-accountable industry, provides, institutionally, a
precondition which enables the de-politicisation of Chinese cinema to take place.

Censorship has always been a fascinating subject in the study of communist cinema, as its
sometimes notorious and bleak practices often offer insights or revelations of the political nature
of the communist system. However, Chapter 4 documents the Chinese world of film censorship
in a what could be called post-communist era. It is worth mentioning that this chapter manages
to address such a sensitive issue from an insider's viewpoint. Due to the sensitivity of the subject,
the available materials are far and few between. However, most of the materials presented in this
chapter are originally drawn or compiled from China's internal official documents, and are only
revealed here for the first time. In this chapter, I will tackle an interestingly new phenomenon
during the 80s: the unprecedented co-existence of a dual censorship system — between political
censorship and commercial censorship. To what degree, have the market forces compromised or
disabled the already disintegrating political censorship? If so, in what way? Another issue that I
will analyse is: during the 1980s, how has the policy and practice of censorship been affected or
influenced by the western opinion or perceptions of the Chinese cinema?

Chapter 5 offers a long and hard look at the rise, the development and the apparently
problematic future of the "Fifth Generation", an "Avant Garde" cinema movement launched by
the first crop of young graduates from the Beijing Film Academy since the end of the Cultural
Revolution. It is probably the most significant Chinese contribution ever towards the history of
world cinema, and also marks one of the most memorable chapters in the history of Chinese
cinema. How have their experience as the "Red Guards" during the Cultural Revolution shaped
their political thinking both about China and the cinema? and how can we unravel the myth
behind the collectively allegorical nature of their film making, in both form, content and
narratives? Is the "Fifth Generation"s increasing popularity in the West merely a manifestation of
what E. Said has called the misconception and ignorance of "orientalism"? It could be argued
that, as the result of western financial patronage, has Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, two leading
members of the movement, already become the suppliers of oriental myths to accommodate the
western curiosities or stereotypes of the "orient"? How a wave of foreign investment from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Europe had affected the Fifth Generation, both aesthetically and politically? I will give a detailed analysis of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou in the hope to present a fair and collective assessment on the Fifth Generation as a whole.

Chapter 6 aims to address an important part of the legacy of Mao's cinema: the veteran filmmakers that have survived the Mao era. In sharp contrast to the increasing world-wide enthusiasm for the Fifth Generation, this veteran generation are largely being ignored or forgotten. How have they transformed themselves, politically and aesthetically? In this chapter, in particular, I will focus on the personal experiences of Xie Jin, a veteran film maker from Shanghai and also one of the best known directors in the post-Mao period. I hope that Xie Jin's unique but also highly illuminating personal experiences will serve to illustrate a collective mission and dilemma facing the veteran generation.

In Chapter 7, the last chapter, I will examine the transformation of China's new film audience during the 1980s, in particular their changing viewing patterns, behaviours and characteristics. This chapter hopes to express and rationalise the emergence of the post-Mao cinema, from distinctively an audience's perspective. How have the politically-conscious film-viewers under Mao been reformed and become the consumers in the 1980s?

Finally, in the Conclusion, I will sum up my major arguments.

1.3 A BRIEF REVIEW ON LITERATURE AND DATA-GATHERING

One of the challenges in conducting any serious study of Chinese cinema is the lack of literature and data, and a poor research record in this field, both in China and abroad. For many decades since the beginning of its history, Chinese cinema had been an unknown entity, largely overlooked by the international film world. For foreign audiences and film critics, access to Chinese cinema was extremely restricted. However, during the early days of the People's
Republic (i.e., in the 1950s), Chinese communist cinema had managed to create a strong presence in mainly the communist bloc in Eastern Europe and many "Third World" developing countries. The result was that Chinese cinema was for the first time in history, blessed with a large number of foreign audience. However, in the Capitalist west, it remained unknown and was often despised.

But this did not alter the fact that Chinese cinema remained barred from reaching the Capitalist West, as a result of political hostilities, ideological confrontations and censorious cultural policies adopted by both sides, China and the West. For the Western part, the USA provides us with a typical case in point. During the Cold War era, even any incoming material of a general nature from mainland China would be commonly seen as evidence of the political or ideological threat of Communism. At the time, Chinese films were rarely seen or known even by western specialists on Chinese affairs, and any attempt to take Chinese cinema seriously as an academic issue would have been dismissed as unworthy, premature or too ideologically-oriented. As a matter of fact, very little academic research in Chinese cinema had been carried out during the Cold War period, and information concerning the recent status of Chinese cinema, occasionally appeared in western newspapers and film publications, was very fragmented and ideologically-led.

However, Jay Leyda, an American film historian (with a keen interest in the Communist Cinema movement, in particular that in the Soviet Union and China) deserves a special mention for his contribution in the field of Chinese cinema history. His book, *Dianying: Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, published in USA in 1972, was the end-product of western scholars' first serious attempt in the study of Chinese cinema. In this book, Leyda presented a comprehensive historical account of Chinese cinema, from China's first encounter with the Lumière's exotic film clips in 1896 to the Left-wing film movement in Shanghai in the 1930s and to the "Modern-Opera " film-making during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. Leyda's research is, in my view, especially valuable on two accounts: First, the gathering of well-researched material from first-hand sources both in English and Chinese; Second, his noticeable sociological approach in tackling the subject, by highly emphasising the
interaction between the state of cinema development and China's socio-political realities of different political periods. In particular, the dynamics of "everyday life" and the role of Chinese audience in such processes were given special attention in his narrative. It is worth noting that despite some factual inaccuracies, Leyda's book remains a must for anybody who takes a serious interest in Chinese cinema. Also, during the 1950s, the French film historian Georges Sadoul had written a number of interesting papers on China's "Left-wing" film movement in the 1930s and the progressive New Cinema of the People's Republic.

During Mao's era, film research in China, in retrospective, had largely been reduced to no more than an ideological exercise of promoting Mao's theory of revolutionary arts and in particular the ideas of "Socialist Realism". The existing publications and materials displayed two attributes that would come characterise the state of film research under Mao: First, thematically, the overall emphasis was on cinema's political and ideological impact, in particular the legitimacy of political correctness (PC) and a kind of everyday life that was associated with it, through a cinematic form alongside other media. Second, film research and film criticism in particular were largely presented as an amateurism activity or movement, and professional film researchers and critics were expected to subordinate their professionalism and individual aesthetic preferences to the collective interests and sentiments of the working class.

However, since the mid-1980s, as a result of China's opening-up to the outside world, and in particular the increasing exposure and popularity that Chinese cinema has received internationally, many western scholars of different disciplines (political scientists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists and, of course, China specialists) were quickly drawn into the field of Chinese cinema that was yet to be explored. A few key names need to be mentioned here. During the 1980s, for instance, Chris Berry is perhaps one of the first western researchers who had taken a serious interest in the development of Chinese cinema. His researches, with a distinctively political perspective, largely continued a long-held western tradition in the field of Chinese studies, that perceives arts and cultural phenomena as an essential "indicator" concerning China's political and social changes, or as a vehicle to accumulate empirical
knowledge about China. His wide ranging research interest on the subject (e.g., stereotypes and ambiguities of film-making during the Cultural Revolution; the comparison between cinematic representation of gender/women and kinship relations in rural China between Mao's era and thereafter; and the Chinese New Cinema in the post-Mao era) has equipped him with a broad knowledge of the status of Chinese cinema, both in the past and present. Moreover, his direct and extensive personal association with China's film industry during the 1980s, and the resulting insights and first-hand observations he had on the subject, has made him one of the most credible and fair-minded western researchers in this field. G. Semtel should also be given a mention for his efforts in introducing the Chinese-language materials on the subject to the West.

During the 1980s, despite the surging significance of Chinese cinema and increasing interest in the West, there has been few full-length scholarly studies of Chinese cinema, past or present. The nature of the existing researches in this field could largely be described as fragmented, unsystematic and without the adequate support of an adequate historical and cultural context. However, there are some exceptions. Paul Clark’s *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (1987) is one of them. As one of the new generation Sinologists in the West, Clark challenges the popular presumption in the West that in China's politicised culture, film has been simply a political tool in the hands of national leadership. He suggests otherwise. He maintains that what has happened to the newest art in the oldest culture illuminates much more about the nation and the medium. Despite its historical nature, Clark's narrative does not confine itself to the conventional framework of China's political chronology. Instead, his critique of Chinese cinema is well developed within a more adequate framework of how politics and culture integrates or interacts. Another interesting characteristic of this study is that Clark speaks the language of a film historian or specialist. As a result, his analysis on the Chinese cinema transcends the superficiality of an essentially ideological interpretation, which often characterises other similar studies in this field. While answering the question why film is more amenable to political manipulation by the Party, for instance, he focuses on those contributory factors such as technological complexity and the capital-intensive nature of the medium, the propaganda property of the medium and particularities of high illiteracy in China. Also he places very highly
an important but often overlooked factor by western researchers: the unique and complex roles that film audiences have played in the making of Chinese cinema.

It is also worth mentioning that in the West, some researches on Chinese cinema have been conducted from an essentially aesthetic perspective, exploring, for instance, the influence of ancient Chinese poetry on the cinematic narrative of Chinese filmmaking.

However, it has to be said that the study of Chinese cinema in the West is still at its very early stage and with a relatively narrow research agenda, i.e. largely politically-oriented. This, coupled with the lack of access to a much wider range of Chinese films and the inadequacy of systematic data or information concerning its latest developments, have prevented western academics from mapping out a more comprehensive, authoritative and reliable picture of Chinese cinema.

The literature and other materials that have been used in this thesis can be mainly divided into four categories: (1) Chinese-language publications on Chinese cinema and related subject matter; (2) English-language publications on Chinese cinema and related subject matter; (3) Materials or data drawn originally from my own fieldwork, in-depth interviews and an audience survey; (4) Chinese-language internal official documents issued by various official bodies in China. It is worth noting that data-gathering during this research was a laborious process. Through the assistance of many institutions, both in China and abroad, I have managed to get hold of, and go through, an enormous amount of materials, data and publications. As a result, a considerable amount of original materials, that were unknown before, have been unearthed. Consequently, they are revealed and examined in this thesis.

1.4 ABOUT RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I have chosen to adopt a mix of research methods in order to carry out successfully the enquiries of different nature, in the hope of presenting a forceful and convincing argument. Mainly, the
following research methods are used: in-depth interviews, self-completion questionnaires and

critical reading of data and other materials. I concede the fact that such an approach in

methodology is nothing but a conventional one for any research of this kind.

Having completed a thorough literature review through a systematic reading of available

materials (both in Chinese and English) on the subject, I returned to China in September 1990

(about 14 months after the suppression of what is known the Tiananmen Pro-democratic

Movement) with a plan to carry out the fieldwork required, mainly in-depth interviews in order
to gather first-hand up-to-date knowledge on the subject. It should take little imagination to

conclude that the timing for this trip was unfortunate. Against all the odds, however, I decided to
go ahead with the plan, while fully anticipating the difficulties and unpredictability lying ahead.

Despite of the extremely intensified political situation which had compromised considerably my
efforts, the trip turned out to be, fortunately, a useful one.

Between September and October, in Shanghai and Beijing, homes to China’s leading film-

making bases, I interviewed more than 20 people from a cross section of China’s film industry

and other relevant personalise, including film directors (of different age groups), film

distributors, heads of film studios, academics, film critics, cultural officials and ordinary film-
goers. Given the different background, duties, expertise and interests among the interviewees, I

intended to choose a core topic for each interviewee, in order to sharpen the focus of interviews,

and to generate the up-to-date knowledge on the current state of Chinese cinema. The interviews

have covered a wide range of issues, focusing on the key areas of this research, for instance, the

changing mechanism of film censorship, the transition of audience behaviours, the Fifth

Generation, the commercialisation of film industry, the TV boom and the rise of popular culture,

and so on.

A few more words on the recruitment of my interviewees. This has certainly been the most
difficult part of the data gathering exercise, in the light of the growing political uncertainties and

crackdown following the June 4th event. Under such circumstances, almost no one, with even
very limited political experiences, would be willing to accept an interview of a stranger, let alone
of someone from abroad, the West to be precise. However, with help from many of my fellow
Chinese friends and colleagues working in the media, arts and, of course, the film industry, I
managed to interview most of those who were on my list. The list was a fairly representative one,
covering a wide range of people working in filmmaking. However, due to the acute political
circumstances at the time, the interviews were sometimes limited to topics and interpretations
that were acceptable to the Chinese authorities. Nevertheless, a variety of opinions, that were
informative and enlightening, were freely expressed during those lengthy interviews (each lasted
2-3 hours or longer). But it is worth noting here that in this thesis I have not been able to quote
as much, and as freely, the content of those interviews as I would prefer, in order to honour the
interviewees' wish not to quote their "off-the-record" remarks. In some cases, interviews were
accepted on the condition that I would not quote them directly in my thesis and I have honoured
those respondents' wishes. However, it has to be said that the guarantee of anonymity or non-
direct quoting should not necessarily mean the diminishing of these particular viewpoints. On
the contrary, I have tried to make good use of these interviews by incorporating or reflecting
them into the major arguments of this thesis. (A list of the interviewees can be found in the
acknowledgements).

In Autumn, 1992, in conjunction with the Chinese Film Weekend held at London's Institute of
Contemporary Arts, I conducted an audience survey among the attending British audiences there,
in the hope of finding out what can generally be described as the "western perception" of
Chinese cinema. It has produced some interesting findings that will be analysed in Chapter 5
(technical details concerning the survey and the way it was conducted will also be given in
Chapter 5, and a sample of the questionnaire is included in the Appendices).

POSTSCRIPT

In every society, it is true to say that the cinema-related experience is not an essential part of our
everyday life. Nevertheless, such experience is important and unique because it does reflect and
characterise a society and its way of life. Historically, almost all societies of a totalitarian nature tend to turn the supposedly individual experiences of cinema-going into a realm of collective and uniform experience. As a result, such experience becomes part of the "national narrative".

During the process of this research, I have drawn inspiration and insights from my own cinema-going experience, as a primary school student, during the Cultural Revolution.

In the process of this study, I have been constantly reminded that it is important to abide by a major rule of any academic undertaking: to be impartial and objective, although, sometimes it was difficult to suppress my own personal feelings and experiences relating this study. Since now the study has now already reached its end, I think that I may be forgiven for expressing some rather personal views on this subject. In the quotation, which is drawn from my own account of film going in China, what I experienced was probably typical of my generation, the generation which had been both the recipients and antagonists of Mao's communist cinema.

All students lined up at a local cinema house, a roll was called by the teacher, and then we marched into the auditorium. Newsreels were not popular and we often tried to get rid of them by stamping our feet or shouting -- providing Chairman Mao did not appear on the screen. As the feature film started, we would compete to be first to spot 'bad elements' or 'hidden enemies', imperial agents, spies and traitors. Contrary to the intentions of the Party, we were most interested in the enemies who entertained us with their funny names, absurd dialogues and distorted images. A case list of the time was in fact a chart of Mao's theory of class division: 'Heroic characters', 'middle' elements and 'negative' characters were separately listed. And we were often required to write a piece afterwards on what we had learnt from the revolutionary heroes. It was in the cinemas that we first encountered and visualised the key concepts of Communist society. (L.F. Zhang, 1992 (1): p12)
What is the history of Chinese cinema? How can one produce an adequate narrative or interpretation? Obviously, there are many ways (or modes) in which these questions can be answered. The most common among them is the so-called "historical mode" that takes the usual form of such analysis and grouping over chronological periods, or types assigned to such periods. However, Raymond Williams, one of the leading British communications scholars and cultural critics, questioned the merits of such a mode. He argued:

This method produces a kind of prehistory, devoted to early technological development and the uses of films, followed in order by silent film, the early sound film, the modern film and so on. A linear view is set out in a linear way. However, it is my understanding of the history of film/cinema that while there are very significant periods of development, in which certain emphases and uses are possible and dominant, there are also, from the beginning, diverse factual elements and possibilities which often, and perhaps always, run through such fixed periods, and what I should in fact be suggesting is the history looks very different according to the bearings that are chosen to run it on.

It may then be through putting the bearings side by side that we can begin to distinguish an actual, rather than an ideal or categorical history. (R. Williams, 1990, p 134)

Williams presented his method by emphasising the following: (a) the actual technology and its uses; (b) film and popular culture; (c) film and established culture; (d) film and modernist culture; As he suggested, these bearings do not intend to "form a linear progression, but a set of lateral and interactive relations" (R.Williams, 1990, p135). I find that such a proposition is, in general, useful and enlightening so as to shape my perspective on the historical development of Chinese cinema and its characters.
So, this chapter will be neither a comprehensive nor a strictly chronological account of Chinese cinema between 1986-1976. Instead, in relating the mode that Williams devised, I would like, firstly, to present an analytic account within a framework of "social history", emphasising major sociological or common life factors which have been closely associated with the historical evolution of the subject (i.e., the films' socio-political roles, film-going and daily life and the political interplay of film-makers, audiences and the political establishment); secondly, I will be examining how the political, social and cultural attributes affected or conditioned the content, form or narrative structure of Chinese cinema at different political periods, in order to expose its relations and interactions with popular and established culture, with a special reference to the Mao Era.

The major purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical background of the Chinese cinema, and I hope it will help us to formulate a more dynamic and adequate understanding towards the transformation of the Chinese cinema in the post-Mao era.

2.1 EARLIEST DAYS (1896-1930)

The Western Cinema: Active in China

On 28 December 1895, the Lumiere brothers of Lyon, the young French entrepreneurs, staged the first show of "cinematograph" in front of a paying public in Paris (D. Robinson, 1981:p1). This occasion has been commonly marked as the beginning of world cinema. Only a year later, in 1896, these monumental clips of "motion pictures", such as The Gardener (or L'arroseur arrose) and A Train Entering A Station, were not only shown in neighbouring European capitals —— London, St Petersburg, Berlin, Moscow and Prague, but also reached some Asian countries like India, Japan and China.

On 11 August 1896, a French showman staged China's first ever film show at the Xu Garden, a modest teahouse in Shanghai, which was already the largest city in the Far East and a booming
international port. Reportedly, Lumière's films were shown in between a variety show of traditional Chinese entertainment, magic, acrobatics, fireworks and juggling (J. H. Cheng, 1978: p7). The "moving picture", which demonstrated the latest form of western technology, stunned the crowds. As its mechanics resembled the ancient Chinese "puppet plays", the film was first called in China as "Xi-yang-ying-xi" or western shadow play. In 1902, the film show arrived in Peking (now Beijing), the Capital of the Manchu's Qing Dynasty. Most of the film shows at the time were held at tea-houses, restaurants, amusement centres or even skating rinks.

Shanghai, at the turn of the century, was a reminder of what the western imperialist powers had achieved in China since the Opium War in 1840. It had emerged as an oriental city with an increasingly western outlook. Downtown Shanghai was divided into British, French and German settlements with extra judicial rules, and the foreign populations, mainly businessmen and missionaries, were on the increase. Gothic-style company buildings were erected in quick succession alongside the famous Bund and housed the ever growing commercial communities. Urban culture was in the making. For instance, the publication of popular tabloids, operated by modern methods of production and distribution, was enjoyed by an increasingly large readership.

Having been attracted by films' enormous potential of commercial profits as a modern and high-tech form of popular entertainment, many western businessmen in China rushed to direct their capital and resources into this new and adventurous business. In 1908, a Spanish exhibitor built China's first indoor cinema in Shanghai, the Hongkou Movie Theatre, with a seating capacity of 250. Several dozen cinema houses were built in Shanghai in the following years, responding to the fast growing demand for cinema-going within the expanding foreign settlements. In 1913, the Asian Motion Picture Co., the first western film company entering China, opened its distribution offices in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Before the First World War, the films shown in China were mainly from France, America, Germany and Great Britain, the most developed nations in film-making at the time. Initially, French films took the largest share in the Chinese market and were the most influential.
However, in August 1914, the eruption of the War effectively slowed down, and even for the time being removed the fierce competition in China among European powers, gave rise to the beginning of American hegemony in the Chinese film market for the next three decades. Between 1918 and April 1930, according to the USA Department of Commerce, film totalling 39,712,121 linear feet, worth US $1,022,172 in total value, were exported to China. (US Department of Commerce, 1931, p213). It was also recorded that of the 450 foreign films exported to China in 1929, 90% were American. There were around 100 or so cinemas in China, and the majority of those first-run venues showing exclusively foreign films, were also run by Americans. By the late 1920s, Shanghai had established itself as one of the biggest film markets in the Far East, with prompt access to the latest American films. Among the seven major foreign distribution companies in China during the 1920s, four were American.

By 1930, China had only a total 273 cinemas, concentrated in about 24 cities including Shanghai, Tianjin, Hankou, Hong Kong, Harbin and Dalian. The combined seating capacity was only 137,000 for a nation of 400 million population at the time, in other words, on average about 3,240 persons per seat. The attempts, by Americans and other westerners, to introduce film to the population in interior China had been severely hampered by the widespread military confrontations between the warlords across China.

It is worth noting that Western filmmakers were tempted, from the very beginning, to make films on Chinese subjects (in both fictional and documentary forms) however from a distinctive "viewfinder" of the West. In 1900, the western repression of the "Boxer Rebellion", China's massive anti-foreign movement, immediately became a sought-after subject by many western filmmakers. It was ideal material that could be manipulated for propaganda purposes while at the same time satisfying the western curiosity for the Orient, exotic, alien and backward. Ironically, those films about the "Boxer Rebellion" were "reconstructed" not on locations in China, but in places afar such as New Jersey, Paris or Brighton. The "Brighton School" (a name denotes two British film-makers, George Albert Smith and James Williamson, who worked in the English seaside resort Brighton in the first years of cinema, deserves a particular mention. They put
considerable efforts and resources into re-creation some of the events during the time of "Boxers Rebellion". However, in *Attack on Chinese Mission Station*, the "villainous" Chinese characters were cast by English men and women (J. Leyda, 1972: p4-5); The first western documentary film-makers arrived in China during the first decade of this century. They travelled up and down the country and recorded a significant amount of footage depicting the socio-political reality and everyday life in the last days of the Qing Dynasty. The most important works among them include: *Imperial Funeral Procession in Peking* (1908), *Shanghai's First Tramway* (1908), and *Compulsory Pigtail Cutting* (1911).

**The First Chinese Attempts at Filmmaking**

In 1903, a Chinese merchant returned from the West with a film projector and a few reels of American films. In Peking, he hired a small teahouse and started his show business. He became the first Chinese film exhibitor. Two years later, in 1905, Ren Jingfen, a photo-shop owner in Peking, set out to film some of the classical repertory of the Peking opera. His first work was the three-reel *Dingjunsan* (Conquering Jun Mountains), starring Tan Xin-pei, the best-known Peking Opera virtuoso of his day, whom the Empress Dowager favoured most. This film is commonly known as the first Chinese film ever made.

Not surprisingly, the first-generation Chinese film-makers were largely drawn from people of theatrical background (notably performers in the Peking opera) and enthusiasts or amateurs of "spoken drama" (the Chinese versions of modern plays). For instance, Zhang Shichuan, one of China's earliest film producers, was a "comprador" (an intermediary through whom a foreign firm trades with Chinese dealers), working for an American company in Shanghai before landing upon filmmaking. Being a theatre lover, he had only seen a handful of films before making his debut. In 1913, funded by western capital, he produced *Troubled Couple*, China's first fictional film, depicting the marriage rituals in feudal China; *Zhuang-zi Questions His Wife* (1913), another historically important production at the time, directed by Li Mingwei, a drama activist, which became the first Chinese film ever exported to the West.
Until the late 1910s, China’s own film industry remained non-existent, and Chinese-language films for consumption by the Chinese market were sponsored predominantly by western capital. Both the emerging Chinese entrepreneurs and bourgeois intellectuals were indifferent towards such exotic form of entertainment. The business community despised it as vulgar and obscene, and wanted to play no part in financing it. In 1918, however, the Commercial Press, a reputable publishing house in Shanghai for advocating western ideas and China’s modernisation, eventually set up a “motion picture department”, China’s first filmmaking organisation. It emphasised that the films should function as a powerful educational apparatus in absorbing western learning, raising social consciousness and serving the public interests. Such objectives were clearly manifest in the genres of films that it produced, displaying its vested interest in non-fictional films: travelogues, newsreels and documentaries, educational films and the Chinese Xiqu (a collective term for China’s traditional opera and folk theatre).

In 1919, when the First World War reached its end, China witnessed what is called the “May 4th Movement”, one of the most important political, cultural and intellectual movements in the century. It was prompted initially by the signing of the Versailles Treaty that allowed the western powers to enjoy a variety of privileges and interests in China. On May 4th, hundreds of thousands of students marched on the streets in Peking, protesting against western imperialism and corrupt government. The demonstration was soon elevated to an explosion of intellectual criticism and debate against traditional Confucian values, and advocated the infusion of western ideas into the Chinese society. However, while western literature, poetry, drama and fine-art were favourably promoted at the time, films remained rejected by the bourgeois intellectuals. Many regarded films as part of western propaganda or colonisation efforts, and were convinced that western films were not only “frivolous, cunning and harmful towards our traditional customs and popular morality...”, but more seriously, “those films on Chinese themes shown abroad usually sought out what happened in the lower reaches of society, and held China up to ridicule” (J. H. Cheng, 1978: p39).
The 1920s was a decade in which China's film industry was primarily shaped and vigorously tested against the ever-stronger American monopoly. Shanghai had become China's biggest film centre (in production, exhibition and distribution). Film-going was an increasingly popular and fashionable entertainment among the urban population; this period was also one of the most confusing and benevolent in the history of Chinese cinema. In 1923, the record box office of *Orphan Rescues Grandfather*, a melodrama produced by Ming Xing Films, a Chinese-owned studio, aroused the envy of many stock-brokers, money lenders and speculators, and they rushed to invest their capital into the film business. This led to a brief period of false prosperity. However, by 1925, most of the 175 Chinese film companies, officially registered in Shanghai, had vanished before even getting one film made.

Between 1928-31, the remaining 50 private companies produced about 400 feature films (an average 100 per year, seemingly a highly figure). It was a commonplace that most of the projects went hurriedly into production without ready-to-use scripts, adequate technical backing or sufficient capital. In some cases, the making of a feature-length film would take only ten days by confining action to a single interior set in a rented hotel suite. The studios had to draw most of their material or sources from the traditional literature of the past, and the tabloid culture of the present. The editorial agenda for tabloid press, as newspapers of commercial entertainment, was identical with the films' thematic preferences: scandal, crime, spectacle and romance. For instance, in Shanghai, a number of well-publicised murder cases were quickly adapted for the screen. As a result, the genre of "melodrama" was highly developed and became the norm.

Meanwhile, the distribution-exhibition network for domestic films remained severely handicapped. By the mid-1920s, there were only 70 cinemas in the whole country where Chinese films might be shown. However, it was the overseas market, home to the large Chinese communities in south-east Asia, including Malaysia, and the Philippines, that helped to secure a considerable financial return and allowed the business to continue. By the late 1920s, having survived the cut-throat competition against foreign rivalry, a number of Chinese film companies,
including Tianyi, Minxin, and Lianhua, were well established with an impressive production capacity.

Film-Going and Audience Behaviour

Unlike the antagonism and resistance that western missionaries had encountered while introducing the religion of Christianity inside China, the introduction of films as an exotic form of western culture was reasonably trouble free, perhaps because its common property was nothing but its technology. However, in Hong Kong, which was already a British colony, the experience was somewhat different. In 1902, when the film show was first staged on the island, the local people could not be persuaded to attend, as they were over-awed by the ideas of objects in motion on the screen. As a last resort, the English showman had to hire a score of local Chinese to be his "guinea-pigs". For three weeks, he paid each of them a stipulated sum for their attendance, until the superstitious fear of "cinema-going" finally died away.

In the high society of the Forbidden City, members of the royal family, incidentally, became China's earliest patrons of the film, the latest addition to the Empress' huge collection of western novelties. However, the reception was somewhat unpleasant. In 1904, the Empress Dowager, on approaching her 70th birthday, was given by Sir Ernest M. Sataw, the UK ambassador to Peking, a film projector and a number of British films. During the first show in the Empress's honour, the projector exploded, and a court official was seriously injured. The Empress subsequently issued a ban forbidding any further film shows inside the Forbidden City. Two years later, a similar incident occurred in which an English interpreter was killed by the blast of the projector. (J. Leyth, 1972: p8). Fortunately, those tragic incidents did not cause any diplomatic rifts at the time.

During the 1920s, film-going had became a respectable part of social life in cities. To affluent westerners and Chinese, an evening film-show was the high point of night life, among a wide choice of diversions. At the same time, it also became accessible to ordinary urban residents.
Film-makers were keen to study the psychology and perceptive behaviour of film-goers. Zhang Shi-chuan, one of the pioneers of Chinese cinema, once told his colleagues that "if you want to find out whether a new film is to be a box-office hit or not, all you need to do is to see whether those housewives can recount the storyline from beginning to end. If yes, this film would be well received." (L. Ke, 1983, p.16).

Film Censorship

As soon as it has its spectators, film can hardly avoid being a major object of political and moral censorship. China's first official film legislation came about in June 1911, only a few months before the Qing Empire was overthrown by the Nationalists. Issued by the Shanghai District Administration, it contained seven articles, including: "permits being required to open a movie house; seats for men and women to be kept separate; all shows to end by midnight." It was concerned more with regulating the behaviour of the film-going public rather than the content of the films. Interestingly, following the abdication of the Qing Emperor, the same legislation was inherited by Dr. Sun Yat-sen's nationalist government.

Up to 1930, film censorship in China was officially non-existent. However, self-styled censors or censoring forces were omnipresent. The target was mainly imported foreign films. Understandably, the humiliations that China had been experiencing since the Sino-British Opium War in 1840 had made the National Government extremely sensitive and alert as to how China was viewed and perceived, in order to safeguard the national dignity and pride. During 1920, a score of foreign films were officially banned largely because of their unfavourable portrayals of the Chinese populace. In 1928, the authorities in Canton banned the American film Ben Hur, on the ground that it advocated "Christian superstition" (W. Burton, 1934: p.597). Meanwhile, the arm of censorship was also extended overseas. When a production with a "Chinese theme" was underway in Hollywood, the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles, would make sure through diplomatic means that it contained no messages that could be interpreted as offensive, biased and distorted.
On 1 January, 1930, the Ministry of the Interior issued China's first ever regulation of film censorship, and the "Drama & Film Censorship Committee" was set up in Shanghai. The code of censorship included mainly three articles:

1) No film may be shown which is in violation of the political principle of the national government or which might affect the dignity and prestige of the nation;  
2) The committee must refuse a license to any film or any part of film which may be disadvantageous to the morality or to the public peace;  
3) Licenses will be refused to all pictures which might conduce to superstitious practices, or might encourage feudalism.

It is understood that the regulation was chiefly a set of political and moral codes or propositions. However, given its highly ambiguous and vague nature, the regulation was open to as many interpretations as the censor would care to have. In other words, the authorities could always hold an upper-hand in exercising its arbitrary mandate. As one Chinese film distributor commented at the time:

Under such conditions, the actual footage taken from any film would be dependent entirely on the personal reaction of the members of the censorship committee. We couldn't say in advance that this picture or that picture would be passed or rejected.

(J. Leyda, 1972: p60)

In contrast to the vague nature of the censorship regulation, its practices were complex and tedious. In the case of Chinese production, the producer had to submit the scripts to the censor board before the production took place, and the film had also to be vetted on its completion; As for foreign films, the censorship practice was more stringent and rigid, in the light of growing agitation against foreign films among Chinese audience; All foreign distributors were required to
apply for licenses, which were good for only three years, and each film had to be censored by the board for approval before public release. One Chinese director observed:

If the film touches on any serious aspect of China today, someone high-up is sure to find something that can be interpreted as criticism of the regime (J. Leyda, 1972: p81)

2.2 THE ADVENT OF REALISM: THE "LEFT-WING FILM MOVEMENT" (1930-37)

Up to the late 1920s, the bourgeois intellectuals were associated with film largely through their fierce criticism of the predominance of western films in China. Lu Xun, one of China's greatest writers and social critics of this century, commented:

European and US imperialists dispose of their old guns to give us wars and unrest, then they use old films to astound us and stupefy us. After the films and guns get even older, they will be sent to the interior of China, to enlarge their potency of making people foolish, (Lu Xun, 1930)

Meanwhile, the West was further convinced that the film would be an effective, accessible and popular means in disseminating western ideas and values. An American film exhibitor observed:

Today it is not so much from missionaries, educators, gunboats, business men and English literature as it is from the cinema that the Chinese learn about the West—particularly the United States. (W. Burton, 1934: p594).

Since the mid-1920s, thanks to the Soviet-orientation of the Nationalist government, the Soviet cinema was introduced into China. In 1926, Seigei Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin, a
monumental work in the history of world cinema, was shown in Shanghai. Lenin's provocative political writing on proletarian cinema was soon translated into Chinese and widely debated in Shanghai's cultural and artistic spheres; at last, a number of bourgeois young artists, including the dramatists Sun Yu and Hong Shen, both educated in the USA, decided to take their part in film-making. On announcing his plan, Hong Shen, then a university professor, was harshly ridiculed by many of his friends, relations and students. One student even called Hong's involvement in filmmaking the "prostitution of art".

The "Left-Wing Film Movement"

On 18 September 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, Northern China, and soon bombèd Shanghai on 28 January 1932. China was facing a national crisis. The bombing in Shanghai had resulted the closures of more than 30 film companies, and almost half of the cinemas run by Chinese were destroyed. The anti-Japanese sentiment among the public was mounting daily, Japanese goods were being boycotted nation-wide. The remaining film studios were seen engaging "left-wing" writers to make patriotic anti-Japanese films. Many film companies realised that anti-Japanese films would also mean high profit at the box office. So, there was immediately a shift among the studio owners towards what could be described as the "economically reasonable patriotism". This had provided an ideal political setting for the emergence of the "Left-wing Film Movement", which had effectively changed the outlook of the Chinese film.

The "Left-Wing Film Movement" was an underground film organisation under the influences of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and its founders were communists (such as Xia Yan, a noted screenwriter). On 18 June 1931, a group of fifteen left-wing film critics published "A Manifesto For the Future Action". In March 1933, the Party endorsed the set-up of "Film Group" in Shanghai, its first film organisation. As Xia Yan recalled, the projected tasks of the movement
were: (1) Promoting "Left-wing" progressive films through film criticism; (2) Introducing more "left-wing" drama activists into film-making; (3) Translating and introducing the scripts of the Soviet films and progressive film theories (Y. Xia, 1985: p231).

Film criticism was thought to be unique and the most successful among all the tasks carried out. At the time, almost all major newspapers and magazines in Shanghai contained their regular section of Film Supplements, run entirely by Left-wing writers. The most distinctive feature of this film criticism movement was its strong socio-political orientation. And, thus, it transformed the common norm of film criticism into a distinctive and subtle form of social critique; As the result of its non-elitist and popular approach, it became a mass movement, involving many ordinary factory workers, teachers, bus conductors, shop-assistants and so on.

Between 1932-37, the Left-wing Film Movement was also the major driving force behind the first "golden era" in the history of Chinese cinema. It was a movement of "Realism". "Left-wing" films were usually identified by the following features: (1) a distinctive proletarian viewpoint; (2) thematically, a strong preference for "casting" ordinary people (i.e. peasants and urban residents) and the hardships of their life; (3) measured social criticism and political messages; (4) an overriding melodramatic outlook. Another important characteristic that had emerged was the distinctive literary-orientation of the Chinese filmmaking. As most of the Left-wing filmmakers were writers, critics or intellectuals of strong literary background, so they placed great importance on script-writing.

1933 was marked as the Year of the Left-wing Film Movement, and 40 out of 70 films produced that year were by Left-wing film-makers. During the period between 1932-37, they altogether produced more than a hundred feature films, and most of them were reportedly well received and also financially successful. The most memorable works of this period are: A Bible for Daughters, New Women, Big Road, Street Angles, Children of Troubled Time, Goddess, and Plunder of Peach and Plum.
Since 1934, as the Left-wing films grew ever popular and influential, the Nationalist authorities were increasingly uncomfortable of what they perceived the "subversive" tendency in Left-wing cinema and decided to "exterminate" them. Threats of banning, arrests and even other violent means were thrown at the left-wing filmmakers as they continued to make films allegedly to incite "the class struggle and the alienation between poor and rich". As a result, the movement had to go further underground fighting a tenacious battle. It still managed to produce several dozens feature films afterwards. Song of A Fisherman, a sentimental story of a poor fishing family, by Cai Chu-shen, was regarded as a monumental work. In Shanghai, it set a new record of continuous running for 84 days. It was later awarded the honorary prize at the Moscow International Film Festival (China's first international award-winning film).

In July 1937, the Japanese army invaded China. In November, Shanghai fell, and several major film studios were seized by the Japanese army. The invasion thus ended the chapter of the Left-Wing Film Movement. Many left-wing filmmakers and artists subsequently fled Shanghai for the interior provinces, devoting themselves to anti-Japanese propaganda warfare.

Having put the unique Left-wing Film Movement into an international context, Jay Leyda, an expert on Chinese and Soviet film, summed up its significance as follows:

For me the most dramatic and the most astonishing period of Chinese film history is the maintenance of an active underground movement in the film industry for almost twenty years. More than any other factor this record distinguishes Chinese films from the films of other countries. Under the threat of two of the most repressive political systems in modern history, the Kuomintang and the Japanese occupation, a group of Chinese revolutionaries made films that continued to reach a large public. The mechanics of this operation have their own fascination. What is of greater significance in the history of the 20th century arts is that these exceptional, bitter, difficult, and often bloody circumstances resulted in the most interesting and lasting Chinese films, superior to what came before, to what was going on above ground at the same time, and in many
important aspects, superior to the Chinese films made in the years well after the triumph of the Chinese revolution (1972: p71)

2.3 COMMUNIST FILM-MAKING IN YAN'AN (1937-45)

In 1935, Mao and a small number of his communist Red Army survived the "extermination" campaign of the National government and the historic "Long March", reached the Northern Shaxi province, and established its base in an area named "Yan'an", which became the Red Capital of the Chinese communist revolution until 1949.

While the left-wing film-makers were engaging in anti-Japanese propaganda warfare in the Nationalist-controlled areas, the communist leadership in Yan'an, decided to create its own film project. To start with, in late 1937, it set up the Anti-Japanese Film Society, a projection unit providing a film-viewing service for the party leadership. For many senior party leaders, this was the start of their life-long hobby: film-watching. In 1938, some film-stock and filming facilities were smuggled into Yan'an, including a cine camera, a gift from Juris Ivens, the Dutch documentary film-maker who was known for his sympathy to the world-wide communist movement. In the Autumn of 1938, the Yan'an Film Team was founded, and two prominent Left-wing filmmakers from Shanghai were among its staff. The team consisted of a mobile projection unit and a film crew. The film crew was ultimately responsible for recording the major activities of the Party leadership and at the same time, making documentary films for political mobilisation. Jiang Qing, a film actress from Shanghai who later became Mao's third wife and one of the leading perpetrators during the Cultural Revolution, also arrived in Yan'an.

The mobile projection unit had also occasionally provided film-viewing for soldiers and neighbouring villagers. It is significant that it was the Party's first experiment on how film could be employed directly as a popular means of political propaganda. As one projectionist described a typical open-air film show at the time:
... Each time before the film, we gave a brief introduction about its content. Moreover, we informed the audiences of what was going on in the world and the local political situation, in order to convey the political education through film watching. Wherever we went for the film show, we would first visit the local party leadership, then prepare the propaganda material for the show. Before the sunset, we usually held a photo exhibition, prepared by the production section, about the political and economic development in the border area. When night arrived, we would read out, before the show, the propaganda materials on current affairs, the party's new policies, and the local political life; If a Soviet film were shown, we would, during the running of credits, introduce to the audiences the storyline of the film. During the show, dialogues and storyline were explained by the projectionist; We also reminded the crowds of the previous sequences during the intervals of changing reels. (M. Z. Yuan, 1985: p22)

In 1942, Mao delivered a famous speech, commonly known as the "A Talk at the Yan'an Forum of Art and Literature", which has the lasting impact on shaping the party policy towards arts and culture. Though no mention of film was in the speech, it had a direct and long-standing impact on the shake-up of its future film policy. The forum was initiated and led by Mao as the result of the large number of writers and other artists who came from the petty bourgeois Shanghai to the Red Base during the war. Mao Tse-tung claimed that:

In the Shanghai period, the audience for the revolutionary works of literature and art consisted primarily of students, office workers, and shop assistants. In general rear (the Guomintang-controlled areas) after the war broke out, this circle expanded a little, but it still consisted primarily of the same people because the government has kept workers, peasants and soldiers away from literature and art. It is a completely different matter in our base areas. The audience for works of literature and art here consists of workers, peasants and soldiers, together with their cadres in the Party, the government and the army. (See B. McDougall's a translation of the 1943 text, 1980: p69-70)
In this speech, Mao also set out the historic mission for all revolutionary artists and writers in China, and that is: to expose all dark forces which endanger the people and to extol all the revolutionary struggles of the people, to make art and literature a component part of the whole revolutionary machine, to make them a powerful weapon for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy, and to help the people to fight with one heart and one mind. (also see B. McDougall's a translation of the 1943 text)

The Yan'an Film Team was dissolved in 1945, following the victory of the Anti-Japanese War. All the members were then dispatched to north-east China, recently liberated from the Japanese occupation. In July 1946, having taken over the seized Japanese film studios, they set up the north-east Film Studios.

2.4 MAO'S RED CHINA AND ITS FILMS (1949-76)

On 1 October, 1949, Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's National government, and the victory of the Chinese communist revolution. The People's Republic of China was established. The new regime began to embark on its historical mission in transforming China, both economically and ideologically. At the time, the problems were daunting, in the words of two leading authorities in Chinese studies, R. MacFarquhar and J. Fairbank:

Society and policy were fragmented, public order and morale had decayed, a war-torn economy suffered from severe inflation and unemployment, and China's fundamental economic and military backwardness created monumental impediments to the elite's goals of national wealth and power. (1987: p51)

The preparation for its new film industry had proceeded well ahead. In 1948, the Party's Central Committee issued a number of decrees on film censorship, thematic preferences in filmmaking, the training of filmmaking personalities and the taking-over of the Nationalist film industry.
By 1949, China remained one of the slowest nations in the world to develop its national film industry and film market. There were merely 646 cinemas nation-wide, concentrated in major cities. The size of film audiences was still very small, with an annual 47 million that year against 600 million population. The rural population had seldom or never been exposed to film; Domestic film production was limited in both quality and quantity, while the market was overwhelmingly dominated by American films.

In April 1949, the Party's Propaganda Department formed the Central Film Management Bureau, headed by Yuan Mu Zhi, a prominent "Left-wing" film-maker; The seized Nationalist-controlled film studios were soon converted into the Beijing Film Studios, the Shanghai Film Studios, together with the East-North Film Studios, forming the main pillar for the industry; Meanwhile, the film distribution-exhibition network was blueprinted.

It is true that on the level not of individuality but of national film practice within a framework of a cinema of liberation, China, following the Communist victory, was among the first countries to address directly about the development of its cinema industry and its socio-political functioning. Its model was neither commercial nor art cinema, but a political one which was deeply influenced by the Soviet system of film-making.

The Nationalisation of Privately-owned Studios

As the largest filmmaking centre in China, Shanghai was home to the majority of the film studios, which were largely privately-owned. In May 1951, a year and half after the communist victory, there were around 10 private studios remaining in operation. In the new era, most of them, according to the Party, were facing two major problems: first, the shortage of scripts; second, deficiency of financial resources. The first problem underlined the ideological confusion of those studios, culminating in a totally unfamiliar socio-political environment, Communist China. Now, films made by the communist-owned studios, and the imported Soviet films, were
politically favourable. Those by the private studios were side-lined, and sometimes resulting in a very poor box-office, as they didn't strike a sympathetic and harmonious chord with the rapid changes of political reality.

As a transitional measure, the Party decided to provide private studios with film scripts. By the end of 1949, the Institute of Film Literature in Shanghai, headed by Xia Yan, once the leading member of the "Left-wing Film Movement", was set up to carry out such a task. Soon, the political tensions on the private studios mounted as the result of the breakout of the Korean War in 1951, and American films were consequently banned throughout mainland China. The Party was determined to eliminate wherever possible the legacy of American imperialist culture in China. More seriously, *Life of Wu Xun*, a production of a private studio, was condemned by Mao personally as an anti-party reactionary film. Some other films by the private sectors were also affected. The nationalisation of the private studios became imminent. In January 1952, all remaining eight private studios were merged into the state-owned Shanghai Film Studios. As Paul Clark has remarked, the nationalisation process, which had taken more than a decade in the Soviet Union, took merely three years in China (P. Clark, 1987: p 38).

**Film Censorship and Party Politics**

The Party's first decree on film censorship (script censorship in particular) was issued in October 1948. It spelled out the fundamental principles for its practices of political censorship. It claimed, in a relatively measured tone, that

> Censorship criterion will approve any film as long as it is anti-imperialist, anti-feudal and anti-bureaucratic capitalism, and as long as they are not anti-Russian, anti-Communist and anti-people's democracy. Films which are not politically-related, or harmless from a propaganda point of view but artistically significant, should also be permitted.
Filmmakers, in particular script writers, directors and performers, should be organised to study the basics of Marxism and Leninism, to arm them with a Marxist-Leninist perspective, and to understand politics and party policies. In so doing, they would be able to create profound artistic works which would appeal to the people. In a class-based society, film propaganda is nothing but a tool of class struggle. (H. M. Chen, 1989: p28)

However, the Party's first wave of film censorship was conducted with much fuss. In July 1950, Zhou Enlai, the Premier and for the filmmakers a highly regarded political patron, proposed to set up a "Film Guidance Committee", a national film censorship body with a total of 32 members representing a cross section of government bodies, such as propaganda, arts, education, industry and the army. The major task for the committee was to "comment on each film script, synopsis, and production-distribution plans, submitted by both the state and private film studios." (H. M. Chen, 1989: p70). It had absolute power over each production proposal, each script, and even each filming schedule. It even laid its hands on deciding the running order of credits. The practices were harsh and arbitrary. Within a period of only a year, more than 40 scripts were abruptly vetoed. As a result of such interferences, no feature-length film was produced between 1951-52, and the cinema suffered its first ever serious shortage of films since the Communist victory. The Party had, consequently, to dissolve the committee, and venture other more effective yet more productive means of political control and regulation. It is worth noting, though, that this was the Party's first trial of film censorship through an institutionalised body. As a result of this disastrous performance, the Party favoured, on the one hand, to internalise the censorship practice by distinctively "prescriptive" measures and self-censorship, and on the other hand, resorting to massive political criticism campaigns.

In 1951, the political campaign against Life of Wu Xun, directed by Sun Yu, an American-educated filmmaker, was the first major incident of film censorship. The film tells the sentimental story of Wu Xun, a legendary beggar in the feudal time of the Qing Dynasty, who later becomes the founder of a village charity school. He is willing to endure all sorts of
humiliations and physical assault in exchange for the funds to support charity education. Mao was apparently so outraged that he even himself penned an editorial for the People's Daily, the Party's mouthpiece. He challenged that why people like Wu Xun didn't strive to revolt the feudal establishment instead of surrendering to the feudal masters for mercy and charity. Moreover, he condemned the film as a manifestation of "the horrendous ideological confusion in the cultural sphere" and "the invasion of reactionary capitalist ideology into the Communist Party.

Having claimed to be the legitimate representative of the people's will, the communist government conducted its film censorship mainly through administrative measures and instructions. In 1952, the Party began to implement its latest film policy: "Making Films About Workers, Peasants and Soldiers" and "Writing Important Themes". It suggested that films should be only written about workers, peasants and soldiers. Moreover, they should concentrate on the Party's political agenda and policy matters, then turning them into the film versions of political textbooks.

In 1953, the Party attempted to modify its film policy and censorship practices, which had again proved to be rigid, ineffective and distracting. It announced that "the party leadership concerning artistic creation should mainly be an ideological leadership, but not by giving orders and instructions." (Xi Zhen, 1953: p3-12). However, it was soon after proved to be otherwise.

China's film industry and its administration was mainly shaped by the Soviet model. China had learnt from the Soviet Union to implement political censorship through the centrally planned economy. From the very beginning, the Party leadership had shown its intention to manage the film industry in exactly the same way as it managed the production of steel, rice and cotton. In December 1953, the State Council issued "The Decree on Strengthening Film Work", and for the first time, the production ratio on "themes" was imposed in accordance with the party's policy and ideological agenda.
At the time, it also recommended nine categories of themes that the Party preferred: (1) Revolutionary struggle under the leadership of the communist party; (2) Industrial construction and workers' life; (3) Agricultural production, rural reconstruction and farmers' life; (4) themes concerning the "Anti-American and Aid-North Korea" campaign and safeguarding peace; (5) The People's Liberation Army in safeguarding the country; (6) Life of the ethnic minorities; (7) Others, including subject on public security, intellectuals, students and children; (8) History and historical figures; (9) Adaptation of literary works, fables and legends. By the end of each financial year, heads of the film studios would have to get ready their thematic plans to be approved for the next financial year; At the same time, the censorship of scripts and synopses remained stringently controlled by the Film Bureau and the Ministry of Culture.

The party's arts and cultural policy seemed always contradictory, centred upon a dilemma that could never been solved. On the one hand, it compelled the artists to strict political orthodoxy and ideological correctness; on the other, it tried to stimulate or provoke them to work productively in their own disciplines. This dilemma had produced a chronically cyclical policy towards artists, in particular the filmmakers and literary workers, which oscillated between periods of repression and periods of relative relaxation and openness. In May 1956, Mao called the "Let's A Hundred Schools of thoughts in Debate, A Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign, encouraging the people, in particular the intellectuals, to voice their concerns and criticism on the shortcomings of party policies and the regime as a whole. The Party decided consequently that the censorship of film literary scripts, director's notes, or shooting scripts would only be carried out by film studios, and would not need to be submitted to the Film Bureau. In a nationwide debate on the Party's film policy, both the filmmakers and the public felt strongly about the way in which film-making had been handled by the Party. Lao She, one of the best known contemporary Chinese writers, exhorted the authorities "To Save the Films". Zhong Dian-Fei, a young film critic working in the Propaganda Dept at the time, delivered a sharp criticism, in a newspaper article entitled *The Gongs and Drums in the Film World*. He claimed that the Party's control of film-making was "too tedious, excessive and stringent. Also, its excessive emphasis on the uniformity of style is no good to film production" (Zhong Dianfei: 1956, p 3).
Mao was unprepared and alarmed by the extent of antagonism among the intellectuals towards his policies, and thus initiated the "Anti-Rightist" political campaign in 1957, suppressing those non-conforming intellectuals. Zhong's article was condemned as an "anti-Party signal". Zhong himself was condemned as a reactionary "Rightist". Many veteran filmmakers were also purged as "Rightists", their works were criticised and eventually banned.

Only a year later, in 1958, Mao launched the "Great Leap Forward" campaign, a mass movement aiming to accelerate China's industrialisation process, which aimed to "equal the USA and surpass Britain" in the near future. However, Mao's political utopianism had turned the movement into a frenzied mass action of irrationality and absurdity. The consequences, both economically and politically, were disastrous. In order to play an active part, the Film Bureau responded by setting up many make-shift film studios even at a rural county level. It also blindly increased the scale of film production and also encouraged the growing tendency of amateurism in film-making. Among 105 feature films made that year, the majority of them were strikingly rough in quality (even by the party's own standards). In the midst of the Great Leap Forward, the purge against the film-makers continued. Kang Sheng, the Party's leading ideologue, demanded to eradicate the so-called "White Flags on the Screen", the allegedly anti-party reactionary films. He also warned that "film scripts should be censored, re-censored and censored again, even by resorting to undemocratic means" (H. M. Chen, 1989: p166).

As we have already noted, since the founding of the People's Republic, after each stormy political campaign, when the artists and intellectuals grew disillusioned and hesitated to speak their mind, the Party would engineer a brief interval of relative relaxation. "The occurrences as such were governed by their own dialectic as the regime sought to establish a balance between the opposing forces of orthodoxy and creativity" (M. Goldman, 1981: p9). In 1959, the tenth anniversary of the People's Republic, came another brief period of political relaxation, two years after the brutal "Anti-Rightist" campaign. For film-making, it was a memorable year as having contributed some
of the masterpieces in the history of Chinese films, including Lin's Family Shop, Lin Zexu, Song of Youth, Golden Flowers, and Storm.

Between 1961-66, we witnessed yet another series of political campaigns that affected the course of film-making. In 1961, a new slogan, which was: Only write about the thirteen-year history of socialist China (1949-63). Such policy was enthusiastically promoted by the ultra-leftists within the party leadership. It claimed that all artistic works should be concerned with only about the Chinese socialist life. Then, in 1964, with Mao's consent, Kang Sheng, the party's ideological chief, publicly denounced several dozen films, including Early Spring in February, Jiangnan in the North and Stage Sisters. In January 1966, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, another 60 more feature films were banned.

The complexity of film politics and censorship under Mao could be partly explained by the special and sometimes extremely close relationship between the party leadership and film-making as a whole. The role of the Party leadership was a combination of instructor, arbitrator, patron and repressor. People outside China may be astonished by the extent to which the Chinese leadership had involved themselves personally with film-making. For instance, Premier Zhou Enlai, who was regarded as a mentor figure, is an interesting example. During his inspection trips nation-wide, he frequently visited the film studios and locations, offering his advice. He acted as the executive producer for the epic musical East is Red, a highly acclaimed masterpiece of propaganda. He presided at, or attended most of the important meetings concerning the film-making; He intervened personally in order to secure a better deal for at least a dozen politically-controversial films; It could be argued that the politicians' deep personal interests and involvement in film-making may have resulted in making the film-making a haunting and troubled political playground.

2.5 THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: THE MAKING OF "MODEL FILMS" (1966-1976)
On 16 May 1966, Mao Tse-Tung declared the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, as an attempt to revive China's revolutionary fervour, and to purge those political rivals whom he regarded as "capitalist roaders" or "revisionists". It immediately led to the downfall of Liu Shaoqi, the President of the People's Republic, Deng Xiaoping, the General Secretary of the Communist Party and many other leading officials.

Film-making and other areas of the arts were immediately affected. The Beijing Film Academy, China's only film academy, was immediately dismantled. At Shanghai Film Studios, 309 out of its 1,000-strong working force were politically denounced. Among 108 directors, scriptwriters, actors and actresses, 104 were detained or imprisoned; At Beijing Film Studios, more than one third of its 800 staff were condemned as "anti-revolutionaries"; In Changchun Film Studios, over 40% of its production staff were prosecuted (H. M. Chen, 1989: p324-5). However, the production of newsreels and propaganda documentaries was gearing up, documenting Mao's over-stretched political activities and the Cultural Revolution.

For the first time, Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, was in the political limelight. She was appointed to the Politburo, the Party's top administrative body, and then became one of the five members for the almighty "Cultural Revolution Steering Group". She was put in charge of culture, propaganda and arts affairs, including film-making.

Film-making during the Cultural Revolution can be easily divided into two periods. Firstly, the period of 1966-70 during which the production of feature films was completely halted, with no single feature film produced. Secondly, the period between 1971-76, during which film production was finally resumed but was characterised by the phenomenon of "Model Opera Films".

"Revolutionary Modern Opera" Films (Yang-ban-xi): Origin and Its Aesthetics
In 1970, when the most violent and chaotic period of the Cultural Revolution was over, Premier Zhou Enlai called for the production of feature films to be resumed immediately; between 1970-72, under Jiang Qing's direct supervision, China produced eight feature-length films, adapted mainly from their staged versions of "Revolutionary Model Operas" or Yang-Ban-Xi. To be exact, they included: five operas (The Red Lantern, Shajiabang, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy, Raid on White Tiger Regiment, In the Dock), two ballets (The Red Detachment of Women and White-haired Girl); one symphony (Shajiabang).

The Peking opera emerged as a distinctive theatrical form in the first part of the 19th century. It is a popular form of theatre. Its structure is heavily formulated; the repertory in the past drew mainly from earlier plays and traditional novels and folk tales. The music scores are relatively simple and formulated with a limited number of aria sequences, and the dominant instruments are percussion and Hu Qing, the two-string fiddle. Mao himself was a lover of Peking opera, and his interest in reforming it can be dated back to the early 1940s when he was in Yan'an. However, it was not until the early 1960s that the Party set out to fulfil this task. Jiang Qing, a middle-ranking official from the Ministry of Culture at the time, was made to take charge of the Peking opera reform, eventually landing herself the personal responsibility for the creation of a new model theatre for the nation, built upon the structure and symbolism of socialist life; As Jiang Qing believed that arts shape consciousness and her overall goal was to purify or improve, "revolutionising", people's minds. To her credit, in the mid-1960s, the "Model Opera" repertory was publicly cited as the rich fruit of socialist culture. As R.Witke, an American correspondent and the author of "Comrade Chiang Ching (Jiang Qing)" observed:

In the workshop of revolution Chiang Ching's special assignment was to cast ideas as social levers built into the performing arts. Her revolutionary dramas are stocked with physically glamorous and morally (red, politically) good characters of both sexes belonging to successive generations. Through the dark hypnotism of the theatre, their styles and values are transmitted consciously and unconsciously by mimetic into people's daily life. (R. Witke, 1977: p381).
According to one famous Chinese saying: Chinese learning for substance and Western learning for function. Mao had also exhorted the people to follow similar tactics: "weed through the old to bring forth the new, and make things foreign serve things Chinese". One distinctive feature in Jiang Qing's Model Opera Movement was the justification and infusion of foreign ideas and devices (in particular those originating from the Capitalist West) into new fabrics for the construction of socialist culture, despite the total denunciation and banning of the Capitalist culture and values. She was increasingly convinced, through her music self-education, that the versatility of western musical instruments or genres could greatly enhance the aesthetic profoundness and expressive power of her creation: the Model Revolutionary Opera. The piano (which she studied briefly when she was young), symphony and ballet, were her particular areas of interest. The Peking opera version of the Red Lantern With Piano Accompaniment, Yellow River Piano Concerto, Yellow River Cantata, ballets Red Detachment of Women and White-haired Girl, were the result of her experimental undertakings. All the "model works" were chiefly accompanied by an enlarged symphony orchestra or a mixture of western and Chinese instruments. However, tunes, tempi, staging styles, acrobatics, stylised movement or routines (such as 'posing') were salvaged to maintain a familiar shape and to serve new political and cultural goals. Stylistically, those "model works" were the result of fusion of traditional Peking opera, ballet and western-style orchestra.

Jingo Ding had pushed Mao's idea of art politics and the notion of "socialist realism" (the Party's prime artistic dogma imported from the Soviet Union), to the extreme. As for "creative methods", she devised what was so-called" three-way combination" of political leadership, artists and the masses: the leadership set the theme or subject matter; then artists were expected to contribute their creative skills and talents in realising and accomplishing the theme; The masses were to offer their opinions and criticism. Each stage of creation, the masses were be consulted for the improvement of the "model" works. Moreover, artists were required to abide by the guideline of what was epitomised as the "Three Prominence" or San-tu-chu in Chinese, which is ideologically heavily formulated:
Among all the characters, give prominence to positive characters.

Among positive characters, give prominence to heroic characters.

Among the heroic characters, give prominence to the main heroic character.

Naturally, Jiang Qing's undertaking in transplanting her "Model Operas" onto the big screen followed an identical dogmatic route, but turned out to be more onerous and troublesome.

Having behaved as China's cultural commissar at the time, Jiang Qing, as a former film actress, was thrilled by the enormous capacity that the films could offer to maximise both the political influence and the audiences for the "Model Operas". During the making of almost each "Model Opera" film, she often issued detailed instructions on every aspect of the production, from casting to scripting, from dialogue to costumes, from music scores to props, etc.; In order to achieve the highest possible technical qualities, that China could not have delivered at the time, she instructed the importation of a large quantity of high-quality film stock from the West, and her economics of film-making, unlike that in the capitalist world, was not measured commercially -- what makes money -- but what makes political and ideological sense. The budget for each of her films was reportedly well above 1 million Yuan, about three times as much for a feature production in the mid-1970s. Owing to Jiang Qing's censorious and temperamental personality, at least two film productions were forced to be remade. For instance, the first version of In the Dock, by Shanghai Film Studios, was rejected on the ground of her dislike of the colour of a neck cloth that the leading lady wears, and a remake was thus made. Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy, Jiang Qing's most favourable production, also by Shanghai Film Studios, was approved by Jiang Qing for public release after three painstaking and wasteful remakes.

As an amateur photographer of certain talent, Jiang Qing had also rewritten the "Three Prominence" principle into a new film language. In order to glorify the revolutionary heroic figures, she stipulated that 'enemy figures should be visually placed far back, dim and small in their presence, while the heroes and heroines should be placed to the up-front, brightly lit, and
imposing" Understandably, her aesthetics were largely at odds with the notion of "realism". She
once spoke to an American reporter about the highly charged scene in Red Lantern, where Li Yu-
he, an underground communist, visits his imprisoned mother. She explained that:

Since he has just got out of prison, logically his clothing and hair should be dishevelled.
But because he is on the verge of becoming a martyr, we have made him appear clean
and tidy, for he must present a dignified image. We don't go in for naturalism. (R.
Witke, 1977: p410)

For a long time in the West, the "Model Opera" was thought to be synonymous with the Cultural
Revolution. During the first half of the 1970s, most of the "Model Opera" films had been shown
in the West, mainly through non-commercial channels, such as left-wing movement and film
societies, with a rather mixed reception. What is certain is that they astonished the world, since
no other nation had reconstructed its theatre, film-making and music, by totally denying its own
traditions, culture and the nature of common humanity so completely.

The Films and Film-Going: The Making of A New Audience;

Immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic, the Party set out to popularise film-
viewing nation-wide, in particular in rural areas, by demonstrating commitment to creating a
proletarian mass culture. In 1949, there were less than 600 cinemas nation-wide. By 1952, they
had been increased to 2,200 exhibition units (including mobile projection teams), and the film
audiences reached 560 million that year (H. M. Chen, 1991: p266). In rural areas, the Party had
largely relied upon mobile projection units to provide regular "open-air" film shows for the vast
rural populations. By, 1957, the number of film exhibition units nation-wide had approached
nearly 10,000, 14 times more than in 1949. The size of film audiences had increased to 1.7
billion. Mobile projection units had also reached most of the rural population.
From the very beginning, the Party was facing an enormous task to create a new generation of "film-goers" that would reflect, and be compatible with, the nature of China's communist revolution and its values. Therefore, the ways in which film-going had been perceived and shaped by the new regime, were largely politically motivated. What the Party intended was to make film-going a popular form of political participation and education. During the undertaking of every political campaign under Mao, large or small, there was always a special film program to propagate the campaign and the Party's policies at large. The audiences were encouraged to reveal their viewing experiences as a way to demonstrating their political loyalty or conformation to the new regime, and they were no longer in the position of "consumers". The government had also fixed the price of film admission artificially low (the fee of around one penny per ticket remained unchanged throughout the Mao era), literally denying the films' commodity nature, which might have posed some threats to the monolithic socialist culture. Of all the purposes of film-making during Mao's time, entertainment was the least important.

Under Mao, the access that the Chinese film-goers had to foreign films was very limited. They were mainly imported from China's communist allies with whom the regime felt comfortable ideologically at different periods. In 1950, in the aftermath of the eruption of the Korean War, the regime first boycotted and then outlawed American films in China for nearly three decades. In the 1950s, Soviet and Eastern European films constituted the bulk of imports to China. A "Soviet Film Season" was regularly held in the major cities, and was a high point of cultural life. In the mid-1950s, the public began to have access to a small number of Euro-American films which the regime regarded as politically "progressive" or at least "acceptable", including De Sica's Bicycle Thieves (Italy), David Lean's Oliver Twist (UK), and Lawrence Olivier's Hamlet (UK). As a result of the worsening Sino-Soviet ideological confrontation, Soviet films quickly disappeared from the Chinese screen during the course of the early 1960s.

Film-going as a whole under Mao, was constructed as part of the ideological indoctrination that encouraged people to identify favourably with the qualities, ethics and life style of "New Socialist Men" ("heroes" or "role models"), a new kind of human being that incorporated all the
praiseworthy moral characteristics. Thus, viewing was designated as a collective political activity, and a mental process of self-identification, self-examination and self-criticism. For instance, in schools, students were regularly given assignments in writing "film reviews" in order to make sure that their interpretations of the films concerned were politically correct and ideologically orthodox. Occasionally, "heroic" fictional characters were promoted as the "role models" for revolutionary heroism.

However, what happened to the film-going public during the Cultural Revolution again illustrated the absurdity and destructive nature of the Revolution. First, virtually all Chinese films made between 1949-1965 were banned from public screening, so were all the imported foreign films. Second, between 1966-1969, as has been mentioned, feature production was completely halted. Cinemas were mainly turned into venues for public denunciation rallies or frenzied political propaganda.

From 1970 onwards, the arrival of the "Eight Model Opera" films caused initially a sensation nation-wide among China's 800 million population. However, the way the Party had promoted them soon exhausted the film-goers. In the cities, tickets were in most cases allocated, free of charge, through factories, schools and street committees. Up to 1976, the authorities had each year to organise a nation-wide re-run of the "Model Films", as partly a measure to fill the shortage of the filming program, and partly as a way to promote their cultural immortality; According to the official figures, by 1976, each Chinese had apparently viewed *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* for seven times.

In 1974, the public nation-wide, from factory workers to commune peasants, were dragged into a political campaign denouncing a documentary film on China, made by the Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni, for failing to honour the great achievements of socialist China. Allegedly by displaying too much passion to old building, primitive rural life and traditional farming, he was accused of "using camera to slander the Cultural Revolution, insult people and attack the leadership" (Beijing Review, 1974, Issue 5).
Since 1970, China had resumed its import of foreign films mainly from Albania, Romania, Vietnam, and North Korea, China's remaining political allies. To ordinary Chinese, they were the only possible resource of knowledge about the outside world. At the time, films from Albania and Romania were in particular well received, being the hottest properties in the film market because they occasionally included hints of intimacy and affection that were generally prohibited in Mao's China. Despite the fact that the sequences of kissing or other intimacy were cut out by the censors (in order to protect the moral well being of its public), these films still had a great capacity to attract notoriety and sensation among the public. Some doggerel, summing up humorously the characteristics of foreign films, reads:

- Vietnamese Films, Bombers and Cannons (war-centred);
- North Korean Films, Weeping and Laughing (sentimental);
- Albanian Films, Kissing and Embracing (sensual);
- Chinese Films, Newsreels and Documentaries (boring);

Another legendary example about the reception of foreign films, which most of the Chinese audience would be familiar with, was the viewing of Romm's *Lenin in 1918*, one of the Soviet Union's propaganda masterpieces lauding the achievements of Lenin. The beginning of the film contains a sequence of the ballet "Swan Lake", staged in Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, watched by members of the Russian aristocracy before they were shocked by the announcement on the stage that the Tsar had been executed. That short sequence of ballet dance was probably the most sensual bodily scene that Chinese film-goers had ever encountered since the communist victory. The reason why this scene had been mercifully spared by the censors was, in my view, that they had to rely upon this particular scene to announce the news of Tsar's death and the message of Lenin's revolution (according to some of my generation whom I interviewed during my field research in China in 1990, it was the most memorable part of their film-going life, and it was
mainly for that very scene that they had found themselves again and again meeting beloved Lenin.)

In the major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, the cinema became, understandably, almost the only social rendezvous that survived the Cultural Revolution, as tea shops, coffee houses, dancing halls and amusement parks had all been closed down. Of course, the increasingly worsening housing shortage had also been an important factor in making cinemas such special places. However, it was far from being an ideal venue for social purposes or a bit of privacy. Under Mao, the regime had constantly advocated a so-called proletarian lifestyle that rejected the universal notion of humanity and humanism, and penalised all social behaviour that was at odds with its puritanical moral yardstick. The nation was submerged in an atmosphere of asceticism. In some of the urban cinemas, there were what was called "united security teams", patrolling in the dark, while a show was in progress. The members of the team were usually drawn from volunteers from the local paramilitary, street committees, neighbourhood factories and retired residents. Armed with electric torches, those "moral policemen" swarmed around the darkened auditorium, vigilant, searching for any trace of moral wrongdoing or turpitude. If "obscene" or "unhealthy" behaviour was suspected (i.e. kissing or any intimate move or merely sitting too close to persons of the opposite sex), a dazzling torch-light would shine on the alleged offenders as a warning. In serious cases, "offenders" would be led away, and then receiving a lecture of moral teaching, or reported such incidents respectively to their "work units", schools or families. The poem below may epitomised the national experience of cinema-going among China's younger generation during the Cultural Revolution, and their cultural life. It could be translated as below:

When we talked about our childhood,
We immediately began to think about Albania,
There was no *Anna Karenina* or *the Red and Black*,
Our classic reading was *the Eighth is a Statue* (a Albania film),
At that time, nobody greeted each other with 'good morning' or 'how are you',
At that time, as soon as I "wiping out the Fascism",
You would reply with “freedom belongs to the people” (a pair of secret code between the underground resistance forces in the film),

This sacred code made all our meetings sacred and intimate,

We grown up watching the Albania films...

(J. Liu quoted in M. Wu, 1995: p10)

In rural areas, the “open-air” film show, provided by state-sponsored mobile film units and paid by the villages’ public funds, had been the most important entertainment in the life of the Chinese rural population. Moreover, it had also been turned into a political institution. The villages’ party committees often organised the public meetings in conjunction with the “open-air” shows, informing and propagating to the villagers the latest party politics and other policies on local matters.

While ordinary Chinese were antagonised by the shortage of films and other leisure activities, the political leaders, many of whom were life-long film enthusiasts, had no personal worries in this regard. Within the Zhongnaihai Compound, though western-style ballroom dances (that Mao and other leaders enjoyed before the Cultural Revolution) were no longer staged, they retained some access to Western films, even some new releases from Hollywood, despite the on-going hostility between China and America. All the acquired foreign films were synchronised with Chinese sound tracks, mainly by the Shanghai Dubbing Studios.

According to the protocol or privilege codes for the leadership at the time, only members of the Politburo were supposed to be able to show films at their residences. Jiang Qing had, over the years, established a personal film archive by acquiring foreign films through the embassies, film exchange or other channels. In 1973, one year after Nixon’s historical visit to China, Jiang Qing sent to the US a filmed version of White Hair Girl, the “Model” ballet in exchange for a print of The Sound of Music, starring Julie Andrews. To a large extent, it was those foreign films which had kept her abreast of the latest developments in film-making internationally, and shaped her
technical criteria for the "Model Films". Having seen the Mexican film Cold Heart, she was very excited by its treatment of colour and light (R. Witke, 1977: p401). As self-styled expert, she would often organise weekly film shows for the high-ranking officials as a means of currying personal favours.

Mao had never actually been a film lover in his life, despite his apparent habit of preceding his political campaigns with a "film" incident. His literary or artistic talents were realised in his mastery of, or interests in some ancient Chinese forms of arts such as classic poetry, calligraphy and the Peking Opera, but he had rarely displayed personal interest or enthusiasm for any form of modern art, in particular those originated in the West. In January 1976, nine months before his death, it was arranged for Mao to see An Unforgettable Battle, a new release by Shanghai Film Studios. It is a melodrama about the PLA soldiers' heroic battle against the hidden Kuomingtang agents in the eve of the Communist victory. It was his last experience of cinema-going.

2.7 A Brief Statistical Survey on China's Film Industry Under Mao

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film Studios</th>
<th>Year of Establishment</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changchun</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Changchun, Jiling Province</td>
<td>Fiction &amp; Dubbing Foreign Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August First (PLA)</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Fiction &amp; Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhujiang</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Guangzhou (Canton)</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xi'an</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Xi'an, Shanxi Province</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emei</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Chendu, Sichuan Province</td>
<td>Documentary &amp; Popular Scientific Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaoxiang</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Changsha, Hunan Province</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Naining, GuangXi Autonomous Region</td>
<td>Dubbing for Ethnic-Language Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianshan</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Wulumuqi, Xingjiang Autonomous Region</td>
<td>Dubbing for Ethnic Language Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Mongolia</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Huhehaote, Inner Mongolia</td>
<td>Dubbing for Ethnic Language Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai Animation</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Animation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Documentary</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Newsreels &amp; Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai Scientific</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Popular Scientific Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing Scientific</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Popular Scientific Films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai Dubbing</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Dubbing Foreign Films</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Complied from *Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (1989), Beijing: China Social Science Press.
## Table 2.2

Production of Films in China (1949-76)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Feature Productions</th>
<th>Cartoons</th>
<th>Popular Science Films</th>
<th>Documentary Films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>481</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>161</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>159</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td>179</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>388 in total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

To present the 80-year old history of the Chinese Films in such a limited space, I am fully aware that there is always a danger of generalisation. It is self-evident that under Mao, films served chiefly as an apparatus for ideological indoctrination and popular mobilisation and had been heavily politicised. They had been manipulated to serve, and participate in, party politics and political struggles.
However, from a historical perspective, the reasoning of such characteristics should not be isolated or divorced from their pre-communist past. We must take into account the unique socio-political situation into which the Chinese films were born and developed. The film, a technical novelty from the West, was introduced to China at the height of the West's semi-colonisation of China; The rise of China's national film-making in the 1930s was shaped directly by the national crisis resulting from the invasion of Japanese imperialists and the continuing civil wars between the Nationalists and Communists. These factors have contributed to the rise of Chinese film's distinctively strong political orientation that has also become part of its tradition and legacy.

The literary tradition that has been displayed in Chinese films is also an important feature. The view that film-making is literary-oriented is deeply rooted among Chinese film-makers and film scholars. Such a characteristic demonstrates the close link between the films and China's rich, profound literary sources. Meanwhile, it also exposed the Chinese film-makers' relative ignorance and prejudices towards one of the most important aspects of filmmaking, the visual language and its presentation. Having acknowledged this, we may be able to understand the reason why the belated rise of the "Fifth Generation", marked by its distinctive visual style, has initially caused so much hostility and cynicism among its predecessors, and also commands such significance that marks the birth of a new era for the Chinese films.

Since film had reached most of the Chinese population (in particular its vast peasantry) after the founding of the People's Republic, it is understandable that their perception of film-viewing was largely hammered out by the political nature of Mao's regime. Film-viewing was structured and promoted as a collective quasi-political participation. The public were, therefore, trained to identify and associate film with political and moral messages that the Party intended to disseminate. The films at this time almost became an authorised textbook for political correctness that guided people's everyday life.

Finally, we must consider the political economy of the Chinese cinema. Under Mao, the Chinese cinema industry was solely state-owned. Within the framework of a highly planned economy, it
was administrated as chiefly an ideological and cultural apparatus rather than an industry in its strict sense. No film studios and film-makers had to worry about financial pressures or box-office receipts, and all they was required of them was their political loyalty towards the Party's political needs. Film-goers were consequently deprived of their rights to become "consumers". It was only through such stringent economic control that the Party managed to achieve its ideological control as well as financial profits.
3

TOWARDS MARKET AND COMMERCIALISATION

--- AN ANALYSIS OF CHINESE CINEMA INDUSTRIAL REFORM

We have discussed in the last chapter how under Mao, film-making's commercial nature had been flatly denied and denounced from the earliest days. As for Mao, the question as to whom film-making and arts should serve commanded the fundamental importance that distinguishes his notion of Communist culture, aiming to serve and educate the proletarian masses, from the Capitalist bourgeois one, in which the production and provision of arts were only for the profit and pleasure of those who owned the means by which they were produced. The mode of the film industry under Mao was consequently a major part of an ideological apparatus and propaganda instrument, rather than a cultural industry that respected both the law of economy and the human needs for pleasure and entertainment.

In this chapter we propose to discuss the issue of the Commercialisation process, from an industrial or economic point of view, through which the Chinese cinema has been struggling to survive. This is an issue which has long been neglected or often misunderstood both in China and abroad. It presents a problem: Why has the Chinese cinema, a traditionally ideologically-motivated means of mass propaganda, an indicator of social consensus and a battlefield for 'political interests', now found itself fighting for profit, entertainment and a pluralistic popular culture, which it was once so against, and which it so hated? How did this come about? This chapter will focus mainly upon those industrial elements, such as production, distribution, exhibition, government policy and the change of control mode and practice. As M. Chan rightly suggested that the importance of media commercialisation "paralleled that of the organised demand for freedom of expression as witnessed during the pro-democracy movement in 1989."

He further argued that it is the "diffusion" of economic reforms into ideological and cultural domain and the erosion of the party's control over ideological sphere. (1993: p252).
3.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHINESE FILM INDUSTRY IN THE POST-MAO ERA

As we have shown, in the last chapter, under Mao, China had established a colossal film industry and an equally gigantic nation-wide distribution and exhibition network, with a total of half a million staff. It was moulded chiefly on the Soviet model, which was operated by a highly planned central economy and also the monopolistic state control of film-making and film market. Its success was not measured in accordance with the general law of economy or finance. Film audiences were not seen as "consumers" since they neither had any choice as to what they wanted to "purchase", nor any means of influencing what kind of films should be produced; Commercialism was seen as a political taboo that would distract film-making from fulfilling its designated ideological obligations. In the mid-1970s, more than half of the distribution and exhibition units nation-wide were financially in the red, and the China Film Distribution & Exhibition Co. (the CFDE), the government body in charge of film distribution and exhibition had suffered a loss of profits of 20 million yuan between 1974-76.

In 1978, two years after the Cultural Revolution was ended, the government resumed the duties of the Film Bureau (affiliated to the Cultural Ministry), the top national body in charge of regulation, planning and administration of the film industry, which was abolished during the Cultural Revolution. In 1986, the Film Bureau was re-designated under the Ministry of TV, Radio and Film. From the chart below describing the structure of China's film industry (see Table 3.1), we can see that the operation of the Bureau remains subject, as it was during the Mao era, to the direct supervision and arbitration of the Central Propaganda Department, the Party's leading body in ideological and cultural affairs.
Since the late 1970s, due to the already colossal yet economically inefficient film industry, the government has tried to avoid setting up any new film studios unless absolutely necessary (the Children Film Studio, established in 1981 in Beijing, and later the Shenzhen Film Studio in...
Shenzhen Economic Zone are the exceptions). Instead, it soon allowed half a dozen of the provincial-level studios (which were previously confined to make documentaries, popular science films or dubbing foreign films) to make feature films (i.e., Xiaoxiang, Guangxi, Tianshan and Inner Mongolia). It immediately expanded the production base for feature films to altogether 15 film studios.

The studio system in China in the post-Mao era remains largely unchanged especially regarding its structural and administrative outlook. Each studio still maintains a complete range of directors, cinematographers, script writers, literary editors, producers, art designers and other technical staff. Moreover, each has also its own pool of actors and actresses mainly for casting its own productions. Each major studio, such as Beijing and Shanghai, employ between around 2,000 staff. (Chinese Filmmakers Association, 1985: p96). However, during the 1980s the movement of film-makers, actors and actresses between the studios has become the norm.

The CFDE is the monopolistic body in control of China’s film market. It has its branches in all provinces, municipal cities and autonomous regions. By 1985, it had set up more than 2,700 distribution and exhibition administrative bodies at county level and beyond. A national film exhibition network emerged, involving around 180,000 exhibition units, including cinemas, theatres, public meeting halls and mobile projection units (See table 3.2). However, since the mid-80s, this mammoth organisation has been increasingly challenged by the commercially-awakening film studios to decentralise its monopolistic practices.
In expanding the overseas market for both economic and propaganda benefits, the government set up the China Film Export & Import Co. in 1979. It maintains business relationships with more than a hundred foreign countries. It arranges and sells the copy-rights of Chinese films to foreign distributors and also purchases foreign films for domestic public release. Between 1980–June 1984, it exported over 500 Chinese films (fiction and documentaries) to over 100 countries (Chinese Filmmakers Association, 1985: p352). It also acts as the de facto censor in arbitrating what foreign films are to be imported for public release. It has its representative offices in Los Angeles, Paris and Hong Kong.

In 1979, China Film Co-production Co. (CFCC), a new national body dealing with co-production with foreign and overseas Chinese film-makers, was established. The rationale behind the setting up of such an organisation is political as well as financial. Politically, it helps the Party to demonstrate its "Open-door" commitment to the outside world. It is significant that, for
the first time in the history of the People's Republic, foreign film-makers, in particular those from
the West, are allowed to engage in commercial film-making in China. Financially, the
significantly low production costs in China (by western standards), and the availability of a
competent force of technical support there, are extremely attractive to many adventurous foreign
film-makers. At the same time, China benefits by the in-coming of considerable sums of foreign
currency and the newest technical expertise that characterises international filmmaking. Since
the late 1970s, the CFCC has co-produced or given technical assistance to more than 100 foreign
productions, including *Marco Polo* (Italian-Chinese), *The Unfinished Chess Game* (Japanese-
Chinese), Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Emperor* (Italian, British and Chinese) and Stephen
Spielberg's *Empire of Sun*.

3.2 THE RISE OF POPULAR CULTURE AND THE ERUPTION OF THE "FILM
CRISIS"

During the 1980s, Deng's economic reform and the "Open-door" liberal tendencies have been
achieving in China's social and cultural spheres what could be largely characterised as the rise of
"popular culture" or cultural pluralism. Another important factor contributing to the making and
development of this culture is the steady improvement of people's material life that gives rise to
the transformation of their daily life. In my view, the emergence of "popular culture" in post-Mao
China has been manifested in the following three areas: (1) The advent of the TV era as a vehicle
for modernisation; (2) The "leisure-led" revolution and the increasing availability of
"entertainment"; (3) Press reform: the de-centralisation and commercialisation (tabloidisation) of
the party press. All of the above factors have, in their own way, prompted and accelerated the
impending "film crisis".

The Signs of the "Film Crisis"

The first visible symptom that marked the so-called "film crisis" is the drastic and yet constant
decline of film audiences between 1980-1984. During the period, film attendances had decreased
by 2.9 billions (down more than 10% from 1980), and the downhill tendency was further accelerating. The film industry reached a critical moment in 1985, and during its first seven months, the film audience nation-wide was 3.5 billion less than the same period the previous year.

The economy of the film industry began to crumble. It lost revenue of 9.36 million Chinese Yuan (around US$ 4 million) in 1985; While the film market in the urban areas became saturated and in sharp decline, the peasantry in the rural areas was facing increasing difficulties in getting access to film shows. Among 181,000 exhibiting sites nation-wide, one third ceased to function, and most of them were mobile projection teams operating in the vast rural areas (J. Hu, 1985).

This was caused directly by the abolition of the collective system of the People’s Commune, and consequently the loss of hundreds of thousands of projectionists who quit their rather ill-paid jobs to be much better-off working for the now booming rural industry.

In the production sector, the picture was equally gloomy. Due to the significant increase in production costs and the continuing monopolistic practices which purchased the distribution rights of each film at a fixed rate, many studios were, for the first time, financially in heavy debt. Productivity was thus whittled down in responding to the bizarre and agonising reality, which could be expressed by a popular saying within the industry: "the more films you make, the more money you lose". The old-style studio system did, therefore, find itself in an increasingly incompatible and difficult position against the sweeping market-oriented economic reform. Moreover, the influx of foreign blockbuster films, especially those from the US and Japan, pushed the domestic productions, which remained heavily politicised, to a more unfavourable position in the market.

The crisis came at the time that Chinese film-making had just enjoyed a boom period since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Between 1977-1979, the new regime lifted the ban on more than two thousand Chinese and foreign films, which were shelved during the Cultural Revolution. The import of foreign films, especially of those from the capitalist West, was resumed despite being
limited in number. In 1979 China produced 67 feature-length films, marking the full recovery of its productivity. More significantly, the annual film admissions in 1979 reached a phenomenal 29.3 billion. In other words, every Chinese viewed on average nearly 30 films that year (see Table 3.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cinema Attendance (bn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Complied from various sources, including: China Statistical Yearbooks (1980-90) by State Statistical Bureau, the PRC; China Film Yearbooks (1981-89); and Cinema Art (Dec. 1985), p23.

The discussion will turn now to: what factors actually prompted and accelerated the "film crisis" and how they have influenced the course of the industrial reform of Chinese film-making.
(1) The Advent of Television Era in China

China set up its first television station in 1958, and it was largely a political creation in order to win a battle against the Nationalists in Taiwan who had been undertaking TV transmission. However, it was not until more than two decades later that it began to emerge as truly a mass medium. If, metaphorically, film-making embodies the essential elements of party political culture in the Mao era, television would be an ideal and ready form of mass medium that reflects the spirit and ethos of Deng's era.

Since 1978, the development of TV technology and a nation-wide TV network has been constantly promoted as part of China's 'modernisation' scheme. In the light of this, the investment in both production of television sets as well as the building up of television networks has been given a high priority. In 1977, there were only about 29,000 TV sets across China. In 1978, the number of TV sets had increased dramatically to more than 3 million nation-wide. By 1985, during which the "film crisis" had become apparent and intensified, the number of television sets has reached nearly 70 million. Two years later, in 1987, the figure reaches the phenomenal 116 million. (Beijing Broadcasting Institute, 1991: p423-4). In 1986, the figure for TV sets per 100 households, including the rural areas, reached 60 (see Table 3.4). Between 1978 and July 1987, TV audiences increased from 80 million to 5,900 million, at a growing rate of 60 million people per year. Almost all the key audience surveys have indicated that television has become the most popular and accessible mass medium of information and entertainment to the majority of the Chinese population (X. T. Liang, 1987: p15-6).

<Table 3.4>

Television Sets Per 100 Households (1981-86)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>TV Sets Per 100 Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**<Table 3.5>**

Growth of Television Audiences (1975-1978)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Audience (mn)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TV’s increasing importance and popularity has been greatly enhanced by its unique role as what could be called the “agent of modernisation”. It is worth noting that the regime seems to have adopted a two-tier policy or double standard in its administration of television and film-making. While the imports of foreign films remained tightly controlled (i.e., the ratio between domestic production and foreign imports is strictly enforced at a 3:1 ratio, according to author’s interview with X. H. Liu of the China Film Co.), ironically, we experience on TV screen the influx of foreign television programmes, largely unchecked by the government. For example, in the first half of 1985, over 400 foreign TV soap episodes were imported and shown nation-wide, and most of them originated from US, Japan and European countries. For ordinary Chinese, TV has become the most accessible way in acquiring information and knowledge about the outside world, the West in particular. Since the early 1980s, no other form of mass media or popular art could rival television in this regard. Of course, the influx of foreign TV soaps has exposed the ordinary Chinese to what could be called a “soap version” of western society, its values and life styles, which is often fantasised or distorted. It is worth noting that, for most of the Chinese population, it is this type of foreign pop culture that has hammered out their general perception of the West. Also, to some extent, it is their unique experience of foreign soap-watching that has modernised or sharpened their perception of what Chinese films would be judged upon.

Since 1983, the growing ownership of video cassette recorders (VCRs) and the mushrooming of commercially-operated video show-rooms, have joined forces with TV in a battle pulling the people away from cinemas. In some regions, people attending public video-shows have outnumbered the film-goers. By 1985 there were over 30,000 video halls across China; In 1988, the number of VCR ownership had increased from 50,000 in 1984 to 790,000 (See Table 3.6).
<Table 3.6>
The Video Industry and Ownership in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sales of VCRs</th>
<th>% of growth</th>
<th>Numbers VCRs in Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>240.0</td>
<td>170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>117.6</td>
<td>370,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>570,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>790,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the outset, the impending crisis in the Chinese film industry seems "strikingly reminiscent of the situation in Hollywood during the 1950s and 1960s, when the box office became increasingly threatened as television proliferated" (G. Sensel, 1990: p30). And, similar experiences and patterns of decline have also applied to most other countries. However, in a developing country like China, acquiring a TV set or home video represents a great leap into modern life. As a matter of fact, the proliferation of television, as a mass medium, has made some profound impacts upon the modernisation of China's media system and everyday life.

The "Leisure Culture" and "Entertainment Revolution".

In a broad sense, the sharp decline in film admissions and the crisis of the Chinese film industry could also been seen as the public's resentment and rejection of the heavily politicised mode of social life under Mao, in the light of the emerging "leisure revolution", in particular in the cities. Film-going has long been seen as the best example that embodies the essence of Mao's idea of proletarian culture, which easily becomes a target. During the Great Leap-forward, and the Cultural Revolution, the public was drawn into the mass movement of song-writing, poem-writing, group dancing and choral singing, not for the benefits of leisure and relaxation, but for political obligations.
During the 1980s, the de-politicisation or liberalisation of Chinese social life can be best demonstrated by the political rehabilitation of "entertainment", and the eventual upsurge of the "leisure revolution", supported by the significant improvement of people's material life. Such a "leisure revolution" has thus transformed, in different degrees, the way of life for most of the Chinese population. It has, naturally, played a significant part in the making of the Film Crisis.

The outlook of "leisure revolution" since the early 1980s can be characterised as a quick succession of one "fever" after another. In roughly chronological order, it has been observed that most of the cities have experienced the following "fevers": self-study, western literature, ballroom dance, Hong Kong pop songs, stamp collecting, western classic music, learning English, photography, travel, Rock n' Roll, gardening, interior decoration, etc. As the choices of recreations increase, the distribution of leisure time becomes ever more targeted as well as diversified. The film's pre-dominant and monolithic position, as it was under Mao, has now finally collapsed.

3.3 HOW HAS THE REFORM OF CHINESE FILM INDUSTRY TAKEN PLACE?

Broadly speaking, the reform of the Chinese film industry is part of Deng's economic and enterprise reforming program. It concentrates mainly upon two areas: firstly, to introduce the market-oriented mechanism into the management of film business; secondly, to allow the "entertainment film", or simply commercially-oriented film-making, to be the main stream in film production.

Production

In 1981, the government decided to abolish its two-decade long practice that allowed the China Film Distribution & Exhibition Co. to purchase the distribution rights of domestic films at a fixed rate. While, on the one hand, it prevented the studios from taking any financial responsibilities,
on the other hand it deprived the studios from enjoying any possible financial benefits should its film be successful in box office. At the same time, as a measure of stimulating economic incentives, a new revenue-allocation method was introduced, and each studio's financial performance was to be judged by the number of film prints that had been sold to the distributors. More prints mean more revenues and profits.

The studio managers, who in the old days had never bothered themselves as to whether a film made money or not, began to be confronted daily by a new vocabulary: 'box-office', 'profits', 'numbers of prints', 'public tastes', 'entertainment', 'Hollywood' and 'audience survey'. They soon realised that they now had to learn to fend for themselves and toughen up to fight a battle for survival. In 1990, during my interview with Wu Yi-gong, head of the Shanghai Bureau and himself also a noted film director, he expressed his anguish as a film-maker-turned-bureaucrat and the anxiety towards the declining film industry:

As I believe, the problems facing the film industry can not be really resolved unless some fundamental changes or adjustments are made in economic and cultural policy. For instance, the monopoly of distribution and exhibition rights, and the ticket price system. As a 'boss', the thing that right now I care and worry about most is, frankly, not artistic or creative matters, but the number of prints sold and profits. I must let all my staff be 'having rice' in their bowls. This is a very painful process of transition. (Quoted from author's interview, 1990; also see Appendix I).

In 1983, the on-going enterprise reform began to implement a profit-related new taxation system, in order to normalise and vitalise industrial performance. It caused another blow to the film industry. According the new tax regulation, the film industry, once in a much favourable "subsidy" position under Mao, was now required to contribute to the treasury up to half of its total revenue in taxation. The public's great enthusiasm towards these TV soaps from the West, not always of high quality though, has certainly indicated what the audiences wants to watch and what is going to be commercially successful. To most of the film-makers, these TV soaps served
their first lessons in commercial film-making, and also, for time being, a ready source for imitation.

From 1983 onwards, we noticed from the outset of film genres that commercial film-making has already been in full swing. Comedy, thriller, romance and action (including Kung-fu) films have constituted the majority of production. The so-called "Three Tou" formula soon appeared as a crude recipe for commercial films: scenes of "Quan-Tou" (violence), "Zhen-Tou" (sensuality) and "Xue-Tou" (slap-stick), became increasingly common on the screen. However, aesthetically, the bulk of those productions were inferior in quality.

The initial less desirable performance in commercial film-making have not only explained the film-makers' lack of general knowledge or experience of popular culture, but, more importantly, manifested the alienation, detestation and resistance against the norm and aesthetics of commercial films. Unlike film-makers from the Capitalist west, who firmly believe that film-making is first and foremost an economic and commercial endeavour, Chinese film-makers under Mao were conditioned to believe that any association between film-making and commercial interests would degenerate or alienate film-making as an art.

Since the early 1950s, the ideological condemnation of the Hollywood Model had literally outlawed any form of commercial film-making in China. Anything commercial was synonymous with being vulgar and demeaning. Having endured the two-decade long subordination to the political masters under Mao, it is difficult for many film-makers to accept and embrace commercialism as a different form of control, which they believe would harm or restrain the newly-gained creative freedom in the Post-Mao era.

For instance, some members of the fifth generation, a group of innovative young filmmakers who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy after the Cultural Revolution, have felt upset and humiliated when assigned to produce commercially motivated entertainment films. A woman director described her outrage on hearing the decision as if "forcing a good girl into
prostitution", a popular Chinese saying (L. Li, 1988). However, they have finally compromised themselves accepting the assigned commercial productions. Firstly, they feel obliged to play their part in relieving the studios from worsening financial crisis, and commercial films are regarded as a quick way of making money. Secondly, and also more important, they recognised that the privileges in making experimental or arts films would be only granted to film-makers who have a sound working record of commercial films. Zhang Yimou, Zhang Junzao, Tian Zhuangzhuang and other members of the fifth generation were soon seen making their first attempts at making entertainment films.

What Chinese film has been going through during the 1980s, is described by one noted Chinese film critic, as a dramatic process that "started by shaking off the ideological shackles, then roaming in artistic experiments, and eventually ended with becoming trapped into an economic cage" (M. J. Shao, 1989 (1): p11). It is worth noting that the mania of commercial film-making has not achieved what the audience expected, and the quality of some productions was really inferior and naturally failed at the box office. This has resulted in great confusion and controversy, among the film-makers and politicians, as to how Chinese film-making should proceed.

Naturally, with a dwindling film market, there has been a mounting pressure upon the Chinese film industry to find a quick fix to at least slow down the accelerating process of the crisis. In June 1988, Chen Hao-su, the Deputy Minister of TV, Radio and Film and a liberal-minded technocrat, convinced that there would be no other way out of the current film crisis, advocated pursing further the commercial reform and commercial film-making. He declared that "the production of 'entertainment films' should be made as the main-stream of Chinese films". (H. S. Chen, 1989: p1). It was a controversial policy from the very beginning, largely due to its lack of clarity as what is actually meant by "entertainment films". However, this move could well be seen as the Party's further compromise in its ideological control of film-making in exchange for further relieving its financial responsibilities towards the debt-ridden film industry. Words were soon turned into deeds. In 1988, among its annual productions of 141 films, three quarters of
them were classified as "entertainment films". (L. Li, 1988). They were mainly in the forms of "Kung-Fu" (or Chinese martial arts), thriller, romance, action, horror and comedy. Wang Suo, a controversial Beijing-based popular writer (labelled by the orthodox critics as a 'riffraff' writer), had his four novelettes adapted for the big screen that year. 1988 was remembered as the "Year of Entertainment Films".

The market and commercial orientation have also worked their ways into core decision-making as well as censorship practice. We noticed that the studios' annual production plans or film scripts, which in the past came under the scrutiny of the political authorities, are now being screened by the "market-forces", namely, the distributors, exhibitors and market researchers. Film-goers as the eventual consumers are also consulted. The studios are extremely anxious to spot, before committing themselves, whether a script is going to be profitable or not, and how many prints it could achieve. In 1988, for instance, as the result of close consultations with the distributors, exhibitors and film critics, the Shanghai Film Studio decided to withdraw two productions, which had been foreseen as having less prospective in profit-making, and replaced them with what were predicted to be profitable ones.

Meanwhile, the state-owned studio system has, for the first time, in history, been challenged as pushed to institutional de-centralisation. One significant development is the tendency towards independent film-making or to be exact, semi-independent film-making. Some studios set up what are called the "economic units", adopting the "economic responsibility system", that had been proved successful in rural reform. This system allows film-makers to conduct their works in an environment that is in both managerial and financial terms more accountable, involving: production in a relatively independent capacity, freedom in deciding subject matter and scripts, freedom in appointing the crew, self-management that assumes sole responsibility for profit and loss.

Xie Jin, one of the best-known directors in China today, formed his independent sector within the Shanghai Film Studio. In 1988, Huangfu Keren, of the Beijing Studio, Mi Jiashan of Emei Film
Studio, and Chen Yaowu, a businessman-turned producer from Sichuan, were three noticeable examples in independent film-making. (L. Li: 1989). Huangpu was funded by resources inside the film studios, Mi Jiashan was sponsored through a normal government grant in film; Chen Yaowu invested in his project through his private finance. He soon made news by sacking the director whom he thought as being inefficient and incompetent in management and budgetary control.

It has to be said that what has happened in the name of independent film-making is reminiscent of the mania of commercial film-making in the 1920s, ill-prepared, purely profit-oriented and sometimes extremely rough in quality. Huangpu's *Night of Terror* took merely 13 days to film, and was initially rejected by his fund provider, the Beijing Film Studio, due mainly to its rough quality. As the result of lack of compatible arts, financial and legal policies in regulating the independent film-making, it is impossible for the film-makers involved not to place "economics above aesthetics", and to "make allowances for films which appeal to a limited audience" (G. Semmel: 1990: p33). What is more significant, in my observation, is that in the West, the conventional norm of independent film-making is primarily characterised as an alternative form of film-making (against the big-budget commercial films), which tends to be aesthetically innovative, exploratory, and less financially-motivated, its Chinese counterpart is just the opposite, by imitating the long tested formula of commercial blockbusters and seeing box-office success as its first and foremost aim.

**Distribution & Exhibition**

The CFDE, as we have seen, up to the present, remains the monopolistic government body that exerts the sole control in film distribution and exhibition. It operates the system which allows it to purchase the distribution of each domestic film at a fixed fee. Since the early 1980s, it has been subjected to growing criticism for such mammoth, arbitrary and centralised practice in regulating the film market. The studios demanded the rights of self-distribution in order to get a better financial return for their productions.
In early 1987, the CEDE had eventually made compromises with 16 major studios by introducing four new methods of profit allocation. They included: first, CEDE grants a minimum guarantee to a finished film and a distribution fee (50% of the box office) is divided between CEDE (71.5%) and the studio (28.5%); second, CEDE and the studios share box office receipts at a negotiated percentage in which no minimum guarantee is granted from CEDE; third, CEDE acquires a film for a flat fee; fourth, CEDE acts as an agent for a studio on a commission basis in which CEDE is no longer obliged to take a poor film. (Variety, October 1988). Following the announcement of the new policies, the CEDE also made reconciliatory gestures by sponsoring the Film Fair that was intended to bridge the business contact between the studios, local distributors and other potential film buyers.

It would be unfair, in my view, to criticise the monopolistic nature of the CFDE while totally ignoring the unequal competition that it has been facing with the government TV policies. As I have discussed earlier, since the late 1970s, the Party has adopted a favourable and less centralised policy, both financially and politically, in promoting and developing its national TV network.

For instance, as early as in 1979, the government decided, as a contingent measure to resolve the shortage of TV programme, that any new film release would be allowed to be transmitted by the Central TV after its first run in Beijing (i.e., within between two weeks and a month). What is more inconceivable is the cost for a TV transmission rights: 180 Chinese yuan per transmission (about US$ 20) for a new release, and 120 yuan (US$ 14) for an old film. (China Film Yearbook, 1980: p210). The figure of 180 yuan for a new release equalled the box office receipts for only 18,000 film-goers (the film admission at the time was about 10 fen each, or less than two cents);

Also, while the import of foreign films is strictly controlled at a ratio of 3:1 between domestic production and foreign imports, TV stations have literally no restriction in importing and
transmitting foreign TV outputs. Moreover, while TV has enjoyed various degrees of state subsidy and growing advertising revenues, film industry has to fight to keep its books in balance. I would argue that such an unfavourable and unequal setting of competition with TV has made it more difficult for the CFDE to make a successful transition towards a market-led system of production.

Let us see how the exhibition sector (i.e., cinemas) has been responding to the declining film attendance and the compelling need to commercialise its service. We noticed that the motto "Audience is the God" has rapidly replaced Mao's well-known slogan "Serve the People Heart and Soul". In order to lure more people back to the cinemas, managers have become increasingly commercially-minded. In the cities, cinemas have been fundamentally transformed, by converting them from traditionally singularly "viewing facilities" into multi-functional entertainment centres. Now, they usually comprise a public video hall, a Cafe, a ballroom, a Karaoke floor, a grocery and a fast food service. Meanwhile, to cater for the proportionally smaller 'serious audience', a dozen art cinemas, the first of their kind in China, were set up in Beijing, Shanghai and other major cities, with considerable commercial success.

As an ever increasing demand for night-life was felt in the urban areas, the "Overnight Cinema" emerged on time. This allows people to attend "en famille" shows, usually a triple bill, lasting up to 8 hours and audiences virtually stay there overnight. Soon, followed the 'Wedding Film Show', which encourages would-be husbands and wives to stage a fashionable film-show, rather than performing the old-fashioned dining session in costly restaurants.

As the result of continuing shortages in housing (with in many cases three generations living under one roof) and also the lack of public social facilities particularly in the major cities, cinemas remain a functional if not really ideal rendezvous in social life, especially among youngsters and couples; Quick-minded managers thus introduced what are called the "Dating Seats", or "Lovebird Seats". These were first appeared in Shanghai in 1986, and were soon seen in Beijing and some other liberal-minded cities. "Dating Seats" normally occupy the last few
rows of the auditorium, and function similarly to theatre boxes. Handrails between seats are removed for obvious reasons, the seating is more comfortable and space is more generous. A curtain is hung in front in case an intimacy-seeking couple demand a bit more privacy during viewing. Despite higher prices (usually five times that of an ordinary seat), they are still in heavy demand (Z. Liu: 1990)

Some cinemas have targeted children and youngsters as the core of their audience by offering story-telling sessions, Karaoke singing or discos, before the film proceeds. Rather than waiting in vain at the ticket office, many cinemas assigned their salesmen or PR people directly to the surrounding institutions (i.e., schools, factories, shops, hospitals, army camps and so on), carrying out direct marketing to dispose of tickets; Since the old fashioned “cultural activity funds” remained in some form of existence among state-owned enterprises and were therefore a potential source for box-office, a new token-ticket method was invented in order to secure a possibly larger share. Collectively purchased in block booking by “working units”, tickets are then distributed to employees and are valid for a certain period of time, allowing ticket-holders to choose from what is available on the programme, and to see the chosen films whenever they wish.

While cinemas in the cities were regrouping audiences and competing for box office receipts, in vast rural areas they are undertaking a different process in order to modernise film viewing facilities, and therefore to transform the peasantry from complimentary film-goers to paying customers. By 1984, although the penetration rate of film-viewing had reached 95% of the rural areas, film distribution and exhibition remained primitive and made no profits. For more than two decades, film viewing in rural areas meant: standing in the open or sitting on a muddy floor, or a portable stool, in whatever the season, watching the mobile film shows. Since the early 1980s, discontent about the primitive condition of rural film-viewing was gradually heard among the peasants, especially in those areas which were now better off as the result of successful rural reform. Some even lobbied the government, hoping to “sit comfortably watching films as the urban population does.” From the government point of view, to achieve this goal, three essential
issues had to be tackled: first, the transition from the 'open-air' mobile show to in-door screening; second, the transition from the free viewing to the individually pay-as-you-enter system; third, the transition from "small screen" (16mm prints) to "big screen" (35mm prints).

As the government had difficulties in financing the scheme fully to build up an up-to-date rural exhibition network, peasants put the government on the defensive by raising public funds or investing private capital. Jiangsu, Zhejiang and a few other coastal provinces, which had been the benefactors of the "responsibility system" reform, and the rise of rural industry, took the lead. By the end of 1982, over 7,000 rural township cinemas (which were mostly operated in a private capacity but officially still claimed collective ownership) had emerged nation-wide (China Film Yearbook, 1986: p11-7). At the same time, in the interior of China, the so-called "family cinemas" (or "household cinemas"), privately run, also appeared, taking over the position left over by the diminishing number of state-owned mobile film teams.

By 1989, Zhejiang province alone, one of China's most developed provinces, had built more than 1,200 township cinemas, which accounted for 50% of the total of rural film exhibition capacity. The audiences in township cinemas exceeded more than 175 million admissions that year, making up one third of the total rural audience in the province. The expansion of township cinemas also strengthened to a great extent the financial perspective of the rural film business, which was desperately fighting for its economic stability. In comparison with the obsolete mobile team with a miserable annual revenue of several thousand Yuan, a township cinema commonly generates an annual revenue of between 80,000 and 90,000 Yuan. In some cases, the development in cinema infrastructures in rural areas even outgrew the pace of their urban counterparts. On the outskirts of Shanghai in 1989, there was one cinema for every 40,000 of population and the total seating capacity out-numbered that in urban Shanghai. In 1990, the rural population in Shanghai viewed nearly 10 movies per person, costing in total 3.20 Yuan (about $0.65), making up 0.02% of one's annual income (Wu Mingchen, 1991). In some less developed areas, peasants can pay as little as the local cost of three eggs for an annual subscription of 18 films in village cinema. Finally, peasants are beginning to attend film-shows as consumers,
becoming a new and important source of finance for the film industry. Against the perpetual loss of film audience and ticket office revenues in the cities, the transformation of the rural film market has somehow helped to "create" a new source of financially viable film audience, that relieves the pain of the escalating "film crisis".

As a result of the growing market pressures and the liberalisation in social values, the government finally decided, from 1 May, 1989 onwards, to implement China's first ever film certificate system. The core of its system is the 'No Children Allowed' (NCA) certificate, or "16" code. According to the new regulation, films among the following four categories are not suitable for, and should not be allowed to be seen by children under 16. They are: firstly, films containing scenes of rape, theft, drug-taking and drug trafficking and prostitution; secondly, films containing scenes of violence, murder and fighting which might seriously affect juveniles psychologically; thirdly, films which depict sensual and sexual behaviours; fourthly, films presenting abnormal or unacceptable social behaviours (J. X. Teng, 1989, p10)

It could be argued that the emergence of the certificate system could be seen as the Party's further ideological concession in order to favour market interests. While imposing restrictions for filmgoers under 16, the certificate system has, at the same time, made allowances for what could be produced and seen. Within only weeks of implementing the code system, the Zhujiang Film Studio cleverly launched a marketing campaign for Widows Village, its new release, by announcing it as China's first 'No Children Allowed' film. The film touches upon a sensational theme of abnormal marriage rituals in the feudal China. The self-claimed 'NCA' certificate helped the film to become immediately a commercial success.

The Policy Change Regarding the Commercialisation of the Film Industry

Commercialisation of the film industry has been largely approved and encouraged by Deng's pragmatic leadership, from at least an economic or financial point of view. The logic is simple the film industry has to keep pace with the on-going economic reform, or to face further decline.
However, each short-lived political campaign has contributed for the party's conservatives some excuses to halt or reverse the tendency. In 1989, after the crackdown of the June 4th Democratic Movement, there was an immediate tightening up in ideological control, and the "commercial trends" in film-making was made a noticeable target. The Film Bureau condemned what they called five "harmful trends" persisting in film-making. Among them, the "commercialisation" was seriously related to, and blamed for most of these trends:

First, degrading the ideological and political substance of films, by merely stressing their entertainment and aesthetic value, and neglecting the film's social up-lift capability;

Second, National nihilism is another manifestation of harmful trends in film theory and creation. The images of progressive workers, peasants, soldiers and intellectuals flicker feebly on the screen. On the contrary, the dregs of society, such as traitors, secret agents, bandits, thieves, smugglers, Mafia-type bosses and lesser ruffians are alive and well on the screen;

Third, advocating of abstract human nature, humanitarianism and the theories of human nature. Some films add titillating sexual scenes. Sexual consciousness was made a major theme or subject. Hence sexual repression, sexual thirst, sexual abnormality and sexual brutality are the themes of a great many films;

Fourth, money worship is getting serious in the film industry. Money dominates film production, and everything is subordinated to the box-office.

"Anti-commercialisation" measures were soon imposed from above. Chen Haosu, deputy minister of the Ministry of Television, Radio and Film and the advocate of "Entertainment Film" policy, was removed. The government demanded the future production plans to be re-examined or adjusted, instructing film-makers to make more what is called "main stream films", a term devised by the Film Bureau referring to productions which are pro-party, pro-socialism, politically-correct, and morally up-lifting.
Meanwhile, a government subsidy scheme was set up to provide financial assistance for the films of "important revolutionary themes", such as the earliest history of the Chinese Communist Party, key military campaigns in defeating the Nationalist Army, and the Chinese communist leaderships, such as Mao Tse-tung, Zhou En-lai and Deng Xiao-ping. The old fashioned and rigid political measures were revived, intruding in the market mechanism to maximum political gains. Official documents were issued nation-wide recommending films which the authorities believed worth watching. The party also launched a nation-wide publicity campaign for a few major propaganda films, hoping to enhance their commercial performances and popularity. It was the party's latest experiment of how films represent contemporary political figures and events in a new and increasing commercially-oriented context.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have tried to interpret the commercialisation process of the Chinese film industry, against the background of Deng's market-led economic reform and the rise of pluralistic popular culture. By adopting a decentralisation strategy and a market-mechanism, the film industry has gradually departed from its previous "politics in command" mode nurtured during the Mao era.

I have tried to argue that the commercialisation process and market reform that have been taking place within the Chinese film industry during the 1980s is not merely a structural or institutional transformation, but also an unique political process. As we have seen that commercialism and market powers have been translated into a driving force in dismantling the politically indoctrinated nature of Chinese films under Mao.

In my view, the transformation of the film industry presents an unique case in Deng's economic reform program. On the one hand, film-making is part of China's colossal industry that needs urgently to be liberalised for greater efficiency and economic performance. On the other hand,
film-making remains in the grip of the party's ideological control, although much less than what was under Mao. Obviously, Deng's leadership has been struggling to achieve an extremely fine balancing act: to promote the market-led economic liberalisation, and to de-centralise the state control over the industry while trying to maintain its role as the paramount political authority and arbitrator over the film-making. But, such attempts have not been successful. The commercially-motivated film-making, that the government has adopted as a primary measure to salvage the film industry, has inevitably undermined, diluted or secularised the party's ideological power that its ruling rests upon.

It would be disingenuous not to point out some undesirable social and cultural effects brought about by the promotion of commercially-motivated film-making. While China has been gradually departing from Mao's cultural legacy, it is in danger of being submerged by the influence of western pop culture, as has manifested fully in the case of film-making. It is evident that the mounting commercial pressure has made many film-makers place their quest for increased profits before aesthetic and social consciousness.

From what has been observed since the crackdown of the June 4th democratic movement in 1989, the Chinese government has been trying to re-assert its ideological authority over the film-making by improvising and deploying economic measures, for instance, the state-subsidy. Also, I would like to point out that even what is called "mainstream films", the propaganda film, has itself been undergoing the process of being "commercialised". In those films, the history of the Chinese communist party and the life of its political leadership are presented in a way that is entertaining, marketable and interesting. They have tried to incorporate "political effects" with "commercial interests". The government has also been using the "box office" figures, as an indicator, to evaluate the social and political impact of its propaganda filmmaking. Under the current circumstance, the present course of film-making towards commercialisation and political liberalisation is impossible to reverse.
The previous chapter has illustrated in detail the drastic changes and transformation in the way with which China's film industry (i.e., production, distribution and exhibition) has been operating and functioning since the early 1980s, prompted by Deng's open-door reform and in particular his economic liberalism. However it is worth noting that the reform of the film industry is, undoubtedly, an economic endeavour as well as an ideological one, if we take the ethos and practices of communist filmmaking into account. It can be argued that this market-led revolution and an ever-growing commercialisation trend within the film industry have, at least partially, achieved two important results.

Firstly, economically, the official acceptance and worship of the market law has, for the first time in the history of Communist China, allowed "film-making" to obtain a status to be a financially viable industry which is at the mercy of market competition and consumer power, rather than a purely ideological apparatus or propaganda cause (as what was traditionally perceived under Mao), which serves nothing but the political ends. As to Chinese filmmakers under Mao, the deprivation of their political independence and creative freedom had been compensated, rather ironically, by liberating themselves completely from, and even becoming immune to, all financial and market pressures of any conventional or commercial filmmaking, i.e., the all mighty Hollywood model (audience-centred, entertainment-seeking, and profit-making). Under Mao, while at no risk of being held as the hostage of market force or the box office, film-makers served truly as the prisoners and victims of party politics and cultural dictatorship. And now, under Deng, the departure of state-subsidy and favourable taxation, that the film industry had been enjoying under Mao, suggests the inevitable change: to survive through market-competition and commercialisation. And now there are two masters to be served: politics and the market.

Secondly, such market-led reform and commercial undertaking have, undoubtedly, helped to create a favourable setting for filmmakers to alleviate their long-standing political obligations,
and also to sever their traditional links with party hierarchy and ideology. The growing trend of commercialisation, as a sign of political as well as economic liberalism, has also promise much more possibilities in resuming creative freedom and relative liberal thinking. The official endorsement of market principle has also paved the way in rehabilitating many western concepts that were politically condemned under Mao, such as box offices, entertainment-seeking, audience taste and so on. By making the film industry responsible financially for their existence, in turn, the state and party hierarchy have to make necessary political concessions in making the former happen. And the major concession is to make filmmaking politically less ideological and culturally pluralistic.

However, before going further it is important to consider how the political regime under Deng has been adopting new methods in controlling and regulating the film industry, in responding to the rise of a new political and economic environment in China. This can be summed up conventionally as the issue of censorship. This chapter aims to reveal a hidden world of film censorship that remains little known to outsiders. So far, few studies has been done on this subject, mainly due to the sensitivities of this very issue and, subsequently, the difficulties in having access to original sources. So, this chapter is, chiefly, to serve as a descriptive and analytical account on the autonomy of film censorship under Deng, how it works, and what change has been made in it since the end of the Mao era. This chapter draws on original data and materials collected during field-work research in China in 1990. In particular, the following issues are examined: (1) how the ethos of film censorship under Deng has been evolving from that under Mao, and why; (2) how censorship works: censors, codes and practices; (3) the rise of a new phenomenon: the combined form of political and market censorship.

4.1 THE ETHOS OF FILM CENSORSHIP UNDER MAO

Censorship is nothing new, and nor is it unfamiliar to societies of any political or social system of the present day, including Liberal societies in the West, which have proudly claimed their triumph over censorship. As Sue Curry Jansen argues so provocatively censorship, an
embodiment of the relationship between power and knowledge, is as much a feature of liberal, market societies as it is of totalitarianism. Clearly, Michel Foucault's thinking of "power-knowledge" has been quietly lurking behind her statement. As Jansen argues:

The powerful require knowledge to preserve, defend and extend their knowledge. For them, knowledge is power. The way the powerful say things are is the way they are, or the way they usually become because the powerful control the power to name, and the powerful use this power to generate and enforce definitions of words and social reality that enhance their sovereignty. (1991: p6)

Let us see that how the different political system of societies has determined the ethos of censorship, and the way it is perceived and operated. In our contemporary time, we have seen that in Liberal and Capitalist societies, church and state censorship have been increasingly substituted by market censorship, which aims essentially to safeguard and maximise economic or commercial advantages. Meanwhile, as to Communist societies, the nature of censorship, as a powerful form of political control and information (knowledge) monopoly, penetrates to the heart of its political system. In such societies, e.g. former Soviet Union or China, the information (e.g., knowledge, arts and media) is "as much a component of power as the police or armed forces". (Schopflin, 1983: p1). The political practice as such was not a perversion of Marxism. It was a logical extension of the principles of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics which regards control of communications and propaganda as an essential step in the development of communist culture. And the legitimacy and homogeneity of such a political system could only be unchallenged and maintained through the monopoly of information and communications.

Then, what was the ethos or main characteristics of film censorship under Mao?

(1) Like the former Soviet Union, film censorship was largely "prescriptive". Apart from a very brief period of time in the early 1950s, censorship and censorship bodies did not officially exist in Mao's China, and there was no law or regulation on censorship. This contributed to the false
impression that editorial and ideological criticism or scrutiny prior or after production was merely a voluntary option for filmmakers. The truth was that such a prescriptive, prior-censorship was so effective and pervasive that it had been "internalised" into each stage of filmmaking. In so doing, the undertaking of each film production became a constant process of self-censorship. As for the party, this prescriptive approach offered a double-edged advantage: first, to instruct or encourage filmmakers to produce what the party demanded or what they perceived to be ideologically permissible; second, to spot, restrict or eliminate anything what the party perceived as politically incorrect or ideologically offensive. Moreover, by co-operating and de-institutionalising the practice of censorship into the filmmaking itself, and by adopting the "prescriptive" tactic, the party had also managed to de-politicise its role as a state censor. Its role magically increased and it became a film/literary critic, a mentor, a patron, a guide, a regulator, and in some cases even an author. Under Mao, the party leadership's intense preoccupation, enthusiasm and interference with filmmaking were well documented.

Unlike what has been operating for decades in Capitalist nations, in China the system (of control) established by the CCP amounted to much more than simple negative sanction and censorship: there was also the will and machinery to exercise positive direction over cultural production. (D. Holm, 1991: p3). Usually, censors sets to work when filmmakers have finished their job. In Mao's time, film censorship took place, not after films had been made, but from the inception of almost every creative process, such as the preparation of scripts, or even before the actual process began. For example, Chairman Mao and premier Zhou En-lai personally read film scripts of important productions, rendering both ideological or aesthetic critiques or suggesting substantive changes in scripts.

(2) There was also an important economic factor in film censorship. Under Mao the goal and effectiveness of film censorship were archived through the means of the highest form of central planning and monopolistic control of all resources concerning filmmaking, from finance to technology. Thus, the party's political priority and ideological preference at each different stage were expressed quantitatively in economic or statistical terms or simply "quotas". Under this
central-planning system, as I have pointed out in Chapter Two, the annual distribution of production quotas was entirely shaped and determined according to the party's political agenda, or the perceived political importance of certain themes. The more politically important, the more "production quotas", which also meant more production budget, would be allocated (for instance, productions to depict the Communist revolution, or the class struggle, usually secured a larger share). The way the quota was distributed had certainly reflected the party's intentions on how politics and society was to be viewed. This emerged as a unique and one of the most effective means of prior-censorship.

(3) In responding directly to party's prescriptive censorship methods and potential political risks involved in filmmaking, film-makers had to opt for self-censorship, perceived to be their safest and only political option at the time. Thus, a filmmaker or writer became a censor. Self-censorship took the form of inter-personal communication. It was a mental battle in sensing what would be politically permissible and how it could be expressed. It took place initially within filmmakers themselves, or in informal consultations between filmmakers and their immediate superiors. The essence of self-censorship required the film-makers of the Mao era to confine themselves to the official jargon, language or vocabulary of political correctness and the authorised discourse of society. It is true that "If everything has to be expressed in a stilted, formalised and alien political vocabulary, it makes criticism and alternatives far more difficult to articulate (G. Schopflin, 1983: p3). Meanwhile, the practice of self-censorship cultivated the filmmakers' political instinct as where roughly the limits or bottom-line lay, and when to exercise self-restraint or compromise. Consequently, the official censor's work was relatively easy and the system extremely effective.

4.2 AFTER MAO: WHITHER POLITICAL CENSORSHIP?

Between Film-makers and the Party Hierarchy
Immediately after the downfall of the Gang of Four in October 1976, the interim party leadership took steps to ban all the films of the so-called "anti-capitalist rooders" or "conspiracies" that were intended as part of a political campaign against Deng Xiao-ping after he was purged for the second time by Mao during the Cultural Revolution. At this time, the entire film industry embarked on a political campaign to eliminate or "sterilise" the legacy that the "Gang of Four" left behind. For all the other productions that were thought to be containing no serious "political errors", they were officially required to have ideological surgeries in order to prove themselves acceptable to the new and volatile political situation. By altering plots or story-lines, re-writing dialogue and sometimes hasty re-filming, most of the planned productions were eventually redeemed and completed for public release. The party's propaganda and cultural bodies went all out to conduct such a special assignment of "censorship". Meanwhile, scripts were in great shortage. As the result of this, a substantial promotion of 50 or so films produced annually in 1977 and 1978, were made from scripts written a few years before under the auspices of "Gang of Four" (P. Clark, 1987: p145). The overall standard of the productions remained artistically mediocre and ideologically dogmatic.

Meanwhile, as part of the political movement to rally the public support and generate new social consensus among the deeply disillusioned population, the new political leadership was eager to reconcile with the filmmakers who had been politically exploited, victimised and suppressed during the time of Mao. The party remained convinced of its traditional thinking about the importance of filmmaking as the most pervasive and effective medium of large-scale propaganda, and its great capacity to change or influence people's socio-political attitudes and behaviours. Deng's modernisation plan and "open-door" reform required the political support of filmmakers in visualising its new vision of China; At the same time, Deng had very strong political incentives to distance himself from, and to repudiate, Mao-style cultural dictatorship. The first positive development in relaxing the grip of censorship was seen in February 1979: the Film authority decided to release its power of script censorship to each film studios.
In October 1979, amidst the increasing political optimism, Deng Xiaoping, then the party vice chairman, made a momentous speech on behalf of the Party Central Committee, articulating the Party's resolution to end the censorious party cultural policy. He claimed:

The party leadership towards artistic and literary creations should neither be a matter of issuing orders (to artists), nor demanding them to be subordinated to casual, concrete and direct political tasks... In literary and literary criticism fields, administrative interference must now cease...

How and what to write, can only be explored and then resolved by artists themselves through their own artistic conscience. There should be no harsh intervention in this respect. (1980: p30)

Only a few months later, in February 1980, Hu Yaobang, then the Party General Secretary and a liberal-minded reformer, made a long and emotional speech, setting out his commitment in reforming party cultural policy. However, in his 23,000-characters long speech, he was obviously facing a political dilemma. He vowed that the party should never ever again wrongly accuse artistic works, or condemn artists as "anti-revolutionary". Understandably, he was extremely reluctant to break himself free from Mao's notion of cultural control and arts politics. He pledged to the artists to concentrate on subjects that are in line with the party's policy and ideology. (Y. B. Hu, 1981: p50-51).

However, underneath, the old-style practices remain deeply rooted and widely applied. Hei Di, controversial essay writer, has offered his observation on the general state of censorship in post-Mao China;

In mainland China, censorship is officially a non-existence. China has, as a matter of fact, been implementing the most effective means of censorship: self-censorship. This mechanism is operated by 'prescriptive warning beforehand' and "censorship...
afterwards'. In other words, certain official or administrative bodies are constantly issuing decrees to the publishers and media (through documents, meetings and other channels) on what is not allowed to be disclosed, and what issue are not to be addressed publicly, which saying is politically improper and which word or phrase would be illegal to use... and the effectiveness of such a censorship mechanism relies on political intimidation. (1990: p64)

The slow change in the reality of filmmaking had increasingly frustrated and infuriated many filmmakers. In May 1979, two young film-makers raised the issue by publishing an article under the title "What's wrong with Chinese cinema?". In the article, they publicly denounced, for the first time in the history of communist China, the existing system of political censorship. They argued:

Whether we should abide by the principles of arts, or merely obey the 'official wills' and so-called 'administrative decrees', this is the very issue demanding to be tackled immediately in the world of filmmaking.

It went further to warn the post-Mao political leadership that:

While attempting to issue instructions on matters of artistic creation, (the Party) must proceed in all cases from the interests or benefits of real life. It should not issue 'administrative decrees', stipulating what artists should write, and how, or instructing script-writers and directors to work on materials they are unfamiliar with. We have been now experiencing such a phenomenon that as soon as some important social problems of our daily life are touched upon, they are silenced and classified as a "forbidden zone". In other words, the artists are barred from depicting or conveying a real life. They are also prevented from having profoundly independent perception on
these complex social phenomena. It allows no artists to speak the minds of millions of ordinary people. (N. Peng, & Z. He, 1980: p178)

In October 1980, a nation-wide public debate was launched, with the consent of the party, on how to improve the party's leadership over literary creation in order to vitalise artistic practices. It was also an attempt to redefine the relationship between the party and artists. To many, this debate is reminiscent of the episode on the eve of the "Anti-Rightist Campaign" in the mid 1950s, in which intellectuals and artists were encouraged by the party to air their criticism of the party. Zhao Dan, China's best known film actor, who had been condemned and put into prison during the Cultural Revolution and is now a terminal cancer patient, made his emotional, angry and astonishing deathbed plea. No longer feared, he, for the first and also the last time in his career, voraciously attacked the party's cultural dictatorship, and film censorship in particular. In an article published on People's Daily, the party's official organ, he argued:

If the party wants to restrain or interfere with artistic creation in every possible detail, there would be no single thread of hope for arts at all. And it would be a self-destructive. The "Gang of Four" had exerted its stringent control over artistic expressions, even to the trivial detail as the type of waist-band that actresses wore, or patches in costumes. As a result of this, 800 million people ended up watching only 'Eight Modern Opera Movies'. Shouldn't we, therefore, to awaken our vigilance?... Censorship could never bring about a masterpiece... For many years, when any debate about filmmaking issues occurred, I often could not help myself crying out, though I had sometimes had to silence myself. But, Now I have nothing more to fear. (D. Zhan, 1980: p139-140)

Zhao Dan died in 10 October 1980, few days after the publication of his article.

As has been said before, between the late 1979 and early 1980, an unprecedented political period of openness and relaxation was carefully orchestrated by Deng, in order to eliminate the
remaining political power-base of Maoists, to consolidate his political authority, and furthermore
to generate a new political consensus that would be favourable to his reform scheme. However,
the optimism for the future of Chinese arts was short-lived. The party ideologues became
increasingly furious that they were quickly losing controls and the artists had gone dangerously
too far. Having secured his power, Deng sensed immediately the threat that the unchecked
political criticism could bring about. The party demanded that censorship be tightened up.

The first major incident of film censorship in the post-Mao era involved two film scripts, *Inside a
Social Archive* and *Girl Thief*. They were barred from being filmed by the authority during
Spring 1980, as both stories were criticised as having exposed the "darkness" of Chinese society.
In *Inside A Social Archive*, a young women soldier of the People's Liberation Army is raped by
an army general and his son; *Girl Thief* tells the story of a young girl who is condemned and
becomes an social outcast during the Cultural Revolution (more detailed descriptions of both
stories are given in this chapter later). The film authority responded immediately by holding a
number of emergency meetings to re-assess or re-adjust the forthcoming productions of all film
studios. Its major concern was to eliminate films which would cause allegedly "negative social
impacts". Consequently, a number of already scheduled productions were aborted because of their
"negative socio-political perception", and some productions were abandoned while on location.
(D. B. Ma, 1981: p9)

Zhao Dan's well-publicised deathbed appeal for the abolition of political censorship in
filmmaking angered many conservative members within the party leadership. It also provided
them with an opportunity to venture their counter-attack, and to force the party liberals to make
concessions. One of the most controversial events was the banning of *Unrequited Love*, a film
written by Bai Hua, a poet and playwright who serves in the Chinese Navy. The storyline is
poetic and philosophical: a China-born intellectual returns from abroad out of devotion for his
country, but is tortured, persecuted and dies during the Cultural Revolution. Outraged by the
satirical and pessimistic tone, the film was banned straightaway and a public criticising
campaign was, at the same time, launched. However, it was too soon for the party to abandon its
recent promises of non-interference policy in the world of arts. In the fear of the reoccurrence of Mao-style political campaign, which would have undoubtedly cast doubt on the new leadership's commitment on the "open-door' reform, Hu Yao-bang, then the party general secretary, was personally involved behind the scenes and tried to settle the dispute in a less damaging and arbitrary way. In concluding the case, the author of the script was officially required to publish a formal self-criticism, acknowledging that he had made serious mistakes in political judgement in writing the screenplay, and that he appreciated the way the incident had been settled. Meanwhile, the party leadership wasted no time promoting this as the best example of its reformed arts and intellectual policy.

Deng, despite being a liberal thinker as well as a doer in economic terms, thus remained a conservative on political ground. He well understood that the growing exposition of the horrendous political turbulence under Mao would pose a further threat towards the legitimacy of his leadership. While Legend of Tianyunshan Mountain, directed by Xie Jin, China's most popular and prestigious filmmaker, was being filmed, it too fell victim to the uncertainties of the period. This film was the first to touch upon one of the most sensitive chapters of the history of communist China, the "Anti-Rightist Campaign" of the mid-1950s, during which hundreds of thousands of intellectuals were wrongly accused and prosecuted. The film is in the form of sentimental melodrama but conveys serious political messages, and that is: ordinary and honest people are the victims of party's political struggles. The film was first condemned as "anti-party" and "smearing socialism". However, in a much restrained move as the result of political balancing act between the liberals and conservatives, the film was salvaged but an alternative upbeat and optimistic ending was demanded, one that justified Deng's regime. This caused outrage among some well-known script-writers. They swore in protest not to write any script for at least a couple of years.

For three months, between October and December, 1983, the party launched once again the so-called "anti-spiritual pollution campaign". Confined only to the artistic, literary, intellectual and ideological sphere, the campaign was designed to curb and eliminate "the various capitalist and
bourgeois thoughts, and the widespread discontent towards socialism, communism and the communist party. Political campaigns as such, are often short-lived due to the lack of grass-roots social support and in particular the resistance of politically-aware intellectuals. However, the filmmakers' ever-growing frustrations were reflected in their thematic choices. In 1983, films of pre-communist revolutionary themes, which are seen relatively safer politically, dominated the production schedules.

During the 1980s, the party was often seen as being deeply divided on the matter of cultural policy, and couldn't prevent themselves from shifting back and forth between obsolete doctrines and liberal thoughts. Ironically, in the aftermath of each campaign, people would be witnessing a short period of political openness and relaxation in filmmaking, as the party tried to re-assure the filmmakers that it still honoured its promise to de-politicise artistic creation.

As noted in the previous chapter, since 1983, the introduction of Deng's market economy into the administration of filmmaking created the inevitable clash between the general law of market and political power. This has challenged substantially the monolithic practice of political censorship. Obviously, it is the party's hope that they would be capable of regenerating China's film industry which is both a vehicle of propaganda for political benefits, and of a popular entertainment for profit-making. Following such a proposition, the ideal formula is to combine entertainment with political correctness or with at least political harmlessness. To accommodate the market and commodity values, it is practically impossible for the party not to de-politicise its operation of censorship. For instance, in 1983, we saw a shift in emphasis of censorship from a narrow political agenda towards the aesthetic or artistic aspects of film-making. In a speech delivered by Shi Fangyu, then head of the Film Bureau, he called on the film industry to rectify what he called some unhealthy trends, such as the excessive use of flashback, misuse of voice-over, unnecessary zoom-lens cinematography, the impropriety of title song and so on. (F.Y. Shi,1984: p110-3)

While acknowledging that the traditional relationship between the party and filmmaking had become increasingly restrained, it is also important to note that the filmmaking remained at the
time still at the mercy of the unpredictability of China's political development, for better or worse. Since the mid-1980s, the majority of the film productions (largely commercial films that cater for mainstream audience) have been distinctively subjected to the scrutiny of "market censorship" rather than that of "political censorship". However, every now and then, there is always a small number of films that attract the attention of the authorities. In 1985 alone, at least seven fictional films were banned (a record-breaking figure since 1979) because of either being political incorrect ideologically distaste.

In the aftermath of the massive student demonstrations during December 1986, Hu Yang-bang, the party general secretary who had been in sympathy with the students, was forced by the party conservatives to resign. The film authority again issued new decrees in tightening political censorship. Meanwhile, the head of the Film Bureau argued that any accusation or criticism that censorship would only hinder the improvement of the quality of filmmaking, or be harmful to artistic creation, was to "put the cart before the horse." (F. Y. Shi, 1987: p1-14). He further elaborated his argument by suggesting that "all so-called democratic countries in the West all have their film censorship, and therefore, China would be ridiculed by the world if it was to abolish it". Such a comparison was unprecedented. From 1987, the film authority set to work on China's first ever film censorship regulation since the communist victory in 1949. Later, various versions of such document was circulated among film-makers and cultural officials for consultation (an analysis of this regulations will be carried out later in this chapter).

In the aftermath of the June 4th Democratic Movement in 1989, the party concluded that the "ideological laxity and weakness" should be blamed for the break-out of such large-scale "political riots". In the field of filmmaking, old slogans and tricks of censorship returned. Ai Zhi-sheng, head of the Ministry for Radio, Television and Cinema, set out his censorship policy, which is identical to what Mao had advocated half a century ago. as follows:

The leading characters in any artistic work must be the mass of people who are the master of human history. How about the current situation (in the field of filmmaking):
the appearances of villains, eunuchs, prostitutes, foreign agents and spies on our screen have been extremely excessive. China, as a socialist country, the 'open-door' reform and modernisation couldn't be achieved by these kind of people... films which incite murder, pornography, violence and the negative side of society are to be stopped; Meanwhile, censorship boards at every level must tighten up their control and be vigilant, especially in the first stage of each production --- script censorship. (Z. S. Ai, 1991: p5)

The party has always regarded its authorised prescription of themes and the vetting of scripts are the most effective measures of pre-censorship. Again, the film authority sets out to impose "thematic ratio" scheme to satisfy the party's political needs. However, the way in which to achieve that has somehow been modified, thanks to the decade long economic reform, the enlightenment of market philosophy and growing tendency of political liberalism of the 1980s. Film authority, which also act as the prime censor, have increasingly come to terms that economic or financial incentives could well be deployed to fulfil its political demand. Without financial backing from the state, it is almost impossible to persuade the profit-driven studios to produce what many would regard simply as "political propaganda films". Thus, in late 1989, Foundation for Films of Important Revolutionary Historical Themes, a government subsidy scheme, was set up to promote the production of certain themes, which largely deal with the history of the communist party and prominent party leaders, from Mao Tsetung to Zhou Enlai to Deng Xiaoping. Other measures, including the block-viewing financed by the state are also imposed to enhance the financial performance of the studios concerned.

Thus, the ethos of film censorship in the post-Mao era could be outlined as follows:

(1) The most significant development among all is the emergence of market censorship, and apparently the official endorsement of such a new and unorthodox approach, thanks to Deng's political and economic pragmatism. It, practically, advocates a new set of values and criteria (i.e., market law, cultural industry, audience-centred mechanism, profits and so on), which derails and
undermines the principles of political censorship. Since the early 1980s, we have witnessed the rise of an unprecedented situation: an unprecedented co-existence of political and market censorship. For the film industry, there are now two masters to serve: political needs and the market ones. Understandably, what the 'market censorship intends to archive would not be successful without being at the expense of political censorship. While the old habit of political censorship still refuse to go away willingly, they have to make a compromise in order to accommodate the notion of market. However, more interestingly, both the party hierarchy and the filmmakers have attempted to combine or incorporate both these interests with some success. For instance, the state has been using financial incentives (through the leverage of subsidy and block booking) to encourage, or prescribe film studios to make films of political importance, which would otherwise not be naturally delivered by the market. Thus, in a clever way, political censorship (or intention) has been turned into a financial issue or market decision. However, there is no way that political censorship could be smoothly carried out while market interests are taken into account. It is simply a conflicting relationship.

(2) The operation of film censorship, once so pervasive, invisible and non-institutionalised under Mao, has now been increasingly institutionalised. A central censorship body has been set up, censorship begins to be regulated and censorship law prevails. One positive development which could be drawn from this phenomenon is that the new political leadership has eventually realised the political need to be open about these issues, and to deal with censorship in a more sensible and institutionalised manner. It is also a powerful demonstration, from the reformers' point of view, to 'professionalise' its administrative or control system of the film industry. In so doing, Deng's pragmatic leadership has also intended to confirm its much publicised political departure from Mao's badly criticised "campaign politics" to the new "economics in command" policy. The tendency towards the institutionalisation of film censorship has, in an ironical way which might be difficult for westerners to apprehend, created, at least, some form of framework or indeed the rules of the game, with which the once omnipresent party interferences with filmmaking could be reduced or detested.
Since the mid-1980s, Chinese filmmaking, in particular that of the "Fifth Generation", a group of "Avant garde" young film-makers, has won international acclaims as being at the cutting edge of world cinema, with its contribution of many top international prize-winners. The increasing popularity and enthusiasm that Chinese filmmaking has been receiving in the West, has triggered the film censors and the party hierarchy to take on a new and unprecedented mission: to extend the hand of censorship and arbitration into the international arena. During the last decade, one of the prime reasons that has been lurking behind many well-known censorship incidents is relatively simple: the party is at odds with the western perception as well as the interpretation of these Chinese films in question, both in political and cultural terms. Despite the advent of the "open-door" era, the suspicion and xenophobia towards the western intentions, however, remains deeply rooted within both China's officialdom and the society, in particular regarding political and cultural matters; It is worth noting that some western film critics or China-watchers are so obsessed with their cold-war style political readings (in many cases misreading) of Chinese films, it has consequently achieved nothing but to justify the Chinese censor's hyper-suspicion of western political conspiracy. This has had a counter-productive impact on the continuation of the liberal and de-politicised tendency in Chinese films after Mao.

Of course, the immediate and ultimate victim fallen of such an ideological warfare is Chinese filmmaking itself. The censors express their defiance against the western reading of these films by simply banning them at home. Also, by differing its opinions and arbitration of these controversial films from that of the West, the party hierarchy has shown to the world that it remains the absolute authority or arbitrator of any cinematic and artistic creations in China, and he is still in charge.

4.3 HOW FILM CENSORSHIP OPERATES: STRUCTURE, CODES AND PROCEDURES

The operative structure of film censorship, as a distinctive reminder of the considerable political constraint that lives with film-making, is a miniature of China's political administration. The
censoring power is devised between four different levels: (1) film studios; (2) the Party’s provincial committees; (3) the Film Bureau; (4) the Party’s Central Propaganda Department and referrals to the party leadership if necessary.

**Film Studios:**

As has been mentioned earlier, since February 1979, film studios have retained the rights for self-censorship of film scripts. Each year, while a film studio’s annual production quotas are granted by the Film Bureau, it is also given official instructions on the preferred themes, genres and the production ratios. So, for a film studio, its freedom or flexibility to choose what to produce is extremely limited from the very beginning.

Within each film studio, there is a designated “script department” (or Wen-Xue-Bu), which solicits and commissions scripts, in accordance with the overall requirement of the production plan. The staff working there, called “literary editors”, would be first “judging” and short-listing among all incoming scripts on the studio’s behalf. For all short-listed scripts, a detailed written verdict is submitted to both the studio’s party committee and the art committee for referral and approval (the art committee normally consists of experienced filmmakers who are politically trusted by the party). As very few scripts get a straight approval at the first stage, most scripts are sent back to their authors, demanding further revision or changes. In many cases, advice or suggestions on amendment would be given by both committees; On the completion of the revision, the committees would sit for another round of scrutiny, hoping to reach a final verdict; If successfully approved at the studio level, a copy of the script has to be submitted to the Film Bureau in Beijing, for the sake of reference. If the studios can not reach an agreement on an important script, they will simply play safe and refer it to the Film Bureau to settle the dispute.

Having satisfied themselves with the “text” of scripts in accordance with political and artistic criteria (which are constantly subject to change and adjustment), the studios would also vet directors’ shooting scripts (though in recent years this has become more of a protocol procedure.
rather than that of substance). On location, directors are obliged to complete their work on the basis of the authorised shooting scripts. According to the Film Bureau's regulation, it allows no production to take place, without first having its shooting script properly examined.

As soon as the rough cut of a film is completed, the studios' party and arts committee would hold an internal preliminary viewing before submitting it to a higher authority concerned. Key members of the production team, including director, producer and leading members of the cast, are invited to sit in on the viewing. After the viewing, the members of committees discuss and produce a verdict as to whether the film has in principle been passed or on what ground it needs to be revised or improved.

The Party's Provincial Committee

Under Mao, the ideological, media and cultural institutions were jointly controlled by a two-tier administrative system: the party's Central Propaganda Department, and the party committee of a province to which the institution belonged geographically. Such a controlling structure has remained intact during the post-Mao era. The involvement of the provincial party committee in censorship is in principle intended as a de facto "gate-keeper" for the central authority. It is commonly accepted that the provincial authorities could exercise the full administrative power to supervise, instruct and scrutinise local film studios. They are entitled to vet scripts if they wish, or examine completed films before they are sent to Beijing for final approval. Scripts in which the plots relate to identical provinces are required to be submitted to the provinces in question for consent, consultation and advice.

In reality, since the beginning of the 1980s, censorship at provincial level has been increasingly weakened, as the direct result of the party's attempt to modify its political control in filmmaking. Though, censorship at provincial level has still been in place, its significance has been largely reduced to no more than a matter of protocol, no longer a measure of power. On the completion of a film, the studios will invite provincial leaders to attend a specially-arranged preview, that
may bear the name of censorship viewing, and to be entertained as privileged guests, rather than as censors with the real power of arbitration.

The Film Bureau

The Film Bureau, under the Ministry of Radio, Television and Cinema, is the top national government body, responsible for the administration and regulation of the Chinese film industry. Meanwhile, it also acts as a film censor or arbitrator. Either Chinese films or imported foreign films need to be vetted and approved by the Bureau for a public release. In most of the cases, it has the final say on whether a film should be passed.

It is the "film censorship section", affiliated to the Bureau, which in fact carries out the day-to-day operation of censorship. Headed by the director of the Bureau, this loosely-structured section usually contains about ten members, largely recruited from other departments within the Film Bureau.

The censoring procedure at the ministerial level proceeds in two phases: (1) the examination of the working-print of a completed film (i.e. double system print, a system that allows separate picture and sound to be projected simultaneously in sync, usually used before editing is finalised). At this stage, the censors would deliver a collective verdict on the film as a whole, and on what grounds the film needs to be revised; (2) the final approval of its standard-print (a ready-to-distribute print with picture and sound already in sync and recorded onto the same piece of film) to check whether the censors' advice and suggestions have been taken into account and implemented in the final version of the film.

Unlike the preliminary censorship at the studio level, which is largely informal and less arbitrary, the proceedings of national censorship are regarded as formal and confidential. In principle, no member of the production, including director and scriptwriter, would be permitted to sit through
the viewing and the discussing session afterward (only a handful of veteran directors, such as Xie Jin, have been given the privilege to attend the censoring viewing of their work). After the viewing, the censoring body is required to engage in sufficient discussions and debates about the film, "in particular its ideological and artistic merits." Of course, ideological as well as political correctness, if any, have always been on top of the censorship agenda to be looked at. Following the discussion, the censors would finally reach a written verdict. If a film is to be passed only under certain conditions, the censors should, at the same time, provide detailed instructions on what needs to be revised or amended for securing the final approval. In some cases, if the censors cannot reach an mutual agreement upon a particular film, the minister in charge of the film industry, will be referred to and will take responsibility to re-examine the case and, hopefully, settle the dispute. According to the latest official regulation, if directors or producers refute the arbitration of their work, they may take the matter to the court within three months of receiving the censors' ruling.

In order to promote productions of the so-called "great historic revolutionary themes", an updated version of political propaganda films, the Film Bureau is obliged to get itself involved in those productions as early as possible, from preparation of the scripts to casting. With the progress of the production, the censors' activities become further intensified. Ai Zhi-Sheng, then the Minister of Radio, TV and Cinema, claimed that he had previewed Making of A Nation, a historic account on the founding of the People's Republic, no less than 7 times for the purpose of censorship (Z. S. Ai 1991, p5).

The Party Leadership and Its Roles as Critic and Paramount Censor

It should be realised that after Mao, the extent that the party leadership has been interfering in filmmaking has become less dogmatic and less pervasive than that of the Mao era. The reason is simple. As a political pragmatist, Deng does not wish to be seen as the inheritor of Mao's ideological and cultural legacy, which has become increasingly unpopular and rejected by
Chinese society in recent years; A somewhat different system was evolved, albeit it has the same fundamental objective of ensuring party control over ideological homogeneity and the flow of information, Deng's regime realises that a certain degree of autonomy and openness is essential and politically rewarding if the public are to be drawn into the new system. Specifically, there is less and less insistence on ideological uniformity and ritualistic declaration of loyalty to the party and its political belief.

Under Deng, the emergence of a relatively free and less dogmatic political context has been constantly pushing the filmmakers to tackle the very issues which are regarded as taboos, in either political or social terms. Every now and then, the party authority is astonished by the enormous capacity that certain films could have in causing political controversies or damage. This has, in turn, justified, from the party's point of view, the validity of the direct censorial involvement by the party's highest authority, when needed. To the party, censorship becomes a necessary constituent principle for the maintenance of the state, as well as a measure of political power.

During the 1980s, Gu Hua, one of the best known contemporary Chinese writers, had his five novels adapted for the screen, including Hibiscus Town. Having left China and emigrated to Canada, he reveals the notion of censorship practice from the highest political authority in the light of political incidents that had once surrounded his novel and the film of same title:

People involved in film-making understand perfectly well that the Zhongnanhai Compound (part of the Forbidden City, where the Chinese leadership work and live) usually pays no attention, or be incredibly tolerant, to films that are thought to be ideologically dogmatic and artistically mediocre. What would draw their attention are those films considered to be ideologically paradoxical, thematically heavy-weight and artistically extraordinary and non-conventional. Then, they would make comments and demand them to be thoroughly checked for political correctness; In theory, though, the final verdict of censorship rests with the Film Bureau, in practice, many remarkable
films have been in serious political trouble after having been examined by the Zhongnanhai. In the end, these films are severely condemned and suppressed. Sun and Men (Unrequited Love), Dove Trees and Wild Field are, among others, some well-known incidents. (Gu Hua, 1992: p71)

Under Deng, despite the party’s proclaimed desire to grant more freedom towards filmmaking and other arts, it has proved to be very hard to implement. In particular, it is difficult for those politicians, who had been in the business of self-styled censors since 1949, to give up such a decades-long habit. Moreover, there is no shortage of chances which lure or invite them to intervene; The party leadership’s direct intervention in censorship has usually occurred under two circumstances. First, when certain films are politically too sensitive or paradoxical for the Film Bureau to handle, especially when the political situation is volatile, the Film Bureau and the Ministry of Radio, TV and Cinema would refer the case directly to the Central Propaganda Department or the Central Secretariat for an arbitration. To the filmmakers, this constitutes the final juncture of the prior-censorship. In most cases, such high-up viewing is used as a political wrestling ground between the liberals and conservatives. Unrequited Love, and One and Eight, for instance, were declared banned immediately after having been examined by the members of the Politburo; Second, when the party leadership are informed, through various channels, of the political controversies caused by films which have been publicly released or ready to be released, they would sometimes demand a briefing, and furthermore, a private viewing before rendering a definitive ideological critique. Dove Tree, Death Certificate, Hibiscus Town, either shelved for good or temporarily banned, fall into this category. Even if a film has been approved by the Film Bureau in the first place, it may still be "killed" later at the order of the top leadership.

Meanwhile, the key members of party leadership has also been occasionally seen having left personally involved in filmmaking, by being an advisor or contributor. In the early 1990s, while Big Battles, a trilogy depicting the key battles of the Chinese Communist Revolution in defeating the Kuomintang forces in the eve of the founding of the People’s Republic, was in prior-production preparation, Yang Shangkun, then President of the People’s Republic of China,
summoned the production crew and offered his suggestions. He even personally revised part of
the script.

Censorship Codes

As has been discussed previously, film censorship under Mao was distinctively prescriptive, both
politically and ideologically. It was conducted in accordance with the party political consensus
and interests. It had no statutory censorship code or regulation. As the party has reckoned that it
represented legitimately the will and interests of its people, therefore its ideology and interests
should naturally be synonymous with that of its people; In 1988, the further commercialisation of
the film industry, and also the party's attempt to regulate film-making in a more professional
setting, the Film Bureau completed the fourth edition of China's first censorship regulation since
1949. The film classification system was first adopted in May, 1989.

Below are the codes of film censorship, extracted from the regulations (personal archives):

Films which contain the following sequences are to be forbidden for public exhibition in this
country:

1. Violation of the constitution and laws;
2. Jeopardy of the national sovereignty, dignity and unity;
3. Jeopardy of the social morality and degradation of citizens cultural
accomplishments, as listed below, by:

   (A) Advocating pornography, obscenity and exposure of private parts;
   (B) Nudity and sexual love which goes beyond the need of the plot;
   (C) Obscene dialogues;
   (D) Jeopardy of public order, endangering peace and unity of the society;
   (E) Murder, brutality, blood and maltreatment which prove to be objectionable;
   (F) Detailed descriptions of criminal offences and methods such as
drug-trafficking, drug-taking, kidnapping, rape and theft.
4. Sex education which is thought to be not scientific;

5. Advocating of feudalism and superstitions (normal religious activities excluded); Films which contain the followings are prevented from being seen by youngsters under age 16.

   (A). Sequences of rape, theft, drug-taking, drug-trafficking and prostitution;
   (B). Sequences of violence, murder and fighting which are thought to be objectionable;
   (C) Sequences of sexual love;
   (D) Abnormal or unacceptable social phenomena;

So far, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that this code has been properly interpreted and further implemented. Moreover, the party and state would be always the authorised interpreter of this regulation when coming to the ruling. To a large extent, its symbolic significance (which is designed to demonstrate the party's commitment to de-politicise and professionalize filmmaking) has outweighed its substance and practicality. Some filmmakers are reported as having argued strongly that the codes as a whole are not clearly defined and are too ambiguous, in particular regarding moral or political matters; Also, the articles concerning film violence have also caused concern. For instance, many filmmakers in the field of Kung Fu films, the hottest property in commercial cinema, have feared that such statutory restriction would reduce greatly the spectacular effects of Kung Fu films.

4.4 WHAT THE CENSORS SEE AND BAN: A BLACK LIST

Below is a chronological account (1979-1991), documenting the films which have been on the censors "black list". This is intended to demonstrate how censorship actually operates and what the censors see and ban. It is also of relevance in providing explicit information and deepening our understanding directly of the notion of censorship and Chinese politics. Hopefully, it would
also shed light on the very fine tuning in the party's manipulation and maintenance of political homogeneity.

Understandably, due to the sensitivity of the issue, the gathering of the materials below has been difficult, painful, although, ultimately, rewarding. So far, in China, almost no source of official information provides or records systematic or relevant materials on film censorship. Most of the materials below are drawn from two sources: first, internally-circulated documents; second, more importantly, the personal interviews I had conducted with several dozen Chinese film-makers and other relevant personalities in 1990. A considerable amount of materials are first-hand, original and are revealed here for the first time.

1979

* The film script Inside A Social Archive, by Wang Jin, published in October 1979 in Film Creation.

The storyline: Li Lifang, a teenage girl of working-class background joins the army during the Cultural Revolution. While a nurse in a military hospital, she is raped by a general, and his son. Forced to be demobilised from the army, she finds herself in despair. Not tolerated by her parents and husband for what has been done to her, she eventually turns to sexually-related crimes bent on revenge and self-destruction. The script was officially banned from filming. Though not a 'poisonous weed', as the official source claimed, this script exposes the negative aspects of society.

* The film script Girl Thief, by Li Kewei, published in Film Creation magazine in November 1979.

This encountered a fate similar to Inside A Social Archive. Huang Ling, a teenage girl, was driven onto the streets, being homeless and poverty-stricken, after her mother, a known Peking opera actress, dies during the Cultural Revolution. To survive she earns her living by theft. Later,
instructed by the head of the Public Security Bureau, she makes a new start. It also was barred
from being filmed.

1980

* Unrequited Love (1980, Changchun Film Studio; s: Bai Hua, Peng Ning; d: Peng Ning)

This is the first fiction movie to be banned in Deng's Open Door Era. Even though the screenplay
had been published, film previews held, and advertisements were on display outside theatres and
in popular movie magazines, it was never released nationwide.

It is a political melodrama: Lin Cong-Guang, an established Chinese painter who lived an easy
and well-to-do life in the United States, returns to his homeland shortly after Mao's People's
Republic was founded, in order to devote himself to the country. The outbreak of the Cultural
Revolution shattered all his dreams. Though assaulted and tortured by the 'radical'
revolutionaries, and his wife is dead, his remaining thoughts, though bitter, are with China, from
which he derives spiritual sustenance. One day, Xing Xing, his grown-up daughter tells him that
she is going to marry an overseas Chinese to settle down in the States. Lin responds with fury
and dismay. Xing Xing questions him: 'Father, you love this country deeply. Through bitter
frustration, you go on loving it, but does this country love you?'. Lin is silent. To escape being
captured, he seeks shelter in the reed marshes. When the film draws to a close Lin is seen frozen
to death. While dying, he dragged his freezing body, thus stamping a huge question mark in the
snow.

The film was, in the first place, approved, by the end of 1980, by censorship at all levels. A few
months later, in Spring 1981, the 'Anti-Spiritual Pollution' Campaign, waged by party
conservatives, changed its fate overnight. The film prints were thus withdrawn from distribution
and then virtually shelved. 'Liberation Army Daily', the official newspaper of the Central Military
Committee, accused the film of being a manifesto provoking bourgeois liberalism. In the
Autumn, an article, entitled 'On Unrequited Love's Wrong Tendency', written by two influential
literary critics at the party’s request, was published in most of the leading national newspapers, concluding that ‘this film, either ideologically or artistically, has serious mistakes being a deviation from the Party leadership and the Socialist line.’ In response, Bai Hua made a public self-criticism, saying that he had ‘failed to draw positive distinctions between the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Socialist motherland, as well as between the ‘Gang of Four’ and the Party.’ He had “ignored the strength of the Party and the people during the ‘ten-year catastrophe’ and exaggerated the power of the Gang of Four.” Claiming further that film ‘should experience social life as though bubbling over with excitement in a society facing historic transition’ and ‘be responsible and faithful to history, people and the Party.’ It needs to be noted that this incident was resolved in a relatively modest manner, as the traumatic consequences of the Party cultural dictatorship remained all too fresh and horrific. But Hu Yao-bang, then the Party General Secretary, himself the victim in a political campaign of same nature in 1987, warned film-makers not to ‘attributing errors in party work’ to the nature of the socialist system itself, and Unrequited Love was thought to ‘convey unhealthy political sentiments and will be harmful to its people’ (Y.B. Hu, 1981).

*Maple Tree* (1980, Emei Film Studio; s: Zheng Yi, d: Zhang Yi)

This tells the story of sacrificed youth: Set in the Cultural Revolution, Lu Dan-Fen, the girl, and Li Feng-Gang, the boy, are two high school students whom have fallen in love with each other. Soon their relation breaks up as the result of their joining two different student organisations which are rivals, resorting to violence. In vicious fighting, Li (the boy) leads his fellow comrades rushing into the enemy headquarters, and conquers it. Feeling humiliated, Lu (the girl) refuses to give herself up by throwing herself out of the window. Later, when the opposition has taken power, Li was consequently executed.

The director was required by both the provincial leader and the Film Bureau, to cut the following sequences, if it was to be released to public viewing:

1. Any dialogue (any sound-track to be exact) containing the phrases ‘Chairman Mao taught us...’; in the fear that it would remind audiences to have a grudge or hatred against Mao;
(2) The documentary extracts from Mao's 1966 review of the Red Guards parade in Tian'anmen Square;

(3) The sequence in which Li holds Lu's body in his arms, struggling forward step by step towards a dazzling red sun. Li, an increasingly tiny figure, is swallowed leaving the sun occupying the screen;

(4) The sequence in which parents of those who died in fighting come to the graveyard, as the Cultural Revolution ends, mourning their beloved ones.

One official of the Film Bureau showed particular resentment to the latter sequence. 'Does the sequence, which Li holds Lu's corpse towards the red sun, signify discontent and hatred against Mao?' Despite the director's protest, the film was cut according to what the censors' wishes, and then released only in a few major cities for a very short period of time) (B. Zhang, 1980: p1)

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*One and Eight* (1983, Guangxi Film Studio; d: Zhang Junzhao, s: Zhang Ziliang)

Set in the later 1930s, this is about a Chinese communist soldier who persuades eight petty criminals to reform and take up arms against the Japanese during the Second World War. This is to be remembered as the first and most momentous work of the Fifth Generation. It is adapted from a long narrative poem, by Gao Xiaochuan, a revolutionary poet. The censorship authority objected to the ending, in which one of the eight criminals shoots a Red Army nurse to prevent her from imminent capture, rape and murder at the hands of the Japanese. As a result, the ending had to be substantially altered and re-taken, because the film did not provoke 'the national spirits', as the authorities claimed. The new ending sees the man shooting the Japanese soldier and rescuing the nurse. Beside this, it is recorded that over 70 sequences were cut. The film was eventually restored to its full version in 1988, and is available for export.

*At Middle Age* (1983, Changchun Film Studio; s: Shen Rong, d: Wang Qimin, Shun Yu)
This film was adapted from a prize-winning novella by Shen Rong, one of China's most prolific woman writers. It focuses on the sensitive issue of the party's poor treatment of intellectuals, in particular of the middle-aged group who suffered most. Set in 1979, Lu Wenting, the leading character, a middle-aged eye surgeon, collapses after undertaking an excessive amount of work. She is in bed, lonely, depressed and indifferent towards life and her thoughts flash back to her best time of youth. She now sees herself as the mother of a family of four, confined to a single room, and the children receiving no proper care because of a heavy work-load and lower pay. She tries hard to make ends meet. What is asked of her is nothing but sacrifices.

The novella took the nation by storm, engaging a nation-wide debate. The author was soon asked to script it for the screen. The script was reported as having reached Shanghai, Beijing and other studios, but it failed to be filmed in the fear of inviting politically harsh treatment. The Changchun Film Studio deliberately exposed itself to danger by having it filmed. Half way through filming was suspended. The film was, however, eventually completed, but the director was required to give it a 'happy ending': On a bright shining day, Lu Wenting, helped by her husband, steps out of the hospital, and is seen confident looking, metaphorically, towards a better future.

1984

*Sisters* (1984, Shanghai Film Studio; s:Ye Nan; d:Wu Yigong)

Set in March, 1937, in the Gobi Desert. A group of Red Army soldiers encounter a section of Kuomintang forces, resorting to vicious combat. Only two soldiers, seriously wounded, survive: a Red Army woman ('sister') and a 'little trumpet boy'. They are anxious to return to their base. The
little boy is shot dead when hunting for food, and the sister's situation deteriorates and is nearly
dying. An unfinished journey.

This work was not approved by the Shanghai Film Bureau. It was said, according to the
censorship committee, to be politically unsound, overstating the cruelty of the revolutionary war
and portraying feelings of pessimism and hopelessness. The ending especially shows the sister
(and an ethnic girl who she met on the way) gazing at, from afar, at a pale and heavy sunset.
Commanded by the committee, the director re-grouped the crew to retake the ending: Sunrise.
The Gobi's horizon immense in bright sunshine. The sister limps forward towards a huge red
sun. (Author's interview with Wu Yigong, 1990).

1985

* Red Queen At Gun Point (1985, Guangxi Film Studio; s:Xiao Jian; d:Wu Tianren)

This touches upon a real problem in China, emerging in recent years which the government
refuses to expose: drug-trafficking. Set in the 1980s, the 'Golden Triangle', one of world's most
influential drug production bases, sets itself up in China. In the film, a Chinese painter and a
film director are dragged into the business, trading for drug syndicates. As usual the ending is
predictable as the syndicate is doomed.

It, a film of lower quality by all means, encountered intensive censorship. It was eventually
referred to the Public Security Ministry and the National Security Ministry to reach a final
solution. It is at last banned on several counts: the drug issue, the religious issue and the
diplomatic issue.

* Death Certificate (1985, Changchun Film studio)
As a reconstructed account of the Northeast Anti-Japanese Army of the late 1930s, it opens old wounds being a long and controversial topic in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. Within a matter of a few days of being shown, many veterans wrote to the Party Central Committee in protest. The film was accused of distorting historic truth, and accordingly banned. (Chinese Film Yearbook, 1986: p3.10-11)

* 19 Flowers (1985, Xiaoxiang Film Studio)

In the mid 1930s, Li Qian, a Shanghai girl-student who becomes a young revolutionary serving in the Red Army, is dismissed from teaching as the result of her questioning Wang Ming (the Communist Party's General Secretary at the time) and his military strategy confronting the Kuomintang forces. Later she again strongly protests while a team of soldiers are ordered to the Kuomintang-rulled area to seize wheat flour for a Comintern adviser in the base. In consequence, she is incriminated as a 'traitor and executed.

The censorship committee decided not to pass this film for public release, because it 'did not spell out how Li's revolutionary faith is generated'. (Chinese Film Yearbook, 1986: p3.10)

* The Last Clue of A World Mystery (1985, E'mei Film Studio)

This work was described, by the party cultural officials, as a typical show-piece 'unduly pursuing economic effects but ignoring social consequences. Set in the Second World War, Japanese, Americans and the Chinese Communist Party, spend their time hunting for the skeletons of Peking Man, a famous archaeological find. The film was first passed and then banned. Violence and brutality were to blame: in the film, Chinese are seen being hung, deformed and violently beaten, which was thought to be upsetting. It was re-released in March 1986 after all the offending shots were removed.

* Dove Tree (1985, Xiaoxiang Film Studio; s: unknown; d: Wu Ziniu)
In 1979, China launched its so-called 'Self-Defending Campaign' against Vietnam. The film tells a tragic story about a Vietnamese army nurse rescuing two Chinese soldiers, but who ends up being shot dead by a group of Chinese border guards. The script was originally prepared for a Hong Kong film studio, but failed to survive as the result of the Film Bureau's persuasion. It was later taken over by the Xiaoxiang Film Studio. The Film Bureau tried to suspend the filming in middle of production, but was not successful. It was reported that, under mounting pressures from high-ranking military officials, the studio, consequently, did not submit the film. It is the first work banned by the film studio itself since 1979. It still shows no sign of being released, as having committed 'serious ideological errors' and 'advocating human love, sympathy and inhumanity of warfare in the abstract terms' (Chinese Film Yearbook, 1986:3.11-12)

1986

* Task Force Beyond Nations (1986, Shanghai; s: Cheng Siqing; d:Huang Shaqin)

This is particularly interesting case. The following account was gathered from my interview with Mrs. Huang Shaqin, the director, in Shanghai, October 1990.

The film is part of the trend of making 'Entertainment Films'. It is an old-fashioned detective story, with a strong touch of modernity in its outset. The story: Beijing is to receive General K, a foreign leader. According to reliable intelligence, the 'Black Storm', an internationally-known terrorist group, is dispatching its members to China to assassinate him. The national security network in Peking, working against time, captures them, preventing an international incident. a list of questions after the censorship proceedings:

.After the censorship viewing, the Film Bureau put forward a list of questions:
(1) How could a foreign terrorist group so easily slip into Peking on the eve of a foreign leader's state visit. It would heavily undermine national security consequently. All dialogues containing 'Peking' were therefore to be removed;

(2) In the film the foreign leader, though identified with no nation-state, speaks Spanish and is also in appearance like a Southern American. It may cause diplomatically misunderstanding or dispute abroad; It was required to blur the identity of the foreign leader in whatever means.

At last, the director outwitted the censors by asking General K to speak, instead, in Esperanto (interview, 1990)

* Bloody Gate (1986 Film Studio)

In 1927, in the aftermath of suppression by Chiang Kai-shek of the Shanghai Worker's Uprising, a revolutionary worker who has had a narrow escape, joins in a local underground society in order to seek revenge for all his martyred comrades. The censorship committee questioned the director's knowledge of the history concerned by asking: Is it logical for a worker to seek revenge for his fellow comrades by being part of the underground society which fully supported Chiang Kai-shek? Is it a distortion of history? (Chinese Film Yearbook, 1987: p1.12-13)

* Hunting Song (1986, Shenzhen Film Company)

Made by the newly-established film studio in Shenzhen, China's earliest and most important 'Special Economic Zone' (SEZ), the film is set in the pre-historic era, reconstructing a human attempt to conquer nature, and also portraying struggles between tribes.

The film was banned because "the director, and the studio as well, lacks fundamental knowledge of history and science in general." Firstly, the birthplaces of the human beings and the developments, in the pre-historic era, were mostly places, with plenty of water, lush grass and
decent weather, which were suitable for human survival. In the film it was depicted as a wasteland with moving sand-dunes; Secondly, there are two neighbouring tribes in the film, one is seen already entered into the Iron Age, but another remaining in the Stone Age. It "created confusion over scientific knowledge". (Chinese Film Yearbook, 1987:1.12)

* Heavenly Buddha (1986, Shenzhen Film Studio)

The story: A pilot from the United States is lost on a mission over China during the Second World War, and later finds himself in a community which is totally cut off from the outside, a Yi ethnic tribe in which slavery still exists. The pilot also eventually becomes a slave, enduring life by living in inhuman and primitive circumstances.

The Film Bureau, after the preview, expressed its indignation at the film, saying that 'it has put the good will between all nationalities of China in jeopardy. It was banned.

1987

* Hibiscus Town (1987, Shanghai Film Studio; d:Xie Jin, s:A Cheng, & Xie Jin)

Adapted from Gu Hua's prize-winning novel of the same title, the movie revolves around Hu Yuyin, a young and charming woman, who sells bean curd in Hibiscus Town. Being hard working and hospitable, she makes a fortune. But she suffers personal traumas when the Cultural Revolution breaks out. Labelled a 'capitalist roader', she is consigned with Qin Shutian, a Rightist, to sweep the streets. They soon fall in love with each other and marry (though without official approval). Hu Yuyin becomes pregnant. Qin is arrested and thrown into jail, and Hu Yuyin nearly dies as the result of a difficult birth. As the 'Gang of Four' are purged, everything turns out right again: Her money confiscated by the Party is returned, Qi Shu-tian comes back from jail and the family is united.
After the novel was published in 1981 and awarded a national literature prize in 1982, according to Gu Hua, 10 of the 11 film studios which were allowed to make fiction films, had approached him in turn, expressing their willingness to film it, but all plans failed to materialise.

Xie Jin, the most privileged director, finally completed the filming in late 1986. The film was first passed and greatly praised by the Film Bureau in November 1986, and Shanghai Film Studio was prepared to produce standard-prints for distribution nation-wide. In conjunction with the first student demonstration ever since 1949, on 28th December, *Hibiscus Town*, and its director, as well as the heads of the Film bureau and the Ministry of Radio, Television and Cinema were summoned to the Zhongnanhai, the Party officials' residential compound. The Politburo decided to preview this film before it could be publicly released. Hu Yao-bang and a majority of members of the Politburo were present. After the showing, it was reported that, Hu Yao-bang was furious, saying: 'I now realise what kind of new movie Xie Jin has made! What is this new society and our Party cadres being portrayed on the screen? A tragedy, a pitch-dark picture, is it not a desperately serious matter? I have nothing more to say, and you sort it out'. The film was banned. (Gu Hua, 1992: p71-72)

1989

@ Zhang Yimou's *Ju Dou* (Japan-China co-production) was perhaps the first to be officially banned from home distribution after the crack-down of the June 4th 1989 Democratic Movement. The film, based on a contemporary Chinese novella, is set in a tiny and isolated village in the 1920s. A prosperous middle-aged man, a dye manufacturer, buys a pretty young wife, Ju Dou, his third. Like the earlier wives, she fails to bear him a child (he is almost certainly impotent), and he tortures her. Tian Qing, his nephew, who works for him in an almost indentured capacity, watches his aunt during the day through a peephole. Ju Dou senses he is watching and exposes her body, which is covered with bruises. This goads him into action. They are in love and she eventually conceives a child, a boy, which her husband allows the village to think is his. Later,
the husband falls into the pool of dye and is drowned. The dye workshop in the end of the film is dramatically burnt down as Judou believed she is doomed.

The government had refused to distribute *Ju Dou* in China. There is, so far, no specified reasons given. Some speculated that the reason why it was banned was because of the unhappy and tragic ending since 'unhappiness is not permitted in the workers paradise', or, as someone believed, that the portrayal of the dyer, a old and cruel man who wants to destroy the youngsters' hope and life, may have annoyed the aged party conservatives especially in the aftermath of the democratic movement.

**CONCLUSION**

Perhaps for both film censors and filmmakers today in China, no one would claim they know exactly what the rules are in censorship. For the censors, it is largely a matter of "I know it when I see it". In order to curtail the excessive and unpredictable official censorship, filmmakers in China have resorted to a more measured form of self-censorship as a safe way to secure the official approval and carry on being a film-maker. Despite sometimes the bizarre practices of film censorship in post-Mao China, we should not overlook an important development which has been taking place for some times now. That is: the once almighty ideological power of the Party, is no longer with the Party, and a kind of self-imposed censorious behaviour among both the film-makers and audiences, that was once so pervasive and common during the Mao era, is now rejected and ridiculed. Another important development in the realm of censorship is the co-existence of a dual censorship system: the political and the commercial. The direct consequences resulted by their mutual compromise could only lead to one possibility: the further disintegration of the already very weakened party ideology. One can certainly tell a great deal about the state of Chinese film from the instinct and behaviour of the censors. One can also tell a lot more about the censors from the way which the film-makers have dealt with them. From what the film
censorship has revealed, we can at least be certain that the Party's intensifying ideological confusion has reached the point of crisis.
Since 1984, a group of young Chinese film-makers, best known as the Fifth Generation, or Diwu-dai, has been regarded as the cutting edge of international film-making, enjoying constant attention as well as controversy both inside and outside China. They have transformed Chinese film with innovation in both narrative and visual forms. In the West, the so-called "New Chinese Cinema" and the Fifth Generation have often been seen as synonymous. Their films have been regular prize-winners at major international film festivals, but at home most of them have been banned for one reason or another (just to name a few: One and Eight, Yellow Earth, On the Hunting Ground, Red Sorghums, Raise the Red Lantern, and Farewell My Concubine). In my view, the Fifth Generation film-making represents, not only aesthetically one of the most significant film movements in the history of world cinema, but also a unique case in which a discourse on the relationship of film-making, politics and everyday life can be examined and revealed.

To some, the most significant feature of the Fifth Generation is its great capacity for creating interests, relevance and controversy among academics of many different principles, both at home and abroad, from political scientists to aestheticists, from cultural critics to anthropologists. However, the group has also its particular significance to Sinologists, film historians and social scientists with a keen interest in China. To a certain degree, each of the different approaches presents a special angle or perspective. For instance, in the West, the Fifth Generation was first perceived as an "Avant-garde" film movement, with a collective aesthetic consensus. But later it was, gradually, considered as a politically dissenting film movement, especially after the military crackdown of the 1989 Pro-democratic Movement. I will be providing an analysis of the findings from an audience survey conducted in 1991 on the British perception of Chinese cinema, in particular of the Fifth Generation filmmaking.
Inside China, opinions about the Fifth Generation are even more divided and sometimes confused or contradictory. The official attitude to, and verdict passed upon, the "Fifth Generation" have constantly been re-adjusted, so as to reflect the changes of political and ideological development, for better or worse. For a short period of time, they were hailed by the authorities as the "glory and hope" of Chinese film-making, but were later condemned as a hidden subversive cultural force under western influence, both financially and ideologically. While the new generation of Chinese intellectuals may take pleasures in their careful search for any deeper and hidden political and cultural subtexts within the works of the Fifth Generation, the majority of Chinese audiences have dismissed such films as intricate, obscure and not entertaining.

In this chapter, I would like to examine the following issues: Firstly, to provide a profile for the Fifth Generation: Who are the member of such group? and how does this term come into being, and what has it actually imply? How has their upbringing under Mao (in particular their personal experience as "Red Guards" and "educated youth" in the rural areas during the Cultural Revolution) has shaped their political and artistic thinking that has become manifest in their film-making? Also, I would like to explain that the Fifth Generation is (or was ) in fact a movement very closely tied to Mao's legacy and the complexity of post-Mao reality.

Secondly, the aesthetics of the Fifth Generation if there is any. It could be argued that, there is no such thing which could be described as purely aesthetic. At least, our observations upon the history of Chinese film-making since 1949 have clearly demonstrated that the aesthetic had never freed itself from the fate of being subordinated to political power and its ideology. In a similar way, looking into the aesthetic aspects of the Fifth Generation film-making is an alternative way of examining its political thinking. For instance, how has it departed from the rigid Leninist concept of Socialist Realism, determining to be "different" from its predecessors? How have these film-makers attempted to rehabilitate the idea of humanism (which was condemned under Mao), by originating a unique set of "aesthetic" codes, in both visual and narrative terms? And, how should this be interpreted?
Thirdly, the Fifth Generation's political and cultural impact, both at home and abroad. What does the Fifth Generation actually mean to Chinese cinema and its home audience during the post-Mao Era? How has the fate of this group been affected by the constant ideological battles between the ever-sensitive political regime in China and the equally speculative China watchers and film critics in the West?

In addressing these questions I will make special reference to two leading members of the Fifth Generation, Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, in an attempt to, more vividly, illustrate the development, the ups and downs, of this movement.

5.1 A PROFILE FOR THE "FIFTH GENERATION": THEIR POLITICAL & SOCIAL ORIGINS

In the evening, of 12 April 1985, Chen Kaige, along with Zhang Yimou, his cinematographer, attended his debut of "Yellow Earth" at the Hong Kong International Film Festival. It was their first foreign trip. The film is set in the late 1930s, and is about a brief encounter between a communist soldier and a peasant family in a poor mountainous village in Northern China, where Mao's communist "Red Capital" was situated at the time. Despite the fact that most expected the usual heavily indoctrinated plots from any film made in Communist China, the cinema house was packed. To most of the local Hong Kong people and western film critics present, the film was reportedly a mind-blowing one that many responded with a sense of disbelief or incomprehension. This film, before their eyes, was distinctively different from any film from mainland China they had seen in the past, from narrative to visual imagery to depiction of communists and peasants. Tony Ryans, a British film critic and for many years a keen promoter of Chinese films, describes the occasion:

The screening was received with something like collective rapture, and the post-film discussion stretched long past its time limit. The occasion was doubly remarkable.
because the audience was predominantly Hong Kong Cantonese, precisely the audiences
with the lowest expectations of Mainland China and its culture, thanks to the endless
stream of double talk from Beijing about the future of the British colony. The Cantonese
are notoriously poor speakers of Putonghua, China's national language, but many of the
questioners that evening were so intent on speaking to Chen and Zhang in a common
language that they set aside their linguistic embarrassment and plunged in regardless.
One of the biggest rounds of applause was for the young man who took the audience
microphone and stammered out not a question but a declaration of love to the two
filmmakers: I gave up hope in China years ago,' he said' but if a film like yours can be
made in China, there's hope for all of us. (T. Ryans, 1990: p1-2)

News dispatches were soon sent to the West, proclaiming enthusiastically: After Mao: the rise of
the New Chinese Cinema. Meanwhile, the above event had also become commonly accepted as
the birthday of the Fifth Generation.

The term of "Fifth Generation" came about between 1983-84. It is largely the end-product of
many broad terms which refers to the emergence of radical and experimental film-making in the
post-Mao era (i.e. "experimental film-making", "Avant-garde", "academy-school" or "Chinese
New Wave" and others). However, the term 'Fifth generation' has narrowed down a great deal. It
refers specifically to a small group of young and innovative film-makers, mainly graduates in
1982 from the Beijing Film Academy, China's only film school, re-opened in 1978 after the
Cultural Revolution. Initially, its leading members mainly included: directors Zhang Junzhao,
Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang and Wu Ziniu, cinematographers Zhang Yimou, Gu
Changwei, and art designer He Qun.

On the surface, the term, which was loosely structured and ill-defined at the very beginning, has
simply manifested a chronological fact: this youthful group is in the line up for China's fifth
generation of film-makers. After a close examination, one finds that the term does not suggest a
natural or purely biological successions of "generations". In essence, it suggests more so of a
political and cultural divide-up among Chinese film-makers, and a way of grouping, by using metaphorically such a "generation" concept.

(1) The First Generation refers mainly to the untrained amateur film-makers in Shanghai, who became the pioneers of Chinese film-making during the 1920s, such as Zheng Zhengjia and Zhang Shichuan. Their works were mainly influenced by the earlier Hollywood mode of commercial film-making, and feudal Chinese culture.

(2) The Second generation consists of many western-educated professional film-makers who were active in the 1930s-1940s (some remained active after the liberation). It was a traumatic and turbulent period during which China was plunged into one national crisis after another (i.e. the civil wars between the Nationalists and Communists, and the Japanese Invasion during the Second World War). Their efforts resulted in the first golden era of Chinese film-making, and the realisation, in cinematic terms, of its "National Characters". Its leading members include Hong Sheng, Tian Han, Shen Yu and Cai Chusheng.

(3) The Third Generation refers to the working force of Chinese communist film-making during the period 1949–66, following the Liberation. It was formed mainly by film-makers of two different political backgrounds: firstly, the less professional communist film-makers from Yan'an; secondly, the more experienced ones from the Nationalists-controlled areas. The representatives for this generation included Tang Xiaodan, Xie Jin, Ling Zifeng and Chen Ying.

(4) The Fourth Generation represents China's first crop of film school graduates in history and also the most highly trained among communist film-makers. Educated at the Beijing Film Academy, founded in 1957, they were moulded in the Soviet mode and supervised directly by Soviet scholars. However, their film-making career was severely disrupted by the Cultural Revolution, and few of them managed to make their debut before the end of the Cultural
Revolution in 1976, a decade and half after their graduation. The leading figures included Wu
Yi-gong, Huang Shu-qin and Xie Fei and Zheng Dong-tian.

It should be pointed out that such a "generation" analogy, as always defining film-makers of
identical demographic and socio-political background was unknown before, at least in the history
of Chinese film. Since the term was rather loosely-structured in the first place, it left sufficient
room for different interpretations, from various perspectives. Nonetheless, it is mainly an
aesthetic and political concept, and inclines to detach or break the Fifth Generation from its
predecessors and the dogmatic practices of "Socialist Realism".

In retrospect, the Fifth Generation was actually conceived during the Cultural Revolution. Their
childhood and upbringing could provide us with a pretext so as to detect their political genetics
and social inclination.

First and foremost, the upbringings of the Fifth Generation filmmakers were unique: they were
born in the early 1950s following the founding of the People's Republic, they were "born into a
new society and brought up under 'Red Flags', according to a popular political slogan of the time.
During their childhood, they were the witnesses of, and innocent participants in a quick
succession of political and ideological campaigns, including the Great Leap Forward. When the
Cultural Revolution broke out sporadically in 1966, they were in their teens, receiving middle
school education. Most of them immediately answered Mao's call of "It is Right to Rebel" and
joined the "Red Guard", while some were barred because of the political misfortunes arising from
their family background (such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige). As "Red Guards", they forced
the closures of schools, rioted on the streets, humiliated teachers, burned books, ransacked the
houses of alleged political wrongdoers. Some, such as Chen Kaige, even denounced their own
families in order to win over political trust or protection from the regime.

In 1967, Mao issued his famous "7 May Directive", calling on high school graduates in urban
areas to be "re-educated by the poor and low-middle class peasants". According to the official
figure, more than 21 million urban youths, aged between 15-18, were dispatched to the countryside nation-wide. At the beginning, hundreds of thousands of "Red Guards" responded to Mao's call with great political enthusiasm. Their vigour, however, was soon diminished, after having seen and endured the backwardness, hardship, poverty and pessimism of rural life. Peasants with whom they worked and lived on a daily basis, poor, ill-motivated and feudalistic, bore no resemblance at all to the peasants' vigorous imagery on propaganda posters or films. They were also antagonised by the party's inability to tackle the escalating social problems; As the result of years of hard labour and physical hardship, many youngsters died or permanently lost their health.

The Fifth Generation's perception of China and politics is, in my view, predominantly hammered out from their agonising personal experiences both as the rebellious Red Guards in cities and "educated youth" down in countryside. By being "Red Guards", they had, for the first time, allowed themselves to experience the thrills of anarchism in defying political authorities and social order in the name of Mao's theory of "Continuing Revolution". It was their first experience of political struggle. Their rural experiences, marked by hardship, cruelty and various social predicaments, had granted them rare opportunities that enabled them to form a painful but realistic view about China. It also nurtured their life-long cynicism towards politics and political establishment. Their outlook on the world is characteristically cold, raw, suppressed, uncertain and yet to some degree rebellious. All these seemingly non-artistic or cinematic factors were vitally important to be eventually blended and transformed into a new and innovative cinematic expression (we will further examine the individual cases of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou later on).

Yellow Earth is no doubt one of the most important works that the Fifth Generation ever produced. But, it was not their "opening shot" as many believed it to be, both at home and abroad. The film which rightly deserves such a claim is One and Eight, directed by Zhang Junzhao, with Zhang Yimou the cinematographer and He Qun the art designer. In 1983, they were assigned, on graduation, to Guangxi Film Studio, a tiny and ill-equipped film studio in

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southern China. Nonetheless, they managed to persuade the head of the studio to set up a "youth production unit", with a small budget for a trial production.

The film is an adaptation of a long narrative poem by Guo Xiaochuan, a noted communist poet from the Yan'an era. The story is about nine prisoners in the hands of the Red army. One of them is a wrongly convicted communist soldier, the victim of an on-going political purge. The story is strikingly different and daring: first, it departs from the omnipresent formula of depicting heroes and villains as purely black or white. These are neither heroes nor villains, but flesh-made down-to-earth human beings. The narrative highlights the latent dignity and patriotism of the eight convicts, who were petty criminals, bandits, landlords and Guomindang spies, in a unified solidarity against the common enemy, the Japanese invaders. Mao's doctrine on social class is being seriously undermined. Secondly, the visual style of the film. By using unbalanced composition, wood-cut effects, maximum natural lighting and location filming, it challenges the homogeneity of visual codes or language that Mao's communist film-making had nurtured and formulated since 1949.

The film was first approved by the Guangxi Film Studio, but was abruptly rejected by the Film Bureau in Beijing. It was accused of inciting defeatism, praising hooligans and bandits, and failing to do justice to the Red Army's historical role in the Anti-Japanese War. The studio was given a list involving more than 120 proposed cuts or changes. Only after all the requirements were met, was the 'abridged' version given a public release (the full version was restored and officially released in 1989).

In both China and abroad, the Fifth Generation has often been thought to be a unified, homogeneous and organised group, with a collective consensus. Is this really true? Has this group launched an underground film movement? How do they view themselves as members of the Fifth Generation?
The notion of the Fifth Generation, I believe, is largely symbolic as a way of identifying radical young filmmakers and their efforts in reforming Chinese film. However, the idea that the Fifth Generation is an organised cinema activity is only an illusion. First, they have never named themselves as such; Second, they have almost never made any collective efforts in promoting or consolidating the movement. So, in this sense, they are certainly not the 'French New Wave' of the 1950s, which had a highly charged and inspiring "manifesto" and collective film-making activities.

Zhang Yimou recalls:

As a matter of fact, we don't really understand one another. The so-called "Fifth Generation" directors, graduated from the Beijing Film Academy, have never, apart from looking after themselves, cared about each other. The situation started even before we left the school. We have never ever had any kind of alliance, not even in the loosest sense. I don't really know how we came to this. It applied not only to students of directing course, but also to students of other subjects. We seldom sat down and talked about things. Communications between us were few and far in between. After graduation, we didn't even bother making phone-calls to each other for a couple of years. If we met by chance, we would greet each other with a laugh 'ha-ha-ha' or talk of something frivolous. In recent years, people have been busy debating about the Fifth Generation. It has, however, created some misconceptions. Foreigners, in particular, often tend to label us on equal terms with the 'French New Wave', or modernism. It is a grave misunderstanding. They imagine that we are just an artists' salon, loosely operated, meeting regularly and with a well-written manifesto. If there were one, the situation may have been much worse. (quoted in X. B. Liu, 1993: p8)

It is not surprising that the Fifth Generation emerged the way it did, non-organisational but individualistic. The reasons seem obvious: in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the political antipathy or cynicism among the younger generation was markedly strong and widespread. Individualism was once again rehabilitated and favoured. Their agonising experiences under Mao led them to believe that so-called collective interests were easily

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manipulated and abused by the political authorities. Therefore, any attempt at initiating any collective (group) activity or a common identity, would be seen as hampering the prospect of exercising the newly gained freedom of expression and individual independence, however limited. It is worth mentioning, though, that the "Fifth Generation", despite its radical and "Avant-garde" image, have never actually taken any leading role in the post-Mao "avant-garde" movement. In fact, members of "Fifth Generation" were greatly inspired, encouraged and pushed by a number of spear-heading arts groups at the time, which were the pioneers of post-Mao "Avant-garde" movement, as Beijing's "Star Group" for painters, and "Misty Poetry" groups, an extremely popular poetry movement among the younger generation. They were certainly no pioneers.

Also, the Fifth Generation is by no means an underground film movement. The reasons were simple: At the time, any non-official involvement in film-making was not viable, either politically or financially; So, the Fifth Generation had to fight their mission from within and to utilise whatever resources and possibilities the existing filmmaking system could provide them.

Many of the Fifth generation filmmakers had vowed to make films which were "different" from their predecessors since their first student days at the academy. To be "different" is their ultimate manifesto but it was vague. The problem was: how to create films which are "different", while the political system remained basically unchanged?

It is worth noting that the motivation behind such a bold and unsophisticated claim seems to be more political than artistic in essence. However, such a motive which might be seen as sinister had to be disguised. As Mao's political ideology was so stringently interwoven into China's culture and arts, the criticism of the latter had to be at the expense of the former. To many members of the Fifth Generation, making films of a "different" kind was a way to expose the deception or distortion which film-making under Mao had orchestrated. Chen Kaige recalls that when he was a teenager, he often vaguely felt there must be "some problems" with Chinese film. It didn't reveal, or was not accountable to, what real life was like, and it was a false illusion. The
end of the Mao era had created a huge ideological vacuum. Nothing was sacred any longer. In order to establish its political authority which was desperately needed to govern, Deng's pragmatic regime had to allow, or even encourage, a somewhat limited critic of the Mao era. It was against this political context that the young filmmakers were prompted to create an alternative on the screen. There could be a "different" way of life, but there was no easy answer on hand.

The Fifth Generation's first and foremost hallmark, the distinctive film language, was directly evolved as an attempt to minimise the political impact of their film-making. Their survival instincts, cultivated under Mao, warned them to keep politics, at least, at arm's length. Before the discussion goes further, we should address ourselves to one of the most common misconceptions about the Fifth Generation in the West, claiming it as the pioneer or front-runner in China's "avant-garde" arts movement in the 1980s. Perhaps film's universal appeal has made the Fifth Generation more accessible to the outside world, particular the West where the most of film-making activities are based. However, as a matter of fact, this group of young film-makers was legged behind their counterparts in the fields of theatre, literature, poetry and literary criticism of the same period, which took a relatively radical and open approach. As Zhang Yinou recalls:

"Very often, people regard the string of films that we made in the early 80s as a sort of "exploration". In fact, film-making had markedly lagged behind literature and cultural studies. At that time, the door of China had just re-opened to the outside world, people were seeking vigorously for fresh inspirations and new directions. It was under such new social circumstance that we made these films. ... which account for our way of re-assessing Chinese culture, arts and the relationships between human beings and the world. (quoted in X.B. Liu: 1993: p8)"

Another interesting aspect which is worth noting is that the Fifth Generation seemed less enthusiastic or willing to be influenced by the West, than their counterparts in other artistic areas. While recalling their four-year life in the film academy, they shared the view that this
period was an eye-opening and inspirational one, which allowed them, for the first time, access to hundreds of foreign and Chinese films that they would otherwise never be able to see under Mao. However, few have declared themselves to be followers of a particular foreign master; also, they rarely acknowledge the significance of their professional training at the academy. To them, the technical side of film-making seemed of secondary priority. They tended to credit their creative achievement more to the troubled experience of life, rather than technical wisdom or convention in the textbooks. After all, they are simply not a generation which worshipped convention or any form of political correctness.

According to Herry Zhao, a researcher on Chinese contemporary literature, the Chinese public had over the years developed a unique way of reading between the lines:

Chinese readers have long been taught to take note of the intentional context of any piece of writing. It has become natural for them to seek out and adopt the intended, prescribed or recommended interpretation. (H. Zhao, 1993: p16)

Like "avant-garde" fiction, the Fifth Generation has since its earliest days attempted to distract, or at least, obscure the official codes of political correctness and the authorised version of "history". Part of its charm, especially for Chinese readers, says Herry Zhao, "lies in the play between the titillating possibility of intentional significance and the lack of reliable guidance as to a real meaning (1993, p16). In so doing, it has created enormous confusion as well as excitement, which the Chinese public has never experienced before — the game of seeking and interpreting some sort of hidden meaning.

How have the Fifth Generation reacted to China's commercial revolution and the patronage of western capital, which has resulted in the eventual modification from an eccentric "avant garde" trend to a popular and direct form of story-telling?
One of the legacies that the Cultural Revolution and the previous political campaigns had left behind was a heavily politicised system of language, including words and images. The serious task facing the Fifth Generation was first to avoid the obsolete clique, and explore the new means of expression.

We have discussed earlier the characteristics of Chinese film under Mao as an accessible and powerful way of exercising political mobilisation and ideological indoctrination. This had largely been responsible for its presentation and narrative style in particular. It was distinctively dialogue-oriented and visually markedly weak. Dialogues and their interpretation were much more easily controlled and censored, than ‘visual’ elements, which allow more room for ambiguity and open-ended interpretation. Political correctness and ideological homogeneity tolerate no ambiguity of any kind. Therefore, the "visual sense", displayed by most of the Fifth Generation's early work, in essence, could be seen as an indirect rebuke towards the style of Mao's film-making and the format of Socialist Realism. To a large degree, it is a pragmatic and innovative solution, which accounts for both the political reality in such a transitional period and the way that filmmakers deal with it. Zhang Jin-xuan, a literary critic, has said:

As film language can be a way of expression without resorting to words, so its interpretation can be profoundly suggestive and delicate. It has special significance in a Chinese context... Though the reform movement of the 80s allowed the artists to exercise unprecedented creative freedom, it was still very limited in China as a remaining authoritarian country run by a one-party dictatorship. The new generation of film-makers, however, found the "mighty magic" inside film language, wordless and abstract, which would make it extremely difficult for political censors to spot or grasp the evidence of "overstepping". The way that film language is used in such a way is purely Chinese. (J.X. Zhang, 1992: p16-7)
When asked about the artistic merits of *Yellow Earth*, Chen Kaige said:

The story is not simply a conventional one which has a beginning and an end. Moreover, we wanted to explore a much deeper meaning of Chinese national character. In order to achieve this, the conventional methods of realism are obviously too limited. So, we explored in the film the use of symbolic expressions. As a whole, this film is symbolic made in a 'brush-stroke' manner. (Chen Kaige 1986 (2): p227)

The most outstanding feature of the Fifth Generation film-making, and also the most visible one, is its innovation in film language, visual language in particular. As has been mentioned early on, film-making under Mao was a keen promoter of a rather Hollywood-style melodramatic tradition, which places the highest emphasis on dialogue and conventional story-telling. The ideological intention of a film was acquired directly through plots and dialogues.

Another equally important hallmark is the great importance that the Fifth Generation filmmakers placed upon Chinese tradition and culture, despite being critical of them. It may have been against a commonly-held perception that such a radical movement of an "Avant-garde" nature should be expected to be anti-traditional, and not otherwise. As has been demonstrated, the inspirations which they drew from traditional culture are two-fold. First, they explored the norm of "traditional culture" and the "national characters" to fill the ideological vacuum left behind in the light of the diminishing power of Mao's ideology. Nationalism thus substitutes for the role that communism had played before, and becomes, ideologically, the backbone and strength of the "Fifth Generation's film-making. Second, ancient Chinese literary theories and aesthetics have also been a source of inspiration for the shake-up of its innovative visual style. It is again quite extraordinary that they didn't turn to the exotic film theories or techniques in order to exhibit their modernistic and rebellious nature. Having read through some of their directing and camera notes, one notices the a great number of references to ancient Chinese aesthetic ideas, i.e.
enhancing human emotions by personalising the physical world surrounding them (a detailed analysis of Yellow Earth is provided later to illustrate the point).

Chen Kaige once said:

Obviously, our generation had endured a great deal of hardship and suffering. However, from a historical point of view, in whatever dynasty or era, whoever you are, aristocrats or laymen, each one has their own predicament. If you regard your suffering and hardship as a common phenomenon in history, then you will not exaggerate the suffering and injustice of the individuals. Instead, we should equip ourselves with a strong will, and face the reality.

We were forced to plunge into the tides of great social unrest during our childhood. It has made some of us ill-spirited and disillusioned. However, a great many have survived the test of life and became mature. Our feeling towards China, an ancient civilisation for 5,000 years, is complex, deep, and indescribable. It is a mixed emotion of joy and sorrow. It is a wide sense of historical profoundness and responsibility. It is a hope and commitment towards the future. (K.G. Chen, 1986 (2): p 265)

In co-operating the above two factors, the Fifth Generation has, from the very beginning, made their name by being, visually, "extreme" and "raw". In so doing, they actually forced their audience to dislocate themselves from their old and static experiences of film-going. Their films aimed to annoy, to upset and sometimes to shock the minds of heavily indoctrinated Chinese audience. In their films, the Fifth Generation often use foul language (a phenomenon almost non-existent on the Chinese screen under Mao), depict outrageously cannibalistic behaviours, and favour naturalistic imagery. After all, it is a deliberate coup to vent revenge on the party's political codes. This approach has certainly worked as judging by either the shocked response or indifference among audiences. However, their tactics to achieve the maximum social attention by shocking or upsetting the audience did not quite strike the chord of a common denominator.
Mao's cultural and artistic policies which emphasised heavily the popularisation of arts and the need to serve the masses have made them cynical and alienated by the call of popularism. As a Chinese saying goes --- straighten the crooked beyond the straight, the Fifth Generation believed that they must exceed the proper limits in righting the deception of conventional film-making and viewing.

Underneath the apparently dazzling visual style and keen interests in embracing ancient Chinese aesthetics, as we have observed, the Fifth Generation has accomplished a great task in "rewriting" or "translating" the messages that they really want to convey and the issues they really care for. Moreover, it is a task that they have to undertake as a measure to maximise their chances of survival. This distinctive way of rewriting history has been achieved through the following means:

First, stories on potentially political themes are distinctively rewritten or translated into something of a cultural issue. Starting from One and Eight, Zhang Jun-zhao, the director, neither concentrates on the brutality of political purges within the party (the wrongly accused Red Army soldier), nor synthesises Mao's classification of social class system in China, which defines his political allies and enemies. Instead, he tries to introduce into the film a new dimension. Nationalism, that could indeed transcends the political enmity and ideological divide. Yellow Earth is another similar example translating the theme of political sensitivity (the party's inability to solve rural poverty and backwardness) into a profound cultural issue concerning the future of China as a nation and one of the great civilisations in the world (how to revitalise the spirit of Chinese ancient civilisation, and reconstruct a vigorous Chinese character). Tian Zhuangzhuang, another leading member of the group, also fully demonstrates this approach in his works, mainly Horse Thief and On the Hunting Ground. Having been acclaimed for its daunting documentary-like portrayal of religious rituals in remote China (specifically the Tibetan and Mongolian), and despite an ancient and religious plot, their contemporary message, in my view, is clear: Tian's cynicism and antipathy towards the mighty religious power which subdued, manipulated and brutalised the life of human creatures, has to be evolved from, or
related to, his own experience of living through the cult era of Mao. Therefore, his films have to reflect and echo his concerns for reality, and become a contemporary examination in disguise of Mao's socio-political mechanism.

Second, the Fifth Generation largely prefer the historical to the contemporary plots, and this practically always allows them to convey contemporary messages in a politically less hazardous and less alarming political context, avoiding or minimising direct confrontation or challenge to the authorities that may be caused while engaging in contemporary themes.

Third, the strong approach in symbolic visual language has resulted in another interesting feature of the Fifth Generation's film-making: impersonation and symbolism of the physical or natural world, an indispensable and distinctive feature of their film-making. As Chen Kai-ge has said:

It seems to me that the depiction of "environment" is a very important artistic issue. The human beings can never survive in isolation, and the manifestation of human personalities, character and tastes are all closely related to the environment they live in. It is not possible to depict a convincing personality without revealing his environment. The depiction of environment is more important to film-making, as it directly contributes towards the character-building and expression of ideas. (1986 (2): p275)

For instance, in Yellow Earth, the scenes of yellow-coloured soils, vast, warm and tenacious, is presented as the symbolic embodiment of the spirit and strength of ancient Chinese civilisation and the Chinese attitude towards nature and natural forces. In On the Hunting Ground, hunting, a less desirable but sometimes necessary human behaviour, has reminds us that human society is just another replica of the apparently remote hunting ground. An example is the famous long-shot: a horrified deer is shot dead on the run, one of its legs is seen to be blown away; A hare is shot and dies instantly; a hunting dog is viciously biting through the throat of a small animal and then tearing it to pieces;... a woman pierces a knife into the heart of a sheep, Slicing and flaying; the head of the sheep being chopped off. The above depiction, in my view, is not merely for the
sake of anthropological documentation but more importantly, as a vehicle for expressing (through disguising) their critical sentiments of Mao's China and the destructive consequence inflicting upon people's life and humanity as a whole.

Despite the fact a number of films have been made concerning the Chinese experience under Mao, in particular that of the Cultural Revolution (Farewell My Concubine, Blue Kite, King Of Children), the Fifth Generation filmmakers still felt reluctant to touch upon contemporary themes or anything relating their own experiences. Instead, they would transform their painful personal experiences into a relative distant historical plot, which has translated them into something more of a myth than reality. However, the hidden messages are always contemporary. Luo Xue-yin, a journalist specialising in Chinese film, comments:

> For someone plunging himself into film-making, he did so because he has the desire to explore and make statements on society and human life. We are different from the 'Fourth Generation', in conveying our feeling of 'anxiety' towards the country. Our rethinking of Chinese history and our manifesto about present reality, are usually projected from a distant perspective, such as Yellow Earth, and, perhaps another more unconventional version, Red Sorghum (X.Y. Luo, 1988: p41)

Below are presented case studies on two leading members of the Fifth Generation, Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou. With a markedly different upbringing that was largely affected by family political background, it would be not difficult to understand that Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou have, over the years, developed their own distinctive styles in film-making.

**Chen Kaige: A Cinematic Philosopher?**

Born in Beijing, on 12 August 1952, Chen Kaige had a privileged childhood. His father, Chen Huaikai, a noted film director, and his mother, a script editor, both worked for the Beijing Film Studios, one of China's most prominent and well-equipped film studios. Part of their privileges
meant that as a child he was able to watch American and European films which later partly influenced his determination to become a film director. While a teenager in the early 1960s, he was educated at Beijing's Fourth High School, the most prestigious boarding school for boys at the time. There, he studied alongside the children of high-ranking Party officials, the 'Red Princes', including the son of Liu Shaoqi (the president of the People's Republic before he was ousted by Mao in the wake of the Cultural Revolution). Despite his diligence and impressive academic performance, Chen Kaige was ineligible to join the Communist Youth League, the party youth organisation, because his father was a former member of the Nationalist Party or Guomintang before the communist take-over. He spent most of his spare time reading and studying ancient Chinese literature and classic poetry, and this has influenced and benefited greatly his career of film-making.

However, the forthcoming Cultural Revolution granted him an opportunity to become a revolutionary or rebel. In 1966, at the tender age of 14, he became a "Red Guard". In order to win the party's trust and be politically progressive, he even denounced openly his father at a public denunciation meeting. He recalled:

At that age I naturally wanted to become a Red Guard... Everybody followed Mao without question. Everybody was afraid of being rejected by society, so everybody had to prove his loyalty (quoted in D. Robinson: 1994).

In 1969, like millions of his generation, Chen Kai-ge, answered Chairman Mao's call and was sent to a village in remote Young province, south-western China, to be 're-educated' by peasants. Later, he cleared forests and chopped trees at a neighbouring rubber plantation. In 1971, he joined the People's Liberation Army. Three years later, he was eventually allowed to return to Beijing, and worked at the film laboratory at the Beijing Film Studios.

In 1978, two years after the Cultural Revolution officially ended, Chen Kaige, against the will of his parents, was enrolled into the film directing program at the newly-reopened Beijing Film
Academy. Four years later, in 1982, he was assigned on graduation to work as an assistant director for the Beijing Film Studio. As we have seen, his debut work, *Yellow Earth* (1984), along with Zhang Junzhao's *One and Eight* (1983), have become the byword of the "Fifth Generation". His other major works include: *Big Parade* (1986), *King of Children* (1988), *Life on A String* (1991). In 1993, his latest work, *Farewell My Concubine* (1992), became the first Chinese winner of the Palme D'Or at Cannes, one of the world's most prestigious film awards.

Chen Kaige is probably the most philosophical among the Fifth Generation film-makers. He is also a strong believer of ancient Chinese wisdom, both culturally and aesthetically, supported by his almost scholarly interest in those subjects. What he has been attempting is, as he has said, to "establish a relation between cinema and life" (in M. Shu, 1992: p36); Characteristically, he prefers simple, non-melodramatic but symbolic plots. And he is certainly not a believer in sentimentalism, and also not a skilful manipulator of human emotions. In his films, one often feels that the dialogue is kept to minimum, and low-key. He has always tried to avoid, or lack some sort of realistic depiction of human emotions, the experiences of individuals and practicalities of normal everyday life.

By way of illustration I will give a detailed analysis of his directing debut, *Yellow Earth*. On its outset, the structure of the story is simple and politically rather orthodox: In 1937, Mao Tse-tung and the communist revolutionaries establish their Red Base in Shanxi province, having survived the epic "Long March". In Spring 1939, Gu Qing, a cultural officer with the Eighth Route Army is dispatched to a neighbouring highland (which remained under the control of the Kuomintang), to collect folk melodies to be renovated for army propaganda work. In a poverty-stricken village, he witnesses a wedding procession, where he transcribes the folk songs, and arranges to stay with a poor peasant and his daughter, Cuiqiao, and son, Hanhan. Gu Qing tells Cuiqiao about the revolutionary life in Yan'an, women's liberation and freedom of choice in marriage. One day, a match-maker from a neighbouring village comes to arrange for Cuiqiao's marriage. Cuiqiao is devastated on overhearing the news. The same day, Gu Qing announces that he will be leaving the following day, and Cuiqiao urges him to let her follow him to Yan'an. Gu
Qing replies that he has to ask for permission first, and promises to return. Guiqiao knows it would be too late to save her from the arranged marriage. On his return, Gu Qing discovers that Cuiqiao has died of drowning in the Yellow River.

According to Chen Kaige, the original script tells a tragic story of a teenage girl in rural China and her struggle against arranged feudal marriage. Although Chen Kaige did not want to be confined specifically to the girl's fate, he had no idea as how to rewrite the script. In January, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou (cinematographer) and He Qun (art designer) arrived in Shanxi highland to look for locations as well as to experience for themselves the rural life. It helped to shape the tone of the film. Chen Kaige commented:

Cuiqiao's father originated from in an old farmer whom we met on location. As we arrived at his house, he tucked his waistcoat under his bottom, putting his hands into sleeves, and then sat down against the wall. We asked him a question to which he gave a simple and brief answer. Later, he told us, bit by bit, the stories of his family. He said that his daughter had got married as a result of a arranged marriage, because the son-in-law's family was affluent and had worries regarding food. A few years on, there was a famine, the daughter wanted to leave. But she was stopped by his father. He told the daughter 'we, however poor, should stick to our words, you must stay with your husband till the end, even she have to beg for survival... This old fellow is also worldly wise, for instance, he said: "if there is no food, how can we afford to talk about love." When asked to sing some folk songs for us, he said: "what the fuss to sing, while I am neither happy nor sorrowful". He was almost a peasant philosopher. (Chen Kaige, 1986 (2): p264)

Ironically, from what Chen Kaige had seen and experienced during his visit, rural life in the mid-1980s northern China, remained largely unchanged, compared with the supposed plot in the late 1930s. He wrote:
This vast and impoverished land (Yan'an and western Shan'xi), once witnessed a rigorous revolutionary movement. The land and the people here had greatly contributed to the founding of New China. This land was, however, cold-shouldered, and the people here remain leading a poverty-stricken life. (Chen Kaige: 1986 (2): p265-6)

From the numerous references Chen has cited in articles and interviews about the rural experiences of his generation during the Cultural Revolution, it is right to suggest that Yellow Earth intended to reflect some modern and critical thinking about Chinese rural life and its tradition. It has a contemporary stylish outlook and a strong contemporary sense of modernity. While it was still, at the time, politically not viable to criticise directly the party's failure to fulfil its pronounced promise in changing people's life for the better, Chen Kaige had to reason his argument at a less political but more historical level: should the Chinese national character be blamed? What is wrong with our ancient civilisation and history?

From the very beginning, he displayed his preference for conveying and preaching messages of a philosophical nature, sometimes in a rather abstract form. His stories are mostly "historical allegories" or "political fables" by their nature. It seems that he always has distinct interests in issues concerning the fundamental nature of human beings and their relationship with societies, nature and political power.

Having read through Chen's directing notes and published articles, one can feel astonished by his highly charged intention, or personal mission in getting his messages across. Sometimes, he is so analytical and interpretative that he not only distracts people's attention from his already very weak story-lines, but also puts himself and his film into a position in which he does not wish to be trapped: that of a preacher in capital "P". His aesthetic problem is that his careful orchestration of visual codes and imagery, sometimes too calculating and intended, has simultaneously affected the vitality and spontaneity of his film-making. Moreover, the importance and seriousness he himself has placed on film-making, encouraged by his scholarly-
approach, has turned each film into a cinematic "thesis" or "manifesto". In his analysis of Yellow Earth, Chen Kaige says:

The awakening of Hanhan (Cuiqiao's little brother)'s is strongly expressed by the sequence of mass ritual of 'rain praying'. It was Hanhan who against the flow of the crowds single-handedly, cried out, waving towards Gu Qing (Red Army officer). It was only him representing the hope and future of our nationality.

For someone who's awakened to fight for her own fate, Cuiqiao's pursuit of a good future is very difficult. Why? The obstacle obstructing her is not the evil forces of society in a narrow sense, but the stupidity, displayed by her own relations who care about her. To challenge the latter, one needs much more guts and courage. As an embodiment of the Chinese nationality as a whole, the tragic side of her story is understandable. (K.G. Chen, 1986: p271)

Big Parade, is another good example that demonstrates Chen Kaige's philosophical and symbolic style. It has apparently a conventional story-line which could be described as politically correct or harmless: the training life in the army training camp on the eve of Beijing's big parade celebrating the 35th anniversary of the People's Republic. It could easily be seen as the celebration of the spirits of socialist collectivism. However, the real message that Chen Kaige intends to imply (through his symbolic film language) is that collective interests are only maintained and fulfilled in the absence and repression of individuality and individual freedom. Throughout the film, he strongly manifested this statement through visual means: the soldiers in parading are often filmed with high-angle shots in remote distance and cast against the vast field which has made them extremely tiny in scale. The ending sequence presents a much stronger statement in point: it is a close-up, the face of a soldier in back light, and the backdrop is a huge red sun on the horizon, that could be interpreted as anything of collective identity or power. This vague and faceless imagery raises a fundamental question: if the glory of the collective interests
can only be achieved by demanding that everybody should make selfless sacrifices, then what is
the rationale and justification for this kind of "glory"?

Chen Kaige's symbolic approach has, to a large extent, also accounted for his lack of enthusiasm
or sometimes disregard of the tradition of realism. In "Yellow Earth", the main location, the
village where Cuiqiao's family is housed, is purposefully built and does not resemble a typical
Shanxi village. Another interesting example is the internationally acclaimed sequence of group
drumming, and dancing, celebrating the liberation by the Red Army. Almost out of nowhere,
150 drummers appear and are seen wearing uniformly black cotton coats, white head towels, red
waist-belts and with red drums. Questioning about the justification for such a seemingly non-
realistic representation was dismissed by Chen Kaige:

> If judged by the rules and methods of realism, people are bound to ask: where did so
> many farmers suddenly appear out of nowhere? How could they possibly dress in such a
> uniformity. The thinking behind our treatment is symbolic. I feel that in order to express
> the joy and strength of these politically awakening peasants, a certain degree of
> emphasis and exaggeration should be allowed. (K.G. Chen, 1986: p280)

Despite the existence of many similar examples, I am by no means suggesting that Chen Kaige is
instinctively against the merits and common notion of Realism. As a matter of fact, Chen Kaige's
directing can sometimes be painstakingly realistic and accurate even to the smallest details (e.g.
the daily life of "educated youth" during the Cultural Revolution as depicted in *King of Children*).
However, they are largely used to reinforce the symbolic significance that Chen has tried to
accomplish.

It is impossible for any film-maker not to convey any messages of some kind in his films,
however, the nature of each message could be quite different. The ones that Chen Kaige prefers
are largely suggestive and need to be revealed. To Chen Kaige, the intended messages behind his
film-making seems always to be an important factor.
Like the Fifth Generation, Chen Kaige has somehow changed and readjusted himself over the years. Since the very beginning, despite the international acclaim he received from abroad or from a minority elitist Chinese audience, Chen Kaige has never been a film-maker which the public can easily identify with. The indifference to, and incomprehension shown towards his works, from Yellow Earth to Big Parade to Life on a String, have been strongly felt on their public releases. While the intellectuals and young educated may be trained to see an elaborate critique of totalitarianism between a few lines of dialogues or imageries, the majority of the viewing public protested with their preference for melodramatic or light-hearted entertainment films. The international patronage for Chen Kaige that encourages a more conventional approach of film-making has played a part in the readjusting process. Farewell My Concubine (1993) could well be regarded as a turning point in Chen Kaige's film-making style, remaining overshadowed, however, by the initial hallmark of the Fifth Generation.

Firstly, in Farewell My Concubine, Chen Kaige has, for the first time, attempted to tell a linear melodramatic story in a rather Hollywood manner. Within three hours and ten minutes in viewing time, Chen Kaige presents a telling story of two Peking opera singers on an epic scale that parades almost the entire period of modern Chinese history, more than 50 years of tumultuous political and social experience: from the demise of the Qing Dynasty to the Japanese invasion, from the rule of the National Government, KMT to the founding of Mao's Red China to the ending of the Cultural Revolution. The story is told through the intimate account of two Peking opera stars, Chen Die-yi and Duan Xiao-lou. They meet as children at the merciless opera school. Chen Die-yi, with his delicate feminine features, is trained to play the Concubine Yu who dies for her king, Chu, in the classic repertory of Farewell My Concubine. Duan Xiaolou plays the King. For Dieyi, life and art, male and female, blur dangerously into one: being loyal and truthful to his friend and oblivious to politics. Their relationship is devastated when Xiaolou marries a real-life concubine, Juxian, a prostitute. In the frenzied political changes that they experience, everything is in flux, power shifts and betrayal is the only way to survive. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, when the opera stars were dragged through the streets by the
Red Guards, the last remnants of personal affection and loyalty are shredded in an orgy of denunciation. Soon after the political rehabilitation, Dieyi cuts his throat and dies while at rehearsal with Xiaolou for their first-ever reappearance after the Cultural Revolution.

Second, politically, *Farewell My Concubine*, is the most straightforward and articulate among his works. The theme is one of the closest and most painful to Chen Kaige's own traumatic experiences as a "Red Guard". This time, its message is personal and more realistic than any of his previous works: Who can one really trust? Why do human beings betray each other? Is betrayal an acceptable way to survive?

On winning the Palme d'Or in Cannes for *Farewell My Concubine*, in a stream of interviews with Chen Kaige, he rarely failed to mention his own experiences of betraying his father during the Cultural Revolution. Just as he says, *Farewell My Concubine*, is "my way of seeking forgiveness". He confessed:

He (Chen's father) stood in front of me, just staring, and I spoke against him. When I grew up, I made excuses for myself. The pressure was on us all. But now I realise nobody really forced me to do it. I have since apologised and he has accepted it. But this film is my real expiation, and the fact that he likes it is the best praise I can have.

Perhaps because I betrayed my own father, I recognise this kind of man as represented by the Peking Opera star. He is first and foremost a survivor and there are a great many such people in China. They know what you have to do to please people. They say they were forced into it. But they weren't and nor was I. It just made life easier if you did it. The film is a burden off my back and says what I should have said earlier. (quoted in D. Malcolm, 1993)

After the Cultural Revolution people looked for excuses for what they had done. I might have pleaded that I was just a little boy and couldn't be held responsible for a whole
political campaign. But even at the time I realised I had done something very wrong".

(quoted in D. Robinson, 1994)

From *Yellow Earth* (1984) to *Farewell to My Concubine* (1992), Chen Kaige has walked a long way in a relatively short period of time. The initially deeply symbolic and suggestive visual language has gradually been evolved into a relative vocal and story-led narrative. Chen Kaige has not, so far, given an explanation for such a change. Perhaps he simply hasn't got one. In my view, the reasons which have contributed to his change are certainly many. It could be that Chen was frustrated by the failure of his previous work in reaching the widest possible audience. It could argued that he has partly come to the conclusion that his earlier symbolic-oriented film language could be seen as apologetic or too compromising towards Mao's era.

One issue that remains untouched is the role that the influx of western cultural influences has played in the shaping of the Fifth Generation. Among the group, Chen Kaige is perhaps the one who is most aware and knowledgeable about Western culture. Not only does he have scholarly knowledge of ancient Chinese literature and poetry, Chen is also literate in English and has read widely in western literature. He stayed in the United States between 1988-90 on a research fellowship, and has toured frequently in the US and the West, giving lectures on the New Chinese Cinema. However, like many other members of the Fifth Generation, Chen has played down the extent which the American-Europe culture has been influencing him and his filmmaking. He says:

It would be unrealistic to claim that I haven't been influenced by American society and its culture. The impact, however, is limited. My major achievement from my stay in the States is my increasing awareness and understanding of the pluralistic nature of American culture. In the States, there is no such a thing called tradition, but it has a mainstream market, for instance the Hollywood film market. This kind of pluralistic culture has been a great inspiration to me, which enables me to hear the different voices
of the society. It makes my eyes wider open and also makes me more creative. (quoted in M. Shu, 1992: p36-37)

**Zhang Yimou**

One of the unique qualities that the members of the Fifth Generation have demonstrated successfully is their great ability to create films which are fresh, different and individualistic, while retaining collectively an identical spirit and worldly outlook towards history, reality and politics: cynical, paradoxical and sometimes satirical.

In 1951, Zhang Yimou was born in Xi'an, Shanxi province, the heartland of the Chinese ancient civilisation, where the first Chinese emperor was buried almost 5,000 years ago, and the world-famous terracotta armies were unearthed. Unlike Chen Kaige, his childhood was not at all easy and happy. His father was a former Kuomingtang soldier who graduated from the prestigious Huangpu Military Academy, and was condemned as an anti-revolutionary reactionary by the newly established communist regime. As a child, he was often bullied, subjected to verbal abuse and political exclusion. No matter how obedient and well behaved he was at school, he could never join the Communist Youth League, the stepping stone to becoming a member of the Communist Party. He recalls:

> From an early age, I felt there was something gravely wrong with my family. I had a sensation of fear and insecurity. Once, aged about 6 or 7, I came upon a brass button in a drawer and took it to my mother. Her face instantly registered alarm, and she snatched it from me. The button was engraved with the flag of the National Government. ... I grew up introverted, withdrawn, and reluctant to reveal my inner thoughts. (quoted in L. Pan: 1992)

During the Cultural Revolution, Zhang Yimou's father was sent to the countryside and became a shepherd, to be 'reformed through labour'. Soon, Zhang Yimou himself went to neighbouring
countryside and worked as a farmer for three years between 1968-1971. In 1972, his skilful playing of basketball came to his rescue, by which he was allowed to return to the city and got a job in the Xianyang 8th Textile Factory. For seven years, he worked there first as a cleaner-cum-porter, and later a designer of socks. In his spare time, as a sheer attempt to make life a bit more interesting, he started his interest in amateur photography, taking mainly still pictures of flowers, architecture and scenery. On 14 December 1974, he acquired his first camera, a Seagull from Shanghai, costing 186 yuan (roughly US$ 70 at the time), almost five times his monthly salary. Most of the money was from selling (or donating, for the sake of political correctness then) his blood to a local hospital.

In 1978, the national entrance examination for universities and colleges was resumed and the Beijing Film Academy reopened after its closure for more than a decade. Already 27, Zhang decided to apply for a place in cinematography. His application was first rejected because he was five years too old even to sit for the exams, according to the official requirement. To appeal against the rejection, he wrote to Wang Zheng, the Minister of Culture, enclosing a portfolio of his photographic works. Luckily, Wang intervened and got Zhang admitted (Chen Kaige, incidentally, was a similar case). In 1982, he graduated and was assigned to China's smallest and remotest film studio, Guangxi Film Studio, south China, bordering Burma.

Zhang Yimou is a film-maker of many talents. He started as a cinematographer. His cinematographer works include One and Eight (directed by Zhang Junzhao, 1983), Yellow Earth (directed by Chen Kaige, 1984), Big Parade (directed by Chen Kaige, 1986) and Old Well (Directed by Wu Tianming, 1987); He began his directing debut in 1987 and has made since a stream of works, including: Red Sorghum (1988), his debut which won him the Golden Bear Award at the West Berlin International Film Festival in 1988, Judou (1991) and Raise the Red Lantern (1992), both nominated for the Oscar's Best Foreign Film between 1991-1992. His latest, Qiuju Goes to Court, was awarded the Golden Lion Prize at the Venice International Film Festival in 1993.
Unlike Chen Kaige who indulges in philosophical and allegorical reasoning, Zhang Yimou is a creature of instinct and spontaneity. He believes in a more natural and entertaining way of filmmaking. He obviously does not take filmmaking as seriously as Chen Kaige. He does not have a sense of historical mission which Chen Kaige often imposes upon his filmmaking. If Chen Kaige worships filmmaking, Zhang Yimou plays with it. However how undesirable reality is, Zhang Yimou uses filmmaking as a way of creating and enjoying a kind of life that would otherwise not to be permitted in real life. In films at least, his art has the final word.

Zhang Yimou's troubled upbringing and youth has certainly affected his personality, tenacious, withdrawn and compromising. He is rarely seen moaning or complaining about his past painful experiences, nor showing any serious attempt at expressing himself. In real life, as a young man he didn't have much expectation but was always longing for a freer and more vigorous lifestyle. Chen Kaige once commented:

As far as Yimou's family background and his personal experiences are concerned, perhaps, he has more reasons than the rest of us to condemn and grudge about what he had suffered in the past, and to transfer his personal trauma onto the screen. However, what we have seen is something else. The grandeur of calmness, and a profoundly poetic power. I feel that his character is more important than his filming tectonics.

(1984)

Professionally, Zhang Yimou was first trained and worked as a cinematographer. He was the director of cinematography for the first two pioneering works of the Fifth Generation, One and Eight and Yellow Earth. For what these two films are remembered and critically renowned, namely the distinctive visual language, he is seen as the most creative force behind the success. Yellow Earth won the Golden Rooster Award for cinematography, China's most prestigious film award judged annually by a panel of professional film-makers, critics and experts (different from the Hundred Flowers Award, chiefly voted for by the public).
If Chen Kaige is known for conveying messages of a philosophical nature within a rather non-melodramatic plot, Zhang Yimou's trademark is his vitality and freshness in cultivating a stylish as well as exciting melodramatic narrative in a remarkably individualistic manner. Film language is, in a way, the embodiment of his personality. While filming Yellow Earth, he said that

What I am pursuing is not brightness but strength, not sheer visual beauty but down-to-earth imagery". (Zhang Xiaohong, 1992: p43)

Red Sorghum was Zhang Yimou's directing debut and an immediate success, both at home and abroad. It has also represented the turning point for the Fifth Generation: the combination of their hallmark of visual language and a shift towards a melodramatic structure of story-telling.

First, Zhang demands and seeks a melodramatic story of some literary merits. From Red Sorghum to Judon, from Raise the Red Lantern to Qiuju Goes to Court, all of them are based on or adapted from novels, very often award-winning ones in which literary qualities are somehow guaranteed. He seems to be obsessed with folk tales, fables, legends or folk stories of a mythic nature, which allow him more leverage to create fantasy, and relatively free from the restriction of political censorship. Despite not having sought to convey messages of any serious nature, his films largely concern a distinctive theme: the dilemma that people would face in fighting for a freer, lively and down-to-earth way of life. To him, film-making comes as a personal way of fulfilling himself. He recalls the preparation for Red Sorghum (the crew planted several dozen acres of red sorghum for the location)

Every day, I would spend some time wandering around the sorghum field, watering and watering them. Sorghum is such a plant that really indulges water. After a heavy rainfall, you could hear, in the field, the cracking noise filtering through to you, from all directions. Murmuring, as if every single sorghum was giving birth, you could almost see before your eyes the sorghum growing inch by inch. Merging yourself in the vast
field, you would feel this is the most splendid labour theatre. The whole world is full of bright green, your ears are filled with beautiful sound, and your eyes are dazzled by those lively creatures. I feel that this piece of sorghum field, these legendary stories, these men and women, in the novel, are all so forthright and sanguine. They enjoy life and death with vigour, and do whatever they please, unconstrained and joyful'. (quoted in Luo Xiaoyin, 1988:p39)

On many occasions, in both his writing or in interviews, Zhang Yimou, has expressed his strong cynicism for conveying serious, philosophical messages in films. This is in great contrast to Chen Kaige's more philosophical tone and carefully calculated narrative techniques, "jigsaw" techniques it may be called. Zhang Yimou says:

I am not denying that film-making needs reason. Film-making without thoughtful ideas would not stand out as a genuine art. However, film must, first of all, realise and explore its own strength, thinking more about how one can make film more watchable and entertaining, rather than burying itself in philosophy and too much (abstract) social consciousness. If all the films we make are statements on the future of our nation and culture, both filmmakers and audiences will surely be tired and frustrated." (quoted in Luo Xiaoyin, 1988:p51)

The way that Zhang Yimou chooses his subject matter is by reading a lot of recently published fictions, written by people of his generation. As a matter of fact almost all the memorable films in China are adaptations of literary works. Red Sorghum, a legend-like love story between "my grandpa", a bandit, and Jiu-er, his wife set against the backdrop of 1920s and 1930s Chinese rural life culminating in the Japanese invasion, was an award-winning novella of the same title by army writer Mo Yan. Judou, a story of the doomed love between Judou and her husband's nephew is drawn from Liu Heng's novel, Puxi Puxi. Raise the Red Lantern, a story about a rural master and his four women (one wife and three concubines) and the women's cruel and sinister fighting for the master's favour, is adapted from Su Tong's Wives and Concubines. His most
recent work, *Qiuju Goes to Court*, Zhang's only film with a contemporary setting, is about a rural women's tenacious fight for an "apology" and "justice" after her husband is wounded as the result of an assault by the village's party chief over village affairs, is based on a novella.

*Raise the Red Lantern* was one of the first Fifth Generation films to be released commercially in the West. The story is set during the 1920s in North China and confined almost entirely within the walls of a vast compound owned by a landowner and a member of the gentry, Master Chen. He has already three wives, and each of them has their own apartment within the compound. The film opens with Song-lian, a 19-year old college student, informing her step-mother of her decision to quit university and become Master Chen's fourth wife, to be exact, a concubine. Song-lian soon finds herself pitted against the other wives, jostling for the master's all important attentions and their pleasurable side-effects. "She" who has slept with the master would be allowed to demand thrice-fried monkey-head mushrooms for luncheon. "She" who has been for chosen for the night will have her doorway illuminated by red lanterns, and her feet massaged by a lady servant wielding tiny hammers. As the result of intensifying rifts against each other between four women, Song-lian decides to fake her pregnancy in order to get in on demand, and to become the master's most favoured woman. However, her calculation ends with tragic consequences.

While as a director, Zhang Yimou has not only maintained his push-to-extreme trademark in compelling visual presentation, but also expanded such a characteristics to story-lines themselves. Its disrespect of political correctness and sometimes explicit portrayal of cannibalistic behaviours have often caused controversies from both the political establishment and the public. In *Red Sorghum*, we see "my granddad" urinating, in front of a crowd including his future wife, into a wine barrel and in so doing producing a barrel of exceptionally good quality wine. Also we see the captured underground communist being flayed alive by a local Chinese butcher who is forced to do so at the gun point of Japanese invaders. In *Judou*, we see that Judou takes revenge on her old and crippled husband, who has badly abused and tortured her, by stuffing him into a water barrel and hanging him up in the air.
5.3 The "Fifth Generation" in the Eyes of the Authorities and the Public

The initial reception which the Fifth Generation encountered in China is rather complex: the official attitude towards it was somewhat benevolent. On the one hand, it was partially accepted on its merits of artistic and technical exploration. For instance, Zhang Yimou was awarded the Best Cinematographer Prize in the Golden Rooster Awards in 1984. On the other hand, the films of the Fifth Generation have been carefully watched for their potentially "unhealthy" and anarchist tendencies. However, their seeming incapability to attracting a large number of audiences has probably prevented them from being clarified as a chief target of many political campaigns.

In the mind of the authorities, it was films such as Bai Han's Bitter Love, a story directly denouncing the Cultural Revolution, which was more dangerous. In the eyes of the majority of the public, the Fifth Generation is often ridiculed or treated with indifference and incomprehension. They simply cannot accept or appreciate it. The reactions from the West are characteristically more interesting and subtle. Western critics have often snatched the chance to impress their colleagues by claiming their status as the discoverers or patrons of the Fifth Generation. In so doing, they have placed the Fifth Generation in an awkward position and made them vulnerable to any political attack, from the high-up politicians or grass-roots society. Such a close link between the Fifth Generation and its popularity seen in the West has become, for the Chinese authorities, a ready-made political justification, or a handy excuse, to suppress the Fifth Generation and their films whenever needed.

It has to be recognised that the initial experience of the Fifth Generation in dealing with the authorities was not at all bad. The intended in-depth-reading of the films makes it difficult for the authorities difficult to pin down severe political charges against them. Over the years, official attitudes have been readjusted and are obviously subject to the changes of political climates or
needs. Whatever attitudes the government held to the Fifth Generation, for or against, are most of the time only determined by and of service to political purposes. It also be-speaks the grave uncertainty into which the young film-makers have been dragged. Fighting for their works to be accepted could be a hopeless battle, or a game without rules. What post-Mao China has created is the loss of an ideological consensus and the decentralisation of its control structure. Anyone within officialdom, could either secure or jeopardise the fate of a film. Chen Kaige claims that sometimes "no one really knows who is objecting to what". Petty officials may hate your film and those with real power find little harm in it." Or vice versa. He went on:

People think we Chinese live under the iron fist of a real dictatorship. But it is not quite like that. The centre may hold but away from it all sorts things are going on. It depends where you live whether or not anybody takes any notice of government’s decrees” (quoted in D. Malcolm, 1993)

After 1987, the increasing international reputation of the Fifth Generation and their films had, to a degree, forced the Chinese government to readjust its official line towards them. A more encouraging attitude could not only offer an ‘open-door’ image for the authorities, but also give them the credentials of being the patrons of this prestigious group of film-makers. The authorities certainly had mixed feelings towards these young film-makers. The West’s attempt in claiming to be the protector or to be the patrons for the Fifth Generation has prompted the reaction from the relative liberal section of the Chinese authorities as to show support, encouragement and therefore to enhance its position as a legitimate patron, when the political situation permitted it. The reason why the government has attempted, every now and then, to show a token of appreciation towards the group is that the Fifth Generation has never been officially perceived as a dissident movement or a political threat, regardless whatever their works may be seen as ideologically inappropriate in the official eyes.

For instance, when Red Sorghum was awarded the Golden Bear at the West Berlin International Film Festival, the authorities and the media fully explored this occasion for political significance
and boosting national pride. Zhang Yimou returned as a national hero, with a lavish party held, and the leading party newspaper even ran an editorial with a strong message on awakening national spirits. Another interesting example, *Qiuju Goes to Court*, Zhang Yimou's most recent work, was much criticised by the western critics as politically rampant and compromising. Much of the fuss was directly generated by the fact that it was praised and promoted by the Chinese authorities. My view is somehow different. I rather view this happening as another attempt from the official side to "conciliate" over much strained relationship between it and the Fifth Generation after the clamp down of the 4 June Democratic Movement. The feasibility in exploring *Qiuju Goes to Court* for such a purpose relies simply upon the fact that the film contains a message which the government is eager to be identified with and in conjunction with the seasonal government propaganda — namely, the awakening of Chinese peasants' feudal mentality and development of China's legal system. Of course, the film is determinedly upbeat and also warm in tone (a radical departure from the sombre mood of his previous works) and this has also attracted official favour and political recognition. However, Zhang Yimou should not be personally blamed or held responsibility for the special prestigious treatment he had received from the authorities.

In the aftermath of the 4 June Tiananmen massacre, the nerves of the political authorities became crippled, oversensitive and extremely vulnerable. The Fifth Generation has thus experienced the most difficult and uncertain period in history. The production and release of every film by the Fifth Generation was met with undue alarm and hostility from the authorities. *Judou* created a political incident after the film bureau unsuccessfully sought to withdraw the film from the Academy Award nomination. It consequently resulted in a nation-wide ban. The fate of *Raise the Red Lantern* was also similar. Tian Zhuangzhuang got into serious trouble sending *Blue Kite* to Tokyo and Cannes International Festivals without official permission, and another ban was imposed for its domestic release. Chen Kaige's latest work, *Farewell My Concubine* was initially banned for its alleged sharp criticism of the Cultural Revolution, and was later allowed to be shown in China, with changes that were not made by him.
As has been mentioned earlier on, the close relations between the Fifth Generation and the
tenagiasm from the West, has reinforced the authorities' cynicism towards western intentions
and sparked off a political confrontation between the Chinese authorities and the West, in the
aftermath of the 4 June incident. In the minds of the authorities, the conspiracy theory was finally
at work. They began to perceive the Fifth Generation as a potential subversive source interested
by the West. This has further deteriorated the political protection that the group once had and
consequently made it politically more sinister and culturally degenerating.

5.4 THE FIFTH GENERATION IN THE EYES OF THE WEST

It is not surprising and quite understandable that, from the very beginning, the West has devoted
considerable attention to the Fifth Generation and its works. However, the reasons which have
contributed to their increasing popularity in the West are complex. They are a mixture of
aesthetic, political and cultural factors. Naturally, for both Chinese and westerners, it is not
difficult to conclude, from their first encounters with the Fifth Generation films, that they are
strikingly "different" (i.e. visual, thematic and narrative aspects) from any Chinese film which
they have ever seen in the past. Moreover, such experiences, especially among westerners,
strongly challenge or contradict their stereotypical conception of Chinese films.

The West has identified the Fifth Generation, since the its very beginning, as a departure from
Mao's communist film-making, both politically and aesthetically. The overwhelming recognition
from the West certainly greatly helped Chinese film to become the cutting edge of international
cinema in the 1980s. However, owing partially to the shadowy cold-war mentality and partially to
their limited knowledge of China, the analysis and interpretation by western film critics or the
mass media about the Fifth Generation are often speculative and politically-oriented. This is
deeply ironic. Some of the interpretations and speculations have turned out to be not so serious
and also counter-productive, and this has made the Fifth Generation's battle for survival a more
tricky and difficult one. For instance, when Raise the Red Lantern was halted officially for public
release, a Western critic provided an explanation: the obscure faceless figure in the film is
believed to be a coded portrait of Deng Xiaoping, China's paramount leader today. In most cases, interpretations of this nature would do nothing but prompt or invite political suppressions. Chen Kaige's *Life on A String*, was banned after the New York Times suggested that its leading figure, an ageing, itinerant musician waiting to break the 1000th string of his lute in order to extract a hidden secret from the instrument, was a coded portrait of Chairman Mao. Understandably, the remarks of similar nature could only be used to justify the Chinese government's suspicion of the sinister intentions of the West, and consequently, further jeopardise or threaten the existence of the Fifth Generation.

From 1988 onwards, the relationship between the Fifth Generation and the overseas enthusiasm over the Fifth Generation began to be translated into a financial partnership. Given the extreme low production costs in China by western standards, the first-class technical support, and most importantly, the Fifth Generation had become increasingly popular and therefore more marketable, overseas capital showed its willingness to sponsor the Fifth Generation. *Life on A String* was sponsored by the British, *Judou* by the Japanese, *Raise the Red Lantern* by Hong Kong, *Story of Qiuju* also by Hong Kong, and *Blue Kite* by the Japanese. In so doing it has raised the issue among the Chinese public and in particular the filmmakers as to whether it will blur or lose its national identity: have the best of the Fifth Generation turned themselves into the profit-makers for western capital and also the manufacturers of imagery or myths of an exotic, primitive and timeless China? A young film director contends that Zhang Yimou only feeds his western enthusiast's exotic fantasy (Lynn Pan, 1993). On the one hand, it is impossible for the Fifth Generation not to take into consideration what is perceived to be the aesthetic taste western audiences if the films they engage were in principle targeted the western film market; On the other hand, there is little evidence to indicate how and to what extent this newly-found financial partnership has affected or reformed their philosophy of film-making.

It is worth noting that despite of the fact that the Fifth Generation's aesthetic contributions in terms of film's visual and narrative style have been very highly acknowledged in the West, the
western reading of Chinese films as a whole has been profoundly a political one. The reasons are understandable. First of all, as we have mentioned before, this political approach stems from the way in which film making had traditionally been perceived or treated in China under Mao, namely as a powerful means of propaganda and mass mobilisation. Therefore, Chinese filmmaking could not escape from such a politically-led interpretation as long as its legacy as a vehicle of propaganda and political indication remains; Second, for many western critics, the Fifth Generation's aesthetic merits can only be fully recognised and justified if, through such fresh aesthetic language, a more adequate or subtle political reading of Chinese cinema can be achieved. In other words, they tend to regard this new set of aesthetic values and expressions as a new political language in disguise, aiming to substitute the old political indoctrination. For instance, while offering some essential advice in reading the Fifth Generation filmmakers, a British film critic commented on the Fifth Generation filmmakers' different ways of disguising their politics:

How does Zhang Yimou disguises his politics: Allegory. Nasty, obsess autocratic men represent oppressive old order. Women represent the down-trodden, but are individualised, so he gets the nod from the feminists;

How does Chen Kaige disguises his politics. Whopping metaphors (all seeing blind men), clod-hopping parallel subplots and allegories (if something nasty happens in the bed room or at the opera, you can bet your bottom Renminbi that Chairman's up to no good).

How does Tian Zhaungzhuang disguises his politics: Doesn't. He is the Ken Louch of the Fifth Generation. (D. Malcolm, 1994 (1))

Although it is not difficult to understand that the western critics or China specialists are tempted to unravel the political subtext of the Fifth Generation film-making, or to make largely a political interpretation on what actually those films convey or imply. The film-makers of the Fifth
Generation and their works have tested both the patience and mettle of the party authorities and the ideological power. To certain degree, the allegorical nature of many Fifth Generation films has certainly helped both the critics in the West and the ideologues at home to justify their suspicion or speculations.

The Fifth Generation's disrespect of official dogma and its revolve to dismantle party's rigid formula in film-making has certainly made their works more accessible, popular and praiseworthy in the West. However, such growing international admiration has inevitably invited the Chinese authorities to re-adjust its attitudes and criterion under which this group of young filmmakers are to be judged. R. Sklar summed up nicely about the dilemma and concerns that the Fifth Generation has been facing with in the wake of increasing world-wide recognition:

By the late 1980s the leading Fifth Generation directors were facing choices similar to those that confronted many film-makers in many countries over the decades: Stay at home with inadequate funding, carping criticism and possible censorship, or go abroad, where financing and critical respect were available (but one's work might lose the cultural details and national specificity that has made it significant in the first place). (1993, p504)

In Autumn 1991, as has been noted before that, in order to gather some empirical evidence on how the public in the West view the Chinese cinema of post-Mao era (with an emphasis on the Fifth Generation and its films), I conducted an audience survey among more than a hundred British participants during the Chinese Film Season, organised by ICA in London. Some of the findings are useful and illuminating for us to reach a better and clearer understanding on western perception of Chinese cinema from a cross-cultural perspective. I will, however, pay particular attention to their views towards the Fifth Generation.

5.5 HOW THE BRITISH AUDIENCE VIEWS THE CHINESE CINEMA
One of the significant developments of Chinese cinema during the post-Mao era is its increasing accessibility and awareness in the West. Once an unknown and somewhat alien entity in the western film market, Chinese cinema has now become a regular and distinctive presence internationally, and is highly appreciated both in aesthetic and commercial terms. Never in its history has Chinese cinema reached such a wide and cross-cultural population beyond the boundaries of Chinese sphere, both culturally and geographically. Consequently, since the mid-1980s onwards, Chinese cinema and the Fifth Generation in particular, has become an issue that increasingly attracts the West and the resulting western views of this subject.

For the sake of practicality and being specific, I would like to explore in particular what could be called the British views of Chinese cinema? For the last decade or so, Britain, as one of a few western nations which have made considerable efforts in introducing Chinese cinema, has been largely kept abreast of the development of Chinese cinema after Mao, through its regular exposures to the most significant Chinese film productions of this period (the Channel Four and the British Film Institute should be given credits for their unfailing enthusiasm of introducing Chinese cinema). The media, both printing and electronic ones, has become the most influential and effective vehicle in shaping the British public of Chinese cinema. For many British film critics, their approaches and emphasises in analysing Chinese cinema could be, in my view, characterised by two related issues: first, the ideological transition of Chinese cinema from a previous propaganda-led model towards a much less political and less totalitarian one. Such changes have not only been reflected in thematics, genres but also in film language and techniques in a general way. Naturally, the legacy of Mao's communist cinema would always become an essential point of reference in their assessment of Chinese cinema of the post-Mao era; Second, despite the growing international recognition of the aesthetic and cinematic merits that Chinese cinema has been demonstrating during the post-Mao period, political or ideological discourse remains among those film critics the most common and important approach in the light of the continuing tradition that bounds closely the filmmaking and politics in China.
But, how the ordinary British public views Chinese cinema? In order to gather some empirical evidence on this issue, I conducted a questionnaire survey in 1991, in conjunction with the Chinese Film Season, run by the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London. Below, I would like to present an analysis of the findings obtained from the survey.

--- Sampling and Background Information

"Chinese Film Weekend", was a one-day event, with a program including seminars, discussions and viewing. It included two recently-made feature films, Mama (directed by Zhang Yuan) and Blood in the Dawn (directed by Li Shaohong) and two TV documentaries, all of which were banned in the mainland China at the time. According to the organiser, there were around 160 people attending the event. The majority of the attendants were believed to be British nationals and the rest were made of non-British nationals, mainly overseas students studying in UK. In total, 120 questionnaire forms were distributed, and non-British nationals among the audience were asked not to participate in the survey since it was intended to find out the British view of Chinese cinema. As a result, 83 completed forms were returned and 77 (92%) among them contained usable data. (A sample of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendices).

One may ask that whether such occasion could produce a representative sample? In answering this question, we have to realise the fact that in UK and elsewhere in the West, Chinese cinema, despite its growing popularity and international acclaim, was and still is in the category of fringe cinema that would attract relatively a small number of audiences. The formation of such audiences is mainly the result of shared interests, knowledge and experiences. In other words, most of those audiences were attracted to Chinese cinema for some very special or specific reasons. So, if we accept this notion, it would not be difficult to accept that such grouping of special audience is representative in its own right.
Actually, one finding drawn from the survey proves such point. On answering "Have you ever been to China?", almost 64% of the respondents claimed they had visited China. While China remains a rare holiday spot for the ordinary British, it would be very difficult to overlook the surprisingly high degree of coloration between one's travelling experiences in China and one's enthusiasm of Chinese cinema.

(Table 5.1) When Did You Visit China?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Numbers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1949</td>
<td>2 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-65</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-1979</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 to Date</td>
<td>40 (52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never been to China</td>
<td>28 (36.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the issues that I wanted to explore was: historically, how the Chinese cinema was introduced into Great Britain, and the public awareness of the subject. Responses to the question "When did you first see a Chinese film (from PR China) in UK (including viewing on TV or video)?" are shown in Table 5.2

(Table 5.2) When Did You First See A Chinese Film?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (period)</th>
<th>Number of Respondent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949-65</td>
<td>3 (4.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-76</td>
<td>6 (8.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-83</td>
<td>15 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-date</td>
<td>51 (66.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from the table, around two thirds of this sample of the British public had got access to Chinese film by the mid-1980s, in the wake of Chinese cinema's growing appearance in the West. This coincides with the rise of the Fifth Generation and the admiration it won in the West. An additional contributing factor was probably the fact that Channel Four TV's regularly supply of recently-made Chinese feature films. Since 1989, it has organised two widely-publicised Chinese Film Seasons, showing scores of films such as *Yellow Earth*, *Big Parade*, *Hibiscus Town*, *King of Children*, *Swan Song*, *Black Cannon, Red Sorghum* and others. Since the late 1980s, the commercial release of some renowned Chinese films, including *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, *King of Children*, *Raised the Red Lantern* and *Farewell My Concubine*, has also greatly helped the Chinese cinema to reach a much wider British audience.

What has also been revealed in this survey is that for majority of the respondents, the first Chinese film that they have ever watched was a fiction film (see Table 7.12), and this coincides with the fact that since the early 1980s onwards, the overwhelming majority of Chinese film shown in UK were fiction films, while few documentary films from China was shown in UK during the same period. However, a minority among the respondents who first encountered Chinese cinema through documentaries or “Model Opera Films” may explain the interesting presence of Chinese cinema in UK during the period of China's Cultural Revolution. In the late 60s and the early 70s, while the production of feature film in China was halted and consequently its export to overseas market stopped, some documentary films depicting China's revolution and the “Model Opera Films” were finding their ways into film societies, universities and the Left-wing organisations in UK. It is understood that during that period, many of the pro-China organisations in the UK (e.g. the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding) did have regular access to newly released Chinese films, although limited in number. The access was made possible with the assistance of the Chinese Embassy in London and other Chinese official bodies. It is significant that, despite the political hostilities between China and the West, about 8% of those who answered the questionnaire had managed to have access to Chinese films, both films and documentaries, during China's Cultural Revolution. The most quoted examples of
fiction films were *Red Detachment of Women*, *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* and *White Hair Girl*, three major pieces among the so-called "Modern Opera Films".

*Table 5.3*  The Genre of Your First Chinese Film You See

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genres</th>
<th>Number of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction Films</td>
<td>61 (79.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary Films</td>
<td>7 (9.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Model Opera Films'</td>
<td>6 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to name the three most interesting Chinese films they have seen since the early 1980s, the answers are (in the order of preferences): *Yellow Earth, Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou*, all of which are works of the Fifth Generation. So, what motivated them to view Chinese films?

The respondents' chief motivations (see Table 7.13) were predominantly two-fold: "personal interest in China" (or "to understand China and its people better"), and the appreciation of Chinese cinema's "artistic merits". It is not surprising that, in the wake of the implementation of China's "Open-door" policy and the cessation of the Cold War, British audiences, like others, are anxious to unravel the mystery of China, both as a nation as well as an ancient civilisation.

*Table 5.4*  What Motivates British to See A Chinese Film

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Numbers of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A personal interest in China</td>
<td>54 (70.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand China and its people better</td>
<td>40 (51.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its artistic merits</td>
<td>43 (55.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curiosity</td>
<td>10 (12.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the survey, there were two questions designed to find out more about what could be called the western perception or "reading" of Chinese cinema, a sensitive and often controversial issue, at least from a Chinese point of view. As observed, inside China since the mid-1980s, the western's increasing recognition and enthusiasm over the Fifth Generation has been sometimes, if not always, interpreted by both the authorities and the general public in China as a manifestation of the ingrained western stereotype, misconception and prejudice against China and its population. Intellectually, such argument would have been strongly echoed and supported by for example Edward Said's critical assessment of "Orientalism". According to Said's theory, as can be summarised that the "oriental", as a culture and a civilisation with its distinctive value system, has been historically perceived, interpreted and portrayed as exotic, closed, backward and authoritarian. (E. Said, 1978)

The respondents were asked to contest such assumptions by asking them "Do you agree or disagree: Red Sorghum (directed by Zhang Yimou) was awarded international prizes because it overstated the western stereotypes of China's backwardness, poverty, ignorance and social shortcomings?" It shouldn't come as a surprise that more than 70% of the respondents "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with this statement (see Table 7.14). Although it could be argued that such overwhelming response to "disagree" might have been the end-product of their exercise of political correctness rather than the expression of the respondents' true opinion (only about 5% "agreed" this statement, while around a quarter of the respondents "didn't know").

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Its &quot;national characteristics&quot;</th>
<th>7 (9.0%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: as more than one choices was acceptable, the percentages could exceed 100%)

(Table 5.5) Do You Agree or Disagree: "Red Sorghum was awarded international prizes because it stated the western stereotypes of China's backwardness, poverty, ignorance and social shortcomings?)
It has to be said that one of the major factors that the Fifth Generation films have attracted the West is their great commercial potential. While the avant-garde nature of the Fifth Generation film-making could be a disadvantage in attracting a large following at home, the same quality could well be turned into a commercial booster in the West. As a matter of fact, the Fifth Generation film-makers have been transforming themselves by fusing conventional narrative and commercial appeal into their philosophy of film-making. Films such as Red Sorghum, JuDou, Raise the Red Lantern, and Farewell My Concubine were commercially very successful in the West. However, would commercialisation prove to be a way out or a recipe of survival for the Chinese cinema? Asked, 59.4% of the respondents "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" while 17.5% agreed. Given the fact that those respondents could be described members of the art cinema audience, it is not difficult to understand that the majority of them were characteristically against the trend of commercialisation (see Table 5.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Number of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>3 (3.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>13 (16.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>33 (42.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>22 (28.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>6 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has to be said that one of the major factors that the Fifth Generation films have attracted the West is their great commercial potential. While the avant-garde nature of the Fifth Generation film-making could be a disadvantage in attracting a large following at home, the same quality could well be turned into a commercial booster in the West. As a matter of fact, the Fifth Generation film-makers have been transforming themselves by fusing conventional narrative and commercial appeal into their philosophy of film-making. Films such as Red Sorghum, JuDou, Raise the Red Lantern, and Farewell My Concubine were commercially very successful in the West. However, would commercialisation prove to be a way out or a recipe of survival for the Chinese cinema? Asked, 59.4% of the respondents "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" while 17.5% agreed. Given the fact that those respondents could be described members of the art cinema audience, it is not difficult to understand that the majority of them were characteristically against the trend of commercialisation (see Table 5.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Number of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>2 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has to be said that one of the major factors that the Fifth Generation films have attracted the West is their great commercial potential. While the avant-garde nature of the Fifth Generation film-making could be a disadvantage in attracting a large following at home, the same quality could well be turned into a commercial booster in the West. As a matter of fact, the Fifth Generation film-makers have been transforming themselves by fusing conventional narrative and commercial appeal into their philosophy of film-making. Films such as Red Sorghum, JuDou, Raise the Red Lantern, and Farewell My Concubine were commercially very successful in the West. However, would commercialisation prove to be a way out or a recipe of survival for the Chinese cinema? Asked, 59.4% of the respondents "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" while 17.5% agreed. Given the fact that those respondents could be described members of the art cinema audience, it is not difficult to understand that the majority of them were characteristically against the trend of commercialisation (see Table 5.6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>11 (14.3%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>26 (33.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>18 (23.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>9 (11.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, what, in the minds of British audience, are the main problems of Chinese film today? And how differ they were from that of their Chinese counterparts? It is interesting to note from Table 7.15 that although there was no single overwhelming factor that the British respondents considered to be the major shortcoming from those Chinese films they have seen, there were some shared concerns towards certain aspects of Chinese cinema: 18.1% of them cited the "imitation of western style" as their main concern over the well-being of Chinese cinema. Was Chinese cinema really in the danger of becoming an imitator of the western style of film-making? How such a worry had come about when most of the Chinese films they had seen in UK during the 1980s are renown for their distinctiveness in visual style, narrative and above all the demonstration of what could be called the "Chinese characteristics"? The most possible explanation for this could be that they conveyed this concern to a much wider picture of the intensifying commercial revolution that was taking place within the Chinese film industry at the time. One of the most visible symptoms created by such market-led reform was the imitation of the western ways of film-making as a quick-fix to solve the industry's worsening financial crisis;

Another issue which had caused certain degree of concern among the respondents is Chinese cinema's deep ideological tendency, and 11.6% of the respondents raised such concern. However, the explanation are two-fold: First, the outlook of Chinese cinema as a whole remained a very political one; Second, the other side of the coin, since most of the Chinese cinema shown in UK and indeed in the West were regarded as politically "controversial" inside China, therefore it was impossible for the British audience not to response with a highly political or ideological reading of those films concerned; Given the highly poetic or philosophical nature of some highly published Fifth Generation films in UK (e.g. Yellow Earth, Big Parade, King of
it may not be difficult to understand that 16.1% of the respondents complained of the lack of good and entertaining storyline in Chinese films. However, only a few years later, situation changed when the Fifth Generation began to adopt a more popularist approach and a conventional narrative in story-telling.

<Table 5.7> What Are the Main Problems of Chinese Films Today ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Numbers of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long and tasteless dialogue</td>
<td>4 (5.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of good &amp; entertaining storylines</td>
<td>9 (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too political or ideological</td>
<td>9 (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitation of western style</td>
<td>14 (18.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>38 (49.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>12 (15.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: as more than one choices was acceptable, the percentages could exceed 100%)

So, to what extent and in what way, has Said’s critical notion of “orientalism” been justified in a Chinese context of the 1980s, with reference to the western perception of Chinese cinema as a whole? I would like to make two points.

First, a very general one. We understand that Said’s concept of “orientalism” is central to and distinctive of a school of thought originated within a deeply-rooted Muslim/Islamic context. And, judged by his writings on the subject, his critique is placed predominantly within the long, irreconcilable and intensifying conflict between an Islamic culture on the one hand and what could be loosely called western imperialism and its value system on the other. Nevertheless, despite China’s oriental characteristics, its historical experience in dealing with the West and western values may have been one of the most complicated and ambivalent cases among the “oriental” countries. For instance, China has a long history of absorbing, interpreting and making
selective use of western learning and values in ways that make them compatible with its long tradition and values, or simply making them seemingly "Chinese". Even during the heyday of western imperialism in China at the turn of this century, the attitude towards the West among the intellectuals and some reform-minded officials could be summarised in the phrase as "make foreign things serve China". If the Westernization Movement of the mid-1890s, in introducing the capitalist mode of production and technology is one of its earliest attempts to introduce western science, the May 4th Movement in 1919 could be regarded as its first move in advocating the notion of western democracy, during which time Marxism, a school of radical revolutionary thought, was introduced. Historically, the fact that Westernisation had been commonly interpreted as a synonym for Modernisation has led to a benign attitude among the Chinese public towards the West. As a result, western values became less alienating when they were introduced into China. Moreover, for China, with a historically relative secular nature, there was no a religious crusade to fight for, which would otherwise be the case in an Islamic society when challenged by western notions. The point I really want to convey is that in China, a benign and practical attitude towards the West had made China a less typical case of the Saidian notion of "orientalism". In short, such a selective and pragmatic tradition in dealing with the West has inevitably affected the way in which China perceives or interprets the West today.

Second, a more specific and relevant point. One of the most noticeable changes upon the Chinese screen in the post-Mao era is the revival of realism, against the three-decade long heavy-handed preaching and practice of "Socialist Realism" under Mao. Society and human life were assembled on the screen in accordance with a set of prescribed political and social codes, and the result was a magnificent pseudo-reality. We have already discussed in details the impact of such a practice. In the 1980s, as "realism" was rehabilitated, the world on the screen began to be characterised as it is rather than as it ought to be. A realistic picture of China soon emerged on the screen, characterising poverty, social ignorance, material backwardness, human suffering, feudal stupidity and many other problematic phenomena. Understandably, the thematics of such "exposure" filmmaking could be very similar to a category of issues sought after by an alleged
western stereotype or prejudice against China. This creates a dilemma: a healthy and much needed social criticism prevailing on the Chinese screen, thanks to the political liberalisation of the post-Mao era, could also be interpreted in the minds of Chinese authorities as synonymous with the ill-harboured western prejudice or even conspiracy against China. That is major reason why the Fifth Generation and their films have been in many cases officially condemned for conveying western interests or reinforcing imperialistic prejudice. That is also the reason why the critique of "orientalism" and the like has often been made a handy but powerful aid for the authorities to discredit and suppress its internationally known filmmakers such as the Fifth Generation, whom the authorities suspected as having gone too far ideologically.

CONCLUSIONS

It would be fair to conclude that the Fifth Generation is the most inspiring and memorable film movement in the history of Chinese cinema. It could be regarded as the most significant and daring cinematic attempt as to discredit or challenge the three-decade long tradition of communist film-making and indeed the totalitarian notion of arts, propaganda and the Leninists' format of Socialist Realism. The term of Fifth Generation has always been an changing concept with no clear-definition, and I doubt whether it would have one in the future. It could be argued that the beauty of the term is that it allows us the freedom to explore or debate the emergence and development of New Chinese Cinema without worrying too much about the need to alter or readjust our opinions. The goal of the Fifth Generation, both politically and aesthetically, is to break free as completely as possible from the film-making format of their predecessors. So, to a certain degree, the Fifth Generation could be regarded as a politically "fatherless" generation, they didn't wish to be seen as the inheritors of the legacy of communist film-making. To a large degree, they've accomplished their historic mission for having successfully challenged the foundations of Chinese communist cinema, a kind of cinema they grown up with and mostly hated.
The essence of the Fifth Generation is far beyond an apparently elitist art cinema movement. In fact, the advent, development and evolution of the Fifth Generation, as observed since the mid-1980s, have become a reminder that reflects almost all the important issues or dilemmas that Chinese cinema has been facing in its reform: the dilemma between the newly-gained political freedom, the increasing pressures of market forces and commercialism, as the result of the decentralisation of state-owned film industry, and in particular the withdrawal of huge state-subsidies; The great difficulty of performing a balancing act between being artistically innovative and at the same time meeting the pressing need to cater for a wider audience; the dilemma between Chinese cinema's increasingly international recognition and the increasing danger of being accused of merely feeding foreign fantasy and curiosity of the Oriental. Most of those issues have not only been experienced by Chinese film-makers, but also by their counterparts in former communist nations, e.g., former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.

The increasing recognition that the Fifth Generation has been receiving in the West has certainly given rise to the politicisation or controversies of this unique group of film-makers. It is the first time in history that a particular school of Chinese film-making has attracted such intensifying and lasting worldly attention. Also, it is the first time in the history that Chinese specialists and Sinologists have made such a wide and critical use of Chinese films, in order to gain some insights about the changing socio-political reality of post-Mao China.

It is worth pointing out that the strong allegorical nature of the Fifth Generation film-making has, in a unique way, been a manifestation of the changing social reality of post-Mao China. To be exact, it reflects the socio-political constraints with which Chinese cinema has been able to survive. Despite their preference for the historical plots and their apparently apolitical thematics, the Fifth Generation has managed, in their own way, to make a political statement about China and its people, both in the past and present.
In the last chapter, we examined what is probably the most significant yet inspiring phenomenon in the history of Chinese Cinema: the Fifth Generation, a young generation of film-makers who were both the participants as well the victims of the Cultural Revolution, the most chaotic political period of Mao's era. However, despite their growing international popularity, demonstrated by the impressive winning records at major international film events and their commercial successes in the West, Fifth Generation film-making remains relatively a minority entity in the domestic market, both in their share of audience and the scope of production. Naturally, the film-making of such obscure, philosophical or "avant garde" nature has prevented it from becoming a major influence upon the majority of film audience in China. Therefore, a question must be asked: what type of film-making, has been most influential and popular to the majority of Chinese film-goers during the 1980s? and why?

This chapter aims to address an important issue which has been seriously overlooked by film historians and scholars of Chinese studies in the West. It is common knowledge inside China that the old generation of film-makers who survived the Mao era (particularly the Third Generation, to use that "generation" category) has been the most influential, productive and popular among the Chinese audiences. However, for those veteran film-makers who had served, in their prime, to realise Mao's political vision of film-making, their transformation during the post-Mao era is understandably painful and challenging. As Chen Hui-kai, a veteran member of the "Third Generation" and Chen Kaige's father, depicted his generation:

An artist must, first of all, be thoughtful. He must have his own unique opinions towards history and life, and with which he would be able to make
statements about society in a unique and creative way. How about our situation (under Mao)? We were imposed with so much ideological dogmas, and we were burdened with heavy mental shackles. We were only allowed to reflect life in a passive manner, or to interpret only one school of thought. Therefore, we had been seriously restricted, from the choices of subject matters to the expression of sentiments and even the use of filming technique. (At that time), we were extremely overcautious and didn't dare to go one step beyond the prescribed limit (1988: p65).

How have they re-defined their role (by reforming themselves, both ideologically and aesthetically) to reflect the “Open-door” political and social reality? How have they reconstructed the political history of Mao's regime into a fictional reality, that accommodates, on the one hand, Deng's political pragmatism that allows limited criticism of Mao's regime and communist ideology, and on the other, reflects the awakening political independence of the public in the post Mao's era? How has their adoption or adjustment to tremendous political and social changes of the post-Mao era been manifested in their consideration of story-telling, and the narrative structure in particular? Part of this chapter is devoted to exploring this tradition.

It is worth noting that ever since the earliest days of China's communist film-making, notably after the establishment of the People's Republic, the genre of melodrama has always been a major attraction to both the political authorities and most of the Chinese film-makers. More importantly, in Mao's authoritarian regime, the form of melodrama had become a powerful form to convey, secularise or popularise its ideology and way of life, and to establish an imaginative yet official relationship between the individual and the state. Interestingly, during the post-Mao era, this form has become, for many veteran film-makers, a ready and effective form to use so as to reconstruct a new version of China's modern history and a new discourse of relationship between self and society, and that between individual and the State.
However, the examination of this group of veteran film-makers and their unique experiences of
transformation during the post-Mao era, will be carried out through an individualistic case study
of Xie Jin, who is widely regarded in China as the most representative figure among this group of
film-makers. He is also acclaimed as the most popular, influential and controversial film-maker
of the post-Mao period.

This chapter will be divided into three parts: (1) Xie Jin and his film-making: a biographical
account; (2) Xie Jin’s narratology: how to read it?; (3) the “Xie Jin Phenomenon”: a critique;

Why are Xie Jin and his film-making career so important and unique as to shape our
understanding about the veteran Chinese film-makers? Below are some interesting observations,
which I’ve drawn from his long and extraordinary career:

(1) Amid the political prosecution and turbulence during Mao’s era, a career of extraordinary
longevity was archived by Xie Jin: he was among a handful of veteran film-makers (e.g. Xie
Tieli from Beijing Film Studios, and Sang Hu from Shanghai Film Studios), who had managed
to continue their film-making throughout Mao’s era, without suffering serious disruptions. Even
during the Cultural Revolution, during which most of the veteran film-makers were condemned
and ceased to make any film. Xie Jin, after a short spell of labour-education camp, was “offered”
to work for the film version of “Revolutionary Model Play”, Jiang Qin’s brain-child. In other
words, he miraculously survived almost every political campaign or purge under Mao. The
obvious question we will be asking: how did he achieve this and why?

(2) During the 1980s, Xie Jin emerged as China’s most important film-maker, in both critical and
commercial terms. Reportedly, the attendance for most of his films exceeded 100 million people,
constituting about one tenth of China’s population. (For instance, Herdsman reached 130 million,
and Garland at the Foot of the High Mountain over 170 million). He had always been proud of
his popularist approach and the great appealing power of his works. In his own words, his
audiences are “from the Premier to ordinary factory workers and peasants. Also his films are not
only attractive to Chinese audiences, but to foreigners as well." (J. Xie, 1987: p109). In almost every film audience survey conducted during the 1980s, Xie Jin's position as China's most popular film director has rarely been challenged. In 1988, he received 92% of a total 2.6 million votes from audiences nation-wide (J. Xie, 1990: p1-2).

(3) It is worth noting that during the 1980s, Xie Jin also became the most controversial figure among the veteran generation. On the one hand, thematically, his emphasis on highly sensitive political subject matter in the history of Communist China (such as the "Anti-rightist campaign" and the Cultural Revolution) has invited party's interventions, making him not only the most talked about film-maker in the film circle but also a familiar name on the high table of China's leading politicians. Therefore, the significance of Xie Jin and his films as an ideological indicator has understandably been inflated to meet the demands of political speculations, both at home and abroad. On the other hand, Xie Jin's great skills in making his films a compromising form of political criticism, by accommodating the legitimacy of the communist party into a melodrama of political correctness and conformity, have alienated many young and more critically-minded film-makers and critics.

(4) Xie Jin is also the first veteran Chinese film-maker who has received international recognition in the post-Mao era. "Xie Jin Film Retrospectives" have been held in eight foreign countries including USA, France and the UK. He became the first Chinese member in the Academy of Motion Picture Art and Science in USA, a title which would have been politically forbidden and inconceivable ten years ago.

(5) Under Mao, Xie Jin was best known for his skillful and innovative approach in conforming, effectively, to the essentials of "melodrama", to convey the communist ideology (Mao's political thoughts in particular) and authorised political messages. Number 5 Basketball Player (1956), The Red Detachment of Women (1960) and Stage Sisters (1964) were the best examples in point, and they are still hailed today as the masterpieces of Chinese revolutionary cinema. Under Deng,
Xie Jin has successfully transformed melodrama into a unique form of political and social criticism. This chapter will try to examine and unravel his world of melodrama.

6.1 XIE JIN AND HIS FILM-MAKING: A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Xie Jin was born in November 1923, in Shaoxin, Zhejiang, Southeast China. His father, a trained accountant, was born into a wealthy and learned gentry family during the late Qing Dynasty. In 1930, Xie Jin arrived in Shanghai, already China's largest commercial centre, and received his primary education there. In his spare time, he enjoyed reading and watching performances of Shaoxin opera (a form of folk opera which is very popular in Shanghai and neighbouring provinces including Zhejiang where it was originated. It is stronger on narrative, dialogue and music, weaker on choreography and movement in comparison with the Peking Opera). However, cinema-going was his prime interest. He started seeing American films about the time he was in the junior high school. Charlie Chaplin’s mimes and John Ford’s western were his favourites. He was reportedly deeply moved by *Waterloo Bridge* (Los Angeles Post, May 16, 1985).

In 1938, when Shanghai had fallen into the invading Japanese army, Xie Jin and his father fled to Hong Kong as refugees. They, however, returned to Shanghai a year later. While a high school student, Xie Jin became an activist in the left-wing student drama movement. In 1941, he was enrolled by the National Drama College, based in Chongqing (Sichuan province), China’s wartime capital, and dropped out half way through to devote himself to anti-Japanese propaganda warfare. On his return to Shanghai, after China’s victory against the Japanese invasion in 1945, he joined a communism-inspired drama troupe, as a floor assistant. In 1948, he was offered the post as an assistant director for a private film studio in Shanghai. This was the beginning of his film-making career.

Following the founding of the People’s Republic, Xie Jin, as a pro-communism progressive youth, was recommended to participate in a short-term training session at the Political Research
Institute, the Northern China Revolutionary University, one of the party's leading political academies at the time. He freely read, for the first time, the political theories of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin and was instructed about their essence, from "Das Capital" to "The Communist Manifesto", from "Introduction to Political Economy" to "State and Revolution). On completion of his political training in 1951, he was assigned to the recently nationalised Shanghai Film Studios. In 1953, at the age of 30, he became a film director, among the first crop of film-makers promoted by the communist cultural authorities.

Xie Jin's adjustment into a new political and ideological system was not easy. His debut as a director, An Incident (1954), and the following Spring in A Region of River (1955), both with a current affair or propagandist approach about the communist land reform of a few years before, were, however, not promising and artistically mediocre even by the official standards at the time. In 1958, in the height of "Great Leap Forward" mass movement, he directed Speedy Wind and Tough Grass, a short feature film with an Anti-Rightist plot, which was seen as equally lacking in propaganda and artistic fervour.

In the 50s, Xie Jin was deeply attracted by some Italian Neo-realist films that were shown in China at the time, and treated them as his "bible" in film-making. For instance, he viewed Roma Ore 11 (Rome 11 O'clock, 1952) for more than ten times, and jotted down comments in hundreds of thousands of words. Xie Jin was greatly encouraged by the critical elements in such school of film-making and its strikingly realistic portrayals of everyday life. It is worth noting, however, that during the 1950s, Xie Jin, like most Chinese artists and intellectuals, was very impressed and encouraged by the enormous efficiency and determination with which the Communist government dealt with the legacy of poverty, humiliation, political instability and social evils (such as drug-taking, prostitution and underground societies). At this time, many people enjoyed the great feeling of "emancipation" and national pride. Meanwhile, Xie Jin devotedly engaged himself in the "thought reform" campaign (a Chinese form of group psychotherapy) designed to bring about the ideological transformation of the individuals (F. Schurmann, 1983; p134-5). It
required film-makers and all "ideological workers" to consolidate with the new political regime, and to propagate communist ideology.

In 1956, encouraged by Mao's call for the Hundred Flowers Bloom campaign, which encouraged the intellectuals to voice openly their criticism of the communist regime, Xie Jin set to prepare *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* (1957), a melodrama about two generations of basketball players during the pre and post-1949 periods. The film was an immediate success on its release in 1957. In the film, despite Xie Jin’s heavy-handed efforts in highlighting the virtues, righteousness and legitimacy of the newly-found communist power, he successfully infused a youthful of idealism, which had become an increasing rarity since 1949, into initially a political storyline. The film was, in the same year, awarded the Silver Prize at the Sixth International Youth Festival.

In 1957, while the "anti-rightist" political campaign was increasing its hostilities against the outspoken intellectuals and artists, including many veteran film-makers, young Xie Jin, a loyal party follower, was not affected despite his bourgeois background.

In 1958, during the “Great Leap Forward”, which aimed to prove that human will could vanquish all natural, technical and social difficulties. There was also a vigorous "great leap" in art and film-making. While vowing to make the most memorable film in the history of world cinema, Xie Jin embarked, with great rigour, on a political mission to innovate a new cinematic genre, the so-called "artistic documentary", an artistic or creative expression based upon factual stories and ideally acted by real-life or non-professional characters. He made *Wang Baomei* (1958), a cinematic piece of reportage about a young woman textile worker in Shanghai. However, the attempt was not successful even from a propagandist point of view.

As a result of the nerve-wrecking political campaigns which had been underway since the mid-1950s, in particular the "anti-rightist" campaign, film-makers, like other artists, began to concede the fact that the only way to survive was to toe the party line, and be politically faultless at the
expense of artistic exploration. Xie Jin, however, was keen to find a middle-ground that would enable him to secure political safety as well as some degree of artistic freedom. His answer rested with the so-called "historical revolutionary themes", largely pre-1949 communist history. Meanwhile, he detached himself from contemporary subject matter which he believed to be politically uncertain and much more likely to the victim of ideological arbitration. Red Detachment of Women (1960) is an ideal example to illustrate his new approach. It also symbolised his return to the Hollywood-style melodramatic format, that he had been so fascinated about and familiar with.

This story is about the legendary experiences of a Red Army women unit in the late 1920s. On the one hand, in the eyes of communist leadership, this story was all too familiar and orthodox. On the other hand, it contains some essential melodramatic elements, that would draw the crowds. In this film, Xie Jin began to show his talent and creativity in his ability to melodramatize Mao's political thinking. Jay Leyda, the American film historian who was working as an advisor in Beijing at the time, was critical of Xie Jin's latest attempt of rendering conventional melodrama with politics, describing this work as "abstract time, abstract place, stereotyped characters and illogical action" (1972, p303). However, in 1962, it won Xie Jin the "Best Film Director" award, in China's first ever national film poll, the "Hundred Flowers Award" (Bai-Hua-Jiang).

In 1962, approaching the end of what is called the "Three-Years Natural Disasters" period, during which China suffered from probably the worst and also most wide-spread famine in history, Xie Jin made his first and only attempt at comedy film, as part of the propaganda efforts providing some up-beat entertainment to China's famine-stricken populations. Big Li, Little Li and Old Li was a story about football fans. At the time, as the public sought desperately after any means of escapism, the film was a commercial success. In 1964, he scripted and directed Stage Sisters, a story of two young Shaoxin opera actresses in the 1940s and their life, both on and off the stage. As the result of the worsening political situation, half-way through the filming, the production was halted for allegedly containing bourgeois sentiments. The authorities demanded
that the script be re-written. Later, after the public release, the film received the harsh condemnation for allegedly provoking "bourgeois humanism". In 1965, prior to the Cultural Revolution, *Big Li, Little Li and Old Li and Stage Sisters* were both banned by the Party's Central Propaganda Department, in the name of "cleaning up poisonous weeds".

During the earlier part of the Cultural Revolution, Xie Jin was, for the first time, publicly denounced. He was later sent to the May 7th Cadre School, Mao's labour camp, to undertake "ideological reform". He remained there until 1970, during which his mother committed suicide because of the mounting hostilities against them. His two sons, both mentally retarded, were subjected to constant humiliations and abuses, mentally and physically. This was the most traumatic and humiliating period in Xie Jin's personal and professional life.

In 1972, when the production of feature films was resumed after more than three years' interruption, Jiang Qing, who was in charge of arts and culture affairs at the time, ordered the "liberation" of a number of condemned veteran film-makers, including Xie Jin and Shang Hu, for the purpose of producing the cinematic versions of "revolutionary model plays". On hearing the news, Xie Jin was reportedly in tears. He recalls:

One evening in July 1970, a confederate of the 'Gang of Four' summoned me, from the May Fourth Cadre School, to the office of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe. He then made an announcement at a mass meeting that Xie Jin was once a representative figure among those who indulged bourgeois and revisionist thoughts. However, he said, Xie Jin had now returned to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, as the result of the "thought-reform" and self-criticism. On hearing this, I could not help weeping. I was grateful and thrilled for having once again come back to the correct course of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. (J. Xie, 18 July 1987: p2)
Under Jiang Qing's censorious supervision, Xie Jin directed two of the ten "model play films", namely *On the Dock* (1971-73), and *Panshiwan Bay* (1975). In 1974, Xie Jin directed *Spring Shoot*, a story about a young rural woman who becomes a Mao-style "bare-foot doctor" during the Cultural Revolution and her struggle against the political conspiracy of her bourgeois counterpart. The film was also later enlisted as part of the propaganda scheme discrediting Deng Xiao-ping after his first political resurrection during the Cultural Revolution.

In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, Xie Jin was first under serious political scrutiny of the new regime, with his duty of film-making suspended, for his alleged association with the "Gang of Four" while making so-called "conspiracy films" (i.e. *Spring Shoot*). Having been cleared of the charge of by post-revolutionary political rectification, he was allowed to make films again. His first film in the post-Mao period, *Youth* (1978), was about the friendship between a deaf-mute girl in a poor rural area and an army doctor who eventually cured the former by using traditional Chinese acupuncture.

Xie Jin had impressed and moved the post-Mao Chinese public by his *Oh, Cradle* (1979), a heroic story about a Red Army nursery in Yan'an during the 1940s. In this film, Xie Jin transcended the norm of humanity above politics. Since the early 1980s, he has made seven feature-length films. They include: *Tianyunshang Legend* (1980), *Herdsman* (1980), *Qiu Jin, A Revolutionary* (1983), *Garlands at the Feet of the Mountains* (1984), *Hibiscus Town* (1986), *Last Aristocracy* (1989), and *Qingliang Temple* (1991). In 1988, *Hibiscus Town* was awarded the prize of the Crystal Globe at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in Czechoslovakia. He has also been on the panels for some key international film festivals, including the Venice festival in 1989.

Xie Jin has been, politically, China's most influential film-maker of the post-Mao era. He sits on the National People's Congress, China's Parliament. He joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1983.
6.2 XIE JIN'S POLITICAL MELODRAMA: THEME AND NARRATOELOGY

In retrospect, according to the Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre, melodrama, as a form of popular play that has gained its ground in the 19th century, was "highly coloured and larger than life — the noble outlaw, the wronged maiden, the cold-blooded villain, working out destinies against a background of ruined castles, haunted houses and spectacular mountain scenery". In England, "it was mainly the use of music, first to separate the various incidents and later to underline them, that gave its name to its this popular type of play. But the new meaning soon took precedence over the old ones, and melodrama indicated everything that fed the popular appetite for horror and mystery, violence and double-dealing, but always with virtue triumphant." (Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre, 1990: 348). Although, the days of melodrama as a form of popular theatre are over, the elements of melodrama have continued to develop, particularly in cinematic form, and it has become the most popular genre in the history of world cinema.

It should be pointed that the privilege that melodrama had been bestowed with during Mao's era was largely the end product of political engineering. First of all, the popular nature of melodrama had made it understandably easier to become favourable by the communist regime, which constantly advocates the popularisation of arts. Secondly, the narrative framework of melodrama, that generally provides a rather simplified or polarised explanation (or solution) for real-life situations, could sit very well with the analytical pattern of the party's political mobilisation and propaganda. Thirdly and lastly, under Mao, the form of melodrama, with traditionally a family-centred setting and a distinctive moral emphasis, could be transformed into a fundamentally political discourse.

A brief examination of Xie Jin's early work under Mao will provide us with a more detailed illustration and some background information.

Xie Jin Film's Narrative Model During Mao's Era
Generally speaking, under Mao, all films' thematic emphasis and their narratives were instructed, by the party, to be "synthesised" with the party line and Mao's political thinking. The ultimate task facing every film-maker under Mao was to transfer the authorised political messages into a projected "imaginary" or "fictional" reality, that constituted a communist version of new life, new human being and even new history. A young Chinese film critic has remarked:

The cinema history of the New China is fundamentally a cinematic discourse about an unitary totalitarian political power. In other words, it is a discourse of power between the Chinese people and Socialist China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party" (Y. M. Li, 1990: p 21)

In his early films, like many other films of the same period, Xie Jin conveyed mainly two inter-related political messages, all about the designated relationship between self and the party or party state, between individual and collective interests: first, the fulfilment of individual freedom and ambition can only be achieved by committing oneself, whole-heatedly and selflessly, to the collective interests of communist cause; second, the value system of communist ideology was the only legitimate and arbitrary power as to judge the righteousness of human behaviour and moral appropriateness of the individual members of society.

A similar pattern can be found emerging in Xie Jin's narratives and character-building. In simplified term, each story consisted of, essentially, three types of characters. Each of them, highly significant in sociological terms, was designated to a particular category of social or political class or group: (1) leading character (mostly female), a proletarian figure, tortured repressed and exploited by his or her class enemies, or being ideologically unstable, incorrect or immature ; (2) helpers, mentors or saviours: insightful, persuasive, amiable and strong-willed ---- the impersonator of communist force and its ideology; (3) villains: cruel, cunning and anti-revolutionary ---- the presence of reactionary forces. (see Table 6.1)
<Table 6.1>

**Character-Building in Xie Jin’s Early Works**

**Red Detachment of Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped</th>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Villain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qionghua, slave girl</td>
<td>Hong Changqin, Red Army Man</td>
<td>Nan Batian, warlord and reactionary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Stage Sisters (1965)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped</th>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Villain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chunhua, actress</td>
<td>Jiang Bo, left-wing journalist</td>
<td>Hong, the theatre manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*On the Dock (1973)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped</th>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Villain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Xiaoqiang, a young worker</td>
<td>Haiqhen, the party secretary</td>
<td>Qian Shouwei, a hidden class enemy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Spring Shoot (1975)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped</th>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Villain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chunmiao, &quot;bare-foot&quot; doctor</td>
<td>Fang Min, the party secretary</td>
<td>Qian Jiren, doctor &amp; class enemy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that there are apparently some similarities between Xie Jin's early narratology and a Hollywood formula of melodrama or the "Westerns". However, Xie Jin had rewritten this original formula by introducing it into a context of political revolution or struggle. Obviously, what Xie Jin aimed to achieve was a unique combination of communist ideology in

Set in the early 1930s, the story takes place in a small town in Southern China: Qionghua, a slave girl, in pitch dark night, escapes from her master, Nan Batian, a ruthless landlord-turned-warlord. The torture and suffering that she has been enduring, mentally and physically, has taken its toll. While on the run, she is rescued by Hong Changqing, a Red Army commissar who is there on a secret mission. Consequently, she joins in the Red Army and becomes a member of the "Red Detachment of Women", an all-women combat unit; in order to seek personal revenge against Nan Batian, her former captor, she acts from impulse, trying to kill him, and this results in an abortive ambush. She is given a disciplinary charge. Soon, she realises, as the result of enlightening political education she has received from Commissar Hong, that a revolutionary soldier's ultimate mission should be to act on the collective interests of all proletarians, rather than that of each individual. In the end, the baptism of revolution has transformed her into a true and determined communist.

On preparation of the film, Xie Jin studied, in great detail, Mao's political writings on the so-called first civil revolutionary war period (between communists and the Kuomintang) in which the film is set (e.g., "Why China's Red-Base has been able to exist", "A survey of Hunan's peasantry movement", "The analysis of all social classes in Chinese society" and "On collision government"). In his directing notes, Xie Jin quoted in great length, Mao's political writings, and he regarded them as his profound source of creativity and inspiration. On completion of *Red Detachment of Women*, he concluded that Mao's teachings were "extremely helpful in reaching a better understanding of peasants' revolutionary struggle, and to perfect the artistic treatment for certain sequences in the film". Also, he claimed, they are "very inspiring in handling atmosphere, rhythm, momentum, characters and other creative aspects of the film." He summarised its theme as "only under the leadership of the Communist Party, armed with proletarian ideology, could one become a true revolutionary. He would be able to live through any trial, and to fight a
determined struggle against reactionary forces to win the victory." (J. Xie, 1990: p5, 6, 8). He further explained:

Firstly, it (the film) aims to prevail the truth that a successful revolution can only be guaranteed with the leadership of the Communist Party. Spontaneous struggle will never be successful. Secondly, audiences would be able to receive a lecture on revolutionary tradition: to learn the bravery and indomitable spirits from their martyrs and veteran revolutionaries, and to learn from their noble sacrifices for the revolutionary cause. Thirdly, to encourage our audiences to continuously reform themselves ideologically, striving for making more progress" (J. Xie, 1990: p8)

Despite some visible ideological constraint, Red Detachment of Women remains a good and effective piece of propaganda. As Timothy Tung, an American-Chinese historian and a film critic, points out:

With Xie Jin's treatment, the film is dramatically entertaining; it has a feel for adventure. It is emotionally arousing. One's sympathy is always with the oppressed; one always sides with the Communist saviour; one's hatred for the villain is unbounded. Red Detachment of Women is perhaps the original Xie Jin tearjerker" (T. Tung, 1987: p201)

It is clear that the nature of such political melodrama was to exclude the ordinariness of day-to-day life and normality of human sentiments. As the notion of communist arts was, in principle, against the universality of humanity, which transcends the class-based love and emotions, any expression of human behaviour and sentiments, in both real and fictional circumstances, became an extremely problematic business. It demanded political fine-tuning or justification. Thus, individuality or the pursuit of personal interest was fiercely condemned, and mutual affection between opposite sex, perceived as petty bourgeois sentiments that endanger the cause of
revolution, should be repressed at all costs. For instance, when *Red Detachment of Women* was in the cutting room, the authorities demanded that a sequence that vaguely implies the mutual affection between Qionghua and commissar Hong, should be cut out for that it may jeopardise the nobility and purity of proletarian love.

Another major feature in Xie Jin's early narrative model was the exclusion and suppression of family existence. Few characters in Xie Jin's early film had their family and marriage status clearly-stated. Sequence within a true family setting was few and far in between, and "bedroom" scenes were non-existent. Sensual or sexual aspects were reserved almost exclusively for the purpose of exposing or discrediting the dissipated and immoral existence of reactionaries or class enemies (the villains), whom the proletarian revolution determines to eradicate (for instance, the lustful Nan Batian in *Red Detachment of Women*, and the equally lustful Grandpa Ni and Manager Hong in *Stage Sisters*).

The political fate of *Stage Sisters*, was similar to *Red Detachment of Women*. The plot lines concern two young Shaoxin opera actresses in the pre-liberation period. Having gone through thick and thin together, they finally reach become stardom. But they soon find that glittering career success has different meanings to them. They have to decide whether to give up courting the rich and powerful or to devote their art to serve and enlighten the mass of ordinary people. The separate paths they take lead them to opposite political destinies. However, when the liberation comes, they become reunited and the "bad" sister is helped by the "good" one in order to adjust to the newly-found socialist society. Half way through the filming, due to a sudden political change, there was an order to halt. Xie Jin was criticised for displaying too much sympathy towards the "bad" sister, instead of depicting her in a negative and unfavourable manner. He had to, consequently, alter the script and dialogues to the authorities' satisfaction. While any possible trace of political ambiguity in both dialogue and plot was intolerable, political slogans may be the safest choice, as the last resort. The film was originally scripted with an ending as below:
Yuehong ("bad" sister): from now on, I will be devoting my life to the opera, leading a decent and honest life.

Chunhua ("good sister"): what I am thinking now is: what kind of person I want to be, and what sort of opera I want to perform.

The ending was later altered:

... (pause)

Chunhua: I want to perform revolutionary opera, and I want to become a revolutionary.

As has been mentioned already, Xie Jin had shown his habit of avoiding so-called "contemporary theme" of the post-Liberation period. Almost all his important work during Mao's era (e.g. Number 5 Basketball Player, Red Detachment of Women and Stage Sisters) happen to have a plot set in the "historical past", namely the pre-Liberation period. Like many film-makers of his generation, Xie Jin took refuge in so-called "historical revolutionary themes", in an attempt to detract or minimise the party's censorious political censorship (or prescriptive instruction). In many cases, elements of realism seemed to have a better chance to survive in "historical " rather than "contemporary" plots.

Here, I would like to state very clearly that the characteristics observed in Xie Jin's earlier work was typical of mainstream Chinese film-making at the time. Therefore, it provides a pretext for our examination, not only on Xie Jin as an individual film-maker, but also on the collective transformation of his generation in the post-Mao era.

Xie Jin's Narrative Model During The Post-Mao Era

Apparently, as we've observed, Xie Jin has retained some essential elements of his early narrative format: for instance, (1) preference of female leading characters (heroines); (2) remaining a
faithful to melodrama; (3) keen to convey or inject political and moral messages through the
careful and skilful orchestration of plots.

During the post-Mao era, however, his world of heroines seems to be increasingly more dynamic,
colourful and down-to-earth, featuring people of a wide-ranging socio-political background:
Yamei — a rural deaf-mute girl during the Cultural Revolution (Youth); Li Nan — a women
communist and head of the Red Army nursery in Yan’an during the late 1940s (Oh, Cradle); Qiu
Jin — a real-life revolutionary woman in the late-Qing Dynasty (Qiu Jin); Feng Jinlan — a
college graduate, innocent, devoted and passionate, during the “Anti-Rightist Campaign”
(Legend of Tionyunshan Mountain); Li Xiuwu — a poor rural girl in the early 1960s
(Herdsman); Hu Yuyin — a bean curd peddler in a small rural town during the Cultural
Revolution (Hibiscus Town); Li Tong, from an aristocratic family, is a college student studying in
USA, on the eve of the Communist victory (Last Aristocracy). Such a list of leading characters,
covering such a wide spectrum of socio-political backgrounds, is unprecedented. It has, at least,
demonstrated that revolutionaries, communists or only politically-corrected people are no longer
the only or legitimate candidate for the leading cast.

How does Xie Jin reconstruct his narratology? What messages does Xie Jin try to convey? To
what degree has Xie Jin’s “fictional reality” reflected the true nature of the contemporary history
of China? Has justice been done to this version of history?

It should be emphasised that since the early 1970s, Xie Jin’s most important and controversial
works are set against the backdrop of the most turbulent and dark political periods under Mao,
the Anti-rightist Campaign and Cultural Revolution. They are: Legend of Tionyunshan,
Herdsman, and Hibiscus Town. They almost form a trilogy about the political history of Mao’s
China, in relating particularly to the collective experiences of condemned Chinese intellectuals.

While analysing his work of the post-Mao era, we must, first of all, put the significance of Xie
Jin’s political melodrama into perspective, in particular its critical edge or strength. We have to
concede the fact that Xie Jin has never been politically a dissident, and for him to become one would be out of character. Despite the sensitiveness of those themes, Xie Jin’s interpretation remains largely in tune with the official perception of the new regime of Deng Xiao-ping. Under Deng’s “liberalisation policies”, Xie Jin’s measured and well-orchestrated criticism has been considered peripheral. The emergence of such criticism reflects mainly the increasing trend of China’s political relaxation. In fact, it was the Party’s 1978 resolution calling for a critical reassessment of “Anti-rightist Campaign” and “Cultural Revolution” that gave Xie Jin the green light. As an experienced political man, he knew instinctively how far he could go, and how to explore the new political situation to his full advantage. He began to work out a new recipe for a different kind of political melodrama. It contains a mixture of following ingredients: (1) the new regime’s open but restrained criticism about Mao’s era and his policy; (2) humanistic values, that have been officially rehabilitated; (3) patriotism. All these elements seem to have suggested an important question about the need for a collective discourse of “national narrative”: how the individuals should reconcile themselves with their agonising past under Mao, and how a new relationship between the political power and its people could be established and justified. In his view:

The ‘Gang of Four’ epitomised all human relations with the notion of ‘class struggle’. Therefore, the relations between parents and children, husbands and wives had also to be judged by this yardstick. Inter-personal relations also became extremely intense; People were afraid of speaking out and revealing their true sentiments, so they became ‘inhuman’ and ‘motionless’. This was the most outrageous violation upon humanity. (J. Xie, 1990: p54)

Concepts, such as human sentiment, humanity and humanism, or the idea of ‘literature is the study of human being’, were severely condemned during the Cultural Revolution. Even before the Revolution, they had been criticised as ‘revisionist thinking’ However, the elements are vitally important to the existence of literature and art.(1990: p52).
Since the late 1970s, the issue of humanity and humanism became Xie Jin’s ultimate concern, and it also became the source of his controversy. In 1978, while preparing Oh, Cradle, a story about the evacuation of a nursery in communist-controlled Yan’an in 1947 in the wake of the Kuo-mingtang’s military offensive, having rejected altogether seven versions of the script, earmarked as in the formats of adventures, thrillers or children films, he made it clear that he wanted this film to be a grand celebration of humanity and human love. The film may be seen by western audiences as a bit too sugary or a tearjerker, but its warmth, subtlety and unpretentiousness were what the Chinese screen had long been deprived of. To cite a few sequences: When Grandpa Luo, the old cook, died peacefully, a group of toddlers is chasing around him and thinking he is asleep. Xiangzhu, a teenage nanny, is killed dead by enemy fire, as the result of her failure to shelter herself, out of her excitement at throwing grenades at enemies. However, since the number of dead from the camp of “positive characters” exceeded the supposedly appropriate ratio in order to prevent unhelpful perception of cruelty inflicted by revolutionary warfare, Xie Jin responded to the criticism with a equally superficial political jargon, saying: “We have indeed lost a great deal during the war-time, but revolutionary war would reward us much more”.

Despite the party’s pronounced policy of “thought liberalisation”, to implement it, one needs highly sophisticated political skills and tactics. Xie Jin’s solution is to advocate humanism and political criticism within the boundary of officially authorised messages, to protect himself and his film-making. In other words, Xie Jin’s new narratology, in essence, still needs, in a subtle form, the endorsement of, or must be in tune with the remaining authoritarian regime, despite of its relative liberal nature in comparison with Mao’s. Li Yimin commented:

An authoritarian-style historic discourse is nothing but an interpretation on what history is all about at a conscious level. It provides the fundamental concepts, logic and methods so as to understand such authoritarian interpretation of history. As it lacks
something, it, therefore, prevents the masses to establish an imaginary relationship responding to such a discourse (Y. M. Li, 1990: p13)

What Xie Jin is best known for is his great ability to transform an officially-endorsed political messages into melodramatic stories, that accommodates both the official message and the public's critical or emotional sentiments.

If film-making under Mao was known for politicising every moral, ethical and humanitarian aspect of every-day life, since the late 1970s, Xie Jin has reversed this trend by "moralising" "political" issues or politics.

Under the new formula, the first noticeable change has been political symbolism of "gender" (maleness and femaleness). As has been discussed, in Xie Jin's earlier works, male "positive characters" often played the roles as the impersonators of communist force, and their function in narrative was mainly as "helpers" or "saviours", representing the moral and human strength. In turn, female "positive characters", weak, deprived and suppressed, are often in the position of being helped, taught and enlightened.

Such symbolism is completely reversed in Xie Jin's later works: male "positive characters" are no longer the traditional type of infallible communist heroes, but the wronged and suppressed intellectuals, the victim of Mao's political repression. They become now the comforted and the helped, while "female positive characters" substitute the "male"s previous role as the presence of strength, inspiration and hope.

In my view, such a new symbolism for female "positive characters" manifests Xie Jin's important shift from "power of politics" to "power of humanity". In his new narrative structure, women represent the presence of human virtue: morality, strength, tenacity, dignity, selflessness and ordinariness. In short, a good woman represents a good world, a decent family which is capable of compensating the suffering of suppressed "males". In so doing, Xie Jin translates a real
political issue into a moral one. Thus, for those "political outcasts", the blessing of love, marriage or having children, substitute or even supersede the justification of political rehabilitation.

To give a few examples: in Legend of Tianyunshan Mountain, the suffering of Luo Qun, a young talented engineer and a 'rightist', is compensated by the devotion, love and understanding of Feng Jinlan, a former colleague, who later becomes his wife. In contrast, after the Cultural Revolution, Wu Yao, the party chief who is directly responsible for the injustice done to Luo Qun, is "punished" by the break-up of his family (; Also, in Herdsman the fate of Xu Lin-Jun, a student-turned-"rightist", is almost a replica of Luo Qun's

Below, I'd like to give a detailed analysis of Hibiscus Town (1986), Xie Jin's most representative work, and also his most controversial, in the post-Mao period, to realise the complexity and implications of such narrative.

The film, Hibiscus Town was adapted from Gu Hua's novel of same title, published in 1981. Hailed as a monumental work of China's contemporary literature, the novel first won China's top literary award, and has later been translated into eight major foreign languages. In addition, it has also been widely adapted for the stage and television. Nevertheless, to produce its cinematic version has been politically problematic. Before Xie Jin, there were at least eight films studios made attempts to film it, but all aborted their initial production plans, due to the fear of possible repercussions caused by its extremely sensitive and volatile theme: the Cultural Revolution. In 1986, the tenth anniversary of the end of the Cultural Revolution, Xie Jin, capitalising on his considerable political influence and distinctive sense of political timing, finally paved the way to film the novel.

Set in the mid-1960s, the story takes place in Hibiscus Town, a picturesque small town in Hunan province, central China. Hu Yuyin, a newly-wed young woman, earns a living selling a local variety of bean curd. Locals adore her charm and hospitality, and the business is booming. Yuyin and her husband eventually are wealthy enough to build a two-storey new house. Nevertheless,
Yuyin’s beauty, popularity and business success are much resented by Li Guoxiang, a plain-looking (homely) woman party official. Soon, the "Four Clean-Up" political campaign sweeps the town, and Yuyin is condemned as "new rich peasant", part of the "socialist". Her new house is confiscated, and her husband consequently commits suicide. Meanwhile, Wang Qiushe, a layabout and bachelor who is classified as a poor peasant, emerges as a political activist and becomes the township's party chief during the Cultural Revolution. Yuyin and Qin Shutian, nicknamed "madman", a professional musician before becoming a 'rightist', are condemned to sweep the streets. They help out and console one another, and soon fall in love. When Yuyin is pregnant, they try to get official approval for their marriage, but failed. Shutian is sentenced to ten-year imprisonment for alleged political crime; In a snowy night, Yuyin almost dies while giving birth to her son. When the Cultural Revolution ends, Shutian returns home and reunites with Yuyin. Wang Qiushe has become mentally disturbed. Li Guoxiang, despite her success in politics, remains a lonely spinster.

Despite its rural setting, the film could be seen as a miniature of Chinese society under Mao. The cluster of seven key characters in the film is sociologically representative, forming the social fabrics and political pecking order in Mao’s society. More importantly, Xie Jin translates the "political repression" into a "sexual repression", the deprivation of the most basic aspect of human existence, i.e. desire, love, kinship, marriage and sexual needs. In so doing, the norm of "revolution" is thus condemned as anti-humanity and socially destructive. Moreover, even the repressors or perpetrators are the victims of their anti-human political actions, manifested by their failure in fulfilling themselves in both emotional and sexual terms.

It can be seen from the chart below that all characters, among both the repressed and repressors, have been prevented, in some way, from fulfilling their sexual or sensual desire. But, the marked difference lies between the repressed and repressors is that the former would eventually be compensated by fulfilling their needs in love, marriage and emotional terms, as a manifestation of moral justice. On the contrary, the repressors would be punished by their inability to achieve these needs. For instance, Gu Yanshan, a veteran PLA soldier, a bachelor and Yuyin's
sympathiser, is impotent as the result of injuries during the War of Liberation. In the end, Old Gu is blessed by, symbolically, becoming the "god-father" of Yuyin's son. In Shu-tian's case, he finally returns home and is bestowed with Yuyin's devotion and a loving family.

<Table 6.2>

CHARACTERS IN HIBISCUS TOWN: THE POLITICS OF SEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Political Status</th>
<th>Sexual &amp; Marriage Aspect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hu Yuyin</td>
<td>a &quot;bad element&quot; &amp; &quot;new rich&quot;</td>
<td>having a prostitute mother; prevented from formally being married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shu-tian</td>
<td>musician &amp; &quot;rightist&quot;</td>
<td>failed to marry Yuyin formally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gu Yansan</td>
<td>Former PLA soldier.</td>
<td>unmarried; impotent due to war injuries; foster father for Gu Jun, son of Hu Yuyin and Qin Shutian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Guoxiang</td>
<td>communist cadre</td>
<td>spinster, and Wang Qiushe's secret lover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Qiushe</td>
<td>poor peasant, party secretary</td>
<td>unmarried and sexually suppressed;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can see from the chart that while the eventual bestowal of "love" and "family" to the suppressed symbolises a refuge where "good" people could be consoled and compensated, the suppressers are morally condemned by stripping them of their rights to have a normal family, children and love.

For instance, Wang Qiushe, the "layabout" party chief, who disapproves the marriage of Shutian and Yuyin, is seen in the film satisfying his lust by desperately caressing a ceramic Buddhist Goddess. Li Guoxiang, Yuyin's rival, whose Freudian jealousy of Yuyin drives her to try to destroy her, even has to fulfil her sexual needs by sleeping secretly with Wang Qiushe, whom she really despises; In the end, she remains a spinster, lonely and loveless and ostracised from the
people. Through this, Xie Jin has turned political criticism into moral criticism. Moreover, he has turned an initially critical assessment about the nature of Mao's political system into an assessment about the moral character or personality of individuals. It understandably allows Xie Jin to stand on a much safer footing by making "individuals", rather than the political system itself, be responsible to China's turbulent socio-political crisis and human suffering. This becomes another important benchmark of Xie Jin's new narratology.

Xie Jin's moralistic approach has little difficulties to appeal to audiences outside China, in particular those of the former communist nations. When Hibiscus Town was awarded the top prize by an international film festival in Czech-Slovak, the panel's verdict was: "in a sensitive and artistically convincing way, the film expresses the urgent need to preserve humanistic ideals and human dignity, which motivate individuals' capacity to surmount difficult and sometimes even cruel social conditions" (China Reconstructs, 1989: p33). Xie Jin presents to us a daunting melodramatic account observing how human being and its existence is affected and threatened during the Revolution.

Anyone who is aware of the nature of the political system in a totalitarian society would not be surprised that Xie Jin's political instinct to survive has found its way into his narratives. In order to maximise the political assurance for both himself and his work, Xie Jin has been seen to convey and insert politically-correct messages into the story-lines. In most cases, such messages are delivered by either voice-over or monologues of leading characters. It has to be said that these very official messages of propagandistic nature are there mainly to assure the party authorities about Xie Jin's political commitment towards the party, and deter or counterbalance any political controversies that may be caused by some other messages of politically offensive nature. As John Downing, an American film critic has suggested:

The question of great interest, finally is the delicacy and skill with which Xie Jin has often juxtaposed official messages approved by the political hierarchy at the time, with other more subversive scenes and comments. His films are often laced with scenes of
sheer human pleasure in everyday social banalities, delight in which quietly melts the edges of hard party truths and relentless social critique. Not that he is a 'schizophrenic' director: rather, he has an overwhelming sense for the full texture of social interaction. Out of context, many of these crucial moments in his films would probably been overlooked by Western audiences. (John Downing, 1987: p207)

A couple of examples will help to illustrate the technique:

(Voice-over)

Once I wanted to die, but I survived. I have, ever since, not only discovered human dignity and values, but also my beloved motherland. My motherland, my fellow Chinese, my working life and splendid beauty of nature, have bestowed me with the encouragement to start a new life.” — Xu Linjun, Herdsman. (the voice-over, as a flesh-back, is against the scene that teenager, wearing the young pioneer’s red scarf, gazes attentively at the “Five-Star” red flag of the People's Republic).

(Voice-over)

Here is the land where my sweat has once been soaked into; here I have friends whom we have been going through thick and thin together; here I have my beloved wife and son; here is the root of my life. ——— Xu Linjun, Herdsman. (Xu delivers this voice-over after his millionaire father from the US persuades him to emigrate to the USA. Xu refuses the offer and decides to stay in China).

(Voice-over)

In China, the fate of the individual and of the nation are so closely linked, and the fate of the nation is all of the fate of every citizen.” Xu Linjun, Herdsman.
Naturally, the distinctive literary tradition in Chinese film-making is also manifested in Xie Jin’s preference of literary adaptation for his films, particular during the post-Mao era. The majority of his films during this period are base upon largely novels and novellas written and published during the same period, such as Legend of Tianyunshan Mountain (1979) was by Lu Yanzhou, Soul and Flesh (1982) by Zhang Xianliang, Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain by (1984) Li Chunbao, Hibiscus Town (1981) by Gu Hua.

What is the rationale behind Xie Jin’s strong literary emphasis? Of course, in a general sense, this very factor is related to traditionally the high prestige that literature has enjoyed in China’s cultural sphere, both in the past and the present. Literary quality is profoundly emphasised and seen as a prerequisite in the making of any satisfactory film. It could also be seen as reflecting traditionally Chinese film-makers’ dislike of the visual aspects of film-making. However, in Xie Jin’s case, this literary approach has not only has historically the aesthetic root, but has also been evolved as a political tactics. Firstly, since almost all the literary sources which Xie Jin was keen to adapt were already published with supposedly certain official approval, they were already known in the public domain. Since these literary sources had survived the trial, both socially and politically, on their publication, they could be considered standing an equally better chance to survive further ideological scrutiny and censorship should they be adapted for the screen (it is not necessary the case, though. Any literary work published with official approval may still be denounced or forbidden from being filmed). Secondly, Xie Jin wants to take full advantage of the existing publicity and social awareness and controversies prompted by these ‘sources’, and to turn them into a tangible protection net for his future production. Thirdly, Xie Jin has developed an extremely cautious approach, the so-called “hitting side-balls”, in readjusting or “rewriting” literary sources to be within the limits of political tolerance at each different stage. It is certainly a speculative and risky business. However, his rich political experiences have made him a master of political timing. He has often planned his adaptation during the height of a political campaign, when few would consider to be a sensible time for a politically-controversial production, because he understands perfectly well the autonomy of changing political climate in China, that each suppressive political campaign would be followed by a short period of relative political
relaxation. By that time, Xie Jin would "provide" something that the authorities would
desperately want in order to substantiate its designated ideological relaxation.

People, in particular those from outside China, may ask the question: why have film-makers like
Xie Jin, not made any direct use of their rich but turbulent political experiences under Mao into
their film-making? Few film-makers and film critics have so far mentioned about this issue. In
my view, since the early days of the People's Republic, the "auto-biographical" narrative, as a
whole, has been perceived to be politically hazardous and risky. Under a censorious totalitarian
regime, an "auto-biographical" narrative would be asking for political trouble. Few artists would
be willing to put themselves into such a vulnerable position by directly depicting their own
personal experiences.

6.3 A CRITIQUE OF THE "XIE JIN PHENOMENON"

Following the above discussion about Xie Jin's narratology, we need to ask further: what has
made him so special? how do we comprehend his importance, unfailing popularity and the great
capacity in generating social controversies? In short, what is the so-called "Xie Jin
phenomenon"?

It is fair to suggest that the "Fifth Generation" and "Xie Jin Phenomenon" provides us an historic
linkage in which the ideological transformation of Chinese film-makers of the post-Mao era can
be observed. While most of the time, the Fifth Generation, has been resented and criticised by the
conservative political and social forces, Xie Jin has sometimes been ostracised or attacked by two
apparently opposite forces, namely, the old-hand ideologues and young liberal artists and
intellectuals (i.e. the avant-garde group). On the one hand, Xie Jin's films have been condemned
by the former group for "exposing the darkened side of Chinese society" and "damaging the
party's image", on the other hand, he has been increasingly alienated or even ridiculed by a
younger and more radical generation, regarding him as politically a conservative conformist, and aesthetically at best a skilful manipulator of human emotions, or simply an effective propagandist.

In the eyes of young liberals, Xie Jin is a symbol of an old-style film-making that is characterised by conventional melodramatic practice (i.e. that of the Hollywood) and a politically conformist approach. The young generation's growing discontent and frustration has been intensified by Xie Jin's unfailing popularity in wider society. In 1986, a nation-wide debate was launched on the so-called "Xie Jin Phenomenon" and the value system it represents. It was activated by a newspaper article, which appeared in the Wenhui Daily in Shanghai. The author, Zhu Dake, a young literary critic, openly declared the "war" against Xie Jin and his film-making. Zhu argued that "Xie Jin film is merely a cinematic version of a modernised Neo-Confucianism. " and "a deeply disharmonious tone pertaining to the on-going process of China's cultural reform" (1986:p3). Soon, Li Jie, also a young literary critic, joined forces with Zhu, and announced that "The era of Xie Jin must end". The initially intellectual debate was soon elevated to a widely publicised cultural event.

In his article, entitled "Drawbacks of Xie Jin's Film Model", Zhu claimed that "Xie Jin film has, for a long period of time, attracted unfailing public attention and has virtually been enthroned as the epitome of Chinese film-making and a cultural phenomenon in its own right." He argued provocatively that Xie's film model was a hackneyed, mixed bag of popular culture and the Neo-Confucianism. He argued:

"those watching in the darkened cinema. The audience, therefore, is led into a position where they are being manipulated, and consequently, forced to accept unconsciously all moral messages which artists intend to convey. Anybody with common sense would realise that the obsolete aesthetics as such, highly placing sentimentalism, is no different from religious propaganda in the medieval times. It denies independent
thinking, modern personality and scientific reasoning. It is this kind of 'tear-jerking' technique which has turned his films into box office hits. (D. K. Zhu, 1986: p3)

Zhu described Xie Jin’s narrative paradigm (his winning recipe) as: (1) a good person is humiliated and subsequently wronged; (2) the "discovery of goodness" about the wronged by the "others"; (3) "others" are won over by the wronged person’s upright moral quality; (4) the goodness finally overcomes the evils.

Li Jie went further criticising what seemed to him an unhealthy spectatorship cultivated by Xie Jin’s films:

While watching Xie Jin’s films, audiences would feel with a sense of uneasiness. The Xie Jin model, which contains various cultural codes at both superficial and deep levels, is merely subordinated to the common denominators. Its most noticeable trademark is sentimentalism: leading characters’ moral sentiments are often centred and evaluated in a subtle and witty form in order to steal tears from very talented filmmaker bowing to them for their blind-hearted clapping. His model doesn’t aim at exploring merits of artistic expression, but emphasising mainly in catering for audiences' sentiments." (Li Jie, 1986:p3)

The debate has not only intensified the increasing growing disdain or hostility between the veteran generation and the younger one, but also became increasingly politicised, as it also drew the party’s attention. Many veteran filmmakers rebuked Zhu’s accusation as being unjustified and sensational. However, Zhong Dian-fei, China’s most respected film critic who was also a political victim of the anti-rightist campaign in 1957, became the defacto mediator in settling the dispute. He wrote a long article, which was also published in the Wenhui Daily, entitled "Ten comments on Xie Jin film". The conciliatory tone and power of tolerance displayed in the article was well received by either side of the debate. He first praised Zhu’s courage and the merits of his criticism, and went on:
Anything which is regarded as realistic is bound to have certain limitations...

First of all, Xie Jin is a person of flesh and soul. He is a film director who has always been making efforts to interact between artistic exploration and the needs of people. His pleasure and predicament are determined by whether his film-making could fulfil this very ambition. Neither has he ever shown a philosopher-like solitude, nor has he indulged in self-complacency. Among film-makers of his generation, he has been the one ahead of his time. However, the drastic changes in China today and the urgent demand for rethinking cinematic principles, have made veterans like Xie Jin restless... Every era would create someone like Xie Jin, but Xie Jin could not create an era" (D. F. Zhong, 1986: p160-4)

Zhong pointed out that it is a pity, though, that Xie Jin's idea of a humane and moralistic approach, which has struck a chord in many people, is often presented as a manifestation of non-resistance or submission while facing the evils of society. However, he rejected strongly the call to put an end to the so-called "Xie Jin Era". So doing, he reckoned, would put the pursuit of freedom of expression and artistic democracy in jeopardy.

However, in my view, the criticism on the dilemma or contradiction displayed in Xie Jin's narrative is largely justified. As one young Chinese film critic claimed:

On the one hand, it (Xie Jin film) condemns social evils. On the other hand, it celebrates the noble relations between human beings. The latter could naturally be taken as the revolt against the former. Meanwhile, it is also difficult to deny that the nobility of human life is facilitated by the latter (the social evils)... If suffering is really the source of happiness, why should we condemn it?" (T. C. Qiu, 1990: p 80)
Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that such contradiction or dilemma is entirely Xie Jin's personal misfortune. In fact, it is a dilemma which is omnipresent among all Chinese film-makers. More importantly, it is indeed a dilemma facing the entire Chinese society. Without taking into account of the political reality of the post-evolution in China, the secret of Xie's narrative would be very difficult to unravel.

Both in the past and at present, Chinese intellectuals have demonstrated their long traditions in translating "political issues" into apparently "cultural ones" (for them a matter of re-packaging with another set of vocabulary, values and a different way of reasoning), since their totalitarian authorities prevent them from voicing their political judgement directly, openly and freely. This remains partly true in the post-Mao period. This debate is no exception. Disguised as a cultural debate, this debate is, in essence, politically-oriented: the young liberals want to challenge the "legitimacy" and "political correctness" that have been displayed in Xie Jin films. Why should 'history' only be told in such a way as to consolidate the legitimacy of political authority? Why can't we have an alternative interpretation?

In my view, behind the smoke screen of this debate, the young liberals' real target was probably not merely the "Xie Jin model", but more importantly, the legacy or tradition of Chinese communist film-making, that Xie Jin has aimed to reform or improve. To many young liberals, this debate, a rather symbolic one, can not be avoided. Xu Chun-fa (the literary editor of the Shanghai-based Wenhui Daily (a reputable newspaper enjoying a wide readership among intellectuals), who was responsible for the launch of this debate) wrote to the author in 1991 explaining the rational and socio-political context behind it:

Xie Jin is the most influential film director in China's contemporary history. His films have been enjoying great popularity all the time for the last three decades. So, to a certain degree, Xie Jin is the symbol or miniature of the film-making of "New China". It is also due to this reason that film-makers have drawn their attention to Xie Jin, while debating about how Chinese film-making should catch up with the standard of
international film-making. At the time, we were all thinking about how to break free from the outmoded conventions. The emergence of a group of 'avant-garde' young film-makers provided a realistic context for such a debate. (Author's personal correspondence, 1991)

"Tearjerker" is the term which has been frequently used in criticising Xie Jin's philosophy on melodrama. It is especially so among the young liberals, who despise such film-making as being superficial and exploiting the sentiments of his audiences. However, the older generation, including many well-educated or western-trained critics and film-makers, is sympathetic to Xie Jin. Timothy Tung, a Chinese-born history professor and also a film critic who is now a resident in New York, suggested to examine the rational or socio-political context behind the formation of this tendency, particularly in relating to what people had gone through during Mao's era:

First, we must understand the psychological make-up of the huge Chinese population after the period of what is now officially called "ten years of calamities". Few people escaped the suffering inflicted upon by the Cultural Revolution. Films such as Legend of Tianyunshan Mountain (1981), Herdsman (1982) and even Garland at the Foot of the Mountain (1984) all point to the miserable experience that audiences could have shared. Xie Jin has provided the people with a common ground, the darkened theatre, where all, young and old, men and women, can have a good cry without the feeling of shame or embarrassment. If in nothing else, Xie Jin's films succeed in offering an effective remedy for the nation's psychological health..."I have become convinced that Xie Jin is indeed a skilled manipulator of human emotions. I can well imagine the reasons for this success among his vast Chinese audiences. But I must confess that I myself ... have been manipulated by his technique, however involuntarily.(T. Tung, 1987: p199)

The public appeal of Xie Jin films is well documented. For instance, within weeks of the release of Legend of Tianyunshan Mountain, Xie Jin received hundreds of thousands of letters from
audiences nation-wide, praising or discussing the film. It was a tearful occasion for many who had gone through the experience which were similar to those depicted. For some, the viewing of this film was a moral trial and soul-searching experience. For instance, after seeing the film, a middle-aged woman, who had betrayed her fiancee during the anti-rightist campaign (as Song Wei does to Luo Qun in the film) committed suicide because she could no longer forgive herself.

The significance of Xie Jin's films, both in the past and the present, can not be fully understood without asking how Chinese audiences in general perceive cinema-going as a social activity. The debate about Xie Jin's sentimentalism is not purely aesthetic but also sociological, because it relies very much on the audiences' personal experiences and the social perceptions. Those who highly value Xie Jin and his works are largely from of his generation, usually with the same experiences and background.

As one Chinese film critic commented 'they (who favour Xie Jin) used to live that way, and struggle through to see themselves alive today. Those practices (depicted in Xie Jin films) embedded their spiritual treasures. No one is willing to discard their own spiritual values. Those who accuse him are largely having no experiences above mentioned. It seems to them that the taste of Xie Jin film is vaguer, timid and petty (abject)... Unfortunately those youngsters, who lack personal experiences and credentials, have failed to convince the others.' (T. C. Qiu, 1990: p87)

Among those who have defended Xie Jin, there is also a strong cynicism towards his huge success. In my view, Xie Jin's increasing influence and the popularity of his films are not entirely the result of his creativity or originality. It could be argued that his unfailing popularity and influence have been greatly "helped" or "magnified" by the adverse publicity or controversies he has created in his film-making. (T. C. Qiu, 1990: p79). Firstly, having been hailed as the master of "Chinese cinema", he and his film-making could not possibly be freed from becoming a readymade "ideological indicator" in the eyes of both the Chinese authorities and western China-watchers. Then, he capitalised on his special influence to increase his power of political
manoeuvring. Xie Jin knows perfectly well how China's political mechanism, and in particular the "cycle" of campaign politics, works. He is often seen to be starting planning a seemingly a politically risky or sensitive project, when a political campaign is in full swing, and then delivers it when the authorities are anxious to seek a way out by looking for gestures of "relaxation". For instance, Legend of Tianyunsan Mountain, Herdsman, Garlands at the Feet of the Mountain and Hibiscus Town, all started filming at the difficult time of an on-going political campaign. His sense of timing and prediction is right in most of the time. His influence has also turned him into a highly-visible political figure nation-wide, and it has in turn become one of his great assets in allowing himself extra weight to survive the scrutiny of the political authorities. The authorities have also to deal with his film-making with great care in order to minimise any unwelcome political attacks. His special position has been certainly helped his carefully-measured risk-taking tactics; His position is, not only viable but also successful. As the matter of fact, none of his film during the post-Mao period has been effectively banned, despite the usual difficulties.

By the mid-1980s, in particular in the light of the success of Garlands at the Feet of the Mountain and Hibiscus Town, Xie Jin had emerged indisputably as China's most popular director. All the audience surveys in the 1980s reinforced this claim. In 1988, in a national survey of the top ten Chinese cinema and television directors of the Open Door era, Xie Jin came first by winning 90% of 2.6 million votes. (H. M. Chen, 1989: p1-2)

In the West, Xie Jin is often referred as to China's Andrzej Wajda (the foremost Polish film director). He was neither pleased with this analogy, nor agreed with it. He said:

I am different. In what sense? My films are more optimistic than his. Apart from exposing the miserable side of life, I have always made efforts to generate some hopeful thinking for the people. People have already suffered too much, film should reward them with the best things in life. (E. Huo, 1985: p24).
Finally, let us go return: Xie Jin’s philosophy of melodrama. The dilemma that Xie Jin has been faced with is: could the form of melodrama really become a useful and mature form of socio-political criticism? Could the truth of history be fully accommodated by the melodramatic form? Can the melodramatic narrative be a successful and faithful story-teller of history?

Arthur Miller, the well known American playwright, remarked on his Chinese visit in 1979 in the wake of the Cultural Revolution:

> The wooden inflexibility of such melodramatics can never succeed in portraying the complexities of human life, whatever the society, and one has finally to judge it as an insufficiency of imagination and a failure to confront experience. The melodramatic urge is basically an authoritarian one in art as it tries to command what the viewer is to make of what he sees rather then give him choices as to what things really mean. "

(A. Miller, 1984: p94)

As one Chinese film critic has stated:

> When interpreting history, authoritarian historic discourse can only be practised on the surface of consciousness. It provides only an authoritarian interpretation, essential concepts, logic and methods to reach an understanding of history, but, in practical terms, it is far from adequate. This inadequacy will become an obstacle in establishing a sound imaginary relationship between the consciousness of the mass people and authoritarian discourse. (Y. M. Li, 1989: p13)

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have examined the life and work of Xie Jin, China’s most popular and acclaimed film-maker in the post-Mao era. While the Fifth Generation is triumphant in gaining the ground in the West, Xie Jin’s political melodramas have swept China and he has become a
household name. The fact that he has not been taken seriously in the West partly accounts for the western misconception about Chinese cinema and the veteran generation of Chinese film-makers.

Xie Jin's hallmarks in filmmaking are aesthetically popularism and, politically, conformity. His seeming success in transforming a sensitive political subject into a moralistic story is typical among his generation an attempt to maximise the social enlightenment of film-making within the remaining party control. In so doing, Xie Jin nevertheless invites the criticism for being too apologetic to the political authority. Unlike the Fifth Generation, Xie Jin has shown no attempt to defy or break free from the political correctness of each period during the 1980s.

The uniqueness and importance of Xie Jin and his work could not be better described by the term "Xie Jin Phenomenon". It summarises the complexity and contradiction that have embodied Xie Jin and his work. The fact that he has been criticised by both young "avant-garde" liberals and political conservatives explains the transitional nature of Xie Jin's films as well as Chinese film in general. His success as "an emotional manipulator" also lies with the fact that China, in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, was emotionally worn out and seeking reconciliation. Therefore, while 'psychological therapy' was in great shortage, Xie Jin is only one of few who have successfully delivered a service through the "melodramatising " the hardship and suffering that the whole population has gone through.

The world of China that Xie Jin has created is a world formed by "fictional reality". It is carefully blueprinted and censored, as subject to the ideological power. In short, the limitation of Xie Jin and his films is the limitation of this very political system. While Xie Jin's filmmaking career may not last very long as he is already over 70, he has left a legacy that will shadow Chinese filmmaking for many years to come. He may not be going down in history as one of the most creative and original Chinese filmmakers, but he will be remembered what he has contributed to our better understanding towards the relationship between cinema and politics.
In the last two chapters, we examined the two most important phenomena concerning the transformation of Chinese film-makers in the post-Mao era: the Fifth Generation filmmaking and the "Xie Jin Phenomenon". However, we have not yet tackled another equally important issue: the world's largest film audience in China where the average daily cinema attendance was around 80 million people during the 1980s and the cost of admission is as low as between the equivalent of 4 to 5 cents. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the forces of the market economy and commercialisation, as means of political relaxation or decentralisation, have taken a very strong hold in the reform of China's film industry since the mid-1980s. There is no doubt that this undertaking has affected or changed the way Chinese people perceive themselves as cinema-goers and the way they react towards film as a whole.

In this chapter, we will discuss a number of important issues relating to the Chinese film audience of the post-Mao period, the transformation of their viewing behaviours and the socio-political functioning of film-going as part of everyday life and socialisation. In particular, I will try to answer the following questions: (1) What role has the Chinese film audience been playing in the restructuring of Chinese cinema and official film policy? (2) How has the film audience developed their various creative forms in turning film-viewing into a mean of socio-political criticism of Chinese reality? (3) How and to what extent has the commercialisation of the Chinese film industry, and also the influx of western culture, given rise to some distinctive new characteristics in the Chinese audience?

It is fair to suggest that the study of the film audience is, fundamentally, a study of human beings and their behaviours, within however a relatively confined world of time and space: darkness
cinemas or in front of television sets of a domestic setting. The ways in which people react or related to the Big Screen can never be divorced from the society they live outside cinema houses. It could be argued that, to a large degree, the characteristics of the film audience of a nation, and how they perceive film, reflects in some way the political nature of that social system.

First of all, we will examine the Chinese public's changing perception of and motivation towards film-viewing.

7.1 THE CHANGING PUBLIC PERCEPTION MOTIVATION TOWARDS FILM-VIEWING

As we have discussed in Chapter 3 since the early 1980s, film-going, which was once a quasi-political activity under Mao, has become increasingly de-politicised, and, at the same time, less ideological or indoctrinating. Another important change is the emergence of popular culture and the increasing development of a modern media system, which has made it possible for the Chinese public to regain their position as "consumers" of cultural commodities. For the first time, many choices in leisure and entertainment are available to ordinary people.

According to some audience surveys conducted during the 1980s, it is understood that the younger generation form the majority of film audience, and have also been the most active and critical ones in shaping the development of Chinese cinema. It is worth pointing out, though, that audience research as a whole, is a new phenomenon in China, and the implementation remains relatively underdeveloped or unsystematic. Although these surveys may be seen less professional and representative by western standards, we have no option but to use them as an indicator to help us chart the transformation of the film audience in China. Under this general category of the young age group, however, audiences of different professional, social or educational background have different and particular emphases about their motivation towards film-going. For instance, university students regard the "appreciation of art" as the first and foremost motive for film-viewing (followed by "absorbing knowledge and self-cultivation"). Their primary interest and
emphasis on film's "artistic or aesthetic qualities" could easily be explained by their high-brow elitist attainment in cultural and artistic matters (See Table 7.1). Such elitist attitudes have consequently resulted in their serious approach to film-viewing. Meanwhile, young factory workers seem to be more down-to-earth and practical, citing "enriching everyday life & seeking entertainment" as their overwhelming motive for going to cinemas (followed by "examine human life and opening eyes" (See Table 7.2). Interestingly, for the Ge-Ti-Hu, a new social group of self-employed who are fighting for a legitimate position and social acceptance. Their main motive for film-viewing could be described as part of socialisation or knowledge-seeking process: "learning worldly wisdom, observing social change and knowing know-how in competition" (see Table 7.3).

<TABLE 7.1>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Number (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of art and self-cultivation</td>
<td>262 (61.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absorbing knowledge and exploring world</td>
<td>123 (28.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refreshing and relaxation</td>
<td>108 (25.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Killing time and entertaining</td>
<td>37 (8.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving education and strengthening social consciousness</td>
<td>36 (8.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking stimulation and escaping from reality</td>
<td>13 (3.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 7.2

**Young Factory Workers’ Motive of Film-Viewing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of Preferences</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adjusting life &amp; seeking entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Observing human-life &amp; opening eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Understanding the world better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Satisfying curiosity and seeking mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Analysing society and exploring the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Examining life and looking for example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Passing time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## Table 7.3

**Motive for Film Viewing by Social Group (1989)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Group</th>
<th>Ultimate Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary &amp; high school students</td>
<td>Interesting in stories, having fun, learning martial arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil servants &amp; professionals</td>
<td>observing society, examining daily life, knowing better the world and broadening knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young factory workers</td>
<td>killing time, seeking stimulation and for social purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers over age of 40</td>
<td>refreshing from work, and vitalise off-work leisure life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Students</td>
<td>appreciation of art, opening eyes and self-cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>knowing worldly wisdom, observing social change, learning competition know-how</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have discovered an interesting development that, regardless of the difference in education, age, profession and other demographic factors, the Chinese audience in the post-Mao period has demonstrated a continuing strong tendency of perceiving film-viewing as an information-led process, in particular information indicating the development of a political or policy agenda. That is part of the legacy of Mao-style communist film-making. In other words, even during the post-Mao period, film is perceived and still acted as an immediate and direct vehicle for changing political, social and moral codes or policies. A typical example is the above mentioned group of the self-employed and their motive for film-viewing: "learning worldly wisdom" and "knowing know-how in competition". It is understandable that "self-employment", as a new social entity whose existence has just been officially endorsed, thanks to the economic liberalism, has to fight a hard battle for its survival and legitimate status in an environment which once so resented private ownership and entrepreneurs. Their anxieties for "learning worldly wisdom", and "knowing competition know-how" through film-viewing, have demonstrated a possible interaction between fictional reality portrayed on the screen and actual socio-political changes taking place outside cinema houses.

Another interesting sociological factor that is worth noting here is that in major cities with large populations, such as Shanghai, Beijing and Nanjing, where severe housing problems remain unsolved, cinemas are still considered as an ideal venue for social or intimate occasions. In Shanghai, more than 75% of young factory workers responding to a survey admitted that they had chosen the cinema as the venue for their first date (W. H. Lou, 1984: p191). In cities, it was a commonplace for many families that the room would be cleared after the evening meal, allowing family members to take it in turn, usually by using a portable wooden tub. Cinemas near-by would often become a likely place of retreat while the bath session was in progress. This has probably partly explains and supports the finding that cinema attendance in urban areas during the Summer is considerably higher than any other seasons. Naturally, during the same period, TV viewing time was also proportionally reduced as the result (Y. Kuang, 1987).
7.2 WHAT CONSTITUTES "PUBLIC TASTE": THEMES AND GENRES

Under Mao, China's cultural policy had always emphasised that the arts, including film-making, should be able to mobilise and appeal the revolutionary masses in direct and accessible forms, in order to build up an effective machinery of political propaganda. Thus, the scope in both themes and genres was subsequently reduced to meet political considerations and ideological criteria. At that time, for instance, issues relating to natural disasters, crime, violence, social problems and other undesirable sides of society, were stringently barred from being featured on the screen, in the fear of demobilising people or undermining the political authority and ideological homogeneity being advocated. Some genres, for instance, such as comedy and tragedy, were minimised in production, because of their alleged capacity or inborn characteristics for undermining the authoritarian rule and its ideology. Thematically, only subject matters that aimed to glorify or praise the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, the Party and were encouraged.

In the 1980s, with regard to the audience's thematic preferences, university students stated that films depicting "hardship and predicament of human life" and "nobility of humanism" would move them most (see Table 7.4). Such responses were perfectly understandable from a young generation of intellectuals who witnessed the last days of Mao's era, the Cultural Revolution in particular, and the destruction of humanity on a horrendous scale. According to a survey carried out in 1984, most of the most popular films among university students concern primarily the agonising experiences of intellectuals under Mao. They include: *At Middle Age* (a tug of love tearjerker about a middle-age woman doctor and her hardship in life following the end of the Cultural Revolution), *Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, and *Herdsman* (both about the intellectuals purged during the "anti-rightist campaign")
TABLE 7.4

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PREFERENCES OF FILM THEME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Answers returned</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hardships of life</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty of humanity</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greatness of love</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolutionary heroism</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zhou Yong-ping, Chinese Film Yearbook, 1984: p187

As for the film audience in the rural areas, despite the lack of systematic survey of a quantitative nature, a number of observational studies have suggested that the rural population preferred to see films of contemporary themes, particularly concerning the newly emerged social and ethical issues in the light of changing reality as the result of Deng's rural reform policy. We have to realise that the public perception that regards film-viewing as a problem-solving device or at least an administrative aid, remains a popular norm in rural areas. For instance, In-Laws, a comedy and also a realistic portrayal of the "in-laws" relationship in a Chinese rural family, was very well-received as on top of 1982 "Top Ten Films" in China. In Beijing, within a period of four months, over 60% of its suburban population had watched the film (B. Q. Zhang, 1982: p19)

Let us now consider "film genres". Between 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution, the notion of "genres" was increasingly discouraged, as they were thought to be alienating, disruptive or unhelpful to the establishment of a new proletarian culture, since "genres" imply essentially of the need to cater for individual tastes or sentiments of different kinds, both socially and
aesthetically. The party had, therefore, increasingly politicised the issue of "genres" in its art policy by restricting or avoiding some "genres", which were perceived to be ideologically unsafe, ambiguous or hazardous. Since the early 1980s, the concept of "genres" was politically rehabilitated by the post-Mao leadership, as a manifestation of the Party's determination to rectify its past censorious cultural policy, and also as a direct measure to reconstruct and flourish Chinese film-making after the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the undertaking of commercialisation within the film industry (with an emphasis to accommodate the entertainment needs of film audiences) has greatly helped to consolidate the liberal approach towards the "genres". As a result, audiences have become increasingly aware and sophisticated in their understanding and appreciation of "genres". During the 1980s, "genres" such as melodrama, Kung-fu (Chinese martial arts), thriller and comedy have become the most popular film genres among the Chinese audience, despite the difference in preferences between film audiences in rural and urban areas. Factory workers in Shanghai may be typical of China's mainstream film-goers. They preferred to see films with a conventional narrative structure, and a good interesting plot (See Table 7.5). Having analysed China's "Top Ten Films" between 1986-1989, we have discovered around 60% of them fall into the category of "Kung-Fu" films. "Thriller" and "comedy" films took approximately equal shares on the "top ten" charts. (L. Q. Lai, 1990: p24-5)
<TABLE 7.5>

YOUNG WORKERS' PREFERENCES OF FILM GENRES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Answers Returned</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melodrama</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kung-fu</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriller</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese opera film</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelogues</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific-education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lou Wei-hua (1984), China Film Yearbook: p192.

7.3 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF FOREIGN FILMS

Since 1979, China's imports of foreign films have increased significantly, and more than 70 foreign countries are now regular suppliers to the Chinese film market. Since the early 1980s, the Chinese government has imposed a ratio of 4:1 between domestic productions and foreign imports. With an annual productivity of 120 films on average during most of the 1980s, China imports about 30 foreign films each year. Western countries have taken an increasingly larger share in China's film market since the commencement of the "Open-door" policy. USA, Europe and Japan have replaced many former communist nations (mainly Vietnam, Romania and North Korea) and have become China's major suppliers. Despite a strong official position in protecting domestic film production, for both economic and ideological reasons, Chinese audiences have, for the first time, gained increasing access to the international film world, in particular that from
the Capitalist West. All imported films intended for public release would be dubbed into Mandarin or Putonghua, the official Chinese language.

As for the majority of the Chinese audience, foreign film has always been an important source of their knowledge about the world outside. However, the public perception towards foreign films in the 1980s has been undergoing significant changes. The period 1977-1985 has been regarded as the "golden era" for foreign imports when they enjoyed an overwhelming popularity against domestic films. According to a survey in 1982, among young factory workers, 62% of them stated their preference of foreign films over the domestic ones (see Table 7.6); Another survey in 1983 found that 73.3% of university students also claimed to prefer foreign films (Y. P. Zhou, 1984: p191); Ken Takakuwa (Japanese actor) and Alain Delon (French actor) were both nominated by university students as their favoured stars (J. P. Mei, 1991: p30)

<TABLE 7.6>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Answers returned</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lou Wei-hua, China Film Yearbook, 1984: p191.

By 1987, the "foreign film craze" was almost over, owing partly to the improvement of domestic production, and partly the undesirable qualities of many foreign imports. Meanwhile, the film-going public has become ever more sophisticated and critically-minded. At ticket offices, foreign films no longer necessarily hold commercial advantages. However, during the second half of the 1980s, American films continued to be most popular among foreign imports. By now, Hollywood's great ambition in regaining its Chinese market, after its absence in China for almost three decades, has been partly fulfilled. The American influence has been on the marked
increase. In Beijing, Sylvester Stallone's *First Blood*, was voted by the audience as the most popular film, and Rambo as their favourite hero. Such reception may be outrageous or inconceivable to some left-wing film critics in the West, as *First Blood* is often criticised for inciting pro-Fascism sentiment and violence. In Shanghai, during the period between 1987-1989, American films accounted for half of the "foreign film top ten" charts (see Table 7.7). French films were also in general well received. Some veteran foreign film stars, such as Kirk Douglas and Alain Delon became the most admired stars among the urban audience. In the contrast, the privilege that Japanese film used to enjoy during the earlier 1980s began to wane. Films from USSR and Eastern Europe, except for a few, were becoming less popular. Among the ten least popular foreign imports during the period of 1987-89, four were from the USSR. "Cops & Robbers", "Romance" and "Comedy" films were reportedly also very popular. However, foreign art films, such as *A Room with A View* (UK), *Mephisto* (Germany), were cold-shouldered by the audiences, and consequently with poor commercial performance.

**TABLE 7.7**

**TOP TEN FOREIGN FILMS IN SHANGHAI (1987-89)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Film Title and Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Parole De Flic</em> (France)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>North by Northwest</em> (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Spartacus</em> (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Sholay</em> (India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Bathing Beauty</em> (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Waterloo Bridge</em> (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Arashi No Yushatachi</em> (Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>The Adventure of An Italian in Russia</em> (USSR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Break-dancing</em> (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Cry of the Black Wolves</em> (Germany)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worth mentioning that despite increasing access to foreign films, the Chinese audience, during the 1980s, were largely prevented from seeing newly-released foreign films, in particular those blockbuster or award-winning films from the USA and other major film-making countries. In the USA, since films' international distribution rights are largely measured or determined by the population of countries where the films are to be exported to, therefore, China was financially not feasible (just think about its incredible low cost for cinema admission) to purchase regularly the newly released or award-winning American films, even though the political situation in China permits it. As a direct result, the Chinese public have had to encounter a considerable amount of second-rate foreign "junks", acquired at a small fee. Only political elites, civil servants, film-makers or intellectuals could have some access to "quality" foreign films by attending "Foreign Film Weeks", or so-called "reference viewing", held occasionally in major cities.

7.4 THE AMATEUR FILM CRITICISM MOVEMENT

THE "HUNDRED FLOWERS": THE LARGEST FILM POLL IN THE WORLD

The "Hundred Flowers Award" (Bai-Hua-Jiang) came into existence in 1962 in the light of the party's political relaxation after the "Anti-rightist" campaign and the "Great Leap Forward". Initiated by Premier Zhou Enlai, this annual award, also a national film poll, was designed to be voted by the ordinary film audience. The public are required to select their favourite films, best director, best screen-writer, best actor and actress, best supporting actor and actress, from domestic film productions made the previous year. It has, since the very beginning, been organised by Popular Cinema, a leading film fan magazine (with a circulation reaching 9 million in the earlier 1980s). However, the award was halted during 1964-81 because of the political turbulence arising from the Cultural Revolution.
In 1982, after seventeen years of disruption, the award was eventually resumed. Within four months, the poll attracted more than 800 thousands votes nation-wide, and approximately 5 million audience members participating. It has been made a national institution ever since. Many film societies, in schools, factories, army camps and government institutions, reportedly, cast mini-polls before filling in official ballots. Some film enthusiasts even held family gatherings in order to settle disputes over nominations.

Even entering the early 1980s, the notion for film-viewing as a politically motivated educational instrument remained intact in the public domain. The following statement was extracted from a speech made by a college student at the 1982 "Hundred Flower Award" ceremony. It may give one some idea of how films' socio-political functioning was viewed by the public at the time:

We love our national film-making and have paid great attention to its development. Film-going has long become an indispensable part of our day-to-day life. It behaves like our attentive teacher, a close and devoted friend, which has accompanied us through growing-up. We draw strength and inspiration from it and its influence upon us is enormous. It plays a very important role in shaping our perceptions of life, morality and human love. Films on revolutionary struggle make us deeply admire those veteran revolutionaries, and we determine ourselves to live up to their expectation by learning more useful skills for the modernisation of our motherland. Films criticiising "Gang of Four" make them more notorious. These films also remind us to treasure more the precious life today, and be faithful to party's correct political policy. We love and are also eager to see films concerning our education, career and daily-life, and we want to be portrayed as a generation with a future, so that we can distinguish good from evil, and nobility from shame. Excellent films reward us with unlimited sources of strength as we march on our way towards modernisation, and they set up examples for our lives" (X. Z. Zhou, 1981: p284)
Having emerged as a national institution, the "Hundred Flowers Award" is often considered as an indicator of public opinion, not only about the well-being of film-making itself but also about what concerns people most about China's fast changing social and political reality. The participation of the poll reached its height between 1984 and 1986, with 2 million ballots received each year, and an estimated 9-10 million people involved. While analysing all 21 prize-winning films between 1980-87, 80% of them are of contemporary themes, pertaining to a wide range of social problems, political and ethical issues. From the rehabilitation of the "Anti-rightist" Campaign (Legend of Tianyanshan Mountain, Herdsman) to the economic hardship of intellectuals (At Middle Age), from people's growing discontent over party bureaucracy and corruption (A Story which Should Never Have Happened, Garlands at the Feet of the Mountain) to the marked increase of juvenile delinquency (Young Offenders). Most of these award-winning films are politically controversial as they often push the official line to the limits.

A Minor Official, an operatic film about an upright minor official of the Ming Dynasty, also won the award, despite its ancient plot, because of its timely echoes of the growing social outrages against political corruption and social injustice. The hero's motto in the film which can be literally translated: "If an official doesn't act on behalf of his people, he would better to resign, going home selling sweet potatoes (as a street vendor)" was so frequently quoted in the press that it has become a popular expression of the time.

Until Zhang Yi-mou's Red Sorghum, as has been noted in Chapter 5, the Fifth Generation had rarely made any serious attempt to win over the mainstream audience, who prefer a conventional form of story-telling. Until 1988, none of the Fifth Generation films, including Yellow Earth, Horse Thief, On the Hunting Ground, had ever been nominated, let alone awarded by the "Hundred Flowers" polls. The famous statement, made by Tian Zhaungzhuang, a leading member of the Fifth Generation, that "my films are only made for the audience of the 21st century" has outraged many members of mainstream audience as well as veteran film-makers. However, in 1989, Zhang Yi-mou's Red Sorghum, made a historical breakthrough: for the first time, the Fifth Generation was on the winning list of the "Hundred Flowers' Awards."
Apart from the audience-led "Hundred Flower Award", there is another interesting phenomenon of which the outside world remains largely unaware: China's ever-growing amateur film criticism movement during the 1980s.

It must be said that amateur film criticism movement is not a new phenomenon in the history of Chinese cinema. Between 1949 and 1976, it had often been seen playing a part, as a mouthpiece, in many party ideological campaigns, from denouncing Hollywood imperialism in the earlier 1950s to advocating the "Great Leap Forward" in the later 1950s, from promoting the Cultural Revolution to criticising Antonioni's "China" in 1973. However, during the 1980s it shifted its emphasis from this course. We must come to terms with the fact that this amateur criticism movement as a whole was not at all an underground activity, but was, from the very beginning, under the auspices of the political authority, in both financial and administrative terms. As China gathered momentum in its pursuit of political liberalisation during the 1980s, the context which embedded the movement was distinctively different from that of other amateur cultural campaigns during the Cultural Revolution, such as "Revolutionary Poetry Writing", "Popular Philosophy Learning" and "Amateur Drama". What the amateur film criticism has managed to achieve is that it has gradually obtained its own autonomy for making their voices heard. The greatest characteristic of this movement is its determination and frankness to speak, both truthfully on not only what's happening on the screen, but also before and behind the screen (such as the government film policy and the operation of film industry).

Zhong Dian-fei, China's veteran film critic and a leading advocate of amateur film criticism, has remarked on the specific characteristics of the amateur film criticism movement:

Sociological perspective should become the mainstream approach in amateur film criticism movement. Since the films are destined to be the reflection of all aspects of...
everyday life, negative or positive, film criticism is obliged to make its own judgement
on what should be praised, and what should be condemned... (1986: p10.2-3)

Film criticism, having stepped out of specialists' study rooms, is now in the hands of the
public who were previously only the recipients. They write to express their pleasure,
thoughts, opinions and criticism. Such a criticism movement has become an
increasingly popular form in people's day-to-day life. Its influence is growing and
quality improving.” (1986: p10.28)

It is this particular emphasis on the sociological function of film criticism that has distinguished
the "amateur criticism" model from the "professional" one.

The driving forces behind this movement are mainly amateur film organisations (such as "film
societies" or "film groups") in schools, factories, government institutions, leisure centres and
army camps. However, such a popular movement can never survive without some form of official
involvement or backing. It has to be said that in some cases, the scale and operation of the
movement make people reminiscent of what happened during the "Great Leap Forward", when
ordinary Chinese people were mobilised to participate in poem-writing competitions or song-
contests nation-wide. In 1981, Xi'an, capital of the Shanxi province, set up the "Hope Film
Criticism Award", encouraging its over one-million primary and mid-school students to
participate in amateur film criticism. By 1991, the "Hope" movement was expanded to include
university students, factory workers and PLA soldiers. For ten years, reportedly it has involved
about four million people from all walks of life, and more than five million film reviews were
reportedly written. In Shanghai, it was reported that there were more than 1,000 film groups,
with a regular membership of 10,000 people. In 1987, there were more than 20,000 film societies
in urban China, and the membership exceeded over 30 million people (B. Q. Zhang, 1987:
p8.52-3). The 1985 National Youth of Film Criticism Competition has attracted more than
13,000 contributions, from teenagers to young adults (China Film Year Book, 1986: p10.28).
Amateur film criticism has also been widely applied and incorporated into other applications: in primary and middle schools, film-reviewing has become increasingly a popular subject for composition courses; In the army camps, film reviewing is widely adopted as an effective way to improve soldiers' writing and analytic skills, since the film show remains the most accessible and regular means of entertainment in the army barracks. In some cases, soldiers are required to hand over their film review to their education officers for assessment. Many newspapers and magazines also regularly sponsor competitions of amateur film criticism. Ironically, in contrast to the constant decline of cinema attendance, more and more people are seen participating in amateur film criticism.

So, what does the amateur film criticism movement actually tell us about the changing characteristics of Chinese film audiences in the post-Mao era?

The emergence of the amateur film criticism movement during the 1980s provides us with an interesting perspective as to examine how the Chinese audience has been transformed, gradually gaining their critical edge and independence. It must be repeated that amateur film criticism movement is nothing new in the history of Chinese cinema. In each different political period, it has presented itself in a different form. The first wave was seen as part of the "left-wing" film movement during the 1930s. Since the founding of the People's Republic, this movement had been incorporated into a vehicle of popular propaganda and an important part of proletarian mass culture.

Since 1978, the first and foremost challenge facing the Chinese film audience was to liberate themselves from the puritan and indoctrinate outlook that had characterised Mao-style film-making. For instance, when Looking Back Home, a Japanese film depicting the misery of Japanese prostitutes in South Asia at the turn of this century, was released in 1978, it immediately caused a strong reaction among the public because of its sensitive theme that had been literally forbidden during Mao's time. A scene containing a half naked young prostitute
became the most-talked-about at the time. Being shocked, some audiences, accused the film of being "obscene" and "unhealthy", and demanded a ban.

In May 1979, "Popular Cinema", China's leading film fan magazine, published a film still of *The Slipper and the Rose* (UK), a fairy tale story about Cinderella and her prince. The still photo features an affectionate kissing scene between Cinderella and the prince. This particular issue became the hottest property at news stands and was sold out in no time. Soon, the editor received hundreds of letters from all over the country (most from urban areas), praising, debating or condemning the publication of this film still. Many supported the publication mainly because it won a symbolic victory for the undergoing "thoughts liberalisation" movement. For those who were against its publication, they feared such a photo would degrade social morality and public well-being. Some were caught between pros and cons. However, one letter, by a cadre from a military farm in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, was pushed to the limelight. The editor decided to publish the letter, at the author's request, in order to open up a public debate on the matter.

The author, Wen Yinjie, remarked in his letter:

It is inconceivable that such a film still could appear in a socialist country, founded and guided by Chairman Mao. Its intention, as I believe, is to corrupt and poison our younger generation. Where are you going to lead them? What is your moral conscience as a Chinese? Foreign fart is not necessarily all that fragrant." (Y. J. Wen, 1979: p8)

In responding to Wen's accusation, the editor of Popular Cinema received hundreds of letters, most of them supporting the publication. Many expressed that the view that Wen's political mentality would be seriously obstructing towards China's modernisation, and in particular the "thoughts liberalisation". (By the way, in Summer 1991, I wrote to Mr. Wen in Xinjiang concerning the possibility of an interview with him on the incident, and unfortunately I received no reply).
Since the early 1980s Mao-style film-making has been increasingly criticised for engineering larger-than-life flawless heroes and heroines. Amateur film criticism is seen as having played an active role in promoting or "breeding" a new type of character that has an anti-hero tendency. In March 1983, China Youth Daily, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Youth League and also one of China's most radical newspapers in the 1980s, called for nominations for "My Favourite Ten Young Film Characters" (See Table 7.8). It received over 1 million ballot papers nation-wide.

The ten popularly "elected" leading characters could be largely divided into two categories: Li Xiuzhi, a character from Herdsman who is at the top of the list, is a significant example for the first type which could be summed up as being "ordinary", a rare quality which characters in the Mao era rarely possesses. Li, a plain-looking teenage rural girl, is forced to flee home on her own because of the famine escalating in the earlier 1960s. On her way, she encounters a young college student, who is send to the countryside after being labelled as a "rightist", a political outcast at the time. However, they soon get married. She is virtually illiterate with little schooling, and knows about little about politics. But she creates a family life with dignity and optimism, and shares wealth and woe with her husband. To some, her overwhelming popularity problem comes as a surprise as the heroin apparently lacks many key qualities which the post-Mao younger generation would consider vital, such as better educated, competitive and politically independent;

In In Laws, Shui-lian, the character, a newly-wed rural girl, belongs to the same category. She is seen from the beginning having been involved in the family conflict between "in-laws", an all too classic phenomenon in Chinese society which can be dated back to many centuries ago. We have to admit that she is a creature of idealism, an exemplary daughter-in-law which every mother-in-law would be pleased to have: caring, tolerant, broad-minded, hard working, and self-sacrificing. These characters, however idealistic stereotypical they may be, have thrown off ideological masks and revived a sense of real life, which is obviously appealing to the public.
**TABLE 7.8**

**TOP TEN FAVOURITE YOUNG FILM CHARACTERS (1983)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character &amp; Film</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Li Xiuizi (<em>Herdsman</em>)</td>
<td>female, a poor, innocent but dignified rural young housewife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shui Lian (<em>In Laws</em>)</td>
<td>female, a young farmer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han Miaomiao (<em>Miaomiao</em>)</td>
<td>female, a primary school teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sha Ou (<em>Sha Ou</em>)</td>
<td>female, a women volleyball player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huang Mei (<em>A Corner Forgotten by Love</em>)</td>
<td>female, a rural girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Sijia (<em>All Colours</em>)</td>
<td>male, a young truck driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xie Jing (<em>All Colours</em>)</td>
<td>female, a driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing Minglu (<em>A Girl Named Jinhua</em>)</td>
<td>female, a shop assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang Lan (<em>Look at This Family</em>)</td>
<td>female, a shop assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liao Xinming (<em>Back Light</em>)</td>
<td>male, a young and rebellious worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** *China Film Yearbook*, 1984: p171

The heroes and heroines falling to the second category are distinctively paradoxical, rebellious and sometimes eccentric. Liu Sijia (*All Colours*), a lorry driver, is highly respected among his work mates for his highly regarded driving skills, his rather cool, independent personality, and also the way he leads his life. He always dresses in style, has a beautiful girlfriend, smokes cigarettes of foreign brands, and enjoys material comfort surrounding himself with all modern conveniences, including a Japanese-made motor scooter, a rather luxurious item in the earlier 1980s. Not only does his pursuit of modernity appeal to the youngsters, but also his cynicism for party big talks and a tendency of despising any forms of authority. Xie Jing (also in *All Colours*) the only one among the "ten", who is given a clear political identification (a member the
Communist Youth League), is however also controversial and an anti-hero in nature. She is shown smoking cigarettes with her male colleagues (as under Mao, few heroines were seen smoking among her male colleagues (during Mao's era, few heroines were seen smoking, and such behaviour were almost exclusively associated with those who politically reactionary figures (such as cunning land-ladies, vicious women spies from the West or Taiwan (the base of the Nationalist government after its defeat by the communist forces), or immoral and corrupt women of any kinds). This current "anti-hero" trend is in fact an attack on stereotypes of many kinds which remained deeply rooted in the everyday life of Chinese society. Sha Ou (in Sha Ou) a leading woman volleyball player vows that "one would not be a good athlete if one lacked the ambition to become the world champions". She is seen throwing away her silver medal into the sea after being defeated by the Japanese team at an international tournament. Such a display of strong personal will and individualism are unprecedented in the history of Chinese communist film-making. Even Zhang Lan (Look at This Family) a lousy and ill-tempered shop assistant, who is to some degree a less desirable character, was also "elected" into the "top ten" mainly because her lively, unpretentious and straightforward personality. People viewed the appearances of such characters, sometimes obnoxious and often imperfect, as a celebration of individualism and a justification of personal fulfilment, which were both severely undermined and even suppressed in Mao's time.

The amateur film criticism movement has also revealed characteristically an important aspect in the way Chinese audiences perceive and relate the screen to the real world. What is meant by "real" or "realistic" on the screen, and should the film in any way represent reality? This is the very topic which has dominated debate amongst amateur film critics. Many existing surveys have shown that the tendency of "falsity" or "pseudo-authenticity" were constantly regarded as the most serious drawback of film production in the 1980s. In a nation, such as China, which was traditionally permeated by feudal ethics, and was later dominated by totalitarian ideology under Communism, the mechanism of film-viewing as a source of mass pleasure was not only ineffective but was also not appreciated. The audiences' 'habitus' derived from their past experiences having perceived film as a either a quasi-indicator of political policy or a set of moral
and social codes of Mao’s time, were still deeply rooted in the collective unconsciousness as well as in the "national narrative" in the 1980s.

In 1982, China Youth Daily (Sunday Edition) solicited contributions on the "Falsity Phenomena on the Chinese Screen", from which we are able to substantiate the trend of social psychology behind all criticisms. Among fifty such examples published, most are thought to be illogical to common sense, to deviate from social principles, to be against codes of professional conduct or principle, to be incorrect in historic facts, to be superficial and false in personalities, or after all, to be at odds with common sense.

For instance, the sequences that were criticised by the audiences, including:

----- Whether the Guomindang would have allowed the imprisoned Communists to play cards inside their cells?

----- How could it be possible for someone during the Cultural Revolution to wear high-heel leather shoes and a fashionable overcoat?

----- Whether is it over-exaggerating that a slap on the face would result in blood dropping down the face?

----- How a wet cigarette could be light without difficulty?

----- How could it be possible for a heroic character looks almost untouched after having jumped from a train at a speed of 70 km per hour? (*China Film Yearbook*, 1982: p508)

After the "Revolution", as Chinese people were making efforts to make some sense of the socio-political turbulence in their immediate context or environment, they found the film an ideal premise for exercising their newly gained freedom to question, challenge or protest at what they called the "false life". Their scrutiny of a cinematic reality on the Chinese cinema can sometimes be taken rather seriously and trivialised at the same time. Having lived through so many years a deeply ideological and politicised life under Mao, they were anxious to see a logical, coherent, down-to-earth, honest and realistic portrayal of life on the screen. For instance, a survey among
young workers conducted in 1990 identified "unreasonable sequences", "stereotyped acting" and "imitation of foreign films" were considered the "top three" drawbacks of Chinese cinema (see table 7.9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawback</th>
<th>Answers returned (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Unreasonable plot</td>
<td>28.5</td>
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<td>Stereotyped acting</td>
<td>17.5</td>
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<td>Imitation of foreign films</td>
<td>13.5</td>
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<td>Obsolete style</td>
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<td>Excessive luxury plot</td>
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<td>Too much dialogue</td>
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<td>No beginning &amp; ending</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<td>No comments</td>
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(Note: 200 workers of various age groups gave answers)

Source: J. Liu, 1991: p38

More importantly, like film-makers, the amateur criticism movement has also developed their own distinctive form in expressing discontent or antagonism in order to survive the changing political climate. In the 1980s audiences increasingly came to realise that many officially approved, publicly promoted political concepts could well be used as an umbrella for safeguarding their political criticism. For instance, revolutionary humanism, patriotism, criticism of the ultra-left ideology, "seeking truth from fact", and many others, have been seen as having given ideological refuges for many controversial productions during the period. Politically corrected slogans are used as frameworks within which to fight against inhumane, party corruption and growing social injustice.
This tactic has been also creatively adopted by audiences, in particular in the aftermath of the crushing of the Tiananmen Democratic Movement in 1989. When the public was organised through block viewing to watch hurriedly-released propaganda films, such as bio-pics of the leadership and the history of Chinese communist movement, the stringent ideological control often invited people to explore criticism in a more subtle and subversive way. Audience found every possible way to resist, ridicule and discard the messages intended by the party. For instance, while Jian Yulu, a celebration of a role-model communist who became a household name in the earlier 1960s, was released in 1990, audiences' counter-propaganda soon formed, in responding to the official large-scale promotion of the film. In Beijing and many other cities, people were reported as having bought tickets and sent them to high ranking party and governmental officials, including Premier Li Peng, urging them to see the film and learn from it. As a result, the Central Party Propaganda Department had to instruct the mass media to reduce the scale of promotion in order to dampen its public appeal and critical edge. In the cinemas, audiences wasted no time spotting any message which could hint their outrage of suppression of the Tiananmen Movement. When a sequence in "Making of A Nation", showing students' mass demonstration against the Guomindang government in 1946, shouting "Down with dictatorship" and confronting the police, proceeded on the screen, the audiences often reacted with long-standing applause and cheering.

7.5 RURAL AUDIENCES

There is a common expression that says: there are two China, rural China and urban China. This applies to the segmentation of audiences too. In the 1980s, we first witnessed in rural areas the drastic structural changes in rural film distribution and exhibition system. Since the earlier 1980s, the implementing of the Responsibility System, the rural reform scheme, brought about immediate economic vitality and improvement to China's vast population, and at the same time, challenged the economic and administrative foundation on which the operation of mobile-projection unit relied on. While the Commune system came to an end, so did the old grass-root administration network and together with the public funds for operating mobile film shows that
had thrived in the past. For instance, as a result, by 1985, one third of 150,000 state-own mobile units had ceased to function. (K. Yang, 1982, p11-2). Farmers began to cry out that "While our life is getting better the mobile film units have disappeared".

Under Mao China had made significant efforts to popularise film viewing in rural areas. Issues concerning film-viewing had often been on top of Party's rural cultural agenda. The reason is very obvious that the Communist Party under Mao Tze-tung since 1949 faced a nation in which there was a high level of illiteracy and ignorance, particularly in the rural areas which accommodated 80% of the whole population. The situation also combined with a low level of accessibility to the mass media —— especially newspapers, and radio, cinema and theatre. The forced march by which Mao was driving the rural Chinese populace from their state of economic and cultural backwardness into the modern age required a social campaign against mass illiteracy and the primitive-feudal living habits and ideas of the masses. In order to come across even the crudest messages and provide the modern means of entertainment (which was part of the socialist educational process) to the rural areas, the Party made efforts to establish a nation-wide rural wired broadcasting network (the "big-mouth" system), and to popularise film-viewing as the most accessible means of communication, education and propaganda.

One of the interesting aspects of rural audiences in the 1980s is the continuation, despite its modification, of a very Chinese tradition which sees films as a problem-solving device or a moral arbitrator. While China's legal and judicial system, and the public awareness of them remained inadequate (Zhang Yimou's Qiuju Goes to Court is an accurate account in point), farmers and local administration bodies often anticipated the mass media be an alternative force in enforcing morality and setting examples for people to follow. There were reports which claimed that regular film-viewing has reduced substantially gambling and superstition activities in villages.

There is something in common between government and farmers that they both believe the film still has an important role to play as a source of social enlightenment, despite the fact there is no sufficient evidence supporting the claim. We realise the fact that both film productions with a
contemporary rural setting and rural exhibition have often been carefully planned, either aiming at the solution of the emerging social problems, or being a timely part of government campaigns, for instance, the one-child policy. In a northern village, while village girls were competing with one another to receive the biggest betrothal gifts from their bridegrooms, the brigade official arranged the showing of a film *A Girl whom Nobody Wants to Marry*, telling a girl who is so keen on having material comforts that she eventually lost her real love; In case of domestic conflicts, in particular of between in-laws, *Grass on the Wall* (an ancient account about the same problem) and *In Laws* were often on the programme. The lack of a well developed system of social or welfare service to help rural population deal with fast-changing reality has forced farmers to explore whatever is available to them for self-help or adjustment. The most extreme case is that they have often mis-interpreted the film as a means of social service, expecting ready-made answers to solve their daily problems.

Such a utilitarian expectation from film-viewing requires distinctively the closer involvement of personal experiences. Take *In Laws* as an example, the film explores the "in-law" and kinship relations within a traditional nuclear family. The following are some after-viewing comments offered by a group of peasants in a suburb of Beijing in 1983.

An elderly farmer said:

> What happened in the film is very similar to what is happening in my own family. I also have two sons and one daughter. As soon as the younger son got married, he decided to live apart. He already reserved big space for his wardrobe, but left no room for his elderly father. So, I still have got a place to shelter myself. (D. F. Zhong, 1987)

A women peasant remarked that there are six aspects which we can learn from Shuilian, the second daughter-in-law: (1) She refuses the elder in-law's demands to join forces in confronting the mother-in-law; (2) She donates to the mother-in-law some money by doing embroidery in order to by some clothing fabrics for the elder in-law; (3) While dividing the family's property,
she offers the biggest wardrobe, the most precious item, to the elder in-law; (4) She makes an offer to take care of both the great-grand pa and the mother in-law; (5) She makes efforts to resolve the misunderstanding between Rengang and Longfang (the sister in law and her lover); and (6) She helps to sort out the family disharmony among Renwen, Qiaoyin and the mother in-law (China Film Yearbook, 1983: p91).

Another typical example. Having viewed the film Our Yuu Baisiu, a peasant wrote:

This film seems to have been specially made for me. I find Tianfu in myself. My family was wrongly classified as landlord during the Socialism Education Campaign in 1966, and I was caught up and gradually had no incentives to doing anything positive. In not so long I became an addicted gambler. Having been in heavy debts as the result of being deceived I had to sell out what I can find from family possessions and still did not clear the debts. Then I ran away, wondering outside for a while. Having came back to the village, the brigade cadres did me a favour and assigned me a piece of land (2 mu) but I did not cultivate them properly. So I remained very poor. Last night having seen the film I was sleepless all night, looking back and forth. I realised that we now have the better policy there is a brighter future for me as long as I can work hard. I should learn something from that guy in the film and I want to become rich by working hard, not being lazy any more. (D. F. Zhong, 1986: p264)

Despite the Party's apparent dissatisfaction and indeed disillusion over the handling of ideological and propaganda affairs in the urban areas they believed that the education and propaganda-oriented film still has a positive role to play. So did some of the film-makers.

Farmers are still coy about intimacy upon the screen. They do not like films narrated in "flashback", with scenes of kissing and embracing, running and chasing (China Film Yearbook, 1983: p80). In the rural areas, especially the remote interior areas, foreign films are not as popular as they have been in the urban areas. Illiteracy, inadequacy of knowledge about foreign
life and sometimes cultural differences remain the obstacles which have prevented the rural population from fully appreciating imported films. Conventional story-telling is still very popular among the majority of rural populations. When viewing a North Korean film 'War Correspondent', a farmer commented that "We wear red five-star cap and the enemies wear iron helmet. It is very easy to distinguish who is good and who is bad" (Chinese Film Yearbook, 1987).

Despite the fact that in the 1980s the majority of the acclaimed or prize-winning films relate to rural themes or locals, such as Yellow Earth, Old Well, and Wild Mountains, they are not favoured or appreciated by rural audiences. These films are often believed to be aiming at exploring the philosophical and spiritual character of the Chinese cultural tradition, in particular how they have been obstructing China from being modernised. The physical backwardness and spiritual poverty depicted on the screen are not something which farmers, both past and present, wish to be reminded. Therefore, tragedy is usually cold-shouldered, instead adventures and comedy, which would reward them with a world of hope or realistic reflection of their everyday life, such as Laughter from the Moon Valley, In Laws, Our Niu Baisui, and Our Demobilised Soldier, are received with enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

We have discovered that despite the fact the film has become a less popular and pervasive medium in China during the 1980s in the light of rapid development of TV and the emergence of the popular culture, it remains an influential social institution. Perhaps, people of few nations on this earth have paid as much attention to the existence of their national cinema than Chinese people. In the past, under Mao, film-going was seen as quasi-political activity but was heavily ideologically bound. During the 1980s, this tradition has retained its framework, but the Chinese audience has managed to turn it into a critical endeavour. For the majority of the Chinese population, film-viewing and amateur film criticism are essentially not about the aesthetically side of film-making, but, more importantly, are useful and effective vehicle of social criticism, or
an aid towards socialisation. Their statement about film and their fictional world are in fact statements about society and the way they live.

We can be relatively sure to conclude that the transformation of the Chinese audience in the post-Mao era is a process of rehabilitating or rediscovering their common sense of every-day life and a sense of political independence. The examination of the Chinese film audience has certainly helped us to gain more insights for a more rounded understanding of Chinese cinema and society.
CONCLUSIONS

It is now time to recapitulate the major themes explored in this thesis, and try to draw some conclusions. Firstly, I would like to add a few words on the general framework of this study, and in particular some of the key terms that have been introduced and frequently referred to. In summary, I have attempted to adopt a "sociological" approach, or a framework of "social history" in order to illustrate my understanding of post-Mao Chinese cinema and its relationship with China's socio-political development during the post-Mao era. In short, this study is an attempt to show how the post-Mao Chinese reality is represented or "reconstructed" by its film-making, and why. It is a study about film and everyday life, both on and off the screen.

In the thesis, I have explained the rationale for and importance of introducing this "sociological" approach. Since cinematic studies can be very easily carried away or be submerged by a vast body of aesthetic and linguistic theories, old and new, I want this study to move away from such a tradition. What interested me most in cinematic studies was not so much how films should be generally "read" or how their visual imagery interpreted, but, more importantly, the socio-political utility of the cinema and the making of a "national cinema". Aesthetic and linguistic theory can play only minor roles in an analysis of the making of a national cinema that could only be reasoned by its culture, language, politics and its association with the outside world. It seems to me that it is almost impossible to conduct any serious discussion of cinema without making reference to the culture and politics of a nation or society that I has actually created that particular form of "cinema". It is partly as a consequence of this that I have specifically drawn the parallels between the Soviet and Chinese cinemas, with some explanations as to the ways in which Chinese cinema was influenced by the Soviet model.

For me, "cinematic reality" is an important and unique source of social and political information. Information of this kind, on the one hand, may not necessarily reflect the true state of socio-political reality or mentality, but, on the other hand, they are also not the only products of fantasy.
or "dream-making". They need to be reprocessed if we really want to make the best of this "information". Cinema or film-making is an important part of the reproduction of society.

In this case study, I have introduced one key term to highlight what I call the "sociological" perspective. Firstly, the notion of daily-life. The reason why I have argued so strongly, throughout this thesis, about its significance is because it was what Chinese cinema had been deprived of during Mao's era, and it thus provided us with an interesting angle in observing the transformation of post-Mao Chinese cinema. The sense of daily-life is really about normality and common sense. Under Mao, when a life-style of "common sense" had to give way to political demands and instructions, the notion of daily-life was the first casualty. To a large extent, the transformation of Chinese cinema in the post-Mao period is a process during which the normality of daily-life and common sense are being restored. Such an undertaking may not seem so significant for those living in the West, who may regard it as aesthetically unimportant. However, for those who have lived through any totalitarian regime that was obsessed with reconstructing or reforming human nature and behaviours, this process of rehabilitating daily-life is very important indeed.

Chinese film-makers took the initiative in discrediting the cinematic version of the artificial life the Party had portrayed for years in their attempts to maintain ideological dominance. People on screen therefore began to learn to lead a normal life which had previously been subverted or deformed. A girl's desire to be pretty was no longer unacceptable, labour was no longer always happy or not tiring, enemies no longer stupid or easily-duped, and heroes no longer unmarried or puritanical. Being part of everyday life, emerging social issues (such as family problems, marriage problems, the 'generation gap', juvenile delinquency, teenage dating, poverty, bureaucracy and corruption), were for the first time raised on screen, enlightening greatly social consciousness over the issues concerned.

In the West, the cinema has long been used as China's indicator of the political climate and the ideological context, particularly during the Mao era. That is why political scientists, sociologists
and China-watchers were sometimes far more interested in the subject than film historians, cinema theorists and film-makers. The essence of the Mao era cinema, in my view, was ideologically-overpowered, aesthetically-deprived and socially-malfunctioning. The nature of the cinema as such, had largely given rise to a certain arrogance and a stereotyped perception towards it.

We have noticed a common-enough phenomenon in history that art, literature and film-making are always taken very seriously under almost any totalitarian regime (Nazi Germany, the former Soviet Union are perhaps the best examples). Under Mao, the vision of a new society, the New China, had to be realised or created by film-making. In such regime, artists are expected to become part of the political hierarchy, playing their designated role as the "engineer of human soul". In China under Mao, film-makers and other artists were a relatively privileged group and enjoyed a high status, socially and economically, but they had to repay the party with their absolute political loyalty and ideological conformity, or face political suppression. The film-makers helped the Party to manufacture "quasi-realities" that were not only larger than life, but also, more importantly, untruthful to the notion of everyday reality and humanity.

One of the findings that this thesis has been able to contribute is the socio-political motives behind what is commonly known as the literary-orientation of Chinese cinema. It is now a common knowledge that Chinese cinema has always been influenced by its ancient tradition of literature and drama, and this had, consequently, resulted predominantly the dialogue-led literary tendency of the Chinese cinema, both past and present. However, few have realised the more immediate socio-political incentives behind this "tradition". Under Mao, the entire operation and control of film-making were literary-oriented. Censorship was predominantly script-based. Dialogues were often subjected to the most harsh and censorious treatment. From the very beginning, political authorities had tried vigorously to create a "Newspeak", to use Orwell's term. We have been amazed and, at the same time apprehended by the Party's obsession in inventing the newspeak. Almost during every political campaign, however brief, "newspeak" was contained in slogans, euphemisms and popular phrases and then soon transferred onto the screen and other
artistic media. It is this heavy demand for "newspeak" that has largely forced the Chinese cinema to be further dialogue-oriented and a direct channel enough for propagating official messages. This is one of the most interesting phenomena in the history of Chinese cinema, and this issue is certainly worth some further examination. Only by understanding the hidden socio-political reasons of this literary approach would we be able to appreciate and make full sense of why the Fifth Generation in its early days had shown considerable contempt against "dialogues" to prefer a strong visual language instead, merely for the sake of avoiding "newspeak" and official euphemisms.

Throughout this thesis, I have analysed the political rationale and significance behind the commercialisation process of Chinese films and the film industry. I argue that the market-led process of commercialisation has not only paid economic dividends as a result of the withdrawal of subsidies and favourable taxation by the central government, but more importantly, it has provided a legitimate as well as practical framework for the film industry to remove itself, fairly smoothly, from the party's heavily politicised tradition of film-making. In China, where the film had been taken almost too seriously for three decades and had also been cushioned with special political and economic privileges, market forces have, at least, helped film-making to be able to sever its ties with the party without seeming politically offensive or provocative. The legitimate and politically favourable market forces have made the Chinese film-making equally legitimate to rehabilitate and revive the notion and fundamental elements of human life that a market economy could not survive without. However, it has to be said that the intensifying competition for box-office receipts has for the time being created some chaotic scenes on the Chinese screen, in particular the inferior quality of some commercial film-making, but this should be counted as an over-riding factor in our general assessment of the well-being of the Chinese film-making. What needs to be done immediately is to explore how best to regulate and adjust market forces and film-making practices.

In discussing film censorship, I have tried to avoid a purely moralistic approach, but to get into the nitty-gritty details and observations concerning the operating mechanism of China's film
censorship during the 1980s. Censorship exists all the time and in many different forms, reflecting the political nature of each nation or culture. The marked changes in direction as well as in practice regarding film censorship during the 1980s, are documented here. A new phenomenon in this particular area is the rise of market censorship, and consequently, the unique co-existence between political and market censorship. This has forced the authorities to perform a difficult balancing act, who have to now make sense both economically and politically in their censorship practices. We have noticed, on the one hand, that the Party has shown its intentions to employ newly-found market expertise to enhance the effectiveness of its political propaganda and mass mobilisation. On the other hand, the film industry has also taken advantage of the government's desperate attempt to hold onto its ideological control by cashing in through a new form of politically-engineered financial subsidy.

The reform in both the notion of film-making as well as in the structure of China's film industry has been largely reflected in the experience of the Fifth Generation, the by-word of the New Chinese Cinema and one of the most privileged film groups in the world today. The Fifth Generation has successfully reshaped the outlook of Chinese cinema and also challenged convincingly the deeply-rooted and stereotyped perception of Chinese cinema in the West. This group has certainly helped to put Chinese cinema on the map. Believing that their films should be different from all others, they have created a cinematic language which clearly displays their experiences and expectations but at the same time reveals many of their limitations. Their films are devoted to the past rather than the present, to the mythical rather than the realistic, to the cultural rather than being directly political, to the rural setting rather than the urban one, to the visual rather than the vocal. Such tactics have considerably reduced their danger of being labelled as political dissidents or becoming party's propagandists.

The Fifth Generation has gone a long way within a relatively short spell of time. Initially, they were radical, extreme, elitist and "avant-garde", which rejected the conventional format of melodrama story-telling, and later it has managed to undertake an important transformation so as to combine some elements of melodrama with its distinctive and highly personal visual language.
This change has enabled this group of young film-makers to be accepted by mainstream audiences. With regard its future, I am convinced that the Fifth Generation as an avant-garde film movement is already over because the initial socio-political context in the early 1980s, that had prompted the rise of the Fifth Generation, now no longer exists.

In recent years, we have noticed that most of the Fifth Generation film-makers have been financially supported by overseas capital. What kind of future relationship will there be between this group of film-makers and their patrons or funding-providers in the West in the future? I am not entirely optimistic about the future of this already volatile relationship. We have to realise that, whilst realising the further strained relationship between the Fifth Generation and Chinese authorities, we should not, at the same time, overlook the equally less cosy relationship between the Fifth Generation and their western patrons. We have felt the increasing discontent from leading members of the Fifth Generation about the way their film-making has been interpreted by narrowly politicising their films, and increasing pressures (from fund-providers), however subtle, upon them in making films of high commercial return. Despite their political cynicism and tendency to non-conformity, the Fifth Generation remains deeply patriotic. They are extremely antagonised by the accusations that their films merely cater for foreign curiosity, or reinforce injustice and prejudices against Chinese society and its culture. However, if the Fifth Generation are pressured by the western market to repeat the successful models of _Raise the Red Lantern,_ _Farewell My Concubine,_ and _To Live_ in order to cash in on the curiosity of western audiences, the days of the Fifth Generation as an "avant-garde" film movement may well be numbered. To a large degree, the Fifth Generation filmmaking has lost its initial capacity to shock, to fascinate, or in some cases to cause discomfort or outrage among its home viewers.

I have long been convinced that the social behaviour of audiences would in some way reflect the socio-political changes of a society, especially in countries like China, where the film was once so politicised. Chinese audiences have gone a very long way within a decade and a half since the end of the Cultural Revolution. I have tried to demonstrate some of the unique qualities that characterise the Chinese audience, distinguishing them from their western counterparts. In a
society where cinema had been treated not primarily as a means of entertainment, but more as a vehicle of political conformation, it is surprising, though, that the Chinese public has certain interesting characteristics. Since the early 1980s, Chinese audiences have found themselves in an unprecedented position: they have acquired their status as consumers. With the return of their consumer status, they eventually have the means and power to choose and criticise what they see, and also to exert their influence on the making of national film policy.

The significance of this thesis is that it has been carried out with a Chinese perspective, highlighting those issues or phenomena that are still unknown in the West. It is for this reason that I have devoted an entire chapter to Xie Jin, a veteran film-maker and also one of China's most popular and influential. Although I have no real intention to make any serious comparative analysis between him and the Fifth Generation, they do differ in many key aspects of filmmaking and its socio-political function. Through Xie Jin's case, I hope I have demonstrated how the old generation film-makers and their idea of film-making has been transformed to be fitted into the new political and cultural surroundings, though not without difficulty and some pain.

It is one of my major aims to present this thesis in a way that could reflect the fundamental changes of the post-Mao Chinese society through the experiences of Chinese film-making and film-viewers of the same period. I hope I have adequately pieced together a jigsaw that contains the essential elements regarding the development of post-Mao Chinese cinema. I also hope that my observation does justice to the reality.

To a large extent, the cinematic reality depicted on the screen, is a world on its own, run with its own logic and reason. Film-making has never been an undertaking that mechanically reflects its object, social reality. It is a mixed world of reality, fantasy and distortion. However, this particular form of fictional reality can be explained or unravelled by making sense of the political and social context within which such cinematic reality is produced. This study is partly an attempt to read this cinematic reality constructed on the Chinese screen.
Finally, the entire process of this study has been, to some degree, a witness of China's political
and social development as well the crises since the 1980s. During this relatively short period of
time, China has experienced a quick succession of party leadership, and the crushing of the
Democratic Movement in June, 1989. In the aftermath of this tragic event, Deng had managed to
survive the international sanction by deepening his scheme for market-reform. Now, whilst the
world is approaching the beginning of next the millennium, China is to face another more acute
turning point or crisis following the death of Deng Xiao-ping, China's paramount leader, whose
health is believed to be declining daily, according to his own daughter (New York Times, 16
Jan., 1994). What does the future hold for China? Views differ. However, one thing is certain,
the fate of the Chinese cinema will always rest upon with China's historical destiny. As the
country has entered a period fraught with political uncertainty, mounting financial pressures and
deepeining social problems, the filmmakers and their industry will, as before, be fighting hard to
reposition or re-justify themselves on a further changing but yet uncertain socio-political context.
The battle is likely to be intensified on two grounds: (1) that between market forces and official
regulations as a means of state control; (2) that between the already deeply-rooted Pluralism in
the society and the legacy of old-style state domination in ideological and cultural affairs.
APPENDIX 1

TRANSCRIPTS OF
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH THREE CHINESE FILMMAKERS (SEPT.----OCT. 1990)
A Note

I returned to China in Sept. 1990 for a research trip concerning my study on the post-Mao Chinese cinema. It was merely 15 months after the crushing of the Democratic movement in Beijing by the Chinese authorities. The situation was rather volatile and unpredictable. However, I decided to take the challenge. The major purposes of this trip were mainly two: firstly, to gather as much as possible the original material relating the Chinese film-making and the industry; Secondly, to conduct in-depth interviews with a representative sample of Chinese film-makers, distributors, cultural officials, film critics and ordinary film-goers.

The difficulty to arrange the projected interviews was huge, given the extremely volatile political situation at the time. However, I managed to fulfill partly my task. Between 28th Sept. and 2nd Nov. 1990, I conducted 12 in-depth interviews in Shanghai and Beijing. Among those whom I had interviewed were film directors, producers, distributors, film researchers, government media officials, newspaper editor and ordinary cinema-goers. Below are the details of three interviews.

(1) SANG HU: a veteran film director and one of the few remaining members of China's "Second Generation" film-makers.

Male, over 70 Ys old, a veteran film director from Shanghai Film Studios. He has made more than ten feature films since the mid-1940s, many of them comedies, a hazardous "genre" during the Mao era. He is one of a few film directors who were allowed to produce the film version of "Modern Peking Operas", the rich fruits of the Cultural Revolution. His important works include: Blessing (1959), The Coincidence of A Magician (1963), and Midnight (1985). Young Shang Hu was a bank clerk for before entering the film-making.

Topic: The fate of comedy films in Communist China
Film, by its nature, is to amuse, entertain and understand people, but certainly not to educate or instruct people. Entertainment is what people would look and it is for entertainment people become film-goers. I think, comedy is a 'genre' which amuses the audience most. That is why I have been a comedy director in my entire film-making life.

When I was a young film fan during the 1930s, I was heavily influenced by a number of great comedy masters such as Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy. Their witty, humour and shape observation had taught me that comedy films were not necessarily a byword of being "vaguer" or "low taste". Comedy can make you happy, tearful, moving and thoughtful. Comedy film can also become a special-angled mirror reflecting changing social reality, or criticising social problems. We all know, there is a traditional Chinese saying "Implying Teaching Through Entertainment", and this has long been my motto in making comedy films.

(Asked why the Chinese politics since 1949, and the politicians in particular had been so intolerable of comedy films, he answered)

It is true that, looking back, comedy film under Mao had faced a rather difficult time: the fate of most comedy films, though very limited in number in comparison with other genres (e.g. the war films) was "tragic" as a result of political interference and criticism. Some were even banned. This was a very complex phenomenon. At that time, not only the cultural authorities, but the audiences themselves also sometimes, accused comedy films of distorting or uglifying the "glory image" of the revolution and revolutionary people. Comedy by its nature always intends to depict its characters as ordinary "laymen" rather than "heroes" or "heroines".

I would like to mention here an interesting term called "praising-worthy comedy". I suspect this term is still unknown outside China. It is a big innovation by both Chinese film-makers and the politicians during the later 50s. The word of "praising" has suggested to us all its essence and intentions, which was to highlight the superiority of socialist system. In my own experience, I have made several attempts at "praising comedy" since the 1960s, even during the 1980s. This type of comedy films has been proved worthwhile. I have been thinking in recent years that our society is now facing a lot of
social problems, the inflation, the bureaucracy, the declining social morality, people are complaining and cursing about these things, and they even feel pessimistic about their future.

However, you must also recognise, China has had its greatest progress for the last decade, we should realise that this is the mainstream tendency. I don't think it is a right thing to do by displaying all the social evils on the screen. We must give our people something good, positive and helpful when they go to the cinema. As a film-maker, we ought to give our audience the warmth and strength, instead of displaying to them the darkness of society in dark cinemas. I believe, today the Chinese audience need even more comedy films as light entertainment, to relieve themselves from pressures and also entertain themselves. Although I am now old, I will continued to contribute to comedy films for the rest of my life.

(Asked what's his view about the Fifth Generation and their films, he says)
The younger generation is daring, bright, sensible and promising. They are very keen on learning new things, critical in thinking. They have made quite a number of excellent works and some are highly acclaimed both at home and abroad. Besides, I also regard very highly the mid-aged generation of film-makers, such as Wu Yigong and Huang Shuqing. For them, I have some advice: first, always bearing in your mind that you are Chinese and you are Chinese film-makers; Second, film is a form of mass culture and entertainment, so never forget or ignore your audience when making film. Cinema without audience is just like fish without water.

(2) WU YIGONG: Film director from the Fourth Generation and also head of Shanghai Film Bureau.

Male, born in 1938. Graduated from Directing Class of the Peking Film Academy during the late 1950s. Now he works as a film director for Shanghai Film Studios, and also the head of Shanghai Film Bureau. His career as a film director was delayed for more than a decade largely due to the eruption of the Cultural Revolution. He made his directorial debut, Our Little Cat (a short fiction) after the Cultural Revolution in 1978. He was already 40, despite of being labelled as a talented
"younger director". So far he has made no less than seven feature-length fiction films. Moreover, he is now highly recognised one of China's leading film-makers today. His main works include: Evening Rain (1979), Old Story of Peking (1982). The latter has been well received both at home and abroad and was awarded the Best Film Prize in the Manila International Film Festival in 1983.

**Topic: film-making and the reform, he tells me**

For me personally, my appointment as the "number one" person in Shanghai's film industry, is "tragic". I am a film-maker, and I am not good at managing people or business, and I even never thought of commanding people. Ironically, this may be the very reason why I have been chosen for this position. Most people who I had worked with regard me as a bookworm, tolerant and not so politically-oriented. Although I had tried very hard to avoid this job, I inevitably failed at last.

For the last three or four years, I have been spending most of my time at various meetings, and my working load is very heavy: the production plan, the budget, the scrutiny of scripts and finished work, the audience survey, and so on. As a result, I have no more time for myself as a film director. I have however got used to this kind of life now. I have learnt the need to compromise and how, also sometimes force myself to do something which is against my own will. What a miserable job! But you have to cope with that.

The management system of China's film industry, in my view, is no longer effective and positive, especially in the light of the sharp decline of film audience and the invasion of a newly-established media network. Nearly all the film studios nation-wide are now financially in debt, some are as high as 20m RMB (about 2m in British pounds). This kind of heavy debt has almost brought some studios to the edge of bankruptcy. Everybody is now deeply worried, urging the industry to reform. To simply draw a blueprint or two, I think, would be relatively easy, but the point is how to implement and make it workable. I agree that the problems facing the film industry could not be solved unless some overall and fundamental changes are made on China's economic, social and cultural policies. If not, the reform would be only a chanting slogan.
Let me give you an example, I have the right, in theory, to fire a less-qualified or under-performed staff, but I am reluctant to carry out this decree, simply because the unemployment policy is not practically ready at this moment. Other problems, including the monopoly of distribution and exhibition and the price of admission all need to be resolved. As a “boss”, the first and foremost important thing now is, frankly, not the artistic quality of film-making, but the figure of film prints and profit. I must let all my staff “having rice in their bowls”. This is truly a very painful transition period, what the film industry can do at this moment, is merely to defend its right to survive.

It is said that I am one of the “Fourth Generation” film-makers. I don’t agree with this kind of categorisation even as early as in 1985, although I myself did not really mind how I am labelled or called. In my view, this categorisation of the “generation” is a superficial and invented one. The idea of “Fifth Generation”, is still a rough and ill-defined concept. It is understandable that film critics have created the term for the purpose of making an issue. Meanwhile, the power of mass media has helped the term to get its publicity, and people just accept it unwittingly.

You (the author) said that my ten-year film-making after the Cultural Revolution has been a good indicator reflecting the changing perception of social and cultural sentiments of each different period since 1979. I entirely agree with your observation, and what you said is true.

The great success of Old Story of Peking (1982), both in critical and commercial terms, was a huge surprise for me. Before it was to be previewed and examined by the censorship committee of Shanghai’s film Bureau, I was very nervous, just like a primary school student. I was not really sure about the film I had made and what kind of reception it would have, and etc, because this was my first full directorial work and it is very simple in narrative and conventional in style. The film is based on an autobiography which depicts the memories of childhood of a six-year old girl in the 1920s Peking. It has an very ordinary theme. I still remember now the reception I had received after that preview: when the film ended, lights were turned on again, people in the stadium all immediately stood up and began to clap their hands, so enthusiastically, I was just overwhelmed and remained in my seat. This
was what I had not expected. At the time, I also didn’t understand why people were so moved by this film, since it had nothing new in film technique, and nothing 'avant-garde'.

However, my next work, *Sister* (1983) almost made me another person. At the time, my idea of filmmaking became radical and even rebellious to some extent. Many people commented Wu Yigong had changed his way. Yes, it is true, but only to some degree. After *Story of Old Peking*, I thought I must change my way, exploring something new, refreshing my mind and broadening my horizon. I remember that, having watched a dozen foreign films, all masterpieces from Japan, the UK, Sweden and the USA, during the later 1970s, I got really excited. *Sister* was my first experimental work. At the time, my feeling was a mixture of anxiety and ambition. I attempted to explore new forms of narrative and style, and on-location sound recording.

The plot of *Sister* is very thin on its storyline, and you can even say it is a bit dull. The story, a revolutionary theme, is situated, during the 1930s, in a remote Gobi area in Northern China. A "Red Army" woman soldier, who is wounded in a vicious battle the Kuomingtang army, is abandoned. Soon, she encounters another survivor, a Red Army trumpet boy. She is anxious to find way out and reunite with her fellow comrades. The film has a tragic and not really up-beat ending: they are still struggling to get out of the Gobi desert. The reason why I have chosen this theme, because I was very much moved by these characters, who have a strong belief. I respect them. I lost about 10 KGs of my weight during the two-month shooting in the Gobi desert.

In *Sister*, aesthetically, I mainly explored how to work out narrative and montage by using the footage of sound-tracks, for instance, drum-beats, footsteps, but not dialogue (as a matter of fact, there is little dialogue in it). Personally, I was satisfied with what I had done. So, when it was completed, I wanted to have it examined as soon as possible. But, very few people liked this film. Colleagues, ordinary audience and the government officials all disliked it. The censorship committee criticised it of being too pessimistic and cruel in my depiction of revolution and revolutionary war. I defended for myself, but it was in vain and vulnerable. As a result of the censorship verdict, I had to go back to the locations to re-shoot some sequences that the committee wanted to be included. Consequently, it was
passed for the public release. In the film, the last sequence, the sunrise, that I acquired in re-shoot, is very unnecessary and cliché. But I had to make some compromises. Only a few people had realised its experimental value; Financially, this film just sold out 27 copies nation-wide (60-80 copies for each film on average in 1983), which was a very bad figure. It resulted in heavy financial loss of half a million RMBs in debt.

I had learnt a lesson from this film: the reason why I have failed is that I had paid too much attention "how to narrate" rather than "what to narrate". But I can not agree with the comments that Wu Yigong is only good at making films such as Story of Old Peking. I do not want to be trapped or buried by "Old Story of Peking".

Soon, I got another chance to make a comedy film, Experience of A Spoilt Boy (1985), the first Sino-German co-production. It is adapted from a novel by Verne. Before the filming, it was decided that we were going to make an "entertainment film". At the time, many film-makers despised this type of film. This novel, in brief, depicts a Chinese youngster from a wealthy family, an unworthy descendent. His troubled experience of adventure and dramatic marriage make a good comedy. As you know, it was my first time to make comedy film, and many friends persuaded me to give it up, saying that making this sort of film would ruin my reputation. However, I decided to take the challenge. Firstly, I thought, I myself got a sense of humour, though a hidden type. Sense of humour is the first and foremost quality demanded to be a comedy director; Secondly, I wanted to make myself more commercially-minded, since I had just been appointed as the head of Shanghai Film Studio at the time. As someone responsible for the entire business of Shanghai's film industry, I wanted to use this opportunity to make a point that "entertainment film" can be both popular and high in quality; Thirdly, an undeclared personal reason, I wanted to make this film a commercial-hit to compensate the financial loss of Sister. It sold over 280 copies nation-wide, which meant nearly one million RMB of profits for Shanghai Film studio. Its commercial success satisfied me greatly, and the audiences enjoyed it. However, some film critics, did not taken seriously about my trial, regarding this film as merely an imitation of foreign commercial film.
Audience is vital for the existence of the film industry. In China, the rapid decline of cinema attendance for the last decade is nothing unusual. The "golden era of the Chinese film is now over. We should take this setback calmly and positively, but not to panic. It is true that audiences are always out there, but the new environment of mass media has made them divided. Television, in particular, has stolen a great number of cinema-goers. It is unreasonable, I think, to over-criticise film-maker for the decline of cinema attendance. The key to solve the problem is to reform the obsolete system of film industry.

(1) HUANG SUQIN: Female Director from Shanghai Film Studios and a leading member of so-called the "Fourth Generation"

Born in 1940 in Shanghai. She went to study film direction at the Beijing Film Academy and graduated in 1964. Huang Suqin has been regarded as one of China's most promising women directors today. Her works include Long Live the Youth (1982) Friends Of My Childhood (1983), Between Human and Ghost (1988) and A Walled City (a ten-part TV Drama series, 1990)

Topic: Film-making and Politics

Chinese cinema, historically, has always paid greater attention to film's social effects. Film's aesthetic or entertainment values had not been taken seriously. This phenomenon could be dated back as early as the 1930s. After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, some remarkable films were made, but they all lacked a strong sense of individualistic merits. Under Mao, party politics was always the major theme for the film-making. And, I think, the greatest achievement that Chinese cinema has reached for the last decade is the emergence of individuality in film-making.

You ask me which factor is more important in my film-making life, my film education or my troubled personal experience during the Cultural Revolution? I think these two factors are both important. I spent five years studying at the Beijing Film Academy. It had, at least, helped to learn all the basics of
film-making, although the curriculum and teaching methods at that time were very Soviet-oriented, rigid and ideological.

I graduated in the early 1960s. Since Shanghai Film Studios was such a big film-making centre, with several dozens of veteran directors, I could not get the opportunity to make my film. During the 1960s and mid-70s, I had actuarily spent most of my time taking part various political campaigns such as the Socialist Education Movement in the early 1960s, and later the Cultural Revolution. I spent a number of years in the "7th May School", the countryside-based labour camp mainly for the purpose of re-educating the bourgeoisie intellectuals. In 1978, when I made my first short film, I was almost forty. I had waited for 15 years to direct my own film.

I should say, film education, to some extent, has made me a film-maker in technical sense, and my rich personal experience had made me politically more matured. Then, I began to re-think what is cinema, and what is the relationship between society and film-making, and what type of film I want to make.

My major concern in film-making is simple. I want to prevent my film from becoming a political instrument as it was in the past. But, how to free film-making from the heavy control and influence of politics? this issue, in my view, is very complex.

Before the shooting of Long Live the Youth began, I discussed with its author Wang Meng (a leading novelist and the former Cultural Minister between 1987-89) on how to adapt his novel for the big screen. I wanted to, through this work, express my personal feeling towards the troubled youth of my generation. Youth is always beautiful, however difficult and painful. Wang Meng's novel depicts vividly the student life in a girl-school during the 1950s. I see this novel as a personal memoir of my youth, especially my wonderful time at high school. I feel that I was one of them. The 1950s was a period of great expectation and enthusiasm. I personally did not want to convey any serious message in the film. But politicians or cultural officials thought otherwise. The Party's ideological chief at the time took great interest in my work. He reckoned that my film could be an ideal educational material
for ideological education in Communism belief. When the film was released, a promotion campaign was immediately launched. All members of the Communist Youth League were required to watch this film. I was not happy about this, and I had to defend myself at a number of the meetings, stating that my interpretation of this film was not different from that of the cultural authority. Not surprisingly, I was accused, finally, of being a conservative or politically-minded director. I was then too weak to defend myself, because the politics and dominant ideology had provided all the answers for my film.

To minimise the further and possible misunderstandings, in the last, I managed to, while dubbing, add a piece of dialogue for the main character, saying “We would meet again in 30 years time!”. The “Long live the Youth”, nevertheless, became the victim of the politics.
APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE SHEET
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
THE CHINESE FILM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Dear friends,

My name is Lifen Zhang and I am currently a Ph.D candidate in Mass Communications at Leicester University. I am conducting an audience survey to find out a few facts about Chinese films in the UK, and British audiences' attitudes towards them, particularly those made in the 80s. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

You will find questions attached hereto. Would you please be kind enough to fill in your answers NOW before you depart and leave the form either in the box by the Exit or hand it to me personally. Many thanks to you all.

This form should only take you approximately 5 or 6 minutes to complete.

Yours sincerely

Lifen Zhang

Please put the number of your chosen answer into the box for each question. Below is an example:

How many children do you have? (2)
1 One
2 Two
3 Three or more
4 None

If you have two children, choose '2' and put the number into the box ( ).

1. AGE GROUP ( )
   1 below 17
   2 18-34
   3 35-49
   4 50-65
   5 over 65

2. SEX: ( )
   1 male
   2 female

3. OCCUPATION: ( )
   1 professional or managerial
   2 academic, artistic or mass media
   3 manual
   4 retired or unemployed
   5 student
   6 others (please specify):
4. EDUCATION: ( )
   1 elementary
   2 high School
   3 college or university

5. RESIDENCE: ( )
   1 London
   2 outside London

6. When did you first see a Chinese film in the UK, which originated in the People's Republic of China? (including viewing by TV & video) ( )
   1 1949-65
   2 1966-76
   3 1977-83
   4 1984 to date

   and, it was a: ( )
   1 fiction
   2 documentary
   3 so-called 'Model Opera Films'

   Please name it if you can: ______________.

7. How many Chinese films you have seen for the last 12 months? (including viewing by TV and video) ( )
   1 one
   2 two
   3 three
   4 four or more

8. Can you name THREE Chinese movies you have seen in the 80s or the early 90s, which you found most interesting? ( ) ( ) ( )
   01 A Good Woman
   02 Big Parade
   03 Black Cannon
   04 Far From the War
   05 Hibiscus Town
   06 Ju Dou
   07 King of Children
   08 Old Well
   09 Red Sorghum
   10 Swan Song
   11 Yellow Earth
   12 others. (please specify):
9. If you have seen 'Yellow Earth', where did you first watch it?

1. at movie house
2. on TV
3. others (please specify):

10. Can you name, from the list below, THREE Chinese directors of the 80s whom you like most?

( )

01. CHEN Kaige
02. HU Mei
03. HUANG Jianxin
04. TIAN Zhuangzhuang
05. WU Tianmin
06. WU Ziniu
07. XIE Jin
08. ZHANG Nuanxin
09. ZHANG Yimou
10. ZHANG Zemin
11. others (please specify):

11. What motivates you to view a Chinese film, either on TV or at movie house?
(including today's Chinese Film Show at the ICA)
(more than one answer is acceptable)

( )

1. a personal interest in China
2. to understand China and its people better
3. its artistic merit
4. curiosity
5. its national character
6. other (please specify):

12. Do you agree or disagree with the statement below:
'Red Sorghum' was awarded an international prize because it overstated the western stereotype of backwardness, poverty, ignorance and social shortcomings in China.

( )

1. strongly agree
2. agree
3. don't know
4. disagree
5. strongly disagree

13. Do you agree or disagree with the following:
In order to survive at home and compete abroad, Chinese cinema should become more commercial or market-oriented?

( )

1. strongly agree
2. agree
3. don't know
4. disagree
5. strongly disagree
14. What, from your point of view, are the main problems of Chinese films today? (more than one answers is acceptable) ( )
   1 long and tasteless dialogue
   2 lack of good and entertaining story
   3 too political or ideological
   4 imitations of the western style
   5 others (please specify): 

15. Apart from seeing Chinese films, do you usually read the following original Chinese materials in translation? If 'yes' please specify. (more than one answers is acceptable) ( )
   1 magazines and newspapers
   2 fictional or creative books (novel, e.g)
   3 non-fiction or academic books
   4 others (specify please)
   5 no

17. Have you ever been to China? ( )
   1 yes
   2 no
   If 'yes', please specify when: ( )
   1 before 1940s
   2 1949-1965
   3 1966-1979
   4 1980 to date

18. Any other comments you would like to make about either Chinese cinema as a whole or the films you just have watched, please write them below? Thanks again.
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