EXCHANGING FACES: DUBBING FOREIGN FILMS IN CHINA, 1949-1994

BY
WEIJIA DU

DISSEPTION
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in East Asian Languages and Cultures
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2018

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:
Professor Robert Tierney, Chair
Professor Dan Shao
Professor Wail S. Hassan
Professor Kai-wing Chow
Abstract

My dissertation examines dubbed foreign films, which were the Chinese people’s “window to the outside world” during the Cold War era. Between 1949 and 1994, when Hollywood’s path to China was blocked by Cold War politics, the Chinese Communist Party dubbed and screened over one thousand films from the Soviet bloc, Western Europe, and beyond. These foreign films made up close to one half of all films screened in China and were more popular and profitable than domestic Chinese films. Despite their immense popularity and lasting impact, no comprehensive study on these films has emerged. I argue that dubbed foreign films disrupt the familiar narratives of Chinese cultural history, by showing that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) never achieved full control over its cinema, and its ideological indoctrination was always confined by its technology.

I use government documents, film companies’ internal publications, and audience memoirs to construct a history of the PRC’s foreign film import and exhibition. I demonstrate that the CCP used foreign films to fulfill three functions: as ideological textbooks, as diplomatic tokens, and as program fillers and revenue earners to supplement China’s meager domestic film output. Much as the CCP wished to regulate the content of foreign films, pragmatic concerns such as diplomatic relationships and the demands of the film exhibition industry compelled them to screen foreign films that were not up to their ideological standards. As a result, foreign films were relatively free from the notoriously severe censorship imposed on domestic films. At times, dubbed films could even betray their propagandist purpose and constitute a legitimate space of mild dissent against mainstream aesthetics and ideology.
I also examine the impact that decades of foreign film dubbing as opposed to subtitling had on the Chinese audience. The Chinese dubbing practice, with its emphasis on synchrony or “matching voices,” carried with itself an ideology that unwittingly subverted the CCP’s nationalism and authoritarianism. Dubbing obscured the boundary between the Chinese and the foreign. The foreign body and milieu, socialist or capitalist, acquired a degree of immediacy and Chinese identity through the accompanying Chinese voice. The Chinese voice, bent by the imperative to adhere to the foreign lips and body, acquired a “foreign accent” as it departed in unobtrusive yet substantial ways from the linguistic and vocal norms of the time. In short, instead of simply grafting a Chinese voice onto a foreign figure, dubbing turned the foreign figure Chinese and the Chinese voice foreign. Furthermore, the dubbing voice was subversive not only because it had a foreign accent, but also because its mission – to become one with the body on the screen – made it unsuitable as a mouthpiece of the CCP and distinguished it from mainstream voices that were dedicated to single-minded propaganda.

In sum, my dissertation demonstrates how dubbed foreign films that were imported, dubbed, and exhibited by the CCP subverted the party’s own ideology due to stubborn, pragmatic circumstances. Revising Xiaomei Chen’s theory that emphasizes “counter-discourse” and the binary between official and unofficial Occidentalism, my research reveals that subversion occurred inadvertently and from within the system.

My dissertation contains four body chapters. Part One of Chapter One traces how the PRC’s foreign film import and dubbing departed from Republican era practices yet remained haunted by the Republican heritage that the CCP ostensibly denounced. Part Two of Chapter One focuses on film exhibition between 1949 and 1966. Here I argue that foreign films both served and failed to serve the conflicting imperatives of program supply, diplomacy, and
propaganda, resulting in the compromise of the CCP’s ideological principles. Part One of Chapter Two analyzes audience reception of nominally education films imported from Albania, Romania, North Korea, and Vietnam to demonstrate that even during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Chinese audience were not restricted by party messages but appropriated foreign films for their entertainment. Part Two of Chapter Two examines how the economic reform after 1978 ushered in both a golden age for dubbed foreign films and their irreversible decline, as new technologies such as VHS and laserdisc enabled ordinary people to smuggle, copy, and exhibit foreign films far beyond the officially imported canon.

In Chapter Three I formulate a theory of dubbing in the Chinese context by bringing translation theories into film studies. I argue that despite the appearance of ventriloquism, dubbing is fundamentally analogous to literal translation in that dubbing requires bending the domestic voice to match the foreign lips and bodies. In the second half of the chapter, I examine ethical issues in the representation of the others in China’s translation and dubbing of foreign films. In Chapter Four, I present close readings of four representative dubbed foreign films. I focus on the ways in which the Chinese translators, critics, and audience were insensitive and susceptible to the values of social injustice portrayed in these films.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER ONE: PREHISTORY AND THE SEVENTEEN YEARS ..........................................................10
Part One: New China, “New” Foreign Films, or the Phantom of the Republican Era .................10
Part Two: Beyond the Ideology Principle: 1949-66 ........................................................................24

CHAPTER TWO: TWO CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS ........................................................................52
Part One: “Progressive” Contents and Reactionary Forms: 1966-76 .........................................52

CHAPTER THREE: EXCHANGING FACES, MATCHING VOICES ...............................................84

CHAPTER FOUR: CLOSE-UPS: FOUR DUBBED FOREIGN FILMS ..............................................113
Part One: Lenin in October and Lenin in 1918 ............................................................................113
Part Two: Jane Eyre: A Timely Classic .......................................................................................121
Part Three: Angels, Whores, and Gypsies: Corazón Salvaje and Yesenia ............................137
Part Four: Proof of the Man in Japan and China ......................................................................145

DISTANT RESONANCES: CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS .............................................164

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................................172

APPENDIX A: PARTIAL FILMOGRAPHY OF INTERNAL REFERENCE FILMS DUBBED DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION ...........................................................................188

APPENDIX B: PUBLICLY RELEASED FOREIGN FILMS MENTIONED IN CHAPTER TWO ........................................................................................................................................192

APPENDIX C: PROOF OF THE MAN: JAPANESE VERSION POSTERS, BOOK COVERS ETC ......................................................................................................................................193

APPENDIX D: PROOF OF THE MAN: CHINESE DUBBED VERSION POSTERS AND BOOK COVERS ..............................................................................................................................195
Introduction

A Stateless Subject

This dissertation is about Chinese dubbed foreign films from 1949 to 1994. During those years when Hollywood’s path to China was mostly blocked by Cold War politics, over a thousand films from the Soviet bloc, Western Europe, and various other countries regularly occupied a third to a half of total exhibition time and achieved tremendous popularity. In China, the word yizhipian (lit. translated films) connotes a bygone era, when these films were the treasured entertainment and world-view for many Chinese, offered and filtered through the official apparatus, yet mingled with individuals’ youthful memories and desires. In Chinese studies, dubbed foreign film has been a specter that roams the margins: scholars know of their existence through hearsay or personal experience, yet no comprehensive study has emerged aside from scattered mentions and a few articles.

The marginality of Chinese dubbed foreign films in film studies and Chinese studies is understandable for many reasons. As far as American mass culture is concerned foreign films are next to a nonentity and receive little scholarly attention.\(^1\) Elsewhere in the world (including contemporary China), the study of foreign films has become almost synonymous with the study of globalization and the impact of Hollywood. It has become difficult to imagine a time and place where non-Hollywood foreign films flourished. Furthermore, as cinematic counterparts of literary translations, foreign films share their fate of marginality in academia due to a general unwillingness to study refractions (to use André Lefevere’s term).\(^2\)

\(^1\) Tino Balio’s *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946–1973* is an exception.
As a result of this cult of authenticity and originality, the field of PRC cinema has been limited to domestic productions or at most co-productions, in other words, what China and Chinese auteurs have to offer to world cinema. Within the framework of national cinema, little consideration is given to the question “what films did the Chinese audience see,” despite Jay Leyda’s prescient remark “I grew increasingly aware of the importance of the Chinese spectator in any analysis of Chinese film history.” Welcomed by the Chinese audience for almost half a century, dubbed foreign films are nonetheless an orphaned, or “stateless” subject in American academia.

**Palimpsest and Afterlife**

A picture is worth a thousand words, and a film is worth dozens of volumes. A film has many texts and contexts: as the finished version leaves the studio and is sent abroad, it begins a journey of afterlife, mutilated by censorship cuts, becomes a double-text via dubbing, then packaged for exhibition, reviewed, received, and remembered. Each afterlife is a story of multiple players and complex motives, choices, circumstances, and consequences.

Then why do I choose to write a dissertation of mere hundreds of pages about an enormous assortment of films, under the umbrella term Chinese dubbed foreign films? There have been precursors in the study of foreign films, such as Sudha Rajagopalan’s *Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas: The Culture of Movie-going after Stalin* and Tino Balio’s *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946–1973*. In China, dubbed foreign films were an actual

---

4 I borrow this phrase from Thomas Chen’s article “An Italian Bicycle in the People’s Republic: Minor Transnationalism and the Chinese Translation of *Ladri di Biciclette/The Bicycle Thief*.”
5 Antje Ascheid uses this term in her article “Speaking Tongues: Voice Dubbing in the Cinema as Cultural Ventriloquism.”
entity, an official genre, and a long-standing enterprise. Unlike foreign films that variously made their way to the American market, Chinese dubbed foreign films had been united as a group ever since the founding of the PRC. The term *yizhipian* (originally *fanyipian*) consistently appeared as a genre in film industry’s production plans and reports alongside domestic features, animation, science education films, etc. Among the common Chinese audience the familiar term *yizhipian* evoked a genre and repertoire in a way that “foreign film” does not in the US.

It is the aim of this dissertation to put Chinese dubbed foreign films on the map. The metaphor is ironic, for these films have been hidden in plain sight precisely because they are in the contact zone and cannot be located on the map. The significance of this genre has not escaped all scholars; Tina Mai Chen’s account of Sino-Soviet film exchange, Nicole Huang’s analysis of 1970s Chinese soundscape, Paul Clark’s reading of a film company’s distribution catalogue, as well as Thomas Chen and Krista Van Fleit Hang’s case studies blazed the trail and signaled growing awareness of dubbed foreign films. Each of these articles devotes paragraphs or even pages re-introducing the basic background of China’s foreign film dubbing industry, for the simple reason that this stateless subject was not on the map. What these isolated studies call for is an aerial view, a reference point, and an establishing shot. What these studies reveal are not mere happenstances; they belong together as pieces of a puzzle: Chinese dubbed foreign films formed a continual movement that reflected and shaped the zeitgeist. This dissertation will pave the way for future studies of individual dubbed films and particular periods, genres, and topics.

A book-length discussion of dubbed foreign films does more than to introduce a new topic to Chinese film studies. The recognition of this tradition of “filmmaking”, the realization of the roles played by this group of films, and the unearthing of untold stories change the entire

---

6 For *yizhipian* were counted alongside domestic productions.
picture of Chinese film and cultural history. The stories of Chinese cinema during the Maoist and post-Mao eras are often centered on the theme of complying with or defying official demands, of addressing, reflecting the culture and politics of the time or choosing not to do so. These narratives are legitimate so long as we focus on Chinese auteurs’ films. But if we redefine Chinese cinema as Chinese audiences’ films and focus on dubbed foreign films, the players change, the dynamics change, and so do the themes.

**Foreignness and Asynchrony**

With dubbed foreign films we are obliged to come to terms with the prominent presence of foreignness in Chinese cinema. Foreignness is hardly a new topic in Chinese domestic cinema or PRC history in general. One cannot begin a history of Chinese filmmaking without mentioning American (Hollywood’s monopoly in old Shanghai theaters), Soviet (PRC’s role model in 1950s), and Japanese (Man’ei personnel) influences. Yet the role of foreignness was much more overt and vivid in dubbed foreign films. The characters of foreignness that I focus on in this dissertation are its complexity, unpredictability, and schizophrenic irrationality; it had a power and privilege to disrupt coherent grand narratives, despite the regime’s notoriously strict control over cinema and despite the fact that dubbed foreign film was firmly within the official system and narrative.

In short, dubbed foreign films were a presence that was asynchronous (to use a term in film dubbing) to our familiar narratives of PRC cultural history. The annual repertoire of foreign films related to, but was very much out of synch with, domestic politics and film production. Much as the authority wished to regulate the themes and genres of foreign films, they nevertheless had to compromise in the face of pragmatic concerns such as diplomatic
relationships and the demands of the exhibition enterprise. The audiovisual chimera that was the
dubbed foreign film was the result of even greater compromise, for dubbing is a form of 3D
translation – in the attempt to synch and reconcile among the foreign dialogue, the foreign face
and body, the Chinese language, and the Chinese voice, all four were distorted and torn. The
foreign face, body, and milieu, socialist or capitalist, acquired a degree of immediacy and
Chinese identity. The Chinese language and voice, bent by the imperative to adhere to the foreign
lips and body, departed in unobtrusive yet substantial ways from the linguistic and vocal norms
of the times. Burdened by the many restraints, the translated dialogues could hardly serve as
mouthpiece of the Party or the zeitgeist as in domestic films, yet they frequently were, or were
compelled to be, traitors to the foreign as well. Finally, the foreign film annual repertoire and the
dubbing voice were also out of synch. From the seventeen year period through Cultural
Revolution to Reform and Opening-up, the repertoire changed dramatically, while the
development of dubbing techniques and mannerisms took its own course and evolved at its own
pace.

The above confusion and asynchrony was not disturbing to the Chinese audience; they
naturally constructed a meaningful (though not necessarily coherent) world-view with what was
available, just as audiences elsewhere were conditioned to make sense of dubbed foreign films or
films in general. This constructed world-view\(^7\) was largely beyond official control, yet it was
impossible to know for certain what it was. It is safe to speculate that dubbed foreign films
promoted multiple layers of belief: foreigners (cinematic or real-life) became both less and more
exotic, and the Chinese audience felt themselves both in and out of synch with the world.

\(^7\) Or world-views.
Structure of this Dissertation

As this dissertation puts the subject of Chinese dubbed foreign films on the map, so it maps three interrelated areas within the field. First, a history of the import, exhibition, and reception of dubbed foreign films that interacts with a background of international and domestic politics as well as cultural transformations. Second, examination of foreign film dubbing as an art form, addressing the issues of translation and sound-image relation both from an aesthetic, theoretical point of view and as they pertain to the Chinese context. Third, close readings of representative dubbed foreign films that investigate their provenance, textual meanings and changes, as well as propaganda materials, reviews, and memoirs.

In Chapters One and Two, I look at the institutional and social history of dubbed foreign films from their precursors in the ROC period to their ultimate decline since mid-1980s. Part One of Chapter One traces how PRC’s foreign film import and dubbing drastically departed from ROC practices yet remained haunted by ROC heritage. For over forty years since 1949 PRC turned its back on revenue-sharing Hollywood blockbusters and charted a difficult path of exchanging and obtaining release rights of non-Hollywood features. Yet contrary to propaganda and popular belief, PRC’s film import and dubbing did not start from scratch: the vision of a dubbing industry that serves as a promoter of diplomatic relations, audiovisual education, and the national language was shared by ROC intellectuals as well; the latter’s criteria for edifying foreign films, best summarized by the concept of wenyi, was subconsciously inherited and cherished by CCP intellectuals for years to come. Part Two of Chapter One focuses on 17-year period film exhibition and argues that foreign films both served and failed to serve the conflicting imperatives of program supply, diplomacy, and propaganda. As a result of these conflicting functions - in addition to their “foreignness” - dubbed foreign films were sheltered
from much of the censorship and denunciation inflicted on domestic productions; at times they could even betray their propagandist purpose and constitute a legitimate space of mild dissent against mainstream aesthetics and ideology.

Chapter Two opens with an account of the concentrated yet divided Cultural Revolution foreign film experience. During these ten years, official import dramatically shrank to some forty features from the four countries that remained friendly to China. While Romanian and Albanian films became the “surrogate Europe” for an isolated Chinese audience, North Korean and Vietnamese films were reminiscent of 17-year period domestic productions – most of which were banned at the time. The scarcity and monotony of public releases was accompanied by unprecedented flourishing of “internal reference films,” which a number of scholars have referenced in passing. While it is true that access to these films constituted elitist privilege or status symbol, historical documents in addition to a filmography that I compile suggest that the films’ reference value was not entirely a sham: the screening and critique of Japanese militarist films corresponded to China’s perceived defense crisis, and Jiang Qing did (ironically) hold up classical Hollywood and contemporary films from Western countries as models for her filmmakers to emulate. Nevertheless for the intended and unintended audiences during and after the Cultural Revolution, the “references” that they drew from these films proved very different than those mentioned above. The 5-10 years after the end of the Cultural Revolution is known as “the golden age of dubbed foreign films” when the mass audience’s craze for these films reached an apex; the decline afterwards continued till this day. My account of this period is much less detailed compared to the previous periods for two reasons: first, the basic, known facts have been very well laid out in Chinese scholar Li Jing’s dissertation; second, at the moment (mid-2010s) available archival materials on 1980s and 1990s are not nearly as abundant as those on earlier
decades. My short account focuses on the reasons for the declining appeal of dubbed foreign films since mid-1980s: increased reform and opening-up, and more importantly, new technologies such as VHS and laserdisc, enabled people and institutions to smuggle, copy, and exhibit foreign films far beyond the official import canon. The latter was rendered contrived and insignificant by the undubbed, uncensored, and unlimited new world-view.

In Chapter Three I formulate a theory of dubbing (in the Chinese context) by bringing translation theories into film studies. I argue that despite the appearance of ventriloquism, dubbing is fundamentally analogous to Schleiermacherian literal translation in that dubbing requires bending the domestic voice to match the foreign lips and bodies. The Chinese dubbing practice, with its emphasis on synchrony or “matching voices,” produced “foreignizing” and “embodied” voices unique within the Chinese soundscape. The dubbing actors distinguished themselves from mainstream voices by focusing on the body instead of articulated messages and emotions; their voices were rare instances of geno-voices amid the chorus of pheno-voices during the Maoist and post-Mao years. In the second half of the chapter, I examine ethical issues in the representation of the Others in the context of Chinese dubbed foreign films and translation in general. In China, foreign films were made to serve too many utilitarian functions, and sustained cultural exchange was but an impracticable ideal. With the vast majority of imported films coming from Europe, Japan, and later the US, and with the anachronism and sanitization that resulted from the Party’s censorship, the Chinese foreign film repertoire generated an exoticized and idealized image of the developed world, with undeniable implications on the audience’s imagination of the global cultural hierarchy.

Chapter Four consists of close readings of four (sets) of the dubbed foreign films that had made the greatest impact on the Chinese audience: *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918, Jane*
Eyre, Corazón Salvaje and Yesenia, and Proof of the Man. In terms of countries of origin these films are diverse and represent the Soviet bloc, Western Europe, the third world, and Japan. In terms of time period, the Lenin films aside, all three others were released in the late 1970s – the so-called “golden age of dubbed foreign films,” which explains their immense popularity. In my analyses of these latter three sets of films, I focus on the ways in which the Chinese translators, critics, and audience were insensitive and susceptible to the values of social injustice portrayed in the films. In other words I dissect these so-called humanistic classics to reveal their underside: though educational in various ways, they did not necessarily make the audience more humane. This single focus might seem tedious and didactic, yet when writing about these films I feel that it is impossible to disregard and bypass those previous blind spots any longer. As I said earlier, a film is worth several volumes of history and criticism, and my readings are by definition superficial and partial. I view this chapter as a first installment (that stands alongside Thomas Chen and Krista Van Fleit Hang’s articles) toward a fuller account of Chinese audience’s foreign film experience.

In the concluding chapter, I enumerate the issues that this dissertation has left unaddressed: films imported from Hong Kong, dubbed foreign TV drama, an analysis of the acoustic characteristics of the dubbing voice, and close readings of more Soviet bloc films. I also point out that my revisionist story is not representative of China’s vast rural areas, nor does it negate the familiar narrative of Maoist oppression. Lastly, I situate this dissertation not only in film studies and translation studies, but also in the broader topic of China’s interaction with the foreign, for it is here that this project derives its inherent significance.
Chapter One: Prehistory and the Seventeen Years

Part One: New China, “New” Foreign Films, or the Phantom of the Republican Era

**Earphone/Yiyifeng**

As in most other countries, the exhibition of foreign films in China in early 20th century was accompanied by narrators or subtitles. In 1939, the Grand Theater (Daguangming) and Nanjing Theater introduced *yiyifeng* (semi-transliteration of “earphone”) service purchasable at the screenings of Anglo-American films. The idea came from the director of Asian Motion Pictures Company who was inspired by simultaneous translation of verbal exchanges at the League of Nations meetings. *Yiyifeng* arose out of the gap and contradiction between Hollywood’s global hegemony and local “backwardness” - most Chinese filmgoers could not understand English, yet most films in Chinese theaters were from America. This gap was exploited for further commercial gains: *yiyifeng* was popular as subtitles did not appeal to viewers who were (semi-) illiterate or who thought reading subtitles affected viewing.

On the surface the function of *yiyifeng* was rather similar to that of *benshi* (Japanese silent and foreign film narrators) and their Chinese counterparts. What set *yiyifeng* apart was its “femininity” - its interpreters were all young females, almost the polar opposite of the predominantly male *benshi* workforce. The setup of *yiyifeng* was also symbolic of gender differences: while *benshi* lectured next to the screen, the female *yiyifeng* interpreter sat in a dark booth at the back of the theater and her voice reached the audience via headphones like intimate, subdued whispers. An advertisement for *yiyifeng* before its introduction at the Grand Theater

---

8 This chapter contains previously published material.
10 “Earphone” was originally transliterated as *yi’erfeng*夷耳風, which was amusingly apt in many ways. The Asian Motion Pictures Company decided to switch to the less offensive *yiyifeng*譯意風 within the same year.
11 Yang, Yun. “Yiyifeng.” *Xinmin* 11-12 (1940): 47.
reads: “once you place the earphones around your head, a kind of soft and clear (輕柔清晰) voice is delivered into your eardrums.”12 Another 1940 article described the interpreter’s voice as “sweet and tender” (婉囀嬌音).13 Interestingly, while the media was eager to feminize and commodify yiyifeng interpreters’ voice, the self-perception of the female interpreters was rather different: one interpreter remarked that a desirable yiyifeng voice should be “low and deep, agreeable, clear and forceful.” 14

Another difference between yiyifeng interpreters and lecture-type narrators was that while there were accounts of film narrations in various dialects, yiyifeng interpreters were required to deliver the translation in standard Mandarin (guoyu 國語; literally “the national language”). The Asian Motion Pictures Company’s publication mentioned that all of their yiyifeng interpreters had spent much time in Beiping and that yiyifeng would make a contribution in the “unification of language” movement.15 As we shall see, the company was not alone in its appreciation of the role of foreign film translation in nationalist causes.

A Romantic Adventure and A Common Soldier

In 1947 an essay in Drama World (戲世界) titled “American Films with Chinese dialogue - Domestic Films Threatened - Yiyifeng is Becoming Useless” announced the rumor that several Hollywood companies were planning to dub their exports into Mandarin.16 Towards the end of the year, a Mandarin-dubbed foreign film did appear - only the producer was not a Hollywood company but a Chinese man in Italy.

China’s very first dubbed foreign film was allegedly Mario Camerini’s 1940 drama *A Romantic Adventure* (*Una romantica avventura*). The circumstances of its dubbing could not have been more different than the CCP’s later enterprise. The project was initiated by Wang Wentao, an administrator at China’s Catholic Central Bureau’s branch in Rome. Wang chose the film himself, recruited twenty-some Chinese students in Italy, and after months of hard work brought the dubbed film to Shanghai. Contemporary Chinese sources claim that the dubbed version (titled *Yi Wu Nan Wang* 一舞難忘) was premiered on January 8, 1948 in the Grand Theater (the first movie theater to be established by a Chinese merchant), though according to *Shen Bao* the premier took place as early as October 1947.

Media responses to *Yi Wu Nan Wang*, mostly published around early 1948, were the best indication of public and intellectual attitude toward the concept of Chinese-dubbed foreign film during the late Republican era. The following four recurrent themes in media discussions were prophetic of later CCP rhetoric on the functions of dubbed foreign films. First, dubbing was seen as a counterweight to Hollywood’s dominance in China’s film market - though unlike CCP’s intention of driving out Anglophone films by promoting Chinese-dubbed Soviet films, the ROC intellectuals’ logic was that Chinese films can now be dubbed into English and earn export dollars. Second, dubbing was seen as a contributor to diplomatic relationship and cultural exchange between China and other nations – *Shen Bao* reported that the commercial attaché at the Italian consulate attended *Yi Wu Nan Wang*’s October 1947 premier and felt honored that “an

---

17 Most contemporary Chinese sources have not identified the original title of this film.
Italian film was chosen by China to be dubbed.”

Third, dubbed films were expected to play a crucial role in educating the masses - one Shen Bao article recommended “dubbing large numbers of educational foreign films in Chinese to facilitate the development of our audiovisual education (電化教育, one of the popular concepts of the Republican era).”

What could dubbed foreign films teach the Chinese audience? Ethics and knowledge of foreign cultures, of course, but more importantly - which leads to the fourth theme - the dubbed soundtrack was seen as a bearer of the national language (國語).

One article remarks, “adding Mandarin (國語) dialogue to foreign films will greatly facilitate the promotion of standard Chinese. Because every time we make the audience listen to a Chinese-dubbed film, we are in fact helping them practice the national language.”

Another author who was apparently not impressed with the dubbed version of Yi Wu Nan Wang commented, “the Mandarin (國語) spoken by the actors doing the dubbing was not very accurate, which was the biggest regret.”

Whether their concern was with the market, diplomacy, education, or language, most of these intellectuals agree on one point: they would like to see more Chinese-dubbed foreign films in the future. One author looks forward to a special organization for Chinese dubbing (國語對白的專業組織), with both professional dubbing actors and occasional recruits from domestic film stars. Little would he have suspected that this was all to come true within the next two years - though under a different regime within a drastically changed political and cultural environment.

---

23 One Shen Bao article quotes Wang Wentao commenting that “China’s imported films were mostly erotic; those few that were educational often could not be understood by the Chinese.” See “Wang Wentao Faming Guoyu Peiyin Yingpian.” Shen Bao [Shanghai] 15 Oct. 1947: 6.
24 This ROC term literally means “national language,” unlike later CCP terminology which refers to the national language as 普通話 (common speech).
That China’s first dubbed foreign film should come from Italy was no mere coincidence: Italy had and still has one of the world’s major dubbing industries. But the eventual systematic establishment of foreign film dubbing studios in China sprang from the Mandarin spoken by the actors doing the dubbing the PRC’s connection with another major dubbing country - the Soviet Union.

The official narrative goes that the PRC’s foreign film dubbing industry began with Yuan Naichen’s attempt to dub *Private Aleksandr Matrosov* (the Chinese title means “A Common Soldier”). Yuan, who had been a propagandist with the Eighth Route Army and later an actor and director at the Northeast Film Studio, was assigned to negotiate with Sovexportfilm representatives for the copyright to dub Chinese dialogues onto Soviet films. The Soviet representative agreed on condition that Yuan could dub *Private Aleksandr Matrosov* to his satisfaction. Without adequate experience, personnel, or equipment, Yuan’s team started from scratch and succeeded against all odds.  

This founding myth, retold time and again by scholars and the media, obscures important truths that lay at the foundation of PRC’s foreign film dubbing industry. It emphasizes the haphazard trial (one man, one film) at the expense of purposeful visions by ROC intellectuals (mentioned above) and CCP filmmakers (e.g. Yuan Muzhi’s 1947 “seven-genre production” plan). More importantly, by portraying CCP’s first dubbing endeavor as “starting from scratch,” it masks the myriad ways in which PRC’s foreign film dubbing enterprise was indebted to ROC heritage as well as foreign assistance. As with domestic filmmaking, since the early 1950s PRC

---

had sought a clean break from the ROC way of foreign film import and exhibition. What follows shows that their break and transformation was dramatic yet by no means complete.

**Revenue-Sharing or Release Rights**

The expulsion of American films from China shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War has been well-documented and analyzed by Zhiwei Xiao and a number of scholars in China. Xiao notes that the CCP’s handling of U.S. film interests between 1949 and 1950 was “cautious, pragmatic, and moderate” in contrast to its later “dogmatic ideology and belligerent rhetoric.”

What is less known is that during the 17-year period China was far from unwilling to import American films. According to Su Liying, section chief in charge of Euro-American films at the Department of Import and Export of the China Film Company, the absence of American films in China was not due to ideological incompatibility but issues of release rights. In 1957 she wrote to the MPAA asking if China could purchase release rights of American movies on a five-year basis. The MPAA president was willing to export films to China, though he pointed out that in film export the U.S. never sold release rights but always employed agents. The Chinese side was alarmed at the idea – in Su’s words, foreign “agents” sounded like a question of sovereignty - and gave up the negotiation.

---

29 The Motion Picture Association of America. Su’s story of her own experience is probably not apocryphal, yet she misnames the then president of the MPAA. She says she wrote to (Jack) Valenti, who did not become president till 1966. It should have been Eric Johnston.
30 Bian, Jing, ed. *Zhongguo dianying ren koushu lishi congshu - ying ye chun qiu: shiye juan* (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2011), 208. Su also claims that the company later bought two American films from an independent distributor in Mexico. The two films were *Espaldas mojadas* and *Las abandonadas*, but they were Mexican films (though both were also released in the US). The only American film imported and released by the CCP during the 17-year period was *Salt of the Earth* on miner strike in New Mexico. The film was blacklisted in the US but won awards at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.
In 1954 when Premier Zhou Enlai attended the Geneva conference he instructed Yang Shaoren (then manager of the China Film Company) to import “excellent films such as *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator.*” When foreign distributors demanded revenue sharing Yang stood his ground and insisted on purchasing release rights. Zhou Enlai supported his stance. Yang’s biographer praised him for “gaining the initiative in film management and protecting China’s economic interests.”

To obtain release rights instead of allowing foreign agents and revenue sharing was a key feature of PRC’s film import up until 1994. Though the early 1950s was an exception – American films were still shown in 1950, and from 1950 to 1954, it could be said that the Soviet Union took over America’s domination over China’s foreign film market, only with more extensive reach and more government collaboration. The Sovexportfilm had offices in each of China’s major regions and exerted some control over the exhibition of Soviet films. Su Liying recalls that when she worked in Xi’an the local Sovexportfilm representative would question her when Soviet films were unfavorably scheduled or had low attendance. The company was concerned not only with the spread of Soviet Union’s advanced ideology, but also reaped fifty percent of the net earnings of its exports’ exhibition in China till 1955. According to Thomas Chen’s reading of the China Film Company’s catalogue, only starting from 1956 were there Soviet films that were imported but not selected for public exhibition. Sovexportfilm did not

---

close its China offices till 1960, and China started to denounce “socialist imperialism” only after Soviet interventionist power withdrew from China.

By the mid-1950s a new Sino-Soviet film exchange agreement was reached, with which China would purchase licenses for films and retain all future profit. For the next forty years this would be the chief method with which China imported and exhibited its foreign films. With this system, China seemed to have gained a level of control over its foreign films that almost matched that of domestic films: China had the power to select titles, schedule screenings, and release, ban, or re-release whenever it saw suited – we will see later in this chapter how this power was curbed by various circumstances.

By switching to the release-rights system, the CCP was compelled to chart a new path in foreign film import and exhibition: new contacts (gone were the “big eight” Hollywood companies), new audiences (expanding the exhibition network from major cities to rural areas), and new kinds of films – the near-monopoly of Hollywood also guaranteed box-office; the reception of films from socialist countries proved far more precarious.

**Hard Times and Solutions**

According to several former officials at the China Film Company, import and export were both difficult during the seventeen years. China’s film exchange with Soviet bloc countries mostly involved non-cash transactions. Every year a contract was negotiated or renewed as to the price ratio of films: with the Soviet Union the ratio was usually in China’s

37 Ibid., 206.
38 Based on each country’s population, economy, film production etc.
favor, and with Eastern European countries it was the other way around. An idea of the price ratio between Chinese and Eastern European films can be gathered from a 1979 contract, which adjusted the Sino-Romanian film price ratio from 1:10 to 1:6, \(^{39}\) “to a level approximate to that before 1966.”\(^{40}\) Throughout the period Chinese officials were content with such unequal exchange, because “in order to export Chinese films what counted was political calculations, not economic calculations.”\(^{41}\)

Films from Western countries were a different story. Former officials at the China Film Company claim that they imported European films mainly via embassies. Though China had not established ambassadorial level diplomatic relations with most major European countries during the 17-year period,\(^{42}\) countries such as the UK maintained an office of the chargé d'affaires in China.\(^{43}\) To purchase films, the China Film Company personnel would first obtain a catalogue from the embassy/office, select “plausible” titles, and then request information on these films in case e.g. members of the cast were anti-PRC.\(^{44}\) Subsequently the company would request film copies for test screenings i.e. approval by CCP officials. At this point most of the films were approved, for rejecting too many films would be a breach of trust and could hurt future business, plus minor cuts could always be made when the film was purchased. During the 17-year period, the budget for purchasing foreign films was typically small: around 100-200,000 USD, with each

---

\(^{39}\) Fixed in 1977: a Chinese feature was 5,500 Swiss francs for Romania and a Romanian feature was 55,000 for China. A Chinese feature was 5,000 Swiss francs for Romania and a Romanian feature was 30,000 for China.

\(^{40}\) “Jiedai luomaniya dianying faxing daibiaotuan jianbao.” B177-4-754, P41, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

\(^{41}\) Bian, Jing, ed. Zhongguo dianying ren koushu lishi congshu - ying ye chun qiu: shiye juan (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2011), 211.

\(^{42}\) Before 1964 China only established diplomatic relations with Denmark, Finland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland among “capitalist” European countries. Most of these countries exported one film to China during the 17-year period.

\(^{43}\) Aside from purchasing from embassies, it is also known that the Soviet Union supplied the PRC with films from countries that it had no relations with (Liang).

\(^{44}\) Bian, Jing, ed. Zhongguo dianying ren koushu lishi congshu - ying ye chun qiu: shiye juan (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2011), 207.
film not exceeding 5,000 USD and exceptionally good ones not exceeding 10,000 USD. The small budget was shared among films from all the non-socialist countries: the UK, France, Italy, and Mexico took up larger shares of the quota; countries such as India and Indonesia were allotted one film a year at the most. That as many as 20 films were imported from Japan during the 17-year period was a result of the China Film Company’s persistent maneuvering, starting with independent producers and distributors, some of whom had connections with the Japanese Communist Party.\(^{45}\)

Foreign film purchase after the Cultural Revolution often relied on long-term partnership with specific companies. Throughout the 1970s and early 80s, UK’s EMI Films would voluntarily send China film copies for test screening and sell them at a relatively low price. Despite the high shipping cost, high rejection rate, and pressure from US companies, EMI Films continued to export to China “at a loss” in the hope of expanding their Chinese business in the future.\(^{46}\) EMI’s exports to China included Convoy – the first “American” film shown after the Cultural Revolution, several Agatha Christie adaptations, as well as a number of Cultural Revolution “internal reference films” such as Jane Eyre, The Dove, and The Railway Children.

One might scorn this repertoire of these release rights films for being quaint and cheap, as cultural refuse recycled from the West, and as further evidence that China was spatially closed off and temporally lagging behind. This was true, but the value of a film does not solely consist in its price tag or its up-to-dateness; it also depends on how an audience under specific historical

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 193. Among the five Japanese films shown at the 1956 Japanese film festival, only Twenty-Four Eyes was produced by a major (“capitalist”) studio. The Shanghai cultural bureau affirmed that the story of Twenty-Four Eyes was “positive on the whole.” The bureau instructed Shanghai theaters “not to refrain from welcoming and recommending the film” in order to encourage major Japanese film studios to produce more positive films (See “Shanghaishi wenhuaju guanyu shanghaishi ‘riben dianying zhout’ yingchu xuanchuan jihua.” B59-2-91-135, Shanghai Municipal Archives).

\(^{46}\) “Jiedai yingguo aimi dianying gongsi jingli meidahua qingkuang jianbao.” B177-4-840, P19, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
and social circumstances interacts with it. To audience of the Maoist and post-Mao eras these release rights films meant as much, if not more, than what revenue-sharing Hollywood blockbusters mean to the contemporary Chinese audience.

The Choice of Films: Wenyi and Republican Era Heritage

Around 80% of the films imported during the 17-year period were from the Soviet bloc. On the one hand it was in the China Film Company’s vested interest to import chiefly through socialist countries where currency transactions were not involved. On the other hand China’s cultural exchange with Western countries was minimal at the time. Films from non-socialist countries also required a second round of censorship by a higher committee, whereas films from socialist countries could be approved by the China Film Company after an initial screening. One wonders why PRC bothered to import any films from the West at all – for justifications one could argue that they helped to diversify the program and generate revenue; plus the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries were all showing films from the West. But I would argue that (at least some) CCP officials/intellectuals held a genuine regard for certain types of foreign films – a regard that was a heritage from the Republican period and that continued to influence the CCP’s choice of foreign film imports up until 1980s. The CCP officials and Republican era intellectuals (quoted earlier) were united in their view that imported films should be educational for the masses - the polar opposite of the stereotypical Hollywood entertainment genres. No doubt the more prominent component of the CCP’s filmic education program consisted of socialist revolution and construction, but the less ideologically-charged films, mostly from the

47 The continuity between PRC and ROC filmmaking in terms of their imagination of the West has been noted in Pickowicz’s article “The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930s.”
48 Comprised of officials from the Ministry of Culture, Committee for Foreign Cultural Relations, Publicity Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs etc.
West and some from the Soviet bloc, represented a remnant of Republican intellectuals’ taste for *wenyi* films, for which many CCP officials/intellectuals always had a soft spot.

Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh has attempted a short history of Republican era *wenyi*, where she points out that *wenyi*, whose original core meaning was translated foreign literature, “became the principle and standard in literary productions and tastes, modeled as an index to the country’s progress toward modern, international stature.”

She also quotes Cai Guorong who defines *wenyi* films as “movies with thoughtful themes and the ability to strike a chord with the audience” as well as those that “express perennial human emotion and the sentiments of the time.”

Along with Soviet influences, the Republican era veneration of *wenyi* had predisposed CCP intellectuals to accept non-Hollywood foreign films that seemed to conform to the *wenyi* standard. The malleable definition of *wenyi* also meant that film imports could easily drift across the thin line from edifying to counterrevolutionary or revisionist, and vice versa, depending on the political circumstances at the time. For instance, after a period of relatively liberal cultural policy in the early 1960s, Mao’s 1963 critique that the Ministry of Culture had become the ministry of scholars and beauties and dead foreigners, indicated that foreign *wenyi* (stereotyped as literary adaptations), along with classical Chinese genres, were the new targets of Mao’s revolution when contemporary entertainment films were long since out of the way.

What kinds of films were likely to fit CCP’s definition of *wenyi*? The most obvious candidate was literary adaptations. Former China Film Company officials recall that among films from Western countries imported during the 17-year period, literary adaptations were the most

---

49 Literally “arts and letters.” Not to be confused with Yan’an style *wenyi*; or one could say both kinds of *wenyi*, the “bourgeois” as well as the Maoist type, coexisted on PRC’s screens.


51 Ibid., 229.
numerous for they were the “safest” – the “safety” of literary adaptations should not be taken for granted; rather it was a sure sign of CCP’s recognition of wenyi’s aura. Biopics were also popular with CCP officials: as late as 1997, the then Politburo Standing Committee member Li Lanqing ordered A Song to Remember (1945) and Madame Curie (1943) to be dubbed and shown to Chinese youths as examples of excellent wenyi films. Wenyi also seemed to connote “classic”: not only was the CCP eager to import films that recently won awards (as far as they were acceptable and affordable), it also did not hesitate to revive “ancient” classics such as those by Chaplin and Hitchcock.

As we contemplate wenyi as a crucial criteria when the CCP selected films from the West, three questions arose. First, to what extent did they have a choice? From previous discussion it is apparent that the China Film Company had access only to a very limited selection of titles and lacked adequate funding. That many of the imported titles seemed random or even ludicrous (e.g. Sam Peckinpah’s Convoy as the first American film exhibited after the Cultural Revolution) was no surprise. Second, where did the CCP draw the boundary between wenyi and entertainment? Most films from the West can be viewed as edifying or exposé of the social ills of capitalist societies in some way, though they may not have been received by the Chinese audience as such. For example, following the success of the dubbed Death on the Nile, Chinese representatives told the manager of UK’s EMI Films that they expected to purchase more films like Death on the Nile with “healthy content, beautiful cinematography, engaging plot, and

53 At a film symposium in Shanghai in 1963, Yuan Wenshu also affirmed that “literary classic adaptations were fine; the rest (of recent Soviet films) were getting worse and worse” (See “Yuan Wenshu tongzhi zai Shanghai dianying zuotan hui shang de baogao.” B177-1-284-1, Shanghai Municipal Archives).
55 When China resumed exhibition of American films in late 1970s, a dozen Chaplin films were selected.
superb performance.”56 Murder on the Oriental Express (TV release) and Evil under the Sun followed – the audience was “edified” by the detective genre, and the film companies profited. Third, if wenyi was more often a pretext for film exhibition rather than a guideline for film selection, how did CCP officials choose titles aside from literary adaptations, biopics, award-winners, and continuity in actors or directors? A lot of the times the choices must have been haphazard and expedient; in some cases, the CCP selected not just films that embodied the ideal of Republican era wenyi but films actually made during 1930s and 40s. Economy was a consideration; nostalgia also played a role – nostalgic not because they looked up to the Republican era as a golden age but because their knowledge of the West had not been updated much since then.

By 1989, Bathing Beauty was re-released in China. This 1944 Hollywood musical was a huge hit in 1948 Shanghai and became the quintessential “obscene film” in CCP’s diatribe against Hollywood.57 During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing ordered it dubbed as a so-called “internal reference film.” When this Hollywood classic captivated the Chinese audience once more forty years after 1949, one is tempted to say that history had come full circle. But no, and it was not even a parabola; the curious montage of the ancient phantoms on a tired and interesting age carried something that was more than a simple return, rebirth, or a release. The phantom of Bathing Beauty could not die until China re-synched with Hollywood in 1994 – both were so changed.

56 B177-4-840, P19, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
57 E.g. in the play Sentinel under the Neon Lights, a poster of Bathing Beauty was juxtaposed with that of The White Haired Girl.
Part Two: Beyond the Ideology Principle: 1949-66

Introduction

“Can the totality of foreign films that were imported into China be reduced to ‘an important tool’ for propagating communist thought?” This question is raised in Thomas Chen’s article on the Chinese-dubbed Bicycle Thieves in response to a 1950s slogan.⁵⁸ He answers the question in the negative by comparing the voices in dubbed foreign films to Deleuzian minor literature, but still stresses that even the importation of “capitalist” country films did not indicate any ideological relaxation, as they also underwent Soviet recommendation, censorship, and propagandist packaging.⁵⁹ Such confidence in CCP’s ideological control echoes the writings of Tina Mai Chen, an earlier pioneer in the study of Chinese dubbed foreign films, who argues that Soviet film in 1950s China produced and mediated an “everyday internationalism” that emphasized friendly cooperation, mutual struggle and future prosperity.⁶⁰

There are some truths in both authors’ claims, but their heavy reliance on propagandist sources such as People’s Daily and Popular Cinema leaves little room for the other side of the story. The purpose of this section is not to dismiss the efficacy of propaganda, but to recognize its limits on the levels of both officials and the audience. To do this it is necessary to think outside the box: much as translated film is an orphan in the study of Chinese cinema (to borrow Thomas Chen’s metaphor), they should not be studied in isolation but in comparison with domestic features for their uniqueness to be revealed. Unlike domestic films whose production and censorship were swayed by the ideological pendulum of the time through endless campaigns

---

⁵⁹ Ibid., 101.
and conferences, the fortunes of dubbed foreign films followed a rather different trajectory. The reason for this difference was that even according to official sources, propagation of communist ideology was never the only or the most important aim of dubbed foreign films. From the very beginning of their production and exhibition in the PRC, dubbed foreign films were dedicated to three functions: to supplement domestic productions, to educate the people, and to betoken diplomatic friendships. These three functions were sometimes interlinked but throughout the seventeen-year period they were often in the process of conflicting and competing for priority. As a result of these conflicting functions - in addition to their “foreignness” - dubbed foreign films were sheltered from much of the censorship and denunciation inflicted on domestic productions; at times they could even betray their propagandist purpose and constitute a legitimate space of mild dissent against mainstream aesthetics and ideology. Moreover, we observe from contemporary reports as well as audience memoirs that even the most propagandist foreign films could have failed their ideologues and become “misunderstood” by the mass audience.

**The Show Must Go On**

It has been widely noted that during the seventeen-year period the CCP viewed and used film as one of the most important tools of propaganda and education.\(^{61}\) The CCP also sought and took pride in the growths in film production and exhibition, as it did with other industries. Ironically, the serious attention that the CCP placed on the film media resulted in a constant dearth of films available for screening. Hollywood films were driven out shortly after the

---

outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, and private film companies were completely incorporated into state-run studios in early 1953. The annual production of features from state-run studios stayed low amid volatile political environment and severe censorship: the output of mainland studios during the seventeen-year period was one seventh of Hong Kong’s output during the same period.

Films imported from the Soviet bloc resolved these issues and became the perfect supplement for a weak PRC film industry. When Lu Dingyi published an article titled “Welcome, Soviet Films” in People’s Daily in late October 1949, arguing that “Chinese-dubbed Soviet films should become one of our film industry’s top priorities,” he was forthright about the urgent need to maintain a sufficient film supply. Later on, CCP propaganda tended to emphasize foreign films’ functions as political textbooks and tokens of diplomatic relationship, but in view of the weak domestic film industry, imported films served as indispensable fillers throughout most of the seventeen-year period. From Fig. 1.1 comparing the annual figures of domestic and foreign features released from 1949 to 1963, it is evident that without dubbed foreign films (not to mention the revenue they brought), the PRC’s film exhibition industry would simply have collapsed. Indeed, with Chinese-dubbed foreign films filling up and diversifying theater programs, boosting production and exhibition figures, the scarcity and often-formulaic quality of domestic films seemed less disturbing. To put it another way, the prominent presence and contribution of foreign films in a sense allowed domestic films to be

---

63 Qi, Zhi, Mao Zedong shidai de renmin dianying (1949-1966), (Taipei: Xiuwei Zixun Keji Chubanshe, 2010), 526.
64 Head of the CCP Central Propaganda Department.
66 PRC’s film industry reports at the time always included dubbed/subtitled foreign film figures along with those of domestic features, animation, newsreel, and science education films.
few, constrained and heavily censored.\footnote{Even during the Cultural Revolution period, foreign films still made up half of the number of films publicly exhibited (Clark 2012, 53). During the post-Mao era, soon after the re-release of some seventeen-year period domestic productions had run its course, the audience’s enthusiasm for domestic films waned. Again it was foreign films that came to the rescue: for decades they were an important source of revenue that nourished China’s film industry. In 1987, 108 of the 142 domestic releases suffered financial loss, yet the 48 foreign films (together with 3 Hong Kong films) enabled the distribution sector to make a profit of 760 million RMB (Li 2010, 102-3).}

![Fig. 1.1: Domestic vs. Foreign Release, 1949-63\footnote{Source: Yingpian (changpian jiemu) pianming paici biao [Feature Length Film Title List]. 1963. Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Faxing Fangying Gongs.}](image)

Yet the cooption of foreign films was not problem-free. Though the CCP could choose (to some extent) which foreign films to import and release, it could not control what foreign films there were. As progressive films from “capitalist” or third world countries were few, it was not surprising that 77\% of the PRC’s feature import during the seventeen-year period derived from the Eastern bloc.\footnote{Statistic from Yingpian. Here for Eastern bloc I do not include the six Yugoslav films imported around 1956-7.} But the fact that a film was (recently) made in an Eastern bloc country was no guarantee that it would be fully congruous with the current political environment within the PRC. Foreign filmmakers were not aware of, and certainly not trying to conform to, the
dictates of the PRC’s domestic politics. An obvious example was that despite the changes that took place in Soviet and Eastern European filmmaking after 1956 (the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party and the denunciation of Stalinism), the PRC’s imports from these countries saw no significant decrease till 1963-4. The filmmaking environments in the Eastern bloc countries in general were also arguably less constrained than in the PRC. This gap was reflected in the cold reception that PRC films received in the Soviet Union and Poland despite enormous publicity. College students in the Soviet Union compared Chinese films to newspaper editorials; Soviet filmmakers complained that PRC films were overly political and formulaic, overwhelmed by wordy dialogues and speeches while lacking in “real life” and characterization.\(^70\) The Chinese audience was also aware of the difference between foreign and domestic films. Though before 1953 domestic films (which included private studio productions) were more popular than Soviet films, after 1954 Soviet films became decidedly more popular than domestic ones.\(^71\) In a word, practically speaking, there were only so many films in the world that might conform to the CCP’s rigid ideological standard during the seventeen-year period, and it is doubtful if even half of the 857 films imported during this period\(^72\) were truly up to the mark.

Why, then, were these sometimes “unorthodox” foreign films tolerated by the CCP, while their domestic counterparts were censored and criticized since as early as 1951? Apart from diplomatic reasons, on which I will elaborate in the next section, the most obvious explanation was that compared to domestic films, foreign films had less direct bearing on domestic politics and less potential to seem critical towards the current regime; it was also not easy to eloquently

\(^70\) Qi, Zhi, *Mao Zedong shidai de renmin dianying* (1949-1966), (Taipei: Xiuwei Zixun Keji Chubanshe, 2010), 203. A popular joke among Soviet cinephiles claimed that “films can be good, bad, and Chinese.” This quip most likely emerged from the seventeen-year period, considering the duration of the Sino-Soviet split (Razlogova 2014, 164).


\(^72\) Statistic from Li 2010.
critique foreign films as if they were domestic ones, as it required knowledge of the history, society, and culture of foreign countries that was beyond the propagandists’ horizon.\footnote{The propagandists’ disinclination and inability to critique foreign films is evidenced in a 1968 document titled \textit{Four Hundred Poisonous Weeds and Films with Serious Mistakes}, a critique of seventeen-year period domestic and foreign films partly based on Jiang Qing’s speech. Only the last one hundred of the four hundred are foreign films (while imported films outnumbered domestic production in the seventeen-year period), and on average the critique on each foreign film is significantly shorter and less eloquent than that on a domestic film.} Lastly, there was another caution against critiquing imported films: since film imports had to be approved by CCP cadres, questioning the ideological correctness of imported films meant challenging the judgment of CCP cadres’.

The following case, cited by Chinese scholar Liu Dishan, wonderfully illustrates the privilege enjoyed by foreign films in the 1950s: when the Soviet film \textit{Guilty without Guilt}\footnote{The film was adapted from Alexander Ostrovsky’s play \textit{Guilty without Guilt} (без вины виноватые). The play had seen several Chinese adaptations, including the 1933 film \textit{Mother and Son} (母與子, dir. Tang Jie) and a 1952 Shanghai opera \textit{Guilty without Guilt} (無罪的人). Unfortunately the regulation and censorship over local opera is beyond the scope of my project.} was screened in 1952, the Southeastern Military and Political Committee Taxation Bureau classified it as “negative” and did not grant it a tax reduction (reserved for progressive films). The bureau chief was disciplined for this “grave misjudgment,” and the \textit{People’s Daily} supported this disciplinary action, stating: “This film forcefully exposed the hideousness and decadence of the Old Russian aristocrat and bourgeois class and depicted the noble image of the humiliated and insulted Russian people seeking truth and justice… how ridiculous it was (to classify it as negative)!”\footnote{Liu, Dishan. 2011. “Shiqinian shiqi sulian dianying fangying shilu.” \textit{Beijing Dianying Xueyuan Xuebao} 3: 30.} Had this actress-finds-long-lost-illegitimate-son film been a domestic production, it probably would not even have passed the pre-release censorship, for only three domestic films were released in 1952 – by contrast, the number of dubbed Soviet films released that year was twenty-six.\footnote{\textit{Yingpian (changpian jiemu) piaoming paici biao}. 1963. Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Faxing Fangying Gongsi.} The momentum of film imports continued; so did their relative freedom and privilege,
especially if they came from socialist countries. In Beijing, Soviet adaptation of *Twelfth Night* had 1,638 showings and an audience of 1,105,000; huge posters of *The Idiot* (an adaptation of the Dostoyevsky novel) were installed on the east and west sides of Tiananmen Square.\(^7\) It was not until 1956 that China started to withhold certain imported Soviet films from public release i.e. limit them to internal, small-scale exhibition.\(^8\) It was not until 1959 that Soviet thaw era classics started to taste CCP’s public censure: *Destiny of a Man* was halfway taken off the program of “Soviet Film Week” and subsequently critiqued in the media.\(^9\) The conflict between the quantity needed and “quality” available of foreign films finally surfaced in 1962, when Chen Huangmei, head of the central film bureau, acknowledged the film industry’s dilemma in a speech:

> We fixed the release figure (for next year) at 70. Based on the situation in our country we need 120 titles each year. Domestic production is insufficient: 30-35 domestic features a year, 8-10 joint productions; it would have been fortunate if a quarter of these domestic films were of good quality… But it is hard to select [foreign] films amid the Revisionist countercurrent; with the emphasis on so-called modernity they cannot avoid the issue of personal happiness. It is questionable whether we can reach the number [of foreign films necessary for the

---

\(^7\) *Beijingshi dianying faxing fangying danwei shi*, (Beijing: Beijingshi Wenhuaju and Beijingshi Dianying Gongsi, 1995), 58.


\(^9\) The novel was translated and published in 1957, and its *lianhuanhua* (picture-story book) version had a print run of nearly 200,000. At the film week it achieved an occupancy rate of 85.4%; with some theaters the figure was 100%. See “Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe guanyu ‘yigeren de zaoyu’ lianhuanhuace chuban qingkuang de baogao.” A-22-2-749, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
exhibition industry] (we selected 18-22 Soviet films this year); it is even less likely that their quality can meet our standard.\textsuperscript{80}

Chen Huangmei’s worry was not unfounded. Despite the CCP leaders’ wish to promote ideologically correct films about life in the PRC and to reduce the proportion of films from “capitalist” countries and the Eastern bloc, the reality facing the exhibition business on the ground dictated otherwise. The exhibition schedules of Shanghai’s first, second and third-run theaters in January 1963 (Fig. 1.2-1.4) show that foreign films still occupied around 40\% of the total exhibition time.

Fig. 1.2: \textit{Shanghai shoulun yingyuan yijiuliusan nian yiyue yingqibiao} [Exhibition Schedule of First-run Theaters in Shanghai, January 1963].\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Chen, Huangmei, “Tan zhiyuan nongye, gangpian, kejiaopian, waiguopian wenti.” B177-1-21-172, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

\textsuperscript{81} Foreign films are highlighted in these figures.
Fig. 1.3: *Shanghai erlun yingyuan yijiuliusan nian yiyue yingqibiao* [Exhibition Schedule of Second-run Theaters in Shanghai, January 1963].
Fig. 1.4: *Shanghai sanlun yingyuan yijiuliusan nian yiyou yingqibiao* [Exhibition Schedule of Third-run Theaters in Shanghai, January 1963].

82 Note: The titles of these foreign films available to Shanghai audiences in January 1963 were as follows (titles with an * were subtitled instead of dubbed):

- 小島奇聞 (Denmark) [Guld og grønne skove; The Girls Are Willing] 1958*
- 媽媽你不要哭 (France) [La verte moisson; Green Harvest] 1959
- 馬門教授 (East Germany) [Professor Mamlock; Professor Mamlock] 1961
- 帶閣樓的房子 (Soviet Union) [Dom s mezoninom; The House with an Attic] 1961
- 烽火的里程 (Soviet Union) [Огненные версты; Miles of Fire] 1957
- 生的權利 (Mexico) [El derecho de nacer; The Right to be Born] 1952
- 鬼魂西行 (UK) [The Ghost Goes West] 1935
- 五天五夜 (Soviet Union + East Germany) [Пять дней, пять ночей; Fünf Tage - Fünf Nächte; Five Days, Five Nights] 1961
- 美麗的盧萊特 (East Germany) [Die schöne Lurette] 1960*
- 大牆後面 (Argentina) [Detrás de un largo muro; Behind the Big Wall] 1958
- 前面是急轉彎 (Soviet Union) [Впереди - кругой поворот; Ahead – a sharp turn] 1960
- 海軍上將烏沙科夫 (Soviet Union) [Адмирал Ушаков; Admiral Ushakov] 1953
- 一僕二主 (Soviet Union) [Слуга двух господ; Servant of Two Masters] 1953
- 柏林情話 (East Germany) [Eine Berliner Romanze; A Berlin Romance] 1956
- 鹽的奇跡 (Colombia) [El milagro de sal; The Miracle of Salt] 1958
- 根據法律 (Finland) [Lain mukaan; According to the Law] 1956
- 縮影 (Japan) [縮図; Epitome] 1953
- 瀑布 (Bolivia) [La vertiente; The Source] 1958
- 上尉的女兒 (Soviet Union) [Капитанская дочка; The Captain’s Daughter] 1958
- 阿爾及利亞的姑娘 (Egypt) [Jamila, the Algerian] 1958
- 神童 (West Germany) [Wir Wunderkinder; Aren't We Wonderful?] 1958
If Shanghai’s theaters in early 1963 still devoted a fair share of their exhibition time to Eastern bloc and “capitalist” country films it was not mainly due to the open-mindedness of CCP officials; literally it was their only choice. The predicaments facing the Chinese film industry at the time were manifold: according to another speech by Chen Huangmei in January 1962, as China was experiencing an unprecedented shortage of film stock, theaters had to rely on old titles for 80% of total exhibition; film imports were cut by 20% but still the Ministry of Culture could only cover 2/3 of the foreign currency needed. Under such dire circumstances, CCP officials could hardly afford to be choosers and always adhere to the ideological principle – or indeed any principle. In 1962 hundreds of imported films whose lease term had expired were allowed to reenter the exhibition scene, on condition that they were only screened in small cities and suburbs, without advertisement, and without the presence of foreigners. The purpose of this rather secretive move was, of course, to ease the title shortage.

Even when film import finally plummeted in 1964, signaling an irreversible tightening of the ideological grip that led up to the Cultural Revolution, the Ministry of Culture and the China Film Company were still re-examining previously imported films and preparing them for

---

83 This was due to both the economic catastrophe and the Sino-Soviet Split.
84 Chen, Huangmei, “Zai shanghai dianyingju shengchan huiyi shang de jianghua.” B177-1-21, P088, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
85 During the seventeen-year period, the China Film Company typically imported foreign films by purchasing their release rights within the PRC for a five-year period.
86 This explains the appearance of films such as Anna Round the Neck on the exhibition schedule shown above. Released in the PRC in 1955, its lease term should have expired in 1960.
87 Shanghaishi Dianying Faxing Fangying Gongsi. 1962. “Guanyu hetong qiman yi tingzhi faxing de waiguo yingpian huiyi faxing de wenti.” B177-3-346, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
88 This was after Mao issued a directive in September 1963 saying that if the Ministry of Culture does not promote socialist art it should be renamed the Ministry of Kings and Generals, Scholars and Beauties, or Dead Foreigners.
future public release,\textsuperscript{89} believing that these films could be “disinfected” by adding opening title cards explaining their ideological limitations.\textsuperscript{90} I will discuss later whether audience reception could be so easily preconditioned.

\textbf{“There is No Trivial Issue in Diplomacy”}\textsuperscript{91}

I have shown in the previous section that under the imperative of maintaining the supply of film titles in the exhibition industry, CCP officials were compelled to import and exhibit films that did not meet their ideological standard. In this section I will reveal that the important part that foreign films played in fostering diplomatic friendships often further protected them from being edited, criticized and banned as domestic films often were during the seventeen-year period. To say that these film imports enjoyed a certain level of “extraterritoriality” might be an exaggeration, but it is certainly true that a double standard existed. While for domestic films the ideological imperative was paramount, the fate of a foreign film in the PRC was often more dependent on China’s relation with its country of origin. Denouncing a film from a socialist country as counterrevolutionary - or even “not progressive,” as in the abovementioned case of \textit{Guilty without Guilt} - was tantamount to a diplomatic slap in the face. Therefore criticism and banning were used sparingly on foreign films, unless a diplomatic split was on the horizon.

The following three instances demonstrate how diplomatic consideration often outweighed ideological correctness in the CCP’s decisions on censoring foreign films. a) The Shanghai film bureau questioned whether the Vietnamese film \textit{Mrs. Tu Hau} was suitable for

\textsuperscript{89} These films included \textit{The Right to be Born}, \textit{Fathers and Sons}, \textit{Intrigue and Love}, \textit{Ordered to Love} and \textit{White Nights}.

\textsuperscript{90} Bian, Shanquan. 1964. “Dui ‘sheng de quanli’ deng ruogan waiguo gushipian chongxin faxing he zhizuo piantou zimu de yijian.” Shanghaishi Dianyingju Chuangzuo Shengchan Chu. B177-3-513, P38, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

\textsuperscript{91} “Waishi wu xiaoshi” is a saying well known among China’s diplomatic circle and usually attributed to Zhou Enlai.
national release, as its overall tone was too gloomy and its portrayal of revolutionary figures superficial. The Ministry of Culture concurred with the criticism but mentioned that since Premier Zhou Enlai, when meeting with the Vietnamese film delegation, had promised early release of *Mrs. Tu Hau*, the film should be publicly released for the sake of Sino-Vietnamese solidarity.\(^92\) b) The Shanghai film bureau, ordered to apply censorship cuts to the Albanian film *Our Soil*, filed a report to the Ministry of Culture saying that “we must be discreet on the issue of censoring this Albanian film lest it affect the friendship between brotherly nations.”\(^93\) c) The Ministry of Culture decided that although the Polish film *Broken Bridge* had a number of defects, they probably would not have much bad influence on the audience, therefore “considering the necessity of diplomatic relationship,” this film should be publicly released in a small number of copies.\(^94\)

These three instances took place around 1964-5 at the height of PRC’s ideological conservatism. That diplomacy could triumph over ideology even then indicated that during the seventeen-year period, the diplomatic function of dubbed foreign films was at least on a par with their propagandist function. During the 1950s, when China was on far better terms with the Soviet bloc countries and had more faith in their ideological correctness, the issue of banning or significantly censoring their films would hardly have come up in the first place. Minor cuts and dialogue manipulations did occur, but they could not be employed as freely as in domestic films.

When Xu Jingxian, Shanghai’s top leader during the Cultural Revolution,\(^95\) examined the dubbed

---


\(^93\) *Shanghaishi Dianyingju*. 1964. “Guanyu a’erbaniya yingpian women de tudi jianyi bu zuo shanjian de qingshi baogao.” B177-3-513, P63, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


\(^95\) Xu Jingxian was a member of the 9th and 10th central committee of the CCP and ranked third next to Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan in the CCP Shanghai Municipal Committee (Guo 330-1).
version of the Albanian film \textit{Broad Horizons} and found that the dubbing studio had inserted slogans to make the dialogue more compatible with PRC’s ideology at the time, he instructed the studio to refrain from such deliberations. According to Xu, “usually Albania does not censor our films and we do not censor theirs. With some changes (i.e. translational deliberations) our central party leaders have to notify the Albanian embassy. If our changes are not appropriate, we will cause many troubles for the central leaders.”\textsuperscript{96} Though Xu’s comments were made during the Cultural Revolution, they offer insights into the unwritten rules of film exchange between China and still-friendly socialist countries during the seventeen-year period. Ideological “improvements” on the foreign films could be diplomatically risky, as “there is no trivial issue in diplomacy.”

Dubbed foreign films were referred to as “barometers of diplomatic relationships,”\textsuperscript{97} and this status was a double-edged sword. Deteriorating relationship or hostile incidents usually led to the banning of films from the countries involved. In September 1962 the Ministry of Culture issued a directive announcing that films from Yugoslavia and India were to be withdrawn from exhibition for the time being.\textsuperscript{98} In 1959, because of the United Arab Republic’s “bad political attitude” (referring to its critique of China on the issue of Tibet and border dispute with India), the Ministry of Culture instructed local film bureaus that films from the UAR should not enjoy as wide publicity as other films did - though they should not be critiqued either.\textsuperscript{99} In both cases, what triggered the ban or restriction of foreign films were diplomatic incidents; the ideology of the films per se was not the issue.

\textsuperscript{96} Xu, Jingxian. 1968. “Xu jingxian tongzhi shencha yingpian ‘guangkuo de dipinxian’ yijian jilu zhengli.” B177-4-33, P1, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
\textsuperscript{97} Li, Jing. 2010. “Xin shiqi tizhi yanbian zhong de dianying jinkou yanjiu.” PhD diss., Shandong University.
\textsuperscript{98} Wenhuabu. 1962. “Guanyu nansilafu he yindu de yingpian he youpai fenzi shi hui daoyan de yingpian de faxing wenti.” B177-3-346, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
\textsuperscript{99} Wenhuabu. 1959. “Guanyu ‘zhongcheng’ deng alian yingpian de faxing xuanchuan wenti.” B177-3-170, P7, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
At other times, films were seen as one of the best means to celebrate diplomatic relationships. The seventeen-year period saw dozens of “film weeks”: delegations from respective countries were invited to the opening ceremony in Beijing and received by officials from the Ministry of Culture - sometimes by the premier himself\(^\text{100}\) - illustrating the political significance of these ostensibly cultural and commercial events.

It is worth noting that an important incentive for foreign film import lay in the promotion of Chinese films abroad. It was no mere coincidence that film import and export were under the same administrative department in the China Film Company. Throughout the seventeen-year period, the PRC had been eager to export its films in a bid for friendship and soft power, yet unfortunately PRC films were unpopular in many parts of the world due to the ideological barrier. Reciprocal film exchange therefore seemed the most viable way to expand the influence of PRC films. In this kind of exchange, the PRC side was often willing to sacrifice its economic interest for diplomatic gains. At the 1957 “Chinese film festival” in Finland, China offered two long features and seven shorts in exchange for one Finnish film. The Chinese delegation still considered it worthwhile: “from a political point of view, to be able to exhibit our films in Finland was a great achievement.”\(^\text{101}\) In some cases, even the ideological principle could be bent: a 1962 Ministry of Culture directive stated that “in order to export more of our films, in the future we can employ the means of exchange. The standard for selecting [foreign] films should not be too harsh; so long as the content is harmless, and the film has some information and

\(^{100}\) For instance, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yi and He Long attended the reception at the Asian Film Week in 1957 (J. Bian 2011, 210).

\(^{101}\) “Zhongguo dianying gongzuozhe daibiaotuan canjia fenlan ‘zhongguo dianying jie’ gongzuo zongjie baogao.” 1957. B177-3-121, P37, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
entertainment value, we can select it. Those that are unsuitable for public release can always be released internally…”

In the previous two sections we have observed how CCP’s will to maintain the ideological standard of their dubbed foreign films was thwarted by practical circumstances - namely these films’ conflicting functions as not only political textbooks, but also exhibition fillers and diplomatic tokens. But what were the consequences of this reluctant loosening of the regime’s ideological grip? Could these foreign films, imported and dubbed within CCP’s system, prove potentially subversive to its ideology?

Anti-official Occidentalism?

In her seminal work *Occidentalism*, Xiaomei Chen examines how dissenting intelligentsia in post-Mao China used the Western Other as a metaphor for political liberation within a totalitarian society, while CCP propaganda used representation of the West to support nationalism and justify domestic suppression. Would Chen’s theory be suited to examine dubbed foreign films? How were these films, with their hybrid identity, utilized by the CCP as well as dissenting voices within and outside the party?

The CCP co-opted foreign films for its own propaganda and diplomatic purposes. The dubbed foreign films created for the Chinese audience a world(view) via the CCP’s screens (in the sense of both projection and filtering). To the audience, the socialist or revolutionary ideology reflected in the films served as outside confirmation for the ideology of the domestic regime (i.e. it was universal therefore it was correct) and justification of PRC’s diplomatic

---

102 Wenhuabu. 1962. “Guanyu Long Senlin tongzhi fu helan deng wu guo jinxing yewu huodong de huibao de pifu.” B177-3-349, P2-3, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
alliances with their countries of origin - especially as these foreign peoples on the screen were speaking Chinese.

Yet throughout the seventeen-year period, dubbed foreign films also provided ammunition for intellectuals who used foreign films’ artistic achievement and popularity to advocate reforms in domestic filmmaking. Famous actor and director Shi Hui wrote in a 1956 essay: “we love the country, the people, and art; we are ready to devote our life to people’s film… (but) we saw audiences in front of theaters waiting for second-hand tickets to French films or queuing to see The Vagabond, and we felt great dismay. In the studio we kept talking about our ideologically correct and well-made films, but outside the studio no one wants to see them.” These observations from Shi Hui the dissenting “rightist” were echoed by Chen Huangmei, head of the central film bureau as he lamented at a meeting in 1959: “provincial film companies would not take “documentary art films;” some of them have to be repriced… In Beijing only one small theater exhibited The Red and the Black yet people queued all the way to West Chang’an Avenue… indeed foreign films are still more popular.”

The subversive potential of dubbed foreign films was best illustrated in the following indignant speech given at a symposium on The Idiot:

At this point (1958-59) some people in the film system have been discontented with documentary art films but dared not voice their discontent publicly. But when Xia Yan and Chen Huangmei called for improvement of the quality of (domestic) films, these people who harbored shadowy purposes found support.

---

103 This is a much toned-down version of Tina Mai Chen’s claim that 1950s Soviet films situated the Chinese audience within a framework of “modernization and worldwide socialist revolution (2004, 106).”
105 He was persecuted in 1957 and committed suicide.
When the Soviet film *The Idiot* arrived at Shanghai Dubbing Studio in early 1959, this “undercurrent” surfaced, applauding and full of praise for the film. They specially invited Zhang Ruifang and Wei Yuping\(^{107}\) to dub the film. … (They organized three symposiums among Shanghai Film Studio personnel who prostrated themselves before this film’ artistic accomplishments.) And while they lavished praises on this film they made some pointed comments, advocating playing “ancient people” (i.e. pre-PRC) and breaking free from our filmmaking restrictions. In effect what they wanted was to lead our actors to give up ideological reform and to cut themselves off from the workers, peasants and soldiers.\(^{108}\)

Dubbed foreign films not only provided an outlet for dissent by intellectuals; the audience, perhaps less consciously, also “voted with their feet” when it came to foreign films. When *The Waves of the Danube* (first dubbed and released in 1960) was re-released in 1972, workers quit their posts and flocked to remote suburbs to watch it; some even exchanged their furniture coupon for film tickets.\(^{109}\) The sole reason for the re-release was that as Romania had exhibited a number of Chinese films, the party leaders felt obliged to reciprocate with at least one Romanian film exhibition, and *The Waves of the Danube* was the most ideologically correct one they could come up with. To minimize its impact they started with remoter theaters (in small cities and suburbs) but that did not dampen the fervor of urban viewers. On hearing this Xu Jingxian was “greatly shocked,” for “it demonstrated the prevalence of bourgeois thought in our

\(^{107}\) Famous film actors.

\(^{108}\) *Yingxie Shanghai Fenhui. “Zuotan ‘baichi’.”* B177-3-474, P013, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

\(^{109}\) According to Xu, furniture coupons (jiaju dengjizheng) were given to youths who were not married by a certain age to help them get married.
society.” And Xu was right; the audience’s embrace of “bourgeois” sentiments (romantic love) in the film did implicitly challenge the CCP’s ideology and aesthetics.

But did the CCP stand to lose in view of these challenges? Here I would like to revise Xiaomei Chen’s theory and argue that Occidentalism, or the appropriation of foreignness for domestic purposes, was an enabler not only of antagonism, but also of a symbiosis between the mainstream and the marginal. Despite the CCP’s paranoid control over the general public’s foreign film access, it is undeniable that imported films have been crucial to CCP’s film industry as a way-out - by supplementing film programs during the seventeen-year period and providing a major revenue source during the post-Mao era. The prominence of foreign films in both periods meant that CCP had to risk ideological impurity, but in the final analysis it was worth it - because by relegating some of the impurities and challenges to the sphere of the “foreign,” CCP was able to sustain its heavy-handed control over domestic films for decades and till this day.

Much as they were a way-out for the domestic mainstream, dubbed foreign films also provided a way-out for the domestic marginal. I have demonstrated how foreign films granted the audience access to materials that sometimes went beyond the strictures of domestic ideology, and how they enabled intellectuals to critique domestic filmmaking by drawing comparisons. Another often overlooked area in which foreign films conveniently served the interest of the domestic marginal was in the placement of film or theater personnel who had a career before the

111 For example, Article 6 in “Measures for Control over Imported Films” promulgated by the State Council in 1981 (lost effect in 1991) states that feature films gifted to Chinese individuals by foreigners would normally be sent back by the customs.
112 When the Chinese film industry fell into another crisis around 1994, an important part of the new “way-out” still lay in import policy reform i.e. bringing in Hollywood blockbusters on a revenue-sharing basis.
founding of the PRC. They found a place within the system where they could be tolerated, which was the sphere of the “foreign”\(^ {113}\) – the hierarchical marginal was relegated to the geographical marginal, or the contact zone. When Northeast (later Changchun) Film Studio started to dub foreign films and needed dubbing directors, feature film directors who used to work under Man’ei or the KMT regime (including Liu Guoquan, Xu Ming, Zhang Defa (or Zhang Puren) and Fang Ying) were assigned as “their past made it difficult for them to participate in feature film production involving ideology and creativity.”\(^ {114}\) The experiences of two actors were also cases in point. The comedian Han Fei, who made twenty films in Hong Kong in three years, returned to Shanghai in 1952. In the next four years, apart from one brief appearance in a 1954 domestic film, he was “put away” to help dub foreign films.\(^ {115}\) Sun Daolin, extremely talented actor and graduate of Yenching University, appeared in less than ten films during the seventeen-year period yet built a brilliant second career in foreign film dubbing, with leading roles in *Hamlet* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. This pattern of “exile” can be observed in the field of literary creation as well: poets such as Mu Dan (or Zha Liangzheng) and Feng Zhi turned almost entirely to a translation career after the mid-1950s.

**“Misunderstanding” Dubbed Foreign Films**

In the previous sections I have focused on the official level, i.e. on the choice of exhibition titles. But the investigation could not be complete without examining the audience level i.e. how were these films exhibited and received? What did they mean to the audience? The

\(^ {113}\) Another place analogous to the foreign is the ancient – the temporal marginal, where directors such as Wu Yonggang escaped to during the seventeen-year period.


official answer, according to numerous stories in *People’s Daily* and *Popular Cinema*, was that these films were exhibited to an unprecedentedly wide audience and became mimetic models: the Soviet film *Tractor-Drivers* inspired China’s first female tractor driver; the protagonist in *A Village Schoolteacher* became the model of countless young men and women who volunteered to teach in remote areas.\footnote{Xinhua News Agency. 1950. “Sulian yingpian zai woguo fangying shoudao guanzhong relie huanying yibei dangzuo xuexi sulan de zhongyang gongju.” *People’s Daily*, Mar 9.}

These stories might have been true to some extent, but they were often one-sided and unrepresentative. Archival research by Chinese scholar Liu Dishan suggests that many Soviet films screened in the 1950s were actually box office failures, and attendance statistics were often overblown, as they included large portions of elementary and secondary school students.\footnote{Liu, Dishan. 2011. “Shiqinian shiqi sulian dianying fangying shilu.” *Beijing Dianying Xueyuan Xuebao* 3: 30.} Even if we take the official figures (including those during the Great Leap Forward) seriously -- that the national total film attendance increased from 47,000,000 in 1949 to 2.8 billion in 1958,\footnote{Chen, Huangmei. 1959. “Xin zhongguo dianying shiye de xunsu fazhan.” *People’s Daily*, October 30.} we still need to bear in mind that it was the increase and not the figure itself that was impressive.

The film exhibition network was rapidly expanding, but it was far from comprehensive; people in rural areas had to rely on itinerant projection units and were usually shown only farming-related features and documentaries.\footnote{Su, Fang. 1956. “Rang nongcun guanzhong kandao duofangmian tica de yingpian.” *People’s Daily*, Mar 24.} For a typical peasant in 1950s China, the only Soviet films he or she saw were probably limited to *Lenin in 1918, Cossacks of the Kuban* and *Tractor-Drivers*. One can hardly claim that Soviet bloc films situated the Chinese people within “a framework of modernization and worldwide socialist revolution”\footnote{Chen, Tina Mai. 2004. “Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s.” *Cultural Critique* 58: 106.} when the majority of the Chinese people, i.e. the peasantry saw them once a year at the most.
Even if we restrict Chen’s argument to include only those who had more exposure to dubbed foreign films, the “educational” efficacy of these films was still questionable. Even with the help of the dubbed dialogue, these foreign films sometimes proved incomprehensible to many in the Chinese audience. Chen briefly noted in one of her papers that film projectionists based their pre-screening explanations on articles in *Popular Cinema* and discussed their methods of explanation in trade journals.\(^{121}\) But in fact, it was the CCP, and not the film projectionists who initiated the explanation practice. Around the summer of 1952, the *People’s Daily* published numerous articles in the form of “summaries of letters from readers” addressing the issue of the propaganda and explanation of films, especially dubbed foreign films.

According to these articles, the masses often either failed to understand or misunderstood dubbed foreign films for the following reasons: 1) Film was a new art form not yet familiar to the masses, especially the peasants. Audience tended to be confused by swift camera movements or the use of flashbacks.\(^{122}\) 2) The dubbed language was not easily understandable. The projecting apparatus and technique also needed improvement; sometimes it was difficult to figure out what was said.\(^{123}\) 3) The subject and content of some foreign films tended to be distant from the everyday life and customs of the Chinese people. Especially hard to understand were those that involved history, biography, international relations or ethnic groups, such as *Conspiracy of the Doomed*, *Secret Mission*, *Cossacks of the Kuban* and *Baltic Deputy*.\(^{124}\) Some films could only be

---


understood by people with a certain level of historical knowledge and ideological sophistication. It was also hard to keep track of character names in foreign films.\textsuperscript{125}

Failing to understand dubbed foreign films could lead to serious consequences, compromising the educational efficacy of the films. A student in the audience of The Defense of Tsaritsyn reportedly said: "We can’t understand it. Why don’t we just leave?"\textsuperscript{126} When a government bureau in Beijing screened a dubbed foreign film, only 200 stayed till the end out of the 1000 that came.\textsuperscript{127} A viewer complained that the audience’s impression of Soviet films was always “vague;” sometimes they even mistook revolutionaries for counter-revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{128} When The Third Blow was screened in Hailar, Inner Mongolia on National Day in 1951, the audience could not tell the Soviets from the Germans and applauded at the wrong moments. When Conspiracy of the Doomed was screened at the same theater three days later, audience members were chattering about whether the story took place in Spain, Iran, or the United States.\textsuperscript{129}

Facing reports of these problems, the China Film Management Company responded with a promise to devote more effort into supplying film propaganda materials, and gave the following instructions to its subordinate units: 1) Distribute (localized) explanatory sheets to the audience instead of simply displaying them in windows. 2) Consult local experts in science and history, and invite them to give talks or radio broadcasts before screening films involving specialized knowledge. 3) Ensure that all local theaters establish a systematic

\textsuperscript{125} "Qunzhong dui fangying dianying de yijian - duze laixin zongshu qingkuang nongming yaoqiu gengduo de dianying xiaxiang.” 1952. People’s Daily, June 30.
\textsuperscript{127} “Ying zhongshi yingpian de xuanchuan jieshi gongzuo.” 1952. People’s Daily, September 14.
\textsuperscript{129} Liu, Xinping. 1951. “Fangying neirong jiao shen de fanyi yingpian shi ying yinfa shuomingshu.” People’s Daily, Nov 11. The above two instances are also quoted by Thomas Chen.
propaganda/explanation practice, including explanatory subtitles on slideshows and plot narration via loudspeakers. The explanation method that the People’s Daily editor most approved of was proposed by the Military Commission General Political Department Projection Unit, which was later summarized as “pre-screening publicity, through-screening narration and post-screening discussion.”

Should we believe what was said in these People’s Daily articles, that the audience of 1950s China needed explanation in order to understand dubbed foreign films? The answer is yes and no. The incomprehension and misunderstandings were real, and the often hilarious anecdotes quoted in the articles were, very likely, not fabrications. In fact they were rather trite: an audience’s clumsy initial encounter with the film medium, the inscrutability of foreign films even when translated, “you can’t tell the players without a program,” and so on. And there was a real need to ensure that audiences understand dubbed foreign films: having them applauding at the wrong moments, chatting, or leaving the theater during screenings must have been deeply embarrassing, and after all, how could these films educate people if they were not understood?

Despite appearances, the campaign in the People’s Daily to help audience understand foreign films was by no means a bottom-up movement that started with letters from the readers. On the contrary it can be seen as part of People’s Daily’s “agenda setting,” where “misunderstanding” and “explanation” were used as pretexts for further efforts to control and dictate the meaning of foreign films. As Tina Mai Chen has argued, despite the mimetic model of spectatorship employed by the CCP, the CCP understood visual culture as “a complicated and

---

132 Thomas Chen vaguely hints at the idea with the phrase “as if taking this reader’s advice (95).”
contested system of signifiers in need of clarification, structure, and appropriate politicization.”\(^{133}\) In other words, the foreign films themselves were ambiguous, and the audience might not get the political messages behind the films unless they were spelled out. Only text, in the form of programs and projection workers’ introductions, with its power to nail down the floating meaning of images, could turn a likely piece of entertainment into a socialist “textbook.”

The question remains as to how assiduously the local theaters and projection units followed the instructions from *People’s Daily* and the China Film Management Company. Given the scale of the investigation that would be required, it is impossible to give a complete answer. It was unlikely that such rigorous procedures as “pre-screening publicity, through-screening narration and post-screening discussion” would be widespread and consistently carried out, considering the lack of incentive and the difficulty of enforcement. In reality, the average explanatory practice for foreign film screening was probably closer to this description in a reader’s letter published in the *People’s Daily*: “during the ‘Sino-Soviet Friendship Month,’ the theaters in Ji’nan did a good job in film propaganda and explanation. They distributed programs with plot synopses, and before each screening they would introduce the film via the loudspeaker for the benefit of those viewers who were illiterate. But when the ‘Sino-Soviet Friendship Month’ was over, the propaganda work at the theaters slackened up again; some even gave up completely.”\(^{134}\)

I would argue that so long as the audiences were allowed to engage with the films without being constantly interrupted by the projection workers’ narration, their viewing experience would not necessarily follow the model of the “ideal audience” and “conditioned


response” constructed by the CCP propaganda; in other words, they were, to some extent, free to “misunderstand” the foreign films. I am not only referring to technical misunderstandings that were highlighted in the People’s Daily, such as not being able to follow the plotline or to tell the difference between Soviet and German uniforms, but misunderstandings of the propagandist message. True, an audience’s interpretation was to some extent bound by the occasion of the screening, the film synopses and reviews she read, and the projection worker’s introduction that she heard. But as a preface does not entirely condition the experience of reading a book, and as a frame does not dominate over the viewing of a picture, we should not give CCP’s propaganda efforts more credit than they deserve. Tina Mai Chen argues that the “Party-sanctioned meanings of film worked to silence other understandings,”135 but in reality they often did not succeed. The fact that those films were produced and exhibited as propaganda did not obliterate the multivalent meanings of the film image and sound, reducing them to dry political messages.

Tina Mai Chen assumed the efficacy of CCP propaganda and noted only in passing the possibly mediated nature of the “audience responses” she cited from Popular Cinema.136 This raises a methodological question: how do we, or can we, look into the audience’s experience of dubbed foreign films in 1950s China? If we rely entirely on official newspapers and magazines such as People’s Daily and Popular Cinema for primary sources and accept their stories without critical analysis, we may end up repeating and reinforcing the CCP version of the story, as Chen did.

Recently published memoir essays tell a very different story. A woman wrote in a literary magazine: “When I was little, I saw in a Soviet film a female agent who wore a plat’e [dress]…

136 Ibid., 154.
and I thought, I would put up with any hard labor if I could wear that kind of dress!”

A musician wrote: “Though the screenings organized by our school were restricted to so-called ideological immersion, facing the screen, I always felt an indescribable emotional impulse.”

A professor from Beijing Film Academy recalled that when films with the Soviet actor Aleksey Batalov were shown, young girls in the audience were whispering and praising him as their idol. If we include memoirs on filmic experience during the Cultural Revolution, we find that a number of them mentioned commonplace lines such as “don’t push, everyone, let comrade Lenin go first!” and “there will be bread, and there will be milk” as memorable quotes, and quite a few admitted that the most exciting parts in foreign films were the shots of lovers kissing.

With these accounts, it is hard to believe that the common Chinese viewer of 1950s was experiencing foreign films only in those propagandist terms prescribed in the official media.

I am not denying that the CCP’s propaganda project was effective to some extent, nor am I suggesting that we can fully reconstruct the foreign film experience of Chinese audiences in the 1950s based on these memoirs. After all, memory is often constructed; and just as editors, interviewees and even diarists in the 1950s tended to mimic the Party rhetoric at the time, might not these memoirs reflect the ideology of our own time, instead of faithfully recording a past experience? And what about the impacts from those films that were more subconscious and ineffable? Nevertheless, despite these question marks, I still believe that it is worthwhile to

---

140. Zhang, Wei. 2006. “Dianying jiyi.” Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan 18: 53. This should not be surprising. Yu Hua in China in Ten Words describes the thrill that he and his friends felt at even the sight of the word “in love” written on a classroom blackboard: “once in front of the blackboard, they gawked in awestruck silence, unable to tear themselves away. I myself had never seen these two words together, for the phrase had long disappeared from popular usage, and to be suddenly confronted by it made the blood flow hot in my veins (144).”
141. In other words, how do we imagine their private film viewing experiences? How did those foreign images mingle with domestic filmic and real life images in the Chinese audience’s mind?
look into audience experience from below. It is true that neither historical publications nor contemporary memoirs are entirely reliable, and it is true that the themes in audience memoirs were often mundane interests in exoticism, fashion, humor or sexual desire, nothing so grandiloquent as “socialist future” or “individual transformation.” But shall we continue to ignore the mass audience’s real lived experience, or suppress their voices by confirming the single-faceted stories in the official media?

Here it may be useful to recall Baudrillard’s comment on the masses in his essay “In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities”: the masses are good conductors of neither the political, social or meaning in general; “Historical Reason, Political Reason, Cultural Reason, Revolutionary Reason… have only penetrated into the masses at the cost of their misappropriation, of their radical distortion.”¹⁴² They scandalously resist the imperative of rational communication: they are given meaning/message, but they only want the spectacle/sign.¹⁴³ Indeed the fact that random lines from politically charged films such as Lenin in October and Lenin in 1918 could be appropriated for everyday entertainment amply proves Baudrillard’s point. What pragmatic efficacy that those foreign films did achieve, e.g. inspiring youths to become tractor drivers and village schoolteachers, were probably built less on audience’s internalization of ideological lessons than on their inherent, irrational mimetic impulse.

¹⁴² Baudrillard, Jean, In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities, Or, the End of the Social, and Other Essays, (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1983), 8.
¹⁴³ Ibid., 10.
Chapter Two: Two Cultural Revolutions

Part One: “Progressive” Contents and Reactionary Forms: 1966-76

Compared to the 17-year period, the Cultural Revolution saw a more unified film culture. The foreign films released during this period, few in number yet repeatedly screened and viewed, acquired canonical status almost comparable to the model operas. In a cultural environment often described as “desert” and “spiritual hunger,” these films were consumed with passionate intensity – intensely felt and intensely remembered. The Cultural Revolution foreign film experience was also that of a split screen: it has become well-known that while the common viewer had access to only some forty films from four socialist countries, China’s elite were entertaining themselves with Hollywood, European, and Japanese cinema – the so-called internal reference films. I will examine both sets of films in this chapter.

North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, and Romania

“There are only four countries in the world that do not play Hollywood films: China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Albania,” said Chen Huangmei, head of China’s central film bureau in a speech in 1963, quoting Darryl Zanuck. This was an interesting assortment of countries,

---

144 The film repertoire of the Cultural Revolution shrank dramatically compared to the 17-year period. Thirty-Five Years of the Film Industry gives the following figures: only 70 domestic features and 36 foreign features were released during the Cultural Revolution, while 589 domestic features and 883 foreign features were released during the 17-year period (340).
145 I use the word advisedly.
146 China’s demography during the Cultural Revolution indicated that teenagers and youths were about a quarter of the total population (Yuan 123); it was on this age group that the foreign films left the most indelible mark.
147 During the Maoist era and especially the Cultural Revolution, there had always been “internal books” as well, referred to as yellow covers or grey covers.
148 Chinese sources usually referred to North Vietnam as Vietnam.
149 Zanuck, in “Hollywood v. Communism” says that “American ambassadors, with their official portfolios, are no more powerful in winning friends and consolidating international friendships than the thousands of round tins, with their tightly wound rolls of celluloid on which is imprinted the thinking, the imagination, and the creative talent of American film-makers, which go to all parts of the world.” This was the mirror image of China’s use of foreign films as propaganda and diplomatic tools. Chen Huangmei quotes the above lines in his speech and also attributes
for during the latter half of the Cultural Revolution, China only imported and released\textsuperscript{150} films from the above three countries in addition to Romania.\textsuperscript{151} A doggerel that summarizes the characteristics of films from each country has been remembered and handed down till the present day and appears in every article that discusses foreign film screening during the Cultural Revolution. In this doggerel, films from North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, and Romania were respectively described as “tears and smiles,” “airplanes and artillery,” “baffling and inexplicable,” and “hugs and kisses.”\textsuperscript{152} We are looking at an almost inverted universe from that of the 17-year period: the “window to the outside world” dramatically narrowed (from two dozen countries to four), and the variety in ideologies and cultures turned into easy stereotypes. The choice of the four countries was especially poignant: with the exception of Romania, films from the other three countries were neither numerous nor popular before or after the Cultural Revolution.

But the experience of millions of people watching (or not watching) foreign films during the ten years, however constrained and bored they were, should not be dismissed with four epithets and a sigh.\textsuperscript{153} My close examination of the background and content of foreign film exhibition during the Cultural Revolution will yield answers to the following questions: Why

\textsuperscript{150} Aside from the “internal reference films” which will be discussed in the next section.

\textsuperscript{151} Soviet films from the Stalinist era, such as \textit{Lenin in October} and \textit{Lenin in 1918}, were also exhibited, but they were imported and dubbed during the 17-year period.

\textsuperscript{152} The epithet for Chinese films is “newsreels,” referring to the disproportionate number of newsreels shown in Chinese theaters and the fact that feature films were often preceded by newsreels. That domestic films and the four foreign cinemas were often mentioned in the same breath was testimony to the importance of foreign films during the Cultural Revolution.

were these four countries singled out, and what was the significance thereof? How did the
Chinese audience receive these films, and how did the films shape the audience’s world-view?

There are many reasons why the choice of these four countries should not be taken for
granted. For one thing, films from these countries only flourished after 1970, and a near hiatus of
foreign film exhibition occurred between 1966 and 1969, when only five films from Albania
were screened. During those years, domestic extremism spread to China’s handling of foreign
affairs and embassies, leading to a significant deterioration of China’s relations with most of its
forty- some friendly nations. Foreign film exhibition during this period was out of the question,
even without taking into account the chaos in the domestic film system and society as a whole.
But the growing threat from a hostile Soviet Union towards the end of the decade persuaded
Chinese leaders to seek allies as well as a place on the international stage. What kind of foreign
films could be exhibited in China at this point? Certainly not those from the Soviet Union and
its Eastern European allies, which had been the mainstays of China’s film import during the 17-
year period and before the Sino-Soviet split, nor those from non-socialist countries either. Since
1970 China had made important breakthroughs in foreign relations, including its re-entry into the
UN, but ideology proved the bottleneck that prevented China from exhibiting films from
countries beyond those four.

---

154 Some poisonous films were still exhibited in the name of criticism. On June 14, 1968, the central leaders had to
issue a directive on the “Recall of Poisonous Films and Turning Over of Waste Film,” which forbade any unit from
screening domestic and imported poisonous films without authorization and without critique (Wu 183).
demonstrations occurred in front of Vietnamese consulates in China, protesting North Vietnam’s Paris peace talk
with the US. Border and nuclear issues also led North Korea to recall its ambassador in China in 1968. See Chapter
3 of The Cambridge History of China Volume 15.
156 Again, with the exception of Romm’s Lenin films.
157 Interestingly, in 1965, the year before the Cultural Revolution started, the output of China’s two major dubbing
studios already shrank to include only North Korea, Vietnam, Albania, and Indonesia (China and Indonesia broke
off diplomatic relationship in 1967). This echo across the 1966-69 hiatus demonstrated the similarity between the
cultural atmosphere of the end of the 17-year period and that of the 1970-76 period. It is also said that 1971 marked
Yet China’s import and exhibition of films from the four countries could not be explained by the mere fact that their films were the most “progressive.”

During the Cultural Revolution, foreign films remained a corollary of diplomatic friendship or alliance, and the four countries were the ones with which China sought to maintain its most cherished strategic relationships. China had to support its two socialist neighbors not only against the US but in competition with the Soviet Union: North Korea and North Vietnam were swinging between China and the Soviet Union, accepting aid from both. Albania had sided with China since the beginning of the Sino-Soviet split and received immense amounts of Chinese aid throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, even as people in China were starving; yet it was in a great measure thanks to Albania’s continued lobbying that China was able to re-enter the UN. Romania, under Ceausescu, pursued an independent foreign policy and maintained friendly ties with China; Ceausescu was also one of the middle men whose maneuvering facilitated Nixon’s 1972 visit to China.

**Surrogate Europe and Surrogate 17-Year Period**

Of the four countries, films from Romania were the ones that Chinese leaders were the least willing to exhibit. The first Romanian film seen by the Chinese audience during the Cultural Revolution was *The Waves of the Danube*. First dubbed and released in China in 1961, it was re-released in 1972. Its embarrassing popularity, which I described in the previous chapter,

---

158 The politics of North Korea, Romania, and Albania was similar to China in the sense that all four countries were headed by long term dictators.
159 In early 1969, when Premier Zhou Enlai ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to send ambassadors to previously vacated embassies, he specified that the Albanian, Vietnamese, and French embassies should be the top priority (Li, D).
had effectively prevented any Romanian film from being released in the next two years (1973-4). Sergiu Nicolaescu’s renowned historic epics *The Dacians* and *Michael the Brave* had to be shown as internal reference films.¹⁶² 1975 and 1976 saw the release of three Romanian films, two of which featured boy heroes,¹⁶³ thus safely precluding the appearance of controversial romance on Chinese screens.

When *The Waves of the Danube* was released in China in 1961 among films from a dozen countries in the Eastern bloc and the West, it created no particular sensation. Set on a ship on the Danube in Fascist occupied Romania, it centers on three characters: the captain Mihai, his wife Ana, and the Communist fighter Toma. To many in the Cultural Revolution audience, the film was not so much about resistance and revolution as about romance. The audience was enamored of the heroine’s “melancholy and feminine tenderness” - not to mention her physical attractiveness.¹⁶⁴ The film also departed from the audience’s usual revolution-themed films with its vivid characterization of “real human beings”: Captain Mihai is a typical “middle character,” a type that had been condemned and banned from Chinese filmmaking for at least eight years: he was rough, uncommunicative, yet righteous and loving.¹⁶⁵

It was from *The Waves of the Danube* that Romanian films earned the reputation of “hugs and kisses” – the protagonists’ kiss was the first one shown on the Cultural Revolution screens and became a major attraction of the film. Xu Jingxian’s bitter comments at a party meeting confirmed this point: “[they all] said it was exceedingly good. What’s so good about it? Just a bunch of vulgar scenes. You know the title even if I don’t say it.”¹⁶⁶ Though of course, the theme

---

¹⁶² These two films were released after the Cultural Revolution.
¹⁶³ They were Gheorghe Naghi’s *Adventures in the Danube Delta* (Aventurile lui Babusca 1973) and *Alarm in the Danube Delta* (Alarma în delta 1976). A third, *The Poseidon Explosion* (Explozie 1973), was Mircea Dragan’s action drama and winner of the Diploma Award at the 1973 Moscow International Film Festival.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 42.
¹⁶⁶ Out of spite Xu did not even mention the film title in his entire speech.
is anti-fascist.” Xu repeatedly explained that the re-release of *The Waves of the Danube* was solely for the sake of foreign relations: “we selected carefully among many films and that film was by all means one of the better ones… It was a necessity of political struggle: [we need] to win over certain countries in order to fight the biggest revisionists.”

The same can be said about Albanian films. Though they were more numerous and more ideologically correct than Romanian films, many of them were exhibited for the sole reason that they represented the so-called socialist lantern of Europe. In a 1968 speech at the Shanghai Dubbing Studio, Xu Jingxian excused the ideological drawbacks in Albanian films and ordered the studio not to “improve” them: “In Albania when you turn on the television you can watch filthy stuff from Italy and Yugoslavia. They are surrounded by reactionary and declining capitalist art; that they can still produce films of such seriousness and high ideological level is truly commendable. It would have been impossible to adapt their films to our current level of struggle and critique.” It was partly because Xu allowed Albanian films to be shown without much editing that some Chinese viewers found them “baffling and inexplicable”: not conforming to the type of straightforward and predictable narrative of classic Cultural Revolution cinema, Albanian films such as *The Bronze Bust* consist of fragmented flashbacks.

The themes and storylines of the Albanian films were not so different than those of 17-year period films: heroes who fought in wars and against spies, heroes who devote their lives to socialist construction etc. But the Chinese audiences were not always so obsessed with the themes and content of the films as not to notice, or shall we say pay disproportionate attention to,
the films’ minor formal features. Memoir authors recall Albanian guerilla soldiers’ unique black hat and vest; their slogan “wipe out the fascists; freedom belongs to the people” accompanied by a hand gesture, was widely imitated by Cultural Revolution viewers.\textsuperscript{170} The exotic landscape of the tiny European country appealed strongly to the isolated Chinese audience: the hilly country and winding paths, the Adriatic sea, and the handsome faces of the revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{171} The two most memorable characters from Albanian films were the female revolutionary Mira and German officer Hans von Shtolc from \textit{Victory over Death}. The beautiful Mira, with her white blouse and skirt, her curls and hair bows, “is still a revolutionary; this was very disturbing: should we ‘analytically’ learn from her revolutionary spirit and turn a blind eye to everything else?”\textsuperscript{172} The German officer delivers a poetic speech as he tries to persuade Mira to surrender and join in the beautiful life outside of prison. Masterfully dubbed by Qiu Yuefeng\textsuperscript{173}, this speech became a favorite at reciting events during the 1970-80s\textsuperscript{174} – not that the viewers had any strong feelings for or against the content of the speech; they were enchanted with its sheer eloquence and formal beauty. The theme song in \textit{Victory over Death} is introduced as Mira and her roommate Perlat, a male revolutionary, sit on a bed while the latter plays the tune on a guitar – an instrument condemned as capitalist/revisionist at the time.\textsuperscript{175}

The prominence of Albanian films in Chinese theaters during the Cultural Revolution (16 out of 42 foreign films) echoed that of Soviet films during the 17-year period, except for the fact that Albania was neither a superpower nor China’s role model. The irony was not so much that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{170} Shen, Zhiyuan. "Zhui Yi A Er Ba Ni Ya Dian Ying - Cong Hai An Feng Lei Shuo Qi." \textit{Dian Ying Ping Jie} 1 (2001): 40-41.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 82-3.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Arguably China’s best dubbing actor.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Shen, Zhiyuan. "Zhui Yi A Er Ba Ni Ya Dian Ying - Cong Hai An Feng Lei Shuo Qi." \textit{Dian Ying Ping Jie} 1 (2001): 41.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Liu, Jialing. "Gan Kuai Shang Shan Ba Yong Shi Men." \textit{Ren Min Wen Xue} 5 (2001): 83.
\end{itemize}
China’s import base went from the entire Eastern bloc to the productions of a tiny country and four Romanian films; it was that films from the latter two countries were by no means free from revisionist or capitalist influences. With little pre-WWII filming experience, Albania’s film industry had been indebted to the Soviet Union to a very great degree. Romania, though much smaller than China, exhibited far more foreign films than China did; the openness in its own films should come as no surprise.

Films from North Korea and Vietnam were often said to resemble China’s domestic productions, given similarity among the three countries in ideology and their cultural affinities. There is truth in this claim, but here “Chinese domestic productions” should refer to those of the 17-year period. It is for this reason that I argue, with the title of this section, that Albanian and Romanian films were for the Cultural Revolution audience a surrogate Europe, filling in the absence of Soviet and Western European films, whereas films from all four countries harkened back to China’s 17-year period productions, most of which were condemned as poisonous and locked up during the Cultural Revolution. Since 1971 some of the “poisonous” elements resurfaced, not so much in domestic re-releases or new productions, but in foreign films. This was not achieved without some reluctance on the part of the party: in a 1972 speech quoted above, Xu Jingxian lamented, “we felt especially uneasy when we saw huge crowds of people at the screenings of some foreign films. Though the themes of these films are good, class

177 During the Cultural Revolution of course, but even during the post-Mao era, Romania exhibited 160 foreign films (90 from socialist countries and 70 from other countries) a year while China exhibited only 40-50 (Xi 43).
178 Or synecdoche Europe.
179 A few were re-released during the Cultural Revolution, including _Fighting North and South, Mine Warfare, Tunnel Warfare_ (Clark 54).
180 If we do not count the five Albanian films from 1966 to 1969.
oppression, anti-fascist struggle etc., they often resort to moving the audience with feelings (以情動人), which was the path that we used to take.”

Xu did not mention *The Flower Seller* by name, but no foreign film during the Cultural Revolution deserved the epithet “moving the audience with feelings” more than this North Korean weepy. It broke the record of foreign film attendance since 1949, and in the words of many memoir authors, “the entire nation wept.” *The Fate of Kim-hee and Eun-hee*, released in 1975, created a similar tear-jerking sensation. The themes of these films, class struggle in 1930s Korea and the superiority of North Korea’s social system over South Korea, could not have been more politically correct for Maoist China. Yet Xu Jingxian was right in accusing *The Flower Seller* and its likes for being “too moving” – the overwhelming affect could easily have obscured the message, or, in the words of a contemporary reviewer, “weeping was suspect of humanism, and might dilute people’s will to struggle.” Other genres were even closer to China’s 17-year period tradition, such as depictions of the cheerful life on collective farms in the fashion of Soviet films of the Stalinist era (e.g. *When We Pick Apples* and *A Flourishing Village*) and suspenseful espionage films (e.g. *The Invisible Frontier/Tale of a Warrior* and *The True Color is Out*).

---

183 Zheng, Qiwu. "Wo Kan Chao Xian Dian Ying." *Dian Ying Ping Jie* 8 (1989): 17. The author goes on to say that during the early 1970s Chinese cinephiles eagerly waited for the coming of each April (Kim Il-Sung’s birthday) and September (North Korea’s national day) as new features from North Korea were usually released during those months.
184 “Tears and smiles.”
186 In a 1962 speech, Chen Huangmei pointed out that in terms of portraying contemporary life, some North Korean films were far superior to their Chinese counterparts, and that North Korean cinema had seen much progress in recent years ("Ruhe").
A major attraction of North Korean films was their music and visuals. Of the four countries, songs from North Korean films were the most numerous, most melodious, and best remembered. *When We Pick Apples* and *The Flower Seller*, released in 1971 and 1972, were the first foreign films in color shown to the Chinese public during the Cultural Revolution – the Albanian and Romanian films were all in black and white up until 1975. As was the case with the Albanian and Romanian films, the exotic clothing (*hanbok* is ubiquitous in most of the films) and witty lines (e.g. “can a pretty face yield rice?”) in North Korean films seemed to have great appeal for the Chinese audience.

The eight Vietnamese films shown during this period well deserved the epithet “airplanes and artillery.” Unlike imports from the other three countries, of which half were about peacetime construction, all but two of the Vietnamese films centered on combat.\(^\text{187}\) Chinese scholar Yuan Qingfeng argues that despite their similarity to Chinese war films shown at the time, Vietnamese films had a more human touch and an individual focus. Yuan illustrates his point with the female protagonist in *Trees of Miss Tham*: various shots of her, her personality and her interaction with men all portray her as a lively young woman instead of an androgynous warrior.\(^\text{188}\) I agree with this point, but I disagree with the author’s other point that Vietnamese films were superior to both Chinese and North Korean films at the time due to the absence of a strong personality cult in that country. That Vietnamese films were spared the artificial sublimation that plagued Cultural Revolution art had less to do with politics than with Vietnam’s film history. Vietnam’s national film industry had very few opportunities to develop in a peaceful environment up to that point – their first feature came out in 1956 and subsequent productions were by no means


numerous. The plainness, naturalness, and shall we say “realism” of Vietnamese films that felt like “a breeze from the south seas”\textsuperscript{189} to the Cultural Revolution audience were probably the result of the country’s stronger tradition in documentary making.

Like foreign films of the 17-year period, films from Albania, Romania, North Korea, and Vietnam served both diplomatic and ideological purposes. They were also supposed to prove to the audience that China was not entirely isolated, diplomatically or ideologically (e.g. China still had European friends that shared its vision). The Chinese audience may have taken in those messages; they may even have been inspired to emulate the foreign worker, peasant, and soldier heroes. But they were not blind to the formal attractiveness of the foreign films which brought them novelty and respite. The hugs and kisses, tears and smiles, or simply the exoticism drew the audience to the theaters to see the same films over and over. Indeed it was the repetition of the small repertoire that further accentuated the form. In the words of Kristin Thompson, “repeated viewings of a film are likely to increase the excessive potentials of a scene’s components; as we become familiar with the narrative (or other principle of progression), the innate interest of the composition, the visual aspects of the décor, or the structure of the musical accompaniment, may begin to come forward and capture more of our attention.”\textsuperscript{190} One wonders if the Cultural Revolution audience, like the man in an ancient Chinese idiom, kept the casket and discarded the pearl – the political message.


The haunting presence of internal reference films during the Cultural Revolution has been summarily noted by many film scholars in China and the US. As early as 1974, Pickowicz in “Cinema and Revolution in China” mentions his experience of viewing and discussing Admiral Yamamoto at Beijing’s International Club in 1971 and quotes at length Yao Wenyuan’s speech linking such films to the resurgence of Japanese militarism. Paul Clark notes that throughout the Cultural Revolution films from the West were imported for “study purposes” to which members of the cultural apparatus as well as those with guanxi had access. Nicole Huang in “Listening to Films: Politics of the Auditory in 1970s China” and Gary Xu in “Edification through Affection: the Cultural Revolution Films, 1974-1976” also mention that a number of

---

191 Internal reference films were in existence both before and after the Cultural Revolution. In this discussion I am only referring to internal reference films dubbed during the Cultural Revolution.

In what follows I seek to answer the following questions: what exactly were these internal reference films? Were these films mostly entertainment for the privileged few, or did they provide guidance and influence opinions among their elite audience, as the term “internal reference” suggests? How did such guidance and influence depart from the films’ original intent and their purported educational value?

Unlike officially imported and released foreign films, a filmography of dubbed internal reference films has not been readily available. According to dubbing personnel Su Xiu and Sun Yufeng, these internal reference films fell into the following categories: (1) 1930-40s Hollywood films (Jiang Qing’s favorites), (2) recent features from the West, especially those featuring political intrigues and assassinations,\footnote{This is not necessarily true, though Sun’s interpretation points to what he thought was the leaders’ intention in choosing these films.} (3) films depicting the Japanese navy and militarism, (4) WWII films from the Soviet Union.\footnote{Sun, Yufeng. "Shuo Shuo ‘Nei Can Pian’ Na Xie Shi Er." \textit{Dong Fang Daily} [Shanghai] 26 Oct. 2011: n. pag.; Su, Xiu. \textit{Wo De Pei Yin Sheng Ya}. (Shanghai: Wen Hui Chu Ban She, 2005), 9.} The most complete and authoritative filmography can be found in Cao Lei’s memoir essay “The Mysterious Internal Reference Films during the Cultural Revolution.” The following chart shows the makeup of Shanghai Dubbing Studio’s output of each of the four categories based on Cao’s recollection of the titles and the studio’s annual output.\footnote{Appendix 1 is a partial Chinese-English filmography of internal reference films dubbed in Shanghai based on Cao’s account.}
The above chart does not take into account films dubbed by other studios. Cao Lei notes that some of the films sent to Shanghai Dubbing Studio were labeled hu (Shanghai), indicating that there must have been studios in Beijing also dubbing internal reference films.\textsuperscript{198} It is doubtful that other studios were receiving nearly as many commissions as Shanghai. August First Film Studio (in Beijing) dubbed \textit{Admiral Yamamoto} (Rengō Kantai Shirei Chōkan: Yamamoto Isoroku 1968), \textit{Gateway to Glory} (Aa, kaigun 1969), and \textit{Battle of the Japan Sea} (Nihonkai daikaisen 1969) among other military-themed films.\textsuperscript{199}

That internal reference films were dubbed in the strictest secrecy is documented in various memoirs. Cao Lei, Su Xiu, and Sun Yufeng recall that after being summoned back from...


the cadre school to the studio, their first task was to study the security regulations. The dubbing personnel were not allowed to take the script out of the studio or to let their family know what films they were working on. Finished versions were examined by Xu Jingxian (lower level cadres were not allowed to watch them) and then delivered straight to the central leadership in Beijing.

A most obvious reason why these internal reference films could not be publicly released was that China’s global positioning at the time would not allow its public recognition of films from the West, Japan, or the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, reviews and critiques of certain internal reference films (especially those depicting Japanese militarism) appeared in prominent newspapers such as *People’s Daily* and *Guangming Daily*, despite the fact that many readers never had a chance to see the films.

Now we come back to the question of the functions of these films. The established argument was that they served as privileged entertainment for cadres and their circle. This verdict was given as early as October 19, 1976, when the Shanghai Dubbing Studio wrote to the Shanghai Film Bureau that “the ‘Gang of Four’ had extended their manipulative hand to our studio through the Shanghai municipal Party committee… ordering us to dub a large number of decadent, reactionary, and obscene films from imperialist, revisionist, and reactionary countries for their enjoyment.” The famous scene in Jiang Wen’s 1994 film *In the Heat of the

---


202 This was parallel to Chinese mainstream media’s critique of Antonioni’s “Chungkuo.”

203 黃色; often translated as pornographic.

204 Shanghai Dianying Yizhichang. 1976. “Guanyu neipian wenti de qingshi baogao.” B177-4-479, P6, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
Sun, where the teenagers slip into an auditorium showing Kampf um Rom has become the stereotypical image of internal reference films. After all, film access as privileged entertainment was almost a tradition that persisted after the Cultural Revolution until the abundance of alternative viewing channels rendered it unnecessary.

The privilege of viewing internal reference films often extended beyond the intended “internal” group. Sun Yufeng recalls that during the Cultural Revolution there was a saying that those who have powerful social connections were those who could watch internal reference films. Indeed in early 1972, the Division of Culture reported to the central leaders that some units were screening poisonous films without central approval, leading to “much reaction from the masses” - an enigmatic phrase that makes one wonder whether the masses were angry at their corruption or simply envious of their privilege. The report also mentioned that conferences held in Beijing were often accompanied by screenings of internal reference films; in some cases they were shown to wide audiences and not followed by critique sessions. It was not until late 1973, almost two years later, that the State Council responded with a directive that was almost

---

206 Though the iconic status of Kampf um Rom was undeniable. Cao Lei wrote that shortly after the Cultural Revolution, she happened to see Kampf um Rom in Beijing and found that the film copy had become so old that many parts of it were damaged – which attested to the frequent screening of this film and the popularity of internal reference films in an age when entertainment was meager (Cao 20).
207 The following excerpt from “Regulations on the Treatment of High-level Cadres by the CCP Central Committee and the State Council” issued in 1979 describes the viewing privileges of cadres: “In principle it is not allowed that film screening, opera or other forms of entertainment be specially organized for individuals. If films are screened for individuals, fees must be collected …when screening “internal reference films” that are not suited to extended audience circles, the children of high-level cadres must not enter.”
209Equivalent to the old Ministry of Culture.
verbatim to the Division of Culture report, banning unauthorized screening of sealed-up films.212

So far I have focused on the “internal”/elitist aspect of internal reference films: the contrast between Lenin in 1918 for the soldiers and Kampf um Rom for the cadres214 was a good satire of the contradictions of the Cultural Revolution. The “reference” aspect of these films only emerges as we look closely at the (partial) filmography. The purported reference value of these films lay in two areas: global politics/military affairs and film art.

(Anti-) Militarist Films

Japanese military-themed films made between 1960 and 70 were the best examples of the first kind of reference. Su Xiu and Cao Lei both recall that before dubbing work re-started in 1971 they were read a telegram from Zhou Enlai saying that these films extolling Japanese militarism were references for studying new developments in international class struggle.215 Retrospectively Su seems somewhat dismissive of this claim, saying that at the time they “readily took it to be true.”216 But the “proletariat headquarters” seemed to be sincerely concerned about Japanese militarism around 1970-71,217 at least based on their media rhetoric.

212 Ibid., 269. It is interesting that in both documents the terms “poisonous films,” “internal reference films,” and “sealed-up films” were used interchangeably; it was likely that these terms referred to a combination of 17-year-period films banned at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and newly imported reference films.

213 For an account of foreign film viewing among China’s top leaders during the Cultural Revolution, see the last part of Qi Zhi’s interview with Dai Guangxi (Li, Z 33-37). Jiang Qing and Wang Hongwen of the “Gang of Four,” as well as top leaders such as Zhu De, Deng Xiaoping, and Ye Jianying often requested screenings of internal reference films accompanied by simultaneous translation. According to Dai their film selection group was headed by Liu Qingtang.

214 A famous scene in In the Heat of the Sun.


216 Ibid.

217 According to The Cambridge History of China vol. 15, since 1968 China had suspected Japan of nuclear rearmament and anti-PRC military operations. The authors believe that this was a fundamental mistake in China’s foreign policy and that the misjudgment was a result of the destruction of files kept at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See Chapter 3.
Of course, the term “Japanese militarism” had never really left People’s Daily ever since 1946, from the Korean War to the Japan/US Security Treaty. But the threat of Japanese militarism was felt ever more keenly since the mid-1960s, with the consolidation of the US-Japan-South Korea alliance and Japanese support for South Vietnam, and more importantly, with the Sato Eisaku government’s anti-PRC position and PRC’s own isolation. Militarist films had always been made in Japan, but before 1970 they never received more than a few lines of critique in PRC media and were never seen by a wide Chinese audience.

From 1970 to 1971, at least a dozen reviews appeared in People’s Daily critiquing recent Japanese militarist films; three of them targeted respectively Admiral Yamamoto, Battle of the Japan Sea, and Gateway to Glory and were written by the same author, Tao Diwen. The above three films and The Militarists were specifically approved by the State Council to be screened internally nationwide. The three reviews by Tao, like many other People’s Daily articles, were broadcast on radio so that even those outside the “internal” viewing circles could learn about these films.

In a way Tao’s reviews were supposed to be of more “reference” value than the films themselves, for in the reviews the films were turned into a foil for teaching the audience and readers about the militarist tendencies of the Sato government. Tao referred to these films as

---

218 Originally published in Guangming Daily. Tao’s critique of Admiral Yamamoto was cited by Pickowicz. They were later collected in a pamphlet Shattering the Pipe Dream of US-Japanese Reactionaries (Xinhua).

219 Here “internal” probably referred to military officers of all levels and possibly higher cadres outside the military. Wu, Di, comp. Zhongguo Dian Ying Yan Jiu Zi Liao: 1949-1979 III, (Beijing: Wen Hua Yi Shu Chu Ban She, 2006), 238.

220 For an account of the listening culture of the Cultural Revolution, see Nicole Huang’s "Listening to Films: Politics of the Auditory in 1970s China."

221 Li, Qun. Mei Hua Xiang Zi Ku Han Lai. Chengdu: Sichuan mei shu ban she, 1985.

222 According to Tao, the “pacifist” objective of Admiral Yamamoto only meant “not fighting the US” and was a perfect portrait of the current Sato government’s role as American imperialists’ Asian lackey (“Chuo”). The glorification of the Russo-Japanese war, whose motivation and outcome were tied to Japan’s expansionist ambition in China and Korea, was in line with the spirit of Sato’s 1970 Defense White Paper (Japan’s first post-War defense white paper) and Nakasone’s speeches (“Ri”). The “heroic” careers of two naval officers in Gateway to Glory
“ironclad evidences” that Japanese militarism was currently being revived. It is doubtful that the "proletariat headquarters” needed such filmic evidence for reference in terms of decision making. It is more likely that these films, accompanied by reviews and discussions, were used as audiovisual illustrations to inform the military and other cadres of a possible threat that China was facing.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to investigate whether in Japan these films were intended or received as militarist propaganda. Admiral Yamamoto and Battle of the Japan Sea (both directed by Seiji Maruyama, starring Toshiro Mifune, Yuzo Kayama etc.) ranked second on the Japanese domestic production box office chart in 1968 and 1969 respectively. These two films, along with Japan’s Longest Day, The Militarists, and Battle of Okinawa belonged to the Toho August 15 series (東宝 8.15 シリーズ) which ran from 1967 to 1972. Gateway to Glory was the most recent in Daiei’s “Ah” (あゝ) series, of which at least two became internal reference films. Following this pattern, Cherry Blossoms in the Air and curiously, Oh, My Comrade, a comedy, were also introduced. Even the Men and War trilogy, directed by JCP member Satsuo Yamamoto, was included in the internal screening and criticism campaign.

That right wing and leftist war films were equally popular in Japan during the Sato era and served as an advertisement for the self-defense force at a time when the Sato government was planning a new round of arms expansion (“Jie”).

223 Though internal reference films were sometimes cited in party speeches. Speaking to the party members at the Shanghai Film Bureau, Xu Jingxian mentioned Patton (dubbed by August First studio) as “boosting the morale of American soldiers in Vietnam” and Love Story as “diverting attention from domestic class struggle and the war in Vietnam.” Xu concluded that “in recent years, American films have become even more reactionary politically and more decadent artistically (“Xu” 1972).”


225 All were released right before August 15 of each year. The 1972 one was not chosen as an internal reference film.

226 The three parts of Men and War were No. 1, No. 3, and No. 5 on Japan domestic production box office chart in 1970, 71 and 73.

227 Many of Yamamoto’s films, such as Storm over Hakone Mountain, The Street without Sun, Duckweed Story, The Matsukawa Case, The Family, and Oh! The Nomugi Pass were released in China before or after the Cultural Revolution.

228 The unfair critique of Men and War in Chinese media was a result of frictions between CCP and JCP in 1960s and of the stance of the Fukuda Masayoshi faction on the film (See http://www.xzbu.com/7/view-4596150.htm).
equally condemned by the Chinese media showed the adaptability of the audience and the fluidity of ideology and propaganda.

These militarist films, rightist or leftist, would have enjoyed the same popularity in China if they were publicly released. Within the “internal” circles where these films were shown, they were received in ways rather similar to the so-called “poisonous weed” films of the early and mid-1960s.\textsuperscript{229} No doubt many found the reviews persuasive and viewed the films through their critical lenses (this would be especially true for those who did not watch the films but only read the reviews or heard them on radio), but there is evidence from memoirs that indicates otherwise.\textsuperscript{230} The series of Japanese militarist films did leave a profound influence on the mind of Lin Liguo (son of Lin Biao). \textit{Project 571 Outline}, a statement of the planned coup d’état by Lin and his gang, repeatedly refers to the conspirators themselves as the “Combined Fleet” and ends with a call for the “Edajima spirit” – a reference to the Edajima Naval Academy featured in \textit{Gateway to Glory}.\textsuperscript{231}

Was it any wonder that the heroes of these militarist films were admired and emulated by Lin (and he was probably not alone among young male viewers in China)? If these somewhat militarist and propagandist films could “poison” the minds of Japanese youths (as Tao claims), why should they not affect Chinese viewers in a similar way? Soviet and Chinese propagandists

\textsuperscript{229} That “poisonous films” and “internal reference films” were used interchangeably in directives during the Cultural Revolution also pointed to this similarity.

\textsuperscript{230} A soldier recalls her surprise when she heard that all officers of her regiment were going to see the three Japanese films (apparently she was not aware of Tao’s reviews in \textit{People’s Daily} and \textit{Guangming Daily}); to her the struggle within the “proletariat headquarters” at the time (shortly before the Lin Biao incident) was far more immanent than the threat of Japanese aggression. Still she was excited about the opportunity for she had longed for new entertainment; she was proud too that even low level military officers had this viewing privilege over outside cadres of comparable level. But the viewing experience was a disappointment: most of her fellow officers, including those who went to junior college, knew little about WWII outside of China’s filmic depictions, let alone Japanese history. As no synopses or background information was given, the lengthy films left them confused and bored (Zhuang 44-45).

\textsuperscript{231} I am aware of the controversies regarding the validity of the \textit{Project 571 Outline} document and the Lin Biao conspiracy as a whole.
had repeatedly remarked that “the cinema is the most potent instrument for educating and
inspiring the masses,”232 and there is truth in that, except that the educational outcome is not
always as intended.233 The belief that a poisonous film could be made into a negative example to
educate the people rested on a faith in the natural persuasiveness of critique and the assured
defeat of the poetic by the analytic. Yet in a theater the audience identified first of all with the
camera-eye and second with the characters – where was the place for the critic and propagandist?
What were they next to the audiovisual appeal of the blockbuster spectacles and all-star cast234 of
the militarist films? It was wise of the State Council to urge (oftentimes in vain) local units to
organize critique sessions after screenings of internal reference films – “only after the poisonous
weed is ploughed can it turn into fertilizer,” says the directive.235 The only way to destroy the
appeal of poisonous films is to destroy the viewing experience altogether.236

To Learn from Hollywood

Around 1972, the dubbing of Japanese militarist films ceased.237 Throughout the 1970-76
period, (somewhat) contemporary films from Western countries were a constant stock in internal
reference films. Aside from the spectacular Kampf um Rom, most of these films follow the
pattern of import selection established during the 17-year period: literary adaptations, award-
winning hits, as well as lesser known TV movies. A new addition came around 1975 and 1976:
dozens of Hollywood films from 1930-40s were dubbed in Shanghai. Cao Lei recalls that the

---

233 I have mentioned this point in my discussion of foreign films of the 17-year period.
234 Especially those of the Toho August 15 series.
236 For instance, by showing only segments or broadcasting critique during screenings.
237 For a variety of reasons: Sato by then had left office, Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relationships were
warming up, Lin Biao and his son died in 1971, etc.
copies that were sent to them were old; some were broken and one even caught fire when they played it.\textsuperscript{238}

It later became well-known among the Chinese audience that it was Jiang Qing who commissioned these Hollywood films to be dubbed.\textsuperscript{239} According to Su Xiu and Cao Lei, these films were purported to be artistic references for model opera films.\textsuperscript{240} Chinese scholar Qi Zhi has looked into Jiang Qing’s favorite films and actors and discovered that she was a fan of Tyrone Power and ordered many of his films to be dubbed, that she never tired of watching \textit{The Red Shoes}, and that she admired Greta Garbo for her naturalistic acting style.\textsuperscript{241}

I have demonstrated that the restricted access to these dubbed films from Hollywood or the West in general constituted elitist privilege or status symbol. The contrast between Jiang Qing (and her gang)’s secret bourgeois taste and their over-the-top “progressive” slogans was ironic and reminiscent of \textit{Animal Farm}.\textsuperscript{242} But was there anything beyond this irony? Is it possible that we take Jiang Qing’s claim seriously, and ask if films from the West did serve as references for her filmmaking projects?

Despite the fact that Jiang ordered the Shanghai Dubbing Studio to dub her favorite star’s films for her own entertainment, it is undeniable that Jiang was serious about using internal reference films as artistic references. Evidence suggests that Jiang did repeatedly employ

\textsuperscript{238} Cao, Lei. "Wen Ge Zhong Shen Mi De ‘Nei Can Pian.’" \textit{Dang An Chun Qiu (Memories and Archives)} 8 (2010): 21. ROC heritage in a literal sense. See Chapter 1 on CCP’s reliance on ROC heritage.

\textsuperscript{239} Especially after the circulation of \textit{Empress of the Red Capital}, a (possibly apocryphal) translation of Roxane Witke’s \textit{Comrade Chiang Ch’ing}.


\textsuperscript{242} I.e. "Four legs good, two legs better!”
contemporary Western films as artistic examples as well as make her filmmakers watch Hollywood films. Shortly after the Cultural Revolution started, Jiang called Xie Tieli, Li Wenhua, Qian Jiang, and Cheng Ying to the state guesthouse to watch American films in order to prepare them for the making of model opera films. In Jiang’s words, “with these American films we do not emulate their content and ideology; we learn their techniques … for the benefit of our proletariat films.”243 From a collection of Jiang’s speeches during the Cultural Revolution it is apparent that she often cited internal reference films (such as *The Dove* and *Jane Eyre*) as she gave instructions to filmmakers from various studios, who presumably also saw those films.244 It is true that Jiang selected some films based on her personal tastes, but it is also true that she was seriously studying the aesthetics of her reference films.

Whether or how these reference films influenced the making of Cultural Revolution films is beyond my concern here; what is rather more fascinating is Jiang’s open admiration for and promotion of the artistic aspects of Hollywood films. Jiang saw a film as consisting of a binary of form and content: formal excellence in a bourgeois film aids the spread of capitalist ideology, whereas the same kind of formal excellence in a model opera aids the indoctrination of progressive ideology. But the form that she wanted her filmmakers to emulate, the classical Hollywood style (invisibility etc.) is itself an embodiment of bourgeois ideology, at least according to many theorists.245 In this way, the ideal propagandist film envisioned by Jiang was

---

243 Zhang, Huan, and Qing Yin. "Li Wen Hua Jiang Qing ‘Yu Yong She Ying Shi’ Bei Huan Shi." *Southern People Weekly* 2 (2011): 75.
244 *Collection of Jiang Qing’s Speeches 1966-1976* (Jiang Qing shi nian jiang hua hui bian 1966-1976). http://e-asia.uoregon.edu. Jiang Qing gave a series of instructions (e.g. use more long takes, achieve greener tones) to her filmmakers and according to Yu Ji, the inspiration for these instructions came from the internal reference films she saw (151). This view is corroborated by Cao Lei (21).
245 E.g. Comolli and Narboni’s famous essay “Cinema/ Ideology/ Criticism.”
nothing short of a chimera – maybe that could explain the schizophrenia of Jiang’s double life: proletariat fighter by day, and bourgeois audience by night.  

**Dubbing Bourgeois Films with Proletarian Voices**

As a young woman Jiang was an actress in Shanghai and presumably watched many Hollywood films, silent or sound. That she (and other leaders) would commission foreign films to be dubbed either for internal reference or personal amusement (such as Tyrone Power’s films) was a sign that Jiang and the leadership as a whole had been profoundly conditioned by PRC’s dubbing practice. Jiang was said to be particular about the quality of dubbing: when Shanghai Dubbing Studio first submitted their dubbed version of *The Red Shoes* for approval, Jiang rejected it and told the studio to redo it. The team then in charge of the studio had no choice but to summon Chen Xuyi and Qiu Yuefeng (both deemed reactionaries at the time) to serve as director and male protagonist.

The studios were also instructed to remain faithful to the content and sentiments of the original films. In August 1976, after relaying Jiang Qing’s favorable comments on Shanghai Dubbing Studio’s version of *Railway Children*, Xu Jingxian delivered the following speech to the studio personnel on their task of being the devil’s advocate:

> Dubbing foreign films is a struggle; over and again we learn lessons from both positive and negative examples. These films are extremely reactionary… yet when

---


you dub it is necessary to truthfully represent and express bourgeois feelings. Here lies the difficulty of your work. Do not fear; contact with these films will give you immunity. You have to analyze them with a sober mind while keeping in touch with workers, peasants and soldiers.248

It is doubtful if many in the studio acquired such immunity. Twenty some years later, fans of the Shanghai Dubbing Studio were celebrating the actors’ immunity from the “worker-peasant-soldier” ideology that surrounded them:

The dubbing actors of Shanghai Dubbing Studio also bought cabbages, rode bicycles, commuted on monthly tickets, attended discussion groups, and read newspapers; they led the same kind of life as every other Chinese. Why could they enter the space of Jane Eyre, War and Peace, and Les Misérables? They stood on the land of China, yet they lived above the clouds.249

Less than two months after Xu’s speech, the Cultural Revolution ended and the Shanghai Dubbing Studio immediately issued a report (quoted earlier) claiming that they had ceased to dub internal reference films for the Gang of Four. But according to Cao, internal reference films continued to be produced well into 1978. Later, the China Film Corporation formally purchased exhibition rights for some of these films so that they could be shown in theaters or on television.250 Even with the public release of some of these films, the secrecy and privileged status of internal reference films persisted. An interview with former members of the “Film

249 Su, Xiu, Wo De Pei Yin Sheng Ya. (Shanghai: Wen Hui Chu Ban She, 2005), 2. Note that the author acknowledges these films as unfolding in a space separate from and dissimilar to the space inhabited by the Chinese audience. But he was not referring to a cinematic space, nor a historical one. The real dichotomy he had in mind was a “geographical” one: “the land of China” vs. “above the clouds,” i.e. the elevated, refined Western Other.
Review Team251 was revealing: “after the Cultural Revolution, all foreign films were called ‘reference films.’” Watching reference/foreign films became the only means of entertainment for their tedious review process, and when the reviewers wanted to see reference films, the staff member would accompany the reviewers to China Film Company’s film archive, which was located on the outskirts and heavily guarded by the military; the staff member had to be at the reviewers’ company until they finished watching to return the films to the archive.252

It is often said that the dubbing of internal reference films enabled the actors to practice their trade during the Cultural Revolution and prepared them for the so-called golden age of dubbed foreign films which lasted from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. I would add that they prepared the elite audience for a smooth transition to the post-Mao era as well. Their intended, realized, or sometimes distorted reference value among their target audience was undeniable, despite all the hypocrisy and irony involved. But the public associated these internal reference films most strongly with the trope of clandestine elite entertainment, and that was for a good reason. When the wider public coveted or sought tickets to internal reference films they were aware of the schizophrenia within contemporary filmmaking, film exhibition, and culture and ideology as a whole. The public release of a number of internal reference films shortly after the Cultural Revolution saw the release of audience’s internal yearning – for something different, and for an alternative world-view. The barriers that kept these films to the elite were down, and “poison” flowed, as some would have it, and the public no longer had to keep a critical eye open. All they had to do was to peep.

251 Since late 1976, the “Film Review Team” at the Ministry of Culture spent over three years reviewing hundreds of pre-Cultural Revolution films.

Foreign films of the reform era have received more scholarly attention than the previous two periods. Li Jing’s dissertation, which partly deals with film import from the end of the Cultural Revolution to 1994, represents and summarizes most Chinese scholars’ view on this subject: on the whole, film import went along with the political and social trends of the period. The percentage of films imported from socialist countries went down, and even these films were less ideologically charged compared to their counterparts from previous decades. As for imports from the West, their theme and content went from “exposé of the dark side of capitalist societies” to individual heroism and other mainstays of entertainment genres. Elements from these films became fashion items, while Alain Delon and Takakura Ken defined masculinity for a generation of Chinese disillusioned with revolutionary heroes. Collectively these foreign films provided the Chinese audience with relief in an age of confusion and stress and enabled them to imagine a materialist and globalized future. It was also these foreign films that financially supported the Chinese film industry throughout the 1980s (enabling the China Film Company to make a profit despite the dismal performance of most domestic films); their high returns urged the authority to expand the quota and increasingly turn from art films to mass culture genres during the latter half of 1980s, but nothing could save the collapsing release rights-based import system, which survived the end of the Cold War by only three or four years – PRC’s first Hollywood revenue-sharing blockbuster, *The Fugitive*, was released in late 1994.

To follow along these veins would be repetitive. What I am concerned with here is rather the paradigm shift in foreign film viewing that took place during the post-Mao period. The major contradiction that determined the pattern of 17-year period foreign film import and exhibition –

---

253 Including Japan.
that of ideology, diplomacy, and title shortage – was no more, as PRC was turning away from Maoist politics, establishing relatively stable relations with most countries, and making large numbers of films on its own. The new contradiction that emerged during the post-Mao period – or rather, one that was obscured by the complex circumstances of the 17-year period – was that between the CCP’s will to control what people could see and the people’s means to get around the “parental guidance.”

To gain full control over Chinese people’s “world-view” was an important motive for switching to the release-rights system in the initial years of the PRC. During most of the 17-year period the loopholes were relatively few, and the audience mostly settled into an acquired taste for Soviet bloc films. By the time of the Cultural Revolution, the appalling scarcity of films for public release forced “internal reference films” onto a prominent stage so that they formed a separate canon. Therefore Chinese audience’s access to unsanctioned (“internal”) foreign films started with the Cultural Revolution. The era of “reform and opening-up” saw the CCP increasingly and inevitably losing its grip on common people’s foreign film access, and a powerful enabler in this process was technology: VHS and laserdisc. During the 1970s and early 80s the CCP complained that “internal reference films” leaked out (or trickled down); after mid-80s foreign films leaked in from abroad, via grassroots channels and in large quantities.

When China returned to Hollywood and revenue-sharing in 1994 it was not entirely due to the film industry’s financial crisis; to a great degree it was because a centralized, carefully-censored world-view was no longer viable. The CCP could no longer really “ban” any foreign film by not importing it; their import merely showed what they approved of. As the 1980s wore

---

254 One example was the “original version special shows” (原版片專場) held in 1950s for students learning a foreign language. These films were uncut and included those not publicly released in China. Reports say that young people who were not foreign language students often attended these screenings (SDFFG 1961).
on, the once dreaded “capitalist lifestyle” hurt less and less, and CCP foreign film censorship gradually came to resemble that of the ROC era. But important twists remained, and legacies from the previous decades continued to haunt China’s film import till the present day.

**Measures for Control over Imported Film**

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution “internal reference films” acquired a new meaning: no longer were they the few dozen films selected by central leaders; they flooded in through every possible channel. The *Circular Concerning Checking the Excessive Showing of Films for Restricted Information Only* (April 1980) mentioned the following sources for the new “internal reference films”: (a) those with connections requested films from the China Film Archive, the China Film Company and its local-divisions, or the military; (b) some institutions requested films from foreign embassies; (c) films were brought in by foreigners, overseas Chinese, and people from Hong Kong and Taiwan; (d) test-screening copies or the so-called “passing-by films (guolu pian).” According to the *Circular* some units organized internal screenings at will, sometimes openly on squares; some made copies or videotapes of the unsanctioned films and rented them to outsiders. The subsequent *Measures for Control over Imported Films*, promulgated in October 1981, stipulated that all feature films that institutions obtained from abroad had to be approved by the Ministry of Culture or its local divisions, before

---

255 In the words of Pickowicz, “the state, or at least the cultural liberals in the bureaucracy, have apparently given up on the Maoist (and Confucian) desire to order family and private life (2012, 337).”

256 “Films for restricted information only” is the official translation for 内部参考片. Throughout the dissertation I use the literal translation “internal reference film.”

257 Colleges in Shanghai, for example, would use their video equipment to show or copy illicit foreign and Hong Kong/Taiwan films. When Shanghai Normal University was showing *Mission to Tokyo* (1966) and *The Young Ones* (1973), the huge crowds broke the classroom door. See “Guanyu bufen gaoxiao liyong dianshi luxiang shebei lufang guowai he gangtai yingpian zaocheng buliang yingxiang de tongbao.” A22-4-548-28. Shanghai Municipal Archives.
they were handed over to the China Film Archive for custody. Features gifted to Chinese individuals would be denied entry and sent back abroad by the customs.

The CCP’s stance was clear: Chinese audience’s filmography had to be absolutely limited to official imports. According to the Circular the rationale was to ward off the “sugar-coated bullets” from the bourgeois world and protect youths from violence and pornography. But strict regulations from above only meant more secretive ways of obtaining and screening illicit foreign films.

**Piracy, Laserdiscs, and Videotapes**

From the 1985 *Temporary Measures for the Management of Film Videotape Distribution*, it is apparent that foreign features outside of the official import canon were still being purchased and distributed by regional film companies and other institutions, often disregarding the film bureau and the China Film Company’s censorship notices. Central regulations were powerless in the face of commercial interests – Li Jing quotes an example where (in Bengbu, Anhui) so long as one handed over 2,000 yuan or 10 tapes to the video company under the city’s cultural bureau, one had a free license to screen whatever films one had.⁵⁵⁸ According to Li these smuggled films had three characteristics: they were mostly from Hong Kong and the US; they almost all belonged to entertainment genres, including explicit pornography; they were mostly new productions (compared to official imports by the China Film Company). In the words of Ni Zhen, Chinese audience flocked to the video parlors not because it was cheaper and more convenient, but because they offered programs otherwise unavailable on the big screen.⁵⁵⁹

---

Theaters and regional film companies joined in the release of smuggled films to make up for their ever-declining attendance rate. A 1989 directive revealed that in southern coastal provinces, theaters openly put up advertisement and sold tickets for smuggled films of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and foreign countries (some were old copies of films shown in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 70s). Some theaters canceled screenings of domestic films to make way for smuggled films. Some smugglers persuaded their family and friends in the film system to show smuggled films; some traveled to distant towns and villages and talked local screening units into showing these films.260

By 1990 a central directive admitted that the influx of foreign feature laserdiscs were “out of control.” As of then, China was not yet capable of producing laserdiscs and relied on import; what was worse, the authority had not yet acquired the technology to “edit and cut some of the content of the laser discs.”261 Soon after, China saw rapid growth in its own production lines of laserdiscs, and predictably, the laserdisc processing trade became a convenient loophole for disseminating foreign films.262

China’s official re-synch with Hollywood did not occur till late 1994, but many in the audience gained their access through unsanctioned means almost ten years before that. The China Film Company’s import since mid-1980s was said to have leaned considerably towards the entertainment genres, but official imports mattered less and less. The inception of the Reform and Opening-up brought about a so-called “golden age” of dubbed foreign films, but it was short-lived – further reform and opening-up dealt dubbed foreign films a serious blow: once

illicit copies tore open the painstakingly constructed world of sanitized diegeses and Chinese voices, there was no return.
Chapter Three: Exchanging Faces, Matching Voices

Foreignized Voices

To Borges, dubbing is a “malignant artifice” whose main fault is “the arbitrary insertion of another voice and of another language.” To Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs, dubbing is simply impossible because the sound film has educated the public to immediately feel the contradiction between French facial expressions and English dubbing. Martine Danan argues that dubbing is an expression of nationalism, while Antje Ascheid and Markus Nornes emphasize the ventriloquist aspect of dubbing as it “mostly succeeds in effacing the film text’s foreign origin.” What these writers and scholars share is a belief in either the irreconcilable contradiction between the original image and the dubbing voice, or the overwhelming imposition of the latter upon the former.

In this chapter I show that despite the appearance of ventriloquism, dubbing is fundamentally analogous to Schleiermacherian literal translation in that dubbing requires bending the domestic voice to match the foreign lips and bodies. The Chinese dubbing practice, with its emphasis on synchrony or “matching voices,” produced “foreignizing” and “embodied” voices unique within the Chinese soundscape. In the second half of the chapter, I examine ethical issues in the representation of the Others in the context of dubbing foreign films in China.

In terms of Chinese dubbed foreign films, previous scholarship (very scanty to begin with) focused exclusively on political circumstances or film narratives, while translation and the

---

264 Balázs, Béla. Theory of Film: Character and Growth of a New Art. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publisher, 1980), 228.
dubbing voice were overlooked. In Nicole Huang’s recent article “Listening to Films: Politics of the Auditory in 1970s China,” she briefly discusses the dubbing voices in foreign films and concludes that close listening to dubbed foreign films was an act of listening against the total soundscape. This is something, but more can be said about the appeal and significance that these translated voices had for the Chinese audience.

The chapter’s title phrase “exchanging faces” is borrowed from a quote in Japanese author Kobo Abe’s novel *The Face of Another* – “a movie's a place where you pay your money to exchange faces for a while.”267 We may adapt it and say: a dubbed foreign film is a place where a nation exchanges faces with the foreign other for a while – only the face, while the foreign language and voices are violently eliminated and substituted with national ones.

Dubbing, which Martine Danan termed an expression of nationalism,268 is undeniably an overt form of speaking for the foreign other while pretending that the foreign is speaking for itself. Compared variously to the dybbuk in Jewish mythology and ventriloquism, dubbing is metaphorically akin to spiritual possession.

Admittedly, PRC’s initial choice of dubbing over subtitling resulted from a number of pragmatic rationales: Soviet Union, then China’s role model, had practiced dubbing for over a dozen years; subtitling was impracticable given the low literacy rate nationwide; and last but not least, according to Danan, dubbing is most compatible with a totalitarian national language policy.269 But almost incidentally, dubbing was also the perfect metaphor that projected China’s long-standing fear of spiritual dispossession in the course of Westernization. From the Self-

---

269 Ibid., 611-2.
Strengthening Movement’s motto “combining Eastern spirit and Western form”270 to Mao’s slogan “make foreign things serve China,” the anxiety over the loss of the national spirit has prompted many among the Chinese elite to emphasize utilitarian appropriation of the foreign as opposed to wholesale transformation. The idea was to keep the changes superficial, on the surface – exchanging faces – while leaving the Chinese essence undisturbed.

But is “exchanging faces” really superficial? The protagonist in Abe’s The Face of Another finds his personality and worldview changed by his newly installed plastic face – as his surgeon foretells him, “man’s soul is in his skin.”271 Tales and theories of the mask and the wearer, of form and content, assimilating and overpowering one another, are ancient and too numerous to relate. If the individual’s face and soul are an organic whole and inseparable, what happens when a nation decides to exchange faces?

In Theory of the Film, Béla Balázs famously argues that (successful) dubbing is impossible because “every language has inseparably pertaining to it a play of features characteristic of the people speaking the given language. To speak English and accompany the speech with Italian gestures is a monstrosity and the audience felt this.”272 To dub, to impose the foreign (language) face and the national speech on one another, is to enact a collision between two languages and cultures. While Balázs pronounces the death sentence on dubbing as a viable method of film translation, in the field of literary translation, “collision of languages” is, at least for the school heralded by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Antoine Berman and others, the very task of translation. Foucault describes this school of translation as “hurling one language against

270 This is Douglas Wilkerson’s translation of 中學為體，西學為用 in his article “Film and the Visual Arts in China: An Introduction (Ehrlich 40).”
272 Balázs, Béla. Theory of Film: Character and Growth of a New Art. (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publisher, 1980), 69.
“another” and “using the translated language to derail the translating language.” In the words of Berman, the two languages “enter into various forms of collision and somehow couple.” Foucault and Berman’s metaphors refer to the type of literal and foreignizing translation advocated by Schleiermacher, which bends the target language to adhere as closely as possible to the foreign tongue. The rationale for Schleiermacher’s method lies in his belief that a person’s being and all her thoughts are produced and bounded by the language she speaks, and that only literal translation can enable a national language to appropriate the spirit of foreign languages and thus strengthen, expand and rejuvenate itself. Much like the surgeon in *The Face of Another* who claims that man’s soul is in his skin, Schleiermacher believes that the spirit of a nation is manifested in its language.

Despite the enormous differences between literary and audiovisual translation, I argue that foreign film dubbing is fundamentally analogous to Schleiermacherian literal translation. Both literal translation and dubbing put form before content: while the former bends the domestic literary conventions towards the foreign, dubbing bends the domestic voice to match the foreign lips/body – indeed the Chinese word for dubbing *peiyin* literally means “(to) match voice.” In foreign film dubbing, where audio-visual synchrony is a foremost priority,

---

274 Ibid.
275 Literal translation is usually pitted against the dominant method that naturalizes the foreign text according to domestic conventions and translates the sense and not the letter.
276 Lu Xun, another famous adherent to Schleiermacher’s theory in the Chinese context, will be mentioned in the next section.
277 Schleiermacher and Balázs are essentially in agreement with each other on the fundamental formative role of the national language on the subject – internally in terms of thoughts, and externally in terms of body language. Their major divergence is that Schleiermacher believes in the plasticity of the national language through translation, while Balázs focuses on the collision.
278 Here I refer to the type of dubbing that strives for phonetic and character synchrony as practiced in China, not the type commonly practiced in Italy and the United States.
279 As Markus Nornes argues in his chapter “Loving Dubbing.”
foreignization or literalness is not a deliberate choice but a nonnegotiable necessity.\textsuperscript{280} The foreign voices were indeed eliminated, but at what cost! The domestic voice was bent, almost by mechanical force, by the foreign body – its lip movement, its gestures, and even its original voice.\textsuperscript{281}

The audience often could tell that the dubbed voices were “foreign,” for though the actors spoke standard mandarin they had a peculiar “foreign” accent - to match the tempo and rhythm of the original speech they were forced into drawls, prestos, paddings, and unnatural pauses unheard of in everyday mandarin. Voice actress Su Xiu said in an interview, “Why did people think our dubbing, which was standard Mandarin, had foreign flavor? It was because we strove to adhere to the characters.”\textsuperscript{282} The bending sometimes went beyond the basic imperative of lip synchrony: in the early 1950s the directors of dubbing were concerned that the Chinese voice, coming out of a stereotypically thin and small figure, could not match the deep and solid voice of the stout Soviet body. They insisted that the Chinese actors emulate the pitch and timbre of Soviet characters, in addition to sound technician’s postproduction to enhance the bass.\textsuperscript{283}

The conspicuous foreignization in the dubbing process contrasts sharply with the sentiment of nationalist self-assertion reflected in the Chinese terminology for dubbed foreign film: in the early years of PRC it used to be called 翻版片 (reprinted films), but soon after the name was changed into 翻譯片 (translated films) and later 譯製片 (translated-produced films), which curiously emphasizes the translation and dubbing process rather than the films’ foreign

\textsuperscript{280} Following this comparison one could argue that subtitles are usually closer to “sense-for-sense” translation.  
\textsuperscript{281} Schleiermacher argues that the foreign spirit resides in the letter; dare we follow Balázs and say that the foreign spirit also resides in the foreign visage/body?  
\textsuperscript{283} Zhang, Jin, ed. Zhongguo Dianying Ren Koushu Lishi Congshu: Changchun Ying Shi Dongbei Juan. (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2011), 314-5.
origin, elevating the Chinese domestication effort almost to the level of production. Yuan Naichen, commonly referred to as the “father of China’s dubbed foreign films,” insists on using the earlier term 翻版片 and argues that terms such as 翻譯片 and 譯製片 do not reflect the true nature of dubbed foreign films: in the dubbed version the foreign 版 (printing plate) remains the same, and this is the fundamental difference between dubbed films and translated novels (221). 284 Yuan’s comment on the nature of the dubbed foreign film is remarkably insightful: whereas in textual translation the entire original text is abandoned and replaced, in the dubbed foreign film the original is always there – at least partly – watching over the translation, announcing its translated-ness, and through its sheer presence bending the translation and dubbing.

The foreign film dubbing accent (“配音腔”) consisted not only of the aforementioned distortions for the purpose of lip-synch, but also heightened theatricality (partly as a result of the actors’ background and training) and a hint of “regional dialects”: according to actor Xiao Nan, Shanghai Dubbing Studio specialized in European films as the Chinese audience associated Europeans with the pidgin of the old semi-colonial Shanghai, whereas Changchun Film Studio, with many of its actors from the Northeast, was most suited to portray the workers, peasants and soldiers of Soviet films – indeed for most imported films the two studios followed that division of labor. 285 The world map was projected unto China’s regional dynamics and vice versa, 286 and foreignness was, to an extent, incorporated into the Chinese linguistic universe. If standard

285 Ibid., 326-7.
286 Though the projection was by no means coincidental. The Northeastern provinces naturally had closer ties with the Soviet Union, Japan and North Korea, and Shanghai had always been (mainland) China’s portal of Western capital and cultural infiltration. A similar case of foreign-local projection was that in early 20th century when film exhibition in Japan were accompanied by benshi narration, the two styles associated with foreign and domestic films were respectively named Yamanote and Shitamachi (two areas of Tokyo) (Dym 191).
mandarin is a symbol of authority and power in the PRC, was foreign film dubbing – standard mandarin with a “foreign accent” – a foreign(ized) authority, which both challenged and cohered with the domestic one? 287

I emphasize the “foreign accent” and the bending of the domestic voice mainly because current scholarship on dubbing tends to overlook the role of the original film text in the dubbing process. Antje Ascheid describes the to-be-dubbed film as “transcultural denationalized raw material… reinscribed into a new cultural context.” 288 Abe Mark Nornes, whose view on dubbing is apparently more nuanced than others, nevertheless claims that “in the gap between the ventriloquist’s thrown voice and the flapping of the dummy’s lips, the hegemony of the target language is laid bare as we speak through them.” 289 Both Ascheid and Nornes quote from Rick Altman’s article “Moving Lips: Cinema as Ventriloquism,” but neglect to mention that Altman is theorizing about postproduction dubbing in domestic cinema, not translingual dubbing. An outright comparison of foreign film dubbing to ventriloquism overlooks the fact that the lip movements in the former are a priori and from a different linguistic system. So long as the foreign lips and facial expressions appear on the screen, the domestic voice has to do its utmost to match them. 290 The domestic voice not only rewrites, it is also rewritten; much as the domestic voice speaks through the foreign figure, the foreign figure speaks through the domestic voice. Man’s soul is in his skin.

Though in a deeper sense Ascheid is right: a foreign film is oftentimes “denationalized

---

287 One can also argue that the regional accents in different dubbing studios demonstrated the natural divisions rather than unification of the Chinese language.
290 The discrepancy between my theory of dubbing and those of Ascheid’s and Nornes’ may also be explained in terms of differences between national dubbing industries. The amount of time and effort that Chinese dubbing studios spent on manipulating the domestic voice to ensure near-perfect synchrony (guaranteed by a state-run instead of market economy) was perhaps unparalleled in the countries that Ascheid and Nornes study.
raw material.” Only this denationalization starts not with dubbing, but with import. In a foreign film we come face to face with the inevitable shallowness of global exchange – a result of the sheer impossibility for a national mass audience to develop deep knowledge and curiosity for foreign cultures. The global or regional hegemony of certain cultures, and the current trend of producing blockbusters aiming to appeal to global audiences, certainly serve to temper the previous statement somewhat. But in most other cases, what gets “translated” in a foreign film is but the tip of the iceberg: the spoken or written texts in the foreign language. No film translator has felt obliged to explain even the most obscure of the original film’s iconographies, social and historical background, or other cultural specificities. They are inconsequential to the audience’s audiovisual pleasure: only the “universal” storylines and emotions are to be understood and remembered. This is the way in which “exchanging faces” is truly superficial.

But some things do get across. Humans are animals of imitation, and visual and verbal objects easily become desires. The platé (dress) in Soviet films and the outfit of detective Morioka in Manhunt were fashion items for the Chinese audience – exchanging faces became exotic masquerade. When the audience heard from Lenin in 1918 the famous line, “there will be bread and there will be milk,” they did not question whether those staple foods were Russian/Western; bread and milk were simply normalized and internalized. This, of course, was in a great measure thanks to the empathy induced by the dialogue dubbed in the domestic language, which Ascheid compared to “a virus transmitter for a cultural infection.”

Though here I might have trivialized the power of foreign cultural artifacts. Yu Hua, recalling his encounters with various foreign novels, concludes that “if literature truly possesses

---

291 Here I am excluding those conscientious volunteer translators for streaming websites who sometimes add detailed footnotes in their subtitles.
a mysterious power, I think perhaps it is precisely this: that one can read a book by a writer of a
different time, a different country, a different race, a different language, and a different culture
and there encounter a sensation that is one’s very own.” 293 It always seems trite to celebrate
human empathies that transcend cultural differences, yet it is one of the most convenient and
persuasive guarantees against cynicism towards the value of cultural exchange.

Embodied Voices

In his famous essay “The Grain of the Voice,” Roland Barthes defines the “grain” as “the
materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue” or “the body in the voice as it sings.” 294 In
this essay as well as a passage on voice in The Pleasure of the Text, Barthes establishes a
dichotomy between “pheno-song” and “geno-song.” 295 The former aims at expression,
communication, “corporeal exteriorization of a discourse,” “the clarity of messages [and] the
theater of emotions.” 296 The latter searches for “the language lined with flesh…the articulation
of the body, of the tongue.” 297 Barthes’s favor of geno-song over pheno-song derives from his
distaste for “tyrannical, ubiquitous, self-evident signification” in an overwhelmingly commercial
and technological world where “the various manners of playing are all flattened out into
perfection.” 298 Distant as Barthes’s world was from that of the PRC, the distinction between
pheno- and geno-text has a special relevance for the place of foreign film dubbing in the Chinese
media soundscape.

293 Yu, Hua. China in Ten Words, 61. Can the same things be said about film? This question is not easy to answer, but I am inclined to say that for film it is less true.
295 Jean-Luc Nancy in Listening employs similar concepts named “signification” and “sensibility.”
Wang, 1975), 66.
297 Ibid., 66-67.
Barthes claims that cinematic voices naturally qualify as geno-voice as “the cinema captures the sound of speech close-up” and throws “the anonymous body of the actor into [one’s] ear.” But what if the body of the actor is not really there? What if the body is suppressed or enlisted for the cause of single-minded communication and persuasion? The voices in China’s radio, television, and cinema were in many cases fitting examples for Barthes’s description of pheno-text, plagued by precision and saturation. Comparing the voice of the legendary dubbing actor Qiu Yuefeng with the rest of China’s official media, Chen Danqing asks, “could you imagine Qiu Yuefeng reading editorials, reporting news, telling ‘revolutionary stories’?” The dubbing voices were unique because they had very different goals: they were not there simply to deliver lines but to approximate a body. In a now-obscure article titled “On the Artistic Creation of Dubbing Actors,” Qiu Yuefeng defines the art of dubbing as the “mimetic re-presentation” of the thoughts, feelings, language, gestures, and rhythm of the original character. Qiu compares the original character to a rubber doll and dubbing to the air that inflates the doll: with too little or too much air the doll would disfigure. During the dubbing process, the dubbing actor enters into the character on the screen and feels one with him/her - according to Qiu’s personal observation, their bodily gestures often become the same.

The basis, priority and measure of the dubbing actor’s performance was the body, not articulated messages and emotions. Qiu Yuefeng and Xiao Nan both cautioned against blindly

---

301 Qiu, Yuefeng. “Shi Tan Yizhipian Yanyuan De Yishu Chuangzuo.” *Zhongguo Dianying Zazhi* 8 (1957): 67. Qiu’s description of the dubbing actor interacting with both the figure on the screen and voice next to him/her is echoed by the published diary by Xiao Nan, a dubbing actor from Changchun Film Studio (154-5). Notably, when it comes to the dubbing actor simulating the bodily gestures of the screen character, Xiao Nan argues that “lines uttered without bodily gestures are drab, lifeless, unnatural and therefore untrue and unmoving (82);” Hungarian author István Fodor also suggests “getting the dubbing actors to copy as closely as possible the movements seen in the picture” as a method to realize character synchrony (77).
following the pauses and intonation of the original dialogue; this rather demonstrates dubbing actors’ natural tendency to follow physical cues at the expense of articulation of meaning. Though only the dubbing actors’ voices were recorded, they were far from being “nothing but a voice” – they were embodied voices i.e. molded by the body. Nothing illustrates dubbing’s plastic, somatic nature better than Qiu Yuefeng’s metaphor of air inflating a rubber doll. Chen Danqing is amazed that Qiu Yuefeng’s “decadent” voice was allowed to air in mainstream media\(^{302}\) – such tolerance was due to the fact that Qiu was simply following the demand of his art. Unlike many other art forms, “perfection” in dubbing cannot possibly be achieved by flattening out or reduction; its relentless goal is to be mimetic and well-synched, and this is by definition material, sensual, geno-voice, and, if we follow Barthes all the way, conducive to jouissance.\(^{303}\)

If the dubbing actors distinguished themselves from mainstream voices by adhering to the body and putting form before content, the audience likewise could transcend the official, message-oriented way of listening by attending disproportionately to the form, the body, or the grain in the dubbing voice. This grain was, in the words of Barthes, “an erotic mixture of timbre and language,”\(^{304}\) as he listens to his “relation to body of man or woman singing” and loses his subjectivity. Many among the Chinese cinephiles were able to identify the dubbing actors’ voices within a few syllables, or even just a sigh. Yan Feng writes in his essay “Beautiful Voices,” “I did not even know what he (Qiu Yuefeng) looked like, but when the lights in the theater dimmed and the duck-like, hoarse, flat, dim, lusterless voice arose, my entire body would feel weak and numb as if under a spell… I found that when he dubbed villains he used a unique way of

---


\(^{304}\) Ibid., 66.
breathing, mixing minute air currents in his voice to produce a snake-like hissing sound.”

Decades after listening, Chen Danqing still remembers Qiu Yuefeng’s dubbed lines and “his hollow laugh, sneer, mumble, groan, as well as his heavy and resonant (中气十足的) whine.”

The other component of the grain of the voice, language, by which Barthes means its “diction” or “the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers,” was also at the center of Chinese audience’s fascination with foreign film dubbing. Contemporary writers and scholars often acknowledge this in passing (without references to Barthes). In the words of Chen Danqing, “when I look back on it, what we listened for greedily and were charmed by in Qiu Yuefeng’s voice, was really the living character of language and phonetics: that was what human feelings and humanity were about.” For Nicole Huang, “in the imagination of a generation of Chinese viewers and listeners, the transcribed film represents the highest form of the art of voice, one that brings out the musical, lyrical and romantic capacities of the modern Chinese language.”

Chinese audience’s attention to the dubbing voices’ diction was best illustrated in their fascination with mimicking some of the seemingly random, nonsensical lines, for example: “Morioka-san, look how blue the sky is, walk on and you will melt into the blue sky.” As the audience listened to and repeated such lines over and over, they stripped the sentences of their context and meaning and reveled in pure enunciation, cadence and rhetoric.

And in the repeated listening and mimicking, something else happened: the foreignized and embodied dubbing voices acquired a monotony of their own. During the Cultural Revolution...

---

308 Chen, Danqing. "Qiu Yuefeng." Duoyu De Sucai, (Jinan: Shandong Huabao Chubanshe, 2003), 111. Yan Feng’s essay “The Beautiful Voices” refers to this fetishism of dubbing voices as “phonocentrism.”
Lenin in October and Lenin in 1918 were probably screened as frequently as the model opera films. During the post-Mao era the “edited film recordings,” \(^{310}\) which were available through both radio broadcast or tape cassettes, enabled fans to replay and repeat after the lines in the fashion of second language acquisition – and it was a second language compared to the mainstream propaganda. Although, were the audience simply “listening against”? Were they not subconsciously following their Maoist-era habit as they compulsively learned random lines by heart as if they were slogans? Did they not find familiarity and comfort in the repetition of the small repertoire of film recordings, as the Chinese society changed rapidly before their eyes? Did they not experience pleasure of recognition, as foreigners in hundreds of films from all over the world spoke with a mere two or three dozen familiar voices, amid the real-life shocks and tensions during China’s rigorous opening-up?

Traduttore, Traditore

So far my focus has been on the voice. But in the words of Henry Higgins, we have to consider not only how someone pronounces, but what s/he pronounces. In the dubbing studio, the invisible translator (here literally, and also in a Venutian sense) of the dubbed film produced a draft translation, the actors tried it out, and then the discrepancy between lip movement and dubbing was fixed by a collaborative effort of distorting voices (discussed above) and revising the translation script. My comparison of foreign film dubbing to literal translation is valid only in the curious sense that in dubbing, the body of the foreign speaker is the “word;” while literal translation prioritizes “word” over “sense,” in dubbing the struggle is between the body/lip movement (the manifestation of language on the body) and sense. The translated film script still

---

\(^{310}\) When the visual foreign figures were out of the way, the identity of the voices was even more dubious.
contains “words,” but their literalness is considered less important in a film, and is something about which the translator/actor cannot afford to care. Walter Benjamin says that in the original text content and language are like a fruit and its skin, whereas in a translation language envelops content “like a royal robe with ample folds.”\(^{311}\) But what is the relation between language and content in dubbing? With the added dimension of the audiovisual speaker, the word/sense or form/content binary in traditional translation theory is further confused. The lip movements and “play of features” are form, and the characters’ speech is content. The speech/voice is form, and the script is content. It is within all these layers of the matryoshka doll that the word/sense binary – the central binary in translation theory – is buried.

When I said Chinese foreign film dubbing was foreignizing, I did not mean that it adhered to all aspects of the foreign. It could not possibly have achieved that. While Chinese dubbing pursued synchrony with the visual figure, the word and sense of the foreign dialogue was sacrificed. So long as the translated lines were plausible, for such distortions there was no penalty. On the contrary, inaccuracy and deliberate mistranslation had a perfect alibi: they were inevitable since the demand of phonetic synchrony was so high.\(^{312}\)

High as it was, the demand of phonetic synchrony was not absolute. There were, after all, many instances in the films where the speaker’s face could not be seen (clearly) so that the constraints on dubbing were much lessened. The translators and actors also strived for ingenious ways of phrasing and paraphrasing so that the gist of the dialogues was usually conveyed as well as possible. But the liberties that the Chinese dubbing took with the original were amazing sometimes. Some of the examples can be found in my analysis of the translation of *Proof of the* [Benjamin, Walter, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn. *Illuminations.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 75.](#)

\(^{311}\) Its counterpart in film subtitling is the limited space at the bottom of the screen, which is only about length, whereas in dubbing the demand of lip synch can justify graver inaccuracy.
Man in Chapter 4. On the whole there were three main types of deliberate mistranslation: over-
Sinification, simplification for the benefit of the audience, and adaptation to make the original
seem more ideologically correct. Xu Jingxian’s comments on the draft translation of Albanian
film Broad Horizons in 1968 are good illustrations of all three types. Xu was dissatisfied that
“water spirit” was translated as “Dragon King” and that Chinese idioms such as 天塌下来也要
頂住 (to hold out even when the sky collapses) dotted the script. “They are not sleeping; they are
always awake” was translated as “they are in combat, fighting the fascists” for fear that the
audience could not get the metaphor. “Little dove” was adapted into “little eagle” to eliminate
the original bird’s pacifist connotations. Many of such deliberate mistranslations were rejected
in the final version, but others survived. The translators and actors’ claim that they strove to
adhere to the original was only half true: they adhered most closely to the visual, and departed
from the content of the original speech when they had to and when they chose to.

Dare I now say that foreign film dubbing can be read as a metaphor of China’s
representation and assimilation of foreign cultures, in other words, China’s “foreignization”?
The pursuit of synchrony entailed technical constraints from all sides that neither overwhelming
conversion nor effective assertion of nationalist agency was possible. The situation was doomed
to complexity; form and content were confused at every level. The perverse attempt to
incorporate and reconcile form and content, domestic and foreign engendered an unimagined
chimera, with a life of its own, that betrayed both the domestic and the foreign.

---

313 The golden eagle is the national symbol of Albania.
314 Xu, Jingxian. 1968. “Xu Jingxian tongzhi shencha yingpian ‘guangkuo de dipingxian’ yijian jilu zhengli.” B177-
4-33, P1. Shanghai Municipal Archives.
315 It should be noted that oftentimes films from Eastern European countries came to China with a translated script in
a better known language, such as English, French, or Russian. The dubbing studios did not seem to have translators
who knew those Eastern European languages well enough.
316 “Westernization” and “modernization” are more familiar terms, which I will address in the next and last section
of this chapter.
The Ethics of Exchanging Faces

In the previous sections I have focused on dubbed foreign films’ roles in the domestic context; I have left untouched the political and ethical issues entailed by their representation of the foreign other. The framework for examining these issues is not readily available, as few have looked into the ethics of translation in non-Western contexts or audiovisual translation.

In his articles and books Venuti repeatedly laments over the fact that “English is the most translated language worldwide, but one of the least translated into.”317 This asymmetry in translation practice is matched by an inverted asymmetry in translation studies: the little translation into English that there is seems to have attracted the most attention from Anglophone scholars who theorize on the politics and ethics of translation. Spivak’s “The Politics of Translation” and Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “Thick Translation” both deal with translating Third World literatures into Western languages. Venuti’s monograph The Scandals of Translation spends seven chapters on translation into English (mostly from European languages) and only in the last chapter mentions translation activities in the Third World.

I have no intention of critiquing the excellent scholarship of the abovementioned authors; I merely point out that their works do not offer a suitable model for studying translation into Third World languages. When we evaluate translation activities in the Third World, should we follow the existing translation theories, which often derived from the experience of translating into European languages, or should these theories be turned upside-down due to the contrasting context and power-dynamic? Spivak mentions in passing that "the act of translation into Third World language is often a political exercise of a different sort.”318 Venuti, who specifically

---

addresses translation in the Third World, can be best described as holding a “double standard”: when discussing translation into English he rigorously advocates “demystification” and “minoritization,” i.e. introducing heterogeneity to the domestic language; but when it comes to Third World translation he argues “since the domestic in developing countries tends to be a hybrid of global and local trends, translation can revise hegemonic values even when it seems to employ the most conservatively domesticating strategies.” For Venuti, Lin Shu and Lu Xun’s translational methods, which are at the opposite ends of the domestication-foreignization spectrum, are equally laudable as they both promote domestic/nationalist cultural innovation by creatively appropriating the foreign.

Not only does Venuti revise his theory of heterogeneity to legitimize domesticating strategies in Third World translation, he also adopts a far more lenient attitude in evaluating the moral dimension in Chinese translations of Western literature with colonial subtext. While he condemns the government-directed publisher Balai Pustaka in colonial Indonesia for issuing translations of “adventure fantasies riddled with racist stereotypes and Orientalist exoticism” by authors such as Rider Haggard, Jules Verne and Pierre Loti, he sees early twentieth century Chinese translations of the same authors in a positive light, as Lin Shu “provocatively adopted the racist stereotyping” in those novels, believing that “representations of colonial aggression could move Chinese readers both to emulate and to resist their foreign invaders.”

Venuti’s standard for ethical translation in the Third World is inward-looking and utilitarian: so long as it promotes a nationalist agenda and does not blatantly collaborate with colonial or global capitalist hegemony, Third World translation is described as either reformist or

---

320 Ibid., 167.
321 Ibid., 180.
revolutionary, and the issue of ethical representation of the foreign other is precluded. Venuti’s
double standard mirrors the imbalance between Said’s Orientalism and Xiaomei Chen’s
Occidentalism: the scope of the former is transnational while that of the latter is largely
domestic. A translation ethics that focuses on the self is incomplete, and in a sense, unethical.
Not that Venuti consciously and condescendingly lowers the benchmark when it comes to Third
World countries, but it is important to rethink the peculiarities of translation ethics in the Third
World with adequate seriousness and from an adequate standpoint.

It is also questionable whether “Third World countries” is a useful category of analysis
when discussing translation ethics. In his chapter “Globalization” Venuti uses terms such as
“subordinate cultures,” “developing countries” and “colonial and postcolonial situations” almost
synonymously. This level of generalization (the West versus the rest) makes it difficult to
address the specific circumstances of individual Third World countries such as China on which
their translation ethics should be based. Though China is sometimes described as having a “semi-
colonial” past, it is set apart from the typical postcolonial situation by the fact that there had not
been a colonial language versus indigenous language dynamics on a significant scale. During the
Cold War era (or throughout most of China’s history for that matter), the dominance of the
Chinese language (broadly speaking) on its territory was basically unchallenged, and Chinese
nationals’ familiarity with foreign languages was minimal. This fact should make us think twice
before imposing on China the translation ethics derived from other Third World but postcolonial
nations. Furthermore, unlike many postcolonial countries which were non-aligned during the
Cold War, PRC’s translation efforts were heavily colored by CCP’s anti-capitalist ideology and
international politics of the time. It was a time when exaggerated glorification of the West was
simultaneously anti-official and therefore “liberating” according to Xiaomei Chen. And indeed,
the very concept of “the West” must have been murky in the minds of the Chinese during the Cold War: did it include the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union (fervently emulated in 1950s and later estranged), whose population looked almost indistinguishable from the rest of Europe? Did it include Japan, a modernized capitalist Asian power, which had long served as China’s surrogate West? These two questions are especially relevant to the study of China’s dubbed foreign films during the Cold War, as imports from these murky regions significantly outnumbered those from Western Europe and the United States.

Lastly, I would like to clarify my definition of “translation ethics” in the context of Chinese dubbed foreign films. I follow in the footsteps of Venuti, Spivak and Appiah, but I lay much less weight on the agency of the translator (or the commissioner, i.e. the CCP). Rather I am interested in the gap between seemingly ethical intentions and the circumstances-driven results – in other words, unwittingly unethical practices/realities. I adopt this approach because the many political, financial, and diplomatic constraints involved in China’s foreign film translation rendered it distinct from the more personal literary or academic translation.

On the surface China’s approach in film import during the Cold War seemed to conform to Venuti’s ideal. Compared to the predominance of Hollywood in contemporary China or much of the Republican era, the Cold War era was an anomaly, with film imports from dozens of countries. On closer examination, this seeming open-mindedness was propelled less by ethical intentions than by pragmatic circumstances. The diverse range of nations represented in dubbed foreign films reflected not so much China’s respect for global cultural variousness, but rather China’s place in Cold War alignment. China’s primary purposes for importing foreign films - to supplement domestic output, to propagate ideology, and to betoken diplomatic relationships - were dictated by necessity and largely utilitarian, and the goal of cultural exchange was
secondary at best. Needs must, but linking film import to politics and diplomacy had the inevitable side effect of fostering among the Chinese audience a cynicism towards the inherent value of sincere cultural exchange. The fruits of the Sino-Soviet (1950s) and Sino-Japanese (1970s-80s) film exchange were impressive yet rather short-lived; with the vicissitudes of China’s ideological and diplomatic shifts, films from certain countries came and went like fashion. Serious commitment to sustained film exchange is an impracticable ideal for any country, and China was apparently no exception.

China’s Cold War film import had the appearance of progressiveness also by virtue of the fact that unlike some Third World countries which were flooded with films from the West, the majority of China’s foreign films came from the “margins” of the West; moreover, instead of appealing to popular taste in metropolitan consumerism, their purported aim was nothing less than to propagate leftist ideology. But the relative absence of the West proper does not erase the relevance of Venuti’s paradigm of translation ethics which derived from postcolonial or globalized situations.\textsuperscript{322} If to Hollywood films during the ROC era we can apply Venuti’s critique that translation from popular genres in dominant cultures “invite the pleasures of imaginative identification” at the expense of concerns for domestic culture,\textsuperscript{323} could not the same be said for Soviet and Eastern European films in the PRC, when they virtually succeeded the

---

\textsuperscript{322} Chen Huangmei, head of the central film bureau, made the following comment on the connection between Eastern Europe and the West in 1963: “…the cultures of Eastern Europe originally were linked to Western capitalist culture in countless ways; they all took pride in speaking French. A Hungarian director told me once that Hungarian culture can be traced from Budapest back to Vienna and then to Paris. When we were in Hungary, we asked to see their night clubs. A scriptwriter who accompanied us said, you guys don’t really like night clubs; you just want to prove how deeply we were influenced by Western culture. We went, and it was indeed just like night clubs in the West. Striptease did not originate in the US but Romania; Romania has a theater that specializes in striptease.” Some of Chen’s hearsay were not necessarily factual, but it is interesting that his examples focused on clubs.

\textsuperscript{323} Venuti, Lawrence. \textit{The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference.} (London: Routledge, 1998), 163. Despite PRC’s professed progressive ideology during the Cold War, the popular genres condemned by Venuti, such as romance, detective, adventure, and swashbuckler were by no means rarities among China’s film imports (not to mention the “internal reference films” mentioned in the next paragraph). \textit{Fanfan la Tulipe} (dir. Christian-Jaque) and \textit{The Ghost Goes West} (dir. René Clair) were exhibited as early as the seventeen-year period and their likes greatly increased during the post-Mao period.
dominance of Hollywood and continued to repress the urgency of developing a domestic film industry? China’s film exchange during the seventeen-year period was very much directed by the power imbalance within the socialist camp. This dynamic faded with the Sino-Soviet split and the Cultural Revolution, and during the post-Mao era the import and exhibition of films from the West saw a dramatic increase.

What remained marginalized throughout the Cold War period were films from the Third World. Venuti’s observation on the asymmetry in global translation practice i.e. prioritizing Western texts at the expense of Third World texts certainly applies to China’s film import. There were, certainly, good excuses for this: China had not established diplomatic relationship with many countries, especially during 1950s and 60s; the imbalance of film industries worldwide was a given, as film production, unlike literary production, required significant capital investment. But these circumstances do not efface the reality that China’s “progressive” ideology did not translate into proportional representation of the Third World on its screens. The binary of communism versus capitalism was projected by filmic imageries from the eastern and western halves of Europe (led by the Soviet Union and the United States on each end), as well as from neighboring Asian countries in both camps such as North Korea, Vietnam and Japan. The rest of the world, with the interesting exceptions of India, Pakistan, Egypt, and Mexico, were usually represented with only one or two films for each country as diplomatic tokens. The face of China’s dubbed foreign films was largely white, sometimes Asian, and rarely dark. It is also noteworthy that beneath the façade of their progressive ideology, many among China’s top

---

324 If, according to Venuti, translation in India was often shaped by Anglo-American canon for foreign literatures, were not PRC’s foreign film selection shaped and filtered, in 1950s at least, by the taste of the Soviet Union and its satellites, either via their bulk supply or their secondhand relay of films from the West?
325 Pickowicz’s claim about the theme of spiritual pollution in Chinese films in the post-Mao era and its impact has to be balanced by the fact that Chinese audience had access to foreign films and could to some extent form their own opinion based on these films.
leaders (e.g. Jiang Qing) enjoyed and preferred “bourgeois” films in private (e.g. internal reference films), which anticipates the current Chinese (and global) taste for mass entertainment genres from the West.

When it comes to PRC’s representation of the West, the Soviet bloc, and Japan through foreign films, we come back to a question I raised earlier: Could there possibly have been “injustices” in these mostly favorable representations, i.e. films that depicted for the Chinese audience desirable modernities in either socialist or capitalist versions? If we hold these translated films to Venuti’s standard for translation in developed countries, it is easy to observe that they fostered misconceptions and cultural stereotypes. The overwhelming anachronism in the film selection from Western Europe is a case in point. This anachronism was partly a result of the preeminence of two genres: World War II drama and adaptations of (especially nineteenth century) literary classics. Stories set during WWII had the advantage of being morally unambiguous and thus complying with Chinese aesthetic at the time. Literary adaptations were favored for reasons ranging from Marx’s commendation for critical realist literature, China’s investment in literary translation since the late Qing, the Chinese and Soviet Communist Parties’ conservative admiration for the Western literary canon, and so on. Even films that did not belong in those genres were often set before WWII, or in the realm of fantasy and fairy tales. The curiously antiquated image of Western Europe on PRC’s screens during most of the Cold War period reflected and intensified PRC audience’s isolation from the contemporary West, which the CCP considered more ideologically contaminating. The fear of “spiritual pollution” also

---

326 The China Film Company’s financial incapacity to purchase newer productions was also a factor.
327 Zhang Fengkui, who worked at the Euro-American division of the import and export department in the film bureau in the mid-1950s, recalled that he started with Dickensian and Shakespearean literary adaptations for with those he was “not likely to make (political) mistakes.” His choices included *Boule de Suif* (dir. Christian-Jaque 1945), *Richard III* (dir. Laurence Olivier 1955), *Great Expectations* (dir. David Lean 1946) (Bian 70).
prompted the CCP to eliminate “unhealthy” elements (such as cursing or partial nudity) in its film selection, editing and translation processes, so that in the dubbed films there was nothing that could appear offensive to the Chinese audience. Such caution issued from the paradox that the CCP hoped to expose the malaise of Western capitalism but feared exposing the Chinese audience to their “decadent” influences; they wanted the Chinese audience to emulate the progressive example of the socialist comrades but not their less restricted manners.

What emerged from the anachronism and purification was a highly exoticized and idealized image of the developed world. Elevated humanistic feelings, which the audience cherished especially during the decade after the Cultural Revolution, manners and material luxuries of the aristocratic or bourgeois life, which never fails to attract audiences of all times and places, and the relative liveliness and freedom as compared with China’s domestic films, rendered the filmic West, and by extension the real life West, far more benign and desirable than the kind of anti-West official Occidentalism described by Xiaomei Chen. Venuti’s criticism of the regressive-ness/conservatism in some of the post-colonial and globalized translation can certainly be applied here, to which I would add that the implications of such image of the West lay not only in the audience’s perception of China’s position vis-à-vis the West, but in their imagination of the global cultural hierarchy. In 1977 the Shanghai Dubbing Studio refused to dub Chinese films into European languages on the ground that some of the dubbing actors they employed used to live in former British or French colonies and had “colonial accents” which “had adverse effects on the foreign audience.”

328 “Shanghai shi dianyingju geming weiyuanhui zhi wenhuabu fu shangyichang de baogao [The Shanghai Film Bureau Revolutionary Committee to the Ministry of Culture; Attaching Report from the Shanghai Dubbing Studio].” B177-4-576, P6.
associated with former colonies; ideally the Chinese revolutionary heroes should align themselves with the received pronunciation of the metropoles.

And that was not all. Here I will go one step further and explore another dimension of translation ethics which is less dependent on politics and power relations. I argue that cultural stereotypes often issue not from intentional malice but ignorance, an ignorance of the Other which we should view as an original sin to be redeemed with knowledge; and this ethics should not only apply to developed nations but to Third World nations such as China. Before I discuss the issue of ignorance in the context of China’s dubbed foreign films I must turn to the second issue I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section: how should we study audiovisual translation? For as I will show below, the ignorance in this case was very much related to and corroborated by the format used in film translation.

In the previous part of this section I have focused on the ethics of the choice of texts for translation; now I come to the translation and dubbing process per se. If we follow what Antoine Berman stated as the “properly ethical aim of the translating act” – receiving the Foreign as Foreign,\(^\text{329}\) we find that the ethicality of film translation, mostly determined by (the choice of) the medium itself, is highly ambiguous. Compared to literary translation, film translation only renders/compromises part of the original film text, yet what it renders (i.e. the verbal text) often strays further from the original than in literary translation due to technical restraints in either subtitling, dubbing or voiceover. Film translations are also presumed to be more transparent: we speak of untranslatable literary works such as *Finnegans Wake*, but seldom of untranslatable films.\(^\text{330}\) George Steiner says that translation (and all understanding) starts with an act of trust: at


\(^{330}\) This is not only because as “mass entertainment” film translation is not supposed to be difficult, but also because translational difficulty or impossibility imposed by the medium is not recognized as untranslatability.
the outset the translator must gamble on the coherence and symbolic plenitude of the world i.e. that there is something to be transferred, and that analogies and parallels are valid. Film translation presumes an even greater coherence of the world: that the distortions in dialogue translation due to the medium’s technical impediments will not be detrimental; that it is possible to enable the audience to witness and make sense of the dramas of foreign lands in real time, even though there is no time and space for explanation and contextualization. The three most viable methods of film translation – dubbing, subtitling, and voiceover – all operate on creating for the audience the illusion that they could follow what the characters are saying. Instead of a humbling experience of encountering the unmediated foreign, a translated film compels the audience to identify with an understanding of the foreign that they do not possess.

If all three methods of film translation tend to make the foreign film appear completely intelligible and foster complacency in the audience, dubbing does so to the greatest degree. Subtitling at least pretends to be subdued and respectful, and voiceover at least announces itself as translation; but dubbing, or making the foreign characters speak the domestic language, is deceit of the clumsiest kind. I mentioned that (well-synched) dubbing is analogous to Schleiermacherian literal translation, the goal of which is to serve the domestic cultural enrichment and rejuvenation. Similarly, in the case of Cold War era PRC, the foreign-accented dubbing (together with the film narratives) constituted a different voice outside the mainstream. But might the Chinese dubbed foreign films not also have been suspect of

---

331 E.g. the kind of “thick translation” advocated by Kwame Anthony Appiah, following Clifford Geertz’s model of thick description. There are exceptions: sometimes there are detailed synopses on film programs; sometimes the exhibition is accompanied by narration in the style of the Japanese *benshi.*
332 The term for dubbing in Japanese “fukikae” has a secondary meaning that has to do with cheating while gambling (Nornes 208).
333 The difference was that unlike Schleiermacher’s translation project, this effect of dubbed foreign films was not intended by the CCP.
334 As I mentioned in the previous section, Martine Danan has long before pronounced foreign film dubbing as an expression of nationalism.
Schleiermacher’s nationalistic agenda? In these cases foreignization and nationalism are not contradictory, for dubbing simultaneously foreignizes the self (i.e. bending the domestic language and voice) and assimilates the Other (i.e. making the Other speak the domestic language and consequently more like the self).

Yet before we judge foreign film dubbing to be unethical as it does not truly receive the foreign as foreign, we might consider two questions: first, what are the other criteria for ethicality besides receiving the foreign as foreign? Second, is it at all possible to be ethical in film translation? These questions are raised because presenting the foreign in unmediated or less-mediated forms often turns out to promote not understanding, but hostility and fear. When foreign sound films were first exhibited in French theaters, the audiences were outraged at the sound of foreign speech. In domestic films, when characters speaking foreign languages go untranslated (such as the Germans in Die Hard), the distancing effect is immediate. Spoken language has been a marker for group identification long before the rise of nationalism, as is evidenced in the biblical story of shibboleth and the Greek etymology of the word “barbarian.” The gut feeling that arises at hearing one’s native tongue is exploited in the Japanese translation of Full Metal Jacket, where the entire film is subtitled except for the scene of Cowboy’s death. The testimony of the translation director Harada Masato, which Nornes quoted at length, forcefully illustrates the power of dubbing in facilitating character identification:

I prefer subtitles as a rule, but when I watched my own dubbing I was so moved.

If it is subbed, the people on the screen are really foreign because they look different and speak a language you can’t understand. There’s a built-in distance.

---

But with dubbing it’s close. They are white, but when Cowboy dies at the end, it was like a friend died because he was speaking Japanese. I want Japanese to feel that kind of pain, but they won’t if it’s subtitled. It’s simply not the same.336

If Harada’s observation were true (which it is hard to prove or disprove), if we can truly empathize with others only when they are not “really foreign,” then the possibility of a fully ethical film translation is dismal: either assimilating the foreigners by compromising their linguistic identity, or keeping them emotionally distant, the translator is between the devil and the deep sea. The Chinese audience of dubbed foreign films may have been lulled into a fool’s paradise and caught a glimpse of the pre-Babel utopia and felt the phantasmatic foreign figures to be as endearing as their compatriots. Their unconscious belief337 in this utopia must have met with unconscious dismay when they encountered foreigners in real life: the latter did not all speak fluent Chinese, and were “really foreign.”

Even if dubbed foreign films had predisposed the Chinese audience to good will towards foreigners and their culture, such sentiment was unsustainable, either in imagination or real life interaction, in the absence of substantial knowledge on foreign cultures. I mentioned earlier that dubbing fosters nationalist complacency more than other methods of films translation; this complacency is not so much a sense of superiority or xenophobic resentment, but first and foremost unwitting ignorance and closed-mindedness. The foreigners on the screen looked and

337 Drawing on Octave Mannoni’s study “Je sais bien, mais quand même…” (I know well, but all the same…) and his conclusion that a belief may be retained without the subject’s knowledge even if it flies in the face of reality, Christian Metz also observes disavowal and multiple belief in the audience of the cinema, arguing that despite the audience’s denial, part of him/her does believe the cinematic fiction to be genuinely true. For the audience of dubbed foreign films, Metz’s concept of disavowal also applies: the legitimacy of the “chimera” depends on the audience’s “will to believe”; as players in a game, the audience scrupulously respected this make-believe for the correct unfolding of the film. The improbable “chimera,” though dismissed by reason, is at the same time accepted without the audience’s awareness (72).
even sounded exotic, but the fluent and colloquial Chinese they spoke assured the audience of their sameness and easy intelligibility. Corroborating this illusion, semi-Chinese identity was imposed on foreign or ethnic figures in other media as well: in imported TV series, which were all dubbed; in domestic films, where ethnic minorities and foreigners spoke fluent Chinese; and in drama, where foreigners were played by Chinese actors in heavy "realistic makeup." The monolingualism in China’s media and its people was comparable to that of the United States, and it only gradually started to shift during recent decades.

One might smile at the Chinese-dubbed chimera’s reversal of the colonial subject, or the dubbing-accent’s reversal of colonial mimicry. While we celebrate China’s assertion of Third World nationalist agency, must we overlook the self-engrossed complacency that came with the monolingualism in China’s media? Beneath the façade of film exchange with forty-some countries, was Chinese audience’s dismal knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, and ignorance of their ignorance. Appiah, who coined the term “thick translation,” calls for translators to “undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others,” arguing that “unless we face up to the difference, we cannot see what price tolerance is demanding of us.” Admittedly, compared to Appiah’s context, the Chinese audience’s ignorance could be excused by a variety of historical circumstances. Neither am I denying that dubbed foreign films did “broaden the Chinese audience’s horizon” – as some like to claim – to some extent. But these factors should not prevent us from holding the admiration and affinity

---

338 E.g. in the 1959 film *Lin Zexu*, the British characters were played by foreign actors but dubbed in Chinese.
340 E.g. “Indian in blood and color, but English in taste…” (Macaulay, quoted in Venuti 1998: 171)
341 Su Xiu, famous voice actress of Shanghai Dubbing Studio, grew up and went to school in Japanese-occupied Manchuria. Chen Xuyi, legendary translator and later chief director at Shanghai Dubbing Studio for four decades, grew up in a comprador family.
342 Italics mine.
that dubbed foreign films prompted the Chinese audience to feel to the standard of “genuinely informed respect,” and recognize that stereotypes, simplified narratives, narrow, shallow and outdated knowledge of the Other are insufficient not just for the Western audiences, but for Chinese audience as well.
Chapter Four: Close-ups: Four Dubbed Foreign Films


Part One: *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918*

Romm’s Leniniana (*Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918*) were two of the best-known Soviet films in China during the Maoist era. *Lenin in October* (1937) was commissioned (with a closed competition for film scripts) by the Soviet government in 1936 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the October revolution. This film was often compared with Eisenstein’s *October* (1927). While *October* also significantly rewrites revolutionary history, *Lenin in October* is much more explicit in conveying Stalinist ideology – indeed Stalin personally discussed with Kapler over the script. Eisenstein’s depiction of spontaneous mass action is

---

344 This chapter contains previously published materials.
replaced by Romm’s emphasis on great leaders directing orderly revolutionary forces, following the new official style, socialist realism, which started with Chapayev (1934).

*Lenin in October* is significant in its pioneering depiction of both Lenin and Stalin. Before this film there was a de facto ban on the portrayal of Party leaders in feature films, with *October* as the only exception. But by the 1930s Stalin felt less constrained by the conventions of Party culture and Marxist histriography that emphasizes impersonal forces. He was also dissatisfied by the fact that documentary footage often failed to produce an official, idealized, and correct image of himself. The commission for films in 1936 specifically granted that Lenin could (should?) appear as a character, but no one was certain whether Stalin wanted himself represented in feature films – which partly explains the relatively brief appearance of Stalin in *Lenin in October*.

*Lenin in October* had to center on and strike a balance among three themes: 1) the greatness of Lenin; 2) Stalin as Lenin’s legitimate heir; 3) the greatness of Stalin. The heroic and holy image of Lenin is a symbol of the creation of the Soviet state and indeed its legitimizing foundation myth. In the context of 1930s Soviet Union the cult of Lenin took on yet a new meaning, as Stalin had assumed the mantle of Lenin so that "direct praise of Lenin became in effect indirect praise of Stalin." But continued reverence for Lenin could threaten the

---

352 Ibid., 150.
353 Ibid., 151.
354 Ibid., 154-5.
representation of Stalin as a great leader. Therefore in *Lenin in October*, Lenin's political and tactical intellect is downplayed and he appears more as a grandfatherly moral authority - according to Lenin's widow Krupskaya, this portrayal transforms Lenin into a Stalinist mode of authority (patriarchal and didactic). Though the character of Stalin does not occupy center stage in this film, various mentions and appearances of him haunt the narrative: Lenin requests a meeting with Stalin as soon as he arrives in Petrograd (it has been pointed out that Lenin's meeting with Stalin in October was a fabrication to “cover up the fact that Stalin had not played a role in the Soviet seizure of power”); Lenin consults Stalin about key decisions at every turn; Lenin pronounces “Comrade Stalin is right;” and finally, Stalin stands a little behind Lenin in the film’s final shot. In a word, *Lenin in October* not only shows Lenin as the uncontested leader of the revolution, but also shows Stalin to be Lenin's “faithful and active young deputy” and only legitimate successor.

*Lenin in 1918* (1939), commissioned for Stalin’s 60th birthday, revised the power dynamics in *Lenin in October* and caught up with the growing Stalinist cult: the revolution is attacked on all sides and Stalin became its primary heroic defender; other leaders, including Lenin, were incapacitated. Lenin on his “deathbed” demands “is this the end? If so … call Stalin.” In contrast to Lenin and Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Bukharin were portrayed as cowardly traitors in the two films. Indeed scholars refer to these films as “conspiracy drama” and “appendices to the show trials.” Lenin’s conversation with Gorky at

---

358 Ibid., 163-4.
359 Ibid., 163.
the beginning of *Lenin in 1918* reveals the film’s central theme “what should we do with our enemies?” and serves to justify the Great Purge during which the films came out.

*Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* were respectively dubbed by Northeast (later Changchun) Film Studio and Shanghai Film Studio in 1950 and 1951. It was the priority of the newly established PRC film industry to dub and release a number of classics from 1930s and 40s Soviet socialist realist cinema as Chinese films of this kind were still rare. Films such as *The Life of Wu Xun* and *Platoon Commander Guan* were still being made and swiftly condemned, showing that the CCP was still groping its way with the “new” art style, socialist realism, which had been practiced in the Soviet Union for almost two decades. While during the early 1950s the Soviet side seemed to have more say in PRC’s film import, in the case of *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* the CCP must have been more than willing to import them. The exhibition of these two films dated back to the Yan'an years: after a medical treatment trip to the Soviet Union in 1939, Zhou Enlai brought back to Yan’an a projector and some Soviet films, including *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918*. This was the beginning of Yan’an’s projection team.362 The two films were also exhibited in major cities under KMT control (albeit sometimes secretly), evidenced by several *People's Daily* articles, including one memoir by novelist Lu Ling.363

During the first decade after 1949, *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* (especially the former) were regularly exhibited on three kinds of anniversaries: the October Revolution festival on November 7, Lenin's death anniversary on January 21 and Lenin's birth anniversary on April 22. As similar events and film exhibitions were often carried out simultaneously in Eastern bloc countries and North Korea, one could argue that these annual exhibitions were symbols of

---

revolutionary internationalism in which PRC participated. Such idealism aside, *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* played a crucial role in symbolizing and reinforcing the diplomatic relationship between China and the Soviet Union during much of the Cold War era. It was telling that these commemoration/film exhibition events were often organized by national or regional Sino-Soviet Friendship Associations (other socialist countries followed a similar pattern). Even during the Cultural Revolution when “Soviet revisionism” was severely condemned, every year from 1967 to 1973 (with the exception of 1968) on November 7 the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association would hold a film reception to screen *Lenin in October* or *Lenin in 1918* alternately.\(^{364}\) Though in the Soviet Union *Lenin in October* famously underwent two revisions in 1956 and 1964 where scenes involving Stalin were cut or edited, (the original) *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* proved to be the only Soviet films ideologically acceptable to both PRC and the Soviet Union during the worst years of the Sino-Soviet split. The familiar line in PRC media was that though the Soviet Union was led astray by Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the Soviet people will one day prevail and bring back the legacy of Lenin and Stalin. At least until 1977, anti-Revisionism and presentation of the “true” picture of the Soviet past was still among the rationales of exhibiting these films in China at October Revolution anniversaries.\(^{365}\)

On a general thematic level, it is apparent that these films found favor with the CCP for two reasons. First, the October Revolution was part of the CCP’s foundation myth – a familiar propagandist line goes that “the thundering cannon of the October Revolution brought us (China) Marxism-Leninism.” Second, the portrayal of Lenin and Stalin in these two films (often described as “cult of personality”) was seen as a metaphorical portrayal of Mao – Mao in a sense

\(^{364}\) Reports on these screenings can be found in *People’s Daily*.

\(^{365}\) Labedz, Leopold, and Melvin J. Lasky. *The use and abuse of Sovietology*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 67. *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* also stood out as two of the few foreign films imported during the seventeen-year period that continued to be exhibited throughout the Cultural Revolution.
was the Lenin-plus-Stalin in China’s communist revolution, yet Mao did not appear as a film character till after his death (*The Great River Rushes On* in 1978). The above two points can be illustrated by a quote from a 1952 article in *People’s Daily*: “We Chinese people feel especially close to these films; they remind us of our great leader Mao Zedong and the past and future of our motherland. The historical success of Chinese people’s revolution was inseparable from the great teachings of Lenin and Stalin, as well as the success of the great October Revolution and the Soviet socialist construction.”

More specifically, *Lenin in October* and *Lenin in 1918* were seen by the CCP to be especially educational on two key issues: whether armed insurgence is central to revolution, and whether class struggle should continue after proletariats seize power. A 1969 *People’s Daily* article points out that Lenin – as portrayed in these two Stalinist films – takes a clear stance on revolutionary violence: he condemns Trotsky, Kamenev, and Zinoviev and insists that “we have no right to wait for the bourgeois class to strangulate revolution;” he strives to protect the new Soviet regime by cracking down on anti-revolutionaries and imperialists without mercy. The article stresses that the scene in *Lenin in 1918* where Lenin reprimands the kulak embodies the “life-and-death struggle between two classes and two paths.” In 1952 *People’s Daily* printed an article by Jia Ji explicating the significance of *Lenin in 1918* during the “Three-anti and Five-anti Campaigns” – namely that one can never be too tough on class enemies – and used the article as a pretext to re-exhibit the film.

---

“Violence” is a key word in the dialogues of both films, which may have accounted for much of CCP’s support for these films throughout the Maoist era. In Lenin in October when asked “what to do with the landlords” Lenin answers without hesitation: “drive them away! Drive away all the landlords!” In Lenin in 1918 Lenin makes the following memorable remarks: “class struggle is a cruel struggle of life-and-death”; “when two people are fist fighting, how can you tell which ones of the blows are necessary and which ones are not?” and “no matter what and how much revolutionary work they have done for the Party, however old they are, we will make absolutely no allowance if they do anything that harms the Soviet regime!” These quotes, coming out of the mouth of the infallible “Lenin,” no doubt became convenient slogans in waves of subsequent campaigns.

One cannot deny that Lenin in October and Lenin in 1918 probably had achieved some of their desired “educational” effects among the Chinese audience i.e. justifying and agitating violence against class enemies, glorifying Stalinist/Maoist lines etc. But the reception of these two films on the whole was more complicated than pure ideological indoctrination. Lenin in October’s employment of Hollywoodian narrative techniques - concentrating on one hero's adventure - gained praises from NYT (for humanizing Lenin)369 and Graham Greene (for being entertaining).370 Lenin in 1918, on the other hand, was dismissed by NYT for lacking a ”compact and dramatic script.”371 Béla Balázs in his Theory of the Film mentions Shchukin’s performance of Lenin as an example of eloquent microphysiognomic close-up, as at one point “four emotions

---

369 Nugent, Frank S. 1938. “Heroes of the Alamo (1937) THE SCREEN; ’Lenin in October' Strikes Twice in the Same Times Square--New Bills at Criterion and Central At the Criterion At the Central At the Teatro Hispano At the Modern Playhouse.” New York Time, April 2.
are all seen together and simultaneously on Shchukin's face like a chord of four notes."  

More than twenty years after the two films were made (in 1960), the director Romm attributed the success of the Lenniana to the fact that he and Shchukin carefully studied Lenin’s physical characteristics: “Lenin liked to walk with his hands behind the back of his chest, which made him look like a little rooster; it was this trait that made the character vivid.”  

Vivid and humanized characters, subtle and layered performance – these were precisely the elements most lacking in Cultural Revolution cinema and model operas.

Yet the majority of the Chinese audience were probably not too concerned about the films’ superior artistic qualities. According to contemporary memoirs (mostly on the Cultural Revolution period), Chinese audiences of Lenin in October and Lenin in 1918 were usually overwhelmed by the excitement of seeing a foreign film, due to the rarity of film exhibition in large areas and the extremely limited repertoire of the period. The content of these films was subject to unexpected appropriations: the most recited quotes from Lenin in 1918, for example, were not the ideologically explicit ones mentioned above, but quotidian and nonsensical ones, such as “there will be bread and there will be milk” and “let Comrade Lenin go first.” The 1994 film In the Heat of the Sun also includes a scene where audience of Lenin in 1918 were preempting and mocking the line “careful! It’s poisonous.” CCP cadres were aware of the possibility of “misunderstanding” and ordered certain shots to be cut for public screening. In cases where cutting is not technically viable, e.g. the shots of the ballet Swan Lake and of Vasily

---

373 “Yuan wenshu tongzhi zai shanghai dianying zuotanhui shang de baogao.” B-177-1-284-1, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
374 For example, in 1973 the Fudan University Revolutionary Committee requested the two films on the pretext that they would facilitate the instruction of two chapters in A History of the International Communist Movements. See “Guanyu peihe jiaoxue fangying dianying liening zai shiyue he liening zai yijiuiba de baogao.” B105-4-1027-41, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
and his wife kissing, the projectionist was ordered to cover the projector lens at these particular junctures – to the great dismay of the audience.\textsuperscript{375} In short, despite the probable but limited propagandist effect, \textit{Lenin in October} and \textit{Lenin in 1918} could be said to have been received by the 1970s Chinese audience as cinema of attraction.

\textbf{Part Two: Jane Eyre: A Timely Classic}

\textit{Jane Eyre} (dir. Delbert Mann 1970) was initially introduced to China as an internal reference film in 1975.\textsuperscript{376} Since its public release in 1979, the film became the definitive filmic version\textsuperscript{377} of the novel for the Chinese audience and was reckoned an absolute classic among dubbed foreign films. The film’s immense popularity is usually attributed to the original novel’s status as a timeless classic and Shanghai Dubbing Studio’s superb translation and dubbing.\textsuperscript{378} These factors were no doubt valid and important, but as one of the first films from the West to be released since the Reform and Opening-up, the significance of \textit{Jane Eyre} for the Chinese audience could not have been so innocent. I argue, in short, that the film both coincided with and shaped the zeitgeist of late 1970s and early 1980s China.

Overall the 1970 version is subdued, subtle, and mature, especially compared to the 1943 version – in the words of contemporary reviewers, the film’s approach is “too rational,”\textsuperscript{379} and its

\textsuperscript{376} The reasons for choosing this film were obscure. Though given the following circumstances the choice was not entirely surprising: a) literary adaptation had been a favorite genre in CCP’s film import before, during, and after the Cultural Revolution; b) the male lead George C. Scott’s previous film \textit{Patton} was also an internal reference film; c) by 1975 the film had become inexpensive. Jiang Qing called the film “reactionary” but warmly praised the film’s direction and cinematography as deserving emulation (“Collection” 751).
\textsuperscript{377} The 1943 version (dir. Robert Stevenson) was dubbed as an internal reference film in 1972, but this version was either not released or unpopular.
\textsuperscript{378} The film script was translated by Chen Xuyi and the protagonists were dubbed by Qiu Yuefeng and Li Zi.
“dramatic pitch is kept surprisingly low,”380 replacing the novel’s Gothic elements with sentimentality.381 And such an approach conveniently appealed to the Chinese audience: not that they had no taste for the melodramatic or the Gothic, but their desire for subtlety was heightened by its long absence in domestic cinema.382 Even today memoir authors laud the ending scene as the most moving and memorable of the entire film: here instead of the Thornfield ruins and the backbreaking kiss (as in the 1943 version), Jane and Rochester meet in the peaceful garden of Ferndean – no ostensible joy of reunion, not a word of love; a few ambiguous lines and minimal gestures are supposed to suffice for the deep and complex feelings of the pair.383 The raptures and passions from the novel are diluted into a more mature view of life, and the Chinese audience felt mature with it – as most of them, young or old, had seen at least some ups and downs in the Cultural Revolution,384 such a view could find resonance.

The 1970 version also seeks to “humanize” the story and the characters at the expense of the novel’s Gothic qualities. Director Delbert Mann explained that their main approach was to adapt the characters to modern realities so that the audience would “identify with them on much more of a personal, human, less symbolic level all the way through.”385 The best example for this approach is the mad wife sequence, where Bertha is portrayed as an attractive young woman386

382 Xia Yan describes China’s domestic cinema during the 17-year period as “straightforward, unreserved, garrulous and shoddy.” Theatricality was also a prominent feature of Cultural Revolution cinema.
383 The appreciation for such reserve and subtlety can be traced back to some masterpieces of pre-PRC filmmaking, such as Spring in a Small Town.
384 I.e. exile, persecution, loss of loved ones, dashed hopes etc.
385 Palmer, James W. "Fiction into Film: Delbert Mann's "Jane Eyre" (An Edited Interview)." Studies in the Humanities October (1976): 3-8. In another interview, Mann stressed that in Jane Eyre the novel there are “real people, real scenes and real dramatic situations,” and that Bronte was “writing about the essential human condition” (Kramer).
386 “In whom you could see the vestiges of the youthful girl that Rochester had fallen in love with” (Palmer 5).
rather than “an absolute mad hag.” Such softening and blurring may not have suited the tastes of all contemporary audiences, but to the Chinese audience of the post-Mao era, humanism and “middle characters” were things that they longed for and relished.

If Bertha is not an absolute mad hag, neither is St. John a mere cold fanatic. Mann felt that St. John’s offer should be “presented to [Jane] as a choice, with some good features to it.”

The choice between St. John and Rochester was one between self-denying devotion to God and earthly, human love, between a life of service and a life of self-fulfillment. The post-Mao audience could not have been conscious of the metaphor, yet their unconscious could not have missed it: since the economic reform many were abandoning a cause and a life of service and turned to pursue individual happiness – certainly “love for each other” as Jane claims in the film, but also personal advancement which Jane achieves at the end.

But the significance of the St. John episode pales beside the “intensity and reality” of the drawing of Jane and Rochester, which according to Mann is what makes the story so enduring.

In what follows I examine the characterization of these two protagonists in the 1970 version and their perception and reception in post-Mao China: for the audience the classic was not only timeless but timely.

---

387 Ibid., 5.
388 I have mentioned this point elsewhere in the dissertation.
389 Ibid., 7.
390 Though post-Mao reception of Jane’s choice of self-fulfillment was not all cynical. After a trip to the grassland that inspired an outburst of new works, Chinese artist Zhang Xiaogang wrote in a 1981 letter, “In the midst of their vast, warm currents I feel an uncontrollable love; as Jane Eyre would say: ‘I have discovered God!’” In the 1970 film Jane says this (“No; I have found him”) when St. John accuses her of turning away from God.
391 Ibid., 3.
The Byronic Patriarch

Rochester is a Byronic hero, therefore “who would be better for portraying an anti-establishment character than George C. Scott”?\(^{392}\) But what about a 43-year-old Byronic hero who looks 50? The 1970 version is one of the few among the dozens of screen adaptations to have a “plainly – almost shockingly – visible age gap.”\(^{393}\) Scott’s gravel voice, his gray hair, and his weight\(^{394}\) mark him as a middle-aged patriarch next to York’s\(^{395}\) still youthful Jane. As for playing a Byronic hero, Scott answers well for the anti-establishment side but not so much the romantic side. Scott’s character is naturally more akin to that of General Patton – an eccentric man who hungered for battle – and Patton\(^{396}\) was the last film Scott played before Jane Eyre. While some argue that Scott parted with his old image in Jane Eyre,\(^{397}\) there was Variety’s widely quoted comment that Scott’s Rochester was “rather like Patton on a well-deserved leave” as he failed to bring out the romanticism of the part.\(^{398}\) York also found Scott to be distant, taciturn, and uncomfortable with romantic scenes – according to York he was rather avuncular when shooting a love scene and she said to him “don’t be paternal; don’t act like my father.”\(^{399}\)

---


\(^{393}\) “Jane Eyre - Reader, She's Marrying Him Again.” The Independent 02 Sep. 2011: n. pag. According to one reviewer, the age gap described in the novel is rarely adhered to in screen adaptations as it is perhaps considered “indecent,” despite the often visible age gap between the leading couple in Hollywood movies (“Jane Eyre”).

\(^{394}\) Which Susannah York (who played Jane) considered very suitable for playing Rochester (Parker).

\(^{395}\) York was 30 at the time.

\(^{396}\) According to Roger Ebert, Patton is “one of those sublime performances in which the personalities of the actor and the character are fulfilled in one another.” He describes Scott as “big, powerful, lonely, brilliant, a drinker, a perfectionist” and Patton as “one of the most uncluttered of war movies, devoid of… ‘human interest’.”


\(^{399}\) Sheward, David. Rage and Glory: The Volatile Life and Career of George C. Scott. New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2008. Sheward describes the chemistry between Scott and York as “cool”; “as the actress recollected, Scott did not give himself over to romantic passion. Despite her pleas to be treated as the object of adoration rather than affection, her Jane is more like a daughter or niece to Scott’s gruff teddy bear of a Rochester. The only fiery moments occur when Rochester rages at Jane early in their acquaintance (196).”
A Byronic patriarch might have been just what post-Mao China needed: it was the oxymoron that made the type viable. After at least a decade of one-dimensional heroes in domestic films and literature, the audience sought a new form of masculinity. The Byronic hero - anti-establishment, romantic, passionate, mysterious – was attractive enough, but these qualities had to be tempered by the status of a patriarch; often this meant middle-aged, experienced, steady, cool, and reassuring. One could argue that Morioka from the Japanese film *Manhunt* (dir. Junya Sato 1976; also released in China in 1979) is also of this type. Despite the vast differences between the background and character of Rochester and Morioka, they share a similar masculine role vis-à-vis the heroine: they are both mature (appearing much older than the woman) and somewhat aloof, while their women are more passionate and take more initiatives in the relationships.

Interestingly, the 1970 version is widely regarded as having been influenced by the feminist movement and more explicitly egalitarian than the novel. While in the 1943 version Orson Welles takes over the film as “a vehicle for his dominant masculine persona” and Joan Fontaine’s air of “unfailing humility” is reminiscent of her previous role in *Rebecca*, the 1970 film makes Jane the key figure and the camera follows Jane’s movement far more closely than Rochester’s. Stoneman points out that Jane’s reply to Rochester as he invites her to stay as his mistress “moves [her] resistance from the arena of Victorian prudery to that of women’s

---

400 The so-called “tall, big, and perfect.”
403 Ibid., 155.
404 Her reply: “I care. You have a wife still living. She still lives, and whatever state God has seen fit to visit on her, she still lives. She cannot help what she is. I will not slip past her slyly in the night to take her place in your bed.”
liberation and solidarity.”

Ellis and Kaplan argue that the 1970 version portrays a more equal gender relationship, for here Rochester is a “vulnerable, open, accessible father who is not afraid to reveal his weakness or the depth of his needs,” whereas “the Gothic is premised on the father’s being distant, unknown, unapproachable, commanding.”

Yet it is precisely the character of Scott’s Rochester that complicates the feminist portrayal of Jane in the 1970 film. Ellis and Kaplan give no evidences as to why Scott’s Rochester is open and accessible. And in fact he is not. In the proposal scene in the Thornfield garden, we hardly see Rochester’s face: he has his back to the camera most of the time (Fig. 4.1-4), and it is not till the very end when he confesses his love that we see his profile. We only see a close-up of his face when he holds Jane with his chin above Jane’s head and vows that he would “keep her” (Fig. 4.5). Maybe the absence of Rochester’s face is what Riley means when he says that the camera follows Jane’s movements, but such focus also means that we do not witness many discernable signs of Rochester’s feelings for Jane, especially when compared to Jane’s expressed affection for him. Such imbalance could not but expose the male figure as distant and unapproachable.

---

407 Ironically, even St. John shows more warmth and closeness in his interaction with Jane.
Ellis and Kaplan do notice another visual cue for gender hierarchy in the proposal scene\textsuperscript{408}: that the camera favors Rochester by showing Jane “looking up to or being looked down upon by a male observer.”\textsuperscript{409} The figure they use in the article, however, is an eye-level shot of Jane and Rochester’s embrace with Jane looking into the camera (Fig. 4.6). This shot does not appear in the film; for after they kiss Jane, overcome with emotions, has her eyes closed and looks as if she is silently crying with joy (Fig. 4.7). After a few seconds the camera cuts to a close-up of Rochester’s resolute (but not so much moved) face. Looking up into the distance, his expression could but seem like a sort of triumph of possession as he utters “for I will keep her;

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{408} They do not specify this scene, though the camera angle they describe is most manifest in this scene.

\textsuperscript{409} Ibid., 201. As high and low angle shots were ubiquitous in Maoist era cinematography to distinguish between heroes, common people, and enemies, the post-Mao audience could not have missed the cue of the camera work in this film.
\end{footnotesize}
keep her” which in the Chinese dubbing turns into “she is mine; mine”\textsuperscript{410} - thus the climactic scene closes.

In Jane and Rochester’s final reunion in the Ferndean garden, the abovementioned high and low angle shot hierarchy is disrupted, as Rochester sits down first on the bench. A large portion of this scene is shot through an angle that approximates Rochester’s point of view (Fig. 4.8-9), in addition to textbook shot-reserves shots. In other words, it is shot as if the blinded Rochester could still see. No doubt it is the choice of these cinematographic devices that make the scene extremely moving, yet such devices also grant the disabled/weakened patriarch some of the power he has lost. Again Jane sheds tears while Rochester’s facial expressions and

\textsuperscript{410} “她是我的; 我的.” It is not certain whether such mistranslation was absolutely necessary for the lip synch. But these lines became part of this classic film to the Chinese audience and to them they were the original.
gestures remain minimal; indeed with his eyes always closed (though his “gaze” not diminished) he seems even more austere.

Stoneman argues that the ending scene (and by extension the entire 1970 film) represents Jane as “making a bid for rational, autonomous subjectivity,” for though here Jane still ends up in an embrace where Rochester is physically dominant, “this time she clearly chooses to take up this position; ‘I’m come home, Edward; let me stay’- and she rests her head on his shoulder,” while Rochester “remains still, pleased with her voluntary closeness.” Stoneman’s point about feminine agency is valid, though here it is accompanied (enabled?) by the apparent lack of emotional investment from the distant, avuncular, and cool male figure.

The post-Mao Chinese audience did not question whether Rochester is paternalistic to Jane or how it affects their gender relations. For them and the reviewers, Jane Eyre is a feminist work and Jane is a feminist figure, and for that purpose they only had to focus on Jane’s characterization. Jane became a role model for ordinary Chinese female viewers because, in the words of the director Delbert Mann, Jane is a “very modern woman” and “far more tough and independent than the ladies around her.” The Chinese viewers were most impressed by the fact that Jane always insists on having her own way – she turns down Brocklehurst’s job offer at Lowood, refuses to humble herself in front of Rochester, dares to reject both Rochester’s invitation for her to become his mistress and St. John’s marriage proposal, etc. Indeed “to rebel” was a keyword in almost every Chinese review at the time; other keywords included “self-love,” “liberated,” “daring to love,” “acting on her own,” “spiritual equality.” These epithets

412 Palmer, James W. "Fiction into Film: Delbert Mann's "Jane Eyre" (An Edited Interview)." Studies in the Humanities October (1976): 5.
were well within the paradigm of CCP’s official rhetoric on women’s liberation and had become domesticated and trite after decades of propaganda. Much as the Chinese audience could appreciate and identify with Jane the rebel, it was other aspects of her character that were less trite in the post-Mao setting that left a deeper impact on the audience.

For instance, Jane’s bold declaration of love (“if God had gifted me with wealth and beauty” etc.) became one of the most popular passages at reciting events. After over a decade when one could not freely speak of romantic love (nor of beauty and wealth for that matter) and now that the taboo was starting to be lifted, the very sound of these words brought freshness and excitement. It did not much matter to them that most girls who were poor and plain could not have their way as Jane does; nor could they foresee that when the idealism of the post-Mao era ended, the new pragmatic goal for women would be to pursue beauty with their wealth or pursue wealth with their beauty.

What was also taking place at the time was Chinese women’s “re-feminization” from the androgynous workers, peasants, and soldiers of the Maoist era, with many of them entering into the burgeoning service industry. Jane is a rebellious woman indeed, but to the Chinese audience she is a woman first and foremost, and could show them what it means to be a woman – for instance, her ladylike manner and her feminine virtues (especially in contrast with the roughness of Scott’s Rochester). After all, Jane makes the ultimate feminine sacrifice: she gives up her career as a teacher\footnote{In the novel Jane declares to the fortune teller/Rochester that “the utmost I hope is, to save money enough out of my earnings to set up a school some day in a little house rented by myself,” which Rochester dismisses as “a mean nutriment for the spirit to exist on.”} to take on the full-time job as Rochester’s wife. It was likely that the Chinese female audience, long deprived of literary or filmic romance, devoured the rich and
layered classic and its screen incarnation for their most superficial and conservative value: as
Harlequin romance,\textsuperscript{415} as an earlier version of Rebecca\textsuperscript{416} and The Sound of Music.

Equality and the New Order

In a personal interview, the script writer Jack Pulman stated that the most important thing that he wanted to do with the protagonists was to present their relationship “which was one of total inequality in a class sense but one of total equality in a human sense.”\textsuperscript{417} Pulman could not have spelled out the film’s theme more directly for the post-Mao audience, as the film was released just as mainstream proletariat class consciousness was fading and the long-repressed humanist values were in fashion; it was a time when the relatively impoverished country was starting to rapidly accumulate wealth and (re-)build economic inequality.

Here I am not proposing a crude link between Jane Eyre’s popularity and its match with post-Mao ideology; I merely argue that the film/novel’s emphasis on selfhood and spiritual equality had special relevance for the period that was not seen in the previous decades.\textsuperscript{418} During the Maoist era, Jane Eyre was valued for its critique of the bourgeois family, marriage, and institutions,\textsuperscript{419} but Jane was deemed “not a revolutionary” as her rebellion is not that of class struggle, and her demand for equality does not result in an attack on the upper class but

\textsuperscript{416} Also released in China in 1979.
\textsuperscript{418} The first full translation of Jane Eyre into Chinese came out in 1936; by 1954 a total of 8,000 copies were printed (Gong). It was after the release of the 1970 film version that the currently best-known translation was produced - the 1980 first edition issued 150 thousand copies; in 1984 it reached its third print run. From 1980 to 1998 a total of three million copies were printed, and that was not counting the figures from six or seven other translations (Yang).
\textsuperscript{419} As most Western literary classics were (purportedly). An excerpt from the novel, “Jane Eyre at Lowood,” was used in PRC’s English textbooks in 1950-60s (Bai 44).
compromise. The 1980s reviews saw an almost complete revision of such a view and concentrated on the affirmation of Jane’s character. In Zhu Hong’s famous article “Jane Eyre – the Strongest Note of Petty-Bourgeois Protest” she argues that personal struggle cannot be dismissed as an offshoot of humanism and that Jane’s spiritual beauty is still relevant for the present day. Other reviewers were profuse in their praise of Jane’s rejection of her society’s values on status and wealth and her pursuit of independence and equality.

I agree with Terry Eagleton that Jane’s attitude toward independence and equality is more ambiguous than meets the eye. Two quotes from Eagleton’s brilliant analysis suffice to illustrate this ambiguity: independence “means not wanting to be a servant, which implies a class-judgment on those below you as well as suggesting a radical attitude to those above;“far from offering a radically alternative ethic, spiritual equality is what actually smooths your progress through the class system.“ It was this ambiguity that disarmed Chinese audience and facilitated their identification with Jane’s values, unconsciously taking the conservative side along with the radical side. As Jane progresses and matures from the hardships and rebellions of Lowood to a peaceful happy ending in Ferndean, the Chinese audience’s mind went through a similar transformation and reconciliation.

Riley observes that unlike the 1943 “Gothic melodrama,” the theme of equality is central to the Thornfield sequence in Mann’s “spiritual romance.” “Spiritual romance” is an apt epithet

420 Zhang, Wei. “Guo Nei Bo Lang Te Jie Mei Yan Jiu Shu Ping." Wai Guo Wen Xue Yan Jiu (Foreign Literature Studies) 1 (1984): 108. This view was similar to Soviet criticism of the novel at the time (Zhang 109)
424 Ibid., 29. Eagleton along with other critics point out the many textual instances of Jane’s ambiguous attitudes toward class, and argues that this tension “deftly defines the petty-bourgeois consciousness which clings to real class-distinctions while spiritually rejecting them (28).”
for the film, for it is only in spirit (i.e. as disembodied souls before God) and romance where
the protagonists can arrive at equality. Romance and humanism go very well with a setting of
“total class inequality” for they can ostensibly soften the latter at one stroke. It only takes
Rochester’s proposal to make Jane his “equal,” but “equality” for the self and equality for all
are completely different concepts. By the post-Mao era the illusory goal of (economic) equality
for all was almost given up. People were, to put it crudely, acquiring a stronger sense of self/self-
interest; more importantly, they were given opportunities and choices. If Jane were a character in
a Maoist era foreign film she would have stayed in Morton as a village schoolteacher, but in
the new era it was no longer the fashion to sacrifice to a cause, nor to take a step which sinks
instead of raising one in the scale of social existence.

The Lost Colonies

In the novel, it is colonial wealth that is the great equalizer in British society. Not only
does Jane become an independent woman through her uncle’s business in Madeira (Portuguese
colony), but Rochester himself, a younger son, escapes poverty before coming into inheritance
thanks to Bertha Mason’s dowry. Had Rochester’s father and brother not conveniently died
within a few years following his marriage, Rochester would have no choice but to stay in the
West Indies with his estranged wife.

425 In the novel Jane is reminded of Helen Burns and her idea of equality of souls a few chapters before her
declaration of love/equality. In the film Jane seems to have developed the idea all by herself.
426 “Your station is in my heart, and on the necks of those who would insult you, now or hereafter (ch. 25).”
427 I am thinking of Mark Donskoy’s 1947 film The Village Teacher.
428 See Chapter 34 of Jane Eyre.
429 Following Azim’s The Colonial Rise of the Novel, Stoneman argues that “like Antoinette [Bertha], Jane derives
riches from plantations worked by slaves; unlike Antoinette, she lives at a distance which enables her to separate
herself from this process (190).”
430 Nine years after her “The Strongest Note of Petty-Bourgeois Protest” article, Zhu Hong wrote a much more
nuanced and poignant analysis on Rochester’s relationship with Bertha.
In the 1970 film, there is only one mention of the West Indies: Jane interrupts Rochester’s card game to say that someone has come from the West Indies to see him.\textsuperscript{431} This single reference is so negligible that unless one has read the novel or is familiar with the history of colonialism, it might just register in the audience’s mind that Mr. Mason travels from a faraway place. Predictably, the film program of the Chinese version makes no mention of the West Indies at all. In the program as well as in the film, Rochester simply introduces Bertha as “mad through three generations, although I in my naïveté was never told” – Bertha and her family might as well come from Britain. And since the film does not reveal Rochester as a younger son forced to marry for money, the sole cause of Rochester’s misery is his ignorance of Bertha’s family history of mental illness. With masterful adaptation, the two protagonists’ financial dependence on the colonies is completely blotted out in the film, and the West Indies all but disappear from the narrative – the film was made in the middle of a twenty year period when many of the former colonies were literally disappearing from the British colonial map.

Interestingly, the 1970 film is often regarded as a version influenced by Jean Rhys’s \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea} (published in 1966). Citing visual continuities between Bertha and Jane, Rochester’s attempt to talk to Bertha after Jane leaves, and Jane’s solidarity with Bertha,\textsuperscript{432} Pasty Stoneman observes in the film “a softer and more sympathetic representation of ‘the madwoman’ and a closer identification of her position and that of Jane.”\textsuperscript{433} Indeed, compared to the 1943 version, Bertha evolves from an uncredited pair of hands and shadow to a regular character with close-ups (though she says nothing); Rochester’s introduction of her as “Bertha

\textsuperscript{431} The 1943 version, in contrast, mentions “Spanish Town” at least three times: when Mr. Mason enters Thornfield, when an attorney reads from a document at the wedding, and when Rochester recounts his first marriage to Jane who is leaving Thornfield.

\textsuperscript{432} See the “You have a wife still living” quote cited in footnote 17.

Mason Rochester” also departs from the novel and previous adaptations in its recognition of her legitimate status as Rochester’s wife. All these were part of director Delbert Mann’s attempt to humanize Bertha (played by Jean Marsh of Upstairs, Downstairs) in order to make the film more “acceptable to today’s audience.” It was indeed possible that the recent publication of Wide Sargasso Sea have influenced the filmmakers in thinking that Bertha is not an absolute mad hag or a mere technical obstacle to the protagonists’ marriage.

But the 1970 film by no means addresses Wide Sargasso Sea as a postcolonial response to Jane Eyre. Stoneman notes that in showing Bertha’s madness as a given, “we lose Jean Rhys’s sharp perception of Rochester’s collusion in the sexual and colonial ideology which contributes to Bertha’s condition.” I would go further and argue that in a version with minimal reference to the creole origin of Bertha, whether Bertha (or Rochester) is treated sympathetically hardly has any bearing on the film’s stance on colonial issues. The film carefully avoids the controversy of Rochester and Jane’s ties to the colonial enterprise; it takes into account the postcolonial response to Jane Eyre by writing colonialism out of the story so that the film does not have to take a stance; in short it preempts a postcolonial reading.

One might argue that even though the 1970 film leaves out most of the colonial references, the audience, having read the novel, would automatically fill in those details. In continental Europe and the United States, film audiences’ familiarity with the original novel could not be assumed: in an interview Mann admitted that he had not read Jane Eyre before deciding the make the movie. In China, however, the novel’s popularity almost rivaled that of the 1970 film adaptation. Though the first full translation (not counting the then out-of-print

---

434 Ibid., 193.
435 Palmer, James W. "Fiction into Film: Delbert Mann's "Jane Eyre" (An Edited Interview)." Studies in the Humanities October (1976): 3. Compared to the novel, the 1943 film adaptation might have been better known to the American audience.
1935 translation) did not appear until 1980,\textsuperscript{436} the novel became one of the best-known Western literary classics in China. Would the novel have enlightened its Chinese readers as to the colonial background of the story, which the film version chose to cover up?

Not really. The 1980s Chinese reader typically had limited knowledge of the history of British colonialism. The 1980 translator’s preface says nothing about the colonial enterprise in the West Indies, though it does condemn St. John’s missionary work as “serving the colonists.” The Chinese translation does contain a footnote for the word “creole” (this is when an attorney reads Mr. Mason’s note at the wedding, referring to Bertha’s mother as a creole) – “people of European descent born in Latin America, or mixed race offspring of them and blacks or Indians.”\textsuperscript{437} This novel was probably the first and last time a typical Chinese reader encountered the word. Unobstructed by further paratext, the reader surrendered to Bronte’s storytelling, taking Rochester and Jane for reliable narrators, and absorbed whatever they say about the land and people of which she was intensely ignorant. The sulphur-steam air, the hot cannon-ball moon, idiots and maniacs through three generations, and the groveling and growling beast herself. This would remain the extent of her knowledge on that part of the world for some time – maybe a long time – to come.

The 1970 film avoids controversy and circumvents almost all colonial references; needless to say that does nothing to contradict the image projected by the novel. Yet if in the mind of the Chinese audience the novel and its film adaptation did superimpose, then it was a good thing that the film tones down the demonization of Bertha. Before the common reader will

\textsuperscript{436} The public release of the dubbed film was in 1979.

\textsuperscript{437} Brontë, Charlotte, and Qingying Zhu. \textit{Jian ai = Jane Eyre}. (Shanghai: Shanghai yi wen chu ban she, 1980), 381.
read *Jane Eyre* side by side with *Wide Sargasso Sea*\textsuperscript{438}, I remain grateful that the 1970 film keeps quiet on the subject of colonialism and has not made it worse.

Part Three: Angels, Whores, and Gypsies: *Corazón Salvaje* and *Yesenia*

*Corazón Salvaje* (dir. Tito Davison 1968) and *Yesenia* (dir. Alfredo B. Crevenna 1971) were first introduced to China as internal reference films during the Cultural Revolution\textsuperscript{439}. They were released along with *María* (dir. Tito Davison 1972) at the 1979 “Mexican Film Festival.” Ten Mexican films were imported during the 17-year period and even more during the 1980s, but none surpassed these two in popularity and impact. Their success was perhaps not to be wondered at: Mexican writer Caridad Bravo Adams’s *Corazón Salvaje* has been adapted for television at least four times, whereas *Yesenia* attracted 91 million viewers in the Soviet Union and became the most-watched film in its history\textsuperscript{440}.

*Corazón Salvaje*’s clichéd plot, according to the China Film Company’s 1979 film program, is as follows:\textsuperscript{441}

“The story took place in late 19\textsuperscript{th} century Puerto Rico.

Juan del Diablo lives on the island, struggling with poverty.\textsuperscript{442} He is an abandoned illegitimate child. His father was an aristocrat and unfortunately died when Juan was a child.

---

\textsuperscript{438} This novel was translated into Chinese and published by Shanghai Yiwen in 1996.

\textsuperscript{439} Jiang Qing was impressed with their cinematography and mentioned them repeatedly to her filmmakers.

\textsuperscript{440} Beumers, Birgit. *A history of Russian cinema*. (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 181; Rupprecht, Tobias. *Soviet internationalism after Stalin: interaction and exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 86-87. According to Beumers, “the film shows the audience’s craving for melodrama, denied to them by the state’s production agenda.” Rupprecht attributes the success of Latin American films among the Soviet audience to “their settings in faraway countries and their adventurous stories.”

\textsuperscript{441} I translate the synopsis in full as most English-speaking readers are presumably not familiar with the story.

\textsuperscript{442} The author of the film program feels obliged to emphasize Juan’s poverty for the sake of ideological correctness, yet the “poor” Juan owns a ship.
Since then, Juan has led a life of hardship and engaged in smuggling, becoming the famous Juan del Diablo.

One day, Juan meets Aimee who is bathing on the beach. Aimee is engaged to Renato, Juan’s half-brother. But after meeting Juan, she falls in love with Juan.

On the day of Renato and Aimee’s wedding, Juan arrives unexpectedly and secretly arranges with Aimee that they run away together that night. But the frivolous Aimee changes her mind afterwards and asks her sister Monica to persuade Juan to leave by himself. Their maid Yanina overhears and reports to Renato. Renato questions Aimee, but Aimee falsely accuses Monica of having an affair with Juan. She also makes Renato see for himself Monica pleading with Juan (in fact on Aimee’s account) so that Renato would believe her story.

Monica is a kind, pure, and noble-minded girl. She has long been in love with Renato, but for the so-called love between Renato and Aimee, she went to a convent and became a nun. Now, in order to save Renato’s happiness, she admits to Aimee’s accusation and agrees to marry Juan. She obtains Juan’s promise that she will return to the convent once the wedding is over.

But, in order to take revenge on Aimee for her faithlessness, Juan forcibly takes Monica on his ship after the wedding. During the voyage, Monica falls sick. She recovers under the care of Juan and Kolibri, the orphan whom Juan adopted. Monica is moved and becomes Juan’s wife.\footnote{This hints at the consummation of Juan and Monica’s marriage, which in fact does not take place till the end of the film.}

Aimee has no real affection for Renato. After their marriage, she still loves and longs for Juan. When she receives Juan’s letter and learns that Juan and Monica are married, she feels even more miserable. At this point, Renato finally realizes that Aimee was indeed Juan’s lover. He decides to punish Aimee and Juan. Aimee cannot bear the torment and runs away from the
planted” (in a carriage) one night to seek Juan. On the way she is dragged to death by the horse.

Renato and his team arrest Juan. In the court, Renato accuses Juan of smuggling, robbery, and kidnapping Kolibri. But after Kolibri and Monica’s stern defense, the court declares Juan not guilty and releases him on bail. Renato foregoes former grievances and recognizes Juan as his brother.”

The enduring attraction of *Corazón Salvaje* derives from the fact that the four protagonists closely adhere to four of the well-known female and male stereotypes in popular media and storytelling. The sisters Monica and Aimee illustrate the angel versus the whore binary. Monica is pure (reflected in her white convent attire), selfless (sacrificing for her sister and Renato’s happiness), kindhearted (befriending Juan and Colibri), and last but not least, attractive (the audience sees her bathing in a wet dress).\textsuperscript{444} The flirtatious Aimee steals her sister’s fiancé, has an affair with Juan while engaged to Renato, and lies and boasts in caricatured mannerisms. Renato and Juan (half-brothers) embody many pairs of opposites: the civilized and the wild, the establishment and the marginal, Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler, etc.

In the Mexican cultural context, the portrayal of the central couple Juan and Monica vividly echoes the masculine and feminine ideals of Machismo and Marianismo. Machismo, best summarized as a “cult of virility,” consists of “exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships.”\textsuperscript{445} Marianismo, deriving from Christian veneration of Mary, is a “cult of feminine spiritual superiority” that complements Machismo.\textsuperscript{446} It is interesting that these time-honored stereotypes were some of the first to captivate the Chinese audience at the dawn of the Reform

\textsuperscript{444} Earlier in the film we (and Juan) also see Aimee bathing.

\textsuperscript{445} Stevens Evelyn P., “Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America,” in: Pescatelo Ann; *Female and Male in Latin America*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973, 90.

\textsuperscript{446} Ibid.
and Opening-up. One could argue that Corazón Salvaje just happened to come their way, but it is undeniable that there was ample ground for the audience’s appreciation and internalization of these stereotypes.

A trend among Chinese youths (at least the educated class) since the end of the Cultural Revolution was to return to the previously-condemned gender division.\(^\text{447}\) The re-polarization of gendered ideals came with and was central to the overall revisionism of the period. This process was helped along by a number of foreign films, in which two male leads became for the Chinese audience the paragons of masculinity: the “tough guy” Takakura Ken\(^\text{448}\) and the swashbuckling hero Alain Delon\(^\text{449}\). “To seek the manly man” (xunzhao nanzihan) was a constant topic in the media and the title of a play and a 1987 film. The male heroes in Maoist cinema did not qualify as “manly men” -- not because they were not heroic but because their masculinity was not juxtaposed with passive femininity and romance.

Juan did not reach the iconic status of detective Morioka or Zorro, nevertheless he was fondly remembered by the Chinese audience as a manly hero. Juan is righteous and “ideologically correct” for sure: he lives in poverty (at least according to the film program), allies with peasants, adopts an orphan, and challenges the establishment in court. But his real, consumable attraction comes from his wildness and exuberant virility. The Chinese translation of the film title was intentionally deceptive: lengku de xin means “cold heart” instead of “wild heart” – it is not known what was behind the mistranslation; perhaps even the Cultural Revolution propagandists realized and tried to mask the fact that the film celebrates virility, not class struggle. Juan is the “wild heart” of the film: we witness his tanned, athletic body and his

\(^{447}\) I mentioned this point in Part Two of this chapter.  
\(^{448}\) Seven of his films were shown around late 1970s and 1980s.  
\(^{449}\) As in Zorro and Black Tulip.
adventurous and aggressive personality (Fig. 4.10) – in one of the opening scenes he flirts with a prostitute and starts a fight at a bar; his abduction of Monica onto his ship only adds to his manly charm (Fig. 4.11).

Fig. 4.10: The “wild heart”  Fig. 4.11: The abduction

Monica, on the other hand, defines the norms and virtues of a proper female: throughout the film she is either a nun or a wife/mother (supporting Juan and caring for Kolibri), showing perfect reserve, abstinence, and loyalty. What are the faults of Aimee? Of course she is self-centered and dishonest, and when Renato finds out about it he sheds his meek civility and shows Aimee and the audience the power and entitlement of a husband by hitting her to the ground (Fig. 4.12-13). But Aimee’s gravest offense is that she dares to take initiatives in sexual relationships. Aimee’s affair with Juan is her ruin, and while Juan is able to quickly put the past behind him and switch to Monica, Aimee could not settle for the less manly Renato. In a much acclaimed rapid cross-cutting flashback sequence, Aimee drives an intractable horse carriage (a metaphor of her passion of course) to her death while recalling her lovemaking with Juan in a cave (Fig. 4.14-15). The film’s judgment is clear: Aimee receives death penalty for her lust/enjoyment of sex. Aimee and Renato are both jealous; Aimee and Juan are both wild, but in both cases only Aimee is punished. It was no surprise that the Chinese audience joined in and applauded conservative condemnation of female sexuality; such values had deep roots in Chinese culture and the angel/whore binary was by no means rare in Chinese literary and film history.
The film also introduced to the Chinese audience something more novel than gender types: a naturalistic display of the race-based social hierarchy of 19th century Puerto Rico. The role of Yanina (Renato’s maid), a girl of Amerindian descent, consists of spying, telling on her mistress, being punished or abused, and wailing. She also engages in (apparently effective) voodoo tricks: pricking a figurine and hiding it under Aimee’s pillow (Fig. 4.16). To complete the caricature, Yanina loves her master Renato and the latter ignores her. The black orphan/slave Kolibri,450 rescued by the white savior Juan, mostly serves as a prop to illustrate Juan and Monica’s humane and caring nature – by the end of the movie Monica literally uses his mutilated body as a prop to prove Juan’s innocence at court (Fig. 4.17).

---

450 Juan adopts Kolibri in the sense that the latter calls him “captain” and Monica “mi ama;” in the Chinese dubbing Kolibri calls Monica “mistress” (女主人).
Chinese film critics and audience at the time did not seem to have noticed the rather obvious stereotypes mentioned above. Extant synopses, reviews, and memoirs mostly claim that the film extols “the true, the good, and the beautiful” while condemning the “cold heart” of Aimee.\footnote{Lin, Hongtong. 1979. “Moxige dianying youliang chuantong de shengdong tixian – yingpian yesainiya, maliya, lengku de xin guanhou.” People’s Daily, August 6. In another People’s Daily article published in 1977, \textit{Corazón Salvaje} was referred to as a film that “advocates decadent bourgeois lifestyle,” due to the fact that Jiang Qing used the film as an example and urged filmmakers to learn from its techniques (See Yan, Bing. 1977. “Fengzixiu wenyi de chuigushou.” People’s Daily, January 2.). The 1979 review, however, calls the film progressive and emphasizes that the film portrays the marginalized character Juan in a positive light.} That they came to such a simplistic conclusion was no surprise: decades of domestic filmmaking and criticism had fixated on simplistic demarcation of good versus evil; the relative isolation and ignorance brought by the Cultural Revolution experience made it difficult for the audience to take images and values from exotic countries with a grain of salt. Moreover for the Chinese audience there was an issue of faith: would the Party approve and exhibit problematic foreign films? Could the famed Mexican director make films that endorse and propagate conservative values? Could there be more issues beneath the surface narrative and beyond the official media’s agenda setting\footnote{Which, in this case, approves of everything of the film aside from the very end where Juan makes up with Renato and the two are class enemies no more. During this period when film import was still a sensitive part of diplomacy, it was impossible to criticize a foreign film or its director for more than a few sentences.}? One would have to be rather rebellious to answer “no” to the above questions at the time. Through their uncritical viewing experience the audience eagerly consumed and absorbed everything, from the true, the good, and the beautiful to sugar-coated...
prejudices. Nineteenth century gender roles and racial hierarchy were taken for granted. The only review in defense of Aimee was not published till 2011 – thirty years later.

If Monica attracted the Chinese audience as a paragon of “the true, the good, and the beautiful,” Juan exemplified another popular type in post-Mao foreign films: the marginalized vagabond. Of this type, other figures included the protagonists in Asshii-tachi no machi (dir. Satsuo Yamamoto 1981) and Indian film Awaara (still shown in theaters in 1980s, as evidenced in Jia Zhangke’s film Platform). From the CCP’s point of view marginalized figures in capitalist societies were undoubtedly politically correct, though incidentally, the proliferation of such figures went along with a prevailing sense of loss and confusedness among youths at the time.453 Marginalized females usually come from the lower class or a different ethnicity, such as the Roma people – indeed the other extremely popular Mexican film, Yesenia, centers around the love story of its eponymous Gypsy heroine. Yesenia is an abandoned illegitimate daughter of an aristocratic white woman and grows up among Gypsies. She meets and marries officer Osvaldo; after many tribulations, she is restored to her aristocratic family.

Yesenia ends up joining the “higher” race/class because she belongs to the latter by descent – this is a worn-out trope in both Western and Chinese literature and pop culture. Needless to say, the endurance and popularity of this trope reveals much about the mentality of the Chinese mass audience after the Cultural Revolution.454 Fortunately, there were scholars in China who were conscious and critical of the audience’s deep-rooted “aristocrat complex.” Chen Shangping and Ni Xueli compare several protagonists in 1990s television drama to Yesenia:

---

454 A reversion of the “blood lineage theory.”
these “country” girls are all descendants of urban fathers, therefore it is little wonder that they are so beautiful and talented and so successful in the cities.\textsuperscript{455}

Yesenia, along with Esmeralda in \textit{The Hunchback of Notre Dame} and the troope in Indian film \textit{Caravan}, also represents the image of the Roma people for the Chinese audience. \textit{Yesenia} opens with a Gypsy singing and dancing sequence, which fit into Chinese audience’s romanticized and exoticized imagination of this people. Did this image go beyond their music, dancing, and unrestrained way of life? Hardly. And it was not until in recent years that Chinese journalistic writings began to touch on the marginality and hardships in the real life of the Roma people. This was improvement, but like the aforementioned articles on the “aristocrat complex,” these writings emerged long after the hay day of \textit{Yesenia}; not to mention the fact that with their limited readership they could hardly act as counterweight to the impact of mass entertainment.

\textbf{Part Four: \textit{Proof of the Man} in Japan and China}

\textbf{Introduction}

\textit{Ningen no shōmei}/\textit{Proof of the Man}, a 1977 Japanese film produced by Kadokawa Haruki Corporation, was adapted from Morimura Seiichi’s 1976 detective novel of the same name. In this film, Johnny, born of a black soldier and a Japanese woman during the Occupation and brought up in the United States, travels to Japan to be reunited with his mother, but his mother rejects and eventually kills him. The film ranked second on Japan’s 1977 box-office hit chart and has inspired numerous television and manga adaptations ever since.

Proof of the Man was dubbed into Chinese by Changchun Film Studio in 1978 and released in China the next year. Like Manhunt, Sandakan 8, and other Japanese films that China imported as part of an extensive Sino-Japanese cultural exchange program in the late 1970s, Proof of the Man gained immense popularity among the Chinese audience. In what follows, I will examine how the social critique embedded in the filmic text of Proof of the Man was rewritten and reinterpreted in the Chinese dubbing and viewing process.

The Film: Occupation Memory, Japanese Nationalism and Racial Tension

Although Proof of the Man is set in the 1970s, its central tension stems from the protagonists’ experiences during the Allied Occupation. Yasugi Kyōko murders Johnny in an attempt to bury her past – her involvement with a black G.I. and the birth of an illegitimate son. This past is stigmatic in five ways: (1) Traditional family values condemn extramarital liaison as immoral. (2) Though Yasugi and the G.I.’s long-term relationship probably involved mutual affection, their liaison is seen in the light of the onri-type prostitution, given the economic hierarchy during the Occupation. (3) Miscegenation and biracial children tend to be discriminated against in Japan, as people have been indoctrinated to take pride in the homogeneity of their nation. (4) Research suggests that liaison with black persons and half-black offspring are especially discriminated against. (5) Sex workers who consorted with Allied servicemen were seen as reminders of defeat and symbols of foreign occupation. They were

---

456 For an account of the Chinese reception of Japanese films, TV drama and stars during the post-Mao era, see Ryū Bunpei’s monograph (written in Japanese) 「中国10億人の日本映画熱愛史 — 高倉健、山口百恵からキムタク、アニメまで」.
457 Only one client (Kovner 2012: 59).
widely disliked and discriminated against, as people discovered in this a way to display an
abiding nationalism.\footnote{Ibid., 15.} It is the fear of revealing these unbearable stigmas of her past that drives
Yasugi to commit the inhuman crime of filicide.

Another protagonist who is traumatized by the memory of the Occupation is the detective
Munesue. While working on the murder case, he is haunted by the image of his father being
beaten to death by a gang of American soldiers – a flashback that is replayed six times in the
film. Munesue’s face is always gloomy and he remains cold to his American colleague, Shuftan,
despite the latter’s friendly gestures. When Shuftan shoots Kyōhei, a murder suspect and
Yasugi’s other son, Munesue bursts out in Japanese – although he always uses English in
Shuftan’s presence, this line just has to be in Japanese – ‘You call yourself a man? How many
more Japanese must you kill?’ Munesue eventually finds out that Shuftan was a member of the
gang that killed his father, and his hatred culminates in a meaningful scene where he shoots at
Shuftan’s image in the mirror. Wartime antagonism lives on in American characters as well.
Shuftan’s colleague, detective O’Brien, is reluctant to cooperate with the Japanese police: ‘if it
was up to me I would not raise a finger to help them. Bastards. (sigh) I lost a brother at Pearl
Harbor’.

‘Race’ is highlighted in the film – not only in the central storyline of Yasugi rejecting her
black son Johnny but also in numerous details throughout the film text. The first scene after the
opening credits is from Yasugi’s fashion show, which lasts for almost four minutes; a similar
fashion show sequence appears in the middle of the film. The models are overwhelmingly black
– rather unique in the Japanese context, and a sign of the film-makers’ deliberation.\footnote{In the original novel, Yasugi is not a fashion designer but an education counsellor.} After
hearing a careless report prepared by the New York police on Johnny’s background, detective
Munesue remarks, ‘to them, a black guy is nothing!’ Munesue’s flashback that follows the remark shows a gang of white soldiers violently beating his father and urinating on his half-dead body. This juxtaposition leads to the question whether the film-maker, or Munesue at least, finds solidarity among people of colour as co-sufferers under white supremacy. The black–white racial tension within the United States is also highlighted in the film’s depiction of interactions between the white policeman Shuftan and Harlem residents. Shuftan’s very first appearance is where he waits in ambush and shoots a black store burglar. The most unmistakable depictions of tension between black, white and Asian races are Shuftan and Munesue’s fight with black hooligans in a bar and the murder of Shuftan by one of those hooligans at the very end of the film – the black man stabs Shuftan and shouts, ‘Japanese lover!’

A Word on the Japanese Reception

Although not the focus of this discussion, two aspects concerning the Japanese reception of this film are worth mentioning here. The first aspect is Kadokawa’s powerful promotion campaign. The film’s tag line, ‘母さん、僕のあの帽子どうしたてしょうね’/‘Mom, I wonder what happened to my hat’, was televised well over 10,000 times in the film’s TV commercials and became a 流行語/current idiom. According to experts, ‘the popularity of the phrase stems from the general mood of contemporary Japanese who have lost a sense of purpose. The phrase is parodied in many other contexts such as, “I wonder what happened to my bonus check”’
nice instance of the masses’ appropriation of cultural and commercial products; but was there a
danger that heavy commercialization might have helped trivialize the serious and thought-
provoking aspects of the film?

The second aspect is the imageries used in the advertisement and cover designs of the
film and the novel of the same name. One cannot help noticing the prominence of the figure of a
black man in these images (see Fig. 4.18 and Appendix C) – and it is doubtful that this figure
represents the mixed-race character Johnny. The black man imagery became more rare in the
cover designs of newer versions of the novel and film (see Appendix C). In contrast to this, the
Chinese advertisement of the film has always emphasized the figure of the mother Yasugi (see
Appendix D). Were these choices purely aesthetic, or did they reflect the sentiments of the
publishers, or even the societies?

![Fig. 4.18: Advertisement in Yomiuri, 6 December 1976.](image)

**Rewriting the Film: The Chinese Dubbed Version**

In this section I will examine the discrepancies between the Japanese and Chinese
versions of *Proof of the Man* and illustrate how some of the translator’s deliberations could
affect the Chinese audience’s understanding of the film. In doing this, I am following Andre Lefevere’s systems approach to literature that does not shy away from the study of refractions.466

There is evidence that suggests that the Changchun Film Studio might have edited and dubbed using the film’s US release copy (see Fig. 4.19-20). The Japanese original is 132 minutes long; the Chinese/US version is some 30 minutes shorter.467 The main difference is that the Chinese/US version omits the entire subplot of the triangular relationship between Naomi (run over by Kyōhei), her husband Oyamada and her lover Niimi – possibly because the subplot makes the film unnecessarily long and might distract the audience from the main plot. Other omissions, although of shorter duration, are more significant in terms of the tone and message of the film. Notably, two of the six flashbacks of Munesue’s father being beaten (see Fig. 4.21) and/or Yasugi being raped by Occupation soldiers are omitted; the other four are edited short. Munesue’s verbal recount of the flashback scene is cut. Munesue’s imagining of a young Yasugi in gaudy make-up and dress, dancing with soldiers in a bar, is also cut (see Fig. 4.22). Since the Chinese version was probably edited from an already abridged version and the US version is not currently available, it is difficult to ascertain which of the above-mentioned scenes (if any) were specifically edited out by the Chinese studio’s deliberation. We do not know whether these cuts were made by an anxious Japanese film exporter who did not wish the American release to betray too much Japanese nationalism, or by a Chinese film censor who would not hesitate to minimize audience’s exposure to sex and violence.

466 Lefevere disputes the Romantic notion of originality and argues that the refraction is the original to the majority of people. He observes that refractions have not been studied enough due to the absence of a framework.
467 IMDB confirms that the US version is also about 100 minutes long.
Fig. 4.19: Title sequence of Chinese version

Fig. 4.20: Title sequence of Japanese version.

Fig. 4.21: Munetsue’s father beaten by Occupation soldiers.

Fig. 4.22: Yasugi dancing with G.I.s.
But the Chinese dialogue was definitely not made by/for the Americans. A comparison between the original half Japanese, half English dialogue and the Chinese dubbing shows that the Chinese studio’s tendency to ‘clean up’ the film dialogue sometimes had the side effect of glossing over conflicts and issues portrayed in the original text. For example, when Shuftan asks Munesue whether Johnny was a G.I. baby, Munesue sarcastically retorts, ‘You know. You’ve been in Japan. Had fun with Japanese girls’. In the Japanese version, the faithfully translated subtitle goes ‘– GI ベビーか。 - あんたは日本にいた、日本の女と遊んだ。’. The concept of ‘G.I. baby’ and prostitution is lost in the Chinese version: ‘– 你是說他是混血兒吗？ - 是啊。你在日本待過。日本女人不是好嗎？’/‘Are you saying he was mixed-race? – Yes. You’ve been in Japan. Weren’t Japanese women good?’

Such vagueness was corroborated by the synopsis in the film programme (電影說明書 collection) Volume 5. Since the early 1950s, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propagandists had consistently drafted film synopses to be displayed and distributed in theatres to help the audience follow the storyline and grasp the educational message. Yet, the author of the synopsis for Proof of the Man did not seem to be keen on providing necessary background information for an audience unfamiliar with the history of the Allied Occupation in Japan. The two-page-long synopsis, which the audience relied on to understand the film, is ambiguous and misleading when it comes to the history of the Occupation. In fact, the concept of an ‘Allied Occupation’ is

468 Shuftan and Munesue’s dialogues are all in English.
469 In Chinese the term ‘混血兒’ does not have the ‘G.I. baby’ connotation as in the Japanese context and simply means mixed-race.
470 A collection of foreign film synopses can be found in Dianying Shuomingshu Huibian (film explanation sheet collection) Volume 5.
mentioned only once in passing. When introducing Johnny’s father, the synopsis simply says, ‘他在一九四六年到一九四九年在日本。曾住在橫須賀的美軍基地’/’He was in Japan from 1946 to 1949. He used to live in the US military base in Yokosuka’. Following the Chinese dubbed dialogue, the synopsis also refers to Yasugi as the black soldier’s ‘wife’, as in ‘戰爭結束不久，有個黑人士兵帶著妻子和孩子來過溫泉’/’Shortly after the war ended, a black soldier came to visit the hot spring with his wife and child’. The original Japanese novel clearly states that they were not married, and the Japanese film version uses the ambiguous term ‘親子’/’parent and child’, as in ‘黒人の兵隊が親子連れで温泉に来た…’. By assuming that Yasugi and the soldier were married, the Chinese film translator and synopsis author mask the fact that most onrii-type relationships never ended in marriage; whether due to prudery or lack of knowledge, their version of the story conceals the (semi-) prostitution nature of the liaisons between Allied soldiers and destitute Japanese women.

Although the film translation and explanation sheet are vague about issues in the Occupation, and although some of the flashbacks of Occupation memories are cut or shortened, the Chinese audience at the time could probably comprehend that the film depicts Allied soldiers as enjoying extraterritoriality (killing and raping without being punished by the local police) by analogy to China’s own semi-colonial past taught in CCP propaganda. What the Chinese

---

471 As in ‘戰爭結束後，阿仲在橫須賀那兒開個酒吧間接待佔領軍，在店裡幹活的一個女孩子叫八杉恭子。’/‘After the war ended, Nakayama Tane opened a bar in Yokosuka to receive the Occupation army. A girl who worked in the store was called Yasugi Kyoko.’ See Anon. (1983), Dianying Shuomingshu Huibian/Collection of film explanation sheets, vol. 5, Hefei: Anhui Sheng Dianying Faxing Fangying Gongsi.
472 Morimura, Seiichi, Ningen No Shōmei/’Proof of the Man’, (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1977), 290. In fact, had Yasugi been married to the black soldier, she would not have been able to marry Yōhei afterwards, as the Japanese government would recognize her as married, and as an international divorce at that time was next to impossible. See Kovner, Sarah, Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 63.
473 Yasugi’s dancing scene, which could have been a powerful visual clue to Yasugi’s real status during the Occupation, is absent from the Chinese version.
audience were far less familiar with was the racial tension that figures so prominently in this film. Unfortunately (and understandably), the aforementioned synopsis dismisses the issue completely. The dubbed dialogue also, as expected, whitewashes many of the signs of racial tension. The black store burglar addresses Shuftan as ‘white motherfucker’; Shuftan calls a young black boy ‘you little bastard’ – these phrases are omitted in the Chinese dubbing.\(^{474}\)

When Munesue explains to Shuftan why Johnny went to see his mother in Japan and why his father supported it, he concludes, to Shuftan’s surprise, ‘they probably hated Harlem’ – a critique of the race-based social and economic inequality in American society from an outsider. ‘How could anybody hate Harlem?’ is Shuftan’s sarcastic response.\(^{475}\) In the Chinese version, Munesue’s observation about Harlem and Shuftan’s sarcasm are eliminated, and the dialogue is rearranged so that it is Shuftan who asks innocently and matter of factly, ‘為了離開黑人區？’/‘In order to leave the black district?’ and Munesue who answers dryly, ‘正是這樣’/‘Just so’.\(^{476}\)

Such omissions and softening culminate in the climactic scene where Johnny confronts Yasugi with his birth identity (shown as Yasugi’s flashback). Johnny dramatically takes off his shirt, bares his brown upper body (see Fig. 4.23) and cries to Yasugi, ‘この身体、誰がつくった？… ニグロのパパとママだ！LOOK AT ME! ママ、僕、嫌い… なぜ、僕を生んだ！

---

\(^{474}\) They are also untranslated in the Japanese subtitles.

\(^{475}\) Shuftan’s response is rendered in the Japanese subtitles as ‘ハーレムが汚ないからか？’/‘Because Harlem is dirty?’. The phrase ‘汚ない’ is used probably to relate to Munesue’s line that follows, ‘However, the beautiful mother was dirty. She was not beautiful at all’ (Japanese subtitle: だが美しい母は汚れていた。). This ‘beautiful’ vs ‘dirty’ discussion, echoing previous lines by Kyōhei, could be read as a critique of the darker side of Japanese society. The ‘dirty’ reference is dropped by the Chinese translator and the line becomes ‘可是他真正的母親已經不像他想的那麼美好’/‘But his real mother is not as wonderful as he imagined’.

\(^{476}\) The same kind of toning down happens when the Chinese translation deals with expressions of nationalism. Detective O’Brien’s line ‘if it were up to me I would not raise a finger to help them. Bastards’ is turned into the polite ‘說真心話，日本人委託的事情我也不大願意幹’/‘to tell you the truth, I am not that willing to do what the Japanese entrust me to do’.
なぜ！なぜ、生んだ！'/'Who made this body? … My black father and you/mother! Look at me! Mama, if you hate me, why did you give birth to me? Why?' The Chinese dubbing wipes out the racial reference and replaces it with emotional fillers: ‘這到底是為甚麼呀？為甚麼不認你的孩子？你看我呀，媽媽，我是你的孩子，我不能離開你，說呀，你愛不愛我？'/‘Why is it this way? Why don't you acknowledge your child? Look at me, mama, I am your child. I can't leave you. Tell me, do you love me or not?’

Fig. 4.23: Johnny bares his brown upper body.

The Japanese version ends with former Occupation soldier Shuftan being stabbed to death by a black hooligan on the account that he was a ‘Japanese lover’ – an ironic retribution as Shuftan was among the Occupation soldiers who beat Munesue’s father to death. The novelist and film-maker’s choice to end on this note reflects their recognition of the gravity and complexity of racial and national conflicts in this work. In the Chinese version, the ending is Yasugi jumping off the cliff with a straw hat – Shuftan’s death scene is not deleted, but moved to the middle, therefore removing some of its significance within the film. While this shift might have been arranged by the Japanese film exporter, it is consonant with the broader emphasis of the Chinese version. Only Yasugi’s crime and punishment is accentuated – and to be remembered.
Chinese Reception of *Proof of the Man*

When the Chinese dubbed version of *Proof of the Man* was released, the title was translated not as ‘人性的証明’, the close literal equivalent of the Japanese title, but as ‘人証’, a legal term for ‘testimony of a witness’ that does not relate to the film’s content. This deliberate mistranslation was a cautious move on the part of the studio to avoid spotlighting the word ‘人性’/‘humanity, humanism’, a term that had been condemned as bourgeois and revisionist for almost two decades. Yet in spite of the equivocal title, the long-repressed idea of ‘humanity’ became the centre of intellectual discussion and popular response.

I have sampled five film reviews from five journals published around 1980 to represent the reception of *Proof of the Man* among Chinese intellectuals. Most of these reviews praise the film for its aesthetic achievement, and observe that this film might be too complicated to follow for a Chinese audience unfamiliar with postwar Japanese history and accustomed to straightforward storylines and black-and-white characterization. Some suggest that explanation sheets should be distributed at theatres. Most reviews agree that the film critiques the ‘cruelty, hypocrisy and selfishness of the bourgeois class’ and the ‘uncivil’ capitalist world where ‘humanity is consumed by materialistic desires’. They argue that Yasugi’s rise in status

477 Though this title was used by the 1979 Chinese translation of the original novel.
478 The five journals are Dianying Pingjie/Movie Review, Dianying Yishu/Film Art, Dianying Xinzuo/New Films, Dazhong Dianying/Popular Cinema and Qunzhong/Populace; the first four are top journals in the film circle and the last is a Party-sponsored journal.
has led to the deterioration of her moral character.\footnote{Wen, Sheng (1980), ‘Renzheng Zhengming Le Zenyang De Renxing’, \textit{Qunzhong}, 4, pp. 42; Su, Shuyang (1979), ‘Ziben Zhuyi Wenming Shi Sharen De Xiongfan – Qiantan Rimei Hepai Yingpian Renzheng’, \textit{Dianying Pingjie}, 10, pp. 8-9.} In one of the more detailed analyses of Yasugi’s motive for killing Johnny, Su observes that now that Yasugi has joined the upper class she does not want people to know of her humiliated years: her low birth and her liaison\footnote{Su has only seen the film and not read the novel. He misspells Yasugi’s name all over the review, and refers to the liaison between Japanese women and Occupation soldiers as 娘緣/marriage.} with a black soldier. Johnny’s death is inevitable because he is a threat to Yasugi’s fame and fortune. Su argues that Yasugi is a representative of the capitalist civilization, and that the capitalist society itself is the true murderer of Johnny.\footnote{Su, Shuyang (1979), ‘Ziben Zhuyi Wenming Shi Sharen De Xiongfan – Qiantan Rimei Hepai Yingpian Renzheng’, \textit{Dianying Pingjie}, 10, pp. 9.}

Most reviewers mention in passing that the film depicts racial discrimination, but none of them seem to consider the topic as deserving separate and in-depth analysis, as they have been taught by CCP doctrines on international class struggle to subsume racial discrimination under capitalist oppression.\footnote{For an account of the official racial discourse in the PRC see ‘Epilogue: Race as Class (1949–?)’ in Frank Dikötter’s \textit{The Discourse of Race in Modern China}.} Some praise the pure and deep parental love of Johnny’s much-discriminated-against father;\footnote{Wen, Sheng (1980), ‘Renzheng Zhengming Le Zenyang De Renxing’, \textit{Qunzhong}, 4, pp. 42} some point out that Johnny naively hopes his bourgeois mother would accept him because ‘though he grew up in the US, he has always lived among impoverished black people and does not understand the bourgeois mentality at all’.\footnote{Su, Shuyang (1979), ‘Ziben Zhuyi Wenming Shi Sharen De Xiongfan – Qiantan Rimei Hepai Yingpian Renzheng’, \textit{Dianying Pingjie}, 10, pp. 9.}

Some reviews note the strong Japanese nationalism reflected in the character of Munesue. They argue that the film delivers the message that ‘the Japanese nation would not put up with oppression’.\footnote{Cai, Weiyang (1980), ‘Renzheng Yu Zuihou Yifu Xiaoxiang’, \textit{Dianying Xinzuo}, 5, p. 103.} Some remark that the film should teach Chinese authors and artists that Sino-
Japanese and Sino-US friendship does not mean obliterating the memory of invasion and oppression.  

Some 30 years after they were written, we may want to dismiss these reviews as saturated with outdated Cultural Revolution rhetoric, although some of their claims – that the film expresses Japanese nationalism, that it critiques bourgeois hypocrisy, and that class and race issues are intertwined to some extent – are not entirely biased. Non-intellectual, popular reception of the film is more intangible, although contemporary memoirs and blog essays suggest that those who saw the film in their youth or childhood (now nostalgic middle-aged men and women) were most drawn to the film’s emotional theme song, known in China as ‘the straw hat song’ (草帽歌). The song’s theme of loss and parental-child love was healing to a generation recently traumatized by the Cultural Revolution in which private and ‘human’ feelings were denied expression, and, in worse cases, people denounced, lost or became distant to family members in the political chaos.

We cannot blame the Chinese audience for not fully understanding the film or for reducing it to a melodrama of Yasugi choosing between humane love and self-interest. Stripped of their class theory, the intellectual film reviews I quoted above are also very much melodramatic readings. Like most audiences of foreign films, they were circumscribed by their horizon and more likely to appropriate elements from foreign films to express domestic concerns – e.g. the popularity of ‘the straw hat song’ and the film reviewer’s attention to Japanese nationalism. Deeper social issues embedded in this film probably only appeared to the Chinese audience as the tip of the iceberg, as they had only the dubbed film text, the film program and their very limited knowledge of Japanese history and society to rely on.

---

In the prevailing melodramatic reading, Yasugi is a sinner whose inhuman crime can only be redeemed by self-destruction. Of all the intellectual reviews and memoirs I have read, none has raised the question why Yasugi has to pay such a heavy price for her onrī past, while her husband Yōhei can get away with his womanizer present – their family conversation reveals that Yōhei is a Diet member, has numerous mistresses and illegitimate offspring and is unashamed. Moreover, unlike Yōhei, Yasugi’s motive for starting an onrī relationship with the Occupation soldier was far less about pleasure than about survival – obtaining necessities and protection. Indeed, when the detectives question Yasugi’s old acquaintance about her past, she emphasizes that at the time people were just trying to make some money to survive. In short, in her past Yasugi did nothing that was morally wrong – she was more wronged against, by the Occupation and the Japanese government that sacrificed lower class women and made them pay for the lost war. Yet this past carries multiple stigmas – as I have illustrated in a previous section – and Johnny is the embodiment of these stigmas. Although not entirely familiar with the situation, the Chinese audience was mostly aware of the weight of these stigmas, as the reviews suggest. How could they not be aware? If the stigmas were not so heavy Yasugi would be insane to eliminate their embodiment at all cost. Yet the reviewers and audience seemed to expect Yasugi to make the ‘moral and humane’ choice by embracing these stigmas; they did not consider that the social values behind these stigmas are unjust in the first place. For the reviewers and audience, such lack of sympathy did not seem sadist only because Yasugi has now joined the upper class. Why not expose her stigmas and see her downfall? And it does happen – the society,

---

491 Or, as some reviewers have misunderstood, ‘wrong marriage partner’ past.
492 Yōhei started his enterprise with money made from the black market. The conversation that references this issue is deleted from the Chinese/US version.
493 The most obvious example was the establishment of the Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA) and, with it, women’s suicides and VD.
with all its prejudices, drives her over the edge, to filicide, and then literally into the abyss (see Fig. 4.24). Right before her suicide (jumping off the cliff), she is awarded the first prize in the national fashion design contest, and almost simultaneously learns that her other son Kyōhei has also died.\textsuperscript{494} Career or children, Yasugi just cannot have both.\textsuperscript{495} Has she not realized that for a woman it is a crime not to make motherhood her most essential profession?

Fig. 4.24: Yasugi into the abyss.

The above might seem like an extreme feminist reading – although no more excessive than the reviewers’ class struggle reading. While one could argue that gender issues were not necessarily prioritized at the end of the Cultural Revolution and the dawn of the Reform and Opening-up, the reviewers and audience’s indifference to the devastating prejudice endured by Yasugi contrasted sharply with the gender equality slogans chanted by the CCP. It took overtly feminist films such as \textit{Sandakan 8} to force critics and audience to face gender issues – yet they were few. Otherwise, the sometimes not so subtle manifestations of gender inequalities, portrayed or betrayed in film texts, continued to escape the notice of China’s male-dominated

\textsuperscript{494} A little before that scene, Yasugi asks her husband for a divorce to which he readily agrees. This scene is cut from the US/Chinese version.

\textsuperscript{495} After giving a speech at the award ceremony, Yasugi, overcome with grief and guilt, returns the award to the organizers.
film propagandist and film critic profession,\textsuperscript{496} even as the class struggle critical paradigm that eclipsed gender issues gradually faded over the years.

Another issue that was eclipsed by, or subsumed under, the theme of class struggle at the time was race. As we have seen, in the film’s dubbed dialogue, explanation sheet and intellectual reviews, racial tensions were often dismissed, whitewashed or oversimplified. While many were quick to denounce the evils of racial discrimination, very few thought it necessary to go beyond CCP doctrines and engage in deeper reflection. More significantly for the Chinese context, racial discrimination has been stereotyped as something whites do to blacks (and other people of colour). Very few, for example, have noted that racial discrimination within Japan – an important subtext of the film – is one of the main causes of Yasugi and Johnny’s tragedy. It is true that the Chinese audience was not familiar with Japan’s propaganda on the superiority of the Yamato race and its policies based on the myth of a homogeneous nation. They were also unfamiliar with the fate of Japan’s biracial children born during the Occupation\textsuperscript{497}: many were abandoned or unloved; many grew up to be delinquent or marginalized; many were disadvantaged in job-hunting and other areas of life\textsuperscript{498} – if Johnny were not conveniently murdered but allowed to stay on in Japan, his prospects might still have been bleak.\textsuperscript{499} Yet it was not just ignorance about

\textsuperscript{496} Zhang Cheng recalled that in 1958 famous film critic Ke Ling gave the following comment on The Cranes are Flying: “after Xue Pinggui leaves home for the army Wang Baocuan remained faithful to him for eighteen years. Vera (heroine of the film) is not even up to the standard of women in feudal society.” See “Shanghai dianyingju guanyu dianying zuotanhui qingkuang jianbao de chubu zonghailiao.” B177-1-284-47, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

\textsuperscript{497} Japanese film Konketsuji (Hideo Sekigawa, 1953) was subtitled and released in China in 1955 (with only six copies). Chinese writer Bing Xin wrote a review titled ‘我控訴 – 看了日本電影《混血兒》以後’/‘J’accuse – Thoughts on the Japanese Film Mixed-Blood Children’.


\textsuperscript{499} Joe Yamanaka, a biracial singer and actor who played Johnny in this film, said in an interview that he faced discrimination while growing up in Japan (‘Story’).
Japanese history that prevented the Chinese reviewers and audience from acknowledging the existence of racism in Japan.

The Chinese audience certainly felt sympathy towards Johnny’s fate, but that was no proof that they were free from racist values. In fact, what was appalling was the ease with which many reviewers and memoir authors wrote ‘Yasugi is ashamed of her black son’ as if the shame was quite natural, and then gave no more thought to it and asked no more questions about racism in Japanese society. Was this not almost tacit approval? Indeed, one of the reviewers Su goes so far as to say ‘through the character of Munesue, the young Japanese detective, the film expresses the Japanese people’s nationalist hatred for the American Occupation forces and sympathy for black people in America’\(^{500}\) as if the Japanese people were incapable of discrimination against black people and as if Yasugi’s fear of stigma was her own fantasy. Comparing this with the reviewers’ eagerness to point a finger at racism in the United States (apparently a result of propaganda), we observe a kind of double standard: racism as white supremacy was condemned, while racism as discrimination against the Other in Asian societies was condoned, or at least overlooked.

The film reviews also display a tendency at the time to follow the CCP doctrine and equate racial discrimination with class oppression. Its validity aside, one could argue that this doctrine was attractive because it further exonerated the Chinese, since they were neither white nor capitalist. But the predominance of such a doctrine had its long-term side effects. If the solidarity that the Chinese people were taught to feel for people of African descent was based on proletariat class consciousness, then once that revolutionary ideology declines the solidarity

might decline too. As China’s economy becomes more essentially (but not nominally) capitalist, there is reason to fear that the ‘capitalism begets racism’ formula is becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the decline of the old doctrine has left a vacuum that is not yet replaced by another powerful racial theory.

With the above discussion on the Chinese adaptation and reception of *Proof of the Man*, I have no intention to condemn melodramatic readings or tendencies to reduce films to theme songs or tag lines – art and entertainment should have their realm of freedom beyond politics and social issues – nor do I wish to dismiss rewritings and reinterpretations of foreign films – they are often inevitably misreadings; but this is by no means deplorable; if anything they enrich and shed light on the original. What I have presented is a case study of refraction: although it is beyond the scope of my short analysis to really examine the trio of inequities in the film text or the Chinese context, issues that have emerged in the translation and criticism of *Proof of the Man* offer a glimpse into the constraints and refractors in the literary/film system of early post-Mao China.
Distant Resonances: Conclusions and Questions

In Jessica Ka Yee Chan’s review of Zhuoyi Wang’s *Revolutionary Cycles in Chinese Cinema, 1951-1979*, after commending Wang for producing “the first book-length study (in English) on Chinese cinema in the Mao era,” she suggests that “future research on the subject could explore the cinema’s engagement with international film discourse and film practices.” Chan notes Wang’s mention of “the ironic fact that in the mid-1950s, ‘box office records of PRC films marked an embarrassing contrast to those of the films imported from outside the socialist camp,’ including those from non-socialist national film festivals such as the French, Indian, Italian, and Japanese Film Weeks.” Chan calls for works that explore “Chinese cinema’s engagement with world cinema, socialist internationalism, and anti-colonial solidarity with the Third World” that would benefit the field of film studies at large.\(^{501}\)

This dissertation is a small step in that direction. As the first book-length study on the subject, it inevitably leaves many questions unanswered. A most obvious question in terms of its scope is: what about Hong Kong films? During the seventeen-year period, select films from Hong Kong’s leftist studios were exhibited nationwide since as early as 1956\(^{502}\) until they were replaced by co-productions between mainland and Hong Kong studios in 1963. According to a Cultural Revolution publication, “before 1959, Hong Kong films had the second widest audience among imported films (after the Soviet Union). As Soviet import decreased after 1959, Hong Kong films took their place and were all the rage during the 1959-61 period (the great famine).”\(^{503}\) During the post-Mao era, official import and exhibition of Hong Kong films thrived

---


\(^{502}\) 1954 for southern China.

but became gradually eclipsed by the popularity of video lounges and pirated VHS. My discussion of dubbed foreign films in this dissertation excludes Hong Kong films. Though they were imported and oftentimes dubbed, their identity was only half-foreign – in official film catalogues published in 1963 and 1978,504 they were grouped alongside “films from privately-owned studios.” Such categorization reflects the historical continuity between ROC cinema and 1950-60s Hong Kong leftist cinema. It would have been an injustice to the complex identity of imported Hong Kong films if they were lumped together with the dubbed foreign films I discuss, and they well deserve a separate volume.

Also omitted from this project is dubbed foreign television drama aired since 1980s. Despite the fact that foreign films and TV shows were imported and dubbed through somewhat different channels, they belong together in terms of how they mediate the foreign and impress on the audience. I arbitrarily choose to leave out dubbed foreign TV drama simply because its inclusion would have made this project too expansive and unmanageable.505

There are many other areas that I regretfully have not elaborated on; for example, a history of the dubbing voice. I only pointed out how, like literal translation, the dubbing voice strove to match the visual characters, and the implications thereof. But how have the dubbing styles changed over the years and varied between the two studios? In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dubbing voices (especially those of the Shanghai Dubbing Studio) apparently stiffened into a monotonous mannerism as evidenced in Wang Anyi’s short story “A Thousand People, One Face.” The story tells of a middle-aged fan of foreign TV drama’s obsessive hatred towards and final reconciliation with the voice of a dubbing actress, Gu Lianhua (a reference to

504 In the 1963 version the category “films from privately-owned studios and Hong Kong” is placed between “domestic features” and “domestic documentaries.” In the 1978 version, the category of the same name is placed after all domestic genres and before Soviet features.
505 Famous titles include Man from Atlantis, Garrison's Gorillas, Sanshiro Sugata, Akai Giwaku.
Ding Jianhua). The narrative is filled with allegories of the Cultural Revolution experience: Gu Lianhua’s pretentious falsetto which proceeded on a single frequency, the fan’s self-criticism that since no one else shared his painful reaction to Gu’s voice he himself must have been in the wrong, and the final allusion to a TV show in which a girl, “after witnessing a cold-blooded murder, all of a sudden loses her memory and speech,” but is finally able to confront the murderer with a deafening cry of “it was him, not me!”506 But more intriguing is what the story reveals about late 1980s dubbing as perceived by the Chinese audience: the domestic voice and foreign bodies were drifting apart: foreignness became stereotype and mere “difference.” The dubbing voice no longer matches but denotes the foreign: Gu’s voice “mercilessly stamped them with her brand, depriving them of their lively personalities”;507 it reshaped the characters’ faces and at one point it “had such energy that it broke through the bodies and manifested itself.”508 The official, monopolistic interpretation of the West began to seem authoritarian: instead of mirroring the foreign and constituting an integral part of the foreign, it now stood between the foreign and the Chinese audience and limits the latter’s imagination of the foreign: the protagonist detested Gu’s voice especially when it attempted to “mimic Westerners’ interjections, such as ‘ah’, ‘oh’, ‘eh’ and ‘aha,’”509 and he found her “hellos” most intolerable: “when she said “hello” it was with pride, as if she gained some kind of power. Here her sharp and shrill voice became especially exaggerated, especially “hello-ish,” as if no one but she could “hello,” as if “hello” was some sort of honor.”510 Yet despite his aversion of Gu Lianhua/Chinese dubbing, he remained addicted to foreign TV shows, and it was not only for their captivating suspense: “in

507 Ibid., 9.
508 Ibid., 12.
509 Ibid., 7.
510 Ibid., 13-4.
the middle of the night, all was silent, only the television screen was alive, full of vigor. It became the real existence, as if that was the real life, and he was a mere bystander. Gu Lianhua’s voice dispersed in the air; even she became real, and yet he was fake.” The phantasmatic foreign world seemed imminent, so did the Chinese voices that sought to attach themselves to it, inviting audience immersion and participation. Yet the protagonist cannot enter the foreign world. Foreign images and Chinese voices both consoled and agitated the unspeakable sense of loss in that generation going through the reform and opening-up.

And what can we say about the characteristics of famous dubbing actors and actresses’ voices - for there were only one or two dozens of them yet they dubbed the protagonists of thousands of foreign films and shaped the Chinese audience’s imagination of those characters; e.g. Yesenia and Jane Eyre were dubbed by the same actress? Yet how does one analyze voices aside from poetic descriptions? Michel Chion theorizes on the “audiovisual contract” in which visual and auditory perceptions contaminate and project on each other; could this be adapted to foreign film dubbing? Could scientific investigations be employed here, e.g. psychoacoustics is the study of sound perception? How about a history of the dubbing personnel – many of whom had interesting backgrounds before 1949, and in 1950s regular actors (such as Sun Daolin) often helped to dub foreign films? How about a history of the dubbing studios? Fu Runsheng’s history of Shanghai Dubbing Studio is an important contribution in this regard. Institutional and personal factors affected the Chinese dubbing industry more than people care to acknowledge; e.g. the decline of the industry was partly due to a forced retirement policy implemented in mid-1980s as well as in-fighting at the Shanghai Dubbing Studio.  

511 Ibid., 12.
512 This is ironic considering Balazs’s claim that traditional Chinese aesthetics as well as Hollywood film art encourages the illusion in the spectator that s/he is in the fictional space of the art work (49-50).
513 See Su Xiu’s memoir.
Another regret is that I have not been able to provide close reading and in-depth background on more dubbed films, especially those from the Soviet bloc. My ignorance of the languages and cultures of non-English-speaking countries is the obstacle. It would have been interesting to learn how certain films were made and received in their countries of origin and to compare that with their afterlife in China, as well as their afterlives in other countries. Moreover, it would have been beneficial to compare China’s foreign film import, exhibition, and reception with that of other countries in the socialist camp – up to now in this field there is only Indian Films in Soviet Cinemas and a few articles.

In the above passages I listed some of the ways in which this dissertation project can be expanded and enriched. I now turn to the inherent limits to the significance of my project, findings, and arguments. Much as it may seem to undercut my effort, I consider it an ethical necessity to acknowledge these limits:

First, though my project does not exclude film exhibition in rural areas, it is important to bear in mind the huge discrepancy in terms of foreign film viewing opportunity across the urban-rural divide. Though domestic and foreign films enjoyed roughly equal status in urban theaters, it was domestic films that dominated the programs of rural projection teams. There were two reasons for this arrangement: a) Many projection teams were enduring great hardships and going out of their way to send films to poor and remote areas, so it was preferable that they screened only “effective,” i.e. directly propagandistic films. Domestic films about rural reform and rural life, especially those that pictorialized current policies, best suited the purpose. As the slogan goes, “for factories and mines there should be numerous programs and few copies, for rural areas there should be few programs and numerous copies.” b) CCP propagandists claimed that people in rural areas were often illiterate and therefore could not even understand straightforward
domestic films without projectionists’ explanation; it would have been harder for them to understand and be educated by foreign films. The fact that most imported films were not available to the majority of PRC’s population i.e. the peasants should warn us against making any sweeping statement about foreign films’ influence on “the Chinese people.” When I said “China re-synched with Hollywood in 1994” it was not without many-layered irony. Just as in the Republican era, the vibrant and insatiable visual pleasure of the Chinese elite and “middle” class hides China’s vast social disparity.

Second, in Chapters One and Two, as I try to overturn the one-sided story of CCP’s successful propaganda and PRC’s cultural isolation, I show that city and town dwellers had (sometimes significant amount of) foreign film access throughout most of the Maoist period with the exception of 1965-69, and I look at how that they appropriated propaganda for entertainment. But this revisionist story should only serve to complicate and not to obliterate the horrors of the period – not that the period was all horror, but I have mentioned none so far. When the amazingly high productivity and diversity of foreign films in the late 1950s is placed side by side with the tragedies of the great famine (most severe in the rural areas), it almost seemed like fiddling while Rome burned. While foreign films might often have been sheltered from criticism for considerations of diplomacy, dubbing actors suffered from persecutions in various movements due to their complicated histories – Qiu Yuefeng committed suicide partly because the Party refused to announce his rehabilitation in 1980. Also, in Chapter Four when I critique post-Mao translators, viewers, and critics for being insensitive to issues of social inequity, am I being too hard on these “post-traumatic” groups with impossible standards? Probably yes, for what they did and said was natural given their circumstances, yet my intention is not to place blame but to examine how foreign films shaped Chinese audience’s worldview.
My aims in this dissertation are three: first, to put dubbed foreign films on the map of Chinese film studies and show how foreignness could disrupt the grand narratives of the Maoist era. Second, to enrich discussions on foreign film dubbing in translation studies and film studies by bringing together the two fields as well as by calling attention to the long neglected ethical issues in film import and dubbing. Third, to present examples of how foreign films were refracted and received, and to reveal what they can tell us about the minds of Chinese audience and how they might have influenced their values. But none of the above endeavors would seem interesting or worthwhile were it not for the larger background behind dubbed foreign films, which was China’s interaction with the foreign.

In Antje Ascheid’s theory of dubbing based on the case of Germany, the key issue is Hollywood/American hegemony. When it comes to Chinese dubbing, the background was not only Cold War ideological contentions, but China’s weak and vulnerable position globally and especially vis-à-vis the West, as well as its long and troubled pursuit of modernity.\(^{514}\) Germany and Italy had strong dubbing industries, but foreign film dubbing could not have been as serious and fascinating a topic for these countries as in the Chinese context because it cannot be situated in a context of over a century of tortured relations with the West.

Dubbing, as one of China’s strategies in interacting with and appropriating the foreign, inspires inexhaustible metaphorical interpretations.\(^{515}\) Was China grafting indigenous sounds and concepts onto foreign appearances, as the Japanese language attaches *kunyomi* to Chinese characters? Was China violently possessing foreign figures and churning out chimeras with the

---

\(^{514}\) Such connections were apparent even in the media reaction to China’s first dubbed foreign film in 1947-8 (Chapter 1).

\(^{515}\) I did not seriously pursue these metaphors in previous chapters as they might seem presumptuous.
same appearance but different souls,516 as Wang Anyi claims in “A Thousand People, One Face”? Was China seeking to create, through its foreign film repertoire and dubbing, a West according to its own imagination, when it could not or would not fully join in with the West?517

And what about now with the decline of dubbing and the rise of subtitles? China seems to have given up its internationalist imagination for globalization, while mandarin is discredited as a filmic lingua franca in China. Subtitling is largely non-official and decentering: on pirated DVDs and video streaming websites, anyone can attach a subtitle to any film; here there is no more censoring of film content, no more striving for elegance in the translated dialogue, only unprecedented efficiency to feed a monetary or spiritual hunger. The foreign (image) becomes ever more available, in legitimate copies or shanzhai doubles518, at least for certain classes. Indeed now is the age of a different doubling, more direct, less poetic, and with less of the masochistic imperative for matching. The foreign comes out as more whole, yet at the same time more intact, impenetrable, and raw.

516 In Futureworld (1976), one of the first American films shown in PRC, Delos Corporation creates robotic clones of domestic and foreign elites who follow the corporation’s designs.
517 Though China’s isolation during the Maoist era is a myth; it was relative isolation at best.
518 Also appropriation of the form at the expense of the content.
References


Bailey, James (1990), ‘Go east, old actors – the rising sun welcomes falling stars’, *Spy*, February, p. 38.


*Baltic Deputy* (Deputat Baltiki). Directed by Iosif Kheifits and Aleksandr Zarkhi. 1937.


Bian, Shanquan. 1964. “Dui ‘sheng de quanli’ deng ruogan waiguo gushipian chongxin faxing he zhizuo piantou zimu de yijian [Comments on the Re-release and Making of Opening
Credits of Foreign Features including *The Right to be Born*.” Shanghaishi Dianyingju Chuangzuo Shengchan Chu. B177-3-513, P38, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


Broad Horizons (Horizonte të hapura). Directed by Viktor Gjika. 1968.

Broken Bridge (Zerwany most). Directed by Jerzy Passendorfer. 1962.


Chen, Huangmei. 1959a. “1959 nian 6 yue shangxun zai shanghaishi dianyingju dang zheng ganbu huiyi shang de jianghua [Speech at the Party and Government Cadre Meeting of the Shanghai Film Bureau in Early June, 1959].” B177-1-21, P003, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


----. 1962b. “Zai shanghai dianyingju shengchan huiyi shang de jianghua [Speech Given at the Shanghai Film Bureau Production Meeting].” B177-1-21, P088, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

----. 1963. “Chen Huangmei tongzhi baogao [Comrade Chen Huangmei’s Speech].” B177-1-21, P078, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


Cossacks of the Kuban (Kubanskie kazaki). Directed by Ivan Pyryev. 1950.


The Defense of Tsaritsyn (Oborona Tsaritsyna). Directed by Sergey Vasilev and Georgi Vasilyev. 1942.

Destiny of a Man (Sudba cheloveka). Directed by Sergei Bondarchuk. 1959.


“Dianyingyuan dianying fangyingdui ying zhongshi yingpian neirong de jieshuo gongzuo [Theaters and Projection Units Should Pay Attention to Explanation of Film Content].” 1952. People’s Daily, Aug 15.


Fathers and Sons (Ottsy i deti). Directed by Adolf Bergunker and Natalia Rashevskiaia. 1958.


“Guanyu bufen gaoxiao liyong dianshi luxiang shebei lufang guowai he gangtai yingpian zaocheng buliang yingxiang de tongbao [Report on the Bad Consequences Caused by
Certain Colleges Screening Foreign and Hong Kong-Taiwan Films Using Television Recording Devices.” A22-4-548-28. Shanghai Municipal Archives.


“Guanyu peihe jiaoxue fangying dianying liening zai shiyue he liening zai yijiuyiba de baogao.” B105-4-1027-41, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

Guilty without Guilt (Bez viny vinovatye). Directed by Vladimir Petrov. 1945.


Hamlet. Directed by Laurence Olivier. 1948.


Hongdaihui Beijing Film Academy Jinggangshan Arts Corps. 1968. Ducao ji you yanzhong cuowu yingpian sibai bu [Four Hundred Poisonous Weeds and Films with Serious Mistakes].


The Idiot (Idiot). Directed by Ivan Pyrev. 1958.

Intrigue and Love (Kabale und Liebe). Directed by Martin Hellberg. 1959.


“Jiedai yingguo aimi dianying gongsi jingli meidahua qingkuang jianbao.” B177-4-840, P19, Shanghai Municipal Archives.
“Jiedai luomaniya dianying faxing daibiaotuan jianbao.” B177-4-754, P41, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


*Lenin in 1918* (Lenin v 1918 godu). Directed by Mikhail Romm. 1939.

*Lenin in October* (Lenin v oktyabre). Directed by Mikhail Romm. 1937.


----. "Yi Qing Dong Ren De Chao Xian Dian Ying." Da Zhong Dian Ying (Popular Cinema) 16 (2007): 46-47.

Li, Zhen. *Yin Hai Fu Cha: The Oral History of Film Culture in China*. Beijing Shi: Min zu chu ban she, 2011.


Liu, Dishan. 2011. “Shiqinian shiqi sulian dianying fangying shilu [A Record of Exhibition of Soviet Films during the Seventeen-year Period].” *Beijing Dianying Xueyuan Xuebao* 3:


“Meipian duibai guoyu hua, guopian shou weixie, yiyifeng yi cheng le feiwu.” *Xi shijie* 352 (1947): 8.


*Mrs. Tu Hau* (Chi tu hau). Directed by Pham Ky Nam. 1963.


Nugent, Frank S. 1938. “Heroes of the Alamo (1937) THE SCREEN; 'Lenin in October' Strikes Twice in the Same Times Square--New Bills at Criterion and Central At the Criterion At the Central At the Teatro Hispano At the Modern Playhouse.” New York Times, April 2.


Our Soil (Toka jonë). Directed by Hysen Hakani. 1964.


The Right to be Born (El derecho de nacer). Directed by Zacarías Gómez Urquiza. 1952.


“Ruhe duidai waiguo yingpian de xuanchuan wenti [How to address the issue of foreign film publicity].”1962. B177-1-21, P200-204, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


Salt of the Earth. Directed by Herbert J. Biberman. 1954.

Satō, Jun’ya (1976), Kimi Yo Fundo No Kawa Wo Watare/Manhunt, Tokyo: Daiei Studios.


SD (Shanghai Dianyingju) 1964. “Guanyu a’erbaniya yingpian women de tudi jianyi bu zuo shanjian de qingshi baogao [Request to Not Censor Albanian Film *Toka Jone*].” B177-3-513, P63, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

“Shanghai shoulu dianyinggu guanyu dianying zuotanhui qingkuang jianbao de chubu zonghe cailiao” [Initial Report on the Film Symposium by the Shanghai Film Bureau]. B177-1-284-47, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


SDY (Shanghai Dianying Yizhichang) 1976. “Guanyu neipian wenti de qingshi baogao [Reports concerning the issue of internal reference films].” B177-4-479, P6, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

“Shanghai shoulu dianying shezhizu guanyu yaoqiu guankan ‘bageda qiezei’ deng yingpian de qingshi baogao” [The Shanghai Film Production Team’s Request to Watch *The Thieves of Bagdad*]. B244-3-238-102. Shanghai Municipal Archives.

*Shanghai shoulu yingyuan yijiuliusan nian yiyue yingqibiao* [Exhibition Schedule of First-run Theaters in Shanghai, January 1963].

*Shanghai erlun yingyuan yijiuliusan nian yiyue yingqibiao* [Exhibition Schedule of Second-run Theaters in Shanghai, January 1963].

*Shanghai sanlun yingyuan yijiuliusan nian yiyue yingqibiao* [Exhibition Schedule of Third-run Theaters in Shanghai, January 1963].


“Shanghai shenhuaju guanyu shanghaishi ‘riben dianying zhou’ yingchu xuanchuan jihua [Shanghai Culture Bureau’s Exhibition and Publicity Plans for ‘Japanese Film Week’].” B59-2-91-135, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

Shao, Mujun (1980), ‘Zai Wenming Shijie De Liceng – Riben Yingpian Renzheng


----. "Zhui Yi A Er Ba Ni Ya Dian Ying - Cong Hai An Feng Lei Shuo Qi." Dian Ying Ping Jie (Movie Review) 1 (2001): 40-41.


Tang, Jie. 1952. “Shehuizhuyi de geming he jianshe de shishi – tuijian yingpian liening zai shiyue, liening zai yijiuiba he xuansi.” People’s Daily, April 24: 3.


The Third Blow (Tretiy udar). Directed by Igor Savchenko. 1948.


Wen, Sheng (1980), ‘Renzheng Zhengming Le Zenyang De Renxing’/‘What kind of humanity has Proof of the Man proven’, *Qunzhong*, 4, pp. 42.


Wenhuabu. 1962b. “Guanyu nansilafu he yindu de yingpian he youpai fenzi shi hui daoyan de yingpian de faxing wenti [On the Issues of Yugoslav and Indian Films and Films Directed by Shi Hui the Rightist].” B177-3-346, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


White Nights (Belye nochi). Directed by Ivan Pyrev. 1958.


XNA (Xinhua News Agency) 1950. “Sulian yingpian zai woguo fangying shoudao guanzhong relie huanying yibei dangzuo xuexi sulian de zhongyao gongju [Soviet Films Received Warm Welcome from Chinese Audience and Have Become an Important Tool in Learning from the Soviet Union].” People’s Daily, Mar 9.


Xu, Jingxian. 1968. “Xu jingxian tongzhi shencha yingpian ‘guangkuo de dipingxian’ yijian jilu zhengli [Record of Comerade Xu Jingxian’s Comments as he Examined the Film *Horizonte te hapura*].” B177-4-33, P1, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

Xu, Jingxian. 1972. “Zai shi dianyingju dangdaihui kaimushi shang de jianghua [Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the City Film Bureau Party Congress].” B177-4-212, P008, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

“Xu Jingxian tongzhi chuanda zhongyang lingdao tongzhi dui ‘tiedao ertong’ yizhi de yijian [Xu Jingxian relaying central leaders’ comments on the dubbing of Railway Children].” 1976. B177-4-508, P17, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

“Xu Jingxian zai shi dianyingju dangdaihui kaimushi shang de jianghua [Xu Jingxian’s speech at the Shanghai Film Bureau party congress opening ceremony].” 1972. B177-4-212, P7, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


*Yingpian (changpian jiemu) pianming paici biao* [Feature Length Film Title List]. 1963. Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Faxing Fangying Gongsi.


YSF (Yingxie Shanghai Fenhu). “Zuotan ‘baichi’ [Symposium on The Idiot].” B177-3-474, P013, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


“Yuan Wenshu tongzhi zai Shanghai dianying zuotanhui shang de baogao [Comrade Yuan Wenshu’s speech at the Shanghai Film Symposium].” B177-1-284-1, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


Zhang, Huan, and Qing Yin. "Li Wen Hua Jiang Qing 'yu Yong She Ying Shi' Bei Huan Shi." Southern People Weekly 2 (2011): 74-77.


“Zhonggong zhongyang guowuyuan zhongyang junwei guanyu zhizhi lanfang ‘neibu cankao yingpian’ de tongzhi [Circular Concerning Checking the Excessive Showing of Films for Restricted Information Only].” A22-4-548-1. Shanghai Municipal Archives.


“Zhongguo dianying gongzuozhe daibiaotuan canjia fenlan ‘zhongguo dianying jie’ gongzuo zongjie baogao [Report on the Chinese Film Personnel Delegation’s Activities at the ‘Chinese Film Festival’ in Finland].”. 1957. B177-3-121, P37, Shanghai Municipal Archives.


Appendix A: Partial Filmography of Internal Reference Films Dubbed during the Cultural Revolution

1970

紅與黑 (The Red and the Black; Le rouge et le noir). Dir. Claude Autant-Lara. Documento Film, Franco London Films, 1954. (There was a 17-year period dubbed version of this film. So there might be a mistake).

漂亮的朋友 (Bel Ami) Dir. Louis Daquin. Projektograph Film, Kleber Film, Les Films Malhesherbes, 1955.


1971


神風特攻隊 (Ah, Special Attack Corps; あゝ特別攻撃隊 Aa tokubetsu kougekitai). Dir. Yoshio Inoue. Daiei, 1960. (others argue that this film was not dubbed and that Cao Lei got it wrong)

最後的特攻隊 (The Last Glory; 最後の特攻隊 Saigo no tokkôtai). Dir. Junya Satô. Toei Tokyo, 1970. (not included in Cao’s article)


湖畔 (By the Lake; У озера U ozera). Dir. Sergei Gerasimov. Gorky Film Studio, 1969.

羅馬之戰 (The Last Roman; Kampf um Rom). Dir. Robert Siodmak, Sergiu Nicolaescu, Andrew Marton. CCC Filmkunst GmbH, Pegaso Film S.r.l., in cooperation with Studioul Cinematografic Bucuresti, 1968, 1969, 1976. (Sergiu Nicolaescu is director of at least four other Romanian films released during and after the Cultural Revolution)

1972


簡愛 (Jane Eyre). Dir. Robert Stevenson. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1943.

切·格瓦拉 (Che!). Dir. Richard Fleischer. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1969.


冷酷的心 (Wild at Heart; Corazón salvaje). Dir. Tito Davison. Clasa Films Mundiales, 1968.

1973-4


沉默的朋友 (Silent Friends; Prieteni fara grai). Dir. Paul Fritz Nemeth, Gheorghe Turcu. Legend Film, Romania Film, Studioul Cinematografic Bucuresti, 1969.

1975


魂斷藍橋 (Waterloo Bridge). Dir. Mervyn LeRoy. MGM, 1940.


海底肉彈 (Crash Dive). Dir. Archie Mayo. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1943. (starring Tyrone Power)

屏開雀選 (Pride and Prejudice). Dir. Robert Z. Leonard. MGM, 1940.

空谷芳草 (The Valley of Decision). Dir. Tay Garnett. MGM, 1945.

怒火情焰 (Son of Fury: The Story of Benjamin Blake). Dir. John Cromwell. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1942. (starring Tyrone Power)

瓊宮恨史 (Queen Christina). Dir. Rouben Mamoulian. MGM, 1933.

蘇伊士運河 (Suez). Dir. Allan Dwan. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1938. (starring Tyrone Power)

春閨淚痕 (Tomorrow is Forever). Dir. Irving Pichel. International Pictures, 1946.


同是天涯淪落人?

化身博士 (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde). Dir. Victor Fleming. MGM, 1941.


1976


Home in Indiana. Dir. Henry Hathaway. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1944.


Appendix B: Publicly Released Foreign Films Mentioned in Chapter Two

列寧在十月 (Lenin in October; Ленин в Октябре). Dir. Mikhail Romm. Mosfilm, 1937.


勇敢的米哈依 (Michael the Brave; Mihai Viteazul). Dir. Sergiu Nicolaescu. Romania Film, Studioul Cinematografic Bucharesti, 1970.


金姬和銀姬的命運 (The Fate of Kim-hee and Eun-hee; 금희와 은희의 운명, geum-hui-wa eun-hui-ui un-myeong). Dir. Pak Hak, Om Gil Son. February 8 Film Studio, 1974.


原形畢露 (The True Color is Out; 숨길 수 없는 정체 sum-gil su eom-neun jeong-che). Dir. Kim Yong Ho. February 8 Film Studio, 1970.

Appendix C: *Proof of the Man*: Japanese Version Posters, Book Covers etc.

1977 version film poster; used as cover for Kinema Junpo No. 718, October 1977

Book cover, Kadokawa Shoten, March 1977

Book cover, Kadokawa Shoten, May 2004

Book cover, Kadokawa Shoten, May 2004

Book cover, Kadokawa Shoten, October 2008

Comic book cover, Futabasha 株式会社双葉社コミック文庫, July 2004

DVD cover, Kadokawa Entertainment, October 2009

DVD cover of 2001 TV drama remake, Kadokawa Eiga, November 2004
Poster of 2004 TV drama remake
Appendix D: *Proof of the Man*: Chinese Dubbed Version Posters and Book Covers

Chinese dubbed version film poster

Chinese dubbed version alternative film poster

Book cover, film stills comic book (電影連環畫)

Book cover, Jiangsu Renmin Press, 1979

Book cover, Hainan Press & Sanhuan Press June 1998

(teaser reads: “In order to cover up her experience of cohabiting with a black man... [no reference to Occupation]"

Book cover, Qunzhong Press, August 2012