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in Contemporary China

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By

Li Zeng

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ABSTRACT

The Past Revisited: Popular Memory of the Cultural Revolution

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This dissertation explores the ways that Chinese popular media, including film, television, and magazines, reconstruct the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76), a traumatic historical event which tremendously affected Chinese people and society. Employing a combination of methods, including visual and narrative analysis of media and cultural forms, institutional analysis of media industries, and archival research on audiences'/readers' letters, it demonstrates that media and culture find innovative ways to engage this significant part of national history and to generate the remembrance and interpretation of the Cultural Revolution in public space.

Rather than reducing the relation between official history and popular memory to a simplified dichotomy of power and resistance, this dissertation emphasizes an understanding of popular memories of the Cultural Revolution in a broader sociopolitical, economic, and cultural context. With a wide coverage of films and television serial dramas from the late 1970s to the turn of the new millennium, it shows how various factors, including the government's cultural policy, economic transformation, individual and generational concerns, as well as the cultural sentiment for reconstruction of gender and sexuality, have influenced and shaped the historical discourses at different moments. While affirming the significant role that popular media have played in keeping memories of the Cultural Revolution alive in public consciousness, this dissertation calls attention to the limitations and problems, such as the increasing sexist narratives and the problematic nostalgic sentiment for the era of the Cultural Revolution.

This dissertation highlights the participation of audiences, viewers, and readers in engaging the memory of the Cultural Revolution. My archival research on audiences' responses to the Cultural Revolution-related films as well as readers' letters regarding the magazine, *Lao zaopian* (Old Photos), shows that ordinary people actively interpret this part of national history from their personal experiences, write their own histories, reveal hidden facts, or show support for such private memories. The general public constitutes a quintessential force, joining the cultural efforts to save the memory of the Cultural Revolution from fading into oblivion.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The past has become a collection of *photographic, filmic, or televisual images*. We, like the replicants, are put in the position of reclaiming a history by means of its reproduction...the meaning of history is changed, and changed too is the representation in which history, forever unattainable, merely exists.

Giuliana Bruno¹

Giuliana Bruno makes this comment in her article on *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982), a film that has aroused enormous interest from cultural critics and film scholars for its striking depiction of a stark postmodern world, a world where the past is impossible to attain and memory becomes unreliable. I quote Bruno at the beginning of this dissertation because her words and the film she and other critics have intensively analyzed provoke serious reflections on the relation between history and memory, media and historical representation. Bruno is right that history is now accessible primarily through media reproduction. Nevertheless, this fact does not weaken the evocative power of popular memory. Popular media, such as film, television, and magazines can create a dynamic space for people to remember and engage history, particularly the traumatic historical events which the government intends to erase from public memory. This is what this dissertation will demonstrate. I will investigate the representation and reconstruction of China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution [1966-1976] (the Cultural Revolution in short) in Chinese films, television dramas, and photographic magazines (the three forms which Bruno empathetically questions) to explore the dynamism of popular memory in shaping Chinese people's historical consciousness in a media-saturated age.

The Cultural Revolution was launched by Mao Zedong in 1966, in the name of transforming education, literature and art, and all other parts of the superstructure that "do not correspond to

the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system.”² It was in essence a political movement that developed from the internal struggles among party members and then was expanded and turned into a national disaster by Lin Biao and the “Gang of Four”—Jiang Qing (Mao’s wife), Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao, and Wang Hongwen. Under Mao’s political line of “class struggle,” anyone who was suspected of being against the Communist Party or against the socialist system could be arrested, physically tortured, or even executed. The Red Guards—primarily middle school and high school students—were the first ones to answer Mao’s call. On May 29, 1966, some students of Qinghua Middle School established the first Red Guard organization. Within a few months, almost all middle schools in the country established similar organizations.³ Red Guards destroyed things that could be categorized as the so-called “four olds”—“old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits,” and attacked people who belonged to the “five black categories”—landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists. The Red Guard Movement (1966-1969) was the most violent part of the Cultural Revolution.

Another important event was the “up to the mountains and down to the countryside” movement (*shang shan xia xiang*) (“down to the countryside” movement in short), which was formally launched by Mao Zedong on December 22, 1968, although some students had gone to the countryside between the mid 1950s and 1966.⁴ According to Mao’s new policy, young students had to go to work in rural areas to receive “reeducation” by peasants. Approximately fourteen million young people left their homes in the city and worked as peasants for almost ten years until 1979 when they were finally allowed to return to the city. These people were called “zhiging” (short for “zhishi qingnian,” translated as “educated youth”). The Cultural Revolution involved almost every Chinese person in one way or another and produced devastating results.

The estimated deaths range from a million to twenty million (see Appendix).⁵

Although discourses on this particular history are under the control of the government, literature, film, television, and magazines have all found ways to address it. “Wound literature” (or “scar literature”), which emerged in the late 1970s, became the most influential literary genre that reflected on this national tragedy. “Wound literature” got its name from Lu Xinhua’s short novel—“The Wound” (Shang hen), which expresses a Red Guard’s regret for what she did to her mother during the Cultural Revolution.⁶ The protagonist, after denouncing her mother who is wrongly persecuted, leaves home to work in a village. For seven years, she has refused any contact with her mother. When the Cultural Revolution is over, she realizes that she is wrong and wants to express her repentance to her mother. However, her mother dies in a hospital before the daughter arrives. Therefore, what the girl has done to her mother became a wound that she will bear forever. Like “The Wound,” most of the literary works of this genre depict the psychological pain that many people, particularly intellectuals, suffered during the Cultural Revolution.⁷ Although this dissertation focuses on visual media, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of literature to the memory of the Cultural Revolution.

Closely linked to “wound literature” is “trauma cinema” (shanghen dianying) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A large number of films (some adapted from novels of “wound literature”) dealt with the Cultural Revolution, and they were very popular. In the 1990s, the number of films on the Cultural Revolution decreased enormously due to the government’s strict censorship on sensitive historical topics. A thorough exploration of the Cultural Revolution would inevitably touch upon the communist Party’s responsibility for the political disaster as well as for the previous movements, such as anti-rightist movement and the Great Leap Forward, which are closely related to the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese government would not allow

any potential element to threaten the existing political system, especially after the Tiananmen Event and the collapse of the communist Soviet Union in 1989. The Cultural Revolution obviously fits into the category of sensitive political and historical subjects.

Despite a more controlled political environment, the few filmmakers who have chosen to explore the Cultural Revolution provide more challenging and thought-provoking reflections than most early films that address the same movement. Television, which has taken the place of film as the most popular entertainment medium in China since the mid 1980s, has found creative ways to engage this part of national history. In addition, *Lao Zhaopian* (Old Photo), a photographic magazine that carries old photographs and common people's personal stories, immediately became a national sensation in the late 1990s. An undeniable fact is that popular media have made this forbidden history a public presence.

The existing studies on the Cultural Revolution are primarily concerned with historical explanations of this movement. Scholars try to (re)define Mao Zedong's role in the Cultural Revolution, to find out the factors that led to the failure of this movement, and to understand the mass participation and the personality cult of Mao Zedong.⁸ They focus on the event itself and attempt to reveal historical truth. Recent cultural studies have begun to address how this particular decade is reconstructed in literary works and is remembered by people who lived through the Cultural Revolution. "Wound Literature" has been one focus of interest.⁹ There also are a few studies on films about the Cultural Revolution, most of which focus on individual films, in particular the fifth-generation directors' films and Xie Jin's films.¹⁰ Clark Paul and Chris Berry significantly examine the Cultural Revolution-themed films as a group.¹¹ Paul's book contains one chapter on these films, with a focus on theme and content. Extended from Paul's work, Berry's book does a close analysis of the structure, form and content of the films made in

the first six years after the movement and emphasizes the impact of the political environment on these films. Berry argues that these films differ from earlier pedagogical films and deploy a strategy of ambiguity to present critical reflections on the Cultural Revolution. In my research, I have not found any publications that compare films on the Cultural Revolution made in the 1990s and those made in the 1980s, except Ban Wang's *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China*.¹² In Chapter Five of this book, Wang compares Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* (fu rong zhen, 1986) with Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (lan fengzheng, 1993), and praises the latter's anti-melodramatic structure. A comparative approach to historical discourse will contribute to a dynamic perception of historical construction in different periods. This is one main approach that this dissertation takes.

A recent issue of *The China Review* includes a special section on memory of the Cultural Revolution in the 1990s. Guobin Yang proposes three hypotheses on collective memories of the Cultural Revolution in the 1990s: the mnemonic control by the government in the earlier periods bred its own resistance; under the new economic system, memory products found a consumption market; and the market created social discontent among the former *zhiqing* members (who were "sent down" to the countryside). Ming-bao Yue studies two transnational Chinese narratives, Anchee Min's *Red Azalea* and Lin Sola's *Chaos and All That*, and argues that the nostalgia culture in the 1990s is the result of the ideological collusion of transnationalism and postsocialism. David J. Davies does a study of *Old Zhiqing Photos*, a collection of old Cultural Revolution-era photographs, and their reception by consumers. His main point is that the photos invite different interpretations and that *zhiqing* readers' responses are largely related to their present economic and social status.¹³ This collection is a pioneering work that explores various forms of memory of the Cultural Revolution as a social and cultural phenomenon. "Collective

memories” and “nostalgia” are the essential concerns of these articles, and all emphasize the people’s resistance against the government’s repression of the Cultural Revolution discourse in the public sphere.

This dissertation builds upon the existing studies, and raises new questions which I believe are crucial to our understanding of cultural memory of this national tragedy, and the relationship between popular media and trauma in general. Little attention has been given to memory of the Cultural Revolution as a visual media phenomenon. For instance, there is no study of how television, an important medium, has brought memory of the Cultural Revolution into domestic space and into people’s daily conversations. This dissertation will fill in this conspicuous gap. In addition, most articles and books that address popular discourses on the Cultural Revolution emphasize popular resistance against the government’s control over this historical issue. While underscoring the role of popular media in keeping the Cultural Revolution in public consciousness, I do not pose an absolute dichotomy between power and resistance. In China, technologies of memory (like film, television, and printing) are part of the official culture, and thus popular memories produced by media forms are entangled with official histories. I will illuminate this point further in the following section on theoretical concerns.

Furthermore, this dissertation addresses the memory of the Cultural Revolution primarily from the late 1970s to the late 1990s and highlights the “processual nature” of collective memory, which Barbie Zelizer considers to have been largely ignored by critics and scholars. She says, “[O]ur analysis has imposed a certain static nature to understandings of memory work, freezing our discussions to one point in time and place. Faced with the difficulty of capturing its processual nature, we therefore may not yet have come full circle in recognizing the various ways in which collective remembering remains a fundamentally processual activity.”¹⁴ Tracing

popular discourses of the Cultural Revolution across more than two decades, this dissertation intends to capture the “processual memory” of the Cultural Revolution, and to propose understanding the cultural construction and re-imagination of the Cultural Revolution in specific social, political, economic and cultural contexts. Therefore, though I underscore the contribution of popular media in preventing this significant historical event from fading into oblivion, my primary goal is to show how memory works at different levels, how popular memory gains its power from cultural producers and people’s engagement, how popular media function between the state and the market, and how social and cultural concerns and gender politics complicate memory.

This dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter Two explores the immediate remembrance of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s and early 1980s from three aspects: the official assessment of the Cultural Revolution, the cinematic reconstruction of this history, and the audience’s response. I argue that most of the films were structured in line with the official discourse, and that the melodramatic representation met the traumatized Chinese people’s desire for healing the “wound” and moving forward.

Chapter Three studies films made in the 1990s and the beginning of the new century. Focusing on three representative films—*To Live* (Huo zhe, dir. Zhang Yimou, 1994), *In the Heat of the Sun* (Yangguang canlan de rizi, dir. Jiang Wen, 1995), and *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (dir. Dai Sijine, 2002), this chapter demonstrates that in a new social and cultural context contemporary cinema presents disconcerted or even conflicting versions of the Cultural Revolution. Personal memory, generational consciousness, consumption culture, and the transnational market problematize and complicate the discourse of history. Trauma and nostalgia, mourning and longing coexist in contemporary cultural memories.

Chapter Four examines three television serial dramas about the *zhiquing* generation—*Time Wasted* (Cuotuo Suiyue, 1982), *The Snow City* (Xue Chen, 1987), and *The Annals* (Nian Lun, 1994). Challenging the criticism that television is not an appropriate venue for serious historical investigations, this chapter shows that television finds creative ways to address this sensitive history and to respond to contemporary cultural and social concerns. This chapter locates content analysis of TV serial dramas within the context of social and cultural transformations as well as the changing relations between television, the state, and the market.

Chapter Five addresses the “old photo craze,” brought about by *Lao Zhaopian* (Old Photos), a popular photographic magazine. Through textual analyses of individual photos, written narratives, and readers’ responses, this chapter demonstrates how common people engage the Cultural Revolution, and what kind of history the old photos reveal. In addition to the issues of the relation between popular memory and official history, media representation and trauma, and cultural forms and memory, I am also concerned with the ways in which gender and sexuality are played out in popular memory. Cultural reconstruction of the traumatic national history becomes a site where gender and sexuality are constantly defined and redefined. This subject is discussed throughout the dissertation to emphasize that the desire to reconstruct femininity and masculinity is a prevailing sentiment deeply embedded in various cultural forms, which interact with each other.

This dissertation is fundamentally framed within theoretical discussions on memory, amnesia, the representation of trauma in popular cultural forms, as well as the relation between popular memory and official history. Bruno, whom I quoted in the beginning, grounds her argument in Fredric Jameson’s postmodernist theory. According to Jameson, the postmodernist culture is one of simulacrum, quotation, and pastiche, which results in a “consequent weakening

of historicity, both in our relationship to public history and in the new forms of our private temporality.”¹⁵ Seeing the repetition of stereotyped images of the past, Jameson provocatively claims, “We are condemned to seek History by way of our pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach.”¹⁶ History becomes the endless repetition of the past, with the real past eventually lost in quotations. With no difference between the past and the present, the determinate moment of history as the precursor to the present has also vanished. What we have is only the perpetual present. Jameson’s conception of the “weakening of historicity” is largely based on his critique of consumer culture—its “rapid media exhaustion of yesterday’s event.”¹⁷ Media and commercialism exploit memory so relentlessly that the by-gone last moment becomes a history, and we can remember only the near past.

Jameson’s argument has aroused strong protest from cultural critics and scholars. They emphasize a collective desire for memory and history, burgeoning activities of seeking the past, and the possibility of obtaining meaning from cultural memory. For example, although agreeing that our experience of time has changed dramatically and that our contemporary culture is plagued by amnesia, Andreas Huyssen emphasizes the struggle for memory against the virus of forgetting. He believes that the contemporary era is characterized by the coexistence of memory and amnesia, and that it is important to recognize the public and personal endeavor against forgetting. He argues that memory “represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of contemplation outside the universe of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, nonsynchronicity, and information overload.”¹⁸ Memory is a cultural battle against the problematic present world and represents the strong desire for a sense of temporality and history.

Similarly, Paul Grainge points out that Jameson ignores the function of the nostalgia mode in creating meaning and refiguring memory. In *Monochrome Memories*, he studies monochromatic images in news magazines, global advertising, Hollywood films, and syndicated television programs to provide concrete examples to counteract the postmodernist claims about the impossibility of memory.¹⁹ He maintains that some particular modes of historical representation carry a depth of meaning and sustain temporal authenticity. David R. Shumway expresses similar ideas. He argues that even while quoting images and fashions, nostalgia films can elicit diverse understandings of history and memory because of people's different relations to a historical period or to the event reconstructed.²⁰

Compared to film, television is even more questioned for its legitimacy as a venue for history. Grounded in Raymond Williams' theory of "flow," Stephen Heath argues, television "produces forgetfulness, not memory, flow, not history. If there is history, it is congealed, already past and distant and forgotten other than as television archive material, images that can be repeated to be forgotten again."²¹ Similarly, Mary Ann Doane claims that "television thrives on its own forgetability...relying upon the annihilation of memory, and consequently of history, in its continual stress upon the 'nowness' of its own discourse."²² To these theorists, the continuous flow of images and the "nowness" are the opposite of memory and history.

Some television scholars disagree with the view that television is a medium of anti-memory. Marita Sturken claims that repetition and reenactment, which postmodernist theorists use to criticize television, are the defining qualities of memory. Television repetition is, in her words, "a memory-making process rather than a negation of cultural memory," and "a contemporary making and remaking of the historical."²³ Mimi White argues that "liveness" and its related concepts of "nowness" and "immediacy" do not substantiate the criticism of TV's

“forgetfulness” because they are only basic features of television, rather than structuring principles of television. She emphatically states that “history, duration, and memory are as central to any theoretical understanding of television’s discursive operations as liveness and concomitant ideas of presence, immediacy, and so forth.”²⁴ Agreeing with White, I would further argue that “nowness” and “immediacy” are not contradictory with telehistories and popular memory, but rather attributes of them. Telehistories may not create a sense of being present at an occurring event, but they are immediate responses to contemporary sociopolitical issues and cultural phenomena. Television scholars, like Lynn Spigel and Gary R. Edgerton, have significantly pointed out that the importance of telehistories lies in their incorporation of contemporary concerns with history.²⁵

In this dissertation, I take the approach that contemporary historical films, television dramas, and other popular media can achieve critical depth of historicity even though they are commodities for consumption. Just as in Western countries, the Chinese cultural market is saturated with all kinds of products related to history—literature, films, television dramas and so on. The popularity of historical subjects coexists with the government’s strict control of public discussions on significant historical events, such as the anti-rightist movement in the late 1950s, the Great Leap Forward between 1958 and 1961, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, and the Tiananmen Event in 1989. We should view the use of the Culture Revolution in popular media within the specific context of Chinese politics. Even though history is turned into a consumer product, consumer culture makes the “prohibited history” present and thus makes it possible for people to engage history in their own ways.

Most of the theoretical discussions I addressed above are situated specifically within the western postmodern context. I must clarify that while studying popular memory as a cultural

phenomenon, I use “postmodernism” from a cultural perspective. Postmodern culture is taking shape in China. China is undergoing tremendous changes, such as transforming from a planned economy to a free market system and being integrated into globalization. The 1990s is characterized by an abrupt disruption between the present and the past, a juxtaposition of various ideologies and values, and a fragmentation of space and temporality. The Chinese scholar Zhang Yiwu remarks that postmodernism is a global cultural phenomenon, a condition culturally corresponding to postindustrialization and commercialization, which the development of modern society faces. China is no exception.²⁶ I want to point out that Chinese postmodernism is essentially different from western postmodernism in scale, form, and content. It is not a product of a late capitalist economic and political system, even though the capitalist economic mode is being adopted by the Chinese government and has henceforth tremendously changed Chinese culture and society.

The particularity of Chinese postmodernism is well put by Sheldon H. Lu when he writes, “Spatial coextension, rather than temporal succession, defines non-Western postmodernity. Hybridity, unevenness, nonsynchronicity, and pastiche are the main features of Chinese postmodern culture.”²⁷ By “hybridity” and “unevenness,” he means the multiple temporalities superimposed on one another: the pre-modern, the modern, and the postmodern. Chinese postmodernism is rather a cultural reflection of various collisions: between western ideology and Chinese tradition, between individualism and collectivism, and between commercialism and spiritualism. The recognition of the coexistence of modern and postmodern tendencies is important in our understanding of contemporary historical representation of the Cultural Revolution.

Although this dissertation is not intended to be a psychoanalytic study of trauma, the memory of

the Cultural Revolution will be approached with an acknowledgement of the theoretical framework of the representation of trauma. Due to the extremity of traumatic events, the representation of trauma has been given more concern than historical representation in general. This explains why Holocaust narratives such as *Schindler's List* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993) have been so massively criticized as well as defended.²⁸ An essential question raised regarding a historical text is whether its representation of history can provoke critical historical reflection and capture the depth of history. Even though the authentic history is hardly attainable, it is worth asking why a culture is so insistent on the traumatic past and how it reconstructs and interprets a traumatic history.

Literature on the Holocaust is of pivotal importance in the study of trauma. Dominick LaCapra is one of the most influential critics in this field. Basing his argument on Freud's concept of trauma as the return of the repressed, LaCapra differentiates two modes of return—compulsive repetition (“acting-out”) and a critically controlled process of repetition (“working-through”). “Acting-out” is the reconstruction of the past on the basis of a reading and interpretation of its artifacts. Narratives which exclude or marginalize trauma “through a teleological story that projectively presents values and wishes as viably realized in the facts, typically through a progressive, developmental process” belong to this category. LaCapra argues that such narratives either tell the empirical truth of the history or convey untroubled “pleasure in narration”—the narration that avoids inscribing trauma and the work of mourning.

In contrast, “working-through” is a dialogic exchange with the past—“an exchange that is more responsible and controlled to the extent that it is attuned to the problem of transference displacements over time and the need to work through them critically rather than to remain fixated in at times necessary processes of acting-out.”²⁹ LaCapra argues that this mode engages a process of mourning and gives the haunting past a proper burial. In other words, LaCapra

criticizes normalized and soothing narration, and recommends discourses that maintain the traumatic nature of a historical event and refuse easy compensation. He suggests that a traumatic event like the Holocaust is unique for its tremendous impact and its unexplainable impossibility, and cannot be appropriately addressed in an unequivocally light manner. As an example, he praises Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, (a comic serial book which depicts the author's father's experience in the Holocaust), for capturing the traumatic memory of the survivors in a critical tone, although its form is associated with comedy and lowbrow culture.

LaCapra associates memory work with healing and "mediated ways of surviving survivals,"³⁰ which explains why he evaluates ways of representing historical traumatic events by the principle of "working-through," and why he emphasizes the responsibility of historians, analysts, and cultural producers in helping to heal the wound. LaCapra's theory of "working-through" is useful in that it offers a standard for cultural producers to designate their projects and for critics to judge whether a narrative addresses a traumatic event appropriately.³¹ The fifth-generation directors' films on the Cultural Revolution can be viewed as discourses of "working-through," which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

Nevertheless, this dissertation is less concerned with the appropriateness of specific cultural representations than with the reasons why cultural forms have used and responded to the Cultural Revolution differently. This principle of "working-through" cannot be used without considering the mechanism of cultural production and various factors that determine the way a history is remembered. In the case of the Cultural Revolution, those who lived through it and those who did not may have different interpretations. Although it is important to construct a healing discourse for the victims, another serious problem about the discourse concerning the Cultural Revolution is how to make this history meaningful to younger generations. Acknowledging the

problem of representing trauma, I place more emphasis on social and cultural elements that shape cultural memory. Insisting on the difficulty of finding the proper language to represent the Holocaust, LaCapra addresses the mode of representation by suggesting what should not be done rather than what can be done. My primary concern about the representation of a national trauma in a popular cultural form is, what has been done, how it was done, and why it was done in that way.

I find a recent anthology, *Trauma and Cinema*, especially inspiring. It is a collection of essays on case studies of cinematic representation of trauma. This anthology addresses the entangled matrix of trauma and visual media and seeks to engage and go beyond the debates on the difficulty or impossibility of addressing extremely traumatic events in language. The editors, E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, argue that such debates tend to turn traumatic histories into fetishized taboos and therefore close down “further discussion and exploration by pronouncing an early death sentence for representation.”³² While agreeing that contemporary media tend to erase traumatic memories of oppression, violence, and injustice, or render traumas into spectacles and thrills, the editors underscore the fact that fewer and fewer young people know much about the histories of traumatic events. They argue that a choice has to be made between “inadequate telling” and the “relegating of trauma to a mystified silence” so that we can make critical use of traumatic memory to “shed light on the chronically trauma-producing social structures so as to forge the will to change them.”³³

Miriam B. Hansen’s analysis of *Schindler’s List* is a compelling case study which challenges the criticism of mass culture’s use of traumatic events.³⁴ This film has been criticized for its superficial attempt to offer an authentic reconstruction of the past which is impossible for direct representation in a popular cultural form. Documentary, interview and testimony are forms

preferred by historians and critics. Hansen argues that the media of technical re/production and mass consumption have become the predominant vehicles of public memory, whether we like it or not. The remembrance of the Shoah has always been more dependent on mass-mediated forms of memory. Thus, rather than denying its value of representing history, we should ask more productive questions, such as how the past is remembered and how the past produces meaning for people. Hansen remarks that it may be justified on ethical and epistemological grounds to dismiss this film because of the unrepresentability of the trauma, but the dismissal also means giving up an opportunity to understand the significance of the Holocaust in the present, in the ongoing and undecided struggles over which past gets remembered and how. I agree with Kaplan, Wang and Hansen that even though extreme traumatic events are unrepresentable, the door to representing trauma in popular media should not be shut. We need to consider how to pass on historical knowledge to younger generations and to make the past meaningful to the present.

In the past two decades, there have been substantial studies on the relationship between popular memory and official history.³⁵ Among these studies, I especially have benefited from Marita Sturken, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, and Robert Burgoyne, who elaborate the intimate relationship between popular memory and official history specifically in the field of popular media. In *Tangled Memories*, Sturken illustrates the dynamic perspective of cultural memory.³⁶ She defines “cultural memory” as the memory outside the formal historical discourse (such as historical books and official documents), which is related to cultural products and imbued with cultural meanings. Sturken’s study covers a very broad range of cultural artifacts including Hollywood films, documentaries, television programs, journalistic photographs, public memorials, and the private objects collected at the Vietnam Veteran Memorial. Some of these have a wider audience/viewer than the others.

Sturken argues that cultural memory and history do not exist within neatly defined boundaries,

and they are entangled rather than oppositional. She objects to the romanticization of popular memory as resistance to official memory. Different discourses of history and memory are interrelated, and cultural memory is, in her words, “a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history.”³⁷ To explore how cultural memory of some traumatic historic events operates in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, she investigates a wide range of resources and takes various approaches including textual analysis of films, photographs and letters, and ethnographic studies such as interviewing veterans and AIDS activists. Her diverse approaches to different discourses provide a most constructive model for my study.

Slightly departing from Sturken’s work, this dissertation focuses on memories evoked by, embedded in, and represented through popular media forms which reach a large number of general audiences/readers. I examine popular television dramas and films instead of avant-garde and documentary genres, and private photos instead of journalistic photographs. Therefore, “popular memory” is a more proper term than “cultural memory” for this dissertation, although I acknowledge that the popular memories I have studied are cultural memories. Furthermore, I am not using the term “popular memory” as an equivalent of “people’s memory,” a term always associated with folk culture and unofficial history.³⁸ Although popular memory registers a certain degree of resistance against official discourses, it is not completely divergent from the latter.

Hue-Tam Ho Tai, in the Introduction to *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*, an anthology of studies of public memory in late-socialist Vietnam, makes a similar theoretical argument. She objects to the strict dichotomy between official history and personal memory as well as the study of history and memory in exclusive terms of hegemony and counterhegemony. She contends, “Although it is certainly possible to study memory and countermemory through these analytic lenses, Vietnamese attempts to come to grips with the

legacy of a century's worth of war and revolution raise issues that are far more complex than a simple story of tension and opposition might suggest.”³⁹

In this anthology, Shaun Kingsley Malarney's article examines two kinds of funeral rite of commemorating the soldiers who died for their country: the official commemorative ceremony and the private funeral rite arranged and performed by the family and relatives of the dead. There are different meanings in these two rites. By showing gratitude to the soldiers publicly and officially, the state glorifies the soldier's patriotic and heroic deeds, whereas the family is concerned with how to put to rest the soul of the dead through a private rite. In a sense, the official commemoration is exclusively dedicated to the glorification and ennoblement of the cause instead of to the person who died. Nonetheless, the private funeral rite is not a resistance, but a complement, to the official commemorative ceremony. People are proud of those who died for the country and are remembered by the state in such an honored manner. The main point is that even though the state may manipulate commemoration to achieve the union of the nation, people use additional forms to transform this public performance into a private commemoration invested with personal emotions.

Robert Burgoyne, in his article “From Contested to Consensual Memory,” defines public memory as the “construction of a past that emerges from the interplay of official, vernacular, and commercial cultural viewpoints and expressions.”⁴⁰ Vernacular memory refers to memory gained through first-hand experience in small communities, with “a sense of loyalty to local and familiar places.”⁴¹ Official memory refers to a commemorative discourse about the past produced by governments or other civic institutions, and is characterized by patriotism, nationalism, and an overarching political intention to neutralize and unify competing interpretations of the past that might threaten social unity and the existing order and power structure. Commercial memory is a form of

commemoration created by commercial culture. Burgoyne notes that these three subsets of memory may converge. For example, in order to appeal to a large number of consumers, commercial products and representations appeal to national heritage. In this regard, commercial industry plays the same role as official memory in preserving the nation's past. Public memory serves to mediate the "competing restatements of reality" that emerge from the clash of these three subsets of memory.

The concept that official history and popular memory are interrelated and contested discourses opens a wide space in which to engage and probe into Chinese culture and society. As this dissertation is going to demonstrate, many Chinese television serial dramas and films incorporate both the official discourse and personal memories of the Cultural Revolution. This dissertation does not simply apply western theories to Chinese cultural studies. Rather, it uses the particular case of popular memories of the Cultural Revolution to critically engage theoretical discussions on memory, history, trauma, and media representations.

Chapter Two

The Immediate Remembrance:

Official History Frame, Cinematic Imagination, and Gendered Trauma

Critics and scholars have, to a large degree, overlooked the representation of the Cultural Revolution in popular media in the first decade of its aftermath, which is probably attributable to the prevailing view that under the government's strict surveillance this sensitive issue was repressed or was manipulated as "a means of power struggle and a target of political control."¹ The diverse forms of historical representations of this traumatic event in the 1990s are celebrated by scholars, like Mingbao Yu and Guobin Yang, as a unique phenomenon emerging from "a decade of mnemonic control."² Although in the first post-Cultural Revolution decade the government controlled media as a propaganda tool, the Cultural Revolution was not a suppressed topic. Between 1978 and 1985, more films on the Cultural Revolution were produced than throughout the 1990s. Examples include *Reverberations of Life* (Shenghuo de canyin) (dir. Teng Wuji and Wu Tianming, 1979), *Troubled Laughter* (Kunao ren de xiao) (dir. Yang Yanjin, 1979), *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (Tianyun shan chuanqi) (dir. Xie Jin, 1980), *Night Rain in Bashan* (Bashan yeyu) (dir. Wu Yonggang, 1980), *Romance on Lushan Mountain* (Lushan Lian) (dir. Huang Zhumo, 1980), *The Alley* (Xiao jie) (dir. Yang Yanjin, 1981), *Xumao and His Daughters* (Xumao he tade nüer) (dir. Wan Yan, 1981), *Moon Bay Laughter* (Yueliang wan de xiaosheng) (dir. Xu Suling, 1981), *Forget Me Not* (Wu wang wo) (dir. Yu Yanfu, 1982), *The Herdsman* (Mu ma ren) (dir. Xie Jin, 1982), and *River Without Buoys* (Meiyou hangbiao de heliu) (dir. Wu Tianming, 1983). Television, a rather new medium in China in the 1970s and early 1980s, also joined the surge of historical reflection. There were television dramas like *A Young*

Man (You yi ge qing nian) (1979, CCTV), *Red Flower That Never Fades* (Yong bu diaoxie de hong hua), (1979, Shanghai TV,) *The New Bank* (Xin an) (1981, CCTV and Dangdong TV), *Times Wasted* (Cuotuo suiyue) (1982, Shanghai TV) and *Snow Storm Tonight* (Jing ye you bao feng xue) (1985, CCTV).

This chapter will explore the immediate remembrance of the Cultural Revolution from three aspects: the official assessment of the Cultural Revolution, its cinematic reconstruction, and the audience's response. The following questions will be specifically addressed: What roles did the state play in the cultural remembrance of a sensitive political movement? How did cinema approach this national tragedy? How did the audience react toward the films? How are gender and sexuality played out on the site of trauma? This chapter argues that remembering and discussing the Cultural Revolution was a collective activity undertaken by the government, popular media and Chinese people as an effort to heal the wound and to move forward. The Cultural Revolution films use melodramatic modes to create a world where innocence is lost and regained and where the audience can find a temporary peace. In the cinematic memory, the ten-year movement not only brought disastrous damage to the nation, but also severely wounded Chinese masculinity. A desire for the redefinition of gender and sexuality was projected onto cultural memory. Through the melodramatic imagining of the past, a traumatized nation found an excuse to forget via immediate remembering.

The Official Discourse: Setting the Memory Frame with Ambiguity

History is a significant venue through which the state legitimates its power and gains support from the people. As Benedict Anderson argues, history is one means through which the concept of nation is imagined and formulated.³ He states that historical revolutions are “contemporary

exhibits of nationalism.” The preservation of history is controlled by the authorities to safeguard a unified understanding and thus to reinforce the consolidation of the state and the control of the ruling party. It becomes especially important when the state is at stake or the party in power enters a critical stage. A historical event can be used to evoke nationalism and patriotism to unify the people and strengthen the government. This may explain why the anti-Japanese war and the Chinese Civil War frequently became the subjects for films in the first two decades after the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

The Cultural Revolution became a sensitive issue at a critical historical moment when the power and legitimacy of the ruling party were destabilized by the disastrous ten-year movement. Instead of imposing silence on this topic in public space, the government chose the opposite, that is, to start public assessment immediately after it overthrew the “Gang of Four.” Leading discussion of the Cultural Revolution, the government set the frame to remember it in a way that avoided negative effects on the Party. By enforcing a unified conclusion, the government purged diverse opinions and voices which might threaten its power. To resume and maintain social order as soon as possible after the chaos, the government, between 1977 and 1980, simplified this complicated political movement by condemning the “Gang of Four” as the origin of all disasters. During this period, most issues of *People’s Daily* (Renmin ribao), the government’s mouthpiece newspaper, carried the headline “To Expose and Criticize Relentlessly the Anti-Party Group of Wang Zhang Jiang Yao.” By categorizing them as an anti-Party group, the official discourse “othered” the “Gang of Four.” They became the “outsiders” of the Communist Party. Hence, this ten-year historical disaster had nothing to do with the Party and the political system. Divorcing itself from the Cultural Revolution enabled the Party to “draw upon the Maoist legacy for legitimacy while distancing itself from the more problematic aspects of its revolutionary past.”⁴

The political agenda was to gain back people's trust and to resume social order under the Party's control.

After a few years of attacking the "Gang of Four," the Central Committee of the Communist Party, led by Deng Xiaoping,⁵ gave the final word on this historical event, which became the "1981 Resolution." This new assessment criticized Mao Zedong for being responsible for the movement:

During this period, Mao's theoretical and practical mistakes concerning class struggle in a socialist society became increasingly serious, his personal arbitrariness gradually undermined democratic centralism in Party life and the personality cult grew graver and graver. The Central Committee of the Party failed to rectify these mistakes in good time. Careerists like Lin Biao, Jiang Qing, and Kang Sheng, harboring ulterior motives, made use of these errors and inflated them. This led to the inauguration of the Cultural Revolution.⁶

The "1981 Resolution" corrected Mao Zedong's policy of "class struggle" (see the appendix). However, the assessment of Mao's role in this political tragedy was mixed with ambivalence: on the one hand, there was criticism; on the other hand, there was a warning against complete denigration of Mao. The ambivalence is reflected in the following statement: "Although Comrade Mao Zedong must be held chiefly responsible, we cannot lay the blame on him alone for all those errors... It is true that he made gross mistakes during the Cultural Revolution, but if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes. His merits are primary and his errors secondary." Although criticizing Mao's class struggle policy and his personal character in his late age, the "1981 Resolution" emphasized his role as the founder of the Communist Party and New China.

The ambivalence was exemplified by the circulation of the Mao icon among Chinese people. During the Cultural Revolution, 2.2 billion portraits of Mao had been produced, three for every person in the nation. After the "1981 Resolution," many people were worried about a sudden

dearth of Mao icons. The head office of Xinhua (the official news agency) instructed bookstores throughout the country to stock Mao's portraits so as to be always ready "to satisfy the needs of Party members and the People."⁷ The coexistence of the Party's criticism of Mao and the guaranteed supply of Mao icons constituted an interesting cultural phenomenon, and legitimized the continuing Mao idolatry.⁸

The official assessment of Mao Zedong is reflected in cinematic references to Mao. No films produced between 1978 and 1985 address or question Mao's role in this movement. Most of these films use Mao's picture as a common prop to stand for the "red" tumultuous age, without associating Mao with the cause of the national tragedy. In some sense, popular culture and the government co-produced the continuing mystification of Mao in popular memory.⁹ Here I am not suggesting that the government failed to fully criticize Mao Zedong. My point is that the connection between Mao and the Communist Party makes such a criticism problematic. Maoism is the essential theory and ideology on which the Chinese communist system is built. To protect Mao from negation is to defend the power of the Party. In Barmé's words, Mao is "a man whose career was linked inextricably with the history and mythology of the Party, the army, and the People's Republic. Deng and his coevals were aware that to abandon Mao could, in the long run, presage the collapse of the Party itself."¹⁰ The official assessment of the Cultural Revolution was conducted under the condition that the government and the political system remain intact.

The state intended to create a unified memory of the past and to move forward. Deng Xiaoping said:

Through this Resolution we should come to an overall assessment of events in the past. We are dealing with the past, and the summary should (therefore) be sweeping rather than finicky. The aim of summarizing the past is to lead people to *unite and look ahead*. We should strive to have things clarified inside the party and among the people by the time

the resolution is passed. *People's understanding should be unified and the discussion on major questions of history should come to a close by that time.*¹¹

The talk on the Cultural Revolution was officially concluded in 1984, with the total negation of the Cultural Revolution. The last editorial on this topic in *People's Daily* was carried in the issue of October 17, 1984, with the title—"The Complete negation of 'the Cultural Revolution' Clarifies Everything." *People's Daily* rarely referred to the Cultural Revolution again until the Tiananmen Event in 1989.

Film production between 1978 and 1985 enjoyed a relatively open political atmosphere on the one hand and had to follow the official assessment on the other. The most direct political instruction on cinematic representation of the Cultural Revolution was stated in Deng Xiaoping's speech to high officials in the Department of Propaganda about problems in the field of culture and art on July 17, 1981. On the film *Bitter Love* (ku lian) (dir. Wang Tong, 1980), which depicts the Cultural Revolution in a depressing tone and provides no solution in the end, Deng said, "No matter what the filmmaker's motive, this film only gives such an impression that the Communist Party is not good, the socialist system is not good either. To decry the socialist system like this, how can [the filmmaker] be a communist? Some people say that this film has high aesthetic values. However, that is the exact reason why it is poisonous."¹² The implication is that cultural reflections on this recent history should not question the Communist Party and the socialist system. Therefore, although filmmakers could explore this sensitive historical movement, they had to negotiate between their artistic intentions and the official history frame.

Many scholars wrongly conclude that the Party banned public discussion of the Cultural Revolution. For example, Barmé states, "The Party's pronouncements in the early 1980s on the Cultural Revolution and the purges that had preceded it had effectively banned public discussion

of the past; there had been no opportunity for people to debate seriously the issues of historical responsibility or even to be apprised of the scale and extent of the depredations of Mao's rule."¹³ Such a view applies to the period after the complete negation of the Cultural Revolution. But between 1978 and 1985, the government adopted a strategy of restrictive freedom. This political context inevitably shaped the cinematic reconstruction of and reflection on the Cultural Revolution. The relationship between official history and cinematic memory is not simply one of oppression/submission or power/resistance, as the following section will illuminate.

The Melodramatic Imagination within the Official Frame

Melodrama, one of the most popular film genres in China since the 1930s, was the predominant cinematic form to address this national tragedy in the first post-Cultural Revolution decade. Chinese melodrama has been extensively studied by scholars, such as E. Ann Kaplan, Ma Ning, Nick Browne, Stephen Teo, and Paul G. Pickowicz.¹⁴ The fundamental works by the above-mentioned scholars have significantly covered the tradition, style and history of Chinese melodrama as well as the affinities and differences between western and Chinese melodrama. For example, Pickowicz studies Chinese melodrama in different periods (from the 1930s to 1980s) and discusses Hollywood melodrama's influence on early Chinese melodrama and the relation between the "May Fourth" tradition and the development of Chinese melodrama. Stephen Teo focuses on a particular subgenre of melodrama, "wenyi pian," and briefly traces its link to "wenming xi" ("civilized dramas") and the literature of the "Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School," a popular literary genre which deals with sentimental love stories. In this chapter, my main concern is not the unique style of Chinese melodrama or a comparison of this genre in different cultures. I concentrate on the reason why this genre was popular in certain periods,

particularly, for the purpose of this dissertation, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This aspect of Chinese melodrama study has been largely ignored by film scholars. I find that the scholarship on western melodrama provides constructive concepts for us to understand the popularity of melodrama in China.

Peter Brooks, in his seminal book *The Melodramatic Imagination*, explains the rise of melodrama in France as a cultural response to a “post-enlightenment world” where moral and religious certainties had been erased. In his words, melodrama “starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue.”¹⁵ Adapting the concept of melodrama to American culture, Linda Williams explains that the rise of sensational culture in America can be attributed to the end of Calvinist moral and religious certainty in the early nineteenth century, and thus the appeal of melodrama lies in its role of establishing “a compensatory moral legibility.”¹⁶ Williams significantly points out that melodrama has been the dominant form of American popular moving-picture narrative, given “the entertainment needs of a modern, rationalist, democratic, capitalist, industrial, and now post-industrial society seeking moral legibility under new conditions of moral ambiguity.”¹⁷ Both Brooks and Williams ascribe the rise of melodrama to the “moral uncertainty” in a post-sacred world, and view pathos produced by melodrama as a means to establish moral legibility.

The collapse of religious belief does not apply to Chinese melodrama because China does not have a strong religious culture and tradition on a national scale. However, as in Western countries, melodrama became a prevalent cinematic mode in China in periods of acute conflicts between tradition and modernity as well as social turmoil. The year 1911 saw the collapse of the Qing Dynasty; the New Culture Movement in the mid- and late-1910s questioned Chinese

Confucianism, which had remained China's ethical tradition for over two thousand years, and advocated modernization and democracy; in 1919, the May Fourth Movement broke out as a manifestation of China's resistance to the Versailles Treaty, which awarded Shandong Province to Japan, and this movement drastically changed Chinese society; and in 1927 the civil war between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party broke out. Coinciding with the social and political upheavals, melodrama became a popular film genre in the 1930s. Representative films include *Small Toy* (Xiao wanyi) (dir. Sun Yu, 1933), *The Goddess* (Shen nü) (dir. Wu Yonggang, 1934), *Street Angel* (Malu tianshi) (dir. Yuan muzhi, 1937), and *Crossroads* (Shizi jietou, 1937, dir. Shen Xiling). These films belong to the category of "progressive melodrama," a product of the left-wing cinema.¹⁸

After the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, this genre remained popular. Different from early melodramas, the melodramatic mode in this period was combined with social realism to serve propagandistic purposes. For example, many films depict the sufferings of poor people under the oppression of landlords or their capitalist employers and their eventual liberation thanks to the Communist Party. The popularity of melodrama in this period may have two explanations: one is that directors who worked within the melodramatic tradition in the 1930s and 1940s constituted a large proportion of filmmakers in the new period; the other reason is that the social context between 1949 and 1966, a period when old systems were overthrown and new values and social orders were established, provided the ideological ground for the melodramatic mode of cultural expression. With the dichotomic structure of good versus evil, the cinematic language of sentimentality and emotional excess, and a cathartic ending, melodrama offers "moral legibility" in the context of sociopolitical transformation.¹⁹

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese society and culture were confronted with an even

more serious void of belief and value signification which necessitated the expression of “a compensatory moral legibility.” The Cultural Revolution destroyed the existing moral and value systems: intellectuals were categorized as pseudo-authorities, previously treasured traditions and knowledge suddenly became “poisonous,” and families were torn apart. The devastating situation is emblematically depicted in *Troubled Laughter*, in which a journalist painfully witnesses the reversal of truth and lies and is arrested because of his insistence on telling the truth. Melodrama creates an imagined world which is structured by Manichean polarities of good versus evil, and evokes cathartic feelings when the victim-hero’s virtue is eventually recognized and order and peace are restored. As Pickowicz writes, the popularity of melodramatic films in China in the 1980s was not a coincidence because “Melodrama, more than any other genre, positioned itself to meet the psychological needs of an emotionally drained and politically battered urban film audience.”²⁰ Chinese melodrama shares with Western melodrama the function of satisfying people’s psychological need in times of social transformation or crisis. This acknowledgement is crucial for our understanding of melodramatic films about the Cultural Revolution.

Williams summarizes five key features of melodrama: first, melodrama begins, and wants to end, in a “space of innocence”; second, melodrama “focuses on victim-heroes and on recognizing their virtue”; third, “melodrama’s recognition of virtue involves a dialectic of pathos and action—a give and take of ‘too late’ and ‘in the nick of time’”; fourth, melodrama “borrows from realism but realism serves the melodrama of pathos and action”; and last, melodrama presents characters who “embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichaeian conflicts between good and evil.”²¹ These generic features primarily describe domestic melodrama. Films that deal with the issue of the Cultural Revolution are usually categorized as “political

melodramas” because of the serious political themes. Nonetheless, most of them combine political subjects with stories of love and romance. In Pickowicz’s words, “Skillful use and even manipulation of the weepy, melodramatic genre is precisely what links the popular political films produced in the 1980s by directors like Xie Jin to the rich tradition of Chinese cinema in the 1930s and 1940s.”²²

Therefore, the political melodramas contain the five features of domestic melodrama, but with variations. For instance, most Cultural Revolution films do not begin with “a space of innocence.” A tension is built up right from the beginning with the persecution of the protagonist under the rule of the “Gang of Four.” Thus, these films concentrate on his suffering and the eventual victory of his virtue. Furthermore, although all films present a world that is organized in Manichean conflicts between good and evil, not all of them include a concrete evil person. In Cultural Revolution films, there is no mystery about the evil force—all audiences are supposed to know that it refers to the “Gang of Four.”

To a large degree, the aesthetic variations in Chinese melodrama are related to an overarching rule, which is that films have to follow the official assessment of the Cultural Revolution. A typical plot of the Cultural Revolution films goes like this: the protagonist (in most cases the protagonist is a man) is wrongly persecuted; he endures various difficulties and struggles against the evil force, the “Gang of Four” in most cases; in the end, the “Gang of Four” is overthrown, and he is rewarded for maintaining nobility and faith in the Party. I will use *Reverberations of Life* (1979), one of the earliest cinematic attempts at addressing the Cultural Revolution, to give a more detailed illustration of the melodramatic mode within the official frame. This film centers on the April Fifth Event in 1976 before the end of the Cultural Revolution.²³ The “Gang of Four” prevents people from mourning Premier Zhou Enlai at

Tiananmen Square. Zheng Changhe, a musician, with the help of his girlfriend, organizes a family concert in remembrance of Premier Zhou. He becomes the target of Wei Li, the antagonist who works for the propaganda department. After several dangerous encounters, the “Gang of Four” is eventually overthrown. The film ends with Zheng Changhe, standing on the stage of a grand music hall, performing the concerto which he composed for Premier Zhou. This film ends with a “space of innocence,” a new world where people find free expression under the leadership of the Party. The evil force is embodied by the antagonist, Wei Li, who executes orders from the “Gang of Four.” The Manichean conflicts between the virtuous and the evil are also the conflicts between the Party and the “Gang of Four.” Thus, the victory of the virtuous is also the victory of the Communist Party.

Although most films suggest that the Party is the main force that changes the fate of the suffering by overthrowing the “Gang of Four,” they highlight the protagonists’ virtues—nobility, honesty, bravery and perseverance—as the necessary condition of their being rewarded. These films establish a moral legibility which is built upon genuine feelings between people. The combination of an assertion of the Party’s role in restoring justice and social order and an emphasis on individuals’ virtues and agency as well as personal emotions characterizes the melodramatic films in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The Cultural Revolution-themed films use various devices, such as music, extreme close-ups, and mise-en-scène, to evoke sentiment and draw tears from the audience. Take *Night Rain in Bashan* as an example. Qui Shi, a poet under arrest for being a “counterrevolutionary” and “capitalist-roader,” is transported incognito down the Yangtze River to prison—most likely to be executed. His daughter, who was born after his arrest, is on the same ship. Her mother, who is dead now, taught her a song composed by Qui Shi. Thus, the song becomes the girl’s only

means to find her father (there is no indication of photos). On the ship, she sings this song to any man that she thinks may be her father. The father-daughter reunion scene is extremely sentimental. The captain arranges an occasion for the little girl and the poet to meet, and asks her to sing. The camera cuts to a medium shot of the poet looking at her, which is followed by a close-up of the little girl looking back. Then it changes again to a medium shot of Qiu Shi looking and a close-up shot of the girl, who begins to sing the song. There is no background music. The camera zooms in to a close-up of Qiu Shi's expression, mixed with surprise, joy, and sadness, then zooms in to the girl, singing and looking at him with expectation. Then she stops. In silence, the camera cuts to a medium shot of him moving slowly forward. We hear the girl picking up the song again, and the camera shifts to a close-up of her walking toward him. Then it cuts to a close-up shot of Qiu Shi bending down, calling, "daughter," which is joined by her exclamation—"Dad!" accompanied by a sudden rise of music full of pathos.



Figure 1. The girl begins to sing, looking at him with expectation. Still from *Night Rain in Bashan*.



Figure 2. Father and daughter embrace in tears. Still from *Night Rain in Bashan*.

The shot/reverse shots of their looking at each other, the touching song in a child's pure voice, the contrast between silence and music, and the quick zoom-ins create a strong emotional tension which reaches a climax with the rise of the music and the close-up of the father and daughter embracing each other. In "Tales of Sounds and Fury," Thomas Elsaesser argues that in the persistence of the melodrama, "there is obviously a healthy distrust of intellectualization and abstract social theory—insisting that other structures of experience (those of suffering, for instance) are more in keeping with reality."²⁴ As a form that relies on strong emotional dynamism, melodrama provides a temporary peace for the traumatized Chinese masses, whose pain finds release in happy tears.

Linda Williams makes an insightful point about the dialectic of pathos and action in melodrama. The recognition of virtue comes not simply through pathos, but also through the protagonist's or other characters' action. In the case of the films about the Cultural Revolution,

the masses play a quintessential role in protecting the innocent and fighting against the “Gang of Four” and facilitate the recognition of the protagonist’s virtue and victory. The emphasis on the masses’ action clearly follows the official assessment. *People’s Daily* constantly emphasized that while negating the past, the majority of people were not to be blamed because they were simply manipulated by the “Gang of Four” and they were victims. This point is clearly stated in the “1981 Resolution”:

At the beginning of the ‘cultural revolution,’ the vast majority of participants in the movement acted out of their faith in Comrade Mao Zedong and the Party. Except for a handful of extremists, however, they did not approve of launching ruthless struggles against leading Party cadres at all levels. With the lapse of time, following their own circuitous paths, they eventually attained a heightened political consciousness and consequently began to adopt a skeptical or wait-and-see attitude toward the ‘cultural revolution,’ or even resisted and opposed it. Many people were assailed either more or less severely for this very reason.²⁵

In *Night Rain in Bashan*, all passengers on the ship respect Qiu Shi and criticize the “Gang of Four.” The female escort is at first hostile to Qiu Shi, believing he is guilty and deserves punishment. She is gradually isolated by other people who sympathize with him. In the end, she awakens from her blindness and naïve belief and is determined to help him to escape. Her partner, who seldom speaks, turns out to be a good person who has been secretly making arrangements to set Qiu Shi free. The ship’s crew is also trying to help him. The collective efforts lead to a satisfying ending: Qiu Shi is secretly released, and he happily returns home with his daughter. This film praises and highlights the wisdom and action of the people, who not only see things clearly, but also act out of conscience.

In *The Herdsman*, the protagonist, who is persecuted as a “rightist” because his father lives in the United States, is treated with kindness and respect by the peasants. The village headman saves his life and introduces him to a kind-hearted woman, who is willing to marry him because

she believes he is a good man. Thanks to the people's understanding and generous love, he begins to enjoy a happy life. This film suggests that the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution maintained their own moral judgments, played an active role in protecting the innocent from persecution, and contributed to the final victory over evil.

Melodrama provides two categories of endings—a salvation which is “too late” and a salvation “in the nick of time.” Most films about the Cultural Revolution belong to the second category. Following the official history frame, most films end in the present day to suggest that the Cultural Revolution is over and people can enjoy a normal life under the leadership of the Communist Party. *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* interweaves present life with memories of the past. The protagonist, Luo Qun, who was persecuted in the anti-rightist movement in the late 1950s and in the Cultural Revolution, is cleared of charges, thanks to the Party's policy of rectification. In *Forget Me Not*, the female protagonist, who has to be “reformed” through hard labor in a remote village, becomes a college student after the Cultural Revolution. In *Troubled Laughter*, the journalist, who is put in prison for his insistence on telling the truth, returns home and is reunited with his family after the defeat of the “Gang of Four.” Emphasizing the return to social order in the present, these films aim to alleviate pain and reject obsession with the trauma.

Some scholars have pointed out that post-Cultural Revolution films demonstrate a shift from grand themes to personal narratives, from nation to family, from socialist ideals to domestic joy and romantic love. For example, Chris Berry argues that in 1950s and 1960s Chinese films family life is subsumed by nationalist themes while the post-Cultural Revolution films foreground personal stories.²⁶ Although I agree with Berry that personal life becomes more important in post-Cultural Revolution cinema, I want to emphasize that in many films personal life is still intertwined with the nationalist narrative. I would argue that the difference lies more

in the way the films deal with the narrative of “nation” than in thematic shifts from the nationalist to the personal. Films before the Cultural Revolution explicitly foreground the nation and the image of the Party, while films in the first post-Cultural Revolution decade convey nationalist messages more subtly and pleasurably.²⁷ Through romantic narratives and expressive cinematography, nationalism and patriotism are evoked with visual pleasure and emotional satisfaction. I will demonstrate my point with the film *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, which Berry views as an example of the shift from the nationalist narrative to the personal. While emphasizing the romantic scenes, Berry does not mention the film’s frequent references to the nation. He says that when the main characters in this film are in love, “nation building does not appear to be at the forefront of their minds.”²⁸ However, the nation is always in the lovers’ minds, as I will show.

Romance on Lushan Mountain, as the title suggests, is a romance story that takes place in Lushan, a famous Chinese resort. Zhou Yun, who grew up in the United State, comes to China for sightseeing and also to seek her Chinese roots. In Lushan, she falls in love with Geng Hua, who is under strict surveillance by the local government because of his father’s “counterrevolutionary crime.” His relation with Zhou Yun arouses the government’s suspicion (at that time, everything related to capitalist countries was condemned). Zhou Yun has to leave China in tears, with unfulfilled love. After the Cultural Revolution, she comes back to Lushan to look for Geng Hua. When they finally meet each other, they face a new problem. During the civil war, their fathers fought for the opposing parties – Zhou Yun’s father for the Nationalist Party, and Geng Hua’s father for the Communist Party. Eventually, forgiveness brings the two families together. Zhou Yun’s parents come back from America.

It is easy to tell from the plot that this film is constructed around the theme of

love—amorous love and love for the motherland. The romance takes place in China's beautiful landscape and the marriage brings the return of the overseas Chinese. There is a scene which interestingly combines romance and nationalism. In this scene, Zhou Yun overhears Geng Hua practicing English. He keeps reading "I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland." Naughtily hiding herself behind a big tree, Zhou Yun corrects his pronunciation. Geng Hua then repeats after her. In total, these sentences are repeated ten times. However, the explicit expression of the nationalist theme does not create an impression of propaganda, thanks to the sumptuous shots of the beautiful landscape and the narrative of romance. Moving between Zhou Yun and Geng Hua, the tracking camera captures the beauty of big green trees and the soft sunshine through mountain mists. The naughty hide-and-seek game brings excitement to their youthful love. Just as with propaganda films, *Romance on Lushan Mountain* interweaves personal happiness with love for the nation. The only difference is that in this film the narrative of romance depoliticizes the nationalist theme.

The nationalist message is also conveyed through expressive cinematography that evokes visual pleasure. The narrative of romance unfolds in a luscious display of the beauty of Lushan Mountain, shot from various angles. Take the couple's first date scene as an illustration. It starts with shots of boats resting on the Yangtze River and the sun rising above the mountains. These are followed by a medium shot of Gen Hua and Zhou Yun looking with amazement at the landscapes. They should loudly in concert, "I love my motherland. I love the morning of my motherland." This sequence shows that the characters are proud of the beauty and grandeur of the motherland. The audience is supposed to identify with them and feel the same.

Following this scene, a more sumptuous display of Lushan further links the amorous love and patriotism. Zhou Yun turns on her tape recorder to listen to a song that sings about a

woman's love for her hometown. For the duration of the two-and-half minutes diegetic music, we see panning shots, zoom-ins and zoom-outs of the mountains, flowers, trees and rivers from different angles. Throughout the scene, there are only two brief shots of the couple. The landscape occupies a more central position than the romance in this scene. Later Zhou Yun explains that in America her family often listens to this song. Thus, "hometown" in the song actually refers to "motherland." Love for the beautiful landscape and love for the nation are merged.

To some degree, the numerous shots of the landscape in this film constitute a documentary of Lushan Mountain. They do not play a significant role in narrative motivation. However, without them, this film could not have provided the audience with the same pleasure, and would have become instead a pedantic propagandist film on nationalism and patriotism. Immediately after the success of *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, a small cinema was built in Lushan, where this film was played day and night. By 1999, it had been shown more than 6300 times.²⁹ This suggests that this film can be appreciated for the visual pleasure of landscapes with the subject of the Cultural Revolution being largely secondary.

The use of landscapes to evoke people's pride in the nation is not a purely cinematic invention. During the first years after the Cultural Revolution, a large number of television programs appeared that introduced famous historical and scenic sites, such as *Beautiful Beijing*, *Huangshan Mountain*, *Lushan Mountain*, *Wuyi Mountain*, *Changbai Shan*, *Mountain Tai*, *Trip on Min River*, *The Legend of Three Gorges*, and *The Origin of The Yangtze River*, to name just a few. Hundreds of scenery programs were shown on television, "like endless rolls of paintings, revealing the spectacular landscapes to Chinese audiences to evoke patriotism."³⁰ The proliferation of geographical programs was not a cultural coincidence. These programs appeared

at a critical time when explicit political narrative lost its original persuasiveness and power.

Visual images of Chinese landscapes in both film and television took on the role of political propaganda in evoking and strengthening the audiences' consciousness of belonging to a single territory. The success of such a cinematic language is proved by the enthusiastic responses from Chinese audiences. If in the revolutionary films of the 1950s and 1960s nationalist messages subsume personal issues, then the new melodramatic films in the early 1980s incorporate nationalist themes in romance, familial love, and visual attractions.

Like *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, *The Herdsman* combines nationalist ideology with personal stories. After the Cultural Revolution, Xu Lingjun's father, now a millionaire in the United States, comes back to look for him. The father wishes Lingjun could go with him to America to inherit his business. However, Lingjun refuses and chooses to stay in the village, living on his meager wages. This film acclaims Lingjun's action of patriotism, and conveys the message that only the motherland is the place where one can enjoy peace and happiness, and that Chinese people should take pride in contributing to the development of China. The narrative of patriotic love is cleverly interwoven with the love story of Lingjun and his wife, unfolded against the beautiful landscape of Northern China. Similar to *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, this film uses sumptuous shots of beautiful grasslands, rivers and mountains to evoke the audience's pride in being a Chinese living on the magnificent land. For example, the film starts with long shots of vast grasslands, accompanied by Lingjun's voice-over, reading a famous Chinese poem in praise of the beautiful landscape.

I agree with Pickowicz and Berry that a few films provide critical approaches to recent Chinese history and even challenge the official frame, such as *The Legend of Tianyuan Mountain*, *Bitter Love*, and *The Hibiscus Town*. Pickowicz argues that *The Legend of Tianyuan Mountain*

and *A Corner Forgotten by Love* (1981, dir. Zhang Qi and Li Yalin) express unofficial political thought by criticizing the 1957 anti-Rightist movement, which was a sensitive topic at the time of the films' release.³¹ He notes that the official political thought, embodied in the "1981 Resolution," neglects the link between the Cultural Revolution and previous historical events, particularly the anti-Rightist Movement and the Great Leap Forward. From the popularity of these two above-mentioned films, Pickowicz concludes that "the unofficial political thought of elites interacts with the popular political thought of non-elites."³² Pickowicz is right to point out the intersection of unofficial political thought and popular political thought. However, I maintain that during this period, the majority of films tended to reconstruct the Cultural Revolution within the official frame. They interweave nationalist narratives with personal stories and aim at a satisfying conclusion that suggests psychological recovery and evokes nationalism. As film historian Zhang Yingjin points out, "Admittedly, with all their humanist concerns, filmmakers rarely challenged the CCP's legitimacy. On the contrary, in the early 1980s they incorporated officially endorsed reform subjects in their exploration of themes and genres."³³

Melodrama is usually criticized for its failure to address complicated social problems by instead emphasizing pathos and a simplified Manichean structure. For example, Elsaesser points out that despite the "healthy distrust of intellectualization and abstract social theory," melodrama "has also meant ignorance of the properly social and political dimensions of these changes and their causality, and consequently it has encouraged increasingly escapist forms of mass entertainment."³⁴ Similarly, even though Williams questions the conception that realism is superior to melodrama by emphasizing their "mutual borrowings and lendings," she agrees that melodrama tends to evade the social problems brought up by the protagonists' victimization through the climax of pathos and action.³⁵ In his study of Xie Jin's films of the Cultural

Revolution, Ban Wang criticizes his use of the melodramatic mode to “derail a sober, critical sense of history.”³⁶ I agree with the above criticism of melodrama. Nevertheless, I maintain that, in “posttraumatic” Chinese society after the Cultural Revolution, melodrama provided a means for the traumatized people and nation to come to terms with the past, which Martha Vicinus would call the “reconciliation of the irreconcilable.”³⁷ The Cultural Revolution overthrew established values and meaning systems which had maintained the coherence of identity and continuity of history. As a format for solving the ideological crisis in an imagined visual world, melodrama plays the role of establishing a new value system, a “moral legibility.” Although the melodramatic mode provides “easy and comforting answers to difficult and complex questions,” as Paul Pickowicz writes, “It offers moral clarity at a time when nothing seems clear.”³⁸

E. Ann Kaplan says, “It seems that fifty years or so must lapse before a culture or an individual finds the right time to return to trauma.”³⁹ Although “fifty years” may not necessarily be the case, she captures the essence of traumatic memory; that is, a culture or an individual can only see the complexity of a traumatic event at a certain distance because “people in a nation who have been through catastrophe such as war may need to ‘forget’ those experiences because they are too painful to deal with in the immediate aftermath of suffering.”⁴⁰ If melodrama is a form of “forgetting” through pathos, it also is a symptom of a traumatized culture.

The Audience: Desire for Healing and a New Start

Between the late 1970s and mid 1980s when film was the predominant form of entertainment, Chinese people established a very close relationship with the cinema.⁴¹ Audiences enthusiastically voted for the best films and actors during the annual Hundred Flowers Film Festival and participated in discussing recently released films. *Popular Cinema*

(Dazong dianying), the most widely circulated film magazine at that time, had special columns for audiences' letters and brief comments. If audiences' letters were specifically addressed to certain directors, the publishing company would forward them to the latter, whose response would also be published in the magazine. Local newspapers also had special sections for comments on recently released films. A vibrant film culture was well established in the first post-Cultural Revolution decade. This section studies the audience's response to the popular films on the Cultural Revolution based on the letters published in *Popular Cinema* and some local newspapers that are available in the Beijing Film Archive.

Most of the letters were written by urban residents, as magazines and newspapers were more widely distributed in cities than in rural areas. Although the writers came from diverse backgrounds, including factory workers, students and office employees, it would be an over-generalization to say that their thoughts represented the thoughts of the entire Chinese film audience. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that these letters represented a large number of educated urban residents' opinions. We should be aware that the letters were likely to be edited and selected to avoid sensitive or controversial contents; but we should also be cautious about drawing an absolute conclusion that all letters were selected to fit the party line or for propaganda reasons. As I have discussed in the previous sections, culture and art enjoyed a relatively liberal environment between 1978 and 1986. For instance, by 1986 there were more than eighty art groups and organizations in China, many of which had no direct connection with the Party and were motivated by artistic expression rather than political propaganda. Newspapers and magazines provided a space, though limited, for debates and the articulation of different voices.

The writings from viewers are usually short, straight-forward, and colloquial, different from

the more polished language of film critics. Discussions and debates on the Cultural Revolution films were more intense than those on other films. The letters show that many viewers actively participated in remembering and interpreting the Cultural Revolution, rather than passively following official discourse. I will focus on viewers' comments on three films, *The Alley*, *Forget Me Not*, and *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, to illustrate how audiences engaged this recent historical event and made meaning out of these films.

The Alley starts with a near-blind man in his late twenties or early thirties telling his story to a film director. During the Cultural Revolution, Xia, a young truck driver, met Yu, a girl whose mother was unjustly persecuted. Some Red Guards cut off Yu's hair to humiliate her. Since then, she began to dress herself as a boy, but deep in her heart, she longed to appear as a woman in public. Xia sympathized with her and determined to fulfill her dream. During his attempt to "steal" a wig which could only be sold to stage performers (he left money for it), he was caught by Red Guards and was beaten cruelly to near blindness. After that he lost contact with Yu.

Near the end of the film, the man, now identified as Xia, and the director try to design a satisfying conclusion for this story. Three endings are provided. In the first ending, Xia meets Yu at a party, drinking, smoking, and flirting with bad guys. He scolds her for becoming degenerate, to which she replies that she has become a useless person because the Cultural Revolution deprived her of the opportunity for education and she cannot fit into the present society. The scene cuts to a high-angle crane shot, in which the two characters look small and lonely in the mammoth gloomy city. In the second ending, Xia meets Yu when she comes to visit the director. Mistaking her as the director's fiancée, Xia decides to leave secretly. Yu clarifies his misunderstanding, and then they walk away together. In the third ending, Yu has been looking for Xia over the past a few years. After she receives the news that Xia is going to take the train

back home, she waits for him on the train. Happily reunited, they go home together.

Among the three endings, the first is a depressing one, refusing to provide catharsis, while the other two are conventional melodramatic happy endings. The choice is left to the audience. Yang Yanjin, director of *The Alley*, explains that his motive for designating this open ending is to reconstruct “the new connection between the screen and the audience,” to create a sense of “regret” so that “[the audience] can create a satisfying conclusion according to their own experience.”⁴² In terms of getting the audience intellectually engaged with the text, this film achieves its goal by leaving room for interpretation. Viewers’ letters show that they participated in designing an ending based on their personal experience:

After watching *The Alley*, I kept thinking about the three conclusions: the first seems too depressing. How about the second, the third? Is there a fourth ending?....Thinking over and over again, I feel that Xia is right when he says, ‘To our generation, what we should look for is not the ending, but the beginning, a new beginning’....⁴³ (Zhou Junjie)

During the Cultural Revolution, the good wishes of Xia and Yu could not be realized. More than that, they were deprived of the rights of man. This film claims their rights, which is meaningful. Nevertheless, when they get the rights of man, how should they live their life? This is a more practical and important question. So, I think *The Alley* should have a sequel which reflects the generation after going through the Cultural Revolution.... Film should not only show us blood and tears, but also fire and strength, and let us feel the call of the modern age.⁴⁴ (Peng Xiaoguang)

During the Cultural Revolution, I was proud of being a Red Guard. I also did things to hurt people. Although the whipping leather belt does not fall on [Xia’s] eyes, it is horrifying and chilling. [The Cultural Revolution] left scars on others, and also left a wound in my body...

If this film is intended to let the viewer design the conclusion through his own experience and look for the new beginning of life, for me, the enlightenment lies in the ending of this film, which is the new starting point of my spiritual life....

The Alley has significant meanings to the generation of *The Alley*, especially to me and to those who have similar experiences to the characters in this film. It encourages the persecuted to look forward, to become strong. It also encourages the persecutors to look forward, to question, and thus improve themselves...⁴⁵ (Wang Honglin)

These letters reflect that they welcomed the open ending and understood the director’s

intention to invite the audience to complete the film. Zhou Junjie “kept thinking about the three conclusions” and asked whether there were other alternatives. Wang Honglin, a former Red Guard, correctly pointed out the director’s intention, which was to “let the audience design the conclusion through his own experience.” Peng Xiaoguang thought the open ending could lead to a sequel to this film, which could be about the characters’ lives after the Cultural Revolution.

The open ending provoked them into serious thinking about the film and the fate of the characters. Each tried to make meaning out of the open ending. Their interpretations share at least one similarity, that is, they were concerned with the present and held a positive attitude towards the future. Zhou Junjie did not like the depressing ending, in which Yu becomes a passive and degenerate woman, and objected to an obsession with the past. What he thought was the most important was to start a new life, a “new beginning.” He agreed with Xia, the male protagonist, who says, “[T]o our generation, what we should look for is not the ending, but the beginning, a new beginning.” Peng Xiaoguang’s letter was a call for a sequel about the generation of the Cultural Revolution, which “should not only show us blood and tears, but also fire and strength, and let us feel the call of the modern age.” Asking for a sequel, he actually looked for a traditional melodramatic ending, in which those who once had suffered in the Cultural Revolution would live a happy and meaningful life and the future would be blessed. Ironically, this kind of melodramatic ending or sequel is exactly what the director wanted to avoid.

To those who directly participated in violence during the Cultural Revolution, *The Alley* proposed a new start—a chance to be reborn. Wang Honglin expressed his horror at watching the disturbing scene of the Red Guards beating Xia, which is rare in the early films about the Cultural Revolution. Most of the films downplay physical violence. Wang re-lived the traumatic

moment and bravely confronted his mistake. He concluded that the most important message that this film conveyed was how to live in the present. He did not think the film intended to criticize those who were guilty, who committed crimes during the Cultural Revolution. Instead, he interpreted it as a film that gave hope to both the persecuted and those who inflicted harm.

A close look at the scene of the Red Guards beating Xia reveals a gap between its intended message and the viewer's interpretation. This scene is very striking in terms of the way it addresses violence. It is composed of a series of shots of the Red Guards chasing Xia, Xia falling to the ground, an eagle struggling in a huge iron cage, close-up shots of leather belts falling onto Xia's head, and leather shoes stamping on his eyes. Following these shots is a red screen, symbolizing a blood-suffused world, accompanied by Xia's scream. The fast-paced editing and the imagery of violence create an intense, violent scene. The message is clear that those who beat Xia are committing a horrible crime, and Xia's blindness will forever be a scar—physically and psychologically, as an evidence of the crime. As Braester comments, "Although the film's three endings all emphasize that one should 'let bygones be bygones,' the wounds of the Cultural Revolution have not healed."⁴⁶ Looking for a way to get rid of the past, the ex-Red Guard reads what he wants to see into this film—in this case, forgiveness and his own victimization, which may not be intended in this film but exist in his imagination.

As Stuart Hall has well argued, there is no one absolute meaning for a literary or cinematic text, and the dominant ideology which is inscribed as the "preferred reading" in a media text is not automatically adopted by readers; rather, readers/viewers may adopt different stances according to their social positions.⁴⁷ In the case of the Cultural Revolution films, audiences made their interpretations based on their experiences in the political movement as well as their primary concerns in the present. Those who were wrongly persecuted and suffered directly or

indirectly might feel strongly towards the scene of the Red Guards' violence against Xia; whereas those who participated in violence might see themselves as victimized by such a representation. Nevertheless, underlying these audiences' responses was a common desire for getting over the past and starting a new life after the national disaster.

The debate over the ending of *Forget Me Not* is another example of this. *Forget Me Not* is an unfulfilled love story. The female protagonist, Wenwen, is sent down to work at a remote village because of her father's "anti-revolutionary crime." Her mother kills herself and her father dies a mysterious death. Wenwen attempts suicide, but is saved by Zhou Hong, a "rightist" and a country doctor. Zhou Hong encourages Wenwen to study and offers to be her private teacher. When the Cultural Revolution is over, Wenwen passes the entrance examination for college. She expresses her love for Zhou Hong, but is turned down because, as Zhou Hong explains, he has suffered from many years of frequent political turmoil and does not want Wenwen to suffer with him.

The audiences' debates were primarily centered on whether Zhou Hong should accept Wenwen's love or not. Most people expressed the wish to see them together. For example, Teng Weizhou, an employee at a chemical fiber factory, wrote,

Why should [Zhou Hong] be so obsessed with "sadness" when he is in love? Obviously the director forces such an artificial plot. The film offers an explanation, that is, Zhou Hong does not want Wenwen to share his sadness. As a matter of fact, the defeat of the 'Gang of Four' brings Zhou Hong not sadness, but hope. He says to Wenwen, 'Now we have hope. The nation, the people, and all things have hope.' So letting Wenwen share the hope would be fair; otherwise, it is unfair.⁴⁸

Teng emphasized that it is "hope" instead of "sadness" that Zhou Hong should feel after the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, to love Wenwen means to share the "hope" together. Teng wanted a conventional melodramatic story, in which all difficulties the couple has encountered

are resolved in a happy romantic ending.

Another audience member even directly designed an alternative ending for this film:

Zhou Hong and Wenwen make an agreement, that is, they will live together after Wenwen graduates from college. This kind of ending not only fits into Zhou Hong's character, but also highlights his lofty morals and unselfishness. This ending will be full of hope and enlightenment, and will give the audience more encouragement.⁴⁹ (Chen Zhiwei)

Chen Zhiwei thought the ending of a film about the Cultural Revolution should give people hope and encouragement for them to move on. Similarly to Peng Xiaoguang's wish for a sequel to *The Alley*, Chen conjured up a happy ending for the two Cultural Revolution survivors.

The viewers' interpretation missed an important message of this film, that the past cannot be completely forgotten, and neither can the pain be fundamentally alleviated. This message is explicitly articulated in Zhou Hong's confession of his feeling:

...In the Anti-rightist movement, I was forced to labor at a reform farm. Later, my 'rightist' charge was cleared, and I was assigned to the village to work. Just when I began to have hope for life, the Cultural Revolution started. I was persecuted again. Now, twenty years have passed away. What reason do I have for marriage? It is already too much for one person to be sad. Why should two people suffer?

This film creates Zhou Hong as a person deeply wounded by the political movements. On Zhou Hong's desk is a picture of him in his early twenties, youthful and cheerful. It appears a few times, constantly reminding the audience that the political movements have changed Zhou Hong in a traumatic way and that his youth and ambitions are wasted and wore away. The picture is a historical evidence of irrevocable loss and damage. The non-melodramatic ending refuses an easy compensation and represents the depth of "critical historical consciousness," to use LaCapra's term.⁵⁰

However, most viewers demanded a comforting ending, just as they wanted one from *The*

Alley. The discussions on the endings of the two films suggest that people were more concerned with their present lives than with the tragic effect of the Cultural Revolution. Identifying with the characters and projecting their wishes and longings onto them, the audiences felt relieved when the characters find hope, get love, and live a happy life afterwards. This, to a large degree, explains why melodrama became the predominant genre addressing the Cultural Revolution. In the case of trauma, melodrama plays the function of healing, even if temporarily.

The viewers' debates on *The Legend of Tianyuan Mountain*, and more precisely on the female protagonist Song Wei, reflect more complex interpretations, and touch the difficult question of "guilt." Song Wei betrays her lover Luo Qun, who is persecuted in the anti-rightist movement and later in the Cultural Revolution. She marries a Party cadre who is largely responsible for Luo Qun's unjustified persecution. After the end of the Cultural Revolution she helps to reverse Luo's case and leaves her selfish husband. Thus, this film seems to suggest that those who were persecuted get justice, and those who unintentionally became complicit in the persecution are forgiven. This film won the prestigious Hundred Flowers Film Award, voted by the audiences.

There were many discussions on whether Song Wei is a bad person or a victim who deserves sympathy. *Beijing Evening* published a viewer's letter with the title-- "Does Song Wei Deserve Sympathy?" This letter excoriates Song Wei:

...Song Wei is indeed a character of contradiction who suffers. However, all she experienced is her own choice. She deserves no sympathy at all...

[Referring to Song Wei crying over the news of Luo Qun being categorized as a "rightist"] Song Wei, why do you cry? Is that because you think Luo Qun is wronged? Or is that because you are disturbed by the conflict between pure love and a promising future?...

[Referring to Song Wei's marriage with the cadre] Nobody forces you to do that. You wear fashionable clothes, enjoy good food, and live in a modern house...all these cannot

disguise your empty heart...

You feel guilty and self-reproachful. You should feel that way.

I think, Song Wei, you will never get back what you have lost.

Song Wei does not deserve our sympathy.⁵¹

This is a very harsh comment on the character of Song Wei. Speaking directly to Song Wei and using the second person “you,” this letter seems to scold the real people who had similar experiences to Song Wei. In a few days, *Beijing Evening* received two hundred and fifteen letters in response. According to the editor’s summary, most of the letters insisted that Song Wei is a victim of history and politics and deserves sympathy, and that it is unfair to criticize her. The following is from the editor’s report:

Most of them do not agree with the point of this article. They think it would be too simplistic and ‘overcritical’ if the judgment on Song Wei is made in disregard of the specific situation and historical background. In addition, Song Wei has lived for over twenty years with the man she does not love. This psychological misery and misfortune are also caused by the same historical reason. However, when the Party’s policy of rectification is in effect in the area of Tianyuan Mountain, she withstands the pressure from her husband and the higher authority, and makes great efforts to reverse Luo Qun’s case. It suggests that she awakens. Therefore, we need to understand her from a progressive point of view—she is harmed by the wrong political line and deserves our sympathy.⁵²

The report shows that most viewers defended Song Wei, and looked for excuses in the political situation of the fifties and sixties. Letters published in other newspapers express similar ideas. For example, an article published in *Wen Hui Bao* gave a very strong argument against the view that Song Wei deserves no sympathy. This article explained that Song Wei breaks up with Luo Qun because she believes in the communist party, and to show her faith she has to break up with the person who is accused of being “anti-Party.” In regard to the criticism that she chooses to marry a high official to enjoy a “luxurious” and “comfortable” life, the writer responded,

...her love [for Luo Qun] does not die with her marriage to Wu Yao. She does not really believe that Luo Qun is a 'rightist' who betrays the Party. She thinks of Luo Qun quite often. However, being a "rightist" is a serious crime. How can Song Wei, in a powerless position, help? The more difficult it is to get rid of her love for Luo Qun, the more pained she is. For twenty years, how could she live a "comfortable" life?⁵³

The film does not explicitly show that Song Wei "thinks of Luo Qun quite often," or that Song Wei has tried to help Luo Qun before her friend brings her attention to his case. Seeking an excuse for Song Wei's betrayal or "weakness," this writer reads what he felt or wanted to see into this film.

The debates suggest that Song Wei was not simply treated as a fictional character. Some viewers might find it necessary to excuse Song Wei's weakness and betrayal because they also had similar experiences during the political movements. The Cultural Revolution is a movement in which the masses participated, willingly or reluctantly. Even though most people did not participate in attacking others, they remained silent and followed the flow. The absence of questioning this collective participation in the popular films of the late 1970s and the 1980s suggests the difficulty of confronting the past and of self-questioning, which is understandable because people were deeply traumatized by what had happened. The official assessment, which ascribes all guilt to the "Gang of Four" and affirms the masses' contribution to the final victory, provides an easy answer to the question of responsibility. Except a small number of extreme followers of the "Gang of Four," the masses were characterized as victims, either being persecuted or being manipulated by the "Gang of Four". Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik makes an insightful comment on the government's anti-"Gang of Four" movement. She says that this kind of assessment "reduced the complexity of the Cultural Revolution to the minimum of reconciling the present with the past...it also helped the participants to overcome anxieties and

feelings of guilt as it opened the door to externalizing responsibility.”⁵⁴ As cultural scholars such as Marita Sturken and Robert Burgoyne have argued, official history and popular memory are not two separate realms, but are connected or overlapping at certain points. In the case of the cultural and popular memory of the Cultural Revolution in the immediate aftermath, traumatized audiences often found the official discourse soothing and easy to accept.

The “guilt” was the trauma of those who remained passive, participated in the movement voluntarily or involuntarily, and/or gave up their moral standards. Defending a “guilty” character, the “guilty” viewers turned away from the wound deep inside and searched for a spiritual release. This may explain why films which praise the people’s agency in the Cultural Revolution were warmly received by general audiences and why the criticism of a character in a film could arouse such intense refutations. Nevertheless, although audiences’ defense of Song Wei parallels the official discourse on the role of the masses in the Cultural Revolution, we cannot simply conclude that the audiences passively accepted the latter. The viewers’ letters suggest that many people formed their opinions by seriously contemplating their personal experience and their concerns about the present and the future.

Recent study of Chinese cinema has given recognition to the agency of the audience. Commenting on *The Alley*’s three endings, the critic Zhang Zhongnian remarks, “The three projected conclusions provoke the audience to fresh imaginations and thoughts more than any stimulant and allow the audience to soar freely in the boundless realm of thought....I believe that...by not providing [the audience] with a happy ending, you make them think, after which they have no choice but to look for their own answers.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Yomi Braester argues that *Bitter Laughter*, *Night Rain in Bashan*, *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, and *The Alley* deal with the Cultural Revolution from the subjective point of view, emphasizing the internal struggle, and

provoking the audience to “think it over,” to think on their own about the past. In Braester’s words, “Unlike Mao’s totalitarian aesthetics, which reduced all meaning to a single blinding, authoritative sign, literary and cinematic works after the Cultural Revolution ask the audience to form their own opinions.”⁵⁶ While acknowledging the active role of the audience in making meaning out of the films and in constructing memories of the Cultural Revolution in public space, I maintain that it is simplistic to conclude that the films and the audiences subverted the official discourse. To a large degree, many audiences enjoyed these films from a healing perspective, desiring to get over the trauma and move forward. The films, which in many ways follow the official history frame, provided the audiences with a means through which they reconciled with the past.

Traumatized Masculinity, Lost Femininity

Many films represent the Cultural Revolution as a national tragedy that inflicted trauma on almost everyone, including intellectuals (*Troubled Laughters*, *The Legend of Tianyuan Mountain*), peasants (*Xu Mao and His Daughters*, *Liu an hua ming*), children (*Night Rain in Bashan*), young lovers (*Romance in Lushan Mountain*, *The Alley*, *The Corner Forgotten by Love*), and the old (*Moon Bay Laughter*, *Xu Mao and His Daughters*). However, most of the films focus on a male protagonist who suffers from unjustified persecution, fights for the truth and maintains his noble character, and bears the weight of history. The audience sees and re-experiences the Cultural Revolution primarily from the wounded man’s point of view. This section analyzes narrative structure to argue that many films in this period reconstruct the Cultural Revolution particularly as men’s trauma.

Night Rain in Bashan is a typical example. Paralleling the narrative conflict between the

wrongly persecuted and the evil force of the “Gang of Four” is the conflict between the wisdom of the male hero, Qiu Shi, and the naiveté of the female protagonist, a blind follower of the “Gang of Four.” The story unfolds around the process of Qiu Shi reforming the naïve woman into one who can “see with her own eyes” and “think with her own mind.” All the other characters seem to exist only as the witnesses of the nobility of Qiu Shi and the transformation of the female escort. From the very beginning, Qiu Shi is the charismatic subject who controls the “look.” As soon as he settles down in the passenger cabin on the ship, he silently observes the people around him. He saves a woman who tries to kill herself because of unfortunate love, and shows sympathy and respect for an old woman whose son died in the Red Guard Movement. Whenever he appears on camera, he occupies the center position. Frequent close-up shots of his expression suggest that he is observing and thinking. When he is not on camera, he is the topic of other characters’ conversation. In one scene, a teacher, who at that time does not recognize Qiu Shi, reads Qiu’s poems and expresses her admiration for him and anger towards the “Gang of Four.” Everyone except the female escort believes in his innocence. Witnessing what Qiu Shi has done for the people, the naïve woman eventually stands by his side and is determined to do whatever she can do to help him escape.

Troubled Laughter has a similar storyline that the male protagonist, who is wise, courageous, and ready to fight and die for justice and truth, succeeds in transforming the naive and narrow-minded woman. It contrasts different attitudes between Fu Bin and his wife toward the repression of truth in the Cultural Revolution. While Fu Bin, a journalist, struggles hard for justice and grieves over the reversal of truth and lie, his wife does not understand him and is obsessed with her family interests. His battle with a world of disorder, madness and atrocity is frequently interrupted and obstructed by domestic frictions. His wife tries to persuade him to

write false reports to meet the taste of high officials so as to keep the family out of trouble. Fu Bin chooses to follow his conscience and is arrested for telling the truth in his report. His heroic act eventually awakens his wife who realizes her mistakes and expresses her support for him. Although the dichotomy between the male protagonist and the female lead does not apply to all films about the Cultural Revolution, most of them put women either in a position inferior to the male protagonists in terms of the courage to confront the reality and the wisdom to understand the situation, or in the role of the wounded men's admirers and supporters. Women in most of these films exist to highlight the male subjectivity and agency.

Even though *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* is constructed from three women's point of view, the narrative focuses on the male protagonist, Luo Qun, who is persecuted in the anti-rightist movement and the Cultural Revolution. Each female character's memory is shot in flashback to reveal part of his personality. Zhou Yuzhen's story introduces the main character Luo Qun to the audience. She goes to Tianyun Mountain to investigate the geographical features of this area and meets Luo Qun. Before we hear his name and see his face in close-up, he is either shot from the back or the side, out of focus. These kinds of hide-and-seek shots mystify him and suggest to the audience that he will be the central character. After a few such shots and other characters' indirect comments about him, he is finally shown in a close-up shot and his name is told to the audience.

The film foregrounds Luo Qun's suffering and thus grants him more agency than the female characters. In one scene, Song Wei, who betrays Luo Qun in the anti-rightist movement, looks at a picture of him standing on stairs carrying a big bag on his back. The camera zooms in to show Song Wei crying. Then the photo becomes animated. Luo Qun turns around to look at her and then begins to climb up the stairs. The bag seems to become larger and heavier and he has to

struggle to sustain the load. This scene empathetically shows Luo Qun's suffering and Song Wei's guilt in betraying him and living a comfortable life. In the end of the film, she awakens and takes action to help Luo Qun. Justice is achieved not only in the rehabilitation of Luo Qun's case, but also in Song Wei's divorce from the man who conspires against Luo Qun. The film, however, does not arrange a reunion between her and Luo Qun. The fallen woman has to be punished—Song Wei loses the man she truly loves and pays a high price.



Figure 3. Luo Qun turns around to look at her and then begins to climb up the stairs. Still from *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*.

Feng Qinglan is a woman who is the opposite of Song Wei in many ways. She is always plainly dressed and wearing a pair of glasses—a symbol of de-sexualization. She does not talk much about ideology or politics, but she admires Luo and has strong faith in him. When Song Wei breaks up with Luo because of his persecution, Qinglan stands by his side and later marries him. Apparently, she is given narrative agency—she identifies good and evil, acts from her conscience, and courageously supports a persecuted man. Nevertheless, her agency to a large degree lies in her belief in Luo and her efforts to take care of him. Before dying, she expresses her gratitude towards Luo for giving her “revolutionary ideals, belief, lofty thoughts, and love,”

in her words. Her last wish is to put on her glasses to have a closer look at Luo. With the wish satisfied, she dies with no regret. Living a life with no sense of herself, Qinglan is a character created to complete the characterization of Luo. Although she also suffers from the Cultural Revolution, we only get a hint of this from a short conversation that reveals she was tortured by the Red Guards and has been seriously ill ever since. She is a woman who sacrifices her life for the man she loves. The film ends with Luo Qun standing on the top of a mountain looking at the city below. This symbolic ending highlights the heroic image of the male subject—the authentic bearer of the historical trauma and the mainstay of socialist construction in a new era.

The contrast between men and women is also explicit in *Forget Me Not*. Except in the first few scenes where Wenwen suffers from her parents' death, she is happily in love and enjoys her life in the village throughout the rest of the film. In contrast, Zhou Hong always carries a sense of sadness and thoughtfulness. While Wenwen can still have a rejuvenated life, going to college and looking for love, Zhou Hong becomes impotent, symbolically, due to the constant political struggles and persecutions. In the last scene, Wenwen cries for the unfulfilled love on the train leaving the country, while Zhou Hong walks to the top of the mountain. The low-angle shot glamorizes his body against the sky, suggesting that he is the heroic figure, the real hero who carries on historical sufferings and will keep carrying the national wound. This ending bares a resemblance with the ending of *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*.

The reconstruction of the Cultural Revolution as primarily a masculinized trauma has its social and historical reasons. China, before 1949, had deep-rooted patriarchal traditions and cultures. The Confucian ideology that says a woman should be subservient to her father and husband has been a traditional ethic for centuries. Although the New Culture Movement in the late 1910s questioned the patriarchal system and advocated women's liberation, it was not until

the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that women were granted the legitimate right to enter the public realm.⁵⁷ The socialist system advocated the equality of men and women in their contribution to the country, and imposed the subordination of family life to national construction. Men's position in the family and society changed. Not only did they have to be subordinate to the state, but also their traditional power in the domestic space was weakened. It is fair to say that socialist ideology enhanced women's consciousness of their equality with men and encouraged their participation in social construction. Women's role in state-building was valued in mainstream nationalist discourses, such as literature, film, and television. This does not mean that equality in domestic and social space had been achieved. Sheila Cornelius gives a balanced description of Chinese women's situation: "In the period following the Communist victory, women are seen to have a more active role in society. Although the remnants of China's feudal and Confucian past remain embedded within the grassroots of Chinese society, women are no longer subject to the strict constraints of life that existed prior to Mao's rule."⁵⁸

Women's presence in the public sphere formed a threat to men's power legitimized by Confucianism and the patriarchal system which had existed for centuries. Cornelius comments that "In fact, Chinese men may be more psychically damaged than women in their submission to the state."⁵⁹ In a sense, men became politically and "sexually" impotent. *Li Shuangshuang* (dir. Lu Ren), which won the best feature film award at the annual Hundred Flowers Film competition in 1962, vividly and humorously depicts men's confusion and resistance towards women's new position. In this film, the female protagonist, leader of the Women's Committee in a village, actively organizes villagers to participate in social construction. Due to her busy schedule, she cannot attend to her family as a traditional wife would do. Her active role in public places and

neglect of her “domestic duty” upset the husband. After failing to change her, he leaves the family. The film makes it clear that the problem lies more with the husband than with the wife. The wife puts social construction above domestic duty and equips herself with the new consciousness of equality, whereas the husband still clings to feudalistic patriarchal traditions. The film ends with the husband’s understanding and acceptance of women’s new roles in society. However, it would be too simplistic to conclude that the ending offered in *Li Shuangshuang* reflects the reality. Films like *Li Shuangshuang* can be best understood as cultural reflections of men’s anxieties about losing their patriarchal power under the new gender policy enforced by the state.

Thus, it is not a coincidence that after the Cultural Revolution, a large number of films were constructed about the sexual difference between men and women. In these films, the Cultural Revolution becomes a tragedy that not only traumatizes the nation, but also traumatizes Chinese masculinity. The anxiety about masculinity was released in the films. While films of the 1950s and 1960s challenged the traditional gender roles, films after the end of the Cultural Revolution participated in redefining and re-conceptualizing femininity. History becomes a platform on which men release their double-traumatized masculinity, and a site through which the “nature” of women is “rediscovered.” I will demonstrate this point by analyzing three films—*Forget Me Not*, *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, and *The Alley*.

In *Forget Me Not*, Wenwen is associated with nature and with traditional feminine values: she enjoys cooking and cleaning, and is frequently seen surrounded by flowers. Her sexuality becomes immediately prominent in the scene where she is sexually threatened by several men in a restaurant. In a few scenes, we see her picking flowers on the hill. Although she comes to Zhou Hong’s house to study, most of the time she is cooking and cleaning for him. In one scene, she

runs to tell Zhou Hong the good news that the “Gang of Four” has been overthrown. Zhou Hong is so excited that he wants to leave immediately. Wenwen, before following him, turns back to collect his clothes. I can think of no other explanation for this seemingly redundant detail except that it foregrounds Wenwen’s domestic femininity.

This film uses a doll in a traditional feminine dress to symbolize Wenwen’s feminine nature. It first appears in the scene in which Wenwen falls asleep after a medical treatment by Zhou Hong. He notices this doll, picks it up, and then smiles at her. This shot connects Wenwen and the doll in Zhou Hong’s recognition. As the plot develops, Wenwen falls in love with Zhou Hong. She gives the doll to him, saying that it will accompany him in her place when she is not there. She self-consciously identifies herself as the doll. Before leaving Zhou Hong’s house on her last night in the village, she puts the doll on the dinner table. The camera presents a close-up shot of the doll standing among the dishes that she has cooked for Zhou Hong. This shot once again associates her with cooking and catering. It expresses her longing to be a traditional woman who takes care of the man she loves.



Figure 4. The camera presents a close-up shot of the doll standing among the dishes that she has cooked for Zhou Hong. Still from *Forget Me Not*.

The Alley depicts the Cultural Revolution as a disaster to femininity. Yu has to disguise herself as a boy to avoid the Red Guards' humiliation, and suffers from this secret. She confesses in tears to Xia, "Whenever I see myself, not female or male, I feel frightened. When I go outside, I feel I lost something, something that belongs to me." At this point, the scene cuts to a flashback, in which Yu wraps her breasts with a long white cloth, which is spread out across the frame. She slowly turns her body into the cloth, and then suddenly stops, looking into the mirror in fear. We hear sounds of scissors cutting hair. She screams hysterically and breaks the mirror. The inserted scene is followed by Xia comforting her, "...I'll help you fulfill your dream. You deserve what belongs to you...I will give you a gift, you will have plaits. I must do it...I'll tell everyone that you are a girl..."

The intense flashback scene explicitly makes a connection between sexuality and a woman's body. Actually, in Chinese literature and folk art, there are a large number of stories about women who dress as men to fulfill their desires. *Mulan* is a typical example. For women who are restricted by social rules, dressing as men becomes an adventure, and a means to achieve what they want. Of course in all these stories, they maintain their femininity even though they are in men's clothes, and resume their female identity in the end.

The Alley is probably the first Chinese film that questions women's cross-dressing, and uses it symbolically to criticize the masculinization of women under the socialist political system. The young man is determined to "return" her female identity to Yu by stealing the wig, for which he is beaten to near blindness. He cannot buy the wig because it is only used for stage performance. Prohibiting people from buying such costumes, the law prohibits any personal or private attempts to "redefine" the body. When not socialized and politicized, the body is an empty entity. In the

film's three endings, the central image is Yu's hair. What will she look like when they meet again? This is the question both Xia and the audience ask. To everyone's satisfaction, Yu appears as a pretty woman with beautiful hair: long curly hair in the first ending, medium-length straight hair in the other two. The camera gives close-up shots of her hair in each ending. Eventually, Yu reclaims her female identity and becomes a real woman.

Romance on Lushan Mountain is more explicit in arousing consciousness regarding a woman's body. The female protagonist, played by Zhang Yu, the same actress who plays Yu in *The Alley*, changes into forty-three costumes. The actress immediately became a hot topic, especially among women audiences. Zhang Yu won the Hundred Flowers Best Actress Award that year with twelve million six hundred thousand votes—the highest vote for this award in Chinese film history.⁶⁰ The conspicuous display of the female body was rare and fresh in Chinese cinema in the early 1980s. The desirable woman became a cinematic attraction for both male and female audiences.

Some Chinese feminist scholars point out that the essential problem with the socialist discourse is the negation of sexual difference. Shuqin Cui claims that “The ideological conventions that enabled the negation of sexual difference made it impossible for women to be ‘women.’”⁶¹ Gender and sexuality were suppressed in the “ideological process toward the socialization, politicization, and masculinization of women.”

First, socialization mobilizes women into the workforce so as to bring them equal rights with men. Second, politicization introduces women into power structures so as to legitimize the ideology of gender equality. Finally, masculinization convinces Chinese women that they can perform all tasks as well as men. ‘Emancipation’ thus alters a sexually distinct human being into a sexless subject of the nation-state. For decades, Chinese women have ‘enjoyed’ the awarded liberation without having a clear sense of their sexual suppression at the hands of the ideology of consensus.⁶²

In her argument, the state desexualized women and persuaded them to participate in socialist construction by propagandizing their sameness with men. It was considered wrong to care for appearance, let alone fashion. Critics Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua state that in socialist narratives, “Women are no longer required to be obedient to men, but women and men together equally obey the sexless collectivity or its symbol.”⁶³ Meng Yue has argued that revolutionary discourse about women is a “process of disembodiment and desexualization, in which the private is suppressed under the public, the feminine neutralized into the political, and sexuality pre-empted by the collective.”⁶⁴ Although I hold the same opinion as many feminist critics that socialist ideology of gender masculinizes women by depriving them of choices, I do not completely negate the role of socialist ideology in enhancing women’s awareness of equality, as I have explained above.

We need to be aware of the discrepancy between the socialist narratives and the reality: the “sexless collectivity” imposed by the state does not necessarily lead to a “sexless” consciousness. Although in public places, between the 1950s and the end of the Cultural Revolution, women were usually dressed in shapeless, drab Mao-suits, dull uniforms or other simple clothes, it does not mean that all women cared little about their appearance and their bodies. It is, however, true that the state enforced a socialist ideology which erased gender difference, and that the state deprived women of control over their own bodies.

Objecting to the “sexless” culture and ideology, popular culture in the post-Cultural Revolution period began to restore gender specificity. *Forget Me Not*, *The Alley*, *Romance in Lushan Mountain* and many other films about the Cultural Revolution were made by male directors. They might project anxiety about lost masculinity, unconsciously or consciously, onto

these films and seek to reconstruct Chinese masculinity through the re-conceptualization of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, given the specific Chinese cultural and social context, it is understandable that women and men act in unison with regard to the redefinition of sexuality. A few films by women directors provide similar approaches. *Sacrificed Youth* (Qingchun ji, dir. Zhang Nuanxin, 1985) and *The Army Nurse* (Hu Mei, 1985), two films set against the background of the Cultural Revolution, are representative examples.

Sacrificed Youth, based on female author Zhang Manling's semi-autobiographical novella *There Exists a Beautiful Place* (1982), is a woman's recollection of her youth in a remote Dai Village in Yunnan during the Cultural Revolution. Dispatched from the city to work and live with the Dai natives, Li Chun undergoes psychological changes from being an outsider and eventually being accepted by Dai natives. She leaves this village at some point. Three years later she comes back, only to see the whole village buried under a mud-rock slide. The contrast between Han values (the mainstream and hegemonic culture under the socialist political ideology) and Dai tradition (the marginal and primitive culture uncontaminated by the socialist ideology) is reflected on the body of Li Chun as a woman.

When she comes to the Dai village, she is isolated by the natives because of her non-feminine appearance: she wears plain shirts and pants, and does her hair in plaits; unlike Dai girls who are proud of their beautiful clothes and feminine features, Li Chun does not care about her appearance. Feminine beauty is recognized and appreciated by the Dai villagers. In one scene, Li Chun sits by a river, thinking. Her thoughts in voiceover express her first awareness of the connection between women and the body: "I didn't know beauty was that important. We are often told that not being beautiful is actually beautiful. I often wash a new dress many times so that it can look old. It has never come to my mind that a girl should do make-up to look pretty."

This narration not only shows her new recognition of the female body, but also reveals the cause of her ignorance, that is, the socialist education of gender. It indirectly criticizes the repression of sexuality in socialist political ideology. Esther Yau insightfully remarks that “Through Li Chun’s self-examination, Zhang [the director] shows that the naive notion of ‘beauty’ has been distorted by repressive indoctrination and that a conceptual and visual restoration of that ‘beauty’ is possible via a process of self-critique and inspiration from the (preliterate) rural south-western Dai culture.”⁶⁵

While Li Chun is musing, a Dai man picks up a lotus flower and puts it in front of her. This scene symbolically affirms her femininity—she is a woman and a beautiful flower in men’s eyes, and she deserves beauty. Li Chun wears the flower in her hair and looks at her reflection in the river. The music rises to suggest her awakening consciousness of being a woman. Accompanied by the non-diegetic music, she runs back home to look for a beautiful dress. Everything turns positive on the day she appears in Dai costume and hairstyle. She is accepted by Dai girls. The cinematography deliberately displays the physical beauty of the girls. Medium shots of Dai girls carrying water and gracefully walking along the country road are alternated with shots of men looking in admiration. There is an interesting scene in which the girls line up to pay to see their images in a mirror. They take great pleasure in looking at themselves in the mirror. A woman becomes a real woman when she begins to enjoy “to-be-looked-at-ness,” and when she is desired by men.

In the following scene, Li Chun is approached sexually by a man, who later becomes her suitor. When she shyly runs away, the camera cuts to a shot of the man looking in her direction with desire. The voiceover reveals her discovery, “I’m like Cinderella in her crystal shoes. I have never imagined that a dress has such a great magic power.” She becomes desirable when she

turns into a woman with feminine beauty. The socialist discourse demands the sacrifice of a female self in the name of a social role.⁶⁶ This film tries to free the female self from the masculinized social role.

While *Sacrificed Youth* arouses the consciousness of sexual difference, *The Army Nurse* is more explicit and bold in addressing women's sexual desire. The beginning of the film clearly sets the story in the Cultural Revolution. It shows the chaotic situation: the Red Guards attacking people, hundreds of Da zi bao (big character newspapers used to attack randomly picked victims), and the broadcasting of propaganda. The heroine is sent to a hospital in a remote mountainous area to be a nurse. There she is attracted by a handsome patient. After he leaves, he writes her a letter to confess his love for her. However, she tears up this letter to show her obedience to the party rules. Years later, she ends up being alone, with an unfulfilled longing for her lover.

This film includes a three-minute sensual scene that reveals her desire for the patient. In this sequence, she helps the patient to re-dress his wound. The shot of him taking off his shirt is followed by a medium shot of her looking and then a close-up shot of her eyes. The shots immediately set her as the viewing and desiring subject. In the scene of undressing, his back is in the center of the frame facing the camera. His body is softened and eroticized by the lights coming in through white curtains. When he tears off the last layer of the dressing, blood runs down. She gives out a low cry, and uses her hand to stop the blood. The close-up shot of her white finger touching his chest and the blood running down across her finger arouses a sensuous feeling. She begins to dress him. The dressing scene is done in four shots. First, there is a close-up shot showing her lowering her body close to his naked shoulder and upper body. Her hand moves slowly and sensuously around his shoulder. The contrast between the movement and the silence creates emotional intensity, and the audience can feel the nurse's strong desire for his

body.

Then there is a close-up shot of her face, showing her struggling emotion. We then hear from the background some loud noise like hammers striking metal, symbolizing her heart beating violently. This shot is followed by a close-up shot of the patient's face, also indicating the struggling desire. The beating sound continues into the last extreme close-up shot of her hand slowly touching his shoulder. Then the soundtrack turns into soft music. The patient stands up, and she leans her face against his shoulder. This excellently shot sequence uses various cinematic techniques, such as lighting, extreme close-up shots, a contrast of sound and silence, and mise-en-scène, to capture her desire for the male body. It is one of the earliest cinematic explorations of woman's sexual desire in Chinese cinema. Centralizing her as the agent of look and desire, *Army Nurse* challenges socialist cinema.



Figure 5. She gives out a low cry, and uses her hand to stop the blood. Still from *The Army Nurse*.



Figure 6. Her hand moves slowly and sensuously around his shoulder. Still from *The Army Nurse*.



Figure 7. The patient stands up, and she leans her face against his shoulder. Still from *The Army Nurse*.

The film links the repression of sexual desire to the political environment of the Cultural

Revolution. In one scene, the nurse receives her lover's letter. Hardly has she finished reading it when the party leader sends for her. The conversation scene is shot in a way to emphasize the authority and power of the latter. We first see a medium close-up shot of the party leader facing the camera, with his back against a wall on which a Mao speech is written. Then there is a long-shot of him talking to the nurse about her personal life, with the long table in the foreground and them in the rear of the shot. We can still see part of the written characters and the name of Mao Zedong. This long shot creates a sense of coldness and political pressure. Since the party leader is warning the nurse that any mistake in her personal life would destroy her future, this shot reflects the intrusion of the political into the personal. In the next scene, we see the nurse tear the envelope into pieces. The repression of sexual desire is attributed to the political system. The state persuades women to participate in socialist construction by desexualizing women and politicizing their bodies.

The Cultural Revolution is represented not only as a disaster that damages the nation economically, culturally, and politically, but also as a trauma of the body. In films like *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain*, men are desired and looked at, but they do not lose their legitimacy as the agents of history and the authentic bearers of the historical trauma. Women desire and look, but they are not the legitimate historical agents, although they may occupy a conspicuous visual presence. Men's trauma is related to history and political power, whereas women's suffering is more about their bodies. These films articulate an anxiety about the wounded masculinity and project the longing for a cure onto the female body. The trauma is imagined to be cured by the new women who find pleasure in domestic space and in devoting their lives to the men they love. Like the wounded patient in *The Army Nurse*, the traumatized men are waiting to be cured by the gentle touch of the nurse who discovers her sexuality in the desire for the

wounded masculine body.

In the films which I have analyzed above, women transform from gender-neutral to gender-specific. These films pose significant questions, at the specific historical moment, about the state's suppression of sexuality. In this aspect, Chinese men and women together challenge the "sexless" identity policy and seek for the return of femininity. In contrast, some western feminists contend that denouncing sexual difference is the ideal state of women's liberation. For example, Donna Haraway invests in fictional cyborgs a symbolic power of subverting hierarchical dualism such as female/male and femininity/masculinity.⁶⁷ Some feminists such as Judith Butler embrace the concepts of "masquerade" and "transvestite" as breaking the boundary of masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality.⁶⁸ The prevalent concern with deconstructing the boundary of body and gender comes largely from a critique of western culture's pervasive representation of women as spectacles and eroticized objects to be looked at, as Teresa de Lauretis argues in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*.⁶⁹ In contrast to what happened in most western cultures, the ideal state of transgressing the boundary of sex was actually imposed on Chinese men and women by the state. It is due to China's unique historical and cultural circumstances that some women writers, filmmakers and critics questioned the "sexless" identity and rebuilt the link between woman and the female body, which to some extent led to a return to traditional femininity.

In the 1980s, Chinese women became more aware of their bodies and of sexual difference. Elisabeth Croll observed, "In addition to dressing fashionably, there is a great interest in make-up, skin care, jewelry, cosmetics and hair-style, all accentuating the enhancement of physical appearance that is the new attribute of women who '*know how to be women.*'"⁷⁰ The great interest in physical appearance formed a peculiar feminine-seeking phenomenon in China.

While western feminists criticized objectification of female bodies in advertisements and other popular discourses, Chinese women, particularly young women, embraced this new culture and re-conceptualized the body.

In an interview, Wang Anyi, a famous Chinese writer says, “I think China is tragic. In China women are only now beginning to have the right and the luxury to talk about the differences between men and women, to enjoy something that distinguishes women from men. That is the reason I absolutely deny that I am a feminist. I have a great aversion to that sort of feminism.”⁷¹ Her attack on feminism is mainly directed at western feminists’ critique of the objectification and eroticization of women’s bodies. For example, Laura Mulvey criticizes the practice of Hollywood classic cinema in representing women as objects under the male gaze —“to-be-looked-at-ness.”⁷² Since women’s bodies had been controlled, de-spectacularized and de-sexualized in Chinese mainstream culture and public space, many Chinese cultural critics and scholars find western feminist theory of the body and viewing pleasure problematic when applying it to Chinese culture.

The perspective of “cultural specificity” has significantly contributed to feminist studies, and aroused feminist scholars’ attention to incorporate race, ethnicity and historical contexts into women’s studies. For example, Jane Gaines⁷³ and bell hooks⁷⁴ poignantly argue that white feminist theory ignores Black people’s unique experience of racial discrimination, which complicates gender relations among Black people and to which white feminist theory cannot be applied unproblematically. Studies that are related to “cultural specificity,” such as Third World cinema study and postcolonial theory, do not close off Western feminist theories. Rather, the latter are tested and appropriated within specific cultural and historical contexts. I agree with Barbara Christian who says that Western feminist theory provides insightful models to

investigate patriarchal culture and society, but we need to have a comparative consciousness and to consider cultural and historical contexts.⁷⁵ Works like Rey Chow's *Primitive Passions* are exemplary in terms of appropriating Western feminist theories to Chinese cinema.⁷⁶

Even though Western feminist theory of the body and viewing pleasure may not particularly be applicable to Chinese culture between the 1950s and mid 1980s, it provides a useful framework for the study of contemporary Chinese culture. In the specific period of the first decade after the Cultural Revolution, the redefinition of femininity and sexuality is significant in terms of freeing the woman's body from the state's control. Nevertheless, since the late 1980s, and especially since the 1990s, when China transformed from a socialist economy to a market economy and consumption became the predominant culture, women's new consciousness of their bodies has given way to the consumption culture's manipulation. What western feminists criticize about the long-existing culture of women as objects to be looked at and men as the subjects of looking is taking place in contemporary China. Western feminist theories offer insights into Chinese culture and society in this new social and cultural context. I will address the new modes of representation of women in the following chapters.

Chapter Three

From Trauma to Nostalgia:

Contemporary Cinematic Representation of the Cultural Revolution

The proliferation of Cultural Revolution films lasted only a short period between 1978 and 1985. This recent history became increasingly sensitive and almost disappeared from the screen due to the government's total negation of the Cultural Revolution in 1984 and the Tiananmen Event in 1989. Between 1985 and 1990, the only significant film that directly explores the Cultural Revolution was Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* (Fu rong zhen, 1986). Many fewer films on the Cultural Revolution were produced in the 1990s than in the early 1980s. My archival research shows that among 1,209 films made between 1990 and 2000 (excluding the censored films), only four films address the Cultural Revolution: *Farewell My Concubine* (Ba wang bie ji, dir. Cheng Kaige, 1993), *The Human Society* (Hong Chen, dir. Gu Rong, 1994), *Red Swan* (Hong tian'e, dir. Gu Rong, 1995), and *In the Heat of the Sun* (Yangguang kannan de rizi, dir. Jiang Wen, 1995).¹ *Farewell My Concubine* was first prohibited from theatrical screenings in mainland China and then was permitted thanks to the prestigious international film awards it won.² Two other films, Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (Lan fengzheng, 1993) and Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (Huo zhe, 1994), both internationally acclaimed, have never been publicly released in mainland China.

Among the above-mentioned films, *In the Heat of the Sun* stands out for its portrayal of the Cultural Revolution as a time when youngsters enjoyed unprecedented freedom and indulged in a carefree life. With evocatively nostalgic and sentimental beauty, this film was a huge box office success in 1995, beating all imported Hollywood films except *True Lies*. Despite its highly acclaimed aesthetic quality, its domestic reception was mixed with appraisal and criticism. Many

critics denounced the nostalgic depiction of the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, nostalgia increasingly has become an artistic and cultural trend. *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (dir. Dai Sijie, 2002), a film by a Chinese diasporic director, continues this nostalgic approach, presenting an idyllic picture of young people pursuing love and knowledge during the Cultural Revolution. The chaotic past is turned into a pleasure land.

Focusing on *To Live*, *In the Heat of the Sun* and *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, this chapter will demonstrate in detail their approaches to the Cultural Revolution, and investigate social, cultural, and personal factors that shape the cinematic constructions of the past. The fifth generation directors, who experienced the Cultural Revolution, continue to develop the discourse of trauma, whereas the younger generation filmmakers insert their personal voices into the historical discourse and challenge the prevalent obsession with the national trauma. Memory is further complicated when the transnational market begins to play essential roles in film production, distribution, and reception. History becomes a site where trauma and nostalgia, mourning and pleasure are mingled. This is the essential difference between contemporary cinematic imaginings of the Cultural Revolution and the earlier mode of representation.

To Live: The Cultural Revolution as Trauma

In the early and mid 1990s, three films—*The Blue Kite*, *Farewell My Concubine* and *To Live*, by the internationally acclaimed fifth generation directors, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Chen Kaige, and Zhang Yimou respectively, rekindled the cultural contemplation of this national tragedy. These three films share one similarity with the earlier Cultural Revolution-themed films on the Cultural Revolution, that is, they assert that the ten-year political movement was disastrous and caused tremendous damages to the lives of millions of Chinese. Nevertheless, continuing the discourse

of trauma, they are not confined to the frame of official history, but cross the boundary and provide more provocative and critical interpretations than the earlier films. In particular, while the earlier films deemphasize the representation of wound and violence, the fifth generation films explicitly expose death and horror; while the former highlight the wisdom of the party and the role of the masses, the latter question them; while the former provide cathartic endings in the form of melodrama, the latter refuse any easy solutions.

It is not a coincidence that Tian Zhuangzhuang, Chen Kaige, and Zhang Yimou became interested in the subject of the Cultural Revolution and took risks in addressing the sensitive issue in their films. They all have painful memories of the political movement, which have impacted their vision of Chinese culture and history. Tian Zhuangzhuang's father, a well-known actor and head of the Beijing Film Studio, died in 1974 as a result of unjustified persecution. Chen Kaige's father, a member of the Nationalist Party (Guomingdang) during the Anti-Japanese war (1937-1945), was accused of various crimes and was imprisoned. Chen Kaige's most traumatic experience was the day he helped the Red Guards beat his father. Ever since he was born in 1950, Zhang Yimou lived in the political shadow of his father and two uncles who served the Nationalist Party. Many years later he recalled,

Some cadre's children were also attacked during the Cultural Revolution, and they suffered a lot. But after the Cultural Revolution they were rehabilitated. It was different for people like us. They say you spend thirty years on the bad side of the river then thirty years on the good side, meaning that your fate is always unpredictable. But I was always kept on one side of the river.³

The shared experience and lived memories led to these three significant films. In *The Blue Kite*, the narrator's father dies during the anti-rightist movement, referential to Tian Zhuangzhuang's father's death. In *Farewell My Concubine*, two main characters reveal each

other's "crimes" in front of Red Guards, alluding to Chen Kaige's traumatic memory of his deeds against his father. The conspicuous use of Mao's image in *To Live* is possibly related to Zhang Yimou's experience of drawing pictures of Mao when he labored in a village.

I will focus on *To Live* to demonstrate its critical approach to the Cultural Revolution. I chose this film instead of *The Blue Kite* and *Farewell My Concubine* because *Farewell My Concubine* only addresses the Cultural Revolution in its last part and *The Blue Kite* reached fewer audiences than *To Live* did in Mainland China. Although *To Live* is a prohibited film, almost everyone in China has heard of or watched it, thanks to pirated DVD markets. *The Blue Kite* is circulated mainly among intellectual circles or through underground cultural venues.

The central message *To Live* conveys is that political violence constantly disrupts people's lives. It tells how an average person, Xu Fugui, and his wife Jiazhen survive the unpredictable and chaotic political movements from the late 1940s to the 1970s: the Civil War between the Nationalist Party and the Communists (the 1940s), the Communist Liberation of China (the late 1940s and early 1950s), the Great Leap Forward (the late 1950s), and the Cultural Revolution (from 1966 to 1976). Both their son and daughter die in the political turbulence. The title "To Live" apparently suggests the theme of survival, but in fact this film foregrounds the threat of death that shadows the family's life.

To Live highlights repetitions of unexpected death: the death of Lao Quan, a soldier who takes care of Fugui when he is captured by the Nationalist army in the civil war; the death of Long'er, who dies in Fugui's place; the death of Youqing, Fugui's son, in the Leap Forward Movement; the death of Fengxia, the daughter, in the Cultural Revolution. This film shows that political movements constantly disrupt people's normal life and that the will to live can hardly countervail the threat of death under an unpredictable political environment.

Throughout this film, we keep hearing Fugui and Jiazhen express their simple wishes to live a normal life. For example, in the first family reunion scene, the camera moves slowly from Fugui's mother resting in bed to the simple furniture, and then to Fugui and Jiazhen, planning for their future. The slow tracking shot accompanied by the couple's conversation presents a picture of harmonious everyday family life. However, the civil war quickly shatters their hope for a peaceful life. Fugui and his puppet are captured by the Nationalist army. For the first time, Fugui is exposed to a shocking view of death and realizes life's fragility. Standing on the deserted battlefield, looking at thousands of dead bodies, Chunsheng, who travels with Fugui's puppet troupe, says to him, "We've got to make it back alive." Fugui murmurs, "And live a good life." They make the most basic and instinctive response to extremity.

If witnessing countless dead bodies in the civil war makes Fugui feel the fragility of life and the horror of death, he gets an impersonalized experience of death from the public execution of Long'er. Long'er is put to death by the communist government because of the big house that he won from Fugui through gambling. In this sense, Long'er dies in the place of Fugui. Standing in the cheerful crowds, Fugui, puzzled and horrified, watches Long'er being pushed to the execution site. After a brief eye contact with Long'er, Fugui runs away to pee in a state of panic. The camera only shows Fugui's back. Suddenly, we hear five gunshots off screen and simultaneously see Fugui's body tremble and convulse, which suggests that he goes through the execution figuratively. Throughout the film, we see Fugui constantly encounter death, no matter how hard he tries to avoid it. I agree with Zhouhui Xiong's view that in *To Live* the anxiety of death is always counter-posed by the instincts for living, and that "the trauma of death and the aspiration of living are the keynotes of [Fugui's] story."⁴

The narrative continuity is frequently disrupted and then resumes: from the happy reunion of

Fugui and Jiazhen to Fugui's being taken captive first by the Nationalists and then by the Communists, from harmonious family life to the death of their son, and from the daughter's promising marriage to her death giving birth in the hospital. The narrative structure of repetition creates a traumatic experience for the audience, a constant anxiety and fear of unpredictability. Joshua Hirsch emphasizes that posttraumatic films should use modernist forms of narration to represent formally the traumatic structure of the experience of witnessing the events themselves. He argues that it is important to transmit traumatic experience to the audience because it creates collective sharing of trauma, which not only eliminates individual alienation but enhances critical contemplation. For example, the use of flashbacks in *The Pawnbroker* (dir. Sidney Lumet, 1964) rejects the classical smoothing over of narrative time jumps, and provokes an analogous posttraumatic consciousness in the spectator. In his words, *The Pawnbroker* "used a fictional form as a medium for the transmission of real traumatic experience."⁵ Although *To Live* chooses a chronological narration, it employs a cinematic structure of disruption and repetition to reproduce the traumatic experience for the audience. Rey Chow also points out that the repeated pattern confronts the audience with a stark discontinuity in emotional experience.⁶

The narrative structure of *The Blue Kite* also embodies an anxiety about the constant interferences of politics into the private sphere. This film is narrated by the voice of a small boy, Tietou, who witnesses the vicissitudes of his family in successive political movements from the early 1950s to the Cultural Revolution. It is composed of three parts, each beginning with harmony and ending with chaos and tragedy. The first part starts with Tietou's mother's marriage to his father and ends with the tragic death of the latter in the anti-rightist movement. In the second part, Tietou's mother marries her ex-husband's best friend, whom Tietou calls "uncle." However, the happiness ends very soon when the "uncle" dies from overwork and

malnutrition during the Great Leap Forward. The third part begins with Tietou's mother's third marriage to an older cadre and ends with the latter's death and her arrest by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. As with *To Live*, *The Blue Kite* does not follow the conventional Chinese film narrative that develops from a certain situation and builds up to a climax. Each sequence begins with harmonious family life and ends with death. If flashbacks in the cinema of trauma mimic the traumatic psychological state of the characters, the use of repetition and disruption to structure *To Live* and *The Blue Kite* shifts the emotional load to the audience. Those who have experienced the Cultural Revolution relive the past through reenactment while those who haven't experienced it get a "posttraumatic consciousness," in Hirsch's terms.

The repetitive pattern in *To Live* and *The Blue Kite* does not suggest that the Cultural Revolution is simply the repetition of earlier traumatic events, but rather that it is the extension of unsolved historical problems. The film raises a critical question that earlier films avoid: How did the ten year disaster take place? And who should be held responsible for the disaster? Instead of starting with the Cultural Revolution, *To Live* begins in the late 1940s, and *The Blue Kite* in the 1950s, tracing the origin of the Cultural Revolution to previous political movements, such as the anti-rightist movement and the Great Leap Forward. Some earlier films such as *The Legend of Tianyuan Mountain* include the anti-rightist movement, but they do not explicitly link this early movement with the Cultural Revolution. Both Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang emphatically put the Cultural Revolution within the modern history of China under the control of the Communist Party since 1949. More than an exposure of people's suffering, their films touches the Party policy, thus breaking the official history frame.

In addition to the structure of repetition that emphasizes the theme of death, *To Live* uses various cinematic techniques to expose atrocity and violence. Each episode of a different period

includes similar shots of death. In the sequence of the 1940s, a point of view shot shows Fugui seeing thousands of corpses of soldiers spread and piled randomly on the battlefield, and white cloths drenched with blood hanging on poles. This scene is shot in silence, effectively capturing the mental state in which one is unexpectedly exposed to horror. To help Lao Quan find his brother's body, Fugui has to touch and move the corpses. There are extreme close-up shots of the soldier's dead bodies, wounds, and blood. In the sequence of the 1950s which ends with the death of Fugui's son, a close-up shot reveals his body covered with blood. The sequence of the Cultural Revolution ends with Fengxia's hemorrhaging right after giving birth to a baby. No doctors are available on site to take prompt action to save her because they have all been arrested by Red Guards. Fugui and Jiazhen watch their mute daughter dying helplessly. The close-up shots of her blood flowing onto a white sheet, her frightened expression, and her inability to call out for help create an agonizing image of death.



Figure 8. A point of view shot shows Fugui seeing thousands of corpses of soldiers spread and piled randomly on the battlefield. Still from *To Live*.



Figure 9 Lao Quan is shot to death. Still from *To Live*.



Figure 10. The Son's body is covered with blood. Still from *To Live*.



Figure 11. The Cultural Revolution episode ends with Fengxia's death. Still from *To Live*.

The Blue Kite provides a striking exposure of political violence in the last sequence, in which Red Guards attempt to arrest Tietou's stepfather. Since a sudden heart attack has impaired his ability to walk, the Red Guards use a stretcher to carry him out of his house. The atmosphere gets intense when Tietou's mother, who begs them for mercy, is humiliated and beaten by the Red Guards. Tietou, still a little boy, runs to protect her, only to be pushed to the ground. The camera moves back and forth between Tietou and his mother calling for each other while trying to break free from the Red Guards. Seeing his mother being dragged away, Tietou picks up a brick to hit a Red Guard. This is followed by a shot of the Red Guards beating him violently. The scene ends with a close-up shot of Tietou lying on the ground with blood on his face.

Farewell My Concubine similarly exposes the political violence. This film focuses on the love and betrayal between two Peking opera performers across a long historical period from the end of the Qing dynasty to the Cultural Revolution. Dieyi, who performs a female role in Peking operas, falls in love with Xiaolou. However, Xiaolou chooses to marry Juxiang, a prostitute. During the Cultural Revolution, the Peking opera is criticized as a remnant of feudal culture. Red

Guards arrest Dieyi and Xiaolou and humiliate them in public. Xiaolou betrays Dieyi, and Juxiang commits suicide after viewing the frantic happenings. After the Cultural Revolution, Dieyi kills himself on stage in front of Xiaolou. In addition to placing an emphasis on death like *To Live* and *The Blue Kite*, this film contains a disturbing scene depicting the political violence of the Cultural Revolution. Red Guards force Xiaolou, Dieyi and other opera singers to kneel down in front of the crowd, and then order Xiaolou to reveal Dieyi's "crime." When Xiaolou submits and curses Dieyi, it breaks Dieyi's heart. Dieyi takes revenge and cries out Xiaolou's "crimes" and Juxiang's history of prostitution. This long sequence dramatizes the destruction of humanity by the political movement. It uses strong colors, fire, extreme close-ups of characters' expressions, and the contrast between silence and clamor to capture the intensity of the political atmosphere and the frenzy of the masses.

Critics have argued that media violence either turns traumatic histories into spectacles for consumption or provides a simplified representation of the past leading to an easy conclusion. In E. Ann Kaplan's words, "The culture of consumption now finds in history a new toy, a fashionable consumer item. This intensifies the shrinking of historical consciousness by rendering past traumas into spectacles and thrills: a form of numbing through small doses of daily-ritualized violence."⁷ Such criticism is mainly grounded on the fact that images of violence pervade the media culture. However, in some countries where media representation of sensitive histories is strictly censored, the image of political violence carries subversive significance. Chinese cinema is far from being redundant with images of the violence of the Cultural Revolution. Although some earlier films about the Cultural Revolution include scenes of violence, they deliberately deemphasize death and horror. As I presented in Chapter Two, these films highlight the masses' resistance to power and injustice and provide happy endings so that

the audience can leave the cinema with satisfaction, rather than be haunted by disturbing images. The images of blood and death in *To Live*, *The Blue Kite*, and *Farewell My Concubine* should be understood in relation to the lack of visual exposure of political violence in Chinese media. The fifth generation directors' films confront audiences with the trauma and alert them to the violent truth of history.

A filmmaker can also use imagery of death and horror in certain ways to enhance critical consciousness. In *To Live*, Zhang Yimou avoids reducing the traumatic events to spectacles of horror by combining the images of violence with the representation of absurdity, and by denying the viewer easy pleasure in narration. "Absurdity" is the overarching tone. The alternating fragments of death and life, of happiness and suffering, and the mix of tears and laughter, humor and irony, present an absurd everyday life that is beyond sensible explanation. A typical example is the sequence of Fengxia giving birth. Fugui and Jiazhen do not trust Red Guard nurses, who have taken control of the hospital, so they ask their son-in-law to get a real doctor. Dr. Wang, previously arrested and denied food for three days by the Red Guards, is brought to the hospital. Seeing that he is starving, Fugui gives him seven big steamed buns. When the daughter begins to hemorrhage and needs help, Dr. Wang is too sick to do the operation because he has overeaten. The scene is a juxtaposition of people running to the bed watching helplessly as Fengxia dies, and then running to Dr. Wang and dragging him to help. This scene allows no easy emotion: on the one hand, the audience is horrified to watch Fengxia dying; on the other hand, the audience is likely to feel ridiculous at Dr. Wang's overeating being partially responsible for Fengxia's death. It seems that the director throws out a joke at a most unexpected and tragic moment. I do not mean that the scene is amusing or that it attributes Fengxia's death to Dr. Wang's overeating or Fugui's ignorance. The film clearly indicates that Fengxia's death is directly caused by the Red

Guards who deprive the doctors of the right to treat patients. What I am trying to illustrate is that by putting together a laughable incident and a desperate situation, this scene captures the absurdity of the political movement.

Absurdity functions to represent the breakdown of meaning. In quite a few scenes in *To Live*, conversations make no sense at all. The most typical example is the conversation at the graves of Youqing and Fengxia. Instead of mourning for the dead, the conversation shifts to Dr. Wang:

Fugui: We shouldn't have given him that water. People say once you drink water, one steamed bun in the stomach turns to seven. Dr. Wang ate seven buns. Seven times seven is forty-nine. That'll knock anyone out of action.

Jiazhen: Er'xi, is it true that Dr. Wang won't eat steamed buns, only rice now?

Er'xi: Not just steamed buns...anything made from wheat.

Fugui: Rice costs more than wheat.

Jiazhen: What a food bill he must pay!

If abstracted from the context, this conversation would draw laughter from the audience. In the context of the tragic death of their only son and daughter, this conversation is awkward. It evokes a striking sense of displacement because this scene takes place immediately after Fengxia's death. Although the intertitle "afterwards" suggests that several years have passed since Fengxia's death, the screen time is too short to prepare the audience for such a conversation. Putting the audience in an absurd state between laughter and tears, this scene makes the audience aware of moments of historical crisis.

To Live is comparable to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in terms of the process of "working-through." *Maus* is a comic serial book based on Spiegelman's father's experience during the Holocaust. LaCapra praises this book for "working-through" the trauma. In the

Introduction, I have briefly discussed LaCapra's concepts of two modes of representation:

"acting-out" and "working-through." "Acting out" is a kind of representation that either tells an empirical historical fact or conveys untroubled "pleasure in narration." LaCapra suggests that "working through" is a more appropriate mode because it maintains the traumatic nature of the event and refuses easy compensation.⁸ He notes that in *Maus* nothing is comic in the sense of provoking either non-ironic laughter or conciliatory good feeling. In his words, "The humor remains muted, infused with sadness, and very close to tears."⁹ This comic book succeeds in achieving "working-through," providing critical interpretations which free the subject from repression and repetition.

Like *Maus*, *To Live* "works-through" the trauma rather than "acting-out." Zhang Yimou designs conversations and scenes to evoke a mingled feeling of tragedy and comedy and make the audience want to laugh and cry at the same time. The film refuses traditional ways of pleasing the audience with cathartic melodramatic narratives. The break in the link between image and meaning, and between the sign and the signified, provokes the audience into thinking, turning the audience from passive consumers into active participants in a critical interpretation of the traumatic historical event.

Questioning the Masses and Agency

Different from the official assessment and the earlier films that affirm the general masses' role in fighting against the "Gang of Four" and highlight people's resistance against injustice and the collective efforts to protect the innocent, *The Blue Kite* and *To Live* do not romanticize or glamorize people's agency. Instead, they raise critical questions about the role of the masses in the Cultural Revolution. The audience is suddenly confronted with the difficult question: Are we

responsible for this disaster?

The Blue Kite presents an ironic representation of the masses. In the anti-rightist movement, each institution has to submit a list of “rightists” to the local government. The library, where Lin Shaolong (Tietou’s father) works, has only one person on the rightist list. The manager calls a meeting and tells the employees that they must provide at least one more rightist to show their support for the movement. Everyone remains silent. At this moment, Shaolong leaves for the bathroom. He returns to the meeting room only to find out that he has been chosen as the “rightist.” The moment of recognition of the shameful deal is marvelously captured by the camera. In a close-up shot, Shaolong pushes open the door. From the doorway, we see his colleagues, who are sitting around a long table, all turning to him. In the next medium shot, he stands in front of a big glass door partitioned by frames, symbolizing his imprisonment. This shot is followed by a point of view shot showing his colleagues looking at him and with some looking down at the table. The scene ends with a medium shot of Shaolong standing there confused and astound. Since the shameful deal is done behind the door, no particular person is singled out for blame. In a coward’s way, his colleagues choose a scapegoat to protect themselves. Every one of them is guilty and cannot escape the responsibility for Shaolong’s death on the labor farm. The two rounds of confrontational shots between Shaolong and his colleagues and the silence freeze the moment of guilt. This film de-romanticizes popular resistance and questions the culpability of the masses in the political movement.



Figure 12. Shaolong pushes open the door. His colleagues all turn to him. Still from *The Blue Kite*.



Figure 13. Shaolong stands in front of a big glass door partitioned by frames, symbolizing his imprisonment. Still from *The Blue Kite*.

In *To Live*, the neighbors are friendly and the revolutionary committee of the small town is not aggressive. However, the masses follow the political movement without complaints. Even when the committee leader is accused of being “anti-party,” he keeps his characteristic smile,

believing everything will be fine. The general masses are depicted as faithful followers of the Party's policy. They are completely different from what the early films depict. For example, in *Night Rain in Bashan*, everyone is trying to help the wrongly accused poet; and in *The Herdsman*, the villagers believe in the innocence of the persecuted protagonist and offer generous help.

In *The Blue Kite* and *To Live*, the main characters either submit to political violence or lack the power to resist. The denunciation of agency is reflected in the way that gender and sexuality are represented. In Chapter Two I argued that a number of the Cultural Revolution-related films in the 1980s position men as the subjects and agents of historical tragedy while positioning the woman's body as the mark of a wound, and that traumatized masculinity is healed through the reconstruction of femininity. In *To Live* and *The Blue Kite*, the woman's body still carries the mark of a wound and men are still historical subjects. The only difference is that men are historical subjects without agency.

In *The Blue Kite*, Tietou's mother helplessly moves from one man to another, witnessing the successive deaths of her three husbands. She has no control over her life except her determination to protect her son regardless of any sacrifice. In one scene, she tells Tietou that she gets married the third time for his sake. In the last scene, seeing his mother beaten by Red Guards, Tietou is furious and struggles to protect her. However, his struggle is futile. If what history inflicts on the mother is the violation of her body, the son's trauma is that he has to witness the violation which he is incapable of stopping. Zhu Ying, an army dancer, is a victim of the state's control over the woman's body. Because of her beauty, she is ordered by the party leader to offer company to high officials. Her refusal leads to her imprisonment—she is arrested for the crime of being a “counter-revolutionary.” Like *The Army Nurse* and *Sacrificed Youth*, *The Blue Kite* criticizes the politicization of a woman's body. *To Live* creates a more sympathetic

female character—the daughter. She loses her voice when she is a child, and her muteness makes her suffering and death more tragic and depressing. Lying in bed about to give birth, she helplessly waits to be saved, only to die in desperate silence. In both *To Live* and *The Blue Kite*, women's bodies testify to the national tragedy.

As with female characters, men are vulnerable to political violence. In *The Blue Kite*, “the father,” “the uncle,” and “the stepfather” die without any gesture of resistance. Zhu Ying's boyfriend cannot figure out what has happened to her, let alone protect her. In *To Live*, Fugui, who only wants to keep his family safe, follows the political movements without much understanding. Even after helplessly witnessing the death of his son and daughter, he never questions the origin of his family tragedy, but lives with what is left. There is no victory for any of these characters.

Rey Chow argues that *To Live* is a critique of the traditional Chinese virtue, endurance, and that this film centralizes the image of food as an allegorical criticism of people's passive submission to political power—“a consumption of political oppression.”¹⁰ She writes that after each traumatic event, the people are always concerned about food and survival, and thus, they passively tolerate “political oppression.” Chow criticizes people's endurance of the authoritarian governance in order to survive as a form of complicity with the state in reinforcing the existing political system. In her view, Fugui and Jiazhen represent the people's submission to and complicity with the state. In this sense, the Chinese people are victims of their non-resistance.

Contrary to Chow's view, Zhaohui Xiong argues that *To Live* asserts the protagonists' resistance by highlighting their strong will to live and the victory of their “survival” because “living, as the basic form of memory and witness, implies the ultimate resistance to the unspeakable pain of shock and death.”¹¹ Xiong maintains that bearing witness is itself a gesture

of resistance. He makes a good point that *To Live* represents the incomprehensibility of the political movements and the impossibility of active resistance. However, Xiong's interpretation of Fugui's wish to live as an alternative form of resistance frames *To Live* in the same category as the earlier Cultural Revolution-themed films, which I think undermines the significance of this film. Zhang Yimou reveals a historical fact that the earlier popular films avoided, that is, in the political movements there were people who suffered and tried to survive and did not know how to make sense of the unpredictable politics. Refusing to centralize the concept of "agency" or "resistance," *To Live* alerts the audience to a more critical thinking about the Cultural Revolution and the previous political movements: the events, the masses, and the political system. Whether the director intends to criticize people like Fugui is open to the audience's interpretation. Each interpretation will enrich the political meaning of *To Live* because by answering the question the audience participates in reassessing the history.

The study of the masses' participation in the Cultural Revolution has drawn increasing attention. Using Slavoj Žižek's concept of aestheticized politics, Ban Wang argues that the Cultural Revolution was not simply a political movement, but also ritual, "an elaborate pattern of daily living that puts enormous premium on forms—forms of speech, behavior, bearing, and countless other ritualistic details."¹² He claims that participation in the communal ritualistic experience "not only compels acceptance of the collective representations but also drums into the psyche of the individual a deep-seated affective response to them." He concludes that the Communist Party won the masses' support by "developing hope, trust and fraternity," rather than by "appealing to reason."¹³ Wang describes immersion in the mass movement during the Cultural Revolution as "a pleasure-in-pain series":

The Red Guards and other enthusiastic young people were able to derive pleasure from what now looks like human misery in the extreme. The motto for this strange experience was ‘Take suffering as honor; take hardship as pleasure’. This was especially true of the educated youth who were subject to harsh labor in the countryside, as well as of the populace at large, who in their enthusiasm for the revolution, seemed to be able to take intolerable material deprivation and wretchedness in stride.¹⁴

He maintains that even as victims, the masses have a considerable share in their own victimization.

Tonglin Lu also questions the official account that attributes this disastrous movement to the “Gang of Four.” She asks, “How can one attribute a decade-long mass movement to four isolated troublemakers?...How could so many good people suffer so much under the oppression of such a disproportionately small number of villains?”¹⁵ She concurs with Wang that the mechanism of the Cultural Revolution is “pleasure-in-pain” experienced by the individuals through a collective frenzy: “Paradoxically, a totalitarian regime is the most able to provide such an intense degree of enjoyment, because in such a regime, the superego relies heavily on surplus enjoyment to appeal to the id, or collective unconscious, bypassing the ego in order to mask its fundamental emptiness.”¹⁶ She calls attention to “individual responsibility for a collective frenzy.”¹⁷ She sees the participating masses as “performers” of the dominant ideology. As she says,

Its performers do not need to believe in the dominant ideology. As long as they agree to perform its empty rituals—often with a cynical distance—such performances can prolong the power of the superego’s empty gaze. It is easy to criticize dominant ideology, but it is much more difficult to admit how we directly or indirectly contribute to sustaining it through our performance. After all, an ideology cannot become dominant abstractly, and its ascension requires mass participation.

She emphasizes the importance of understanding the “phoniness” of a dominant ideology, and of being responsible for one’s own activity—individuals should act “on their knowledge as ethical subjects,” and “take uncompromising ethical stances by assuming responsibility for their own

conduct.”¹⁸ Lu’s proposition is idealistic because it is hardly plausible that the general masses could see through the “manipulative” dominant ideology when they lived inside the system. Boudieu’s concept of “habitus” provides an insightful sociological explanation of people’s compliant response to ruling ideologies. He says that the habitus is “a practical sense that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules,” and is “the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes a ‘second sense’ or a ‘second nature’.”¹⁹ The masses act correspondingly in specific situations based on their “second nature” formed under the long-term inculcation.

Nevertheless, I strongly believe it is important for intellectuals, scholars, and artists to find ways to expose the manipulateness of the dominant ideology and to provoke people into questioning their role in society.²⁰ The fifth generation directors’ reconstruction of modern Chinese history and the critics’ debates over mass participation in political movements represent a significant trend of seeking the cause of the Cultural Revolution from a new perspective. Their films ask people to think about their relationship with the political power. Ban Wang maintains that only by recognizing how power operates through our bodies and minds may we “reduce the not too slim chances that we will be victimized once again.”²¹ It is particularly in this aspect that the fifth generation directors’ approach to the traumatic history demonstrates more profundity and thoroughness than the earlier mode of representation.

In the Heat of the Sun: an Alternative History

No matter how different the Cultural Revolution films by the fifth generation directors are from early cinematic representations, they all address the Cultural Revolution as a trauma. None

of these films evokes a sense of longing or elicits pleasure in revisiting the past. The discourse of trauma is challenged by Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun*, a film marking the turning point of cinematic representation of the Cultural Revolution. *In the Heat of the Sun* came as a shock by constructing the Cultural Revolution period in a completely different way from all previous Cultural Revolution films. It marks a shift from representing the Cultural Revolution as a period of depression, desperation, and death to a period when "the sun was always bright," in the words of the film's narrator. This film raises questions about the representation of the Cultural Revolution in popular culture, and about trauma and memory in general: Whose memory is authentic? Why does a national trauma become a site of longing? Is it everyone's obligation to carry the burden of a national trauma? How should a cultural producer position himself in relation to historical discourses?

Different from *To Live* and *The Blue Kite* which cover a long historical period from the 1950s to the 1970s, *In the Heat of the Sun* is set in one particular moment of the Cultural Revolution—a summer in the early 1970s. It follows fifteen-year-old Ma Xiaojun and his gang friends in their daily lives: hanging around in the courtyard, playing tricks on their teachers, chasing girls, watching movies, and fighting with other gangs. This film shows that the Cultural Revolution was not all about politics and turmoil; instead, it was a time when young people were indulged in their non-political world, in which identity, dreams and sexual desires were more meaningful than the mass political movement.

Although this film does not intend to address the 1970s from a political aspect, it uses cultural icons, such as revolutionary songs and images of Mao, to capture the aura of the Cultural Revolution. Statues and pictures of Mao appear in many sequences as the conspicuous background for the youngsters' activities. The film begins with a crane shot of a towering Mao

statue accompanied by a revolutionary song, which immediately brings the audience into the period of the Cultural Revolution. Against the blue sky, Mao looks like a god, waving his hands to his people. The scene recalls the historical moment of August 18, 1966 when a million Red Guards gathered at Tiananmen Square to receive the Chairman's personal blessing. "Mao appeared atop the gate at sunrise in a godlike posture and solemnly donned a red armband, thereby becoming the 'supreme commander' of the Red Guards as well as their 'great teacher,' 'great leader,' and 'great helmsman'." ²²

Following the opening shot, Ma Xiaojun and his friends watch the army setting out amid the crowd's cheers. This scene ends with a medium close-up shot of a military aircraft taking off. The body of the aircraft occupies the whole frame, creating a sense of mobility. Without dialogue, the series of images of the statue of Mao, the crowd, the soldiers, and the plane effectively capture the atmosphere of excitement, passion and aspiration, which is further magnified by the revolutionary song that runs throughout the whole scene. The voice-over of grown-up Ma Xiaojun describes his feelings at that moment: "My greatest wish was that China and the Soviet Union could start a war. Our army would defeat America and the Soviet Union. Then a great hero would emerge—that's me." This childish dream of becoming a war hero represents many youngsters' thoughts during the "red" age.



Figure 14. Against the blue sky, Mao looks like a god, waving his hands to his people. Still from *In the Heat of the Sun*.



Figure 15. The army sets out amid the crowd's cheers. Still from *In the Heat of the Sun*.

The dream of becoming a hero is the theme that weaves the fragmentary scenes of Xiaojun's activities together. Xiaojun's participation in street fighting is motivated by his strong desire to be heroic. I agree with Yomi Braester that this film grants an ironic tone to the concept of "heroism" as defined by propagandistic revolutionary films and Maoist rhetoric.²³ In the Maoist

period, young people formulated ideas of the hero based on the depiction of larger than life film characters, usually communist leaders or Red Army soldiers who devoted their lives to the country, and Mao's speech on revolution, which was widely cited by people in the Cultural Revolution. Mao said, "A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."²⁴ Mao's affirmation of the necessity of violence and the pervasive representation of war heroes were integrated by the youth of Ma Xiaojun's generation into their lifestyle. They fashioned themselves as fearless fighters. But instead of fighting in the war, they fought in the street. Braester argues that "Although the narrator, like Jiang Wen himself, looks back on the Cultural Revolution as his heroic days, he does so from the viewpoint of post-Mao China, in which the revolutionary jargon has been discredited."²⁵ I agree that Jiang Wen's post-Mao perspective gives a critical interpretation of Maoist "heroism," which is best demonstrated in the scene of violent street fighting between Ma Xiaojun's gang and another gang, accompanied by the music of "The Internationale." Nevertheless, I argue that even though Jiang Wen questions the concept of Maoist heroism, the film does not disclaim the youth's longing and aspiration for being a hero. The film expresses nostalgia for the period when life was invigorated with heroic dreams.

The nostalgic mood is explicitly captured in color. The past sequences are shot in bright colors to create an atmosphere of freedom, vigor, jubilation, and zeal. The ending episode, set in 1990s Beijing, is shot in black and white to suggest the flatness and void of the present. In the last scene, the grown-up Ma Xiaojun (played by Jiang Wen himself) and his old gang friends sit in a luxurious limousine, patrolling a street in the city of Beijing. They wear decent suits and

drink expensive foreign brand wine—signs of success in contemporary China—but they look detached and bored. When they see the neighborhood idiot, with whom they used to exchange greetings in the old days, they excitedly shout greetings at him. Without recognizing them, the idiot responds with expletives. Xiaojun and his childhood friends are searching for something from the past, only to realize that the past has been lost in time and space and is forever irretrievable. The camera turns away from these characters to give a panoramic view of the city, modern but indifferent, where “nothing is recognizable now,” in Xiaojun’s words.



Figure 16. They wear decent suits and drink expensive foreign brand wine—signs of success in contemporary China. Still from *In the Heat of the Sun*.



Figure 17. They excitedly shout greetings at the neighborhood idiot. Still from *In the Heat of the Sun*.

The film ends with the theme song “The People Love Chairman Mao.” In one interview, Jiang Wen, the director, says that the revolutionary songs that praise Mao are actually love songs and he personally began to understand “love” through those songs. In his words, “I feel the Cultural Revolution was a love movement. All the people in China fell in love with Mao Zedong. That was a very broad and generous love.”²⁶ I concur with Tonglin Lu’s comment on the epilogue: “The Cultural Revolution, symbolized by Mao’s statue, was their golden age, which, despite their current financial success in the post-Deng era, they can no longer regain. Mao’s symbol is much more colorful than expensive wine and a luxurious car, indicators of economic prosperity in the era of globalization, precisely because the former encouraged fantasy, but the latter is too concrete to allow any room for imagination.”²⁷

Different from the meaning of the Mao icon in Jiang Wen’s film, the fifth-generation directors’ films use icons of the Cultural Revolution (Mao’s portrait, revolutionary songs, etc.) to convey a sense of absurdity. For example, both *The Blue Kite* and *To Live* include a wedding

ceremony scene in which the bride and groom sing revolutionary songs and salute the picture of Mao. The ironical use of Mao portraits is most explicit in *To Live*. In Fengxia's wedding scene, Fengxia, Erxi (the groom), Fugui and Jiazheng line up in front of a wall, on which is painted a huge picture of Mao, to take a family photo. The zealous guests put before them a big ship-shaped board, also with Mao's image on it. As Mao is compared to the "Great Helmsman," this posture symbolizes that the family will always follow the guidance of Mao. Each of them holds a copy of *The Little Red Book* (Selected Works of Mao Zedong). The conspicuous use of the Mao icon in the wedding scene indicates the intrusion of the political into the private realm. This scene is intended to make the audience laugh at the absurdity of the Mao idolatry during the Cultural Revolution. *To Live* and *The Blue Kite* subvert the official history frame that prescribes an ambivalent assessment of Mao and prohibits "inappropriate" criticism of Mao, which I have explained in the previous chapter. The films of the early 1980s avoided explicit reference to Mao.

In the Heat of the Sun differs from both modes of representing Mao. It is neither ambiguous nor ironical in its reference to Mao. Rather, using the Mao icon, this film evokes a nostalgic longing for the period when Mao encouraged youth to dream and legitimized their rebellion. In contrast to the image of political violence in the fifth-generation directors' films, *In the Heat of the Sun* blocks out visual images that may produce anxiety and fear, such as the Red Guards' violence and terrible public struggles. In this film, Mao statues, together with abundant sunshine, green trees, quiet alleys, and a boisterous Russian-style restaurant, construct a world of freedom for the adolescent boys, a world that has less to do with politics than with heroic dreams and sweet love.

Fredric Jameson criticizes that nostalgia films like *American Graffiti* rely on stereotypical

images of the past, on “quotations” and “pastiche” to conjure a sense of history. Jiang Wen’s film seems to be subject to such criticism in terms of its use of stereotypical images, such as Mao icon and revolutionary music, to reconstruct the era of the Cultural Revolution. Nevertheless, I would argue that this film is to some degree a self-reflexive film that arouses critical historical consciousness by using flashback and voice-over to question the reliability of memory. The whole film unfolds in one extended flashback, except for the epilogue, which is set in the present time. Flashbacks have been used in a number of films as a modernist cinematic technique to represent traumatic memories, such as *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1964) and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959). In those films, flashbacks appear abruptly or seemingly impulsively to resist an unconscious burial of the past, and thus put into crisis the continuity of the present and the viewers’ established beliefs.

Voice-over that usually accompanies flashbacks is also exploited by filmmakers to explore memory and to challenge the audience’s habitual trust in a narrator. The audience tends to believe that the narrator represents an authority that holds the secret of a past event and will guide the audience to the eventual truth at the end of the film. This kind of unquestioning investment in a narrator and in the reliability of memory has been challenged in many films. For example, in *L' Année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961), a man, who tries to persuade a woman to believe that they were once lovers by telling her what happened between them last year, gradually becomes uncertain about himself. The tone in his voice-over changes from unequivocal to ambivalent. The experimental use of voice-over and flashbacks in *L' Année dernière à Marienbad* questions the reliability of memory as well as the authority of the narrator. “Changes in the form of the flashback and the voice-over narration,” as Maureen Turim argues, “can not only reorient the stated ideology but question the ideological processes of making and

telling history.”²⁸

Although less experimental than *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, *In the Heat of the Sun* shares affinities with this film in terms of disclaiming the reliability of one's memory. The film unfolds in a seemingly traditionally structured flashback, accompanied by the grown-up Ma Xiaojun's voice-over narration. Since the narrator himself is the protagonist, the audience does not question his authenticity in telling his own story, thus comfortably following Xiaojun's narration. It is not until almost the end of the film that the audience suddenly realizes that it has been misled by the narrator. The transitional scene takes place in the Moscow restaurant. Xiaojun and his friends are having a dinner party to celebrate his and the gang leader Liu Yiku's birthday. Jealous of the intimate relation between Yiku and Mi Lan, whom Xiaojun secretly loves, Xiaojun picks a fight with Yiku. He breaks a wine bottle and uses the sharp edge to stab Yiku repeatedly. However, Yiku shows no sign of pain from the attack and the situation seems to become unreal. Then the soundtrack is muted and the image freezes. We hear Xiaojun's voice-over: “Haha!...Don't believe any of it. I never was this brave or heroic. I kept swearing to tell the story truthfully, but no matter how strong my wish to tell the truth, all kinds of things got in the way, and I sadly realize that I have no way to return to reality.” The narrator disclaims his authority in representing the truth. Later on, he warns the audience that maybe some of the stories he has previously told are not true, and that perhaps even his close relation to Mi Lan, the female protagonist, is simply his imagination. Braester beautifully describes the transitional scene as: “Memory finds itself at a standstill. The inability to capture the past – the impossibility of ever reconstructing the past as a reality – causes the narrative to grind to a halt.”²⁹

Just as with the use of voice-over in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, the adult Ma Xiaojun questions his own memory and claims that memory cannot retain the whole truth of the past. The

line between truth and imagination is blurred and the audience's habitual reliance on an authentic voice-over to reveal the truth is challenged. The audience is forced to suspend their belief or disbelief and to participate in reconstructing the past with the self-doubting narrator. Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* expresses "reflexive nostalgia," to use Fred Davis's term, or "reflective nostalgia," to use Svetlana Boym's term.³⁰ Davis explains that in reflexive nostalgia, the individual "summons to feeling and thought certain empirically oriented questions concerning the truth, accuracy, completeness, or representativeness of the nostalgic claim."³¹ Boym notes that "restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt."³² Both Davis and Boym identify in reflexive/reflective nostalgia a critical contemplation on the truth and authenticity of memory. *In the Heat of the Sun* reveals the accuracy of what Boym says, "Longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection."³³

To Whom Does History Speak?

Notwithstanding its unanimously praised artistic quality, *In the Heat of the Sun* is a controversial film because of the "nostalgia" sentiment it evokes. Many Chinese critics disparage it for distorting or downplaying the traumatic effect of the Cultural Revolution. For example, Wang Dongcheng says,

Contrary to Jiang Wen's memory, the Cultural Revolution, to lots of honest intellectuals, workers and peasants, was absolutely not a time of sunshine, but nightmares and suffering... Their memory is also true, based on their life experience. But which one of these opposing memories is the true history? Or, which one reflects the truth of history objectively? In my opinion, the memory that can objectively represent the truth of history results from deep thinking and self-transcendence. Such memory not only comes from personal experience, but also from *conscience and reason*. It shows recognition of and respect for the nation and national memory which is higher than personal experience.³⁴

While admitting that Jiang Wen's memory may be true to his personal feelings, Wang argues that Jiang Wen and his supporters "use their not-faked light memory to obliterate and change the painful memory of the Chinese nation, and to beautify and disguise the dark, absurd and shameful history of the Cultural Revolution."³⁵ Wang emphasizes that personal memory cannot disregard or subsume national memory, that even if the past reconstructed in the film comes out of the director's true feelings, as an artist, Jiang Wen should consider the feelings of those who suffered in the Cultural Revolution. Thus, Wang does not deny the legitimacy of personal memory, but maintains that national memory is prior to personal memory. To address an important historical event like the Cultural Revolution, the filmmaker should first use national memory to frame his personal memory.

Zhang Qiu criticizes the "phoniness" of the emotions that pervade this film:

What he [Jiang Wen] calls passion, longing and "love" were completely phony in that age. The phony passion is abstracted from the specific context, and directly influences his judgment and misleads him into thinking that his feeling about the Cultural Revolution is "real"... What "shines" over Ma Xiaojun and his friends is not really "sunshine"... Ma Xiaojun and his friends are doomed to pay a high price for the "Brightness." The price is their youth. This is the tragedy produced by that particular history. Can you say Ma Xiaojun and his friends are not victims?³⁶

Zhang Qiu's comment reveals the following logic: As the Cultural Revolution is a disastrous national trauma, nobody, including young people, could or should possibly feel great about that period. This logic has almost become commonsense. It assumes that in the particular case of national trauma, personal memory conforms to collective memory. Even critics who defend *In the Heat of the Sun* follow this logic and argue that this film uses black humor to explore the traumatic effect of the Cultural Revolution rather than romanticizing the past.³⁷

The director explicitly asserts that this film is based on his personal memory and expresses his true feelings about that period. He further claims that this film is not intended to explore the history of the Cultural Revolution:

Actually I hadn't thought of making a film about the Cultural Revolution. Wang Shuo [author of the novella "Wild Beasts" (Dongwu xiongmeng), which provided the origin for Jiang's script] and I were writing about the experience of a boy growing up to be a man. We could only write about that period [the Cultural Revolution] because we started to become men at that time. We couldn't write about the fifties, especially when I tried to make my first film. I only wanted to make something that I could feel and be sure of. So I couldn't avoid that period [in my film]. I had to use my feeling about that time, the social condition, music, architecture, and people's interests and ideals because they were essential factors that affected manhood at that particular time.³⁸

When asked about his choice for the film's title, Jiang Wen says, "When one is seventeen or eighteen, it is the most beautiful time. Like the days of bright sunshine, he always feels warmth and passion."³⁹ To Jiang Wen, his film expresses a universal feeling towards the past and towards youth. He refutes the criticism that this film distorts history: "I think that an artist should make films from his heart. If I remembered my youth as an age full of sunshine, why should I avoid such depictions? Why should I lie? Why should I cater to some other people's thoughts?"⁴⁰

Jiang Wen claims the right to personalize or individualize the writing of history. Cultural scholar Dai Jinhua argues that this individualized and romanticized remembrance of the Cultural Revolution "embodies the 'self' and the expression of self." This new "self" is "manifestly different from the self of the 1980s vocabulary of historical narratives, which is not only encumbered with a certain grand narrative but more closely resembles the embodiment of a newly born or suddenly emerging collectivity."⁴¹ While agreeing with Dai that *In the Heat of the Sun* is a discursive construction and redefinition of "self" in relation to "individualism" instead of to nationalism and collectivity, I would also argue that this film intends to assert a

generation's voice and construct a generation's identity.

Fred Davis insightfully comments on the relationship between nostalgia and generation:

It should be kept in mind that nostalgic sentiment dwells at the very heart of a generation's identity; that without it, it is unlikely that a "generation" could come to conceive of itself as such or that 'generations' in advance or arrears of it would accede to the distinctive historical identity it claims for itself. And, in large part it is because human consciousness can forge 'generations' from the raw materials of history that the generations come to speak to each other, as it were, each reminding the other of 'precious things' about to be lost or forgotten. Thus, the dialogue of history is itself enriched and given dramatic form far beyond that which could be evoked from a mere chronology of places, persons, and events.⁴²

According to Davis, shared personal memories of the past are fundamental to the formation of generational identity. Generational memory can positively enrich historical discourses by turning history from one facet into a "dialogue." In the case of *In the Heat of the Sun*, the memory of Jiang Wen's generation turns the Cultural Revolution from trauma to a conflicting discourse of trauma and nostalgia.

Jiang Wen introduces a new perspective to our understanding of the Cultural Revolution and reminds us that there were not only people who lived with horror under the unpredictable political environment, but also people who were too young to be involved in the political movement and thus looked at the world in a different way. Jiang Wen claims that this film is an attempt to let the people hear the voice of the generation that has been ignored. He says, "I treasure the memory which a lot of people think could be ignored because we were too young."⁴³ The fifth generation directors depict the second generation as victims of the movement. In *To Live*, the son dies young in the Great Leap Forward, and the daughter, who cannot speak, symbolizing the deprivation of voice, dies in the Cultural Revolution. In *the Blue Kite*, the son helplessly witnesses his family being destroyed by political ups and downs. In *the Heat of the*

Sun, for the first time, grants subjectivity to the “neglected” and “silenced” generation during the Cultural Revolution. It articulates the desire to write the younger generation into history. It is in this aspect that I think Jiang Wen can be categorized as a sixth-generation filmmaker. The sixth generation filmmakers are concerned with revealing another kind of reality different from the fifth-generation directors: their films usually choose the marginal, the silenced, the neglected to be the subjects.⁴⁴ Jiang Wen’s film, which tells the story of his generation that has been ignored in the discourse about the Cultural Revolution, contributes to a diverse approach to national trauma.

Nevertheless, this generational perspective in Jiang Wen’s film has problems. First, we should be aware that generational memory tends to erase or refuse to confront certain aspects of the national heritage, particularly national trauma. The more recent generation, says Arthur G. Neal, “are notorious in their disregard for the long reach of their historical past...There is a sense of comfort in putting bad times behind us and thinking positively about both the present and the future.”⁴⁵ Neal explains why it is important for younger generations to remember a traumatic history, even though they have not experienced it. He says, “When a trauma becomes national in scope, however, both the needs of individuals and the needs of the social system must be addressed. At the level of the social system, there is a need to give some form of enduring recognition to traumatic events.”⁴⁶ The messages we receive from the past may, as Neal further explains, “help the nation to avoid or to minimize such problems in the future...our society must pass its heritage from one generation to the next and prepare people for the challenging conditions.”⁴⁷ Although Neal’s concern is American society, it is applicable to collective memory in general.

The criticism of *In the Heat of the Sun* emphasizes the responsibility of an artist in

constructing a historical discourse, especially in addressing a historical event that has tremendously changed the nation. The debate over this film conveys a collective wish to see more films made that will engage critically the relationship between personal memory and collective memory. For me, it is an artistic challenge worth taking. Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1984), for example, is one of the greatest films that intricately interweave nostalgia and trauma, personal memory and collective memory.

A Time to Live, A Time to Die is Hou Hsiao-Hsien's autobiographical film. Hou is a second generation Taiwanese who moved to Taiwan from the mainland in 1947 at the age of one. Two years later, Jiang Jieshi (Jiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalist Party) and his followers fled to Taiwan, after being defeated by the Communists. The Nationalist government closed off communications and transportation between Taiwan and the mainland. The film follows Ah-hao's family from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. It never explicitly addresses the political situation, but uses broadcasting, newspapers and brief conversations to link the personal story to the historical and political environment. More significantly, it presents a strong political articulation of Taiwanese identity by mingling trauma and nostalgia. The camera captures the beauty of the landscape of southern Taiwan, and conveys the second generation Taiwanese' sense of belonging to this land. The nostalgic depiction of Ah-hao's childhood is intermingled with Ah-hao's parents and grandma's nostalgia for the motherland—Mainland China. The story of Ah-hao's growing up is also the story of witnessing his parents and grandma's unfulfilled dream of going back "home," and their successive deaths.⁴⁸ This nostalgic film reflects the director's profound understanding of the exile's suffering and the importance of constructing Taiwanese identity. It articulates the voice of both the older generation and the younger generation, and the personal recollection is self-reflexively framed in a broad historical and

political context.

Another problem about Jiang Wen's claim of a generational perspective is that Xiaojun and his gang friends' experience is not a shared experience among the people of Xiaojun's /Jiangwen's age. Jiang Wen's vision of history is restricted by his privilege of growing up in the idiosyncratic environment of military family housing (budui jiashu dayuan), which separates him from the majority of people who had suffered. Both Jiang Wen and Wang Shou were born a few years before the Cultural Revolution. They lived in a residential area exclusive to high army officers. Children with this background enjoyed more privileges than others because of their parents' social status. They usually formed their own circles and did things together, as this film depicts. In Jiang Wen's memory, the Cultural Revolution was the happiest time in his life: "The sky was bluer, clouds were whiter, and even sunshine made you feel warmer. I seem to feel that there was never rain. No rainy season. Whatever you did at that time, it is unforgettable and beautiful in memory. At that time life was full of idealistic dreams."⁴⁹ This nostalgia is only partially "generational" and "collective," excluding those who could not live a privileged life as he did.

Furthermore, the nostalgia evoked in this film is gendered. The past is narrated predominantly from a masculine point of view. As Jiang Wen directly states, this film is about the transition from boyhood to manhood. The Cultural Revolution becomes a showcase of masculinity, which is defined and strengthened by violent heroism and the possession of a desirable woman. The central theme of *In the Heat of the Sun* is Ma Xiaojun's dream of becoming a hero, thus becoming a real man. Manhood and heroism are manifested through violence. A real man should have the courage to fight and die in a war and be loyal to his "brothers" (gang members). In one scene, Xiaojun's gang seeks revenge for one member who

was beaten by another gang. To prove his courage to other gang members, Xiaojun strikes a boy with a brick, beating him to unconsciousness, without even knowing whether that boy is the guilty one.

Although the story is narrated from Xiaojun's point of view, it is clear that all the other boys share the same desire to become a hero. In another scene, hundreds of boys gather in a restaurant to celebrate a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two bands. In front of a wall with a huge picture of Mao, they drink to their hero—the “bad boy” who has the highest reputation among the youngsters for his fighting skills. They lift him above their heads and admiringly shake hands with him. The long shot of the cheering boys and their hero against the background of the picture of Mao associates Mao with the “bad boy.” Both are heroes and are admired by the young people. Although there was danger in fighting and in the boisterous years, the teenage boys had fun and felt important in their ways.

The possession of a desirable woman is the proof of a man's ability and power. Cultural scholars such as Wendy Larson and Dai Jinhua argue that the nostalgic sentiment evoked by this film is largely related to the sexualization and romanticization of the Cultural Revolution.⁵⁰ Wendy Larson notes that contemporary Chinese culture tends to “reinterprets past revolutionary ideology, recasting it as sensual, erotic, and interesting as revolutionary eroticism.”⁵¹ *In the Heat of the Sun* is representative in depicting the Cultural Revolution as “a spontaneous, real, and sexual time when true freedom reigned.”⁵² While affirming the importance of sexual representation, Larson calls attention to the danger of such an approach. She says, “Yet we must recognize that although the narrative of sexualization or the discourse of desire appears to be an overwhelming favorite in this reconfiguration—a historical trend that for now has won—it is not natural, normal, or original in the social sense. It belongs to one historical period and is pervasive

enough to have taken on the urgency of a mandate.”⁵³ Although Larson makes the above comment on Anchee Min’s *Red Azalea* (1994), a fictionalized autobiography depicting a homosexual love between two female educated youths during the Cultural Revolution, the comment can be applied to films like *In the Heat of the Sun*. Larson underscores the contradictions between the realities of revolutionary culture and a “utopian sexual idealization.” Making a step further, I would argue that the problem with sexualizing the Cultural Revolution is the objectification of woman in the “sexual liberation.”

Although much of the appeal of nostalgia for one’s youth is rooted in the memory of adolescent sexuality, in this film the theme of manhood subsumes the narrative of romance. Xiaojun always tries to gain Milan’s attention and love by showing off his manly courage. For example, when seeing her admiringly smiling at Liu Yiku, who claims to have climbed to the top of a factory chimney, Xiaojun impulsively decides to do the same thing just to prove his courage and ability to Mi Lan, regardless of the great danger. He even makes up stories of his “heroic” acts, wishing to impress her. When he fails to gain her love, he tries to possess her by force.

This film constantly suggests that Mi Lan is a beauty, a frequent topic among the boys. Men fight and even die for her. In the swimming pool scene, Xiaojun’s gang almost starts a fight with another gang over the possession of Mi Lan. This scene begins with a few close-up shots of Mi Lan in a red swimsuit. When she gets out of the pool, the camera slowly moves from her feet up to her face, turning her body into a sexualized object under the fetishistic gaze of Xiaojun. Xiaojun jokes about her appearance and then pushes her into the pool, probably punishing her for choosing Yiku as her lover. Following that, a one-eyed man, head of a gang, tries to force Mi Lan to be with him. A later conversation reveals that he was blinded during a violent fight for Mi Lan. Yiku, head of Xiaojun’s gang, confronts the one-eyed man and claims Mi Lan as his girl.

Throughout the film, Mi Lan exists as an object of desire under the male gaze, and a prize to be won by the man who can demonstrate the most violence.



Figure 18. Mi Lan is a sexualized object under the fetishistic gaze of Xiaojun. Still from *In the Heat of the Sun*.



Figure 19. A one-eyed man, head of a gang, tries to force Mi Lan to be with him. Still from *In the Heat of the Sun*.

I have argued that the previous Cultural Revolution-themed films criticize the masculinization and politicization of the woman's body and female sexuality, and redefine femininity in terms of traditional feminine roles and the desirable body. Popular culture in the

1990s continued to redefine femininity and masculinity. In an increasing consumer culture, women obtained significant visibility via their consuming power, but at the same time their bodies became fetishistic images on TV commercials, consumed for the voyeuristic pleasure of men. This trend is reflected in Jiang Wen's film, in which Mi Lan is an exchangeable object among men who are powerful enough to possess her. The past is romanticized by the male narrator's fantasy of a woman. The heroic dream, of which the possession of an ideal woman is an integral part, belongs to men. If films in the 1980s rediscovered and returned sexual specificity to women and reclaimed gender difference, nostalgia films in the 1990s flattened women's image to consumable objects for men's desire.

As one form of Cultural memory, nostalgia film is inseparable from the context of its production and reception. *In the Heat of the Sun* is not simply a representation of the director's memory of the Cultural Revolution. Cultural memory, as Marita Sturken states, is a site where personal memory, collective memory, history and other cultural expressions and concerns interact and converge.⁵⁴ The nostalgic look at the Cultural Revolution is largely attributed to the nostalgia sentiment and nostalgia commercial culture in the early 1990s. In this film, the Mao icon is the primary reference to the past and the embodiment of longing. This representation is partly the reproduction of the Mao-craze in the early 1990s. The Mao-craze started with taxi drivers hanging images of Mao in their cars, believing Mao would protect them. This practice immediately spread from South China to cities nationwide. Following this was the resurgence of revolutionary songs, in particular, songs dedicated to Mao. Music companies played a primary role in popularizing these old songs. Karaoke clubs lost no time including these songs in their albums to attract more customers. The Mao-craze phenomenon has been studied by Chinese and western scholars, such as Geremie R. Barmé and Lei Ouyang Bryant. The main explanation is

that this nostalgia was evoked by the disjunction between the present and the past, resulting from China's shift from spiritual construction to economic construction, from the planned economy to the market economy. The Mao-craze is interpreted as the older generation seeking comfort from the past as a way to deal with the present disillusion.⁵⁵ Barmé comments that, "Despite all its horrors, for many people, the Mao era was a time of deeply stirred passions and beliefs firmly held. In the glow of nostalgic reverie and from the comfortable perspective provided by the passing of two decades, the Cultural Revolution appeared to many—on certain levels of consciousness at least—to have been a period of simple emotions and plain living."⁵⁶

Similarly, Dai Jinhua argues that contemporary nostalgic sentiment results from the rapid urbanization and the globalizing burst of progress that causes identity crisis:

The wave of nostalgia brings new representations of history, making history the "presence in absentia" that emits a ray of hope on the Chinese people's confused and frenzied reality. A kind of familiar yet strange representation of history, a long repressed memory emerging from the horizon of history, through the repressed identification of contemporary Chinese history, allows people to receive consolation and gain a holistic, imagined picture of modernized China. ...the mesmerizing allure of this picture is that it rebuilds a kind of imagined link between the individual and society, between history and the present reality, in order to provide a rationale for our contemporary struggle and to impart to us some sense of comfort and stability.⁵⁷

According to Dai, nostalgia culture provides a means through which individuals find connection with society and get "some sense of comfort and stability" when they have to live with China's drastic transformative changes of the 1990s. It is the present disillusion that leads to the obliteration of the pain and nostalgia for the past. As Fred Davis says, "What occasions us to feel nostalgia must also reside in the present, regardless of how much the ensuing nostalgic experience may draw its sustenance from our memory of the past."⁵⁸

Since the early 1990s nostalgia has become a profitable commodity exploited by the

growing consumer market. For example, at the height of the Mao revival, Shaoshan, Mao's birthplace, became a major profit center. "May you make a fortune out of Chairman Mao!" (Fa Mao zhuxi de cai!), became a usual greeting in Shaoshan.⁵⁹ Jiang Wen had been preparing for the shooting of *In the Heat of the Sun* since 1991, when Mao was hailed back to the modern world as a "superstar."⁶⁰ It is possible that Jiang Wen's personal memory of the past is actually partly his memory and partly the collective nostalgia prevalent at that time. In her study on Vietnam veterans' memories of their war experience, Sturken notices that veterans sometimes cannot tell whether some of their memories came from their own experience, from photographs or from Hollywood movies. She states that "Images have the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals and as a nation."⁶¹ In the case of memory of the Cultural Revolution, the image of Mao and the nostalgia sentiment are integrated into the filmmaker's memory of the past, which is elucidated in *In the Heat of the Sun*. This film in turn becomes part of popular memory and consumer culture and henceforth "interfere[s] with and trouble[s]" the personal memory of its audience.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress: The "Homeland" and the Transnational

Like *In the Heat of the Sun*, Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is a semi-autobiographical and nostalgic film based on the director's personal experience during the Cultural Revolution. It also concentrates on the main character's secret love for a beautiful girl, and has few references to political persecutions and struggles. As regards age and experience during the Cultural Revolution, Dai Sijie has more affinities with Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang and Chen Kaige than with Jiang Wen. Born in 1954, he is two years younger than Zhang and four years younger than Tian and Chen. Between 1971 and 1974, he worked in a

village in Sichuan province as a *zhiqing*, as many young people did during the Cultural Revolution, including Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang and Chen Kaige. He went to France in 1984 for further education, and has stayed there ever since. The enormous discrepancy between his nostalgic portrayal of the early 1970s and the fifth-generation filmmakers' traumatic approach, as I will argue, can be attributed to Dai's diasporic identity and the transnational market.

This film centers on two characters, Ma (the narrator) and his friend Luo, who, because of their fathers' persecution, are wrenched from their families and sent to work in a village during the Cultural Revolution. They are assigned to heavy-labor work, such as hauling human waste up a mountain and mining coal in near darkness. However, the film turns from daily drudgery to the joy of music, books, and romance. Ma brings his violin to the village and fascinates the villagers with a Mozart sonata. He and Luo both fall in love with the daughter of a local tailor, the "little seamstress." The three of them always hang out together in the mountains and read forbidden western novels, among which Balzac becomes their favorite. In the end, the "little seamstress" transforms from an illiterate village girl to a civilized woman and, beyond Ma and Luo's expectations, chooses to start her new life in the city. The Cultural Revolution is portrayed as a period of purity, beauty, friendship, love, and passion for knowledge.

Although *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* uses icons, such as revolutionary songs and Mao's pictures, to make allusions to the Cultural Revolution, this history exists as a vague backdrop. We see Mao's pictures on the walls outside and inside the mine where Ma and Luo work, but no elaborate camera angles, mise-en-scene, or other cinematic techniques are used to give special meanings to the images. In comparison, *In the Heat of the Sun* uses various cinematic techniques to highlight the icon of Mao and juxtapose it with young people's

boisterous and wanton activities to create a contrast or association between image and meaning. *To Live* and *The Blue Kite* use Mao's pictures in wedding ceremonies to reflect political intrusion into the private sphere.

No anxiety or rupture of violence breaks the rather harmonious and idyllic life in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. Take the self-criticism scene as an example. At such a meeting, those who were branded as "bad" elements of the country stood in front of the crowd to criticize themselves for what they had done or thought, even though they had done nothing wrong. It was a form of public humiliation. In this scene, "Four eyes," another *zhiqing* character, confesses his "bad" family background: "I'm from a family of reactionary intellectuals. My father is a criticized writer, and my mother is a poet." He expresses his gratitude for having worked with the peasants, who have transformed him into a good person who has learned how to farm, to plant, to plow, and to whip buffaloes. The confession scene ridicules similar activities that occurred during the Cultural Revolution, such as children criticizing their parents and "revealing" their "backward thoughts" at public meetings and intellectuals being publicly humiliated for "polluting" people's mind. However, the irony and historical criticism in this scene is weakened and subsumed by the love sequence. Immediately following the confession scene is Luo and Ma's conversation with the "little seamstress" outside the auditorium. They invite her to dinner but she declines because she and other girls have planned to bathe together in the hot springs. The close-up shots of the "little seamstress's" blush and Ma's embarrassed expression suggest an erotic imagination. Thus, the transition from the confession to the imagery of eroticism undermines the heaviness of public struggle meetings, which many Chinese still painfully remember.

Even the abortion scene is romanticized by Ma's beautiful Mozart sonata. The "little

seamstress” has to go through an abortion because a woman is not allowed to have a child out of wedlock. The operation is carried out in Ma’s house. Ma plays the violin outside as a way to cover up the secret operation as well as to comfort the “little seamstress.” The village headman comes by and stays there for a while listening to Ma playing, which creates suspense and tension. To the audience’s relief, he eventually leaves, dropping a comment: “The song is not beautiful. I like better ‘Mozart Is Thinking of Chairman Mao.’” The music piece to which he refers is actually not called “Mozart Is Thinking of Chairman Mao.” Luo made up this title to prevent the village headman from destroying the violin on the day of their arrival. The audience, who knows the truth, will not miss the joke. Thus, a scene which could provoke the question of abortion and the repression of sexuality during the Cultural Revolution loses its depth as a result of the sentimental music of love and the humorous dialogue.

A highly romanticized scene is the “oral cinema show.” The village headman commands Ma and Luo to watch revolutionary films in the town and then recite the plots to the villagers. They take the opportunity to put on their own show, turning revolutionary films into beautiful and sensational stage plays. The villagers listen so attentively to their narration that they seem to be fascinated by the power of knowledge, eager to be intellectually liberated. Historicity is lost in excessive romanticization and the untroubled “pleasure in narration.”

Nostalgia and desire for the “homeland” characterize diasporic and exilic cinema, or “accented cinema,” to use Hamid Naficy’s term, in which the “homeland” is usually idealized to cope with difficulties or feelings of displacement in host countries. Distance and longing for “home” may have erased the unpleasant memories of the Cultural Revolution. Having been in France for over twenty years, Dai Sijie still maintains his Chinese identity. In one interview, when he was asked why he still held a Chinese passport, he said, “Because I don’t have to ask

myself—‘Who am I.’ I am simply a Chinese working in France.’⁶² As Wang Zhebing, the film’s Chinese producer, recalls, Dai insisted on making this film in China because he had been waiting for this chance for years. Even though it meant he had to go through many script alterations and wait a long time for the approval of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), Dai did not change his mind. He told Wang that if this film could not be shot in China, he would rather give up making it. Wang says that for Dai, making this film was a way of seeking the feeling of “going home.”⁶³

In diasporic and exilic films, mountains are frequently used to “condense the entire idea of nation.”⁶⁴ This is exactly the case in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, in which fetishistic shots foreground magnificent mountains and convey the narrator’s (the director’s) emotional attachment to the landscape. The film begins with a long shot of the beautiful mountains and then the camera zooms in to Ma and Luo walking on a mountain road. This establishing shot displays the beauty of the mountains where Ma and Luo are going to spend their youth. At the end of the film, Ma comes back from France to visit this place. In a long take, the camera tracks from the mountains to the small house where Ma and Luo has lived. The mountain represents the emotional link between Ma and the homeland, more than an external geographic setting where the love triangle story unfolds.

The mountains are also inner psychological and spiritual landscapes. In one scene, Ma feels so excited after reading foreign books that he shouts to the mountains “Ursule Mirouet!” (Ursule Mirouet is the female protagonist in Balzac’s novel *Ursule Mirouet*). The camera moves from him to the mountains and stays with the mountains for a few seconds. In another scene, Ma sees Luo and the “little seamstress” kissing. A close-up shot of his sad expression is followed by a shot of the mountains. The mountains are maternalized, understanding and feeling the character’s

joy and loss. As Naficy observes, “In the exilically accented films, the mountain is usually posited as feminine and maternal, and the return to it as reunion with homeland, motherland, and mother.”⁶⁵ In Dai’s introduction to the Chinese translation of his novel, he explicitly expresses his love for the “mother,” the “motherland.” He tells a touching story: a Greek French writer asked his mother to listen to a record of his interview in France. His mother understood French, but she could not identify her son’s voice. So she asked him when it was him speaking. Dai writes, “I wish, even though I tell the story in French, my mother still knows it is the voice of her son.”⁶⁶

In his longing for the symbolic “return” and “reunion,” Dai seeks an authentic representation of the past in his memory. During the shooting process, Dai insisted that the characters should speak with the local accent. Dai explained that even though he could communicate with others in Mandarin, he actually could only speak one language, that is, the Shichuan local language, the only language in his memory of his youth. If the Shichuan accent was obliterated in this film, he could not find the feeling of the past.⁶⁷ However, the authenticity is lost in the idyllic world created by the director to express a sense of belonging.

In the last sequence, Ma returns to the village when he knows that it will be demolished in the construction of the Three Gorges Dam. He videotapes the last view of this village. Even though the material existence of this place vanishes, its photographic image continues to prove the existence of his home. The home will not only exist in his memory, but become attainable in his daily life wherever he will be. This nostalgia is, in Boym’s words, “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed,” “a sentiment of loss and displacement,” and also “a romance with one’s own fantasy.”⁶⁸

Although Dai’s diasporic identity can explain the nostalgic sentiment of *Balzac and the*

Little Chinese Seamstress, it does not encompass the whole picture, especially when Dai's first film *China My Sorrow* (a.k.a. *Chine, ma douleur*, 1989) is taken into consideration. Dramatically different from *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, *China My Sorrow* is unequivocally a film representing the Cultural Revolution as a national trauma. This film is shot from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old boy who is arrested for playing popular music records and sent to a "cowshed" (a term used in the Cultural Revolution to refer to a kind of prison where the "criminals" labored to get reformed). There he and sixteen other people live a difficult life. He befriends another boy, who later dies from the harsh living conditions, and an old monk, whom he saves from a suicide attempt. The film ends with a shocking and depressing scene—the boy kills the monk, for whom living in this world is more miserable than death.

Similar to the fifth-generation filmmakers' works on the Cultural Revolution, *China My Sorrow* depicts the political violence that people went through and refuses to provide a melodramatic ending that suggests justice has been achieved or there is hope for the future. This film was not shot or distributed in mainland China, and therefore it could address the Cultural Revolution in a more explicit and critical way. "Nation" is condensed into a "cowshed" where everyone becomes a prisoner. This "cowshed" has no Red Guards or policemen to supervise the prisoners; neither does it have walls or barbed wires to confine them. However, they all act as if they were under police surveillance. The "cowshed" is depicted as a panopticon, where individuals are aware of invisible surveillance and control themselves as if they were under the gaze of the authorities.⁶⁹ In this sense, *China My Sorrow* belongs to the category of exilic cinema which, as Naficy notes, tends to construct the homeland "as a chronotope of modernity, surveillance, claustrophobia, and control."⁷⁰

The mountain, which constitutes a primary setting in this film, is shot in a completely

different way from the one in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. The sequence with the main character being sent to the “cowshed” opens with a long tracking shot of the mountains under a murky sky, appearing threatening and desolated. Instead of being covered with green trees—the central image of the mountains in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*—the mountains in this film are covered with sharp stones and rocks, cold and indifferent to the prisoners’ suffering. In contrast to the mountain in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, which symbolizes a bridge to a nurturing nation or to an idyllic homeland, the mountain in *China My Sorrow* is a depressing prison and a formidable foe.

Nevertheless, despite its mourning tone and castigation of political violence, *China My Sorrow* expresses a serious and sincere concern for the nation, as its title explicitly suggests. Presenting the homeland as a prison does not contradict the filmmakers’ emotional attachment to the “home” where their souls reside. This is one essential characteristic of exilic cinema. For example, Yilmaz Guney’s *Yol* (The Way, 1982), which criticizes the claustrophobic and militarized spaces of Turkey, also gives a lovely depiction of the verdant hills around a Kurdish village near the Syrian border, which Guney encodes as “the open and longed-for Kurdish homeland that can be created only from exile.”⁷¹ Although Dai Sijie is not an exile, because he left China for education instead of for political reasons, and he can come back to China whenever he wants, *China My Sorrow* is a depiction of China from an exilic point of view.

If generational memory explains Zhang Yimou’s discourse of trauma and Jiang Wen’s nostalgic approach, how shall we understand the shift from exilic to diasporic representation by the same director? Stuart Hall’s concept of the incompleteness of identity may shed some light. He states that identity is “a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.”⁷² Over the years between 1989 and 2002, Dai’s

relationship with his host country and his original home might have changed, which consequently had an impact on his identity and his films. Or we can simply explain that time has taken away painful memories, leaving only the pleasant fragments. These could be possible factors. However, I would argue that the global market of transnational cinema plays a more crucial role in the dramatic shift from trauma in *China My Sorrow* to nostalgia in *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*.

Although Dai Sijie projects his personal longing for “home” onto the making of *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, it is not simply a personal film, but a commercial film aimed at selling to international audiences. Although it uses Chinese actors, the setting is in China, the story is about Chinese people, and the director is Chinese, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* is a French production, exclusively funded by French capital. This film has been distributed internationally, but not screened in mainland China.⁷³ However, many Chinese people have watched this film on pirated DVDs. According to Beijing Forbidden City Studio, a state-owned film enterprise, the French producers had not planned for this film’s distribution in mainland China from the beginning of production. *Balzac and the Little Chinese* has been distributed to over fifteen countries and regions, most of which are western countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The data of distribution indicates that the intended audiences are western ones.

Apparently, this film is about Chinese history and Chinese people, but the overarching theme of French literature’s contribution to the Chinese youths’ spiritual enlightenment, combined with the soundtrack of western classical music, suggests it is more about French or western civilization. Ma and Luo read Balzac to the “little seamstress” and gradually transform

her from an illiterate village girl into a civilized independent woman. They fascinate the ignorant villagers with western classical music and literature, which is exaggerated in the scene where the villagers join Ma and Luo shouting out “Balzac! Balzac!...” to pay respect to this great French writer. The most excessive romanticization of French culture is the “fashion show” sequence. The village tailor is so captivated by the characters’ costumes in the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* that he makes clothes imitating western styles for the villagers. Therefore, French literature not only uplifts young people’s souls, but also broadens Chinese people’s vision of beauty and the body.

One main reason that this film could get French funding is that Dai Sijie’s novel of the same title, from which this film is adapted, was a best-seller and prize winner in France in 2000, and its rights had been sold to more than twenty countries. Originally written in French, Dai Sijie had to consider the taste of the intended reader—the French people. Yu Zhongxian, Chinese translator of the novel, identified Dai’s use of various methods to attract French readers. For example, in the novel Dai repeatedly emphasizes that only three out of one thousands *zhiqing* from a “bad family background” could return to the city, whereas, the actual number is over ten percent. Yu did not make any changes in his translation because, he wrote, “the shocking number is written for French readers and to give them a ‘shock,’ to attract their attention.”⁷⁴ As Yu understands, an immigrant artist has to use certain strategies if he wants his work to enter the foreign market:

To Dai Sijie, his targeted French readers are unfamiliar with China, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the “down to the countryside movement.” Therefore, he has to deliberately create for the French readers an exotic cultural background. The “little seamstress” stands for Chinese native culture, and she is eventually seduced by French culture represented by “Balzac.” This satisfies, to a large degree, French readers’ pride and ethics. This is exactly one of the reasons for its popularity in France.⁷⁵

Although Dai Sijie objects to such interpretations by emphasizing the truth of young people's enthusiasm for forbidden western books during the Cultural Revolution, the elaborate centralization of the French theme and the excessive romanticization of western culture's impact on Chinese enlightenment make his defense unconvincing. Two scenes, which are not included in the novel, specifically position Chinese literature as inferior to French Literature. When Ma and Luo try to steal books from "Four Eyes," they are disappointed to see Lu Xun's (a great Chinese writer) works in the bookcase. Later when they discover French novels hidden behind Lu Xun, they are thrilled and manage to steal the bookcase. In another scene, Ma offers to read Lu Xun to the "little seamstress," but she declines, insisting that Balzac is the best.

To provide an exotic cultural background to western audiences, this film uses sumptuous shots of beautiful scenery of mountains and lakes to display the charm of local geography, and bold cinematography to stage erotic love scenes between Luo and "the little seamstress." The desirable woman—the "little seamstress"—is introduced to the audience in an erotic bathing scene. Almost naked, the "little seamstress" and her female friends play in the hot springs surrounded by the mountains. The "bathing" scene appears a few times and it is also repeatedly hinted at in conversations to evoke erotic imaginings. Dai's gaze upon his native home becomes touristic and voyeuristic, internalizing the West's pleasure in consuming the erotic oriental land.

"Self-exoticism" has been identified by film scholars as a common strategy that immigrant artists adopt. For example, *Salaam Bombay!*, a film about the lives of Indian street children made by Mira Nair, an independent director from India living in the United States, has been criticized as a product for consumption by outsiders. In Arora Poonam's words, this film's appeal resulted "precisely from its ability to produce the Indian subject in terms dictated by the representational

codes of the West.”⁷⁶ Diasporic filmmakers’ works on cultures and histories of their original “home” are susceptible to criticism, especially when their films are primarily intended for international audiences, instead of local people. Although we recognize nation as “imagined communities” and talk about the concept of “post-nation” in the context of globalization, we also see increasing support for cultural specificity and authenticity.

Discussing a culture’s distinctive identity and an individual’s local allegiance, which are both intensified by increasing globalization, Ban Wang regards memory as the means to maintain tradition and cultural specificity as well as to resist the trend toward homogeneity. He says, “I contend that the era of globalization, history and memory, although at risk of being estranged into antiquated things of the museum and flattened into quaint spectacles in costume dramas, has emerged as a stronger countervailing resource.”⁷⁷ Ban Wang’s optimistic view of national memory and history as a “countervailing resource” against global homogeneity ignores the fact that memory has become increasingly “globalized.” As Xu Beng correctly points out, contemporary memories of the Cultural Revolution are constructed and circulate in a transnational media space, distinguished from memories in the late 1970s and 1980s which were preserved primarily within the boundary of China’s territory.⁷⁸ Although Xu does not develop his argument on the impact of globalization on memory of the Cultural Revolution, he specifically addresses the necessity to re-envision collective memories of the Cultural Revolution in a transnational context. Transnational media, which is beyond the control of the nation-state, provides unprecedented freedom for reflections on the Cultural Revolution. This can be demonstrated from Chinese Diasporic works, such as Anchee Min’s memoir *Red Azalea* (1994) and Jung Chang’s autobiography *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (2003), and Joan Chen’s film *Xiu Xiu: The Sent-down Girl* (1999). Significantly, many of these books and films

engage the Cultural Revolution from women's perspectives, a conspicuous absence in China's media representation of this particular history. Nevertheless, the transnational space does not necessarily result in diversity or heterogeneity. Most fictions and narrative films about the Cultural Revolution that are widely circulated in Western countries tend to display the Cultural Revolution as a spectacle of political atrocity in China. Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* goes to another extreme—to display the Cultural Revolution as an erotic pleasure land. Therefore, while embracing the flexibility and freedom provided by transnational media, we should also ask: When the world becomes the consumer market for national histories and memories, to what degree can historical representations maintain “cultural specificity”?

This chapter is less concerned with an evaluative judgment on cinematic representations of a national tragedy than with the importance of understanding different historical reflections, the context of production and reception, as well as issues posited by the multiple discourses, such as gender and sexuality, national memory and transnational cinema. Unlike the early films about the Cultural Revolution, which construct a progressive historicity in response to the official agenda to move forward toward modernization, contemporary cinema presents varied discourses on this particular historical period. The fifth generation filmmakers, who suffered in the Cultural Revolution, continued to develop the discourse of trauma. Jiang Wen, who enjoyed a teenager's freedom during the Cultural Revolution, challenged the prevalent obsession with the national trauma. Dai Sijie, whose diasporic experience became an integral part of his filmmaking, expressed his longing for the “homeland” through a nostalgic depiction of the past. Consumer culture and transnational markets interfere with personal memories and further complicate multiple historical representations. Trauma and nostalgia coexist with each other and converge on the site of cultural memory. Neither the optimistic view of popular culture as resistance nor

Jameson's criticism of the "flattening of historicity" in postmodern consumer culture can encompass the diverse cultural memories of the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter Four

The *Zhiqing* Television Serial Drama: Making History in an In-between Land

Since the mid 1980s, television has replaced film as the most popular medium in China. In 1980 when the Chinese population reached 996.1 million, 52 TV stations were established and television reached 200 million viewers. Five years later, the viewers doubled that of 1980, and television stations increased to 202 (above county level). By the late 1990s, television reached more than ninety percent of the Chinese population.¹ With its vast coverage, television plays an increasing role in the Chinese people's daily lives as well as in the political and economic realm. This chapter focuses on the television serial drama to demonstrate how it contributes to the construction of public memory.

Among diverse forms, television serial drama ranks near the top in terms of viewing rates, next only to news programs. Historical serial drama has been one of the most popular genres, primarily portraying the anti-Japanese war, the civil war, and court conflicts in ancient China. Nevertheless, there are no historical serials that address the Cultural Revolution or deal with related political issues. It is another genre—the *zhiqing* serial drama—that continuously foregrounds the importance of the Cultural Revolution in Chinese history and individuals' lives. This genre focuses on *zhiqing* characters. The most popular ones include *Times Wasted* (Cuo tuo sui yue) (1982), *Snow Storm Tonight* (Jing ye you bao feng xue) (1985), *The Snow City* (Xue cheng) (1987), *China's Zhiqing Tribe* (Zhongguo zhiqing buluo) (1993), *Unpaid Debts* (Nie zai, 1994), and *The Annals* (nian lun) (1994).

I have briefly introduced the concept of “*zhiqing*,” which refers to the approximately fourteen million middle and high school graduates who went to rural regions during the Cultural

Revolution to “be reeducated by peasants.” Many of them spent ten or more years working in rural regions and then came back to their home cities between 1978 and 1980. The government promoted this movement as a great revolutionary act to bring down the differences between the country and the city. After the Cultural Revolution was officially assessed as “a ten-year disaster” in 1978, the “down to the countryside movement,” an integral part of the Cultural Revolution, became a sensitive and problematic issue.

The unusual experience of “exile” gave rise to a new literary genre—*zhiqing* literature, through which *zhiqing* writers depict their life in the country, express their complicated feelings towards this movement (traumatic, confusing, nostalgic), and assert their position in history. This literary genre was popular between the late 1970s and mid 1990s, providing significant information on the *zhiqing*’s lives during and after the Cultural Revolution. The *zhiqing* serial drama is fundamentally linked to this literary genre because almost all *zhiqing* serials are adapted from *zhiqing* novels. Seen from this aspect, *zhiqing* serial dramas contain a certain degree of authenticity in terms of the *zhiqing*’s self-expression.

Nonetheless, this chapter does not intend to prove how television dramas provide a true picture of the Cultural Revolution. Television scholars, such as Lynn Spigel, Steven Anderson, and Gary R. Edgerton, have pointed out, that television tells “popular history” in contrast to professional history, and it is wrong to judge a historical television program by the criteria of the latter.² The significance of telehistories is their ability “to embody current concerns and priorities within the stories it telecasts about the past,”³ and to provide people “with a way of making sense of an alienating and imperfect world.”⁴ The recognition of television histories as a discourse of the past in relation to the present is constructive to our understanding of the ways that television deals with history. In this chapter, I will study *zhiqing* television serials to

demonstrate how they (re)construct the Cultural Revolution to cater to the viewer's immediate concerns and respond to current social and cultural issues.

In addition, this chapter intends to unravel the discourses and policies that facilitate or restrict historical constructions. As a state-run institution in China, television works along with the state's policy, the demand from the market, and cultural producers' artistic and social consciousness. All these factors influence the way a historical event is remembered and represented. As Steven Anderson notes, "The process of understanding how the past is transformed into memory—whether individual or collective—is best described as an archaeology in which the goal is not simply to uncover something that has been buried, but to discover how and why additional layers have been built on top of it." By locating three popular *zhiqing* serial dramas, *Times Wasted* (4 episodes, 1982), *The Snow City* (16 episodes, 1987), and *The Annals* (45 episodes, 1994), within specific historical and cultural contexts, this chapter intends to "discover" the "additional layers" that have been added on memories of the Cultural Revolution.

These three serials are of unique significance in the history of Chinese television: *Times Wasted* is the first *zhiqing* serial drama, *The Snow City* marks a turn from melodrama to social realistic criticism, and *The Annals* presents a complete historical trajectory of the *zhiqing* from the pre-Cultural Revolution period to the present. Produced in different cultural and historical contexts, these serials differ in style, thematic concern, characterization, and gender representation. Through a combined analysis of content, context, and intertextual relations, this chapter will demonstrate how telehistories respond to current social and cultural concerns, how television manages to insert critical historical voice in the intersection of the state and the market, and how the role of gender plays out in the memory of the *zhiqing* generation.

Television Serial Drama, the State's Control and the Market

Although China's television services started in 1958, watching television did not become a way of life for the Chinese people until the mid 1980s. The latency was largely attributed to the two decades of political movements which hindered China's economic and technological development. The revival began with the open-door policy and the reform in the late 1970s. The number of program-originating TV stations rose from 105 in 1984 to 569 in 1989 and 923 in 1997. Before the early 1990s, the Chinese viewers could only receive either China Central Television (CCTV) or local TV programs, but not regional or provincial programs. The situation changed in 1993 when regional TV stations began to use satellites to transmit signals. Since then, provincial stations have developed extra channels for additional programming, which means viewers have more choices of channels and programs than before.⁵ Nevertheless, as the sole national television network, CCTV is still the dominant player in the Chinese television industry.

CCTV is under the administration of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (MRFT, renamed as the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television in 1998). While the administrative structure of television has not changed over the years—all stations are state-run organizations; the Central government administers CCTV while local governments administer local stations—it is reductive to simply view Chinese television as a medium essentially designed for propaganda or indoctrination purposes. As the television historian Tsan-Kuo Chang states, “Aside from serving as the mouthpiece of the Chinese government and the Communist Party, television took on other roles as well, becoming a viable source of information and criticism, a mass entertainer, a mass educator, and an advertising vehicle.”⁶

Chinese television serial drama does not have a long history. The first Chinese television serial drama—*Eighteen Years Disguised in the Enemy* (di yi shi ba nian)—was produced and

telecast on CCTV in 1981. It ran for nine episodes. *Times Wasted* was produced the following year, and ran for only four episodes. Most of the 1980s serial dramas were usually adapted from classical and modern literature. For instance, *Times Wasted* was adapted from Ye Xin's novel of the same title; *The Snow City* from Liang Xiaosheng's novel. Both of the writers were *zhiqing*. Although Chinese serial drama was still at an experimental stage in the 1980s, it immediately caught viewers' fancy. Since then it has remained one of the most popular television genres. Its format became standardized in the 1990s.

Chinese television serial drama has the generic characteristics of episodic serials: it is coherently constructed on certain characters and plots, with the next episode developed from the preceding ones. It is closer to the Latin American *telenovela* than to American soap opera: it has a closed ending, is usually shown during prime time, and attracts viewers of both sexes and diverse generations. But it is much shorter than *telenovela*—usually between twenty to fifty episodes.⁷ Serials are produced in mainland China are primarily for domestic Chinese viewers, although a few have reached Chinese immigrants in foreign countries. In this aspect, they are different from Latin American *telenovelas* and American soap operas, many of which have been exported to countries worldwide. From its beginning in the early 1980s to mid 1990s, the telecasting of the serial drama was not interrupted by commercials, which only appeared at the intervals of programs. This allowed television viewers to enjoy a fifty-minute non-stop story without the distraction of commercials.

Domestic TV drama production has grown at a rapid rate since the mid-1980s: in 1986, more than 1,500 episodes TV dramas were produced, and the number grew to over 15,800 by 1999. With the enlarging popularity of the television drama, official concern with this specific form also increased. The government's guiding principle of television drama is the "mainstream

melody”(zhu xuanlü)—the cultural slogan of the state. Its tenet is that cultural products should “sing highly of the party, the people, and socialism,” and the core of its ideology is patriotism, collectivism and socialism. Since 1986, the government has enforced control over the production of television dramas by three means: issuing production licenses, investigating their contents, and regulating their distributions and broadcasting. Any institutional applicant that plans to produce TV dramas must first obtain official permit issued by MRFT or from provincial TV bureaus in cases where the applicants operated at the local level. All TV stations can only show dramas that have been produced by permit-holders. Further, a drama can only be aired after previewing and censoring, and financial sponsors do not exert influence on the content of the programs.⁸

The government is very specific on the representation of history in art and literature:

Literary and artistic works may touch the history of the Party and the Army that is controversial, and may touch the subjects that are unsolved today. However, these works should be especially careful when dealing with subjects which the Party has not reached agreement. *To the history which the central government has concluded, they must follow the principles of the Party.*⁹

This guiding principle has not changed. Television programs that address historical events and figures related to the Party have to be submitted to a special committee for production permission.¹⁰ *The Red Age* (Hongse niandai, 1995), a serial drama which depicts the traumatic experience of several families going through a series of political movements in the 1950s and 1960s and provides a critical reflection on the Cultural Revolution, was prohibited from being broadcast. It indicates the Cultural Revolution can be a sensitive topic even in popular television genres.

Nevertheless, television production has more space for creative ideas and serious cultural

and sociopolitical explorations than it had before the late 1980s because of the increasing economic independence of television industry. In 1987, the Thirteenth National Congress of the Chinese Central Party prescribed the new target of reform, which is “the state adjusts the market, and the market guides enterprises.” It was a big change in economic policy, which meant that the government reduced its overwhelming control over the market. This new policy tremendously changed cultural markets, particularly television. Before 1987, television production was sponsored by the state. After 1987, the market economy began to play a greater influence on this industry. In 1987, Chinese Central Television received advertisement revenue of 27 million dollars (RMB), about twice as much as the government’s investment; by 1994, the advertisement revenue of CCTV had reached 1.2 billion dollars (RMB).¹¹ Television no longer relies on the financial support from the government. Now, as is the case in most Western countries, the primary goal of a television station is to make programs which appeal to the audience so as to enlarge advertising income.

The profit-orientated cultural market is reinforced by Deng Xiaoping’s “south talk” in 1992 which advocated further economic development and put commercial construction as the foremost task of the country. The government has adjusted specific rules to fit into the market. For example, since the mid 1990s more private companies have been allowed to participate in drama production, and most serial dramas are produced with non-government investment. Therefore, while in the 1980s television drama production was largely under the state’s control, since the 1990s, it has become more motivated by the market and the audience.

I agree with Yin Hong that contemporary television dramas are produced at the intersection of the party-state’s control over media and television’s increasing commercialization.¹² While the state intends to insert propaganda and official ideology into television drama, the latter has

shown its ability to absorb the imposed restrictions and adapt to changes in the socio-economic environment. *Times Wasted* and *The Snow City*, which were produced in the 1980s, are more restricted by the state's policy than *The Annals* produced in the 1990s. The different ways that the *zhiqing* serials deal with the Cultural Revolution should be understood within the contexts of the shifting relationships among television institution, the state and the market.

Times Wasted: A Melodramatic History

This short serial revolves around two *zhiqing* characters, Ke Bizhou and Du Jianchun, who come to a village during the “down to the countryside movement.” Bizhou is discriminated against by other *zhiqing* because of his “bad” family background—his father is a “counter-revolutionary.” For the same reason, Jianchun refuses Bizhou's love. Bizhou attempts suicide and is saved by Yurong, a kind peasant girl, with whom he falls in love. However, Yurong dies in a fight to protect Jianchun. In the meantime, Jianchun's father is persecuted as a “capitalist-roader,” for which she is assigned to do heavy-labored works. Suffering from discrimination and sexual harassment from the evil leader of the “Cultural Revolution Committee,” she attempts to commit suicide only to be saved by Bizhou at the last minute. She begins to understand Bizhou and they fall in love. After the Cultural Revolution, the “Gang of Four” is overthrown and they stay in this village to contribute to rural development.

Times Wasted is a melodramatic representation of *zhiqing*'s experience. The plot is overly exaggerated—in the four episodes, two attempts of suicide and one death take place. The narrative structure is a simplistic dichotomy: the virtuous, represented by the two *zhiqing* characters, versus the evil, represented by the “Gang of Four” and their followers in the village.

The serial ends with the triumph of the virtuous over the evil. Moreover, cinematic devices like mise-en-scene and music are used to create the intensity of emotion. The scene in which Jianchun receives unfair treatment after her father is persecuted is illustrative. It begins with a series of close-up shots of Jianchun shoveling soil fertilizer into baskets, which are followed by close-ups of her climbing slopes carrying a big basket full loaded with soil fertilizer. Then it shows another series shots of Jianchun shoveling soil fertilizer, suggesting the monotonous, repetitive, and labor-demanding nature of this work.

Following this is a medium shot showing Jianchun carrying a basket of soil fertilizer while several women laughing at her. Then the scene abruptly shifts from the day to the night, and from sunshine to thunderstorm; close-up shots of her climbing slopes, falling down, and struggling to stand up are juxtaposed with shots of trees swaying and howling in the storm. Throughout the scene, non-diegetic sentimental music heightens or softens with Jianchun's moves. Without any conversation, this nine-minute scene effectively employs visual and aural devices to create intensity and evoke the viewer's sympathy towards Jianchun.

Three factors may explain the use of melodramatic style in *Times Wasted*. First, still a new form, the television serial borrowed from the existing visual styles to fit into the viewing habit. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, films constituted a main source of TV programs, and provided a narrative model for serial drama producers to follow. *Times Wasted* imitated the melodramatic Cultural Revolution films during this period. Second, *Zhiqing*'s situation in the late 1970s and early 1980s was "melodramatic" in reality; *Times Wasted*, in some sense, captured the social sentiment through the melodramatic representation. Lastly, melodrama has a therapeutic function in helping people to get over the past and to move forward, just as I argued about the Cultural Revolution films in Chapter Two. For *zhiqing* viewers whose identity was problematized by the

historical assessment of the “down to the countryside movement” and the trend of “returning to the city,” melodramatic *zhiqing* serials articulated their anxiety and satisfied their desire for social and historical recognition. I will illustrate the last two points in further detail to show how social context affects the aesthetic style of historical reflection.

The “down to the countryside movement” did not end immediately with the demise of the Cultural Revolution. It was officially halted in 1981, with five years of delay. From October 31 to December 10, 1978, the central government organized a national conference to discuss how to judge the “down to the countryside movement;” whether they should continue to send urban students to villages and farms; and how to allocate *zhiqing* in the countryside. There were intense debates over the first issue: some insisted the achievement of this movement should be affirmed and some criticized that this movement wasted money, hindered *zhiqing*’s development and dismantled family lives, and thus it was completely wrong. In the end, the government decided to adopt the positive assessment—there was a concern that if this movement was judged wrong, millions of *zhiqing* would feel cheated and take extreme actions. Therefore, the official assessment had its political implications. Meanwhile, the government decided to take measures to transfer *zhiqing* back to the city.¹³

Before the government officially allowed *zhiqing* to return to the city, in many places *zhiqing* had started to leave villages and farms in early 1978. For example, in November 1978 more than three hundred *zhiqing* who worked in Xi Shuang Ban Na, Yu Nan province, wrote a letter to the Central government for permission to go back to the city. When they found out that this letter was withheld by the provincial department in charge of *zhiqing*, they protested by going on hunger strikes and lying on train tracks. *Zhiqing* in other places also took actions. 2,550,000 *zhiqing* returned to the city in 1978, and another 3,950,000 returned in the following

year.¹⁴ Therefore, the end of the movement was not a mild and peaceful one. The years of 1978 to 1980 were vehement as well as traumatic. It was a period characterized by intense emotions mixing anxiety, pain and anger. The emotional intensity of melodrama captures this reality, or precisely, the psychological reality of the *zhiqing* generation.

The large number of *zhiqing*'s literary works also suggests the emotional intensity. According to Yao Xinyong's survey of twenty literary periodicals between 1977 and 1989, the percentages of *zhiqing* literary works in the year of 1979, 1980, and 1982 are the highest: 4.1%, 4.7%, and 5.3% respectively.¹⁵ Many writings depict *zhiqing*'s traumatic experiences and express pain and anger. The large number of works indicates a collective desire to speak to the people about *zhiqing*'s experience. Ye Xin's novel, *Times Wasted* (1979), from which this serial is adapted, is one of those literary works.

The central subject of *Times Wasted* is the fighting spirit of the *zhiqing* and their contribution to the nation. This serial shows that although Bizhou and Jianchun suffer from the political movement of the Cultural Revolution, their spirit is not destroyed. Under great pressure, Bizhou continues to study and use his knowledge to build a small dam for the village. To a large degree, *Time Wasted* articulated *zhiqing*'s desire for social recognition of their sacrifice and contribution. Through the justice achieved in the melodramatic narrative, *zhiqing* viewers found comfort and emotional compensation.

CCTV had received a large number of letters from *zhiqing* viewers who praised this serial for speaking to them.¹⁶ *Zhiqing*'s responses to other *zhiqing*-related television dramas and films may shed a light on how they interpreted these popular texts, including *Time Wasted*. Some *zhiqing* viewers wrote to local newspapers and film magazines to praise *Our Fields* (*Wo men de tian ye*, 1984), a popular *zhiqing* film, for capturing the spirit of their generation who suffered

but remained strong. An audience member quoted one character's words as a manifesto of the *zhiqing* generation: "Very few generations' youth has been destroyed like ours. However, our ideal and belief would never be destroyed, nor disappear, just like our fields in Baidahuang."¹⁷ After a big fire, no matter how thick the dust it leaves, the new sprouts growing underneath the dark burned soil will become greener and stronger."¹⁸

Popular Cinema, a widely circulated film magazine which I introduced in Chapter Two, organized a discussion on *Snow Storm Tonight* (1984), another popular *zhiqing* television serial drama. Expressing his appreciation of this drama, one discussant said, "For many years, I have been asking myself, 'Did we sweat and bleed for nothing? Are we the 'cheated' generation? Has our youth been wasted? This television drama gives us a definite and convincing answer: 'No! This history is worth remembering. We should also be proud of it.'"¹⁹ Another *zhiqing* agreed, "I'm happy to know that my feeling was not cheated... The 'down to the countryside movement' maybe failed, but our contribution and achievement cannot be erased from history."²⁰

Zhiqing viewers' responses suggest that television serial dramas that affirmatively portray *Zhiqing* characters are particularly meaningful to their generation, proving a release for their tension and anxiety. The status of the *zhiqing* was emphatically affirmed in an editorial titled "the going up to mountains and down to the countryside movement cannot be negated."²¹ This report was carried in a 1986 issue of *People's Daily*, almost ten years after the Cultural Revolution. The editorial indicates that the "down to the countryside movement" remained a problematic historical issue and that the *zhiqing* had been concerned about the official assessment in the first decade of the post-Cultural Revolution period. The portrayal of Bizhou and Jianchun was based on the present concern of the viewers—the *zhiqing* and all those influenced by this movement one way or another. Rather than offering a professional history,

Times Wasted constructs an “emotional” history which allows the *zhiqing* to come to terms with the past.

An interesting feature of *Times Wasted* is the ending—both characters choose to stay in the village rather than go back to the city. This ending contradicts the great trend of *zhiqing* “re-migrating to the city” which took place in violent and traumatic ways during 1978 and 1980. My research on *zhiqing* history as well as the government’s policies on *zhiqing* problems suggests that such an ending fits into the government’s policy on media reportage on *zhiqing*.

I have talked about the government’s decision on the “down to the countryside movement” at the national conference in the end of 1978. Although the government decided to take measures to transfer *zhiqing* back to the city, it encouraged *zhiqing* to stay in the countryside because the city did not have enough jobs for them.²² The large number of *zhiqing* pouring into the cities put local governments under great pressure. In 1979, there were fifteen million people waiting for jobs, including the returned *zhiqing* and locals. Unemployment became the toughest problem that the government had to deal with, “*Zhiqing*” being the most serious social problem.²³ In the words of the Vice-President, Ji Dengkui, “If the *Zhiqing* problem is dealt with well, they will become a strong production force; otherwise, they will affect social stability.”²⁴

The government used media as a means to help control the situation. On November 23, 1978, *China Youth*, an influential newspaper, published an article which pointed out that one motivation of the “down to the countryside movement” was to alleviate pressure of urban employment. Although this article told the truth, which has been proved by substantial research, revealing the truth at the critical moment would result in social instability. This article was immediately criticized by the State Council, which required all news media to convey the unified message, that is, “to fully affirm the achievement of the ‘going down to the countryside

movement.”²⁵ The State Council organized a symposium in which model *zhiqing* participated between August 17 and 30, 1979, the peak of the *zhiqing*’s return to the city. The purpose was to cooperate with news agencies to propagandize and promote the importance of the “down to the countryside movement.”²⁶ *The People’s Daily* (August 31, 1979) published a letter addressed to all educated youths in the name of the thirty three *zhiqing* representatives. This letter told the educated youths to carry on this glorious historical mission and to overcome difficulties to consolidate and develop this great revolutionary career. During the years between 1978 and 1980, *People’s Daily* carried many reports on *zhiqing* choosing to stay in villages.²⁷

The media reports contradicted the government’s measures to transfer *zhiqing* back to the city, revealing the government’s dilemma: on the one hand, it made efforts to arrange *zhiqing* to return to the city and solving related problems like unemployment; on the other hand, it tried to control the situation by strategically encouraging *zhiqing* to stay in the countryside. This is the important social and political background for our understanding of *Times Wasted*, the first serial drama about the *zhiqing* generation in this critical moment. How this drama represented this movement was not only crucial to the *zhiqing* but also to the government.

As I previously mentioned, television in the early 1980s was financially and ideologically controlled by the government. Television production had to fit into the government’s media policy to express unified messages in order to maintain social stability. In *Times Wasted*, Bizhou finds the meaning of life in the village, and uses his knowledge to contribute to agricultural development; Jianchun follows Bizhou back to the village, despite her family’s objection. It may be argued that this ending is related to the novelist’s personal experience—Ye Xin stayed in a village until the late 1980s, rather than joining the trend of “returning to the city.” However, I would argue that even though the writer did not intend for this novel to convey “unified

messages,” such an ending might explain why this work could be selected for television adaptation. Actually, the plot of *zhiqing* characters choosing to stay in villages or farms was prevalent in *zhiqing* serial dramas and films at that period, such as *Snow Storm Tonight*, *Our Fields*, and *The Life* (ren sheng, 1982).

The emergence of the *zhiqing* serial is also largely attributed to creative personnel who intend to speak for the *zhiqing*. *Zhiqing* serial dramas are usually adapted from the novels written by former educated youths, and sometimes screenwriters and directors also belong to this generation. Therefore, this subgenre is a collective effort of the *zhiqing* and those who sympathize with the *zhiqing*. In an interview, Cai Xiaoqing, the director and a former educated youth, said that praising the spirit of the *zhiqing* generation is the motive behind the making of *Times Wasted*:

Personally I like the novel-- *Times Wasted*. Although this novel tells about the suffering which was imposed on this young generation by the ten-year disaster, it focuses more on their thinking, awakening and struggling. Capturing the spirit of our generation, *Times Wasted* depicts how *zhiqing* construct their lives in relation to the people and the country and become stronger. It is a healthy and optimistic representation. Although the difficult years were over, it is meaningful and instructive to show today's young people the noble revolutionary ideals and the courage of this generation who had walked a long, difficult way.²⁸

What she said was echoed by Shun Zhou, director of *Snow Storm Tonight*, three years later, in an interview on his making of this serial drama,

Four hundred thousand educated youths came to Beidahuang with enthusiasm. They contributed to the construction of the border area and made great changes. Some devoted their young lives and paid high price with blood. The pioneering spirit and heroism should be affirmed, although the political line of the movement was wrong... [In this TV drama] we want to praise the heroism and spirit of this generation, and offer justification for their sacrifice.²⁹

Newcomb and Hirsch emphasize the role of producers and creative personnel in shaping the

narrative construction of a television program. They address them as “cultural interpreters.”³⁰

In China, even though the state strictly controls television production, I think creative personnel should be viewed as “cultural interpreters” who want to use television to express their concerns instead of passively following official ideologies. The cultural producers who share similar experiences as *zhiqing* or sympathize with them, on the one hand follow the official requirement to create “healthy and optimistic” versions of history, while “offer justification” for the *zhiqing* on the other.

The Snow City: Revealing the Impact in the City

The Snow City (Xue Chen, 1987), one of the most popular serial dramas in the late 1980s, is adapted from a novel with the same title by Liang Xiaosheng, a well-known *zhiqing* writer, a few of whose works have been presented on TV, including *Snow Storm Tonight* and *The Annals*. *The Snow City* takes place in the first two years (1979-1980) when two hundred thousand educated youths return to the city of Harbin, and specifically focuses on the experience of six *zhiqing*. The past interweaves with the present through the characters’ memories. Produced five years later than *Times Wasted*, *The Snow City* manifestly differs from it in setting, style, tone, and theme, because of new social and cultural contexts and concerns.

During almost one decade of seeking for their historical status in the “down to the countryside movement,” the *zhiqing* had to come to terms with reality, to adjust themselves to the urban everyday life. Deprived of education during the Cultural Revolution, they had difficulty in competing with those who stayed in the cities. Between January and May of 1979 in Beijing, eighty unemployed youths committed suicide, eighteen percent of the total suicides in this municipality. In addition to unemployment, they were treated as criminals, and had to deal

with social discrimination. Although some *zhiqing* did become criminals, society should have questioned the social origin of their crimes.

The situation of the returned *zhiqing* in the early 1980s is seldom addressed in official and academic discourses. Even Liu Xiaomeng concludes his book—*A History of the Chinese Educated Youth: the Great Waves (1966 to 1980)*, so far the most comprehensive historical study of “the down to the countryside movement,” with an emphasis on the government’s efficient solution of *zhiqing* problems by 1982. The impact of the Cultural Revolution on the *zhiqing* appears only in *zhiqing* literature, such as Wang Anyi’s “The Terminal of This Train” (Ben ci lieche zhongdian), and Ji Guanwu’s “Return to the City” (Hui cheng, 1980). Liang Xiaosheng’s *The Snow City* gives a detailed and profound depiction of the *zhiqing*’s situation after their return. The adaptation of *zhiqing*’s writings into serial dramas is not simply a result of *zhiqing* literature’s influence. Rather, *zhiqing* serials suggest television’s ability to penetrate into culture and different stratus of society, to engage the *zhiqing*’s new concerns, and to re-discover history.

The optimism in *Times Wasted* is replaced by a somber and dark tone in *The Snow City*. Every *zhiqing* character is trapped in his or her own problems. When Yao Yuhui worked in Beidahuang, she was so occupied with her political duties that she lost her true love; back in the city, she falls in love with a man, who in the end chooses to marry someone else. Wang Zhisong comes back to the city only to find out that his girlfriend becomes another *zhiqing*’s wife. After he luckily gets a job and finds his true love, his company dispels him. Liu Dawen, who was a singer in Beidahuang, makes his living in the city by illegally selling cigarettes in the street because he cannot afford a business permit. Later, when he finally gets a professional position, his wife dies in an accident. Guo Liqiang eventually solves his marriage problem, but is arrested for being involved in a *zhiqing*’s protest. The *zhiqing* characters are not linked together by a

central plot, but rather by their shared life situations and sentiments of disillusion, loss, and anger.

The Snow City diverts from the melodramatic mode to a more social realistic style. In this serial, the virtuous do not get rewarded in the end. None of the *zhiqing* characters finds a satisfying solution to their sufferings. In addition, “the villain” is absent in *The Snow City*, unlike the American soap opera and Mexican *telenovela*, in which the villain plays a crucial role and is the most important cause of misery.³¹ In *Times Wasted*, the villain is the leader of the “Cultural Revolution committee” and the “Gang of Four.” In *The Snow City*, the characters all suffer, but their sufferings result from the social and historical context rather than from evil people’s schemes.

For example, in Episode 2, Wang Zhisong and his two other *zhiqing* friends eat in a restaurant. They are provoked into a fight with some customers because the customers laugh at their uniforms, which they used to wear in Beidahuang. This scene ends with their being arrested by the police who clearly take side with the city people. This incident reveals the conflict between the *zhiqing* generation and those who stayed behind in the city during the Cultural Revolution. Although the *zhiqing* earned the rights to return to the city, they did not receive a wholehearted welcome. They were treated as strangers, outsiders, and even trouble makers.

The episodes about the recruitment incident depict a direct confrontation between the *zhiqing* and the city. The Travel Bureau, a governmental enterprise, will employ 150 people and the recruitment is open to the public, particularly to *zhiqing*. This news gives hope to a large number of unemployed educated youths. As only 1,500 application forms will be distributed, thousands of educated youths come one day earlier and line up in front of the building of the Travel Bureau. The exam is actually a deception because the recruitment list has been

prior-determined in favor of children and relatives of officials, cadres, and others in privileged positions. Thus, the city betrays this generation. As the viewer already knows the truth from earlier episodes, the scene, in which the *zhiqing* earnestly plead for more application forms, arouses strong sympathy.

In this way, the city is represented as a hostile force that threatens *zhiqing* characters' survival. However, the city is also their home which they love. They long for it to embrace them, to recognize them for their ten-years of sacrifice, and to offer them opportunities. Therefore, different from melodramatic soap operas in which the virtuous characters unravel the villain's schemes and overcome obstacles, *The Snow City* represents a world where the villain does not exist and the virtuous characters keep losing.

Although *The Snow City* occasionally uses melodramatic music or other modes to create an emotional intensity, realistic modes prevail in most scenes. The scene of Guo Liqing "robbing" a job application form exemplifies this point. In the sequence of the recruitment incident, many *zhiqing* believe it is their chance to get a job. A former *zhiqing* tries to sell one application form to Guo Liqiang for fifty dollars, which he cannot afford. Liqiang begs him to sell at twenty dollars. When the man refuses, he follows him. There is no music, no special movement of camera to create intensity or sadness. In a long take, Liqiang follows him to a railway station, and tries to get the form by force. In the fighting scene, Liqiang takes off his coat and thrusts himself onto the man. They wrestle on the ground, and Liqiang struggles to search for the form.

The fighting is not violent at all. No close-up shots are used to show Liqing's expression. The long angle shot contrasts the empty space and the twisted bodies and creates a sense of indifference of the city towards the *zhiqing*'s predicament. As the preceding episodes have established Liqiang as a loving husband and a respectable person, this scene forms a sharp

contrast to his personality. It captures the desperation of Liqiang, for whom this application form may be his only chance to get a good job and to start a new life. Furthermore, the fact that the exam is a lie makes this scene extremely depressing. It exposes the social reality, which has forced a kind and self-disciplined man to behave in a degrading manner.

This serial has a certain naturalistic style: somber urban space, doomed characters, and a pessimistic tone. The characters are doomed because the history they were drawn in can never be changed—they were victims manipulated by political leaders during the Cultural Revolution, and they carry the historical burden and continue to pay high prices for the past. This doomed feeling is explicitly reflected in a conversation between Zhishong and Wu Yin in the last episode. Wu Ying, an ex-Red Guard and *zhiqing*, participates in a violent fight between two Red Guard factions and witnesses the death of her friend during the Cultural Revolution. She has been living with this traumatic memory and always wishes she could go back to the time before the Cultural Revolution when she was innocent and happy. In this scene, they are rowing a boat on a lake. Wu Ying begins to sing a song, which she used to sing when she was a child. Suddenly, Zhishong stops her because this song reminds him of the years before the Cultural Revolution. He says, “If I could really go back to the past, I would rather die ten years sooner.” Later Wu Ying says in tears, “I know we can never go back to the past. But I still so desperately want to go back.”

Meng Fanhua, a Chinese cultural critic, argues that *zhiqing* literature in the 1980s reflected a nostalgia sentiment, which resulted from *zhiqing*’s disillusion with the present after they returned to the city. He says, “...the city was not the home in their imagination. The ‘little generals’ who had played the role of heroes in the Cultural Revolution could hardly find a position of survival. This led to another trend of nostalgia. A strong rootless sense gave rise to their imaginative travel

between the city and the countryside.”³² *Zhiqing* television serial dramas of the 1980s did not follow this trend. *Times Wasted* emphasizes *zhiqing*’s suffering and contribution, *Snow Storm Tonight* praises the *zhiqing*’s spirit in fighting against harsh environment and unfair treatment, and *The Snow City* underscores the pain and loss both in the past and in the present. *The Snow City* does express the longing of “return,” but it is not a return to the village, but a return to the age of innocence before the Cultural Revolution. It is a longing which can never be fulfilled. The shift from the melodramatic to social realistic style mirrors the shift of concern from a justified assessment in the late 1970s and early 1980s to the *zhiqing*’s social existence in everyday life after their return.

As I have previously discussed in the 1980s television drama production was under the state’s strict regulation, therefore *The Snow City* had to shape its historical reflection to fit into the “mainstream melody.” And while the story criticizes some officials’ ignorance of *zhiqing* problems, it also gives a positive representation of the government. For example, scenes of the local government’s meetings on providing help to the returned educated youths are inserted in realistic depiction of the *zhiqing*’s predicament, such as in episodes 2, 12, and 16. In the last episode the mayor declares that three million dollars will be used to support the *zhiqing* to start their business. Following this exciting conference is a long shot of a train running through a modern bridge towards the camera. The image of mobility symbolizes that progress has been made and that the educated youths and the city will move forward together.

Accompanying this scene is the voice-over of the off-scene narrator: “They are the generation that grow up in Communist China. Today, when the city has not fully recovered from historical trauma, it opens to this generation in earnest. Yes, they have survived everything, and our city also has survived everything. This is exactly the spirit of the People’s Republic of China.

It is exactly the spirit of the generation. Any pressure and difficulty cannot defeat [the city], or [the educated youths].” The message is obvious: it praises the spirit of *zhiquing* as well as the efforts of the government to solve the *zhiquing* problem.

A comparison between Liang Xiaosheng’s novel and the television adaptation reveals the compromise between Liang’s critical intention and television’s “mainstream melody” principle. In his novel, Liang offers a powerful and provocative ending: A *zhiquing* is killed by the police (this novel shows the police unsympathetic towards the *zhiquing*, while the television version avoids such reference to the authority). Two hundred thousand *zhiquing* demonstrate for justice in front of the city government’s office building. The ground collapses.³³ The ending is symbolic and powerful. It expresses the anger of the *zhiquing* generation who sacrificed their youths only to find out they are left behind by history. In contrast, the television serial drama shows the government’s concern for the educated youths and represents the “mainstream melody”—singing highly of the party and the people, and expressing positive values.

Liang Xiaosheng’s letter to the editor of *Popular TV* indicates that this drama had encountered censorship problems before it was finally telecast. Liang is not satisfied with the ending which does not follow his book. He believes the original ending is more profound and richer in meaning.³⁴ However, an ending that does not provide a promising or optimistic solution had little chance to get approval from the censors. Moving from print to television screen, *The Snow City* has to be shaped by the government’s media policy.

My intention is not to make a simplistic causal connection between institutional policy and television texts. As Newcomb and Hirsch have pointed out, it is not unusual that television presents and maintains dominant ideological messages and meanings because, “For the most part, that is what central story-telling systems do in all societies.” They maintain that it is more

important to see “the ways in which television contributes to change than with mapping the obvious ways in which it maintains dominant viewpoints.”³⁵ Chinese television has to follow the state’s policy as it is state-run, but it is more important to find out how television dramas offer new angles of addressing social and historical issues. My analysis of *The Snow City* emphasizes that this serial criticizes social discriminations and the city’s indifference to the *zhiqing*, which earlier *zhiqing* serials did not address. More importantly, it manages to maintain critical reflections and to speak for the *zhiqing* generation through ambiguity, a very common strategy that some Chinese filmmakers have adopted to evade censorship.

For example, the conclusion of *The Snow City* uses abstract imagery to create ambiguity. Although the government meeting declares the promising news of providing financial support to educated youths, the last episode does not end with the scene of a train running forwards which suggests progress and hope. Instead, the train scene is followed by abstract images. At sunset, Yao Yuhui holds a flower spike of cattail, which she takes back from Beidahuang. Wind blows away the flower and leaves only a stick in her hand. There is an extreme close-up shot of her looking at the stick, in contemplation or sadness, and then looking away from the stick and the camera. We hear her interior monologue, in a rather melancholy tone, saying, “It is too hot. The last spike of cattail is broken. It is over. Yes, it is all over. Jane Eyre, spike of cattail, you fill my mind full ...” *Jane Eyre* is Yao Yuhui’s favorite book. During the Cultural Revolution, Jane Eyre is her imagined friend and she keeps a journal to record her internal conversation with the imagined Jane. The “spike of cattail” is an indigenous plant in North China. The one she holds in hand belongs to the man who she loves in Bidahuang. Thus, her words indicate that she still lives in her memory of the past. Concluding the serial with abstract images instead of the image of train suggests a refusal to a simple happy ending, an easy coming to terms with the present.

Some scholars such as Yang Jian criticize *The Snow City* for its confusing standpoint—at one place criticizing the government while at other places praising the government.³⁶ However, it should be recognized that this ambivalence is the dilemma confronted by many Chinese cultural producers, particularly in the 1980s.³⁷ *The Snow City* may not express exactly what Liang Xiaosheng intends, but it gives a realistic depiction of *zhiquing*'s life after their return to the city, which official and academic discourses had neglected, and provides a more profound reflection on *zhingqing* than the preceding *zhiquing* serials. Steven Anderson is right to say that “TV has modeled highly stylized and creative modes of interaction with the past.”³⁸

***The Annals* (Nian Lun, 1994): Historical Reflections in Consumer Culture**

The Annals (45 episodes) covers almost thirty years between the early 1960s to early 1990s. The TV serial revolves around the friendship of six *zhiquing* who spend their childhood together in a city, participate in the Red Guard Movement in their teens, leave their hometown to work as *zhiquing* in Beidahuang, and then return to the city to start a new life. While the first part of the serial drama deals with the way the characters form their friendship during the Cultural Revolution, the latter part focuses on how they support each other after they return to the city.

Liang Xiaosheng, the writer of *The Snow City*, is also the screenwriter of *the Annals*. There are some similarities between these two serials. For example, *The Annals* also depicts the difficult situation of *zhiquing* characters after their return to the city. *Zhiquing*'s life in the early 1960s and the Cultural Revolution is shot in seven episodes, which suggests that *The Annals* is more about the present than about the past, as with *The Snow City*. Nevertheless, produced in a new context of Chinese serial drama's aesthetical maturity and television's increasing commercialization in the 1990s, *The Annals* explores *zhiquing* history from new perspectives and

angles, which demonstrates television's ability to engage historical issues and constantly regenerate historical consciousness.

The Annals is the first serial that explicitly links the *zhiqing* with the Red Guards. As I briefly described in Introduction, the Cultural Revolution started from the Red Guard Movement (1966-1969), the most violent part of the ten-year disaster. Most Red Guards went to villages or farms in the “down to the countryside movement.” Therefore, the Red Guard Movement occupies a crucial position in both the Cultural Revolution and the history of *zhiqing*.³⁹ Despite its historical significance, it is rarely addressed in detail in historical books or films.

The term “Red Guards” has negative connotations. The government denigrated the Red Guard Movement and discredited the 1986 and 1989 students' demonstrations by linking them to Red Guards.⁴⁰ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, even though films about the Cultural Revolution were popular, the Red Guard Movement was rarely depicted. In the 1990s, the fifth-generation directors' films, such as *The Blue Kite* and *Farewell My Concubine*, only revealed the violence of the Red Guard Movement. *Zhiqing* serial dramas in the 1980s only focus on *zhiqing* experience in the “down to the countryside movement” or their struggles in the city after their return. Even though in the 1990s, there were *zhiqing* exhibitions and media coverage of *zhiqing* activities, they did not refer to the Red Guard Movement. Guobin Yang attributes the absence of the Red Guard history in contemporary China to the *zhiqing* generation's refusal to address it:

Although many former educated youth were involved in the Red Guard Movement, that aspect of their lives provides relatively little of the ‘material’ of *zhiqing* nostalgia. This absence is understandable. For one thing, the Red Guard Movement was officially denounced as a source of social chaos, and the label “Red Guards” took on negative connotations in the political discourse of the post-Cultural Revolution period. In contrast, the *zhiqing* identity does not have such politically negative resonance.⁴¹

Yang is right that the official negation of the Red Guard Movement makes it problematic for ex-Red Guard *zhiqing* to remember and talk about this important part of their lives.

The Red Guard Movement is a prominent issue, although unspoken, that always exists in the social and cultural consciousness of China. In an interview, Hu Ping, a well-known writer who was supportive of the Red Guard Movement, said,

In order to correctly evaluate the Red Guards, one must correctly evaluate the various social forces and organizations before the Cultural Revolution. What was the main force of the Cultural Revolution? Were the Red Guards victims or victimizers? Were they devoted, sincere, and naïve sacrificial objects, or devils? Who actually initiated the Cultural Revolution and led China into such a catastrophe, and for what reason? Only when all these are properly assessed can the Red Guards be fairly judged. Somehow, this must eventually be done.⁴²

For many former Red Guards, a complete exclusion of this movement from historical discourses is unjustified. In the late 1990s a number of books and memoirs by ex-Red Guards appeared, expressing their strong need to assess this movement from their own perspectives. The typical reflection on their participation can be best illustrated in the article—“I do not regret,” by An Wenjiang, leader of a Red Guard organization:

Some people think Red Guards rebelled because they were rebellious in nature and had evil thoughts. This is a distortion of them. I haven’t done any statistics, but there must have been thousands and thousands of Red Guards who starved themselves, shouted ‘Long Live Chairman Mao’ in battles, and sacrificed their lives. They are “martyrs” who history refuses to accept. They are innocent sacrifices. They may be disdained or attacked. However, please don’t doubt their strong loyalty.⁴³

In this collection of articles by ex-Red Guards, the main sentiment is that they admit the mistakes in the past, but assert their idealism and love for the country.

Liang Xiaosheng, the screenwriter, was an ex-Red Guard. The Red Guard experience deeply influenced his writing. He is one of the first who wrote on the Red Guard Movement from an

insider's perspective. Most of the stories about the Red Guard characters in *The Annals* are from his autobiographical book—*The Confession of a Red Guard*. When the Cultural Revolution started, he was seventeen, waiting to graduate from middle school.⁴⁴ He participated in the Red Guard Movement, which he strongly believed to be a heroic and revolutionary action. Like other millions of Red Guards, he made all his efforts to go to the Tiananmen Square to see Mao Zedong. In this book, he criticizes extreme violent activities, like gun shots between Red Guard factions and inhuman ways that the Red Guards punished innocent people, and gives a heart-wrenching depiction of his Red Guards friends and some Red Guard leaders who devoted to and died for the revolutionary ideals in which they strongly believed. He criticizes the Red Guard Movement, but does not think it is justified to blame the Red Guards for all the crimes in the Cultural Revolution.

Liang's attitude towards the Red Guards is strongly enunciated in the following words: "Some people denigrate Red Guards as 'Wolf Men' and let off their hatred onto Red Guards, but it is not completely right. In fact, [Red Guards] are victims of the Cultural Revolution. If we ascribe the numerous crimes that were committed in the Cultural Revolution all to Red Guards, we cannot explain them logically."⁴⁵ He compares the Red Guards to Rodin's statue—"The Thinker"—because ex-Red Guards take great responsibility for the nation and have been seriously reflecting on the Cultural Revolution. On the dedication page are written the following words: "I was a Red Guard, but I don't regret." Liang Xiaosheng's personal experience and opinion on this movement are more or less reflected in the way that the Red Guard characters are depicted. *The Annals* avoids a simplistic generalization of the Red Guards as bad people.

In addition to the restrictions set by the official assessment, any attempt to create a sympathetic portrayal of Red Guards has to consider the people who had suffered from the Red

Guard Movement. Many of those people are still alive and demand justice. They criticize that ex-Red Guards are still at large, some are in power. Thus, re-addressing the Red Guard Movement is very problematic, given the complicated emotions it might evoke. The representation of a historical event as sensitive and intricate as the Red Guard Movement cannot simply follow the standard of “authenticity.” *The Annals* strategically deals with the restrictions, conflicts, and anxieties surrounding this topic.

I will describe the first sequence of the Red Guard Movement to show how the main characters are situated in this historical event. An off-screen narrator announces the coming of the Cultural Revolution. Xiaosong and Hao Mei stand on a balcony looking at doves flying across the sky. The doves dissolve into propaganda flyers, falling down from the sky to a street. This indicates the historical transition from peace to chaos. In the street young people are reading propaganda flyers while trucks carrying Red Guards and persecuted people wearing “tall hats” pass through the street.⁴⁶ Throughout this scene we hear broadcast of revolutionary songs and propagandas. Then Xiaosong and Hao Mei see some Red Guards arresting an artist because he has drawn a picture in which Buddha, with his big belly exposed, gives three copies of *Little Red Book* (Mao’s speech) to Monkey King.⁴⁷

The Red Guards criticize that the painter viciously distorts Chairman Mao’s image by comparing Mao to Buddha with an uncovered belly. This painter will be charged of the crime of “active counterrevolutionary,” which means he could be in prison forever or even be executed. Debao, another protagonist, is among these Red Guards. Xiaosong and Hao Mei blame him for participating in it. Debao says, “I didn’t know what was going on. I heard Red Guards shouting—‘down with active counter-revolutionary,’ so I joined the chasing.” Following this incident, some Red Guards force Debao to take off his shoes because they leave footprints in the

shape of “毛” (“Mao”). According to Red Guards’ logic: how can one step Chairman Mao under his feet? So Debao has to walk barefooted.

On the one hand, this scene reveals the absurdity and the atrocity of the Red Guard movement. It captures one primary terror of the Cultural Revolution—the loss of freedom of speech and artistic expression. Nothing was safe and predictable during that period. On the other hand, this sequence clearly tries to prevent a simplistic generalization of Red Guards as aggressive and violent trouble-makers. In this episode, the main characters are observers who remain removed from the Red Guards’ violence, although they are themselves Red Guards. Xiaosong and Hao Mei watch the violence done to the artist and the absurd shoe incident, and are obviously very upset about what is happening. Debao regrets participating in the violence without knowing the truth, and he himself is a victim of the shoe incident.

The tension between criticizing the Red Guard Movement and avoiding generalization is more explicitly reflected in the following scene, in which Hao Mei and Xiaosong discuss about “da zi bao” (big-character poster). “Da zi bao” is a hand-written and wall-mounted poster, using large-sized characters; its content is usually propaganda or criticism. It is the most common form of public criticism during the Cultural Revolution. Xiaosong and Hao Mei are the only ones in their class that have not written a “da zi bao.” If they do not come up with one, they will be subject to other Red Guards’ attack. After choosing Miss Yang, their teacher, as the target of criticism, Xiaosong and Hao Mei discuss how to write this “da zi bao” so that the Red Guard Committee would not treat Miss Yang too badly. This scene conveys two messages: they write “da zi bao” out of self-protection and they care for the person who they involuntarily choose as the target of attack.

A scene in Episode 4 is more explicit in showing the Red Guard characters are innocent.

Xiaosong blames Xu Ke, another protagonist, for humiliating Miss Yang in his “Da zi bao.”

Xu Ke protests that Xiaosong’s “Da zi bao” actually has brought about a more severe punishment to Miss Yang. There is a close-up shot of Xiaosong’s eyes in tears. In the next scene he comes across Miss Yang who is sweeping the stairs, obviously as a punishment. The close-up shot of Xiaosong’s expression suggests that he is stricken by guilt.

Showing the Red Guard Movement from Xiaosong’s point of view and focusing on his suffering, this serial exposes the violence and absurdity of the Cultural Revolution while putting the Red Guard characters at the position of victims. Xiaosong does not intend to make Miss Yang suffer and feels pain for the unexpected consequence of his deed. The sequence on the Red Guard Movement ends with a scene of forgiveness. On the day Xiaosong and his friends leave the city to go to Beidahuang, answering Mao’s call of “going down to the countryside,” Miss Yang comes to see them off. There are two shot/reverse shots between the students standing in the truck waving hands to Miss Yang and Miss Yang waving hands back to them in forgiving smiles. Guilt is figuratively removed.

The Annals emphasizes their identity not simply as Red Guards, but also sons and friends, thus humanizing them. Scenes of participating in the Red Guard Movement parallel with family scenes: Xu Ke makes brick molds to build a new kitchen for the family; Liu Zhengxin helps his father deliver goods; and Xiaosong takes care of his mother. They become concrete individuals who may make mistakes but have love for their teachers, families, and friends and maintain their conscience.

Dominick LaCapra says, “History may never capture certain elements of memory: the feel of an experience, the intensity of joy or suffering, the quality of an occurrence.”⁴⁸ Television history is characterized by emotional intensity, rather than concern for factual description. The

Red Guard Movement in *the Annals* is less an authentic depiction of the historical event than a cultural memory which encompasses different emotional responses and avoids hurting those who lived through this trauma, either the Red Guards or those who were persecuted by them.

Chinese intellectuals have debated the effect of commercialization on television drama. Some criticize its lack of social responsibility, the tendencies towards vulgarity, and the low taste of its audiences. Others embrace commercialization for allowing television drama to “break away from its pedagogic and propagandist tradition, and from its elitist aristocratic tradition.”⁴⁹ Not necessarily disagreeing with the view that contemporary television dramas become more profit-driven, I think the second approach correctly and significantly points out that commercialization brings about more creative space and transforms television’s function from the government’s tool for propaganda to a more viewer-oriented medium. It allows television drama to fully function as a “cultural forum,” to use Newcomb and Hirsch’s term. Addressing the Red Guard Movement, *The Annals* demonstrates television drama’s ability to engage serious and sensitive historical issues and contemporary social and cultural concerns under a market economy.

Intertextual Influence: The *Yearnings* Model and the “Business Circle Drama”

In his textual analysis of the soap opera genre, Robert Allen emphasizes the intertextual codes that structure soap operas. He writes, “Like all cultural products, soap operas exist within networks of other texts to which they inevitably in some way refer, so that the reader is constantly comparing the text being read with the encyclopedia of other texts he or she has experienced.”⁵⁰ His concept can also be applied to *zhiqing* serials. New serials are built on preceding ones with variations. Viewers, particularly the younger generations who have not

experienced the Cultural Revolution, form an idea of the *zhiqing* generation through the continuous *zhiqing* serials as well as other related serial dramas.

While Allen emphasizes the factor of viewing habits, I would suggest that the market plays a significant role in the intertextual codes. Following previous successful dramas is a common strategy of commercial television. As Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch say, “[I]t is in the economic interests of producers to build on audience familiarity with generic patterns and instill novelty into those generically based presentation. Truly innovative forms that use the generic base as a foundation are likely to be among the more successful shows.”⁵¹ Of course, intertextuality does not simply refer to genres. It includes other discourses that are related to the text. Newcomb and Hirsch’s comments highlight the ideas behind the making of a commercial television program.

Different from *Times Wasted* and *The Snow City* which were adapted from *zhiqing* novels, *The Annals* was shot as an original screenplay, which Liang Xiaosheng developed into a novel after this serial’s success. The striking similarity between *The Annals* and *Yearnings* (Ke Wang, fifty-episode, 1991), one of the most popular and significant television serial dramas in Chinese television history,⁵² suggests that *The Annals* is produced on the *Yearnings* model.

Yearnings is the first television serial drama that explicitly touches the issue of the Cultural Revolution. It covers the period from the Cultural Revolution to the late 1980s, with twenty episodes set in the Cultural Revolution. History is represented through vicissitudes of two families—the intellectual Wangs and the working class Luis. The Wang family suffers from the political movement: the father is persecuted and is in prison; the mother dies from illness; the son, Wang Husheng, cannot get a decent job; and the daughter, Wang Yaru, is assigned to do trivial works in the hospital although she is an experienced doctor. However, *Yearnings* does not

emphasize the tragedy of the Wang family; instead, it is structured around the Liu family, particularly Liu Huifang, and portrays how she helps Wang Husheng and Wang Yaru go through the difficulties. The intellectuals are rather depicted unsympathetically: Wang Husheng marries Liu Huifang when his family is ruined by the political movement and then divorces her when his father's case is rectified after the Cultural Revolution; Wang Yaoru treats Huifang badly without knowing that Huifang is mothering her lost child for all those years and has sacrificed a lot for this child. Huifang goes through endless hardships to protect the adopted child and to help the Wang family get reunited. The unselfish love of the Liu family alleviates the pain caused by the Cultural Revolution.

At a symposium on *Yearnings*, Ai Zhisheng, head of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, highly praised the way this serial drama deals with the subject of the Cultural Revolution. He said,

For the sake of providing correct education to the people, we do not approve excessive representation of the barbarian and backward phenomena in the Cultural Revolution. However, the Cultural Revolution was a period when our country underwent tremendous transformations. It provides rich resources for television drama. I think *Yearnings* excellently solves this conflict. It does not excessively depict things like 'wearing tall hat,' fighting, destroying, breaking into private houses, but it profoundly represents the relationship among people, the dramatic changes of social relation, and the joy and sorrow, separation and unity of thousands and thousands of families...*the depiction of the Cultural Revolution in Yearnings is encouraging, not depressing. It does not excessively depict the superficial things, but profoundly represents thousands of kind-hearted ordinary people's lives.*⁵³

Ai's speech reveals the government's attitudes towards media representation of the Cultural Revolution: it should not be a tragedy, should not focus on public violence and the persecuted people, and should not remind people of the "depressing" history; instead, it should sing highly of common people's virtue. Ironically, it is popular culture that provides the government with the

“appropriate” model of addressing the Cultural Revolution. Cultural memory and official history become increasingly complicit and combined in the commercializing environment. With the commercialization of cultural markets, the government has recognized the power of consumer culture and has begun to use popular culture to spread official ideologies and nationalist messages.⁵⁴ A good example is the “Five Ones Project” (wu yi gongcheng) award which the Central Department of Propaganda established in 1992 to honor one book, one theoretical article, one film, one television production, and one play every year that express the “mainstream melody.”⁵⁵

Following the *Yearning* model, *The Annals* interweaves the representation of the Cultural Revolution with stories of ordinary people and families, and gives an “encouraging” portrayal of the Cultural Revolution. I will use the “public struggle” scene in Episode 4 as an illustration. Red Guards are organizing a “public struggle parade,”⁵⁶ and they order work units to provide at least one person to participate (to be publicly attacked and criticized). The factory workers in Xiaosong’s neighborhood are worried because, if the manager is publicly attacked, the factory has to be closed and they would lose their jobs. Xiaosong’s mother decides to help the workers by substituting for the manager in the public parade.

On the day of the parade, Xiaosong’s mother climbs onto the truck on which stand several other people wearing “tall hats” and wooden boards on which are written their “crimes,” with phrases such as “counter-revolutionary,” “rightist,” or “capitalist-roader.” She puts on a “tall hat” prepared by the employees, and a wooden board on which is written “capitalist-roader.” In a light-hearted mood, she asks Xiaosong to prepare some greens and wait for her to cook dinner. This “public struggle” seems to have nothing to do with her. At dark, Xiaosong goes to pick her up. When he finds her, she has picked lots of mushrooms, which she puts in the “tall hat.” The

episode on public violence ends with a beautifully shot scene of Xiaosong taking his mother back home on bicycle. The trauma of the Cultural Revolution is diffused into the love between mother and son, and the happiness of everyday life.

Instead of focusing on the people who were persecuted and suffered, this sequence depicts the public violence in a humorous tone. Like the Liu family in *Yearnings*, Xiaosong's mother does not truly understand the political movement, neither is she interested in it. She is an ordinary mother who cares about her children and a kind-hearted neighbor who is ready to help others. For her, the "public struggle parade" is only a performance. She is happy because she is helping the factory. The "tall hat" in her eyes is simply a container for mushrooms rather than a symbol of humiliation. The past is made easier to watch and remember due to the serial's focus on traditional ethics of family, the simplicity of average people, and an optimistic attitude towards life.

Like *Yearnings*, *The Annals* covers both the Cultural Revolution and the post-Cultural Revolution period. In *Yearnings*, after the Cultural Revolution the wrongly persecuted people are rehabilitated, the broken families are reunited, and people begin to live a peaceful life. In *The Annals*, all *zhiqing* characters except Debao become successful in the business fields—Zhengxin becomes the general manager of a big company; Xiaosong works abroad at an international company; Xu Ke runs his own business; Hao Mei becomes a fashion designer; and Zhang Meng is director of a company.

The conspicuous emphasis on *zhiqing* characters' success in the business world references the popular "business circle drama" (*shang jie pian*). In the early 1990s, economic construction became the top agenda of the nation. The economic transformation and a new concept of successful entrepreneurs as national heroes became hot subjects for television dramas. "Business

circle drama” came into being. This genre primarily resolves around how main characters overcome various difficulties and eventually achieve success in the business world. *Miss P.R.* (gong guan xiaojie, 1991), *Love of Pear River* (qing mang zhu jiang, 1993), and *Beijingers in New York* (beijing ren zai niuyue, 1993) all had very high viewing rates. It is quite likely that this genre influenced the making of *The Annals*.

The Annals praises traditional ethics of family, marriage and friendship to balance the glamour given to materialism. This balanced representation gained enthusiastic reception from the government. On November 13, 1994, Liu Zhongde, Deputy-Minister of the Department of Propaganda and Minister of the Ministry of Culture, met the production group of *The Annals* and some main actors, and highly praised the national spirit and ethics embodied in this serial:

The Annals depicts this generation’s growth, and profoundly reflects the pure and genuine feelings between people in socialist China. The genuine feelings, regardless of time, will always unite people. *This is the greatness of socialist system. What connects people in capitalist society is money instead of genuine feelings...*the prosperity we want is not prosperity in general, but the real prosperity that is compatible to our epoch.⁵⁷

This speech conveys the government’s ambivalence about the market economy: on the one hand, the government has accepted the capitalist economic system; on the other hand, it is concerned about losing control over ideology, and warns people against capitalist spiritual corruption. *The Annals* combines the *Yearnings* model and the generic feature of “business circle drama,” that is, traditional Chinese ethics and virtues and the new desire for prosperity and success embraced by the free market economy. It did not come as a surprise that it won the “Five Ones Project” award in 1995.

Nostalgia Culture as a Context

Beside the explicit depiction of the Cultural Revolution, *The Annals* differs from the preceding *zhiqing* serial dramas by giving a nostalgic portrayal of *zhiqing*'s lives in the countryside. The main characters' experience in Baidahuang is poetically depicted in Episodes 5, 6 and 7. The three episodes are not as much about hard, difficult work as about love for the land, friendship, and romance. The scene of paying salute to the land is one example. Standing in the middle of the vast field, with a group of *zhiqing* behind him, the commander of the military construction corps gives a speech to the land which they are going to spend ten years cultivating:

“Beidahuang, my mother!
 Beidahuang, you uncultivated virgin land!
 The black soil of Beidahuang, please listen carefully,
 How dearly we respect you!
 How venerating we feel about you!
 We, including those who have just arrived,
 And those who came earlier,
 Belong to you!
 In order to turn you into Beisdachang [the Great Grain Storehouse],
 We do not care how much sweat we shed.
 From now on, between you and us,
 Only you can lose temper and refuse us.
 We will never do you wrong...”

This poetic and passionate speech evokes a sense of solemnity and pride. It expresses the intimate relation between the land and the educated youths; the land is not treated as inanimate, but as “a mother,” with love and compassion. *Zhiqing*'s work is romanticized as establishing a relationship with the Mother. Throughout the three episodes, shots of white birches, golden wheat, and rivers all reveal the beauty of the landscape and the *zhiqing*'s affection for it.

Another typical example of romanticized depictions of *zhiqing* life is the scene of fighting a fire in Episode 5. Thousands of *zhiqing* struggle to put out a big fire in the forest. However, the fire scene quickly changes to a love sequence. Zhengxin rescues Zhang Meng from the fire and then they lose their way in the woods. A thunderstorm comes, creating a melodramatic

atmosphere for a confession of love. This episode ends with their passionate embrace and kiss.

Fires are common plots in *zhiqing* serials and films in the 1980s as evidence of the dangerous living conditions which the educated youths had to deal with. A fire usually ends with the death of *zhiqing* character(s), as in *Our Fields* and *Snow Storm Tonight*. From *zhiqing* serials of the 1980s to the 1990s, sacrifice shifts to romance, trauma shifts to nostalgia.

The nostalgia mode was a trend in the *zhiqing* television serials in the 1990s. For example, *China's Zhiqing Tribe* (Zhongguo zhiqing buluo, 8 episodes, 1993) depicts the life of several *zhiqing* friends in the early 1990s in the city of Guangzhou. Some are struggling with making a living while others become successful businessmen. Simplicity, purity, and idealism are destroyed by modern life. The main character quits his editorial job in protest of the tabloidization of the newspaper. A couple, who were deeply in love when they worked in a village during the Cultural Revolution, become strangers. Money does not bring about a sense of fulfillment and happiness. The serial drama ends with a tracking shot of some old photos displayed in a gallery. In the pictures, educated youths are working in the fields, doing everyday chores, enjoying leisure time entertainment, or simply standing casually. All are smiling. Nostalgia for the past is embodied in the depressing depiction of the present, and a sentimental longing for better times.

In the previous chapter, I have discussed that nostalgic sentiment, which emerged in the early 1990s, is attributed to the drastic social and economic changes. *Zhiqing* nostalgia is part of the prevalent nostalgia culture. Guo Bingyan states that *zhiqing* nostalgia is the result of the present “materialism, excessive rationalization, and a lack of meaning and purpose.”⁵⁸ In one interview, Liang Xiaosheng explained that he wanted to use *The Annals* to warn viewers of the increasing moral deterioration and weakening of traditional ethics resulted from consumerism

and commercialism:

In recent years, familial love, friendship, traditional ethics and lofty ideals, and sincere human relation are disappearing in our real life. People feel confused, and gradually become indifferent. This phenomenon shocks me. I think television serial drama is one of the cultural forms that can most directly influence people. So I decide to use this method to do what I should do.⁵⁹

Liang's words confirm Guo Bingyan's interpretation of *zhiqing* nostalgia. *The Annals*, in a dramatized form, plays out the conflicts between modernity and tradition and reflects contemporary social anxieties and aspirations. Raymond Williams has insightfully remarked that there is a continuum between the enclosed room in the TV drama and our living space. He argues that TV dramas are constructed on specific conventions, which are "profoundly worked and reworked in our actual living relationships. They are our ways of seeing and knowing, which every day we put into practice, and while the conventions hold, while the relationships hold, most practice confirms them."⁶⁰ In the specific case of contemporary *zhiqing* serial dramas, nostalgic scenarios represent our ways of seeing the everyday world.

In addition to social anxiety for moral deterioration, consumption-oriented nostalgia culture is another crucial factor that has impacted the production of *Zhiqing* television dramas, including *The Annals*. In November 1990 in Beijing there was a museum exhibition with the theme of "*Our Spiritual Attachment to the Black Soil—A Retrospective Exhibit about the Educated Youth of Beidahuang*," which featured the history of the "down to the countryside movement" in the northernmost part of China. Approximately 150,000 people, mostly former educated youths, visited the exhibition. Other cities also organized similar events.⁶¹ In addition to exhibitions, "homecoming" trips to the places where *zhiqing* had spent their youth became a fad.

Interestingly, these *zhiqing* activities are reflected in *zhiqing* serial dramas. *China's Zhiqing*

Tribe ends with a long tracking shot of old *zhiqing* photos on display inside a museum. The main female protagonist goes back to the village after her failure in career and marriage. This “home-coming” theme is more obvious in *Unpaid Debts* (Nie zai, 1994), which revolves around five children coming to Shanghai to look for their parent(s) who returned to the city in 1979 and left them in the countryside.⁶² Their parents have formed new families; therefore, the kids’ arrival forces them to confront their past which they have tried to forget. At the end of the serial, three of the five children decide to go back to their villages. At the train station, their parents and their new families see them off. Meixia’s father, the central character, jumps onto the train at the last minute. After over ten years since he returned to the city, he eventually finds the courage to pay a visit to the village and face his past. For the first time, we see him smiling wholeheartedly. Throughout this serial, he tries to persuade his wife to accept Meixia and is constantly frustrated by his wife’s stubbornness. This cathartic ending clearly dramatizes the theme of “returning” or “homecoming,” suggesting that the trip will bring him peace and relieve his guilt.

The *Zhiqing* television serial drama, as both a cultural and a commercial form, interacts with other *zhiqing* expressions. The characters’ desire to go back to “home” was fulfilled in reality by *zhiqing*, or vice versa, the *zhiqing*’s actual “homecoming” trips were inspired by *Zhiqing* serial dramas. As Dai Jinhua comments, the “homecoming” was “more like a self-confirmation in the sense of revisiting home after one has left and become a success, or like the popularity of a new type of item on travel itineraries. Here, consumer culture repeatedly demonstrated its ability to adopt the ways of consumer ideology.”⁶³ Although *The Annals* does not include scenes of exhibition or of homecoming, its nostalgic depiction of *zhiqing* characters’ lives in Beidahuang is, to some extent, influenced by the prevailing nostalgia culture in the early and mid 1990s. Liang Xiaosheng, actually, was one of the organizers of the exhibition—“*Our Spiritual Attachment to*

the Black Soil.” In this sense, he was one of the producers of *zhiqing* nostalgic consumer culture, and thus *The Annals* was likely to be constructed within the nostalgia discourses.

Gender and Nation

Despite the thematic and stylistic differences among the *zhiqing* serials under study, they share a concern with *zhiqing* identity and a desire to write *zhiqing* into national history. Almost all *zhiqing* television serials explicitly link the *zhiqing* generation with the nation. For example, in *The Snow City* and *The Annals*, an off-screen narrator addresses *zhiqing* as “the generation that grows up with the People’s Republic of China,” or as “the generation of the same age as the People’s Republic of China.” In the end of *The Snow City*, the off-screen narrator declares, “Yes, [the *zhiqing*] have survived everything, and our city also has survived everything. This is exactly the spirit of the People’s Republic of China. It is exactly the spirit of the generation.”⁶⁴ The repetitive enunciations enhance the connection between *zhiqing* and the nation, and highlights *Zhiqing* as national subjects.

The emphasis on the concept of nation and national identity may explain why these serials under study were all telecast on CCTV, China’s only national network.⁶⁵ CCTV is a channel through which the state intends to produce a national culture and construct a national consciousness. The *zhiqing* serial fits into this nationalist category, even though it may not be intended to express nationalism. However, the national subjects or heroes represented by *zhiqing* characters are increasingly gendered with the commercialization of television drama. While the early *zhiqing* serials create strong female *zhiqing* characters and assert their agency as historical subjects (contrasting to the nostalgic films of this era which I addressed in Chapter Three), *zhiqing* serials in the 1990s depict male *zhiqing* as the guardians of traditional ethics and national

dignity. The following section will illustrate this point.

In *Times Wasted*, Jianchun occupies as central a position as Bizhou. Going through the political movement, she changes from a naïve girl to an independent woman. In the end of the serial, she disregards her family's objection to her marriage with Bizhou and follows her heart. *The Snow City* depicts three strong female *zhiqing* characters fighting bravely to change their fates. Yao Yuhui, the mayor's daughter, refuses to take advantage of her social status; instead of accepting her mother's arrangement for her employment at the city's Travel Bureau, she exposes the Travel Bureau's fraudulent recruitment exam which gives false hope to unemployed *zhiqing*. Shufang, who struggles between guilt over her ex-boyfriend and love for her husband, makes every effort to find a solution to her dilemma. Wu Yin, who is manipulated by her husband, gets herself out of this marriage and actively pursues her true love. They are actually the only people who act and make things happen, contrasting with male *zhiqing* characters who only bear the harsh social realities in a passive way. Moreover, the female *zhiqing* characters are explicitly created as historical subjects. I have mentioned before that Wu Yin carries the wound of the Red Guard Movement. Yuhui is the main bridge connecting the past and the present. The *zhiqing*'s lives at Beidahuang are revealed to the viewer through her memories.

In striking contrast to those produced in the 1980s, *Zhiqing* serials in the 1990s became essentially a masculine discourse which, I would argue, is largely attributed to consumerism in a new market economy. Complicated feelings, anxieties, and desires evoked by consumerism are projected on the redefinition and reconstruction of gender and nation. In *zhiqing* serial dramas that express negative attitudes towards consumerism, female *zhiqing* characters are corrupted in the materialist world. In dramas which give positive portrayals of the market economy, women's success is balanced with domesticity and traditional femininity. In either category, male

characters occupy the center of narratives and act as the agent of history while female *zhiqing* are pushed off the center stage of history and nation. I will illustrate my point with three popular *zhiqing* serials—*China's Zhiqing Tribe*, *Unpaid Debts*, and *The Annals*.

In *China's Zhiqing Tribe*, the most successful *zhiqing* character is Rao Yiwei, who becomes the CEO of a big company. In the sequences set in the countryside, she is a good mother, always carrying her baby. Her first appearance after she and other *zhiqing* characters return to the city immediately presents her as a different person. Dressed fashionably and professionally, she gives a welcome speech to the guests who have come to attend her company's anniversary party. This scene tells us that she is successful in the business world, and she has money and power. However, as the serial unfolds, we begin to know that she is an “incomplete” woman because of the lack of true love. Ten years before, on the day of returning to the city, thousands of *zhiqing* struggle to get on the train. Yiwei carries her baby, waiting for her husband, Hou Guo, who has promised to meet them after having all things settled in the village. However, when the train is going to depart, Hou Guo does not show up due to an accident. The baby is too sick to take a long trip. In this commotion, Yiwei makes a choice that she will regret for her whole life—she leaves the baby behind and gets on the train. Hou Guo divorces her after he comes back to the city.

After her efforts of gaining back Hou Guo's love fail, Yiwei marries her chauffeur, who only wants her money, and the marriage soon falls apart. In the last episode, she goes back home from a business meeting and catches her new husband in bed with another woman. She angrily returns to the living room. In a long angle shot, her weary body against a window contrasts to the foreground empty space. The shot evokes a sense of loneliness. Before her husband leaves the house, he blames her for spending more time on work than being a wife. She collapses onto a

couch, and then, almost the same moment, she receives a call informing her that her manager has run away with all the money she invested on a huge construction project. At the end of the drama, she returns to the village where she and her *zhiqing* friends spent their youth, a symbolic gesture to seek the lost innocence. The ending not only suggests that a woman cannot have both power and love, but also erases her presence from the cosmopolitan business world.

In *Unpaid Debts*, two female *zhiqing* leave their children in the village and remarry in the city.⁶⁶ This serial drama shows that they live a luxurious but empty life. Yu Yueying marries a rich entrepreneur, who has love affairs with different women. Her husband only wants a submissive wife who takes care of the family and does not interfere with his licentious lifestyle. Yueying passively endures her husband and takes no action when he sleeps with his mistress in their house. Meanwhile she starts an affair with a good-for-nothing man who only cares about money (the serial drama does not indicate that she does it for revenge). Troubled with her own marriage life, Yueying cannot take good care of Yonghui, her son whom she has left in the village. In the end, Yonghui is arrested for stealing. Tianming's mother, Yang Shaoquan, marries a rich man who is doing business in Japan. Although always appearing in beautiful and sexy dresses, Shaoquan feels lonely and empty. She starts an affair with a photographer, who simply wants sex. In the end, she is deserted by both her lover and her husband. Disappointed at what he sees in the city, Tianming decides to go back to the village. Thus, this drama suggests that the female *zhiqing* characters are unable to manage their own lives and are unqualified mothers.

In contrast to the passive female *zhiqing* characters, the countrywomen of Dai ethnicity, whom the male *zhiqing* characters married during the Cultural Revolution, represent the perfect womanhood which men fantasize. In male *zhiqing* characters' memories, they are beautiful, gentle, understanding, and self-sacrificing. In one scene, Meixia's father says to his friends, "If it

were not for returning to the city, I would rather have spent my whole life with [Meixia's mother]." The male *zhiqing*'s memory sequences express a strong nostalgia for the past, which is symbolized by the country women. The theme song of *Unpaid Debts*—"Xiao Fang"—is an explicit expression of men's desire for the ideal woman:

In the village there is a girl whose name is Xiao Fang;
 She is pretty and kind-hearted;
 She has big beautiful eyes
 And long plaits.
 On the night before I left for the city,
 You and I came to the riverside,
 Tears pouring down
 Along with the river.
 Thank you for your love,
 Which I will never forget in my whole life;
 Thank you for your gentleness,
 Which accompanied me throughout that age.
 Many times I look back at the road I took,
 Giving my best wishes to you—kind-hearted girl;
 Many times I look back at the road I took,
 Seeing you standing by the river.

This song depicts a girl who is pretty and generous in giving love without asking anything in return. Like the Dai women who agree to divorce so that their *zhiqing* husbands can return to the city, "Xiao Fang" sees her lover leaving, with no complaint, but only love. The ideal womanhood which "Xiao Fang" stands for refers to feminine beauty, self-sacrifice, subordination, and domesticity. This song distorts the traumatic fact that "Xiao Fang" and lots of countrywomen alike were deserted by male *zhiqing*. Thus, male *zhiqing*'s longing for "Xiao Fang" is simply an expression of male narcissism. In male *zhiqing*'s nostalgia, both country women's and female *zhiqing*'s voices are erased.

Different from *China's Zhiqing Tribe* and *Unpaid Debts*, *The Annals* has a positive portrayal of the economic transformation, and the two female *zhiqing* characters, Hao Mei and Zhang

Meng, are successful in their career. Nevertheless, *The Annals* does not emphasize their career; instead it highlights their vulnerability and motherhood. During the Cultural Revolution, Hao Mei is driven out of her house because her parents are persecuted. The four male protagonists help her to get back her belongings. The first night in Beidahuang, she faints after being bitten by a snake, and Xiaosong and other male *zhiqing* save her. After the Cultural Revolution, she loses her voice permanently from a serious illness, and since then she has been taken care of by the four male protagonists. Zhang Meng suffers from her father's persecution during the Cultural Revolution; in order to return to the city, she abandons her daughter; after she comes back to the city, Debao and Zhengxin help her to get reunited with her daughter.

Though both Hao Mei and Zhang Meng are victims of the Cultural Revolution, there are no scenes that show them struggle with and then overcome difficulties. Although they achieve success in the city, they are less associated with glory in the business world than with their roles as mothers. In most of the episodes about Hao Mei, she takes care of her son who is always sick. The episodes on Zhang Meng revolve around how she works out her relationship with her daughter. We seldom see Hao Mei and Zhang Meng in their work places. In some sense, *The Annals* tries to make a balance between women's traditional roles and their presence in the business world.

I do not want to create an impression that Chinese popular culture in the early and mid 1990s denied women's presence in the world of money and power. Actually, many serial dramas centralize women characters who achieve success through their hard work. These women are called "white-collar beauties," who are pretty, stylish, intelligent and successful. However, these serials always link their success with traditional femininity, such as *Love in Pearl River* (Qing Man Zhu Jiang, 1994), and *East Sunrise, West Rain* (Dongbian Ri Chu, Xibian Yu).

Unlike female *zhiqing*'s problematic presence in the business world, male *zhiqing* are portrayed as the guardians of morality and national dignity. In *China's Zhiqing Tribe*, Lin Dachuan, editor of a local newspaper, refuses to accept "popular taste" (more stories of crime and pornography) as the governing principle of the newspaper. Hou Guo, another main character, loses his legs in a fire accident when he works in a village. After returning to the city, he makes a living by mending shoes. Instead of complaining about life, he lives in honesty and dignity.

Male *zhiqing* as national heroes are strongly represented in *The Annals*, particularly through the characterization of Liu Zhengxin, who is able to gain success in the competitive commercial world, and meantime maintains traditional ethics—respecting parents and helping friends, and most importantly, loving the country. Zhengxin goes through suffering, struggling, surviving before becoming a successful entrepreneur. His achievement is closely linked to his efforts to protect the dignity of the nation. In the episodes about a business negotiation between Zhengxin's company and a big Japanese company, the business deal becomes a competition between China and Japan. Before the Japanese representatives arrive, Zhengxin tells his workers to show Chinese people's dignity in front of the Japanese businessmen. For example, the employees should not bow too low when greeting the Japanese. The business meetings always end with intense debates related to Chinese and Japanese politics and culture. They do not reach an agreement on the deal, but Zhengxin gains respect from the Japanese representative who eventually understands the Chinese people and the greatness of Chinese culture.

At a conference on *The Annals*, a discussant says, "For me, the most touching scene is the negation between Liu Zhengxin and the Japanese. It is a very exciting moment when Liu Zhengxin leaves the meeting angrily after hearing the impossible terms [proposed by the Japanese party]. Although in terms of diplomatic etiquette it is inappropriate, the viewers can

understand his reaction.”⁶⁷ What he says is true. Since the anti-Japanese war has been a popular subject in historical films for over forty years, anything related to Japan can provide an effective material to enhance nationalism and win Chinese viewers’ applause.

Besides Zhengxin, Xiaosong’s success is also linked to his love for the country. Before going abroad, he says to his mother, “Even if I would travel to all kinds of places and call myself a number of foreign names, when I die in a foreign land, people there would point at my tomb and say, ‘Here is buried a foreigner.’ I will come back. It should be the day when I can do something meaningful for China.” His words clearly tell the viewer that a good citizen should always be proud of being a Chinese and to contribute to the motherland. The market and the state are perfectly combined in the new definition of citizenship: to become successful in career and meanwhile to serve the nation.

Female *zhiqing* characters are not structured within this nationalist discourse. The strong association between women and the nation in the socialist discourse is gradually weakened by popular culture in contemporary China. Why is a man’s success in the business world represented as a glorious contribution to the nation, whereas a woman’s success represented as either problematic or as being balanced by her performance of traditional feminine duties? I would argue that “nation” in popular discourse has become an increasingly masculinized concept. Men become the spokesmen for the nation as well as the faithful guardians of the nation’s integrity and dignity. Women may have power as consumers, but do not have the legitimacy to defend and represent the nation. If we agree that nationalism is a hegemonic ideology imposed by the state, we should praise popular culture for breaking the symbolic connection between women and the nation. However, while setting women free from nationalist discourses, the *zhiqing* television serial drama confines women to a patriarchal system.

In her study of the relation between nation and gender, Purnima Mankekar says that although nationalism is “intrinsically both gendered and engendering, creating specific subject positions for men and for women,” television viewers “variously interpret, appropriate, resist, and negotiate these subject positions.”⁶⁸ I agree with her that viewers may interpret the discourse of nationalism differently to negotiate with or resist the dominant ideology. It is quite possible that many female viewers simply enjoy the glamorous and powerful presence of women entrepreneurs while ignoring the traditional roles, thus such readings empower them. Nevertheless, my focus in this chapter is television as a cultural form which is structured with underlying social and cultural ideologies. Modleski and Gledhill, while affirming audiences’ resistance against mass culture’s manipulation, point out that it is important to identify the dominant political and cultural structure underneath discursive presentations and to explore how popular texts function as a site of struggle between male and female voices over the meaning of the symbol “woman.”⁶⁹ Agreeing with them, I study the television serial as a parameter of society and cultural sentiment, and a cultural site where gender is contested and defined.

In this chapter I studied three *zhiqing* serial dramas to demonstrate that the televisual reconstruction of the Red Guard Movement and the “down to the countryside movement” are shaped by both the changing relationships between television, the state, and the market, and by social, cultural, and intertextual discourses. *Times Wasted*, through melodramatic representation, emphasizes the *zhiqing*’s suffering in the past and their contributions to the country, articulating the *zhiqing* generation’s desire for justified assessment. *The Snow City* gives a more realistic picture of the impact of the “down to the countryside movement” on the *zhiqing*, shifting from the past to *zhiqing*’s everyday lives in the city. *The Annals*, for the first time in television history, depicts the sensitive Red Guard Movement and links the *zhiqing* and the Red Guards, while

fitting into both the state's ideology and the cultural market. The *zhiqing* serial drama fills in the absence of the Cultural Revolution in the historical drama, bringing historical issues to public consciousness through individual stories of the *zhiqing*.

The meanings of these dramas are not finalized within the texts. As Edgerton claims, television should be viewed as “a means by which unprecedentedly large audiences can become increasingly aware of and captivated by the stories and figures of the past, spurring some viewers to pursue their newfound historical interests beyond the screen and into other forms of popular and professional history.”⁷⁰ The following chapter will address how ordinary people publicize their personal memories of the Cultural Revolution and actively participate in historical reflection and interpretation.

Chapter Five

Photo-textual Memories:

Lao Zhaopian (Old Photos) and the People's History

In the late 1990s, *Lao Zhaopian* (Old Photos), a magazine which publishes old photographs and short descriptive or explanatory essays, gained tremendous popularity in mainland China, and created an “old photo craze” (*Lao zhaopian re*).¹ Shandong Pictorial Press, a newly established provincial publishing house, launched this magazine in December 1996. The first three issues were reprinted six to seven times each. By October 1997, more than 1.2 million copies had been sold.² Following its sweeping success, numerous “old photo” books appeared, such as *Old Photo Album* (*Lao Xiangce*), *A Century of Old Photos* (*Bainian lao zhaopian*), and *Zhiqing Old Photos* (*Zhiqing lao zhaopian*). When the “craze” began to fade a few years later, *Lao Zhaopian* maintained its sales volume at 40,000 copies per issue and it has remained at that level till today.

Scholars like Zhao Jingrong and Edward S. Krebs consider the popularity of *Lao Zhaopian* to be the cultural expression of nostalgic sentiment that became prevalent in the 1990s.³ For example, Zhao Jingrong says, “*Lao Zhaopian* awakens and enforces the nostalgia sentiment of the people, and thus turns nostalgia into a trendy spiritual fad.”⁴ Shandong Pictorial Press also originally positioned this publication within the cultural context of nostalgia. The launching issue includes a short article “Nostalgia Is a Beautiful Feeling,” written by Wang Jiaming, general editor of the publishing house.⁵ He writes, “The twentieth century is approaching its end. A conspicuous feature of the end of a century is a widespread nostalgic sentiment...thus, *Lao Zhaopian* is born.” Although I agree that nostalgia has played a significant role in the emergence

of *Lao Zhaopian* and its subsequent popularity, I would argue that the perspective of nostalgia simplifies *Lao Zhaopian*. For example, the large number of photos and heart-wrenching writings related to the Cultural Revolution cannot comfortably fit into the discourse of nostalgia. There are more than sixty photos and essays about the Cultural Revolution in the first twenty issues (1996 – 2001), not including those that refer to the political movements in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Borrowing from the vocabulary of Alex Huges, Andrea Noble, and Wu Hung, I categorize this type of integrated visual and textual representation as “photo-text.”⁶ In their anthology of photographic studies—*Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, Huges and Noble use the term “phototext” to emphasize photographs as a form of narrative that challenges the traditional view of photographs as secondary to written narratives. Wu Huang categorizes this form of *Lao Zhaopian* as “photo/text,” which suggests the equivalent function and importance of photographs and written texts. He explains, “[P]hotographic images in such compositions never simply ‘illustrate’ the accompanying texts; nor do the texts merely ‘explain’ the photographs. Rather, images provide stimuli, clues, and sites for reconstructing history and offering recollections.” I use the term “photo-text” because it can best express the reciprocal relationship between photographic images and written narratives as well as the intersection between these two forms of narratives.

My textual analysis will not only demonstrate how individuals remember and reflect on the Cultural Revolution period, but also emphasize the unique form of photo-text as a powerful medium through which sensitive historical topics are brought to the public’s attention. The textual analysis of the photo-texts is complemented by my archival research on readers’ letters, which I did at Shandong Pictorial Press in Ji Nan in September 2006. The nineteenth issue of

Lao Zhaopian invited readers to complete a survey, which includes a few simple questions:

“What are your favorite columns? What columns are you dissatisfied with? What do you think of this magazine? What suggestion would you like to give us?” About 180 people responded.⁷

Instead of simply filling out the form, many readers wrote down their expectations, opinions and suggestions on separate sheets. These results indicate that these readers value *Lao Zhaopian* as a serious publication that reveals true history—the history that is erased, distorted or manipulated by the government.

This chapter is composed of three parts. First, I will discuss the unique photo-textual form of *Lao Zhaopian* and demonstrate how and why this form is enthusiastically embraced by the reader. Then I will examine individual photo-texts related to the Cultural Revolution. I am concerned with how common people use their personal photos to retell this particular history, and what role *Lao Zhaopian* plays in reconstructing and rethinking the traumatic period. Special attention will also be given to women’s memories. In the last part I will study how the reader responds to the photo-textual memories of the Cultural Revolution. My research shows that both contributors and readers actively participate in writing personal memories of the Cultural Revolution into history. Such accounts have repositioned *Lao Zhaopian* as the people’s history and created a public forum for personal histories to be seen and heard.

The Form of Photo-textual Memory

Lao Zhaopian sets the following guidelines for contributions: “All provided photos must be taken twenty years ago. They should have a certain degree of clarity. The photo(s) should represent a certain event, person, object, custom, or fashion style. The accompanying essay should be written about the photo(s). There are no particular requirements as regards to writing

styles. It can be a biography, an essay, a short note, an archaeological report or a statement.”

The photo-texts of the launching issue, which were mostly provided by the editors and others who worked on this new publication, set an example for contributors. The photos were rarely seen in history books, the stories were interesting and informative, and the essays were characterized by simplicity and straightforwardness. The successive issues began to publish primarily contributors' works. Feng Keli, the chief editor, told me that about fifty percent of the photo-texts are from people who work in archival collection, history, and archeology or who are interested in collecting photos. Their photo-texts are primarily anecdotes about historical events, stories about famous people, or essays about interesting cultures and customs from the late nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. In contrast to official history which emphasizes the nation, grand events, and historical figures, these photo-texts give priority to small incidents, daily life, and average people. I am more interested in the photo-texts provided by ordinary people; they are usually personal photos accompanied by short explanatory essays, which may range from 50 to 1,000 words. Most of these personal photo-texts are displayed in the “Private Album” column, a favorite among readers.

The personal photos in *Lao Zhaopian* include snapshots and formal family or individual portraits taken by professional photographers. The former constitute what anthropologist Richard Chalfen calls “the home mode of visual communication,” which includes family album snapshots, wedding albums, baby photos, and home movies. The formal family photos taken by professionals can loosely fit into this category because they were originally intended to be used for private purposes, for the pleasure shared among family members or close friends rather than for public display. Home mode photography had not been given as much attention as journalistic photographs prior to the 1970s. One possible reason is that it was not seriously considered as

historical documentenation because of its focus on private and family events, rather than big historical scenes, like war or national elections, which were the recurring subjects of journalistic photographs. Since the 1970s, thanks to scholars such as Richard Chalfen, John Kouwenhoven and Marianne Hirsch,⁸ studies of photography have been extended from professional and public fields to the private realm. These view snapshots as a way of looking and a means of representing what people think is important in the everyday world. In Kouwenhoven's words: "Unwittingly, amateur snapshooters were revolutionizing mankind's way of seeing. We do not yet realize, I think, how fundamentally snapshots altered the way people saw one another and the world around them by reshaping our conceptions of what is real and therefore of what is important."⁹

A unique value of home mode photography, as many scholars have pointed out, is its "documenting" quality.¹⁰ In her dissertation on veterans' memories of the Vietnam War, Jennifer M. Tiernan distinguishes snapshots from official and journalistic photographs of combat. She says that the reasons for creating snapshots "are very personal and are in direct contrast to the very public purposes official and journalistic photographs of combat serve. There was no mass public awaiting the image, no organization planning to use the image to represent a particular viewpoint of the war effort, and no explicit journalistic standard for technical or compositional excellence to uphold."¹¹ She indicates that the significance of snapshots is that they do not carry intentional, larger social or political messages, and that they are merely for personal and private use. The spontaneity embodied in personal photos grants them a certain degree of credibility.

While affirming the significance of home mode photography, Chalfen gives a more balanced view on the "evidentiary quality" of the "naïve" snapshot image. In his seminal book *Snapshot*

Version of Life, Chalfen argues that home mode photography is a social process and represents the photographer's vision of the world.¹² Thus, even a snapshot involves a certain point of view. He also warns us of consumer culture's manipulation of snapshot images for pragmatic purposes. For example, snapshots are increasingly used in advertisements for travel, or in TV commercials which promote a particular weight reduction plan by juxtaposing pictures of overweight men and women with slimmer figures of the same people after they have participated in the plan. Chalfen notes, "The home mode image seems to lend an air of authenticity, of certain reality, of unquestionable truth to forms of persuasive discourse. It is suggested that a conventionalized pattern of representation has been used to promote an untampered, unmediated (read 'unstaged') view of reality which, in turn, helps reader/viewers believe they are gaining 'an inside look.' In short, we are witnessing an exploitation of home mode imagery in the construction of credibility."¹³

I agree with Chalfen that we should be aware of the ways consumer culture usurps "the look of reality." Nevertheless, a skeptical attitude does not mean a complete negation of the "documenting" function of home mode photographs. Particularly in the cases where public discourse regarding certain histories is strictly controlled by the authorities, and when historical facts are kept out of people's reach, home mode photographs are powerful evidence of a past, speaking to the people in the authentic voice of individuals. These photos stand for what Roland Barthes calls "that-has-been"—the objects within the frame were once there. Barthes states, "The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation."¹⁴ Photographs function as historical evidence, sustaining the passage of time.¹⁵

The personal photos in *Lao Zhaopian* are appreciated by the reader for “that-has-been.”

There is a conspicuous lack of visual records of the Cultural Revolution. People may occasionally see documentary footage of thousands of people gathered at Tiananmen Square to adore Mao Zedong or footage of crowds reading “big-character letters” (da zi bao) in the streets. Nonetheless, there is no documentary footage of public violence or individual victims, except in banned films, which are only available in pirated DVD markets. *Lao Zhaopian* was the first publication that allowed photos of political trauma to be seen in public. These photographs not only function as personal testimonies of the horror and absurdity of the Cultural Revolution but also reveal the haunting effects of the movement on those who were involved.

The snapshots and formal family portraits stand for, or are believed by the reader to stand for, naturalness, and hence “authenticity.” Here, I do not intend to argue that snapshots or personal photos have greater historical value than journalistic photographs or docudramas, but rather to emphasize the way that the reader evaluates the photos in *Lao Zhaopian*. In my archival research on readers’ letters, almost all of them praise *Lao Zhaopian* for its “authenticity.” The following excerpts from their letters are good examples:

First of all I want to thank you for being the first to record and illustrate history in this form. Many are about what average people saw and experienced. But this is the real history. It is pointless to judge whether it is official or non-official, or whether it ‘conforms to the trend.’¹⁶ The essential reason that I like *Lao Zhaopian* is for its authenticity. It does not deliberately comply with or prettify [official] history. Instead, it simply shows us the fact as it is. Through these facts, we look back from our contemporary perspectives and thus achieve a deeper understanding. Another feature of *Lao Zhaopian* that is worth praising is its courage to speak straightforwardly about the truth—the truth of history. (Yu Yuanzhang)

It is not easy to tell the truth. In many years, our nation has paid a great price for telling the truth and returning the true face to history. People like Peng Dehuai, and Yu Luoke are countless¹⁷ ... I wish you could keep following and maintaining the principle of publication, that is, to respect history and restore its true face. You cannot dress up history as you would

a little girl. People have the right to know [real] history, thus to respect history. (Zhang Yushuo)

Why do those yellow old photos evoke great interest and responses from people of different generations? It is because they expose the fakeness of [official] history and reveal the beauty of truth. (Yang Xiaoqi)

The readers' letters convey three primary messages. First, they view the photos as historical evidence, and take personal stories as "the real history," in Yu Yuanzhang's words. Second, they criticize the fakeness of official history. Zhang Yushuo strongly claims that people have the right to know the truth of history. Third, they believe the "historical evidence" resists the invention of official history. Yu Yuanzhang praises *Lao Zhaopian*'s "courage to speak straightforwardly about the truth," and Zhang Yushuo appreciates this publication because "it is not easy to tell the truth." Given the fact that historical issues like the anti-rightist movement, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the 1989 Tiananmen Event are strictly censored by the government, it is quite understandable that the readers regard the photo-texts as resistance against the government's control of history. Many readers assume that *Lao Zhaopian* riskily attempts to reveal the truth. Actually, both Wang Jiaming, general editor of the press, and Feng Keli, chief editor of the magazine, told me that this publication did not encounter any pressure from the government.¹⁸ They explained that as *Lao Zhaopian* covered histories of diverse periods rather than focusing on the Cultural Revolution, it did not receive special surveillance from the government. The readers may romanticize *Lao Zhaopian*, but their comments are evidence of their active role in contemplating national history and public commemoration. Aware of the government's control over historical discourses, the readers support serious historical reflections on the past, and contribute to collective memories that prevent important histories from being forgotten or abused.

Although photographs are valued as significant historical evidence, the accompanying written accounts are by no means reduced to insignificant positions. The guidelines for contributions state that the accompanying essay should be constructed around the photograph(s). Actually, most essays do not stop at describing the photographs. Some essays even say nothing about the photos. Rather the contributors write about their experience or the experience of their parents or friends, whether present or absent in the photos, and express their feelings about what had happened. In some sense, the photographs allow their owners to get their personal stories published and revealed to the public. I asked Feng Keli about the discrepancy between the published essays and the guidelines for contributions. He explained that as the press received a large number of essays that were not written about the photos, the editors decided to accept such contributions. His comment further suggests that people want to “talk,” to speak up, to be seen and heard. Taking people’s needs and expectations into consideration, Shandong Pictorial Press has adjusted its form and style.

The essays by average people are simple, straightforward, and unpolished. In response to some critics’ suggestion that they should publish more polished articles and invite essayists to contribute, Wang Jiamin explains that since *Lao Zhaopian* gives priority to photos rather than to words, it does not matter whether people are capable of writing a good story as long as they speak their thoughts with sincerity.¹⁹ According to most readers’ comments, the use of “vernacular language” (pingmin hua yuyan, the language of ordinary people, a literal translation) is one major reason why they like this publication. For example, one reader says,

Lao Zhaopian should publish more articles and photos about common people. It should make efforts to maintain its “vernacular” style and avoid the “elitist” tendency...to tell the truth, express sincere feelings, and communicate with the people heart to heart. (Cui Zhaosen)

Another reader criticizes a guest editor's writing style:

...If *Lao Zhaopian* adopts [a more “polished” style and more works from critics and scholars], it will lose its distinctive quality. Shifting from “vernacular” to “elitist” would be a sad thing.²⁰

Implicit in these comments is the message that average people's unpolished writings are more believable and objective than literary works. The readers' comments may be seen in relation to Susan Sontag's comment on authenticity:

The only prose that seems credible to more and more readers is not the fine writing of someone like [James] Agee, but the raw record—edited or unedited talk into tape recorders; fragments or the integral texts of sub-literary documents (court records, letters, diaries, psychiatric case histories, etc.); self-deprecatingly sloppy, often paranoid first-person reportage.²¹

Although Sontag is talking about the American people's suspicion of historical discourses, what she says is also applicable to Chinese people's attitude towards official history and the “preaching” of history in schools. Unpolished and straightforward writings by average people are considered more reliable and easier to accept. As one reader says, “The people's history means the people writing and telling their histories. Written by the person in the photo, by a family member, or by a friend, the essay is believable.” For the reader, the reliability of personal histories is more important than the aesthetics of writing.

Nancy M. Shawcross raises a critical question on the relationship between a photograph and its interpretation: “Can others really see, let alone read, the evidence such [photographic] artifacts possess?”²² There is always a concern that personal photographs will not be appreciated as the owner expects. This may explain why in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes makes great efforts to explain the Winter Garden photograph (a photograph of his mother as a little girl) without

displaying it for the gaze of the reader.²³ He says,

I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the “ordinary”; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound.²⁴

John Berger makes a similar point about the risks involved in the shift from the private to the public. While a private photo can touch people intimately, the public photograph “has been severed from life when it was taken, and it remains, as an isolated image, separate from your experience. The public photograph is like the memory of a total stranger, a total stranger who has shouted ‘look’ at the event recorded.”²⁵

I agree that the reader may not view photos as the owner does, since the owner has a personal relationship to the photos, which influences his/her description. Nevertheless, words can break the barrier of distance between the reader and the owner of the photos. Without them, the photo(s) only have value as a historical document. The people in the photo(s) are only strangers. With words, we can understand and feel. Although we do not see the Winter Garden photograph, and thus cannot know how Barthes’ mother looks in it, we can understand Barthes’ refusal to show his reader this picture of his mother. As a reader, I am touched by his affective description of this picture, and feel the “wound” in him—the loss of his mother. The failure to see what the photo’s owner sees does not necessarily negate an outsider’s empathy. Concerning the Cultural Revolution photos, the people who contribute their personal photos do not simply want the reader to *know*, but to *feel*. Only by sharing the feeling can we understand and then remember. Berger suggests that the solution to problems caused by the shift from the private to the public is, “to construct a context for a photograph, to construct it with words, to construct it with other

photographs, to construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images.”²⁶

This is exactly what the photo-text does.

Barthes defines two categories of photograph: “studium” and “punctum.” According to Barthes, some photos are valuable and provocative in their historical and cultural connotation, which he terms “studium”—“a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment...but without special acuity.”²⁷ Other photos are valuable because they have a “punctum,” an element that breaks the “studium” and exists beyond the frame. In Barthes’ words, “A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”²⁸ Barthes has a proclivity for the latter perspective, perhaps because he sees photos as “wounds.” He says, “As Spectator I was interested in Photography only for ‘sentimental’ reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think.”²⁹

“Punctum” describes the photo-texts of trauma in *Lao Zhaopian*. The intersection between the visual images and the written narratives creates a “beyond-the frame” space for the reader.

The cultural scholar Zhao Jingrong describes her experience of reading the photo-texts:

At first we were touched by the photo. Then, out of curiosity or expectation, we started reading the description...Perhaps the description confirmed our feelings, leaving us more satisfied with the photograph than we were at the beginning; but even if [the words] had not met our expectations, the photograph would have still surprised us. We might feel gratitude, or might be at a loss. Then we read the words again. Just like this, history travels between words and photos. We are touched again and again.

Moving between photographs and descriptions, imagery and language activate the reader’s imagination, through which the reader sees and feels. In the following section, I will analyze some photo-texts related to the Cultural Revolution, primarily from the perspective of “punctum,” which exists in “beyond-the frame,” not simply because this is how I read them, but because this is how the contributors expect them to be read.

Mourning the Dead

Ba Jin, a well-known Chinese writer persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, proposed many times to the government to build a Cultural Revolution museum, but was turned down.³⁰ After his death in 2005, local newspapers and websites published hundreds of articles in memory of him. Most of them brought up Ba Jin's unfulfilled wish and expressed support for this project. However, the government still remains irresponsible. As an outlet of cultural expression, *Lao Zhaopian* provides a symbolic mourning space for the Cultural Revolution.

The children of the victims have contributed some photos and essays to *Lao Zhaopian*, expressing their sadness over their parent(s)' death and criticizing the ten-year political movement. Gao Xian provides a formal family photo of him with his mother and five brothers (**Figure 20**) as well as a short essay. Quite possibly this photo was taken by a professional photographer in the family courtyard or outside the house, as we can see a big tree and part of a brick wall in the background. In the photo, the mother, in her late 40s or early 50s, sit in the middle at the front, with her two youngest sons beside her, and her four older sons behind her. When I first looked at Gao Xian's family photo, I immediately noticed the absence of the father figure. With this question in mind, I started to read Gao Xian's description:

He died—he died a violent death one year before this photo was taken. According to the official report at that time, my father 'isolated himself from the people and committed suicide for fear of punishment.' That day was October 25, 1968—Father left us forever.³¹

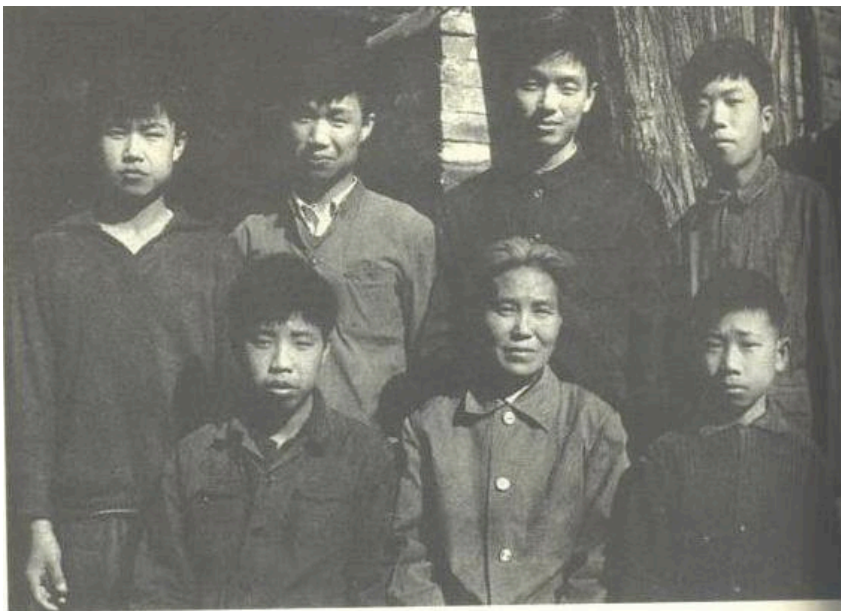


Figure 20: The photo of Gao Xian's family, with the absence of his father. Courtesy: *Lao Zhaopian*

This short account immediately associates the family photo with death and loss, and with the atrocity of the political movement in the 1960s. It expresses the son's sadness over his father's death and anger towards the unfair and inhumane treatment his father received in the Cultural Revolution. The passage of thirty years has not alleviated the son's pain and anger. By telling the exact date of his father's death, Gao Xian seems to ask the reader to remember that day and mourn for his father.

Gao Xian does not show a picture of his father. Perhaps, like Barthes, he doubts whether the reader can cherish the photo of his father as he does. For the reader, this family photo is a striking mark of his father's absence. Before the 1980s, when cameras were a rare luxury, on special occasions like the Spring Festival many families would have a photograph of the whole family (*quan jia fu*) taken, either in a photo studio or in their house. It was important that every family member appeared in the photo, to celebrate the wholeness and unity of the family. This

tradition continues to exist. The difference is that many people can afford cameras and the “quan ju fu” are taken by family members rather than by professional photographers. If one family member cannot make it to the family gathering due to emergency or death, the family photo is incomplete and carries a sentiment of regret or sadness. The tradition of family photos is the context in which Gao Xian’s photo is viewed. Consciously or not, Gao Xian makes a wiser choice by showing the reader this family photo instead of a picture of his father, because even without a word, the reader’s familiarity with the family photo breaks down the barrier of strangeness and distance. The absence of his father can immediately be noticed and felt, and the son’s sadness is thus understood and shared by the reader.

Transferred to public space, this family photo becomes historical evidence of the sufferings of average people and families in the Cultural Revolution. Gao Xian clearly uses the photo to criticize political atrocity:

[In this picture] our expressions are both complicated and uniform: bitter, helpless, submissive, and with forced smiles. Because smiling was too difficult in this period, many families shared this same expression.

Facing the camera might be the only exceptional case in which people smiled in those inhuman years...When a man’s heart is filled with pain and desperation, the smile on his face can only be forced, like the expressions of me and my family in this picture.

....

No need to detail the difficulty and suffering in those years. The facial expressions of my family in the photo are more authentic than words in revealing the oppression of the dictators over the “dictated class.”³²

Obviously the way Gao Xian looks at this family photo is affected by what happened to him in the Cultural Revolution. The reader can immediately question his absolute claim: “Facing the camera might be the only exceptional case in which people smiled in those inhuman years.”

There were of course other moments that people would laugh genuinely, such as at weddings and celebrations of a new born baby. Jiang Wen’s film *In the Heat of the Sun*, for example, shows the

less depressing side of the Cultural Revolution: freedom for young people. Gao Xian's writing suggests that the wound he carries with him overshadows his memories of the past, including the object that evokes his memories. Actually, I do not see any unusualness in their facial expressions since we can find numerous family photos that look the same way. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland say, "Our memory is never fully 'ours,' nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past. Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a 'real' one."³³ Gao Xian's suffering from the loss of his father at an early age, and his anger towards the social injustice, construct a past of sadness which he finds "real."

It is not necessary to identify whether the smiles on their faces are "real" or forced. This photo-text is evidence of trauma related to "postmemory," in Marianne Hirsch's term,³⁴ the trauma that the children of the victims bear. The possible gap between Gao Xian's description or interpretation of his family photo and the reader's first impression of the photo (I did not see the photo as Gao Xian does) constitutes the "beyond-the-frame" space. Even though the reader does not know what his father looks like, or does not see the smiles as "forced," the reader may feel the "wound" in Gao Xian. Thirty years later, he still sees tears behind forced smiles.

Jiang Weiping provides a similar photo-text (**Figure 21**).³⁵ This family photo is likely to have been taken in a studio, as the empty background and the elaborate symmetrical composition suggest. Jiang Weiping's parents sit in the front, his youngest brother stands between them, and Jiang and his two elder brothers stand behind the parents. Everyone wears a shining Mao badge. They look serious. At that time many families only had photos taken on special occasions, so they usually looked serious or a bit nervous in front of the camera. This photo immediately reminds me one of my family photos, which was taken in 1978 when I was five. My brother and

I look very serious in the photo, just like Jiang Weiping and his brothers.



Figure 21: Jiang Weiping’s family photo. He is on the right at the back, wearing the biggest Mao badge. Courtesy: *Lao Zhaopian*

However, Jiang reads sadness in their eyes, and blames the unpredictable politics for this “sadness”:

There is sadness and anxiety in my father’s eyes. It is because the Cultural Revolution was at its peak at that time. Although the political organization that he joined was temporarily judged as “walking the correct line,” the unpredictable political changes made him feel insecure about the future. He was a politically ambitious man. He couldn’t tell us his thoughts, so he chose smoking and drinking as an escape.

His father died of pneumonia during the Cultural Revolution. Jiang believes that his father got addicted to smoking because of the unpredictable politics and his unfulfilled goals. He also sees “confusion, grief and indignation” in the eyes of his older brother, the one who stands in the

middle at the back. According to Jiang's explanation, his older brother suffered from working in the countryside as a *zhiqing*. Actually, the reader can easily tell from the photo that Jiang's father and older brother are smiling. One explanation of Jiang's interpretation of this old photo is that, like Gao Xian, the wound that Jiang carries with him affects the way he sees the photo thirty years after it was taken.

Jiang's interpretation of the family photo leaves something out. For example, in his conclusion, he comments that the present is better than the past because "we don't need to wear the heavy Mao badge anymore. People are no longer naïve and frantic, but have become rational, realistic, and practical."³⁶ However, he is the one who wears the biggest Mao badge in the family photo. Jiang simply explains that in China parents always give the best to the children. In this case, it is usually the youngest that gets the best. Then, we must wonder why he is the one who wore the biggest and the best badge instead of his youngest brother. Perhaps he was the earnest one who insisted on wearing the largest badge to show his love for Chairman Mao. Does Jiang forget the reason or choose to forget it? Given his bitter criticism of the idealism that most Chinese youths held during the Cultural Revolution, it is possible that he refuses to look back at his once naïve belief or to admit this evidence.

Sturken comments on the relation between photographs and memory in relation to the present:

While the photograph may be perceived as a container for memory, it is not inhabited by memory so much as it produces it; it is a mechanism through which the past can be constructed and situated within the present. Images have the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memories we hold as individuals and as a culture. They lend shape to personal stories and truth claims, and function as technologies of memory and forgetting.³⁷

Photographs not only contain memory, but also construct memory which can be "situated within

the present.” They embody both remembering and forgetting. Selecting what to remember and what to forget, Jiang may find his own way to live with the trauma and to deal with the present.

Besides the contributions from children of the victims, a number of photo-texts commemorate siblings, spouses, and friends. Many of them are intended to mourn their subjects rather than to criticize politics. For example, Ma Zhongxing’s photo-text includes five pictures of her with her late husband and an elegy-style essay.³⁸ The photographs show they were deeply and happily in love. In speaking directly to her husband, who was wrongly persecuted in the anti-rightist movement and the Cultural Revolution, she uses the second-person point of view. The use of “you” makes this essay more intimate and personal, and establishes a tone of mourning which forms a striking contrast to the smiling faces in the photos. The presence of her husband in the photos evokes sadness over his permanent absence. For those whose parents, spouses, friends, or relatives died from this political movement, writing about them and making their images and stories known to the public is one form of commemoration as well as a way of seeking justice. Justice is to be achieved not through legal procedures, but through public remembrance.

There are also photo-texts about people who have no close relationships to the contributors but whose deaths have traumatized them. Ye Yanbing’s photo-text is a typical example (**Figure 22**). This photo was taken in a studio, as indicated by the empty background, to celebrate Ye’s graduation from high school. In the photo, Ye (at the front left of the photo) and his two friends smile into the camera. In the accompanying account, Ye does not describe this photo; instead, he tells about a traumatic experience of his encounter with death.

A laboratory technician in Ye’s school committed suicide. The school’s “revolutionary committee” assigned Ye Yanbing and his friends to bury him. Ye describes his feelings this way:

When I held his [the laboratory technician's] arms, I felt they were still soft, and there was a layer of cold and sticky liquid on his skin. I almost vomited, feeling death was sticking to my hands. This feeling lived inside me throughout the Cultural Revolution. Whenever the Cultural Revolution is mentioned, this feeling comes back to me.³⁹



Figure 22: The words on the picture read “Be Revolutionary Seeds—Photo taken in memory of high school graduation.” Courtesy: *Lao Zhaopian*

Ye’s description suggests that he was traumatized by this experience, even though he was not persecuted or attacked in the Cultural Revolution. The horror did not end in 1976, but has haunted him throughout his life. The Cultural Revolution is metamorphosed into a sensory memory and an embodied experience. As Bergson wrote, memory is “actualized in bodily sensations, and correspondingly is not simply a mental but an embodied process.”⁴⁰ Gao Xian’s essay on his own photo suggests the haunting sensory memory of the past: “Every time I look at [this picture], I seem to hear the people in the photos breathing: the slow and heavy panting pierces into my eardrum and enters my mind. It evokes the pain in my soul. My whole body trembles!”⁴¹ The Cultural Revolution is traumatic not only because people died, but also because its horror is engraved on the bodies of its victims and its witnesses.

Although the written text concerns the death of a young laboratory technician, the picture has nothing to do with him. Printed in the corner of the photo is a popular slogan at that time: “Be Revolutionary Seeds” (zuo geming de zhongzi). The caption explains that the picture had been taken right before Ye and his two friends were assigned this horrible task. In a sense, this picture marks the loss of innocence. After reading the essay, I looked at the photograph again. Their smiling faces in the photo evoked an unbearable sadness—these young boys were ignorant of what they would see and touch and of the mental consequences they would suffer throughout their lives.

Ye Yanbing castigates the invisible murderers, whose evil hearts, as he writes, “even if put in sulfuric acid (the laboratory technician committed suicide by drinking it), would not produce a bubble.” The metaphor suggests that the murderers were inhuman. *Lao Zhaopian* provides him with a chance to release the burden that he has carried for years, to express his anger towards the murderers, and more importantly, to share his experience with other people who may know little of this part of history.

The last paragraph contains only one sentence: “Till today I do not know his name.” It calls attention to the absence of the laboratory technician, who died with no name and no photo. Personal memories assert the individual existence and sacrifices of one’s beloved. They also let us realize that many people disappeared without leaving any mark or trace for us to remember and mourn for them. Personal photo-texts like Ye Yanbing’s provide a valuable channel for us to know these people, even though their faces and names are forever lost and untraceable.⁴² The transformation from private memory to public mourning is a way to save the unknown from being forgotten.

The Confession from the Other Side

Lao Zhaopian also publishes photos and articles by those who participated directly or indirectly in attacking innocent people in the Cultural Revolution, although there are not many. I am particularly interested in this kind of photo-text because it is usually difficult to look back at one's mistakes, especially when they caused serious consequences. I read this category of photo-texts with the following questions in mind: How does a guilty person tell his personal stories? How does he explain his deeds in the past? Why does he feel it is necessary to reveal a "shameful" past? I will focus on two photo-texts.

Ding You's photographs and the accompanying essay (**Figures 23-26**) tell the activities of a "revolutionary organization" formed by deaf-mutes.⁴³ He was one of the leaders. Four pictures are presented:

Figure 23: Members of the organization are putting "Da Zi Bao" (a big-character poster) on the wall.

Figure 24: Members of the organization demonstrate in the street. Two young people, holding a big poster of Chairman Mao, walk in front of the crowd.

Figure 25: The organization is holding a public struggle meeting. Mao's picture is in the center of the photograph. On the left side of the stage, an old man, the "counterrevolutionary," stands behind a table. On the right side of the stage, two people are disclosing the old man's "crimes." Between the stage and the audience stand eight people, lowering their heads. It is a common practice that during a public struggle against one person, revolutionary committees or organizations forced other persecuted people to stand before the crowd to receive "education."

Figure 26: This is a close-up shot of the two people on the stage. One of them is reading some documents to the audience, while the other is translating his words into sign language.



Figure 23: putting up “da zi bao” Courtesy: *Lao Zhaopian*



Figure 24: the parade



Figure 25: the public struggle



Figure 26: the translator

These four photos capture the absurdity of the political movement. The absurdity does not lie in the way that the deaf-mutes demonstrated with their sign language to express “Long Live Chairman Mao” and “Down with China’s Biggest Capitalist,” but rather in the immense scale of

the movement: it is hard to imagine how such a disastrous movement could motivate all kinds of people to participate. The deaf-mutes enthusiastically joined in “class struggle” to prove their ability to serve the country, only to find out ten years later that they were on the persecutors’ side. A photograph “changes according to the context in which it is seen,” Sontag says.⁴⁴ At the time these photos were taken, they were evidence of the deaf-mutes’ support for the movement that they embraced as a “great revolution.” However, after the Cultural Revolution, they became symbols of mistakes and shame.

Ding You’s essay expresses his guilt for his participation in the activities. He wrote down the following comment in June 1987 when he opened the album:

Looking back is very painful, and looking at the historical photos which record our mistakes at that time is even more painful. That was an era when right and wrong, black and white were reversed. Many people were wrongly persecuted. Many activities were meaningless. Nevertheless, history is history. It cannot be changed. So, keep the record of it, and let me never make the same mistake again in the future.⁴⁵

These words were written ten years later, after the end of the Cultural Revolution. In order to get rid of the burden of the past and to come to terms with the past, one has to face the scar. Lucy Noakes’s comment on autobiography is constructive for our understanding of Ding You’s essay. Noakes says, “Autobiography can also be written for therapeutic reasons, as a means of coming to terms with one’s past and attempting to make sense of one’s life in the present.”⁴⁶ Ding You’s writing is autobiographical in some sense. His wound could only be cured through a courageous confrontation with his past. This essay thus is a “therapeutic” attempt. Perhaps this is the reason that Ding You wrote down his feelings and decided to share with the public the photos of his guilt and confess his mistakes.

His essay also expresses a desire to clear himself of guilt. He emphasizes that the public

struggle meetings held by his organization were more civilized than those held by other organizations, which used violence and various methods (e.g. forcing the accused to wear tall hats and shaving their heads half-bald) to humiliate and torture the wrongly accused people. He says that even the people whom they criticized and punished admitted that they “were polite”—he uses quotation mark to suggest that this was exactly what the people said. Even if it is true, Ding You ignores the sadness behind the “thanks”—the sadness that these people who were dragged before the public to be humiliated and tortured thanked them for being “polite.” “Public struggle meetings” were violent and extremely humiliating and many people committed suicide afterwards. Maybe by holding onto the idea that he was “polite” to the persecuted people, Ding You feels less guilty and easier to cope with the traumatic past.

Ding You does not point out whether he is in the photos. In the last two, the deaf-mute translator holds a central position. Is Ding You the translator? Does he deliberately avoid identifying himself in the photos? Or is he the person who took these photos? Ding You’s essay does not give any clue. Perhaps he tries to keep himself out of the shameful historical record. Perhaps he still feels uncomfortable revealing his identity to the public. The reader may find his/her curiosity unfulfilled. However, this uncertainty is where the trauma lies and what Ding You tries to overcome and forget. This unknown land beyond the frame is exactly what touches me and “pricks” me.

Ding You and people like him must build up great courage in order to look back and tell their stories to the public. What about the children of the guilty people? Do those people talk about their past to their children? How does the second generation respond to their parent(s)’ mistakes? In the first twenty issues of *Lao Zhaopian*, I found only one photo-text that fits into this category. This single text cannot be used to generalize postmemory. Nevertheless, it does

articulate a voice of the second generation.

The photo-text (**Figure 27**) is provided by Guo Baowen, whose father was the leader of a Cultural Revolution Committee.⁴⁷ In the center of the photo is a big poster of Mao, surrounded by ten men facing the camera. Each of them holds a “Little Red Book” in his hand. Even though a shadow image, Mao is the overpowering figure. This photo is evidence of the extremely politicized public space—taking photos became a public confession of faith in the Communist Party and in Mao, or a public performance, perhaps. Guo’s father stands at the right end of the back row, wearing a hat.



Figure 27: Guo’s father is at the right end of the back row. Courtesy: *Lao Zhaopian*

Guo introduces his father to the reader this way:

My father is a modest, attentive, reticent, and mild-tempered person. As he was good at calculating and handwriting, the leaders of the people’s commune saw his value and transferred him from the village to the commune to work as an accountant.

As my father was considerate and diligent in his work, he immediately gained a good

reputation among his colleagues. However, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out. Because of my father's esteem among the people, he was unanimously chosen as Head of the commune's Cultural Revolution Committee. How could he possibly be qualified to do this kind of job! He is such a "gentle, kind, modest, simple, and polite" person! The term "Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee" is associated with the person who dared to fight, to rebel, and to "overwhelm an emperor regardless of sacrificing his own life." My father does not have such a quality.

However, like the powerful waves of the ocean which can throw a person into the air or press a person to the bottom of the sea, the revolution was beyond one's control. If the revolution has chosen you, you cannot flee. "Either you are a revolutionary, or you are a counter-revolutionary. There is no middle way."

Guo's description reveals an earnest attempt to prove his father is a good person, as we can tell from the words that he chooses to describe his father: "modest," "kind," "attentive," "mild-tempered," "considerate," "diligent," "gentle," "simple," and "polite." In addition, he tries to provide an excuse for his father's role as Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee, that is, nobody could control his fate during the political movement. He suggests that his father was, in a way, forced to play such a shameful role, rather than doing it out of his own choice. Guo also explains that his father accepted this position because his life would be in danger if he refused it—"Either you are a revolutionary, or you are counter-revolutionary. There is no middle way."

After describing his father as a good person, Guo begins to talk about the photo:

Look at the picture! How frail my father (the one who stands at the right end of the back row) looks! He does not have piercing eyes. How can this image be linked to the "Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee"? He looks rather like a person who has been sent to the "school of Mao Zedong thoughts" to be reformed. My father must have suffered from the conflicts between his world view and the revolution. The "leaders of the Cultural Revolution Committee" in literary works are all aggressive, boastful, and pretentious. How could there be such a "Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee" as my father!

After reading these words, I began to understand that Guo uses the photo as a proof of his father's harmlessness and innocence. Showing the photo, in which his father looks "frail," Guo expects the reader to believe in his words that his father was a good person even though he was

Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee. He differentiates his father from other leaders of Cultural Revolution organizations who performed violence or committed crimes. He seems to hold a naïve belief that one's appearance reveals one's character. Although Guo's conclusion about violent leaders, largely based on stories and fictions, is naïve and superficial, we can understand that he draws this conclusion out of his deep love for his father. In addition to using the photo to prove his father's innocence, Guo uses it as evidence of his father's victimization. He explains that his father was thin and frail because he was suffering from the conflicts between his good nature and the violent revolution. Interestingly, Guo's essay starts by finding excuses for his father's role as head of a Cultural Revolution Committee and ends with the conclusion that his father was a victim.

As Guo does not provide any information about his age when his father was head of the committee (we can vaguely guess that Guo was a child or a teenager, as his father appears to be in his earlier thirties in the photo), or what his father did in the position, we cannot judge whether Guo tells the truth. We have good reasons to doubt Guo's words: how can Guo remember and tell the real story about his father when he was only a child at that time? There are many questions that this photo-text raises: Why does Guo feel it is important to share this picture with the public? Why does he think it necessary to clarify his father's innocence? What did Guo's father tell him about the Cultural Revolution and how did he explain his role as Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee? We try to search for the answers from the photo and the text only to realize that they are beyond our knowledge. Nevertheless, the inaccessibility does not lead to frustration; instead, it is where the "punctum" lies. The intersection between the photo and the text constitutes a space beyond the frame. Guo's explanation, no matter how difficult it is to judge its degree of authenticity, is the extension of the framed image, the continuity of

remembrance passed from the older generation to the younger generation, and an imagination based on a son's love for his father. This imaginative space beyond the frame "punctures" the reader and asks him to *feel* about the past and its impact on the second generation, rather than simply to *know* the fact.

***Zhiqing* Memories: Not a Simple Story**

I argued in Chapter Four that *zhiqing* television serial dramas in the 1990s expressed a strong sentiment of nostalgia: nostalgia for the years in the countryside, and nostalgia for spiritual richness and traditional ethics before China's transformation into a market economy. The television dramas also emphasize the collective identity of this generation. In *Lao Zhaopian*, many photos show the authors and other *zhiqings* working together in the countryside. The written narratives include stories of their *zhiqing* friends.⁴⁸ These photo-texts suggest that their identity is inseparable from their inclusion in the *zhiqing* group. However, *zhiqings'* photo-texts present multiple reflections on the past, beyond the assertion of their collective identity, which cannot simply be categorized as nostalgia.

Some *zhiqings'* photo-texts express *zhiqing's* pride in their experiences and affirm *zhiqing* collectivity and spirit. I will study Ding Dong's photo-text as an illustration.⁴⁹ He provides seven photos (**Figures 28-34**).



Figure 28: Ding Dong with his classmates



Figure 29: Ding Dong with his father and sister

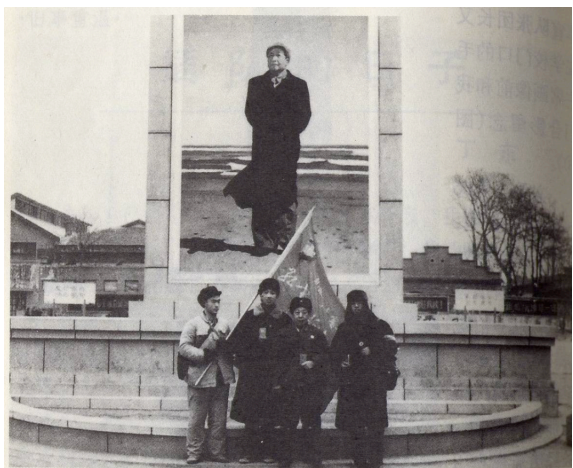


Figure 30: Ding Dong with his friends



Figure 31: Ding Dong and other *zhiqing*



Figure 32: A Rehearsal



Figure 33: *Zhiqing* in the fields



Figure 34: *Zhiqing* in Beihai Park

In Figure 28, Ding Dong (in the middle) and his two schoolmates are taking an oath, probably facing the picture of Mao, at Tiananmen Square. Each holds a “Little Red Book.” It was common that young people, before going to the countryside to receive “re-education,” would come to Tiananmen Square to swear to Mao (the picture of Mao actually) that they would follow Mao’s words. Their expression indicates that they were in high spirits and were sincere about their oath. In Figure 29, Ding Dong, his father and his younger sister pose in front of the

Memorial of Revolutionary Heroes at Tiananmen Square, each holding a “Little Red Book.”

Ding Dong’s father and sister heard that he would go to a village in Shangxi province, so they came to see him off. Figures 30 and 31 look similar: Ding Dong and his friends pose in front of a huge Mao poster in Figure 30 and a Mao statue in Figure 31. In Figure 32, some *zhiqing* are rehearsing a performance. Figure 33 is a snapshot of *zhiqing* gathering in the fields. The last photo was taken in Beihai Park during Ding Dong and his *zhiqing* friends’ short visit to Beijing. If the seven photos construct a visual history of Ding Dong’s *zhiqing* experience, this history is one of youth, passion, idealism, and happiness.

Ding Dong’s essay emphasizes that *zhiqing* went to the countryside out of sincerity, to devote their lives to the development and construction of rural areas, rather than being forced to do so.⁵⁰ Although he realized later that *zhiqing* were manipulated by those in power, he does not regret the years in the countryside because *zhiqing* learned the skills to survive hardships and acquired abilities that non-*zhiqing* do not have. Ding Dong writes,

Those who did not go to the countryside, no matter whether they joined the army or became factory workers, ate from the same “big pot.”⁵¹ According to popular slang at that time, they had “everything taken care of by the party.” Today, this advantage becomes their weakness. The “iron rice bowl” is not reliable any more; the state does not give you a job. There is no bargain when you are laid off... living and working in the countryside could be said to be an experience of rebirth after death.⁵²

He contrasts the success of the *zhiqing* in contemporary competitive society with the failure of those who stayed in the city during the Cultural Revolution. Ding Dong explicitly expresses his pride in living through the hard times. His personal memory of the *zhiqing* experience and subjective assessment of this history are very close to the depiction of the *zhiqing* characters in the television serial drama *The Annals*: all become successful in contemporary society because of their ability to survive hardships.

In contrast to Ding Dong, Fu Zuomei does not grant positive values to his *zhiqing* experience.⁵³ The only photo he presents has no connection to working in the fields. It was taken on a tourist trip. In the photo, Fu and his *zhiqing* colleagues pose in front of a pavilion, smiling.



Figure 35: Fu Zuomei and other *zhiqing* in a park

The accompanying essay does not describe the *zhiqing*'s work in the field or their struggle with formidable conditions. On the contrary, Fu presents a very passive image of *zhiqings*. He writes,

Three times Yu passed by his house without entering it when he was carrying out the task of curing floods.⁵⁴ We were not that great. Every day, we learned from Da Zhai and constructed reservoirs.⁵⁵ What we did might be regarded as inheriting Yu's legacy. However, too much work, impoverished material life and more impoverished spiritual life quickly wore off our lofty ideas and great aspirations for "saving the whole world." We thought only about home when we did not work. 'Home' was the permanent topic among *zhiqing*.⁵⁶

Clearly this is an anti-heroic representation of *zhiqings*. The tone is also quite sarcastic, especially when he talks about the *zhiqing*'s "lofty ideas and great aspirations." As Fu explains, this photograph was taken on a trip to celebrate the good news that *zhiqing* could be transferred back to the city. Therefore, this photo stands for escaping the hard life in the countryside and giving up idealism.

Li Weihong's photo-text is the most critical of the *zhiqing* experience, compared with Ding's and Fu's, but it is also the most ambivalent.⁵⁷ Her essay is constructed around one picture, which was taken when she was seventeen. In it, she wears an army uniform and stands solemnly at Tiananmen Square, in front of the picture of Mao.



Figure 36: Li Weihong at Tiananmen Square

This photograph is very similar to some of Ding Dong's photographs in terms of the omnipresent Mao icon. Nevertheless, her evaluation of the past is more conflicted than Ding Dong's. In the essay, she points out that the educated youths were manipulated, and their time in

the countryside was wasted:

What is society? What is life? What motivates us? What motivates the human being? I could not understand at all at that time. The only concept of life and mode of living came from mainstream education. *I was blindly motivated by enthusiasm and idealism. It took me many years to correct my earlier stubbornness, naivete, and ignorance.* Looking back now, I think we should not be called “educated youths,” because we were only kids, who were used as “social tools.” (italics mine)

She denigrates the “down to the countryside movement,” and criticizes society and the social system for manipulating the youths’ idealism. She describes the past as “wasted” and refuses to romanticize the *zhiqing*’s contribution. She writes down what she saw on her trip back to the village where she had worked as a *zhiqing*:

The village is still very impoverished, which seems to tell us that our blood and sweat have been wasted, and that the whole generation’s blood and sweat have been wasted. All is lost with the passage of time, including the beliefs we held when we were young.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, although she is sad about the wasted years, she cherishes the beliefs she held in the past. She ends this essay with the following words: “Although I am now different from the person in this photo, I will never laugh at the past life and the beliefs I once had.” The tone is similar to that of the *zhiqing* television dramas in the 1980s, such as *The Wasted Years* and *Snowstorm Tonight*: their youth was wasted, but their spirit was noble.

These three photo-textual memories construct diversified and multi-faceted narratives of *zhiqing* experiences in the Cultural Revolution, different from the homogenous and simplified depictions in the 1990s television dramas. While consumer media produces a trend of *zhiqing* nostalgia, *Lao Zhaopian* provides a space for individuals to tell their own experiences of historical events and express their own thoughts and feelings. The photo-texts are *ex-zhiqing*’s reflections on their experiences rather than narratives of an authentic history. Providing the

photo-texts, the *ex-zhiqing* participate in defining the meaning of the “down to the countryside movement,” preventing their voices from being subsumed by nostalgia consumer culture.

Two years after the launching of *Lao Zhaopian*, the book *Zhiqing Lao Zhaopian* (*Zhiqing Old Photos*) was published. Its form is quite similar to that of *Lao Zhaopian*: old pictures accompanied by descriptive essays. But there are two essential differences between these two publications: the essays in *Zhiqing Lao Zhaopian* are much shorter than those in *Lao Zhaopian*; and nostalgia is the overarching tone of *Zhiqing Lao Zhaopian*. In *Zhiqing Lao Zhaopian*, the photographs show *zhiqing* working in the fields, managing everyday life, or enjoying various entertaining activities after work, and the written narratives express the *zhiqing*’s love for their “second home” and stress the value of *zhiqing* spirit. This collection was a hit in the late 1990s and instigated another “*zhiqing* craze” (*zhiqing re*).⁵⁹ But it began to lose its popularity after the “old photo craze” was over. *Lao Zhaopian*, however, continues to be a public site for former educated youths to tell their stories. The primary reason, as I have presented, is that *Lao Zhaopian* values individual expressions and allows different interpretations of the past to coexist.

Women’s Photo-textual Memories

I have argued in the previous chapters that male protagonists in films and television dramas occupy the center of the historical stage: in films and television dramas which delineate the Cultural Revolution as a national trauma, men are the witnesses of the vicissitudes of society and the bearers of the national trauma; in nostalgia films and television dramas, men are the agents of action and the narrators of history. Although there are not as many photo-texts by women as by men in *Lao Zhaopian*, women’s works challenge the masculine historical discourses, and affirm women’s historical subjectivity. There are two categories of women’s photo-texts: one is

daughters' memories of their mothers; the other is authors' memories of their past experiences.

Daughter/mother photo-texts usually show the mother's image in various pictures and give a detailed description of her noble character, her suffering and struggle in the Cultural Revolution, and express the daughter's deep sorrow for her death. Each contributor intends to present her mother to the reader as a concrete person, a person who bravely fought against evil forces. For example, Xu Dong provides nine photos of her mother, Peng Zigang, showing her at different stages of life: from a little girl to a young student to a middle-aged woman.⁶⁰ The two photos I include here (**Figures 37-38**) show a contrast between the young Zigang and the middle-aged Zigang. The first photo was taken in a studio in the late 1920s or early 1930s when Zigang was a middle school student. Even though studio photography contains staging, the girl in this photo carries a kind of charming naturalness: her innocent smile and her eyes beaming with joy or aspirations. The other photo, Xu Dong with her mother in a park, was taken in the early 1970s when Zigang was persecuted and was forced to labor at a "May Seventh Cadre School."⁶¹ Zigang was in her mid-fifties. Although the change in Zigang's appearance is obvious, an essential character remains unchanged: the calmness and confidence.

When I read Xu Dong's essay after seeing the photos, I was emotionally captured by her first sentence, "I was once loved by my dear mother and father. But they left me a long time ago—Mother Zigang died in 1988 after lying in bed for eight years after her case was 'rectified' in 1978."⁶² The beginning of Xu Dong's essay sets the mourning tone and expresses a daughter's sadness over the loss of her parents, particularly her mother. It also links the mother's death to the Cultural Revolution. In the essay, Xu Dong gives a detailed account of her mother's experience from the 1950s to her death in 1988: Zigang's devotion to the Communist cause, her

suffering from the successive political movements, her struggle with illness, and her death after eight years' paralysis.



Figure 37: Young Peng Zigang



Figure 38: Zigang and her daughter Xu Dong

What strikes me most is the choice of photos of her mother. Xu Dong does not give any comment on or description of the photos. It seems that she wants to use the photos to bridge the

distance between the reader and her mother: we see Zigang as a small girl, a lively teenager, a confident college student, a young woman in love, a caring mother, a devoted intellectual, and a strong woman struggling with persecution. The photos provide us with a visual history of Zigang, who ceases to be a stranger, a shadow. I am especially impressed by the last photo (**Figure 38**), taken when her mother was persecuted and forced to do manual labor at the “May Seventh Cadre School.” Xu Dong’s essay describes in detail how her mother had suffered from the extremely heavy work and how her health had deteriorated. Zigang’s paralysis in later years actually resulted from the labor during the Cultural Revolution. However, the photo does not give the viewer an impression of a weak and frail woman who had endured and was enduring physical torture. Zigang looked into the camera with a calm smile, as if nothing could break her down. Probably, Xu Dong does not simply want the reader to remember her mother as a victim but also as a strong fighter. Although we can only guess Xu Dong’s motivation in providing these photos of her mother, we can be sure that the photo-text asserts her mother’s visibility in history and her agency in fighting for justice and truth.

Yang Tuan’s photo-text about her mother is similar to Xu Dong’s.⁶³ Yang Tuan also provides photos of her mother in different life stages: her mother as a teenager in middle school in the 1930s; her mother and father and her two brothers at Tiananmen Square in 1970 before her parents were sent to the “May Seventh Cadre school”; the family reunion in 1973; her parents in 1975; her mother crying at the funeral of Yang Tuan’s father in 1980. There is a clear contrast between the first photo of her mother smiling and the last photo of her mother crying. The contrast can be read as Yang Tuan’s criticism of the political movements which destroyed people’s lives. In her essay, Yang Tuan gives a detailed account of her mother’s suffering during the Cultural Revolution and her mother’s efforts to write *Si Tong Lu*, a book about her reflections

on the horrible and irrational history. Her mother died immediately after finishing this book.

As with Ding Dong's photo-text, Yang Tuan's photo-textual narratives present her mother as a person of strong will and noble character, and as fighter rather than a victim.

The second category of women's photo-texts can be seen as self-reflections or self-explorations. Most photos show the authors working on farms or in the fields. The accompanying essays describe their struggles against political persecution or their hard work in the countryside. For example, three of the four photos provided by Cui Gangzhu show her doing research in the field, constructing roads with other women, and working at a chicken farm (**Figures 39-42**).⁶⁴ At that time she was discriminated against because of her "capitalist" background. (She was born in Hong Kong.) Her essay depicts how she endured all hardships and tried to prove to the people that she was a good person. She worked much harder than others because she wanted to show the people that she was willing to devote herself wholeheartedly to the country.



Figure 39: In the Fields



Figure 40: Baby Cui Gangzhu carried by her mother



Figure 41: Women Construction Team in 1958



Figure 42: Cui Guangzhu at the Chicken Farm

Through the photos and their writings, women assert their presence in the traumatic history, as fighters, witnesses, survivors, and most importantly as writers of their personal history and national history. They are not simply victims, as in the films of the 1980s; their bodies are not simply a symbolic site on which men's trauma is projected, as in the fifth-generation films; and they are not simply fetishistic images created by men's nostalgia and fantasy, as in nostalgia films and *zhiqing* television dramas in the 1990s. Women are individuals who suffered, struggled, sacrificed, resisted, and acted during the Cultural Revolution.

I observe that women's photo-textual narratives tend to construct identity in relation to nation, and emphasize their subjectivity within national history. For example, Cui Gangzhu remembers that in those years when she was labeled "Miss Capitalist" by some "revolutionary" people, her only wish was to be accepted by the Party—"As long as I'm alive, I will prove by action that I am the good daughter of the Motherland."⁶⁵ She never gave up her dream of becoming a communist. Written more than twenty years later, this essay is still constructed within the narrative of nation. In conclusion, she says, "All that had happened to me may mean

little, if considered individually... however, I must say, if we add millions and millions of these “little” things together, they would really mean a lot to our nation.”⁶⁶ She is more concerned about the nation than about herself.

Some feminist scholars criticize socialist ideology for politicizing women’s bodies, which I addressed in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, I think socialist ideology does help women to build a strong sense of independence and equality and give them confidence in competing with men. Perhaps this is the reason why those who were born in the 1950s and 1960s refuse to deny idealism, and still construct their identity and value in relation to the nation. For example, Li Weihong (whose work I studied above), who is very critical of the past, does not oppose the idealism she once strongly believed in. For women, one important meaning of idealism is that women can contribute to the construction of an equalitarian and prosperous world as men do.

The difficult confrontations with contemporary consumer culture and the resurgence of patriarchal ideology in the 1990s may be another reason for women’s insistence on idealism in the past. Take Yu Qing’s photo-text as an illustration. She provides a photograph which was taken in 1975 when she was in high school (**Figure 43**). In the photo, Yu Qing and her friend wear army uniforms.⁶⁷



Figure 43: Yu Qing (on the left) and her friend

The short essay is primarily constructed around this photo, particularly around their clothes. At that time Yu Qing's greatest dream was to become a soldier. She liked her army uniform and felt a sense of solemnity when wearing it. Her writing expresses a nostalgic sentiment, which is conveyed in her concluding comment:

Today, we live in big cities. We don't wear army uniforms anymore, and our dream of becoming soldiers has been replaced by desires, which we have to pursue even though we know they are shallow. Our past innocence has gradually been replaced by worldliness. Now, no matter how expensive and fashionable the dresses I am wearing, I do not have the same pride I had when I wore the army uniform. Only the memory of 'army uniform and plain costume' is still with me.⁶⁸

This comment explains that her nostalgia comes largely from dissatisfaction with the present. In Chapter Two I argued that films of the early 1980s criticize the masculinization of women's bodies and redefine gender and sexuality. The (re)discovery of gender difference, and the awakening consciousness of women's bodies were embraced in the 1980s by both women and men. However, in the 1990s when men began to control the economy and politics and women were more "objectified" and "fetishized" by consumer culture, many women who were born in the fifties and sixties found themselves lost in the materialist world. Therefore, women like Yu Qing are nostalgic for the plain uniforms of the past, instead of enjoying "expensive and fashionable dresses." In this regard, positioning themselves in relation to the nation and to socialist idealism can be viewed as women's resistance to the present patriarchal culture and society.

The Readers' Response to Traumatic Memories

The guidelines for contributions to *Lao Zhaopian* prescribe that all submitted photos should be taken at least twenty years ago. *Lao Zhaopian* was launched in 1996, so that means the photos

should be taken before 1976, the year that marks the end of the Cultural Revolution. In his newly published book—*Reflections on Lao Zhaopian*, Feng Keli explains why Shandong Pictorial Press set the time at “twenty years”:

Several big events took place that year [1976], which tremendously changed Chinese people’s life.... We think, at the historical moment of social transformation, *Lao Zhaopian* should look back at life and development before the dramatic social transformation, from a leisurely angle so that people can have a certain comparison and make some adjustments through relaxing reading.⁶⁹

His words suggest that although the editors linked the year of 1976 with the Cultural Revolution, they did not intend to address sensitive issues or to position this magazine as a publication that opposes official history. The main purpose was to provide entertainment and knowledge.

The idea of creating *Lao Zhaopian* actually came from the availability of a large number of photographs. Two years before *Lao Zhaopian* was launched, Wang Jiaming had been working on compiling *A Century History of China in Photos* (Tupian Zhongguo Bainian Shi). Approximately six thousand photographs were collected for this project. But only 2,743 pictures were finally used in this book. Wang Jiaming did not want to waste the rest of the photographs, which he and his colleagues had spent lots of time and effort collecting from all over the country. He thought these photographs could be used in another publication. This is how *Lao Zhaopian* was born.⁷⁰

I agree with Wu Huang, who says that “although *Old Photos* contains a considerable number of entries that allude to personal tragedies in the 60s and 70s, its goal was not to establish a ‘museum of the Cultural Revolution’ in printed form.”⁷¹ *Lao Zhaopian* was not designed with an explicit political agenda. Nonetheless, I would also argue that this magazine gradually builds a “museum of the Cultural Revolution” thanks to the contributors and the readers. The contributed photo-texts about the Cultural Revolution should not be taken as a contingent phenomenon.

Although films and television dramas make allusion to the Cultural Revolution, this history is far from being thoroughly investigated. Popular media has to compromise with the government by addressing the Cultural Revolution through ambiguous representations—half revealing and half covering. For many people who experienced the Cultural Revolution, *Lao Zhaopian* provides a precious opportunity to tell their own stories, to reveal the truth which is covered up, distorted or manipulated by the government, or to mourn those who were persecuted to death.

If the publishing house had no idea what kinds of photos and essays people would submit at first, it got some clues gradually. In the ninth issue, its special column published three pictures of Zhang Zhixin, who was tortured to death in the Cultural Revolution, and an article in memory of the twenty-fourth anniversary of her death.⁷² In “Editor’s Note,” Feng Keli especially asks the reader to pay attention to this photo-text, and to think about this history and the people that are excluded from official history. He says,

The neglect of Zhang Zhixin should be viewed as the shame of “official history.”

Our “circle of thinkers” should also feel ashamed. In that particular era, under various pressures or temptations, many professional “thinkers” gave up their “thoughts,” and turned away from danger. People like Zhang Zhixin, who were not professional “thinkers,” were left alone to save our nation, for which they lost their lives. No matter how many years will pass by, our “circle of thinkers” will always feel ashamed because of it.

The neglect of Zhang Zhixin by “official history” happens today. The absence of the “circle of thinkers” happened in the past. However, I cannot help feeling that there is some connection between these two. Whenever I think of it, I am deeply worried.

We should not forget Zhang Zhixin, nor should we forget numerous people who are not included in “official history” for various reasons....⁷³

Feng criticizes the professional “thinkers” (intellectuals, artists, cultural producers, etc.) for their non-confrontational attitude during the Cultural Revolution, and calls for critical thinking about history and the responsibility of intellectuals. He also warns against the danger of forgetting. It was the first time that *Lao Zhaopian* explicitly specified its concern for officially excluded or neglected histories and people. I think this magazine began to self-consciously take a more

serious role: not simply discovering history, but also rethinking history. This point is further proved by the continuing publication of photo-texts related to the Cultural Revolution. In its seventeenth issue, seven photo-texts related to the Cultural Revolution were included, compared to an average of two or three per issue previously. Although *Lao Zhaopian* publishes a wide range of old photos, it is impossible to ignore the special attention given to the history of the Cultural Revolution.

Did the private photos and writings about the Cultural Revolution remind the reader of this sensitive history? How did readers react to the “traumatic” photo-textual memories? The readers’ responses to the survey indicate that most of them could identify the photo-texts specific to the Cultural Revolution. One question on the survey asked readers to choose their favorite photo-texts. Many chose the Cultural Revolution-related photo-texts, such as “Yu Luoke,” “My Father and Mother—*Confession of Thought and Pain*” (Wo de fuqing muqing yu shi tong lu), “Commemorating the Twenty-Fourth Anniversary of the Death of Zhang Zhixing” (Zhang zhixin yunan er shi si zhounian ji), “Once There Was a Contrast” (Ceng you yi zhong can zhao), and “The Irrational Age” (Si qu lizhi de niandai). Some readers expressed strong wishes to see more photo-texts about the Cultural Revolution. The following excerpts from the readers’ letters are illustrative:

The time period you set for contributions [to *Lao Zhaopian*], from the invention of photography to the eve of China’s reform and opening up, is exactly the period when our nation experienced lots of suffering and difficulties. The history of this period has been largely disguised, distorted, forgotten, erased, or manipulated by ‘power.’ *Lao Zhaopian* re-presents the truth, re-presents the history. Your contribution is tremendous. You have done full justice to the martyrs (like Zhang Zhixing, Wang Shengkui, Yu Luoke). You have paid your full duty to the Chinese people, and the descendents.⁷⁴ (by Zhang Yushuo)

In the future, I wish the editors could reveal to the public the things that are rarely known,

the people who died long ago, and their stories. Especially in the Cultural Revolution, there were lots of wronged cases, in which black and white were reversed and humanity was destroyed. Many intellectuals died. There should be lots of photos and facts [about this period]. Don't miss them. (by Ming Zhengdong)

I hope *Lao Zhaopian* can publish more photos about the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution is a movement that lasted the longest time, involved the largest population, gave the most devastating attack on man's value and dignity, and brought about unprecedented catastrophes to various fields of our country, including politics, economy, culture, art, the military and science. Although many people wish to see a museum of the Cultural Revolution built in order to 'turn the lesson into good use,' it is not permitted by "the above."⁷⁵ The consequence is that young people under thirty think the crimes and atrocities that happened in the Cultural Revolution are merely "stories," and are "made up!"...So, if [*Lao Zhaopian*] can publish more photos and articles about the Cultural Revolution, it may remind the people [of this history]. "The preceding happenings that are not forgotten will become the lesson for the future." "Forgetting the past means betrayal." (by Yu Yuanzhang)

Although more than thirty years have passed, we still mourn and regret the unjustified death of the people like him [in the letter, the reader writes about his colleague who was tortured in the political movements in the 1950s and 1960s and committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution]. I think now it is time we should return the truth to history. This is my sincere expectation for *Lao Zhaopian*. (by Zhang Zhengyi)

These letters suggest that the Cultural Revolution still haunts those who experienced this political movement. The readers criticize the government for avoiding and silencing the history of the Cultural Revolution. They see *Lao Zhaopian* as an opportunity through which the real history will be revealed to the people, and justice will be achieved through the public sharing of trauma. We can feel the gratitude of the readers to this publication from Zhang Yushuo's sincere words, "You have done full justice to the martyrs... You have paid your full duty to the Chinese people, and the descendents." *Lao Zhaopian* is embraced as a publication that performs the duty that should have been done by the government.

The readers' letters also convey a concern for the younger generation's ignorance of the Cultural Revolution. Yu Yuanzhang points out that due to a lack of exposure to the history of the Cultural Revolution, nowadays young people do not believe in the horrible events of the Cultural

Revolution. He wishes *Lao Zhaopian* could inform the younger generation of this particular history so that the same tragedy would not happen again. Actually, the same concern is expressed in most photo-texts. For example, Yang Tuan ends her essay with her mother's words to the younger generation:

People always say that there is a generation gap between the older and the younger generations. They cannot understand each other. I would say in tears: young men, please understand the pain of the older generation, their sacrifice. These old people, old communists, paid the price with their lives for today's freedom of speaking. In fact, we are walking forward on their blood. Won't you admit it?⁷⁶

In an interview with Feng Keli, Zhao Jingrong asked Feng whether he felt any regret about *Lao Zhaopian*. Feng answered: "In terms of the content, it may be too dark and onerous (chenzhong)."⁷⁷ Zhao did not ask him to clarify. His explanation appeared in the fourth issue of 2004:

Pain and suffering to those involved are surely unfortunate. But ancestors' sufferings can also become descendents' benefit, only on the condition that the latter have the courage to face them. Otherwise, if people today and the descendents are blind to past sufferings, and even try to cover them up, not only have our ancestors suffered in vain, but also people will continue to suffer. Then history would be traumatic forever... What breaks my heart is that the same tragedy happened again and again after China entered the era of peace [in 1949]... Why could the same mistake be made again and again? Why couldn't we remember? A human being shouldn't be amnesiac; he especially shouldn't forget the sufferings of the past. If only we can face them, history will not be traumatic any more.⁷⁸

Clearly, Feng Keli is aware that a large number of photo-texts from the contributors are related to the Cultural Revolution. He does not object to these contributions, but rather realizes that the past remains a trauma for many people. He believes amnesia—forgetting the suffering of the past—causes the repetition of tragedy in modern Chinese history. He believes only by remembering and confronting the past will the same tragedy not be repeated. Readers and editors of *Lao Zhaopian* commonly recognize that memory of the Cultural Revolution should be passed

on to younger generations to prevent tragedy from repeating. From the contributors' photo-texts, the readers' letters, and the editors' words, we can conclude that *Lao Zhaopian* is the result of a collective effort to save the Cultural Revolution and other traumatic histories from oblivion.

Among the 180 readers who responded to the survey, about eighteen percent were people under thirty. They said they like this magazine primarily for the following reasons: it tells history from a unique angle unlike that of institutional education; it tells the truth; it allows the people to write their own history. Some young readers expressed their interest in the photo-texts about the Cultural Revolution. For example, Zhang Xian suggests that in addition to victims' confessions, *Lao Zhaopian* should also publish photo-texts from the persecutors,

I don't know whether these people have the courage to confess. It would be more difficult to find such photos. Who could happen to capture the "dark moments?" However, the more difficult it is to get those photos, the more we are eager to see them, and wish such tragedies would never happen again.

Although only a few young readers specifically address the Cultural Revolution, it is clear that they like the way *Lao Zhaopian* presents history, and wish to understand the older generation through personal histories of the people. As one reader says:

These old photos and simple words enhance my emotional connection with my ancestors. History is not something empty and dead. Our ancestors lived a life the same as we do. Their happiness and sufferings become concrete to me. We share similar emotions and thoughts with older generations. Their experience can become a lesson for us today.

Although the photo-texts may not have the same emotional power for the younger generation, their letters show their interest in history and their efforts to understand their ancestors. Launched as a non-political entertainment magazine, *Lao Zhaopian*, has been gradually shaped by the contributors' and the reader's expectations and keeps histories,

particularly traumatic histories, alive in our cultural consciousness.

In this chapter, I have studied how *Lao Zhaopian* became a public site for people to mourn the dead and express their opinions on the Cultural Revolution. The photographs, which are rarely seen in official history books, have become evidence of untold or prohibited histories. The plain and vernacular writing style enhances the reliability of the written narratives. To the reader, *Lao Zhaopian* challenges and resists official history by allowing average people to tell their own histories and by granting visibility to the histories hidden by the authorities. Although it is difficult for the reader to view the photos just as their owners do, the intersection between images and written narratives provides an imaginative “beyond-the-frame” space—the “punctum.” As the reader, we move between the photographs and the words and “are touched again and again,” to use Zhao Jingrong’s words, and feel the “wound” in the owners of the photographs, to use Barthes’ concept. Through sharing feelings, we re-think and remember the past. This is why the photo-text is a powerful form of popular memory.

Although not initially designated to address “traumatic” histories and memories, *Lao Zhaopian* has gradually adjusted to the people’s expectations, giving them space to tell their traumatic memories. In 2001, Shandong Pictorial Press published *People’s Own History*, a collection of photo-texts from the old issues of *Lao Zhaopian*. Without a doubt, the publishing house fully recognized that the “old photo craze” was created by people’s strong desire to engage with history from their own experiences. The readers, the contributors, and the editors of *Lao Zhaopian* have collectively turned this entertainment-oriented magazine into a history of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the re-construction of the Cultural Revolution in popular films and television serial dramas between 1978 and 2002, as well as a photographic magazine that caused a sensation in mainland China in the late 1990s. It demonstrates the roles that popular media have played in keeping the memory of the Cultural Revolution in the public consciousness, and explores various factors that have determined or influenced the modes of remembering at different historical moments. As I have stated, this thesis is less concerned about the degree of authenticity in historical representation than about the function of popular media in addressing sensitive and traumatic histories, the participation of the audience/viewer/reader/consumer in public remembering, and the sociopolitical, cultural, and economic factors that have (re)shaped popular memory.

Even though Chinese popular media are largely controlled by the state, they find their own ways to explore the Cultural Revolution and provide a space for people to engage this traumatic national event. Melodramatic films in the late 1970s and early 1980s might have evaded a thorough investigation of the complicated social and historical causes of the national tragedy, but they, to a large degree, satisfied the traumatized people's need for making peace with the present and moving forward. One decade later, the fifth-generation filmmakers challenged the forbidden zone of the Cultural Revolution, revealed the covered wound, and criticized the political system. In their films, modern Chinese history comprises frequent disruptions of the normal mundane life and the state's intrusion into the private sphere. Breaking the link between meaning and image, content and context, Zhang Yimou's *To Live* reenacts the painful moment and provokes the audience into serious contemplation of the past, rather than providing an excuse to escape into

the future. Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* takes a nostalgic approach to the Cultural Revolution, challenging the fifth-generation filmmakers' discourse of trauma. Notwithstanding controversy and problems, this film, for the first time, introduces the younger generation's historical perspective, and calls attention to significant questions about the relationship between art and the representation of trauma, the gap between generational memories, and the problems of passing memories of the Cultural Revolution to the younger generations.

Television, a popular medium which has been denigrated as a cause of the "weakening of historicity," has significantly participated in (re)envisioning history and brought prohibited historical issues into domestic space. At the intersection of the state's control and the market's demand, Chinese television dramas manage to address the Cultural Revolution in profound ways. *The Snow City* has exposed the social problems caused by the "down to the countryside movement" as well as the ensuing torrent of "returning to the city," which had largely been ignored by mainstream discourses. This serial drama also uses ambiguity and abstract imagery to evoke critical thinking beyond the official assessment of the "down to the countryside movement." *The Annals* has directly addressed the Red Guard Movement, a highly sensitive and controversial historical topic. Although only three episodes were devoted to it, they significantly brought this part of history into millions of households. Its popularity, continuous format, and everyday presence grant the television serial drama an irreplaceable function as a public platform for historical reflections and social criticism.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, *Lao Zhaopian*, with its unique form of photo-text, has been enthusiastically embraced by people as a publication of "authentic history." The photographs, which are rarely seen in official history books, become evidence of untold or prohibited histories. To the readers, *Lao Zhaopian* challenges and resists official history by

allowing average people to tell their own histories and by granting visibility to the histories hidden by the authorities. Although not initially intended to address “traumatic” histories and memories, *Lao Zhaopian* has gradually adjusted to the people’s expectations, providing space for individuals to tell their private traumatic experiences. The photo-texts, which mourn the dead, function as a public ritual of commemoration, resisting the government’s refusal to remember. Shifting from the individuals to the community, personal sufferings are relieved and the wounds are healed through public mourning and sharing.

Although I emphasize the role of popular media in keeping the memory of the Cultural Revolution alive in public space, I do not view the relationship between official history and popular memory as a simple dichotomy of power and resistance, master narrative and counter-narrative. Even though some historical discourses consciously resist the restriction imposed on the issue of the Cultural Revolution, the relationship between popular memories of the Cultural Revolution and the official discourse is multi-layered: confrontation, conflict, negotiation, and compromise. As I have illustrated, in the first post-Cultural Revolution decade, the Cultural Revolution-related films follow the official assessment. The fifth-generation directors’ films, to a large extent, subvert the official history frame by questioning the origin of the Cultural Revolution and emphasizing its devastating impact on people’s lives. Nevertheless, they agree on the official assessment that the Cultural Revolution is a national tragedy. Although Jiang Wen’s *In the Heat of the Sun* diverts from the official discourse by introducing a nostalgic sentiment, it does not intend to challenge the official history. Focusing more on personal memories, this film avoids confronting the Cultural Revolution from social and political perspectives. Nostalgia is a relatively non-threatening approach to the Cultural Revolution, which the government would welcome more than it would the fifth-generation directors’ cinema

of trauma.

The intermingled relations between popular memory and official history are more explicitly embodied in the *zhiqing* serial dramas. Adapted from *zhiqing* writers' works, most *zhiqing* serial dramas represent the *zhiqing* generation's collective memory, while at the same time incorporating the official history to different degrees. Responding to the *zhiqing*'s demand for a justified assessment of the "down to the countryside movement," *Times Wasted* affirms the contribution of the *zhiqing* generation. To be in line with the government's instruction on media reportage on *zhiqing*, this serial drama ends with the protagonists choosing to stay in the countryside, which runs counter to the reality of millions of *zhiqing* returning to the city. The depiction of the Red Guard Movement in *The Annals* is based on ex-Red Guards' personal memories and the official assessment. Following the official history, this serial drama portrays the Red Guard Movement as one of violence and absurdity. Incorporating ex-Red Guards' personal memories, it humanizes the Red Guard characters by emphasizing their sincere feelings for the victims, and their love for friends and parents.

The memory of the Cultural Revolution cannot be categorized simply as personal memory, popular memory, or official history. This dissertation highlights the "processual" nature of memory, to use Barbie Zelizer's term, and the social and cultural factors which shaped memories of the Cultural Revolution at different historical moments. As I have argued in Chapter Two, the Cultural Revolution was not a suppressed topic in the first post-Cultural Revolution decade. The relatively free political environment gave rise to a proliferation of films addressing the Cultural Revolution. Responding to the official assessment and the prevalent sentiment for leaving the past behind and moving forward, these films present a melodramatic world in which the persecuted people win the battle against the perpetrators after sustaining pain and adversity, and

provide a version of history which would help the traumatized nation to release the pain through tears and laughter.

In Chapter Three, I analyzed three individual films, Zhang Yimou's *To Live*, Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun*, and Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, to demonstrate the complexity of cultural memory in a new social and economic context in the 1990s. Zhang Yimou's critical exploration of the Cultural Revolution as both a national and personal trauma is related to his experience during the Cultural Revolution as well as his concern with the nation, Chinese history, and culture. The nostalgia embedded in Jiang Wen's *In the Heat of the Sun* is attributed to the director's personal memory as well as to the Mao-craze in the early 1990s. What he claims as personal memory of the past is better understood as an account that interweaves his individual experience and his consciousness of the nostalgia cultural trend. Dai Sijie's film is a diasporic director's longing for the "homeland," as well as the West's re-imagining of the oriental for its consumption in a transnational market. No longer confined to the national boundary, memory becomes elusive with the increasing globalization and an enlarging transnational market. How transnational cinema will affect cultural memory of a national tragedy becomes a pressing question.

Chapter Four traces the shift of the retrospective modes in *zhiqing* television serial dramas in the 1980s and 1990s. In the first few years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the assessment of the "down to the countryside movement" became problematic. The *zhiqing* television drama articulated the *zhiqing*'s desire for a justified assessment of their role in the movement as well as for social recognition. *Times Wasted* constructs the past in a way that provides a satisfying answer to this generation—although the ten years were wasted, the *zhiqing* endured the test of life and contributed to the nation. In the late 1980s, the search for justified

historical assessment was quickly replaced by the struggle for survival. The returned *zhiqing* were not only discriminated against or rejected by urban residents, but also found themselves incapable of competing for jobs due to ten years' lack of education. The sense of loss and unfairness is captured in *The Snow City*, which gives a sympathetic depiction of the difficult lives of the returned *zhiqing*.

The Annals was produced in a very different economic and cultural context. Television serial drama in the 1990s became an increasingly market-oriented popular cultural form, which had a great impact on the selection of subjects and the aesthetics of representation. The government gave much attention to the production of television drama as the most effective channel to enhance mainstream ideology. The production of television serial drama was shaped by the market and the state. *The Annals* successfully incorporates the identity-seeking tradition of the *zhiqing* genre, the market and the “mainstream melody.” It addresses the Red Guard Movement in response to the ex-Red Guards' desire for a re-evaluation of this part of history; it quotes from preceding successful television serial dramas to secure its place in the market; and it expresses strong nationalist messages to comply with the “mainstream ideology.” The way a cultural text reconstructs the past is shaped by multiple factors, including politics, the market, generational identity, personal experience, and social and cultural concerns. Cultural memory is better understood as a contested site where different forces operate.

This thesis gives special attention to the representation of gender and sexuality in the popular discourse about the Cultural Revolution. In Chapter Two I argued that men and women joined hands in challenging the socialist oppression of sexuality and body in the early and mid 1980s. The films by male directors, such as *The Alley*, *Forget Me Not*, and *Romance on Lushan Mountain*, project men's anxiety about their wounded masculinity onto women's bodies, and

create female characters associated with nature, domesticity, and sexual attraction. Films by female directors, such as *Sacrificed Youth* and *Army Nurse*, explicitly criticize the state's control of a woman's body and enunciate women's desire for self-control of their bodies. In Chapter Three I demonstrate that the woman's body continues to be used in the fifth-generation films as evidence of political violence, which is exemplified by Fenxia's bleeding to death in *To Live* and Zhu Ying's imprisonment as a punishment for her refusal to accept the party's control of her body in *The Blue Kite*.

The nostalgic mode of representation in the 1990s continued the cultural re-definition of masculinity and femininity, but from new perspectives. The female body in nostalgic films and television serial dramas ceases to function as evidence of political violence. To some extent, popular culture in the 1980s had successfully separated the woman's body from political signification. In the nostalgic representation of the Cultural Revolution in the 1990s, the female body becomes a desirable and consumable object. In Jiang Wen's film, *In the Heat of the Sun*, the possession of a beautiful woman is an emblem of masculinity. In *The Annals*, even though the two female protagonists are successful career women, they are more often associated with the traditional feminine role as mother in domestic space than they are with their performance at work. Underlying the redefinition of femininity is men's desire to control women's presence in public space. After the woman's body is more or less freed from the state's power, it is immediately subject to the control of the patriarchal system. The patriarchal ideology that resurfaces affects the way the Cultural Revolution is reconstructed. The cultural efforts in the 1980s to free women from the state's control, ideologically and physically, is a crucial step towards women's independence, whereas the reduction of women to flattened images and traditional femininity in the 1990s is a backward move. Therefore, while affirming the

contribution of film and television in rescuing the significant history of the Cultural Revolution from oblivion, I question the repositioning of women within a patriarchal structure in the historical narratives of the 1990s and the present.

Of course not all films and television dramas objectify women or define women primarily in terms of the image or domestic roles. There are women filmmakers and TV producers who create strong female characters with agency and explore the social realities that women are confronted with, such as Peng Xiaolian's films *Women's Story* (Nüren gushi, 1989) and *Shanghai Women* (Jiazhuang mei ganjue, 2002), and Li Shaohong's film *Baby in Love* (Lianai zhong de baobei) and the television serial drama *Palace of Desire* (Da ming gong ci, 2000). However, in the 1990s women directors rarely addressed the topic of the Cultural Revolution in their films or television dramas. One possible reason is the difficulty of getting funding for films dealing with sensitive issues, especially when the Chinese film market has been increasingly driven by commercial profit. Peng Xiaolian's late film *Shanghai Story* (Meili Shanghai) in 2003 touches the memory of the Cultural Revolution briefly in a conversation between mother and daughter. It is not clear whether this subject will continue to be explored by female directors.

Lao Zhaopian to some extent fills the gap of women's perspective of the Cultural Revolution. Women's photo-texts challenge the stereotype of women as either victims in the traumatic mode of representations or sexualized objects in the nostalgic mode, and affirm their role as witnesses and agents of history. Their photos are historical proofs of their presence in the Cultural Revolution, and their written narratives tell the history from their personal experiences and perspectives.

This dissertation highlights the participation of the audience/viewer/ reader/consumer in remembering and reinterpreting the Cultural Revolution. In Chapter Two, I have studied

viewers' letters, published in film magazines and local newspapers, to demonstrate that audiences actively respond to the Cultural Revolution films from their personal experiences. Cultural memory is produced through the interaction between consumers and cultures. Chapter Five especially focuses on average people's participation in the collective memory of the Cultural Revolution. I argue that by contributing personal photos and life stories, and writing to the press about their opinions on and expectations for this magazine, readers have significantly transformed *Lao Zhaopian* into a people's history. Readers, contributors, and the *Lao Zhaopian* publishing company co-produce the photo-textual memory of the Cultural Revolution.

In this thesis, I emphasize the contribution of popular media in keeping the memory of the Cultural Revolution alive rather than criticizing the limitations of popular media. Nevertheless, I am aware of a dangerous trend of forgetting through nostalgia, which has emerged since the mid-1990s. I disagree with Geremie R. Barmé who holds a romantic idea about nostalgia culture in contemporary China:

The mechanism of public nostalgia, especially when it is manipulated by the media, often makes the past more palatable and handy for shoring up present exigencies. Given the perceived burdens of the Chinese past and its complex mesh of historical precedents, the various lapses in collective memory that have occurred over the past two decades may not, however, have been such a bad thing. They may well have allowed people a chance to clear the way to the future without the pressures of earlier horrors constantly invading and overwhelming the present.¹

His main point is that nostalgia and selective memories help people to live in the present without being disturbed by the "earlier horrors," especially when people are confronted with social anomie and disjuncture in contemporary Chinese society. Although I agree that nostalgia in general is a strategy to make peace with the present, I am less optimistic that the same can be said of nostalgia for the period of the Cultural Revolution. This part of Chinese history is far

from being thoroughly investigated and discussed. Those who were traumatized by this political movement are far from being cured. To heal the wound and to prevent the reoccurrence of similar tragedies in the future, Chinese people need to understand this history first before they can afford “forgetting.”

When a history is silenced by the state, and when a “light” consumer culture becomes dominant, nostalgia, in particular “restorative nostalgia,” will easily turn the past into an abstract picture and a pleasure land for easy consumption. In the early 1990s, consumer culture created the peculiar Mao-craze phenomenon, followed immediately by *zhiqing* nostalgia culture which was incorporated into *zhiqing* television serial dramas. The nostalgia culture extends from the television screen to physical consumer space. Retro-restaurants with the theme of *zhiqing* appeared in big cities in the mid 1990s and became social gathering places for ex-*zhiqing*. This kind of restaurant is usually decorated with propaganda posters, newspapers, and pictures of Mao from the Cultural Revolution. Waiters and waitresses are dressed in soldier’s uniforms, a fashion among the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. In this nostalgic space, customers consume the past together with delicious food. As Jennifer Hubbert says, the Cultural Revolution now has become a “Dinner Party.”²

Following the tremendous success of *In the Heat of the Sun*, nostalgia became the most popular mode of portraying the Cultural Revolution. Recent films and television dramas depict the sixties and seventies as a period of carefree lifestyles, thrills, freedom, and simplicity. Feng Xiaogang’s film *Cell Phone* (shouji, 2003) contrasts moral degradation in the present modern consumer society with people’s simplicity in the late 1960s. *The Road* (fangxiang zhilü) (dir. Zhang Jiarui, 2005), a film that traces a woman’s love and marriage from the late 1960s to the twenty-first century, creates a nostalgic image of the Cultural Revolution era characterized by

simplicity, collectivity, and passion. Starting from *Where Dream Begins* (meng kaishi de difang, 2000) to the most recent *Romantic Life* (xue se lang man, 2005) and its sequels, television serial dramas present the late 1960s and 1970s as a period of “dream” and “romance.” Take *Romantic Life* (I) as an example. This 36-episode serial drama covers thirty years, from 1968 to 1998, and focuses on love and friendship among several young people. The part about the Cultural Revolution in Beijing is apparently a television version of *In the Heat of the Sun*: boys chase girls, fight with other boys, and enjoy a carefree life style. According to an on-line survey, 83.7% of 1614 votes declared this serial drama “very interesting.” In an on-line discussion among 379 participants, most of them wrote that they enjoyed the first part, which is set in the Cultural Revolution, much better than the other parts. I found quite a few comments like, “I’m so in love with that period,” “I wish I could have grown up in that period,” “The *zhiqing*’s lives were not bad at all.”³ These television dramas target younger generations who have not experienced the Cultural Revolution. The on-line discussion reveals young people’s lack of knowledge and understanding of this part of Chinese history. It is in this particular context that I call attention to the danger of nostalgia consumer culture.

Aware of the nostalgia trend, I am not arguing that it has become the only mode of representation. The popularity of *Lao Zhaopian* in the late 1990s is evidence of the struggle for collective commemoration of the Cultural Revolution in a more engaging way. Although some photos and articles express nostalgia for the past, a large number of photo-texts on the Cultural Revolution represent individuals’ traumatic memories of their experience. Readers’ responses show their warm reception of the photo-texts on the Cultural Revolution and their support for the publication of private memories. Many people who experienced the Cultural Revolution have not got over the trauma, and thus project their wish for more exposure of this traumatic history in

Lao Zhaopian. Both the contributors and the readers emphasize the significance of passing on the memory of the Cultural Revolution to younger generations. *Lao Zhaopian* is the site of a cultural struggle for more profound engagement with the Cultural Revolution. As popular media play a crucial role in preserving history and passing the historical legacy to younger generations, the mode of representing the past needs special attention. Chinese culture needs to more seriously confront the Cultural Revolution and other traumatic events. By seriously, I do not simply propose that the focus should be on horror or bloodshed, but rather on engaging the past in a way that evokes people's consciousness of historical crises.

As this dissertation is primarily concerned with popular memory of the Cultural Revolution in mainland China, I focus on feature films, television serial dramas, and a photographic magazine that have reached average Chinese people and households on a large scale. I locate my study of memory of the Cultural Revolution specifically in mainland China because it is the place where the movement started, where people's lives were and still are deeply affected by it, where discourses about this history were officially controlled, and where remembering and critical contemplation greatly matter to the people living within the territory. Nevertheless, by no means do I undervalue other creative visual arts such as paintings and professional photographs that are exhibited in museums, or documentary films that are circulated primarily among academics and critics' circles, or historical discourses produced outside mainland China. These are all substantial cultural efforts to engage Chinese history and to enhance historical consciousness.

I will give a few examples. *Goodbye! China!* (*Zaijian zhongguo*, 1974) by Tan Shuxuan, an acclaimed Hong Kong female director, is one of the earliest films that address the Cultural Revolution. It depicts four friends' escape from the mainland to Hong Kong during the Cultural

Revolution, and exposes political atrocities and frenzy. It is a powerful film in terms of exploring the psychological suffering of the marginalized young people (those who are not eligible to be Red Guards and those who do not support the Red Guards Movement). Another compelling Hong Kong film that addresses the Cultural Revolution is Ann Hui's *Song of the Exile* (1990). Although this film only has a few scenes that are explicitly related to the political movement in mainland China (the scenes about the protagonist's visit to her grandparents in Guangzhou), it links identity, more precisely Hong Kong identity, to personal memory and national history. These films offer a unique Hong Kong perspective on the Cultural Revolution, which demonstrates the impact of the political movement on Hong Kong and the conceptualization of local identity in relation to national history.

Chinese Diaspora artists' works are distinctive in terms of exploring the Cultural Revolution with more freedom than works produced within China's media system and in the ways they present China's history to Western audiences. In Chapter Three, I discussed Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, and briefly talked about Joan Chen's *The Sent-Down Girl*. The internet is another media site through which Chinese Diaspora communities participate in discussing and remembering the past. Youqin Wang's website project, "The Chinese Holocaust Memorial," is one example.⁴ A more comprehensive study of Chinese Diaspora works will definitely enrich our understanding of the relation between identity and nation as well as the impact of the transnational media market and new media on historical discourses.

Other important recent works that engage memory of the Cultural Revolution include *Morning Sun* (ba jiu dian zhong de taiyang, dir. Carma Hinton, Geremie R. Barmé and Richard Gordon, 2003), a documentary film mainly circulated in academic circles, as well as paintings,

photographs and videos which have been produced by Chinese artists but are primarily exhibited in museums outside China. A noteworthy project is “Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China,” an exhibition of innovative photo and video art produced since the mid-1990s in China, which was presented at the International Center of Photography and the Asia Society and Museum, New York, from June 11 to September 5, 2004, and the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, from October 2, 2004, to January 16, 2005. The exhibition consists of four sections, “History and Memory,” “Reimagining the Body,” “People and Place,” and “Performing the Self.” The first section particularly examines the consequences of such recent historical moments as the Cultural Revolution.⁵ I went to the exhibition at the Smart Museum of Art in January 2005, and was deeply impressed by the powerful images through which the artists expose the trauma inflicted on Chinese society and individuals.

The above works are just a few examples of cultural and artistic engagement with the Cultural Revolution that I have left out of this dissertation. All together they illustrate new dimensions of the relationship between visual media and historical discourse, and between individual artistic expressions and national memory. Although set within the geographical site of mainland China, this dissertation is best understood with an awareness of memory works beyond the territory, and as an ongoing process propelled by various motivations. A traumatic history, as complicated as the Cultural Revolution, may be difficult to define, and its interpretation may continue to be tenacious and even contradictory. Nevertheless, through dynamic cultural discourses and interactions, the nation may avoid similar tragedies and move forward unburdened by the past trauma.

Notes:

Chapter One

¹ Giuliana Bruno, "Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner," in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London, New York: Verso, 1990), 193 (*italics mine*)

² CCP Central Committee, "Decision Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," in *China's Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969*, ed. Michael Schoenhals (Armonk & London: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 33. Source: *Peking Review*, no. 33 (1966): 6-11.

³ From August 18 to November 25 Chairman Mao received the "Red Guards" on the rostrum of Tiananmen eight times, totaling eleven million persons. The Red Guard movements swept through the country and more young people joined. For studies on the Red Guard Movement, see Jing Lin, *The Red Guards' Path to Violence: Political, Educational, and Psychological Factors* and Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*.

⁴ Between 1962 and 1966, about one million twenty-nine thousand city students went to the countryside. During the Cultural Revolution, about one-tenth of city residents were evacuated. See Liu Xiaomeng, *A History of the Chinese Educated Youth: the Great Waves (1966-1980)*.

⁵ To name just a few books on the history of the Cultural Revolution: Yang Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*; Pamela Lubell, *The Chinese Communist Party and the Cultural Revolution*; Xi Xuan and Jin Chunming, *A Brief History of the "Cultural Revolution,"* ("Wenhua de geming" jianshi); and Nianyi Wang, *The Age of Great Disaster: Ten Years of the Cultural Revolution* (Da dongluan de niandai: wenhua da geming shinian shi).

⁶ Lu Xinhua, "The Wound" (Shang hen), *Wen hui bao*, August 1978.

⁷ For examples of works of "wound literature," see Geremie Barme and Bennett Lee, eds., *The Wounded: New Stories of the Cultural Revolution* 77-78; Gu Hua, *The Hibiscus Town* (fu rong zhen); and Ye Xin, *Wasted Times* (cuo tuo sui yue).

⁸ See Guokai Liu, *A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution*; Kam-Yee Law ed., *China's Cultural Revolution Reconsidered*; Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*; and Woei Lien Chong, ed., *China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*; Anita Chan, *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation*; and Arif Dirlik, "The Politics of the Cultural Revolution in Historical Perspective," 158-183. Some books include sections on the Cultural Revolution, which provide valuable approaches to this movement by situating it within the history of modern China. See June Grasso, Jay Corrin and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China*; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*; Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000*.

⁹ For studies of "wound literature," see Monika Gaenssbauer, "The Cultural Revolution in Feng Jikai's Fiction" and Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China*.

¹⁰ Xie Jin is the most acclaimed Chinese filmmaker of the third generation. He made three influential films on the Cultural Revolution: *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (1980), *The Herdsman* (1982), and *Hibiscus Town* (1986). For studies on Xie Jin's films, see Charles W. Hayford, "Hibiscus Town: Revolution, Love and Bean Curd"; Andrew Kipnis, "Anti-Maoist Gender: *Hibiscus Town*'s Naturalization of a Dengist Sex/Gender/Kinship System"; and Ma Ning, "Symbolic Representation and Symbolic

Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s." The films by the fifth-generation directors that have been extensively studied include Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (1994), Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* (1993). For studies on these films, see Zhaohui Xiong, "To Live: The Survival Philosophy of the Traumatized"; Rey Chow, "We Endure, Therefore We Are: Survival, Governance, and Zhang Yimou's 'To Live'"; Yomi Braester, "Farewell My Concubine: National Myth and City Memories"; Wendy Larson, "The Concubine and the Figure of History: Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*"; and Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past*.

¹¹ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*; Chris Berry, *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution*.

¹² Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past*.

¹³ Guobin Yang, "Days of Old Are Not Puffs of Smoke: Three Hypotheses on Collective Memories of the Cultural Revolution;" Ming-Bao Yue, "Nostalgia for the Future: Cultural Revolution Memory in Two Transnational Chinese Narratives;" and David J. Davies, "Old Zhiqing Photos: Nostalgia and the 'Spirit' of the Cultural Revolution." The other three articles in this special issue explore Cultural Revolution theme restaurants, plays with Cultural Revolution themes, and Cultural Revolution songs, respectively.

¹⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," 223-4. Although Zelizer specifically uses the term "collective memory," this term overlaps with "cultural memory." While collective memory emphasizes memory of a group of people, cultural memory is the concrete embodiment of collective memory.

¹⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?," 150. Also see his *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

¹⁸ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, 7.

¹⁹ Paul Grainge, *Monochrome Memories: Nostalgia and Style in Retro America*.

²⁰ David R. Shumway, "Rock 'n' Roll Sound Tracks and the Production of Nostalgia." There is a rich literature on the use of history in mainstream films. See also Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past*; Paul Grainge, ed. *Memory and Popular Film*.

²¹ Stephen Heath, "Representing Television," 279.

²² Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," 226-27.

²³ Marita Sturken, "Television Vectors and the Making of a Media Event: The Helicopter, the Freeway Chase, and National Memory," 200.

²⁴ Mimi White, "Television Liveness: History, Banality, Attractions," 37-56.

²⁵ Gary R. Edgerton, "Introduction: Television as Historian: a Different Kind of History Altogether"; Lynn Spigel, "From the Dark Ages to the Golden Age: Women's Memories and Television Reruns," in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. I borrow this term "telehistories" from Spigel.

²⁶ See the discussion in Xiaobing Yang's *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction*.

²⁷ Sheldon H. Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity*.

²⁸ For example, see Yosefa Loshitzky ed., *Spielberg's Schindler's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*; Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*; Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*; and Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory."

²⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, 175.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

³¹ Joshua Hirsch does a comprehensive study of films concerning the Holocaust in his book

Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust. The book provides an excellent example of applying Dominick LaCapra's theory of "working-through" to film analysis. I will address his work in Chapter Three.

³² E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, eds., *Trauma and Cinema*, 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴ Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Schindler's List Is Not Shoah".

³⁵ For example, Michael Bommers and Patrick Wright, "'Charms of Residence': The Public and the Past." They are among the first who argue that popular memory is closely connected to the dominant perceptions of history. Also see Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse in Cultural Criticism*.

³⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ For the various usages of the term "popular," see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed., 236-38. Also see Michael Foucault, "Film and Popular Memory: An Interview with Michael Foucault," in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)*, trans. John Johnston, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, 89-106.

³⁹ Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed. *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*, 7.

⁴⁰ Robert Burgoyne, "From Contested to Consensual Memory: The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum," 209.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

Chapter Two

¹ Guobin Yang, "Days of Old Are Not Puffs of Smoke."

² In the Introduction to a special collection of essays on memory of the Cultural Revolution in the 1990s in *The China Review*, the editors raise a question: "Why did popular memories of the Cultural Revolution flourish in the 1990s after over a decade of mnemonic control?" Also see Mingbao Yue's article "Introduction: Gilded-Age Memories of the Cultural Revolution," in this collection.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

⁴ Jennifer Hubbert, "Revolution Is a Dinner Party: Cultural Revolution Restaurants in Contemporary China," 133.

⁵ Deng Xiaoping never held office as head of the government, but was the de facto leader of the People's Republic of China from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. He started China's economic reform, that is, the "socialist market economy."

⁶ For the complete report of the "1981 Resolution," see CCP Central Committee, "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," *Beijing Review*, no. 27 (July 16, 1981): 10-39. Here, I use Barmé's translation. Geremie R. Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader*, 119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ Jennifer Hubbert also points out the selective nature of the state's critiques of the Cultural Revolution. See "Revolution Is a Dinner Party."

⁹ In *Shades of Mao*, Barmé has done a comprehensive study of the Mao-craze in the beginning of the 1990s from the perspective of nostalgia. He suggests that the Mao-craze reflects people's nostalgia for an age of simplicity and passion. Actually the government's ambivalent assessment of Mao prepared for the later Mao-craze. I will address the point of nostalgia in Chapter three.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-4.

¹¹ Xi Xuan and Jin Chunming, 503 (emphasis mine).

¹² Quoted in Chen Zhi Ang, *History of Chinese Television Art* (Zhongguo dianshi yishu tongshi)

(Zhongguo wen lian chubanshe: 2004), 150. (translation mine).

¹³ Barmé, 51.

¹⁴ For studies of Chinese melodrama, see E. Ann Kaplan, "Melodrama/Subjectivity/Ideology: Western Melodrama Theories and Their Relevance to Recent Chinese Cinema"; Ma Ning, "Symbolic Representation and Symbolic Violence: Chinese Family Melodrama of the Early 1980s"; Nick Browne, "Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Melodrama"; Paul G. Pickowicz, "Melodramatic Representation and the 'May Fourth' Tradition of Chinese Cinema"; and Stephen Teo, "Chinese Melodrama."

¹⁵ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, 20.

¹⁶ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸ For more information on early Chinese melodrama, see Yingjin Zhang, ed. *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*; also see William Rothman, "The Goddess: Reflections on Melodrama East and West."

¹⁹ During the Cultural Revolution, film production almost stopped, and model plays, in traditional Peking opera format with communist themes, became the primary cultural entertainment and/or propaganda. Some plays also used the melodramatic mode to glorify the party's role as the nation's savior and to evoke audiences' patriotic emotions. A good example is *Red Detachment of Women*, which is actually adapted from Xie Jin's melodrama film (1961) of the same title.

²⁰ Paul G. Pickowicz, 316.

²¹ Linda Williams, 28-42.

²² Pickowicz, "Popular Cinema and Political Thought in Post-Mao China: Reflections on Official Pronouncements, Film, and the Film Audience," 49.

²³ In April of 1976, Chinese people from all over the nation came to Tiananmen Square to mourn for Premier Zhou Enlai, who died on January eighth the same year. On the fifth of April, the police crushed this movement by force. Thousands of people were arrested.

²⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," 72.

²⁵ Michael Schoenhals, 298.

²⁶ Chris Berry, *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China*.

²⁷ During the Cultural Revolution, film production almost stopped.

²⁸ Berry, 121.

²⁹ Wu Shixing, *Born in the 1970s: Film* (qishi niandai sheng ren: dianying), 116.

³⁰ Chen Zhi Ang, *History of Chinese Television Art* (zhongguo dianshi yishu tongshi), 40.

³¹ Pickowicz (1989), 39-42.

³² Ibid., 38.

³³ Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 229.

³⁴ Elsaesser, 72.

³⁵ Williams, 38-40. She gives Griffith's *Way Down East* and Cameron's *Titanic* as two examples. She argues that the former avoids exploration of flawed patriarchal law as the source of the protagonist's suffering, and the latter diverges from social problems resulting from class. Focusing on race issues, she criticizes black and white Manichean polarities which simplify and twist the real social and historical complexities of the problems.

³⁶ Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past*, 145.

³⁷ The "reconciliation of the irreconcilable" is a term which Martha Vicinus uses to address the simple solution in nineteenth-century domestic melodrama. Martha Vicinus, "Helpless and Unfriended: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama," 132.

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- ³⁸ Pickowicz (1993), 321.
- ³⁹ Kaplan (2005).
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.
- ⁴¹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s film was the predominant entertainment for people in the city as well as in the countryside. The government saw the function of film as promoting national culture and encouraged wide exhibition of films, including in rural areas. Many villages showed films once a week at public gathering places. I grew up in such a vibrant film culture in a small village. Actually, as early as the 1950s, projectionists were trained in Beijing and sent to villages nationwide.
- ⁴² Yang Yanjin, "Reply to Comrade Chen Huangmei on *The Alley*," *Wen hui bao*, November 1, 1981. (translation mine)
- ⁴³ Zhou Junjie, "A Thought-Provoking Ending," *Yangcheng Evening* (Yangcheng wanbao), Dec. 4, 1981. The editor usually gives a title to the letter to be published. (translation mine)
- ⁴⁴ Peng Xiaoguang, "Wish *The Alley* Had a Sequel," *China Youth*, 1982, Jan. 31. The letter indicates he is an employee at a factory. (translation mine)
- ⁴⁵ Wang Honglin, "The Alley Inspires People," *Beijing Evening*, Jan. 13, 1982. (translation mine)
- ⁴⁶ Braester (2003), 145.
- ⁴⁷ See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 128-138.
- ⁴⁸ Teng Weizhou, "Refusal to Love Does Not Mean Beauty," (duan qing bing bu mei), *Heilongjiang Daily* (Heilongjian ribao), Oct. 5, 1982. The letter indicates the writer is an employee in a chemical fiber factory. (translation mine)
- ⁴⁹ Cheng Zhiwei, "A Faked Cold Ending," (Yige renwei de yinleng jieju), *Wei Hui Bao*, Nov. 21, 1982. (translation mine)
- ⁵⁰ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*.
- ⁵¹ Liu Chonglong, "Does Song Wei Deserve Sympathy?" *Beijing Evening*, January 28, 1981. (translation mine)
- ⁵² *Beijing Evening*, March 8, 1981. (translation mine)
- ⁵³ Xiao Lin, "On Song Wei," *Wen Hui Bao*, Jan. 8, 1981. (translation mine) I chose this article because it is representative. It argues on behalf of Song Wei from many aspects, connecting this character and the political situation in the fifties and sixties.
- ⁵⁴ Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Coping with the Trauma: Official and Unofficial Histories of the Cultural Revolution," paper presented at Brandeis University, March 16, 2005.
- ⁵⁵ Braester (2003), 142.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 139.
- ⁵⁷ Sheila Cornelius succinctly analyzes Confucius's ideology of women and femininity which is the root of the patriarchal system in China, and women's place in socialist narratives in her book, *New Chinese Cinema: Challenging Representations*, 68-78.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 31-2.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 77.
- ⁶⁰ Wu Shixin, 116. (translation mine)
- ⁶¹ Shuqin Cui, *Women through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, 55.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Yue Meng & Jinhua Dai, *Emerging from the Horizon of History* (Fuchu lishi dibiao), 31.
- ⁶⁴ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, 133.
- ⁶⁵ Esther C. M. Yau, "Is China the End of Hermeneutics?; or, Political and Cultural Usage of Non-Han Women in Mainland Chinese Films," in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, 287.
- ⁶⁶ Cui, 55.
- ⁶⁷ See her "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,"

Socialist Review, vol. 80 (1985): 65-107.

⁶⁸ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

⁶⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women: Rhetoric, Experience and Self-Perception in Twentieth-Century China*, 152. (emphasis mine)

⁷¹ Shuqin Cui, 172.

⁷² Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." The article was originally published in 1975.

⁷³ Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory," 176-190.

⁷⁴ bell hooks, "the Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," 207-221.

⁷⁵ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," 348-359.

⁷⁶ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*.

Chapter Three

¹ I collected data from plot descriptions published in *China's Film Yearbook* 1991-2001.

² The government's strict control over the representations of the Cultural Revolution does not change even today. While doing research in the China Film Archive in the summer of 2006, I was denied access to the files on *Bitter Love* (1982), a film about the Cultural Revolution that was prohibited from public screening.

³ Ni Zhen, *Memoirs from the Beijing Film Academy*, 44.

⁴ Zhaohui Xiong, "To Live: the Survival Philosophy of the Traumatized," 206.

⁵ Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*, 18.

⁶ Rey Chow, "We Endure, Therefore We Are."

⁷ E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, 12.

⁸ Dominic LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust and History and Memory after Auschwitz*.

⁹ LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 142.

¹⁰ Rey Chow (1996), 1047.

¹¹ Zhaohui Xiong, 206.

¹² Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History*, 209.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁵ Tonglin Lu, "Fantasy and Ideology in a Chinese Film: Zizekian Reading of the Cultural Revolution," *Positions*, 12:2 (2004): 539.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 554-5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 540.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 560-1.

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. 5.

²⁰ Questioning the role of the victims and the general masses in traumatic historical events has resulted in a new cultural consciousness formed in the last decade of the Twentieth century. "Collective guilt," "individual guilt," resistance or complicity have been debated in terms of the politics of memory of the Holocaust in Germany. "Innocence" is questioned. Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* is one of the most popular books that de-romanticizes the concept of "resistance," and brings up the issue of complicity and collective guilt. See Mary Nolan, "The politics of memory in the Bonn and Berlin Republics."

²¹ Ban Wang (1997), 228.

- ²² Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, 336.
- ²³ Braester, 354.
- ²⁴ Mao Tse Tung, *Quotations from Mao Tse Tung* (1927-1964) (Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1964). Source: "Report on Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (March 1927), *Selected Works*, Vol. I., p. 28.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 354.
- ²⁶ Li Erwei, *The Man Jiang Wen* (Han zi Jiang Wen), 212.
- ²⁷ Tonglin Lu, 550-1.
- ²⁸ Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*, 18.
- ²⁹ Braester, 353.
- ³⁰ For detailed explanation of the terms, see Fred Davis *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, 17-26; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41-55.
- ³¹ David, 21.
- ³² Boym, xviii.
- ³³ Ibid., 50.
- ³⁴ Wang Dongcheng, "The Distortion and Misinterpretation of History," (Dui lishi zhengshi de waiqu yu wudu) *China Film Weekly* (zhongguo dianying zhoubao), January 4, 1996. (emphasis and translation mine)
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Zhang Qiu, "Is It 'Brightness' or 'Emptiness'?" (Shi "canlan," haishi xukong) *Weekends* (zhoumo), Oct. 7, 1995. (translation mine)
- ³⁷ See Mei Duo, "What to Be Nostalgic About? What to Praise?" (Huainian shenme? Gesong shenme?) *Weekends* (zhoumo), Oct. 4, 1995. (translation mine)
- ³⁸ Jiang Wen, etc., *Birth: The Birth of a Film* (Dansheng: yi bu dianying de dansheng) (Wuhan: Changjiang Wen Yi Chubanshe, 2005), 22-23. (translation mine)
- ³⁹ Ibid., 75. (translation mine)
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 75. (my translation)
- ⁴¹ Dai Jinhua, "Imagined Nostalgia," trans. Judy T.H. Chen, *Boundary 2*, 24:3 (Autumn, 1997): 143-161.
- ⁴² Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 115.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 77.
- ⁴⁴ For studies on the sixth-generation Chinese filmmakers, see Zhang Zhen ed., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*.
- ⁴⁵ Arthur G Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory*, 206.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 206.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 203.
- ⁴⁸ For an excellent analysis of *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* in terms of nostalgia and trauma, see I-Fen Wu, "Looking for Nostalgia: Memory and National Identity in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*," *CineAction* (2003 winter):45-51.
- ⁴⁹ Li Erwei, 175.
- ⁵⁰ Wendy Larson, "Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution"; Dai Jinhua, "Imagined Nostalgia."
- ⁵¹ Larson, 423
- ⁵² Ibid., 433.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 445.
- ⁵⁴ Marita Sturken (1997).
- ⁵⁵ See Barmé, *Shades of Mao* and *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*; Lei Ouyang Bryant, "Music, Memory, and Nostalgia: Collective Memories of Cultural Revolution Songs in Contemporary

China,” *The China Review*: 151-176.

⁵⁶ Geremie R. Barmé (1999), 324.

⁵⁷ Dai Jinhua, “Imagined Nostalgia,” 159-160.

⁵⁸ Fred Davis, 9.

⁵⁹ For examples of the commercialization of Mao icon, see Barmé (1996), 31-39.

⁶⁰ For detail of the process of shooting, see Jiang Wen, etc. *Birth: the Birth of A Film*.

⁶¹ Marita Sturken, 20.

⁶² The interview with Dai Sijie by *Guang Ming Daily*, published at

<http://202.116.13.5/news/content.asp?newsid=7367> (accessed September 14, 2006)

⁶³ Wang Zhebin, “The Age of Books” (Dushu de niandai), May 2003,

<http://www.bph.com.cn/chinese/top/media/xcf2.htm> (accessed on June 26 2004)

⁶⁴ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, 160.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁶ Dai Sijie, Introduction to *Balzac and the Little Seamstress*, trans. Yu Zhongxian (Beijing: Shi Yue Wenyi Chubanshe, 2003).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Boym, xiii-xiv.

⁶⁹ For the notion of “panopticon,” see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

⁷⁰ Naficy, 181.

⁷¹ Ibid., 185.

⁷² Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 392.

⁷³ For data on this film’s production and distribution, see

<http://www.filmfileeurope.com/profiles/production.asp?lang=en&p=23>

⁷⁴ <http://www.ssreader.com/Review.asp?ReviewID=52> (accessed Sept. 18, 2006)

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Arora Poonam, “The Production of Third World Subjects for First World Consumption: *Salaam Bombay and Parama*,” 294.

⁷⁷ Ban Wang (2004), 3.

⁷⁸ Xu Beng, “Memory of the Cultural Revolution in transformation” (biange zhong de wenge jiyi), *Twenty-first Century* (er shi yi shiji), no. 93 (Feb. 2006).

Chapter Four

¹ Chang, Tsan-kuo. *China’s Window on the World: TV News, Social Knowledge and International Spectacles*, 4-17. This book provides substantial information on the history of Chinese television and policies and regulations.

² Gary R Edgerton, “Introduction: Television as Historian: a Different Kind of History Altogether”; Steve Anderson, “History TV and popular memory”; and Lynn Spigel, “From the Dark Ages to the Golden Age,” in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*.

³ Edgerton, 3.

⁴ Spigel, 374.

⁵ Tsan-kuo Chang, *China’s Window on the World: TV News, Social Knowledge and International Spectacles*, 11-13; also see Won Ho Chang, *Mass Media in China: the History and the Future*, 21.

⁶ Tsan-Kuo Chang, 19.

⁷ For a more detailed study of the difference between TV narrative genres, read Robert C. Allen, ed., *To Be Continued...: Soap Operas Around the World*.

⁸ Tsan-Kuo Chang, 41-43.

- ⁹ Reprinted in *Popular TV* (Da zhong dian shi), (April 1984): 23 (emphasis added). All the quotations from Chinese newspapers, magazines, and books are my translation.
- ¹⁰ China Film Yearbook Committee, *China Film Yearbook* (Zhongguo dianying nianjian) (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chu ban she, 1988), see 3: 9; *China Broadcasting Yearbook* (Zhongguo Guangbo dianshi nianjian, 1997), 57-59.
- ¹¹ *Chinese Broadcasting Yearbook* 1994, 66-67.
- ¹² Yin Hong, "Meaning, production, consumption: the history and reality of television drama in China."
- ¹³ Liu Xiaomeng, *A History of the Chinese Educated Youth*, 716-18.
- ¹⁴ Zhang Shu, "Deng Xiaoping and the Solution of *Zhiqing* problems," in *Literature of Chinese Communist Party*, No. 6. (2003): 61. Also see Liu Xiaomeng, *A History of the Chinese Educated Youth* and Gu Hongzhang, ed. *The Beginning and End of China's Zhiqing Going up to the Mountain and Down to the Country*.
- ¹⁵ See the appendix in Yao Xinyong.
- ¹⁶ Chen Zhi Ang, *History of Chinese Television Art* (zhongguo dianshi yishu tongshi), 12.
- ¹⁷ Beidahuang, literally translated as "Great Northern Wasteland," refers to the large rural area in North China where thousand of thousands educated youths had worked.
- ¹⁸ *Zhejiang Daily* (Zhejiang ribao), March 24, 1984.
- ¹⁹ *Popular Film* (Dazong dianying), no. 48 (Jan. 1985): 9.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao), January 1, 1986.
- ²² Liu Xiaomeng, 716-18.
- ²³ Zhang Shu, 57.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 57-8.
- ²⁵ See Liu Xiaomeng, 663-67.
- ²⁶ For detail on this conference, see Liu Xiaomeng (1996): 790-96.
- ²⁷ For example, November 12, 26, 1979 reporting model *zhiqing* devoted to countryside development; January 1, 1981 reports on eighty thousands youths contribution to Beidahuan; April 7, 1981 reports *zhiqing* returning to the village, etc.
- ²⁸ *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao), November 12, 1982.
- ²⁹ *Contemporary Play* (Dangdai xiju), June 1985.
- ³⁰ Horace M. Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch, "Television as a Cultural Forum: Implications for Research," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 1983 (summer). While in most western countries producers are important, in China before the late 1990s, producers did not have much importance because most television dramas were produced by the television station. The most important people were directors and screenwriters. See Tan Tao, "Tan dianshiju zhipian ren de zhiye su zhi" *China TV* (Zhongguo dianshi), no.10 (2001).
- ³¹ For the role of the villain in soap operas, see Ien Ang, "Dallas and the Melodramatic Imagination" and Tania Modleski, "Searching for Tomorrow in Today's Soap Operas."
- ³² Meng Fanhua, *Carnival of All Gods: Chinese Cultural Phenomena at the Turn of the Century* (Zhong shen kuang huan: shiji zhi jiao de zhongguo wenhua), 49.
- ³³ Liang Xiaosheng, *Xue Cheng* (I) (Beijing: renming wenxue chubanshe, 1987)
- ³⁴ *Popular TV* (Dazong dianshi), no. 91 (Aug. 1988): 5.
- ³⁵ Newcomb and Hirsch, 53.
- ³⁶ Yang Jian, *History of Chinese Zhiqing Literature*, 370.
- ³⁷ Liang Xiaosheng wrote the sequel of *The Snow City* in the following year. He designed a rather satisfying ending for each of his main *zhiqing* characters. Nevertheless, although this serial drama was very popular, the sequel was not adapted to television drama.

³⁸ Steve Anderson, "history TV and popular memory," 23.

³⁹ Not all educated youths were Red Guards. Some people were sent down to villages and farms because of their "bad" family background.

⁴⁰ To have a more comprehensive understanding of Red Guards, see Liu Guokai, *A Brief Analysis of the Cultural Revolution*, and Natascha Vittinghoff, "China's Generation X: Rusticated Red Guards in Controversial Contemporary Plays."

⁴¹ Guobin Yang, "China's *Zhiqing* Generation: Nostalgia, Identity, and Cultural Resistance in the 1990s," *Modern China* 29, no. 3 (July 2003): 270.

⁴² Laifong Leung, *Morning Sun: Interview with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation*, 63. Most of the interviews were done in 1987 and 1988 summer. Hu Ping was excluded from the Red Guards because of his "landlord" family background. But he was enthusiastic about the Red Guard Movement.

⁴³ An Wenjiang, "I Don't Regret," in *Memories of Our Generation*, 99.

⁴⁴ At that time, many children began school very late, so it was not unusual a 17-year boy was still in a middle school.

⁴⁵ Liang Xiaosheng, *The Confession of a Red Guard* (Yi ge hong wei bing di zi bai), 369.

⁴⁶ "Tall hat": during the Cultural Revolution, at public struggle meetings and parades, the struggled people were forced to wear tall conical hats, made of paper, and wear heavy wooden boards on which their "crimes" were written.

⁴⁷ It is related to a classic Chinese novel—*The Journey to the West*, which tells a monkey (Monkey King) escorts a monk (Tang Monk) to the Holy land to get the Holy Scripture.

⁴⁸ Dominick LaCapra (1998), 20.

⁴⁹ Yin Hong, 34.

⁵⁰ Robert Allen, "A Reader Oriented Poetics of the Soap Opera," 516.

⁵¹ Newcomb and Hirsch, 50.

⁵² This serial drama has been regarded as the first of indoors drama genre, the symbol of the maturity of Chinese television drama production, the first successful practice of combining mainstream melody and the market, and the first television production that makes the government recognizes the power of popular television drama. For a detailed study of this serial drama, see Lisa Rofel, "The melodrama of national identity in post-Tiananmen China," in *To be Continued: Soap Operas around the World*.

⁵³ *China Television* (Zhongguo dianshi) (March 1991): 34-35. (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ For example, see Jianying Zha, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers are Transforming a Culture* and Barmé, *In The Red*.

⁵⁵ Music and radio production are included later.

⁵⁶ Red Guards often ordered those who were charged with various crimes like "capitalist-roaders," "bad elements," or "counterrevolutionaries" to parade in public places. The parade would be accompanied with broadcasting of their crimes. It is a way to punish them and to educate the mass.

⁵⁷ *China Television* (Zhongguo dianshi) 97, no. 2 (1995): 3 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁸ Guo Bingyan, 285.

⁵⁹ *China TV* no. 97 (Feb. 1995): 3.

⁶⁰ Alan O'Connor ed., *Raymond Williams on Television*, 10.

⁶¹ See Guo Bingyan.

⁶² According to the policy of return, the educated youths who were married could not get back to the city. In order to return, some educated youths got divorce and left their children behind. *Unpaid Debts* is the first serial drama that seriously addresses this tragic aspect in *zhiqing* history.

⁶³ Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, 184.

⁶⁴ It is in Episode 16.

⁶⁵ In addition to national network, there are regional networks and local stations. For example, each

province has its provincial TV station. But all local, regional, and national television broadcastings are under the administrative regulation of the Party. For details on Chinese television system, see Tsan-Kuo Chang, Jian Wang, and Yanru Chen, *China's window on the World*.

⁶⁶ As I have briefly mentioned when discussing *Unpaid Debts*, some of the *zhiqing* who married local women during the Cultural Revolution chose to divorce in order to get back to the city. China has a “huko” (household registration) system, which restricts population movement. The Public Security Bureau issues every household one booklet containing names of every family member. Only a registered resident can have complete access to social benefits provided by the city associated with the “huko.” Prior to 1998, an individual’s huko status was inherited from the mother. That means if the mother holds an agricultural huko, the child’s huko status would be agricultural. It means that the child could not enjoy social benefits available to the children in the city. Although this system has undergone various stages of reform and relaxation, it is still existent, as an essential factor of the divide between rural and urban residents. I think huko system is one main reason why many *zhiqing* chose to go back to the city, which means a more privileged life. In the late 1970s, the policy of allowing *zhiqing* returning the city prescribes that those who had married should stay in the village. This policy and the huko system left a large number of broken families and abandoned children, although individuals’ should also take responsibility for their choices.

⁶⁷ *China Television* 97, no. 2 (1995): 6.

⁶⁸ Purnima Mankekar, “national texts and gendered lives,” in *The Anthropology of Media: a Reader*, 316.

⁶⁹ Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a “Postfeminist” Age*; and Christine Gledhill, “Pleasurable Negotiations,” in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*.

⁷⁰ Gary R. Edgerton, 9.

Chapter Five

¹ Although *Lao Zhaopian* uses a book code instead of a journal or magazine code, I categorize it as a magazine in terms of its quarterly (and later bimonthly since 2002) publication and magazine-style content.

² The data was provided by Wang Jiaming, the general editor of Shandong Pictorial Press, in my talk with him in September 2006 in Beijing.

³ Edward S. Krebs, “Old in the Newest New China: Publications on Private Memories as Sources of Individual Views of History,” paper presented at Chinese historiography conference, at Heidelberg University in May, 2001.

⁴ Zhao Jingrong, *Di Da Shengming de Di Se* (Reach the Primal Colors of Life), 124-5. All citations from Chinese books and *Lao Zhaopian* are my translation.

⁵ Wang Jiaming, “It Is a Beautiful Feeling” (Yizhong meihao de qinggan), *Lao Zhaopian* 1 (1996): 126.

⁶ Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble eds., *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*; Wu Hung provided me with his forthcoming publication—“Negotiating Art and Visual Culture: The ‘Old Photo Craze’ and the Avant-garde Use of Old Photographs in 90’s China” in *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*. It is developed from his paper, “Old Photo Fever in 90’s China,” presented at The First Annual Symposium of the Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago, May 16-17, 2003.

⁷ All the excerpts from the readers’ letters in the archive and the citations from *Old Photos* are my translation.

⁸ Richard Chalfen, *Snapshot Version of Life*; John Kouwenhoven “Living in a Snapshot World,” in *Snapshot*; and Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frame: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*.

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- ⁹ Kouwenhoven "Living in a Snapshot World," 107.
- ¹⁰ For example, Marianne Hirsch, ed. *Familial Gaze*; Kirsten Emiko McAllister, "A Story of Escape: Family Photographs from Japanese Canadian Internment Camps," in *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, 81-112.
- ¹¹ Jennifer M. Tiernan, *An Illusion of Calm: Snapshot Photography, History, and Me*, 68.
- ¹² For more studies on the concept of home mode photography and home movies as a social process, see Christopher Musello, "Studying the Home Mode: An Exploration of Family Photography and Visual Communication," *Studies in Visual Communication* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 23-42; and Chuck Kleinhans, "My Aunt Alice's Home Movies," *Journal of Film and Video*, 38: 3-4 (summer-fall, 1986): 25-35.
- ¹³ Chalfen, 156.
- ¹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photograph*, 88-9.
- ¹⁵ We should be aware that here Barthes does not condise manipulative photographic techniques such as photomontage and fake snapshots
- ¹⁶ "Conform to the trend" (shunying chaoliu) is a slogan that is usually used by the government to emphasize "mainstream" and "correct ideologies."
- ¹⁷ Both Peng Dehuai and Yu Luoke were persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution.
- ¹⁸ They only mentioned one case of an exception. Someone reported to the government about an essay which used positive words to describe the author's first impression of Jiang Qing, one of the "Gang of Four." The publication company got an oral warning about the use of such words in future publications. Feng Keli told me that *Lao Zhaopian*'s publication hasn't been affected by this incident, and that it isn't under special surveillance.
- ¹⁹ Wang Jiamin, in *Lao Zhaopian* 6 (1998): 126.
- ²⁰ The reader did not write her/his name on the survey sheet.
- ²¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 74.
- ²² Nancy M. Shawcross, "Image—Memory—Text," 101.
- ²³ Barthes, 67-77.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 73.
- ²⁵ John Berger, "Ways of Remembering," 44.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 46.
- ²⁷ Barthes, 26.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 27.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 21.
- ³⁰ Ba Jin, *Records of Thoughts* (Sui Xiang Lu), 601-614.
- ³¹ Gao Xian, "The Past that Is Hard to Look Back At," (Bu kan hui shou de suiyue), *Lao Zhaopian* 12 (1997): 95.
- ³² Ibid., 94-6.
- ³³ Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, eds., *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography*, 13-14.
- ³⁴ Marianne Hirsch, 1997.
- ³⁵ Jiang Weiping, "A Family Photo," (Yi zhang quanjiafu), *Lao Zhaopian* 17 (2001): 84-7.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 87
- ³⁷ Marita Sturken, "The Image as Memorial: Personal Photographs in Cultural Memory," 178.
- ³⁸ Ma Zhongxing, "Yi Dacheng" (In Memory of Dacheng), *Lao Zhaopian* 14 (2000):124-135.
- ³⁹ Ye Yanbing, "Tou yici jiandao shishen" (The First Encounter with Death), *Lao Zhaopian* 8 (1998): 68.
- ⁴⁰ Quoted in Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, 146.
- ⁴¹ Gao Xian, 94.

⁴² There have been efforts to collect information about victims who were persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution. One of the most significant projects is the Chinese Holocaust Memorial website <http://www.chinese-memorial.org>, established by Youqin Wang, Senior Lecturer of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Chicago University. The site began with between 500 and 600 victims' names and now lists more than 1,000. It posts victims' names, their bios and stories, witnesses' letters, and witness testimony.

⁴³ Ding You, "The Deaf-Mute in the Cultural Revolution" (Wenge zhong de longya ren), *Lao Zhaopian* 7 (1998): 25-29.

⁴⁴ Sontag, 106.

⁴⁵ Ding You, 29.

⁴⁶ Lucy Noakes, "Women and the War That Never Happened: British Women, Autobiography and Memory During the Gulf War," in *Temporalities, Autobiography and Everyday Life*, 227.

⁴⁷ Guo Baowen, "My Father Was 'Head of the Cultural Revolution Committee'" (Fuqin dang guo "wenge zhuren"), *Lao Zhaopian* 17 (2001): 88-89.

⁴⁸ For example, see Tang Xi's photo-text in Vol. 3 (1997): 109-110 and Rui Ming's photo-text in vol. 13 (2000):153-155; Wang Nanhai in 15 (2001).

⁴⁹ *Lao Zhaopian* 18 (2001):136-143.

⁵⁰ We should be aware that Ding Dong excludes a large number of people who were forced to go to the countryside because of their "bad" family background.

⁵¹ Eating from the same "Big Pot" (Chi da guo fan), means getting the same pay, no matter if one works hard or does not work at all.

⁵² *Lao Zhaopian* 18 (2001): 143.

⁵³ Fu Zuomei, "In Memory of 'Bu Xi Zou'" (Xin xi 'Bu xi zou'), *Lao Zhaopian* 6 (1997): 92-95.

⁵⁴ This is a well-known legend in China: Yu, an official in ancient China, sacrificed his personal life for public interest. When he was carrying out the mission of preventing floods, he did not go back home for rest. There were three times that he passed his home, but he did not stop.

⁵⁵ Da Zhai refers to one people's commune, which was set as a model by the government for other communes to follow.

⁵⁶ Fu Zuomei, 93.

⁵⁷ Li Weihong, "The Last *Zhiqing*" (Zuihou yige zhiqing), *Lao Zhaopian* 2 (1997): 47-49.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁹ For a detailed study of this collection, see David J. Davies, "Old *Zhiqing* Photos: Nostalgia and the 'Spirit' of the Cultural Revolution," *The China Review* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2005), 97-123.

⁶⁰ Xu Dong, "Memory Not to Be Forgotten: Remembering My Mother –Zigang" (Weile yong bu wangque de jilian: yi wode muqin Zigang), *Lao Zhaopian* 17 (2001): 43-56.

⁶¹ The May Seventh Cadre Schools were set up in late 1968 following Mao's May Seventh Directive, in which Mao suggested setting up farms, later called cadre schools, where intellectuals and cadres were "sent down" to perform manual labor and undergo ideological reeducation.

⁶² Ibid., 43.

⁶³ Yang Tuan, "My Father and Mother and *Confession of Thoughts and Pain*" (Wode fuqin muqin yu "si tong lu"), *Lao Zhaopian* 14 (2000): 44-45

⁶⁴ Cui Gangzhu, "Elegy of the Soul" (xin shang), *Lao Zhaopian* 5 (1998): 21-8.

⁶⁵ Cui Guangzhu, *Lao Zhaopian* 5 (1998), 26.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁷ Yu Qing, "Hong zhuang su guo" (Army Uniform, Plain Costume), *Lao Zhaopian* 1 (1996): 90-2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁹ Feng Keli, *Reflections on Lao Zhaopian* (Gangyan Lao Zhaopian), 8-9.

⁷⁰ All the information was provided by Wang Jiaming.

⁷¹ See Wu Hung.

⁷² See Luan Yu, "In Memory of the Twenty-Fourth Anniversary of Zhang Zhixin's Death" (Zhang Zhixin yunan er shi si nian ji), *Lao Zhaopian* 9 (1998): 9-13.

⁷³ Feng Keli, *Lao Zhaopian* 9 (1998): 126.

⁷⁴ The three people he mentioned are victims of the Cultural Revolution.

⁷⁵ "The above" refers to the government, the authority. It has an ironic connotation. This term is commonly used in contemporary China.

⁷⁶ Yang Tuan, *Lao Zhaopian* 14 (2000): 44-45.

⁷⁷ See Zhao Jingrong, 132.

⁷⁸ Feng Keli, "Beyond the Trauma of History" (Rang lishi bu zai chenzhong), *Lao Zhaopian* 34 (2004): 66-67.

Conclusion

¹ Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red*, 317-8.

² Jennifer Hubbert, "Revolution Is a Dinner Party: Cultural Revolution Restaurants in Contemporary China," *The China Review*. In the article, Hubbert argues that nostalgia becomes materialized to be consumed, but she also points out that the retro-restaurants provide a meaningful space for former *zhiqing* consumers to remember and rethink the past.

³ <http://club.chinaren.com/71464257.html> The discussion on this serial drama lasted from July 18, 2006, to September 5, 2006. (accessed October 10, 2006)

⁴ See her website <http://www.chinese-memorial.org>.

⁵ For details on this exhibition, see Wu Hung and Stephanie Smith, *Between Past and Future: New Photography and Video from China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

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Appendix:

The Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution: History and Interpretations

Since this dissertation is less concerned with the history of the Cultural Revolution per se than with its media representation, I only give a brief account of this political movement in the Introduction. This appendix will provide more information concerning this historical event and its interpretation over the past three decades.

Recent studies relate the Cultural Revolution to the preceding national events and the political and economic situation in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the early 1950s, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) tried to impose intellectual conformity by forcing intellectuals to adopt Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism to serve the cause of socialist construction. Those who resisted were purged from professional positions and “sent down” to the countryside for rectification through physical labor. It caused anxiety among intellectuals. In 1956, Mao Zedong proposed to allow free discussion, to let “a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend.” This was the “One Hundred Flowers Movement.” However, when the gusts of criticism went beyond Mao’s anticipation, the CCP launched the anti-rightist campaign in 1957. The intellectuals who criticized the government were purged. It was suggested that 550,000 people were tagged as “rightists,” most of whom were sent down to the countryside for rectification.

In the late 1957, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward (1957-1960) to mobilize China’s

entire population in military-like fashion to overcome the limitations of economic scarcity. He disregarded the existing constraints and believed that man's will could overcome any obstacles. The consequence of the Great Leap Forward was devastating. The acute scarcity of food brought the movement to an end. Approximately 25 million or even more people died as a result of the agricultural disasters of these three bad years. Peng Dehuai, Minister of Defense, was purged from his position for criticizing this movement. Historians and scholars, who hold the view that the Cultural Revolution was a result of the conflict and power struggle in the CCP, argue that the anti-rightist movement and the Great Leap Forward increased the division between Mao Zedong's faction and Liu Shaoqi's (Liu was Mao's successor as Chairman of the Republic) regime, which eventually led to the breakout of the Cultural Revolution.

The years between 1962 and 1965 saw economic recovery and relative stability in political environment under the aegis of Liu Shaoqi. However, behind the façade of national unity, the polarization in the Party was increasing. There were disagreements between Mao and Liu Shaoqi's regime in many aspects: literature and arts, education, economic planning, and industrial management. The most fundamental discrepancy lies with the issue of "class struggle." Mao insisted that the biggest threat to the nation was the continuing existence of class and the corruption in the Party, and that the Party at every level should be submitted to non-party criticism to prevent corruption. In contrast, Liu Shaoqi and his supporters chose to solve problems of corruption at a lower level, rather than extending it to the upper level of the government.

In 1965 Mao demanded an investigation of Wu Han's play—*The Dismissal of Hai Rui from Office* (hai rui ba guan). The play is about Hai Rui, a Ming dynasty official who punishes local

officials for exploiting and mistreating the peasants. In the end of the play, Hai Rui is dismissed from position by the fatuous emperor. Mao attacked the play for criticizing the Party's decision to purge Peng Dehuai. Yao Wenyuan (who later became one of the radical leaders of the Cultural Revolution) wrote an article based on Mao's criticism of the play and published it on the Army's newspaper *Liberation Army Daily*. The article, "Critique of *The Dismissal of Hai Rui from Office*," was then broadcast nationwide. According to scholars such as Jonathan D. Spence and Jack Gray, the attack on the play was a deliberate challenge by the left (Mao and his followers) to the right (Liu Shaoqi's regime) who was in control of the Party at that time. Following the attack, Mao started the Cultural Revolution at a nationwide scale with the aim of "class struggle," to clean the Party, the government, the Army, and various cultural circles that had been "polluted" by representatives of the bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary revisionists.

The Cultural Revolution has been one of the most studied subjects related to modern Chinese history, largely because of its complexity and its tremendous impact on Chinese society, and on revolution in general. While the Chinese official assessment of the Cultural Revolution stays with the "1981 resolution," which repudiates the whole ten-year movement, interpretations by Western scholars and Chinese scholars living outside mainland China have gone through four phases over the last three decades (Arif Dirlik, 2003).

Although Dirlik focuses on the responses in the United States, his study encompasses the major trends in the interpretation of the Cultural Revolution. When the news of the Cultural Revolution reached the outside world in late 1966, the initial response was negative. Some scholars viewed this movement as a result of power struggle in the Communist leadership in its extremeness. In the late 1960s, this interpretation was challenged by radicals who lauded the

Cultural Revolution as a great movement propelled by the ideal of revolutionary socialism. This positive assessment of the Cultural Revolution gained ascendancy in the early 1970s, especially after President Nixon's visit to China. The third phase followed Mao's death in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's reform policies in 1978. The prevalent images of the Cultural Revolution that were circulated in the United States exposed the disastrous damage that this movement inflicted on the lives of the Chinese people. Almost in line with the Chinese official assessment of the Cultural Revolution as a "ten-year disaster," scholars searched for evidence to prove this movement to be false and attributed Chinese people's suffering to the violence of the Red Guards as well as Mao's erroneous policies.

The fourth phase, the most recent one, was formulated following the Tiananmen Event and Deng Xiaoping's "south talk" which has accelerated China's transformation from a planned economy to a market economy. There are primarily two conflicting tendencies in the reevaluation of the Cultural Revolution: on the one hand, the accumulation of memoirs by those who had suffered under the Cultural Revolution confirms this movement as a disaster; on the other hand, some scholars reassert in positive lights Mao's economic policies, his motivation in starting the Cultural Revolution, and his concept of socialist revolution.

Some historians such as June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort (1991) argue that the Cultural Revolution was Mao's final effort to regain control over the progress of revolution and was a result of the power struggle between Mao's faction and Liu Shaoqi's regime. Some scholars such as Jack Gray (2002) and Arif Dirlik (2003) propose a more balanced view on Mao's role in the Cultural Revolution: while criticizing Mao for his authoritarian control and for his neglect of the social and economic reality, they affirm his ideas about economic construction and

his intention to solve the problem of corruption inside the Party. For example, Gray argues that the Cultural Revolution did not fail because it was a completely wrong revolution, but because Mao's authoritarian policy, the Red Guards' excessive actions, and the power struggle inside the Party turned the movement into a disaster.

Although largely concurring with Gray, Arif Dirlik proposes an interpretation that allows ambivalence. He insightfully points out that any interpretation of the Cultural Revolution involves considerations of one's perceptions of China and the world. Even one person's view of the same event could shift dramatically with his changing perception of China, of socialism and capitalism, and of revolution. For instance, Bill Hinton, the foremost chronicler of the Chinese revolution, gave very different interpretations of this historical event over a span of thirty years: he firmly supported the goals, methods and achievement of the Cultural Revolution in the early 1970s; in the 1980s he criticized that the movement had degenerated into factionalism and unprincipled contests for power; in the 1990s he refuted the claims that the Cultural Revolution was a disaster and praised Mao's "class struggle" as an insight to prevent the power struggle within the Party (Dave Pugh, 2005). The shift of Hinton's interpretation may suggest that he has gained more insights on the Cultural Revolution. But it may also suggest that Hinton's interpretations have been shaped by his changing attitudes toward China.

Dirlik directly admits his own bias in his interpretation of the Cultural Revolution. He says that if he places a positive evaluation on the policies that informed the Cultural Revolution, it is because he believes that socialism is "a critique of capitalism and a source of alternative conceptualizations of human development" (171). I agree with Dirlik that our evaluation of the Cultural Revolution is largely based on our own beliefs and values. It is impossible to reach an

absolute conclusion, but each interpretation will reveal one aspect or another of this complex historical event.