Doctoral Thesis for

PhD in International Studies

China's Nationalism and Its Quest for Soft Power through Cinema

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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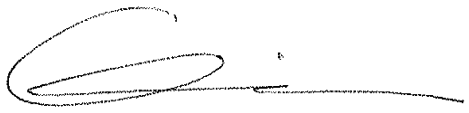

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the important role that contemporary Chinese cinema has played in fostering nationalism, reconstructing national identities in the PRC, and the fundamental challenges facing China's soft power aspiration and its cinema going-going project. It compares contemporary Chinese films about China's historical clashes with foreign Others with earlier Chinese productions, transnational co-productions, and Hollywood movies of similar themes, focusing on values-orientations and national identity.

The analysis finds that although the Party-state is adamant about China's national unity and sovereignty, it is deliberately more flexible with China's national identity. The differential representations of the Japanese and the Western Others in the post-1989 cinema suggest that China's national identity is an evolving construct tailored to support the CCP's shifting political agenda. The separation of the Japanese and Western Others is designed to simultaneously validate the Party's nationalist ideology and its opening-up policy. Within this context, China's Official Occidentalism is a more fluid and complex concept than Xiaomei Chen has observed in the 1990s. Apart from its domestic concerns, China's official imagination of the West also has an international dimension.

In addition, China's response to Hollywood's representations of Mulan is politically defiant and culturally surrendering. This study argues that the CCP's cultural policies of making the past serve the present and making culture serve the state can have serious side effects. Ignoring Joseph Nye's emphasis on the significance of shared values for a nation's soft power, China's soft power-driven cinema going-global project faces the fundamental challenge of lacking moral clarity and the shortage of shared values with the outside world. Nationalism clashes with universal values and China's practice of turning cinema into a nationalistic enterprise and pushing nationalistic films to go global could further undermine, rather than enhance, China's soft power.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the Party-state has used cinema as a propaganda machine to advocate nationalism as a principal ideology. In Mao's time, China's historical clashes with the foreign Others, particularly during the Opium Wars, the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Korean War, were important themes for the PRC's socialist cinema. With the West and Japan portrayed as evil imperialist Others, nationalism was the dominant ideology firmly embedded in the red classic films of Mao's era.

However, China's opening-up to the outside world in the 1980s introduced western influence and alternative values to China and Chinese cinema. Chinese filmmakers began to reflect China's historical clashes with foreign Others quite differently. Wu Ziniu's 1988 film *Evening Bell*, for example, introduced western humanitarian values into its reconstruction of the Sino-Japanese War, a typical topic for nationalistic films of the pre-reform era.

Nevertheless, the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown brought China's liberal cultural discourse to an abrupt end. In the 1990s, the Party-state tightened its film censorship and launched Cinema Project 9550 to fund new propaganda films. Once again, cinema became a prominent vehicle for the Party to instill its official ideology of nationalism into the minds of Chinese population.

The CCP's post-1989 nationalist agenda, however, is complicated by the Party's continuous embrace of the opening-up policy. In the cinematic scene, China is no longer sealed off from the West. Starting from 1994, Hollywood formally returned to the PRC and by 2012, China's annual film import quota had increased to 34 films a year, 14 of them in 3D format (Hennock, 2012).

Cinema has subsequently emerged as an important transnational cultural platform in China, subject to increasing political and cultural contests. As the Chinese film industry continues to boom, poised to become the world's No.1 within ten years or so from 2011 (Hille, 2011), the tensions between Hollywood, the Chinese state and the

domestic film industry intensify. The 2010 open rivalry between the high-profile Chinese film *Confucius* and Hollywood blockbuster *Avatar* highlights the intensity of the ideological wrestling between Hollywood and state-backed Chinese films, and Hollywood's potential threat to the CCP's ideological security.

Meanwhile, as the Chinese economy ascends on the global stage, China's international standing and its soft power also become a significant consideration for the Party-state. Driven by its desire to enhance China's international image, the state has urged Chinese filmmakers to step out of the national borders, to go global, and to promote Chinese culture to the world.

Zhang Yimou's 2011 film *The Flowers of the War* was a revealing case of China's cinema going-global efforts. The film engaged an A-list Hollywood star, pitched hard for mainstream global audiences and aimed to win China's first Oscar. But the film failed miserably outside China. Its US box office receipts were just $311.000 (Tunzelmann, 2012) and the film was attacked by western critics as 'a crude mix of commercial vulgarity and political propaganda' (French, 2012).

While much has been written about Chinese cinema, the important role that Chinese films have played in fostering nationalism in contemporary China, the state's maneuvering of Hollywood, China's response to Hollywood's misrepresentation of Chinese culture, and the dilemma between the CCP's domestic agenda of using films to advocate its nationalist ideology and China's desire to enhance its international soft power through cinema, still remain under-examined and demand urgent academic attention.

Aiming to address the research gap, this study will examine Chinese cinema's role in nurturing nationalism on one hand and analysing the substantial challenges China's soft power-driven cinema going-global project faces on the other. Focusing on the representations of values and national identities, this thesis compares contemporary PRC films about China's historical clashes with foreign Others – including the Opium War, the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Korean War – with earlier Chinese films, Western-led co-productions, and Hollywood films of similar themes.

Anthony Smith defines nationalism as an ideological movement that aims at attaining and maintaining *autonomy*, *unity* and *identity* of a nation (Smith, 1991, p.74). Smith also observes that nationalism offers each class the promise of dignity and unity in the 'super-family' of the nation (Smith, 1990, p.184). This multi-class character and the emphasis on the pursuit of national autonomy, unity and identity made nationalism the ideal ideology for the CCP to draw upon, and re-introduce as its official ideology when the Party faced credibility crisis after the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown.

Through state-funded Cinema Project 9550, cinema resumed its function in the mid 1990s as an important platform for the state to inject nationalism into the minds of Chinese audiences, particularly the youth. Since then, nationalism has continued to be the CCP's official ideology for the big screen, and films such as *Confucius* and *The Flowers of the War* emerge as state-sanctioned high-profile films designed to assert such ideology. Meanwhile, as China faces increasing western influence, the questions of how to protect the Party's ideological security at home, and to enhance China's soft power in the global arena, begin to attract the state's serious attention.

Joseph Nye defines soft power as 'attractive power', an ability to shape others' preferences, an attraction that persuades us to go along with others' purposes without any threat (Nye, 2004, p.7). Nye also links soft power with the status of a nation's culture and political values, stressing that soft power rests on shared values (Nye, 2004, p111). He argues that when a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values that others share, the probability for the country to obtain its desired outcomes would increase.

In recent years, soft power has become a buzzword in China, appearing frequently in the media and government reports. In 2007, former Chinese President Hu Jintao made the following statement at the CCP's 17th National Congress.

> In today's world, culture has increasingly become the source of what holds a nation together and a key factor which makes a nation competitive. We should endeavor to stimulate our nation's creativities and enhance our soft power' (Xinhua, 2007).

In the same report, however, Hu Jintao also stressed the importance of building China's core socialist values system and enhancing the affinity of socialist ideology.

Hu's statement points to the key research questions of this study: what values can China build its soft power on? What role has cinema played in fostering nationalism in China? How have PRC films represented China's historical clashes with foreign Others in the post-1989 era? How would these films differ from early Chinese films, Western-led co-productions and Hollywood movies of similar themes? Can China rely on nationalist ideology to enhance its soft power through cinema?

Aims and Significance

The significance of this study is closely linked to the interdisciplinary nature of the research. Firstly, through examining the role that cinema has played in cultivating nationalism in China, the study contributes to the research on contemporary Chinese nationalism, a significant phenomenon for both China and the world. Although substantial writings on Chinese nationalism and Occidentalism have been published, the evolving role which cinema has played in fostering nationalism, and the shifting nature of official Occidentalism in contemporary China, are still under-examined, resulting in a gap that this study seeks to address.

Secondly, the importance of this research lies in its analysis of China's quest of cultural soft power. These include the state's concerns over China's lack of soft power, key official statements about how China should enhance its soft power, and close examination of China's soft power-driven cinema going-global project. The fact that the Chinese state has selected nationalistic films *Forever Enthralled* (2008) and *The Flowers of the War* (2011) as China's official entries for the Academy Awards, demonstrates that nationalism not only serves the CCP's domestic political agenda, but is also an ideology which the Party wishes to project to the world as a foundation of China's cultural soft power. This exposes the major flaws of China's interpretation of soft power and China's state-initiated soft power activities.

Thirdly, the value of this research lies in its study of cinema as a transnational cultural platform which offers valuable insights into the cultural and ideological clashes

between China and the West. Through a series of case studies of Chinese and Disney films about Mulan, the legendary Chinese heroine, the study examines Hollywood's misinterpretations of Chinese culture, China's cinematic response to such misinterpretations, and the country's declining cultural awareness.

Finally, the study reflects the extension of traditional film study that tends to be pre-occupied with aesthetics and cultural address (Miller, 2005). Since the late 1980s, cinema study has moved toward a paradigm change which includes the shifts from text (auteurist studies) to context (cultural history, political economy), and from elitist (great intellectual minds) to popular (mass audience) (Zhang, 2010). This research supports such major shifts by exploring the political and cultural contexts of Chinese cinema, and by examining mainstream Chinese films targeted at mass audiences.

Literature Review

The interdisciplinary nature of this research requires the engagement with academic literatures in multiple fields, including nationalism, Occidentalism, soft power, and Chinese cinema. Drawing on concepts and frameworks in these fields, this thesis aims to address the important questions of how Chinese cinema has been used by the state to project the CCP's nationalist ideology, how this political function has evolved historically from Mao's years to post-reform and post-Tiananmen eras, and finally, how China has responded to Hollywood's misrepresentations of Chinese culture and attempted to enhance its own soft power through cinema.

In addition, this study engages other major literature on Chinese nationalism. Geremie Barme believes that representing China as a nation ruthlessly violated by the western imperialism and the concern over China's inferior position in the New World Order have been central to Chinese thought and debates (Barme, 1996, p.184). Barme's observation places China's perceived historical trauma at the hands of foreign imperialists, and its concerns over China's national identity and its international standing, at the centre of modern Chinese intellectual discourse.

Yingjie Guo states that the central concerns of Chinese post-colonialism are national identity, national autonomy, and international recognition. He also divides nationalism

into official (or state) and unofficial nationalism, which includes cultural nationalism and popular nationalism (Guo, 2004). This division allows this research to investigate the revealing difference between the CCP's state nationalist agenda and the popular nationalist sentiment of Chinese audiences.

Yingjie Guo also observes that due to the essential roles of history in national identity formation, contests arise as historical narratives are revised, reaffirmed, remade, blocked and created to validate or institutionalize certain identities at the expense of others (Guo, 2010, p.28). This observation is critical for this research as it informs its analysis of how Chinese films have reaffirmed and revised the historical narratives concerning China's clashes with foreign Others.

In addition, the thesis draws upon the concept of *Occidentalism* coined by Xiaomei Chen in the mid 1990s. Chen believes that Occidentalism is a discursive practice that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to actively participate in the process of self-appropriation (Chen, 1995, p.4). This research argues that Occidentalism is a strand of nationalism. It represents the desire of the Orient through their construction of the Occident, the Western Other. With the focus of the Oriental Self and the Occidental Other, national identity, one of the key concerns of nationalism, is at the core of the Occidentalism.

Xiaomei Chen further states that China's official Occidentalism refers to a process whereby the Western Other is officially construed by a Chinese imagination, in order to support nationalism, for the domination of the Chinese Self at home (Chen, 1995, p.5). This thesis observes that Chen's definition of official Occidentalism stems from her analysis of the PRC's political and cultural conditions up to the mid 1990s. This study, however, places Chen's concept in more recent Chinese political context and argues that in contemporary China, official Occidentalism has an international dimension.

This research will also compare Chen Kaige's two Peking opera films, *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) and *Forever Enthralled* (2008). Engaging the concept of culturalism, it examines the major shift from culturalism to nationalism between Chen's two opera

films. According to Joseph Levenson, China's traditional self-identity stems from culturalism, which is based on shared cultural heritage and beliefs, not nationalism, which centres on the modern concept of nation-state (Levenson, 1968). James Harrison further argues that because the primary Chinese identity was cultural, the ultimate loyalty is thus attached to the culture, not to the state (Harrison, 1969).

Moreover, James Townsend argues that culturalism dominated traditional China and was incompatible with modern and imported values of nationalism. China's culturalism tradition yielded to a new nationalist way of thinking only under the assault of imperialism and western ideas (Townsend, 1996, p.1).

These statements bring to light the sharp contrast between China's culturalist traditions and the modern imported concept of nationalism, as well as the irony that nationalism emerged in China at the cost of the country's cultural heritage, as a form western imperialist assault. The contrast between the two concepts is further highlighted by Prasenjit Duara's observation that China's cultural tradition has an inclusive quality, as culturalism is a statement of Chinese values as superior but significantly, not exclusive from other barbarians who did not share these values (Duara, 1996, p.36).

These observations offer valuable insights into questions such as what constitutes authentic Chinese culture and values, what traditions and ideals China can draw upon as its own cultural resources and moral foundations to present to the world, and whether China's culturalist tradition has more relevance and appeal to today's world than nationalism, the western concept embraced by the CCP's as its official ideology. This thesis will explore these intriguing questions in detail.

Soft Power is another significant concept for this study. Apart from Joseph Nye's definition, this thesis also acknowledges the popularity of Nye's concept in China and engages major researches on Chinese soft power. In recent years, soft power has emerged as a buzz word in China as the country considers its weak soft power a serious threat to its rise as a global superpower. Although statistics show that the world's largest consumer goods exporter is mainly an importer of foreign cultural products (Li,

2009), China's soft power activities have focused mainly on the international reach of state-sanctioned Chinese media and cultural content and avoided the critical issue of China's ideological clash with the outside world.

By the end of 2008, China's clash with the West during the Beijing Olympic torch relays and the lack of voice of China's own international media have triggered China's decision to invest 45 billion RMB (6.6 billion USD) to enhance its international communication capacity. However, the focus of such expansion has been to broaden the international reach of state-approved Chinese media content. As Wanning Sun observes, China's global media expansion strategy can be characterized overall as 'to transmit more media content within the shortest possible time, over the longest possible distance, and to the largest possible audience' (Sun, 2010), with little change to the function and values of its media and cultural content, and with little sign of relaxing government censorship.

The existing research on China's pursuits of soft power provides informative context for this study to further investigate China's cultural soft power initiatives, in particular, China's quest for soft power through cinema. Furthermore, this research also involves the study of Chinese cinema. As Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar observe, the close link between cinema and nation has been a critical framework for Chinese cinema. Chinese films cannot be understood without reference to the nation and the crucial role different Chinese cinematic traditions have played in shaping and promulgating various depictions of the nation and national identity (Berry & Farquhar, 2006).

Since the founding of the People's Republic, the connection between the nation and cinema has been further strengthened. As Ying Zhu observes, the nationalisation of the Chinese film industry in the early 1950s allowed the CCP to use the state-owned studios to produce ideologically-driven films to disseminate Communist ideology and to ensure the Party's political control (Zhu, 2002).

Cinema has since become an important propaganda tool for the Party to advocate its nationalist ideology. Depicting the heroic Chinese Self fighting against stereotyped foreign 'devils', films about China's historical clashes with the western and Japanese

imperialists were produced and screened to the masses in Maoist China. These films played important role to disseminate CCP's nationalist ideology, and to support the Party's legitimacy and political agenda.

However, stimulated by China's opening-up policy in the late 1970s, Chinese films began to critically reflect upon the CCP's official historical narratives. As Chinese filmmakers became aware of western audiences after the international triumph of Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth (*1984) (Donald & Voci, 2008), *Evening Bell,* Wu Ziniu's 1988 film about the Sino-Japanese War, introduced western humanitarian values into what had been a typically nationalist propaganda theme.

Nevertheless, the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown resulted in a dramatic shift in China's cultural and intellectual discourse. Nationalism re-emerged as the CCP's official ideology in the post-Tiananmen era and cinema once again became an important vehicle for the Party to disseminate such ideology. This thesis analyses this significant shift and examines the dilemma the Party-state faces as it continues to project nationalist ideology through cinema while encouraging Chinese films to go global, to help enhance China's cultural soft power.

Methodology

Case studies are critical for this research. In addition, this thesis also uses first-hand materials collected through interviews with Chinese filmmakers, administrators, and scholars, as well as China-based Hollywood reporters and the directors of Australia-China co-production films. These interviews offer valuable insights into Chinese film policy, censorship, and the state's interference with the creative process in Sino-foreign co-production films.

This research also draws upon the author's personal observations of two international promotional events for Chinese films – the 2010 Beijing Screenings and the 2011 Sydney Chinese Film Festival. Participating in these events allowed the author to closely observe what Chinese films have been selected to join the events and how these films have been promoted to transnational audiences and potential international distributors.

Overall, case studies will be the main methodology of this research project. This thesis analyses a series of contemporary Chinese films about China's conflicts with foreign Others, including the Opium War, the Korean War and the Second Sino-Japanese War. It also compares these films with the earlier Chinese films, Western-led co-productions, and selected Hollywood films of similar theme. The focus of the analysis would be these films' choices of values and their representations of the Chinese Self and the foreign Others.

These comparative studies lead to investigations in several dimensions. Firstly, they explore the historical dimension through comparing Chinese films about the Opium War and Sino-Japanese War, produced during Mao's era, with those made in post-reform and post-Tiananmen China. These studies offer valuable insights into Chinese cinema's political function in supporting China's state-controlled historical narratives, and in particular, the important role which cinema has played in fostering the CCP's official ideology of nationalism since the mid 1990s.

Secondly, the comparison between historical and contemporary Chinese films about Chinese heroine Hua Mulan and the Hollywood animated sequel offers major insights into China's mixed responses to Hollywood – the CCP's strong reactions to the politically-sensitive 'anti-China' films versus the state's insensitivity towards Hollywood's interpretations and misrepresentations of Chinese culture.

Thirdly, the study also examines the Chinese state's interpretation of soft power and China's quest for cultural soft power. Revisiting the mysterious removal of the giant Confucius statue from Tiananmen Square, the research reveals the intense ideological contest within the Party. Moreover, the detailed study of the state-backed film *Confucius* (2010) exposes the political nature, the weak moral foundation, and the potential counter-productiveness of China's soft power exercises.

Finally, this thesis analyses contemporary Chinese war films such as Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of the War* (2011) and Feng Xiaogang's *Assembly* (2007) and compare them with several Western-led co-productions and Hollywood films about China and America's wars with Japan. The study demonstrates the gap in the choice of values

between these films and questions the technical-orientated formula proposed by some senior Party officials about how Chinese cinema should lift its game to rise on the global stage. It concludes by observing the fundamental challenge facing the Party as it struggles to accommodate both its domestic and international agendas through cinema.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis includes seven chapters.

Chapter one outlines the historical context of this research. It illustrates that Chinese cinema has long been a nationalized space and a nationalist enterprise. The chapter revisits how cinema was mobilized by various states to serve different political agendas during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It then reviews the anti-imperialist ideology of the socialist cinema in Maoist China, and investigates how nationalism was re-introduced as the CCP's official ideology for state-sponsored 'main-melody' films in post-Tiananmen China. Finally, the chapter introduces how the Party-state has used its control over Chinese film markets to influence the way Hollywood portrays China while struggling with the challenges both of competing with Hollywood at home and encouraging Chinese films to go global.

Chapter Two examines the role cinema has played in fostering nationalism in post-Tiananmen China, focusing on the cinematic reconstructions of the Sino-Japanese War (SJW). Through analyzing various types of SJW films and their different representations of values and national identity, the chapter investigates how some Chinese filmmakers have supported the CCP's nationalist ideology with their main-melody films, while others have used their SJW films to modify or challenge the official narrative of the war. The chapter also studies how the Party-state has reacted to alternative representations of the war, and how some Chinese audiences have responded to a controversial SJW film through online postings, revealing disturbing popular nationalist sentiments and disjuncture between state and popular nationalism in China.

Chapter Three examines the shifting landscape of China's official Occidentalism in the post-Tiananmen era and the transformed identity of the West in state-funded main-

melody films. By comparing two films about the Opium War – *The Opium War (1997)* and *Lin Zexu (1959)* - the chapter investigates how the 1997 film has strived to reconstruct national identity to support the CCP's evolving political agenda, and how it turns the heroic Chinese 'people' in the 1959 film into a flawed self, transforming western 'devils' into a more dignified Other while still supporting the CCP's nationalist ideology. The chapter also observes how the film *My 1919* (1999) redefines the traditions of the May Fourth Movement and how the PRC's official construct of the West has changed dramatically in the post-reform era.

Chapter Four investigates China's attempt to use nationalistic films to guard its spiritual home against Hollywood imports. The chapter first examines China's closure reaction to Hollywood's formal return since the mid 1990s. It then compares the 2009 Chinese film *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* with the 1939 and 1956 Chinese films about Hua, and with the Disney animated sequel *Mulan* (1998) and *Mulan 2* (2004). Focusing on these films' different value orientations, the chapter investigates how the 2009 PRC film replaces traditional Chinese values with the CCP's nationalist ideology on one hand, and fails to counter Hollywood's alleged cultural imperialism on the other.

Leading up to Chapter Five, the analysis has focused on the re-imagination of the Chinese Self and foreign Other in mainstream films. Chapter Five turns to the Chinese government's quest for soft power and the connection between this quest and nationalism. Drawing on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power and using 2010 Chinese film *Confucius* as a case study, the chapter investigates China's soft power activities, focusing on the state's desire for Chinese cinema to go global. The chapter also probes into the ideological dilemma China faces today, and analyses the Party's new interest in China's Confucian traditions. It argues that China's soft power activities are built on a weak moral foundation and could potentially be counter-productive.

Chapter Six compares two Peking opera films directed by Chen Kaige – *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) and *Forever Enthralled* (2008) – and examines the significantly different values and national identity they represent. In addition, this chapter revisits China's culturalist traditions embedded in *Farewell* and analyses the dramatic shift from culturalism to nationalism in Chen's second Peking opera film. Finally, the chapter

observes the new development in China's official imagination of the West and critiques the concept of official Occidentalism coined by Xiaomei Chen in the mid 1990s.

Chapter Seven compares Zhang Yimou's 2011 film *The Flowers of the War* with several Sino-Western co-production films about the Second Sino-Japanese War. These include *Empire of the Sun* (1987), *Children of Huangshi* (2008), *John Rabe* (2009), and *Shanghai* (2010). The chapter first revisits the historical trajectory of Sino-Western co-production films and explores the evolving role of Chinese state and filmmakers in the transnational co-production process. It then compares *Flowers*' representations of values and national identity with those of the co-production films and investigates how *Flowers*' value orientation and its projected national identity may have affected the film's international receptions.

Chapter Eight undertakes comparative study between Feng Xiaogang's war film *Assemble* (2007) and Clint Eastwood's war epic *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). It also compares several Chinese films about the Sino-Japanese War with two Hollywood films about America's war with Japan – *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006). Aiming to identify fundamental differences between Chinese and Hollywood war films, this chapter examines these films' distinctly different representations of national identities and their contrasting choices of values.

CHAPTER ONE

CHINESE CINEMA AS A NATIONALIST ENTERPRISE

Historically, Chinese cinema has been closely linked to the nation. During the Sino-Japanese War, cinema was mobilized by various states to project different versions of national identities to serve different political agendas within the war-torn country. This illustrates that Chinese cinema has long been a nationalized space and a nationalist enterprise. It is thus critical to explore the traditional connections between the cinema and the nation and place this research into its historical context. Chapter One reviews how cinema has been historically deployed as a political machine during the Sino-Japanese War, in Mao's years and in post-Tiananmen China.

Within this historical context, China's interactions with Hollywood and its reactions to Hollywood's (mis)representations of China add another interesting dimension to the study. This chapter revisits Hollywood's dominance of the Chinese film market during the Republican era and the Nationalist government's failed attempts to curb Hollywood's vilification of China and Chinese. It then evaluates Hollywood's return to the PRC after China's opening-up and the CCP's more effective maneuvering with Hollywood.

Finally, as China's economic power ascends on the global stage, the Party-state also aspires for greater international recognition, influence, and soft power. Given cinema going-global is a significant component of China's cultural soft power strategy, this chapter also probes into China's desire to enhance its soft power through cinema.

Resisting Hollywood and Screening the War in the Republican Era

Chinese cinema of the Republican years could be characterised as the combination of development under the shadow of Hollywood and the engagement of nationalist rhetoric. Drawing upon nationalism was a natural response to the anti-imperialist sentiment in the society as China was divided up by imperialist powers. Engaging nationalism also allowed the local film industry to enlist the government's support and to win the public's sympathy in its competition with their foreign rivals. For the

Nationalist government, nationalism helped the state to win the industry's cooperation and to rally popular support (Xiao, 1997).

During the Republican era, the Chinese film market was dominated by Hollywood imports. Hollywood's popularity in China can be traced back to the early 20th century. Since motion pictures were first introduced to the country in 1896, the early development of Chinese cinema was largely under the shadow of Hollywood imports. By the 1920s, Hollywood had occupied 90 percent of screen time (Zhu & Nakajima, 2010, p21).

Hollywood films of the time, however, portrayed China and Chinese unsympathetically.

> In American films, wherever a Chinese character is introduced, he must be an ugly-looking creature with queue hanging behind his back and his part is always a personage of the underworld; whenever any Chinese scenes are adopted, they are laid in the Chinatowns of American cities and featured with rowdy scenes in the chop-suey houses, in the fan-tan joints, and in the opium dens (Whang, 1930).

In 1928, in response to the calls from both the public and Chinese film industry, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Nationalist government issued *Thirteen Regulations on Film* to ban films with offensive depictions of the Chinese. In 1930, the Nanjing government published China's first film censorship law which prohibited the screenings of films that were contemptuous of the dignity of the Chinese people.

Established in 1931, the National Film Censorship Committee took a strong stand towards offensive foreign films and the relevant activities of foreign studios in China (Zhu, 2003). Unfortunately, these measures had limited effect. In the meantime, Chinese film industry, together with Chinese cinema's role in cultivating nationalism, continued to grow. Cinema's nationalist function was further accelerated after Japan invaded China.

Wartime Cinema: Contested Values and Identities

The Sino-Japanese War heightened the urgency to defend the nation. Cinema became an important tool for the Nationalist government to mobilise the masses to resist the

invaders. By the end of 1937, 'national defence cinema' had become an important film 'genre' in Kuomintang (KMT)-controlled Chongqing and South-West China. Two KMT-owned studios facilitated the major switch from commercial cinema to government-supported political cinema (Wang, 2011).

Films such as *Eight Hundred Heroes, Protect Our Home* were produced by KMT-owned studios during the war. Based on a battle in real life, *Eight Hundred Heroes* portrayed the courageous fight of the KMT army against the Japanese troops. The film projected a strong nationalistic spirit and was designed to educate Chinese audiences to stand up to the invaders and to protect their nation.

Meanwhile, in the semi-occupied 'orphan island' Shanghai (November 1937 to December 1941), *Mulan Joins the Amy* (1939) emerged as a great success. The film combined a disguised patriotic message of resisting foreign invasion with the traditional values of loyalty to the nation and filial piety. It also presented a sense of pride in Chinese cultural traditions. Unlike the nationalistic films produced in KMT studios during the war, the patriotic message in *Mulan* was more subtle. The focus of the film was more on the Chinese Self rather than the foreign Other.

In Japan-occupied areas, however, cinema was turned into a propaganda machine by Wang Jingwei's collaborationist regime to support the Japanese imperialist rhotic of the New Order in East Asia. The Nanking-based Wang government also established centrally controlled filmmaking facilities and films such as *Eternal Fame* were produced as a weapon against different enemies – the British and American colonialists (Wang, 2011).

The 1943 film about the Opium War featured racist representation of the British. It was part of Japan's pan-Asian rhetoric of common resistance to western imperialism. The production was China's first film about the Opium War. The same theme was later followed by two PRC films – *Lin Zexu* (1957) and *The Opium War* (1997). As Chris Berry observed, China's historical films follow the logic of national wound but each had significant variations, demonstrating that different state formations require different

versions of historical events at different times, according to their own needs (Berry & Farquhar, 2006, p.23).

In *Eternal Fame,* the female lead character was played by Li Xianglan, the key star of the Japanese-owned Man'ei film company (*Manzhou yinghua xiehui*) of the Japanese-occupied Manchuria. In Manchuria, the Manchukuo government issued The Film Law (1937) and Film Censorship codes (1939) which demanded positive portrayals of the Japan-Manchukuo relation (Wang, 2011). Dictated by these laws, Man'ei produced feature films to promote 'Pan-Asia love' and became part of Japan's war time propaganda machine.

China Night (1940) was a classic example of such films. Li Xianglan played a Chinese woman who lost all her families during the war and was rescued by a young Japanese officer. At first she resented the Japanese man, but gradually she accepted his kindness and fell in love with him. The film projects a positive image of Japan as China's friend and saviour in order to justify Japan's invasion of China and reduce the audience's resentment towards the war and the invading Other.

The 1930s and 1940s wartime films presented a vivid picture of Chinse cinema as a feverishly contested and nationalised space. Within the war-torn country, cinema became an important weapon for several different states to simultaneously promote their own political agendas, their own sets of values, and their own versions of who 'we' were, and who our 'enemy' should be.

In KMT-controlled South-West China, 'we' were the nation's heroes who would resist Japan's aggression to the bitter end. In Japan-occupied China, the invader became our friend, lover and saviour, 'we' were part of the Pan-Asia family, and our common enemies were the British and American imperialists. In semi-occupied Shanghai, 'we' were politically-aware and culturally-confident Chinese Self who would defend the nation during its crises but would ultimately return to our family.

1945-1949: Shifting Away from the Other

With Japan's surrender in 1945, the fierce screen contestations between various nation-states came to an end. Between 1946 and 1949, realist films such as *Far Away Love* (1947), *A Spring River Flows East* (1947) moved away from the anti-Japanese theme to depict the impact of the war on 'us' and the social divisions among 'us' after the war. *Far Away Love* told the story of a house maid Yu Zhen being transformed by her American-educated husband professor Xiao Yuanxi during the war. The war was only the background in the film; the focus of the film was not the war but 'our' journey of modernity.

A Spring River Flows East is another outstanding classic of the Republican era. The 1947 film was so popular that it was continuously played in Shanghai for almost a year (Rickowicz, 2011). The film also used family drama to portray 'our' different experiences during the war and the how the war had further divided us. In the film, Zhang Zhongliang left home to support the war of resistance. He later fled to Chongqing, married a well-connected woman and became a pleasure-seeking businessman. Soon after the war ended, he returned to Shanghai to join the post-war profiteering. Struggling to support her family, his wife Sufen worked as a washwoman for a rich family in Shanghai. When she discovered Zhongliang had deserted her, she jumped into the river.

Again, the focus of the film was not the war with the foreign Other but how differently 'we' had lived through the war. The film demonstrated that while most of 'us' suffered terrible ordeals during the war, some had lived a good life and even profited from the war in the KMT-occupied hinterland. The film turned the lens away from the war with the foreign Other to the divisions among 'us', the Chinese Self. Although the film was produced in 1947, the war had receded to the background and the focus of the film had switched to critiquing the post-war Chinese society, the struggling of the poor and the squander of the rich and powerful.

However, the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 saw a dramatic shift in the function, theme and style of filmmaking. Cinema was once again deployed as a

propaganda tool to educate and mobilise the masses. With increased state control, the Sino-Japanese War returned to the central stage and became a convenient topic for the nationalised film industry to project the CCP's nationalist ideology and its own version of national identity. Subsequently, the focus of the PRC war films shifted from the modernity discourse in *Far Away Love* and the social critique of *A Spring River Flows East* to 'our' collective resistance against the Japanese imperialists, under the CCP's leadership. Chinese cinema was once again transformed into a nationalist enterprise.

Anti-Imperialism, Nationalism and Soft Power in the PRC

After establishing the People's Republic, the CCP paid close attention to the film industry and quickly established its control over China's film production and exhibition. By the mid 1950s, the film industry was nationalised and the style of filmmaking also changed dramatically to serve the political purpose of eliminating imperialist films and strengthening the educational nature of the film industry (Ward, 2011).

Cinema's target audience also changed. Instead of catering for the urban bourgeoisies, films were required to represent and become accessible to the new embodiment of 'Chinese people' – workers, peasants and soldiers. Within this political context, China's wars with Japan became a safe topic for Chinese filmmakers to draw upon to create the new image of the 'people' and to demonstrate the Party's leadership in defending the nation.

Zhao Yiman (1950), a film about a Communist underground worker who led factory workers and peasants to resist the Japanese occupation, was a case in point. Unlike the post-war and pre-PRC films such as *Far Away Love* and *A Spring River Flows East* which focused on Chinese Self, *Zhao Yiman* brought the audience back to China's war with Japan. The film opened with the Japanese troops marching on the street and a Japanese flag flying in the sky. It later showed the Japanese soldiers setting village houses alight and killing Chinese civilians with a machine gun and a guillotine.

The film projected anti-imperialism and called for unyielding loyalty to the Party. When a peasant woman sent her young son to join the resistant troop, she told him:

‘Remember, we poor people have only one way forward, that is to always follow the Communist Party!’ To make the film more comprehensible to mass audiences, the film deployed slower dialogues and exaggerated body languages. For instance, Zhao and her comrades used their tight fists to show their hatred towards the enemy and their resolve to fight them to the bitter end.

The film also used substantial voiceover and inter-titles to guide the audiences through its narrative. As if based on a formula reflecting Mao’s Yan’an talk, the film covered all three groups of ‘people’ that socialist cinema were supposed to represent – the workers, peasants and soldiers.

Before Zhao was executed by the Japanese, she raised her fist and shouted: ‘Down with the Japanese imperialists! Long Live the Communist Party!’ The slogans summarised the key message of the film and the political functions of socialist cinema – anti-imperialism and loyalty to the Party. Cinema once again became an important political tool for the CCP to educate the masses about its role in saving the nation, about ‘nationalistic hatred’ (*minzu hen*), and about who the nation’s leader and enemy should be.

Anti-Imperialism in Mao’s Era

To facilitate the CCP’s anti-imperialist propaganda, many films about China’s wars with foreign forces were produced during Mao’s era. These included the Opium War, the Korean War, and the Second Sino-Japan War. During the seventeen years between the funding of the People’s Republic in 1949 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, at least 87 percent of historical films focused on revolutionary history (Berry & Farquhar, 2006). These films projected nationalism and revolutionary heroism with stereotyped depictions of who ‘we’ and the imperialist Others were.

In these films, the Chinese Self was both the victim of the foreign imperialists and the courageous hero. In *Lin Zexu* (1959), for instance, China was depicted as an innocent victim bullied by the West during the Opium War while the heroes were the Chinese ‘people’ such as fishermen A-Kuan and his wife. The film showed that the Opium War

was the result of the West's evil desires towards 'us'. To demonstrate the burning hatred and the unyielding courage of the Chinese 'people' towards the western 'imperialists', A-Kuan's wife slapped the face of a British merchant, twice.

The film's strong anti-west sentiment was also evident in PRC films about the Korean War, another popular subject for red classic Chinese films. Films such as *Battle on Shangganling Mountains* (1956), *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (1964) were among the limited number of films produced over the Seventeen Years that were still allowed to be screened during the Cultural Revolution. In these Korean War films, the Chinese troops were fearless heroes while the Americans were ants-like cowards who would flee the battlefields at the first opportunity and would even surrender to two Chinese army cooks armed only with a wooden shoulder pole.

The CCP's role as a resistant force during the Second Sino-Japanese War also made the war a perfect subject for socialist cinema. Even during the Cultural Revolution, while many other local productions and foreign imports were banned, films such as *Landmine Warfare* (1962), *Little Soldier Zhang Ga* (1963) and *Tunnel Warfare* (1965) were still repeatedly screened across China to mass audiences.

These films represented a stereotyped Chinese Self and Japanese Other. In *Tunnel Warfare,* the peasant-turned resistant fighter Gao Chuanbao was a fearless hero, a symbol of the courageous Chinese people who were determined to defend the nation. The Japanese, on the other hand, were depicted as evil invaders. They burned Chinese villages and killed Chinese civilians and were referred to by the Chinese side as the 'Japanese devils'.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, among Madam Mao's handful model Peking operas and red ballets, three of them involved China's anti-imperialist war with the foreign enemies. *The Red Lantern* and *Sha Jia Bang* were about the CCP's role during the war against Japan while *Raid the White-Tiger Regiment* portrayed how the Chinese Communist army defeated the American and South Korean troops during the Korean War.

One distinctive characteristic of anti-imperialism of Mao's time was that there was no clear distinction between the Western and the Japanese Others, they were both portrayed as 'imperialists' and referred to as 'devils', be it 'Japanese devils' (*riben guizi)* or 'Western devils' (*yang guizi)*.

Reflections in the Reform Era and Nationalism since Tiananmen

China's opening-up policy in the late 1970s dramatically changed the country's attitude towards the West. Influenced by China's modernisation discourse, the old propaganda function of socialist cinema faded away and Chinese filmmakers began to make ground-breaking films to critique China's feudal traditions and Chinese history. During the reform era of the 1980s, war films retreated from the central stage. Even when a war film was produced, the purpose of the film had shifted from simply validating the CCP's historical narrative to challenging the orthodox narrative. The 1986 film *Battle of Taierzhang* was a case in point.

Instead of praising CCP's leadership during the Sino-Japanese War, the film made a daring move by portraying the Nationalists as the major resistant force. The depiction fundamentally challenged the CCP's official narrative that the Communist army was the only genuine resistant fighters against the Japanese and the KMT troops were cowardly, money-driven and were only interested in eliminating the Communists.

The film challenged the vilifications of the Nationalists in previous PRC films and presented the KMT, from Chiang Kai-shek to his generals to the foot soldiers, as courageous and patriotic. In the film, the soldiers dismissed the silver coins laid on the ground, declaring that 'we are giving our lives, what's the use of money?' In spite of the film's shifted representations of the KMT, its depiction of the Japanese Other remained unchanged. The dramatic reconstruction of the Japanese Other and the attempt to introduce alternative values emerged few years later, in Wu Ziniu's 1988 award-winning film *Evening Bell.*

However, the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown put an end to China's modernity discourse and subsequently, the reflective phase of Chinese cinema. Nationalism was re-

introduced as the CCP's official ideology to reinforce the Party's political credibility. Cinema once again became part of the Party-state's propaganda machine. Soon after the Tiananmen crackdown, President Jiang Zemin launched the patriotic campaign, with major state patriotic projects focusing on younger generation. This included the 'hundred film program' of 1993 -1994, when a film with patriotic themes was screened on television every day for over three months (He & Guo, 2000).

In 1996, the ideological function of socialist cinema was re-emphasised at a national film conference in Changsha and a state-funded *Cinema 9550 Project* was formally launched (Zhu, 2003, p.101). The project provided policy and financial support for the production of 50 'main-melody' films within five years. Injecting modern cinematic style into old propaganda films, the project was the state's attempt to revitalise cinema's propaganda function.

The *Cinema 9550 Project* was launched when the Chinese film industry was undergoing major structural reform. As part of China's economic reform, state-owned studios were losing government subsidies and had to fend for themselves. The state's financial support for new 'main-melody' propaganda films provided much needed funding for these state-owned studios and helped to rejuvenate the old propaganda film 'genre', turning it into part of China's contemporary mainstream cinema.

Subsequently, many main-melody films focusing on the CCP's leadership during the war with Japan and the civil war with the Nationalists emerged. As Zhang Yingjin observed, between 1991 and 2000, 35 titles and 48 parts of the CCP-designated 'major historical films' depicting how the CCP led the Chinese people to defeat the Japanese and Nationalists have been produced, four times as many as in the 1980s (Zhang, 2004).

Just like the 1950 Sino-Japanese War film *Zhao Yiman*, these films remind Chinese audiences of the Party's historical role in saving the nation, hence its ongoing political legitimacy. With technical enhancements, they renew the pro-CCP and anti-imperialist theme of the socialist cinema of Mao's time. As part of the surging main-melody films, the Sino-Japanese War was once again revitalized on the big screen to demonstrate the Party's leadership against China's external enemy.

Feng Xiaoning's war films were illuminating examples of such revamped propaganda films about China's war with Japan. His 1999 film *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* drew on commercial elements such as a female star and a love story to enhance its popular appeal while its key message was unmistakably pro-CCP and anti-Japanese. By inserting an American pilot into China's war against Japan, the film also introduced a differential treatment of the foreign Others.

The 2005 main-melody film *On the Mountain of Tai Hang* was another case in point. The film showcased how the CCP used a 'main melody' film to restore its orthodox historical narrative and to project its nationalist ideology in the post-Tiananmen era. By re-sidelining the Nationalists and reaffirming the Communists' leadership during the war, the film completely reversed the subversive narrative of the 1986 film *Battle of Taierzhuang* and reaffirmed the CCP's leadership during the war and its role in defending the nation against Japanese aggression. The film also inserted a friendly western face, Agnes Smedley, a pro-CCP American journalist, to endorse the Party's opening-up to the West policy.

The friendly American faces in these 'main-melody' films reflect a new trend in contemporary Chinese cinema. To endorse the state's opening-up policy, China's new propaganda films abandoned the sweeping anti-imperialist approach of Mao's time and began to portray the West as China's historical friend and ally. As a result, the Korean War, the once popular topic for red classic films, became a taboo. In 2001, the Chinese state banned two screen productions about the war – *Resisting America and Assisting Korea*, and a feature film *38th Parallel* (Chen, 2009).

Even for a familiar topic such as the Opium War, Xie Jin's 1997 film *The Opium War* adopted more balanced approach towards both the Chinese Self and the Western Other. Instead of simply condemning the British, Xie's film portrayed a corrupt and arrogant Qing government. China's opening-up policy thus resulted in more objective representations of China's war with the West. Even when nationalism re-emerged as the CCP's official ideology, the West was no longer the target of the modified ideology.

The contrasting treatments of the Japanese and the Western Others continue in more recent Chinese films, including Chen Kaige's 2008 film *Forever Enthralled* and in Zhang Yimou's 2011 war epic *The Flowers of the War*. Both films project an escalated awe towards the West and an intensified sense of resentment towards the Japanese Other.

Guarding the Spiritual Home: China Vs Hollywood

One significant difference between the film scenes of Mao's time and the post-reform era is Hollywood's return to the PRC. Although the Communist takeover ended Hollywood's fortune in China in the early 1950s, China's reform paved the way for Hollywood's reappearance in the 1980s. Hollywood films first re-emerged through internal screenings at selected venues, and later, old Hollywood films begin to appear on Chinese television. In 1985, the release of Hollywood blockbuster *Rambo: First Blood* caused a national sensation (Zhao, 2005, p.70). Hollywood's re-entry, along with karaoke bars, discos, video parlours, pirated videos and other previously restricted forms of leisure provided intense competitions to Chinese cinemas (Rosen, 2002, p.50).

In 1994, facing a drastically declining domestic film market and a struggling local film industry, the Chinese National Film Bureau allowed first-run Hollywood films to enter China on split revenue bases. The Bureau justified its decision with the following reasons.

> 'To meet the demand of the domestic film market, to allow domestic studios to acquire (western) skills and experience, to establish normal exhibition channel to offset film piracy, and to broaden the funding source for state-subsidised films' (Minutes, 1994).

The justifications revealed the Bureau's intention to turn an existing market demand for Hollywood imports into a fund-raising opportunity for state-backed local films. Hollywood's return hence presented both a potential threat to the CCP's official ideology and an extra funding source for new propaganda films.

For Hollywood, this formal re-entry was a significant milestone. Inspired by the exciting commercial and ideological potentials of the new China market, some Americans started to dream that 'Hollywood moves to colonize China' (Logston, 1994). Within

China, the decision also brought new anxiety to the already stressed Chinese film industry (Song, 2005). In reality, Hollywood's return proved to be a doubled-edged sword. It lured Chinese audiences back to cinemas but also overshadowed local productions. By 1998, domestic film productions, which had ranged between the annual figures of 100 to 130 since 1980, dropped to a record low of thirty-seven (Zhao, 2005).

Hollywood also learned that China was not an open market waiting to be colonised. Hollywood imports had to pass strict state censorship before they could be released in China and the fate of imported films also faced unpredictable state interferences. Between May and October 1999, for example, after the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during the Kosovo conflict, China banned all screening of American films, showing that for the Chinese state, commercial considerations are only secondary when compared with political imperatives (Rosen, 2002, p.65).

Nevertheless, Hollywood managed to increase its access to the Chinese film market over the years. Joining the World Trade Organisation forced China to quadruple its film imports to 40 films per year, and by 2005, the number increased to 50, 20 of them were first-run Hollywood blockbusters (Zhao, 2008, p.163). In 2012, the annual import quota for first-run foreign films rose again to 34 to include 14 new 3D films.

Even with the rising import quota, China did not embrace Hollywood with open arms. In May 2006, China State Council introduced 'Regulations on the Management of Films', stipulating that at least two-third of the total exhibiting time of Chinese movie theatres be reserved for domestic films (Rosen, 2002, p57). In addition, Hollywood films were also subject to various discriminatory measures such as blackout times during key holiday periods.

The Party-state also taught Hollywood a harsh lesson about the heavy price they must pay for their involvements in 'anti-China' films. In 1997, China not only banned three such films – *Red Corner* (MGM), *Seven Years in Tibet* Sony/Columbia/Tristar), Kundun (Touchstone/Disney) – but also all films produced by the Hollywood studios involved in the production and distribution of these films.

It took the Hollywood studios much effort to lift the ban. In the case of Disney, with its plans for China including a large theme park and the scheduled 1998 release of *Mulan,* the studio undertook extensive damage control to get the ban rescinded. This included CEO Michael Eisner's visit to China in October1997, Disney distributing two Chinese films in the US and sponsoring a Chinese acrobatic troupe to Europe. In February 1999, China finally allowed the theatrical release of Walt Disney's *Mulan* in the PRC*,* ending a de facto ban on new Walt Disney films in China (Rosen, 2002, p.63).

The Party-state's control over the booming Chinese film market also gives it more power to influence the ways Hollywood portrays China and Chinese. As a China-based *Hollywood Reporter* correspondent observes, as Chinese market continues to boom, becoming the No. 2 after the United States for *Avatar*, grossing more than $200 million, Hollywood studios will increasingly take into account not only what will fly with China's middle-class audience but also with Beijing censors, as they realize that films must contain proper 'Chinese elements' to be approved for release (Landreth, 2011).

This new trend is already evident in more recent Hollywood productions. Sony's 2009 disaster film *2012* reversed Hollywood's traditional negative portrayals of China by featuring Chinese ark-builders as the saviors of the world as a devastating tsunami wipes the US and its western allies off the planet. The highly positive attention the film received in China hints at the country's eagerness for Hollywood to abandon its historical vilification of China in favor of helping it look good to the world. In 2011, in its remake of a 1984 cold war drama *Red Dawn,* MGM scrubs all references to a Chinese enemy and digitally replaces Chinese military insignias with North Koreans ones (Landreth, 2011).

Hamish McDonald observes that although 'the oriental villain' has been a staple of Hollywood for nearly a century, this old villain is disappearing, replaced by new images such as an earnest Chinese professional, a responsible world citizen like the rest of us (McDonald, 2012). He also points out that as Chinese audiences become more important in the economics of film-making, more positive Chinese characters are inserted into movies to please Chinese audiences and investors. When Relativity Media

gets Chinese financing for a college comedy called *21 and Over*, it decides to add a 'back story' with a Chinese-American character (McDonald, 2012).

Nevertheless, China's influence on Hollywood is not just one-way traffic. Since its formal return, Hollywood's popularity and market share in China continue to rise. By 2012, only three of the top 10 films of the year are local productions, and the box office of 3D version of *Titanic* reaches 1 billion RMB. Between January and October 2012, the market share of Chinese films has dropped to 41.4%, below the sensitive half mark China has carefully defended over the years (Li, 2012). In the meantime, China's state-funded 'main-melody' films often have to rely heavily on state-subsidised group-bookings.

The open clash between Hollywood blockbuster *Avatar* and state-backed Chinese film *Confucius* in 2010 demonstrates that Hollywood's growing popularity has created considerable challenges to state-sanctioned local films and to the CCP's ideological security in China. Meanwhile, as the Chinese economy ascends on the global stage, China also desires for more positive international image and greater international influence. Subsequently, the Party-state urges Chinese film and media industries to 'go-global', to reach international audiences, and to help enhance China's soft power.

Go-Global: China's Quest for Soft Power

In recent years, soft power has become a buzzword in China frequently appearing in Chinese media, government reports and screen production proposals. Joseph Nye defines soft power as 'attractive power', an ability to shape others' preferences and an attraction that persuades us to go along with others' purposes without any threat (Nye, 2004, p.7).

China's enthusiasm for Nye's concept stems from its perception of China's lack of soft power. As one of the few remaining communist countries, China is acutely aware of its political isolation in the world. Since the fatal damage caused by the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, China's efforts to reinvent its international image have had limited effects (Brady, 2007). In order to defend its political legitimacy at home and to secure a

favorable global environment for China's development, the Party desperately seeks to enhance China's international image.

In 1999, former President Jiang Zemin called for China to establish an international communication capacity which would allow it to exert an influence on global opinion comparable to China's international standing (Kurlantzick, 2007). This desire was later translated into China's quest for soft power. China's lack of soft power is considered a serious threat to the CCP's ideological security, and an obstacle to China's rise to a global superpower.

In 2006, Zhao Qizheng, the former Director of the State Council Information Office, pointed out the serious implications of China's weakness in soft power. He observed that compared with its large trade surplus, China had serious cultural deficits which threatened China's cultural and ideological security (Zhao, 2006). Zhao's concern over China's cultural deficit is valid. Since China's opening-up in the late 1970s, it has been subject to increasing influence of foreign cultures. In 2006, for instance, China's imported books valued at $180 million while the values of its exported books were only $36 million (Li, 2009, 149).

Zhao believed that in order to revitalise the nation, China must revitalise its culture (Zhao, 2006). To address the issue, he urged that China must boost its cultural export, strengthen the weak international standing of Chinese language, and enhance China's own international media. Guided by such interpretation of soft power, China rapidly set up its global network of Confucius Institutes to teach Chinese language and culture. Between 2004 and June 2012, over 350 Confucius Institutes have been established in more than 100 countries around the world (Liu, 2012). In the meantime, in order to boost China's cultural export and enhance China's own international communication capacity, Chinese film, media and publishing industries are urged to step out of China (*zou chu qu*), to reach international audiences.

Soft power also entered the official vocabulary of the Chinese leadership. In 2007, at the Party's 17th National Congress, President Hu Jintao emphasized the important role which culture plays in a nation's competitiveness and urged that China to enhance its

soft power (Xinhua, 2007). In the same report, however, Hu also stressed the significance for the Party to build its core socialist values system and strengthen the affinity of socialist ideology. Hu's statement raised a fundamental dilemma facing China: the CCP's attempt to maintain its socialist ideology at home and the unlikely prospect of the Party using socialist ideology to enhance its soft power on the global stage.

China's lack of soft power was fully exposed during the Beijing Olympic torch relays in 2008. International protests against China's crackdown of a recent Tibetan unrest turned China's international public relation campaign into a total disaster. By the end of 2008, China's highly publicised clash with the West during the torch relay and the lack of voice of China's only international media had triggered the Party-state to invest 45 billion RMB (6.6 billion USD) to enhance China's own international media.

The following statement made by Li Changchun, the then CCP's top leader in charge of all media, indicated the Party's thinking behind the decision.

> In the modern age, whichever nation's communication methods are most advanced, its communication capacity the strongest, it is that nation whose culture and values can spread far and wide, and that nation has the most power to influence the world (Li, 2008).

Li's statement once again disclosed the Party's interpretation of soft power, which assumes that China's weak soft power is caused by its weak communication capacity, or its lack of reach to global audiences, rather than the attractiveness of the content of Chinese media and the unpopular values it represents. Driven by such interpretation of soft power, the Chinese government accelerated its media and cultural go-global steps.

In April 2009, China launched a new English newspaper *Global Times.* In July 2009, the State Council released 'The Plan for the Revitalization of Chinese Cultural Industry', urging China's cultural industry to accelerate its go-global pace (Xinhua, 2009a). In October 2009, China joined the Frankfurt Book Fair as its Guest of Honour, bringing with it over 70,000 Chinese books. In 2010, the state-run Xinhua News Agency launched a new 24 hour English television channel 'CNC World' (China Xinhua News Network

Corporation), demonstrating that China's intention to create a global media empire to project its own views to an international audience.

However, as part of its 'external propaganda' (*wai xuan*) machine, China's own international media still has little international creditability and influence. The focus of China's global media expansion has been extending the international reach of state-sanctioned media content, with little attention paid to the clashes of ideals and values with international audiences.

Similarly, China's cinema going-global aspirations also face formidable challenges. Compared to Hollywood, China's international market share is negligible. Between 2005 and 2006, for example, Hollywood and its European co-productions occupy over 90% of the global film market while China's market share is below 1% (Yin & Tang, 2008). The clash between Hu Mei's 2010 film *Confucius* and Hollywood blockbuster *Avatar* highlights China's weak position when facing competitions from Hollywood on its own home ground, let alone on the global stage.

In the wake of *Confucius'* defeat, China's State Council issued the 'Guidelines for Enhancing Chinese Film Industry' in January 2010. The Guidelines urge the local film industry to actively pursue Chinese cinema going-global strategy, to produce more films suitable for international market, to strengthen Chinese cinema's international influence, competitiveness and market share, and to enhance China's cultural soft power (China State Council, 2010). The Guidelines indicate both the state's desire for China to produce international influential films and its emphasis on the commercial dimension of the cinema going-global strategy. However, film is not a simple consumer product which China can easily produce for the international market. Apart from the commercial concerns, China still faces the fundamental question of what values Chinese films should represent in order to connect with international audiences.

Hu Mei's 2010 film also brings to light the state's attempt to re-embrace Confucius as a symbol of Chinese culture. China, however, has 'smashed the Confucius shop' in pursuit of western-style modernity since the May Fourth Movement. As Tu Wei-ming observes, historically, China's semicolonial status has severely damaged her ability to tap into

indigenous resources as the western impact fundamentally dislodged Chinese intellectuals from their Confucian heaven (Tu, 1994, p.2).

The sweeping anti-traditionalistic nature of Mao's Cultural Revolution further damaged Confucius' role as the moral foundation of Chinese society. China's opening-up to the West in the late 1970s sparked yet another manifestation of the May Fourth's legacy of anti-traditionalism and anti-Confucianism. Although the CCP has endorsed Confucius as the symbol of Chinese culture in the post-Tiananmen era, China still faces the basic questions of what Confucian values are still relevant to today's world, and what happens when Confucian values clash with the CCP's official ideologies.

The screen reconstruction of Confucius in Hu Mei's film also offers valuable insights into these questions. The film also indicates the considerable challenges facing Chinese filmmakers when they have to juggle between the conflicting objectives of supporting the CCP's nationalist ideology and promoting traditional Chinese values.

Among contemporary Chinese films about the Sino-Japanese War, Lu Chuan's 2009 film *City of Life and Death* is an unusual case. The film shows a rare attempt to introduce western humanitarian values to a traditional propaganda topic. Although the film is generally well-received internationally and won the Best Director and Best Cinema Photography of the Asian Film Awards, it fails to win any domestic awards and is subject to severe attack by popular nationalists. The fate of Lu's film suggests the substantial challenges facing Chinese filmmakers who attempt to introduce alternative and universal values to Chinese cinema, in particular, a film about China's war with Japan, a typical topic of China's nationalist education.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the historical context of this research. It first sketches the historical trend of Chinese cinema as a nationalized space and nationalist enterprise. The chapter observes that during the Second Sino-Japanese War, cinema had been used by different state formations within the war-torn country to simultaneously project different values and conflicting versions of national identities.

Japan's surrender brought such screen contestation to an end. But cinema was quickly turned into a propaganda tool again soon after the founding of the People's Republic. Many films about China's historical clashes with foreign invaders – the Opium War, the Korean War, and the Second Sino-Japan War – were produced to project the CCP's version of history and to disseminate the CCP's official ideologies of anti-imperialism. During Mao's era, however, anti-imperialism was undifferentiated, and both the West and Japan were portrayed as evil imperialists, China's dead enemies.

China's reform and opening-up revitalised China modernity discourse and Chinese filmmakers began to make groundbreaking films reflecting on China's cultural traditions and modern history, including China's wars with the foreign Others. Films such as *Evening Bell* boldly introduced western humanitarian values and sympathetic deceptions of the Japanese invaders to challenge the orthodox representations of the war in previous PRC films.

However, the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown resulted in a dramatic shift in China's cultural discourse. Nationalism once again re-emerged as CCP's official ideology and the key theme for state-sponsored 'main-melody' propaganda films. Subsequently, the Second Sino-Japanese War was revitalised on the big screen to project nationalism and the Party's leadership during the war.

One significant difference between state-sponsored nationalism of the pre-reform and the post-Tiananmen years is the differentiation of the foreign Others. To support the Party's pro-West reform policy, the Korean War became a taboo topic and the former 'imperialists' are divided into two camps – the Japanese enemy and the American friend.

The chapter has also examined China's historical interactions with Hollywood. It traces back Hollywood's dominance of the Chinese market during the Republic era and the Nationalist government's failed attempts to restrain Hollywood's vilification of China and the Chinese. The founding of the PRC resulted in the total ban of Hollywood films in the mainland, until China's opening-up paved the way for Hollywood's formal re-entry into the PRC in 1994.

To the Chinese state, this presents both new challenges and fresh opportunities. By controlling access to the booming Chinese market, the state has exerted considerable influence over how Hollywood portrays China. This forms an intriguing contrast to the KMT's less effective manoeuvring with Hollywood several decades earlier.

However, Hollywood's return to the PRC also presents substantial challenges to both the Party-state and the local film industry. The 2010 open clash between Hollywood blockbuster *Avatar* and a high-profile Chinese film *Confucius* across China demonstrates Hollywood's surging popularity in China, its potential threat to the CCP's ideological security, and the lack of competitiveness of state-backed local productions.

Finally, this chapter discusses China's desire to enhance its cultural soft power. It observes China's soft power activities have focused on addressing China's cultural deficits, the weak international standing of Chinese language, and China's lack of international communication capacity. Although the party- state has abandoned the CCP's anti-feudalism tradition by re-embracing Confucius as a symbol of Chinese culture, China still faces the basic questions of what Confucian values are still relevant to today's China, what happens when Confucian values clash with CCP official ideologies, and what values China can present to the world other than nationalism.

Lu Chuan's 2009 film *City of Life and Death* showcases a daring attempt to introduce universal values to a traditional propaganda topic of the Sino-Japanese War. However, two years later, Zhang Yimou's war epic *The Flowers of the War* (2011) reverses Lu's experiment and re-endorses the CCP's official ideology of nationalism. The ideological shift indicates the formidable challenges facing Chinese filmmakers with respect to the choice of values – the need to support the CCP's official ideology and to follow international trends by embracing alternative values.

The historical review in this chapter has laid the foundation for the following chapters to further investigate how contemporary Chinese films have reconstructed China's historical clashes with the Japanese and Western Others; how the CCP has used Hollywood's re-entry into the PRC for its own political advantage; how China has responded to Hollywood's interpretation of Chinese culture through its own film; and

finally, how the Party-state struggles between the conflicting objectives of using nationalistic films to strengthen its political legitimacy at home and to enhance China's soft power through cinema on the global stage.

CHAPTER TWO

REINFORCED NATIONALISM: CHINESE SELF VS THE JAPANESE OTHER

Following the overview of the historical connections between Chinese cinema and the nation, Chapter Two investigates the role cinema has played in fostering nationalism in post-Tiananmen China, focusing on the revitalization and the filmic reconstructions of the Second Sino-Japanese War (SJW). Through analyzing various types of SJW films and their different representations of values and national identity, the chapter examines how the war has once again become a contested screen topic in contemporary China; how some Chinese filmmakers have supported the CCP's state nationalism agenda with their main-melody films while others have used their films to modify or even challenge the state's official narrative of the war.

Additionally, the chapter also examines how the Party-state has reacted to alternative screen representations of the war, and how Chinese audience have responded to a controversial SJW film through online postings, revealing rising popular nationalist sentiments as well as the disjuncture between state and popular nationalism in China.

Renewed Interest in the Second Sino-Japanese War

As discussed in Chapter One, the Second Sino-Japanese War has been a significant screen topic in China in the Republic era, during the SJW, after the founding of the People's Republic, throughout the Cultural Revolution and since the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. This makes the war an ideal topic for examining the connection between the cinema and the nation and the important role Chinese cinema has played in nurturing nationalism and constructing China's national identities.

During the early reform years of the 1980s, Wu Ziniu's film *Evening Bell* (1988) was a daring attempt to introduce humanitarian values into a traditionally nationalistic topic. The story took place immediately after Japan's surrender. On a barren mountain in Northern China, five Chinese Communist soldiers were confronted with the challenging task of handing a band of starving Japanese troops hiding inside a cave.

The film placed the Chinese soldiers in the dilemma of taking revenge on the brutal enemies and the basic humanity of saving the starving prisoners of war who could barely walk. Although furious with the atrocity committed by the Japanese troops, the Chinese soldiers showed their humanity by placing their own food outside the cave. The film also portrayed the Japanese with respect and dignity through the ways they conducted themselves, even when they were nearly starved to death.

With its powerful depictions of the Chinese Self and the Japanese Other, *Even Bells* became a ground-breaking PRC film about China's war with Japan. Embracing humanitarian values, the film daringly humanised the Japanese 'devils', presenting them as not only China's invaders but also dignified human beings and the victims of the war.

In so doing, the film challenged the CCP's orthodox narrative about the war and added new meaning to the typical topic for the Party's nationalist propaganda. The film's humanitarian message resulted in a Silver Bear Award at the 39th Berlin International Film Festival and multiple Golden Rooster Awards, including Best Direction, Best Cinema Photography and Best Leading Male Actor. However, the 1989 Tiananmen event saw a dramatic shift in the ways China's war with Japan was represented on the big screen. Nationalism re-emerged as the dominant ideology of the post-1989 Chinese cinema.

Anthony Smith defines nationalism as '*an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity*' (Smith, 1991). Yingjie Guo extends the concept to the Chinese context and believes that the central concerns of Chinese post-colonialism are national identity, national autonomy, and international recognition. He also divides nationalism into official (or state) and unofficial nationalism which includes cultural nationalism and popular nationalism, and observes that the official construct of national identity is designed to define and produce who we are, what we can be, and influence how we see ourselves and the world (Guo, 2004).

Smith believes that nationalism only becomes prominently important in crises of nation-building, external threat, disputed territories, or the perceived dominance of a

hostile ethnic or cultural group (Smith, 2001). In contemporary China, such a crisis was the 1989 Tiananmen event, which prompted the CCP to launch new initiatives to instill nationalism into Chinese society. The historic event also turned Chinese film criticism from the discourse of modernisation to the discourse of popularisation. Subsequently, China's Fifth Generation filmmakers were criticized for courting the West. Nationalism, in this case, served as an ideological base for the local capitalism to compete with global capitalism (Zhu, 2003).

The key driver behind the re-emergence of nationalist ideology was the Chinese state. Aimed to rebuild the CCP's credibility and to resist western ideological influences, President Jiang Zemin launched the patriotic campaign in the early 1990s, focusing on the younger generation (He & Guo, 2000). In 1995, in response to the Party's patriotic campaign, the Chinese Film Bureau launched *Cinema Project 9550*, an initiative to fund 50 "main-melody" propaganda films within five years. The project highlighted the CCP's determination to remind Chinese audiences of China's historical suffering at the hands of foreign enemies and the Party's role in saving the nation.

Nevertheless, the Party's continued embrace of Deng's opening-up policy requires a fresh treatment of the West. This means that certain historical events, such as China's clash with the US during the Korea War, have now become taboo subjects, leaving the Sino-Japanese War as one of the few politically safe screen topics to be fully exploited in the post-Tiananmen era.

Reinventing Chinese Self and the Japanese Other

For Chinese screen producers, managing unpredictable state censorship can be politically risky and financially disastrous. Compared with sensitive contemporary topics, the censorship boundaries for SJW projects seem relatively clear and stable. According to an assessor from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), the key factor for a SJW TV drama to secure a government approval is 'to respect the history and not to distort the image of any heroes' (He, 2005).

The underlining message is clear – this is a safe topic as long as a TV drama respects the CCP's official narrative of the history and does not distort the image of the heroes (or to be precise, the image of the Party). When censorship normally poses considerable risk for expensive screen projects, this relative transparency is rather attractive for investors and screen producers. As a result, Sino-Japanese War re-emerges as a popular topic not just for state-sponsored 'main-melody' films, but also for commercial films and TV dramas.

The following section will explore how Chinese filmmakers have used the war to both support and critique the Party's official narrative, to test the state's censorship boundaries, and to reinvent the national identities of both the Chinese Self and the Japanese Other.

Recasting Chinese Self: The Party, Heroes and People

Although the CCP's policy and funding support help to revitalise the Sino-Japanese War on the big screen, the state-sponsored 'main-melody' films have to compete with Hollywood imports as well as local commercial and art films. The war subsequently becomes a fertile ground for Chinese filmmakers to reinterpret the historic event and to either validate or critique the official version of history and the CCP's nationalist ideology.

Among state-sponsored new propaganda films about the war, *On the Mountain of Tai Hang* (2005) is a classic example. Produced by August First studio associated with the People's Liberation Army, the film showcases how the CCP attempts to transform the old propaganda films with modern technology and to project a new version of national identity. Contrary to the subversive narrative of *Battle of Taierzhuang* (1986), which portrayed the Nationalist troops as heroes of the war, *On the Mountain of Tai Hang* reaffirms that it was the Communists, not the Nationalists, who lead China's resistant fighting against Japan.

In the film, the Communist army, lead by Commander Zhu De, held the higher moral ground and sharper military wisdom. The film shows that the CCP was willing to give the areas they took from the Japanese to the Nationalists in order to support the two parties' united front against Japan. The Communists become the genuine defender of

the nation whilst the Nationalists and the local warlords are depicted as selfish and narrow-minded troops with pre-occupations of their personal and regional interests.

The film reconnects with the red classic films by praising the Party's leadership and the wisdom of Mao's guerrilla warfare strategy. It illustrates the Communist army and the peasants under its leadership as fearless fighters whilst the Nationalists troops as cowards lacking in resolve and military wisdom. To improve its popular appeal, the film also features Hong Kong and Taiwan stars and adopted modern technology to improve its sound and visual effects.

The new main-melody film is also different from red classic SJW films of Mao's time. In the red classic films, the heroes were the Chinese 'people' – factory workers in *Zhao Yiman*, peasants in *Landmine Warfare, Tunnel Warfare*, and ordinary underground Party members in *Red Lantern* and *Sha Jia Bang.* The 'people's' theme was most pronounced in *Tunnel Warfare* where at the end of the film, the voiceover claimed that the war was a 'people's war' and the victory a 'people's victory'.

In *On the Mountain of Tai Hang,* however, the hero becomes General Zhu De, a top CCP leader and commander. This indicates that the new propaganda films are no longer about 'the people', but about the Party and its leadership in saving the nation from its external enemy, hence its current political legitimacy. The fact that the 'people' – the workers, the peasants, the soldiers – in red classics have faded into the background also reflects the end of Mao's class war. As China's social inequality continues to widen, it is no longer in the Party's interest to remind Chinese audience of the class-based division among the 'people'.

Another clear difference between *On the Mountain of Tai Hang* and the red classics SJW films is the insertion of a western character, Agnes Smedley, a renowned pro-CCP American journalist before the Communist took over China. The film features her interviewing Zhu De, in English. This friendly American face and the sound of English indicate the film's friendlier' approach towards the West and its support of the Party's opening-up policy.

However, despite the state's policy and financial support for new propaganda films, there are still alternative representations of the war emerging in post-Tiananmen China. *Devils on the Doorstep* is a case in point. The film challenges the state's official narrative by turning the image of the 'people' and the Party upside down. In the film, the only Communist guerrilla fighter is portrayed as a dubious character. Early in the film, a man knocks on a door in the dark. When villager Ma opens the door, he faces a gun pointing at his forehead. The intruder then demands that Ma keep a Japanese soldier and his interpreter as prisoners until the New Year's Eve. During his intrusion, the man remains faceless; the audience can only hear his tough voice and see his gun, but not his face.

This is the only time this invisible man has ever appeared in the film. He never returns to take away the Japanese prisoners, nor leads the villagers to fight against the Japanese. Facing constant danger, the villagers have no other choice but to think for themselves and defend their own interests. The film sends a politically subversive message – that the connection between the Party and the people was nowhere as close as the Party has claimed, and the Communist fighters' presence during the war was only sporadic. The film shows that hiding in the dark, they burst into people's home at night, dragging them into the conflict, and then leaving them to fend for themselves against the invaders.

The film thus separates the 'people's leader' from the 'people'. To the CCP, such a separation, with the villagers making their own decisions, in the absence of the Party's leadership, is politically rebellious. Such a reconstruction of the war directly challenges the CCP's grand narrative of its unquestionable leadership during the war, a critical justification for the Party's ongoing political legitimacy.

In Jiang's film, the people become anti-Japanese heroes again. And yet, the villagers in Jiang's film have little in common with the old heroic 'people' in socialist cinema. In red classic SJW films such as *Landmine Warfare* (1962) and *Tunnel Warfare (1965),* the Chinese villagers were automatically courageous resistant fighters who harboured deep hatred against the Japanese and unquestionable loyalty to the CCP.

In Jiang's film, however, the 'people' become de-revolutionised normal peasants. They are not fearless and patriotic by design but have their own pragmatic minds and their personal lives. They are anything but automatic defender of the nation. The film opens with villager Ma, the 'hero', having a secret affair with a young widow. Early in the film, Ma is reluctant and almost incapable of killing. Despite the Japanese prisoner's determination to kill himself, Ma tries everything he can to keep him alive. Even after the invisible man fails to return to collect the prisoners and the head of the village has decided to kill the prisoners to avoid trouble, Ma still cannot kill the two men.

Ma's hatred towards the invaders only arises after the villagers strike a deal with the Japanese for food. After the Japanese troops deliver the grain and hold a party in the village, they then grow suspicious of the villagers' intention. Feeling humiliated by a villager's casual remark and his lack of respect for Japanese troops, the Japanese officer orders the whole village to be gunned down. Only then does the hero toughen up, determine to kill the Japanese 'devils', even though the war has been officially declared over.

One could argue that Ma's initial inability to kill actually represents his natural reaction to brutality, and more importantly, it brings to light the villagers' deep sense of humanity and their higher-level moral judgement than the Japanese. It is this humanity, not their patriotic spirit, which has finally touched and changed the Japanese prisoner and gives him the will to live and the willingness to negotiate with the villagers. However, the film is deemed as a political sabotage by the state. Even after the film has won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes in 2000, it is still banned indefinitely in China.

Purple Butterfly (2003) is another interesting film about the Sino-Japanese War. Directed by Lou Ye, a young, free-spirited Sixth Generation filmmaker, the film subtly critiques China's official narrative the war. It begins with an uneasy relationship between a Chinese woman Xin Xia and a Japanese young man Itami in Japan-controlled Manchukuo. Having witnessed the murder of her brother by a Japanese extremist, Xin Xia moves to Shanghai and joins a resistant group called Purple Butterfly. Years later, Itami reappears in Shanghai, as a member of Japanese secret police unit whose task is to destroy Purple Butterfly.

Lou's film is the first PRC production which presents a Japanese man both as an enemy and a lover. The film positions Xin Xia and Itami's personal feelings for each other against the interests of their nations, placing them in an acute moral dilemma. Itami seems more capable of separating his personal feeling and his duty to Japan. Even knowing Xin Xia's real identity, he still offers to take her to Japan and keep her out of his official duties. Xin Xia, however, painfully chooses to sacrifice her personal feelings for the nation.

By mixing one's personal feeling with one's duty to the nation, the film ventures into a new territory and suggests that it is possible to love someone in the enemy camp and separate oneself from the nation. The film also introduces a group of alternative heroes and some independent protectors of the nation when it announces that Purple Butterfly is not attached to any organisations. This subtly challenges the CCP's orthodox narrative that the Party was the only defender of the nation.

The film also weaves another love affair into its plotline. Through an uneasy intimacy between Xin Xia and Xie Ming, the head of Purple Butterfly, the film divulges the flaws of resistant 'heroes'. At times, even the heroes' patriotic spirit is overshadowed by doubts. 'What are we fighting for?', Xin once asks. It indicates that the heroes' devotion to the nation is not unquestionable. These new breed of heroes are individuals with their own minds, feelings, and doubts about themselves, their relation with the nation and their decision to defend the nation. They are not those fearless and mindless heroes in Chinese propaganda films who are inseparable from the nation and whose only mission in life is to protect the nation.

The co-existence of the *On the Mountain of Tai Hang, Devils on the Doorstep* and *Purple Butterfly* demonstrates the shifting landscape of contemporary Chinese cinema. Although the CCP has revitalized propaganda films and used the Sino-Japanese War to support its post-Tiananmen political agenda, there are still alternative voices behind the iron curtain, as some Chinese filmmakers choose to either directly challenge, or, subtly critique the state's official representations of the war and the Party's nationalist discourse.

Re-Imagining the Devils

To validate the CCP's nationalist ideology, *On the Mountain of Tai Hang* has re-demonized the Japanese Other. The film portray the Japanese as 'devils' who lock Chinese villagers in a small room, using tear gas to force them to reveal the hiding place of the Communists. The depiction of their savageness reaches its climax when a Japanese soldier stabs a Chinese nurse while she is addressing his wound. The film's reimaging of the Other echoes the one-dimensional portrayals of the Japanese 'devils' in red classic films.

Feng Xiaoning is arguably the most important director of main-melody war films in post-Tiananmen China. Shot against spectacular landscapes, his 'war and peace' trilogy – *Red River Valley* (1999), *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* (2001), and *Purple Sunset* (2003) — re-imagines China's clashes with the foreign Other and projects strong nationalistic sentiment. Both *Lovers' Grief* and *Purple Sunset* are SJW films. To justify his pre-occupation with the war, Feng claims that it is his duty to remind Chinese youth of the nation's history, adding that if the future generations forget the atrocities the Japanese had committed in China, it would be a great shame for all Chinese (Jia, 2002).

Feng's statement discloses his belief that cinema should serve as a form of patriotic education. This belief is deeply embedded in his films where the Japanese are depicted as savages without a trace of humanity. In *Lovers' Grief*, they are mass murders and rapists whose evil deeds drive the female protagonist to carry a hand grenade with her all the time. In *Purple Sunset,* the Japanese troops use Chinese civilians as live targets to train new soldiers.

Through a gruesome scene, the film displays that the inhumanity of the Japanese also extends to themselves. Hearing Japan's surrender, many Japanese soldiers commit suicides; they also give hand grenades to Japanese civilians, including the elderly and children, to encourage mass suicides. Such depictions emphasis the inhumanity of the savage Other and evoke nationalistic sentiments against China's former enemy.

During a 2002 interview, Feng admits that he is strongly under the influence of red classic war films. 'For generations, Chinese filmmakers have reflected on the wars with

foreign invaders, and such a patriotic tradition should not be broken in my generation' (Jia, 2002). Feng's remark indicates his endorsement of the anti-imperialist tradition of socialist cinema. His political stance, together with his willingness to accommodate the state's post-reform policy, makes Feng an ideal filmmaker of China's post-Tiananmen propaganda films.

Feng's more recent films show yet another intriguing trend. With an unusual twist, his SJW sequel *Hands-Up!1: Devils in the Village* and *Hands-up!2: Track Aduowan* turn the war into commercial comedies. Both films cast Chinese comedians in the roles of Japanese soldiers. Subsequently, the Japanese become not only evil but also physically ugly, stupid and laughable. The lead Japanese character is a short and hideous soldier. He has bowlegs and cross eyes, and he walks, talks, and behaves like an idiot. The film shows him getting a mouse into his pants by mistake and then running around madly, jumping onto a long dining table, trashing all the food in front of international guests.

The film also intensifies its nationalistic tone. It engages lengthy dialogues and twisted plots to list the atrocities Japan has committed during the war: using Chinese prisoners to experiment biological weapons, stealing Chinese cultural relics, and plotting to use nerve gas to bomb America…. In the film, a Japanese officer claims that Japan will never admit any of such criminal acts, to which the lead Chinese character responds: 'Your evil deeds will be remembered by Chinese for generations to come!'

Through such arrangements, the film turns China's war with Japan into an odd mixture of vulgar comedy and patriotic lecture. The Japanese Other is subject to racist ridicules and nationalistic condemnation. The film's lack of basic respect for the Japanese contradicts Feng's claim that his films intend to project a sense of equality among individuals and nations (Jia, 2002). Rather than rendering any respect for an equal Other, Feng's latest films accelerate their validation of the CCP's nationalist ideology by further demonising and undignifying the Japanese Other.

The intensified nationalistic otherness contrasts sharply against the depictions of the Japanese in Jiang Wen's 2000 film *Devils on the Doorstep*. In Jiang's film, the invaders are not even referred to as 'Japanese devils' as they are in most Chinese films about

the war; instead, the Chinese villagers simply call them 'the Japanese' in their local dialect (*ri ben zi).* The film abandons the deep-seated hatred against Japanese in most Chinese SJW films and portrays the Japanese troops with certain respect and even well-intended humour.

The film opens with Japanese troops arriving in the village with a brass band. They wear white gloves and give candies to Chinese kids. Later on, when a Japanese soldier finds that he has become a prisoner, he tries to kill himself to defend his honour. To keep him alive, the villagers make him dumplings which they cannot afford to eat themselves. Gradually, the Japanese prisoner gives up his suicide attempts and reaches an agreement with the villagers to return him to the Japanese troops in exchange for the grain they have consumed. By doing so, the film shows how the Japanese 'devil', the savage Other, can also be human, capable of being transformed into civilised and practical beings by 'us', and just like 'us'.

Similarly, in Lou Ye's *Purple Butterfly*, the Japanese are not 'devils' but human beings capable of deep love. Itami is portrayed as a man who genuinely loves Xin Xia. He treats Chinese as his equals and refuses to move to a Japanese-only carriage on the train. He tells Xin that he misses their innocent student life of literature club and carefree suppers. The film also hints that Itami's father committed suicide because he opposed the war, suggesting that not all Japanese are villains obsessed with military aggressions towards China. In addition, the film illustrates that when a Japanese woman is fatally shot at her restaurant, her last words are about home, Japan, suggesting that the war has brought trauma to 'them' as it has to 'us'.

These films' dramatically different representations of the war and the Other demonstrate that unlike the socialist cinema of Mao's time, China's new propaganda films can no longer monopolise Chinese film market. As in the wartime cinema of the Republican era, China's war with Japan has once again become a fiercely contested topic for Chinese filmmakers to struggle for their own right to speak for the nation.

However, it is the Chinese state which calls the shots and determines what can and cannot be shown on the big screen. Hence, how the state has responded to alternative screen representations of the war becomes an important issue deserving further investigations.

Government Censorship: Negotiable Boundaries?

The Party-state's severe treatment of *Devils on the Doorstep* suggests that the Sino-Japanese War can be a politically dangerous topic. The state's dramatically different responses to Feng Xiaoning, Lou Ye and Jiang Wen's films about the war also illustrate what the state would encourage, tolerate, and absolutely forbid with regard to the cinematic representations of China's war with Japan.

Defending the Party's Image

In April 2000, *Devils on the Doorstep* received nomination at the 35th Cannes Film Festival. Within days, the Chinese Film Bureau instructed its director Jiang Wen to withdraw the film from Cannes, an instruction Jiang ignored. As a result, although Jiang's film won the Grand Jury Prize at the Cannes, the film and Jiang himself were blacklisted in China. The government believed that the film distorted the image of the Chinese villagers 'who did not hate the Japanese troops as they should', and the state's fury at the film extended to the highest levels of its hierarchy (Rennie, 2000).

The official ban deeply disturbed the film's investors. In China, all films must pass state censorship before they can be released or join international film festivals. Those who dare to challenge the rule would be subject to severe punishment. Chen Weiming, one of *Devil*'s investors, told Chinese media that 'We're extremely concerned about our investment. If we're fined, the amount could be twice as much as the total investment. If the film is banned from domestic release, then all of our investment would be lost. Worst of all, our company may never be allowed to invest in any films in the future' (Devils, 2000). The statement discloses the Party-state's overwhelming power over Chinese filmmakers and investors and the state's tight control over the screen representations of the Sino-Japanese War.

In the eyes of the state, the most unforgivable offence of *Devils* is its subversive portrayal of the Party. The film shows the CCP's resistant fighters budge into villager Ma's house in the middle of the night, pointing the gun at his head, demanding he keep two Japanese prisoners for them. This scene subtly sabotages the carefully-guarded official narrative that the Communist Party is a 'people's party', and the relation between the Communist troops and the Chinese people has been as close as 'fish and water'.

The protection of such a historical narrative is at the core of the state's censorship. As a state assessor who works for the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) points out, the key for SJW TV dramas to secure a state approval is 'to respect the history and not to distort the image of any heroes' (He, 2005). The 'history' here implies the official narrative of the history, the 'heroes' refers to either certain Party figures, or 'people' under the Party's leadership. Both criteria can be boiled down to the image of the Party.

The fact that *Purple Butterfly* has secured the permit for a domestic release indicates that regarding the screen reconstructions of the Sino-Japanese War, the state censors are prepared to forgive the lack of representations of the CCP, a love story between a Chinese resistant fighter and a Japanese secret policeman, even her doubt over the purpose of the fighting, but what the state will not tolerate is the distortion of the Party's image. After all, in *Purple Butterfly*, Xin Xia's final choice is her nation rather than her Japanese lover. The fact the two Chinese lovers are not Communists also gives the film more room to expose their flaws.

Nevertheless, the alternative cinematic representations of the war and the more sympathetic depictions of the Japanese Other are marginalised in contemporary China. With Jiang's film banned and Lou's film having only limited domestic release, Feng Xiaoning's state-sponsored and commercialised main-melody films have become the mainstream representations of the war. These films support the CCP's state nationalism agenda while propelling China's popular nationalist sentiments.

Pursuing Universal Values under the Party

City of Life and Death (2009) is the first PRC film shot mainly from a Japanese soldier's point of view. It tells the story of a Japanese soldier being traumatised by the Nanjing Massacre and ends up committing suicide. The film displays a rare attempt to humanise the Japanese 'devils' and to portray both sides as the victims of the war.

City of Life and Death is a breakthrough SJW film on multiple fronts. Following *Evening Bell*'s footsteps, the film demonstrates its moral courage to project an alternative voice against the sweeping current of nationalist ideology and the nationalisation of the war. Compared to most Chinese films about the war, Lu Chuan's film displays a daring attempt to humanise the Japanese Other and to introduce western liberal values to a traditional topic for nationalistic propaganda.

The film is Lu Chuan's personal response to the nationalistic main-melody films about the war. In 2009, Lu posted Ard Vijin's review of his film on his blog. Vijin points out the blatant propaganda nature of many Chinese SJW films: 'Lu's film proves that Chinese filmmakers are capable of keeping the regime happy while still producing terrific cinema' (Lu, 2009). Lu's endorsement of Vijin's review implies his intended departure from Chinese propaganda films about the war.

However, the film's sympathetic portrayal of the Japanese enemy infuriates many Chinese audiences. Within the first week of its release, the film attracts such severe attacks from internet postings that it is almost withdrawn from cinemas. Surprisingly though, the fate of the film is dramatically different from that of *Devils on the Doorstep*. Not only is it allowed a national theatrical release, the film even receives open support from Zhang Hongsen, Deputy Director of the National Film Bureau and behind-the-scene support from Li Changchun, the CCP's propaganda chief (Wong, 2009).

In a Chinese media interview, Zhang Hongseng indicated that, during the film's development, he advised Lu that 'the film should be a journey of spiritual climbing, a fundamental, honest and contemporary expression'. When asked what should be allowed in films about the Sino-Japanese War, Zhang commented further:

> This is the 21st century, and we cannot remain at the one-dimensional level and only focus on how to vividly depict shooting and burying people alive (on the screen). If we cannot defend our national cinema, that would be a real tragedy. It is critical that we change our one-sided and isolated approach and adopt broad historical perspectives. We should lift the stories to the level of humanity, to embrace deeper humanitarian reflection (Yuan, 2009).

Zhang's comments bring to light his discontent with the common flaws of Chinese propaganda war films; the fact they tend to use digital technology to emphasise the killings of enemies while ignoring the films' deeper meaning. Zhang's comments also unveil the government's anxiety about the future of Chinese films as the local industry faces the threat of Hollywood imports. In order to save the national cinema, the government is willing to slightly relax its censorship, to allow Chinese filmmakers to 'both uphold nationalist ideology and embrace humanitarian reflection', as long as they continue to endorse the Party's political legitimacy.

In February 2010, the National Film Bureau released the 'The Announcement Regarding Improving Film Script (Outline) Registration and Film Approval Process' (SARFT, 2010). The Announcement delegates certain authority to provincial departments, allowing them to register and respond to submitted film scripts (or outlines), to assess, even finally approve certain films. However, the Announcement stipulates that if the proposed films involve major revolutionary and historical themes, the provincial departments will need to obtain approvals from the relevant provincial authorities first before submitting the applications to State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) as special projects for further approval.

This new policy streamlines the approval process for normal commercial films on one hand while maintaining a tight grip on films about key historical events on the other. The policy discloses the great importance the state has attached to its control over China's historical discourse through cinema. Within this political context, Zhang Hongsen's comment is an encouraging step forward. It suggests that the senior film administrator is concerned about the future of Chinese cinema and the fact that he is willing to tolerate the humanitarian experiment of Lu's film.

The state's new position hints certain flexibility within the CCP system when Chinese cinema faces increasing threats from western imports. One could argue that Li Changchun's support for Lu's film also reflects the state's desire for Chinese film industry to step out of China, to go-global. In December 2008, Li delivered a speech urging the Chinese media to create more content suitable for international audiences.

The state's contrasting reactions to Lu and Jiang's films deserve further exploration. This study argues that a major difference between the two films rests in the way they each projects the image of the Party. While Jiang's film portrays the CCP resistant fighter as a dubious character, Lu's film opens with a courageous image of the Chinese Self. It shows Lieutenant Lu Jianxiong and a small group of Chinese soldiers blocking the city gate of Nanjing, trying to stop deserting KMT troops from fleeing the city. They then fire at approaching Japanese troops on the street before being captured. Facing a Japanese machine gun and the mass murder scene, Lu stands up, stepping forward, looking calm and dignified.

Although the state's endorsement of Lu's film is controversial and the film fails to win any domestic awards, the Party's ultimate tolerance of the film demonstrates that driven by China's desire to defend its national cinema, the state is prepared to broaden its censorship boundaries, as long as the film does not distort the image of the Chinese Self, particularly the image of the Party.

These modifications suggest that the CCP is capable of both maintaining and adjusting its own censorship regime. By keeping tight control on critical issues while relaxing control over minor issues, the Party-state has managed to face the cultural globalisation process on its own terms – maximising the benefits and minimising its own vulnerability (Saunders, 2000).

Audience: Rising Popular Nationalism

The strong nationalistic reactions which *City of Life and Death* received in the PRC make the film a valuable case study for investigating how cinema has become a breeding

ground for popular nationalism and the intriguing relation between state nationalism and popular nationalism in post-1989 China.

Popular Nationalism and Nationalistic Films

In 2009, *City*'s national release arouses strong popular nationalistic reactions across China. Nationalistic postings, including death threats to Lu Chuan, surge on the internet. Stunned, Lu admits that he has never imagined his film would have induced so much hatred against him (Wong, 2009). One Chinese poster puts a red cross across Lu's photo, calling Lu a traitor, claiming that the Japanese is the most savage race on earth. 'Every Japanese soldier was an executioner, they killed and raped so many Chinese during the war, how could you possibly praise them? How dare you try to erase our hatred?' (Blogger A, 2009)

Another poster claims that during the Nanjing Massacre, 99.99999% of Japanese soldiers were demons. The poster demands that Lu provides historical evidence to prove that any Japanese soldiers had actually committed suicide during the war due to his own conscience. 'Are you confessing on their behalf?', asks the blogger. The blog then adds: 'What I find most offensive is the scene of the Japanese devils' memorial ceremony. How on earth could SARFT approve such a scene? How come each time a Japanese Prime Minister visits the Yasukuni Shrine the Chinese government would protest, but a so-called Chinese patriotic film could have a scene like this? You think you can fool us? You are a traitor!! I hope our nation will always remember the humiliating history and one day we will repay the blood debt and clean up all the humiliation forced upon our ancestors!!!' (Blogger B, 2009)

The online comment indicates that China's popular nationalism may not always align with the CCP's state nationalism rhetoric. Popular nationalism could have its own mind and may seek to speak on behalf of the nation, in opposition of the state and the CCP-initiated state nationalism. This highlights the important distinction between China's popular nationalism and state nationalism.

Popular Nationalism Vs State Nationalism

The fact that some popular nationalist postings question the state's approval of Lu Chan's film and the state's role in defending the dignity of the nation makes it possible to draw a line between China's state-initiated and popularly-generated nationalism. The phenomenon brings to light the disjunction between China's popular nationalism and state nationalism, and the fact that the country's popular nationalism does not necessarily serve the state.

This argument is further supported by Chinese bloggers' response to President Hu Jintao's 2008 Japan visit. During Hu's official visit to Japan in May 2008, he calls for the reconciliation between China and Japan and urges the two nations to 'remember the history but forget hatred'.

> The reason we emphasise the memory of history is not because we want the hatred to continue, but due to the fact we wish to draw upon history as a reference in order to look forward to the future, to build friendship between our two countries for generations to come, and to help the world to enjoy perpetual peace (Qi, 2008).

However, judging from the following online postings, Hu's call has fallen on deaf ears. On May 10, 2008, two days after Hu's speech, a Chinese blogger comments: 'I don't know why I hate the Japanese so much. I am a farmer's son and no one in my family had been killed during the war. But I remember the films I watched during my childhood – *Tunnel Warfare, Landmine Warfare, Little Soldier Zhang Ga.* Since then I've hated the Japanese! In my vocabulary, there is no such phrase as 'the Japanese' but 'Japanese devils'. Later on, through studying history at high school, I saw the ugly nature of Japan as a nation. At university, I watched the film *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River,* the ways the Japanese kill our people bring tears to my eyes each time I think of it. The Japanese are beasts. How can we possibly forget?? This is our nation's deepest hatred, we must remember this hatred! We must carry it on for generations to come!' (Blogger C, 2008).

Although the posting may only represent the views of a small proportion of Chinese audiences, it nevertheless indicates how the red classic films have planted the seeds of

the hatred into the mind of the blogger since childhood, and how, by the time the blogger entered university, Feng Xiaoning's 1999 main-melody film *Lover's Grief over Yellow River* has further cemented anti-Japanese nationalistic sentiment. Judging from the year *Lover's Grief* was produced, the blogger would be in the right age group which the CCP's post-Tiananmen patriotic education campaign has targeted. This demonstrates that the CCP's post-Tiananmen patriotic campaigns and the nationalistic propaganda films have played an important role in fostering popular nationalism in contemporary China.

Furthermore, the online posting also indicates that China's nationalism can be a double-edged sword. Although it seems that the Party's post-Tiananmen patriotic campaign has taken effect and the seeds of nationalistic hatred have taken root and borne bitter fruit, popular nationalism can have its own mind. Despite Hu Jintao's call 'to remember the history but forget hatred', China's 'angry youth', who have grown up being fed with a steady diet of nationalism, cannot be easily held back to simply give up their hatred, even when their government tells them so.

Although the Party has used nationalism to justify its role in defending the nation and its current political legitimacy, such efforts can also create an irrational force of popular nationalism which potentially could undermine the Party-state's long term agenda of peaceful economic development via international engagement.

As another Chinese blogger points out, nationalistic hatred has overshadowed people's need for love and peace in China. 'We believe that foreigners have a conspiracy to stop us from rising.… We grew up watching war movies and dream to be heroes to fight against foreign enemies. Shall we allow such hatred to squeeze the last drop of humanity out of us?' (Blogger D, 2008). Once again, the blogger refers to the role which propaganda films have played in cultivating nationalism in China. The comment further validates the link between state-sponsored propaganda films and popular nationalism in China.

In September 2012, when a 21-year-old man Cai Yang is arrested for seriously injuring a Toyota-driving Chinese national during an anti-Japanese protest in Xi'an, his mother Yang Shuilan tries to explain why his son had been so irrational.

> The education at school always instils the idea that Japanese are evil people. If you turn on the television, most of the programmes are about the Anti-Japanese War. How can we possibly not resent the Japanese?' (Anderlini, 2012)

The mother's observation confirms that in contemporary China, the Sino-Japanese War has flooded Chinese screens. Between 1991 and 2000, 35 titles and 48 parts of the CCP-designated 'major historical films' depicting how the CCP led the people to defeat the Japanese and Nationalists were produced, four times as many as in the 1980s (Zhang, 2004). In 2005, over 20 TV drama series about the Sino-Japanese War were produced by nine Chinese provinces and cities to mark the 60th anniversary of its end (He, 2005).

The overwhelming screen representations of the war have infused strong anti-Japanese sentiment in the minds of millions of Chinese 'angry youth'. The fact that Cai's nationalistic resentment has driven him to inflict violence on a Toyota-driving fellow Chinese also discloses the serious side effects of the CCP's patriotic education and its post-1989 policy of turning contemporary Chinese screens into a nationalist enterprise.

Instead of nurturing mutual understanding and tolerance, the patriotic preaching has fostered nationalistic resentment and intolerance in contemporary China. Although nationalism may help the CCP's to strengthen its political legitimacy in the short term, in the long run, irrational popular nationalism could turn more Chinese youth into extreme nationalists like Cai and threatens China's own social stability.

Some Chinese intellectuals have openly challenged the roles which the state and media have played in cultivating popular nationalism in China. Zhang Wen accuses local newspaper *Global Times* of provoking popular nationalism. He also points out that China's angry youth are the result of (the state's) continued brainwashing through education and propaganda (Zhang, 2011). What Zhang has not spelled out is that since the 1990s, nationalism has become a convenient tool for the state to brainwash the masses in order to strengthen its political control. For some Chinese media outlets,

nationalism also offers a politically-safe vehicle to exploit popular nationalistic sentiment for commercial gains.

However, China's popular nationalism is not necessarily pro-state. The audiences' strong reactions to the popularised main-melody film *Founding of a Republic* (2009) expose the complex nature of popular nationalism in today's China. When it is exposed that many Chinese celebrities in the film who play the founders of the People's Republic actually hold foreign passports, many Chinese online postings turn from nationalistic comments to political complaints. One blogger admits that 'We talk about movie stars because we dare not to talk about those officials who have sent their wives and kids overseas.... Among the children of our ministers, there are hardly any Chinese nationals left. Do not turn around and lecture us on how to love our country!' (Blogger E, 2009).

These comments indicate that Chinese popular nationalism could be a disguised popular outlet for political discontent and potentially becomes anti-government. Under its patriotic façade, China's popular nationalism can be a convenient excuse for the masses to voice their political frustration and their resentment towards the corrupt government and China's new rich. Although popular nationalism may appear to be popular support for Party-sponsored state nationalism, it could well become an excuse for the public to challenge the Party-state's official rhetoric, corrupt officials, even the Party itself.

Conclusion

Chapter Two has explored the renewed interest in the Sino-Japanese War films in post-Tiananmen China. Through studying various types of SJW films and the different values and national identities they represent, this chapter examines how China's war with Japan over half century ago has once again been rejuvenated and become a highly contested topic in contemporary China. The chapter also interrogates how Feng Xiaoning's popularized main-melody films have supported the state's new political agenda on multiple fronts – re-demonizing the Japanese Other to validate the Party's nationalist ideology and turning the West into China's friend to endorse the state's opening-up policy.

Jiang Wen's film *Devils on the Doorstep* however, challenges the state's official historical narrative and casts a dark shadow over the Party's image during the war and is subsequently banned indefinitely. Lu Chuang's film *City of Life and Death* serves as another intriguing experiment. The film presents an innovative approach – an attempt to portray a Communist soldier as a dignified resistant fighter while humanizing the Japanese Other.

The diversity of the Sino-Japanese War films in contemporary China indicates the complexity of Chinese cinema when compared with the socialist cinema of the Mao's era. The study discloses that although the Party-state has launched Cinema Project 9550 in the mid 1990s to revitalize propaganda films via 'main-melody' films, state-backed new propaganda films can no longer dominate the post-Mao film market, nor can the state have total control over Chinese filmmakers. Among the more free-minded Chinese filmmakers, Jiang Wen even uses his SJW film to challenge the Party's image and the state's official historical narrative.

How the state has responded to the alternative representations of the war is equally illuminating. The state's permanent ban on *Devils on the Doorstep,* its tolerance of *Purple Butterfly* and its strong support for *City of Life and Death* prove what the Party-state cares most is how these films projects the Party's image. The state thus may tolerate the absence of the Party in films such as *Purple Butterfly*, but it will not tolerate any derogatory depictions of the Party and its leadership during the war.

Meanwhile, SARFT's strong support for *City of Life and Death* also suggests that facing the threat of foreign imports, the Chinese state is prepared to relax its censorship on minor issues while maintaining its tight control over the key issue of the Party's image and its political legitimacy. By doing so, the Party-state has managed to face the challenge of cultural globalisation on its own terms – maximising the benefits and minimising its own vulnerability. For Chinese filmmakers, the state's new censorship boundaries present the opportunity to praise the Party on one hand while humanising the Japanese 'devils' and introducing universal values on the other.

This study also validates the conceptual separation of official and unofficial nationalism. The tensions between the state, filmmakers and audiences over SJW films suggest that nationalism can be generated from different sources, with different agendas, for different purposes. The analysis uncovers a disjuncture between state and popular nationalism in today's China, and the fact that some Chinese filmmakers and audiences have defended their rights to represent the nation, in opposition to the state.

Finally, Chinese audiences' strong reactions to *City of Life and Death* and the 2012 incident of a young man attacking a Chinese Toyota driver during an anti-Japanese demonstration further expose the serious side effects of the CCP's re-endorsement of nationalist ideology. The Party's post-Tiananmen nationalist propaganda have planted the seeds of hatred, cultivated a generation of 'angry youth', and fuelled the rise of popular nationalism in the PRC. Audiences' online postings also suggest that China's Sino-Japanese War films, from the red classics to new main-melody film such as *Lover's Grief over the Yellow River*, have played a critical role in fostering popular nationalism sentiments in contemporary China.

Instead of nurturing understanding and tolerance, the state's reinforced patriotic preaching has encouraged the nationalistic sentiments of intolerance, hatred and revenge against China's former enemies, especially Japan. Although the state's nationalistic preaching may help the CCP to strengthen its political legitimacy in the short term, in the long run, China's rising popular nationalism could potentially jeopardize world peace and undermine China's international image and its peaceful development, critical for the Party's long-term political legitimacy.

CHAPTER THREE:

MODIFIED OCCIDENTALISM: CHINESE SELF VS THE WESTERN OTHER

Chapter Three examines the shifting landscape of China's official Occidentalism in the post-Tiananmen era and the transformed identity of the West in state-funded main-melody films. The chapter compares two films about the Opium War – *The Opium War (1997)* and *Lin Zexu (1959)* and investigates how the 1997 film reconstructed China's national identity, turning the heroic Chinese 'people' in the 1959 film into a flawed Self and transforming the Western 'devils' into a more dignified Other, while still supporting the CCP's nationalist ideology. Furthermore, the chapter interrogates how the 1999 film *My 1919* redefines the traditions of the May Fourth Movement and why the Korean War becomes a taboo topic in today's China. .

From the founding of the People's Republic till the end of the Maoist period, 'anti-western imperialism' had been an important theme of Chinese socialist cinema. The anti-West representations reflected China's hostile relations with the West during the cold war era. The state's role in constructing and controlling the image of the West validates the concept of *official Occidentalism* coined by Xiaomei Chen in the mid 1990s. Chen believes that the concept refers to a process where the Western Other is officially construed by a Chinese imagination, in order to support nationalism, for the domination of the Chinese Self at home (Chen, 1995, p.5).

The concept captures the officially construed nature of the Western Other in the PRC and the political purpose of the artificial construction. *Lin Zexu,* the 1959 film about the Opium War was a telling example of China's official Occidentalism embedded in Chinese socialist cinema. The film opened with voice over and onscreen text condemning the economic invasions of China by 'western imperialists' through opium trade. This opening set the tone for the film's anti-imperialism theme. The film placed the West as China's evil Other and the western characters were referred to by the Chinese side as 'Western devils' (*yang gui zi).*

In the film, the Western Other was totally rejected by the Chinese Self. The negative depictions of the West reflected the state's anti-imperialism ideology of the time. As Xiaomei Chen observes, for many Chinese, anti-imperialism is not merely an intellectual discourse……China's official Occidentalism imposed during Mao's China was an ideology. The imagined West was the counter Other, subversive to the 'revolutionary' China (Chen, 1995).

By the end of the 1970s, however, China's opening-up demanded a fresh approach towards the West. Subsequently, the official Occidentalism of Mao's time was modified on the big screen. *Burning of the Imperial Palace* (1983), a highly popular film in the 1980s, was a case in point. Directed by a respected Hong Kong director Li Han Hsiang, the film shifted its focus from condemning the Western Other to reflecting on the flaws of the Chinese Self.

Unlike *Lin Zexu*, Li's film presented a more balanced history. It told the story of how Qing Emperor Xianfeng indulged in the pleasures of the court, ignoring a country in turmoil and how western forces entered Beijing and burned down the Old Summer Palace. The focus of the film was more exposing the corrupt Qing ruler rather than simply blaming the West for China's misfortune.

The 1989 Tiananmen crackdown ended much of the modernity drive of the 1980s. Consequently, nationalism was reintroduced as the CCP's official ideology. To support this new political agenda, more state-sponsored films involving China's historical clashes with foreign Others emerge. State-sponsored new propaganda films such as *The Opium War* (1997) and *My 1919* (1999) are produced to project the updated version of official Occidentalism and the adjusted image of the West. Among these films, *The Opium War* showcases a new mixture of partially inheriting the self-reflective nature of Li's film and partially reconnecting with the anti-imperialist tradition of the socialist cinema.

The Opium War: Re-Constructing Self and the West

The Chinese epic film *The Opium War* is released in 1997 to commemorate the Hong Kong handover after a century of British rule of the former British colony. Directed by

renowned Chinese director Xie Jin, the film offers valuable insights into the evolving official Occidentalism and the shifting national identity in post-1989 China.

While the 1959 film *Lin Zexu* concentrated on condemning western imperialists and praising the heroic resistance of the Chinese Self, *The Opium War* transforms *Lin*'s one-dimensional attack on the West into a two-dimensional narrative – a critical reflection on the Chinese Self and a modified and more respectful depiction of the Other.

The film presents many Chinese characters as corrupt Qing officials. It also turns the undignified foreign 'devils' in the 1959 film into more humanised and diversified human beings. Nevertheless, the film's modification of the Western Other is limited. The fact that nationalism has become the CCP's official ideology since the 1990s has determined that the film's central theme must be nationalism.

Reinventing the Chinese Self

In *Lin Zexu*, the Chinese Self was depicted as both victims and heroes. The emphasis was the evilness and the cowardliness of 'them' and the righteousness and the courage of 'us'. In the 1997 film, however, such strong anti-West stance has been softened, replaced by more balanced representations of both the Chinese Self and the Western Other.

On the Chinese side, many Chinese characters in *The Opium War* are anything but heroes. The film shows that most local officials were opium addicts bribed by the opium traders. And yet the Qing government still held a false sense of superiority and a Qing official even claimed that 'England is such a small island country it wouldn't even qualify as our affiliated nation'. When China was defeated by British gunboats and had to negotiate with British representatives, the Qing official told his British counterpart: 'We are not asking for truce, our Emperor is granting you truce.'

These remarks reveal the Qing mandarins' Middle Kingdom mentality which assumed a world centring on China where all the other nations were mere tributers. The statements also divulge China's total ignorance about the rapid industrialisation of the western world. Instead of embracing modernity like Japan, China's inward-looking

mentality hindered its own modernisation. By exposing the inward-looking mentality on the screen, the film transforms the Chinese Self from the righteous anti-imperialistic hero in the 1959 film to a mixed group of Qing officials, most of whom see the world from their narrow point of view, like 'a frog from the bottom of a well'.

In the 1959 film, the heroes were mostly the Chinese 'people', such as poor fishermen A-Kuan and his wife, a reflection of Mao's class theory. The West in the film was portrayed as both the enemy of the nation and the class enemy of the 'people'. The film told its audiences that the Opium War was the result of the evil desire of the West; they were the only party to be blamed, hence the nationalistic hatred towards them.

Although the film showed a brief and distant scene of Chinese opium addicts, most of the Chinese characters were upright and courageous. The fishermen were fearless heroes when they told Commissioner Lin: 'If you want to punish the Western devils, we'll follow you to climb over mountains of knife blades and dive into burning seas.' The film's anti-West position was further highlighted towards the end, when the local fishermen matched towards the western troops, under the banner of 'Eliminating British Troops'.

In Xie's 1997 film, however, the courageous, revolutionary, working class Chinese 'people' have disappeared, replaced by Qing officials, merchants, and a beautiful singer. These urbanised, middle or upper class figures become the new embodiments of the Chinese Self. This new self identity echoes the changing social and class formations of contemporary China. It reflects a social reality that China's working class is no longer China's 'masters' as they were called in Mao's China; instead, a new elite class of government officials and affluent merchants has emerged.

The film's general attitude towards the new Chinese self is reflection and critique. It exposes the cunningness of the merchants, the corruption and the arrogance of the Qing officials. Instead of blaming the western imperialists for all of China's sufferings during the Opium War, Xie's film reflects on the flaws of the Chinese Self. In so doing, the film projects a new sense of national identity and a fresh political message that is relevant for contemporary China – pro-reform and anti-corruption.

Re-Imagining the Western Other

In the 1959 film *Lin Zexu,* the Western Other was referred to and portrayed as 'Western devils', whether they were greedy merchants and cold-blooded murders. The film showed Fisherman A-Kuan hated them to the bones because a British merchant killed his father when he refused to ship opium for the foreign 'devils'.

The film also depicted the West as a united force, determined to invade China. 'In London, capitalists and the British Foreign Secretary are scheming invasion of China,' the voice-over told the audience. The most intriguing scene was when fisherman A-Kuan's wife confronted the British opium trader who killed A-Kuan's father.
'I'm a foreigner', the man claimed.
'I know you are a foreigner', A-Kuan's wife replied as she slapped his face.
'I'm Chinese', the British merchant changed his claim, to which A-Kuan's wife responded with another forceful slap across his face.

This scene clearly drew the indisputable line between us – the proud and furious Chinese Self and the cowardly and undignified Western Other. The first slap was a direct strike against the Other while the second one was an even stronger reaction towards the man's false claim that he was Chinese. With these two slaps, the film declared the sharp distinction between 'us' and 'them', affirming that we were human and they were the 'devils' who deserved nothing but our disgust and revenge. Such official construction of the West reflected the unyielding anti-imperialist ideology of Mao's era. The slapping itself also exposed the violent nature of the anti-imperialist revolution.

In the 1997 film *The Opium War,* however, the depictions of the demonised Western Other disappears, replaced by the representation of a more humanised Other. The film portrays the British as dignified human beings with their own thoughts, values and perspectives who were annoyed by the arrogance of the Qing court and demanded to be treated as equal.

The film also reveals, through the voice of the young Queen, that the real motive behind Britain's decision to send gunboats to attack China was the British Empire's

dependence on free trade, vital for its prosperity. The film also features a lengthy debate at the British parliament over whether Britain should send troops to China and uses the scene to demonstrate that not all British politicians supported the War. The fact that the bill to fund the war was passed only 271 vs 262 at the British Parliament suggested that there were considerable resistance within the Parliament against the war; in other words, not all British were evil imperialists determined to invade China.

Interestingly, the film gives considerable screen time to an important speech by a British parliamentarian. Using some Chinese artefacts to support his speech, he makes the following remarks in the Parliament:

> 'China is the home of Confucius and Zhuang Zi, who lived there two thousand years ago. It will take us generations to understand the profundity of their thoughts and to understand China…. We may be able to defeat them, but we can never conquer them…. Back in the Tang dynasty, China was the most civilised and cultured nation on earth. The Qing, however, is proud and hollow, filled with nothing but self-importance; one touch, it will shutter to pieces'.

Through such remarks, the film turns the Western Other into both an admirer of ancient Chinese civilisation and an observer of Qing's conceit and decline. Compared to the 1959 film which blamed the West for all of China's misfortune during the war, Xie's 1997 film introduces a new prospective of what constitutes China – a glorious nation admired by the world in the Tang dynasty but a nation that has declined into a backwater by the Qing dynasty. In so doing, the film stops portraying the West as a homogenous national enemy but as a divided counterpart. With the praising of China's ancient civilisation, of China being 'the most civilised nation on earth by the Tang dynasty', the film also mobilises part of the modified Other to validate the glorious past of the Chinese Self.

But self-praising is not the film's key motivation. Towards the end of the film, Lin Zexun hands a terrestrial globe to his friend and urges him:

> 'Please tell the Emperor, in today's world, there are many strong nations. We cannot afford to be a narrow-minded frog which watches the world from the bottom of a well'.

This statement summarises a key message of the film. It acknowledges the existence of 'strong nations' outside China and alerts the audiences of the danger of narrow-minded conceit. The focus of the film has shifted from the denouncement of western imperialism to a more balanced reflection on Chinese self and more objective portrayal of the Western Other. The film redefines the Opium War as a clash between China's rejection of international trade and British Empire's dependence on free trade; between Qing's false sense of superiority and Britain's military strength. The film reminds Chinese audiences of the lesson of the Opium War and validates the CCP's opening-up policy.

Despite these adjustments, the film still maintains certain nationalistic traditions of the socialist cinema. This is particularly evident in the film's treatment of Rong Er character. When the beautiful Chinese singer is sent to entertain a British officer during the truce negotiation, Rong Er stabbed the British man with a pair of scissors. This arrangement turns Rong Er's female body into an embodiment of the nation and national dignity, and Rong Er's drastic action symbolises the film's overall rejection of the West.

Through Rong Er's defiance, the film puts another barrier between the righteous Chinese self and the undesirable Western Other. It shows the Chinese audience that the Other still deserves 'our' despise. In a sense, Rong Er's action is the extension of A-Kuan Wife's slapping of the British merchant. While A-Kuan's wife represented liberated Chinese women who were as patriotic and courageous as men, Rong Er becomes a sexual object desired by all men.

Rong Er's firm rejection of the British officer is designed to simultaneously enhance the film's popular appeal and to symbolise China's ultimate rejection of the Western Other. In spite of the film's more sympathetic depiction of the West, the division between 'us' and 'them' still remains; even though the film no longer refers to the West as 'devils', Rong Er's action suggests that after all, the Other is still not quite a human being.

The film's modification of official Occidentalism is thus only superficial. Even with its critical reflection on the Opium War and national identity, the film's underlining values clearly remains nationalism, the CCP's official ideology of the post-Tiananmen era.

Redefining the May Fourth Movement

My 1919, a 1999 state-funded main-melody film is another informative example of how cinema has been used to project modified official Occidentalism in post-Tiananmen China. As the state's designated film to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, the film also offers valuable insights into how the CCP has redefined the enlightenment movement and reaffirmed the May Fourth traditions.

Reconstructing 1919 Paris Peace Conference

My 1919 is produced to remind the Chinese audience of the humiliating history during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War One. During the Conference, western powers allowed Japan to take over Germany's interests in China's Shandong province, a historic event which embarked the beginning of the May Fourth Movement. The film describes how Wellington Koo, an articulate and courageous Chinese diplomat, confronted Japan and western powers and fought for China's interests during the Conference.

The film upholds the anti-imperialist tradition of the May Fourth Movement. While the film *The Opium War* allows a lengthy speech by a British parliamentarian, *My 1919* gives the Chinese Self its own voice on the international stage. In the film, Koo tells the world China's contributions during the WWI; he also accuses Japan's demand for Shandong as an 'open robbery' and declares that China cannot lose Shandong, as the West cannot lose Jerusalem.

The film continues to criticize the weak Beijing government. However, compared to *The Opium War,* self-reflection has faded into the background while the condemnation of the West takes the central stage again. Meanwhile, the film introduces a more complex and individualised Western Other. They can be arrogant at the beginning but learn to respect 'us' later. The film shows that the arrogant French President first deliberately keeps Koo waiting, but when they finally meet, he tells Koo that 'the US President speaks highly of you. With young men like you, China shall have a bright future'.

During the Conference, when Koo speaks passionately about Shandong, the US President comments, 'Excellent display of logic and passion. Everyone in Paris will be talking about him'. At the end of Koo's speech, the audiences warmly applaud him. These scenes serve to portray both a more worldly Self and a more humanised Other, a West that is capable of fair judgment and appreciation of 'us'.

The film displays a contrasting mixture of Parisian women. When Koo refuses a French prostitute's hassling, she yells, 'This is Paris. What are you doing here you yellow man?' But the daughter of Koo's French landlord admires Koo. When Koo is threatened by Chinese protectors, she grabs a gun, rushes into the rain, and fires a bullet into the sky to save him. All the same, the film warns its audience not to have any illusion about the West. It shows that when Japan threatens to walk away from the Treaty, the western powers all yield to its demand for Shandong, exposing what the West really cares about is not justice but their own interests.

In the film, China responds to this betrayal with utter outrage. Students demonstrate in Beijing and Paris while Koo condemns it at the Paris Conference:

> 'I am very disappointed. You have sold up China. I am outraged. What right do you have to give Shandong to Japan? Who can accept such national betrayal and humiliation? We refuse to sign the Treaty. Please remember, Chinese people will never forget this heart-breaking day!'

The film finishes with both the following onscreen text and the voice over:

> On June 28, 1919, for the first time, China finally told the western powers:
> No!

These statements summarise the key message of the film and highlight that the film's central theme is indisputably nationalism. The film condemns the West's unfair treatment of China and reminds audiences of the historic injustice and humiliation China has suffered at the hands of the imperialist powers. As a Chinese student declares in the film, 'This is a conference of the bandits dividing their spoils!' Although the film introduces some positive images of the West as individuals, as nations, they are 'bandits', the morally corrupt Other. Through these depictions, the film reconnects with the anti-imperialist tradition of the May Fourth Movement and of socialist cinema.

Apart from Koo's voice at the Paris Conference, the film's nationalist theme is also enhanced through the character of Xiao Kejian, a Paris-based Chinese student. When the western powers decide to give German's privileges in Shandong to Japan, Xiao sets himself alight in protest. Xiao's dramatic sacrifice for the nation is celebrated in the film with high flames and surging music, pushing the film's nationalist theme to its climax.

Xiao's sacrifice embodies the film's ultimate rejection of the Western Other. While the film *The Opium War* finishes with Lin Zexu urging the Chinese Emperor to be more open-minded, to know that China could not afford to be the frog at the bottom of a well, *My 1919* finishes with Xiao's glorified sacrifice and the clear message that in 1919, for the first time in history, China finally said 'No!' to the West.

Refocusing the May Fourth Movement

As China's official film to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, *My 1919* also represents the official reconstruct of the Movement. Often referred to as the Chinese enlightenment movement, the May Fourth Movement is renowned for its ideals of anti-feudalism and anti-imperialism.

However, *My 1919* avoids the anti-feudalist pursuit of the May Fourth and focuses purely on the anti-imperialism dimension of the Movement. Such selective approach reflects the focus of the CCP's post-Tiananmen political agenda – moving away from the modernity discourse of the 1980s to concentrate on the Party's post-1989 official ideology of nationalism. As a result, *My 1919*'s reconstruction of the May Fourth Movement leans heavily towards China's suffering at the hands of foreign powers and the anti-imperialist ideal of the May Fourth rather than the equally important May Fourth tradition of anti-feudalism.

Ironically, the May Fourth Movement was commemorated in a totally different manner ten years earlier. In May 1989, the Movement was celebrated as a source of inspiration for young Chinese students to demand more political freedom during the student protest at the heart of Tiananmen. The Movement was then the symbol of

China's quest for estern ideals of democracy and modernity, rather than a state-orchestrated commemoration of the May Fourth's anti-imperialist tradition.

Films such as *The Opium War* and *My 1919* signify a critical shift of Chinese cinema in the post-Tiananmen era. From the mid 1990s, the anti-feudalist films of the 1980s have been replaced by state-driven nationalistic propaganda films. These films represent the revised version of official Occidentalism which humanises the West on the surface while reconnecting with the anti-imperialist tradition of Mao's time.

The nationalistic nature of the film dictates that *My 1919* is shot entirely from the Chinese perspective, with no allowance for any alternative perspectives or further reflections on the history. This forms interesting contrast to *The Rising: Ballad of Mangal Pandey*, a 2005 Indian film about India's 1857 uprising against British colonisers, also known as India's First Independence War.

The film tells the story of a group of Indian soldiers embark on a mutiny when the British army introduced a new gunpowder cartridge greased with cow and pig fat, a religiously offensive move for both the Hindu and Muslim sepoys. Among the rebellious Indian soldiers, the film inserted a British army officer Captain William Gordon. Unlike other British officers who treated the locals like servants, Gordon befriended an Indian soldier and urged his British superiors to withdraw the cartridges and not to hang the mutiny leader. Gordon thus offered an alternative perspective; he became the conscience of the coloniser, a bridge between the two parties' racial, cultural and historical divide, between the coloniser and the colonised.

However, such treatment of the Western Other is largely absent in Chinese films. Modern history is still a sensitive topic subject to strict government censorship. In January 2006, *Frozen Point Weekly*, a Chinese current affairs magazine, published an article by Professor Yuan Weishi, entitled 'Modernity and History Text Books'. The article criticised Chinese history textbooks for glorifying the role that the Boxers had played during the 1900 Boxer Rebellions, their destruction of power lines, schools, railways, and their killings of foreigners and fellow Chinese who had anything to do

with western culture. ‘Such destruction and brutality were also China’s national humiliation which we cannot forget’ (Yuan, 2006).

Yuan’s article offended state censors. As a result, *Frozen Point Weekly* was suspended and its Chief Editor and Deputy Editor were both dismissed. When questioned by foreign journalists, a Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman claimed that Yuan’s article seriously distorted Chinese history and hurt the feelings of Chinese people. The case demonstrates that, while the Party-state invests heavily on main-melody films to re-enforce its own version of history, it also sets clear boundaries as to how Chinese history can and cannot be represented.

Compared to the large number of screen productions about the Sino-Japanese War, *The Opium War* and *My 1919* are rare examples of contemporary Chinese films about China’s historical clashes with the West. As the CCP continues to embrace Deng’s opening-up policy, the officially controlled screen representations of the West softens again. A 2011 event demonstrates how outdated a red classic film about the Korea War has become and why China’s official Occidentalism must abandon its anti-imperialist tradition of the cold war era.

The Korea War: From Red Classics to A New Taboo

On January 19, 2011, Chinese pianist Lang Lang performed for the visiting Chinese President Hu Jintao at the White House during a state dinner hosted by US President Obama. During the performance, he played ‘My Motherland’, the theme song of the 1956 Chinese film *Battle on Shangganling Mountain.* The red classic film re-enacted a fierce battle between Chinese and American troops during the Korean War, and in the song, American troops were referred to as ‘wolves’.

Lang Lang’s choice of music excited nationalistic audience in China and stirred up controversy in the US. The lyrics of the song described the beauty of China, the hospitality of its people, and their determination to defend their homes should ‘the wolves’ (the invaders) arrive.

> A great river flows, its waves wide and calm.
> Wind blows through rice flowers, bearing fragrance to both shores.

My family lives there by the water,
I am used to hearing the boatmen's call,
And seeing the boats' white sails…
If friends come, there is fine wine.
But if the wolves arrive, we will greet them with guns.

The song affirms the anti-imperialist theme of the film and signifies the official Occidentalism of Maoist China. It draws a clear line between 'us' and 'them' and illustrates how 'we' should treat our friends with good wine but point the gun at the 'wolves', the hostile Other.

Old Korean War Films: US vs American Devils

The dehumanised Other was the typical image of America in red classic films about the Korean War. In *Battles on Shangganling Mountain* (1956) and *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (1964) for instance, while the Chinese soldiers were portrayed as courageous fighters ready to sacrifice their lives for the nation, the American troops were depicted as cowardly 'paper tigers'.

Within this context, *My Motherland*, the theme song of *Battle on Shangganling Mountain* was used to arouse the audience's emotional connection with the nation. While the soldiers sang the song in North Korea, images of Great Wall, rivers, waterfall, factories and chimneys appeared on the screen, reinforcing China's natural beauty and its progress through industrialisation. The film supported the Chinese state's key agenda at the time – total loyalty to the state and blind devotion to the war. The film depicts that the low-level Chinese leaders and soldiers were valiantly fighting a vaguely defined enemy that threatened a vaguely defined China (Pickowicz, 2010).

Both red classic films showed deep resentment towards the Western Other. In *Heroic Sons and Daughters*, hero Wang Cheng ignored the bandage around his head and repeatedly pleaded for the opportunity to return to the frontline: 'For the sake of proletarian revolution, we are ready to climb mountains of knifes and jump into burning seas'. On the battleground, as large numbers of American soldiers approached his trench, Wang stood up, yelling through his walkie-talkie: 'Don't worry about me.

Open fire towards me!' When he was surrounded by American troops, Wang ignited a Bangalore torpedo among terrified American soldiers.

In honour of the hero, his sister and colleagues performed the following poem and song:

> Wang Cheng is a Mao Zedong's soldier, made of special materials.
> He has unlimited love for the Korean people
> Together with teeth-grinding hatred towards the (American) invaders.
> He is the pride of our great motherland.
> ……
> People's soldiers drive out tigers and leopards,
> Using their lives to defend peace;
> The enemies rot into mud,
> While our hero turns into golden stars.

To validate Wang's unlimited love for the North Korean people, the film also explained how a Korean family risked their lives to carry Wang's wounded sister across the river while bullets flew around them. To support the teeth-grinding hatred towards the invaders, the film portrayed the American troops as faceless, insect-like masses swarming up the mountains. Unlike the Chinese soldiers, they all appeared as cowardly and reluctant fighters. When facing flying bullets, they hastily turned their backs to retreat; when facing Wang's ignited bomb, their faces turned ashen, their eyes frightened, like terrified demons.

In *Battle on Shangganling Mountain*, all American soldiers hid their faces under their helmets. The only thing stood out were their exaggerated, 'eagle-hook' noses which made them look more like aliens. Such devilish looks justified the deep hatred for the American imperialists which had been drilled into the minds of Chinese audiences in Maoist China.

The cowardly image of the American Other serves to demonstrate that the Americans were only 'paper tigers'; they looked scary from the distance but were in fact hollow inside. Such a 'paper tiger' image of the Other was also conveyed through a scene in *Heroic Sons and Daughters*. When facing two Chinese army cooks holding shoulder

poles, two American soldiers, unsure what weapons they were facing, kneeled down and handed over their guns to the Chinese cooks.

Such ridicule of the American Other became politically-inappropriate in the reform era. Even after nationalism re-emerged as the CCP's official ideology in the 1990s, as China moved to join the World Trade Organisation, popular anti-West sentiment no longer served China's national interest and the CCP's political agenda. Consequently, the Korean War, the once popular topic for red classic films, became a taboo topic.

New Taboo: Korean War Off the Screens

In 2000, China Central Television (CCTV) produced a 30 episode TV drama about the Korea War, *Resisting the US and Assisting Korea War*. In the same year, a feature film about the War, *38th Parallel*, was also produced by China's military-run August First Film Studio. According to Li Qiankuan, Director of the TV drama, the TV production re-enacted the Korean War realistically. Its characters included top Chinese, Soviet and American leaders and generals including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Peng Dehuai, Stalin, Eisenhower and Macarthur. The TV drama also had a huge cast of over 100,000 people, coming from 17 countries' (Hong, 2010).

The TV drama was scheduled for a national release in early 2002 but it never happened. During a 2010 media interview, Yang Weiguang, the former head of CCTV talks about why CCTV wanted to restage the Korean War and why the TV drama was shelved.

> The Resisting US and Assisting Korea War was the first clash between China and foreign forces during which China had forced its enemy to sit down, negotiate, and reach a relatively fair resolution. Our victory destroyed the illusion of America's absolute superiority and demonstrated that the new People's Republic was undefeatable. This TV drama is hence an important history textbook and a valuable source for patriotism, internationalism, and heroism.

According to Yang, he went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and argued that 'if the Americans can commemorate the Korean War as its achievement in curbing the expansion of communism around the world, why can't we do it in our own way?' Although Yang managed to convince the Foreign Affairs Ministry, when the TV drama

was completed a year later, 9.11 happened. Given the sensitive circumstances, the TV program's final release was halted (Chen, 2009).

Yang's remarks disclose his pride in China's efforts during the Korean War. If the Opium War was a case of national humiliation for China, then according to Yang, the Korea War marked China's ability to defy Western imperialists, a victory China should draw upon as sources of pride and patriotism. Yang's argument neglects the fact that in the reform era, confrontation with the US no longer serves the Party's political and economic interests, and China's official Occidentalism needs new adjustment to reflect this change.

As a result, the two new screen productions about the Korean War ended up being shelved. Yang's remarks also indicate his belief in the rhetoric of revolutionary heroism and internationalism during Mao's era. Back then, China's internationalism was embodied in its close ties with other communist countries. However, with the collapse of communism in the Eastern Block and the poverty of North Korea, such communist-based 'internationalism' has lost its political legitimacy.

Arguably, emphasising the obsolete communist ideology would only highlight the failure of communist ideal and China's awkward position as one of the few remaining communist countries in the world. In addition, a retreat to Maoist ideology may jeopardise China's economic reform and the key objective of the CCP's state nationalism agenda – China's development under its leadership.

Splitting the Other: Fighting Japanese Enemy with Western Friends

Contrary to the state's censorship over the Korean War, the Sino-Japanese War has been fully revitalised on both big and small screens in China. As Yingjin Zhang reports (2004), between 1991 and 2000, 35 titles and 48 parts of the CCP-designated 'major historical films' depicting how the CCP led the people to defeat the Japanese and Nationalists were produced, four times as many as in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, a fresh image of the Western Other began to appear in these films and a new trend of official Occidentalism emerged. In 1999, Feng Xiaoning's popularised

main-melody film *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* managed to split the foreign Others into two camps – the American friend and the Japanese enemy. The film told the story of an American pilot landing in China during the Sino-Japanese War. He was saved by a small group of the CCP resistant fighters and fell in love with a beautiful Chinese soldier. Compared with previous PRC films, the film presented a dramatically different image of the West.

In the film, the American pilot was a handsome and lovable hero, a pilot who risked his life fighting against the Japanese during the war. The West, particularly the US, the most powerful player in the West, was transformed from the cowardly 'devils' in Chinese Korean War films into a courageous hero, an ally, even a lover. Once again, cinema became an important vehicle for the Party-state to project its modified official Occidentalism to support its new political agenda.

The film also introduced an innovative approach to handle the contradiction between the CCP's opening-up policy and its post-Tiananmen nationalist ideology. It humanised the Western Other, turning it into China's friend while keeping the Japanese as China's deadly enemy, the remaining target of the state's nationalist ideology.

In *Lover's Grief*, the devils became the Japanese and the Japanese only. And instead of stabbing the Western enemy, as the young singer Rong Er did in *The Opium War*, the beautiful Chinese communist soldier loved him back. The plotline signified that while the Japanese Other remained an unforgivable 'devil', the Western Other had become an acceptable, even desirable human being.

Through such a split arrangement, the official identity of the West shifted once again on the big screen. To support the state's opening-up policy, the image of the West completed its full transformation from the 'Western devils' in *Lin Zexu*, to the humanised but still alienated Western powers in *The Opium War* and *My 1919*, and finally, to China's friend in *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River*.

In addition, the film attempted to be transnational. It opened with lengthy voice-over narration of an American man, in English. In an early scene, two American pilots bombed a Japanese battle ship. One of the pilots took it as a personal revenge against

the Japanese who killed his brother at Pearl Harbour. When his plane was shot down by the Japanese, the other pilot risked his life to hit the ship before landing in China.

Such shared resentment towards the Japanese became the moral and emotional bond between the American pilot and his new Chinese friends, between the Chinese Self of the reform era and the new Western Other, China's enemy in red classic films. Though the film allowed the American appear as normal human beings who loved 'us' and was loved in return, the Japanese remained the savage Other. The film used the Sino-Japanese War as a vehicle to justify the new friendship between China and the West while continuing to demonise the Japanese to support the film's nationalist theme.

This contrasting arrangement between the Western and Japanese Others allowed the film to legitimate the state's opening-up policy on one hand, and to remind Chinese audiences of China's historical trauma and the CCP's role in saving the nation on the other. The film thus simultaneously supported the state's opening-up policy and its politically-driven nationalist ideology.

The film's embrace of the West, however, was superficial. Although it portrayed the American pilot's yearning for a peaceful life beyond the war, the profound nationalistic hatred the film projected towards the Japanese suggested that the film's final choice of values was unmistakably nationalism.

Lovers' Grief was China's official submission for Best Foreign Language Film of the 47th Academy Awards, but it did not even manage a nomination. Despite the film's effort to introduce a positive image of America, the fact what linked the American hero and his Chinese friends was the nationalistic hatred towards the Japanese rather than a humanitarian reflection of war, made the film still look and sound like a Chinese propaganda film, with little international appeal.

In 2001, *Purple Sunset*, the last leg of Feng Xiaoning's East-Meets-West trilogy was released across China. Set near the Russian border, the film portrayed the unlikely friendship between a Chinese peasant, a female Russian soldier and a Japanese school girl as they tried to find their way out of the forest in Japanese occupied area just

before Japan's surrender. The film was another example of splitting the foreign Others – the Western friend, this time the Russians, and the Japanese enemy.

Although the film introduced the character of a Japanese girl to show a glimpse of humanity among the inhumane Japanese Other, on the whole, it continued to emphasis the savage deeds of the Japanese and 'our' righteous fighting against them. As a result, in spite the fact the film won the Golden Rooster Best Cinematography Award in China, it was deemed as a film scuppered by its nationalist theme in the West (Elley, 2001).

During a 2002 interview, Feng Xiaoning admitted that he has been heavily influenced by Chinese red classic films and *Heroic Sons and Daughters* is his favourite (Jia, 2002). Feng's comment confirmed the ideological alignment between his film and the red classic films of the cold war era. Although *Lovers' Grief* turned the American Other into China's friend, the fundamental values of the film remained unchanged. The film shared the same anti-imperialism ideology with the red classic film such as *Heroic Sons and Daughters* and *Battle on Shangganling Mountain.* The only difference was that in Feng's film, the Americans became China's friends and 'the imperialists' were narrowed down to the Japanese Other.

The film's modified representations of the Chinese Self and the foreign Other speak volumes about China's shifting national identities, about who 'we' are and what 'we' should be. Through the changing depictions of the Western Other, China's official Occidentalism demonstrates its capacity to adapt to the new political context to serve the state's new political agenda.

By showing the West as China's new friend, the official Occidentalism in contemporary China supports the CCP's opening-up policy and encourages Chinese audiences to forgive and accept the West, China's former enemy. But in order to secure the Party's political control, this official embrace of the West cannot include the endorsement of Western political values. Instead, however pro-West China's new propaganda films may appear to be, their core values must be the CCP's nationalist ideology.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the shifting landscapes of Chinese official Occidentalism in Chinese cinema. It first compares the 1997 film *The Opium War* with the 1959 film *Lin Zexu* and argues that although the 1997 film projected a more humanised West, the central theme of the film was still nationalism. Rong Er's stabbing of the British officer symbolised the film's ultimate rejection of the Western Other. The film also used a lengthy speech of a British parliamentarian to turn the West into an admirer of the ancient Chinese civilisation.

In the 1999 film *My 1919,* the trajectory of modified official Occidentalism continued. The Western Other became more complex and individualised. Their warm response to Wellington Koo's speech validated both the new image of the Chinese Self and the modified identity of the West as the humanised Other, capable of appreciating 'us'. However, nationalism was again the film's central theme. This theme was supported by a Paris-based Chinese student's dramatic sacrifice for the nation and the film's depiction of Koo's refusal to sign the Versailles Treaty as China's first 'No!' to the West.

As the state's designated film to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, the film also demonstrated a selective reconstruction of the Chinese enlightenment Movement. It avoided the anti-feudalism aspect of the May Fourth traditions and focused purely on the anti-imperialism dimension of the Movement. The selective memory of the history further exposed how cinema has been used by the state to commemorate and magnify the anti-imperialist tradition of the May Fourth Movement.

As China moved to join the World Trade Organisation, the Party-state re-adjusted its official Occidentalism again by suppressing screen productions about China's historical clash with America. As a result, the topic of Korean War and the red classic-style 'anti-American imperialists' rhetoric became new taboos. In this case, official Occidentalism acted as a gate keeper, and its purpose was no longer fostering nationalism at home as Xiaomei Chen had argued, but to contain popular nationalism against the US, the Party's new economic partner.

Feng Xiaoning's 1999 film *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* went a step further. It transformed the old 'Western imperialists' in earlier PRC films into China's new ally against the Japanese Other. The official construct of the West shifted once again. This time the purpose was neither to provoke nor to contain nationalism against the West; instead, it was designed to mobilise an old foe to attack a common enemy and to support the CCP's nationalist agenda. Nationalism hence became a narrower and more targeted official ideology, and official Occidentalism was turned into a new weapon against Japan, the remaining target of the CCP's nationalist ideology.

These cases demonstrate that Chinese official Occidentalism is more fluid and complex than what Xiaomei Chen has defined in the mid 1990s. Although this study validates Chen's general observation that the Western Other is an official construct for the domination the Chinese Self at home, it argues that the purpose of official Occidentalism is not necessarily simply 'to support nationalism' as Chen suggested. Instead, the shifting images of the West in state-funded main-melody films since the mid 1990s demonstrate that the purpose of China's official Occidentalism can have two opposite dimensions.

It can be exercised to condemn the West in order to support the Party's nationalist ideology, as *The Opium War* and *My 1919* have done. It can also be used to laud the West in order to support the state's economic policy and to curb anti-Wes popular nationalism in China. The latter is evident in the state's blocking of new Korean War screen productions and the beautification of the Western Other in new main-melody films such as *Lovers' Grief.*

Both cases disclose that when anti-West sentiment no longer serves the CCP's political interest, official Occidentalism can be called upon and twisted to support contradicting policies – China's opening-up policy and the state-sponsored nationalist ideology; resisting the ideological influence of the West while containing anti-West popular nationalism at home.

Finally, the chapter argues that despite the more positive image of the West in films such as *The Opium War* and *Lovers' Grief,* deep down, these films still reject Western

liberal values and advocate nationalism. This proves that the modifications to China's official Occidentalism in post-Mao and post-Tiananmen eras are only superficial adjustments. They are not introduced to completely embrace the West; instated, they are designed to support the Party-state's evolving political agenda.

CHAPTER FOUR

GUARDING THE SPIRITUAL HOME: CHINA VS HOLLYWOOD

Chapter Four turns to China's attempt to use nationalistic films to guard its spiritual home against Hollywood imports. The chapter first examines China's closure reaction to Hollywood's formal return since the mid 1990s. It then compares the 2009 Chinese film *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* with the 1939 and 1956 Chinese films about Hua, and with the Disney animated sequel *Mulan* (1998) and *Mulan 2* (2004). Focusing on these films' different value orientations, the chapter investigates how the 2009 PRC film replaces traditional Chinese values with the CCP's nationalist ideology on the one hand and fails to counter Hollywood's alleged cultural imperialism on the other.

Between the early 1950s and early 1980s, Hollywood films were banned in the People's Republic. China's opening up provided Hollywood with new opportunities in the PRC. In 1994, facing the drastic decline of the domestic film market, the Chinese National Film Bureau made the historic move and allowed first-run Hollywood films to re-enter China on a box-office revenue- sharing basis. The Bureau justified its decision as necessary action in order 'to meet the demand of the domestic film market, to allow domestic studios to acquire (western) skills and experience, and to broaden the funding source for government-subsidised films' (Minutes, 1994).

As this decision caused excitement in Hollywood, prompting some in the US to claim that 'Hollywood Moves to Colonize China' (Logston, 1994), it also brought considerable anxiety to the already stressed Chinese film industry. In early 1994, hundreds of students at the Beijing Film Academy signed an open letter calling for the "Resistance of Hollywood" (Song, 2005). In August 1994, Chinese newspapers published an article questioning '*Are Hollywood Films Beautiful Wine or Deadly Poison?*' (Jia, 1994).

Since then, Hollywood has learned that China is not an open market waiting to be colonised and their films are subject to unpredictable state censorship and interference. In May 1999, after the US bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, China banned all screening of American films for five months, resulting in a 50 per cent decline of the Chinese film market that year. Once again, the Chinese government

made it clear that commercial considerations were secondary to political imperatives (Rosen, 2002).

Meanwhile, China's accession to the World Trade Organisation has forced the country to accept 20 first-run Hollywood blockbusters each year (Zhao, 2008), and by 2012, another 14 films in 3D format were added to the annual film import quota. To Chinese filmmakers and administrators, these Hollywood imports have brought in formidable challenges. As China learns to 'dance with the wolf' and join the rest of the world to watch Hollywood lure away their audiences and colonize their subconscious (Wenders, 1991), how to compete with Hollywood and respond to its threat to China's cultural and ideological securities remain a significant challenge for the Party-state.

The following section will compare *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior,* a 2009 Chinese film about the legendary Chinese heroine, with 1939 and 1956 Chinese films and a Disney animated sequel about Mulan. Focusing on these films' value orientations, this chapter will probe into Hollywood's cultural and political deconstruction of Mulan and how the 2009 Chinese film has responded to such deconstruction.

Mulan: China's Earlier Versions of Self Vs Hollywood Reconstructions

1. Earlier Chinese Films about Mulan: Family over State

The story of Hua Mulan originated from an ancient poem *Ballad of Mulan* during the Northern Wei Dynasty (around 386-581 AD). For over 1500 years, the story about a young Chinese woman who disguised herself as a man and joined the army in her sick father's place has captured the hearts of Chinese population and inspired many plays, poems, novels and films in China. As Louise Edwards observes, the enduring popularity of the story reveals the gendered nature of the key tension in the social and moral universe of China – how an individual manages the competing demand between family and state (Edwards, 2010).

In the *Ballad of Mulan,* Mulan farewelled her parents in the morning, slept along the Yellow River at night until she reached the Black Mountain. After twelve years of battles, General Hua turned down the high post offered by the emperor and returned

home to her parents. When she reappeared in her feminine dress, her army mates were all shocked that their courageous general was in fact a woman.

The story embodies two core traditional Chinese values – loyalty to the state (*zhong*), and the virtue of filial piety (*xiao*). Historically, the balance between these two values or the priority of each has been contested in various versions of the Mulan story. In the Qing dynasty, for instance, Chu Renhuo's *Sui Tang Yan Yi* portrayed Mulan as a filial daughter but a fierce rebel against the imperial ruler. To demonstrate her resolve to reject the unwanted desire from the emperor, she committed suicide at her father's grave. Louise Edwards regards the depiction as the author's political critique of the Manchu rule of China during the Qing dynasty (Edwards, 2010).

In 1939, during Japan's occupation, *Mulan Joins the Army* (*mulan cong jun*) was produced in Shanghai. The film combined a disguised patriotic message of resisting foreign invasion with the traditional values of filial piety, as well as some modern entertainment elements. The narrative was both politically committed and commercially appealing, and the film was a record-breaking success (Fu, 2003).

Directed by Bu Wancang, the film was one of the key productions of Shanghai's Island Cinema (*gu dao dian ying*) during the Japanese occupation. Although China was facing Japanese invasion, the film still managed to maintain the delicate balance between *zhong* and *xiao*, between loyalty to state and filial piety to parents, creating a film that was both faithful to the *Ballad of Mulan* and relevant to the wartime national sentiment.

The film first tried to evoke audiences' patriotic sentiments with Mulan's father commenting that 'when the nation is in crisis, everyone should defend it.' Later on, when Mulan was writing a letter to her parents, she was alerted about the enemy's movements. She then gave up her unfinished letter, adding 'When the state affairs are urgent, does it matter if one sends one less letter home?' Both comments advocated a sense of duty to the state, particularly during national crises. Through these comments the film resonated with the nationalistic sentiment of the Chinese audience during Japan's occupation of China.

However, facing the corrupt Nationalist government of the Republic era, the film's attitude towards the state was both of duty and political critique. When Mulan became a general, she decreed strict military discipline for her army: 'Do not break any laws or bully any civilians. Do not flee from battleground. No corruption will be tolerated. Offenders would face death penalty!' In other words, although Mulan showed her resolve to defend her nation against invaders, she also demanded the ruler of her nation to be incorrupt and legitimate. Mulan's disciplinary order to the army symbolised her quest for a clean state.

Through this scene, the film displayed certain political independence from the state. The values of *zhong* were modernised, with the considerations of laws and the fair treatment of civilians added to the traditional sense of loyalty to the state. The film indicated that the state could not simply demand unconditional loyalty from its civilians; it had to abide by the law and not to mistreat its civilians. While acknowledging one's duty to the state, the film also deployed this modernised sense of *zhong* to project political critique and demand of the state.

Mulan's detachment from the state was further expressed through her final choice of home over the state. When the emperor offered Mulan and her comrade-in-arms Liu Yuandu high official posts at the end of the war, both of them declined the offer and chose to settle for ordinary family life. The love story between Hua and Liu added a modern dimension to the traditional Mulan story. It showed Mulan as a woman who preferred to pursue her own happiness outside the state.

Given the film was produced during Japan's occupation of China, it was commendable that the filmmakers had maintained Mulan's final choice of family over the state and resisted the temptation to demonise the foreign Other and turn the film into a nationalistic propaganda exercise.

In addition, the film's depiction of the Other was rational, minor and non-nationalistic. In the film, Mulan's mother asked: 'I don't understand why they would come to bully us?' To which Mulan's father replied: 'They are bandits. That's why!' Through such a statement, the film conveyed its dismay and outrage towards the invading Other. But

this outrage was controlled; the film did not demonise the Other. Just like the *Ballad of Mulan,* the heart of the film was not about provoking resentment against the foreign Other; instead, the focus was Mulan, her courage and commitment to the state when required during national crises and her ultimate choice of family over the state.

The film began with Mulan riding a horse hunting for her sick father. The opening scene vividly portrayed her as a tomboy-like but filial daughter. When she decided to join the army in her father's place, she did not run away from home. Instead, she went out of her way to persuade her parents to allow her to join the army.

In order to secure their consent, she demonstrated her martial skills and her ability to speak like a man. Mulan's filial piety was further displayed when she kowtowed to her ancestors after she secured her parents' consent and before she left home. These scenes presented Mulan as a filial and capable daughter. She had both the vigour of a modern woman and the traditional virtue of filial piety.

The film also demonstrated its sensibility to Chinese culture through some visual details. For example, it showed how Mulan used few magic stones to defend herself when she was bullied by two fellow soldiers. When she wrote to her parents, a close shot of Mulan writing with a brush was introduced.

The film's treatment of the romance between Mulan and her comrade-in-arms Liu Yuandu was another example of its cultural sensitivity. Although Liu hinted his affections for Mulan several times, Mulan remained restrained, demonstrating her self-respect as a good Chinese woman. The romance was subtle and more Chinese-like, and it stayed unannounced until Mulan returned home and asked her mother to see her chosen man first.

In so doing, the film skillfully combined the Western belief in free love with traditional Chinese values of filial piety. The film, therefore, defended the Chinese Self on two fronts. It affirmed Mulan's loyalty to the nation through her protection of the national borders. It also exhibited certain openness to western ideals, but presented it as a supplement, rather than a subversive force, to key Chinese values.

This inclusive approach allowed the film to reaffirm its confidence in Chinese cultural traditions on the one hand and to display its openness to western ideals on the other. Through such adjustment, the 1939 film skilfully combined the traditional and the modern, showcasing its ability to protect Chinese cultural heritage and its willingness to absorb certain elements of western modernity ideals, to slightly modernise the traditional values of *zhong* and *xiao*, making them more relevant to the audiences of the time.

2. Mulan as a Liberated Woman

After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, Mulan continued to capture the imagination of Chinese filmmakers and audiences. In 1956, a black and white Yu (Henan) opera film *Hua Mulan* was released across China. The film largely maintained the storyline of the original Ballad and portrayed Mulan as a filial daughter and a courageous soldier determined to fulfil her duties to both her family and her nation.

To support the CCP's advocacy of women's liberation, the film also placed great emphasis on gender equality. Mulan, played by the renowned Yu Opera singer Chang Xiangyu, projected onto the screen her pride as a woman, a liberated gender in Mao's China which was said to be capable of holding up half of the sky. The film was highly popular and *Hua Mulan* became a classic opera film. The opera's most popular aria was Chang's 'Who says women are not as capable as men?' It proudly claimed women's contributions to the nation: 'While their husbands join the army, women work in the fields during the day and weave and sew at night. Not to mention all the heroines defending the nation in history. Hence, who can say that women are inferior to men?'

Through these statements, the film endorsed the PRC's women's liberation movement. Unlike the 1939 film, the 1956 film did not add romance to the story, but focused on Mulan's pride of being a woman and her sense of gender equality, which fitted into the state's anti-feudalist agenda. Similar to the 1939 film, the 1956 production did not break the traditional balance between *zhong* and *xiao;* it depicted Mulan as both a respected general and a filial daughter who loved her family.

In the film, Mulan tried to persuade her parents to allow her to join the army; after the war, she was delighted when she was finally able to return home. The film showed Mulan, imagining her homecoming in her armour:

> Mum and Dad greet me before I enter the village. Younger brother slaughters a pig and a sheep for a family banquet. Holding my hands, Sister asks me endless questions while Dad asks me this, Mum asks me that, and the whole family happily return home…

Mulan then envisaged her new life back home with great joy:

> Undressing my armour, I put on my old dress, pinning a yellow flower in my hair in front of the mirror… Delighted, General Hua becomes the Hua daughter again.

Unlike many anti-imperialist films of Mao's era, the 1956 film did not demonise the foreign Other, nor did it turn Mulan into an extreme nationalist. Once again, the focus was not the foreign Other but the Chinese Self; the heart of the film was about 'our' values of *zhong* and *xiao*, 'our' duty to the state as well as our love for our family, and 'our' pride in the female self. The film faithfully reflected the moral priority expressed in the *Ballad of Mulan* by reaffirming Mulan's final choice of family over the state.

Like the 1939 film, the 1956 production skilfully combined traditional Chinese values and the modern ideal of gender equality. Its advocacy of gender equality was not built on the rejection of traditional virtues expected of Chinese women. Instead, Mulan was portrayed as both a courageous general and a feminine daughter of the Hua family.

The film's faithful reflection of the core values in the *Ballad of Mulan,* together with its successful accommodation of Mulan's traditional virtues and the modern agenda of women's liberation, have underpinned its enduring popularity in China and secured its historical value as a faithful screen representation of authentic Chinese culture.

3. Disney's Mulan – Americanising a Chinese Heroine

In 1998, Disney released its animated feature *Mulan* in China after much negotiation with the Chinese government. In the US, the film was both a box office hit and critical success, praised for breaking gender stereotyping (Masline, 1998). Some American critics commented that the film earned Disney credit for finally realizing that there's a

world in which women want more than a prince, and that people are made up of more than one colour, gender or particular way of life (Shreve, 1998).

In China, however, the film was commercially successful but was critically deemed as a distortion of Chinese culture. While the 1939 and 1956 Chinese films about Mulan demonstrated their appreciation of Chinese culture and their confidence in the traditional values of *zhong* and *xiao,* the 1998 Disney film criticize both values.

The animated feature portrays Mulan as a rebel, a young woman who is inherently uncomfortable with her own cultural heritage. She refuses to memorise the traditional scripts about how women should behave. In order to pass the test of the match-maker, she copies the text on her arm. After she fails the test, she asked herself 'When will my reflection show who I am, inside?' These depictions contradict the traditional Chinese moral codes for women such as the virtues of obedience and devotion, and substitute them with western belief in freedom and individuality.

The film's treatment of the traditional virtues of Chinese women is mockery. The traditional values are something for the audience to laugh about. The match-maker who would command certain respect in traditional culture is depicted as a fat and annoying woman. She judges Mulan as 'too skinny for bearing sons'. In response, Mulan cheekily reads the Chinese characters she secretly wrote on her arm for the test: 'Fulfill your duties calmly and respectfully'. When Mulan speaks in public, a skinny official repeatedly warns her to know her place as a woman and be quiet. The fat match-maker and the skinny official here become the symbols of the Chinese cultural orthodoxy while Mulan becomes a rebel—at least partially—against that orthodoxy.

By mocking the Chinese match-maker and the skinny official and their strict moral codes for women, the film rejects China's traditional prejudice against women. Meanwhile, the Disney version of gender equality is not quite the same as women's liberation in the 1956 Chinese film. As the 1956 Yu Opera praised Chinese women's contributions to nation-building, the 1998 Disney film openly challenges China's cultural orthodoxy, the moral demands placed on women, and the deprivation of women's rights to speak in public.

In the 1998 Disney film, Mulan's ancestors emerge as domineering ghosts who still command the affairs of the real world. The (mis)representations of Mulan's ancestors directly challenge a cornerstone of the Mulan story – the values of *xiao*, the respect for one's parents and ancestors in traditional Chinese culture. The film's ridicule of Mulan's ancestors forms stark contrast to the kind of respect Mulan showed to her ancestors before she left home in the 1939 Chinese film.

Nevertheless, the 1998 Disney film displays some considerations for Chinese culture. Mulan is portrayed as both a semi-westernised girl who desires freedom and equality and a Chinese woman who cherishes her family responsibility. According to the commentary of Mulan's production team in the 2004 DVD version of *Mulan* , the team initially wanted to make Mulan an unhappy girl but later decided to portray her as a courageous and responsible woman who wanted to join the army in her father's place. By so doing, the film also partially endorses a key Chinese cultural orthodoxy – filial piety in the form of family responsibility.

Regarding the values of *zhong,* the 1998 Disney film launches a charming attack. The film shows that when Mulan returns from the borders, she hugs the emperor; in return, the emperor bows to her, in front of the whole town. This scene challenges the traditional values of loyalty to the state, not through direct confrontation but with a western-style hug. Instead of validating the traditional division between the ruler and his subjects, the film brings the emperor down from his high seat to Mulan's level and celebrates the western ideal of equality.

The fact the film got away with such a statement suggests that the Party-state is more sensitive towards political statement against its rule in 'anti-China' films such as *Red Corner* than Hollywood's reinterpretation and subversion of Chinese culture. The CCP's cultural insensitivity allows Disney to take even greater liberty to interpret Mulan, and to use her as a convenient vehicle to project western ideals.

In 2004, Disney released *Mulan*'s sequel *Mulan 2.* The film is made by a different production team and it transforms the partially Americanised Mulan in the 1998 version into a full-blooded American woman who completely rejects *zhong* and *xiao*,

the two key values embedded in the Ballad and the earlier Chinese films about Mulan.

Mulan 2 also totally uproots Mulan from her historical Chinese context. The film begins with Mulan's family guessing when Mulan's boyfriend General Li Shang is coming to ask for her hand. To their delight, Li arrives. But instead of consulting Mulan's parents, he heads straight to Mulan and proposes to her on his knee, just like an American boy. Hearing the word, Mulan jumps with joy and her grandma exclaims 'She says yes!'

Such depiction completely Americanises Mulan and her family life. By giving Mulan and Li Shang free reign of their marriage and presenting Mulan's family as an applauding audience, the film turns the traditional Chinese belief in filial piety and the old custom of arranged marriage into a mockery, showing Chinese audiences how young folks should take things into their own hands and pursue their happiness the American way.

Though the film treats Mulan's Americanised family life with a touch of humour, it challenges the state and the emperor in a more serious manner. In the film, Mulan is deeply troubled when the emperor announces that her next mission is to escort three princesses to a foreign land to forge political alliances through imperial marriage. During the journey, Mulan encourages the free love between the princesses and her three soldier friends. It showcases Mulan's moral stance – how she places her friendship, and her westernised belief in equality and free love, well above her loyalty to the state and the emperor.

Mulan's westernised mindset is also shared by other characters in the film. The film shows how Mulan's fiancé is initially loyal to the emperor but later abandons such foolishness. The three soldiers who wanted 'a girl worth fighting for' in the 1998 version of *Mulan* extend their personal dreams to the three princesses. Ignoring their official duty, they hijack the imperial mission and pursue three princesses without any hesitation. Such blunt advocacy of American individualism openly challenges the state and the traditional Chinese values of loyalty to the state, one of the key themes in Chinese versions of Mulan.

This is a revealing example of how cultural globalisation has influenced China. Firstly, Disney's involvement in 'anti-China' film *Kundun* aroused China's strong closure

reaction towards the Hollywood studio; then Disney's business interest in China forced it to soften its stance towards China, including such as to portray the emperor as a kind old man in its 1998 animated feature *Mulan.* The film makes Mulan carry American and Chinese hybrid values. She is American enough to hug the emperor to show her sense of equality; but she is also a filial daughter, a responsible woman who would risk her own life to protect her family. The result is a hybrid 'third culture' product, neither typically Hollywood nor authentically Chinese.

The film adopts a more inclusive approach in its treatment of the culture and values of the Other. It avoids direct clash with the key values embedded in *Ballad of Mulan* – filial piety – and affirms Mulan's self-sacrifice for her family. The strong family values not only give Chinese audiences a sense of pride in their own traditions but also have universal appeal to global audiences.

Compared with *Mulan 2,* the political message in the 1998 version of *Mulan* is more implicit. The film portrays the emperor as a likeable old man who is prepared to walk down his high seat to be on the same level of Mulan. By contrast, in *Mulan 2*, Mulan becomes a fully westernised woman and the emperor an autocratic dictator.

If the 1998 *Mulan's* critique of the Chinese values of *zhong* and *xiao* is more disguised and constrained*,* in *Mulan 2,* the charming offense has developed into open attacks. In the film, Mulan no longer tries to please her parents, and she certainly has no time for the emperor. Instead of hugging the emperor who sacrifices his daughters' happiness for his own political power, Mulan stands up to him and is determined to ruin his plan.

It seems that *Mulan 2's* producers have little patience to accommodate traditional Chinese values. If Disney's first *Mulan* has showed certain sensitivity towards Chinese culture, *Mulan 2* has converted China's legendary heroine into a fully liberalised American woman who demands total individuality and would challenge the highest Chinese ruler and the notions of *zhong* and *xiao* head-on.

While the Chinese government reacted strongly against politically sensitive films such as *Red Corner* and *Kundun*, Disney's *Mulan 2* is allowed a national release in the PRC. Such a reaction reaffirms the CCP's attitude towards Hollywood imports – it is

politically-orientated. The CCP would unveil its iron fist to any politically 'anti-China' films, but it is less sensitive towards Hollywood's misrepresentations of Chinese culture.

The state's politically-driven position allows Hollywood to use a traditional Chinese story to project western ideals of individuality, freedom and equality onto Chinese screens. Contrary to its tight political censorship, the CCP's more lenient approach towards Hollywood's distortion of Chinese culture exposes the Party's lack of commitment to its own culture and cultural security. Meanwhile, as the 2009 Chinese film *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* suggests, the Party is far more serious about its ideological security.

The 2009 Chinese *Mulan*: Sacrificing All for the State

Disney's portrayals of Mulan have aroused considerable concerns in China. Some Chinese scholars observe that Disney has ignored the fact Mulan represents the virtues of Chinese people, including industriousness, kindness and courage, and has Americanised Mulan (Huang, 2008). The film changes the storyline in the original Ballad and made Mulan flee from home, turning her from a Chinese heroine into an embodiment of American values of freedom and equality.

Some Chinese scholars argue that Disney has used its international discursive power to subvert Chinese cultural heritage, turning the story of Hua Mulan into a narrative of American individualism and feminism (Huang, 2008). Others believe that as Hollywood turns the world into its supermarket, it has profound influence on other countries' cultural identities (Yin, 2000). These arguments are supported not only by the Americanisation of Mulan in the Disney sequel, but also in how the 2009 Chinese film has reconstructed the Chinese heroine in response to the Disney version.

The popularity of Disney's *Mulan* sequel prompted some Chinese filmmakers into action. In 2005, three Chinese companies considered three separate Mulan film projects. In the end, a group of young filmmakers secured the deal to make a new Chinese feature film about Mulan. With Hong Kong filmmaker Ma Chucheng (Jingle Ma) appointed as its director, the Chinese company was determined to create a national

heroine with 'avant-garde spirit' (Weng, 2009).

The filmmakers claimed that during the development of the project, they discovered a local version of Mulan story in Henan Province: when hearing the emperor's announcement that he would make Mulan his concubine, the returned heroine bashed her head against a wall and died in front of the emperor. Although this comment seems to hint the filmmakers' intention to portray a politically defiant Mulan, in reality, the 2009 Chinese film *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* has ended up in the opposite direction and conveyed an overwhelming sense of loyalty to the state.

1. Abandoning Traditional Chinese Values

Despite the Chinese filmmakers' declared intent to create a Mulan with 'avant-garde' spirit, the central theme of the film is unmistakable nationalism. The film breaks the traditional balance between *zhong* and *xiao* in the 1939 and 1956 versions of Mulan and overturns Mulan's final choice of family over state with an unconditional loyalty to the state. Apart from its political alignment with the CCP's nationalist ideology, the film also fails to respond to Hollywood's distortion of Chinese culture.

Ironically, within such overall value orientation, the film also attempts to introduce an anti-war message. Mulan is first introduced as someone who is demoralised and disgusted by the suffering of the war. This humanitarian sentiment is perhaps the 'avant-garde' spirit the filmmakers intend to introduce into the film in the first place. But such sentiment is short-lived. The film soon shows Mulan toughening up, becoming a cold-hearted general and an unyielding nationalist. This exposes the film's fundamental dilemma in its values proposition – whether it should follow the international trend to convey an anti-war message, or carry the state-endorsed nationalist ideology. The result is an awkward compromise, with a brief attempt at the former and then a dramatic shift to the latter.

Overall, Mulan's blind loyalty to the state overtakes the film's brief attempt to create a modern version of Mulan who has humanitarian concerns and anti-war sentiments. In the meantime, the film pays little attention to the traditional values embedded in the

Mulan story and in the earlier Chinese films about Mulan.

Since the Ballad, Mulan's moral ground has been set – that in order to protect her ill father and the border, she needs to join the war to fulfil her duty to her family and to her state. These justifications have enabled her to fulfil her duty to the state first, and then her devotion to her family. The 2009 film's early attempt to introduce an anti-war sentiment would disconnect the story from its historical roots and from its traditional moral ground.

Nevertheless, the film's anti-war message was brief and weak. It is presented as a brief setback in Mulan's life which paves the way for her resurrection as a loyal servant of the state. The film's cultural rebellion, however, is consistent. The film abandons the strong bond between Mulan and her entire family – her parents, her elder sister and a younger brother, and reduces Mulan's family to just one coughing father.

In the two earlier Chinese films, the other family members all played important roles to forge Mulan's family bond – her respectful father, her loving mother, and her dutiful elder sister. By cutting Mulan's family members to just one sick father, the 2009 film has weakened Mulan's love for her family and downplayed the significance of the values of *xiao.* The shrinking sizes of Mulan's family and the reduced scenes of her family life serve to reverse the traditional priority in the Mulan story and to place *zhong* above *xiao,* the state above the family.

In so doing, the film is politically submissive to the Party-state and culturally subversive to the traditional balance and the priority between *zhong* and *xiao* entrenched in the Ballad and in the early Chinese productions. While the 1939 and 1956 films confirmed Mulan's final choice of family over the state, the 2009 film changes the priority and declares that Mulan's ultimate loyalty lies with the state, not her family.

In addition, the film has also copied Hollywood's misrepresentations of Chinese culture. It imitates Hollywood's plotline of Mulan running away from home without her father's consent, signalling its rejection of the notion of filial piety. The film also reveals Mulan's doubt over her father's values system: 'I don't understand how my dad could be excited when he talks about war. We have fought so many battles and lost so many

brothers, I really don't want to fight anymore. I just want to be an ordinary person.'

Such a critique of the father figure and his interest in wars openly challenge both *zhong* and *xiao*, the two key traditional values embedded in the Mulan story. This indicates the film's desire to break away from Chinese traditions to modernise the Chinese Self. However, this attempt is fundamentally compromised by the film's overall emphasis of *zhong*, an endorsement of the CCP's nationalist ideology. After its political conformity, what is left for the film to be avant-garde about is only cultural rebellion. Through imitating Hollywood's rebellion against Chinese cultural traditions, the film has cut itself off from the real historical roots of its national culture (Hamelink, 1988).

Furthermore, overshadowed by its nationalist theme, the film's brief flirting with western ideals is too weak and inconsistent to create a modern version of Mulan. Morally speaking, the film fails to duplicate the success of the 1939 film in its skilful incorporation of western belief in free love into the traditional Chinese values of filial piety. Contrary to the values inclusiveness and the cultural sophistication of the 1939 film, this 2009 production is ideologically in limbo, as it abandons traditional Chinese values but only embraces western ideals half-heartedly.

Perhaps frustrated with the film's moral contradiction, the filmmakers also signal a deep sense of helplessness through their own production. In the film, Mulan's lover Wentai complains: "Who wants to fight the war? If I can use my life to stop this war, I'd have done so long ago. But we have no choice. Once we put on this general's armour, we no longer belong to ourselves. This is war!' The comment is suggestive of the Hong Kong director's own helplessness towards the nationalistic theme of the film and perhaps the state's blatant interference with his film.

2. Imitating and Rejecting Hollywood

The fact that the 2009 Chinese film has imitated Hollywood's distortion of Chinese culture highlights the issues of China's cultural autonomy. With Hollywood's rising presence in China, the issue has attracted critical attention. When China increased the Hollywood import quota during its negotiation with the US for China's accession to the

World Trade Organisation, some Chinese critics questioned whether Hollywood's narrative of individualism would affect Chinese national coherence; whether the trend of Hollywood spectacle would suppress Chinese films' concerns for local lives and experiences; whether Hollywood's consumerism would erode the values of the Third World; and whether Hollywood would destroy national cinema, diminishing its national conscience and responsibility (Yin, 2000).

The ways that the 2009 Chinese film depicts Mulan suggest that these concerns are justified. The film has copied Hollywood-style spectacle at the cost of reduced respect for local experiences, traditional values, and national conscience. The film considerably reduces the domestic scenes and concentrates mainly on the spectacle of the battlegrounds. By focusing on Mulan's life away from home, the film largely abandons the family dimension of the Mulan character, her love for her whole family and her deep sense of family responsibility, ignoring the focus and the key message embedded in the *Ballad of Mulan* and in the 1939 and 1956 films about Mulan.

The 2009 film has also imitated Hollywood's Americanisation of Mulan. Unlike the earlier Chinese films, the 2009 production shows Mulan secretly fleeing home to join the army without consulting her father; in the army, she boldly pursues free love without any concerns for her father's views and permission. These westernised depictions of Mulan ignore the story's historical context and expose the film's lack of awareness and respect for Chinese culture.

Contrary to its cultural imitation of Hollywood, the 2009 film has taken a strong political stance in its response to Disney versions of Mulan. With respect to the relation with the state, the film totally rejects the western ideals of individualism, equality and democracy embedded in Disney's Mulan sequel. The film rebuffs such scenes in the Disney versions as Mulan hugging the emperor, or Mulan challenging the legitimacy of her imperial mission. Instead, it moulds Mulan into an unconditional servant of the state and the emperor.

To highlight its core values of *zhong*, the 2009 film also goes out of its way to alienate the foreign Other. The film begins with the prince of Rouran, the fictitious foreign

Other, killing innocent Chinese civilians. This sets the tone for the entire film – that it is a film about 'us', or *da wei* (the grand Wei), fighting against 'them', the Rouran, the savage Other. In the film, the Rouran claim that they are powerful wolves and the Han are powerless lambs. The film then proves Rouran's savage nature by showing the Rouran prince killing his father for his power.

Such reconstruction of the Other is more prominent and heavy-handed than in the *Ballad of Mulan* and in the 1939 and 1956 films. Although the 1939 film *Mulan Joins the Army* was produced when Shanghai was semi-occupied by Japan, the film only referred to the invaders as 'bandits', not wolves. The intensified otherness allows the 2009 film to demonise the Other, to provoke nationalistic sentiment against them, and to turn the alienated Other into a clear target for the film's nationalist theme.

The film also defines Han's self-identity as the defenders of the state. To affirm this identity, Mulan tells her troops: 'We are human, not lambs. We are the soldiers of the Grant Wei (*da wei*)!' The statement confirms the 2009 film's nationalisation of the Chinese Self. By downplaying *xiao* and disproportionally amplifying *zhong*, the film breaks the traditional balance and the priority between *zhong* and *xiao*, nationalises Mulan, turning her into an advocate of the CCP's nationalist ideology.

The film's imitations of Hollywood-style spectacles and Disney Mulan's disregard for Chinese culture also undermine the film's ability to match the 1939 film's confidence in traditional Chinese values and in China's self-identity. Contrary to the 1939 Mulan played by Chen Yunshan, who had both modern charm and the traditional virtue of filial piety and sincerity, a combination the wartime Chinese audiences could readily identify with (Fu, 2003), the 2009 version of Mulan played by Zhao Wei lacks both Chen's modern quality and her traditional virtue.

Overall, the 2009 Chinese version of Mulan has politically yielded to the CCP's nationalist ideology and culturally surrendered to Hollywood's cultural erosion and misrepresentations. Facing Hollywood's distortion of Mulan and its attack on traditional Chinese values, the film has failed to rectify Disney's misrepresentation of Mulan, and failed to assert China's cultural autonomy.

3. Sacrificing All for the State

The conflicting agendas facing the production team of the 2009 film, the desire to produce an 'avant-garde' Mulan and the need to support the CCP's nationalist ideology, have resulted in the film's moral inconsistency. This is most evident when Mulan suddenly shakes off her doubt about wars and reappears as a cold-blooded general.

The film uses the false news of Wentai's death as a trigger to erase Mulan's doubt about wars and transform her into a ruthless general and a blind servant of the state. So much so that she proudly announces to her army, 'Soldiers can betray me, the general can abandon us, but Hua Mulan will never betray our country!' Such a declaration turns Mulan from a vague humanist into a hardline nationalist who is prepared to sacrifice all for the state.

To demonstrate Mulan's willingness to sacrifice, the film puts her to the ultimate test – the choice between the emperor and the love of her life. Early in the film, Mulan claims that Wentai's love is the reason why she opens her eyes each morning, but when the emperor demands that Wentai marry the princess of the enemy state, Mulan oddly encourages Wentai to obey the order. Mulan's love for Wentai becomes just another device to bring her closer to the emperor, and another opportunity to prove her unconditional loyalty to the state and its ruler. This again highlights how the film has departed from both western liberal ideals and the traditional Chinese values rooted in the *Ballad of Mulan.*

Apart from Mulan, the film also projects strong collective loyalty to the state. In the battlefield, when facing a large number of foreign enemies and the likelihood of death, the entire Chinese army sings together:

One's life is like a dream,
To protect our national territory, to uphold our national pride,
What is so joyful about life, what is so pitiful about death?

Such nationalistic lyrics directly contradict the filmmakers' declared intention of creating a Mulan with 'avant-garde spirit'. If anything, the film has gone backwards by resorting to the revolutionary heroic spirit of socialist cinema to enhance its nationalist

theme. Under such a theme, the film's attempts to portray Mulan's dislike of war and her choice of free love have all become mere decorations.

By nationalising the legendary heroine, the film becomes another shallow, nationalistic main-melody film with little cultural subsidence and moral strength. In the name of defending Chinese culture, the 2009 reconstruction of Mulan has become yet another state propaganda exercise.

The film's radical emphasis of *zhong* also forms sharp contrast to the western ideals embedded in Hollywood versions of Mulan. In Disney's Mulan sequels, the Chinese soldiers are portrayed as individuals with personal desires. In the first Disney *Mulan*, the dream of the three soldiers is 'to find a girl worth fighting for'.

In Disney *Mulan 2*, the personal aspirations of the three soldiers are placed in opposition to their official duties. Instead of escorting the three princesses as brides of politically-motivated marriages arranged by the emperor, the three soldiers actively pursue the princesses. The action is comic on the surface but subversive in its nature. It rejects the assumed irremovable division between the emperor, the princesses and their subjects, and projects the western ideals of social and political equality.

With Mulan and her comrades-in-arm declaring their unyielding loyalty to the state, the 2009 Chinese film has clearly rejected Disney Mulan's western liberal ideals. This political choice, coupled with the film's detachment from the traditional Chinese values of *xiao,* demonstrates that the film's response to Hollywood versions of Mulan is essentially political rejection and cultural imitation. The result is a film that is politically nationalistic and culturally compromising.

By reverting Mulan's original choice of family over state and imitating Hollywood's rebel against traditional Chinese values, the 2009 Chinese film has proved its political alignment with the Party-state and its cultural alliance with Hollywood in undermining traditional Chinese culture.

Conclusion

This chapter has used several Chinese and Hollywood films about Mulan to investigate the shifting values reflected in the 2009 Chinese film *Hu Mulan.* Drawing on Disney versions of Mulan, the chapter also looks into Hollywood's cultural imperialist approach towards Chinese culture and its (mis)representations of Mulan.

The chapter discloses that the 2009 Chinese film has abandoned Mulan's final choice of family over state evident in the *Ballad of Mulan* and in the 1939 and 1956 films and turned loyalty to the state into the dominant theme of the film. The dramatic shift is a clear departure from both traditional Chinese values and western liberal ideals.

The chapter also argues that Disney's *Mulan* sequel has displayed an increasing dose of Hollywood-style cultural imperialism. *Mulan 2* discards certain respect for Chinese culture displayed in the Disney's first *Mulan,* and fully Americanises Mulan. Politically, the film directly challenges the notion of loyalty to the state, and transforms Mulan into a rebel who is determined to challenge the emperor head on. Culturally, Mulan shows little regard for her traditional heritage. She ignores the notion of filial piety and pursuits her own happiness like a fully westernised individual. Such reconstruction of Mulan is a clear defiance against both *zhong* and *xiao,* the two key values embedded in the Chinese versions of Mulan story.

The fact Disney versions of Mulan have been allowed a national release in China suggests that the Party-state is more sensitive towards Hollywood's politically hostile 'anti-China' films but less defensive with Hollywood's cultural imperialism. The state's political-orientated position allows Hollywood to use a Chinese heroine to carry western values to 'colonise' Chinese minds.

Facing Hollywood's Americanisation of Mulan, the cinematic response of the 2009 Chinese production reflects the CCP's position – it is politically defiant against Hollywood's ideological threat, but culturally insensitive or even imitating Hollywood's distortion of Chinese cultural traditions.

To validate the CCP's nationalist ideology, the film exaggerates the importance of

zhong and nationalises Mulan, turning her into a loyal servant of the state who would sacrifice all for the state. The film downplays Mulan's family bond and her sense of *xiao,* and fatally breaks the traditional balance and priority between *zhong* and *xiao* which are deeply embedded in the original Mulan story and in the 1939 and 1956 Chinese films about Mulan.

Morally speaking, the film is full of contradictions. It attempts to be both anti-war and nationalistic; it tries to distance itself from traditional Chinese values but fails to project and uphold alternative ideals in order to transform Mulan and sustain the film.

Along the way, the film has lost its confidence in its own cultural identity and become half-hearted in everything, be it western ideals, or traditional Chinese values. The film's moral dilemma and aloofness highlight the danger of the CCP's policy of making culture serve the state. By turning Mulan into a blind servant of the state, the film has fdamaged Mulan's image and undercut the traditional Chinese values that have been embedded in her story and celebrated by Chinese populations over centuries.

CHAPTER FIVE

REIMAGINING CONFUCIUS, CHINA'S SOFT POWER AND MORAL DILEMMA

So far the analysis has focused on the re-imagination of the Chinese Self and foreign Other in mainstream films. This chapter turns to the Chinese government's quest for soft power and the connection between this quest and nationalism. Drawing on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power and using the 2010 Chinese film *Confucius* as a case study, the chapter investigates China's soft power activities focusing on the state's desire for Chinese cinema to go global. The chapter also probes into the ideological dilemma China faces today, and analyses the Party's new interest in China's Confucian traditions. It argues that China's soft power activities are built on a weak moral foundation and could potentially be counter-productive.

Reinventing Confucius: A Nationalised Sage

In January 2010, a high-profile film *Confucius* was released across China amidst much media fanfare. The film had received high-level attention and support from the government since its early development. According to its director Hu Mei, even the then President Hu Jintao regarded the film as an important initiative.

> This is an excellent topic. Internationally, people may know little about China, but they would know Confucius, and he is recognised as one of the world's four great spiritual leaders (Shao, 2010).

During another media interview, Hu Mei also indicated that a senior Chinese leader commented that 'This is a very important project for promoting Chinese civilisation to the world.'(Chai, 2010)

These statements point to the great importance the Party-state has attached to this film and the state's intention to use the film to promote Chinese culture to the world. The high-level attention also echoes the resurgence of cultural nationalism in China. As Yingjie Guo observes, although Confucianism has little to offer to Marxism, the Party has recognized that there are certain elements in Confucian values, including the notion of Great Unity, loyalty to the ruler and to the country, that can be of particular benefit to the state (Guo, 2004, p.74).

Daniel Bell argues that apart from the demand of loyalty to the state, Confucianism also has certain expectations of the ruler. Confucius calls for good government; at minimum, rulers should strive for peace (*an,* or *ning*), a united world governed by benevolence (*ren*). In an ideal Confucian world, one sage-king would rule over the whole world, without any coercion. In a non-ideal multi-state world, rulers should still strive to realise such an ideal (Bell, 2008, p231).

This raises an important question. How has Hu Mei's film represented Confucian values? Has it emphasised the ruler's demand of their subjects' loyalty or the subjects' expectation of a benevolent ruler?

Guojia over Tianxia, Nationalism over Benevolence

According to its director Hu Mei, the 2010 film intended to represent the Confucian ideals of benevolence and promote Eastern values to the world.

> With enhanced national strength, Chinese audiences no longer blindly follow the West. Instead, they want films which reflect their own culture and values. To introduce Eastern values to the world, I recently directed the film *Confucius*… It is impossible to cover Confucius' life in two hours. You can only go to the core, which is his ideal of *ren*, benevolence' (Hu, 2010).

Contrary to Hu's claims, the film's representation of benevolence is patchy and inconsistent. In the opening scene, Confucius meets the Duke of Lu and introduces his ideal of '*tianxia dadong'*, harmony for all under heaven, where children, the elderly, the weak, and the sick would all be taken care of. The film then supports this ideal of *ren* through storylines such as Confucius saving a slave boy and urging the Lu court to abolish human sacrifice as part of the noble burial custom.

However, the film soon takes a sharp turn to focus on the interest of the state. Confucius suddenly shifts from a man who demands benevolence from the ruling class to a man who is obsessed with the interests of the state of Lu. So much so that in order to protect Lu's territorial sovereignty and its centralised power, he is prepared to provoke a war. With this dramatic shift, the film substitutes Confucius' ideal of harmony under Heaven, with a strong preoccupation with the interests of the state.

Confucius' obsession with Lu's territorial integrity is vividly depicted in a scene in which the sage accompanies the Duke of Lu on a visit to the state of Qi. When the Duke of Qi proposes an alliance with Lu, Confucius quickly seeks a demonstration of goodwill by asking Qi to return the three cities which Qi has won from Lu in a war thirty years ago. The request exposes Confucius' desire for territorial sovereignty, a key nationalist pursuit. It is nation-based rather than *tianxia*-orientated. Although the film allows Confucius to articulate his grand ideal of *tianxia datong* verbally, his actions are actually territorially driven and nationalistic in nature.

The most nationalistic and anti-*ren* action in the film is Confucius' determination to raze the three city walls. He regards the three walled cities ruled by three noble families as a major threat to Lu's central power and is subsequently determined to raze the walls. When his disciples warn him of the great danger of such a mission, Confucius replies: '*Gou li guojia, shengsi yi zhi* – for the interest of the state, one should be prepared to sacrifice his own life.' The statement signals that by now the film's value orientation has completely shifted, from *ren* to blind devotions to state, from benevolence to statism.

Later in the film, this mentality expands further when Confucius urges the Duke of Lu to destroy the three city walls: 'To strengthen the throne, the power of the nobles must be curbed.' When the proposal brings chaos and war to Lu, the film then depicts how Confucius led troops to defend the state. While burning oil is poured from giant pots down the city wall to burn soldiers underneath alive, Confucius stands on top of the city gate, beating a huge drum, stimulating the spirit of the defending force.

The disturbing scene of burning soldiers versus the drum-beating sage is a striking betrayal of the film's declared objective of representing Confucius' *ren*. It signifies the film's final transformation from its early attempt to project *ren*, to its total abandonment of the ideal. It shows that in order to protect the central power of the state, the sage could suddenly turn into a cold-blooded politician who would not hesitate to choose the interests of the state over the lives of ordinary soldiers.

Such representations of Confucius not only contradict Hu Mei's declared objective but also fundamentally defeat the purpose of the film. Thus did Mencius once explain the spirit of *ren*: 'All men have the mind which cannot bear to see the suffering of others' (Lu, 1983, p81). If the film's purpose is to present Confucius' benevolence and humanity, as Hu Mei suggested, then the film's graphic scenes of the soldiers' suffering, together with Confucius' encouragement and participation in the war, and the indifference he shows towards the suffering the war causes, have in fact depicted a ruthless Confucius, a man who is prepared to be anti-*ren* for the sake of the state.

The film then takes Confucius' obsession with his state's central power to a new height when the sage refuses to abandon his plan to bring down all the three city walls, even after the Duke of Lu has changed his mind. Facing the ruler of Lu, Confucius insists that '*sha shen qiu ren'* (a man of high principles must be willing to die for his belief). The irony is that the *ren* referred to here has nothing to do with Confucius' ideal of benevolence. Under the same banner of *ren*, Confucius' benevolence ideal has been substituted by a blind sense of loyalty to the state. This exposes that what the film really preaches is the interest of the state, not Confucius' ideal of benevolence for all under Heaven.

The film later tests the sage's loyalty to his state by taking him through the ordeal of a lengthy exile. After suffering much from the mistreatment by the Duke of Lu and nobleman Ji Shi, Confucius still encourages his student Ran Qiu to lead the Lu army against Qi's invasion. Towards the end, the film depicts a highly emotional scene of Confucius returning to his home state. Standing outside the walled city, he exclaims: 'Lu, my homeland, I am back!' According to Hu Mei, during the shooting, actor Chow Yun-fat, who plays Confucius, comments that this line is too much and asks her to edit it out, but Hu insists that 'this is too important a line to delete' (Zhang, 2010). This statement suggests that, although representing Confucius' benevolence is Hu's announced intention, in reality, nationalism has taken a much higher priority.

The film's misrepresentation of Confucius also supports Rana Mitter's observation that as Confucius' precepts on avoidance of force, or mutual obligation between superior and inferiors, could not be always be followed in reality, political philosophers over the

centuries have adopted Confucian thought, often retaining harsh and coercive laws while using a rhetoric of persuasion and loyalty (Mitter, 2004, p17). Similarly, Hu Mei's film has reduced Confucius' teaching of mutual obligation between the ruler and the subjects, to the CCP-style rhetoric of unconditional loyalty to the state.

Spectacle and Violence over Moral Substance

The final choice of values in the 2010 film *Confucius* seals its fate as another quasi main-melody film with little international appeal. The film has attracted little international attention and failed to win any international awards. An international film critic observes that the film surprisingly portrays Confucius as 'a very worldly man of action and war… with large-scale set pieces that carry an almost Red Cliff-like charge' (Elley, 2010). The observation reveals another feature of the film – its diversion from depicting Confucius' ideals to Hollywood-style spectacle.

To enhance the film's visual appeal, the sage is depicted as a multi-talented man with amazing archery skills. The film also uses digital technology to boost the visual effect of its battle scenes. From flying arrows in the sky to spurting blood in battle field, to a soldier's burning face under the city wall, the film's sensationalised visuals have little to offer to its declared objective of presenting Confucius' benevolence. On the contrary, these visuals could in fact project the damaging image of a man who is pro-war and lacking in humanity.

The film's choice of visual spectacle over emotional subsistence also exposes its awkward position of being caught between the Party line and the bottom line, between the political pressure of supporting the CCP's nationalist ideology and the financial pressure of attracting mass audiences. What the film has ended up doing is yielding to both political and commercial pressures by placing *guojia* over *tianxia*, nationalism over benevolence, and sensationalised visuals over moral substance.

More importantly, the film has vitally misrepresented Confucian values. As Daniel Bell observes, the film tells us that what Confucius really cared about is his nationalistic affiliation to his homeland. However, one cannot find such thought in *The Analects of*

Confucius. On the contrary, Confucius says: 'He, who is too attached to a particular place, is not a real *shi* (a learned man).' A real *shi* pursues his spiritual life and does not really care where he achieves such a life. The fact Confucius had travelled among various states itself demonstrates that instead of fixing his affiliation to his home state, he chose to serve whichever political entity that was most conducive for realizing his benevolent governance ideal (Bell, 2011).

The film's representation of Confucius' fixation with the state also leaves out some critical components of Confucius' ideals. According to *Great Learning*, the core of Confucius' *ren* lies in his belief in the respect between people, and the fact that moral values should be established at personal (*xiu shen*) and family levels *(qi jia*) first, before the higher achievement of national order (*zhi guo*) and world peace (*ping tianxia*) can be realised. By focusing on Confucius' relations with the state, the film has ignored the critical steps of establishing the moral ground at personal and family levels first and omitted his ultimate vision of world peace.

Inventing a Female-Friendly Sage

Directed by a female director, the 2010 film demonstrates its sensitivity towards women's image and Confucius' attitude towards women. In the film, the sage is portrayed as a man who is loved by all the women around him, including his wife, daughter, and Nanzi, the beautiful wife of the Duke of Wei. This is in stark contrast to Confucius' preaching that women are inferior to men, and a dramatic shift from his infamous comment that 'Women and vile characters (*xiao ren*) are hard to keep.'

The film ignores the historical discrimination that Chinese women have suffered as a result of the country's Confucian tradition. By reinventing a female-friendly Confucius, it has taken a major step to modernising Confucius' traditional image to make him more acceptable to the modern world. Nevertheless, this moral upgrade is limited and superficial. Unlike the 1956 Yu opera film *Hua Mulan*, gender equality is not the key message of this film. What the film has done is basically using Confucius' new female-friendly image to support its overall theme of loyalty to the state.

This is most evident in the film's depictions of a private meeting between Nanzi and Confucius. Nanzi is a historically controversial woman. Her sexual liaison before she married the Duke of Wei was condemned by Chinese historians. In Hu Mei's film, however, she is portrayed as a young beauty, a free-spirited and politically astute woman. During a media interview, Director Hu Mei admits that she has personal sympathy for Nanzi. 'Chinese women have suffered too much prejudice over the past 2500 years. Their so-called notorious reputation derives from their desire and pursuit for true love. From a modern feminist point of view, they shouldn't carry any bad reputation.'(Wang, 2010)

Although the film treats Nanzi with respect, it deprives her of love in the modern sense. The film portrays Nanzi as an admirer of Confucius, but that feeling is not reciprocal. During their private meeting, Confucius kneels on the floor, his eyes avoiding Nanzi's beautiful face and her adoring gaze. According to Hu Mei, this scene turns 'women's gaze towards Confucius', not the other way around. Nanzi was touched by the man whom she has always admired while Confucius remains courteous (Shao, 2010, p43). At a deeper level, however, what this scene has demonstrated is that the sage is a man who knows his place in the political hierarchy, a man who would never betray his preaching of *zhong* and abandon his loyalty to the ruler.

Through scenes like this, the film manages to invent a female-friendly sage, a man who is admired by all women and a man who is prepared to tolerate women with controversial backgrounds. But the reinvention of Confucius' attitude towards women is executed under the film's overarching theme of loyalty to the state. Through the sage's humble reaction to Nanzi's admiring gaze, his detachment from the irresistible woman, the film reaffirms its key message of loyalty to the state.

In addition, the state's high-level support for the 2010 film has not occurred in isolation. It reflects the shifting moral landscape in post-Mao China, including the revival of traditional culture, the state's new attitude towards China's Confucian tradition, and the moral dilemma facing contemporary China and Chinese cinema.

Confucianism, Nationalism, Soft Power: China's Moral Dilemma

In the reform era, Confucianism has enjoyed a strong resurgence in mainland China. The revival is rather ironic given Confucius was condemned during the May Fourth Movement in the early 20th century and was subject to severe attacks again during the Cultural Revolution and Mao's Criticising Lin Biao and Confucius campaign in the 1970s.

China's disconnection with its own cultural traditions had since created a moral dilemma. Although during Mao's era, socialism helped resolve China's ideological crisis temporarily, when socialism was debunked in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, the nation's value system collapsed with it. Driven by a strong current of cultural nationalism, Confucianism resurges in post-Mao China. The New Confucians see themselves as the 'moral innovators' at time of social crisis, when 'over a billion Chinese are deprived of spiritual guidance and their souls are wandering aimless in the mainland' (Guo, 2004).

As China's economic reform sweeps away the planned economy, together with the social relevance of Marxism and Maoism, the Party begins to recognise that certain aspects of China's cultural nationalism can be beneficial to its rule. Although cultural nationalism calls for the nation's moral regeneration and casts doubt over the legitimacy of the Party-state and its official ideology, the CCP has managed to turn some elements of cultural nationalism to its own advantage, especially at a time when the CCP's own ideology is becoming increasingly irrelevant and the Party itself is moderating its anti-traditionalist stance (Guo, 2004).

As a result, Confucius has been endorsed both by the Party-state and Chinese cultural nationalists. Giant Confucius statues appear on university campuses. Confucius temples, smashed during the Cultural Revolution, are restored to host Confucius' birthday celebration ceremonies, and receive tourists and local students. In September 2009, children dressed in traditional costume were organised to attend a ceremony held at a Confucius temple in Nanjing to mark the beginning of their schooling (Xinhua, 2009b).

Confucius also becomes a hot topic in popular culture. Supported by her talks at the popular CCTV Lecture Room program, Yu Dan's popularised books about *The Analects of Confucius* sold millions of copies, turning her into a national celebrity. Several TV dramas and an animated series about Confucius have also been aired on many Chinese television channels, reaching millions across China.

Ambivalence towards the Confucian Tradition

Under the surface of the revival of Confucianism, there are signs of strong resistance within the Party. In January 2011, a 9.5 metre Confucius statue was erected outside China's National Museum, on the eastern side of Tiananmen Square. On April 20, however, the statue was mysteriously removed and relocated to a much less prominent position in a garden behind the museum.

The appearance and disappearance of Confucius' statue in Tiananmen, the ceremonial heart of China, has significant political implications. China's devoted Maoists who share Mao's resentment towards China's feudal traditions were delighted. Some believe that placing Confucius' statue so close to Mao's mausoleum has gone too far and the move has directly challenged the May Fourth spirit and the CCP's anti-feudalist tradition.

Chen Lai from Tsinghua University suggests that some in the powerful Central Party School strongly opposes the sensitive position of the statue. For China's New Confucians, the statue's removal was devastating. Guo Qijia, a professor at Beijing Normal University, said that only Confucian teachings could rescue China from its current moral crisis (Jacobs, 2011).

The coming and going of Confucius' statue reflects the ideological contest over whether Confucian values can be treated as equal of the CCPs' orthodox ideologies such as Marxism and Maoism. The Party-state's final decision to remove the statue signals the Party's lack of sincerity in its endorsement of Confucianism. After all, the CCP's emergence was closely linked to the anti-feudalist tradition of the May Fourth Movement. To the CCP's founders, Confucius' hierarchical thinking was responsible for the cold treatment of the poor, the patriarchal oppression of women, and China's

inability to create a modern nation state….. Among the May Fourth generation and the CCP's founders, Chen Duxiu had a remitting hostility towards China's Confucian tradition (Mitter, 2004, p20).

In any case, China's connections with its own cultural roots have long been wounded. As Wei-ming Tu observes, historically, China's semi-colonial status has severely damaged her ability to tap into its indigenous resources as the Western impact fundamentally dislodged Chinese intellectuals from their Confucius heaven (Tu, 1994, p.2). The May Fourth Movement cemented China's paradoxical intellectual traditions – the intertwining of nationalism and anti-traditionalism. The anti-traditionalist nature of Mao's ruthless Cultural Revolution further damaged Confucianism's role as the moral foundation of Chinese society.

China's opening-up in the 1980s sparked yet another radical manifestation of the May Fourth's anti-traditionalist legacy. A well-known example of this phenomenon was *River Elegy.* The 1988 Chinese television series advocated the necessity to embrace the blue ocean (the West) as the only way to save the 'Yellow Earth'. The Yellow River, long regarded as the cradle of Chinese civilization, was condemned as the symbol of unmitigated violence against innocent Chinese people and Chineseness was made to stand for the authoritarian and brutal ruling minority (Tu, 1994, p.6).

The 1989 Tiananmen crackdown ended such radical advocacy of total westernization. To help protect its political legitimacy, the Party has re-embraced May Fourth's anti-imperialist tradition but abandoned May Fourth's heritage of anti-feudalism. However, the removal of Confucius' statue from Tiananmen indicates that the Party's re-endorsement of Confucius is more a cultural gesture than an ideological shift. It suggests that as one of the few remaining socialist countries and one that has adopted a market economy, China is yet to decide what ideals it really stands for and can proudly introduce to the world. After all, it is a formidable challenge for the Party to reassert its value system to its own people, let alone to the world.

Soft Power: Shared or Clashing Values?

Apart from endorsing the revival of traditional culture, the Party-state's high-level support for the film, *Confucius* also echoes the CCP's growing desire for Chinese films to go global to enhance China's soft power on the global stage.

In recent years, soft power has become a buzzword which frequently appears in Chinese media and government reports and attracts wide academic attention. Some Chinese scholars argue that China's embrace of the soft power concept reflects the grand narrative of China's 'great revitalization' (*weida fuxin*) at home, that China's rise is part of the unfolding story of the country's historic comeback (Wang, 2011). Others believe that China's global aspirations are mainly shaped by the historical trauma that China has suffered at the hands of foreign imperialist powers in modern history since the Opium War (Deng & Zhang, 2009).

This perception is supported by the statements of some China-based scholars who believe that over the past century China has been constrained by 'three afflictions'—namely, foreign aggression (挨打), a weak economy (挨饿), and the continuing demonization by a hostile West (挨骂) fearful of a rising China (Bandurski, 2010). These observations, which link China's current global ambitions with its historical trauma caused by foreign aggression, suggest that nationalism is a significant motivation behind China's quest for soft power, and China's soft power aspirations are, at least partially, driven by a nationalist desire to rectify the historical humiliations inflicted on China by foreign imperialists.

Despite the surging popularity of the term 'soft power' in the PRC, what values and ideals China could uphold to propel its soft power still remain unclear. Should it be the CCP's official ideology of nationalism, China's Confucian tradition, or Western liberal values? The critical question stays unanswered and unclarified.

In 2007, at the CCP's 17th National Congress, the then President Hu Jintao stated:

> In today's world, culture has increasingly become the source of what holds a nation together and a key factor which makes a nation competitive. Therefore, we should

> endeavour to stimulate our nation's creativities and enhance our soft power (Xinhua, 2007).

In the same report, Hu Jintao also stresses the importance of building China's 'core socialist values system'. Hu's speech links soft power with the nation's creativity whilst emphasizing that the CCP's socialist values should remain as China's core values. The speech indicates that Hu's interpretation of soft power has more to do with China's cultural creativity and economic competitiveness than the lack of political relevance and competitiveness of the CCP's official ideology in the global arena.

Joseph Nye, who coined the concept of soft power, believes that a country's soft power should be built on shared values. When a country's soft power is built on values shared by the wider international community, that country has a better chance to enhance its soft power (Nye, 2004). However, both Hu Jintao's speech and the comments made by Zhao Qizheng, the former Director of the State Council Information Office, have failed to address the issues of shared values.

In 2006, to emphasise the significance of soft power for China's global standing, Zhao Qizheng quoted the following comment made by the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

> China will never become a superpower because it does not have internationally influential ideals to propel its power. What China exports today is television sets, not ideas (Zhao, 2006).

Thatcher's comment highlighted the key weakness of China's soft power, its lack of internationally influential ideals. However, when recommending the necessary actions China should take to strengthen its soft power, Zhao completely ignored the key message in Thatcher's remark and focused only on operational issues such as enhancing China's international media and improving the international popularity of Chinese language. These recommendations avoided the fundamental question of what values China's soft power should be built upon, and what ideals China can project to the world as its 'internationally-influential ideals'.

Zhao Qizheng also stated that China should revitalise its culture to pave the way for its rise as a global power.

> History has proved that a nation's rise begins with the renaissance of its culture. It is only when a nation's culture occupies certain proportion (of global culture), can the nation become a cultural great power. Only when a nation rises as a cultural great power, can it become a global power (Zhao, 2006).

Despite his emphasis on the importance of Chinese culture, Zhao failed to specify what constitutes Chinese culture, whether Confucian ideals could be the moral foundation of China's soft power and, if so, what aspects of the traditional values are still relevant to the contemporary world. Hu Jingtao's speech and Zhao Qizheng's comments expose a fundamental flaw of China's quest for soft power – the lack of attention to the value orientation and the moral foundation of China's soft power.

This flaw is also reflected in the CCP's directives concerning the Chinese cinema going-global project. In recent years, while 'soft power' has become a handy word for Chinese screen producers to use when seeking state support for their transnational aspirations (Keane, 2010), cinema going-global also emerges as a hot topic in China. Although few scholars hint that Chinese films should avoid clashes of values with host countries (Yin & Tang, 2008), most Chinese scholars have focused on the commercial side and stayed away from the politically-sensitive topic of value representations.

Within this political and cultural context, China's desire to enhance its soft power through cinema has failed to stimulate any major reflections on Chinese films' value-orientation. Failing to address the critical role which shared moral ground play for a country's soft power, the Party-state continues to use the word 'soft power' to urge Chinese films to go global.

As a result, the lack of shared values and the lack of a clear moral direction remain as the major roadblocks for China's cinema going-global aspirations. The moral contradiction of the state's directives is highlighted in a speech delivered by Chinese Propaganda Minster Liu Yunshan at the 2008 Chinese filmmakers' national conference:

> We should maintain the correct political and artistic directions and actively promote core socialist values… Meanwhile, Chinese filmmakers should also uphold Chinese cultural traditions, follow the international trend, stay relevant to the contemporary

> world, and use the latest technology to enrich Chinese films' artistic expressions (Liu, 2008).

Liu's speech exposes the fundamental dilemma of China's cinema going-global strategy. Moral wise, the strategy is supposed to serve conflicting agendas. If Chinese filmmakers are to follow Liu's directive, it could be driven in three different directions – to project China's socialist ideology to the world, to promote traditional Chinese values such as Confucianism, and to follow international trends by embracing Western liberal values. Such an ideological contradiction is a fatal flaw for the state-driven initiative.

Liu's speech also indicates the great importance the state has attached to the latest production technology. However, technology cannot replace the critical role of moral foundation for a film. If used inappropriately, technology could in fact hinder China's international image. Digital technology has for instance increasingly been used to amplify the visual details of violent scenes in Chinese films, such as how blood spurts out when a dagger is thrust through a body, in slow motion.

It is hard to imagine that these digitalised scenes could help to portray China as a civilised nation to the world. In Hu Mei's film *Confucius,* the digitally-enhanced images – the burning face of a soldier, the *Red Cliff* -like grand battle scenes – have not contributed to the film's declared objectives of introducing Eastern values to the world and representing Confucius' belief in benevolence, but undermined such intents.

Confucius is also an enlightening case for examining the state's interference in filmmaking in China. Since its development stage, the film has received the state's special support. Apart from President Hu Jingtao's personal attention, Zhang Hongsen, Deputy Director of National Film Bauera organised six meetings and invited experts from various fields across China to discuss different versions of the script. Three screen writers were employed to work on 30 drafts of the script, and before its national release, Zhang Hongsen watched the film five times (Cai, 2010).

However, the end result of *Confucius* suggests that the state's heavy involvement has not helped the film to fulfil its declared objective of introducing Eastern values to the

world. If anything, the interference is more likely the cause of the film's final choice of placing the CCP's nationalist ideology over Confucius' ideal of benevolence. The case once again demonstrates that the CCP's political manoeuvring of culture and its policy of making culture serve the state can have serious side effects.

Ironically, instead of promoting Chinese culture to the world, *Confucius* has confirmed Thatcher's prediction that what China is capable of producing is only television sets, not internationally influential ideals. The film's defeat by *Avatar* proves that China still struggles to compete against Hollywood imports on its home ground, let alone on the global stage.

The film's substitution of genuine Confucian values with the CCP's official ideology has resulted in an absurd misrepresentation of Confucius and his ideals. Instead of promoting Eastern values to the world, the film has turned Confucius, the official symbol of Chinese culture, into a blind servant of the state, an unappealing image to both domestic and international audiences. This makes the film a classic example of the counter-productiveness of China's cultural soft power exercises.

Following *Confucius*' failure, the Chinese State Council issued the 'Guidelines for Enhancing Chinese Film Industry' on January 25, 2010 (China State Council, 2010). The Guidelines recognize the importance of cinema and the local film industry and calls for state agencies' stronger involvement and control over the industry.

> The great importance of the film industry must be fully recognized. State agencies should enhance the management of films' market entry process, diligently guard the key steps in the process such as project establishments, filing, censorships, distributions, screening and broadcast permits, and the online film market (China State Council, 2010).

The statement both calls for the advancement of the Chinese film industry and demands stronger state control, as if the industry can be strengthened through more state interference. In reality, the increased state interference in the post-Tiananmen era, such as the state's renewed support for propaganda films and its tightened censorship, have been a key obstacle for the healthy growth of the Chinese film industry. Since the 1990s, many talented Chinese filmmakers have been banned from

making films for years, and the tightened state censorship has crippled the once thriving and internationally renowned local film industry.

In December 2012, Chinese film director and educator Professor Xie Fei issued an open letter calling for the state to relax its tight film censorship. The letter urges state censors to allow a self-governed film industry ruled by law, not by men.

> The current system of the state using an administrative approach to control all films, from the beginning of the project to the whole censorship regime, has long ago lost its social, economic and cultural significance. The system has become a set of old rules, undermining the prosperity of the industry, killing artistic explorations and wasting administrative resources (Xie, 2012).

Xie's letter also quotes the final words of Zhao Dan, a renowned Chinese actor, before he passed away in 1980. 'With the (state's) micromanagement, it (Chinese cinema) has no hope'. Xie adds: 'Even today, Zhao's final words still ring true'. These statements highlight the frustration and despair of Chinese filmmakers under the state's tight censorship. What is exposed in Xie's letter also suggests that instead of nurturing the local film industry, the State Council's call for the state's enhanced control over the art form could further suffocate the local film industry and reduce its ability to produce internationally competitive films.

Ironically, compared to Liu Yunshan's 2008 speech, the 2010 Guidelines also place greater emphasis on Chinese cinema's international reach, its international competitiveness and market share. But the Guidelines once again avoid the critical issue of what values and ideals Chinese films should represent, and whether such values would be acceptable to international audiences and can actually help China to enhance its soft power.

The state's considerable involvement in *Confucius* and the film's final choice of values demonstrate that the Party-state has not taken shared values seriously, nor has it avoided clashes of values with the outside world. *Confucius'* nationalisation of the sage suggests that the CCP lacks genuine interest in promoting authentic Chinese culture to the world, or in seeking common moral ground with international audiences. Instead, even with the highest level attention and the filmmaker's declared intention to

promote Confucian ideals, the film still ends up advocating unconditional loyalty to the state.

With respect to the state's manipulation of culture, the film *Confucius* is not an isolated case. Within China, state-funded main-melody films make up 30% of China's domestic production (Davis, 2010) and continue to project the CCP's nationalist agenda to the Chinese audience. Internationally however, such films are clearly against international trends and lack competitiveness.

Between 2005 and 2006, Hollywood and its European co-productions occupied over 90% of the global film market while China's share was below 1% (Ying & Tang, 2008). Even within China, Hollywood's return has presented new ideological challenges for the Party-state. In 2010, Chinese audiences' strong support for *Avatar* and their rejection of the nationalised Confucius highlight the irrelevancy of nationalist ideology to the contemporary world. The failure of *Confucius* also demonstrates that China cannot rely on state support to enhance the global appeal of Chinese films.

The dominance of nationalist ideology in contemporary Chinese cinema and Chinese films' lack of international influence are confirmed by an international survey conducted by Beijing Normal University. The 2012 survey which involved 1400 viewers in nine countries reveals that Chinese films have little international influence; in the eyes of foreign audiences, patriotism and heroism are the most 'impressive' values conveyed by Chinese movies (China Daily, 2012).

The state's post-1989 policy of using films to promote its nationalist ideology has placed contemporary Chinese cinema in an ideological dilemma. To a large extent, the CCP's official ideology clashes with both Western liberal values and China's cultural heritage such as culturalism and authentic Confucius' beliefs. By turning Confucius into a firm nationalist and misrepresenting his ideal of *tianxia datong*, the 2010 PRC film *Confucius* unveils an attempt to reduce the gap between the CCP's nationalist ideology and China's cultural traditions.

The film also proves that tempering China's cultural heritage to serve the Party's political agenda could have serious side effects. By nationalising and misrepresenting

the sage, the film has missed the opportunity to identify what elements of China's cultural traditions still have modern relevance and international appeal, and can be drawn upon as the moral foundation of China's soft power.

The contrasting international receptions of Chen Kaige's two Peking opera films support this observation. Chen's second Peking opera film *Forever Enthralled* turns Mei Lanfang, China's most celebrated Peking opera singer in history, into a man who loves the nation and hates the nation's enemy more than anything else. Although the film validates the CCP's nationalist ideology, it has completely abandoned China's culturalist tradition as brilliantly portrayed in Chen's first Peking opera film *Farewell My Concubine,* together with the moral strength and transnational appeal of *Farewell*'s belief in culturalism and culturally-centred Chinese Self.

The nationalisation of Confucius in Hu Mei's 2010 film further discloses China's inability to identify and articulate the modern relevance of its cultural heritage. As Suisheng Zhao, a US-based scholar observes, China's current approach to soft power lacks a contemporary moral appeal and is, therefore, not sustainable in the competition with the US to inspire the vision of building a free and prosperous world. Although China attempts to promote its traditional culture as world culture, it is yet to demonstrate what elements of its traditional values are still relevant to, and could be accepted by, today's world (Zhao, 2009, p247).

With respect to international relations, Suisheng Zhao believes that China's pragmatic approach would only confirm the damaging impression that China is a country that will always put profits above human rights and other moral principles (Zhao, 2009, p260). Zhao's observation further affirms the serious implications of China's lack of moral direction for its international credibility and soft power.

Conclusion

Using Hu Mei's 2010 film *Confucius* as a case study, this chapter highlights the major challenges facing China's quest for soft power. It observes that China's quest for soft power exercises are reach-orientated, it is at least partially driven by a nationalistic desire to rectify China's historical traumas inflicted by foreign imperialists. The chapter

argues that China has failed to address the most fundamental weakness of its soft power – its lack of internationally influential ideals.

Hu Mei's 2010 film *Confucius* is a revealing case of China's flawed soft power activities. Despite Hu's declared intention to introduce Eastern values to the world, the film has misrepresented the sage and substituted the genuine Confucius' ideal of *tianxia datong,* harmony for all under heaven, with the preaching of total loyalty to the state.

The film's final choice of values exposes the lack of appreciation of the significance of shared values for a nation's power and the moral dilemma facing Chinese filmmakers: the need to support the CCP's legitimacy-driven nationalist ideology and the desire to connect with international audiences to help enhance China's soft power.

Contrary to Joseph Nye's emphasis that a nation's soft power should be built on shared values, the CCP's directives regarding Chinese cinema going-global are ideologically contradictory. The state urges Chinese filmmakers to simultaneously uphold socialist values, promote traditional Chinese culture and follow international trends to stay relevant to the contemporary world. However, these objectives are incompatible; efforts to fulfil one could damage the other.

Such fundamental contradiction reflects a much broader issue. It discloses that China is morally in limbo. As one of the few remaining socialist countries in the world, China still struggles to re-build its own values system, let alone demonstrate to the world what ideals it stands for. The 2012 relocation of the giant Confucius statue from Tiananmen suggests that the Party's post-Mao endorsement of Confucius is superficial; it can only be part of the CCP's vocabulary, not its grammar (Guo, 2004).

Hu Mei's 2010 film *Confucius* also confirms that the Party's endorsement of the sage is half-hearted and politically-motivated. The film's final choice of nationalism over authentic Confucian ideals has resulted in its absurd misrepresentation of Confucius and Chinese cultural heritage. This makes the film a classic example of the counter-productiveness of China's cultural soft power exercises.

Overall, the film highlights the fact that China has failed to recognise the significance of shared values for a country's soft power. The lack of common moral ground has seriously undermined Chinese cinema's going-global aspirations. Arguably, what China stands for today is the most fundamental question that China as a whole must answer before it can speak of cultural soft power and global cultural strategies.

To support the CCP's domestic political agenda, China has carried on producing nationalistic films and promoting them internationally. But if China continues to push nationalist films to go global, such efforts could in fact tarnish China's international image, and further undermine, rather than enhance, China's cultural soft power.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM CULTURALISM TO NATIONALISM: TWO PEKING OPERA FILMS

Chen Kaige's 1993 film *Farewell My Concubine* is widely held to be one of the best films China has ever produced. Depicting the love and loss of two Peking opera singers against sweeping historical backgrounds, the film is China's only Palme d'Or winner so far. Fifteen years later, however, Chen's second Peking opera film *Forever Enthralled* receives little international attention. Chapter Six compares these two films, focusing on their value orientation and their reconstructions of national identities. In addition, the chapter probes into China's culturalist traditions and interrogates the two films' dramatic shift from culturalism to nationalism. Finally, the chapter examines the new development in China's official Occidentalism and critique the concept of official Occidentalism coined by Xiaomei Chen in the mid 1990s.

From Culturalism to Nationalism

Chen's two Peking opera films present dramatically different identifications with Chinese culture and the nation. *Farewell My Concubine* displays a strong sense of confidence in traditional Chinese culture. The film shows how Peking opera singer Cheng Deyi devotes his entire life to the Opera but remains detached from the nation. His view of the people, be it Chinese or Japanese, is not based on their racial or political backgrounds, but on how much they understand and appreciate Peking opera.

By contrast, Mei Lanfang, the protagonist of *Forever Enthralled,* is a challenger of traditional culture, and his loyalty is not attached to Peking opera but to the nation. Moreover, the film places America as the centre of the world and turns the West as the applauding audience of the Chinese Self. The following section will compare these two films in detail.

The Culturalism of Farewell My Concubine

According to Joseph Levenson, China's traditional self identity stems from culturalism, which is based on shared cultural heritage and beliefs, not nationalism, which centres

on the modern concept of nation-state (Levenson, 1968). Likewise, James Harrison believes that because the primary Chinese identity was cultural, with no perception of a Chinese state or nation, the ultimate loyalty is thus attached to the culture, not to the state, and there could be no justification for abandoning culture to strengthen the state (Harrison, 1969).

Farewell's representations of both the Chinese Self and the foreign Other are informed by culturalism. Culturalist values are most prominently embodied in Dieyi, a devoted Peking opera singer who defies the sweeping political waves and remains loyal to Peking opera, an emblem of traditional Chinese culture. The film illustrates Dieyi's indifference to the nation or the state—be it a warlord, Nationalist or Communist regime. He is loyal to Peking opera only, and this unbending loyalty transcends the Sino-Japanese War as well as the shifting political landscapes and ideologies around him. He resists any state formation that undermines the beauty of Peking opera and would work with anyone, including China's invaders, for the sake of the opera.

This culturalist view of the world gives Dieyi a distinctive perspective and a culturally-based sense of identity of both the Chinese Self and the foreign Other. It allows him to see the Japanese occupiers more as cultured audiences of Peking opera instead of China's enemy. For this reason, Dieyi refuses to admit that he was forced to perform for the Japanese, and claims that if the Japanese officer who understands Peking opera was alive, he would have introduced the opera to Japan. In fact, in his eyes, the Japanese are more cultured and acceptable than many Chinese in the film – be it the thug-like Nationalist troops, the culturally-illiterate Communist soldiers, or the violent Red Guards.

Dieyi's culturalist view of the world allows him to rise above the sweeping political waves which divide people by race, class, nation or political beliefs. He firmly believes in the traditional values of '*cong yi er zhong'* – to be faithful to one's devotion (be it a spouse or an art form) until death – and refuses to bend with changing political winds. This obsession with the opera is ridiculed by his stage brother as opera-infatuation (*xi chi*), but from a culturalist point of view, Dieyi is a man of integrity and conviction. It is this devotion to the culturally-centred self identity that has driven him to transcend the

political upheavals and remains true to his culturalist belief. Although in real life, he too has to compromise, such as having an affair with the 'opera boss' Yuan Shiqing', Deyi always remains faithful to the opera and his dream of singing the opera with his stage brother for the rest of his life.

The film's pride in Peking opera is also reiterated by Yuan Shiqing. When a Nationalist government prosecutor accuses Dieyi of performing 'obscene words and decedent songs' for the Japanese in court, Yuan responds furiously.

> This is ridiculous! Anyone with basic knowledge of Chinese culture would have known that what he performed was part of kunqu *Peony Pavilion*, the cream of Peking opera. How could someone label it as 'obscene words and decedent songs'? Who has inflated the enemy's arrogance and damaged our national dignity?

Yuan's statement places the opera at the core of China's national identity and dignity. To him, the attack on the opera is a worse assault on the Chinese Self than Dieyi's accused crime of betraying the nation.

The film then portrays the Communists as culturally illiterate. Facing a roomful of People's Liberation Army, Dieyi forgets his line and stops mid-sentence. As the panicked theatre boss urges 'Give them whatever they want. Don't fight!' To everyone's astonishment, thundery applauses suddenly erupt from the audience, followed by the soldiers' loud and simple revolutionary songs. This scene vividly depicts the Communist army as disciplined but unsophisticated troops whose knowledge of Peking opera is so limited that they are even more of an outsider than the undisciplined but opera-enjoying Nationalist troops.

The film also shows how Yuan Shiqing is executed by the Communist and how everyone takes off their Chinese long gowns and cheongsams and changes into Mao-style suits, another betrayal of the culturally-centred Chinese Self. Meanwhile, classic Peking opera faces a complete make-over. Opera singers are forced to abandon the traditional opera to embrace a modern and revolutionary version of the opera. Dieyi openly questions the legitimacy of the new opera. He argues that real Peking opera should have the grace of 'No sound appears without singing, and no movement emerges without dancing'; the modern version loses the elegance of the classic operas.

While Dieyi holds on to his culturalist values, people around him begin to crumble. Among them, Xiaosi, an abandoned boy saved by Dieyi, thrives in the new world. Unlike Dieyi, Xiaosi is a product of the communist China, a symbol of China's rootless new generation. Intoxicated with the earth-shaking revolution around him, Xiaosi soon learns to rebel. He forces his former masters to embrace modern operas and openly humiliates Dieyi by stealing his role in his favourite opera. Later, he also interrogates Dieyi's stage-brother Xiaolou and turns one of his old friends against him.

Xiaosi's action is a blatant betrayal of Dieyi's belief in Chineseness – the basic Confucian values of family and social orders based on filial piety, respect and loyalty. Xiaosi's rebellion against traditional Chinese values is by far the most damaging violation of the culturally-based Chinese Self in the film. Xiaosi becomes the embodiment of the CCP's crushing of China's culturalist tradition, and through Xiaosi's ruthless betrayals, the film exposes how the Party-state has brutally broken the backbone of the old Chinese Self as it sets out to construct a new socialist China and Chinese Self. The construction of a new socialist identity requires the destruction and negation of the age-old Chineseness, including traditional Chinese values and the traditional art form of Peking opera.

Dieyi's stage partner Xiaolou is as another embodiment of the broken backbone of the Chinese Self. Before the Communist takeover, Xiaolou was a proud man. He defied the powerful opera boss and stood up to the Japanese and Nationalist soldiers. During the Cultural Revolution, however, he yields to the physical abuse and public humiliation by the Red Guards and openly denounces Dieyi and his wife. His ultimate betrayal of those dearest to him can be attributed to his lack of sincerity to his Chinese root. To him, being an opera singer is just a profession; when under pressure, he chooses to go with the flow. He is never as devoted to the opera and to the traditions as Dieyi has been.

As a result, when pushed by the sweeping tides of the Cultural Revolution, Xiaolou easily gives in and betrays both his stage brother and his devoted wife. His betrayal results in his wife's suicide and irreversibly damages his friendship with Dieyi. These heart-breaking stories expose the devastating destructions which Cultural Revolution has inflicted on China's traditional beliefs and the culturally-based Chinese Self.

Dieyi and Xiaolou's life-long respect for their own master and Xiaosi's ruthless betrayal of Dieyi also demonstrate the brutal consequences of such destruction. Through the broken bonds between masters and students, families and friends, *Farewell My Concubines* implies that the Cultural Revolution, initiated by the Chinese state, has caused more damage to 'us' than the Japanese Other, the common target of the CCP's nationalist preaching. In Chen's second Peking opera film, however, *Farewell*'s critical reflections on Chinese history disappear; the rage towards the ruthless destruction of traditional beliefs and culturally-centred self identity by the CCP is turned into nationalistic resentment against the Japanese Other.

Forever Enthralled: Nationalism Replacing Culturalism

Chen's second Peking opera film *Forever Enthralled* (2008) presents a clear departure from *Farwell*'s culturalist theme. The film opens with the young Mei Lanfang reading a letter from his uncle. The letter describes how his uncle, an established Peking opera singer, is beaten by a Qing court official for failing to wear red clothing on the Empress's birthday. As part of the punishment, he has to wear a paper yoke. Terrified that he might break the yoke, Mei's uncle begs: 'Please, I'd rather you beat me more than wearing this'. After the humiliating ordeal, the uncle advises Mei: 'I want you to leave this circle and never touch the opera again.'

Unlike *Farewell,* which illustrates Dieyi's devotion to the opera, *Forever* begins with a sense of fear and resentment towards the opera. Later in the film, this bitterness is further magnified by Mei's proud stage partner Thirteen Sparrow, who warns Mei before his death: 'Remember, we are among the lowest classes!' The statement turns Peking opera, the unfailing source of pride for Dieyi and his master, into a source of humiliation.

This sense of humiliation escalates further when the film shows a fallen Peking opera star having to perform in a noisy restaurant and thank a man who throws a coin to the stage. Such depictions of the indignity of the opera contrast sharply with the prestige of opera portrayed in *Farewell* where Peking opera singers are celebrities adored by mass audiences and respected by social elites. During the pre-PRC eras, Dieyi and

Xiaolou used to perform for the social elites of the time and their screaming fans. So much so that Master Guan proudly announces to his disciples: 'You live in the best of times. When has Peking opera ever been so popular and prosperous?'

Apart from his pride in the opera, Master Guan also teaches his students traditional values through the proverb of '*cong yi er zhong*' – devoting one's life to his chosen destiny, till the very end. It is this firm belief in culturally-based self identity and traditional values that has driven Master Guan to discipline Xiaolou for downgrading the opera when he was a boy, and for giving up the opera when he becomes a married man. The film's pride in Peking opera is also evident in how the opera is adored by the changing audiences below the stage – be it the Qing court, the warlords, the Japanese, or the Nationalists.

In Chen's second opera film, however, the pride in the opera is gone. Mei Lanfang becomes a reluctant performer who lives in the fear of an invisible paper yoke. He hides in the backstage before his performances and is hesitant in pursuing his love for a fellow opera singer. He tells his lover Meng Xiaodong that he is reluctant to go to the US because he is terrified. Meng replies 'As an opera singer, we have plenty to worry about. The audience, the critics… after all, we have to make a living by watching the faces of thousands.' To which, Mei replies 'Yes, you are right.'

The statements indicate that while Peking opera is Dieyi's source of pride and moral strength, for Mei, the opera has become a burden. In *Farewell*, Dieyi describes the elegance of classic Peking opera as 'no sound appears without singing, and no movement emerges without dancing'; in *Forever*, classic opera is under severe attack. This is evident in the following remarks made by Mei's advisor Qiu Bairu.

> A female opera singer can only smile but cannot laugh; an official has to hold his belt to show his authority. Peking opera is full of rules. In short, it says 'Don't move!' People in the opera have no freedom and they have to hide all their feelings. It is like a cage, trapping all performers inside… After enduring much injustice, Su San can only appeal her case but she can't rebel, and the obedient Su San serves as a role model for all Chinese women to follow.

Qiu's comment discloses the film's anti-traditionalist sentiment. While classic Peking opera gives Dieyi and Master Guan a great sense of pride and purpose that underpins their self-identity, in *Forever,* the opera becomes the film's target. Instead, *Forever* demonstrates a strong sense of loyalty to the nation. *Farewell*'s identification with China's culturalist tradition is overthrown, replaced by a firm attachment to the nation.

The central theme of film is not Mei's love for Peking opera but her courage to defend the nation, at the cost of the opera. When the nation is under attack, Mei, who appears as a delicate woman on the stage, is suddenly transformed into an iron-willed man, determined to give up the opera to protest the invasion of the Japanese Other. Dieyi's ready willingness to perform for the courteous Japanese officers and Mei's stern refusal to perform for the Japanese enemy demonstrate the two films' contrasting values – *Farewell*'s culturalism and *Forever*'s nationalism.

Forever's anti-traditionalist and nationalist themes are also embedded in the film's treatment of the Qiu Rubai character. Early in the film, Qiu is depicted as a Western-educated man who encourages Mei to break the rigid traditions of Peking opera, and to step out of the shadow of his old mentor to launch his own career. Later on, the film forcefully injects patriotic spirit into Qiu. In a scene well before the Japanese occupation, Qiu tells Mei: "In ancient China, there were two brothers. After losing their state, they refused to eat food growing from the soil of their enemy state and starved themselves to death. We are such brothers'. This out-of-context statement is artificially inserted in the film to reinforce its nationalist theme. The statement tells the audiences who 'we' are and what 'we' should be – that we should devote our allegiance and our lives to the nation, not to our flawed culture.

In the second half of the film, Qiu suddenly becomes a traitor of the nation and an odd defender of the opera. He tells Mei that wars come and go but Peking opera is timeless. When Mei stops performing after Japan's occupation, Qiu repeatedly urges him to reconsider. In order to bring Mei back to the stage, Qiu even falsely announces Mei's return against his will, and his behaviour is openly despised by Mei's family and friends. By now, Qiu has become a staunch culturalist, a traitor of the nation and Mei's friendship, and the internal target of the film's nationalist theme.

If Dieyi is the embodiment of the culturally-based Chinese Self in *Farewell*, Mei Lanfang is then the carrier of *Forever*'s final choice of nationalism over culturalism. The film's attack on Qiu is also a direct attack on Dieyi and his culturalist values. Dieyi's pride and attachment to Chinese culture is severed, condemned, and substituted with a strong sense of attachment to the nation. Culturalism, the only source of pride and moral strength for the old Chinese Self disappears, replaced by a new hollow self driven by a strong affiliation to the nation and nationalist values.

In *Farewell*, culturalism is the strong backbone of the Chinese Self. It gives Master Guan and Dieyi courage, strength, and dignity. Those who betray culturalist values, such as Xiaolou and Xiaosi, lose their moral compass. The film condemns the Communist state for breaking that backbone. In *Forever*, however, this culturalist backbone is smashed, removed, replaced with the substitute of nationalism. The film nationalist theme is thus not built on the pride, but on the shame, of Chinese culture.

Towards the end of film, this odd mixture of nationalism and anti-culturalism reaches its climax. Facing a roomful of journalists, Mei takes off his scarf, revealing his new beard and his dry lips, the result of a typhoid virus injection. To justify his final rejection of the Japanese Other, Mei recounts the dying wish of his old stage partner Thirteen Sparrow.

> Before he passes away, he asks: 'Can you do something for me?' 'What is it?' I ask. Can you lift the status of our opera singers and encourage people to treat us as human beings?' he says. I agreed, but did not know how. I think this is the best I can do.

This scene links Mei's most nationalistic action with his discontent with the lowly status of Peking opera singers. Mei's ultimate sacrifice for the nation is not motivated by his pride in Chinese culture and the culturally-based Chinese Self, but by his attempt to rectify the wrongs of the culture. *Forever*'s nationalism is thus built not on the continuation of China's culturalist tradition, but on its denouncement. In *Forever*, it is Mei's loyalty to the nation – his defiance against the nation's invaders, his sacrifice of the opera for the nation – that overrides all.

This unconditional loyalty to the nation is in stark contrast to *Farewell*'s attitude towards nationalistic outbursts. In *Farewell*, nationalism is subject to ridicules. The film shows when students shout 'Down with Japanese Imperialists!' and block the way, theatre owner Na Kun skilfully changes their slogan to 'Chinese won't fight against Chinese!' As Na Kun escorts two opera stars leaving the scene, Na comments: 'This is understandable. These students are not married, and they can't afford to pay prostitutes, so they would need an outlet for their energy, won't they?' Na's comment turns the students' nationalist outburst into a mere outlet for their restless energy. This sarcastic comment is based on the film's culturalist view of the world which holds culture as a higher being than the nation.

However, it is hard to imagine that such mockery of nationalism would be allowed on today's Chinese screens. The sharp contrasts between Chen's two Peking opera films reflect the dramatic changes in Chinese cultural scenes in the post-Tiananmen era. After the Tiananmen crackdown, particularly since the state launched its Cinema 9550 project in the mid 1990s, nationalism has dominated Chinese cinema.

As Chen Kaige hinted in an article published after the release of *Forever*, *Farewell* is the product of the liberal 1980s. 'The success of some graduates of Beijing Film Academy, the so-called Fifth Generation film directors, was due to the era of China's early reform and opening-up. It wasn't that we were particularly talented as such; it was simply because when the time came, it had to choose its own representatives' (Chen, 2009a).

Chen's statement reveals his sense of hopelessness towards the changing political tides. In the same article, Chen also states that after viewing *Forever,* some Chinese critics joke that it seems that it is Chen (not Mei's uncle) who has to wear a paper yoke (Chen, 2009a). The comments suggests that unlike *Farewell*, *Forever* is the product of the post-Tiananmen era, when filmmakers have to wear paper yokes and accommodate the state's political agenda.

In *Farewell*, culture is an end, not the means. It rises above politics, nations, and states. In *Forever*, however, the nation takes precedence and culture is reduced to a political tool for the state. *Farewell* declares that it is Chinese civilization, not the nation, which

has a moral claim over man's loyalty; *Forever,* however, downgrades the man's commitment from the higher level of Chinese civilisation down to the nation, a local political unit. This significant shift supports Levenson's argument that Chinese nationalism was an intellectual alienation from traditional Chinese culture (Levenson, 1968, p.104).

Levenson's statement also highlights the paradox between the two key objectives of the May Fourth Movement — anti-traditionalism and anti-imperialism. Chen's two Peking opera films embody this paradox. While *Farewell* condemns the devastating destruction of the Cultural Revolution to the culturally-centred Chinese Self, *Forever* substitutes *Farewell*'s rage towards the destruction with strong attacks on Chinese cultural traditions. As *Farewell* takes immense pride in traditional values and the old Chinese Self, *Forever* abandons this tradition and declares its total loyalty to the nation.

Forever's attacks on Peking opera's and its depictions of the indignity of the opera singers also contradict Chen's claim that *Forever* is a film about a man who believes in Chinese culture. Although the film features authentic Chinese visuals such as Peking opera theatre, courtyard houses, colourful opera costume, opera is no longer at the heart of the film.

The magic power of the opera that *Farewell* has projected to the screen is gone, together with the authentic Chinese characters deeply grounded in their own culture. What is left is a film which no longer believes in its own culture, a film which discards its own culturalist tradition and substitutes it with the imported, nation-dividing nationalist ideology. As a result, the film and the culture it represents become a puppet of the state, with little chance to travel beyond national borders.

Occidentalism and Transformed Others

Apart from the changed values and transformed Chinese Self, *Forever Enthralled* also alters *Farewell*'s portrayals of the foreign Other. Extending the differential treatment of the Others in Feng Xiaoning's 1999 film *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River, Forever* divides the foreign Other into two camps – the friendly West and the evil Japan. In the

film, the Japanese are no longer appreciative audiences of Peking opera as they were in *Farewell*; instead, they become China's enemy, the external target of the film's nationalist theme. In contrast, the film projects America with passion and awe. The following section will examine *Forever*'s dividing representations of the foreign Others.

The Japanese Other: From Cultured Audience to National Enemy

Farewell's gazes at the foreign Other is informed by culturalism. Compared to the thug-like Nationalists troops and the disciplined but uncultured Communist soldiers, the Japanese troops are portrayed as the most courteous and respectful audience. The Japanese officers watch Dieyi's performance attentively in the film and applaud at the end with their white-gloved hands. On one occasion, a senior Japanese officer even stands up and takes off his white gloves to applaud with the rest of the audience. Their appreciation of Peking opera earns Dieyi's enduring respect. After Japan's surrender, standing at the Nationalist government's court, Dieyi insists that his performance for the Japanese was not forced.

In *Forever*, however, the Japanese becomes ruthless invaders. Mei Lanfang firmly refuses to place his commitment to the opera above his loyalty to the nation. *Farewell*'s rage towards the destructions of Chinese culture by the state is irreversibly switched to nationalist resentment towards the Japanese Other. The Japanese officer who takes off his white gloves to applaud at the end of Dieyi's performance becomes a stereotyped Japanese invader who draws out his knife to intimidate Mei. Even a young Japanese officer who admires Mei's talent only intends to use Mei to conquer Mei's fans for Japan. For both the Chinese and the Japanese sides, Chinese culture becomes a tool for the nation. The Japanese Other is turned from a civilised admirer of Chinese culture into an aggressive national enemy.

Some international critics argue that *Forever* has exaggerated Mei's resistance against Japan. They observe that historically, Mei's relation with Japan was not as bad as the film suggests and *Forever*'s plotline of Mei using typhoid virus injection to avoid performing for the Japanese is fictional. In fact, a Western newspaper reported that Mei had five million fans – four million Chinese plus one million Japanese (Fu & Rebull,

2010). Others point out that Mei visited Japan well before his US trip. He gave his first performance in Tokyo on 1 May, 1919, three days before the beginning of the May Fourth Movement. Due to its sensitive timing, this visit was rarely mentioned in China. Nevertheless, Mei presented China as a country with a rich traditional culture infused with refinement during his visit (Yeh, 2007).

These observations suggest that *Forever*'s depiction of Mei's iron-willed resistance against Japan is fictional. It is part of China's revised historical narratives aimed at reconstructing national identity to serve the state's nationalist agenda. This confirms that due to the essential roles of history in national identity formation, contestations arise as historical narratives are revised, reaffirmed, remade, blocked and created to validate or institutionalise certain identity at the expenses of the others (Guo, 2010, p.28). *Forever*'s blocking of Mei's trip to Japan and its remaking and reaffirming of the Japanese as China's national enemy serve to validate the Chinese state's post-Tiananmen nationalist agenda.

Forever's embrace of nationalist ideology determines that Mei's resistance of the Japanese Other is a key component of the film's plotline. This differs considerably from *Farewell* where the focus is not the Japanese Other. In *Farewell,* the camera briefly shows Japanese soldiers marching into Beijing at night; later on, when Dieyi finds a group of Japanese soldiers executing Chinese prisoners, it again happens in the dim and misty night air. Under the bright theatre lights and in close-up shots, the Japanese appear as Dieyi's civilised and appreciative audiences.

The focus of the film is the common interest and the cultural link between the Chinese Self and the Japanese Other. Peking opera becomes a cultural bridge connecting the two nations divided by the war. In *Forever*, this cultural link becomes a dividing line between the Chinese Self and their Japanese enemy. It is a line that Mei firmly refuses to cross at all costs, and a line which costs the life of a young Japanese officer when he faces the impossible choice between his loyalty to Japan and his love for Peking opera. Instead of bringing people of different racial and national backgrounds together, culture becomes something to be sacrificed, for the nation.

The American Other: The World Endorses China

While Chen's second Peking opera film portrays the Japanese as China's national enemy to be resisted at all costs, America becomes China's admired friend whom 'we' adore and who also loves 'us' in return. As the admired Other, the word 'America' appears frequently in the film. Mei's advisor Qiu repeatedly urges Mei to visit America. He even asks Mei's lover Meng to encourage Mei to embark on the trip:

> He must go to America. If he does, he will no longer be just only the No. 1 in Asia; he could well be the No. 1 in the world!

This comment endorses America as the centre of the world. This endorsement is a clear abandonment of the China-centred view of the world in *Farewell.* Considerable screen time is then allocated to depict Mei's performance in New York in 1930. The focus of the visit, however, is not Mei's talents, or the confidence in the Chinese Self. Instead, the cameras turn to the American audience under the stage to capture their warm reception of Mei's performance. As soon as the show finishes, the American audience erupt from their seats and burst into lengthy, whole-hearted applauses, creating the much-craved Western endorsement of the Chinese Self and pushing the film to its climax.

According to Chen Kaige, in order to gather 1000 Western audiences to the filming set, the crew had to use coaches to bring Westerners living in Nanjing and Suzhou to Shanghai (Chen, 2009b). The fact that the filmmakers are prepared to go through so much trouble to shoot such a scene indicates the significance of the 'applauding West' for the film. The scene showcases that unlike the hostile Japanese Other, the Americans are 'our' friends and admirers. This applauding Western crowd is a clear example of China's *official Occidentalism.* It highlights the officially-constructed nature of the Western Other in contemporary China.

The constructed nature of the West is also evident in *Forever*'s glorified depictions of Mei's 1930 US trip. As some scholars point out, Mei's first American trip was not an easy victory as the film suggests. Western visitors to China had often described Peking opera as 'cacophony', Mei's performance was thus anything but an easy sell (Yeh, 2007). Even though the trip took seven years to organise, Mei's first performance in

Washington DC was still a disaster. As a result, the troupe had to hire F.C. Kapakas, a Hollywood producer, to re-craft the entire program. For a whole month, Mei had to rehearse every item in his repertoire time and time again so that Kapakas could observe each detail and make a final selection for Mei's Broadway début. This process allowed Kapakas to select a new program suitable for the taste of the American audience (Yeh, 2007).

This anecdote suggests that Mei's US success required much more efforts than just the courage to take Peking opera to America. This study argues that film's artificial reconstruction of the applauding West is also driven by its choice of nationalism as its core values. The film supports the CCP's official ideology on two fronts – through its anti-Japanese rhetoric and via its Occidentalist recreation of the Western Other.

The applauding West *Forever* is an extension of China's state-sanctioned official Occidentalism embedded in Chinese cinema. Since the establishment of the PRC, the image of the West on Chinese screens has fluctuated according to the political climate at the time. In socialist cinema of Mao's time, the West was portrayed as evil imperialists, China's invaders and national enemies in films such as *Lin Zexun*, *Battle of Shanghai* and *Heroic Sons and Daughters*. Deng's opening-up policy in the late 1970s put an end to the anti-imperialist representations of the West.

The 1989 Tiananmen crackdown saw China's relations with the West plummeted. China's screen depictions of the West also took another sharp turn. A 1993 Chinse TV series *Beijing Man in New York* illustrated that screwing the West was patriotic again. As Geremie Barme's observed, representing China as a nation ruthlessly violated by western imperialism and expressing concerns over China's inferior position in the New World Order have become central to Chinese thought and debates in the post-Tiananmen era (Barme, 1996, p.184).

By the end of the 1990s, as China integrates further into the global community, the negative screen representations of the West subside again and Chinese films begin to portray the West as China's ally and friend. For instance, Feng Xiaoning's 1999 film

Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River depicts the West as China's ally during the Sino-Japanese War.

By the time *Forever* is produced in 2008, the status of the West has been fully elevated. It is no longer the imperialist to be slapped as in *Lin Zexu* (1959), to be screwed as in *Beijing Man in New York (1993)* and to be stabbed as in The *Opium War* (1997).Instead, the reinvented West becomes China's new lover who also loves China in return.

In order to construct, validate, and institutionalize China's new national identity, *Forever's* has largely suppressed the perceived wrongs committed by Western imperialists over the past century. Yet, the film's embrace of the West is conditional. It demands the re-imagined West to applaud the Chinese Self in return. With the applauding West as China's new friend, the film projects an artificial sense of endorsement of the Chinese Self by the international community.

Ironically, despite *Forever*'s contrived endorsement of the Western Other, the film generates little interest in the West. Why has Chen's first Peking opera film been an international triumph while his second opera film fails miserably outside China? The following section will turn to the question.

Soft Power and Cultural Awareness

Compared to *Farewell,* Chen's second Peking opera film is a clear international disappointment. It failed to secure any international awards and was only released in Hong Kong, Taiwan and a few Asian countries, even though it was China's official candidate for the 2009 Academy Awards (Schwankert, 2009). This is in stark contrast to *Farwell*'s international triumph in the 1990s. The film won a string of international awards, including the prestigious Golden Palm Award at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, the Best Foreign Language Film of the 1993 Golden Globe Award. The film was also nominated for the 66th Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and was rated by the Empire magazine as one of the 100 Best Films of World Cinema.

The striking contrast between the two films' international receptions demands further investigation. This is particularly relevant given *Forever* is produced at a time when

China is more eager than ever to produce internationally successful films. Some international critics comment that Chen's second opera film has 'never got to the heart of Mei's amazing talent' which bewitched audiences of the time and has since made him one of China's national treasures' (Elley, 2009).

However, capturing Mei's amazing talent is no longer the purpose of the film. The film's core values and focus have shifted, from culturalism to nationalism, from the love of the opera and the pride in the culturally-based Chinese Self to the love of the nation, the rejection of the Japanese Other, and the creation of the applauding West. By ignoring the challenges Mei had to overcome during his 1930 US trip, the film misses the opportunity to retrace Mei's journey, to represent an authentic West, and to reconnect with the western audiences.

The film's construction of the applauding West also highlights the new development of China's official Occidentalism. China's continued embrace of Deng's opening-up policy means that the demonization of the West in Maoist China and in the aftermath of 1989 Tiananmen event no longer serves the state's interest. China's entry into the World Trade Organisation and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games have brought the country even closer to the outside world. When China's international image has profound political and economic implications, winning international endorsement becomes an urgent priority for the Party, and China's official Occidentalism needs to reflect this change and adds an international dimension.

Forever's contrived depiction of the applauding West echoes this important shift. The film is so eager to win the applause of the West that it is prepared to abandon *Farewell*'s culturally-based and China-centred world view and to treat the America as the centre of the world. The purpose of this new official Occidentalism is not simply promoting nationalism for the domination of Chinese at home. Instead, it is designed to modify nationalism against the Western Other, in order to win its endorsement and to support the CCP's opening-up policy.

However, *Forever*'s new representation of the West has not helped the film to secure an international success. This indicates that China cannot rely on its modified official

Occidentalism to boost the international prospect of its films. In contrast, although the West is never mentioned in Chen's first Peking opera film, its representations of authentic Chinese culture has been cherished as a 'cultural achievement' (Canby, 1993) on the global stage.

According to some international critics, it is *Farewell*'s brilliant depiction of Peking opera and its magic power on Chinese audience (not its fantasy of the West) that has fascinated western audiences. They find that the most compelling aspect of the film is its swooning infatuation with the theatre. The film shows that the opera is more popular than ever, its glamorous stars worshiped like deities… the stage radiates with light and magic… The line between their art and their lives is smudged, and so they play their roles, both on and off stage (Hinson, 1993).

In Chen's second Peking opera film, however, Mei Lanfang is preoccupied with the nation and the foreign Others. Instead of his passion for the opera, his unyielding resistance against the Japanese and his desire to win the heart of America take the central stage. While Dieyi devotes his entire life to the opera, Mei is haunted by his uncle's letter urging him to leave the humiliating profession. Dieyi's love for his stage brother is embodied in his desire to keep him on the stage forever; Mei's love for his stage partner Meng Xiaodong, however, is expressed through his desire to escape the opera, to have time watching a film with Meng. Instead of cherishing the opera, *Forever* presents China's most celebrated Peking opera singer as a man whose real desire lies not in the opera, but in escaping from it.

Peking opera, a key component of Chinese cultural resources, is consequently downgraded to a humiliating profession. This contradicts Chen Kaige's statement during a CNN television interview that he wants to show Mei Lanfang as a man who believes in Chinese culture. The film's attack on the opera and its chosen focus of the nation rather than the culture inevitably hinder its potential to demonstrate the beauty of the opera, the pride in Chinese culture, and Mei's outstanding achievement as China's most respected Peking opera singer and China's most successful cultural ambassador.

Chen Kaige also claims that he wants to project Mei's calm and courage, the spirit much needed in a country undergoing tremendous changes and facing profound Western influences (Chen, 2009b). In reality, the film has projected the West as the desirable Other, rebelled against China's culturalist traditions, and demonstrated its political alignment with state through its endorsement of the CCP's anti-Japanese nationalism and its pro-Western official Occidentalism. By attacking its own cultural traditions and endorsing America as the centre of the world, the film has in fact surrendered to the very Western influence Chen intends to resist.

Paradoxically, while *Farewell* is praised as a celebration of the rights of the individuals and the importance of idiosyncrasy (Canby, 1993), *Forever* is criticized for dramatising Mei's life and implying that 'art could not coexist with love or patriotism in those days' (Lee, 2009). These comments illustrate the downside of *Forever*'s choice of the nation over individuals, politics over culture, and nationalism over culturalism. These choices have resulted in another anti-Japanese propaganda film, with limited historical value and little international appeal.

The two films' contrasting international prospects also indicate that compared to the nation-dividing and hatred-provoking nationalism, culturalism has more potential to travel beyond national borders and touch international audiences. As Prasenjit Duara argues, culturalism is a statement of Chinese values as superior, but significantly, not exclusive from other barbarians who did not share these values (Duara, 1996, p36). It is this inclusiveness that allows Chen's first Peking opera film to humanise the Japanese Other and portray them as courteous and appreciative audiences of Peking opera.

This inclusiveness displays the universal quality of China's cultural heritage – the traditional culturally-based self identity enables the Chinese Self to rise above the traumas of wars to connect with people beyond national borders, even enemies. Culturalism's inclusiveness allows *Farewell* to show a rare connection between people of warring nations during the war. It echoes the core values in Hollywood war films such as *Schindler's List,* where humanity brings hopes to the hopeless at the darkest moments in history. This humanity has timeless and universal appeals. It has much greater potential to resonate with international audiences than nationalism.

To some extent, *Forever*'s choice of nationalism over culturalism supports Edney's statement that by tying the concept of soft power with its ideological program of building 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', the Party-state has linked soft power to a goal of generating greater national unity and cohesion to maintain the CCP's leadership within China (Edney, 2012). However, Edney's argument that China's efforts to promote Chinese cultural internationally are undertaken primarily to shape a public opinion environment conducive to the pursuit of the CCP's domestic agenda is subject to further debate.

If soft power is predominately a domestic project of the Chinese propaganda system, then *Forever* would have fulfilled its role. However, China's clash with the West during the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relays has demonstrated the regime's unpopularity in the West and its lack of voice on the global stage. The explosive domestic reactions to China's clash with the West also reveal that China's poor international image can have serious domestic implications. China's pursuit of soft power, therefore, must also have an international dimension.

The international dimension of China's soft power efforts is also confirmed by Li Changchun, China's then highest official in charge of propaganda work. In October 2011, Li published an article in People's Daily, highlighting the importance of cultural soft power for China's cultural security and for China's international standing and influence.

> In today's world, more and more countries treat cultural soft power as an important part of their national building strategy. To some extent, whichever nation possesses strong soft power, that nation will gain advantage in intense international competitions. We must vigorously promote fine elements of traditional Chinese culture, propel advanced socialist culture, and continuously enhance the international influence of Chinese culture, to build cultural soft power comparable to China's international standing and to ensure our cultural security (Li, 2011).

Li's statement unveils both the domestic and international dimensions of the CCP's soft power agenda. Li regards cultural soft power as a key element of China's future development, critical not only for China's cultural security at home, but also for China's international standing, influence, and competitiveness in the global arena.

Nevertheless, the domestic and international dimensions of China's soft power agendas often contradict each other, and Chen's two Peking opera films are illuminating cases in point. Although *Forever* has conformed to CCP's domestic-orientated ideology of nationalism, the film has failed to resonate with international audiences. Despite China's soft power aspirations and *Farewell*'s outstanding achievement in promoting traditional Chinese culture to the world, it is highly unlikely that the Party-state would tolerate another culturalist film with anti-CCP and anti-nationalism undertones.

Forever's international failure also supports Chinese scholar Hu Jian's concerns that the bottleneck of China's cultural development is its inability to turn Chinese cultural resources into soft power (Hu, 2012, p.76). Hu believes that China is rich in cultural resources; its culture is deep and wide-ranging, with a long history. Chinese culture can offer not just the spiritual anchor for its own people, but also spiritual nourishment to people around the world. China, however, has been unable to convert its rich cultural resources into soft power, and Hu believes that the root cause of this inability rests in China's lack of cultural awareness (Hu, 2012).

Cultural awareness is a term coined by established Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong who believes that

> Cultural awareness is about people have 'self knowledge' of the culture they live in. They understand its origins, formation, characteristics and development trends, without any implications of 'cultural revision' or 'restoring the old'. Meanwhile, they should not advocate 'wholesale Westernisation' or becoming 'totally Other' either (Fei, 2010, p.207).

Fei's statement highlights the significance of China's self-knowledge and consciousness of its own culture in the increasingly globalised world. Cultural awareness does not encourage total rejection of the foreign Other or, advocate a complete retreat to the old Chinese Self, nor does it suggest China should abandon its own culture and become totally absorbed by the Other.

Applying this concept to Chen's two Peking opera films, one may argue that Chen's first Peking opera film has demonstrated a strong sense of cultural awareness. Through Dieyi and Master Guan, the film showcases its thorough understanding of the origin

and characteristics of Peking opera and traditional Chinese values. Dieyi appreciates where Peking opera's beauty lies and is sceptical about the CCP's attempt to modernise the opera and destroy its elegance.

Yet, Chen's second opera film displays a much weaker sense of cultural self-knowledge and appreciation. The film not only fails to demonstrate the grace of Peking opera but also turns around to attack the traditional art form. The film's fixation on the West and its pre-occupation with America as the centre of the world forms a sharp contrast to *Farewell*'s pride in Chinese culture and in the China-centred universe. Although *Forever* advocates loyalty to the nation, it supports the Western-centred Orientalist perspective which regards the West as the powerful centre, the embodiment of the new and modern while treating Asia as the defeated and the distant Other, the symbol of the old and traditional (Fei, 2010, p.214).

Conclusion

This chapter argues that Chen Kaige's 1994 Peking opera film *Farewell My Concubine* represents a firm belief in culturally-based Chinese Self and is built on China's traditional values of culturalism. This allows the film to take immense pride in Chinese culture and rise above wars and changing political scenes. However, Chen's second Peking opera film *Forever Enthralled* abandons such traditions and replaces *Farewell*'s firm belief in culturalism with politically-driven anti-Japanese nationalism and pro-Western official Occidentalism.

Forever's artificial construct of the applauding West also discloses a significant shift in China's official Occidentalism. The chapter observes that Xiaomei Chen's argument that the purpose of China's official Occidentalism is to support nationalism, for the domination the Chinese Self at home (Chen, 1995) reflects the CCP's pre-occupation with its domestic political legitimacy in the early 1990s. As China continues to embrace economic reform and globalisation, winning international endorsements has become a critical task for the CCP, and China's official Occidentalism needs to reflect this change with an international dimension.

Forever confirms the emergence of this international dimension. The film is selected as China's 2010 official entry for the Best Foreign Language Film category at the Academy Awards. The applauding West in the film serves dual purposes. Domestically, it repositions the Western Other as China's friend to discourage nationalism against the West, to validate the CCP's opening-up policy, and to show the West's endorsement of China; internationally, the re-imagined West is designed to please the West and to win its support.

Hence, this chapter argues that official Occidentalism has become a more fluid and complex concept in today's China. It refers to a process where the Western Other is officially construed by a state-driven Chinese imagination, to either enhance or to modify nationalism, for the domination the Chinese Self at home, and for winning the support of the Western Other.

The striking contrast between *Farewell*'s international triumph and *Forever*'s international disappointment also suggests that China's traditional belief in culturalism has more universal appeal than the CCP's official ideology of nationalism. Culturalism connects people, it empowers them to rise above national borders and the traumas of wars and thus has more potential to resonate with contemporary international audiences than the nation-dividing and hatred-provoking nationalism.

This further demonstrates the counterproductive nature of *Forever*'s switch from culturalism to nationalism. Despite the film's attempt to construct an applauding West, its nationalist theme is built, not on the pride of Chinese culture, but on its belittling. The result is a film with a clear political stance but with little awareness of its own culture. The film's pursuit of nationalism at the expense of Chinese culture raises the fundamental question of the logic and viability of the Party-state's current practice of using nationalistic films as a vehicle to promote Chinese culture as part of China's cinema going-global strategy.

By abandoning China's culturalist traditions, Chen's second Peking opera film no longer believes in the culture it desperately wants the West to applaud for. This paradox exposes the film's dramatically reduced cultural awareness when compared with

Farewell. It also supports Hu Jian's argument that China's weak cultural awareness remains a main cause of the country's inability to convert its cultural resources into soft power.

The contrast between *Farewell* and *Forever*'s international receptions also raises a fundamental question: if Chinese nationalism is an alienation from its traditional culture, how can the state rely on nationalistic films to promote Chinese culture to the world? *Forever*'s international disappointment reaffirms that although nationalist films support the CCP's domestic political agenda, outside China, nationalism clashes with universal values and can fundamentally spoil a film's international prospect.

Forever's international failure proves that at least internationally, the film's attempt to replace *Farewell*'s culturalist traditions with the CCP's nationalist ideology has been a fatal move. It suggests that reinforcing the Party's domestic hard power and enhancing China's international soft power are incompatible agendas. *Forever*'s role in supporting the state's nationalist ideology has come at the costs of the film's potential to promote authentic Chinese culture to the world, and to enhance China's cultural soft power through cinema.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSNATIONAL CO-PRODUCITON: CONTESTED VALUES AND TROUBLED IDENTITIES

Chapter Seven compares Zhang Yimou's 2011 film *The Flowers of the War* with several Sino-Western co-production films about the Second Sino-Japanese War. These include *Empire of the Sun* (1987), *Children of Huangshi* (2008), *John Rabe* (2009), and *Shanghai* (2010). The chapter first revisits the historical trajectory of Sino-Western co-production films and explores Chinese state and filmmakers' evolving role in the co-production process. It then compares *Flowers*' representations of values and national identity with those of the co-production films and investigates how *Flowers*' choice of values and its projected national identity may have affected the film's international receptions.

Rising China: From Site Assistant to Creator

In December 2011, Zhang Yimou's much anticipated film *The Flowers of the War* was released across China. Set against the backdrop of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, the film tells the story of how a group of prostitutes decide to sacrifice themselves to save twelve convent schoolgirls, with the help of an American man. Aimed to be an international blockbuster, the Sino-American co-production hires a Hollywood A-list actor to play the male lead role and engages some of the world's top production teams to create special visual and sound effects. The film is endorsed by the Chinese government and is selected as China's 2012 candidate for the best foreign language category at the Oscars.

The production of the film also signals a significant shift in China's transnational film co-production process and unveils China's desire to control the collaborative process. Unlike previous Western-led co-production films about the Sino-Japanese War such as *Empire of the Sun* (1987), *Children of Huangshi* (2008), *John Rabe* (2009) and *Shanghai* (2010), *Flowers* is written and directed by people of Chinese backgrounds, from a Chinese perspective.

Compared to those Western-initiated co-productions, *Flowers* represents considerable different values and a new sense of national identity. All of these make *Flowers* an appropriate case study for examining the contested values and identities in Sino-Western co-produced films and whether China's increased control over the transnational collaborative process would help Chinese films to go global and enhance China's soft power.

After decades of closure from the West, China's opening-up in the late 1970s allowed Western filmmakers to return to china. In 1979, the state-run China Film Co-production Corporation (CFCC) was established to manage international co-productions. During the early years, China's role in the co-production process was mainly providing logistic support for foreign directors. When Bernardo Bertolucci produced his Academy Awards winner *The Last Emperor* (1987), its Chinese partner only provided the filming sites and was not involved in the film's finance and production at all (Zhang, 2012). When Steven Spielberg shot his *Empire of the Sun* (1987), the Shanghai Film Group Co. only assisted his crew in 'closing the Shanghai Bund for a month for the shooting and removing 1300 air conditioners' hanging outside the buildings (Tang, 2011).

Today, co-production films have become a formidable force in the Chinese film market. According to Zhang Xun, General Manager of the China Film Co-Production Corporation, although co-production only counts about 10% of China's annual film productions, most of China's annual top 10 films since 2007 are co-production films, many of them being co-productions between mainland and Hong Kong. To a certain extent, these mainland and Hong Kong co-production films help China to resist Hollywood's infiltration into the Chinese market. Internationally, China also relies heavily on co-production for film export. In 2009, 96.2% of China's international box office is delivered by co-production films, rising from 68.15% of 2007 (Zhang, 2012).

In addition, co-production model offers international filmmakers valuable access to the flourishing Chinese film market. Since 2004, China has signed co-production treaties with countries including Italy, France, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore (Li, 2011). State-approved co-production films under these bilateral agreements can be treated as local films. This allows Western filmmakers to enjoy government subsidies at home

while gaining access to the fast-growing Chinese market. Commercially, international filmmakers can have up to 43% of the Chinese box office if their film is deemed as a co-production film, a much larger share than the 25% split if the film is treated as an imported film.

From the Chinese state's point of view, co-productions allow the local film industry to gain international experience and encourage more films with Chinese elements to reach global audiences (Zhang, 2012). The policy uses commercial incentives to attract international producers to train Chinese filmmakers, to produce more competitive films for the domestic market against Hollywood imports, and to assist Chinese cinema to go global and improve China's international image.

However, in Western-led co-production films, the images of China and Chinese are often unflattering. In Western-led co-production films about the Sino-Japanese War, the stories are usually told by the Western characters, from Western perspectives, while the Chinese characters are generally portrayed as the inferior, the marginal and often the negative oriental Other. In *Empire of the Sun,* for instance, the Chinese characters were cold, silent and dubious servants. In *John Rabe*, the Chinese driver was unrefined, unintelligent and stubborn.

This issue of national image in transnational co-production films has long been a concern for some Chinese officials. In 1996, the then Head of National Film Bauera Liu Jianzhong made the following statement, signalling the state's desire for co-production films to portray a positive national image.

> Co-production films need to reflect a positive national image. The backward and primitive images of Chinese do not reflect modern China. When screened overseas, co-production films need to properly represent national image.... Chinese films should turn their lens toward the true feelings and the good life of our people, advocating the national spirits of righteousness, truthfulness, kindness and beauty (Rui, 1996).

In 2004, China's National Film Bauera released the document *Measures for the Administration of Chinese-Foreign Co-Production Films* (2004). The document formalises the procedures for co-production films and stipulates that when a film project involves key foreign creative personnel, it would need the approval from the

State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), and the total number of foreign actors should not exceed two thirds of the cast (Zhang, 2012). By setting up the strict approval procedure, the state gains the power to influence co-production projects from its early creative process.

Since 2008 and 2009, China's transnational film co-productions enter a new phase where the Chinese side calls the shots (Qiao & Zhong, 2011). This shift is summarised by the head of the China Film Co-Production Co. as a transition from 'using leased ships' (*jie chuan chu hai*) to 'jointly building ships' *(lian he zao chuan*) to help Chinese films go global (Zhang, 2012).

Subsequently, international co-production proposals are subject to increasing scrutiny and many international producers find that there are many invisible rules they have to comply with. During a 2011 interview, the Australian director of an Australia-China co-production film mentioned the enormous power which the Chinese state yields during the approval process of a co-production film. 'Apart from censorship of the script, they can also ban a co-production film, not just in China but also around the world, after the film is finished! They say co-productions are also their films (therefore, subject to the same rule as Chinese films). That's lots of money and efforts at stake!'

These comments expose the political agenda behind China's interest in co-production films. By offering attractive commercial incentives, such as the attractive access to the Chinese film market and a larger share of domestic box office receipts, the Party-state hopes to attract more international filmmakers to join their transnational co-production scheme. This would extend the CCP's power considerably, allowing it to censor not only local productions but also any Western-led co-productions about China. Transnational co-production, therefore, becomes a convenient vehicle for the state to influence the cinematic representations of China on the global stage.

For this purpose, the state-run China Film Co-Production Co. acts as a gate-keeper to safeguard how China is represented in co-production films. In 2011, when asked about a rejected co-production script about a Chinese policeman with mafia ties, the head of CFCC Zhang Xun responded that 'We absolutely do not encourage such films. The

institutions of the state are a force for good and we do not hope to see Chinese police being portrayed as so ugly'. This comment unveils the Chinese government's desire and effort to prevent any negative depictions of China, particularly the government itself (Hille, 2011).

Apart from filtering negative national image, there is also evidence to suggest that CFCC has intervened in the development process of a co-production film to influence the film's choice of values. In the case of *Yip Man*, a 2008 *kungfu* drama set in Japanese-occupied China in the 1940s, the nationalistic determination of the Chinese against the Japanese invasion was not in the original script but was inserted later. Some foreign studios find such state manipulation of injecting the CCP's nationalist agenda into a co-production film too much to swallow (Hille, 2011).

The 2011 Australia and China co-produced film *33 Postcards* is another case in point. During the approval process, the filmmakers are required to remove the love story between a Chinese orphan girl Meimei and her Australian sponsor and replace it with an innocent relationship between an orphan girl and her adopted father. The film ends with Meimei insisting that she must return to China because 'That's my home'. When asked about the unconvincing ending, the film's Chinese producer explains that 'China does not encourage migration through marriage; we thus have no choice but to end the film with Meimei returning to China' (Huang, 2011). However, with Meimei's love for a Western man substituted with her love for China, the key message of the film has changed from transnational love and understanding to patriotism.

In March 2008, Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein announced that his China-US co-production film set in Japanese-occupied Shanghai would be shot in Thailand instead of China, because the company had failed to secure a shooting permit in China. By then, the company had already spent three million dollars on the Chinese site. Weinstein said the decision had everything to do with (the Chinese authorities) not liking the script, especially elements about the collaboration (with the Japanese) (Ransom, 2008).

These cases demonstrate the Chinese state's interference with the creative process of transnational co-production films. The state's co-production approval process gives the

authorities considerable power to influence how a Western-led co-production film depicts China and even these films' value orientations. Ironically, despite China's state censorship, international co-productions often face criticism within China. Some Chinese scholars believe that Sino-Western co-production films still represent Western cultural colonialism.

In *Forbidden Kingdom (2008),* for example, an American young man enters the ancient Chinese world and saves the trapped Money King. Such a plot turns the West into China's saviour, not only in the contemporary world, but also in ancient times. So much so that even the unstoppable Money King has to be saved by a young American hero. The underlining message of the film challenges the commonly accepted historical narrative in the PRC that China is a glorious ancient civilisation. It has only declined in modern history, largely due to the aggression of the Western and Japanese imperialists.

Painted Veil (2006) is another interesting case of Western-led co-productions. The film features a British couple saving the lives of countless Chinese, in a hell-like, cholera-infected Chinese village. The West is once again portrayed as the civilised and superior masters who sacrifice their lives to save the primitive and inferior Chinese Other in the Far East. The film clearly depicts the inequality between the East and the West (Chen, 2009), as well as the West's sense of superiority, and its orientalist view of the world.

Zhang Yimou's 2011 film *The Flowers of the War* is a mile stone in China's transnational co-production journey. It signals China's growing desire and its decisive move to take control of the co-production process. The purpose of the move is to project China's own prospective, values, and national identities, and to fulfil China's cinema going-global aspirations. The following section will examine the film and its international receptions in detail.

Humanitarianism or Nationalism?

The Flowers of the War is China's officially selected candidate for the best foreign language category at the Oscars. Yet, the film failed both commercially and critically outside China and did not even secure a nomination for the Oscars. Why has a film,

directed by one of China's top filmmakers and pitched so hard at western audiences failed so miserably internationally? What values has the film intended to project and actually projected? How might the film's value orientation have affected its international receptions?

Flowers' Value Orientation

Zhang Yimou claims that *Flowers* is not meant to be a nationalistic film. He believes that unlike many other Chinese films about the Second Sino-Japanese War, his film intends to portray the Japanese with multiple layers of complexity (Mu, 2011). Zhang's wish to distance himself from other nationalistic films also is evident in his following statement.

> This film is not intended to be a narrow nationalistic film. Hollywood has made many films about the horror of the Nazis, but do they intend to incite hatred against the Germans? Perhaps not. What we need today is to extract humanity out of wars and disasters. What is humanity? It is love and kindness, and love and kindness against the background of the war is what we seek (in this film).' (Zhang, 2011).

The statement indicates the director's intended choice of values – it is humanitarianism, not nationalism – and *Flowers* is designed to portray love and kindness between people vis-a-vis the horror of war.

However, this humanitarian intention does not exactly match the objective declared by *Flowers*' producer Zhang Weiping.

> There are a lot of misconceptions about China in the West. We want this movie to give the Americans and Europeans a perspective on China and Chinese cinema…This is a story about heroism which everybody can relate to ….It speaks a universal language, and that makes us hopeful (Zeitchik, 2011a).

Zhang Weiping's statement offers multiple insights. First, it exposes the producer's ambitions to rectify the West's misperception of China through *Flowers*' projection of the heroic Chinese Self. Second, it assumes that heroism is a universal language which will help the film to connect with global audiences. Third, the two Zhangs' statements

about *Flowers*' intended values also reflect the lack of moral clarity of what values China's go-global film should promote to the world.

In reality, heroism and humanitarianism are not necessarily compatible values. While the former advocates courage, the latter promotes the ethic of kindness and sympathy towards all, regardless one's race, class, gender, age, religion, or nationality. If heroism is upheld to serve a humanitarian cause, then the two values are aligned. However, if heroism is used to provoke nationalistic hatred towards a national enemy, then such heroism is aligned with nationalism and could be anti-humanitarian in nature.

The conflicting moral claims of *Flowers*' director and producer reflect the lack of moral clarify of China's cinema going-global project. Nevertheless, the film seems to have embraced the suggestions proposed by senior Party officials regarding how Chinese cinema should lift its game to step out of China.

In 2011, Cai Wu, Chinese Minister of Culture, called for more efforts to promote Chinese culture worldwide by 'actively absorbing the excellent achievements of foreign cultures'. Zhang Pimin, the Deputy Head of State Administration of Radio, Film and Television elaborated on how the notion of 'using foreign achievements to promote Chinese culture' can be implemented.

> If we want our films to step into the international arena, we should utilise all possible resources to showcase Chinese culture and values, including inviting renowned international stars and adopting overseas marketing methods (Mu, 2011).

The Flowers of the War is arguably a product of this official formula. The film's international ambitions are confirmed by its producer Zhang Weiping, who claims that 'Given our government attaches great importance to the film and cultural industry, it is critical that we promote Chinese film and culture to the world' (Rohter, 2011).

Before the film's international release, Zhang Weiping was confident that this technical formula would work. He believed that *Flowers*' world-class visual and sound effects supported by a Hollywood A-list star should make it a global success.

> Given the film's positioning as an international blockbuster, we have invited the world's best production teams from the US, UK, Australia and Japan to help make the film. The greater market of the film is actually overseas (Liao, 2011).

Technically speaking, *Flowers* has fully subscribed to Zhang Pimin's interpretation of 'using foreign achievements to promote Chinese culture'. The film is seen as a weather vane for Chinese-American co-productions. Its executive producers include William Kong, the producer of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and former Universal Pictures co-chairman David Linde. With its Hollywood-style spectacles, the film is speculated to be a better chance for a Chinese film to succeed in the West. Zhang Yimou also believes the film is the most organic collaboration between the East and West and 'it will give people hope about what can be done' (Zeitchik, 2011b).

However, this formula is based on a technical interpretation of the art form and of soft power. It assumes that international popularity can be achieved through technical improvements without touching the core values it represents. The formula places great emphasis on the technical side of a film, how good a Chinese film should look and sound before it could compete with Hollywood, but avoids the critical question of what values Chinese films should represent in order to resonate with international audiences. This again reflects the lack of appreciation of the significance of shared values for a nation's soft power in China.

Just like *Forever Enthralled*, *Flowers* is another example of a prominent Chinese filmmaker being used by the state to project the Party's official ideology. Despite Zhang Yimou's denial of *Flowers*' nationalistic intention, the finished film demonstrates that its choice of values is unmistakably nationalism, and this study argues that such a value orientation has fundamentally undermined the film's international prospect.

International Reception: Anti-Japanese Propaganda

The Flowers of the War represents China's reinforced effort to fulfil its cinema's go-global ambitions and its Oscar dream. The film is China's official candidate for the Best Foreign Language category at the 84th Academy Awards, and it carries China's strongest desire for an Oscar. Some international critics even believe that Zhang Yimou was

tapped by the Chinese authorities to make a film that would travel internationally. With a US$100m budget, an A-list Hollywood star and almost half of its dialogue in English, no Chinese film has ever pitched harder for the mainstream global audiences (Tunzelmann, 2012).

Within China, *Flowers*' Oscar dream is an open secret. Some Chinese commentators charge that pleasing Uncle Sam and winning the Oscars is the film's ultimate goal. One Chinese critic observes that *Flowers*' producer Zhang Weiping has submitted applications for all 13 categories of the Academy Awards, 'as if he has paid the deposits for all of them'. Judging from the Chinese media hypes, it seems that the film's fate as China's first Oscar winner has already been sealed (Xiao, 2012).

But *Flowers* ends up as a huge international disappointment. The film fails to secure a nomination for the Oscars and its American box office intake is just $311.000, a tiny figure compared to the $54 million that Zhang's 2002 film *Hero* has grossed in the US (Tunzelmann, 2012). The film is also under attacks by Western critics who generally regard the film as anti-Japanese propaganda. Some critics even call the film an expensive, crude mix of commercial vulgarity and political propaganda (French, 2012).

One international reviewer states that with *Flowers*, Zhang mostly just proves that there is no tragedy too terrible to be turned into an operatic pageant—human suffering reduced to visual showmanship (Grierson, 2011). Another critic concludes that if Warner Bros. had made such a film back in 1942, it would have made effective anti-Japanese propaganda and probably absorbing drama in the bargain. Today, it just plays like hokum (Rohter, 2011). One American viewer comments online that

> It was the moment when the Japanese soldiers broke into a cathedral, tried to rape some Chinese schoolgirls, and a lone Chinese rifleman managed to shoot through the church's stained-glass windows, into the neck of a Japanese attacker, that it became clear to me that *The Flowers of War* is, well, propagandistic and, yes, anti-Japanese (Kaufman, 2011).

These comments suggest that contrary to Zhang Weiping's prediction, *Flowers*-style heroism, or nationalism under the cover of heroism, is not a universal language that

would allow the film to travel overseas. Internationally, this is a fatal flaw which cannot be offset by the film's engagements of a Hollywood star and the world's top production companies. Zhang Yimou's visual talent, widely recognized through his earlier films such as *Ju Dou* and *Hero*, has not helped *Flowers* either. While *Hero* is praised as 'visual poetry' by international critics (Larson, 2010), *Flowers* is regarded as a film which reduces human suffering to visual showmanship.

Flower's Heroism Vs Western Humanitarianism

Prior to *The Flowers of the* War, several Western-led co-produced films about the Second Sino-Japanese War have been produced. These include *Empire of the Sun (1987), Children of Huangshi* (2008), *John Rabe* (2009), and *Shanghai* (2010).
A key difference between *Flowers* and these films lies in the fact that humanity in Zhang's film is partial; it only applies to the Chinese Self and the Western friend, not the Japanese Other. The Japanese Other in the film largely remains as the same 'devil' as has been portrayed in Chinese propaganda films. In Western-led co-productions, however, compassion and respect are extended to all, including the Japanese enemy.

In *Children of Huangshi*, an Australia, China and Germany co-production, the English young man George Hogg is horrified when he witnesses the slaughtering of the Chinese civilians by the Japanese troops. He is almost beheaded by the Japanese for taking photos of the murder scene. Still, when two Japanese soldiers are captured, he insists that they should not be killed, claiming that he is a pacifist. This is not just an empty statement; it is a belief that dictates how Hogg treats everyone, including the Japanese troops which nearly killed him.

This sense of fraternity and compassion for all becomes the core values and the soul of the film. This genuine humanity contrasts sharply to the deep nationalistic resentment in Zhang's film. In *Flowers*, the resentment against the Japanese Other reaches its peak when all the courtesans smash mirrors on the floor, making glass knifes, and one of them swears that she will use hers to take an eye ball out of a 'little Japanese'.

The 2010 Hollywood-China co-produced film *Shanghai* is another example of genuine humanity in Western-led co-productions. The film peels away the mystery over the

murder of an American diplomat in Shanghai and gradually reveals that what appears to be a political assassination of an American spy is in fact a death cause by a triangle love. Captain Tanaka is not a cold-blooded Japanese war criminal as he seems to be, but a man who is devastated by the loss of his love over the political tensions between Japan and America and the war between Japan and China.

In the film, Chinese gangster boss Lan-Ting first treats Tanaka as a friend, and it is only when Tanaka breaks his promise and wants to arrest his wife Anna that Lan-Ting picks up his gun and shoots Tanaka. Through such a plotline, the warring nations fade into the background. The war between China and Japan, a typical subject for state-sponsored Chinese films to advocate nationalism, is turned into a painful love story, in which everyone, be it the Chinese, the American, or the Japanese, losses someone close to their heart.

Shanghai's humanitarian theme is also highlighted in two separate scenes. The first is that when the American spy Paul Soames realizes that the wounded Tanaka lying on the street is the murder of his close friend, he points his gun at Tanaka. In the rainy night, Tanaka gazes at Soames, his eyes pleading for mercy. Soames hesitates and slowly walks away. The second scene is when Soames takes Anna to a ship to flee Shanghai. Just before their boarding, they find Tanaka standing at the check point. Tanaka's eyes lock with Soames' again. This time it is Soames who is pleading for Tanaka's mercy. Tanaka gazes at Soames furiously, but instead of arresting them, he reluctantly turns his head sideways.

Both scenes show basic human compassion for one's national and personal enemy. In *Flowers,* however, this universal humanity is clearly absent. What *Flowers* cherishes is not mercy for all, but heroism and nationalism against the nation's enemy. Instead of showing mercy for the Japanese Other, the film celebrates the violent eliminations of the enemy through self-sacrificing bombing of a Japanese tank, shooting through a Japanese soldier in the neck, and swearing to take an eye ball out of a Japanese 'devil'.

The most noticeable contrast between *Flowers* and the two Western-led co-productions are their differences in values. While *Flowers* focuses on 'our' heroic

sacrifices to fight against the Japanese 'devils', and to save fellow Chinese, *Children of Huangshi* and *Shanghai* project compassion and mercy for both sides, including the enemy when they are most vulnerable. These Western-led co-productions advocate genuine and undiscriminating humanity for all, and in so doing, take a higher moral ground.

The aim of such universal humanity is not to showcase who has been the hero during the war, but to expose the deep trauma the war has inflicted on all involved. To support its humanitarian values, both films have presented glimpses of humanity between enemies, affirming that it is such humanity that has connected people in the darkest moments in history and will continue to guide them into the future. This quintessential humanitarianism, not *Flowers*-style nationalism, is more likely a universal language that would allow a film to travel, to touch international audiences.

Identities: Flowers Vs Western-led Co-productions

The contrasting values between *Flowers*' and the Western-led co-productions lead to further question about how *Flowers*' has projected the national identities of the Chinese Self and foreign Others, and how these identities differ from those portrayed in relevant Western-led co-productions.

Transformed Self: From Servant to Master and Hero

Flowers' representation of the Chinese Self is in sharp contrast to those in Western-led co-productions about the War. In Steven Spielberg's 1987 *Empire of the Sun,* Shanghai is a primitive land and the Chinese are dubious servants at home, dirty beggars and a chaotic mass on the street. The film about a British schoolboy Jamie Graham surviving the Japanese occupied Shanghai on his own is shot entirely from Jamie's prospective.

His encounters with the locals are limited and unflattering. A Chinese woman who used to follow Jamie around in the garden and bow to his parents shows her true colour as soon as Jamie's parents leave Shanghai. When Jamie finds her stealing their furniture and confronts her, the servant steps forward, looks Jamie into his eyes and slaps him across his face. This slap symbolises *Empire*'s orientalist gaze towards the Chinese

Other. It shows that Jamie and his parents are the masters and the Chinese are their primitive servants.

This savage image of the Chinese continues in *Children of Huangshi* (2008), an Australian, Chinese and German co-production. The film tells the story of an Oxford-educated young man George Hogg, who sacrifices his own life to save 60 Chinese orphans during the War. The Chinese orphans first appear on the screen as lice-ridden, vicious little monsters. Unhappy with Hogg's arrival, they encircle him at night and beat him up with bamboo sticks.

A similar image re-emerges in *John Rabe*, a 2009 Germany-China co-production about the Nanjing Massacre. The film is about John Rabe, a China-based German businessman, leading the local Western community to establish a Nanking Safety Zone which saved 200,000 Chinese civilians during Nanjing Massacre. In the film, the Chinese are portrayed as clumsy servants, fleeing masses, and passive victims of the war. The film shows them lowering their heads when their German boss walking pass before the war; when the war breaks out, they flee into their German factory seeking Rabe's protection. The Chinese soldiers are war prisoners who are in no position to resist the Japanese troops and have to face mass murder or being shot in their hospital beds.

Rabe's driver Chang is an illuminating example of the servant image of the local Chinese. Early in the film, Chang rushes into his boss' home when Rabe is just about to kiss his wife. 'How many times have I told you to knock on the door before you enter?', Rabe raises his voice. He then orders Chang to leave the room and knock on the door several times before he is finally allowed back in. 'How could there be such stupid people in the world!', Rabe complains to his wife. When Chang re-enters, Rabe realises that Chang has failed to pass on an important telephone call: 'What do you have your head for?' Rabe asks in frustration, to which Chang replies in German: 'To stop the rain drop into my throat'. This scene clearly depicts Chang as a clumsy Chinese servant of his frustrated colonial master.

Chang's next appearance is in the courtyard of the Japanese headquarter. As Rabe meets the Japanese general, Chang waits outside, smoking and pacing around his car.

Annoyed by Chang's casual manner, a passing Japanese officer tells Chang to stay in the car. Chang is offended by the Japanese's stern voice and fails to respond respectfully. The film's final glimpse through a cracked fence of Chang is his beheading by the Japanese troops. The film then shows a Japanese officer questioning Rabe's demand of 20 Chinese soldiers as compensation. 'Do you really think one Chinese driver who can speak German is worth 20 Chinese men?', asks the Japanese officer. The scene further displays the lack of dignity of Chinese during the war and the worthlessness of Chinese lives at the time.

The representation of national identity during Nanjing Massacre, one of the most traumatic pages in modern Chinese history, has significant meaning for China. It is estimated that around 300,000 Chinese civilians and war prisoners were slaughtered during the massacre. The topic hence evokes deep emotional connections among Chinese audiences and their collective feeling for the nation and national identity. The different national identities represented in the three films about the massacre illustrate the essential roles of history in national identity formation: historical narratives are revised, reaffirmed, blocked and created to validate certain identity at the expenses of the others (Guo, 2010, p.28).

Zhang Yimou's *Flowers* demonstrates how the narrative of the history can be revised and created to validate and institutionalise certain identities of both the Chinese Self and foreign Others. It also showcases China's growing power in the production process, proving that the Chinese side is now making more decisions for co-productions (Tang, 2011).

The film's representations of 'us' and 'them' differ considerably from the previous Western-led co-production films about the war. In *Flowers*, the Chinese are no longer dubious and clumsy servants of their Western masters, nor passive victims of the War. Instead, they become the masters of their own destiny and courageous, self-sacrificing heroes against the Japanese aggressors. The film's intention to reconstruct national identity and the Chinese state's endorsement of such an objective is confirmed by the film's director.

During a media interview soon after the film's national release, Zhang Yimou admits that although usually films about foreigners, religions and the World War II are sensitive topics discouraged by the state, *Flowers* has received the government's full support because it is about what kind of people 'we' are and what sacrifice 'we' are willing to make for others. The state's endorsement of the film is such that three days after it received national screening licence, the National Film Bauera decided that the film would be China's official entry for the Best Foreign Film of the 84th Academy Awards (Zhang, 2011).

With regard to how the film should portray what kind of people 'we' are, *Flowers*' producer Zhang Weiping also has his own vision. During a media interview, he explains his thinking behind the film's adaption of Yan Geling's novel.

> When I first read the novel I found that it lacked in scope and the war was missing. To turn it into a film, the story must show the courage of our people and demonstrate that we Chinese are not all that hopeless…. Four years later, after many drafts, we incorporate the war into the script and the resistance against the Japanese becomes a highlight of the adaptation (Liao, 2011).

Zhang Weiping's intention to represent the heroic and capable Chinese Self during the war is beyond doubt. It explains why the film dedicates substantial screen time to street battle scenes where Chinese soldiers wear American-style helmets, hide behind broken walls and shoot Japanese soldiers with great accuracy. The film's portrayal of the courageous Self reaches its climax when a handful of Chinese soldiers run towards a Japanese tank in a vertical line, using their own bodies as shields to allow the soldiers behind him to get closer to the tank, until the last soldier uses the hand grenades wrapped around his chest to blow up the tank. This violent scene uses the world's top production teams to reaffirm the film's nationalist theme.

Flowers' depictions of the courageous Chinese Self also differ from those in Lu Chuan's film *City of Life and Death*. In Lu's film, facing death, Lieutenant Lu Jianxiong stands up, his face showing a quiet sense of dignity. In Zhang's film, however, to further highlight the courageous Chinese Self, this inner strength is magnified into a flamboyant heroism and Major Li becomes a highly capable rifleman who single-handedly fights against the

Japanese troops till the bitter end. This change reflects the important shift in China's self identity. It indicates China's desire to project a stronger, smarter and braver version of the Chinese Self during the war to match the preferred national image of the rising China.

The lead Chinese character Yu Mo embodies the transformed Chinese Self too. She is no longer the voiceless and dubious servant in *Empire of the Sun,* nor is she a clumsy driver and passive victim of the war in *John Rabe*. Instead, she becomes a proud, sophisticated and courageous heroine. She is capable of manoeuvring with an American man and leading a group of courtesans to sacrifice themselves to save some schoolgirls. She becomes the best embodiment of the film's declared objective, of demonstrating what kind of people 'we' are and what sacrifice 'we' are willing to make for others (or more precisely, other Chinese).

The fact *Flowers* portrays a fallen woman as a courageous heroine also shows the film's tolerance towards the marginalised groups within the Chinese Self. Yu Mo presents herself with grace, pride and dignity. She speaks fluent English, the new symbol of her worldliness and sophistication. She knows what she wants and how to get it. Soon after arriving in the church, she approaches the American drifter John Miller, asking him to take her and her friends out of the church to safety. Facing the drifter, she even shows a sense of superiority as she teases him, in English: 'I know your face is a way out of here. Why else would I flirt with you?'

Yu Mo also embodies courage and self-sacrifice. She is the first woman who offers to sacrifice her own body to replace the convent girl to be the Japanese troops' comfort women. She encourages her other 'sisters' to follow her steps. Before they leave, they all smash mirrors to the floor, turning the broken mirror into glass knives and hide them in their gowns. Although the film does not show their confrontation with the Japanese, the smashing of the mirror and the hiding of the glass knives bring to its climax their courage, their sacrifice, their resolve to fight the Japanese till the bitter end, and the transformation of the Chinese Self.

The convent schoolgirls further confirm such transformed self-identity. The film begins with the narration of a convent girl Shujuan. These girls are much more presentable and dignified than the orphans in *Children of Huangshi*. Facing the prospect of being raped by the Japanese, they climb up the church roof, holding hands, ready to jump off the building together to defend their honour.

All the same, there is a serious downside to *Flowers*' glorified Chinese Self. When Major Li hides in a paper shop, blows up the approaching Japanese soldiers and himself, he sends colourful papers up in the air… Instead of portraying the terror of Nanjing Massacre, the film celebrates the heroic Chinese Self with a visual feast. Such celebration substantially reduces the film's ability to truthfully reflect the horror of Nanjing Massacre, and to condemn its horrendous crime against humanity.

A Twisted West: A Drunken American Hero

In Western-led co-production films, the central character and heroes are Westerners. From the *Empire of the Sun (1987)* to *Painted Veil* (2006), *Children of Huangshi* (2008), *John Rabe* (2009), the Western heroes have endured much hardship in the distant land, and many have devoted their own lives to save the Chinese from plague, hunger and the danger of war.

In *Painted Veil,* Shanghai-based British bacteriologist Walter Fane volunteers to go to a remote Chinese village to treat victims of a cholera epidemic sweeping through the area. He finally gets the epidemic under control but dies a painful death himself. In *Children and Huangshi,* George Hogg gives up his comfortably lifestyles in London and sacrifices his own life to care for the 60 Chinese orphans during the Sino-Japanese War. In *John Rabe*, it is a handful of Westerners led by Rabe who saved 200,000 Chinese civilians from the slaughtering of the Nanjing Massacre.

In *Flowers*, however, the table is turned. The Chinese become the maters of their own destinies while the selfless and courageous Western heroes are replaced by a drunken, greedy and undignified American drifter John Miller. Early in the film, John sneaks into the cathedral, goes through a priest's drawers searching for money and drinks. He then sits on the church's window, blowing whistles to the group of Chinese prostitutes as

they enter the church. Soon afterwards, we see him flirting with these women while indulging himself on the red wine stored in the church's cellar.

John Miller no longer holds higher moral ground. He admits that 'I am not a priest. I stay here because I was looking for your cash.' His colourfully-dressed new companies think little of him. One woman teases him of being a womaniser while another adds: 'Haven't you heard? Western men with a beard would take off their pants anytime.' The American drifter's lust for Yu Mo, the prettiest and smartest in the group, is first met with reluctance and contempt. When John tries to throw his drunken body onto her, she responds with disgust:

> You are such a fool. If it wasn't for your white face, I won't even bother to glance at you from the corner of my eyes. You think I would fall for you? Get lost!

Out of her disgust, Yu Mo then slaps John Miller across his face. This slap is an extension of the anti-imperialist expressions in earlier Chinese films – Mrs A-Kuan's slapping of the English opium trader in *Lin Zexun* (1959) and the young singer Rong Er's stabbing of a British officer in *The Opium War* (1997). It symbolises the deep-seated resentments towards the West and its aggressions towards China in modern history. It also signals *Flowers*' desire to represent the rising Chinese Self from the voiceless servant and passive war victim to the new master in Sino-Western co-production films.

However, apart from the century-old resentment, *Flowers* paradoxically adds a new sense of awe and desire towards the West. This awe is embodied in John Miller's dramatic transformation from a hopeless drunk to a courageous hero. Witnessing Japanese soldiers raping the convent girls, John Miller steps out of the wardrobe where he hides himself, holds a giant red cross banner and shouts: 'Stop! This is the house of the Lord. You are breaking the law of the man and the Lord. I command you in the name of the father to leave now!'

The American drifter slapped by Yu Mo the night before suddenly becomes a hero who uses his Western Lord to protect the Chinese. It is as if early in the film, John Miller is another Western character in an anti-imperialist Chinese film, and yet from this point on, this Western character suddenly turns from a clown into a hero, joining his heroic peers in Western-led co-productions to save the helpless local Chinese.

John Miller's magical transformation draws Yu Mo's attention who praises him: 'Even though you were a drunken bastard yesterday, what you did today makes you a hero.' This new heroic image is a substantial upgrade of the image of the West in previous Chinese films. Since then, he is certainly no longer an 'American devil' in the Chinese Korean War films in Mao's era, nor an American pilot rescued by the Communist troops in *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* (1999), nor a voiceless applauding western audience in *Forever Enthralled* (2008).

Nevertheless, the film's praise of the West is only half-hearted. It only allows John Miller to be a half hero, an odd combination of a villain and a hero. Through this contradictory character, 'we' the Chinse Self are given the opportunity to slap the big-nosed 'devil' first, then forgive him, adore him and embrace him as 'our' hero. The film even gives this split character a physical transformation. When he is a 'drunken bastard', he has a beard and wears untidy clothing; when he becomes a respected hero, he is clean-shaved and wears a new priest gown.

Yet, even with a transformed and clean-shaved American hero, *Flowers* fails to impress the American reviewers and audience. Some critics find the film's attempt to place a dubious American character among a group of desperate Chinese women unconvincing. Larry Rohter feels that John Miller's manner of speaking sounds silly and outdated. He is indeed a 'jerk' when he starts raiding the sanctuary's wine stash and behaves selfishly in every instance. There could be various motives behind portraying the white guy as a money-grubbing, unintelligent and uncouth mercenary...and neither the script nor the actor provides the John Miller character with any back story, real or invented (Rohter, 2011).

Intriguingly, many Chinese critics believe the film has tried too hard to please the West. Xiao Ying states that *Flowers'* depiction of an American drifter risking his life to save Chinese women is the film's attempt to jump from 'nationalism' to 'internationalism'. He explains the shift as Zhang Yimou and his Oscar-driven team's 2011 Christmas present for Uncle Sam (Xiao, 2012).

The contrast between Rohter's suspicions of the film's motive behind its negative portrayal of the American and Xiao's disappointment in the film's glorification of the Western Other is highly illuminating. It discloses the film's complex feelings towards the West – the mix of despise and awe, resentment and admiration. Depicting John Miller as a jerk first allows the film to express its disgust towards the imperialist West; this American drifter's transformation then demonstrates the film's acceptance and awe for the Western Other, paving the way for the film's go-global journey.

It seems that *Flowers*' depictions of John Miller are designed to please both local and western audiences. In reality, however, John Miller's dubious past and his later role as the saviour of the Chinese have alienated critics on both sides. The negative responses to the film's mixed depictions of the West highlight the challenges China's cinema going-global project faces. Chinese films cannot use artificially created Western Other to please everyone. *Flowers'* failed attempt to use a complex and contradictory American character to attract both local and western audiences offers a valuable lesson for future Chinese filmmakers.

Apart from turning John Miller into an ally of China's anti-Japanese nationalism, *Flowers* also assigns him to be the admirer of the transformed Chinese Self. In a lengthy monologue, he tells the convent girls who the Chinese courtesans really are:

> 'These women are formidable. They are brave, exquisite, and skilful. They have characters like nobody I've ever met. The Japanese are amateurs; these women are professionals. They love and hate just like us. Maybe they know more about it than any of us…These women have strength and beauty that will never die.'

This is an intriguing example of how the film tells the world who 'we' really are. The statement is a further extension of the official Occidentalism in Chen Kaige's film *Forever Enthralled.* In *Forever*, the West is only some voiceless white audiences applauding 'us' under the stage. In *Flowers*, the voiceless Western Other has become a vocal admirer of 'us' who openly endorses our courage, strength and beauty. He acknowledges 'our' new identity as 'their' equals, or maybe even more than equal, given 'we' may know more about love and hate than anyone else.

Despite John Miller's flattering comments about 'us', some Chinese critics still believe that *Flowers* has placed the Western Other above the Chinese Self because it portrays the West as the land of promise and the Western God is called upon to save 'us' at the time of crisis. The film's awe for the West is also reflected in its westernised visual images and the fact Yu Mo's confidence is not rooted in her Chinese upbringing but the fact she went to a church school where she learned English and gained her airs and grace of the 'Queen of England'. Although compared to the Western-led co-production films, *Flowers* has given the voiceless Chinese characters a voice, ironically, the film's leading Chinese voice takes enormous pride in her ability to speak English, and her association with the West.

Japanese Other: A Powerless Man among Vicious 'Devils'

The film's depiction of the Japanese Other is a mixture of the old 'Japanese devils' and an isolated human face. In the opening scene, after shooting Chinese civilians hiding behind a stack of straws, three Japanese soldiers thrash their bayonets into the stack repeatedly while yelling in Japanese 'Go to Hell!' This scene sets the tone for the film's devilish portrayal of the Japanese Other.

Later, a group of Japanese soldiers break into the church where John Miller and the Chinese women are hiding. When they find the convent girls, a soldier shouts in Japanese: 'Come up here, we've got virgins. Hurry!' The soldiers then run around the church, chasing the schoolgirls, catch them, drag them on the floor, up the stairs, and violently rape them… When John Miller holds a giant Red Cross banner and tries to stop them, a Japanese solider cuts the banner off his hands and shouts in Japanese: 'I'll eat you up!' He yells as he points his bayonet at John, his face dirty, just like a devil.

This savage image of the Japanese Other is a clear departure from the key Japanese character in Lu Chuang's 2009 film *City of Life and Death.* Lu's film opens with Japanese soldier Sergeant Kadokawa slowly opens his eyes under the sun. Facing the Nanking city walls, he holds his rifle nervously. Later, when he shoots through a closed door in a church and a stack of Chinese women's bodies fall out, he is stunned, and has to be

dragged away by his fellow soldiers. Shot mainly from Kakogawa's perspective, the film exposes a Japanese soldier's own fear, vulnerability and trauma during the war.

If Lu's 2009 film about the Nanking Massacre attempts to humanise the Japanese 'devils' by venturing into the inner world of a Japanese soldier, *Flowers* has gone backwards and pushed the Japanese back into the stereotype of the savage Other. The film's demonised otherness reaches its climax when a group of Japanese soldiers tie a Chinese woman onto a chair, gang rape her, and when she bites a soldier's ear, the solider thrashes a bayonet into her body, sending blood splashing in the air…

These sensationalised visuals make the film's attempt to introduce a civilised Japanese officer Colonel Hasegawa totally unconvincing. In the film, Hasegawa first comes to the church to apology for the Japanese soldiers' misconduct; he even plays the organ and sings a Japanese folk song. Later, however, Hasegawa returns to deliver an order that all convent girls must join a party to entertain Japanese officers. When John Miller asks whether Hasegawa has posted guards to protect the girls just for this celebration, Hasegawa walks away without another word.

Compared to Chinese propaganda films about the war, the Hasegawa character embodies *Flowers*' limited attempt to humanise the Japanese 'devil'. This cautious attempt reflects Zhang Yimou's claim that what the film intends to project is not nationalism but common humanity. However, the film's overall representations of the Japanese Other contradict such a claim; the film's demonised otherness also contrasts sharply against how the Western-led co-productions have portrayed the Japanese.

In the German-Chinese co-production *John Rabe*, Japanese officer Major Ose is reluctant to kill Chinese war prisoners. When Prince Yasuhiko Asaka presses him to execute his order, Ose is shaken by the mass murder scene when hundreds of captured Chinese soldiers are slaughtered by a Japanese machine gun. When he finds Prince Yasuhiko Asaka intends to destroy the Nanjing Safety Zone, Ose leaks the information to the Safety Zone organising committee. Unlike Hasegawa who only appears to be more civilised, Ose's humanity prompts him to take action against his own people to prevent further loss of innocent lives.

In the 2010 US-China co-production film *Shanghai,* Captain Tanaka is presented as a courteous and sophisticated Japanese officer. Despite his hunt for anti-Japanese Chinese resistant elements, the film gradually reveals him as a man who is deeply in love with a Japanese woman seduced by an American spy and kidnapped by Chinese resistant fighters. Such a story transcends the Japanese Other from the stereotyped war criminal to a victim of the war, and a carrier of the film's anti-war message.

Conclusion

Following the trajectory of Sino-Western co-production films, the chapter observes that *The Flowers of the War* showcases China's rise from a site assistant for western directors to a content creator in the transnational co-production process. This rise reflects China's desire to produce its own go-global films and to show the world a stronger and more sophisticated national image.

Driven by such a desire, *Flowers* repositions China's self identity against the Western Other. In Western-led co-production films about the Sino-Japanese War, the West is the centre, the gazer and the saviour of the Chinese. In *Flowers*, however, the Chinese Self takes the centre stage and becomes the gazer and the hero themselves. In the meantime, the Western Other becomes flawed. He is despised by the Chinese first before his final transformation into a hero.

The film is also a product of the state's technical-orientated formula designed to boost China's cinema going-global plan. It believes that China should mobilise best international resources, including Hollywood stars, to enhance Chinese films' global appeal. The proposed formula avoids the critical question of what values China-led co-production films should uphold. The lack of moral clarity of China's cinema going-global aspirations is reflected in the contracting intentions declared by *Flowers*' director and producer. What the film ends up projecting is not humanity as Zhang Yimou has claimed, but the CCP's nationalist ideology.

This chapter argues that *Flowers'* value orientation sets it apart from Western-led co-production films about the war and fundamentally undermined the film's international

prospect. In the Western-led co-productions, human compassion applies to all, including the Japanese enemy. In *Flowers,* however, humanity is limited to the Chinese Self, and may be extended to the West, but not to the Japanese Other. If anything, the film has used technically-enhanced special effects to highlight the savage nature of the Japanese 'devils' to arouse nationalistic resentment against the Japanese Other, the No.1 remaining target of China's state-sponsored nationalist ideology.

The film is subsequently criticised by many western critics as a crude mixture of commercial vulgarity and political propaganda. This proves that China's desire to take control of co-production process, to project a more positive national image on the global stage cannot be built on nationalism.

In an attempt to appeal to both local and western audiences, *Flowers* also re-imagines the West as a mixture of villain and saviour. But this odd compromise has offended critics on both sides. The fact John Miller's transformation is designed to support the film's nationalist theme is likely to further alienate western audiences. This suggests that the lack of shared values is still a key weakness of China's quest for soft power and this weakness is yet to be fully acknowledged by the Chinese state and filmmakers.

Flowers' international failure reflects the significant challenge China's cinema going-global project faces when it strives to project positive national image while upholding the CCP's nationalist agenda. It suggests that China's cinema's go-global plan cannot rely on a technical formula; China needs to recognise the profound unpopularity of nationalism on the global stage and learn to embrace universal values.

Steeped in the political function imposed on PRC films, *Flowers* demonstrates that it cannot represent the Japanese enemy in the same manner as those Western-led co-production films about the war. And yet for western audiences, the film's burning nationalistic hatred of the Japanese clashes with the humanitarian values of compassion for all. How to overcome the domestic political barrier and to find the common moral ground between domestic and international audiences thus present the most fundamental challenge for Chinese filmmakers who are charged with the responsibility of 'going global' and enhancing China's soft power through cinema.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RESTAGING WARS: CHINA VS HOLLYWOOD

Chapter Eight undertakes comparative study between Feng Xiaogang's war film *Assemble* (2007) and Clint Eastwood's war epic *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). It also compares several Chinese films about the Sino-Japanese War with two Hollywood films about America's war with Japan – *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006). Aiming to identify fundamental differences between Chinese and Hollywood war films, this chapter examines these films' contrasting choices of values and their distinct representations of national identities.

Contrasting Values: Heroes and the States

Feng Xiaogang's 2007 war epic *Assembly (ji jie hao)* was both critically acclaimed and a box office winner in China. It won the 2008 China's Hundred Flowers Awards and the 2009 Golden Rooster Awards for Best Film and was also nominated for Best Film at the 45th Golden Horse Awards in Taiwan. The film's attempt to introduce an alternative hero and to display certain detachment from the state makes it an ideal case for a comparative study with Clint Eastwood's award-winning film *Flags of Our Fathers*.

Alternative Heroes Supporting Different Values

Both *Assembly* and *Flags of Our Fathers* feature alternative war heroes. In *Assembly,* Capitan Gu Zidi is not an ordinary Chinese war hero but a free-spirited, down-to-earth and unpretentious one. He never talks like a typical Chinese hero and he is not afraid of breaking rules set by the Party. In *Flags,* US Marine Ira Hayes, who is held as a national hero during the WWII, resents the war and the title of war hero.

The alternative hero in *Assembly* separates the film from average PRC war films. Its effort to create a different hero is evident from the beginning. It starts with a fierce battle between Gu's Ninth Company of the CCP's army and Nationalist soldiers during the Civil War. When a Communist soldier is wounded, he does not pretend to be brave and self-less as often seen in PRC war films; instead, he yells: 'I am hit, save me!'

Captain Gu is not an ordinary commander either. Witnessing the heavy casualties of his troop and the brutal death of his political officer, Gu orders the shooting of the surrendering KMT prisoners. He is subsequently imprisoned for three days where he befriends his cellmate, a bookish army teacher Wang Jincun who faces military discipline after he pissed in his pants in battlefield. Hearing Wang's embarrassing story, Gu assures him:

> 'Well, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Who is not afraid of death? With bullets flying over your head, grenades exploding under your legs, even a god would pee in his pants!'

For a PRC war film, this is a bold statement. It suggests that the film has turned away from the traditional preaching of heroism, courage and self-less sacrifice in Chinese war films. To challenge this tradition, Feng's film openly acknowledges human's natural reaction to the brutality of war. The film's introduction of an alternative hero and its depictions of the tension between the hero and the state is an unusual display of political boldness.

According to Feng Xiaogang, *Assembly* is inspired by Steven Spielberg's 1998 film *Saving Private Ryan*.

> 'Chinese war films tend to ignore human nature and portray fearless heroes. *Assembly* intends to reflect such human nature' (Xinhua Community, 2007).

Although Feng's film acknowledges human reactions to wars through Gu's empathy for the terrified army teacher, the film has failed to probe further to question Gu's sacrifice for the state. This brings to light a fundamental difference between *Assembly* and *Flags* – their different representations of values.

Anti-war is often a key message in contemporary Hollywood war films. *Flags of Our Fathers* is no exception. Surrounding the battle of Iwo Jima, the film reminds us of the cruelty of war and the irreversible damage the cruelty could do to us, even when the war is a just war between the US and Japan.

The film tells the story of the Battle of Iwo Jima, a brutal conflict between American and Japanese troops in the Pacific Island of Iwo Jima towards the end of the WWII. It

involves five American Marines and one Navy Corpsman who raised two American flags on Iwo Jima, and the aftereffects of that event on their lives.

Early in the film, an elderly American veteran reflects on the war, not with pride, but with remorse:

> What we see and do during the war, the cruelty is unbelievable. Most people I know don't want to talk about it and they certainly don't think themselves as heroes.

The comments project a dramatically different image of wars and war heroes than most Chinese war films. In *Flags*, America's victory over Japan is no longer a source of pride but a fountain of traumatic memories for American veterans. The film shows that after the photo of several US soldiers planting an American flag in Iwo Jima is published in the US, three servicemen – Ira Hayes, Rene Gagnon, and John 'Doc' Bradley – are brought home by the US government to help raising money for the war. As they tour the country, memories flashback, taking them back to the merciless battleground of Iwo Jima.

When they reach Washington, the three soldiers meet Bud Gerber of the Treasury Department. Doc notices that Hank's mother is wrongly placed on the list of mothers of the dead flag raisers; Ira calls the whole thing a farce. An annoyed Bud then confesses that if the bond drive fails, the US will have to abandon the Pacific and their sacrifices will be for nothing. The three men give in. The bond drive begins and the three flag raisers are sent around the country to give speeches.

Haunted by memories of the war, Ira gets drunk frequently and throws up in front of the commandant of the Marine Corps. Before he is sent back to the Pacific, Ira confesses that he cannot stand being called a hero. When the war ends, Ira hitchhikes to Texas and tells Harlon's father that Harlon was at the base of the flag in the famous photograph. Several years later, Ira dies of excessive drinking.

With its revelation of the fatal damage that the war has inflicted on Ira, the film declares that this is not a nationalistic film, but one that is critical of both the war and the state's war machines. Through flashback memories, the film takes its audience to

the battleground of Iwo Jima, to share the Marines' experience, to feel how the war has shaken their humanity.

One scene describes that when a Japanese solider jumps into the American trench, US Marine John 'Doc' Bradley stabs the Japanese in his chest. The Japanese man gasps, struggling to draw the last few breaths, before he finally stops breathing, his eyes still remain open. Such a disturbing scene of a man dying in front of Doc, as a result of his action, shocks Doc and evokes the basic humanity within the audience.

Through this scene, the film acknowledges that the Japanese Other as fellow human beings. The purpose of the film is, therefore, not to provoke nationalistic hatred against the former enemy but to illustrate the damage of war to 'our' humanity and to project humanitarian values.

In *Assembly,* however, the unpretentious hero Gu Zidi has never questioned the meanings of the wars, nor appreciated the humanity of his enemy. His distance from the war and the state is measured and controlled. His fresh approach towards the war stops at his acknowledgement of the horror of war, his sympathy for his terrified fellow soldier, not the irreversible damage the war has imposed on 'us', nor our reactions towards the suffering of the enemy. The film draws on Hollywood-style visual spectacles to emphasise the violence of the war, but it never introduces a close shot of a wounded or a dying enemy.

In addition, Captain Gu's connection with the state offers valuable insight into the film's value orientation. Gu's journey of tension and final reconciliation with the Party also forms sharp contrast to Ira's drifting away from the US administration. The following section will compare these two films, focusing on their protagonists' contrasting connections with the states.

Reconciliation with the CCP Vs Separation from the US State

Gu Zidi's evolving relationship with the Party is central to *Assembly*'s plotline and its value representation. Early in the film, Gu Zidi is locked up by the Communist army for

killing surrendering KMT soldiers. This punishment drives the first wedge between Gu and the Party. Unhappy with the treatment, Gu turns quiet and refuses to eat.

Later on, the division between Gu and the Party deepens. After Gu's release, he is ordered to lead the 47 men of his company, including the army teacher, to defend their battalion and not to retreat until they hear the bugle call for assembly. When facing the prospect of being completely wiped out, several Gu's remaining men mention that they have heard the bugle call and ask Gu to order the retreat. But duty-bound Gu resolves to stay and ends up as the only survivor.

Gu suspects that his men were right and he feels guilty for missing the bungle call. This sense of guilt is further compounded by the fact that the remains of his 47 lost brothers are missing, and instead of receiving the full honors of war heroes as they deserve, these men are treated as 'missing in action'. Outraged by the injustice, Gu embarks on an arduous journey to find the remains of his lost men.

Gu's anger over the lack of recognition of his men serves as another wedge between Gu and the state. This sense of detachment is further affirmed by Gu's close friend who discourages his search of the lost men and warns him about the distance between them as individuals and the state. 'Even if we think a world of ourselves, we are just drops in a river. Who cares where we came from?' The seemingly low key comment contradicts the orthodox political parameters in most PRC war films that the Party always represents the interests of the people, and the Party and the people are inseparable.

The division between Gu and the state reaches its climax when a Party official repeatedly asks Gu about his past, why he was found in KMT's uniform in the battlefield in 1948, what was really on his mind when he put on the enemy's uniform. He also warns Gu that 'It is our duty to review our carders and the Party hopes you take these questions seriously.' 'Fuck you!' Gu shouts. When he is further provoked, Gu then throws a chair towards the stern-faced Party man.

Such daring display of anti-establishment is rare in PRC films. For this reason, the film is praised by a western critic for 'eschewing the customary patriotic rhetoric in China'

with its subject of friendship, respect for individuals, and the quest for justice and historic truth (French, 2008).

Years later, Gu finally realizes that his entire company was deliberately sacrificed in order to save their battalion. The revelation infuriates Gu, he yells:

> 'What? You were afraid of being wiped out. What about us? What about the brothers of our Ninth Company?'

Gu's outrage is the film's final attempt to separate 'us', the ordinary people, from 'them', the Chinese army and the Party. Up to this point, Gu and his 47 men are 'outsiders' who have been unfairly treated by the Party. Gu's fury towards the army's decision to sacrifice his men is the film's strongest and last attempt to separate Gu from the state.

However, as an international critic points out, after all, this is a PRC film which means it cannot be critical of the government or its past unless the filmmaker wants to be banned and the film relegated to dusty warehouse (Kozo, 2007). Towards the end of the film, Gu and his lost men are brought back into the system as 'insiders'. All of Gu's wishes are fulfilled. The remains of the lost men are found and the film ends with Gu and his 47 men being honored as 'revolutionary heroes' and awarded the Medal of Valor of the People's Republic. A formal military burial is performed to commemorate these heroes.

Through this ending, Gu and his 47 men reconcile their differences with the state and are remolded into old Chinese war heroes. The film's early attempt to distance the hero from the state is reverted; the hero is tied up with the state again. A war film that displays early signs of political courage ends up as yet another PRC war film that celebrates sacrifice for the state.

According to a Chinese media report, *Assembly*'s happy ending is not Feng's personal choice. Even during the shooting, Feng still struggled with the ending. He commented that although the film could easily have a happy ending where Gu finds justice for his lost brothers, and such an ending may be more acceptable to the audience (and the

state), for a film director, 'it is not believable' (Sohu, 2007). What Feng has not and cannot openly spell out is the political boundaries set by the state's film censors.

As a PRC film, *Assembly*'s respect for individuals and its quest for justice have their limits. In spite of Gu's early discontent over the unacknowledged sacrifice of his 47 men and the chair he throws at the stern-faced Party official, towards the end, the film takes a dramatic turn and suddenly the lost men's sacrifices are justified, the state remains unchallenged and even is praised for finally honoring its heroes.

Captain Gu begins as a spirited individual who cares more about his men than the rules imposed on him by the state, but ends up as just another patriotic hero whose quest for justice settles well within the CCP's political boundaries and stops at the basic level of fighting for the missing titles of the heroes. No matter how daring Gu's words and actions may appear to be, in the end, his tension with the state is fully dissolved and Gu's loyalty to the Party is secured.

Gu's reconciliation with the CCP contrasts sharply against Ira's drifting away from the US establishment in *Flags*. In *Assembly,* hero Gu is first punished, suspected and scarified by the state. But in the end, the tension and division are dissolved and the free-spirited hero turns out to be neither anti-state nor anti-war. In *Flags,* however, the three US marines are first introduced as war heroes. They are brought back from the battlefield, showered with honour and pubic attentions. But haunted by the war, they begin to distance themselves from the hero title, the war, and the state's war machine.

Among the three Marines, Ira Hays' reaction to the war is dramatically different from that of Captain Gu. While Gu wants his lost men to be recognized as heroes, Ira cannot stand being called a hero because 'all I did was try not to get shot'. He is disgusted by the fact he has been used by the US government as a patriotic propaganda machine to generate money to keep the war going. Although he has left Iwo Jima, the brutality of the war never stops haunting him, and the war has broken his spirit and ruined his life.

Another US servicemen Doc also reflects cynically about his 'hero' title in his old age.

> ‘All your friends are dying. It’s hard enough to be called a hero for saving someone’s life, but for putting up a pole (of a flag)? … The whole thing (the tour) was a fuss created to sell hope to the nation and to generate money to keep the war going.’

If Captain Gu’s central quest is about finding out what happened to that retreat order of the bungle call and why his lost brothers have not been properly recognized by the state, Ira and Doc’s concerns are the opposite. They have been showered by the American government with the honor and the fame of a war hero but find the hero title disgusting. They feel they have been used by the state, to feed a war that has permanently damaged them.

Clint Eastwood’s film has gone well beyond Feng Xiaogang’s declared intention of breaking the stereotyped heroes in Chinese war films and portraying human reaction towards war. Instead of just describing the fear of war, *Flags* has presented American servicemen’s critical reflection on the war and the state’s war propaganda machine. The film ends on that reflective tone whilst in *Assembly,* the tension between the state and the hero is completely dissolved when Gu and his 47 men are finally recognized as ‘revolutionary heroes’.

In *Flags*, the separation between the state, the war and the heroes is maintained throughout the film. After the war, Harlon’s mum remains bitter about the loss of her son. The film hints that she never believes in the state’s patriotic propaganda. After losing her son, she cannot forgive her husband for encouraging Harlon to join the war.

> ‘He would be alive and sitting right here if it wasn’t for you. You think about that every time you look at his picture Ed!’

In *Assembly*, that bitterness over the loss of a family member is much milder. The film shows that after the Korean War, a Chinese farmer complains to Captain Gu that his brother is killed in the war but the official verdict says he has been missing in action. When Gu replies that whatever it is, you cannot bring your brother back, the farmer replies:

> ‘Of course there is a big difference. The families of heroes get 700 *jin* of mullet (as compensation), but the families of those mission in action only receive 200 *jin*!’

The farmer's remark reduces his grief over the irreversible loss of his brother to a mere dissatisfaction with the compensation the family receives. Similarly, the film shows the widow of the army teacher searches for the reason of her husband's death because people in her hometown gossiped that he was shot by the CCP's own army. As a result, the army teacher's mother died in shame.

With such reduced quests, *Assembly* seems to suggest that the Chinese families who lost their loved ones to wars care more about the financial compensation they receive or the titles of their lost families. They do not share American families' doubt and bitterness towards the war and their state's responsibility for the loss of their loved ones as *Flags* suggests.

In *Assembly*, Gu Zidi's compassion extends only to his lost men and their family, not to the enemy. The film only tells us how the war has affected 'us' by losing our loved ones, it never shows a close-up shot of the enemy Other, how they die in agony, how killing a human being for the first time can disturb the humanity within 'us'. In spite of Feng's declared intention to portray human reaction to war, in his film, that human reaction and humanity is limited to only 'us', not the enemy.

In *Flags*, through Ira's death and Houlon mum's unhealable bitterness over the loss of her son, the film presents a strong anti-war message. In *Assembly,* however, the message is less subversive. Although Captain Gu first appears as an outsider, he has always remained loyal to the state. He has never shown any doubt about the two wars he served in, nor the state that initiated the wars. Gu's quest is simple and politically safe – it is about finding his lost men and seeking official recognition for them. In the end, he gets what he wants and the heroes' sacrifice for the state is justified.

Although *Assembly* has pushed the boundaries of the stereotyped heroes in PRC war films, it still has to stay within the ideological boundaries set by the Party-state. Consequently, the film cannot fully endorse humanitarianism, or project the subversive messages of anti-war and anti-state war machine. The alternative hero may appear to be different and politically daring, but in the end, he can only return to the Party system and reaffirms his loyalty to the Party-state.

Rewriting the Wars with Japan: Chinese Vs Hollywood

During the WWII, China and the US had a common enemy – Japan. This leads to an intriguing question: how have China and Hollywood represented their wars with Japan respectively through their own films? The following section will compare several Chinese films about the Sino-Japanese War with two Hollywood films about America's war with Japan – *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006).

National Image Vs Historical Truth

Tora! Tora! Tora! is a 1970 Hollywood classic depicting the historic event of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. The film released by 20 Century Fox Studio was co-produced between America and Japan. Almost half of the film was Japanese sequences, written and directed by Japanese filmmakers, in Japanese language, with English subtitles. This makes the film an excellent case for a comparative study between Hollywood and Chinese films about wars with Japan.

The film painstakingly reconstructed the historical situations leading to the Pearl Harbour attack and was deliberately shot from both the American and the Japanese perspectives. By contrast, most PRC films about the Sino-Japanese War, from the red classic *Tunnel Warfare (1965)*, to post-Tiananmen main-melody films such as *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* (1999), to the 2011 Chinese blockbuster *The Flowers of the War,* have been shot by the Chinese side, from Chinese perspectives.

The results of the different approaches are obvious. *Tora* won an Academy Award for Best Special Effects and was nominated in another four categories – Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Editing and Best Sound. On the Chinese side, however, although both *Lovers' Grief* and *Flowers* were selected as China's official entry for the Academy Awards, neither film managed to secure a nomination.

Three decades after its release, Michael Bay's 2001 film *Pearl Harbor* brought renewed attentions to *Tora.* One American critic observes that while Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor,* with its ridiculous romantic subplot, looks instantly dated, Richard Fleischer's 1970 film now seems strikingly modern and mature (Kehr, 2006). Another film critic points out

that whereas most (Hollywood) movies about the Pacific war have a tendency to demonize the Japanese, or to present them as a thin yellow line, *Tora! Tora! Tora! is* a refreshing reversal which shows the Orientals as individuals (Kanfer, 1970).

These comments indicate that *Tora!*'s respect for historical truth and its courage to avoid racial and political prejudice by presenting the Japanese Other as individuals have given the film its timeless quality and modern appeal. While films such as *Lovers' Grief* and *Flowers* embody China's desire to project its own prospective on the global stage, *Tora!* symbolises Hollywood's moral courage in representing one of the most traumatic historic events in American history from both American and Japanese perspectives.

In the 2006 release of a special edition of a *Tora!* DVD, Richard Fleischer, the director of the American half of the film, reveals through the Director's Commentary that the film had an American and a Japanese part, each with its own script, crew, and was shot separately by an American and two Japanese directors. The script was based on thorough research of the historical event, including two acclaimed books about Pearl Harbor attack, and some of the dialogues were the original words of the true characters (*Tora! Tora! Tora!,* 2006).

In the same Director's Commentary, Richard Fleischer also indicates that instead of simply blending the two parts together, they decided to show the contrast between the American and Japanese characters. The US troops were portrayed as relaxed, informal, ill-prepared while the Japanese Imperial Army appeared formal, orderly, and meticulously prepared for the attack. The film director also reveals that before the production process, they decided not to use big stars in the film because 'it may take away the authenticity of the story'.

Such comment contrasts sharply with the remark made by a senior Chinese film administrator. In 1996, Liu Jianzhong, the former Head of National Film Bauera makes the following statement.

> Co-production films need to reflect a positive national image. When screened overseas, they need to properly represent our national image....They should also turn their lens

> toward the good life of our people, advocating the national spirits of righteousness, truthfulness, kindness and beauty (Rui, 1996).

In short, Liu believes that co-production films should project the image of positive China on the world stage. Judging from his criteria, if *Tora!* was a China-led co-production film, it would have either been banned or required to change its depiction of the ignorant and ill-prepared self to a more positive and desirable one.

Liu's statement also exposes the state's assumption that China's positive national image can be achieved through the reconstructions of the nationalistic Chinese Self in Chinese films. This assumption is evident in most PRC films about China's war with Japan. From red classic *Tunnel Warfare*, to main-melody film *Lovers' Grief,* to more recent war epic *The Flowers of War,* the emphasis in these films has been placed on the image of the heroic Chinese Self fighting and defeating the evil Japanese Other. Dominated by such a nationalist theme and objective, the historical truth of what really happened, who 'we' and 'they' really were becomes almost irrelevant.

However, judging from Richard Fleischer's comment, what the Hollywood director cared most was not national image but authentic history. It explains why the film showed little attempt to reinvent the history, to beautify the American Self, or to demonize the Japanese Other. The film was designed to represent the historical truth, to show the world what really happened, and who 'we' and 'they' really were.

The film's central concern was thus not about how to glorify the American Self and justify 'our' historical failure, but to present an authentic reconstruction of the historic event. In order to achieve that objective, the filmmaker was prepared to present a flawed American Self and give the Japanese side a genuine opportunity to demonstrate who they really were, not as faceless and vilified enemies, but as authentic individuals who deserve 'our' understanding and respect.

This demonstrates the Hollywood filmmakers' belief in humanity and equality, and the ideological freedom they have enjoyed without state interference. In contrast, Chinese films are subject to strict state censorship and are influenced by the state's political agenda such as the CCP's official ideology of nationalism.

Letters from Iwo Jima (2006) is another compelling example of Hollywood's contemporary representation of America's war with Japan. Directed by Clint Eastwood, the film is also about the Battle of Iwo Jima but is shot entirely from a Japanese perspective, in Japanese language. The film treats the Japanese as individuals in various shades – from the Japanese general who lived in America and has fond memory of the country to ordinary soldiers like Saigo, whose life with his pregnant wife was abruptly interrupted by the war. Unlike some of his blood-thirsty commanders, Saigo sees the absurdity of the war and is determined to stay alive.

The film is a critical success in the US, Europe and Japan. It receives multiple awards, including the Best Sound Editing at the 79th Academy Awards, the Best Foreign Language Film at the 64th Golden Globe Awards, the Cinema for Peace Award at the Berlin Film Festival, and the Outstanding Foreign Language Film of the Japan Academy Prize. In America, the film is credited for allowing audiences to sense the fear of war experienced by Japanese soldiers. In Japan, the film made nearly five billion yen at the box office and is critically celebrated due to its anti-war message and its largely unbiased portrait of Japanese (Ikui, 2007).

Together with Eastwood's film *Flags of Our Fathers, Letter from Iwo Jima* is another powerful example of Hollywood's respect for historical truth. Both films have not attempted to glorify the American Self or demonise the Japanese Other in order to project a positive national image. On the contrary, they have both showcased the moral courage to uncover and reflect on the historical truth of what really happened to 'us', the American Self, and 'them', the Japanese Other, during the war.

While China's desire for a positive national image is informed by the CCP's nationalist ideology, Hollywood's respect for historical truth is driven by its belief in humanitarian values. The different value orientations of Chinese and Hollywood films have also underpinned their contrasting representations of the Chinese or American Self and the Japanese Other.

Self: Righteous Chinese Vs Flawed Americans

In most PRC films about China's war with Japan, the Chinese Self is courageous and righteous. From Mao's era to contemporary China, from *Tunnel Warfare, Little Soldier Zhang Ga* to *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River*, *On the Mountain of Tai Hang,* to *The Flowers of the War,* the key Chinese characters in these films are invariably brave, competent and proud people who are determined to fight against the Japanese invaders.

Jiang Wen's 2000 film *Devils on the Doorstep* offers a rare exception of self glorification. The Chinese villagers in Jiang's film are anything but courageous and righteous. In the greater part of the film, they are pragmatic, calculative, and incapable of killing. Before the Japanese troops turn suspicious and slaughter the whole village, the lead character Villager Ma has done whatever he can to avoid killing the two Japanese prisoners. However, such a depiction of the Chinese Self is deemed subversive and the film's perceived misrepresentation of the Chinese people has contributed to its permanent ban in China (Rennie, 2000).

Contrary to the self-righteousness in most Chinese films about the Sino-Japanese War, the image of the American Self in *Tora!* is much less contrived and complimentary. The film reveals no intention to glorify the Americans, nor the desire to cover the flaws of the American Self. Instead, it\\ shows that few American military commanders were willing to contemplate the idea that the Japanese would have the audacity to attack America in general and Pearl Harbor in particular. The US had cracked the Japanese secret code, but the warning signs were repeatedly ignored.

Although Colonel Rufus Bratton and Lieutenant Commander Alvin Kramer had access to the secretly decoded Japanese messages and were convinced that the Japanese were planning an attack, their superiors essentially ignored their warnings. The film illustrates that the US had access to information that might have prevented the tragedy at Pearl Harbor but did nothing.

The film recounts that on the morning of December 7, 1941, decision makers in Washington and Hawaii were enjoying a leisurely Sunday routine while American

intelligence worked feverishly to interpret the coded transmissions. Attempts to convey this message to American commanders failed because they were playing golf and horseback riding. Finally, Chief of Naval Operations Harold R. Stark was informed of the increased threat, but decided not to inform Hawaii until after he had a chance to call the President.

An American destroyer spotted a Japanese submarine trying to slip through the defensive net to enter Pearl Harbor. It sank it and notified the base. Although the receiving officer Lieutenant Kaminsky took the report seriously, Captain John Earle at Pearl Harbor demanded confirmation before alerting Admiral Kimmel. When two privates posted at the remote radar spotted the incoming Japanese aircraft and informed the Hickham Field Information Center, Army Air Forces Lieutenant Kermit Tyler dismissed the report, thinking it was a group of American bombers. In short, before the final launch of the fatal attack, the American side had ignored repeated warnings and failed to take the threat seriously.

Once the Pearl Harbour attack was launched, the American side was taken by total surprise. Their aircraft security precaution allowed the Japanese bombers to destroy the US aircraft parked on the ground with ease. The damage to the naval base was equally catastrophic. At the end of the attack, the Pearl Harbor base was in flames, only then, the commanders finally received the Pentagon's telegram, warning them of the impending danger. Overall, the film shows that the success of the Japanese attack was the result of the bureaucracy, incompetence and conceit of the American military. Such honest reconstruction of a major historic event and its open reflection on the flaws of the American Self set the film apart from most PRC films about China's war with Japan.

Following the trajectory of PRC films about the Sino-Japanese War, the glorified Chinese Self has been recreated and reaffirmed over the past 60 years. From the heroic villagers in *Tunnel's Warfare*, to the dignified female soldier in *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River*, to the nationalised Peking opera star in *Forever Enthralled,* to the self-sacrificing courtesans in *The Flowers of the War,* the overwhelming image of the Chinese Self is righteous and nationalistic. Meanwhile, an alternative character such as

Villager Ma in *Devils on the Doorstep*, who is detached from the state and lacking nationalistic spirit, is deemed as a distortion of the Chinese and banned by the state.

The glorification of the Chinese Self in PRC war films forms stark contrast against Hollywood's willingness to expose the flaws of the American Self. However, it can be argued that *Tora!*'s American-style self-reflection has not tarnished the image of the Americans. The film's moral courage to truthfully present the conceit of the American side before the Pearl Harbour attack has in fact contributed to its enduring quality and its modern appeal. The film's honest self-portrayal also makes the praise of the Americans by the Japanese more convincing.

Towards the end of the film, Japanese navy commander Admiral Yamamoto observes:

> 'Many misinformed Japanese believe that America is a nation divided and isolationist; the Americans are only interested in enjoying luxury life and are spiritually and morally corrupt. That is a great mistake. If a war becomes inevitable, America would be the most formidable foe we have ever fought. I have studied in Harvard and lived in Washington so I know the Americans are a proud and just people.'

Yamamoto's praise of the Americans contrast sharply against John Miller's praises of the Chinese in Zhang Yimou's film *The Flowers of the War*. While Yamamoto's approval of the Americans is based on a faithful recount of a real historical event, John Miller's compliment of the Chinese is a fictional construction of a fake character. Yamamoto knows Japan's misconception of America because he has lived in America and studied in Harvard; John Miller on the other hand, has only just met the Chinese courtesans, and the film fails to demonstrate how he has acquired his understanding and appreciation of the Chinese Self.

More importantly, Yamamoto's observation that 'the Americans are a proud and just people' does not alienate any third party. The values it adopts to assess the Americans – a people who believe in moral, pride and justice – are universal values that would transcend national borders. In contrast, John Miller's admiration of the Chinese comes with the package of belittling the Japanese Other, labelling them as amateurs.

Tora!'s belief in historical truth allows the film to offer the audiences on both sides valuable insights into the significant historic event and through so doing, fostering deeper understanding between the two nations. The film's truthful representation of history and its efforts to cultivate deeper understanding of the former enemy is more likely to translate into a more positive national image than the nationalistic depictions of the nation and national identity.

For Chinese films, however, overshadowed by the state's political agenda, historical truth cannot be the top priority. From the state's point of view, Chinese films are not supposed to simply represent Chinese history. Instead, they are designed to reconstruct history to support state-sanctioned historical narrative and ideology. No Chinese film-maker is allowed to question the official narrative of Sino-Japanese War that affirms the CCP's leadership during the war. This is evidenced by the permanent ban on *Devils.*

The above comparisons reveal the dramatically different approaches China and Hollywood have adopted in representing the Chinese and American Self and the two counties' historical clashes with a common enemy. Ironically, it seems that *Tora!*'s willingness to expose the flaws of the American Self has allowed the film to survive the test of time.

Other: Japanese 'Devil' Vs Civilized Enemy

Similar to the revealing representations of the self, the depiction of the Japanese Other are also significantly different in Chinese and Hollywood films about the wars with Japan. In most Chinese SJW films, the Japanese are savage 'devils' and China's deadly enemies. In Richard Fleicher's *Tora! Tora! Tora!,* however, Japan is presented as a modernised nation and the Japanese as interesting individuals.

The film opens with Japanese navy officers lined up in their smart uniforms on a large battleship, waiting to welcome their newly appointed Admiral. When the new Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto steps onto the red carpet, he salutes the sailors while a navy brass band plays western music. This opening scene sets the tone of the Japanese part of the

film. It shows that the Japanese Other as modernised, sophisticated, and well-organised.

The film's even-headed representation of the Japanese is a direct result of a genuine co-production model. To emphasise the historical authenticity and its dual perspectives, all the dialogues in the Japanese segments are produced in Japanese. As a result, about 40% of the film is subtitled. The objective and even positive image of the Japanese Other is maintained throughout the film. Unlike the American navy pilots who keep missing their target during their drill, the Japanese pilots are spot-on with theirs. The film also features the sophisticated dinning of the Japanese navy officers – sitting across a long dining table covered in white table cloth, holding silver cutleries, with a navy brass band playing in the background.

The film also illustrates that the Japanese are not a faceless crowd but spirited individuals. They can be a cocky navy pilot, an eccentric navy officer nick-named as 'Gandhi', a worrying Japanese Ambassador to the US, and a middle-aged Japanese fisherman who complains that: 'Navy pilots attract geisha girls, but they scare the fish' as Japanese surveillance planes roaring over Hawaii, attracting the attentions of the local geishas.

The film breaks the stereotyped image of the Japanese Other in anti-Japanese war films by depicting the Japanese as individuals with their own minds and characters. The film discloses that before the Pearl Harbour attack, there has been high-level resistance within Japan over the proposed war against America. Later, as the pro-war faction gains the upper hand, Japanese Ambassador to the US sighs: 'The war that I have dreaded for so long may soon becomes reality.'

Although it is Admiral Yamamoto's duty to carry out Pearl Harbor attack, he believes that Japan's army hotheads are underestimating the Americans. Even after the Pearl Harbour attack has been planned, when he addresses his navy officers, he still hopes that the war can be avoided:

> 'The date of the attack has been set, but if an agreement can be reached with Washington, the fleet will be recalled. (Facing disappointing reactions, he adds) If any commander is inclined to reject an order to return, let him resign now!'

When the war becomes inevitable, Admiral Yamamoto fulfils his duty by commanding the Pearl Harbour attack. However, when he realises that the attack was launched before Japan's official declaration of war with the US has been announced, he then realises the profound implications of such a diplomatic blunder. The film closes with a quote by Yamamoto:

> 'I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve.'

This comment serves dual purposes. First, it tells the world that Japan's undeclared war with the US was a technical error, not a calculated move. Through this confession, the film attempts to clear Japan's name in the eyes of the world that Japan is not a dishonourable and untrustworthy nation which would do anything to get what it wants.

Second, the comment also pays tribute to America. By referring to the US as an awaking 'sleeping giant', the film acknowledges Japan's respect for America. The respect for the former enemy is subsequently mutual and reciprocal. The respect the Hollywood filmmakers have shown to the Japanese Other is returned. As a result, America's national image is reaffirmed, not by itself, but by its former enemy. Such endorsement of the Other seems more convincing than the self-promotion of the Chinese Self in Chinese SJW films.

Clint Eastwood's film *Letters from Iwa Jima* (2006) presents another compelling case of Hollywood's contemporary representation of the Japanese Other. Through a Japanese soldier Saigo, his love of family, his refusal to kill a dog, and his doubt and fear of the war, the film turns the Japanese Other into an ordinary human being whom western audiences can easily identify with.

By contrast, most Chinese SJW films refuse to humanise the Japanese Other and continue to celebrate nationalistic killing of the Japanese 'devils'. These films' denial of

the humanity of the Japanese Other also deprive them the opportunity to find common moral ground and to connect with wider international audiences.

Historically, mutual respect between the Chinese Self and the Japanese Other is very rare among Chinese films. In most PRC films, the Japanese Other has been presented as 'devils', deprived of basic humanity. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, there have been attempts by Chinese filmmakers to introduce alternative and more sympathetic portrayals of the Japanese.

Wu Ziniu's *Evening Bell* (1988), Jiang Wen's *Devils on the Doorstep* (2000), and Lu Chuan's *City of Life and Death* (2009) are cases in point. Overall, however, these alternative representations of the Other are unusual, controversial and, in the case of *Devils,* fatal. Regrettably, even after Lu Chan's 2009 film has been endorsed by the state, Zhong Yimou's 2011 film *The Flowers of the War* completely reverses Lu's earlier attempt to downplay nationalism and to humanise the Japanese Other.

The fact China has selected *Flowers* as its official entry for 2012 Academy Awards demonstrates that as the CCP's official ideology, nationalism is still the dominant ideology for Chinese war films. The strong resurge of nationalism in Zhang Yimou's film also suggests that with regard to seeking shared values with the outside world, critical for enhancing China's soft power, *Flowers* has moved further away from what *Evening Bell* had achieved in the 1980s.

Conclusion

Through comparative study, this chapter argues that the most fundamental division between Chinese and Hollywood war films lies in their different choices of values. This contrast can be summarised as Chinese films' endorsement of the CCP's nationalist ideology and Hollywood's celebration of humanitarian values.

This ideological division has underpinned these films' contrasting representations of national identities. Produced from a humanitarian perspective, Clint Eastwood's film *Flags of Our Fathers* acknowledges the Japanese Other as human beings. By illustrating how the war and the American state war machine have destroyed a US Marine and

broken the heart of an American mother, the film also challenges the US state and projects a clear anti-war message.

In contrast, Feng Xiaogang's film *Assembly* introduces Captain Gu as an alternative hero but affirms that Gu's non-conforming character and his frustration with the Party can only exist within the ultimate boundary of loyalty to the state. Unlike *Flags*, *Assembly* has never ventured further to question how the war has damaged individual soldiers and their families, or to challenge the state's war machine.

The fact *Assembly*'s nationalistic ending was not Feng Xiaogang's initial design also suggests that Feng is not in the position to produce Eastwood-style anti-war films; ideologically, PRC filmmakers are not allowed to do what Hollywood has been doing.

The contrast between *Tora!* and several Chinese films about the Sino-Japanese War also confirms the clear division in values between Chinese and Hollywood war films. *Tora!* demonstrates that even in the 1970s, Hollywood was capable of giving the Japanese side an equal opportunity to present their own perspective on one of the most traumatic events in American history. Three decades later, this tradition is further strengthened in Clint Eastwood's film *Letters from Iwo Jima*, a film about American's war with Japan shot entirely from Japan's perspective, in Japanese language.

China, however, is marching towards the opposite direction. Although some Chinese filmmakers have attempted to introduce humanitarian values into their SJW films, these alternative representations of the war and the Japanese Other have been marginalised or even banned. After Lu Chuan's 2009 film *City of Life and Death* attempted to humanise the Japanese Other, the strong revival of nationalism in *The Flowers of the War* indicates that China's acceptance of humanitarian values is temporary and superficial. Driven by the CCP's political agenda and its policy of making culture serve the state, nationalism is still the dominant ideology of Chinese war films.

When compared with the thrust of Hollywood war films, from the semi-Japanese prospective in *Tora!* (1970) to the full Japanese perspective in *Letters* (2006), *Flowers'* reversal to nationalism is a move towards the opposite direction. This suggests that

China's pre-occupation with nationalism is anything but following the international trends of celebrating common humanity and embracing humanitarian values.

The stark contrast between Chinese and Hollywood war films highlights the moral contradiction embedded in the Party's directives that Chinese films should uphold socialist values and follow international trends simultaneously, and further exposes the lack of shared values and the weak soft power of Chinese cinema.

CONCLUSION

Historically, Chinese cinema has been closely linked to national identities, values and ideologies. Since the founding of the PRC, China's historical clashes with foreign Others, together with the CCP's official versions of national identities, have been variously reaffirmed, blocked and revised on the silver screen. From Mao's-style undifferentiated anti-imperialism to the humanitarian experiment of the 1980s, and on to the reinforced and remodelled nationalism of the post-Tiananmen era, the changing screen representations and the re-alignment of the Chinese Self and foreign Others offer fertile research ground for examining China's shifting national identities and the significant role which cinema has played in cultivating nationalism in China.

The previous chapters argue that nationalism has emerged as the dominant ideology of contemporary cinema in post-1989 China. Nationalism has not only underpinned state-funded 'main-melody' propaganda films, but also infiltrated commercial films about China's historical figures. These include films about China's most celebrated Peking opera singer Mei Lanfang, the legendary Chinese heroine Hua Mulan, and Confucius, the official symbol of Chinese culture.

Together, these films advocate the CCP's nationalist ideology, aimed at reminding Chinese audiences, particularly youth, of the Party's historical role in saving the nation from foreign aggression, hence its ongoing political legitimacy. Internationally, however, the state's pre-occupation with nationalism and its practice of turning the big screen into a nationalist enterprise have serious implications for the state's desire to enhance China's soft power through cinema.

Engaging literature in the areas of Chinese nationalism, cinema and soft power, this thesis has selected a series of Chinese films about China's historical clashes with foreign Others as case studies. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on Chinese cinema's evolving representations of national identity, the depictions of the Chinese Self, and the re-creations and re-alignment of the Japanese and Western Others.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 then analyse how the CCP's nationalist ideology has underpinned China's cinematic (mis)representations of its own cultural traditions as well as China's responses to Hollywood's interpretation of Chinese culture. To identify key differences between Chinese and western war films, Chapters 7 and 8 compare selected PRC war films with Western-led co-productions of similar theme, and with several Hollywood films about America's war with Japan.

Nationalism, Occidentalism and Cinema: China's Evolving National Identity

Conceptually, this study has drawn upon Anthony Smith's definition of nationalism, Yingjie Guo's work on Chinese nationalism, Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, and Xiaomei Chen's writing on Chinese Occidentalism. In particular, the study is informed by Anthony Smith's observation that together with national autonomy and unity, national identity is a key component of nationalism (Smith, 1991), and by Joseph Nye's belief in the significance of shared values for a nation's soft power (Nye, 2004, p.111).

Early on, this thesis traces back the historical ties between the cinema and the nation. It observes that during the Sino-Japanese War, Chinese cinema was used by different states within the war-torn country to simultaneously project different versions of national identities to serve various states' own political agendas. Although Japan's surrender brought such screen contestation to an end, the founding of the People's Republic saw a dramatic shift in Chinese filmmaking again.

Cinema was quickly turned into a propaganda tool for the CCP to disseminate ideologies such as anti-imperialism aimed at both Japan and the West. During the early reform era of the 1980s, nationalist ideology faded away and Chinese film *Evening Bell* even introduced humanitarian values into the typical nationalistic propaganda topic of the Sino-Japanese War. However, in post-Tiananmen China, nationalism has been reintroduced as the CCP's official ideology and the dominant values embedded in mainstream Chinese cinema.

Meanwhile, China's continued commitment to economic reform and opening-up policy post-Tiananmen also demand a fresh approach towards the West. As a result, the Korean War becomes a taboo screen topic and the former 'imperialists' are divided

into two camps – the Japanese enemy and the American friend. Such a split arrangement allows contemporary Chinese films to uphold the CCP's nationalist agenda on the one hand, while supporting the Party's opening-up policy by reconstructing the West on the other.

This differential treatment of the Western and Japanese Others in films such as *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* demonstrates that although the CCP is more assertive about China's national autonomy and national unity, it is prepared to be more flexible with national identity. In many post-1989 PRC films, the wholesale anti-imperialism of Mao's period is abandoned; the West is turned into China's friend and ally, while Japan remains as the key target of the state-sponsored nationalism. The fluidity of the official version of national identity allows the state to redefine and readjust who 'we', the Chinese Self are, and who 'they', the foreign Others are, based on its political agenda of the time.

Nationalism, therefore, becomes a more nuanced and manipulated official ideology. The transition, from the undifferentiated anti-imperialism of Maoist China to the pro-West anti-Japanese nationalism of the post-Tiananmen era exposes the state-controlled nature of China's national identity and how it has been massaged, blocked and remodelled to suit the Party's evolving political agenda.

The artificial re-imagination of the West also sheds more light on the concept of *Occidentalism* coined by Xiaomei Chen in the mid 1990s. Chen believes that Occidentalism is a discursive practice that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to actively participate in the process of self-appropriation (Chen, 1995, p.4). This research argues that Occidentalism is part of nationalism. It represents the desire of the Orient through their construction of the Occident, the Western Other. With its focus on the perceptions and interactions between the Oriental Self and the Occidental Other, national identity, one of the key concerns of nationalism, is at the core of the Occidentalism.

Chen also states that China's *official Occidentalism* refers to a process where the Western Other is officially construed by a Chinese imagination, in order to support

nationalism, for the domination of the Chinese Self at home (Chen, 1995, p.5). This thesis observes that Chen's definition stems from her analysis of the PRC's political and cultural conditions up to the mid 1990. This study places Chen's concept in more recent contexts and argues that in contemporary China, official Occidentalism has an international dimension.

This international dimension is determined by China's rise on the global stage and the country's desire to enhance its international image, influence and soft power. The fact that PRC films *Lovers' Grief over the Yellow River* and *The Flowers of the War* have both re-positioned the West as China's friend, and were selected as China's official entries for the Academy Awards, suggest that the purpose of China's official Occidentalism is not simply to support nationalism, nor just for the domination of the Chinese Self at home. The artificially recreated Western Other in both films is designed to support the state's opening-up policy at home, and to obtain international recognition outside China.

Chinese official Occidentalism can be multifunctional. It can be exercised to condemn the West in order to support the Party's nationalist ideology, as *The Opium War* and *My 1919* have done. It can also be used to laud the West in order to support the state's economic policy and to curb anti-West popular nationalism in China. The latter is evident in the state's blocking of new Korean War screen productions and the beautification of the West in films such as *Lovers' Grief.*

Both cases disclose that when anti-West sentiment no longer serves the CCP's political interest, official Occidentalism can be called upon and twisted to support contradicting policies – China's opening-up to the West and the state-sponsored nationalist ideology; resisting the ideological influence of the West while containing anti-West popular nationalism at home.

China's *official Occidentalism* is, therefore, more fluid and complex than Xiaomei Chen has described. It refers to a process where the Western Other is officially construed and adjusted by a state-driven Chinese imagination, in order to support China's

evolving nationalism, for the domination of the Chinese Self at home, and for winning international recognition.

The state-sponsored split representations of the Japanese and Western Others also support Yingjie Guo's observation that, due to the essential roles of history in national identity formation, contestations arise as historical narratives are revised, reaffirmed, remade, blocked and created to validate or institutionalize certain identities at the expense of others (Guo, 2010, p.28). By reaffirming anti-Japanese nationalism and blocking anti-West representations, cinema once again becomes a significant platform for the Party to mobilize the Chinese population under its leadership, to embrace its revised national identity, and to endorse its post-reform policies.

Nationalism, Culturalism and Confucius: Making the Past Serve the Present

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have illustrated and critiqued the nationalization of China's historical figures in several high-profile PRC films, as well as China's declining cultural awareness and the fact these films have asserted blind loyalty to the state at costs of China's own cultural traditions. From turning the filial daughter of Hua into a diehard servant of the state, from downplaying Confucius' ideal of benevolence and magnifying his loyalty to the State of Lu, nationalism has trampled Chinese cultural traditions in these state-sanctioned contemporary PRC films. In the case of the 2009 Chinese film *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior,* the betrayed tradition is the historically celebrated balance and the changed priority between *xiao* and *zhong*. In *Confucius,* the trodden cultural heritage is Confucius' belief in benevolence.

The contrast between nationalism and traditional Chinese values is even more pronounced in Chen Kaige's two Peking opera films. The analysis in Chapter 6 discloses that Chen's second Peking opera film *Forever Enthralled* has adopted nationalism at the cost of China's traditional belief in culturalism, as brilliantly presented in his first Peking opera film *Farewell My Concubine.*

The case unveils a profound irony that China's celebration of nationalism actually stems from the country's abandonment of its own cultural traditions. The Party-state's

pre-occupation with nationalism and nationalistic films, therefore, contradicts its declared intention of promoting Chinese culture to the world.

The stark contrast between *Farewell*'s international triumph and *Forever*'s international disappointment confirms that China's traditional belief in culturalism and culturally-centred self-identity has more universal appeal than nation-bound nationalism. Culturalism connects people, empowering them to rise above national borders, and thus has more potential to resonate with contemporary international audiences than the nation-dividing and hatred-provoking nationalism.

This further demonstrates the counterproductive nature of *Forever*'s switch from culturalism to nationalism. The film's nationalist theme is built, not on the pride of Chinese culture, but on its belittling and betrayal. This raises the fundamental question of the logic and the validity of the Party-state's current practice of using nationalistic films to promote Chinese culture to the world.

By abandoning China's culturalist traditions, *Forever* no longer believes in the culture it desperately wants the West to applaud. This paradox supports Hu Jian's argument that lack of cultural awareness remains a main cause of China's inability to convert its cultural resources into soft power (Hu, 2012). However, overshadowed by the state's tight censorship and its policy of making culture serve the state, Chinese filmmakers are in no position to reaffirm their belief in traditional values, particularly when these values clash with the CCP's official ideology of nationalism.

As analysed in Chapter 5, Hu Mei's 2010 film *Confucius* is another illuminating example of how China's cultural heritage has been redefined, remodelled and re-mobilised to serve the state's political interest. Despite Hu's declared intent to introduce Eastern values to the world, the film has misrepresented the sage and substituted his belief in benevolence and his ideal of *tianxia datong,* harmony for all under heaven, with the preaching of total loyalty to the state. The state-backed high-profile film is yet another case of PRC's approach towards its own cultural heritage – sacrificing authentic Chinese culture to serve the state's current political agenda.

The nationalistic reconstructions of the sage in the 2010 film *Confucius* and the 2012 relocation of the giant Confucius statue from Tiananmen suggest that the Party's post-Mao endorsement of Confucius is half-hearted and politically-motivated; it can only be part of the CCP's vocabulary, not its grammar (Guo, 2004). The state's half-hearted re-embrace of Confucius is further reaffirmed through a 2013 visit to Confucius' residence by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

On November 26, 2013, Xi visited the Confucius residence in Qufu, Shandong Province. Meeting with Confucian scholars, Xi stated that 'China as a nation possesses a traditional culture that reaches far back in time and can certainly create new glories for Chinese culture.' Xi stressed that the contemporary studies of Confucius and Confucianism should adopt the approach of using the past to serve the present, abandoning the flaws and preserving the truth, so that the sage's thoughts can play a positive role in the conditions of the new era.' (Southern Daily, 2013)

Xi's speech highlights the CCP's practical and critical approach towards traditional Chinese culture. It both affirms its historical roots and acknowledges its flaws. The central concern is how to use the past to serve the present. To better serve the present, the Party's current political agenda, the past is to be screened and selected. Chinese cultural traditions, therefore, become a filtered and fluid historical deposit which can be drawn upon to serve the contemporary interests of the CCP.

China Facing Hollywood: Political Resistance and Cultural Surrender

Apart from making the past serve the present, the Party-state has also responded to Hollywood's return and its representations of Chinese culture in a politically-orientated manner. As examined in the previous chapters, the CCP has in the 1990s reacted strongly to Hollywood's 'anti-China' films. Since then, the severe punishment imposed on relevant Hollywood studios and the Party's control over access to the booming Chinese film market have largely muzzled Hollywood's critical voice of the PRC and resulted in a more positive image of China on the big screen.

Lured by the world's second largest market, Hollywood studios have learned to avoid subject matters that are likely to offend the Chinese film censorship board. Some studios also quietly ask Chinese officials for assurance of their planned films, even when they do not have a Chinese theme (Cieply & Barnes, 2013). The facts that Sony's 2009 film *2012* features a Chinese ark as the saviour of the world, and that MGM is prepared to replace Chinese soldiers with North Koreans ones in its 2011 film *Red Dawn* (Landreth, 2011), demonstrate that the Party-state has now yielded considerable influence over the way Hollywood portrays China and that the CCP's desire to enhance China's international image is fulfilled more successfully through its handling of Hollywood than via its own cinema going-global project.

During Xi Jinping's 2012 US visit, a new commercial agreement between China and Hollywood was reached. With higher quota and profit share for imported films, the commercial appeal of the Chinese film market is further enhanced. Hollywood's increasing willingness to collaborate with Chinese film censors suggests that, by sacrificing certain economic interest, the Party-state has secured stronger influence over Hollywood.

However, contrary to its strong political stance against Hollywood, the Party-state is much less defensive of China's cultural autonomy. This is apparent in how the 2009 Chinese film *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* has responded to Hollywood's portrayals of the legendary Chinese heroine. Although the film has rejected Mulan's political rebellion in the Disney sequel by projecting unconditional loyalty to the state, culturally speaking it has imitated Hollywood in its rejection of traditional Chinese culture and values. This is particular evident in the film's lack of attention to the strong family bond and the values of *xiao* that have been deeply embedded in the *Ballad of Mulan* and in the 1939 and 1956 Chinese films about Mulan.

Instead of responding to the culturally Americanised Mulan in the Hollywood version, the 2009 Chinese film has imitated Disney's cultural distortion, portraying Mulan as a rebellious daughter and reducing her family to just a coughing father. The film brings to light China's declining cultural awareness and its inability to defend its own cultural traditions. Overshadowed by its strong nationalist theme, *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* has

not only failed to rectify Disney's misrepresentation of Chinese culture, but also copied, or even exceeded, its cultural distortion. To some extent, the film has imitated Hollywood's disrespect for Chinese culture and joined forces with Hollywood to undermine China's cultural autonomy.

The fact that Disney versions of Mulan have been allowed commercial releases in China also indicates that the Party-state is far more sensitive about Hollywood's political hostility than its cultural colonisation. Furthermore, facing Hollywood's cultural and ideological infiltration, the lack of modern relevance of the CCP's nationalist ideology has become even more pronounced.

Nationalism and China's Quest for Soft Power

Although nationalism has served the CCP's interest in the domestic arena and the Party has managed to make the past serve the present, be it recreating historical figures or remodelling the identities of the Japanese and Western Others, internationally the Party's official ideology collides with universal values and hinders China's desire to enhance its soft power through cinema.

Contrary to Joseph Nye's emphasis that a nation's soft power should be built on shared values, senior Party officials' references to 'soft power' have ignored the significance of common moral ground. Although Zhao Qizheng, former Director of the State Council Information Office, quoted Margaret Thatcher's comments that 'China will never become a superpower because it does not have internationally influential ideals' (Zhao, 2006), his soft power-related recommendations focused only on operational issues such as enhancing China's international media and improving the international standing of Chinese language, but avoided the fundamental questions of what values China's soft power should be built upon, and what ideals China can project to the world.

As Suisheng Zhao observes, China's current approach to soft power lacks a contemporary moral appeal, China thus cannot compete with the US to inspire the vision of building a free and prosperous world (Zhao, 2009).

With regard to China's cinema going-global plan, the state's directives are ideologically contradictory. The state urges Chinese filmmakers to simultaneously uphold socialist values, promote traditional Chinese culture, and follow international trends to stay relevant to the contemporary world. However, these objectives are incompatible; efforts to fulfil one could damage the other. This fundamental contradiction reflects a much broader issue and discloses that China is morally in limbo. As one of the few remaining socialist countries in the world, China still struggles to re-build its own values system, let alone demonstrate to the world what ideals it stands for.

Consequently, China's cinema going-global project has avoided the significance of shared values and China continues to produce nationalistic films and promote them as China's going-global films. Zhang Yimou's 2011 film *The Flowers of the War* is a revealing case in point. *Flowers'* strong nationalist theme and its international failure highlight the key weakness of China's soft power – its lack of internationally influential ideals and the inappropriateness of nationalism as the moral foundation of China's soft power exercises. Overall, the Party-state faces a fundamental dilemma – its domestic agenda of producing nationalistic films to validate its nationalist ideology and its international aspirations of enhancing China's international image and soft power through cinema.

As examined in Chapters 7 and 8, the comparative studies of Chinese war films with similarly-themed Western-led co-productions and Hollywood movies about America's war with Japan, further demonstrates that the key difference between Chinese and western war films lies in their contrasting values and their different depictions of national identities.

In Western-led co-productions and in Hollywood war films, humanity is universal; it applies to both the Western Self and the Japanese Other. In Chinese SJW films, however, humanity and empathy only exist between 'us', the Chinese Self, and may be extended to the West, but not to the Japanese Other. The state-dictated value orientation of these PRC films has determined that the Japanese Other must remain as China's national enemy, the unforgivable target of the CCP's nationalist ideology.

The contrast between two Hollywood films about America's war with Japan and Chinese war films further highlights the ideological differences between Hollywood and Chinese war films. Even in the 1970s, Hollywood was capable of giving the Japanese side an equal opportunity to present their own perspective on one of the most traumatic events in American history. Three decades later, this tradition is further strengthened in Clint Eastwood's *Letters from Iwo Jima*, a film about American's war with Japan, shot entirely from Japan's perspective, in Japanese language.

China, however, is marching towards the opposite direction. Although some Chinese filmmakers have attempted to introduce humanitarian values into their SJW films, these alternative representations of the war and the Japanese Other have been marginalised or even banned. After Lu Chuan's 2009 film *City of Life and Death* attempted to humanise the Japanese Other, the strong revival of nationalism in *The Flowers of the War* suggests that China's acceptance of humanitarian values is temporary. Driven by the CCP's political agenda and its policy of making culture serve the state, nationalism is still the dominant ideology of Chinese war films.

Flowers' highly publicised international orientation and its subsequent international failure further demonstrate that nationalism cannot be used as the moral foundation for Chinese cinema's rise on the global stage. Instead, China needs to recognise nationalism's profound unpopularity outside China and learn to embrace shared values with the outside world. Consequently, how to unchain Chinese cinema from its current political task, and identify and embrace common moral ground, present the most fundamental challenge for Chinese filmmakers charged with the responsibility of 'going global' and enhancing China's soft power through cinema.

Failing to address China's fundamental weakness in soft power, its ideals deficit and the clash between nationalism and soft power, China's soft power exercises would be built on shaky ground. So far, the state-sponsored nationalist narrative has not helped China to enhance its international image. As Robert Kagan observes, China is, in the eyes of the West, still a 19th century power in a 21st century world, filled with nationalist pride, ambitions and resentments (Kagan, 2008).

Although nationalism has allowed the CCP to win popular support after it took power and when it faced political crises such as the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, a rising China needs a new national story in today's world, not one based on 'one hundred years of humiliation'. Even though historical memories may help to stimulate China's determination to fulfill the 'China dream' of rejuvenating itself, both China and the world have changed and it is time for China to move on (Schell & Delury, 2013).

Furthermore, the Party-state's fixation on its nationalist ideology suggests that the CCP is still pre-occupied with its ideological security, its hard power, not soft power. Compared with the Party's hard power, supported by its nationalist ideology, soft power is just a secondary concern.

Nevertheless, if the Party continues to treat its hard power-driven nationalist ideology as the moral foundation of China's soft power exercises and keeps pushing nationalistic films to go-global, such efforts could in fact highlight China's lack of common moral ground with the outside world, tarnish China's international image, and further undermine, rather than enhance, China's soft power.

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