

CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS



CHILDREN OF MARX AND COCA-COLA

**CHINESE AVANT-GARDE
ART AND INDEPENDENT
CINEMA**

XIAOPING LIN

Children of Marx and Coca-Cola

Critical Interventions
Sheldon H. Lu, general editor

Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China
Yingjin Zhang

*Children of Marx and Coca-Cola: Chinese Avant-garde Art
and Independent Cinema*
Xiaoping Lin

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Critical Interventions

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For James Cahill

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Children of Marx and Coca-Cola

Introduction

Reading Chinese Avant-garde Art and Independent Cinema in Context

This book is a study of Chinese art and cinema in the context of postsocialist China and capitalist globalization. In this book, I draw on my experiences in Beijing and New York, the two “global cities,”¹ where a variety of art exhibitions, film festivals, academic conferences, and museum programs provide access to an emergent “transnational” Chinese visual culture essential to my study.² For this inquiry, I have selected Chinese artists and filmmakers from the mainland and overseas who represent avant-garde art and independent cinema in both national and global contexts.³ The body of artworks and films examined in this book spans roughly from 1998 to 2008, a decade of China’s rapid integration into the world, as marked by the country’s admission to the World Trade Organization and Beijing’s sponsorship of the 2008 Olympics.⁴ Today, China’s sustained economic growth seems a blessing to many but a threat to a few. At home, the continuous economic boom brings prosperity to a large segment of the population, yet it polarizes a society shaped for decades by Mao’s egalitarian socialism. On the one hand, China embraces capitalist globalization that boosts its foreign trade, domestic market, and living standard. On the other hand, China’s efforts to build a free market economy force countless state-owned enterprises into bankruptcy, resulting in mass unemployment and grave social problems unprecedented in the nation’s socialist history. Such is the paradox of China’s integration into globalization, a paradox that avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers in this study attempt to portray.

Defining Chinese Avant-garde Art and Independent Cinema: A Critical Reflection

The works of artists and filmmakers included in this book are called “avant-garde art” (*qianwei yishu*) and “independent cinema” (*duli dianying*). In various contexts, critics use the two terms interchangeably with “experimental art,” “Sixth Generation cinema,” or “Urban Generation cinema.” In what follows, I will define these

critical terms by drawing on the writings of leading scholars in the fields, and I will offer my views on what I see as a dual identity avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers are compelled to maintain under the circumstances of a global and a national cultural industry.

Gao Minglu has explicated the use of “avant-garde” in the context of Chinese modernity. As he points out, some critics and curators have tended to use “experimental art” rather than “avant-garde” to redefine Chinese contemporary art. In his view, however, the term “experimental art” cannot describe Chinese contemporary art from the 1980s and 1990s, such as “Political Pop” and “Cynical realism.” For Gao, the word “experimental” sounds too passive and lacks direction, so he asserts, “To be avant-garde is to have choices, to have a specific critical direction. This critique integrates two inseparable tendencies: social critique and self-critique. Self-critique refers to the avant-garde’s disillusionment at its own conservatism and corruption, at the lifelessness of artistic language and methodology. Thus ‘avant-garde’ has a built-in sense of critique and protest.”⁵ Gao concludes that the use of the term “avant-garde” has become “a fundamental, structuring part of the history of Chinese contemporary art.”⁶ But Gao also points out that when Chinese artists and critics began using the term, its meaning was different from the earlier meaning derived from Western modernism because “the separation between aesthetics and politics implied by that earlier meaning was replaced in China by a unity of the aesthetic and the social.”⁷

Gao Minglu’s vigorous definition of Chinese “avant-garde,” which by nature possesses “a built-in sense of critique and protest,” is in consonance with a general notion of the avant-garde in the West. As Andreas Huyssen put it, the avant-garde is “a genuinely critical and adversary culture.”⁸ Analyzing avant-garde in its political sense, Matei Calinescu cited Eugène Ionesco as saying, “I prefer to define the avant-garde in terms of opposition and rupture. . . . An avant-garde man is like an enemy inside a city he is bent on destroying, against which he rebels; for like any system of government, an established form of expression is also a form of oppression. The avant-garde man is the opponent of an existing system.”⁹ Ionesco’s heroic concept of “the avant-garde man” has been translated into Chinese avant-garde art since the 1980s. When comparing the Western avant-garde movements with that of China, Gao noticed “many ideological similarities on the level of abstract spirituality and basic rebelliousness.”¹⁰ Yet he suggested, “While the avant-garde movement in the West was fighting against middle-class commercial society and its kitsch tastes, one might say that the Chinese avant-garde was caught in a far more complicated relationship between localization and globalization, ideology and materialism.”¹¹

This multifaceted cultural identity of the Chinese avant-garde needs to be further examined in comparison with the Western avant-garde. In the West, the

avant-garde is widely known to have fought against so-called official culture,¹² but Huyssen believes there is “the secret bond between avant-garde and official culture in advanced industrial societies.”¹³ On this problem, Peter Bürger has given an in-depth analysis: “The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men.”¹⁴ Like Huyssen, Bürger has nevertheless discerned a contradiction in what he calls “the avant-gardiste intent.” “During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this also allows one to recognize the contradictoriness of the avant-garde undertaking.”¹⁵

From the late 1970s through the 1980s, Chinese avant-garde fought hard against the dominant power of Mao’s socialist ideology and, in particular, Socialist Realism. As a style and aesthetic method, Socialist Realism perfectly exemplifies “art as an institution” in Bürger’s terms, and this “institution” had oppressed Chinese artists for decades. It is in this context that Gao Minglu defines the avant-garde ’85 Movement as an “anti-traditional and anti-authoritative” movement, in which the artwork was never considered for its commercial or artistic value but was a “spiritual vehicle” to engage the public and society.¹⁶

In early February 2009, Gao Minglu and his assistants organized a series of exhibits and events under the title of “20 Year Anniversary of China/Avant-Garde Exhibition” to commemorate the original “China/Avant-Garde Exhibition” held at the National Art Gallery in Beijing in 1989, but the police barred the exhibits and related events because, the organizers were told, they “had not properly registered with authorities.”¹⁷ Gao read a protest letter to a small audience in public and later said, “It’s been 20 years, and it’s still the same.”¹⁸

Since the early 1990s, however, many avant-garde artists have devoted their critical attention to the contradictions of new Chinese capitalism and globalization, which seem to echo what Bürger described as “the contradictoriness of avant-garde undertaking” in the West of the 1960s. As he interpreted the pop art of Andy Warhol, “It must be remembered that where art does in fact submit to the coercion to bring what is new, it can hardly be distinguished from a fad. What Adorno calls ‘mimetic adaptation to the hardened and alienated’ has probably been realized by Warhol: the painting of 100 Campbell soup cans contains resistance to the commodity society only for the person who wants to see it there.”¹⁹ In other words, American pop art blurred the line between a work of art as a commodity and any other commodity. Everyone was part of the same consumer society, and shopping became culture; Warhol was a shopping junkie himself.²⁰

Andy Warhol and China

In the fall of 1982, Warhol and a film crew came to Beijing from Hong Kong on a mission to make a documentary titled “Andy Warhol in China” (which was printed on a crew member’s black T-shirt). I was then working at Chinese Artists’ Association²¹ and was assigned to be a translator and tour guide to the Warhol group. During a three-day trip in Beijing, the crew first went to the Great Wall to film Warhol. Then they visited Tiananmen Square, where Warhol took a picture before Chairman Mao’s portrait hanging on the Gate of Heavenly Peace (before that visit Warhol had produced hundreds of “Mao portraits”).

Later, as Warhol requested, I took the group to the home of Mr. Wu, an old artist who specialized in traditional Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. Warhol showed no interest in Mr. Wu’s work but was attracted to an oil painting hanging on the wall. He asked about the picture, which was a still life of Chinese folk toys done by Mr. Wu’s daughter. Warhol offered to buy the artwork, but Mr. Wu said he would give it to him (as the old man was afraid to accept money from a foreigner). Warhol was clearly displeased by this “free” gift. He insisted on buying it, and after my mediation, an assistant to Warhol handed over several hundred yuan to the old painter and Warhol happily took away the “commodity” he had purchased.

In the evening, the association hosted a banquet for the Warhol people, at which Warhol and his entourage asked why there was no “night life” in Beijing (in the early 1980s, the Chinese capital city was dark after seven o’clock), since they truly enjoyed it while in Hong Kong.

Three years later, in the winter of 1985, under the sponsorship of Asian Cultural Council, I made a trip to New York and met with Andy Warhol at his “Factory” located at East Thirty-third Street between Madison and Fifth Avenues. At our meeting Warhol presented me with a copy of his new book *America* (which turned out to be his last book) and a December issue of his *Interview* magazine. He kindly autographed the two publications and I have kept them to this day.

In 2008, I was back in Beijing working on the revision of this book. By chance I read in the June issue of *TimeOut Beijing* that Christopher Makos, an American photographer who accompanied Andy Warhol on his 1982 trip to China, had returned to Beijing in late May to promote his new book *Andy Warhol China 1982: The Photographs of Christopher Makos*.²² In Beijing, Makos stayed at the same place as he had with Warhol twenty-six years before—the prestigious Beijing Hotel²³—where he gave an interview with an editor of *Sheying zhi you* (Photographer’s companion).²⁴ Makos told the editor that he had seen a new model of the prestige car Hongqi (“Red Flag” in Chinese) in the hotel parking lot and wanted to take a picture of it, as he had in 1982 because he and Warhol were attracted to the grandeur

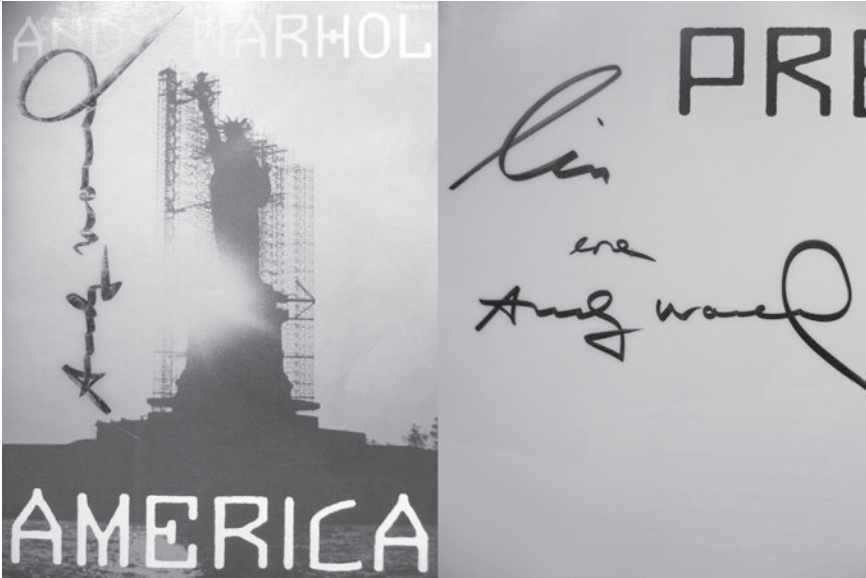


Figure 1. Andy Warhol, *America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), book cover and title page. Author photo.

of a Hongqi they saw in the street.²⁵ Makos then asked the editor, “Is Hongqi for sale in the United States? If it is, I must buy one.”²⁶ Hongqi was a Soviet-style limousine made in Mao’s socialist era,²⁷ and Mao himself often rode in one, as did other Chinese Communist Party leaders. But these days we see Hongqi taxicabs roaming the city’s streets, and one of them had caught the eye of Makos at his hotel.

During his trip Makos held a press conference at Timezone 8 Books & Café, located in Beijing’s trendy 798 Art District. Although I had missed Makos’ book promotion event, I went to the bookstore and bought the conference’s poster. Another press conference took place at Timezone 8’s branch in Shanghai. Just days before I came back to New York in late August, I heard from a friend that Makos was now represented by the New Beijing Gallery in the Chinese capital. To me, Makos’ 2008 “return” to China seemed like Warhol’s own—all through the interview with *Sheying zhi you*, Makos talked about “his friend Andy” on that 1982 trip. And a Chinese version of *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* was published in May 2008²⁸ as a belated tribute to Warhol, who told Makos, “I love Chinese culture more than our own. It’s simpler.”²⁹

Yet Warhol’s 1982 trip was unknown to avant-garde artists in China because his Chinese host, the Chinese Artists’ Association, represented a socialist “official culture” that repressed the avant-garde. Warhol, in turn, was unaware of the existence of the Chinese avant-garde, which had turned to the West, including to the

famed pop artist himself, for inspiration. In any event, Warhol's impact on China's avant-garde has increased considerably in the intervening decades. In an interview with Ellen Pearlman in September 2007, Xu Bing spoke of Warhol's fascination with Mao: "Mao is actually a big contemporary avant-garde artist. . . . Andy Warhol learned a lot from Mao. . . . Compare Mao's pop culture to Andy Warhol's pop culture. If you had the experience of the Cultural Revolution in China you can understand authentic pop culture. Everybody had to read the same book and do the same thing. If you look at the Andy Warhol photo where he is standing in front of the big portrait of Mao in Tiananmen Square, then you can understand how Andy Warhol's art works with Mao's ideas about the masses, the people, and pop culture. . . . Andy Warhol is the greatest artist. He is a real thinker."³⁰

Zhang Huan is a Chinese artist who, in Bürger's view, works within the best tradition of Warhol as a "neo-avant-garde." In September 2007, the exhibition "Zhang Huan: Altered States" opened at the Asia Society in New York. On display were many large-scale sculptures that, according to Lance Esplund of the *New York Sun*, were produced in the artist's "large Warholian studio-factory" in Shanghai.³¹ As early as 1993, Zhang Huan established himself as a performance artist in the legendary "Beijing East Village," named for New York's East Village.³² In 1998 he came to New York as a participating artist in Gao Minglu's exhibition "Inside Out: New Chinese Art" held at the Asia Society and P.S.1, affiliated with the Museum of Modern Art. There seems to be a mythical and spiritual link between Warhol and Zhang Huan, even though the two artists never met in person. Warhol was an ardent supporter of "underground" pop art, rock music, film, and multimedia performance. Zhang Huan was a member of Beijing's art underground in the 1990s,³³ when most avant-garde art was banned in China and the police frequently raided East Village, often forcing Zhang Huan to flee after a performance.³⁴ Warhol had a similar fear of the police; when he first met Valerie Solanas, he thought she was a cop.³⁵ An initial success in the art world led Warhol to go into business for himself. In 1968 he opened the Factory, which became an efficient production line for American pop art. In 2006 Zhang Huan launched his "studio-factory" in Shanghai, which employs about a hundred craftsmen and is indeed a Warholian "business art"³⁶ enterprise built in China. The vital link between Warhol and Zhang Huan helped establish a new cultural identity for China's avant-garde. On the one hand, Chinese avant-garde artists maintain what Gao Minglu defines as an "anti-traditional and anti-authoritative" stance; their best works still vigorously critique the country's economic and social problems. On the other hand, avant-garde artists such as Zhang Huan, who has a "reputation for aggressively peddling his images" to collectors and art galleries,³⁷ have become the true successors to Warhol as "neo-avant-garde" pop artists. As Calinescu put it, "To be popular in our age is to create for the market, to respond to its demands—including the eager and quite

recognizable demand for ‘subversion.’ Popularity is equivalent to accepting if not the ‘System,’ then its most direct manifestation, the Market.”³⁸ Hal Foster’s analysis of pop art is most relevant here: “In the case of pop, then, the fabled integration of high art and low culture is attained, but mostly in the interests of the cultural industry, to which, with Warhol and others, the avant-garde becomes as much a subcontractor as an antagonist.”³⁹ This “dualistic” cultural identity of the avant-garde in the West, I think, has entered Chinese contemporary art. Today a Chinese avant-garde artist is in a similar paradoxical situation: become either a “subcontractor” struggling in the highly competitive global art market or an antagonist fighting an existing “System”—be it old socialist ideology or new capitalist globalization. Just as the “avant-gardist” Warhol was eventually, in Foster’s opinion,⁴⁰ turned “into an institution,” many Chinese avant-gardists who were once rebels now, in Holland Cotter’s judgment, “form the new Chinese art establishment.”⁴¹

The Avant-garde Traditions and the “Sixth Generation” Filmmakers

As a “neo-avant-gardist,” Warhol had also produced films that had no plot but rather simply recorded “man’s daily activities, the things he sees around him.”⁴² “The world” filmed by Warhol is “transposed, intensified, electrified” so “we see it sharper than before.”⁴³ The strong documentary and improvisational elements we see in Warhol’s films are characteristic of his paintings that depict everyday objects such as Coca-Cola bottles or Campbell’s soup cans. In this sense, Warhol’s filmmaking revived the great tradition of the European avant-garde movements of the 1920s. As Siegfried Kracauer put it, the European avant-garde artists broke away from the commercialized cinema because of their conviction that the narrative as the main factor of feature films is alien to the medium.⁴⁴ Kracauer considered the avant-garde cinema “an extension of contemporary art”⁴⁵ because it “took much of its inspiration from contemporary art.”⁴⁶

Kracauer’s view is perfectly illuminated by Warhol’s creative work, and I will turn in this direction to define Chinese independent cinema with respect to avant-garde art.

Film scholar Zhang Zhen’s anthology *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*⁴⁷ is a fine collection of articles on the subject of contemporary independent cinema. According to Zhang Zhen, the Fifth Generation directors, despite their reputation for avant-garde art cinema as well as the political controversy that surrounds some of their films, have worked mostly within the state-sponsored studio systems. The Sixth Generation or Urban Generation filmmakers, however, have from the beginning identified themselves as institutionally and financially independent. They have resigned from assigned

jobs in state-owned studios, worked on low-budget underground productions, and participated in international film festivals without official sanction.⁴⁸ To Zhang, this new cinema of the Urban Generation is driven by a “documentary impulse.”⁴⁹ She writes, “For a filmmaker like Jia Zhangke, the documentary method is not only necessary when the film is set in his hometown, which supplied all the ‘locations’ for *Xiao Wu*, but also critical for the particular kind of story he wanted to tell about people *in* their social milieu. It is an aesthetic grounded in social space and experience—contingent, immanent, improvisational and open-ended.”⁵⁰ The strong documentary and improvisational elements in Warhol’s films are echoed in the “documentary impulse” of the Urban Generation cinema, and Chinese filmmakers of this new generation may see themselves as true heirs of a great tradition of the European avant-garde movements.

The cultural critic Dai Jinhua also points to the avant-garde stance the Sixth Generation has adopted since its emergence in the early 1990s.

The appearance of Sixth Generation films suggested a break away from commercial culture’s ambush of art film. Their avant-garde style also constituted a subversion of the official system of film production. More precisely, the Sixth Generation feature directors’ cultural pose and creative style they selected were more or less an enforced choice. Documentarists working in video did not experience this productive pressure. In a sense, the new documentaries that appeared under the labels “Sixth Generation” or “China’s underground film” were actually the works of those who had been eclipsed by eighties mainstream culture. In other words, marginal cultural forces banished during the social turmoil of the eighties and nineties now gathered strength along with other exiles and began the march toward the center.⁵¹

Here I want to elaborate on two main points raised by Dai Jinhua: (1) the Sixth Generation’s “subversion of the official system” and (2) “the march toward the center” by so-called marginal cultural forces, which, according to Dai, comprise Political Pop painters, rock stars, avant-garde poets and writers, photographers, and experimental theater directors.⁵²

The Sixth Generation’s “subversion” is not only anti-institutional, but, more important, it is anti-ideological. That is to say, the Sixth Generation filmmakers subverted the official artistic ideology of Socialist Realism, as did avant-garde artists. Yet this “subversion” is a complex issue in both contemporary art and cinema. As Gao Minglu put it,

The Political Pop artists had complex and contradictory feelings about the Cultural Revolution and the Mao era. Although Political Pop allegorizes and

criticizes Mao's mythic utopia and the political realities it brought about, the artists by no means simply criticize the power of Maoist discourse itself. Rather, the artists still worship and desire to gain this power as the major source for the construction of a new Chinese identity in the face of growing globalization and international influence. Mao's Socialist Realism becomes a symbol of recent Chinese heritage.⁵³

Yet, in Gao's view, Political Pop "has already exhausted itself because it simultaneously relies on Socialist Realism in order to exist, even as it seeks to critique and deconstruct it."⁵⁴ This paradox of Political Pop in regard to Socialist Realism is what I see as a dual identity of China's avant-garde art and independent cinema.

In the eyes of a Chinese cultural critic, filmmakers of the Fifth Generation have already "visually dismantled" Socialist Realism "in the name of a higher realism."⁵⁵ But this critic regards "the Fifth Generation as a failed project" because it attempts to establish a Chinese modernism "by locating its institution under the protection of the state whose representational officialdom it found suffocating and set out to challenge."⁵⁶ This dual identity of Fifth Generation cinema is similar to that of Chinese avant-garde art such as Political Pop as characterized by Gao Minglu. Thus, a question should be raised here: Is the Sixth Generation cinema seeking "the protection of the state" that it supposedly challenges? As Dai Jinhua observed, the Sixth Generation filmmakers had begun to march toward the center, which is "the state whose representational officialdom" both the Fifth and Sixth Generation filmmakers found "suffocating and set out to challenge." Accordingly, Zhang Zhen addressed this same problem by saying that "just how 'independent' the Sixth Generation cinema was in its formative years, or remains today, has been the focus of critical debates both inside and outside of China."⁵⁷ It is necessary to examine the current status of Sixth Generation cinema and determine its identity in a context of changed political and cultural circumstances.

On November 13, 2003, China's Film Administration Bureau held a conference at the Beijing Film Academy. Two Sixth Generation directors, Jia Zhangke and Wang Xiaoshuai, whose films had been banned years before, attended the conference and met with the director of the bureau and other officials. The conference was said to mark "a change of attitude towards so-called 'underground' directors as it advocated their being regarded as the new blood of the Chinese film industry to be guided and nurtured, rather than renegades whose creativity is choked at source."⁵⁸ As a result, Jia Zhangke's two recent films, *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004) and *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*, 2006), were partially sponsored by the Shanghai Film Studio, a major state-owned studio. On January 18, 2007, *Shanghai Daily* published a report titled "Film Regulator to Aid New Generation of Directors," which reads like a tragicomic "official story" about all current Chinese filmmakers:

Sixteen young Chinese film directors will receive funds from the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television to develop more sophisticated movies. The administration will offer 500,000 yuan (US\$64,267) for each good script and help them publish their films more easily. The 16 directors include Lu Chuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, Xu Jinglei, Jia Zhangke and Ning Hao, who have won awards from international film galas [*sic*] or won high reputation from audiences. Ning, the director of *Crazy Stone*, may be the first to be given the funds for his new film, the English name of which is translated as “Crazy Racing Car.” The administration plans to lower the maximum age limit to 40 years next year from the current 45. An official of the administration said crowd-pleasing entertainment productions filled Chinese theaters, especially those directed by Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Feng Xiaogang, the Fifth Generation of directors in China. These big-budget movies earned a lot of money rather than a good reputation because of their lack of creativity, culture and philosophy, the official said.⁵⁹

From this report we learn that the Fifth Generation is out of favor with the state, yet its best director, Zhang Yimou, was put in charge of the Beijing 2008 Olympic opening ceremony, which is definitely the “crowd-pleasing entertainment” the Chinese government cannot afford not to stage before the eyes of the entire world. The Sixth Generation directors are indeed being “guided and nurtured” by the state, both politically and financially, although their sophisticated, international-award-winning films have had almost no audiences at home. In this regard, I think, the Chinese state is actually caving in to the power of global cultural institutions that have also been guiding and nurturing the two generations of Chinese filmmakers over the past decades (most of the funds for the Sixth Generation’s films, for example, come from outside China). And the state’s policy change is merely a reflection of China’s submission to global capitalism in the cultural sphere.

Zhang Yimou’s *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*, 1987) won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1988 to become the first Chinese-language film ever to bring home a major international award.⁶⁰ At home, however, the film’s reception, especially among intellectuals, was “a mix of celebration and bitter accusation of sellout.”⁶¹ Dai Jinhua wrote that through this film, Zhang “showcased himself as a sign of the oriental/Chinese subject,”⁶² and that Chinese directors like Zhang “had to turn their native history and experience into a reified object, an exotic and sensational Other, which was still accessible to the Euro-American cultural decoding machine. Thus the process of cultural subordination and the self-exile of indigenous culture unfolded.”⁶³ Twenty years later, this “process of cultural subordination” seems to have continued, as exemplified by Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life*,

which won the Golden Lion at the 63rd Venice Film Festival. Derek Elley of *Variety* first expressed critical doubt about this award-winning film: “The surprise film at this year’s Venice fest offered no surprises: Aptly titled ‘Still Life’ it is another slow, contemplative look at spiritual/emotional malaise in modern China by thirtysomething auteur Jia Zhangke. . . . Virtually docu-like look at a town about to be submerged by the Yangtze River Three Gorges Dam project has almost zero plot but molto mood. It will appeal to the most faithful of the director’s camp-followers and no one else.”⁶⁴ Agreeing with Elley, Bernard Perusse wrote in *The Montreal Gazette*, “Plot and narrative seem almost incidental. . . . There is . . . very little to engage the viewer on the level of the heart.”⁶⁵ In his review of the film, Kevin Laforest was keen to point out, “While *Still Life* remains a heavy film that offers spectators little by way of human connection, its formal mastery and value as a documentary are undeniable.”⁶⁶ Interestingly, an anonymous online Chinese commentator also pointed out that there was no connection whatever between the two protagonists in *Still Life* and the imposing landscape of the Three Gorges Dam that has fascinated many Western viewers.⁶⁷ On that account, Jia Zhangke, like Zhang Yimou before him, used the Three Gorges Dam as “a reified object, an exotic and sensational Other” to appeal to “the Euro-American cultural decoding machine”—this time the Venice Film Festival. Zhang Weiping, a long-time producer for Zhang Yimou, accused the festival’s director, Marco Muller, of manipulating “the award of the top prize to *Still Life*,” and Jia Zhangke considered suing the producer.⁶⁸

This bitter feud between the two generations of Chinese filmmakers reveals what Calinescu termed “a culture of crisis.” For Calinescu, the avant-garde was “furthering the ‘natural’ decay of traditional forms in our world of change, and [doing] its best to intensify and dramatize all existing symptoms of decadence and exhaustion.”⁶⁹ He believed that “the ‘decadentism’ of the avant-garde is not only self-conscious but also openly ironical and self-ironical—and joyfully self-destructive.”⁷⁰ In this light, Zhang Yimou’s latest film, *Curse of the Golden Flower* (*Man cheng jin dai huangjin jia*, 2006) is blatantly “self-ironical” and “self-destructive” because it radically reverses the main theme of his *Red Sorghum* and *Ju Dou* (*Ju Dou*, 1990), in which the mother, in complicity with her lover or son, violently and successfully revolts against the father. As Sheldon Lu put it, “The oedipal complex in the triangulation of the relationship between fathers, mothers and sons is not only a fundamental element of the melodrama of most of Zhang’s films but also the basic condition of the historic appearance of the Fifth Generation in relation to its predecessors.”⁷¹ From Dai Jinhua’s point of view, Zhang’s *Red Sorghum* “locates the act of patricide within the narrative environment” so that the film “becomes an acclaimed, triumphant legend and an exquisite myth about Chinese men and Chinese history.”⁷² In *Curse of the Golden Flower*, however, the father/emperor

triumphs while the mother/empress is poisoned and her two elder sons commit suicide. Moreover, the youngest son is slain by the father/emperor, which, to borrow Dai Jinhua's words, is "a theme that forms the backbone of the narrative of 'oriental infanticide' (*shazi wenhua*)."⁷³ The movie concludes with a glorious scene in which the paternal authority of the father/emperor is restored. With *Curse of the Golden Flower*, Zhang Yimou destroyed the "myth about Chinese men and history" he had created two decades before.

Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* manifests this same "self-ironical" and "self-destructive" pattern of the avant-garde. As noted, *Still Life* is a film that in the eyes of many Western and Chinese viewers, if not the jury of the 63rd Venice Film Festival, severs any "human connection," in Laforest's words. More recently, the British film critic Neil Young has questioned the legitimacy of Jia's prize-winning film: "*Still Life* was the surprise winner of the Golden Lion at last year's Venice Film Festival and, while by no means a bad movie, is the kind of middling affair that makes you keen to find out what else was in competition. In fact, *Children of Men*, *The Queen* and *Black Book* were all in the running—and any of these would have been a worthier winner than Jia's topical but torpid tale of discontents in back-of-beyond China."⁷⁴ Clearly Young's doubt is raised by the movie itself, in which the two protagonists set off to search for their long-lost spouses, yet roam around the hills and plains of the Three Gorges as if they were somnambulists who feel nothing in real life.

At a film conference in Jiangsu, China, in March 2007, Zhang Hongsen, a deputy director of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, strongly criticized the film, suggesting that "Jia cuts himself off from the people he films" and pointing to "the dismal box-office for *Still Life* as evidence of artistic failure."⁷⁵ This view seems to parallel that of Gao Minglu, who is critical of films both by Zhang Yimou and Jia Zhangke. Gao considers *Curse of the Golden Flower* a commercial production, like "rubbish coated in gold and jade" (*jinyu qi wai, baixu qi zhong*). By comparison, Gao says, *Still Life* is a documentary feature (*jishi dianying*) that at least tries to portray the sufferings of people who are displaced by the Three Gorges Dam project. Yet, as he points out, Jia's filmic language is too "crude" (*cucao*), because the director has no patience or desire to refine his narrative structure.⁷⁶ (Jia claimed that he wrote the script in a week, and he regarded *Still Life* an "improvisational work" [*jixing de zuopin*].⁷⁷) Gao then asks: Are all Chinese people as "straight (*zhibai*), inarticulate (*mune*), indifferent (*mamu*) and impassive (*wudongyuzhong*) as the protagonists in *Still Life*?" He continues: like many Chinese avant-garde artists who paint "signs" (*fuhao*), Westerners see the Three Gorges as a "sign" or "subject" typical of China's crudeness, which is primordial but good, and they appreciate the crude Chinese life portrayed in Jia's film, an appreciation which is itself discriminatory.⁷⁸

Gao Minglu's criticism of Zhang Yimou's and Jia Zhangke's latest work illustrates a dilemma that confronts Chinese avant-garde art and independent cinema today.

In my opinion, Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers are caught in a conflict between global institutions and Chinese authorities that fund projects to promote their different agendas. The French actress Catherine Deneuve, who headed the jury of the 63rd Venice Film Festival, praised *Still Life*, saying that "the story was moving without being political."⁷⁹ Yet her acclaim was at odds with other Western critics such as Neil Young, who dismissed Jia's tale as "topical but torpid." Clifford Coonan of *The Independent* (London) also noted that *Still Life* "may not be explicitly political, but it is hard to avoid the political aspect of the Three Gorges Dam project."⁸⁰ The Chinese media reported in 2006 that Marco Muller came to China and asked Jia Zhangke for "a feature film" about the Three Gorges. Earlier that year, Jia was filming Liu Xiaodong, a well-known avant-garde painter and Jia's close friend, at the Three Gorges at the request of a collector of Liu's paintings.⁸¹ Since Jia was not sure he could finish his feature picture in time for the competition, he instead recommended his documentary to Muller.⁸² *Still Life* was a late entry at the Venice Film Festival but won the top prize anyway. Many concluded that Jia was "commissioned" by Muller to make the film and was "guaranteed" to win. In Dai Jinhua's view, Muller is an excellent example of "the Euro-American cultural decoding machine." He is an Italian, university-trained "Orientalist" who studied Chinese language and culture in China from 1975 to 1977. Since the early 1980s, Muller has been known as a "festival maker." He was director of prestigious international film festivals such as the ones in Rotterdam and Locarno (Switzerland), and eventually became a film producer himself.⁸³ In this context, Muller should be seen as a shrewd "contractor" of a global culture industry, and Jia Zhangke indeed "becomes as much a subcontractor as an antagonist," to quote Foster's words about the "Warholian" avant-garde. But Warhol's documentary films merely record daily activities, so they are by their nature improvisational. In contrast, Jia's recent work seems to have exhausted the "documentary impulse" extolled by Zhang Zhen; Jia had to defend the use of staged scenes in his *Useless*, a documentary about a Chinese woman fashion designer, which won the Orizzonti documentary prize at the 2007 Venice Film Festival, run by Muller.⁸⁴

Nowadays too few successful Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers can elude this dual identity of "subcontractor" and "antagonist." At the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999, Cai Guoqiang's *Rent Collection Courtyard* won the Golden Lion Prize, which aroused a great deal of controversy about the copyright issue in mainland China's art circle.⁸⁵ Cai's award-winning installation appropriated a canonical work of Socialist Realism—*Rent Collection Courtyard*—which

had been commissioned by the provincial government of Sichuan from professors and students at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 1965. Harold Szeemann, head curator of the 48th Venice Biennale, had been trying since 1972 to invite the original *Rent Collection Courtyard* to the Documenta 5 exhibition, while Cai was fully aware of Szeemann's intense interest in this masterwork of Socialist Realism at the time.⁸⁶ In the context of the Venice Biennale, however, Cai "co-opted the socialist realist style for the entertainment of the very bourgeoisie the original denigrated."⁸⁷ So the saga of Muller and Jia Zhangke is a replay of that of Szeemann and Cai Guoqiang. In both cases, there was a "contractual" relationship between Western Orientalists representing global institutions and Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers aspiring to international success, a contractual relationship most likely to blossom among avant-garde artists. As noted by Esplund, in Shanghai Zhang Huan manages "a large Warholian studio-factory" supplying his works to Western museums and galleries. In that context, Esplund says, Zhang Huan's art is "a global product of our 'inter-connectedness,'" and he calls it "Western art made in China."⁸⁸ Although Esplund's opinion may seem overstated, it is true that capitalist globalization allows many Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers to thrive.

Under these circumstances, I believe, Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers are obliged to assume a dual identity of "subcontractor" and "antagonist," especially in their relationship with global institutions and Chinese authorities. Thus a key question must be raised: Can they still perform the essential role of antagonist? For Bürger, this is a fundamental question about the avant-garde and political engagement.⁸⁹ As he points out, in avant-garde artwork, "the individual sign" or "the individual political motif" "does not refer primarily to the work as a whole, but to reality," and "the recipient" of the avant-garde art "is free to respond to" such sign or motif "as an important statement concerning the praxis of life."⁹⁰ In a discussion that follows, I will demonstrate how Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers employ their signs and motifs to portray Chinese realities as true "antagonists" in the best tradition of the historical avant-garde movements.

The Paradox of Perceptions: Globalization, Nationalism, Postsocialist Trauma

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin writes that film unfolds "all the forms of perception" so "all problems of contemporary art find their definitive formulation only in the context of film."⁹¹ This thesis sets a conceptual framework for my approach. In this study, Chinese avant-garde art and independent cinema are

treated as two related “forms of perception” in Benjamin’s terms. In art and cinema, I think, these “forms of perception” can only be expressed through “individual sign” or “political motif,” which, as Bürger says, can exert a direct effect on the spectator who “can confront it with life as he experiences it.”⁹² In my observations, Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers use such “sign” and “motif” to convey their paradoxical views of a China caught between its socialist past and capitalist present. In other words, Chinese artists and filmmakers examined in this book perceive China as a hybrid of two conflicting yet coexisting systems, ideologies, cultures—Mao’s socialism and global capitalism.

Liu Kang has defined this paradox of China’s process of globalization under Deng Xiaoping’s “reform and openness” policy:

Deng Xiaoping’s *gaige kaifang* is a strategy of modernization and globalization without a real alternative vision. It retains only the discursive forms of Mao’s revolutionary hegemony, but not his revolutionary globalism, as its ideological core. Capitalist globalization, by contrast, has both a vision (in a variety of ideological guises) and enormous material and institutional power. Yet the neoliberal vision of the free market, the dominant ideology of globalization, cannot rationalize and camouflage the ever-increasing rifts between the wealthy and the dispossessed, between the powerful and the disempowered, which are, in the final analysis, the fundamental and irreconcilable contradictions of globalization. The global/local, universal/particular, or homogenizing/diversifying dichotomies or paradoxes are different manifestations of this fundamental contradiction.⁹³

Liu Kang’s insight into a sharply divided Chinese society—“the ever-increasing rift between the wealthy and the dispossessed”—is well illuminated by a 2004 “BMW incident.” On a busy road in the city of Harbin, a farmer’s truck scratched the side mirror of a new BMW X5 driven by a woman, who became angry and ran over the farmer’s wife, killing her and injuring several other bystanders. The female driver was the wife of a wealthy property developer who was connected with the local authority, and she was later cleared of manslaughter and given a suspended sentence. This “BMW incident,” wrote Jonathan Watts of the *Guardian*, has strengthened “a growing public belief that wealth equals corruption in a country that once prided itself on communist equality but is now racked by suspicions that officials are exploiting their control of land, the courts and the media to grow rich and escape justice. The feeling is particularly strong in Harbin, the heart of the rust-belt in northeastern China, where millions of workers have been laid off from state-owned enterprises since the switch to a market economy.”⁹⁴ Watts cited a Chinese sociologist at Heilongjiang University as saying, “People believe the rich

can influence the law behind the scenes with money. More cases like the BMW furor are likely to happen in the future.”⁹⁵

BMW, the world's largest premium car maker, entered the Chinese market in 1994, and since then the German-made luxury car has been seen as a symbol of wealth and power. In Chinese, the name of BMW is dubbed as *Baoma*, meaning “precious horse.” In July 2007, BMW reported that it had sold 38 percent more cars in China during the first half of the year than in the first half of the previous year, as the country's *nouveau riche* “snapped up the latest models.”⁹⁶ Earlier in that year, an exhibition titled “Art in Motion” was held in Long Match Space, an art gallery in the 798 Art District in eastern Beijing. The exhibition showcased four of fifteen “BMW Art Cars” designed by prominent artists such as Alexander Calder, David Hockney, and Andy Warhol.⁹⁷ Also on display was a group of Chinese avant-garde artists' new work. In fact, the 798 “Art in Motion” show was part of the BMW Art Car Collection's world tour, which kicked off at the Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in September 2006 and traveled to Singapore, the Philippines, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, China, Russia, Turkey, and the United States.⁹⁸ In this respect, the BMW Beijing exhibition was an exemplar of global capitalism's “enormous material and institutional power” on the one side and China's assimilation into a global car industry and culture on the other.⁹⁹

Four BMW art cars included in the “Art in Motion” show were conceived by Alexander Calder, David Hockney, Matazo Kayama, and Jenny Holzer, who admired the modern science, technology, and aesthetics of the capitalist car culture and whose cars, except for Kayama's, were used in auto races.¹⁰⁰ By contrast, five participating Chinese avant-garde artists presented their work as “a multilayered dialogue regarding the conflict between contemporary culture and the logic of capitalism in our globalized world,” and their “creative endeavor” was characterized by “contradictions and confrontations.”¹⁰¹ One example is Wang Gongxin's video installation *Myth of Capitalism* (*Zibenzhuoyi de chungqi*, 2007), which consists of nightmarish scenes of an auto junkyard as a source of pollution and a murky Forbidden City in Beijing as a casualty of car exhaust. Wang's work “overlaps today's familiar landscapes to summarize the ghoulish results of humankind's pursuit of capital and the hegemony of industrialism.”¹⁰² The avant-garde artist's grim perception of global capitalism, as reflected in the BMW art car collection, also “overlaps” with that of independent filmmakers such as Ning Hao, Wang Chao, and Wang Quan'an. In their recent films, these directors use BMW, Audi, and Mercedes cars as central motifs to convey a clashing vision of China's modernization and globalization.

Ning Hao's *Crazy Stone* (*Fengkuang de shitou*, 2006) is a black comedy about property developers and thieves chasing a gem discovered in a bankrupt state-

owned factory in Chongqing, a “mountain city” in southwestern China where one in five employees of state-owned enterprises is laid off because of the government’s policy of “reducing workforce and increasing productivity.”¹⁰³ As Ning put it, “It’s about the reality of this crazy developing China and Chongqing being a micro-cosm of the country. In this crazy city, there must be a lot of crazy stories. . . . Lots of contradictions and conflicts, class differences and wealth gaps. . . . I have known some thieves. They’re not necessarily bad guys. I’ve known some governmental officials and property developers. They are not necessarily good.”¹⁰⁴ In the opening sequence of *Crazy Stone*, a collision between two parked vehicles is staged like a surrealist “happening.” While parked on a steep empty street, a van driven by a worker from the bankrupt factory suddenly rolls downhill and crashes into a stationary BMW owned by a property developer in a symbolic clash between a waning socialism and an omnipresent global capitalism. During a quarrel over the collision, the developer points to the BMW logo on the hood and yells at the factory worker, “See this is a *Bie mowo!*” *Bie mowo* is another Chinese dubbing of BMW that means “Don’t touch me!”—a popular name that seems to mock the brash arrogance of BMW owners. In the movie’s heist sequence, a professional thief from Hong Kong drives the same BMW provided by the developer. In Ning’s view, a BMW is not an object of admiration but one of “class differences and wealth gap” and even criminal adventure.

In *Luxury Car (Jiangcheng xiari, 2006)*,¹⁰⁵ director Wang Chao also employs a flashy Audi as an object of desire that induces greed, crime, and death. The car is driven by a businessman, who, like the woman in the BMW incident, has a reckless disregard for human life and knocks down a rustic youth in the city of Wuhan, and the Audi is then stolen by a street gang. From the country, the youth’s father sends his daughter to look for her “missing” brother, but the girl too is lost in an underworld of crime and prostitution in the city. A retired policeman solves the crime but is killed in the car driven by the gang leader, who has profited from the robbery. An American reviewer remarks, “The story plays out to a satisfactory close but the real tension in the film is between the two Chinas that father and daughter represent.”¹⁰⁶ The father is a residual figure from Mao’s socialist China who was denounced in the Anti-rightist Campaign in 1957 and sent to the countryside for forty years. The daughter and her brother belong to a young generation that escapes an impoverished countryside to seek a better life in the big city. In the film, father and daughter (or the “two Chinas”) ride together in the Audi driven by her gangster “boyfriend.” In the eyes of a French critic, “This Audi has turned into a hearse. This black vehicle has a color of tragedy and is an omen of catastrophe. The car illustrates greed, corruption, larceny, and exploitation. In a word, it is a certain Evil that destroys Chinese civilization.”¹⁰⁷ The critic calls the

Audi a “seductive MacGuffin” through which Wang Chao presents “a society in transformation, a people perplexed and lost . . . a China whose metamorphosis is unjust, unequal, and painful.”¹⁰⁸

Wang Quan’an’s *Tuya’s Marriage* (*Tuya de hunshi*, 2007) is a tale about a woman’s search for a reliable man who can support her children and her disabled husband.¹⁰⁹ The story takes place in the barren land of Inner Mongolia, where Tuya, the protagonist, agrees to marry a prosperous businessman who drives a Mercedes on the rugged country road. The man makes a fortune in the oil industry and, unlike the owners of the BMW and the Audi in two previous films, he is clean. There is no greed, no corruption, no crime, and no exploitation that may be attached to the Mercedes. With Tuya’s consent, the businessman drives her family to a city and puts her husband under the care of the city’s best welfare facility, at his own expense. In this case, his pristine Mercedes is an iconic image of triumphant Chinese capitalism that is generous to the needy. Later, the depressed husband attempts suicide by slitting his wrist, which leaves him in a hospital emergency room bleeding because he has no money to pay for treatment. When the businessman is called for help, his generosity dries up after Tuya refuses his sexual advance in a hotel room. In the end, Tuya marries a young man who drives a truck and digs a well for water, which Tuya’s village needs most. In a long shot, we see the Mercedes confront a huge truck on the road, with the businessman and the Tuya family standing in silence on opposite sides of the frame. This memorable image of two vehicles is yet again an image of a conflict between an old socialist China and a new capitalist China.¹¹⁰ Tuya’s husband was disabled in an accident while digging a well for her village. The young man continues his “socialist” cause for water, in sharp contrast to the businessman’s “capitalist” enterprise for oil. Against this backdrop, Tuya’s marriage is a choice of old socialism over new capitalism.

Mao’s socialist legacy is also an integral part of new Chinese nationalism, a discourse that finds a distinct echo in contemporary Chinese art and cinema. First of all, the discourse of this new Chinese nationalism is a mixed reaction to or paradoxical perception of capitalist globalization. In this sense it is a fight for national symbols and icons against globalization. In July 2007, *China Daily* reported, “The most controversial symbol of globalization in Beijing has closed its door. The Starbucks outlet in the Forbidden City downed its shutters on Friday after months of online protests by millions of people, saying its presence undermined the solemnity of the former imperial palace and trampled over Chinese culture.”¹¹¹ The online protest campaign was led by Rui Chenggang, an anchorman with CCTV’s English language Channel 9, in January. A year before, Rui had met with Jim Donald, Starbucks’ chief executive, at a summit at Yale University and had asked Donald to shut down the coffee shop in the Forbidden City,¹¹² formally known as the Palace Museum (Gugong Bowuyuan), a symbol of Chinese civilization for Rui and

his supporters. Yet Rui denied that he was “nationalistic” and said, “Sure I hope Starbucks will consider the dignity and sensitivity of Chinese people. But I’m not accusing anyone, or globalization. Nobody can stop globalization.”¹¹³ Starbucks left the Forbidden City only after millions of China’s Internet users “react[ed] strongly to any perceived slight to national pride.”¹¹⁴ In fact, the Starbucks coffee shop had opened in 2000 at the invitation of the museum authorities, who needed to raise money to maintain the 178-acre complex of palaces and gardens. Since 1999, Starbucks has opened 250 outlets in the mainland, and its chairman Howard Schultz describes China as the company’s “No. 1 growth market.”¹¹⁵ But even some Western visitors to the Forbidden City noticed “the paradox that an American cultural icon should spring up . . . inside a crowning glory of Chinese civilization.”¹¹⁶ In any case, the removal of Starbucks is a triumph of so-called cultural nationalism or liberal nationalism that has engaged Chinese intellectuals since the 1990s.¹¹⁷ As Suisheng Zhao points out, after a century of turbulence and thirty years of Mao’s socialist experiments, Chinese intellectuals have “found the real possibility of rejuvenating the nation because post-Mao reforms not only brought about rapid economic growth but also fed national pride. They were determined to eradicate all obstacles in their pursuit of national prosperity.”¹¹⁸ Liu Kang also remarks that nationalism is keenly felt in China’s modernization and globalization, and it has increasingly influenced the country’s political and social life.¹¹⁹ For Liu, Chinese nationalism is a paradox that cannot be simply attributed to a change from Mao’s revolutionary globalism to Deng’s nationalist agenda or an emergent “China threat.” In his judgment, Chinese nationalism should be seen as a result of China’s integration into globalization, which is actually “a symptom of the fundamental contradictions of globalization.”¹²⁰

In art and life, I think, Chinese nationalism as “a symptom” is curiously referenced by a certain foreign object that invades a Chinese society still burdened by Mao’s socialist legacy. A prominent referent for this Chinese nationalism is Coca-Cola, an American soft drink brand and cultural icon. In February 2004, the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce conducted a study, titled “PRD Patriot’s Paradox: China Youth Nationalism not Reflected in Brand Choices, Recent Survey Finds,” on youth preference for brands in the Pearl River Delta (PRD). In this survey we read, “Despite growing feelings of nationalism, fuelled, among many other things, by China’s recent success in space exploration and the upcoming Beijing Olympics, Chinese youths are not discerning when it comes to choosing local brands over foreign ones.”¹²¹ Yet the study also states that China’s national brands are competing with international ones such as Coca-Cola for “the hearts and wallets of China’s dynamic youth” and that many brands like Jianlibao are appealing to national pride as part of their offering to the market. And the study concludes that these national brands, especially Jianlibao, have exploited patriotism to achieve

their success.¹²² Once called “China’s magic water,” Jianlibao was established as a state-owned sports beverage maker in the 1980s. It dominated the soft drink market in the early 1990s but could not compete with Coca-Cola, which re-entered China in 1979. Recent mismanagement and corruption scandals have thwarted the company’s growth.¹²³

The avant-garde artist Wang Guangyi takes Coca-Cola and other famous Western brands as subjects in his “Political Pop” paintings. But Wang’s oeuvre, which contrasts Western brands with symbols and icons of Mao’s socialist revolution, is a critique of capitalist consumer culture. Sheldon Lu has analyzed Wang’s art in depth:

In Wang Guangyi’s *Great Criticism* series, one notices a pastiche of symbols and icons: revolutionary workers, peasants, and soldiers—all engaged in criticism of the past—as can be commonly seen in posters during the Cultural Revolution and commercials for Nikon, Kodak, Coca-Cola, Benetton, Philips, and other commodities in the age of global capitalism. The symbolic and real juxtaposition of a residual revolutionary enthusiasm with emergent transnational commodification actually makes up contemporary China. The union of disjoined, contradictory elements of social life marks the unfolding of a post-modern culture in China.¹²⁴

In Wang’s work, the “contradictory elements” in contemporary China nonetheless appear more as a clash than a “union.” A picture in his *Great Criticism: Coca-Cola* series depicts Mao’s socialist revolutionary heroes—the big, robust figures of worker, peasant, and soldier (*gong nong bing*)—passionately stabbing at a Coca-Cola logo, since “the artist sees the Coca-Cola logo as an invasion of Western brands into China.”¹²⁵ Although this “violence” is imaginary, it is a parodic discourse of Chinese nationalism. Wahaha, a Chinese soda maker and a domestic competitor of Coca-Cola, has ardently claimed that “Coke and Pepsi have long dominated the China market; their empire should be dismantled and more domestic players should enter the fray. Chinese people should have their own Cola.”¹²⁶

Coca-Cola as an invading alien object is a common theme in recent Chinese films. In Zhang Yimou’s *Not One Less* (*Yige ye buneng shao*, 1999), there is a satirical depiction of the domestic competition between Jianlibao and Coca-Cola. In the town’s grocery store, a group of twenty-six children from a poor village want Coca-Cola instead of Jianlibao, but they do not have enough money to get one for everybody, so they decide to take a sip from the two cans of Coke they are able to purchase—only two cokes for twenty-six thirsty kids! Coca-Cola controls 70 percent of the Chinese market, mostly in the big cities, but the U.S. soft drink giant

has not won over the country's vast rural area, where "domestic players, even in a small capacity, can thwart the monopoly of Coke or Pepsi."¹²⁷ This assessment proves credible in Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* (*Xiao Wu*, 1997). After seeing a play about a village girl's tragic suicide, Xiao Wu and his sister walk down a dark street. The sister steps on a metal object and finds a discarded can of Coke in the ground. In resentment she kicks it miles away. In the sister's symbolic gesture, we recognize a similar nationalistic suspicion—global capitalism is to blame for all that the impoverished rural population has to suffer. In *Crazy Stone*, Ning Hao uses a can of Coca-Cola to construct a subplot: San Bao, a young worker from a bankrupt factory, is obsessed with the lottery. He has been laid off from a state-owned enterprise and desperately needs fast cash to survive. By accident, San Bao enters a hotel room in his home town of Chongqing, where he finds a mountain of Coke cans. He picks up a can, lifts the lid, and finds the winning number in a Coca-Cola lottery. San Bao travels to Beijing to claim the prize, but the lottery turns out to be a scam. The hotel room is occupied by local thieves who have conceived the sting. In this diegetic context, Coke is a motif for sham capitalism that thrives on fraudulent business practice. The film opens with a Coke can being thrown from a cable car. The can falls onto the city of Chongqing like a bomb, which crashes into the windshield of a white van driven by San Bao and his supervisor, which is parked on a steep hill. A moment later the driverless van rolls down the street and collides with a parked BMW. Through this chain of absurd events we witness how two alien objects, a Coke can and a BMW, together wreak havoc on a Chinese society unprepared for the brutal invasion of global capitalism.

In a long shot in *Crazy Stone* we see San Bao standing alone in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, a symbol of China's socialist revolution. After being conned in the Coke lottery, San Bao looks forlorn and disenchanted. Yet, as a good citizen, he is duly paying his tribute to the revolution led by Mao, whose portrait is hung over Tiananmen Gate behind him. On the soundtrack, a hit children's song from the early 1970s sings, "I Love Beijing's Tiananmen where the sun is rising. Great Leader Chairman Mao is leading us to march on."¹²⁸ For San Bao, however, even the Great Leader can no longer prevent a postsocialist China from the near anarchy that victimizes him and his family. Both the *mise-en-scène* and the childish musical score define San Bao as a traumatized youth who has little knowledge of today's Chinese society plagued by massive fraud and crime. Apparently, the young man comes from the so-called disadvantaged community (*ruoshi qunti*)¹²⁹ largely ignored by China's new leadership, which advocates "socialism with Chinese characteristics" or, in essence, new Chinese capitalism. This "disadvantaged" segment of Chinese society has not fared well since the country's economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. It is, in Ning Hao's view, vulnerable to a violent foray of global

capitalism, as rendered by the vicious Coke “bomb” in the opening of the film.¹³⁰ Though young in age, San Bao, too, is a residual figure from a socialist past like the father in Wang Chao’s *Luxury Car*.

The San Bao character might be called the “Child of Marx and Coca-Cola,” to appropriate Jean-Luc Godard’s famous phrase that characterizes 1960s European youth engaged in socialist leftist politics and capitalist pop culture in his film *Masculin/Feminin*.¹³¹ In San Bao’s case, however, this Chinese “Child of Marx and Coca-Cola” may represent a fusion of and a paradox between Mao’s socialism and global capitalism. As such, San Bao is a schizophrenic and a traumatic child undergoing personal psychosomatic chaos. In his study titled “Walker Evan’s Depression and the Trauma of Photography,” Eric Rosenberg says, “Freud’s image of trauma is that of a wound to the psyche. This configuration would seem to lend itself to the totality and expectation of documentary photography.”¹³² Indeed San Bao inflicts such wounds, both psychologically and physically. The youth’s psyche is first damaged by the Coke lottery scam, so in revenge he beats a thief unconscious. Later San Bao himself is almost strangled to death by his superior, who assumes he has stolen a gem. Most male characters in the film are prone to such mindless violence (e.g., father beats son, boss beats employees, thieves beat each other, stranger beats stranger), which is surely a warning sign of social inadequacy, mental illness, and trauma. As Rosenberg puts it, “We can never truly know what trauma looks like. Nevertheless, trauma can *have* outward appearances, can hide behind manifestations, perhaps symptoms. But it can reveal its own image only to that or in that body or subject it inhabits.”¹³³ Thus San Bao’s bruised face or wounded psyche reveal nothing but “symptoms” of what I would call a postsocialist trauma, a social illness that prevails in a Chinese society subject to change and anarchy.

What, then, is postsocialist trauma? To answer this question, we first need to clarify “postsocialism,” a term that has been defined by scholars from in and outside China. In his book *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture*, Sheldon Lu probed the origin and meaning of the term by drawing on a range of scholarly writings, such as the following: Arif Dirlik writes that postsocialism is a historical condition in which socialism has lost its coherence as a dominant theory of politics and existing socialist states must adjust to the demand of a capitalist world order. Postsocialism is thus the historical condition of Deng’s China, where the people have lost their faith in socialist ideology and the government has to instill capitalist elements into the Chinese economic and social systems in order to modernize the country. Paul Pickowicz asserts that in arts and culture, postsocialism refers to a negative, dystopian cultural condition that prevails in China and other existing socialist states. Postsocialism deals with the domain of perception; it is the perception of a dehumanizing and dystopian reality. According to Zhang Yiwu, postsocialism is a period of new culture directed

toward consumption, supported by mass communication, and guided by pragmatism. Lu summarizes by saying that postsocialism is a socioeconomic condition in which capitalist modes of production have been implemented in a “socialist” China that has joined the global capitalist regime of the World Trade Organization. Thus postsocialism is a contradictory overlapping of capitalist economy and communist politics, and it embodies the fundamental internal contradictions of Chinese society.¹³⁴

On that account, I propose that postsocialist trauma is the trauma of China’s transition from socialism to capitalism, an agonizing experience for people in China as well as Russia and Eastern Europe. Citing Ralf Dahrendorf’s use of “vale of tears,” Slavoj Žižek described this transition as a “necessarily painful” process. After the collapse of socialism, one cannot pass directly to a market economy; socialist welfare and social security systems must be dismantled first, which means less social security and less guaranteed social care.¹³⁵ In Žižek’s judgment, however, people in former socialist countries never had a chance to choose this transition; they were just thrown into “a new situation in which they were presented with a new set of given choices.”¹³⁶ To follow Žižek’s psychoanalyst view, this transition is a trauma that designates a person’s “shocking encounter” with his or her new environment, especially “a violent intrusion of something which doesn’t fit in” a person’s “life-world.”¹³⁷

Zhang Zhen considers new Chinese cinema since the 1990s to be “the witness” to the traumas of China’s economic and social transformation (*zhuanxing*).¹³⁸ According to Zhang, Deng Xiaoping’s 1992 “southern trip” is the mantra of *zhuanxing*, or transformation, and that, in Deng’s words, “socialism can also practice market economy.” This transformation is no longer about the market reforms but about “a kind of structural overhaul in mentality and ideology as well as infrastructure.”¹³⁹ In Zhang’s view, many contemporary filmmakers depart from Chinese cinema’s tradition of critical realism or Socialist Realism by taking up a new position of “the witness who produces testimonials rather than epistles. Yet this form of witness is one mediated through the visual technologies used for making the films or embedded in the films as metacommentaries, which are deployed as resources for social critique, collective recovery, memory production, and reflections on the nature of cinematic representation.”¹⁴⁰ And she stresses that “the concept of the witness derives in part from the growing field of trauma studies.”¹⁴¹ In this regard, I think, new Chinese cinema stands “witness” to the nation’s traumatic encounter with what Zhang Zhen has called “a blatant form of capitalism that voraciously mixes the rawness of industrial capitalism and the slickness of the computer-age postindustrialism thriving alongside the residues of socialism.”¹⁴²

Much of recent work by independent filmmakers is expressive of this post-socialist trauma. Earlier in 2005, three Chinese films won top prizes at various

international film festivals. Gu Changwei's *Peacock (Kongque)* (2005), Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams (Qinghong)* (2005), and Li Shaohong's *Stolen Life (Shengsi jie)* (2005), all look into the subject of China's rapid yet painful transition from socialism to capitalism. Central to the three filmmakers' work is a traumatic encounter between father and daughter; the working-class father from a bygone socialist era is incapable of understanding the daughter who has grown up in Deng's "reform and openness" era. The bitter conflict between the two generations takes a tragic turn. In *Peacock*, the daughter hastily marries a man she does not love in order to leave the family, and the marriage ends in divorce. In *Shanghai Dreams*, the daughter attempts suicide in protest of her father's disapproval of her boyfriend, who is later sentenced to death for raping the girl. In *Stolen Life*, against her parents' will, the daughter chooses to live with a man she falls in love with. Yet she soon finds out that their romance is a scam; with different women, the man has already fathered a string of babies and sold them to childless couples. So in the eyes of the three filmmakers, the disintegration of the traditional Chinese family arises from the breakup of socialism, as the unfit father exerts no authority or lends no help to his children traumatized by loss, death, and crime in this crude era of transformation.

Li Yang's *Blind Shaft (Mang jing)* (2004) is another prize-winning film that bears witness to China's transformation or, to borrow Pickowicz's words, "a dehumanizing and dystopian reality" that defines postsocialism. The film not only depicts horrid working conditions in which Chinese coal miners struggle to survive, but also a demoralizing criminal mentality tied to China's market reforms. Deep down in the pit, two rural miners murder their co-workers so they can get compensation for the dead victims, whom they claim to be their relatives, while the mine owners are willing to pay to cover up any coal accidents that subject them to safety inspection by the government. Yet, as an American critic comments, the film "puts faith in neither communism nor capitalism—it's a savage swipe at China as the filmmaker finds it. Communist slogans are emptied of meaning and capitalist progress is emptied of hope. The new China is a place where everyone is for sale, and the lives of the once-exalted working class are the cheapest."¹⁴³

In China, "the once-exalted working class," such as coal miners or steel workers, has its glorious socialist past, but it is now a painful reminder of new Chinese capitalism that takes a human toll. The dehumanized miners like those in *Blind Shaft* represent a haunting image of postsocialist trauma, the image that also dominates the work of the avant-garde artist Zhou Hai. In the best tradition of documentary realism, Zhou's photographic series *The Unbearable Heaviness of Industry* portrays miners working under brutal conditions and exposes a lesser-known underworld of China's economic boom. As Erick Eckholm of the *New*

York Times remarked, “You cannot just glimpse at Zhou Hai’s photographs; the grimy factory workers and miners in them catch your eye and peer into your soul as you are drawn to look into theirs. The weary faces do not show bitterness, but they do seem to say: ‘This is the underworld of China’s miracle, and I exist.’”¹⁴⁴ This “underworld of China’s miracle” has also attracted the attention of Zhang Jianhua, who produced a series of sculptures of the dehumanized coal miners. Howard French of the *New York Times*, in an essay titled “Carving Plight of Coal Miners, He Churns China,” wrote of Zhang Jianhua: “Many of the life-size works depict miners sitting on the ground in their black rubber boots wearing looks of sheer fatigue. Some stare blankly into the distance or prop up their heads with both hands, their faces fixed in nameless agony.”¹⁴⁵ And what was most shocking to French was Zhang’s portrayal of the miners killed by coal accidents: “Yet, easily overlooked at first are the most haunting sculptures of all. At the edge of the out-of-the-way Beijing lot in a newly created art zone that is frequented by foreigners—but few Chinese—lie six figures shrouded in green blankets. Silently, they symbolize the largely anonymous victims of China’s rolling mine-worker catastrophe.”¹⁴⁶

It is widely known that coal mining is “the most deadly job” in the country¹⁴⁷ and that China’s mines are “the world’s deadliest.”¹⁴⁸ The miners powerfully rendered in Zhou Hai’s and Zhang Jianhua’s work come to light as the “human sacrifice” to the country’s economic growth. In March 2007, China’s Supreme People’s Court issued “a legal interpretation on penalties for coal mine safety accidents,” and an SPC spokesman said that this legal interpretation “provides a yardstick for fixing penalties for those who make a fortune out of blood-tainted coal production.”¹⁴⁹ Obviously, he is referring to the private owners of illegal mines in China, but Chinese miners are not the only victims of this “blatant form of capitalism,” to use Zhang Zhen’s terms. In June 2007, the *Sunday Times* published a report titled “Miners Face ‘Suicide Mission’ Working for Mittal’s Empire,” which reads:

The exact sequence of events that led to the explosion in September 2006 at Lenina—which occurred during routine maintenance work on the ventilation system—is now the subject of a criminal investigation and a trial of eight middle-ranking managers on charges of negligence. It is one of a series of incidents at the Kazakh mines owned by Arcelor Mittal, the company owned by Lakshmi Mittal, Britain’s richest man with a fortune of £19 billion. They have cost the lives of 91 miners since 2004, raising concerns over safety standards.¹⁵⁰

This British newspaper coverage sounds like a media trope of China’s deadly mining industry. Yet the tragic events happened in Kazakhstan, one of the republics

of the former Soviet Union, where a similar crude global capitalism has caused a profound trauma to society.¹⁵¹

In this context, postsocialist trauma is a global *perception*. The image of coal miners serves as a consistent metaphor for all the postsocialist countries prone to global capitalism's exploitation. The reputed American economist Joseph Stiglitz has observed, "For the majority of those living in the former Soviet Union, economic life under capitalism has been even worse than the old Communist leaders had said it would be. Prospects for the future are bleak."¹⁵² That Kazakh miners were killed at Lenina, a mine named after Vladimir Lenin, conveys a bitter historical irony. On April 25th, 2005, President Putin lamented "the breakup of the Soviet Union, a trauma he said Russia was still struggling to recover from,"¹⁵³ and called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."¹⁵⁴ Putin's critics dismissed his speech as that of "post-traumatic politics." Richard Lourie wrote in the *St. Petersburg Times*, "President Putin and his generation were shaped by the traumatic collapse of the Soviet Union, just as previous generations were shaped by revolution, terror or war. Their own relationship to the Soviet Union and its demise—their sense of loss, regret and acrimony—was dwarfed by the sheer magnitude of the event itself. Their shock resulted from seeing that something as mighty and gigantic as the Soviet Socialist Republics could vanish so suddenly and so easily."¹⁵⁵

But such a "shocked" response by Putin and his generation opens a political and psychological discourse on "postsocialist trauma," a discourse that has found its artistic expression after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The acclaimed Ukrainian filmmaker Kira Muratova seems to have shared Putin's response to the breakup of the Soviet Union when she said, "My country had reached bankruptcy and there was nowhere else for it to go. Everything had to burst!"¹⁵⁶ Muratova's *The Asthenic Syndrome* (1989) is a masterpiece of post-Soviet cinema in which "the psychological paralysis afflicting both female and male characters is inseparable from the dissolution of the Soviet Union on the eve of *perestroika*."¹⁵⁷ The film begins with a scene of a funeral; a woman is burying her dead husband who happens to resemble Joseph Stalin. After hearing someone laugh at the funeral, the woman stalks away, and we follow her wandering through a bleak landscape of the fallen Soviet empire. Muratova's recent picture *The Tuner* (2004), depicts "the clash of two worlds: The old world of Soviet Odessa, where official immorality was compensated for with close-knit ties between private individuals, and the new world of Kuchma's oligarchic capitalism with its degradation of human values and disappearing distinction between good and evil."¹⁵⁸ Muratova's grim social and moral postsocialist landscape has found a distinct echo in China's "New Urban Cinema" of the 1990s, when most Chinese cities were going through an enormous process

of demolition and reconstruction. As Yomi Braester put it, the films of New Urban Cinema, such as Zhou Xiaowen's *No Regret about Youth* (*Qingchun wuhui*, 1992), used "demolition as a symbol for the need to chronicle the city's transformation."¹⁵⁹ And Braester described China's new cityscape as "a map of trauma": "Demolition sites are also the scars in spatial form left by traumatic events, from the forceful evacuation of tenants to political oppression. . . . Like other forms of visual art, cinema traces the city's scars and translates history into spatial representation; the photographic and cinematic documentation turns the city into an exhibition space for personal and collective traumas."¹⁶⁰ He also noted that the avant-garde artist Wang Jinsong's photographic series *One Hundred Signs of Demolition* (*Bai chai tu*, 1999), juxtaposes one hundred photos of the Chinese character *chai* (demolition) painted on old houses or walls waiting to be demolished.¹⁶¹ In this sociocultural context, the character *chai* has become a universal sign for a national trauma, the trauma of China's gradual yet painful switch to a market economy, which according to Žižek must make its way by first "dismantling" old socialist welfare and social security systems.

In Zhou Xiaowen's *No Regret about Youth*, there is a cinematic reference to this "dismantling" of old socialist systems. The film's male protagonist, under an order from higher authorities, drives a bulldozer to demolish an old courtyard house (*siheyuan*) and its enclosing walls, where his female lover still lives. According to Braester, the film "portrays Beijing in the late 1980s as a doomed space, waiting to be rebuilt into impersonal high-rises, shopping centers, and other shrines to new capital."¹⁶² However, the scene is staged as if it were a rape of the woman by the bulldozer operator,¹⁶³ who, I think, adequately embodies an aggressive and violent form of "new capital." (The bulldozer operator suffers from amnesia and dies of a head injury he had suffered during his service in the army.) Zhou Xiaowen depicts the clash between two worlds of capitalism and socialism as man's savage sexual assault against woman. It should be noted that the Chinese character *an* (peace/security) was originally constructed as a pictograph: a woman sitting under the roof of a house. If a house is razed, there is no peace or security. Such is how Zhou Xiaowen perceived old Beijing being destroyed by "new capital" in the late 1980s and early 1990s. More than a decade later, in the mind of the avant-garde artist Liu Jin, that "new capital" (read global capitalism) is still threatening the divine tranquility of the traditional Chinese home. Liu Jin's newest work is a performative photographic series titled *Wounded Angel* (*Shoushang de tianshi*, 2006). In one picture, we see a "wounded angel," white wings covered with blood, clinging to the roof of a courtyard house that is being torn down. Towering above the "wounded angel" and his dilapidated house is a modern high-rise condo, which surely signifies global capitalism's triumph over Chinese socialism.

About This Book

In this book I offer a close reading of the most representative works of avant-garde art and independent cinema, which are related by common themes and motifs of globalization, nationalism, and postsocialist trauma. The book is divided into three parts. In part 1, “Re-creating Urban Space in Avant-garde Art,” I explore urban space as perceived by Chinese avant-garde artists who live and work in two global cities—Beijing and New York. Chapter 1 reviews the photographic and video installations of a group of Beijing artists that represent the capital city’s public and private spaces affected by globalization. It then gives insight into Beijing as an “Olympic city,” where new architecture evokes a strong response in avant-garde artists such as Hong Hao and Wang Guofeng. Chapter 2 continues to look at Beijing as a domestic space for the female artist Yin Xiuzhen, whose installation *The Ruined City* depicts a tranquil Chinese family life threatened by fast urban developments. Chapter 3 turns its full attention to Cai Guoqiang, Zhang Huan, and Xu Bing, three Chinese artists relocated to New York City, where they express their critical views of global capitalism and the anxiety and turmoil it causes around the world. In part 2, “China’s Lost Youth through the Lens of Independent Cinema,” I examine the theme of “lost youth,” which is central to Chinese independent cinema, against a background of China’s economic and social transformation. Chapter 4 analyzes five landmark films by Sixth Generation directors, which portray the alienated urban youth victimized by injustice and violence (Zhang Yuan’s *Beijing Bastard* [*Beijing zazhong*, 1993] and Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle* [*Shiqisui de danche*, 2001]), the schizophrenic young female characters torn between true feelings and pragmatic compromises (Lou Ye’s *Suzhou River* [*Suzhou he*, 2000] and Wang Quan’an’s *Lunar Eclipse* [*Yueshi*, 2000]), and the repressed sexuality of a young worker isolated from society (Zhang Ming’s *Rain Clouds over Wushan* [*Wushan yunyu*, 1995]). Chapter 5 focuses on Wang Chao’s *Anyang Orphan* [*Anyang yinger*, 2001], a film that reveals the growing power of Chinese patriarchy (as represented by the young mother/prostitute) in a capitalist market economy and its social and moral consequences. Chapter 6 discusses three recent films made by independent directors: Gu Changwei’s *Peacock*, Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Shanghai Dreams*, and Li Shaohong’s *Stolen Life*, in which the adolescent female protagonists are traumatized by conflict with their working-class fathers who cannot cope with rapid economic and social changes. In part 3, “In Quest of Meaning in a Spiritual Void,” I investigate both independent films and avant-garde videos that seek a flight from a spiritual void left by Mao’s socialism. Chapter 7 is a close examination of Jia Zhangke’s “home” trilogy: *Xiao Shan Going Home* [*Xiao Shan huijia*, 1995], *Xiao Wu* [1997], and *Platform* [*Zhantai*, 2000], which take

a symbolic man's journey across a ruined post-Mao China. Chapter 8 centers on Yang Fudong, an avant-garde video artist based in Shanghai, whose unique black-and-white filmic style not only harks back to Chinese silent cinema of the 1920s and 1930s, but also serves as an aesthetic escape from today's nightmarish global realities. Chapter 9 is a case study of Ning Hao's debut film *Incense* [*Xianghuo*, 2003], which relates a curious tale about a young Buddhist monk who forsakes his religious faith for economic survival. In the postlude, "Chinese Artists and Filmmakers at the Beginning of a New Century," I take a critical look at Chinese avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers active in the first decade of the twenty-first century, concentrating on Huang Yongping, Xu Bing, Paul Chan, and Qin Yufen, whose latest works challenge a Western "master discourse" on politics, religion, and culture.



PART 1

**Re-creating Urban Space
in Avant-garde Art**

Discourse and Displacement

Contemplating Beijing's Urban Landscape

In July 1998, “Space and Vision: The Impression of Transmuting Daily Lives in Beijing,” an exhibition of five Chinese avant-garde artists curated by Huang Du (who invited me to attend the show), opened for two days at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Beijing, a small, little-known museum that for the past decades has provided artists with a non-governmental space in which to display their work.¹ On the first day about a thousand people came to see the exhibition. In the afternoon of the following day, a China Central Television (CCTV) crew arrived to film the works, but left the gallery soon after a cameraman became upset about what he saw in the show. Ironically, what infuriated him was not “indecent” or “obscene” art, but the seeming banality of the five artists’ subject matter, which ranged from skyscrapers to McDonald’s hamburgers.² To me, however, the works that portrayed everyday objects such as skyscrapers or hamburgers all highlighted startling contrasts between high and low, public and private, global and local, in Beijing’s urban space. Fredric Jameson notes that “the transformation of space itself... serves as an example in the case of capitalist cultural revolution.”³ Indeed a capitalist cultural revolution is currently taking place in Asia. As Hans-Peter Martin and Harald Schumann observe in *The Global Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Democracy and Prosperity*, each of Asia’s major centers is already straining to take the lead. Young people are growing up with images of global cities that are completely different from those their parents knew. No longer does Paris, London, or New York glitter with superlatives, nor do Moscow or Chicago. Since March 1996 the tallest building in the world has cast its shadows in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, and the largest number of construction cranes tower not over the roofs of Berlin, but of Beijing and Shanghai.⁴ In Beijing, a skyscraper looming over a traditional courtyard house (*siheyuan*) can be read as a metaphor for the conflict between global capitalism and Chinese nationalism. It is the transformation of Beijing that furnished the theme of “Space and Vision,” a subject that has recently aroused considerable discussion among Chinese and Westerners.⁵

Anonymous Architecture, Anonymous Man

“Space and Vision” began with Hong Hao’s photographic series depicting governmental and commercial high-rises familiar to the residents of Beijing. But there is something odd about such new architecture. As Hong Hao reveals, the monstrous skyscrapers are totally divorced from their immediate human environment, seemingly irrelevant to an absent bustling life below on the streets. The low vantage point of his photographs emphasizes the stark verticality and monumentality of the skyscraper, which exudes an oppressive power over the urban community. In the West, H. H. Arnason wrote, the skyscraper has long been regarded “as a monumental symbol” for modern industry and is “comparable to the Gothic cathedrals which were monuments to medieval religious beliefs.”⁶ In Hong Hao’s treatment, however, the “celestial” height of the skyscraper seems to give different visions to people living below.

Beijing No. 1 shows the Beijing Municipal People’s Congress building, whose authority is indicated by the national flag and insignia. In addition to these political symbols, there is a palace-style roof—a gabled and hipped structure often called *dawuding* (big roof)—sitting atop this example of new architecture. In Hong Hao’s photograph such enforced tradition is depicted as an aesthetic failure. The solemnity and grandeur of the imperial roof is lost in the artist’s vision as well as in ours; it is a modern building that wears an ill-fitting “feudal cap,” which has become one of many “shameful things” (*chishi*) in Beijing.⁷ The structure of the People’s Congress building eludes human activities and is more likely to elicit a fear of abusive power than a sense of willingness to “serve the people.”⁸

Henri Lefebvre (1905–1991), a French Marxist scholar, first inquired into the crude symbolism of high-rise and government buildings: “The arrogant verticality of skyscrapers, and especially of public and state buildings, introduces a phallic or more precisely a phallogocratic element into the visual realm; the purpose of this display, of this need to impress, is to convey an impression of authority to each spectator. Verticality and great height have ever been the spatial expression of potentially violent power.”⁹

Apparently, Hong Hao’s impression of the People’s Congress building is that of obscene power, which is antithetical to the heavenly power of skyscrapers that Arnason had admired.

The steel and glass Zhongfu Dasha, or China Garments Plaza, depicted in *Beijing No. 2*, is another example of expressive verticality and great height. Called the “Big Tower” (*datieta*) by local residents, Zhongfu Dasha is a circular skyscraper with a roof that resembles that of the Temple of Heaven, now situated

in Tiantan Park.¹⁰ Unlike the People's Congress building, which is heavy with political and national symbolism, this thrusting glass tower seems anonymous in spite of its "phallic verticality," to use Lefebvre's terms.¹¹ The reason for this obscurity is that the Big Tower's top floor is a French-style cabaret,¹² yet no "Moulin Rouge" dancing girls are ever shown on the exterior of the tower. This entertainment facility is mysterious to those who do not read informative tourist literature or have "connections" in business circles and can enjoy "authentic French cuisine" and "romance."¹³ But, as seen in Hong Hao's photograph, a sign outside the building reads "one country, two systems" (*yiguo liangzhi*), a slogan used to celebrate Hong Kong's return to China in 1997. So the Big Tower rises as a monumental symbol for both an invasive global capitalism and Chinese socialism, embodying the seduction of a global finance capital and the secrecy of a socialist state.¹⁴



Figure 2. Hong Hao, *Beijing No 2*. Photograph. Contemporary Art Gallery, Secondary School of Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, 1998.

Only in *Beijing No. 3* does Hong Hao include some shadowy human figures. They are workers hanging off a scaffolding against the background of a high-rise building under construction. Hong's treatment of these workers works against a great modernist tradition in American photography in the 1930s, where construction workers in New York stand on the scaffolding as heroes who build world-famous skyscrapers such as the Chrysler Building and Empire State Building. (Fernand Léger's *The Great Constructors* affords a brilliant example in modernist painting.) The inert and spectral imagery of anonymous construction workers in Hong's work creates a metaphor for individuals in a modern city, who cannot escape what Lefebvre calls "the loss of identity that is now added to all other besetting terrors."¹⁵

Wang Jinsong's photographic series *Parents* seems to share Hong Hao's vision of such "anonymous modernity,"¹⁶ but his art contrasts sharply with Hong Hao's. Wang Jinsong shifts his vision from high to low. If Hong Hao demystifies public space that alienates man and woman, Wang Jinsong extols a private realm that embraces both. His twenty framed pictures portray only one subject: the parents sitting at home, content and dignified. Hong Hao's phallic skyscrapers raucously command Beijing's public space, while Wang Jinsong's husband and wife attend serenely to their private space. According to Wang Jinsong, the elderly couples he photographed all came from his own neighborhood—a *hutong* (alley) called Nanxiaojie (Southern small street),¹⁷ which consisted of one-storied courtyard houses, or *siheyuan*.¹⁸ These couples were retired factory workers, small businessmen, and college professors, yet in Wang Jinsong's photographs, they are above all *parents* living by themselves, independent of their adult children. To me, these ordinary couples are heroic in a rapidly changing Chinese society, where the old family structure, *sandai tongtang* (three generations, father, son, and grandson, live in the same house) is dramatically collapsing.

A 1998 book, *The Critical Problems Facing China (Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti)*, discusses political and social issues crucial to the government policymaking. In a chapter titled "The Distortion and Transformation of a Modern Family," a sociologist observes, "Nowadays, drawn to the call for individualism, independence, and freedom, the family psychology has been transformed to such an extent that nobody can bear to live with another individual in a single space. More and more young people have become members of the so-called 'family-phobia' clan in the modern city."¹⁹ And this sociologist advocates a tolerance for extramarital affairs, which he calls "a sin to be forgiven."²⁰ He concludes that a short separation is necessary even for a happy family to stay intact, and he cites successful examples of the "weekend couple."²¹

Against this social background, Wang Jinsong's husband and wife are courageously inseparable, but his portrayal of brave parents is more an appropriation of

tradition than a reflection of reality. The strict frontal view of subjects in the *Parents* photographs mirrors a long-established pictorial convention of *fumu daren xiang* (dear father and mother) or “ancestor portraits.”²² Therefore, to ascribe a deeper meaning to Wang Jinsong’s new portraits of “dear father and mother,” we should examine his work with respect to contemporary Chinese life.

In *Parents No. 1*, a man and his wife lean toward each other at a table, behind which landscape and calligraphy scrolls adorn the wall. A detail merits our attention: a tall building reflected in the glass of the landscape scroll can be read symbolically as a public intrusion upon a private space. Both the landscape and the calligraphy scrolls are part of Chinese private life, and in this case they are gifts wishing the couple longevity and happiness. The couple’s inner life is threatened here by an external force, but this public intrusion into private space is less precarious than a system that is failing from the inside. According to the sociologist cited above, young people now are fearful of sustaining a family because no one wants to live with another person “in a single space.” This “family-phobia” is precisely what Wang Jinsong intends to reverse through his own portrait of “dear father and mother.” All the parents in his work have the courage to “live with another individual” in a packed but well-kept private space. One old couple sitting in their grocery store impresses me most. Compared to others, they don’t even have a tidy and warm home, only their cramped work place.²³ Nevertheless, they thrive in a meaningful partnership (husband and wife as co-workers). To overcome this fear of a collapsing system, Wang Jinsong recounts this same message all through his *Parents* series.

Wang Jinsong’s work evokes nostalgia for a moral system deeply rooted in Chinese society, where Western values have had a major impact in the past decades. As a Chinese critic comments, “By all means Western society has imported to us Hollywood movies, Coca-Cola, and blue-jeans, which our young people have accepted instantaneously. But the West cannot export individual modernity, which is embedded in the people’s spirit.”²⁴ In *Parents*, therefore, man and woman stick together in their humble home because they share an ancient fear of “disharmony between *yin* and *yang*,” which is “sickness” in Chinese tradition.²⁵

House of Strangers

Contrary to the enclosed and protective private realm that governs Wang Jinsong’s imagery of *Parents*, Song Dong approaches the same social space of home openly and permissively, as demonstrated by his photographic series *Family Members*. Projecting the Song family portrait onto a screen, the artist invited museum visitors to stand in for any of the family members in the portrait. He then photographed

the participants so that the completed work resembled a pseudo-Song family portrait, peopled by strangers who “displaced” or, more accurately, overlapped with the original occupants. The Song family was photographed in diverse urban spaces, such as a handsome home or a racy Beijing street, indicating the switch from private to public space. The involvement of strangers represents a welcome public intrusion upon privacy.

Like Wang Jinsong’s parents, Song Dong’s *Family Members* are depicted with a strict frontal view: Song’s parents are placed in the center, his brother and sister-in-law and their daughter to their right, and the artist and his wife to their left. The composition mirrors the patriarchal domination of prosperous Chinese families. But in *Family Members*, strangers are welcome to replace any family member, regardless of age or sex. According to the artist’s report, many men replaced the father figure in the center, and young women replaced the artist’s wife to the far left. Without the presence of the actual family members, a purely visual, nonverbal connection is established between the family and the strangers. In other words, the work allows for the articulation of ambivalent relationships, just as dreams, according to Freud, are often “disguised fulfillments of repressed wishes.”²⁶

In his psychoanalysis, Freud characterized such dream experience as “displacement and condensation.”²⁷ Not surprisingly, in Song Dong’s daydreaming “displacement” game, male participants continue to desire authority and power in a patriarchal system (the Symbolic), where females crave romance or “extramarital affairs” (the Imaginary). Describing a dire crisis of today’s Chinese family, a sociologist in *The Critical Problems Facing China* cites *Besieged City (Weicheng)*, a well-liked fiction written by Qian Zhongshu in the 1940s: “A marriage is like the city under siege: people left outside want to get in, and people stuck inside wish to get out.”²⁸ To the author’s surprise, 70 percent of the people who “wish to get out” of this “besieged city” these days are women, according to a nationwide survey by the divorce court.²⁹

This is precisely what Song Dong has satirized in his *Family Members*, in which a stranger, or “third person” (*disan zhe*), is invited to act in a tolerable extramarital romance. As noted, such a romance is “a sin to be forgiven” from a perspective of a sociologist or family psychologist; it appears even safer and more enjoyable for a stranger to be engaged with the Other in Song Dong’s photographs. Since the early 1990s, many stories and television plays on the subject of the “third person” have come out. To many players or survivors of this in-and-out social game, the promiscuity seems fashionably postmodern. In a novel, *A Bachelor in Beijing (Beijing de danshen nanren)*, female writer Chen Wei recounts this social trend through her heroine’s (a young female painter named Bohe) soliloquy:

In fact, the authors [of such literature] do not encourage people to have extra-marital affairs; they simply see marriage as an allusion to tradition. A modernist advocates eloping with a lover fearlessly, yet a postmodernist champions a brave love without damaging the family in the end. However, it is too difficult to accomplish both. Ultimately, women return to their husband and children, while an infatuated male lover winds up heartbroken and miserable for the rest of his life.³⁰

In this woman's discourse, there is an acute sense of humor combined with a seriousness, which also shines through Song Dong's *Family Members*: the invited stranger interferes freely with the family, yet no matter how many "break-ins" take place, the family/marriage/tradition model remains intact.

Perhaps Gustave Flaubert was the first ironic modernist to reveal a bitter truth through his heroine Emma in *Madame Bovary*: "Adultery, Emma was discovering, could be as banal as marriage."³¹ In Flaubert's novel, however, Emma had no "modernist" lover or "third person" to elope with. On the contrary, her paramour Rodolphe stated, "She'd be sweet! But—how would I get rid of her later?"³² And Rodolphe never intended to ruin Madame Bovary's marriage, though he considered her husband Charles as "very meek indeed for a man in his situation—comical, even, and a little contemptible."³³ In this respect, Rodolphe may be labeled an unabashed "postmodernist" that comes near Chen Wei's vision of today's marriage and romance—"it is too difficult to accomplish both." And this postmodern dilemma is well illuminated by Song Dong's playful *Family Members*. During the exhibition, Song Dong promised to send those "family romance" pictures back to the participating strangers. In doing so, the artist could easily get rid of his Emma, a fictional figure of "bovarysme" that manifests a "desire to desire' whose objects have become illusory images."³⁴ To Song Dong, however, family/tradition/system is unfaltering and enduring—one can play with it but never break it down.

According to *The Critical Problems Facing China*, there are too many secrets family members want to keep from each other, and the whole family is overwhelmed by each individual's "privacy," which "devours family members' existing space."³⁵ This erosion at the family's core may propel Song Dong to meditate upon an external intrusion as a welcome relief from the family burdens of privacy or secrets. In Song's vision, a wistful family interaction with the outside world, or public interference with a troubled home, can ease that internal tension and may even save an innocent life such as Emma's. "*Madame Bovary*," Jameson remarked, "invented a register of impressionistic daydreaming."³⁶ For that same reason, Song Dong's *Family Members* is a wish-fulfilling text like that of Flaubert,³⁷ and yet his

imaginary text seems to have unveiled more about harsh realities of Chinese life than about illusory dreams.

Food, Sex, and Voyeurism

Two artists in “Space and Vision” who look at the trivial in daily life are Xu Yihui and Li Yanxiu, a ceramic artist and video artist, respectively. Xu Yihui’s *Hamburger* displayed McDonald’s world-famous meal inside a wooden box. In order to see the hamburger, viewers had to bend down to see into the box. In so doing, they were transformed into voyeurs, because the hamburger lay on a silk-covered bed surrounded by jewelry. The sexual overtones of this “bedroom scene” were strange but also very real. Though the scene was awkward and aberrant, the viewer’s curiosity was satisfied.

In China’s big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, McDonald’s has prevailed among urban youth. In *The Critical Problems Facing China*, a sociologist scorns this Western fast-food frenzy and calls it “a contemporary Chinese colonial culture.”³⁸ He claims that if this enthusiasm for Western food, such as McDonald’s or Kentucky Fried Chicken, “becomes a [nationwide] habit . . . not only will the Chinese people lose the chopsticks, but probably also forsake their power to eat to the Other. However, to look at the Other’s facial expressions while eating is perhaps not a life so enjoyable.”³⁹ Although a bit nationalistic, this worry is well grounded in Chinese political thought. In history, Confucian scholars often blamed a woman (by and large a beautiful mistress of the emperor) for the collapse of a dynasty.⁴⁰ At present, the sociologist chooses a transnational enterprise as a new “evil woman” to reproach. According to his study, the McDonald’s Beijing branch “is the 12474th, which is the largest McDonald’s restaurant on the globe.”⁴¹ And this omnipresent McDonald’s is, he says, responsible for China’s loss of a cultural heritage—namely, “to eat with the chopsticks.”⁴²

In this context, Xu Yihui’s *Hamburger* is a sexualized and feminized object that parodies such a nationalistic apprehension about anything foreign. But Xu did not share the sociologist’s bias against “imported goods” (*yanghuo*), and neither did the Beijing municipal government. With the help of city officials, McDonald’s had opened two hundred new locations since the demolition of its flagship outlet at the famous Wangfujing Street in 1996. In my view, Xu Yihui’s McDonald’s hamburger merely implies the temptation of an easy global lifestyle that is hard to resist. While McDonald’s image is feminized in Xu’s work, Voltaire’s suggestion seems suitable here: “It is not enough to conquer; one must know how to seduce.”⁴³ If that exotic global lifestyle upsets some Chinese people, there must be a remedy

to alleviate their public anxiety. In *Lunch Box*, another work by Xu Yihui, chopsticks and Chinese-style fast food are set before the viewer like a religious altar. The sociologist's "narrow nationalism" seems to be fulfilled in Xu Yihui's *Lunch Box*, although it is manifested sardonically.

However, Xu Yihui is by no means a nationalist; rather he is a well-adjusted "globalist" who envisions a postmodern world full of irony, parody, and contradiction. His installation *Little Red Book* looks back at the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a time in which Chairman Mao's "little red book" was as popular as McDonald's hamburgers are today. Xu Yihui's *Little Red Book* is a sequel to *Hamburger* and *Lunch Box*, because Mao's widely distributed book was dubbed *jingshen shiliang* (nourishment for the mind). In contrast to the tangibility of the tasty fast food in *Hamburger* and *Lunch Box*, the "food for thought" in Xu Yihui's *Little Red Book* is devoid of palpability. Mao's book was read by millions, but beneath its hollow rhetoric it offered no nourishment. Again, the sacred object is eroticized; emerging from flashy flowers, the bland open pages of Xu Yihui's *Little Red Book* evoke an illusion of bare and curvy hips, inviting a voyeuristic gaze.⁴⁴ According to a popular novelist's observations, the Cultural Revolution gratified many people's desires, particularly young women's sexual repression, which was manifested in the form of brutality toward political victims.⁴⁵ Combining politics and sexuality, *Little Red Book* is a provocative work that engages the viewer in a voyeuristic look at China's most recent history.

Li Yanxiu's video installation *The Wall* is devoted to the same voyeuristic gaze. He chose to film his unsuspecting "victims" in Longfusi Street (meaning Temple of Prosperity and Happiness), where a Tibetan Buddhist monastery of that name was built in 1452 during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The temple had been torn apart over the past decades, but the old street, as depicted in Li Yanxiu's video, remained a bustling marketplace. Due to limited space in "Space and Vision," *The Wall* was represented only by a wooden column and a plastic mannequin, each of which contained an opening that allowed visitors to view the video stills. The mannequin's opening was located at its navel, thus engaging the viewer in the same voyeurism that dominates Xu Yihui's work. While a wall is a defense that blocks the viewer's access to objects, a wall with "openings" such as Li Yanxiu's is a parody of that "defense" against human desire. In fact, the artist's approach to his subject goes far beyond voyeurism; his video imagery raised important questions about the disappearance and simulation of cultural identity.

From the mid-Ming period to the late 1990s, Longfusi Street has undergone constant political and social change. For centuries a unique local culture had evolved around the Temple of Prosperity and Happiness, including commerce, local delicacies, tea drinking, drama, rare books, and antiquity. Modern scholars

term it “temple fair culture” (*miaohui wenhua*) in Beijing.⁴⁶ Nowadays, while commerce and regional cuisine are noticeable, other local traditions have perished.⁴⁷ As seen in Li Yanxiu’s video, prowling along the street, young men and women dressed in the latest Western fashion typify an urban landscape not much different from that of the rest of the world; the banality of globalization has sadly displaced a unique local history and culture. This elimination of indigenous culture by globalization is threatening Old Beijing. One video clip from *The Wall* shows a young woman using a cell phone on the street. She is an iconic figure who could be from any urban landscape in the world, and her youthful vitality seems to despise the old “temple fair culture,” which has long since evaporated. In that case, a national identity has been given away to a global sameness or simulation. In another voyeuristic shot from *The Wall*, the artist’s camera focuses solely on the bared legs of young female pedestrians. No individual identity exists in this social and cultural space; rather it harbors nothing but simulated feminine sexuality. In the past, Longfusi was a celebrated monastery where Tibetan and Chinese monks worked and lived together. Now the old street is rumored to be the place where the prettiest girls gather.⁴⁸ Consumerism and sexuality have superseded the Tibetan Buddhism that hitherto made this old neighborhood an unrivaled location of culture.

A Transnational Space, a Displaced Vision

In July 1998, Zhang Kaiji, a venerated architect, published an essay titled “It Is Unnecessary to Imitate Hong Kong in Residential Building” in the *Beijing Evening News* (*Beijing wanbao*). In it, Zhang Kaiji spoke passionately about Beijing’s ancient skyline: “Today the primary problem facing Beijing is how to preserve its original image in the modernization of the city. One of the most characteristic features of . . . Old Beijing is its skyline. It is basically horizontal, extending and opening, which gives us a feeling of stability and peace. . . . In recent years, however, it is distressful to see that a flood of high-rises has wrecked this unique Beijing skyline.”⁴⁹ Zhang’s anxiety is widely shared by ordinary citizens, intellectuals, and avant-garde artists in the capital city. But this “modernization of the city [of Beijing]” is somehow forcing its way. As Old Beijing “falls to ‘progress,’” inevitably many Chinese and Westerners alike are apt to reflect on its ancient glory.⁵⁰ In opposition to the horizontal and gentle skyline of Old Beijing, the “arrogant verticality of skyscrapers” as portrayed in Hong Hao’s photographs has begun to reign over a “new” Beijing. If the phallic Big Tower represents brute global capitalism, the horizontal and circular All-China Women’s Federation building symbolizes a national identity prone to globalization; the vertical and masculine skyscraper is



Figure 3. All-China Women's Federation. Summer 2008. Author photo.

devastating the horizontal and feminine skyline of Old Beijing. (According to Beijing taxi drivers, the former resembles a penis, the latter a vagina. In a wider sense, this Beijing cab drivers' joke is a mockery of a Third World country subjected to "penetration" by global capitalism.)

Global capitalism has no doubt transformed Beijing's urban space, hence the displaced vision of life, culture, and architecture evoked in "Space and Vision." This displaced vision is having a great impact on the city, and the artists in "Space and Vision" express a deep concern for humanity's survival in today's "transnational" space (to borrow Masao Miyoshi's critical term.)⁵¹ And this "transnational space" is perhaps what Homi Bhabha would call "a new international space of discontinuous historical realities."⁵² For all the spatial struggles between high and low (or vertical and horizontal), private and public, and local and global in Beijing' urban landscape, and everywhere in the world, to quote Masao Miyoshi, "Globalization is always the context: transnational corporations are really what set the paradigm of our life. This is what I would call ugliness, and we can't completely reject it. But if we let that system absorb us, then there's not much left."⁵³ The Big Tower is a symbolic image of that ugly "paradigm of our life," as highlighted by Hong Hao and other artists represented in "Space and Vision."

Beijing: A Global “Olympic City”?

After China’s successful Olympic bid in 2001, many believe that Beijing is “being transformed into a hybrid global megacity.”⁵⁴ But to me this “new Beijing” or “Olympic City”⁵⁵ is politically and architecturally ironic. Beijing the “Olympic City” is embodied by three landmark buildings designed by Western architects: the new CCTV headquarters, nicknamed the “Crotch”; the National Stadium, or the “Bird’s Nest”; and the National Grand Theater, or the “Egg.” Over the past years, these unconventional monolithic structures have provoked great controversy and made a fine target for local obscenities or Chinese humor.⁵⁶ In a recent interview with CNN, the American architect Joseph Rykwert remarked that when a new building goes up anywhere in the world, people instantaneously find nicknames for it. For instance, the city hall in London is called the “testicle,” while the CCTV Tower in Beijing is the “Crotch.” Such nicknames, says Rykwert, often carry “sexual connotations.”⁵⁷ As noted, in late 1990s’ Beijing, the Big Tower was known as the “penis” and the All-China Women’s Federation building the “vagina.” Today the CCTV headquarters soars 768 feet (234 meters) high in the vicinity of the Big Tower, which is 413 feet (126 meters) tall. As both skyscrapers are constructed adjacent to the city’s East Third Ring Road, they make a well-matched pair of sexual symbols in Rykwert’s terms.



Figure 4. Wang Guofeng, *The New CCTV Headquarters and the Big Tower*. Photograph. 2008.

On the night of February 9, 2009, during the end of the Chinese New Year celebration, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, part of the CCTV headquarters complex, was engulfed in flames caused by a fireworks display organized by some CCTV employees, who were later arrested by the police. Not surprisingly, the CCTV fire elicited “little sympathy”⁵⁸ among young Chinese, but it did provoke “an outburst of irony.”⁵⁹ As Han Han, a twenty-six-year-old popular writer and leading blogger based in Shanghai, claimed, “Self-castration perfectly fits the image of CCTV which is the world’s number one eunuch media.”⁶⁰ And the images of a burning CCTV building have “become the latest hot cultural icons” for young Chinese netizens “who see the building as a symbol of authoritarianism and government extravagance.”⁶¹ In the eyes of an American historian, however, the event was “a sad spectacle rich with historical metaphors; it was as if the old Chinese spirit rebelled against the tyranny of the glass and metal skyscraper behemoths now being built across China.”⁶²

Yet the new CCTV headquarters is not a conventional tower but an unbroken “loop of horizontal and vertical sections that establish an urban site rather than point to the sky.”⁶³ Seen in this light, the CCTV Tower does not appear to be a symbol of what Lefebvre has called “phallic verticality,” as is the Big Tower. To me, it is a mixed metaphor for today’s Beijing as a new global “Olympic City.” The CCTV headquarters has two L-shaped towers linked at the top and the bottom at an angle to form a loop, which is seen as a Z crisscross.⁶⁴ However, this rather odd sculptural shape of the CCTV Tower provoked a great public outcry, as did other Olympic projects in Beijing.⁶⁵ In an article titled “Brave New Beijing,” which appeared in the British newspaper *Guardian*, Alex Pasternack wrote:

The shock response to Rem Koolhaas’s twisted take on the skyscraper has made his headquarters for China state TV an apt symbol of China’s ambitions. Each 40-story, 60-degree-leaning tower turns dramatically at the bottom and top, forming a single loop that has earned it many nicknames, including *wei fang*, or “dangerous building” (rumours have swirled that some employees are too scared to occupy it). As Arup engineer Rory McGowan puts it, “it’s probably the most analyzed building we’ve done, period.” It’s also one of the largest, meant to support as many workers as Canary Wharf, with more floor space than any other single structure save the Pentagon. Koolhaas has defended his work for the building’s public-ness (it features a “public loop” that will be open to all).⁶⁶

To many Western observers, the CCTV building is in effect “an upside down U with right angles, an office tower bent out of shape.”⁶⁷ In an interview with Chinese media, Zhao Gang, an assistant to Koolhaas and now a professor at MIT,

interpreted the English word “loop” as *huan*, meaning “ring” or “hoop” in Chinese, which was the key concept of the CCTV Tower design.⁶⁸ And Ole Scheeren, Koolhaas’ partner, also emphasized that the CCTV Tower is “actually a circuit of life inside.”⁶⁹

Obviously, this significant “loop” found in Koolhaas’s CCTV Tower marks a reversal of the “phallic verticality” that characterizes other public and state buildings.⁷⁰ The “phallic verticality” in Lefebvre’s analysis is often interchanged with “phallic erectility,” which, Lefebvre says, grants “a special status on the perpendicular.” This asserts “phallocracy as the orientation of space,” which metaphorically symbolizes “force, male fertility, masculine violence.”⁷¹ Since Koolhaas’ CCTV Tower is a loop-shaped skyscraper, it is not phallocratic by nature but strangely feminine, especially compared with the Big Tower nearby, which is brazenly phallic. It is commonly acknowledged that in art and architecture, the vertical denotes masculinity and the horizontal denotes femininity. In his book *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*, Marc C. Taylor regarded this vertical/horizontal and male/female duality as “the play of sexes” in nature, where “horizontal lines refer to the female principle and vertical lines to the male principle.”⁷² In Lefebvre’s mind, such a vertical/horizontal and male/female dichotomy may have a political consequence: “By and large, however, horizontal space symbolizes submission, vertical space power.”⁷³ So, in his judgment, Western architecture has long been willing “to reduce ‘femaleness’ to a ‘femininity’ subordinated to the principle of maleness, of masculinity or manliness.”⁷⁴

In my opinion, such feminine horizontality as evinced by the CCTV Tower or the “Crotch” is rendered more exquisitely in the Egg and the Bird’s Nest, for their design evades that oppressive “phallic erectility” altogether. We find no masculine vertical straight lines but only feminine horizontals and irregular or organic curves in the shape of the Egg and the Bird’s Nest. In that way, I believe, all the three Western-designed Olympic megabuildings accommodate easily to the “unique skyline” of old Beijing, which is “horizontal, opening and extending,” in Zhang Kaiji’s words. (Or, the horizontal skyline of an old Beijing is feminine in Western aesthetic terms.) In recent years, critics of the CCTV Tower, the National Grand Theater, and the National Stadium were largely ignorant of these structures’ submissive, feminine horizontality. They dismissed these giant structures as *Jingcheng san daguai*, or “Three Big Oddities in the Capital City,”⁷⁵ and the CCTV Tower and the National Stadium were singled out as two of “China’s Ten Money Burning Buildings in 2006.”⁷⁶ However, the strong domestic opposition to the Western architecture did not deter Chinese leaders, who resolved “to make the ‘look’ of Beijing international and contemporary” and “spared no efforts to present China as an open and progressive nation.”⁷⁷ At a December 26, 2007, news briefing, Zhao Huayong, director of CCTV, declared that the two L-shaped “arms” of the



Figure 5. *The National Stadium.* Summer 2008. Author photo.

CCTV Tower had successfully “shaken hands,” which, as Zhao said, was “a decisive victory” and “a mirage that finally catches the eyes of the world.”⁷⁸

Here we sense an irony of the new Beijing as a “global megacity.” It is the Chinese government that has turned itself into the “biggest single patron of avant-garde architecture in the world,”⁷⁹ while the expert critics of such avant-garde architecture appear to be prominent members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering. In June 2000, 108 members of the academies petitioned the Ministry of Construction, denouncing the French architect Paul Andreu for his “ill-conceived” plan for the National Grand Theater.⁸⁰ In 2004, several members of the academies wrote to the higher authorities, complaining about the huge costs and poor safety of the National Stadium, designed by the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron.⁸¹ Koolhaas’ CCTV Tower also met strong opposition from China’s architectural elite, and he had to defend himself in a meeting at Qinghua University in August 2003.⁸² All three monumental constructions were put to a halt but recommenced after certain changes were made in the original design.⁸³ Thus, it is ironic that these contentious, foreign-designed Olympic buildings were soon to become “a source of deep nationalist pride.”⁸⁴

In an article published in the 2008 summer issue of *ARTFORUM*, Sean Keller offered a fine formal and ideological analysis of the new Olympic buildings in Beijing, particularly the National Stadium.⁸⁵ Keller quoted Herzog and de Meuron as saying that the overall shape of the stadium resembled that of a Shang dynasty (c. 1600 BC–1046 BC) ritual vessel, so it “draws on the ancient traditions of Chinese art.”⁸⁶ For Keller, the main desire of the two creators of the Bird’s Nest was to

work against the gigantic size of the stadium and “to de-monumentalize it through the erratic web of [steel] bands.”⁸⁷ In Keller’s view, Herzog and de Meuron tended “to soften the power of what is ostensibly a monumental project,” thus ensuring that “this huge structure is not oppressive.”⁸⁸ In this way the two Western architects have indeed incorporated what Keller called “a nonthreatening national monumentality” into their design.⁸⁹ In this respect, the Chinese government’s patronage for Western “avant-garde architecture” can be explained. As Keller put it, China competed for the Olympics in order to stage a coming-of-age party as a global power, but at the same time it needed to prove that “this power is benign.”⁹⁰ The softening effect of the National Stadium is that of feminine horizontality I discussed above. Undoubtedly, this soft and non-oppressive feminine horizontality of the Bird’s Nest contrasts sharply with the “phallic verticality” that the Big Tower has stood for in the past decade.

As noted, China’s architectural elite who opposed the Bird’s Nest took no notice of its structural design, which is expressive of a non-threatening femininity characteristic of Beijing’s new Olympic architecture.⁹¹ In late June 2008, the Beijing Olympic Committee released an “official documentary” titled *Dream Weavers-Beijing 2008 (Zhu meng 2008)*. In this film, there was a faithful record of the heated debate about “No. 11 Proposal” (Herzog and de Meuron’s design) for the National Stadium, in which all Chinese experts were against it while all foreign experts applauded it.⁹² In this argument the Chinese government firmly sided with the foreign experts, and lately, as Thomas J. Campanella has observed, China has become the Holy Land for Western architects, who “fall all over themselves for a piece of the action, and for good reason: the great Chinese building boom has made the skills and expertise of design professionals in demand as never before.”⁹³ Paul Andreu, creator of the controversial National Grand Theater, explained the complex relationship between power and architecture: “This is a building built at a certain moment in the history of China. . . . It has been ordered by the power and paid by the government, but it’s made for the people of China, and I was never asked to compromise on that thinking.”⁹⁴

In fact, many Beijing residents, including avant-garde artists, have embraced these radical landmark structures that rose up one after another in the capital city. Ron Gluckman reported in April 2004 that although average Beijingers had no idea what was coming to their skyline, they were proud of anything that would improve the international standing of the capital city, and a cab driver believed that all those big buildings made Beijing look like “a city of the world.”⁹⁵ Interestingly, Campanella found that what had dominated the skyline of Beijing and other cities in China was “the tower crane,” which, he noted, “is such a ubiquitous presence on the skyline that people call it China’s national bird (a particular irony, given the esteemed place of cranes—the feathered one—in classical Chinese painting).”⁹⁶ In

classical Chinese art and culture, the crane, or *he*, is a symbol of longevity and immortality and a vehicle for Taoist immortals while traveling to the heavens.⁹⁷ In the present day, this omnipresent “national bird” on the skyline can be seen as the mascot of China’s fast-growing construction market, which was ranked number one in the world in 2008.⁹⁸ In this respect, some Western architects even stated that authoritative central governments like China’s were among the most efficient in getting buildings built. “The more centralized the power,” said architect Peter Eisenman, “the less compromises need to be made in architecture.”⁹⁹ Yet this relationship between autocratic power and architecture seems problematic for Keller, who called it “a fundamental problem in thinking about China today.” The question, in his view, is “whether it is better to deal with an autocratic political system that clearly represents itself as autocratic, or with an autocratic political system that partially dissimulates itself with gestures toward openness.”¹⁰⁰

In his latest works, Hong Hao addressed this issue of power and architecture, as did other avant-garde artists from Beijing. Earlier in this chapter, I analyzed Hong Hao’s *Beijing No. 2*, or *The Big Tower*, which depicts a commercial high-rise and a joint venture managed by Chinese government agencies and Hong Kong firms. According to Huang Du, his 1998 exhibition was framed by a key concept, “floating international capital,” which had dramatically changed the old city of Beijing.¹⁰¹ At that time, Hong’s skyscrapers could be seen as architectural representations of that “floating capital,” or foreign investment. As Campanella wrote retrospectively, foreign investment first flowed to China through so-called special economic zones, mainly from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and soon investors from the United States, Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Europe were pouring millions into joint-venture projects in China.¹⁰² However, since China today is much less dependent on foreign capital than before,¹⁰³ it is human intellect and creativity that is flowing into China’s present building boom.

Hong Hao’s new oil painting *The Bird’s Nest* (2008) touched on this problem of economic power and human creativity in architecture. In this work, the artist treated the Olympic architecture as a subject different from his *The Big Tower*. The artist first scanned a Google satellite map of the Bird’s Nest, which served as the underdrawing for his painting. Because it uses a satellite view, Hong Hao’s *Bird’s Nest* is totally flat, thus erasing any tangibility of the building. He then applied brush strokes over the scanned satellite image of the stadium. Many in China’s architectural circles have praised the stadium for its creative use of steel bands and beams instead of columns. In Hong’s painting, those bands and beams metamorphose into various lines of horizontal, curve, circle, and diagonal, but never vertical. So *The Bird’s Nest* is a refreshing image that is perceived by human intelligence, i.e., the satellite, not the naked eye. Since no one can actually see the building the way the satellite does, Hong Hao’s image of this Olympic architecture presents a

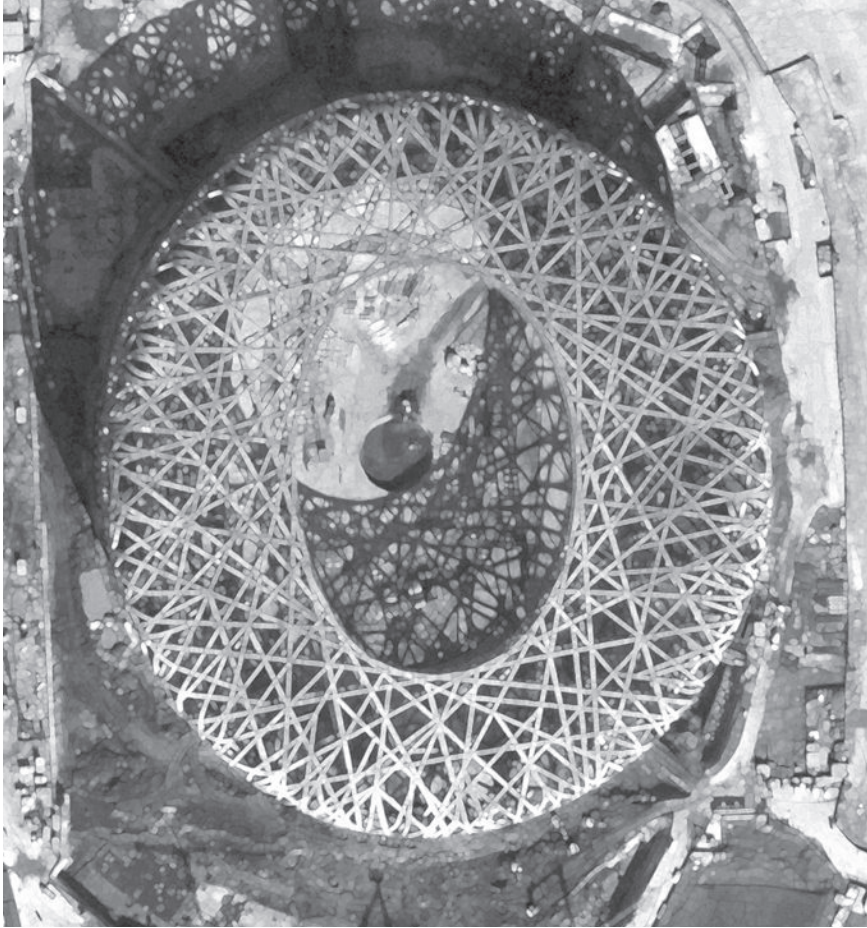


Figure 6. Hong Hao, *The Bird's Nest*. Oil painting, 2008.

mystery to the viewers. But if we simply read this planar stadium as a circle or oval, we may as well consider it a symbol of female sexuality or reproductive power.

As Eric Samuel De Maré noted in his book *Photography and Architecture*, diverse lines convey different meanings to the viewer, sometimes unconsciously, and lines can make the pyramid, the circle, the ellipse, or the cross. “The circle and oval,” De Maré stressed, “will express the womb, soft femininity, calm protection.”¹⁰⁴ On that account, the nickname “Bird’s Nest” accords well with De Maré’s view of femininity in architectural and photographic representation. The circular shape of the Bird’s Nest is evidently feminine, and it is even more so in the artwork of Hong Hao, who like the satellite envisaged the stadium from “outer space.” To

me, Hong's *Bird's Nest* is a metaphor for a pleasing, caring, and protecting "soft femininity," which was intended by the creators of the stadium.¹⁰⁵ However, this reading of mine is not uncontested in Beijing's art world. In July 2008, I visited an exhibition held at the Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, a Spanish cultural agency in the 798 Art District. There I saw Li Qing's oil painting *An Effect Drawing of the Nail Torch Tower for Beijing Olympics*,¹⁰⁶ in which a nail-shaped Olympic torch that Li designed penetrates deep into the Bird's Nest just like a penis. First I was a bit shocked to see such hideous "phallic erectility" in Li's image, but soon I realized that the artist must be so upset by the National Stadium's "soft femininity" that he felt compelled to subvert it with a graphic phallic symbol.

Anyhow, that feminine softness is also conferred to the National Grand Theater, or the Egg, which is widely regarded as "gentle" and "elliptical" in its architectural form.¹⁰⁷ As Andreu indicated, it was the Chinese government that gave the order and paid Western architects for their service. In the case of the Grand Theater, former president Jiang Zeming "thought new architecture would complement the architecture of the state."¹⁰⁸ Andreu's theater was built next to the Great Hall of the People, which caused a public controversy, as some people thought the elliptical shape of the theater resembled a burial mound.¹⁰⁹ However, Andreu's



Figure 7. Li Qing, *An Effect Drawing of the Nail Torch for Beijing Olympics*. Oil painting. Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, 798 Art District, Beijing. Summer 2008. Author photo.

“futuristic design” of the egg-shaped Grand Theater was never meant to be “an insult to Chinese architecture,” as his harsh critics claimed.¹¹⁰ In an interview with *People’s Daily* in August 2000, Andreu defended his plan. “The Grand National Theater will, in architectural terms, oppose the Great Hall of the People in what I see as a classical rhetorical figure: the opposition of contraries. One has impressive neoclassical facades composed of straight lines. The other has no facade, but only a roof and is composed of almost exclusively of curves.”¹¹¹ “The curves of his theater,” Jennifer Welker was told by Andreu in Beijing in July 2005, “create a new landscape, one that always changes.”¹¹² Andreu also made it clear that the Great Hall was very vertical, so that his curved Grand Theater would lend a contrast to the Great Hall and set off its glory rather than suppressing it.¹¹³ Thus in this new urban landscape created by Andreu, not only do we sense a striking contrast between the vertical and the curve in architecture, but also that of paradoxical ideologies embodied in the two monumental structures. The Great Hall of the People is a socialist state building where almost all important meetings, such as the People’s Congresses and the Party Congresses, had been held since its construction,¹¹⁴ while the National Grand Theater is, in Andreu’s own words, a “promise,”¹¹⁵ which “will be open to all people and give them a new social place, a new view of the town.”¹¹⁶ To me, the French architect’s “promise” may imply a kind of social democracy under a current Chinese government, which, in Keller’s eyes, is a “mixture of socialism and capitalism.”¹¹⁷

In Beijing, Wang Guofeng is an avant-garde artist who depicts the Great Hall of the People as a tribute to a socialist utopia. Wang’s photographic series *Ideal* portrays the so-called Ten Grand Buildings in Beijing,¹¹⁸ all of which were constructed as “a visible demonstration of socialist achievements” to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the People’s Republic in 1959.¹¹⁹ In design, these buildings, including the Great Hall of the People, incorporate traditional Chinese architecture, classical Western styles, and the Soviet models.¹²⁰ However, Wang’s image of the Great Hall of the People seems grotesquely unreal, for it is emptied of any “people”—an effect achieved through computer editing. Wang considered it essential to “eliminate the crowd, cars, advertisements, and other affecting factors to restore the actual sense of the buildings, to highlight the visual elements of their architectural design, to emphasize the sublimity of their monumentality.”¹²¹ In many works of the *Ideal* series, we see a tiny figure of the artist himself, who dresses up in a Mao jacket from a bygone socialist era and roams around those unpeopled buildings like a somnambulist. This alter ego of his, Wang said, was a personal and fictional experience that allowed his images “to convey a temporal-spatial absurdity and estrangement.”¹²² In March 2007, Wang visited Moscow as a participating artist of the Moscow Biennale, where he found Beijing’s state architecture shockingly similar to that of the former Soviet capital. One year later, the artist returned to



Figure 8. Wang Guofeng, *Ideal No. 8* (detail), 2006.

Moscow to take pictures of those Soviet socialist buildings.¹²³ Wang's fascination with a socialist past in architecture may reveal his own displacement and alienation in today's Beijing. For Wang and many others, capitalist globalization seems to mercilessly thrash socialism in Beijing's new architecture. Isabel Hilton, a British writer who has visited Beijing since the early 1970s, compares the capital city in Mao's socialist era and in the "era of globalization."¹²⁴ The former, she says, was a "reckless assault on the historic character of Beijing," while in the latter, "the explosion of capitalism is transforming Beijing into a world-beating megalopolis amid a frenzy of building, commerce and art."¹²⁵ Yet, as Miyoshi has noted, this globalization's triumph over socialism breeds an "ugliness" that we must endure in our daily lives. This view is shared by Ed Vulliamy, a British journalist who visited Beijing to report on the Olympic facilities and reported that the city was a "metropolis of concrete, unapologetic ugliness, punctuated by the odd monument to modernity, usually designed by a famous foreign architect."¹²⁶

This "ugliness" or, to quote Hilton again, an "unlovely postmodern mix of expensive apartments, offices, hotels and glossy shopping malls" in Beijing's street scene today,¹²⁷ may compel another avant-garde artist, Lu Hao, to search for an imperial past in China's capital city. In late June, 2008, Lu Hao's installation

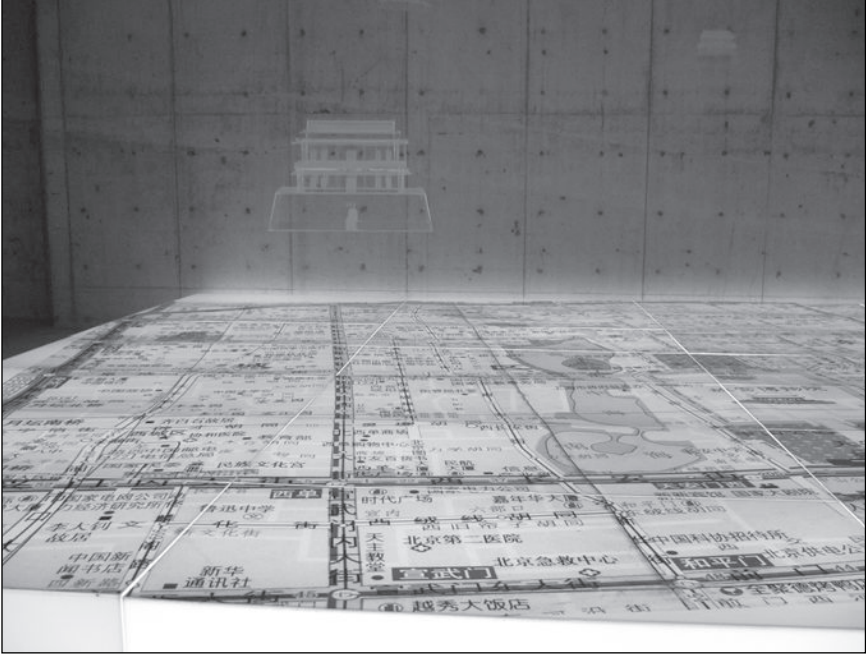


Figure 9. Lu Hao, *Duplicated Memories*. Installation. Xin Dong Cheng Space for Contemporary Art, 798 Art District, Beijing. Summer 2008. Author photo.



Figure 10. Wang Guofeng, *The Forbidden City, the Great Hall of the People, the National Grand Theater*. Photograph. 2008.

Duplicated Memories was opened to the public at Xin Dong Cheng Space for Contemporary Art, a gallery located in the 798 Art District, which had just been “upgraded” for foreign tourists during the Olympic Games.¹²⁸ At the opening reception of the exhibit, I spoke with Lu Hao and Mr. Cheng, director of the gallery (who met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy during his brief visit to the 798 Art District in December 2007). Lu’s installation comprised two parts. One was a huge street map of today’s Beijing mounted on a platform. The other appeared to be architectural models of Beijing’s old city gates, which were built during the Ming and Qing dynasties. These models of the city gates were made of acrylic plastic and suspended in mid-air over the map, which imbued Lu’s work with a lingering ethereality. As I read the street names on the map, I suddenly realized that right above the names of the city gates were the dangling models of those gates. For example, above the Xuanwumen Gate I saw the model of that building, which no longer exists but was on the map anyway. Thus Lu’s models stirred up hallowed memories of a recent past when the city gates and walls still stood in their glory, before they were demolished starting in the late 1950s and continuing through the 1970s.¹²⁹ So, like the ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the phantom of an imperial Beijing in Lu Hao’s *Duplicated Memories* returns to this world to haunt us. Lu grew up in a courtyard house in the historic area of Qianmen or the Qian Gate, which means “front gate,” which was originally built in 1437. As an entrance to the Imperial City, the Qian Gate has long been seen as the symbol of Old Beijing. And the famous Qianmen Street was a bustling commerce and pop entertainment center during the Ming, Qing, and Republic periods.¹³⁰ (After a year-long renovation, the brand-new Qianmen Street was ready for the Olympic torch relay on August 7, 2008.)¹³¹ By his personal and ethnic background, Lu Hao felt strongly related to that old imperial Beijing. “I come from an old Manchu family in Beijing and I grew up in a traditional *hutong* quarter. In our courtyard, we had a pool with many fish. In the morning I would go and buy insects to feed them. Neighbors would drop by to have a chat and watch the fish. Sometimes my grandfather played the er-hu. We often sang bits from Beijing opera plays. That was old Beijing.”¹³² However, can this “old Beijing” be resurrected as Lu so wished in his *Duplicated Memories*?

Over the past decades nearly all the city walls and gates have been ravaged, but there is one crucial factor that remains unequivocal in Beijing’s urban landscape today. The Forbidden City is aligned along a north-south axis, which forms part of a longer Beijing axis that begins at the Yondingmen Gate of the Outer City and ends at the Bell Tower of the Inner City.¹³³ And the Qian Gate and Qianmen Street are also laid out along this same south-north axis or “central axial line” (*zhongzhou xian*), which is a key factor in the planning for Beijing as an imperial capital.¹³⁴ Keller’s comments that this “imperial axis” has been used as “an unambiguous sign of centralized power.”¹³⁵ In past centuries, Qianmen Street was called Heaven Street,

because twenty-three emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties walked through this street to pray at the Temple of Heaven.¹³⁶ In the 1930s, Li Jianwu (1906–1982), a famous playwright, even said that Qianmen Street southward looked as if it were “a path to China’s heart.”¹³⁷ It is in this historical and mythological context that the “imperial axis” has determined Beijing’s unique identity, that is, the identity of all three ideologies—feudal imperialism, Mao’s socialism, and global capitalism, which are admirably illustrated in Wang Guofeng’s 2008 photographic work *The Forbidden City, the Great Hall of the People, the National Grand Theater*.

Beijing

Yin Xiuzhen's *The Ruined City*

In the 1950s, the Qianmen Gate was preserved as a significant structure along Beijing's north-south axis.¹ In the summer of 2008, the restoration of a "deteriorated" Qianmen Street² was completed in time to attract Olympic tourists. The Beijing government had poured 9.2 billion yuan into renovation work on Qianmen to revive the former glory of the six-hundred-year-old neighborhood.³ But critics dismissed the redevelopment project as "Beijing's fabled antiquity," which, they said, was "laced with old, crudely renovated buildings stripped of the collective memories of its inhabitants."⁴ As Henry Sanderson observed,

When Olympic marathon runners pass through Beijing's historic Qianmen neighborhood this August, the gray-brick storefronts with red and gold curved eaves will only look like traditional Chinese architecture. The area's main shopping drag is being rebuilt with two- and three-story commercial buildings that will house name brands from Prada to Starbucks. In the narrow alleys to the east, more than 10,000 families have been moved out of their one-story courtyard homes that are a symbol of old Beijing to make way for pricier residences, high-end restaurants and a boutique hotel.⁵

Many people driven out of this old Qianmen area complained that local government officials offered too little compensation to displaced residents and used force to tear down their houses if they refused it.⁶ A woman whose home was demolished said bitterly, "This doesn't feel like a socialist country, it feels worse than a nest of bandits."⁷ To me, this woman's "unsocialist" feeling was caused by China's "authoritarian capitalism," which, in Hilton's analysis, was "a combination of corruption and speculation" that "unleashed a power greater than [socialist] ideology—that of money—on to the city."⁸



Figure 11. *Qianmen Gate*. Summer 2008. Author photo.

In fact, this capitalist ravage of Old Beijing had begun long before the city's "final frenzy of dressing up for its Olympic display."⁹ Since the early 1990s, Beijing had been in an economic boom: skyscrapers rose along the boulevard, and office buildings and hotels with revolving rooftop restaurants attested to Beijing's new role as a global center of trade and finance.¹⁰ But this process of capitalist globalization had a negative side. Within the old inner city, neighborhood after neighborhood fell to the bulldozer, and high-rise apartments and stores replaced the traditional *hutongs* and courtyard houses. Beijing's selection to host the 2008 Olympics only accelerated more construction (and destruction), which raised grave public concern about environmental damage done to this ancient capital city.¹¹

In Beijing in the summer of 1996, I visited a one-woman exhibition held at the Art Museum of the Capital Normal University, which for many years had been a center for Chinese avant-garde art. I met with the female artist Yin Xiuzhen, a graduate of the university; her installation on display was titled *The Ruined City (Feidu)*. In the past years, Yin Xiuzhen had established herself as an avant-garde artist with feminist and environmental concerns, and *The Ruined City* focused attention on the so-called urban human ecology of Beijing¹² from a postmodern feminist viewpoint. As Hal Foster put it, "[p]ostmodern art is allegorical...in

its stress on ruinous spaces (as in ephemeral installations).¹³ For Yin Xiuzhen, Beijing is the “ruined city” which has been transformed from an ancient town, rich with a “natural” and “cultural landscape,” into a postmodern jungle of callous construction and destruction.¹⁴

In *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic*, Fredric Jameson has analyzed Adorno’s thoughts on the “natural” and “cultural landscape,” which is instructive to my reading of Yin Xiuzhen’s installation. Adorno, Jameson says, “remind[s] us that even in this metaphysical or ontological sense all experiences of nature are mediated historically and socially: his discussion of natural landscape, for example, modulates almost at once as though by its own inner force of gravity towards that rather different thing he calls ‘cultural landscape’ . . . in which natural perceptions have somehow become indissociable from cultural and historical ones: without historical recollection or commemoration [*Eingedenken*], beauty would not exist.”¹⁵ In this regard, Yin Xiuzhen’s *The Ruined City* can be read as a historical recollection or commemoration of Beijing, the old capital city glowing with natural beauty and human warmth. Yin Xiuzhen grew up and still lives in a courtyard house in the Xisi area, which was a busy commercial district as old as Qianmen. The area’s landmark buildings were four archways (*pailou*) built in the Ming dynasty but demolished in 1954.¹⁶ (Next to Xisi is Xidan, which too had been a thriving business quarter since the Ming dynasty. In July 2008,

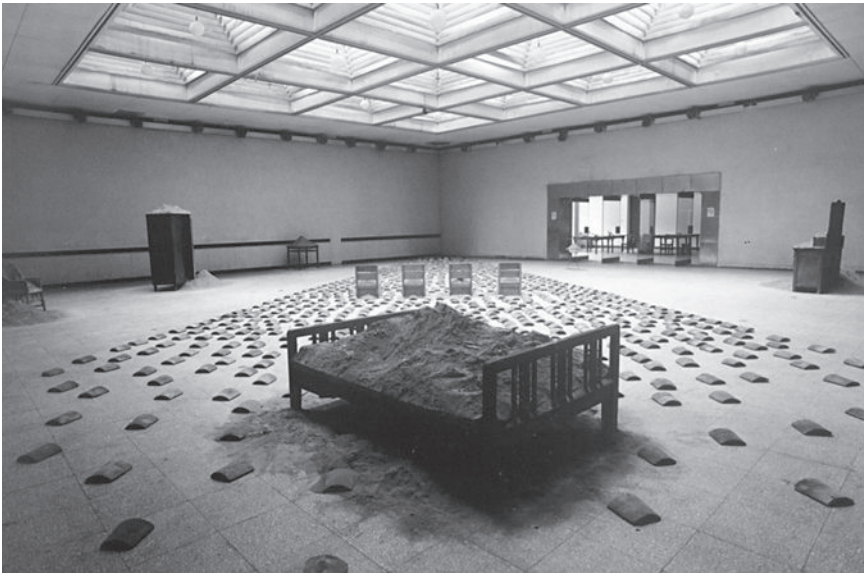


Figure 12. Yin Xiuzhen, *The Ruined City*. Installation, Art Museum, the Capital Normal University, 1996, courtesy of Beijing Commune, Beijing.

a new Xidan Archway appeared at Changan Avenue, which was a replica of the Ming original destroyed in 1923.¹⁷) Before attending the Capital Normal University, Yin Xiuzhen was a construction worker who was agonized by the demolition of old *hutongs* with their courtyard houses, and she later stated, “I live in an age of demolition and construction.”¹⁸ So *The Ruined City* not only manifested the artist’s personal experience but also brought back the “collective memories” of Beijing residents. Yingjin Zhang has observed that “Beijing is a city whose configuration is articulated in space. ‘Closeness’ to nature and ‘closeness’ in human relations in a fundamentally rural community are already inscribed in spatial configurations.”¹⁹ And he holds that such “spatial and gender configurations conjoin to dominate the cultural landscape of Beijing . . . a ready example [of which] . . . is found in the *sihe yuan*, the essential type of Beijing residential compound with houses built around a courtyard.”²⁰ To me, Yin Xiuzhen’s *The Ruined City* is indeed configured as a symbolic courtyard house, typical of that “‘closeness’ in human relations,” yet viewed from a female artist’s perspective.

The installation occupied an entire gallery in the university’s Art Museum. Across the gallery floor was a long, expansive ensemble of dark gray roof tiles lying solemnly and orderly on the ground in straight columns, with just a few gently curving rows of tiles to disrupt the unbending gravity. The roof tiles are a single motif that expanded this interior scene to a far beyond—the whole city of Beijing can be identified by such dim roof tiles if viewed from above. And I will return to the symbolism of the roof tiles (which are an essential constituent of Beijing’s aerial view) later in this chapter. At the moment this “roof tile span” seems to serve as a center for the work, from which all other elements were constructed. In the middle of this assemblage of roof tiles stood four yellowish wooden chairs that were contained in the “ruinous” grayish cement mounds, a vital motif to unify all the thematic components of the installation. At the very end of the roof tiles’ grim sweep, there was a reddish wooden double bed also lying buried in a huge mound of cement. To the left of the centered roof tiles, there appeared a washing stand and a dressing table, both embedded in the same cement mounds. To the right, a tall wooden wardrobe with a mirror stood amid the cement heaps. Farther away and behind the chest, a lone cane chair was set against the wall. Although an air of elegy pervaded the whole installation, the banality of the familiar pieces of furniture, notably the double bed and the tall chest, comforted the viewers, especially those who dwell in domestic spaces filled with such “ready-made” objects.²¹

Those ready-made objects created a tranquility that seemed to narrate a personal tale of “‘closeness’ in human relations.” Anyone from the city can recognize at once those objects culturally and historically, but their symbolic or historic meanings may appear obscure to an outsider. During the 1970s and early 1980s, it was widely acknowledged that if a young couple planned to marry, they must have

“big pieces” [of furniture] installed at home before the wedding day. But it was difficult to purchase big pieces without coupons that were issued by the government and made available through a “unit” or *danwei*, to which everyone belonged. The most significant big pieces were the double bed and the “big wardrobe” (*daligui*) that every married couple must have. Many people’s wedding ceremonies were probably delayed simply because they had to wait for purchasable big pieces that were often scarce in a “rationed” socialist economic system. This piece of Beijing history may sound like a pathetic joke to today’s young people, but it was a reality that the older generation endured in everyday life. So the ready-made objects known as “big pieces” are recognizable objects from a recent past that constituted the cultural landscape of Beijing in the Mao era,²² but they are cherished by the artist as a transitory vision of the vanquished cultural landscape, meaningful only to a certain “chosen” audience, that is, “*hutong* dwellers,” whose life still resembles that of old days in Beijing.²³ This is because, to borrow Adorno’s words, “[a]ll making in art is what that made object itself can never be . . . and this is where the idea of art as the restoration of a repressed nature submerged in the dynamics of history comes in.”²⁴

In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson examined an American ready-made object—“the wall or fence of corrugated metal” (or “the wrapper” made of “cheap junk materials”) that encloses Frank Gehry’s house in Santa Monica, California. He writes, “The corrugated aluminum, the chain-linked balcony above, are, one would think, the junk of the Third World side of American life today—the production of poverty and misery, people not only out of work but without a place to live, bag people, waste and industrial pollution, squalor, garbage, and obsolescent machinery.”²⁵ On that account, the “cheap junk materials” of “waste and industrial pollution” were also used by Yin Xiuzhen in her work—they were nothing but the cement mounds which “wrap” everything seemingly less cheap, say, the wooden furnishings. To a handful of newly rich Chinese from the Beijing of today, those pieces of furniture are “junk” left over from a bygone era, but they are still an everyday reality to many people in “poverty and misery.” From that perspective, the cultural landscape of *The Ruined City* was bleak at first glance; the house, whether historical or cultural, lies buried in the omnipresent cement mounds, a sign of “waste and industrial pollution.” Allegorically, marriage, love, and family, which once survived even under impoverished circumstances, now seem to be brought to an end, as hinted by those hushed pieces of bedroom furniture that used to bear witness to the happiness of a Chinese family.

The Ruined City was a work so complex and intriguing that it needs to be read on several levels. First, the desolate vision of the “ruined” home may suggest that a booming economy of global capitalism makes the ready-made objects from the recent past all but obsolete. The cement mound intimates the global capitalism

that has in recent years intruded into almost every corner of Beijing. The Chinese government builds new high-rise buildings and rents space to foreign firms, which stirs up the construction business that is in full bloom and never seems to come to a halt, and big hotels for foreign tourists are being built all over the city. The city used to be an undisturbed place of imperial power, rich cultural heritage, and natural beauty, but that has all been wiped out bit by bit in the long, tortuous process of capitalist globalization. To a good many local residents, especially those who knew the Old Beijing, the entire city today is a huge construction site abounding in the dust of cement mounds symbolic of relentless global capitalism.

Nicolai Ouroussoff, an American journalist who flew in to Beijing days before the 2008 Olympic Games, noticed a grim ugliness of capitalist modernity that pervades this ancient Chinese place,

Yet your sense of marvel at China's transformation is easily deflated on the drive from the [Beijing] airport. A banal landscape of ugly new towers flanks both sides. Many of those towers are sealed off in gated compounds, a reflection of the widening disparity between affluent and poor. Although most of them were built in the run-up to the Olympics, the poor quality of construction makes them look decrepit and decades old.

It's the flip side of China's Modernist embrace: *tabula rasa* planning of the sort that also tainted the Modernist movement in Europe and the United States in the postwar years. China's architectural experiment thus brims with both promise and misery. Everything, it seems, is possible here, from utopian triumph of the imagination to soul-sapping expressions of a disregard for individual lives.²⁶

In modern Chinese, cement is translated as *shuini*, a term which literally means "water mud." But *shuini* has a popular name, *yanghui*, which connotes "foreign dust."²⁷ Now this "foreign dust" has permeated the ancient Chinese capital like a ghost—you feel it everywhere but you can hardly grasp it, because it is light, airy, soft, shapeless, like a specter. This is perhaps the reason why Yin Xiuzhen, a former construction worker and now an environmentalist, employed the cement mound as a vital motif for *The Ruined City*, a city cloaked in the ghostly foreign dust. The artist put it:

Cement is the material that had surrounded my daily life. At that time, everywhere [in Beijing] was undergoing *chaiqian*, or "demolition and resettlement." I rode a bicycle to work passing through my *hutong*, where an old house still stood. When I returned home, the house was gone. The explosion and demolition [of the old house] made dust float about like smoke. The whole city under

construction was just like a cement plant. The air was filled with cement, so were my clothes.²⁸

Victor F.S. Sit, an expert on the human ecology of Beijing, has given a more insightful and historical explanation for this restless ghost of global capitalism: “The threat to the old city [Beijing] has arisen mainly since the open policy of 1978 and it takes two forms: the invasion of over 100 tall buildings which threaten the traditional skyline of the Imperial City, some even threatening the central axis of the Forbidden City; new developments taking up courtyards and empty spaces, doing a great deal of damage to the traditionally built form of courtyard houses, royal gardens, old temples and traditional mandarin houses.”²⁹ In this context, the “ruined” home as portrayed in Yin Xiuzhen’s work is one of those ravaged “courtyard houses” that the female artist lamented passionately. But the cement mound in her installation should not be taken only as a brutal symbol of global capitalism that people in the Third World have just begun to experience. Jameson offers an inspiring reading of the New York artist Robert Gober’s *Untitled Installation*, in which a “natural” mound is as pervasive as that of Yin Xiuzhen’s, but invested with different meanings. As Jameson put it, “the ‘mound’ with its aesthetic precursors, the ‘ironic’ text with its own rather different ones... all of these distinct artistic materials... here summon up the ghostly, but social, presence of human collaborators.”³⁰ And he raised a probing question about what he calls the “postmodernist mound” in Gober’s work: “For we can now move from the postmodernist text to the equally postmodernist mound and ask ourselves whether—far from marking the place of Nature—it does not rather constitute something like the grave of Nature, as the latter has systematically been eclipsed from the object world and the social relations of a society whose tendential domination over its Other (the nonhuman or the formerly natural) is more complete than any other moment in human history.”³¹

To me, this “postmodernist mound,” or “the grave of Nature” in Gober’s installation, is similar to Yin Xiuzhen’s cement mound, which may be called “the grave of Nature and Culture.” In Gober’s case, the clay mound is symbolic of the “natural” that is lost in late capitalist society, while in Yin Xiuzhen’s work, the cement mound may seem an allegory for both “natural” and “cultural” beauty that is obliterated by global capitalism. According to Sit, the courtyard house represents what he defined as “the cultural root” of Old Beijing in the theory of *yin* and *yang*: “The concept of a huge open square for public rallies is itself non-Chinese. Old Beijing only had courtyards, a *yang* type of design. The new Square is a Western and a *yin* design.”³² In that case, the courtyard house buried by the cement mound can be seen as the blighted “cultural root” or the *yang* force, which is so devastating to people living in that old capital city. Sit explains in terms of *Zhou*

Li, a Confucian classic: “The layout of [Old Beijing] clearly matched what was said in Chapter 1, that the capital of the sovereign should be where ‘Heaven and Earth are in perfect accord, where the four seasons come together, where the winds and rains gather, where the forces of *yin* and *yang* are harmonized.’”³³ Obviously, if the harmony of *yin* and *yang* forces in the layout of the Chinese capital is destroyed, chaos ensues—as signified by excessive construction of tall buildings or big hotels. In Yingjin Zhang’s view, a preglobal-capitalist Beijing still preserved “rural value,” for there is little difference between a courtyard house and a country home; both are flat, spacious, natural, and accessible to interpersonal communication.³⁴ He quoted Lao She (1899–1966) as saying that Beijing was “the number one city in the world because ‘it produces its own flowers, vegetables and fruits, and it consequently situates its residents more closely in nature.’”³⁵ Now this rustic beauty of Beijing is fading as we have caught the sight of the cement mound in Yin Xiuzhen’s elegiac work.

It is in this morbid vision of global capitalism that we see a parallel between Gober’s and Yin Xiuzhen’s art. As Vincent B. Leitch vividly describes in his book *Postmodernism: Local Effects, Global Flows*: “The virtualization of economics appears in the fin de siècle inevitable and irreversible, stupendous and spectral, unreal and protective. For all that, true catastrophe looms like a recycled ghost in a shattered foreground encumbered.”³⁶ Thus, the cement mound or “foreign dust” in Yin Xiuzhen’s work is indeed “a recycled ghost” in the Third World that sacks Old Beijing and its unique local culture. And her response to such an intrusion of global capitalism is, to borrow Jameson’s words, “the powerful expressions of the marginally uneven and the unevenly developed issues of a recent experience of capitalism,” which are “more intense and more powerful, more expressive, and above all more deeply symptomatic and meaningful than anything the enfeeble center still finds itself able to say.”³⁷

But such a “recent experience of capitalism,” narrated by Yin Xiuzhen through her *The Ruined City*, is only one meaningful emotional dimension of the artwork. It also demonstrates a strong feminist touch, especially compared with a similar discourse of feminist art from “the enfeeble center”—Europe or America. As I discussed, Yin Xiuzhen’s installation has called our attention to a home/city “ruined” by the cement mound of global capitalism from the point of view of a female artist. In the West, as Edward Lucie-Smith says in his *ARTODAY*, “Much feminist art was made in new media, such as video. A great deal of it consisted of environmental work or performances.”³⁸ And he also points out, “Environmental work of this kind does seem to have had an effect on the American art world. It convinced the artists, critics and public alike that anything, literally any object, could rank as art, provided that it was presented in a recognizably fine art context.”³⁹ A recent example of such feminist art in the American art world is Janine Antoni’s installation

Slumber, exhibited together with Cai Guoqiang's *Cry Dragon/Cry Wolf: The Ark of Genghis Khan* in the Hugo Boss Prize 1996 exhibition at the Guggenheim Soho, New York. *Slumber* consists of a hand-operated wooden loom, framed yarn, a bed, a nightgown, and an EEG machine and the artist's REM readings. The artist gave a performance of "sleeping" in the bed with the EEG machine standing by and "reading" her "slumber." In addition, there are two images that strike the viewer's eye: the yarn hanging in mid-air and the "woven" fabric turned into a long "nightgown" meandering on the floor. In a formal sense, the sweeping yarn and the roaming fabric in Janine Antoni's work resemble Yin Xiuzhen's extensive ensemble of roof tiles in long rows we encountered earlier. All these motifs centralize or sustain the two installations, which may otherwise go astray. So a question must be raised: What is the significance of such centralizing or dominant motifs in relation to others in both artists' work?

In one of her performances Antoni "acted" as a weaver holding a shuttle in her left hand and gazing at a pattern made by the red threads sprung from her right hand. More important, the red-thread pattern echoed a similar pattern visible on the EEG reading record placed on the loom confronting her. The female weaver or spinner is an age-old Christian image from the Bible:

And all the women that were wise hearted did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun, both of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine linen. . . . Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work . . . of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.⁴⁰

Undoubtedly, weaving and spinning have long been regarded as women's domestic virtues. For instance, while discussing women's many virtues, a Shakespearean male character said, "She can spin."⁴¹ Diego Velázquez's *The Tapestry Weavers* is a resplendent example that blends the ancient myth of feminine virtue with a cruel reality. In *The Tapestry Weavers*, women "that devise cunning work" seem irrelevant to the production of their labor—the beautiful tapestry hanging in the palace and being appreciated by female members of the aristocracy.

This irrelevance is reversed in Antoni's *Slumber*; she slept in the bed wearing the nightgown made of the fabric that is the production of her own work as the biblical weaver. Like Velázquez's weavers and spinners, however, Antoni the artist-weaver confronts another cruel reality of her time: the EEG machine and its reading of her slumber. To me, the modern EEG machine is somehow hideous compared with the ancient loom. Its cold, harsh, and grayish metallic appearance is especially distasteful among the warm, soft, and cream-colored yarns and fabric. But the resemblance between the pattern of the red threads issuing from Antoni's right

hand and the pattern displayed on the EEG reading establishes a link between the artist “posed” as the virtuous biblical weaver and modernity, which, in Jean Baudrillard’s terms, is “the age of the production of the other.”⁴² (Interestingly, as early as the 1870s, a Mr. Fisher in Shanghai took a photo of a Chinese female weaver. To me, this picture is a fine example of “the production of the other,” because it shows how a Westerner admired the same feminine virtue in what Baudrillard called “the mirror people.”⁴³)

The EEG is an instrument for measuring and reading the electronic activity of the brain. In Antoni’s case, it is an apparatus for monitoring a woman’s brain that seems “compliant” with machinery, science, technology, and above all “the production of the other,” which characterizes modernity. In other words, the female artist-weaver, as we see in this theatrical installation, looks more like “the production by male hysteria of an imagining of woman in place of her stolen femininity.”⁴⁴ Thus, her “stolen femininity,” as resurrected by the “biblical weaver” in Antoni’s work, is still under electronic surveillance, potentially by a male. As a result, she appears simply as a production of that patriarchal power or male desire which operated as early as biblical times.

Linda Hutcheon has pointed out, “What postmodern tactics have allowed feminist artists is a way to foreground the politics of the representation of the body through parody and counter-expectation, while remaining within the conventions of visual art.”⁴⁵ In that perspective, the female body as seen in Antoni’s artist-weaver is a parody of the biblical woman weaver, which surely invites “counter-expectation,” that is, in Hutcheon’s phrasing, a feminist artist’s goal of “overtly contesting the male gaze.”⁴⁶ In her installation, the EEG machine personifies the male gaze that pierces the female artist’s sleeping figure, illuminating a “cascade of antinomies” such as machine/body, active/passive, masculine/feminine, production/consumption, and so on.⁴⁷ During her performance, however, the artist-weaver “stared” at her own “production” (the pattern of the red threads) when faced with the “production” of that male gaze (the EEG record). Her attitude is more ironic than confrontational. As Baudrillard remarked, “The *femme fatale* is never *fatale* as a natural element, but as artifice, as seductress or as the projective artefact of male hysteria. . . . She scoffs at desire and the subject of desire.”⁴⁸ Therefore, “the opposition [between male and female] does not exist. It is merely the substitution of a symmetrical, differential form for a dual, dissymmetrical one.”⁴⁹ And this nonexistent opposition between male and female is, I believe, well illustrated by the two identical patterns of the red threads and the EEG readings in Antoni’s *Slumber*.

None of such explicit feminine sexuality or “ironized” female body can be found in Yin Xiuzhen’s *The Ruined City*. In this Chinese female artist’s installation, it is what Hutcheon would call “the active absent presence” at work.⁵⁰ This “active

absent presence” is suggested by the dressing table, a motif ubiquitously associated with women in Western art. For example, Cindy Sherman’s photographic work *Untitled Film Still* (1978) depicts such a conventional female figure standing before a dressing table/mirror in a postmodernist parodic posture. The lady (Sherman herself) in front of the mirror appears finely dressed and attractive, but somehow uneasy. Compared to this postmodern ironic theme of “woman/mirror” in Sherman’s work, Yin Xiuzhen’s “absent” woman before a “ruined” dressing table is again disturbingly spectral, just as is the cement mound or “foreign dust” that engulfs her entire installation. This fictive invisibility seems to mock that clichéd topos for feminine vanity prevalent in global culture. In classical Chinese art, the “woman/mirror” theme is first seen in a painting titled *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Palace Ladies* by Gu Kaizhi (334–406) in the Six Dynasties (220–581). The inscription that accompanies the images reads: “Everyone knows how to adorn his/her face, but no one knows how to cultivate his/her character.” The accusatory attitude expressed in such “admonitions” is typical of the Confucian view of women.

While Sherman impersonates such a character of feminine vanity in her “self-posed self-portraits modeled on Hollywood film stills,”⁵¹ what she intends to do is, as Hutcheon says, “to contest that maleness of the gaze: her many self-portraits which offer her own body in the guise of social and media stereotypes are so self-consciously posed that the social construction of the female self, fixed by the masculine gaze, is both presented and ironized, for she herself is the gaze behind the camera, the active absent presence, the subject and object of her representation, of woman as sign, of woman as positioned by gender—but also by race and class.”⁵² In contrast, Yin Xiuzhen eliminated “the presented and ironized” female self but left the dressing table/mirror intact. To me, this is the Chinese female artist’s distinct way of “ironizing” the Confucian or male view of female vanity. It is a criticism of woman without her actual presence; nothing but that “self-reflexive” dressing table/mirror. The Confucian or masculine attack on feminine vanity misses the real target but only hits its “accessory,” that is, the lone dressing table that is already divorced from woman. Or, to put it another way, the dressing table is deserted by woman free from the male gaze. There is no uneasy woman positioned in front of a mirror to be looked at, as exemplified by Sherman’s work or Karen LeCoq and Nancy Youdelman’s theatrical performance back in 1972 at Womanhouse in Los Angeles.

Unlike Sherman, who used her own “ironized” female body to contest the male gaze, Yin Xiuzhen removed the traditionally present woman from the dressing table, so it loses its feminine affinity and transposes itself into a symbol of the “averted” male gaze. In this regard, Antoni’s EEG machine functioned like the deserted dressing table. It was glimmering in the darkness of the night when the artist-weaver slept in the bed; it was a feeble presence of male desire, gaze, and

power compared to the golden rays of her “woven” fabric, which was triumphant and glorious. Although Antoni was being watched or “read” by the EEG machine, she didn’t show any uneasiness, as Sherman’s well-dressed lady would. The artist was in deep slumber, unaware of the EEG machine that symbolized masculine force. Therefore, the traditional woman’s virtue or her “cunning work”—weaving—is a powerful counterculture against the male-dominated world of science and technology. In Antoni’s view, ancient weaving is as potent as modern science and technology, so the “cascade of antinomies” such as machine/body is redefined. Similarly, the absent woman in Yin Xiuzhen’s *The Ruined City* harnesses the same female force that overturns the symbolism of the dressing table/mirror imposed on woman, which was manifested by Gu Kaizhi’s *Admonitions*. However, Yin Xiuzhen did not refute this symbolism by confrontation but by absence, which renders the male desire and gaze vacuous, absurd, and pointless. As woman is removed from the dressing table/mirror, man’s will to shape “her as ideal figure in his likeness”⁵³ is cancelled out. (The irony that the male gaze hits no female target was already sensed in Barbara Kruger’s work *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*.) Here I want to borrow Baudrillard’s words to shed light on Yin Xiuzhen’s feminist postmodern stance: “Man is only different, but woman is other: strange, absent, enigmatic, antagonistic.”⁵⁴

Although this feminist postmodern discourse is delivered by the forsaken dressing table, its counterclaim ensues. The persisting and orderly roof tiles that centralize and solidify *The Ruined City*, I believe, are an eternal symbol of protection that is inseparable from patriarchal power. As pointed out earlier, the characteristic image of roof tiles is a vital component of Beijing’s aerial view; it too can be reckoned as one of the “more condensed symbols” of a city, “which are often more evocative, for all their conciseness.”⁵⁵ In Old Beijing, it was these sedate roof tiles that welded the city and its diverse communities into one coherent architectural and political entity. Everyone, aristocrat or commoner, seemed to be under the protection of the tiled roofs or “*huangtian*” (Great Heaven).⁵⁶ A photo taken by Donald Mennie in the last days of imperial China (1912), titled *The Hours of Rest*, shows local residents in Beijing, old and young, relaxing in wintertime under the majestic imperial tiled roof of a ceremonial gate.⁵⁷ This picture may well illustrate what Jeffrey Meyer has said of Beijing as a “sacred city.” “In a very concrete way, the structure of the city of Beijing made clear to all levels of society their places in the cosmic/social hierarchy. And if it did not bring freedom as urbanism did in the mercantile cities of medieval Europe, it at least provided a kind of security and a measure of peace in the acceptance of an assigned role.”⁵⁸ This “kind of security and a measure of peace” can be found again in a photo taken by Brian Brake in socialist China in the 1960s, in which people shop from a street stall below an imperial city gate that had not been demolished.⁵⁹ To me, both Mennie’s and

Brake's pictures present a Beijing community that is sheltered under a ceremonial gate of "Great Heaven"—be it the Qing dynasty or Mao's socialist state. The common people, it seems, are always represented as being under such protection in whatever historical period. This is because, as Sit points out, "Traditional or old Beijing is a horizontal city with key landmarks at commanding heights to provide identity and direction to the spatial ordering of the city."⁶⁰ So in Yin Xiuzhen's *The Ruined City*, it is this all-embracing roof tile span that counterbalances the obtrusive "foreign dust" of global capitalism that is permeating daily life of the people of Beijing. As I have described, the "foreign dust" or cement is pliable and amorphous, while the roof tile is solid and adamant, an imperial force capable of withstanding the invading "foreign dust." But even this resilient roof tile is perhaps what Jameson (following Raymond Williams) would call a postmodern "cultural residual" that is no longer dominant or emergent in today's Beijing.⁶¹ Jameson asserts, "The postmodern is... the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses... must make their way."⁶² This I think is precisely the significance of the roof tile span in *The Ruined City* that is making its way as one those "different kinds of cultural impulse."

I certainly felt that "cultural impulse" resistant to global capitalism or modernity when I was visiting Beijing in December 1996. As I mentioned, *The Ruined City* reflects a general mood shared by many residents in Beijing, a complex mix of feelings for a Beijing both old and new. While researching for this book, I read a popular city newspaper, the *Beijing Evening News* (*Beijing wanbao*) daily. To my surprise, stories often appeared on the front page about the Beijing municipal government's plan to rebuild a section of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) city walls by asking for help from local residents, who volunteered to collect Ming bricks scattered throughout the city. In the late 1950s, the Ming city walls were demolished under an order from Chairman Mao, who wished to see a new socialist capital modernized in the Soviet style.⁶³ At that time numerous Ming bricks, dispersed after the demolition, were picked up by local residents for personal uses—they took them home to build courtyards or pigsties. Decades later, some concerned intellectuals discovered on a construction site a tiny section of the surviving Ming city wall, which they suggested to the authorities should be rebuilt of original Ming bricks. This proposition seems to echo a preserving plan cited by Sit in his book: Although the old city wall was demolished and lost as an artifact, its site still remains. And the old site needs to be rebuilt "in such a way that a 'new wall' fitting such a perceived image of the old city may re-emerge."⁶⁴ The Beijing government launched a campaign among local people to find those Ming bricks wherever they were "in use." The *Beijing Evening News* reported that within a few months about 300,000 Ming bricks had been retrieved and given to the construction project, and some volunteers, including a foreign professor teaching English in the city,

received award certificates for their active participation in the so-called Love Beijing and Contribute the City Wall Bricks campaign.⁶⁵

The old city walls and palace-style gabled roof in Beijing are symbols most characteristic of a unique culture that is forever unyielding. Nobody seems to be able to destroy these “cultural residuals,” not even Chairman Mao, “the unchallenged leader” of the Chinese Revolution.⁶⁶ In Yin Xiuzhen’s work, the roof tiles are assembled not only to counteract the “foreign dust” of global capitalism, but also to hold together a savaged city/household from falling apart. Sensing that threat from the outside world, people in Beijing offered to collect Ming bricks to resurrect the imperial dream, glory, and safe haven, which can only be achieved under the direction of patriarchal or state power.⁶⁷ In the mid-1990s, the Beijing government had demanded that an imperial-palace-style gabled and tiled roof be added to almost all new high-rise building, entertaining the notion that “a perceived image of the old city may re-emerge,” in Sit’s terms. This same notion is also likely to compel Yin Xiuzhen to create her *The Ruined City*, in which the acknowledgment of protection from patriarchal/imperial/state power seems to be a truth that the female artist would not recant.

This may sound contradictory to her thematic concern as a feminist environmentalist. Chinese culture, however, is complex and paradoxical, as Henry Kissinger has observed:

Through the millennia, Chinese rulers have governed a population far more numerous than those of any other society, often by assertions of absolute power. . . . In the end, a kind of pluralism would assert itself, not as the result of a political philosophy expounding liberty but because the family, not the state, has been the irrepressible purpose of Chinese life. Families would bend, like so much bamboo, to a prevailing wind, but they would not break. Even the most powerful Chinese rulers ran up against this paradoxical mass—at once obedient and independent, submissive and self-reliant, imposing limits less by direct challenges than by hesitance in executing orders they considered unreasonable.⁶⁸

Yin Xiuzhen’s *The Ruined City* is above all a touching tale of the home and family and their survival in “this harsh world.”⁶⁹ The “absent woman,” in particular, is “at once obedient and independent, submissive and self-reliant” because, unlike her Western counterpart, she would not challenge that patriarchal power face to face but simply “absent” her “from felicity awhile.”⁷⁰ But, in my imagination, she would come back to resume her traditional role as daughter, wife, and mother in the family that in a predicament would bend but not break. In his analysis of postmodern spatiality in the Taiwanese film *Terrorizer*, Jameson said, “The women’s dramas are

thus spatial, not only because they are somehow postmodern . . . but also and above all because they are urban, and even more because they are articulated within this particular city.”⁷¹

In Yin Xiuzhen’s case, “this particular city” is Beijing, in which she is “articulated” across patriarchy and femininity. In her installation, while the “arms” of the roof tiles (symbol of patriarchy) stretch interminably to shield the house and the family from any outside danger or destruction, the quintessence of this sheltered home (symbol of femininity) is what Kissinger admires as the “irrepressible purpose of Chinese life.” The “Chinese life” rendered in *The Ruined City* seems certainly full of contradictions and passions, just as any human life does in this fallen world of global capitalism.

Globalism or Nationalism?

Cai Guoqiang, Zhang Huan, and Xu Bing
in New York

In spring 2003, photographs of Chinatown taken by Lia Chang after the 9/11 terrorist attacks were on view as part of the exhibition “Recovering Chinatown: The 9/11 Collection,” held at the Museum of Chinese in the Americas in New York City. Lia Chang’s photographic works effectively documented the experience of Chinese New Yorkers during and after the 9/11 tragedy. The attack on the World Trade Center inflicted profound damage on Chinatown’s economy, especially its tourist services, garment shops, and restaurants, and the Asian community in Chinatown has never really recovered. Among the affected Chinese New Yorkers is Zhang Hongtu, an accomplished artist whose ironic Chairman Mao portraits were exhibited at various museums and published in art journals and scholarly books worldwide.¹ Originally from Beijing, Zhang has lived in New York for the past two decades and regards the city as his home. As “a true New Yorker,”² Zhang has participated in two exhibitions commemorating September 11. One was organized by Exit Art in New York in January 2002, where he exhibited his photographic installation *Missing Mona Lisa*, in which pictures of the missing people after 9/11 overlap with Leonardo da Vinci’s masterpiece. *Mona Lisa* in this installation seems like a pensive mourner gazing at the victims of the World Trade Center attack from a long-ago past. In the days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, people from New York’s art community lamented that art was pointless in the face of such horrors, but they began planning trauma-oriented art programs, and artists “returned to their studios, sometimes in loft buildings that were once in the towers’ shadows.”³ Zhang Hongtu was among those New York artists who felt obligated to help the 9/11 victims.

In New York, many people have mulled over the political and philosophical meanings of September 11. In a *New York Times* article, Richard Bernstein

surveys a public reaction to the events from both the right and the left. According to Bernstein, a controversial response from the left is that of Susan Sontag (1933–2004), who said that “the attacks were aimed not at American freedom but rather at ‘the world’s self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions.’”⁴ “The other common critique offered by the left,” Bernstein continues, “is . . . that American policies and actions around the world caused the anti-American fury that erupted on Sept. 11.”⁵ Then Bernstein presents a conflicting view between the left and the right aired on the campus of Yale University:

Paul Kennedy, the Yale University professor best known for his book warning against American imperial overreach, provoked a stir when he asked students to imagine how they would feel if the United States were small and the world dominated by a unified Arab-Muslim state. “In those conditions, would not many Americans grow to loathe that colossus?” he asked, “I think so.” This prompted a rejoinder from Donald Kagan, a Yale classics professor and a conservative on foreign affairs, who said that Mr. Kennedy’s comments were a “classic case of blaming the victim.”⁶

Like Kennedy, Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, has voiced a by now familiar opinion on the issues of terrorism, American hegemony, and globalization: “It is what haunts every world order, all hegemonic domination—if Islam dominated the world, terrorism would rise against Islam, *for it is the world, the globe itself, which resists globalization.*”⁷

With the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, we are confronted, says Baudrillard, with the “pure event” that concentrates in itself “all the events which have never taken place.” We had all dreamt of this event because it was impossible “not to dream of the destruction of American monopolistic power.”⁸ This remark may sound very “anti-American,” but it is a feeling shared by some Americans themselves. Fareed Zakaria, an editor for *Newsweek* and a CNN world affairs analyst, pointed this out in his cover story “Why America Scares the World,” on the eve of the Iraqi war: “What worries people around the world above all else is living in a world shaped and dominated by one country—the United States. And they have come to be deeply suspicious and fearful of us.”⁹ It is from this geopolitical perspective that I examine the works of three Chinese diaspora artists active in New York City—Cai Guoqiang, Zhang Huan, and Xu Bing. Their work manifested an ironic anxiety over globalization long before the 9/11 events.

In *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, John Gray found fault with a global free market system. The global market system, Gray wrote, leads to “creative destruction”; progress is made through endless cycles of boom and bust;

like capitalism in the past, global capitalism today achieves its high productivity by destroying old ways of life on a worldwide scale.¹⁰ Advocates of globalization dismissed Gray's critique as a familiar attack on Western culture, i.e., the Enlightenment itself.¹¹ However, William Greider, in his bestseller *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, shared Gray's vision of a destructive global capitalism. For Greider, the market process is a source of vast creative energies, yet it also creates "so much destruction and human suffering, subordination and insecurity."¹²

As a journalist, Greider traveled extensively around the globe to investigate the effects of capitalist globalization that have caused all nations to converge into what he calls "one world,"¹³ and he drew a conclusion from his vast experiences in countries he had visited—including China. In this age of globalization, Greider said, people no longer have free choice in the matter of identity; ready or not, they are already of the world, and "everyone's social existence" is tied to globalization and there is no place for anyone to hide from the others.¹⁴ Cai Guo-qiang, Zhang Huan, and Xu Bing are no exception, although they came to New York at different times and under different circumstances. In his informative *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, Geremie Barmé describes Cai Guo-qiang and Xu Bing and others in New York as members of the artistic diaspora that comprises many "prodigal cultural dissidents" who frequently return to China to gather information for their future writing or artwork.¹⁵ But, as Barmé argues, they are "forced into this passive position by the state corporate system, international audiences, critics (or the demon 'global culture')." ¹⁶ This is because globalization, again in Greider's analysis, "is also driven by a palpable sense of insecurity" as nobody is able "to control the energies of unfettered capital."¹⁷ What dominates these artists' latest work is a grave thematic concern over globalization, especially its protean and acute impact on people's daily lives everywhere, particularly in China and other Asian countries. In fact, dynamic and disruptive globalization has clashed with a rising nationalism in China and Asia. Political uncertainty in Indonesia and Thailand gives nationalists "much room to advocate protectionist policies."¹⁸ China's economic reforms opened the nation to the biggest global capital flow since 1990.¹⁹ A recent opinion poll considered such foreign investments harmful to national industries.²⁰ Two Chinese journalists found that a shift "from the 1980's globalism to the 1990's nationalism" has taken place in Chinese society today.²¹ In this chapter, I intend to explore how the conflict between globalism and nationalism in contemporary life strongly impacted these Chinese artists. They have obtained increasing recognition in a glitzy global art community, yet their work remains rooted in and inspired by national traditions.

Nationalism as a Resistance to Globalization?

In September 1998, Cai, Zhang, and Xu participated in “Inside Out: New Chinese Art,” an exhibition held at the Asia Society in New York. Holland Cotter, an art critic for the *New York Times*, wrote favorably about much of the exhibits. But he singled out Cai for his “distinctly nationalistic, implicitly anti-Western bent” discernible in contemporary Chinese art.²² Cai Guoqiang’s *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows*, though “an arresting installation” in Cotter’s words,²³ was illustrative of that “nationalistic” and “anti-Western bent.” Cai Guoqiang had appropriated a popular Chinese historical narrative from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* that elucidated a ruse of war (which I will discuss later). Cotter was heedful of the “borrowed” symbolic meanings of Cai’s installation: “Is China’s new art based on such opportunistic strategies, fulfilling Mao’s famous directive to make foreign things serve China? Some of it is certainly geared to turning a fast profit in the Western market, especially while ‘Chinese’ is hot in the way ‘Korean’ was a few years ago.”²⁴

Cotter had a keen eye for the “anti-Western” and “nationalistic” tendency in Cai’s work, but he ignored the postmodern, global context in which the artist’s works were created. In that particular context, as Edward Said (1935–2003) says, a work of art always “begins *from* a political, social, cultural situation, begins *to do* certain things and not others,” by which Said means a cultural nationalism that aims to distinguish the national canon and maintain its eminence, authority, and aesthetic autonomy.²⁵ Since the 1990s, a new nationalism has infiltrated China’s political, social, and cultural life, a situation in which Cai’s Asia Society installation was created. This recent development in Chinese politics is explored by Yongnian Zheng in his 1999 book *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*. Chinese nationalism was misperceived by many in the United States, especially at a time when Sino-American relationships were strained and volatile, which occurred after NATO’s bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in the summer of 1999 and the U.S. Navy EP-3 Aries spy plane incident in the spring of 2001.

According to Zheng, the rise of new Chinese nationalism during the 1990s is primarily “reactive” to a variety of anti-China theories and actual threats from the West, as it has always been. From the Opium Wars (1840–1842) to the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945), the nation has been a victim of foreign imperialism. In his view, “China is never nationalistic without any external threats.” As China now is able to concentrate on economic modernization, “the West also begins to form new anti-China forces.”²⁶ This Chinese position was

categorized by James Townsend as “state nationalism” as opposed to “popular nationalism,”²⁷ exemplified by a 1996 bestseller, *China Can Say No*. (A copy of this book was used by Cai Guoqiang as a component of his *Cry Dragon/Wolf: The Ark of Genghis Khan*, an installation for “The Hugo Boss Prize 1996” exhibition held at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo.) Throughout the 1990s, this popular nationalism had been “a reaction” to the humiliations China suffered at the hands of Western powers²⁸—from its losing bid for hosting the 2000 Olympics to its repeated failure to enter the World Trade Organization, and its ravished embassy in the war in Yugoslavia.²⁹ Such reaction to indignity can be dubbed as “aggrieved nationalism,” in Michel Oksenberg’s terms.³⁰

But there is also a domestic reason for rising Chinese nationalism. In post-Mao China, in which the Marxist-Leninist dogma as “the national canon” has lost its mass appeal, the government either uses or curbs popular nationalism as a way to tackle domestic problems. According to Barmé, the decay of Maoism has led to a reliance on nationalism as a unifying ideology. In the 1980s the Chinese Communist Party stressed its role as the vital patriotic force in the nation; since the 1990s, however, the party no longer has a monopoly on patriotic sentiments, so nationalism functions as a consensus that is “beyond the bounds of official culture.”³¹ Barmé examined many forms of contemporary Chinese culture, such as TV series and feature films and pop fictions, that conveyed anti-West and nationalistic sentiments (e.g., a 1993 soap opera titled “A Beijing Man in New York”). He called those writers, filmmakers, and artists “China’s avant-garde nationalists.”³² Not surprisingly, popular nationalism is best expressed through the mass media, with a plethora of soft porn and obscenities in imagery and language.³³ By contrast, Chen Kaige, a Fifth Generation director and one of Barmé’s “avant-garde nationalists,” seems bounded by nostalgic, nationalist aspirations in his lavish and elegant filmmaking: “I’m turning into a royalist. . . . China could not have been a great unified nation but for the imperial powers and Confucius.”³⁴ Chen’s vision of a glorious, epic, and nationalistic past was chided by many young critics at a conference on film theory held in Chengdu in the summer of 1999. So too was Cai by his Chinese fellow artists in New York at the Asia Society show in the autumn of 1998, a “situation” implicated in Cotter’s *New York Times* review article.

Cai Guoqiang: A Deft Narrator of Global Anxieties

Cai’s *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows* blends the nation’s distant past with its present-day realities. The ancient war tale of the Three Kingdoms, “Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows” (*Caochuan jiejian*), inspired Cai as a national allegory that imparted an air of historical and cultural gravity to his installation. *The Romance*

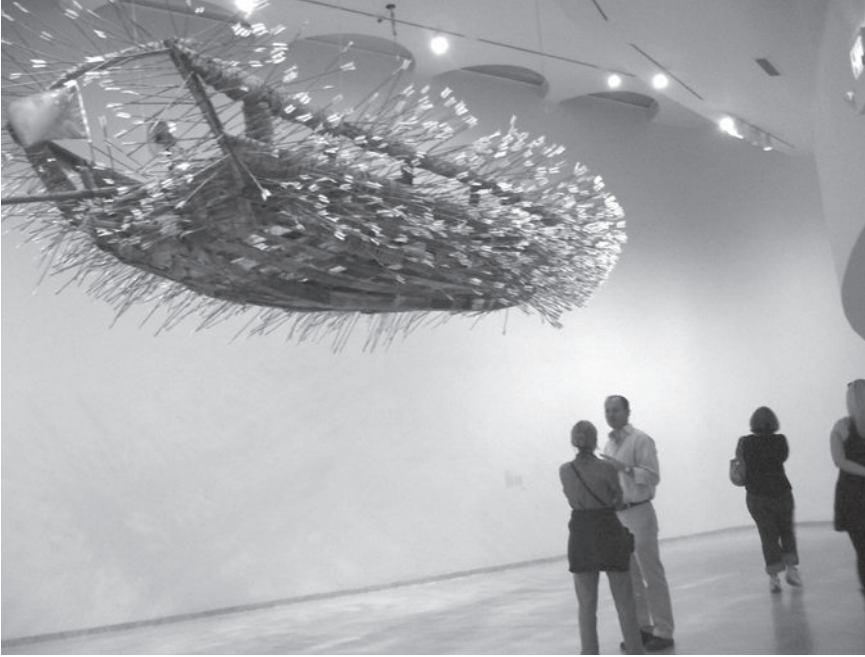


Figure 13. Cai Guoqiang, *Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows*. Installation. 1998. Author photo.

of the *Three Kingdoms* has served as a paradigm of Chinese thinking about human relations in international affairs. The historical epic tells of the power struggles among three rulers who seek to unify a China embroiled in political and social turmoil. Much loved by Chinese from all walks of life, the tales are enacted in operas and movies and illustrated in calendars and New Year pictures, and some heroes of the epic are worshipped as gods in temples.³⁵ “Chinese diplomats and military officers often describe their maneuvers in terms of these stories. The very language is full of reference to it.”³⁶ Mao Zedong himself was an ardent admirer of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as a classic of astuteness and resourcefulness.³⁷ Yet, “with his ‘Sinification’ of Marxism, Mao claimed to have combined a national identity with a cosmopolitan one, and to have forged a world-class model of thought and society that was distinctively Chinese.”³⁸

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is a classic example of what Said calls “national canon.” It is a “Sinocentric” Maoism or neo-Maoism that is still deeply embedded in contemporary Chinese political thoughts. “The perception of China as the center of the world,” Yongnian Zheng says, “resulted from the external circumstances it encountered when it was a strong power prior to the arrival of Western imperialism. However, China’s nationalism . . . has been repeatedly re-constructed in

accordance with changing domestic priorities and international circumstances and is thus in a state of flux.”³⁹ During the 1999 May protests against NATO’s bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Chinese university students in Beijing chanted “Long Live Chairman Mao” because they believed that “Mao was the only Chinese leader who really dared to stand up to anyone” from the imperialist West.⁴⁰ Chinese students’ identification with anti-West neo-Maoism is conceivable in a precarious international climate in which “re-constructed” Chinese nationalism also mirrors what a Beijing-based CNN reporter termed “a national insecurity complex” that had unraveled in China in the post-cold war era.⁴¹

As an artist well versed in Chinese classical philosophy and history, Cai embraces the national canon as exemplified by *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. A Chinese who has resided abroad (in Japan and the United States) for almost two decades, Cai seems to share his fellow countrymen’s view of a treacherous post-cold war international society in which an American cold-war nationalism still overshadows global politics. In his analysis of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), Robert J. Corber has “tried to illuminate the ideological conditions that led the mass of Americans to consent to this contraction of their freedoms, a contraction that continues to shape American political culture, despite the end of the cold war.”⁴² This is perhaps the case with Samuel P. Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro’s *The Coming Conflict with China* (1997), and *The Cox Report* on Chinese nuclear spying (1999). All these writings hardly addressed any new post-cold war realities, but what Corber calls “[t]he trope of the invisible subversive, which was so central to cold-war political rhetoric, worked to contain opposition to cold-war ideologies.”⁴³ That is to say, such rhetorical discourses merely replaced the former Soviet Union with China as the main adversary to the United States—an invisible and incomprehensible communist country in the post-cold war era.

It is intriguing to see such tropes revived on both sides of the Pacific—China and America. For instance, *The Coming Conflict with China* is an antidote to *China Can Say No*. In both cases, the subject under attack is displaced—a communist China in place of the former “evil empire” Soviet Union, or the United States substituted for European and Japanese imperialism. These tropes regarding the “China threat” or “American hegemony” express what I would call cultural nationalism. As Said put it, “In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them,’ almost always with some degree of xenophobia.”⁴⁴ “Culture in this sense,” Said asserted, “is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent ‘returns’ to culture and tradition.”⁴⁵

I see no other Chinese artist’s work that better represents (or is mostly attacked for) such a postmodern “return” to culture and tradition than Cai Guoqiang’s

Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows, a contemporary masterwork that has awakened to a new global reality.⁴⁶ The wooden boat at the core of the installation was excavated near the artist's hometown of Quanzhou, a historic port city visited by Marco Polo (1254–1324) during the Yuan dynasty (1206–1368). The arrows were made of bamboo tipped with bronze and furnished with goose feathers. The combined imagery speaks in blunt irony: the newly fashioned arrows perforate the body of the ancient ship, while the five-star red national flag of China sits intact at the stern. The sardonic overtone of Cai's installation should be read as a proverbial metaphor for China, a Third World country that is to some extent a passive recipient of whatever globalization may stand for. Therefore, this work "alludes both to the contradictions within Chinese society and to the dangers and hypocrisies inherent in global relationships."⁴⁷ As the aged ship is felled by the arrows, it "may represent China and the arrows foreign influences, but they might equally well represent self-inflicted pain."⁴⁸

Since China began its economic reforms three decades ago, global capital flow and cultural homogenization have been efficiently targeting the nation, just as "the enemy's arrows" pierce through the obsolete, worn-out ship in Cai's work. So it appeared in May 1999 that the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was the only target the CIA picked for NATO's bombing in Yugoslavia.⁴⁹ Outraged university students took to the streets and pelted the American embassy in Beijing with rocks. That "frenzied nationalism" by "a generation raised on rock music and Coca-Cola" resulted from distrust and refusal to believe that a superpower as technologically advanced as the United States could make a mistake in choosing a "legitimate" target.⁵⁰ As an American journalist observed, "the demonstrations reflected a society-wide resentment toward the United States that feeds on China's mixture of wounded pride, desire for influence commensurate with its size and shame at its nagging poverty and intractable politics."⁵¹ Modern Chinese society is ensnared in a cultural war between national identity and global integration at all levels of social life.⁵²

Ironically, the grim, wounded boat in Cai's work *predates* the target sign held by civilians during the NATO bombing of Belgrade. Both signify a "self-inflicted pain" suffered by a nation or a people vulnerable to military attack by an all-powerful enemy. In the Chinese war tale of "Borrowing Your Enemy's Arrows," the genius strategist Zhuge Liang (AD 181–234) was ordered by a jealous commander to produce 100,000 arrows in ten days for his army, a seemingly impossible task. He narrowly survived by devising a plan to trick the enemy into supplying the arrows. In the Kosovo war, Henry Kissinger wrote, "defensive" NATO transformed itself into an "institution prepared to impose its values by force."⁵³ The armed conflict in Kosovo was all but a one-sided war, or "borrowing your enemy's arrows" in a sadly satirical sense. The original sense of the Chinese narrative is to expose oneself to

the enemy's attack without suffering any real casualties. General Zhuge, a legendary folk hero, made straw bales in the likeness of soldiers standing on a battle ship to attract his enemy's arrows, then had the empty boat sail out as if for battle, and he later paraded the victory of his wisdom over a potent yet heedless war machine. In the Yugoslavia war of 1999, the target sign was mockingly "borrowed" from an American superstore and appeared in Belgrade under the NATO pounding. This target sign revealed a hapless humanity willingly subject to a sanctioned, "properly Utopian violence."⁵⁴ (In 2007, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who died at eighty-nine a year later, said in an interview that the NATO bombing of Serbia shattered Russia's view of the West as a "knight of democracy," and he called the event "a grave disillusion, a crushing of ideals."⁵⁵)

In my view, Cai Guoqiang is both a "globalist" and one of Barmé's "avant-garde nationalists." I met the artist at the opening of the 1998 Asia Society exhibition, and standing by that afflicted boat, I felt utterly dispirited. There was another example of boat imagery that is sunny, intact, and joyful. A few years before, Cai Guoqiang had posed as captain for a Chinese boat that appeared at the 1995 Venice Biennale as part of the exhibition called "TransCulture." Cai arranged for the boat to be brought to Venice from Quanzhou. This installation, titled *Bringing to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot*, shows his good humor and idealism without relinquishing his "ironizing" strategy. The artist himself took charge of sailing, together with two handsome Italian boatmen who helped him pole the worn yet beautiful and elegant Chinese junk "from Piazza San Marco down the Grand Canal to the Giustinian Lolin Palazzo, where it will remain docked, as a transcultural icon for the duration of the exhibition."⁵⁶ There were "texts" and other materials on view in the main hall of the Giustinian Lolin Palazzo, which turned out to be Cai's own statement and a note from a local doctor in Quanzhou explaining the desired result of Chinese herbs. Juxtaposed to these "texts" were bottled herbal medicines available to museum visitors through a vending machine, and "hanging from the ceiling near the doors which open out onto the canal is a clear plastic curtain printed with acupuncture charts and filled with water taken from the Grand Canal."⁵⁷ Dana Friss-Hansen remarked in the 1995 exhibition catalog: "We might see this presentation as a witty and sly rebuke to the spread of Coca-Cola across China (as a symbol of Western capitalism, mass marketing, and taste for sugar), as the artist uses modern distribution technology to popularize ancient Eastern Philosophy across the West."⁵⁸

A few years later, Coke—"a symbol of Western capitalism"—became a "new threat" to human security through globalization. In June 1999, the Belgian government banned Coca-Cola after forty children were hospitalized with symptoms of poisoning associated with the drink. Many other European countries also limited sales of Coca-Cola. Scientists pointed out that the illness linked with Coca-Cola

might have been caused by “fear over contamination rather than any impurities in the soft drink,” and they called it “mass sociogenic illness (MSI).”⁵⁹ Whatever the case, in his 1995 Venice installation Cai prophesied such a global mass “Coke scare,” and he was eager to provide a substitute or a “supplement” (in Jacques Derrida’s critical terms⁶⁰) for destructive Western capitalism by offering Westerners themselves a sample of Chinese herbal medicines available from the vending machine.

Bringing to Venice What Marco Polo Forgot was an intended “supplement” to the world-famous *The Travels of Marco Polo*, already supplemented by the chronicle of the Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), published in 1615 after Ricci’s death. Ricci’s report on China seemed more “truthful” than Marco Polo’s wonder-struck, credulous accounts of the country.⁶¹ But I consider the two books fictional, for they both describe China as the Other from a Christian point of view that “is no longer an object of passion, it is an object of production.”⁶² The image of China presented by the two Italian travelers was nothing but “production” of an expanded modern Christianity. Or, to quote again from Cotter’s essay on the “New Chinese Art” show: “And bit by bit, China came West. During the 1980s and 90s, contemporary Chinese culture, sometimes tailored to non-Chinese tastes, gained international presence. Fiction by mainland writers regularly appeared in English. The opera ‘Marco Polo’ by Tan Dun was produced in New York last season.”⁶³ I was one of those in New York who went to see the opera, Cotter’s example of “China came West,” and was surprised to hear loud boos from the “Western” (or Manhattan) audience when the composer/conductor Tan Dun came on the stage to thank his cast at the close of the performance. The crowd booing Tan Dun’s controversial operatic play, I think, must have wished to see the “production” as an exotic mimicry of Western classical opera. But the Chinese composer appropriated a great deal of Chinese opera motifs and musical techniques, which, in the eyes and ears of Cotter and the like, was surely “anti-Western” or “nationalistic.”

Many modern scholars have pointed out that Marco Polo, the adventurous Italian merchant, might have altered his story to make it believable to his Christian audience of that time (but unbelievable to a Chinese reader), in which case “the book is poetry then, not story.”⁶⁴ Thus his picture of the “East” is no more than a mirror of the West or the Same. As Baudrillard puts it, “with modernity, we enter the age of the production of the other.”⁶⁵ *The Travels of Marco Polo* should be seen as the earliest example of “the production of the other.” Cai reverses “an artificial synthesis of otherness”⁶⁶ by foregrounding “what Marco Polo forgot” in his Venice installation—Eastern philosophy and Chinese natural herbs to cure the “modern ill.”⁶⁷

At the APEC meeting in Shanghai in October 2001, Cai Guoqiang exhibited his evocative fireworks in which “the audience will see dragons, red lanterns and

willows—all symbols of traditional culture.”⁶⁸ Since the fireworks display was part of the APEC conference sponsored by the Chinese government, at which many world leaders were present, it would seem that the artist identified with global politics in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As he said of the occasion, “China and Shanghai are at a turning point. This is the most exciting moment of a country. Being Chinese, I don’t want to be a spectator, I want to get involved and feel the momentum myself.”⁶⁹ In this respect, I think, Cai is both an avid “nationalist” and “globalist” who earnestly dreams of a better world in hope and deep anxiety.

Zhang Huan: A Utopian Dreamer on the Streets of New York

Zhang Huan, another artist, came to New York in 1998 with high hopes. He soon found himself sharing a vision of cataclysm with Cai, who had arrived from Japan four years before. Zhang Huan gave a solo performance in October 1998 for the Asia Society’s “New Chinese Art” show, which attracted a large and young audience. The performance was titled “Pilgrimage—Wind and Water (*fengshui* or geomancy) in New York,” indicating that the artist intended to voice his response to a global environment—New York City—that was new to him both physically and culturally.

In a short speech delivered before his performance, Zhang Huan sounded as fatalistic as Cai in *Borrowing Your Enemy’s Arrows*:

Every day, we lie on a mutant bed, dreaming without any direction. The deepest impressions in the dream are the living here between dogs and their owners, and the living on the Atlantic City Casino as well [sic]. When I watched the ceremony of the Tibetan triumphing over myriad hardship and hazard, prostrating themselves in the ritual of worship... I was astonished and moved by the devotion of the pilgrims. I dreamt of the exhausted and anxious faces in the subway. I really feel sad for them, for myself, for the blue skies and wonderful moments. We are surrounded by the fear of violence, war, catastrophe, death, drugs, pollution, Aids and basic human surviving. Human beings have been evolving for thousands of years; modern civilization and technologies have been developed to an unprecedented degree. I was utterly confused about these changes. However, I doubt if human beings have made any progress. Are we really happier than before? Where is our future? Where are our spirit and faith? I am hungry! Behind me, there is wind and water.

This statement or “text” in his own words is the key to the artist’s actual performance. He first sat upright and naked on a Chinese-style bed surrounded by “dogs



Figure 14. Zhang Huan, *Pilgrimage: Wind and Water in New York*. Performance. 1998, courtesy of Zhang Huan Studio, New York, and Shanghai.

and their owners”; a “mattress” made of ice was placed on the bed. He then lay face down on this ice mattress for more than ten minutes. He demonstrated the contrast and contradiction in his particular “cultural” setting. The warm wooden Chinese-style bed was “imposed” upon by a freezing Western-style mattress (not as in everyday life). The artist had to endure this icy and multilayered bed by exhausting his body heat. The Chinese wooden bed with a rail is secure yet hardy, while the Western ice mattress is chilly but ravishing. The naked male artist lies prostrated on this East vs. West bed. For Zhang, the West, incarnated by New York City, appears like a cold temptress. It requires great effort to resist (or absorb) her seduction. His “text” alluded to Tibetan Buddhists who used their sexual energy to achieve a spiritual end. But what tempted him here in New York was a spirituality reduced to a corporeal world, such as “dogs and their owners” or “the exhausted and anxious faces in the subway” that spoke of the banality of everyday life. Zhang felt himself “utterly confused” and fearful of “violence, war, catastrophe” on his arrival in this perilous global city.

But the abiding Chinese bed granted Zhang a certain security, whereas the evanescent Western ice mattress beneath his body provided a stimulus—the artist needs to work up to his ascendancy in a new but seemingly incomprehensible world. Zhang’s eclectic approach to life and art would help him survive, just as it had before in Beijing. He had already made his fame in Beijing by giving performances that demanded greater human endurance and put himself at risk with the authorities. In New York, Zhang adapted himself to a special posture of Tibetan Buddhism that was “global” rather than “nationalistic.” Tibetan Buddhist ritual—prostration—inspired the artist as a “pilgrim” to New York. Traditional Chinese

formal postures involve bowing and kneeling or “kowtowing,” which are primarily Confucian rituals. Prostration peculiar to Tibetan Buddhism or Esoteric Buddhism is the main constituent of a daily ritual that is called *ke chang tou* (literally “long kowtowing”). A Tibetan believer would perform this ritual from three times a day up to several hundred times.⁷⁰ By prostrating himself like Tibetan pilgrims (“their entire bodies touched the ground”), Zhang expressed his admiration for a religion of pious believers that astonished and moved him. A lack of religious piety seemed to him characteristic of daily life in New York. He cried out to an audience consisting of “dog owners”: “Where are our spirit and faith?” In Zhang’s “performed” reality, everybody is as unsafe in this ephemeral and volatile world as the artist himself on an ice mattress that could collapse at any moment.

Since settling in New York, Zhang Huan has studied Eastern and Western symbols that have become essential constituents of his latest works. At the Whitney Museum of American Art’s 2002 Biennial, Zhang staged a performance titled *My New York* as “part of an ongoing series titled *My America*,” which “reflects his uneasy existence living in the still unfamiliar culture of New York.”⁷¹ As the artist’s statement disclosed:

Something may appear to be formidable, but I will question whether or not it truly is so powerful. Sometimes such things may be extremely fragile, like body builders who take drugs and push themselves beyond the limits of their training on a long-term basis, until their heart cannot possibly bear the enormous stress.

In this work I combine three symbols: migrant workers, doves, and body building. I interpret my New York through concerns of identity, through the Buddhist tradition of setting a live animal free [to accumulate grace], and through man’s animal nature and machinelike qualities. A body builder will build up strength over the course of decades, becoming formidable in this way. I, however, become Mr. Olympic Body Builder overnight.

The imagery of Zhang’s “Mr. Olympic Body Builder” combines three American masculine symbols: Superman, Spiderman, and a Schwarzenegger-like body builder in an American pop culture dominated by Hollywood cinema. These borrowed “superhuman” symbols in Zhang’s performance serve to imply a much less “heroic” reality. Several Chinese immigrant workers from New York’s Chinatown (who were also the artist’s fellow townsmen from Henan province) carried Zhang Huan the “Mr. Olympic Body Builder” onto the “stage” (a courtyard in Whitney Museum of American Art), where the artist then walked barefoot on a chilly day in early April. Like his *Pilgrimage—Wind and Water*, this work conveyed a strong sense of cataclysm, the unbearable stress suffered by many body builders who

“push themselves beyond the limits of their training.” The all-American ideal of “superman” is more a cinematic fantasy than a reality. As for those migrant workers who participated in the performance, they too may have awakened to an unrealized dream from their own experience after 9/11. According to Dean Murphy of the *New York Times*, although it was not physically hit on September 11, a month later Chinatown still “showed signs of trauma most everywhere, from jobless workers to streets with barricades to shops teetering on bankruptcy. Chinatown has been transformed into a near ghost town since the attacks on the World Trade Center.”⁷² Anyone from Chinatown had indeed become a “superman” in order to survive that catastrophe. Perhaps it is in this traumatic sense that Zhang, out of his fervid sympathy with his compatriots, declared, “I, however, become Mr. Olympic Body Builder overnight.”

Zhang’s imagery of angst and insecurity is overshadowed by global conflicts and local disasters. He seems the artist most susceptible to “local” human conditions—the exhausted subway travelers or laid-off migrant workers who cannot be separated from global crises. And in this regard the artist is truly a “Utopian” dreamer on the streets of New York, as exemplified by his performance series such as *My New York* that invokes a universal appeal to all suffering humanity.

Xu Bing: A Nomadic Player with Restless Intellect

In this age of global turmoil, Xu Bing appears to keep his cool. In his uniquely impassive manner, Xu critiques Eastern and Western cultures not as “universal values” but as absurd illusions. He engages in a tenacious and self-possessed cultural game, such as the invention of thousands of pseudo-Chinese characters in his *A Book from the Sky*, which made fun of the educated elite in China during the late 1980s. His calligraphic games expressed a frustration with cultures that lay claim to “universal values.” In Xu’s perception, all cultures, whether Chinese or Western, should be reckoned as flawed and even meaningless in certain contexts. And he is a master at creating contexts or spaces that disavow language and writing.

Xu gave rein to his savage irony in performances like *A Case Study of Transference*, in which a male pig and a female pig, each imprinted with textual script, mated as a crowd looked on. Cultural theorists, either engrossed or chagrined by Xu’s work, discerned an existential absurdity in his “deconstructionist” play that ventured to collapse a distinction between humans and animals in their cultural and sexual pursuits. He added a postmodern spin to the famous dictum of Tertullian (AD 160–230): “It is certain because it is impossible” [Certum est, quia impossibile est]. The mating pigs were covered with Chinese characters (female) and Roman letters (male). Xu Bing did not reply to the “cultural rape” controversy

he generated. The disinterested artist evaded any “rational” interpretation to his “irrational” work, which aimed to disclose the meaninglessness of our daily existence or the absurdity of gender and cultural difference.

As Fredric Jameson remarked upon Lévi-Strauss’ *La Pensée sauvage*:

This kind of analysis effectively neutralizes the old opposition between the rational and the irrational (and all the satellite oppositions—primitive versus civilized, male versus female, West versus East—that are grounded on it) by locating the dynamics of meaning in texts that precede conceptual abstraction: a multiplicity of levels is thereby at once opened up that can no longer be assimilated to Western rationalism, instrumental thought, the reifications and repressions of the narrowly rational or conceptual.⁷³

In this light, Xu’s work is a vigorous attack upon such “Western rationalism,” which suppresses alternative views of human existence. In his most recent work titled *Introduction to New English Calligraphy*, the artist demonstrated how this “Western rationalism” could be as absurd as his calligraphy lesson.

The basic idea is to create a classroom in the gallery. Each desk has a small container of ink, brush, and an elementary calligraphy book created by myself. You will see that the book is a teaching tool for learning calligraphy and the words will have a square word style resembling Chinese strokes. The square word will look Chinese but will not be understood by the Chinese yet will be understandable to Western people because the square words are English. The audience can try to learn these words by following the “Elementary New English Calligraphy Instruction Video.” When people try to recognize and write these words, they begin a process of having to forcefully and constantly readjust their ingrained thinking. During this process of readjustment and transformation, their former concepts are powerfully replaced and attacked. People need to have their routine thinking attacked this way. While undergoing this process of strange and yet familiar (the strangeness comes from within oneself) transformation one can enter a realm never experienced before.

What Xu meant by people’s “ingrained” or “routine thinking” is that of “the old opposition between the rational and irrational” that typifies Western modes of thought, as exemplified by Cotter’s criticism of contemporary Chinese art in his *New York Times* review. However, there are Western critics who envision the Other in a more enlightened manner than Cotter’s. Xu has realized his calligraphy project in many galleries of Europe and America, and one venue was the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City. Dan Cameron, the museum’s former senior curator, insightfully wrote about the artist: “*Introduction to New English Calligraphy*

is the Chinese-born artist Xu Bing's most elaborate treatment to date of a traditional expression of his native culture, which he infuses with the rootless, nomadic sensibility found at the core of postmodern, globalist identity."⁷⁴ He also stressed "the strangeness" of this learning process on the part of the participating visitors:

For participants who read Chinese, a system of language masquerading as one's own and adapted to Western modes of thought and communication raises other issues of appropriation, displacement and Western dominance. On the other hand, the use of time-honored techniques to teach people a new way to write in English might be taken as an homage to a venerated tradition. But by adding a subtext, that of the non-Chinese world's growing awareness of all manifestations of Chinese culture, both assumptions of cultural superiority are pitted, however fancifully, against each other.⁷⁵

In such works, he concluded, "Xu mocks certain intellectual underpinnings of contemporary global society, particularly those notions of cultural authenticity which are rooted in the West's projections onto Asia."⁷⁶

Xu assailed not only "Western rationalism" but Chinese culture as well, as Cameron was quick to point out: "By challenging the venerated Chinese tradition of sericulture through the rule of time-based performance art, Xu collapsed a vast and ancient practice into a spectacle of nature framed by aesthetics."⁷⁷ By collapsing "the old opposition between the rational and irrational," Xu appeared to return to a Buddhist notion that regards any duality as illusion. In the artist's concept, it is pointless to seek a non-existent cultural superiority from either a Chinese or a Western perspective. Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995), too, dismissed such a duality in psychoanalytical terms long before:

The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history, and subject of enunciation that oppose masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally that of the body—the body they steal from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms.⁷⁸

Samuel Huntington (1927–2008) recently fabricated such "opposable organisms"—which he called "the clash of civilizations."⁷⁹ And Slavoj Žižek has examined Huntington's self-serving "theory" in a post-9/11 context:

This notion of the "clash of civilizations," however, must be rejected out of hand: what we are witnessing today are, rather, clashes within each civilization... If we look more closely, what is this "clash of civilizations" actually about? Are not all real-life "clashes" clearly related to global capitalism? The Muslim

“fundamentalist” target is not only global capitalism’s corrosive impact on social life, but also the corrupt “traditionalist” regimes in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and so on. . . . A proper dose of “economic reductionism” would therefore be appropriate here: instead of endless analysis of how Islamic “fundamentalism” is intolerant towards our liberal societies, and other “clash-of-civilization” topics, we should refocus our attention on the economic background to the conflict—the clash of economic interests, and of the geopolitical interests of the United States itself.⁸⁰

Huntington’s claim produces nothing but “the old oppositions” between primitive and civilized, male and female, East and West, which are already critiqued by Jameson and Deleuze. In Gray’s analysis, Huntington’s “dualistic” thesis is “incurably Americocentric, purveying a view of the world that is unrecognizable to the majority of Asians and Europeans.”⁸¹

The three New York-based Chinese avant-garde artists seem to have assumed a “postmodern, globalist identity,” as defined by Cameron. That is to say, in their work they constantly express a deep concern over all humanity, especially in a world that is not yet clear of “war of values conflict.”⁸² In this age of global anxieties, a Chinese artist like Xu Bing who remains cool in defiance of any “clash of civilizations” or “globalization” deserves wholehearted admiration. At the Shanghai Biennale held in December 2002, Xu Bing exhibited his new work, *The Living Word*. Hovering across the gallery floor, Xu’s airy “bird” aroused in the viewer an eerie feeling of transient beauty. By now, I think, nobody would be unwise enough to “read” the unreadable “living word” for which Xu has been searching all his life. In 2007, Xu became a vice president at Beijing’s Central Academy of Fine Arts (from which he graduated more than two decades ago), and he recently created an installation for the new Chinese embassy in Washington.⁸³ Similarly, Cai Guoqiang did gunpowder drawings for the new American embassy in Beijing as requested by the embassy’s art curator.⁸⁴ He also spent three years preparing fireworks for the opening night of Beijing’s 2008 Olympics as director of visual and special effects.⁸⁵ He even bought a late nineteenth-century *hutong* courtyard house in the capital city. But Cai will not spend much time there after the Olympics. He told Arthur Lubow, an American writer, “For an artist, a good place to be is where you have some kind of influence and power to get things done, but in essence you remain a nomad or a soldier facing a difficulty to be overcome. You can do things for your country, but you cannot be imprisoned by it.”⁸⁶

PART 2

**China's Lost Youth through
the Lens of Independent Cinema**

New Chinese Cinema of the “Sixth Generation”

A Distant Cry of Forsaken Children

At the 51st Berlin International Film Festival held in February 2001, a Chinese film, *Beijing Bicycle*, won a Jury Grand Prix of Silver Bear. In a large sense, the story of *Beijing Bicycle* is a contemporary Chinese variation on the Italian neorealist classic *The Bicycle Thief*. The prizewinning film was written and directed by Wang Xiaoshuai, a young filmmaker of the so-called Sixth Generation or Urban Generation.¹ Years before, his debut work *The Days* (*Dongchun de rizi*, 1993) was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York and was chosen as one of the top 100 films of the century by the BBC.² During the Berlin competition, an enthusiastic Chinese media predicted a public release for Wang’s latest feature, even though all his previous works have been banned in mainland China (another film by Wang Xiaoshuai, *Frozen* [*Jidu hanleng*], was shot in 1996 and released in the West under the pseudonym of Wu Ming, meaning “nameless” in Chinese). However, this innocuous Wang Xiaoshuai film was also prohibited by the State’s Film Bureau from being shown in any movie theaters, because the film portrayed Beijing as “a gray, dirty and disorderly place.” It was sent to the Berlin Festival without official endorsement.³ When I came back to Beijing in the summer of 2001 to conduct research on Chinese avant-garde art and cinema, I had a chance to watch *Beijing Bicycle* on VHS with a small audience of art critics at a private viewing held in an obscure office building located in the north of the city. It was a personal arrangement between an editor of *Dushu* (*Readings*, a liberal book review journal), and a certain Mr. Shan, who owned a “sample tape” of *Beijing Bicycle* and claimed to have the legal rights to sell films by the Sixth Generation directors to Westerners.⁴ In Mr. Shan’s office I also noticed VHS tapes of almost all the banned films of the Sixth Generation, such as He Jianjun’s *Postman* (*Youchai*, 1995) and Zhang Ming’s *Rain Clouds over Wushan* (1995). Access to these underground films gave me a pleasant thrill on a long hot summer day in Beijing.

This tragicomic fate of Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle* is common to all Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers. Unlike their Fifth Generation predecessors, who

primarily worked within the state-run studio system in the late 1980s and early 1990s and achieved great success both at home and abroad, this new generation of Chinese filmmakers has been ostracized from the very start of their careers because of political and social aversion to their film art. The most talented Fifth Generation directors, such as Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, are still very much in the media spotlight, although the Chinese film industry is unable to compete with Hollywood imports. A journalist reported recently in *Xinwen zhoubao* (Weekly news), a popular Chinese magazine imitative of the American *Newsweek*: "It is unknown from when a declining Chinese movie industry, which used to make about 100 films a year during the 1980s, has silently dropped to 50 or 60 films at present. This figure seems shameful if compared with India, which produces 300 films annually. However, the situation would be worse if not for the fact that [Chinese] audiences of ten billion can share nearly 20 blockbusters from America every year. . . . Because of uncontrolled piracy and a distrust of national cinema's qualities, we do not want to waste our time in a movie theater."⁵ Under these pitiable circumstances, Zhang Yimou, a Fifth Generation director best known in the West for his masterpieces such as *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaolian*, 1987) and *To Live* (*Huozhe*, 1994), has compromised with the rigid censorship and "degenerated" into "imbuing the audiences with false happiness" through his films for the sake of profit making. On the other hand, the state-sponsored film productions that intone the so-called *zhu xuanlü* (main melody) lately have had an "estimable box-office record" that even "beats imported [Hollywood] blockbusters." This is because moviegoers were paid by their employers or "units" (governmental institutions or state-run enterprises) to see the assigned movies that propagate the Communist Party's current policies.⁶

By contrast, the young filmmakers of the Sixth Generation live and work in obscurity⁷ or, even worse, in an environment ignorant of and hostile to their artistic creation. However, their works are frequently shown and have won awards at prestigious international film festivals. They have gained a sympathetic Western audience and significant foreign financial support unavailable in their homeland. Even the famed film critic Dai Jinhua first learned of their existence from newspapers and journals published abroad and saw their works only at international film festivals, foreign embassies in Beijing, and with her friends.⁸ Ironically and sadly, none of the internationally acclaimed films by the Sixth Generation directors, such as Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle* and Jia Zhangke's *Platform* (2000), were ever allowed to have any public screenings in China. Private viewings of such films, granted by a director or his or her business associates, affords a precious opportunity to interested students of contemporary Chinese cinema.⁹

The subject matter of Sixth Generation films differs fundamentally from those of the Fifth Generation. As many film critics have acknowledged, the film

art of the Fifth Generation deals with the nation's political, social, and cultural past, with a greater emphasis on the mystique of an unchanging and closed rural communal system that has lasted for thousands of years. In Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984), for instance, even a radical Communist soldier fails to salvage a young girl from the agony of her pre-arranged marriage, as it is a patriarchal peasant family ritual still being carried out everywhere in the country. Furthermore, Wu Tianming's *Old Well* (*Lao jing*, 1987) regards that rural communal system as a threat to a few communist youths in a remote mountain village, who simply attempt to escape it instead of confront it as demanded by the Party. In his *Ju Dou* (*Ju Dou*, 1990), Zhang Yimou uses an enormous old walled house as a metaphor for the same undying system that is unbreakable by the masses until a female protagonist burns it down from within. All such dramas or "national allegories" undeniably appeal to the Western Other. In some Chinese critics' opinion, however, this appeal is merely a strategy of the "Fifth Generation" directors to appease the "Western gaze," which comes with a price. These critics reflect the popular view in China that these directors "unveil the nation's weakness and ugliness to Westerners and vilify the nation's character" in return for favorable reviews at international film festivals like Cannes, Venice, or Berlin.¹⁰

Nevertheless, this severe and nationalistic criticism of Fifth Generation filmmakers turns out to be a blessing in disguise for those of the Sixth Generation, who see that same rural communal system in a fresh new light. Above all, the Sixth Generation directors resolve to take the modern city and contemporary life as their main themes, for they have little or no regard for a national past that is either chastised or mystified by their precursors of the Fifth Generation. As an American critic put it, "If there is one theme coursing through many of the new generation of Chinese independent films, it is the notion of being trapped in an intense present."¹¹ They are obsessed with everyday realities around themselves. Wang Xiaoshuai professed, "My films do not handle any historical events or grand narratives. They all relate our own experiences, especially unhappy things that have happened to us and our friends."¹² To be sure, it is this "infelicity" of individual lives, in particular that of urban youth, that abounds in the films of the Sixth Generation, but which is redeemed by the same seemingly impregnable rural communal system vehemently assailed by the Fifth Generation. For the Sixth Generation directors, strangely, the traditional vice of the centuries-old system has turned into redemption of the new evil of a capitalist market economy and neoliberal globalization. Jia Zhangke's *Platform* is a case in point. This slow-paced, 198-minute epic film painstakingly chronicles the frustrated lives of an itinerant provincial theatrical troupe, spanning a decade of China's economic reforms from 1979 to 1989. After years of unfulfilled dreams of a better life and love, all the members of the troupe return to their hometown, which is an insular, semirural community and yet provides a

refuge to their wounded souls. So too, Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle* depicts a young boy who leaves his family in a poor village and comes to the big city to pursue a good material life. In the end, however, the country youth is broken both physically and spiritually, as he gets no help from his rustic siblings whom he has long ago deserted.

In this context, the cinematic discourse of the Sixth Generation directors exactly reverses what the Fifth Generation considers "the nation's weakness and ugliness," the rural communal system. The work of the Sixth Generation filmmakers is in general a study of China's painful transformation from a Soviet-style socialist state into a new global capitalist country, or "socialism with Chinese characteristics."¹³ From their point of view, those drastic changes have a destructive impact on individuals who seek solace in the same rural communal system derided by the Fifth Generation. A Chinese critic pointed out, "In the films of Jia Zhangke, we have found that he is a thorough pessimist. However, man's despair is perhaps not a bad thing because it may give him a strong self. This is how he feels about this world, and man is just like that."¹⁴ As for many of the Sixth Generation filmmakers, such pessimism seems to derive from their personal life as a "*dushi bianyuanren*" (urban social outcast).¹⁵ Although they "grew up in the cities of increasing prosperity and market economy since [Deng Xiaoping's] reforms, they have a sharp sword of 'commercialization' that hangs over their heads from the very beginning, adding all the difficulties and obstacles that have impeded the older generation."¹⁶ In this respect, the marginal existence of the Sixth Generation filmmakers itself furnishes a clue to their artistic identity, as I will further examine in this chapter.

From *Beijing Bastard* to *Beijing Bicycle*: A Lost Soul on the City Streets

A leading figure of the Sixth Generation directors, Zhang Yuan, in his *Beijing Bastard* (1993) conveyed a quintessential thesis of this new Chinese urban cinema.¹⁷ As the title indicates, the pathetic youth as graphically portrayed in this landmark film is physically and spiritually fatherless. The Fifth Generation filmmakers bitterly attacked an antiquated Chinese patriarchy and its oppression of women and children, but in the work of the Sixth Generation, that same patriarchal authority is simply absent or ridiculously impotent.¹⁸ In *Beijing Bastard*, there appears not a single father figure, be it biological or spiritual. Karzi (Li Wei), a central character in the movie, lives with his mother, who does nothing but cook for her son. Karzi is jobless, so he frequents a sordid apartment building where a female artist called Li Ying sleeps with an unmarried man. The young woman visits her grandmother

whenever she is short of clothing or other daily necessities. Zhang's film makes no mention of Li Ying's parents—where they are or why she doesn't go to them for help. Another key character, Da Qing, lives alone in a traditional run-down courtyard house. When two hoodlums break into Da Qing's one-room house in search of money, none of his "folks" comes to his aid—he has neither parents nor neighbors, which is rare even in a Beijing courtyard house community. This fatherlessness or unrelatedness is best expressed by Da Qing himself as he speaks directly to the audience in Jean-Luc Godard cinematic fashion: "I understand that those two guys are in desperate need of cash, especially the one whose wife is pregnant lately. And I don't blame them because we are all social outcasts." The alienated youth characters in Zhang Yuan's *Beijing Bastard* presaged those of other Sixth Generation directors, such as Zhang Ming's *Rain Clouds over Wushan*, Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* (1997), and Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* (2000).

Zhang Yuan said of *Beijing Bastard*: "This film is permeated with only one action—search."¹⁹ In the movie, there are three searchers: Karzi, the rock star Cui Jian (played by the pop singer himself), and Da Qing. They are each looking for different things in life and their search is loosely connected with Cui Jian's rock band and its music as a pivotal and interweaving theme in the filmic narration. In the opening credits, Karzi stands under a highway bridge on a stormy night and tells his pregnant girlfriend Mao Mao (Yu Feihong) to get an abortion. This hasty advice strongly suggests that the fatherless Karzi also refuses to become a father himself. Mao Mao resents his irresponsibility and disappears into the heavy rainfall. Hence the plot of the film is built around the search for a vanished young girl who, unlike the derelict Karzi, wants to be the mother of an unborn child. This contrast in attitude toward life between Karzi and Mao Mao seems conventional or even clichéd, but it actually lends a clear tone to the entire film: the absent and negligent Father versus the dutiful yet suffering Mother/Other.²⁰ In the film, a shot of Mao Mao's contorted face just a minute before her delivery in a clinic is intercut with Karzi's aimless wanderings on the city streets. The montage, I think, is a harsh criticism of Chinese patriarchy that has failed and betrayed a younger generation.

Throughout the movie, the Chinese rock star Cui Jian rummages around for a "legitimate" place to perform. His rock band first rents an abandoned building for a rehearsal, but is soon told to leave by the owner, who is fearful of police interference. Then Cui Jian finds a construction site where he can hang the band's red banner on the scaffold. But Cui Jian manages to give only one performance as the "contractor" threatens to dismantle the scaffold covered with the red banner, which might instigate a "rebellion," termed a *dongluan* in Chinese official vocabulary. With hundreds of young men and women singing along with the band, the scaffold collapses—a beautiful and sad scene that symbolizes the disfranchised young generation. Afterwards, the rock group holds an all-night outdoor concert,

which again attracts a great many urban youth, who dance around a bright bonfire in the open air. In reality, wrote Geremie Barmé, “As the flag bearer of mainland [China] rock, Cui often argued that he had taken on the role to negotiate performing space for the rock scene as a whole, and there was little doubt that in the gray zone of cultural tolerance and coexistence, Cui did have a seminal impact.”²¹ In the film, Cui Jian emerges as a surrogate and a “spiritual” father for those abandoned youngsters who are subject to excessive drinking, senseless violence, and illicit sex. (In Zhang Yuan’s movie Cui Jian is the only male character who does not yell obscenities.)

Like Karzi, Da Qing in *Beijing Bastard* is another paragon of the fatherless youth who is habitually associated with petty crime, alcoholism, sex, and violence. As we learn at the start of the film, Da Qing is looking for money he says has been stolen by his rivals. He asks two hoodlums to help him find the money, meaning a street fight against his rivals. But one of the hoodlums believes Da Qing has double-crossed him and arranges with his pal to vandalize Da Qing’s home, an event that attests to Da Qing’s claim that “we are all social outcasts.” In this sense Da Qing’s broken home is symbolic of a forsaken youth who is reduced to a “marginal urban existence”—that is, a life of wandering the city streets without any goals or security.²² The whole affair of Da Qing’s search for the lost money is a farce that makes Karzi’s search for Mao Mao look like a solemn and noble one. In a subway station, Karzi parts with another girl who refuses to “substitute for Mao Mao.” Thereafter he stands on the platform, contemplating a new meaning for his search and speaking unswervingly to the audience as Da Qing had done.

But Karzi is prone to anger, sexual violence, and drug use. After Karzi rapes a female acquaintance in what appears to be a deserted school building, he is seen smoking pot, standing naked and smashing the building with a firefighter’s axe. Later Karzi is arrested for a berserk bar fight. A typical “Beijing bastard,” Karzi is contaminated by the unknown forces of city vice. In Zhang Yuan’s film, dismal rain drenches the city day and night, which lends a brooding mystery to Beijing and its unruly inhabitants. Ironically, whenever there is a sunny day in the movie, a crime takes place (the rape and the housebreak).

In all respects, Wang Xiaoshuai’s 2001 *Beijing Bicycle* is more a sequel to Zhang Yuan’s 1993 *Beijing Bastard* than a Chinese variation on De Sica’s 1948 *The Bicycle Thief*. As opposed to Zhang Yuan’s rainy and nocturnal Chinese capital city, however, Wang Xiaoshuai shot his film in a Beijing basked in beautiful summer daylight. Yet his *Beijing Bicycle* portrays a life of troubled urban youth that is no less violent and cruel than that of *Beijing Bastard*. This award-winning movie tells a tale of two young teenagers, Gui (Cui Lin) and Jian (Li Bin), whose life is centered around a bicycle. Gui arrives in the big city from the country, and he is soon hired as a bicycle messenger. The employer gives Gui a new mountain bike

under the condition that he deliver messages to customers to earn enough money to buy the bicycle. Gui works hard and is close to owning his bike when it is stolen. Gui's boss tells him the only way he can keep his job is if he can find the bicycle, which in a city the size of Beijing is no easy task. Gui manages to find the bicycle, which is now in the hands of Jian, who claims he got it at a second-hand shop and is not about to give it up. Gui steals the bike back from Jian in the dead of night (contrary to Zhang Yuan's "bastards," who are active in broad daylight), but he is severely beaten by the tough boy Jian and his roughneck friends at a vocational school.²³ What follows is a street gang war between Gui the loner and Jian's private army, which leads to an accidental death of one of Jian's hired muscle at the end of the movie. In this context, Nicholas Ray's 1955 Hollywood classic *Rebel Without a Cause* is surely a resourceful predecessor that Zhang Yuan and Wang Xiaoshuai have emulated in their work.

In both *Beijing Bicycle* and *Beijing Bastard*, the adolescent youngsters resort to violence whenever they run into conflict with the Other. And this human condition is reflective of that fatherlessness or unrelatedness I have pointed out earlier. A country boy, Gui's only human contact in the big city is a lowly grocery store owner of the same rural origin (which is reviled by native Beijing residents). So in Gui's life there is no "father figure" that can ensure him parental protection and guidance. As evinced in Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*, this lack of patriarchal authority causes trouble for adolescents in every culture. In Zhang Yuan's film, that patriarchal space is occupied by the Mother/Other who exercises no power but ill-judged mercy. In Wang Xiaoshuai's movie, Jian's Chinese father is as incompetent as the American father in Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*, who, clothed in woman's apron, trips over the stairs when delivering a food tray to his domineering mother. Seeing his father crawling on the floor, the hero Jim (James Dean) cries out in humiliation: "Do you have to dress like that!" In Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle*, however, the disgrace that rests on the Chinese father is not the bizarre feminine appearance scorned by the James Dean character, but his economic insolvency as a laid-off worker. The father promised to buy Jian a new bike if he did well at school. Jian met his father's conditions, but the father could not keep his word because of his sudden unemployment. Jian takes some money from home, goes to the second-hand store, and buys the bicycle, which turns out to be Gui's stolen one. So the gory clash between Jian and Gui arises from a dire economic situation: Gui's livelihood depends on his bicycle, just as Antonio Ricci's did in *The Bicycle Thief*. On the other hand, Jian's desperate need for a mountain bicycle is not economical but sexual. He is attending a vocational school where all boys and girls are required to dress in the school uniform of a dark blue suit and red tie. After school the vogueish boys often compete in the back alleys of Beijing in a mountain-bicycle-riding contest that is alluring to girls.

In fact, the Wang Xiaoshuai film was inspired by Liu Xiaodong's oil painting titled *Since Ancient Times All Heroes Come from Youth*. The sarcastic tone of the title is perceptible in the picture: at the left three trendy vocational school girls stop riding as two schoolboys on the right block their way. It is obvious that the "heroes" in Liu's work are these two boys posing a sexually implied threat to the girls cornered in a squalid back alley (note the garbage at the foot of a wall at the boys' side). A similar sexual tension is also present among the school kids in Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle*. Jian craves a mountain bicycle because he falls in love with a girl named Xiao (Gao Yuanyuan) from his school. But Xiao is attracted to another boy who can beat others in the mountain-bicycle-riding game. In the movie, I believe, the bicycle exemplifies what Slavoj Žižek calls "the *object petit a*," which symbolizes "the link between the capitalist dynamics of surplus-value and the libidinal dynamics of surplus-enjoyment."²⁴ In other words, all vocational school students will join the workforce that creates capitalist "surplus-value" in China's new market economy. In Jian's case, the bicycle is also a fetish object that represents "surplus-enjoyment" he secretly shares with Xiao. In this sense the bicycle as a gadget of the "libidinal dynamics" in Chinese capitalism haunts many a youngster like Gui and Jian. As we see in the film, hiding in a quiet wooded park, Jian almost blows a first kiss to Xiao, but he is instantly sidetracked by the unexpected appearance in the distance of Gui—and the bicycle!

Gui's obsession with the bicycle is far stronger. After he is chased and brutally beaten by Jian and his gang under a murky highway bridge, Gui clings to the bike with his entire body. This ritual act softens even the hard Jian and his soldiers. On the spot, the chivalrous vocational schoolboys consent to a reasonable truce with the stubborn Gui: since Jian and Gui both need the bike that is so vital to their personal life, the two must split the use of the bicycle, with each boy using it on alternating days. To me, this is one of the best scenes in the movie, for it manifests a local resistance to globalization in contemporary Chinese life. In Wang Xiaoshuai's filmic narration, the "fatherless" youths from a global city such as Beijing are moronically unruly. Nevertheless, they come to their senses, while violence is proved to be futile in solving their problems; the stubborn Gui, from an agrarian society, does not concede their "big-city" values (e.g., male belligerence and valor in a bloody street fight).

However, Gui himself is not immune from this big-city culture either. Just like Jian, Gui is passionately attached to the bicycle, which is not only indispensable to his employment but also "libidinal" in his new urban dweller's life. One day after Gui comes home from work, he and the grocery store owner furtively watch a beautiful young housemaid (Zhou Xun) dressing by an apartment window across the street. In this instance Gui is already assimilated into a city vice (the "voyeuristic gaze"). On another occasion Gui "accidentally" collides with the girl

while both are bicycling on the street. Afterwards Gui learns that this stylishly clad girl is of the same rural origin as he. Unfortunately, before Gui is able to pursue his new love, the maid is dismissed by her hostess for stealing goods and hiding them in Gui's friend's grocery store. The tawdry imagery of the fallen housemaid stands for the urban material culture, and Gui is fatally succumbing to its constant velvet lure just as Jian does. This parallel between Gui and Jian in Wang's film emulates what critics would call the "Hitchcockian" duality in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951). As Mladen Dolar pointed out, in Hitchcock's films "every duality is based on a third. The third element is both excluded and introduced as a stain in this mirror-relationship, the object around which it turns and which fills the gap of the exclusion, makes the absent present."²⁵ In the case of *Shadow of a Doubt*, said Dolar, "most important and central to the film is the ring. *Shadow of a Doubt* could be schematically summarized as the journey of a privileged object, the circulation of the ring. It goes back and forth between the two specular protagonists, and their dual relationship can ultimately be seen as the background for this circuit of the object."²⁶ Dolar's fine analysis of "Hitchcock's objects" is without doubt applicable to the bicycle in Wang's film, around which the dual relationship of Jian and Gui turns.

However, "the journey of a privileged object" (the bicycle now being shared by the two protagonists) is more frightful and savage than that of Hitchcock's objects. In love, Jian is just as unlucky as Gui. Though he diligently practices on the newly returned bicycle, Jian loses the riding game to the skillful boy who dyes his hair bright yellow, fashionable for Asian kids in big global cities from Tokyo to Hong Kong to Beijing. So Jian loses Xiao, who dumps him for the "blond" boy right after the game. Outraged by Xiao's betrayal, Jian hits the blond from behind with a brick, and the blond takes his revenge by starting a gang war against Jian. This time Gui comes to assist Jian in a bitter street fight, and he accidentally kills a boy who, after the blond and all other kids have fled the scene, lingers on and ravages the bicycle that is imperative to Jian's and Gui's individual lives. With Jian lying wounded against a gray brick wall (a reminder of the Liu Xiaodong painting), the film ends with a close-up of Gui's bruised face and the mutilated bicycle on his shoulders. In this final scene the bicycle becomes a symbol of broken dreams for troubled youth in Beijing. If we were empathetic with Jian and Gui, who made a truce early on, at this moment we can only sigh and lament for these two "fatherless" children who have no one to turn for guidance. In Jian's position, that "fatherlessness" is more allegorical; as the unemployed father fails to obtain the bicycle for his son, the uncared for boy begins his own problematic and violent "pursuit of happiness." In the movie, the seemingly better-off blond and his gang members are all attired in baggy clothing and flashy T-shirts like the characters on MTV. But these Chinese youths too are subject to senseless violence and cruelty,



Figure 15. *Beijing Bicycle*. Dir. Wang Xiaoshuai. 2001.

like their peers in the West. Therefore, the transgressions of youth we observe in Wang Xiaoshuai's brilliant film *Beijing Bicycle* seem universal in this uncertain age of capitalist globalization.

***Suzhou River and Lunar Eclipse:* A Phantasmal Father, a Schizophrenic Child**

Two new films by Sixth Generation directors, Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* and Wang Quan'an's *Lunar Eclipse* (2000), again shed light on the vexing social and psychological problem of fatherless and lawless youth.²⁷ Both movies end with the ghastly death of the central character of young woman abandoned by her father. The tale of *Suzhou River* is set in Shanghai in the 1990s, and the plot is founded on the misfortune of Moudan (Zhou Xun), a teenage girl deserted by her father whenever he entertains his latest sexual conquest. The lecherous father is a shady "businessman" smuggling alcohol from Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. He pays Mardar (Jia Hongsheng), a young man involved in black marketeering, to shuttle his daughter to her aunt's while he enjoys his mistress's company. Moudan falls for the tall and handsome Mardar on their daily motorcycle trips to the aunt's along the Suzhou River in Shanghai. Afterwards, two sleazy business associates of Mardar scheme to kidnap Moudan and extract a ransom from her father. With Mardar's reluctant assistance, the racketeers receive the money from the girl's father. When Moudan learns of Mardar's betrayal, she runs to throw

herself into the Suzhou River, cursing that she will come back as a mermaid to haunt him. Years after his release from prison, Mardar bumps into Meimei (also played by Zhou Xun) on the street and is shocked by her resemblance to Moudan. Soon Mardar is obsessed by Meimei, a nightclub performer who plays the mermaid in an aquarium. Meimei first brushes off Mardar’s advances until he tells her the story of his sordid past. She is convinced by Mardar’s story and falls in love with him. Thus “Moudan and Meimei fuse in Mardar’s fragile psychology.”²⁸

This fusion of two female characters in *Suzhou River* no doubt belongs to a great Hitchcockian tradition, namely *Vertigo* (1958). In Hitchcock’s masterpiece, the intrinsic difference between Madeleine and Judy (both played by Kim Novak) lies in the two women’s social station: the former is a troubled but refined and elegant upper-class lady, the latter a vulgar redhead working-class girl. But in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* Madeleine and Judy are in fact the same person, who acts upon the orders of her master/boyfriend who is planning to murder his rich wife. In Lou Ye’s *Suzhou River*, however, Moudan and Meimei are two persons distinguishable by their physical appearance, yet they compound into one in Mardar’s disturbed mind (Mardar is called “a madman” by Meimei). This is a plot device for Lou Ye to get across a pertinent message: the identity of a woman is schizophrenic if judged by her natural or “acted” appearance.



Figure 16. *Suzhou River*. Dir. Lou Ye. 2000.

In the opening sequence of the Lou Ye film, Meimei, clothed in a bright green miniskirt, walks across an old iron bridge on the Suzhou River. In the following shot, the camera moves swiftly from Meimei to capture a back view of Moudan, who is a pigtailed schoolgirl running parallel to Meimei on the same bridge. We first see a leggy but jaded Meimei with her arms folded narcissistically. Then we find in Moudan an innocent and vivacious child, dressed in her teen's sporty attire—a red jacket, black pants, and sneakers. In this montage, Moudan's naïve and cheerful look contrasts sharply with Meimei's blank and world-weary expression. (Later in the film, after Moudan jumps to her death from the bridge, Mardar is seized by the police against the background of a bridge railing inscribed with a date: 1907.) As the characters of Meimei and Moudan are introduced through this bridge scene, the iron bridge built in 1907 thus links two different social realities epitomized by two young women.

Moudan's personal profile is quite simple. Her father is a rich man who profits from the so-called sham capitalism that has flourished in post-Soviet Russia and other Eastern European countries. The foreign alcohol Moudan's father smuggles in is called Buffalo Grass Vodka, a Russian hard liquor reminiscent of China's past alliance with the Soviet Union. In this connection Moudan is fated to be a child of the country's socialist past, although her father hardly survives the brutal sham capitalist present. As mentioned, Mardar's associates blackmail the father, and he pays 450,000 Chinese dollars to save his daughter's life. But Moudan is humiliated by her father's wishful payment and the racketeers' "price," shouting to her lover/captor Mardar, "Am I that cheap?!" On an allegorical level, Moudan's anguished cry is also a protest from her father, who belongs to yesterday's China despite his personal efforts to make it right in today's market economy. But the father's sexual relationships with paid mistresses have made Moudan an orphan of the socialist past, and the girl seeks that lost fatherly love in Mardar, who is a fatherless youth (we have no knowledge of Mardar's family background) or, as it were, a Shanghai "bastard." In the movie Moudan's father has the shortest filmic presence, dallying with a prostitute at his dingy apartment. Yet his misdeed hurts his daughter gravely. Even the father is almost a ghostly figure; he is at the same time a most important signifier for China's burdensome recent history.

Under Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, only the powerful, the well-connected, and the young could "get rich gloriously." As Maurice Meisner expounded, "The post-Maoist Chinese bourgeoisie... is a class that is in large measure composed of Communist officials, their relatives and their friends who were politically well-positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities the market offered."²⁹ Meanwhile the underprivileged Other desperately resorts to illegal means in order to prosper, as does Moudan's father. So Moudan's suicide is more symbolic than real. It is the death of a socialist past of which Moudan is merely a residual and

schizophrenic figure caught in a sham capitalist present. Her rich businessman father is unable to save her because he operates "unlawfully" according to Meisner's definition of "the post-Maoist Chinese bourgeoisie." Neither would Moudan embrace sham capitalism, for her family (we assume) suffered no such disgrace under an egalitarian socialism. When Mardar finds Moudan alive working in a twenty-four-hour convenience store, the girl wears a plain shirt of checked fabric, which again casts her in the same light of a bleak and bygone socialism.

Meimei is in every way the opposite of Moudan in background and character. Like Mardar, Meimei comes from nowhere and has no family in the global city of Shanghai. She lives at the frowsy edge of the city by the murky water of the Suzhou River. Her "home" is a boat with a crane, anchored on the river. So Meimei is hardly rooted in any community and she can leave any time she wants (and does so at the close of the film). Her last words to an unlucky lover are "find me if you can!" If in classical Hollywood cinema, women "say a lot through their clothes,"³⁰ Meimei in Lou Ye's film would say something by undressing herself in front of a mirror and under the gaze of a male spectator. Moudan is always fully clothed, whereas Meimei appears to be an exhibitionist; she bares her body as entertainment (a scantily dressed "mermaid"). Moreover, Meimei is an antagonist double of Moudan in terms of symbolic color. Moudan in red stands for a lamentable socialist past; Meimei in light green represents a felicitous capitalist present. Meimei's presence has no relevance to Shanghai's past; she is indeed an alien "mermaid" or a floating soul roaming the Suzhou River, ready to entertain and seduce the multitude of this "wicked city."³¹

Mardar seeks redemption in Meimei, who in his guilty psyche he sees as a resurrection of Moudan. But he is uncertain about Meimei's true identity except for her enchanting resemblance to Moudan. This misgiving is resolved when he discovers Moudan and dies with her in a motorcycle accident after they consume a tremendous amount of the Buffalo Grass Vodka smuggled in by Moudan's father. Their suicidal death is again allegorical: they choose to perish with that socialist past rather than live with the sham capitalist present. At the close of the movie, Meimei rushes to see the dead Moudan and Mardar after the drowned couple are fished out of the river by the police. Apparently, this ending is a directorial tactic to "convince" Meimei (and the audience) that Moudan is not solely Mardar's fantasy but a living reality. However, the fusion of Moudan and Meimei in physical appearance does pose a serious question to us: Is that "past" socialism as seductive as the present-day global capitalism? In the context of China's recent history, Moudan's first suicide attempt at the bridge can be read as a symbolic death of "another Western Utopia" for the Chinese—that is, "Soviet communism" in John Gray's analysis of global capitalism.³² As Gray put it, "Mao Zedong's celebrated statement that 'The Soviet Union's today is China's tomorrow' encapsulates the central thrust

of the failed modernization imposed on China by the Maoist regime. Despite the numerous occasions on which the two states came into conflict, the Soviet Union always remained the exemplar of a modern society in Maoist China.”³³ To be sure, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the failed Soviet-style socialism *was* certainly a foreign temptation to the Chinese, just as global capitalism is nowadays.

In the film, after Moudan's symbolic death, many local residents in Shanghai claim to have seen Moudan transformed into a mermaid on the Suzhou River. To me, this urban myth of the “mermaid” is nothing but that of vanquished socialism as “witnessed” by the people in the city. In the movie's opening shot, that past socialism is graphically portrayed as the debris of a demolished building from the Mao era. In a shot that follows, new skyscrapers rise from behind post-socialist ruins, suggesting that global capitalism has triumphed over the bygone “Soviet communism.” These two consequential introductory shots present a hidden theme in Lou Ye's *Suzhou River*: The city of Shanghai has witnessed a rapid transition from Mao Zedong's idealistic Soviet-style socialism to Deng Xiaoping's pragmatic “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” (However, even in post-Mao China, Russian sham capitalism may still serve as “the exemplar of a modern society,” as symbolized by the Buffalo Grass Vodka that makes Moudan's father rich but devours two innocent young lives.) In the last scene of *Suzhou River*, we see again a tall TV tower thrusting into a gray sky, a landmark of Shanghai in global capitalist transformation. So in Lou Ye's “love triangle” of *Suzhou River*, Moudan must die to make way for Meimei—a symbol of “another Western Utopia.” Mardar, however, seems incapable of making a wise choice under the circumstances of the hard economic struggle of sham capitalism. So he resolves to perish with Moudan, a blameless incarnation of that fading legend of “protected” socialism.

In his *Lunar Eclipse*, Wang Quan'an also expresses bitter doubts about new Chinese capitalism, and he sets his story in Beijing, an ancient imperial city different from “pro-West” Shanghai in the eyes of many Chinese. The movie poster of *Lunar Eclipse* states, “This is one tale of two women; or, two stories of one woman.” And the tale is recounted from the point of view of a young woman named Yanan (Yu Nan), chiefly through her video camera. Like Meimei in *Suzhou River*, Yanan has a double, Jianiang (also played by Yu Nan), and Yanan is a witness to the baleful death of Jianiang at the end of this Wang Quan'an film. To me, the doubling of Yanan and Jianiang is yet again an obvious plot device to grapple with that same arduous problem in *Suzhou River*: a phantasmical single parent and a schizophrenic child. Yanan has a father living in Dalian (a port city in North China), whom she communicates with only on the phone. Jianiang has a mother institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital in the suburbs of Beijing. Romantically caught between the two women is Hu Xiaobing (Wu Chao), a taxi driver whose father dies in the middle of the movie (a significant scene to be discussed below).

Yanan's new husband Li Guohao (Hu Xiaoguang) is a successful businessman in the food industry. Although he comes from the country, he has no parents or any other siblings outside his marriage. In the movie all these fatherless or motherless youths act like schizophrenics. Li Guohao sleepwalks at night, whereas Hu Xiaobing rattles on out of any context. In Wang Quan'an's direction, the main characters in *Lunar Eclipse* demonstrate an inability to grasp personal and social realities. In *Beijing Bustard*, *Beijing Bicycle*, and *Suzhou River*, all the films I have analyzed, an innocent youth often turns unruly under Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, or "socialism with Chinese characteristics." In *Lunar Eclipse*, however, all the youthful protagonists are law-abiding citizens who try to make it right in a fresh environment that challenges the sacred traditions guarded by their parents. But these children of absent parents are themselves infirm, and Wang Quan'an's *Lunar Eclipse* elaborates on such human infirmities from start to finish.

The film begins with an overhead tracking shot of Yanan lying unconscious in the street after a minor car accident has caused her to have a minor stroke. With her black overcoat swirling around, the inert yet handsome Yanan is under the prying gaze of a mixed crowd on a bitterly cold day in Beijing. This opening scene of *Lunar Eclipse* forecasts the young woman as a vulnerable victim of unexpected circumstances and events. Here the camera work is also a cinematic trope of the famous shot in Hitchcock's *Topaz* (1969), in which a sexy female spy, Juanita De Cordoba (Karin Dor), lies dead in her gyring elegant evening gown. In this frame of reference, Yanan is staged as a creature who has already succumbed even before anything happens to her. After her recovery, Yanan makes a long-distance call to her father in Dalian, who tells her that he had a similar stroke on the same day. She also informs her father that she is soon to marry. In this phone conversation scene, the camera registers Yanan's face up close and from multiple angles as if she is speaking to an evanescent but beckoning ghost. This camera work establishes Yanan as a child of a hallucinatory father who is more susceptible than his daughter (no wonder Yanan says that her heart problem is a "genetic" one). The next time they converse is a late-night call from the invisible father concerning Yanan's wedding photo, in which he is first mistaken for her husband Li Guohao. Apparently, the ghostly father has no authority over Yanan's life, and he is inept at offering any help to his daughter in whatever troublesome situations might arise (e.g., the car accident and the stroke). On that account Yanan's hasty marriage to Li Guohao, a rich yet much older man, is a compulsory submission to a surrogate father. As we soon learn from the movie, Li provides the frail Yanan with a financial safe haven from which her natural father is by now expelled under "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

If Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* is filled with subversive crooks of sham capitalism, Wang Quan'an's *Lunar Eclipse* focuses on the strange life of Yanan taking refuge

in her marriage to Li Guohao, a man of the “post-Maoist Chinese bourgeoisie,” in Meisner’s terms. Li’s grain-processing company and his rustic upbringing and manner answers the Party’s call for “letting a handful of people get rich first,” above all in the countryside. In *Suzhou River*, the crooks mainly operate in those dilapidated buildings scattered at the edge of Shanghai, while in *Lunar Eclipse* Li Guohao has a decent office located in a trendy downtown district of Beijing. After the marriage, the actress Yanan quits her state-run troupe, but she frequents a female colleague’s home annexed to the troupe’s building. Although these visits by Yanan sound like a middle-class housewife craving sympathetic companionship (since her husband is always away on business), this Western bourgeois cliché is endowed with new meanings in Wang’s film. As Yanan observes, the female colleague’s family is falling apart economically and emotionally. At first, her state-employed musician/husband performs in a bar to earn extra money because his troupe has no programs to run in a shrinking cultural market (Hollywood blockbusters are the only movies shown in the city). Later, the woman tells Yanan that their marriage is over, and her utterance is heard against the soundtrack of the husband playing a sad song (“He is still very good,” comments Yanan). All these brief scenes are shot in the shadowy darkness of the woman’s cramped apartment, which makes Yanan’s sunny and spacious home a truly “Chinese bourgeois” heaven.

But Yanan’s nouveau riche husband is more of a social embarrassment than the object of her love. Since Yanan finds nothing to do in that paradise, she takes out a camcorder to shoot for amusement the “lowly” people on the street and her “better-off” husband at home. All through the film Li Guohao is pored over by Yanan’s bizarre female gaze. In one instance, Li Guohao awakes from his sleep and walks into a living room like a somnambulist. He turns off a TV that Yanan is watching, then starts shining his shoes in a frenetic state of unconsciousness. In another, Li Guohao is singing karaoke folk songs in a noisy bar, and Yanan stares at her uncultured man with a condescending smile. In a most humiliating episode, Li Guohao is snoring aloud in bed while Yanan sits nearby, filming him with utter contempt. Li Guohao in such shots is lit either from above or below, and the camera is often positioned at odd angles. These unflattering shots portray Li Guohao as a vulgar upstart whose coarse character and rustic origin—but not his money—embarrass Yanan. As mentioned, the much older Li Guohao functions as Yanan’s surrogate father, yet his unspoken personal flaws and illness (such as sleep-walking) make him appear a ridiculous man of Chinese capitalism in the making. By projecting sardonic imagery of Li Guohao, director Wang Quan’an raises serious doubts about the social consequences of Chinese capitalism, which in *Lunar Eclipse* simply degrades the Father’s material and moral life.

This depravity of the Father caused by a market economy is best illustrated by Yanan’s discovery of a love affair Li Guohao is carrying on with his secretary

in his voguish downtown office. Li's infidelity grants Yanan an excuse to have her own affair with the taxi driver Hu Xiaobing, who by family background is indelibly associated with the bygone Mao era. Hu's father was a driver for a Party boss before his retirement, and the old man is always dressed in a dark blue Mao suit that is out of fashion in post-Mao China. Through his "connections" (*guanxi*) the father manages to purchase a cab for his son, thereby fulfilling his responsibility as an aging parent who narrowly survives in the new economy. However, Hu Xiaobing is tempted by capitalistic flourishes or gadgets (such as his sleek Japanese-made camera), not the hard work one must perform under such economic conditions. He dislikes his secure job of driving a cab and fancies himself as a creative photographer. By this invented vocation Hu Xiaobing gets to know Jianiang while on duty, and he pursues the girl and his voyeuristic camerawork of her image. Like Yanan, who is married to a rich businessman, Jianiang, also a starving actress under the new economy, is possessed by a devious "entrepreneur" (*qiyejia*) who abuses her, so Jianiang always carries a fruit knife for her own protection. After she dies, Hu Xiaobing keeps the knife and gives it to Yanan, who "accidentally" cuts Li Guohao's face with it while the newlyweds are frolicking in their bedroom. In this light the knife is once more a Hitchcockian "privileged object" circulating among the protagonists in *Lunar Eclipse*.

In Wang Xiaoshuai's film, the bicycle embodies a "libidinal" temptation to Gui and Jian, who are wanting to make it good in the new economy. By contrast, the knife in Wang Quan'an's movie that bounds Yanan and Jianiang together is a sad protest against "the beneficiaries . . . of China's state-sponsored capitalism."³⁴ Both the young women slit their men's face by chance, then immediately kiss the wound to atone for their mischief. Such a hasty, perfunctory kiss merely shows how sadly defenseless they are. Financially, Yanan and Jianiang still depend on their exploitive husband and boyfriend, so they are subject to the abuse that comes with economic safety. And they pay the same heavy price. Yanan is cheated on by Li Guohao, and Jianiang is gang-raped by her "entrepreneur" boyfriend's thugs and hit by a truck while escaping. In such a dreadful situation the two women turn to Hu Xiaobing for help, but the lanky, soft-spoken taxi driver/amateur photographer is capable of nothing other than daydreaming. Hu's inability to act is "genetic," just like Yanan's heart problem.

The young man's father is a retired blue-collar worker attached to the Party, which is losing control over a money-oriented, capitalistic society. This demise of Party dominance is cinematically rendered in *Lunar Eclipse*. Although the old man does not approve of his son's photographic adventures, he asks Hu Xiaobing to take his picture. While the youth is busy adjusting his camera, the sedate father, dressed in his neat Mao suit, suddenly drops dead, with a dim shadow demurely cast across his face. However, the tranquil death of his father marks the onset of

Hu Xiaobing's misfortune. His attempt to save Jianiang from harm fails miserably. His cab is wrecked, and he is maimed. At the close of *Lunar Eclipse*, Yanan, mad at her husband's adultery, rushes into a dark street on a cold winter night, where she surrealistically witnesses Hu Xiaobing's bad luck and Jianiang's grim death. At this frantic moment Yanan experiences another stroke, and she leans against a tree trunk to recover. Li Guohao follows his wife to the spot, and he hangs his head in shame. On the soundtrack we hear a loudspeaker broadcasting "traffic regulations" (*jiaotong guize*): "The red light is on. Bicycle riders please stop within the line. Otherwise please back your bicycle behind the line. Let's work together to enforce traffic regulations." The same broadcast was also heard when Yanan fainted after her first stroke, and she was found lying "across the line" in that street scene. Therefore, in this last shot of *Lunar Eclipse*, Yanan and Li Guohao unite and survive the New Order of Chinese capitalism. In fact, the couple never violates the "traffic regulations" of this market economy that devastates Hu Xiaobing and Jianiang. In a sense, either Yanan's idle life or Li Guohao's office romance can be judged as a Western bourgeois cliché and the by-product of classical capitalism. Hu Xiaobing and Jianiang, however, must be extinguished because they belong to a socialist past no longer safeguarded by the Party/state. As they are children forsaken by the ghostly Father, they find no way to stay alive in this giddy world of fallen Chinese patriarchal socialism.

The Unhappy Loners of *Rain Clouds over Wushan* and *Xiao Wu*

Zhang Ming's *Rain Clouds over Wushan* and Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* evoke a common imagery—a solitary young man bereft of a normal family life and sexuality under China's economic reforms. And this unhappy loner seeks redemption in a young woman who sinks into prostitution thanks to the same economic conditions. In both films the male and female protagonists look alike in their character and physical appearance. The man is lanky, shy, and wordless, the woman voluptuous, genial, and vocal. This poignant contrast between man and woman, or an unbalanced *yin* and *yang* by Chinese traditions, is a potent factor in the cinematic discourse of the Sixth Generation directors; the marred masculinity is offset by a robust and yet problematic femininity. In addition to such asymmetry of man/woman imagery, *Rain Clouds over Wushan* and *Xiao Wu* also convey a prevalent new social reality. As the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss pointed out, a long-established "gift economy" that functions through "a social network" has survived within the modern market economy.³⁵ In contemporary China, however, the same antiquated gift economy has failed to bind young Chinese together and

assure them of their bodily and emotional well-being. From this perspective, *Rain Clouds over Wushan* and *Xiao Wu* are most likely to rank among the best works of the Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers (I will discuss Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* at length in chapter 7).

The unhappy loner in *Rain Clouds over Wushan* is Mai Qiang (Zhang Xian-min), a signal operator whose personal life is confined to his workplace—a secluded office on the bank of the mighty and beautiful Yangtze River. Day and night Mai Qiang guides ferries and cargo ships, and he spends his spare time practicing traditional Chinese ink painting. It is a lonely existence, but Mai Qiang is content, if not bored, with such a quiet life, which does not discriminate between work and pleasure. One day, however, Ma Bing (Li Bing), a self-employed entrepreneur and Mai Qiang's only "social network," brings him a "gift" to break the spiritless cycle of Mai Qiang's humdrum daily existence. The "gift" is a prostitute named Lily (Liu Yang), whose entry into Mai Qiang's uneventful life is first heard on the soundtrack—as Western-style rock music. Then we see Lily, dressed in a trendy miniskirt and stockings, turn to speak to Mai Qiang, who is unprepared for the girl's sudden appearance. Ma Bing signals to his bashful friend that Lily is available for sex, and he demonstrates it with the young girl in a room where Mai Qiang can only listen to their lovemaking. Later Ma Bing tricks Mai Qiang into entering the same room, where Lily is waiting to do business with a second customer. But Mai Qiang is not capable of being aroused by a seductively undressing Lily, a scene reminiscent of a Hollywood classic, Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* (1967). The following morning, a loud quarrel breaks out between Ma Bing and Lily because the businessman suspects that the girl did not complete her job properly. As Lily raucously demands payment, Ma Bing comes to Mai Qiang for "proof." Glancing at Lily, who seems so needy, Mai Qiang "admits" that he had sex with the girl the night before. Although Ma Bing is not convinced, he agrees to pay Lily in the end.³⁶ Anyhow, he whispers a sympathetic sigh to Mai Qiang, who is so oblivious of this rough and unfeeling "business" world.

But Ma Bing is soon shocked to learn that his meek friend has been arrested by the police and charged with rape. This time the woman involved in the case is Chen Qing (Zhong Ping), a hotel receptionist who has had a long affair with Lao Mo (Xiu Zongdi), the resentful manager who brought the charge against Mai Qiang. Chen Qing is a widow living with her young son on the top floor of a hotel overlooking the Yangtze River. In a picturesque long shot she is seen standing alone on the balcony of her "home." This lovely *mise-en-scène* identifies Chen Qing with Mai Qiang, who also lives in his office building located on the opposite side of the river. Both of them are equally "imprisoned" in their workplace. For those who have limited skills in a market economy, their workplace is their entire

livelihood. In this sense, Chen Qing is even more vulnerable; after her husband died, she has had to raise their son alone on her low income as a hotel clerk. To support her little family, Chen Qing has sold her sexual favors to her boss Lao Mo, a married man who in return has given her money and taken care of other matters for her at the hotel. When Chen Qing decides to remarry, Lao Mo feels betrayed, and he comes to talk to her. In a close-up we first see Lao Mo's hands holding a fashionable backpack—a "gift" to Chen Qing's boy. Then we hear Chen Qing telling her son not to accept the gift until she realizes it will be good for his school activity. This scene reveals a "gift economy" that is still running strong in a traditional Chinese workplace community and that links people socially and emotionally. In Chen Qing's case, for years she has received Lao Mo's "gifts" in exchange for her sexual favors. Now her need to survive in a competitive capitalistic economy is more desperate. She needs to marry a man with a steady income or sell herself to men other than Lao Mo alone. Strange "tourists," including a Taoist priest, seeking "accommodation" at her hotel is a hint that she does this occasionally.

Unlike Lily, who works openly in China's booming sex industry, Chen Qing engages in this ancient woman's occupation in secret for her son's sake. She works at home, and her customers are provided through a certain "social network," as shown by a fishy pimp who introduces the Taoist priest to Chen Qing. Mai Qiang is just one of those customers, who pays her four hundred Chinese dollars after sex. Unaware of Chen Qing's "second job" outside the hotel, Lao Mo accuses Mai Qiang of raping his mistress after he sees him leaving her room. Unfortunately, what Lao Mo does not understand is that as a workplace leader of the bygone Mao era, his power is considerably weakened under new Chinese capitalism. As a lowly representative of the state, the hotel manager Lao Mo used to "own" Chen Qing exclusively within the confines of a socialist bureaucracy. But now the widowed woman is "out" in a capitalist free market and available to anyone who brings the cash she needs most. Compared with the capitalistic cash flow represented by Mai Qiang and other "customers," Lao Mo's implied socialist "gift" no longer counts for much in Chen Qing's financial struggle. Thus we see a diminishing role of the gift economy in the face of Chinese capitalism. However, in a community where a person like Chen Qing still utterly depends on state employment (whenever greeting guests, Chen Qing stresses that "we are a state-run (*guoying*) hotel"), a "gift" by implication must be paid back at whatever cost, so Chen Qing consents to have sex with Lao Mo one more time, as he anticipates.

Lao Mo is nonetheless let down when Mai Qiang is not indicted in the case, and he attributes this "lawlessness" to Wu Gang (Wang Wenqiang), a young policeman who sympathizes with Mai Qiang. If Lao Mo acts for a weakened socialist state, Wu Gang acts for a government that tolerates transgressions such

as prostitution for economic need. At the police station, Wu Gang asks Mai Qiang why, when even with a modest income he could still marry, is he visiting a prostitute and leaving her so much money (Mai Qiang's payment of four hundred Chinese dollars equals one month's salary)? Mai Qiang answers, "I see her in my dream." Correspondingly, Chen Qing often asks her son if anybody "calls the mother." In the film, Mai Qiang and Chen Qing did not know each other until their sexual encounter that led to the signal operator's arrest, and there was not a single clue to this mysterious bond between the man and the woman. But I have detected two connections: (1) they are both tied to a state-run business enterprise, no matter how small, and (2) both Mai Qiang and Chen Qing's little boy practice Chinese ink painting. In this respect they favorably fit into a socialist past and a time-honored Chinese tradition. Mai Qiang was impotent with Lily, a prostitute in Western style (i.e., miniskirt and stockings), but he has no trouble "sleeping with" (in his own words) Chen Qing. Unlike Lily, Chen Qing wears a plain dress of white and blue, typical of the Mao era, yet she is no less nubile than Lily, as suggested when she is nude behind a plastic shower curtain. It would seem that Mai Qiang's repressed male sexuality can only be "cured" through a traditional Chinese wife/mother. Conversely, Lily's "simulated" Western femininity/temptation (a parody of Anne Bancroft's character in *The Graduate*) does not provoke Mai Qiang's sexual desire at all. At the conclusion of the film, Ma Bing visits Mai Qiang again and informs him of Chen Qing's disgrace at her workplace. Feeling responsible for her downfall, Mai Qiang rushes at night to swim across the Yangtze River to reach the woman. He offers himself to a nearly hysterical Chen Qing, who affectionately smacks the wet, half-naked, and slim protagonist. At this very moment the young boy enters the frame—he is fetching water for the home. Thus we see in this final *mise-en-scène* a conventional Chinese family happily united.

It should be noted that in Zhang Ming's film a recurrent visual motif is a pair of fishes. In several scenes, we see Mai Qiang and Chen Qing slice fish while preparing a meal, and the close-up shots show a pair of fishes that either swim in a bucket of water or lie on a table. In Chinese tradition, a pair of fishes in the water is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, and a happily married couple can be described as having "the pleasures of fish in water." In this regard, a pair of fishes symbolizes harmony, mutual sexual pleasure, and the development of personality.³⁷ In this respect, the use of the pair of fishes links Mai Qiang and Chen Qing symbolically—the two little people who are struggling in a ruthless capitalistic market economy that would eradicate all the "unfit." However, both Mai Qiang and Chen Qing seem to have survived in the end, for the man is free of criminal offense and the woman finally finds true love at the doorway of her home.

A Return to the Real: Forsaken Children of a Past Socialism

One day after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games opened on the night of August 8, Jim Yardley wrote in the *New York Times*, “An ecstatic China finally got its Olympic moment on Friday night. And if the astonishing opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games lavished grand tribute on Chinese civilization and sought to stir an ancient nation’s pride, there was also a message for an uncertain outside world: Do not worry. We mean no harm.”³⁸ However, only hours after the extravagant opening ceremonies, Todd Bachman, a sixty-two-year-old American tourist, was badly “harmed”—he was stabbed to death by Tang Yongming, a jobless and homeless Chinese factory worker. Tang arrived in Beijing from Hangzhou on August 1. At 12:20 p.m. on August 9, this forty-seven-year-old Chinese man attacked Bachman, his wife Barbara, and their Chinese female guide with a knife at the Drum Tower (Gulou), a thirteenth-century landmark in central Beijing, then killed himself by leaping from the tower.³⁹ China’s state news agency Xinhua described Tang as a man who “had lost all hope after a series of failures in his life and took his anger out on society,”⁴⁰ implying that Tang’s action had resulted from a personal breakdown. Yet in the eyes of many Westerners, “the bloody tragic event in Beijing exposes a China the world did not see” at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics.⁴¹

Andrew Jacobs’ essay “Behind Murder of American in Beijing, a Tale of Despair and Dislocation” draws a sharp profile of Tang Yongming that might represent a China unknown to the world:

Tang Yongming was like countless other middle-aged, marginally skilled men struggling to find their way in the new China. Laid off from a meter factory in the central city of Hangzhou, Mr. Tang, 47, briefly sustained himself as a security guard. Then, two years ago, he found himself idle, broke and living alone in a rented room with no furniture and no future.⁴²

This profile of Tang reads like a piece of contemporary Chinese history. Beginning in the 1990s, the Chinese government stopped supporting state-run factories that were unable to compete in a market economy and let them go out of business. As those factories closed their doors, they spilled millions of laid-off workers out on the streets, which sparked widespread labor unrest.⁴³ Jacobs comments, “Tang typified the many working men cast aside by ailing state-run industries. He was angry at being left behind by China’s headlong rush into an economy that lacked the succors of the Socialist past.”⁴⁴ Clearly, Tang’s revenge on “society” is not personal, as the authorities would want the public to believe.⁴⁵ According to Jacobs,

Tang's case stirred heated debate on the Internet; some people worried that it could tarnish China's image of Olympic glory, whereas others used Tang's murderous outburst to criticize unattended social ills: mental illness, chronic unemployment, and xenophobic nationalism.⁴⁶ In any case, the incident is a social tragedy that in Jacobs' judgment is linked to the "Socialist past."

In today's Chinese society, I think, people who are left behind by China's new capitalism should be seen as forsaken children of Mao's socialism—that is, a "fatherless" generation, which is a leitmotif in the new cinema of the Sixth Generation filmmakers. As Shuqin Cui put it,

Frequent viewing of the "fifth-generation" films reinforces our perception of their oedipal structure, where rejection of cultural and political father figures drives both narrative construction and psychological reasoning. The presence of fatherly discourse (history and revolution), either on or off screen, serves simultaneously as the subject dominating the narrative and the target subverted by the representation. . . . By contrast, films made by the younger directors [of the Sixth Generation] are concerned with the memory of an adolescent past and the construction of the coming-of-age narrative. What we have observed from the adolescent world is transient youth and the absence of father(s). The lack of a fatherly discourse allows youth and their experience to occupy the center of the representation. The centralization of the coming-of-age narrative also reveals a psychological trajectory, where the loss, search for, and return to the father(s) demonstrate discursive transitions in post-Maoist China.⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, it was the Fifth Generation master moviemaker Zhang Yimou who directed the lavish opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics; Zhang "wanted the opening ceremonies to be his gift to China."⁴⁸ According to Yardley, Zhang's "production was filled with signature Chinese touches," including "the elaborate choreography of dancers on a giant calligraphy scroll" and "the undulating rows of Chinese characters, with the character for 'harmony' [*he*] illuminated."⁴⁹ Yet this display of the Chinese character *he* or "harmony" is a special "gift" to those "dour-faced leaders of the ruling Communist Party, who dutifully, if sometimes unconvincingly, regurgitate the phrase 'harmonious society' [*hexie shehui*]."⁵⁰ (Recently critics accused Zhang of "playing the role of favored court artist—a kind of Chinese Leni Riefenstahl, creating beautiful backdrops for iron-fisted rulers."⁵¹) Zhang's "visual extravaganza," Yardley says, was to promote "the politics of harmony," which is for certain a "fatherly discourse (history and revolution)" in Cui's analytical terms. But in Yardley's view, the concept of a "harmonious society" is just a "rhetorical tent encompassing policies intended to soothe, if not necessarily resolve, a range of tensions."⁵² And Yardley is quick to point out: "Just as men really

cannot fly, art is not reality.”⁵³ So, before a global audience, Zhang’s spectacular show simply aids Chinese rulers (or “political father figures”) to create an *illusion of he* or harmony. But this illusion is shattered by Tang’s attacks on American tourists, “a tragic and senseless event” in the words of Hugh McCutcheon, a U.S. volleyball coach and the son-in-law of the victim.⁵⁴ Anyhow, the Drum Tower incident left a stain on Beijing’s Olympic glory that Zhang Yimou had helped to bring. Symbolically, though, it signifies a return to the real—it tells the bitter truth about *another* China, a suffering country that many Sixth Generation directors have convincingly portrayed in their work.⁵⁵

Behind Chinese Walls

The Uncanny Power of Matriarchy in Wang Chao's *Anyang Orphan*

In recent years, filmmakers of the Sixth Generation have attracted increasing attention from both Chinese and Western film critics and cultural theorists. *Anyang Orphan* (2001) is a critically acclaimed film directed by Wang Chao, one of the Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers whose works portray the turbulence of human life under China's new capitalistic market economy. As Wang Chao stated, *Anyang Orphan* was an "auteurist" gaze at people living on the margin of the city,¹ such as unemployed factory workers, gangsters, and prostitutes, who were socially displaced by the country's rapid economic transformation. A central motif in *Anyang Orphan* is a variety of walls: the ancient city wall, the wall of a closed factory, and the wall of a ruined communal apartment building from a bygone socialist era. In the movie's opening shots, the protagonist, a laid-off (*xiagang*) factory worker named Dagang persistently stands contemplating the various walls in the city of Anyang,² which, symbolically and psychologically, no longer "protect" him from financial insolvency and emotional misgivings caused by his sudden unemployment. Against this bleak postsocialist urban landscape, the walls in Wang Chao's film serve as a cinematic metaphor of a troubled socialist state and a broken traditional family, which the director describes as the heavy "social price" of China's economic progress in the past decades. In the film, Dagang's emotional attachment to Yanli, a prostitute and the mother of a newborn baby, results in a strangely unconventional "family," which, I think, is a by-product of massive unemployment that results from China's so-called state enterprise reform (*guoqi gaizao*). In Wang Chao's "auteurist" gaze, however, the prevalence of prostitution in a postsocialist society seems to pose a new challenge to Chinese patriarchy. Seen differently, it provides a necessary "supplement" to a wrecked Chinese masculinity (as represented by Dagang) under "a new kind of ruthless capitalism" embodied by a "China as the emerging superpower of the twenty-first century," in Slavoj Žižek's observations.³ In this chapter, I analyze Wang Chao's

Anyang Orphan in the context of China's "capitalistic" economy that has had a major impact on the lives of ordinary people.

The opening sequence of *Anyang Orphan* is a tour de force that "establishes first-time director Wang Chao as one of the most talented of China's 'Sixth Generation' filmmakers."⁴ A striking wide shot of the old city wall first catches our eye; it is a massive gray brick wall that mantles the entire frame. In it, a few faceless elderly men appear to be crushed into the ground by the high, thick wall. Then a spiritless figure enters the scene from the right. It is Dagang, who stops to look at some bird cages displayed by the old men. Jobless, Dagang now is rich with his time as an aimless wanderer in the ancient city of Anyang. In history, Anyang was the last capital of the Shang dynasty (1766–1122 BC) and one of the earliest centers of Chinese civilization.⁵ By using this city, and in particular its surrounding old city wall, as a backdrop to his narrative, Wang Chao attempts to link the present with a distant past allegorically, as we will soon see in subsequent shots. Continuing his wandering, Dagang approaches a noisy chicken coop on the street. A second later we find him alone in a deserted park reading a fenced gravestone of some important historical figure. In the background there is a battlemented city wall emerging from a low wintry sky. A deep, long shot of a barren hillside within the wall follows, then a shot of a minute figure of Dagang walking along the secluded hillside. The small man then blends into the dark, naked trees that surround him. In these bleak yet vigorous city landscapes, the protagonist seems to question his own cruel fate: How did it happen and why? And he seems to seek an answer in a past Anyang represented by the walls, symbols of permanence in a time of flux, that he has just stared at in despair. Dagang may never have seen the ancient elegance and grandeur of those old city walls until his recent layoff as a factory worker. Now, as a resident of the ancient city, Dagang desperately seeks a reply and even "protection" from the walls he used to ignore, but to no avail. All is deadly silent there.

In the next scene, we see that the factory is closed down, but Dagang nonetheless returns to its empty yard. In one long shot of the bankrupt factory, the slight figure of Dagang walks in front of the hushed workshop, kicking around a glass bottle that emits an ominous sound. In another medium shot, however, a large frontal image of Dagang confronts us; still in a blue boiler suit, he is leaning against a wall bathed in a glorious sunset. In this scene, Dagang is again significantly linked to a wall, that is, the wall of the closed factory. If the solemn city wall we saw earlier in the film symbolizes "protection" that is denied to Dagang, the factory wall in golden sunshine revives a fading "memory" which tacitly suggests Dagang's good old days before his sudden unemployment. A short while before, Dagang had inquired about his bitter fate in front of the ancient city wall, which gave him no answer; now he turns to this abandoned site of the factory for a clue. Dagang

has devoted all his adult life to work here, yet in the end he has become utterly irrelevant to this place. The irrelevance that engulfs Dagang is most felt in a long shot of a factory building: the monumental facade soars against a glowing sunset sky, whereas the demure figure of Dagang passes under the lofty facade like a frightened ghost. Sunk in this twilight postsocialist industrial landscape, Dagang seems resigned to his alienation and issues not a word of protest.

Wang Chao's ample use of industrial landscapes to reiterate man's alienation from his environment is akin to that of Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Outcry* (1953), one of the best Italian "neorealist" films. At the close of the Antonioni movie, Aldo (Steve Cochran), a skilled worker at a sugar refinery who quit his job for a pointless wandering, eventually returns home, only to find that his beloved factory has been shut down by the local authorities for a new defense industry site. Distraught, Aldo roams through the empty yard, just as Dagang did in the opening sequence of *Anyang Orphan*. He then climbs a tower, faints, and plunges to his death. Thus in both films we find that the alienation of a workman from his milieu can be disastrous for him. Peter Bondanella has remarked on Antonioni's *The Outcry*: "The emotional impact of this work is achieved by completely understated methods. Very little musical accompaniment is employed and dialogue is often sparse or elliptical; silence rather than words accompanies the director's stark images of alienation."⁶ In the sedate opening of *Anyang Orphan*, Wang Chao coalesces a few "Antonionian" elements, such as a solitary working-class character and desolate local landscape.⁷ Yet his Chinese protagonist's alienation must be studied in a sociopolitical context of postsocialist China's market-driven economy.

In the movie, what follows Dagang's disaffected wandering in the city and the factory is an episode that is both devastating and comical. As the long winter night falls, Dagang goes out for supper at a noodle shop in his neighborhood. When he reaches into his pocket for money to pay for his meal, he finds a *fanpiao* (meal ticket) instead. In socialist China, the meal ticket was used as substitute money within a *danwei* (work unit), where workers ate at a *shitang* (canteen) run by the workplace. But the meal ticket was not accepted currency at the food market outside the *danwei* in either socialist or postsocialist China. Embarrassed, Dagang rushes back home to look in every corner of his dingy one-room apartment for some valid paper money, but finds none! He then begins a desperate, tragicomic "money search" to survive the chilly and hungry evening. In the dim hallway of his apartment building, Dagang knocks on the doors of his neighbors one after another, asking for cash in exchange for his meal tickets in the amount of thirty-four yuan. One well-fed man gives Dagang a sly answer: "I no longer eat at the factory but bring my own lunch." A woman doesn't even bother to see Dagang face to face, declaring behind the door that she too is out of work and has not been paid

for several months. The last person Dagang pleads with is invisible on the screen, but we hear his dry voice: "I'll exchange them for you since we are old buddies." At this moment we heave a sigh of relief for our starving protagonist. At the same time, however, we can but laugh bitterly: Why is this factory worker so loyal to his *danwei* that he never thinks of a life outside the system that has let him down?

Allegorically, this tragicomic meal ticket exchange scene takes place in the deep darkness of a stern Maoist "socialism" (or in the gloom of a new Chinese capitalism), especially its *danwei* system modeled on the Soviet Union of the 1950s.⁸ According to Martin King Whyte, an American sociologist, the Chinese *danwei* system was more highly accentuated than that of the Soviet Union because of the absence of market distribution of basic goods and services. In this respect, Chinese workers depended more on their work units, and the political control and monitoring of the employees' private lives made "personal autonomy and privacy virtually impossible."⁹ Vital to this *danwei* system was the so-called *neibu shitang* (internal canteens) where workers were required to use meal tickets to buy their food, as we have just seen in Wang Chao's film. According to Yunxiang Yan, a Chinese sociologist, the central message of such family-style canteens was that the work unit, which represents the party-state, provided food to its employees "just as a mother feeds her children." And the relationship between the canteens and those who ate there was "a patronized relationship between the feeder and the fed, rather than a relationship of service provider and customers."¹⁰

As a devoted factory employee, Dagang had always trusted in the system, like a child who relied on his parents. Once dismissed from his "work unit," however, Dagang is allowed no access to the "motherly" internal canteen that used to feed him generously. So, with thirty-four yuan in his hand, Dagang hurries back to the noodle shop, glittering in the cold shadowy night. Almost certainly for the first time in his life, he pays for his meal with currency accepted in a free market. From now on, he must survive on food supplied by the market rather than by the workplace controlled by the party-state.

The sympathetic shop owner hands Dagang a baby left by a stranger a while ago as he busily cooks a big bowl of hot noodle soup for the weary, jobless man. As he eats, Dagang reads a note offering two hundred yuan each month to take care of the child. Realizing that the amount of money he had just gotten from his co-worker won't last long, Dagang wastes no time bringing the baby home as a new means of earning a living. This is the second step taken by the confused factory worker in his fight for his life without the system that no longer "feeds" him. In this sense, Dagang is actually looking for a new "feeder"/mother, and he finds one—a prostitute named Yanli, who had left the baby with the note containing her beeper number. When Dagang and Yanli first meet in a new "market-driven" restaurant, the outspoken young woman acts as a truly caring "mother" to both

the quiet worker and the baby he is awkwardly holding. Yanli asks if the baby has eaten, and the shy “first-time father” replies that he has fed him with milk. Satisfied, the young woman then asks if *he* has eaten, and the timid man admits he has not. The fiery Yanli then gives a loud order: “Waiter! Two bowls of noodles!” The meeting between the two protagonists, I think, is a most significant scene in *Anyang Orphan*; abandoned by his “work unit,” Dagang has become an “orphan,” while Yanli is nourishing him as a way to care for her own child. Evidently, this bittersweet sight demonstrates a shift in power from the party-state to a capitalistic free-market economy in which newly found economic power is exercised by a prostitute.

On an allegorical level, the Yanli character represents the uncanny power of Chinese matriarchy, which displaces the party-state that formerly provided for its workforce “just as a mother feeds her children.” However, the emerging Chinese matriarchal power as shown in Wang Chao’s *Anyang Orphan* is ironically a by-product of nationwide unemployment, which, as Jennifer Lin reported, “hit hardest against” female workers. In the spring of 1998, according to the semi-official All-China Women’s Federation, women made up 39 percent of the workforce in the state sector, but 60 percent of laid-off state workers were women (most over the age of thirty-five).¹¹ Such mass layoffs of female workers in the 1990s contrasts sharply with a rapid growth of the female labor force during the 1960s and 1970s.¹² Hence the entrance of a traditional “force of pleasure” (i.e., prostitution) for a great many young female former factory workers. And Yanli is simply a cinematic representation of this uncanny feminine economic force. Pan Suiming, a renowned scholar specializing in sexology and the sex industry, has termed this feminine economic force the “misses economy” (*xiaojie jingji*),¹³ which is even supported by some local government officials. They argue that there are three good reasons to bolster a “sex service” (*xing fuwu*) industry: (1) it employs many young female laid-off workers, (2) it stimulates consumption of cosmetics, clothing, housing, and tourism, (3) it is a way for the rich to “support” the poor,¹⁴ thus boosting “a corner of Chinese economy.”¹⁵ A recent article in the *New York Times* also reports that the sex trade is “an industry that has served as a financial backdrop for millions of China’s rural migrants.”¹⁶ In any event, this “misses economy” may also confirm what Karl Marx said of prostitution in a capitalist society more than a century and a half ago: “Just as the woman passes from marriage to general prostitution, so the entire world of wealth (that is, of man’s objective substance) passes from the relationship of exclusive marriage with the owner of private property to a state of universal prostitution with the community.”¹⁷ In Marx’s view, “Prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer.”¹⁸

At the meeting in the restaurant, the “miss” Yanli gives Dagang two hundred yuan as she sympathetically watches him tuck away his noodles. In my view, the

noodle shop opens a new social space for Dagang, which is far beyond the boundary of his “work unit” and where the famished worker has found an alternate “feeder” at the end of the day. Wang Chao’s movie does not say whether Yanli is a factory worker who has just lost her job. But as soon as the business deal about the welfare of the baby is concluded, Yanli rushes to a post office to remit some money to her father, who, as we read in a close-up of the money order, lives in a small village in Heilongjiang on the northeast frontier. Yanli is one of those girls from the region specializing in *xing fuwu* and has to “whore” to support her father in the countryside, who is as vulnerable as Dagang is in the city.

By effectively “feeding” two men in one day, Yanli poses a daunting challenge to a gravely damaged Chinese patriarchy. However, this challenge by women is not new—it is in fact deeply embedded in traditional Chinese society. In *About Chinese Women*, Julia Kristeva has examined the “uncanny power” of Chinese matriarchy. In China, Kristeva argues, there are two familial models—matrilinear and patrilinear, and “the symbolic paternal function,” Kristeva says, “is assumed by women as well. This allows them, even when the demands of social and economic development oppress them to the point of slavery or martyrdom, to function as the most solid support of the social order, of its administration, of its reform, and even of its revolution.”¹⁹ Kristeva also defines this power assumed by woman as “a power with a body, and a body that knows about power: symbolic contract, economic limits, but also impulse, desire, and contradiction. A power in infinite process: a power that cannot be represented.”²⁰ In this sense, Yanli surely takes on the male role of a “provider” to her father and Dagang, who would otherwise be defenseless in the face of new market forces. In *Anyang Orphan*, there is an ever-fresh portrayal of the brutal market forces that besiege almost the entire city. Street life is crammed with gaudy advertisements—from ubiquitous food stand signs to garish women’s clothing to children’s toys. Throughout the movie, we see Dagang and Yanli walking along busy streets as they visit a shopping center, a Buddhist temple, and a photo shop. Not surprisingly, we hear no background musical score but only the loud pop songs that break out at random in the marketplace. In the end Dagang finds his own “place” in the market-driven economy. After receiving the first payments from Yanli, he draws on his small capital to set up a bicycle repair stall on the street. In this way, Dagang starts a new life as a laid-off worker turned “self-employed entrepreneur” (*getihu*), the solution enthusiastically endorsed by the government during the 1990s. In the meantime, a policeman who knows Dagang well stops by and asks about his life after the layoff. The former state employee replies, “It’s better than before.” In this ambivalent answer, however, we still sense the power of a new Chinese matriarchy in the form of Yanli, which has brought timely relief to Dagang. Yanli’s feminine help is merely “supplemental” to a man like Dagang struggling to mend his economic deficiency. By Chinese



Figure 17. *Anyang Orphan*. Dir. Wang Chao. 2001.

traditions, Dagang ought to become a man of independent means and “reinstat[e]” the masculinity depleted by unemployment. His efforts to reclaim his masculinity might reasonably include getting married and having a normal family.

When Dagang brings the baby to meet with Yanli again, we see them arrive by taxi in a thriving district of the city. In the scene that follows, we find the two protagonists eating in a spacious, tidy restaurant, far more pleasing to our eyes than the dingy noodle place of their first “business meeting.” At the dinner table Dagang is retiring as usual, but his eyes widen as Yanli breastfeeds the crying baby. The laid-off worker is also reclaiming his libidinal drive after his economic recovery. To our surprise, the sexually deprived man says to Yanli, “Miss, I want to give you back the baby.” Since it is the child that ties Dagang with his object of desire—the “maternal” prostitute—such a request is incomprehensible to the audience. In the next shot, however, Dagang and Yanli lie side by side in bed like a loving couple. As in Antonioni’s *The Outcry*, the dialogue between the protagonists is often elliptical: we don’t hear how Yanli responds to Dagang’s request and why she refuses to take back the child. But this eventual “union” between the two people is only natural and “logical” if we consider each protagonist’s own troubled life. Acting as a confident husband, Dagang pleads, “Don’t be a *xiaojie* any more.”²¹

The would-be-wife Yanli answers coolly, "I don't do it for myself." At this point Yanli's seeming refusal to adopt a cleaner, better life almost provokes a crisis in the couple's new relationship. Yet Dagang's response is shocking: "Then do it at my place. And I will take care of the baby." There is a perverse undertone in this blunt talk, but we also discern in Dagang's proposal that the man is resolute to survive in a crazy market-driven economy at whatever price.

In fact, Dagang's "place" is a tiny, single-room apartment he had rented cheaply from his factory in the Mao era. According to David Fraser's study, the Maoist party-state had "decommodified" housing and made it a state-provided social good under the socialist welfare system. The party-state transformed housing into an element of the redistributive economy, allowing individual work units to allocate accommodations.²² Mockingly, the now self-employed Dagang recommodifies his housing with the income from China's revived sex industry. Following the bedroom scene is a wide shot in which Dagang is standing at his bike repair stall in front of an immense gray brick wall, a striking image similar to that we saw in the opening scene of the film. Only this time the wall is not the graceful old city wall of Anyang but the one opposite to his shabby apartment building. From here Dagang is able to attend to three things simultaneously and efficiently: (1) working as a bicycle repairman, (2) babysitting the child placed in a basket, (3) watching Yanli's customers come and go. In one scene, Dagang walks cross the street to pierce the tire of a bike left there by one of Yanli's customers. Not only does this vandalistic act double Dagang's income as a repairman, it also relieves his repressed feelings as a lover of the working mother. It is a charming vignette in Dagang's daily struggle to build an unorthodox family. Such concerted efforts by Dagang and Yanli even compel us to forget about the negative social consequences of prostitution and vandalism. Under the circumstances we can but share the hard-working couple's hope for a new life. And, as we have just seen, this new life begins right below the wall of his apartment building, which belongs to a bygone socialist era but helps put Dagang back on his feet. It is against this past socialist wall that the former factory worker has yet again found an "answer" to his query about life, love and family.

In *Anyang Orphan*, there is another affecting episode that depicts the couple's everyday existence. Across the street from his building, Dagang stands dutifully fixing a tire while watching the child. Inside his apartment, Yanli is awakened by the alarm clock, and she sends her customer away (she is paid by the hour!). Then she changes the sheet and makes a new bed for the night. Afterwards Yanli, dressed in a pure white sweater (at work she is always in brassy red), sits before the mirror and thoughtfully applies her lipstick. As the night falls, Dagang packs up his tools and carries the baby home, where Yanli gives him a warm welcome. In bright lamplight the entire "family" eats a simple dinner at the table without

talking, and Yanli's fresh white dress seems to speak of a spiritual cleansing. Soon after, all three—Dagang, Yanli, and the baby—are “lying in bed side by side” in a medium shot that “brings the point home with a poignant simplicity that few contemporary directors are able to achieve.”²³ At this moment Yanli tells Dagang: “I’ll quit this spring.”

The scene then cuts to a close-up of a Buddhist statue of *guanyin*,²⁴ and in the next shot Dagang and Yalin are praying in a Buddhist temple filled with burning incense. Shrill sutra chanting is heard on the soundtrack, which continues even after the couple leaves the temple and walks through a noisy crowd on the street. Like Yanli's “immaculate” white dress, this lingering Buddhist chanting is a reassurance of “purification” that paves the way for a new wholesome life, as the couple rushes into a photo studio to have their *quanjiafu*, or “photograph of the whole family,” taken.²⁵ In this staged scene, Dagang, Yanli, and the baby all play a role in a tight, well-governed family. Dagang is a solemnly responsible “husband” in blue boiler suit. Yanli wears a dark gray jacket so that she can shed her prostitute look and assume a new identity of a virtuous “wife.” The little boy is wrapped in white and deep blue clothes, and he remains quiet as an “obedient son.” Such cool and dull colors chosen for the occasion seem to shield this would-be family from any sensual persuasion. Behind three devoted family members, however, is a balmy and dreamy landscape. In it a farmhouse, a wheat field, and sunflowers are painted in velvet red, green, and yellow, pertinent scenery for the family in search of a redeemed humanity. Although this *quanjiafu* imagery is commonplace in commercial photography, its banality somehow arouses a sweet desire for a tranquil and ordinary life—a rarity in the maddening capitalistic market world.

But one day the family's bucolic dream is disrupted when a crimson car pulls up in front of Dagang's apartment building. Four young men in dark blue suits jump out of the car, and two of them come to Dagang's stand across the street. Without a word, they look at the boy in the basket and walk back to the car. Moments later a burly bald man emerges from the car and comes to see the baby for himself, who, surprisingly, gives the bald man a welcome smile. The man seems to be touched by the child's greeting and goes back to his vehicle in silence. Dagang is first on the alert for this unexpected visit by the strangers, then goes back to his work afterwards as if nothing had happened.

The bald man is Side, a gangster who owns a “singing and dancing” building where Yanli used to work. In the film, we first see Side walk into a karaoke bar in the building yelling at those “misses” and asking for Yanli in particular. Having served a customer upstairs, Yanli soon comes down to the bar, exhausted. The “pimp” Side derisively demands a “fee” from the prostitute. Yanli replies to the gangster in a similarly sarcastic voice: “The money I earned is to raise *your* bastard son!” Humiliated, Side hits Yanli's face with a steel fork and instructs his men

that the girl be dismissed from the “entertainment” facility. Coming out of the building, Side suddenly faints by his car and is checked into a hospital, where he is diagnosed with cancer. To me, Side’s instant illness looks like a retribution in Buddhist terms: as he just hurt Yanli in a vicious attack, he is now avenged by the power of Chinese patriarchy for his evil karma.²⁶ In other words, his sickness is a karmic manifestation of “rebellion” by young women like Yanli against a thug who believes he is a big boss in China’s sex industry.

Unlike Dagang, whose working-class status has rapidly declined under China’s “market socialism,”²⁷ mobster bosses such as Side “have taken advantage of new market opportunities to gain access to private industrial and commercial resources.”²⁸

Like their counterparts around the world, Chinese gangs engage in drug trafficking, gambling, prostitution, robbery, and extortion. Gang activities attract many young people who “are looking for any means to get rich quickly.”²⁹ So in *Anyang Orphan*, there are always silent young men in Side’s company dressed in neat navy blue suits who look like the mob characters in Kitano Takeshi’s *yakuza* films. After the visit, Side joins those young men in a public bath, where they agree that the boy must be Side’s son. Side’s urge to recognize the son given birth by Yanli does not mean that the dying gangster develops any affection for the prostitute he had once grossly abused. In fact, as soon as Side learns of his terminal illness, he calls on his mother, who lives in a country house. During Side’s visit, his mother sits at a table with an old photo of her deceased husband, and she unflinchingly instructs Side. The old woman notices her son’s lost hair, reminiscent of her husband, who had also died of cancer. Traditional as she is, the poised mother tells her son to have a family, especially an offspring (*hou*). Hence Side’s hasty inquiry about Yanli’s little boy. Again, we see how Chinese patriarchy can still exert its power even over a gangster who tends to ignore all the “rules” in a Chinese society under rapid economic transformations. (As Kristeva puts it, Confucian patriarchy “has been haunted by the mother, by her sexuality, and by her function as the inversion of power.”³⁰)

In Wang Chao’s film, Side is portrayed as a rogue who is curiously bound by traditions. In his karaoke bar he snubs modern pop music but sings along with Chinese folk songs. Right after the ominous hospital checkup he goes to pay homage to the Yellow River, an eternal symbol of Chinese civilization.³¹ In this scene Side sustains a measure of dignity while his crass lieutenants urinate on the riverbank. And Side’s “costume” merits our attention: he is wearing a pseudo-classic jacket called *tangzhuang*, or Tang-style attire, a style popular among wealthy Chinese and favored by former communist leaders such as Jiang Zemin.³² However, this iconographic reference to Chinese nouveaux riche and the power elite only mocks Side, since the rogue’s doom has been sealed by his infirmity.

To fulfill his mother's wish, Side comes back to ask Yanli for the custody of her child, with his men standing guard against any unwanted intruder. This time Dagang is watching the situation more vigilantly from his stand across the street, and he soon realizes he must go back to his apartment, where the mobster is pressing Yanli to give up the child. Dagang enters the room and silently stands by his woman. Unable to brush off Dagang, a ruffled Side resorts to violence. A fistfight between the two men in the dark hallway (and off screen) ends with a bang, and a moment later we learn that Side has been killed in the fight. Dagang is jailed for murder. Yanli and the child pay a last visit to Dagang, now on death row in a state prison. Speaking from behind the wire netting, a composed Dagang tells Yanli, "If I die, take care of the baby. He is my *offspring*." In the next shot, we see the front of that noodle shop where the two protagonists met for the first time. Now Yanli walks alone into the restaurant carrying the baby. What follows is an exceedingly long take in which Yanli eats a bowl of noodles to the very end, with the baby dangling from her arm. On the table we find another bowl of noodles in front of the distressed woman—an "offering" that stands for the absent Dagang. Suddenly Yanli burst into tears. The lengthy act of eating is no doubt a ritual that Yanli performs to honor her deceased lover on the day she learns of Dagang's execution.

In any event, the grim deaths of Side and Dagang raise a question critical to our understanding of Wang Chao's *Anyang Orphan*. Who indeed will be the father to Yanli's child? To put it another way, is there any patriarchal power that has survived the brute force of "market socialism"? In my judgment, both men's failure to *become* the father marks a grave masculinity crisis in a postsocialist Chinese society. In Dagang's case, his economic deficiency leads to a transgression: he turns to a prostitute for the assistance that the system has declined to provide, but he also benefits from that same system by using his socialist housing for the prostitution that is essential to his survival. In fact, Dagang's transgression mirrors a troubled socialist state whose proper functions have been impaired in a frantic free-market economy. As Marx and Engels famously wrote of "the bourgeois mode of production" in *The Communist Manifesto*: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind."³³ And they pointed out: "The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate."³⁴ In a Marxian sense, Dagang is perhaps a classic example of the "proletarians" who "have nothing to lose but their chains."³⁵ However, as a man confronting "his real conditions of life" in that ruthless capitalistic mode of production, Dagang appears complicit in tearing down "all Chinese walls" of social order and moral principles, as he turns his home and even his love into a compulsory commodity in the marketplace that rejects any sentimentality.

Similarly, Side's profitable prostitution business is also a transgression that reflects a weakened socialist state that has failed to provide for its citizens. Side's incurable illness, however, sounds like a Buddhist cause-and-effect play resulting from his unlawful previous life. In any case, both men's paternal inadequacy seems to be effected by a socialist state undermined by the "manic logic of global capitalism."³⁶ On the one hand, the state is incapable of caring for laid-off workers such as Dagang. On the other, it falls short of regulating crooked "businessmen" like Side. In short, the troubled socialist state itself is a waning patriarchal power that allows social fragmentation and breakdown. Even a strong-willed woman like Yanli cannot find a father for her child among either "losers" (Dagang) or "winners" (Side) in the "market socialism." And her hope to build a normal, happy family has been shattered twice, first by the impoverishment of her home village under the market reforms, and second by a harsh state apparatus blind to suffering humanity. The capital punishment of Dagang for killing the gangster is nothing but a manifestation of an ancient principle—*sharen changming* ("a life for a life"). In this case it indiscriminately cancels Yanli's search for her baby's father. In this respect, the demise of the Father in *Anyang Orphan* only aggravates that masculinity crisis in a Chinese community already driven to despair by various market forces.

In the final sequence of *Anyang Orphan*, director Wang Chao continues to remark on the coercive state power that undermines Yanli's troubled hope. Seen from a deep archway, Yanli and other "misses" are being chased out of their place by the uniformed police. During her hurried escape Yanli gives her baby to a stranger on the street. After the chase she returns and looks for the stranger to take back the child, but the man has vanished. Again Yanli is seen running along the street in desolation. She asks a young man about the stranger "with a baby." Without any warning the man jumps out from behind her with handcuffs—he is a plain-clothes cop lurking in the shade of a shoe repair stand, waiting for the escaped "misses." Yanli screams as the cop grabs her hair and ties her up. In the subsequent wide shot, we see a "new" Anyang city rinsed of any social evils. Against a clear blue sky a train station comes into sight, although it appears like a socialist monument with revolutionary slogans of the Mao era. Compared to the previous cityscapes from the movie, which are dreary and murky, this image of the city is eerily "cleansed." With the "bad elements" all purged, Anyang is reborn like a phoenix rising from the ashes. A police van and a truck arrive in a public square next to the train station. A following medium shot shows the vacant-faced young prostitutes (some are teenagers), including Yanli, who step down from the truck under the policemen's watch. By Chinese law they are sent back to their hometowns to begin a new life after a period of detention and "re-education." The girls are then packed into a cargo train to be sent home. A dazzling sun shines through a tight window in

the darkened freight car. Trapped in this claustrophobic space, Yanli stares up at the glowing window—the only link with the outside world. And we see what Yanli sees in the last matching shot: a “resurrected” Dagang holding *their* child against the background of a sunny street in the city of Anyang. Is Yanli under an illusion that she has found a father for her baby in the next life?

To me, this surrealist ending in Wang Chao’s film reflects China’s everyday reality and the nation’s ideological traditions as well. As we saw earlier in the movie, Dagang and Yanli went to a Buddhist sanctuary for “purification” of their tainted existence. In that final shot Yanli sees a *vision* of Dagang, which is a “reincarnation” as defined by the Buddhist religion. The Buddhist doctrine of karma states that “what one does in this life will have its effects on the next life” and “the karma of the deceased conditions the birth of a new self.”³⁷ In this sense, Dagang’s “new self” is that of the father he had not attained in this life but accomplishes in the next because of his good deeds or karma done for Yanli and her child. This Buddhist “happy ending” contradicts the oppressive realities so forcefully conveyed in Wang Chao’s *Anyang Orphan*. Perhaps we need to speculate on such a paradox in the context of Confucianism, a Chinese ideology that stresses a strong bond between the individual, the family, and the state. As *The Great Learning* said: “When the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the state will be in order; when the state is in order, there will be peace throughout the world.”³⁸ In *Anyang Orphan*, however, the sacred tie between the three “entities” in the Confucian concept is broken down: the bankrupt state factory disposes of its loyal employee; the forlorn worker goes astray to befriend a prostitute; and the hapless prostitute strains herself to carry out filial duties. Moreover, in a “free” market economy, neither the personal life nor the family is regulated by any traditional value systems. The result is disorder, violence, and “the humiliated father,” to borrow Žižek’s psychoanalytical term.³⁹

At any rate, central to Wang Chao’s *Anyang Orphan* is this problematic “Confucian trinity” of the individual, the family, and the state. It is a revered ideological trinity, yet it is pulverized by crushing market forces. As we have witnessed in the film, the severed trinity has fatally affected all three protagonists’ lives. For Dagang, he is twice humiliated by the state: it first throws him out on the streets then puts him to death as a criminal (which he certainly is not). In Side’s case, even though the gangster profits from “market socialism,” he too is humiliated not only by his providential illness, but also by the country’s sex industry that he helps to build. (Remember what Yanli said to him: “The money I earned is to raise *your* bastard son!”) Both men’s masculinity is completely washed out as they all die toward the end of the film. The perdition of Dagang and Side thus signifies the traditional paternal authority usurped by a new source of power—ruthless

Chinese capitalism that seems to defy any human values. In this context, Yanli is probably the strongest character emerging from Wang Chao's film because she has survived under such harsh circumstances. That is to say, Yanli is still alive and even visionary, which is expressive of an enduring Chinese matriarchal power. But can the perky young woman succeed in finding a father for her child in a pathetically fatherless world?

The Imagery of Postsocialist Trauma in *Peacock*, *Shanghai Dreams*, and *Stolen Life*

In early 2005, three Chinese films received top prizes at various international film festivals: Gu Changwei's *Peacock*, Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams*, and LiShaohong's *Stolen Life*. All these award-winning films portray a family drama set in the early post-Mao era, or, as it were, at the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). A central character in the three movies is a young daughter who is alienated from her family, especially her working-class parents. The parents find it difficult to understand their children who have grown up under Deng Xiaoping's policy of "reform and openness," which has transformed a "puritan" Maoist socialist China into a country infested with all the malignant ills of new Chinese capitalism. In such a postsocialist family drama, the female protagonist is drawn into a traumatic conflict with her working-class father, who seems to embody a repressive old socialist regime in an economic and moral decline. In this chapter, I will analyze the three films in terms of what I would call "postsocialist trauma," a psychological and emotional trauma that a working-class Chinese family has to endure to survive new Chinese capitalism.

The story of *Peacock* is set in a small town in northern China in 1977, just one year after Mao's death. It is divided into three sections, each concerning one of the children of the Gao family: the daughter Weihong, the elder brother Weiguo, and the younger brother Weiqiang. The film's first section opens with a quiet scene of the Gao family eating a meal; the parents and three children sit around a tiny table in a long, open corridor shared with other families living in a storied apartment building. It is a moving scene of Chinese family union, which is repeated and "becomes one of the film's strongest images."¹ In a medium shot that follows, we see Weihong standing alone in the corridor playing an accordion song that sounds like a pop Soviet Russian song from the 1950s. Weihong works at a daycare center, but she is fired after she accidentally drops a baby. Weihong's parents pressure her to find another job, and she soon becomes a bottle washer in a local pharmaceutical plant.

Depressed by her new job and a dull life, Weihong seeks to escape from her home. A chance arises when a unit of paratroopers arrives in town looking for recruits. In this episode, Weihong is first seen lying on the rooftop of the storied building and dreaming. Then we hear the thunderous sound of a passing airplane and we find Weihong riding on a bicycle dashing into a vast open field, where the girl meets head-on with a group of female paratroopers that has just landed (in a reverse matching shot Weihong becomes one of those young women in uniform). A second later, Weihong confronts a handsome male officer whose white parachute had draped over her, which can be seen as a symbolic act of Weihong's submission to the officer's masculine charms—she falls in love with him all through the movie. In the film, however, this episode of love at first sight is staged like a divine call to Weihong from the heavens of Socialist Realism. Against a blue sky, a number of white parachutes unfold like a lotus flower, while young male and female paratroopers descend like those Soviet heroes from Socialist Realist painting widely available to the Chinese public in the 1950s. And the plane used in the movie can be identified as either a Russian-made An-2 Colt or its licensed Chinese version.² On the other hand, I think, this beautifully shot episode pays a belated homage to Soviet socialism that was wholeheartedly adopted by Mao in the early 1950s when Weihong's parents were born and grew up. Although Weihong is attracted to the young man in uniform, who seemingly comes from a "socialist" heaven, she fails to realize her dream with him. Like other girls in town, Weihong rushes to the office building with hope and anxiety to take a physical examination. Yet in this sequence, Weihong is shown entering the office in the reflection of a mirror hanging on the wall, where she stares at that officer who is also framed by this mirror shot. This device (which is repeated in a subsequent episode in the movie) clearly suggests that the man Weihong desires to see and love is nothing but an illusion, and so is the socialist ideal that the man seems to stand for. (Later on in this sequence, we see the male officer stand in front of the mirror in a narcissistic pose before taking off with his young, fresh-faced female recruits). Soon we learn that Weihong's application to join the paratroopers is turned down because of her poor physical condition. At home, Weihong refuses to eat, and her parents and two brothers stuff food into her mouth by force. This violent, traumatic scene forecasts what will happen to Weihong when she tries to break out of the "normal" familial and social life.

Weihong is found wandering on the rooftop again in the next scene, which is cut to a single shot of an An-2 Colt rumbling through a bright sky. Is this another divine call to the girl who seems to exist only in dreams? Anyhow, Weihong rushes back to her room and starts sewing a "parachute" in blue, which serves a central motif that embodies Weihong's romantic idealism. Enchanted by her own creation, Weihong rides a bicycle through a crowded street with the blue "parachute"

trailing behind like a peacock. This is an image of the idealistic protagonist that glows in ecstasy. Yet, as I have just noted, Weihong's deviant behavior only leads to another violent, traumatic confrontation with her family. As we cut to the inside of Gao's home, we hear Weihong screaming as her mother (who is a factory doctor) is forcibly giving her a tranquilizer injection with the help of her father and brothers. To me, this scene is representative of "postsocialist trauma" that many Chinese working-class families have gone through under Deng's economic reforms. It is commonly known that in this new era of Chinese capitalism there is no longer any job security for the working class, not to mention their children who have no education or professional skills as they grow up during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. For the Gao family, therefore, a most troubling problem is that of unemployment. Neither Weihong nor her elder brother Weiguo (who is mentally retarded) can have a steady job because of their abnormal or antisocial behavior. Weiguo is born with brain damage, while Weihong is also contracting a mental illness in the eyes of her father and mother. For them, their daughter's romantic idealism is an utter madness that must be contained by whatever means necessary.

But Weihong's "divine" madness seems to have no cure, so she continues to seek escape from the family or find comfort outside her home. One day she passes



Figure 18. *Peacock*. Dir. Gu Changwei. 2005.

by a local cultural center (*wenhuazhan*) and she hears someone playing an accordion inside the building. She walks into a lonely hall with a huge mirror covering the entire wall (a dance studio perhaps?). Again Weihong is shown in the mirrored shot, and so is an old man playing a Russian pop song that sounds familiar to her. The girl feels an attraction to the elderly musician and asks him to be her “godfather” (sheer madness indeed!). The old man looks as if he is afraid of her request, but he promises to teach her how to play the accordion. Another day Weihong returns to visit the man with faked wounds on her arms, telling him of a beating by her parents, trying to elicit sympathy from him. The two go to the movies with her younger brother Weiqiang (as a screen?). The last time we see Weihong and the old man together is yet again in a mirrored shot: the man is dancing a Korean dance while she is playing the accordion. A moment before, the man tells Weihong that he had served in a military art troupe during the “War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1950–1953).” This surely explains Weihong’s madness, as she is always attracted to men that personify a socialist ideal, including the paratroop officer she met early in the movie. A while later the scandal of this mismatched couple breaks out and Weihong is told by the old man’s children that he has committed suicide, and they thrash Weihong in front of her co-workers at the pharmaceutical plant. I would consider this tragic event in Weihong’s life a temptation of a bygone Maoist socialism; the old man was no doubt a member of the Communist Youth League in the early 1950s and had dedicated himself to a just cause of building a new China.

Soon after this incident Weihong declares to her family that she is going to marry Xiao Wang, a young man who is a driver for the director of the Bureau of Civil Affairs. By this marriage Weihong finally leaves her family, but her marriage is a loveless one that ends in divorce. The film’s second section begins with Weihong bidding farewell to her elder brother Weiguo, who then becomes a central character in the movie. In previous scenes of the family, Weiguo appears as an obese figure, like a mountain that overlooks others in the family. Since he is born with brain damage (according to his mother), Weiguo acts as if he were a five-year-old, never keeping a job for more than a week. At a flour mill he is bullied by his co-workers and left sleeping on the job all day long, while in a meal processing factory he leaves his post and locks the door to an ice house, where a co-worker is almost frozen to death. After Weiguo loses eight jobs, his parents give up on him. They want him to marry a woman who is willing to take care of their “idiot” (*shazi*) son. They succeed in arranging to have Jinzhi, a crippled girl from the country, become Weiguo’s wife. However, Weiguo’s idiocy turns out to be feigned. As the film narrative progresses, we learn that Weiguo is the smartest of all his siblings. The big man and his wife set up a food stand business on the street, and they work hard to make a fortune. This is perhaps the finest irony in the film

Peacock. Not long before, Weiguo was one of the most unfit under Mao's socialist system because he had squandered all the jobs the welfare state had offered to an "idiot." Now he has become a most successful businessman in a capitalist market economy. In that case, the abnormal expansiveness of the Weiguo character may symbolize new Chinese capitalism, which is proudly bloating.

The film's third section depicts the life of Weiqiang, the youngest in the Gao family, who turns out to be prematurely senile due to his personal weakness. Weiqiang cherishes no ideals in his heart as does Weihong; neither does he work to earn a good living like Weiguo. He runs away from home for years and returns with a wife and a son from her previous marriage, and the wife supports him and the young boy by performing at a karaoke bar. Weiqiang whiles away his time hanging around with the elderly, becoming a member of the community of "retirees" at a very young age. A mystery about the Weiqiang character is that he lost one of his fingers during his years of absence, and this wound is indeed that of "postsocialist trauma," which hurts people of both old and young generations. However, in this section of *Peacock*, we discover that this seemingly mindless and innocuous Weiqiang can be a murderous sibling. On a rainy day Weihong sends Weiguo to bring an umbrella to Weiqiang, who is at school. When Weiguo walks into Weiqiang's classroom and the students all laugh at him, a humiliated Weiqiang denies that Weiguo is his brother. Later, Weiguo is beaten up by a mob after he is caught staring at a young girl at the ladies' room at the school, and Weiqiang joins the mob to avenge his humiliation (a second time!). At home both Weihong and Weiqiang are punished for this by their parents and forced to kneel in the open corridor for several hours. Late at night Weiqiang puts poison into a glass of water on Weiguo's nightstand, but Weihong empties the glass. This attempted murder reveals Weiqiang as a troubled and traumatized young man who knows nothing about family ethics, social morals, or common human decency.

In fact, all three of the Gao children suffer from a similar mental disturbance and exhibit similar strange behavior. Weihong drops her pants while meeting a young man who asks a sexual favor in exchange for the blue "parachute" he had picked up in the street. Weiguo stands listening to the girl singing in the ladies' room until he is confronted by a girl who calls him "a rascal" (*liumang*). Weiqiang marries a much older woman and is happy with his choice because the woman can "raise" (*yang*) him as well as her own little boy (as said by the woman in the movie). In a word, Weihong, Weiguo, and Weiqiang are all emotional and sexual screwups who as adults cannot grasp reality. Toward the end of the film, Weihong is again forced to return to a harsh reality. While shopping for fresh vegetables with Weiqiang on a bustling street, Weihong catches a glimpse of a man she recognizes as the paratroop officer she fell in love with at the start of the film. But the man is now in civilian clothes—apparently discharged from the air force long ago.

This once handsome young officer is now a tired and haggard husband with a wife and kid. Without a moment of hesitation Weihong runs to tell him, "I just told my brother that you are the man who would love me forever." Yet the man responds to Weihong's tender words by simply asking, "May I know your name?" Stunned, Weihong returns to her brother and continues to shop. In the next scene, Weihong is picking tomatoes in a marketplace when she suddenly bursts into tears. After all these years Weihong has not changed her mind about the officer who, like the old cultural worker, brought her the only joy in life. Yet, as we have seen in the movie, Weihong's relationships with both the officer and the old man are portrayed as mirrored events, so that her happiness is a self-imposed, sweet illusion. The old cultural worker has taken his own life, while the former officer is struggling in a free-market economy, where he seems a most unfit outsider. When Weihong was approaching him, the man leaned against his bicycle swallowing up a steamed stuffed bun, with his son hanging on the bike. Soon he was joined by his grim-faced wife, who held a rice pot in her hand. At this very moment Weihong was left alone with all her ideals betrayed.

Nonetheless, *Peacock* concludes on a merry note. On a cold winter day the families of Weihong (she married a man of an ethnic minority from Yunan who wears a turban, and they have a daughter), Weigu, and Weiqiang visit a local zoo. Through a fence they look at two peacocks and wait to see if they will fan out their colorful tails. After a few moments nothing happens, so Weigu's wife suggests to him, "We may *buy* two peacocks for our home." Weigu answers, "We can *build* a zoo so we can see them whenever we want." This is a statement by a triumphant Chinese capitalist who is eager to purchase almost everything, including fleeting natural beauty. But the two peacocks do not fan out their tails until the Gao families all vanish from the scene. So this final display of natural beauty leaves the audience with an unanswered question: Is a beautiful dream such as Weihong's sustainable in this fast-changing world?

Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams* addresses this same question, although the consequences of a shattered dream in his film seem more fatal than in *Peacock*. Similar to Gu Changwei's film, *Shanghai Dreams* depicts the two generations of a working-class family that suffer for their impossible dreams. A central character in Wang Xiaoshuai's movie is yet again a young daughter called Qinghong, who is in constant conflict with her father, Lao Wu. In *Peacock*, Weihong is a strong-willed young woman who pursues her ideals relentlessly, while in *Shanghai Dreams*, Qinghong appears as a reticent and passive feminine type that submits to a patriarchal authority. If the father in *Peacock* is a colorless character who is almost unaccounted for in family affairs, Lao Wu turns out to be an abusive patriarch who rules his family as a tyrant.

Yet Lao Wu himself is a wretched man that belongs with China's socialist past. He is one of the "Third Line Builders" (*sanxian zhigong*) who were sent from Shanghai to Guizhou, a remote province in southwest China, in the mid-1960s. At that time, this displacement of countless urban families like Lao Wu's resulted from Mao's national policy of a "Third Front," which is defined as:

Strategic redistribution of resources for a self-reliant interior economy between 1964 and 1971 with the aim of creating a self-sufficient industrial complex to act as a strategic reserve if China were to find itself at war. As an operation with a military purpose, it remained secret for years. It was closely associated with Lin Biao who...feared that Guomindang forces on Taiwan might take advantage of the post-Great Leap Forward crisis to launch an attack on mainland cities, and suggested that such an attack could not be successfully resisted especially if such an attack were backed by American naval power. An attack on Shanghai should therefore be met by withdrawal and resistance at a "second front" around Suzhou; if necessary withdrawal to a "third front" in the Huang Shan region of Anhui would take place, and protracted war begin. The Third Front may have had a profound effect on China's economic modernization. It was an extremely expensive programme carried out for strategic rather than economic considerations. From the point-of-view of the post-1979 reform programme, it has left many enterprises non-viable and uneconomic to convert into private businesses.³

Against this historical background, the Lao Wu character is but one of millions of unwilling victims of post-Mao China's political change. That is, Deng Xiaoping's postsocialist state has begun to rescind many policies adopted by Mao and other leaders, including Lin Biao, who had betrayed Mao. But in the early 1980s, when the story of *Shanghai Dreams* is set, the state's new policy of reforms and openness did not seem to reach as far as a small town in Guizhou, one of the poorest regions in the country, where Lao Wu's factory and his family were located. Frequently brushed off by a party secretary at his factory, Lao Wu relies on the Voice of America for information on China's economic reforms or "change" (*bian*), the vital information denied to him by his superior. At a secret meeting held at Lao Wu's home, he and his blue-collar colleagues intently listen to the American broadcast station, which is ironically a crime of "listening to enemy broadcasting on the sly" (*touting ditai*) under Mao's socialist laws. Then they discuss issues such as "piecework wage" (*jijian gonzi*) and an outdated "registered residence" system initiated by the reform programs, both of which are essential to their dreams of a salary increase and a good life back in Shanghai. Apparently, Lao Wu and

his co-workers are skilled, top-grade workers in the country's eight-grade wage system (*baji gongzizhi*).⁴ Before, they had devoted their youthful years to a failed socialist cause—the uneconomic “Third Front”—and they now feel strongly that they deserve to return to a decent “middle-class” life in their hometown of Shanghai,⁵ a modern city by any standard, be it Mao's socialism or new Chinese capitalism. As we soon learn from the film, Lao Wu's appeal to “transfer” (*diaodong*) to Shanghai is rejected outright by the factory authority that is concerned with the same request by other workers. So Lao Wu turns into a petulant tyrant at home—he vents his bitter anger toward the entire family, especially Qinghong and her mother, whom Lao Wu blames for the family's displacement in the first place.

For Lao Wu, however, the most frightful obstacle to his plan to return to Shanghai is not posed by the factory authority but by his daughter Qinghong, who is in love with Xiaogen, a nineteen-year-old apprentice in his factory and a native of a small town in Guizhou. In Xiaogen's eyes, the beautiful Qinghong is his best dream of love, and he waits at an observatory every day to see the girl pass by on her way back home from a vocational school she is attending. One day Qinghong finds a pair of high heels in her classroom desk that Xiaogen has bought for her. After school she happily tries on the shoes, with her girlfriend Xiaozhen cheering her on. Yet the two girls soon realize that Lao Wu stands on a hill nearby watching them. After Xiaozhen disappears from the scene, Lao Wu follows Qinghong, walking downhill like a leering stalker. This “stalking” sequence continues for a few minutes and clearly defines Qinghong as prey to what I would call the *obscene power* of the father. Back home, Lao Wu asks Qinghong to take off the shoes, then throws them out the window.

All through the film, Qinghong appears to be a prisoner in her own home, for she is repeatedly shot through a narrow doorway or a window frame. When the girl is not being scolded by her father, she is always seen washing clothes or cooking meals, as does her mother, who is too often shouted at by her husband (later in the movie she demands a divorce). In this loveless family, the only affectionate moment comes when Qinghong's little brother is learning to play the accordion from a neighbor, and his father Lao Wu holds up sheet music for the boy and his teacher.

Like Weihong in *Peacock*, Qinghong seeks escape from her family, and she finds a comforting refuge at Xiaozhen's home. In the movie, the Xiaozhen character functions as a psychological and emotional double for Qinghong, doing everything Qinghong desires to do but cannot under the tyranny of Lao Wu. It is Xiaozhen who complains to others that “her friend's dad follows her as if she were a prisoner.” On several occasions Xiaozhen offers her home to Qinghong when the latter is so distressed by her oppressive father. Both girls attend the same vocational school and they share all the secrets in their personal lives. As Qinghong is in love

with Xiaogen, Xiaozhen falls for Lü Jun, a young man she met at an “underground dancing party” (*dixia wuhui*). Lü Jun is a leader of a local street gang and his parents have forced him to marry a farm girl whom he had impregnated. However, at the dance party Xiaozhen is immediately drawn to Lü Jun, who gives a brilliant disco performance that fascinates the girls in the room. All through the party, strangely, young men danced by themselves while girls were standing against the wall watching. In this homoerotic dancing episode, Qinghong also stands among other girls without participating. Suddenly the light goes off and there is a moment of chaos in the room, caused by Lü Jun’s rival gang from the street. By the light of a flashlight, Qinghong glimpses her friend Xiaozhen being kissed by Lü Jun. In the next shot we find Qinghong alone in the room, seemingly shocked by what she has just seen. It would seem that Qinghong’s love for Xiaogen is “platonic”; there is no intimate physical contact between the girl and the boy like there is between Xiaozhen and Lü Jun.

As noted, Xiaozhen is Qinghong’s double who does what the latter is incapable of doing. In the film, Xiaozhen often rides with Lü Jun on his bicycle through a crowded street under the admiring gaze of strangers. The couple truly enjoys their sexual freedom, and later in the film Xiaozhen proudly hints to Qinghong that she is pregnant. By contrast, Qinghong is seldom seen together with Xiaogen (there are a couple of encounters between the two that take up very little screen time), and the boy is time and again left alone waiting at the observatory. In a sense, Xiaozhen’s love affair parallels that of Qinghong, but her romance is real and sensual. Determined to fulfill her dream despite the pressure from her parents and society as well, Xiaozhen elopes with Lü Jun, although she returns home in the end. While Qinghong’s love seems romantic, her romance is doomed by the austere aloofness that has defined her relationship with Xiaogen, who wrote her many love letters that ended up in Lao Wu’s hands. One evening Lao Wu is busy holding a meeting with his colleagues at his home, at which he finally decides to leave for Shanghai without obtaining any “approval” from the factory. Qinghong has a chance to meet with Xiaogen in secret for the last time, and she tells him that their relationship is impossible because her family is going back to Shanghai. In despair Xiaogen forces himself on Qinghong, an act of consummating their love, which had been denied to him for so long.

Earlier that day, Xiaogen stalks Qinghong in the hilly area where Lao Wu had followed his daughter at the start of the film. In this scene Xiaogen is shot as a doppelganger of Lao Wu. Before the rape incident, the two men met once in a public bath at the factory, where Lao Wu told Xiaogen to lay off his daughter. In this respect, Xiaogen is a rival to Lao Wu, who is in possession of Qinghong. On the other hand, Qinghong is subject to an abusive patriarchy represented by both men. Unlike Xiaozhen, Qinghong has no willpower to fight for her own

happiness, not to mention ill treatment by that patriarchal power. After the rape she returns home weeping, and the whole family is in shock. A few days later Xiaogen is arrested by the police on a charge of raping Qinghong, who attempts suicide by slitting her wrist. Although Qinghong's life is saved in a hospital, the girl becomes mentally ill afterwards, a fact that prevents her mother from divorcing her father. Toward the end of *Shanghai Dreams*, Lao Wu, the raucous and obstinate patriarch that tyrannizes his family early in the film, seems a changed man who remains quiet all through the final sequence. One cold day at dawn, Lao Wu manages to arrange for his family to escape from the dismal town in the "Third Front." Inside the back of a jeep the entire family sits wordless in the dark, and the camera shows each character's vacant face—a claustrophobic shot that foresees impending doom. As the car passes through the town, we suddenly hear, over loudspeakers coming from outside, a list of names of murderers and rapists who have been sentenced to death, which includes Xiaogen. Again the camera quickly surveys each character's face. Lao Wu and his wife appear gravely affected, while the message is incomprehensible to Qinghong, who is still very ill and gives no response. In the last long shot, we cast a glance at the jeep vanishing into a vast mountainous area in the distance, and at the same time we hear three gunshots that close the film. Even though we have no way of knowing how Lao Wu and his family react this time, we may speculate that the grim death of Xiaogen will overshadow the family to the very end.

In *Stolen Life*, by the female director Li Shaohong, the theme of "postsocialist trauma" is tackled as a consequence of another failed socialist cause, Mao's policy of sending urban "educated youth" (*zhiqing*) to "the countryside to be reeducated by the poor and lower-middle peasants."⁶ Similar to Mao's "Third Front," this policy displaced millions of young Chinese, who were "deprived of the possibilities of higher education or urban employment, and subjected to the unanticipated hardship and poverty of rural life." They "eventually came to view themselves as the 'lost generation.'"⁷ This "reality of hard rural life and the experience at first hand of oppressive and ignorant cadres led to disillusion with the Party and often with Mao himself."⁸ Li Shaohong's film is centered on a young daughter called Yanni, whose mother is one of those "17,000,000 urban youth" who, "willing or not, were sent to live in the villages" during the years 1967 to 1976.⁹ *Stolen Life* opens with an unsettling scene of mass social displacement. On a cramped train, the six-year-old Yanni is being shoved by her aunt through a noisy crowd of "educated youth," including Yanni's own mother, who are returning to the country after a short family leave in Beijing. The little Yanni was born in a village where her mother worked. The mother was impregnated by a local farmer, who took care of her in that "unanticipated" hard rural life and later married her as soon as the unwanted pregnancy became known to the whole village. But Yanni was sent back to Beijing after her

birth and left “to the begrudging care of her spiteful aunt and grandmother.”¹⁰ In this opening scene, Yanni is taken to the train station to say good-bye to her mother, whom she had not seen since her birth. However, facing this “woman of sweaty hands and oily face” (in Yanni’s voiceover narrative), the girl refuses to call her “mother” as requested by her aunt, and afterwards Yanni is punished by her aunt at home for that blunt denial. This disconcerting train station scene sets a clear tone of neglect and rejection that traumatizes both daughter and mother in Li Shaohong’s urban family drama.

When Yanni turns fourteen, there is a family get-together about the girl’s future. First we see Yanni washing clothes in her aunt’s courtyard house in Beijing. In the following scene, shot from Yanni’s viewpoint, her “educated youth” mother and peasant father emerge from the dim doorway of the courtyard with their hands full of bags. The mother looks a bit older than before, while the father, whom Yanni has never met, turns out to be a quiet schoolteacher from the village. Yanni greets her parents in a sullen silence, which causes her aunt to call her “a dead fish that can’t open its mouth!” Then, inside the house, the entire family sits at a table eating the evening meal, with Yanni wearing a black knit wool hat, which again irritates her aunt. (This black hat is later used by Yanni to identify herself with Muyu, the male protagonist who wears the same hat and ruins Yanni’s life in the end.) At dinner the mother suggests that Yanni had better attend a vocational school so she can get a job and be married soon. But her schoolteacher father insists that Yanni should go to college, which becomes a final decision for Yanni, as we see Yanni’s parents leave a considerable amount of money to the aunt and grandmother, who will continue to look after Yanni until she graduates from college.

During this family meeting, however, Yanni remains coldly hostile to both of her parents, even though a future planned by the father is in her best interest. In this respect, Yanni is indeed a self-made orphan of Mao’s socialism who chooses to defy any paternal authority.

Yanni’s defiance may result from many years of parental neglect and abandonment, yet by the same token, her “wounded” psyche makes her vulnerable to an excess of attention from an outside world about which she knows almost nothing. The first day Yanni breaks free from her old, repressive home is a sunny early autumn day when she comes to a university that has admitted her. But this brightest day in Yanni’s life is also the blackest because she attracts the attention of Muyu, a delivery truck driver Yanni meets by chance on the campus. Yanni is attracted to Muyu at once, for this tall and handsome young man wears the *same* black knit wool hat as she. Thus, strangely, this black hat becomes an ominous sign that cements a fatal link between the two persons. Muyu voluntarily carries Yanni’s luggage to her dormitory and helps her to settle down in a room shared

with other students. In this dormitory scene Muyu acts as if he were a parent or a boyfriend of Yanni, and he showers the girl with the attention she never receives from her family. For a few days after this first encounter, Muyu comes to Yanni's place and brings her food, books, and even cosmetics. One day Muyu gives Yanni a pink bicycle as a birthday present (Yanni is surprised by this gift but Muyu tells her that he got the "information" of the day of her birth from her university registration card) and takes her to see a movie at a drive-in theater, where Muyu kisses the girl in his delivery van. "Yanni, absolutely starved for attention, falls for him in an instant."¹¹ Muyu is a Freudian displacement for Yanni, who fears and defies her parents. As we read in *Encarta Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, "displacement" is a psychological term denoting "the transfer of emotion from the original focus to another less threatening person or object, or the substitution of one response or piece of behavior for another."¹² Jeremy Hawthorn also points out that "Freud sees displacement as a means whereby censorship is outmanoeuvred; if a person cannot consciously admit his or her hatred of another as a result of the operation of the censor, this hatred may be transferred to something associated with the person in question, *displaced* from one object protected by the censor to another one about which the censor is unconcerned."¹³ In Yanni's case, the "censor" is the officious aunt who constantly reproaches the girl for her rejection of the family, while Muyu is somehow unknown to the aunt. Ironically, Yanni's utter refutation of a parental authority is transferred into an abject submission to a man she hardly knows. This "displaced" emotion only leads to Yanni's ultimate spiral into the nightmarish underworld in which Muyu operates. The first warning sign comes when Muyu suddenly disappears from Yanni's life for a week. Passing by a shabby courtyard house, Yanni finds the pink bicycle, which she had asked Muyu to ride back home late one night. Here she discovers that Muyu is in fact living with another woman with a young baby. Shocked by Muyu's double life in this home, Yanni runs out of the courtyard but is followed by the woman, who angrily believes Yanni to be "another woman."

This sequence is staged like a banal, boisterous farce of a "love triangle," with a close-up of the woman chopping the pink bicycle (which in her eyes represents Yanni herself) with a kitchen knife. However, it is Yanni who is misled by Muyu to believe she is his true love. As Muyu explains to Yanni afterwards, he met the woman in a hotel, where he made deliveries and she worked as a *zuotai xiaojie* (a "desk miss," i.e., a prostitute who serves clients staying at a hotel). They had a baby because she wanted to marry. When she returned to her hometown in Sichuan for several months, he got acquainted with Yanni. Muyu then complains that the woman came back with her baby so he must take care of both mother and child. Soon the two are split and the baby is "adopted" by a barren couple. Before the eyes

of Yanni, Muyu is actually laying open a possible future for Yanni, who is unaware of it at all. This is because Muyu has concealed the crucial information regarding the adoption—the baby was *sold* to the couple, and Yanni learns about this “profit-building” adoption much later when she finds Muyu’s “receipts” for the adoptions. In this respect, we may compare the Muyu character to that of Lenox Sanderson (Lowell Sherman) from D. W. Griffith’s *Way Down East* (1920), a wealthy playboy who sexually explores young women for carnal pleasure. The female protagonist, Anna (Lillian Gish), is duped into a sham marriage by Sanderson, whose “three specialties” in life are “Ladies, Ladies, and Ladies!” as a title indicates. Sanderson dumps Anna after she is pregnant with his child, who dies soon after birth. In Griffith’s film, Anna condemns Sanderson for his cruel deception, but the playboy smiles and says to her, “Man can sow his wild oats.” In Li Shaohong’s *Stolen Life*, Muyu is a man “sowing his wild oats,” just as Sanderson, but while Sanderson expects no financial returns from his sexual explorations, Muyu actually makes a living from his many mock marriages with young women who are desperate for love and family. In *Stolen Life*, Muyu has tricked at least three young women into his “baby-producing” business disguised as marriage: the “desk miss,” Yanni, and Fanfang (a girl who tells Yanni that Muyu is her *laogong*¹⁴). In *Way Down East*, Sanderson gives Anna a ring as a sacred “proof” of their marriage. In *Stolen Life*, Yanni lives with Muyu in a squalid basement apartment of a high-rise building, and she is soon pregnant. She first decides to continue her college education by having an abortion (Li’s film is set in the 1990s, when Chinese universities would expel female students who were pregnant). But Muyu presents her with a ring that he says will bid a farewell to their unborn “first child.” Deeply moved by this “proof” of Muyu’s love, Yanni drops out of college and gives birth to a baby boy, whom Muyu sells to a couple along with “legal documents” such as a birth certificate and health examination. However, this time it is Yanni’s mother who pays Muyu to give away the child. The mother learns about Yanni’s “new life” with Muyu from the aunt, who, after a long time out of touch, spots Yanni on a dim street under a highway bridge in the city, selling “fried river snails” at a stall. Muyu had lost his job as a delivery truck driver several months before, and he cannot find a new job. So Muyu “borrows” money from Fangfang to open a street food-peddler business. While meeting in the sordid basement apartment, the mother tells Yanni she should not repeat the mistake she had made with the farmer years ago. Here we discern a kind of “recycling” of a postsocialist trauma that inflicts both mother and daughter. As a victim of Mao’s disastrous socialist cause in the early 1970s, the mother married the farmer after her pregnancy, yet she sticks with the man in the countryside and does not return to Beijing.¹⁵ Ironically, Yanni’s “husband” Muyu also comes from the country; he tells Yanni that he is an orphan and he doesn’t remember what his

mother looks like and recalls nothing about his father. Muyu appears to be a “bastard son” of an unwed couple, born during the chaotic years after Mao’s death when the Party-state was losing control of people’s private lives.¹⁶

With this shabby background, Muyu can be identified as one of those millions of peasant migrant workers or “floaters” in Beijing who “holed up in hidden back streets, in tunnels, under trucks and buses in parking lots, in the waiting areas of railway stations, and under bridges.”¹⁷ As we have seen in the film, Yanni is found by her aunt selling a local delicacy in the dark “back street” under a highway bridge, a location most familiar to a “floater” like Muyu. After quitting school she moves in with Muyu in “a rented room deep in the basement of an anonymous building where seemingly hundreds of migrant workers live in an endless maze of hallways and alcoves complete with shops, restaurants, and barber shops. This is an entire underground society, both literally and figuratively.”¹⁸ In this underworld of the city, migrant workers “were freed, if to a limited but growing extent, by congregating altogether outside the pale of the state’s organization of administration and often beyond its watch.”¹⁹ However, this underground society is not “free” from crime and suspicion, as migrant workers “are also regarded by city dwellers as prime suspect of theft and other urban crimes, which may be true of a minority who fail to find work and who are tempted by the affluent sights of the city.”²⁰ Muyu is no doubt a member of such a “minority” of migrant workers who commit crime in defiance of the state law. When Yanni accuses Muyu of his horrendous crime by saying, “I’ll go to the law!” Muyu replies, “You are joking!” He tells Yanni that all his “marriages” with women are his “*touzi*” (investments) by which he must profit. In this way, Muyu behaves like a venture capitalist who disregards any law that forbids his money making. At the close of the movie, Yanni passes by the “anonymous building” and sees a pregnant Fangfang emerging from the doorway of the basement. In this scene we feel that this young woman is just another human “investment” of Muyu who is at the gate of hell. Like Sanderson in *Way Down East*, Muyu in *Stolen Life* is home free at last, for there is no indication anywhere in the film that he is ever punished. All his female victims, however, are left deep in the mire of losing their children to strangers for Muyu’s benefit. Is this a triumph of venture capitalism or a degeneration of humanity?

In fact, both Yanni and Muyu are traumatized children of inadequate family upbringings, a result of Mao’s socialist legacy. Yanni simply denies her parents’ existence, a denial which, in Freudian terms, “is a defense against external realities that threaten the ego.”²¹ Yet Yanni repeats her mother’s mistake by “marrying” Muyu, a peasant but very different from Yanni’s farmer father. Muyu doesn’t mind if he ever has had a parent, but he is eager to cope with the threatening external realities of a ruthless market economy. Since the law does not seem to apply to the underworld of migrant workers in the big city, Muyu takes advantage of this

sanctioned lawlessness and succeeds in stealing lives from others as a satanic capitalist. Yanni is lured by Muyu into the underground society of potential criminals, and she almost becomes one of them. To avenge her lost baby, Yanni purchases a pair of kitchen knives to kill Muyu and then take her own life. But she drops the knives at the last minute and we hear her narrative voiceover: "He cannot take my life! He is not worth it!" Yanni's decision is a triumph of a common humanity that finally sets her free from Muyu's shadow and its dark future.

Undoubtedly, all the young protagonists in *Peacock*, *Shanghai Dreams*, and *Stolen Life* belong to that same "fatherless generation" of post-Mao China, as I have suggested in previous chapters. But the "forsaken children" of Mao's socialism in the work of Gu Changwei, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Li Shaohong seem to have gone through a more severe and almost irredeemable emotional and psychological trauma. In any event, this "postsocialist trauma" has greatly affected contemporary Chinese filmmaking (and avant-garde art, as I will discuss in the postlude). Hal Foster has called such representation "trauma discourse," and he explains: "Across artistic, theoretical, and popular culture, there is a tendency to redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma."²² Foster further elaborates: "From a conventionalist regime where nothing is real and the subject is superficial, much contemporary art presents reality in the form of trauma and the subject in the social depth of its own identity."²³ So, in analyzing the images of "Death in America" created by Andy Warhol, Foster conveys his notion of traumatic realism,²⁴ which, I believe, can be usefully applied to the films of the three Chinese filmmakers examined in this chapter.

PART 3

**In Quest of Meaning
in a Spiritual Void**

Film and Video

Jia Zhangke's Cinematic Trilogy

A Journey across the Ruins of Post-Mao China

By 2000 Jia Zhangke had created three major films of the new Chinese Sixth Generation, including *Xiao Shan Going Home* (1995), *Xiao Wu* (1997), and *Platform* (2000).¹ In these three works, Jia Zhangke conscientiously explores one man's journey across a ruinous post-Mao China.² The first shot of *Xiao Shan Going Home* is, strangely, a wood block print that depicts a young man facing Mao's portrait on Tiananmen (the Gate of Heavenly Peace). And in this print the late chairman appears like a ghostly father figure to the bewildered youth. As Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping himself observed, "It isn't only his [Mao's] portrait which remains in Tiananmen Square, it is the memory of a man who guided us to victory and built a country."³ In an introductory sequence of *Xiao Wu*, however, the itinerant protagonist's theft on a bus is intercut with Mao's portrait hanging at the driver's seat. Here the irony is quite clear: without Mao's guidance the country has turned pathetically "lawless," especially for the lost young generation that concerns the Sixth Generation directors. In a similar fashion, *Platform* begins with a stage performance titled *A Train Traveling toward Shaoshan*, meaning a pilgrimage to Mao's birthplace, deemed sacred in the Chinese Revolution. Hence, the opening of Jia's trilogy symbolically initiates a long and tedious journey, only to be accomplished by a male protagonist under the shadow of Mao/Holy Ghost, in postmodern terms.

The male protagonist/traveler in each film is played by Wang Hongwei, a talented non-professional actor and a new icon of contemporary Chinese cinema. Wang's physical features are typical of a classic Hollywood "anti-hero": he is a small, lanky young man wearing hilariously huge bifocals. In Jia's directing style, Wang Hongwei's imagery is persistently used to represent a prodigal son who would challenge the Father (be it natural or symbolic) in whatever unlawful manner. This one man's journey starts from the capital city of Beijing in *Xiao Shan Going Home*, continues in a small town called Fenyang in *Xiao Wu*,⁴ and finishes in

an unknown barren land in *Platform*. Therefore, I will examine this journey taken by the Wang Hongwei character according to the spatial and temporal order found in Jia Zhangke's cinematic trilogy.

Xiao Shan Going Home: "Who Is Not Afraid of the Big Boss?"

In Jia Zhangke's debut work,⁵ the protagonist Xiao Shan is a young man from the countryside, lured to Beijing to seek a better life. In the official Chinese vocabulary, such a character is called *mingong*, meaning "a laborer working on a public project"⁶ who belongs with "the 'floating population' (*yumin*) of migrant laborers who travel to and from the cities in search of such temporary work as they can find."⁷ The film's story line is set in Beijing during the eve of the Chinese New Year of 1994, and the entire film is shot with a hand-held camera on real locations in the capital city, including famous streets, marketplaces, subways, university buildings, and slum areas. Moreover, all the characters are played by non-professional actors who speak with a provincial dialect, and the film has a gritty, semidocumentary flavor.

As the film opens with Mao's spectral portrait in Tiananmen Square, we simultaneously hear the rough voice of an invisible woman: "Who is not afraid of the big boss" (*dalaoban*)? The symbolism of the imagery combined with the sound is obvious: in a Chinese mind, the late chairman was the "big boss" that nobody dared to challenge while he was alive. But now that the chairman is dead, a reasonable question should be raised: in post-Mao China, who is the new "big boss" everyone fears? In *Xiao Shan Going Home*, as it turns out, the enormous vacuum the deceased "big boss" left behind is to be filled not by any superman, but by the driving force of a capitalist market economy.

In the first scene, we see a slim and pale Xiao Shan in a cook's white uniform cutting vegetables in a grimy restaurant kitchen. This country boy wears his hair long, as is popular in big cities, although he is one of the migrant laborers despised by local residents for their rustic, "uncivilized" manners. Naturally, Wang Hongwei has the look of an "anti-hero," and there is an eerily comic-tragic quality to his facial expression and posture. With such a feeble and uninviting physique, Wang presents a striking contrast to the "revolutionary hero" expressive of male chauvinism and patriarchal authority in Chinese cinema of the Mao era. In this sense, Wang characterizes a "flawed" masculinity felt in Chinese films of the post-Mao reform era, as I will further demonstrate below.

At that moment, Xiao Shan is angry at his "big boss," who did not give his employees a day off for the coming Chinese New Year. Sensing Xiao Shan's discontent, the "big boss" fires him on the spot. This episode seems to answer the

question of whom to fear in the post-Mao era; the new “big boss” is a capitalist market system that disgraces almost everyone in the film. Now a “free” man, Xiao Shan telephones Wang Xia, a girl from his village, asking her to go home with him for the New Year celebration. When they meet on a bustling street called Che-gongzhuang, northwest of the capital city, Xiao Shan hurries off without a word, leaving a fashionably dressed Wang Xia behind. A second later, we learn that the girl is a prostitute, whose customers summon her by the pager she carries, which irritates Xiao Shan to no end. When Wang Xia is too “busy” to spend the holidays with Xiao Shan, the angry young man blames the girl for her cheap occupation. Wang Xia hits back at her male accuser in shocking language: “I sell cunt, what do you [men] sell?” (Wang Xia’s line is subtitled in Chinese as if being used in a silent movie). And she continues: “If I were you [men], I would steal and rob. My mother is sick in bed, and crying out in pain. Don’t you think I’m willing to do this? Who among you [men] takes care of me?” Contrary to expectation, Xiao Shan is silent.

Both Xiao Shan and Wang Xia are migrant laborers in Beijing, bound to their own village communities that are generally isolated from the local urban populace.⁸ Within this “rural” community in the big city, men still traditionally care for and exercise power over their womenfolk. Because Xiao Shan himself hardly survives the new capitalist market system, his male authority is undermined before his women. When Xiao Shan imposes his will on an “easy” woman of his kinship, he is crushed badly because he is unable to protect her as required by old agrarian communal “laws.” As a result, Xiao Shan no longer has influence over Wang Xia’s personal behavior or life.

To make up for Wang Xia’s grief, Xiao Shan accompanies the girl on a holiday shopping excursion to Xidan, a commercial district in western downtown Beijing. Soon after, we follow them through a gaudy and boisterous marketplace set in Yuetan (Moon altar), a scenic public park not far from Xidan. This lengthy “shopping” episode is shot with a hand-held camera that allows us to see the driving force of the capitalist market economy in mid-1990s China. Time and again, Wang Xia stops to examine some beautiful clothes at a vendor’s stand, but she leaves disappointed after learning the price.⁹

At the end of their shopping trip, Wang Xia and Xiao Shan rest against a peddler’s stall full of “luxury” woman’s fur coats that the call girl craves but cannot afford. Disenchanted, she asks Xiao Shan to tell her family that she won’t be back home for the holidays because she is busy as a “housemaid” in Beijing. At this moment Wang Xia’s pager rings again—another customer phones her for service. Thus, in this *mise-en-scène* of a cheerless farewell, the two migrant laborers are helplessly locked in the ruthless free-market system. Wang Xia then vanishes into a dark back alley nearby, which quickly empties. If frantic marketplace activity

adds “liveliness” to Beijing, the bare alley compels us to feel a void in the capitalistic “prosperity” experienced in Chinese cities during the mid-1990s.

Xiao Shan takes the subway back to his place in the city, and we follow him alone on a long excursion into Beijing’s underground. Once more, we stumble across one vendor’s stall after another, strewn around in the dim subway station. Everywhere in the city, above and below, we hear that frenzied market noise, only this time no subway rider bothers to pause and look at any merchandise. The same gloomy void, it seems, falls upon those tired urban dwellers. A medium shot of a sad-faced Xiao Shan holding his Xidan shopping bag on the train sarcastically hints at his irrelevance to the city’s prosperity. In the scene that follows, we see Xiao Shan back home, and his irrelevance is more evident—he lives in a slum of the thriving capital. In my view, such a slum represents a ruined past socialism, especially in Beijing.¹⁰ And people mostly associated with this past and bankrupt socialism are “the victims, not the beneficiaries, of China’s state-sponsored capitalism.”¹¹ Thus, Xiao Shan’s and Wang Xia’s previous shopping trip paid tribute to “state-sponsored capitalism,” whereas the young man’s lonely journey home expresses an elegy to the past socialism, whose “residual” young citizens, such as Xiao Shan and Wang Xia, hardly survive the new “big boss” of Chinese capitalism.

Xiao Shan makes a second cross-town trip, this time to the Beijing University of Telecommunications, where he visits his fellow villager Wang Dongfang, a student at the school. In a shadowy university dormitory, Xiao Shan asks Wang to pick some college textbooks for his relatives back home, and Wang promises to meet him in a bookstore at Qianmen the next day.

Back in his slum, Xiao Shan celebrates the New Year by drinking with several fellow villagers, who talk dirty about Wang Yinhua, a village girl working for the same “big boss” as Xiao Shan in the shady restaurant in Beijing. The following morning, Wang Yinhua shows up at Xiao Shan’s place, but she refuses to go home with him because she wants to enjoy the New Year in the capital. Rejected a second time by a woman from his village, Xiao Shan angrily makes love to the girl in bed without her consent. Afterward, they ride together on a bicycle and pass by Deshengmen (Gate of Victorious Virtue), the most beautiful ancient city gate to have survived both socialist and global capitalist destruction in the past decades. On the street, Xiao Shan eats his breakfast alone at a tiny open-air restaurant, leaving Wang Yinhua aside. This peculiar scene, however, corresponds to Xiao Shan’s compulsory sex with Wang early on. In a sense, Xiao Shan’s coarse treatment of Wang is the vengeance of a poor loser. Because the rustic youth cannot fight against the big boss running the capitalist market economy, he picks on Wang Yinhua, who is still working for the most hated big boss. By abusing the women from his village, such as an innocent Wang Yinhua, Xiao Shan believes he

is exercising his male power that has been crushed by Chinese capitalism in a big city. Here Xiao Shan's rationale is certainly pitiful and preposterous, but it is also customary within a rural communal system.

Xiao Shan next makes a cross-town trip to Beijing's Nanzhan, or South Railroad Station. During the Chinese New Year, the train ticket is a hot commodity in the black market outside the station, especially for migrant laborers. After a year's toil in the city, they are eager to go home, and they spend their hard-earned money on the expensive tickets. Xiao Shan finds Qing Hua, a fellow villager specializing in this underground business. Qing Hua introduces Xiao Shan to his women at the black market, for deals often take place inside the ladies' rooms of the station. But the ladies have nothing available at the moment, so Qing Hua invites Xiao Shan to lunch in a restaurant, adding that "there are two gangs," a hint at the fierceness of the black market. Suddenly a tall young man enters the restaurant, glances at Qing Hua, and immediately leaves. Qing Hua then urges Xiao Shan not to go home this year. Xiao Shan answers: "I have to go home for the New Year," which unfortunately is a belief that none of his fellow villagers—men and women alike—have so far shared. When Qing Hua goes out to buy some gifts for Xiao Shan to take home, he is harshly beaten on the street in a show of force by Qing Hua's rival gang in the trade, including the tall young man who spotted him at the restaurant. This street violence brings an end to Xiao Shan's mission to acquire a train ticket. These events all but shatter his dream of "going home for the New Year" (*huijia guonian*)—a sacred ritual for "the floating population" in Chinese big cities.

Despite these events, Xiao Shan is an unyielding believer in this ritual. He completes his last cross-town trip to Qianmen, where he has made plans to meet Wang Dongfang in a bookstore. But the university student has forgotten about the appointment and gone to Tianjin for the holidays. In a close-up, we see Xiao Shan standing in a phone booth on a swarming street of Qianmen, lonely and disheartened. In the movie, every one of Xiao Shan's trips across Beijing to seek company or help winds up in vain. Nobody from his village community in the city is able to observe the hallowed Chinese New Year ritual any longer. In the Deng era of Chinese capitalism, "who is not afraid of the big boss" that has eclipsed Chairman Mao? In fact, Xiao Shan's "journey" pays homage to the dead Mao/Father that provided Chinese people with no capitalist material goods but a socialist sanctuary—which is now in ruins. The last scene of *Xiao Shan Going Home* is astonishingly otherworldly. Against a tranquil vista of Beijing high rises, the protagonist is getting a haircut in a sunny street. By shaving off his Western-style long hair, Xiao Shan finally admits his irrelevance to this grand Chinese city of a capitalist boom and placidly returns to his rural roots.¹²

Xiao Wu: An Unhappy Loner and an “Easy” Woman

Jia Zhangke's second feature, *Xiao Wu*, begins with a bleak scene of a dusty country road. In it a peasant family of three—father, son, and daughter—is waiting at a bus stop. In the next shot, the film's central character Xiao Wu (Wang Hongwei) emerges from a similar stark landscape of the bus line. Dressed in an oversized jacket and baggy trousers, this lean and pale country boy stands alone by the road and edgily smokes a cigarette. In the distance, a smoking tall chimney of a steel factory rises from a barren mountain slope. The *mise-en-scène* in this introductory sequence serves to link the youthful protagonist with China's socialist past. Such a steel factory had been run by a so-called rural people's commune during the Mao era, producing no useable steel but a great deal of poisonous smoke. It then grew to be a “residual” of the disastrous “Great Leap Forward” campaign launched by Mao almost three decades ago.¹³ Allegorically, because Xiao Wu's journey starts from here—that is, the ruins of a problematic socialist past—he is doomed to turn into a residual figure unfit for China's new reform era.

We find this residual trait in Xiao Wu soon after he gets on a bus. The conductor asks him to buy a ticket, but he refuses, saying, “I'm a policeman.” To our surprise, Xiao Wu's phony reply sends the conductor away. (It was in the Mao era that the police ordinarily enjoyed such a privilege while on duty, yet it may continue into Deng's era of economic reforms as another type of “residue.”) A moment later, Xiao Wu's true identity is revealed when he successfully snatches a passenger's wallet. As mentioned, Xiao Wu's theft on the bus is intercut with a Mao portrait hanging at the driver's seat. The sarcastic tone of this montage is twofold: Xiao Wu's appropriation of the Mao-era police benefit, and his lawbreaking penchant while Mao/the Father is gone. So from the very beginning, the protagonist's travel is an ironic pilgrimage to the dead Father's institutional and moral legacy, as signified by the steel factory and a lawless youngster. Paradoxically, Xiao Wu's pilgrimage ends in Fenyang, a small town in northern China, where the local government has resolved to “strike hard” (*yanda*) on various crimes ranging from shoplifting to smuggling to prostitution. In every corner of the city, the “strike hard” propaganda is aired over loudspeakers, and policemen and TV network reporters interview people at random on the street. In this town motivated to act *en masse*, Xiao Wu is however a loner. The pickpocket and his “crew”—a few boys clothed in the same outsized suits as his—cleverly dodge the police and the media in the crowd. Xiao Wu's evasion is indicative of his total isolation from a post-Mao Chinese society.

Even a loner like Xiao Wu has friends beyond his tiny underclass circle. Having arrived at Fenyang on the “free” bus, Xiao Wu first runs into his old friend Gengsheng in the street, who gives Xiao Wu a lift on his bicycle. Gengsheng is

the owner of a traditional Chinese drugstore called Huichun (Spring returning), which makes him another residual figure from the Mao era. On their bicycle trip to downtown Fenyang, Gengsheng mentions to Xiao Wu: "Xiao Yong is doing well these days, and I saw him on TV yesterday." Xiao Yong is a "sworn brother" of Xiao Wu from the 1980s (the movie's story line is set in 1997), and both of them have a Chinese tattoo on their arms that says "*youfu tongxiang*" (share good fortune). Not long before, Xiao Yong had also been a pickpocket, but of late the authorities have designated him a *mofan qiyejia* (model entrepreneur). Xiao Yong's success story and his new marriage are well publicized by the local TV station alongside the "strike hard" campaign party line. Unlike Xiao Wu, who stays away from the police and the media, Xiao Yong is a media-savvy businessman who grants a PR interview to a TV anchor and invites her crew to film his wedding activities. But Xiao Yong neglects to inform his "sworn brother" Xiao Wu of his wedding because the latter is only a reminder of his own shady past—an embarrassment to his newly acquired social status. (Soon we learn that Xiao Yong's "business" is nothing other than smuggling cigarettes and running karaoke bars—in other words, brothels—in Fenyang, an enterprise as reprehensible as his old trade of pickpocketing.)

Among those "honorary" guests attending Xiao Yong's wedding is Hao Youliang, a kind, middle-aged policeman who used to detain the two sworn brothers and "educate" them in past years. At Gengsheng's drug store, Xiao Wu bumps into Hao and respectfully addresses him as "teacher." The policeman advises Xiao Wu to emulate the good example of Xiao Yong, since the former pickpocket "is now a manager, a *big boss*, and a model worker" and "his new wife is as beautiful as Ni Ping" (a movie star and a CCTV anchor). In Hao's view, Xiao Yong's fresh identity of a *big boss* accounts for everything in life, no matter how he attained such a position. Anyhow, throughout the movie we feel a sympathetic relationship between the policeman and the pickpocket, which echoes that of Robert Bresson's masterpiece *Pickpocket* (1959). Similar to the good-natured French inspector in Bresson's classic, Hao serves as a father figure in Xiao Wu's troubled life, instructing the straying youth on what is "right" in a new capitalist economy. In this sense, the benign Chinese policeman personifies the state that labors to carry on the New Order and keep everyone in check.

In fact, the nouveau riche Xiao Yong simply acts according to the rules of this New Order that is well-guarded by the state, and he rejects anyone who is less viable financially and "morally," including those best friends from his ambiguous past. By contrast, his sworn brother Xiao Wu tries in vain to maintain an old fraternal bond. He brings a wedding gift to the bridegroom—cash wrapped in red paper, as he had vowed to give to Xiao Yong years before. In the movie, the *mise-en-scène* of this "gift economy" is a long take of Xiao Yong's home, where the two childhood friends first sit face to face smoking in a sullen silence, and Xiao

Yong tries to explain to Xiao Wu why he is not invited (“It’s just a family gathering,” murmurs Xiao Yong apologetically). To some extent, Xiao Wu’s brotherly ritual to fulfill his pledge is comically noble, for he has lost touch with a new reality of Chinese capitalism. The nouveau riche Xiao Yong, however, declines Xiao Wu’s wedding gift, shattering an antiquated male bond that Xiao Wu deems sacred. Sensing this rejection, Xiao Wu stands up and leaves without a word, but he gently slaps Xiao Yong’s left arm, which bears the tattoo “share good fortune.” The stern reality of Chinese capitalism is best expressed through this lengthy, stifling shot of an aborted gift exchange. The big boss Xiao Yong refuses to accept the gift, and the pickpocket Xiao Wu is accordingly not welcome at his televised wedding. The “brotherly love” instilled in the two men’s tender years of the 1980s is hence mercilessly forsaken. (When Xiao Wu first arrives at Xiao Yong’s home, a close-up shot of the facade of the courtyard house shows a date of “1982” carved on the brick wall; both Xiao Wu and Xiao Yong enter this historical frame of “1982” respectively during the gift exchange sequences.)

Faced with humiliation, Xiao Wu turns reckless. We see him drinking heavily in a restaurant where Xiao Yong’s interview with a reporter is being broadcast on a TV screen. Later, Xiao Wu seeks solace in Mei Mei (Hao Hongjian), a prostitute working at a karaoke bar owned by Xiao Yong. Meeting with a tall and voluptuous Mei Mei, the scraggy Xiao Wu seems incapable of uttering any words of love. The “working” girl invites him to sing along with her before an MTV screen, which the timid young man also cannot do. A few days later, when Xiao Wu again visits Mei Mei in this sleazy karaoke bar, a man dressed in a light yellow suit (director Jia Zhangke in a cameo role) walks into their “private” room; he is sent by Xiao Yong to return the wedding gift that Xiao Wu left behind in the businessman’s home. This brief yet critical scene pronounces a demise of the gift economy that used to bind men and women together in a socialist China under Mao.¹⁴ As this benign ancient economy is on the wane, so is the social network associated with it. Deserted by his childhood male friend socially, Xiao Wu attempts to buy back his emotions through a woman of easy virtue in the friend’s employment. When Mei Mei catches a cold and stays in bed, Xiao Wu comes to visit her and brings a hot water bottle that she needs most. This comforting bottle is also a gift from Gengsheng, the drugstore owner and Xiao Wu’s only loyal friend in town. A happier Mei Mei then asks Xiao Wu to sing a song to her, and this time the shy young man tenderly responds to the girl’s love request—he flips open a golden lighter (which he took from the rich man Xiao Yong by accident as they smoked wordlessly in the wedding gift scene) that plays Beethoven’s *Fur Elise* in tinny electronic tones. Deeply moved, Mei Mei weeps and buries her face in Xiao Wu’s arms.

In the next sequence, we observe how a reticent Xiao Wu grows adept at singing and dancing with Mei Mei in the karaoke bar. Realizing that Mei Mei is fond

of him, Xiao Wu buys a “wedding ring” for her, only to be notified that the girl is gone. According to her roommate, Mei Mei was taken away by a few rich men “to a good place.” Mei Mei herself never informed the “*duxiang*” (fiancé) Xiao Wu of her sudden departure, and the desolate lover finds only that hot water bottle in her emptied room—another “returned” gift and another blow to the pitiful youth unprepared for Chinese capitalism. Apparently, Xiao Wu’s purchasing power with a little stolen money counts for nothing when compared to the post-Mao Chinese bourgeoisie, who can buy off the prostitute herself. Once again, Xiao Wu is written off by Chinese capitalism even in his personal pursuit of Mei Mei, who in any event must search for a financial security that Xiao Wu’s dubious occupation is unable to provide. So under the New Order of Chinese capitalism, both the sworn brother Xiao Yong and the new girlfriend Mei Mei abandon Xiao Wu without explanation. In Mei Mei’s case, the abrupt severance of her “love” relationship with Xiao Wu is an economic choice rather than a moral or emotional one, a choice illustrative of new Chinese capitalism that has reduced Xiao Wu to an economic, as well as a societal, nobody. Here Marx’s satiric remark on the power of money in bourgeois society still seems most pertinent: “Money, then, appears as this over-turning power both against the individual and against the bonds of society, etc., which claim to be essences in themselves. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue.”¹⁵

Barred from a dwindling social network in the city of Fenyang, Xiao Wu has nowhere to go but his home in the country. It is an impoverished small village where everyone is struggling to survive economic hardship caused by the government’s free-market policy. As we soon learn from this homecoming sequence, Xiao Wu gives the wedding ring to his aging mother, while his cynical father wonders whether the ring is gold or copper (“It is gold,” protests Xiao Wu). Although the ring has no more use for an unmarried man, Xiao Wu’s gift giving is a ritualistic gesture for a filial son in Confucian ethical terms. This Chinese social ritual may symbolize what Siegfried Kracauer called “the desire to return to the maternal womb” for an emotionally wounded man in German expressionist cinema.¹⁶ However, sensing the value of the ring, the mother offers it to her daughter-in-law because she has no betrothal money to buy any gifts for the bride’s family. Insulted by this inordinate gift giving, Xiao Wu quarrels with his mother, and the old woman chastises her son as “disobedient” (*wuni*). From this sadly ironic Hitchcockian circulating ring,¹⁷ we find again an ultimate breakdown of the agrarian gift economy and traditional family. In a final shot of the homecoming sequence, the angry father wields a rod at Xiao Wu, denouncing his son as *wuni* (the same Chinese word the mother used), and Xiao Wu leaves the village for the city. In this way the young man’s peasant parents abandon him, as Xiao Yong and Mei Mei did before.

Within Xiao Wu's family, however, a sibling who still accepts him no matter what he does with his life is his younger sister. In the evening they go to see a play at a local theater, which I believe is "a play in a play" that sums up new Sixth Generation Chinese cinema. The play tells a heart-wrenching story of a little girl who takes her own life to confront her unfeeling father and mother. After the show Xiao Wu and his sister walk in a dark street on their way home, and the sister accidentally steps over a metal object on the ground. By the flashlight the girl finds a discarded red can of Coca-Cola, and in blank dismay she kicks it far away. From this explicit montage we discern what the young farm girl's gesture symbolizes. In her mind, global capitalism or "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is to blame for all the tragedies—real or "staged"—that her brother and the family are living through.¹⁸

In an earlier scene at the bar, Mei Mei had asked Xiao Wu to carry a beeper with him so she could contact him any time. Later in the movie, as it turns out, Xiao Wu is caught plying his trade in a crowded marketplace when the beeper rings unexpectedly. Afterwards Xiao Wu is busted by the police and brought to the station, where he meets his "teacher," Hao Youliang. At the station, all Xiao Wu's stuff is confiscated, including the beeper, which affects him gravely. The beeper, now in the police's possession, buzzes again, and the lenient Hao delivers the received message to Xiao Wu: "A certain Miss Hu [Mei Mei] wishes you that everything goes well." In a close-up, we see Xiao Wu's aggrieved face in response to Mei Mei's greetings. A critic vividly described this regretful screen persona of the Wang Hongwei character:

This monosyllabic, cheap-suit-wearing, chain-smoking, ill-postured loiterer is perhaps the most hopeless loser ever to darken a movie screen. You can hear the sucking sound produced by two decades of winner-take-all greed, confusion, and despair as it whistles through his soul. His meandering gait echoes the rhythms of someone dragging an overloaded, grimy handbasket to hell. Xiao Wu is so pathetic, you can almost see ducts of downtrodden pathos and meanness welling under his eyes, threatening to explode through his comically large horn-rimmed glasses.¹⁹

To me, this memorable shot epitomizes the defeatist pessimism of the Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers. Among them, Jia Zhangke is, according to a Chinese critic, most likely to be "a thorough pessimist."²⁰ In my judgment, he is a fatalist.²¹

The next day, Xiao Wu is taken by Hao to a detention center. On the way, the policeman stops to run errands, and he ties a handcuffed Xiao Wu to a telephone pole in the street. A mob swarms to watch this "most hopeless" thief.

In this closing scene, the wretched Xiao Wu, under the public gaze, poses a mocking challenge to the Party/state, as their leaders proclaim that China is

“advancing along the road of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics.’”²² Perhaps the American historian Maurice Meisner’s analysis of China’s economic reforms is more relevant here, as he writes that the country’s “economic progress has exacted a fearful social price.”²³ In my view, the “fearful social price” that China must pay is above all a cruelly impaired human dignity, as we have uncovered in this masterful Jia Zhangke film *Xiao Wu*.

Platform: A Long, Frightful Journey Home

In the words of an American film critic, Jia Zhangke’s *Platform* is “an allegorical epic that traces China’s snarled transition from Maoism to the economic liberalization of the 1980s.”²⁴ Chronologically, Jia’s filmic tale is set between 1979 and 1989—the decade of Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms that have changed the lives of so many Chinese. In this 198-minute epic, musicians and dancers of a provincial performing arts troupe tour the country to “see the outside world.” At the beginning, all the young performers willingly undertake this journey as “liberation” from their repressive local traditions. In the end, however, almost every one of them is compelled to come back home from “a tortuous trip to nowhere in particular.”²⁵ Thus, on an allegorical level, the troupe sets out on a journey into what I would call “the abyss” of a post-Mao China, that of the mighty and ungoverned “outside world” of Chinese capitalism in the 1980s.

As I mentioned earlier, *Platform* opens with a musical titled *A Train Traveling toward Shaoshan*, which pays homage to the bygone Mao era. Shaoshan is well-known for being Chairman Mao’s birthplace, so it is a sacred site of the Chinese Communist Party that was born in 1927. Such an opening before the film’s credits sequence suggests a temporally backward movement in Jia Zhangke’s cinematic narration. The performers of this musical belong with the Fenyang Peasant Culture Group, a state-run Maoist propaganda troupe that is soon forced to change under Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms. Therefore, from the very start the troupe’s “journey” is allegorically a pilgrimage to China’s socialist past, not a tribute to the country’s capitalist present. This backward movement sets a nostalgic tone for the entire movie.

The key members of this troupe are two pairs of young performers who fall in love with each other: Cui Mingliang (Wang Hongwei) and Yin Ruijuan (Zhao Tao); and Zhang Jun (Liang Jindong) and Zhong Ping (Yang Tianyi). These men and women share the lovemaking “secrets” they have just learned from Western advertisements, pulp fiction, and popular Hollywood cinema imported to China in the early 1980s. In *Platform*, this impact of the West on a younger generation of Chinese is ironically linked to the Party’s call for “ideological liberation” (*sixiang*

jiefang). In the movie, following the Chinese title of *Zhantai* are the flashy shots of Guangzhou, a big city in southern China that has been serving as an inspired model for Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. As Geremie Barmé has pointed out, "As a way station, Guangzhou itself had also risen in prominence. Imitating Hong Kong... Guangzhou in the early 1990s was claimed by some to be the second most influential city after Beijing, and it had gone further in its efforts to sweep away feudal remnants and introduce democratic elements into its social life."²⁶ So, among those swift and ostentatious frames of Guangzhou, we can catch a glimpse of the Party's slogan of "ideological liberation" written in big red Chinese characters on the "model" city's skyline filled with commercial high-rises. In Barmé's observation, the Party's policy of "ideological liberation" is not necessarily oppositional to the West, because "[d]uring the 1980s, the avowed official ideology—what the authorities presumably out of habit rather than sincere belief still call 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought'—expanded to embrace a burgeoning realm of market culture."²⁷ To me, this "market culture" as endorsed by the Party is nothing but Western consumerism.

The Guangzhou sequence in *Platform* is followed by a scene that further explicates this party-sponsored "market culture." In a dimly lit courtyard house, Mingliang's mother is altering the blue cotton pants of her "inspired" son, who demands they be modified to look like the bell-bottoms trousers (*labaku*) he saw in a local department store. A moment later, Mingliang's father walks in and sees his son trying on the "new" costume. Irritated by the bizarre Western-style clothing, the father, like the one we saw in *Xiao Wu*, chastises the prodigal son (who is standing awkwardly in the courtyard under a gray snowy sky), shouting "How can a farmer in such pants go to the field?" The father's condemnation of his son, however, is more rhetorical than real. He himself is not a farmer but a lowly blue-collar factory worker. And his invocation of peasantry is merely a metaphorical device that compares a diligent Chinese farmer to a lazy and corrupt Western urban dweller that he believes his son is imitating. (Later in the film, this "pro-tradition" Chinese father deserts his wife and children, opens a shop, and lives with his mistress in the same town of Fenyang.)

In any event, what Barmé calls "feudal remnants" remain strong in Fenyang, a sleepy inland town in northern China. A bitter conflict between the young and the old generation always pivots on those "bad" influences coming from the capitalist West. If Mingliang's attraction to Western consumerism is so appalling in his father's eyes, his pursuit of Ruijuan is deemed by the girl's father to be because of "bad influences." Ruijuan's father is a well-respected policeman in Fenyang who is loyal to the Party and the state. Yet he does not appreciate the Party's motto of "ideological liberation" in connection to Western "market culture" that has deluded

the youth in this closely knit semirural community. When the cop sees Ruijuan and Mingliang together in a theater that shows an Indian film from the 1950s, he warns his daughter, "You have seen too many foreign movies." Immediately after the admonitions of the worried father to his "liberated" daughter, there is a deep-focus shot of the city wall of Fenyang in snow. The overhead camerawork of the extensive wall corridor metaphorically addresses a vital issue: Can China's patriarchal authorities protect their children from the impact of the West? The answer to this question is not provided at that moment, but it will be sought throughout this Jia Zhangke epic film.

For me, the question can be reversed and asked from the point of view of the young generation: Can children break through the solid "wall" of sacred traditions warily guarded by patriarchal authorities? In a consequential long take of the same city wall and its main front gate, we see Mingliang and Ruijuan standing face to face; both of them are framed by the darkened ancient arches.²⁸ In *Platform*, the old city wall and gate serve as the *mise-en-scène* for a tortuous romance between Mingliang and Ruijuan. Only in this secluded corner of the town would they meet to discuss their repressed feelings. So the thick, gloomy, and self-contained city wall is a metaphorical allusion to the oppressive patriarchal authorities. Under the shadow of that omnipresent power, however, the two tender lovers strive to keep their relationship alive. Here the second rendezvous of Mingliang and Ruijuan occurs just before their Maoist propaganda troupe is transformed into a private enterprise. (Later, although the whole crew of performers agrees to go around the country to earn either freedom or money, Ruijuan declines to take this trip because her father falls ill. By contrast, Mingliang is eager to break loose from this walled "prison" of severe repression.) The scene is shot at the top of the city gate, where Ruijuan and Mingliang alternately come in and out of the battlements against a distant, bright sky. This in-and-out movement effected by the two protagonists can be considered an apt allegory for today's young generation. That is to say, if man must throw off the yoke of tradition, the Woman/Other should stay under it as an alternative solution. Tempted by a Western notion of individual freedom, Mingliang sets himself free of any responsibilities. Yet Ruijuan sacrifices herself to remain inside a sober tradition of Confucianism; thereby she becomes a filial daughter. Unable to reconcile with Ruijuan on this matter, Mingliang takes off from the site of the historic city wall, leaving Ruijuan alone within that "allegorical" wall of weighty patriarchal authorities. (*Platform's* heartwarming ending—the placid marriage of Mingliang and Ruijuan—continually augments this seeming antimodern and antifeminist allegory.)

A year later, on a sunny summer day, Mingliang comes under the city wall to see Ruijuan again, only to be told that her father disapproves of their relationship.

Afterwards, Mingliang climbs up the city wall while Ruijuan stays behind below. Here, in shadow of the Father, the two young lovers cement their subsequent separation. As mentioned, if Ruijuan is willingly to observe that old Chinese family ritual of being a filial child, Mingliang is eager to achieve a new goal of Western individualism. After the breakup, an unimpeded Mingliang travels with the private contracted troupe gleefully, giving a variety of performances in the countryside, ranging from Chinese revolutionary songs to American break dance. He and Zhang Jun also grow long hair that is not acceptable in their hometown of Fenyang. On this tour, Mingliang is happy until he meets his cousin Sanming by chance at a small coal mine in the remote mountains, where low-wage workers (ten yuan a day) such as Sanming, are required to sign a so-called life-and-death contract (*shengsi hetong*) that relieves the mine owner of any responsibility for workers' personal safety.²⁹ At night the troupe performs for these exhausted coal miners. The next morning while the troupe is on the road again, Sanming follows them and asks Mingliang to take the money he had just earned to his sister back in Fenyang.

This bitter encounter with his slave-labor cousin seems to shake Mingliang's new faith in capitalist privatization and political liberty. In fact, the coal mine episode portrayed in *Platform* is an enactment of Jia Zhangke's own experience with his own cousin while filming in Shanxi; Jia's cousin plays the sad and reserved character in the movie.³⁰ So this brief "semidocumentary" personal story illuminates another unsolved problem in the film: If Mingliang eagerly undertakes this journey into the faith of new Chinese capitalism, what he has seen on this journey is what I would term the "ruins" of post-Mao China, as shown by the privately owned coal mine where human life has so little value.³¹ Ironically, the privatization of the Maoist propaganda troupe allows Mingliang to savor the newly obtained "freedom," but what he discovers on this exploratory journey is his cousin's misery in another privatized enterprise. So the coal mine episode becomes a turning point in Mingliang's journey toward an unknown outside world he had been longing for. In the film, as the troupe's truck continues to travel deep into an immense no-man's land, Mingliang plays a tape on a cassette recorder, and a 1980s rock hit titled *A Long Platform* suddenly is heard on the soundtrack: "[M]y heart is waiting; there is only a bugle call for departure but no love of return." This theme song of *Platform* felicitously designates the troupe's urgent wish. It is a fearsome journey from which everyone is anxious to return, except for a strong-willed Zhong Ping.

As noted, there is another pair of young lovers portrayed in the film. Zhang Jun and Zhong Ping are from the same troupe and are also close friends to Mingliang and Ruijuan. In general, Mingliang and Ruijuan still appear as well-behaved children faithful to their family and local traditions, whereas Zhang Jun and Zhong Ping turn out to be the avowed "radicals" who succumb without hesitation

to a new Western lifestyle. Zhang Jun is the only performer in the troupe who takes a trip to see for himself Guangzhou, the city of economic liberation and social democracy, and a perky Zhong Ping is the first girl in town to have her hair done in permanent wave, which in the Mao era was slammed as a “bourgeois world outlook” and which stuns her timid colleagues at the troupe’s business meeting. Moreover, Zhong Ping shares her “new” knowledge of sex with Ruijuan and practices it with Zhang Jun. Her sexual liberation results in an abortion, which is performed by a doctor friend of the troupe owner, in secrecy to avoid a scandal. The scene is derisively accompanied by a newsreel of Deng Xiaoping inspecting a military parade in Tiananmen Square on October 1 (National Day), 1984. In the movie, both Zhong Ping and Ruijuan are trained dancers who give very different performances. Before an audience of admiring troupe members, Zhong Ping, in the sexy red Spanish costume, revels in a frantic Latin dance. By contrast, Ruijuan, dressed in the dark blue uniform of a tax collector (after she refuses to travel with Mingliang and the troupe, Ruijuan takes a job at the tax bureau in Fenyang), dances serenely alone in her office, a scene that is eerily beautiful.

In *Platform*, such narrative and visual parallels between the two couples can be understood again allegorically in terms of their fates that vary distinctly as the film comes to its end. As we have learned, the sickness of Ruijuan’s policeman father has effected an uncertain separation of Mingliang and Ruijuan. The couple reunites after the father dies toward the end of the movie. In the case of Zhang Jun and Zhong Ping, however, their fatal separation springs from an authoritarian state apparatus and the young man’s own lack of faith in their relationship. After the tiring trip through the vast barren land along the Yellow River, the troupe stays in a seedy hotel on their way back to Fenyang. Though unmarried, Zhang Jun and Zhong Ping take a room together at the hotel. The local police arrest the amorous couple and interrogate them separately. Zhang Jun is frightened and admits that their relationship is “unlawful” in that he cannot produce a marriage certificate, while the plucky Zhong Ping defends herself and the man she loves until a police officer scorns her by saying that “you are *not* husband and wife at all.” The marriage certificate fuss is resolved by the troupe owner with the police, as had been done before with Zhong Ping’s abortion, but the benevolent boss fails to save the young couple from their faithless love. A few days later the troupe arrives in Fenyang, but the owner cannot find Zhong Ping—she has vanished from the scene forever. For me, this sudden disappearance of a female protagonist (which is incomprehensible to a Western audience) is an allegory for a frail and flawed Chinese masculinity that disheartens so strong a woman as Zhong Ping. In physical appearance, the daring Zhong Ping is tall and robust, yet her unadventurous friend Ruijuan is slender and delicate; this contrast between the two women is deliberately figurative.

For Zhang Jun, although he had been the most “liberal” person among his peers at the beginning, he descends into a truly broken man toward the end. In a scene in the baneful backyard of his home in Fenyang, Zhang Jun cuts his Western-style long hair with a blade. This “hair cutting” mise-en-scène sullenly echoes the concluding shot of *Xiao Shan Going Home*. Jia Zhangke’s cinematic trilogy is resonant of an almost Buddhist ritual that renounces a male protagonist’s shaky faith in Western values. At this moment, Zhang Jun seems determined to return to his rustic Chinese roots, no matter how belated it may appear. He has lost Zhong Ping because of his “impotence” in a spiritual rather than physical sense (the Liang Jindong character is also tall), but he can still seek a safe haven at home. In *Platform*, this long, frightful journey home is magnificently portrayed in a scene of a wintry dust storm that bursts over the sterile soil of Inner Mongolia. In it, the troupe in a big truck with a canvas roof is on its way up a hill, leaving a long trail on the ground—just another tiresome performing trip to North China. When the storm is whipping through the land, the truck stops overnight for safety. The next morning, under a clear blue sky, the troupe performers emerge from under the roof and all cheer in one single word: “Home! Home!” The truck turns around and goes downhill, completing the extended trail in a U shape on the earth. With that, the allegory of Jia Zhangke’s cinematic epic is also finalized: For these young people who were once tempted by an impulsive Western idealism combined with a brutal Chinese capitalism, home is perhaps the only place where they can revive their lost identity and a common humanity.

Back in the town of Fenyang, Mingliang visits Ruijuan, who has remained single and lives quietly in her father’s house. Entering a sunny living room, Mingliang glances at some old family photos, especially those of Ruijuan’s deceased parents. After years of the weary journey into the “outside world,” Mingliang realizes for the first time that he must settle down with Ruijuan here in this humble parental home. Only in this “inside world” in which he had grown up with Ruijuan can Mingliang find tranquil happiness again. Earlier, Mingliang had gone to see his father, who has left his wife and is running a hardware store with his mistress. On that visit, Mingliang was unable to meet his father, but he did meet the mistress and asked her to tell his father to come home. Now Mingliang, the returned “prodigal son,” resolves to become a father in his own right, as we see in a final scene of the film: A dignified yet playful Ruijuan stands by the door holding their newborn baby, while a whimsical Mingliang is “collapsing” into his sofa. Accompanying this heartwarming conclusion of *Platform* is the sound of traditional Chinese music, a song titled *Traveling in Suzhou* (*Gusu xing*) played on a bamboo flute.³² I can think of no other filmic or musical finale so ephemerally beautiful to bring an end to Jia Zhangke’s cinematic trilogy.

Epilogue

Like all his three previous films I have examined in this chapter, Jia Zhangke's *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiaoyao*, 2002) is again "a powerful depiction of the spiritual malaise afflicting Chinese youth as a result of global capitalism," in Howard Schumann's analysis.³³ The story of *Unknown Pleasures* takes place in the city of Datong, Shanxi province, China, in 2001, where unemployed and disaffected teenagers look for any kind of excitement to enliven their dreary everyday existence. Bin Bin (Zhao Weiwei) dates a female student called Yuan Yuan (Zhou Qingfeng), who is thinking of going to Beijing to attend college. They spend their time together holding hands and watching karaoke and *Monkey King* videos (from which Bin Bin has derived inspiration for personal freedom). Bin Bin has quit his job at a local market, but he doesn't tell his mother (Bai Ru). When she finds out, she wants him to join the army. His less-thoughtful friend Xiao Ji (Wu Qiong) stalks a flashy performer, Qiao Qiao (Zhao Tao), who promotes Mongolian King liquor and dates a gangster. The gangster doesn't appreciate Xiao Ji's attentions and slaps him around. Qiao Qiao seems to like Xiao Ji, but even as a seeming "free-spirited" young woman, she is afraid to defy her violent boyfriend (who was also her "coach" in high school). Bin Bin tries to sell bootleg DVDs on the street to earn a living. One of his customers, a thug named Xiao Wu (Wang Hongwei), complains that Bin Bin doesn't carry underground titles such as *Xiao Wu* and *Platform*, but he is pleased to find *Pulp Fiction*. Inspired by the American movie, Bin Bin and Xiao Ji plot an ill-fated bank robbery. *Unknown Pleasures* was shown in competition at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival and was also selected for the 2002 New York Film Festival.³⁴

More recently, the film critic J. Hoberman of the *Village Voice* wrote admirably of all three films by Jia Zhangke: "The 1997 *Xiao Wu* (also known, in tribute to Robert Bresson, as *Pickpocket*) was a remarkable, semi-documentary immersion in backwater urban lowlife; his 2000 *Platform*, a movie much promoted by the *Voice*, used the evolution of a panoramic long view of China's transformation from Maoist austerity to free-market confusion. The more overtly pop, impressionistic, and improvisational *Unknown Pleasures*, one of the strongest inclusions in the last New York Film Festival, may be Jia's most concentrated evocation of contemporary China's spiritual malaise."³⁵ Interestingly, many American reviewers of *Unknown Pleasures* have all noticed the curious final sequence of the film. In it, Bin Bin is arrested by the police after the failed bank robbery, while Xiao Ji flees on his motorbike, which nevertheless breaks down on the road. One reviewer sees no hope for the youth depicted in Jia's film: "Even with the newly opened

superhighway linking them to Beijing and, hopefully, the world at large, it seems no one in Datong is really going anywhere.”³⁶ Another reviewer, however, “optimistically” points out, “Rather than head back to town, he hitches a ride from a stranger and perseveres.”³⁷ Schumann’s comment on this ambiguous conclusion of *Unknown Pleasures* is more inspiring: “When Xiao [Ji] finally abandons his sputtering motor bike in the middle of a new superhighway, Jia seems to be suggesting that both he and China itself are at a precarious crossroads in their existence and must discard what isn’t working if they are to move on.”³⁸ To me, this is perhaps just another long, perilous journey that Jia Zhangke is to embark on in the near future. And I share with Kevin Lee the anticipation for the gifted Chinese director’s new creation. Lee, a New York–based filmmaker and writer, also remarked on the evasive ending of *Unknown Pleasures*:

Again, we are brought back to the respective fates of Xiao Ji and Bin Bin: one seeks refuge in the anonymity of the impassive crowd, while another sings out defiantly, expressing Jia’s unnerved, even virulent need to take a stand against the mounting inequities of the world. This conflict in artistic intent, that confronts the calm observer with the impassioned activist, is to me what makes Jia’s next project worth anticipating eagerly. In the meantime, we—those lucky enough to have access to his films either through festival screenings or pirated video—have a small but formidable body of work to interpret, discuss, critique and defend, and in doing so we are reinvigorated with the possibilities of contemporary cinema to affect our relationship with the world we live in.³⁹

The Video Works of Yang Fudong

An Ultimate Escape from a Global Nightmare

On a rainy day in mid-October 2004, I flew from New York to London to visit a new exhibition of contemporary art held at Tate Modern. The show was titled *Time Zone: Recent Film and Video* and featured ten artists from various countries such as Albania, Belgium, Germany, China, Indonesia, Israel, the Netherlands, and the former Yugoslavia.

It was a Friday afternoon at Tate, and a few museum visitors roamed around the third-floor gallery where the film and video works were screening in the partitioned dark rooms. As I entered one of these rooms, I found myself watching *Liu Lan* (*Liu Lan*, 2003), a fourteen-minute film made by Yang Fudong, a Chinese artist living and working in Shanghai. For a while there was only one middle-aged couple sitting beside me, but soon a small crowd gathered and they sat through the entire film with great amusement. Yang's film was shot in black and white, so it looked very "singular" among the colored "moving images" on display. In addition, *Liu Lan* was perhaps the only film that narrated a warm human love story against a rustic setting, while much of the other exhibits of *Time Zone* seemed to render a cold and unpeopled urban landscape as a central motif, especially Anri Sala's *Blindfold* (2002) and Jeroen de Rijke's and Willem de Rooij's *Untitled* (2001). In this chapter, I will discuss Yang Fudong's two video works, *Liu Lan* and *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I* (*Zhulin qixian 1*, 2003), both of which intimate what I see as an ultimate escape from a global nightmarish reality.

***Liu Lan*: An Aborted Chinese Modernity?**

In general, Yang Fudong's video works remind us of a welcoming human love that is tragically missing from everyday realities around the globe. As we watch daily news on TV and are shocked by video pictures of increasing violence and cruelty

such as the decapitation of civilians or slaughter of women and children, we may agree with Michael Ignatieff, an American scholar at Harvard University, who has called “the terrorist as auteur”¹ a disturbing “filmic” phenomenon that has dominated the Western media in recent years. In this context of televised atrocities from all over the world, Yang’s films seem to imply an escape from the “global nightmare” described by Noam Chomsky and by Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyu Davis in their writings on today’s international conflicts.²

However, the iconography of Yang’s *Liu Lan* is rather a cinematic trope of time-honored themes and motifs in modern Chinese cinema, which tends to deny any political implication. *Liu Lan* tells the tale of a young girl named Liu Lan, who comes from a fishing village and is in love with a young man of a quite different social class. Throughout the film, this young man’s identity cannot be determined as can Liu Lan’s, whose activities include fishing and embroidering. The young man appears to be a “businessman,” dressed in a white suit and carrying a mysterious suitcase when arriving at Liu Lan’s ferry moored alongside the lakeshore. But the content of the suitcase is never revealed to the audience, even though the man and the girl both open it once or twice. In the film there is another fisherwoman whose weather-worn, wrinkled face indicates her great age. This old woman could be Liu Lan’s grandmother, or she might merely symbolize the youthful Liu Lan in her old age. I will further explore the mystery of the suitcase and the symbolism of the old fisherwoman in a moment.



Figure 19. *Liu Lan*. Dir. Yang Fudong. 2003, courtesy of Shanghart Gallery and Yang Fudong.

First of all, the mise-en-scène of the small fishing community in *Liu Lan* evokes two early Chinese films. One is the well-known *Song of the Fishermen* (*Yu guang qu*, 1934), a canonical work by Cai Chusheng (1906–1965) in modern Chinese cinema. The other is *The Fisherwoman* (*Yujia nü*, 1943), a popular movie directed by Bu Wancang (1903–1974), who was a veteran director in the Shanghai film industry. In both films, there are two motifs that also play an essential role in Yang Fudong's *Liu Lan*: a young fisherwoman and a young man in a suit with a suitcase. More importantly, the relationship between the woman and the man gives rise to a central theme similar to that of Yang's *Liu Lan*. In Yang's work, this relationship seems picturesquely romantic. As we see in an opening sequence of *Liu Lan*, against a far glowing sky and vast shining waters, the young "businessman" in a white suit and checked scarf comes out of nowhere and yet walks into Liu Lan's life with ease and grace. He embarks on the girl's ferry and the two sail homeward to the other shore. During this journey the young man even manages to row the girl's boat while she sits on the deck embroidering. This scene, I believe, is cinematically meaningful, as it refers to Bu Wancang's *The Fisherwoman*, in which a fisherman's daughter, named Qiong Zhu, gladly instructs her young male lover/painter in rowing her boat. Similarly, the title character Liu Lan in Yang's film receives her beloved "businessman" with a fostering warmth; she cooks him a meal of fish and rice and then puts him in bed as if tending to her own child. So the relationship between Liu Lan and her man is, to be sure, both romantic and maternal.

However, this curiously romantic/maternal love as portrayed in Yang Fudong's *Liu Lan* is at odds with *Song of the Fishermen* and *The Fisherwoman*. In Cai Chusheng's *Song of the Fishermen*, the man is He Ziyang, who grows up with a fisherman's daughter called Little Cat and her elder brother Little Monkey. Yet He Ziyang comes from a local gentry family and is sent abroad by his father to study modern science and technology. Later he becomes an engineer in his father's fishery company that is in fierce competition with foreign firms in Shanghai. In Cai Chusheng's film, although Little Cat's relationship to He Ziyang is ambivalent or innocent, the striking contrast between Little Cat and He Ziyang is the same as that between Liu Lan and her male lover. But unlike Liu Lan, who is in her beautiful yet theatrical "fisherwoman" costume, Little Cat wears a fishing village girl's shabby, padded clothes, whereas her male friend He Ziyang is neatly dressed in a well-tailored dark business suit, and in a "homecoming" scene he carries a suitcase. This social and class difference between the two characters in *Song of the Fishermen* is a crucial point of reference for us in understanding Yang Fudong's *Liu Lan*, a film made seven decades after Cai Chusheng's 1934 masterpiece.³

He Ziyang is a central character in *Song of the Fishermen*, and the director Cai Chusheng considered this young man a "reformist" symbolic of China's struggle for an advanced Western-style capitalist economy in the 1930s. However, as Cai put it,

“I intended to portray He Ziyang as a reformist who wanted to change society. But his cause perished under the iron hoofs of imperialist economic invasion, and so there is no doubt his hopes were inevitably dashed.”⁴ As mentioned, another main character in the film is Little Cat, the young girl whose relation with He Ziyang is ambivalent and innocent but somehow passionate, as she cries heartbrokenly when the young man tells her he is going abroad to study the fishery business. Halfway through the movie, He Ziyang, as a childhood friend and a well-meaning “reformist,” gives the impoverished Little Cat and her brother Little Monkey a hundred dollars as “charity,” which, as it turns out, only sends the two to jail on suspicion of thievery and rushes “them into a greater disaster.”⁵ After their release from prison, Little Cat and Little Monkey return home, only to find their house burned down and their mother and uncle killed in the fire. In a subsequent shot we see He Ziyang come off a passenger ship carrying a suitcase. Riding in his family car, he hurries to the ruined home of Little Cat. In this poor neighborhood a crowd has gathered around the weeping sister and brother. He Ziyang jostles his way through the pitying crowd, and Little Cat hands back the money to him as soon as she feels his presence nearby. To me, this gesture symbolizes China’s failed attempt to reform a defunct old system as well as “modernize” the country’s dilapidated rural society in the 1930s. From the point of view of Cai Chusheng, though, that “imperial economic invasion” was to blame for national failure. As we see in the film, He Ziyang works hard to advance his father’s fishery enterprise by applying new technology that he had learned from the West, yet the father commits suicide because of a sex scandal and business failure. Later, to help the now homeless Little Cat and Little Monkey, He Ziyang employs the two childhood friends in his modernized fishing boat that demands efficient yet exhausting labor. Toward the end of *Song of the Fishermen*, however, the intense, unceasing toil results in Little Monkey’s death on the job, and the movie concludes with a scene of “labor’s separation from its product,” in Marxian terms.⁶ In the final shot, the camera travels swiftly from right to left on the boat, thus contrasting two significant images: the prolific production of fish on the right of the deck and the tragic death of a laborer named Little Monkey on the left.

In the movie, the Little Monkey character represents the trials and tribulations of China’s countryside in the 1930s, especially its vulnerable and backward rural economy. After Little Monkey’s father died in a storm, his mother had to work as a wet nurse to breastfeed He Ziyang instead of her own newborn son. Little Monkey thus grew up undernourished, and because of that the young boy is mentally deficient—he is incapable of comprehending a rapidly changing world around him. At the close of the film, Little Monkey dies of physical and spiritual exhaustion, symbolic of the weak and flawed masculinity of China’s peasantry. So in the film’s diegetic space, or in Little Cat’s new life, He Ziyang must displace Little

Monkey and be a Western-educated “modern man,” stronger and more intelligent, and who possesses what Little Monkey lacks most—a physical and intellectual fitness in face of modernity.

This fresh, “modern” Chinese masculinity is manifest in the figure of He Ziyang from *Song of the Fishermen*, which, I believe, serves as an archetype for the anonymous “businessman” in Yang Fudong’s *Liu Lan*. To put it another way, between the two male characters there exists an intertextual, filmic relationship that denotes *Liu Lan* not a story of picturesque romance, but one of problematic “modernity.” As we have discerned in both films, this “modern man” habitually carries a suitcase, which is a metaphor for unexpected arrival and awaited departure. The man emerges as a seasoned business traveler without a home, leaving his family or his lover forever in waiting. But the suitcase may also signify that this “business-oriented” man would take all his ambitious plans with him in that suitcase. In the case of He Ziyang as a “reformist,”⁷ the suitcase may contain his blueprints for building a new fishery industry in China, although his borrowed “Western” paradigm only leads to a catastrophe: the deaths of his father and Little Monkey. Whereas in *Liu Lan*, as I have mentioned earlier, the contents of the suitcase remains a mystery; in the shots where both the young man and the girl are opening it, the camera quickly slips away, allowing the spectator no sight of what the two characters have seen inside the suitcase. In my view, however, this camera eclipse designed by director Yang Fudong is most likely to unveil the true substance of the suitcase—the emptiness or nothingness of modernity.

Near the ending of *Liu Lan*, the girl inquisitively opens the suitcase and finds nothing in it. Afterward the young man awakes from his sleep and the two return in her boat to the ferry where the man had arrived at the beginning of the film. In a following medium shot, the man resolutely steps out of the boat with the suitcase in his right hand, while the girl stands behind him holding the oar. This scene, it seems, again attests to the emptiness or nothingness this man has brought to her life even in such a romantic and maternal relationship. As we have seen all through Yang’s film, the suitcase represents unexpected arrival and awaited departure, which typifies the girl’s relationship to this modern man. We also find this central theme of a prolonged separation in Bu Wancang’s *The Fisherwoman*. In it, there is an extended sequence of the young fisherwoman Qiong Zhu bidding farewell to her artist lover. First we see Qiong Zhu chase the young man dressed in a smart suit with a suitcase going uphill; a moment later we find her running downhill to say a good-bye to him over again. In a final long shot in this affecting sequence, Qiong Zhu, with her back toward the audience, gesticulates to her man, who is vanishing into the distant champaign under a vast, cloudless sky. Obviously, the last scene of awaited departure in *Liu Lan* is a cinematic trope of this lengthy farewell sequence from Bu Wancang’s *The Fisherwoman*. Yet Yang Fudong tackles

this long-established theme of separation in modern Chinese cinema as his inquiry into a problematic modernity.

In Bu's movie, Qiong Zhu's male lover is Cui Shijun, an artist trained in Western-style oil painting, which is a new foreign medium as compared with traditional Chinese ink painting. The man first appears as an art student sketching from nature on a lakeshore, where he spots Qiong Zhu casting a fishing net with her father and sister in a boat. He is attired in a white student dress and a checked scarf, which in iconography is nearly identical to that of the young businessman in *Liu Lan*.⁸ Through a few incidents Cui Shijun and Qiong Zhu meet, and they fall in love with each other. As mentioned, Qiong Zhu teaches her artist lover how to row the boat, and later we see the well-educated Cui Shijun is giving reading and writing lessons to the illiterate fishing girl. Once again, Cui Shijun from Bu's *The Fisherwoman* is a representation of modernity, but he is a sharply different "modern man" than He Ziyang from Cai Chusheng's *Song of the Fishermen*. As we have learned, He Ziyang is a capitalistic "reformist," and his relation with Little Cat is benignly patronizing at best. In contrast, Cui Shijun embodies the Chinese Enlightenment that championed universal education in society—an intellectual ideal of the 1919 May Fourth Movement. And this "modern man" is committed to his love for Qiong Zhu; he rejects his father's marriage arrangement with a lady from a wealthy family and eventually takes the deprived fisherwoman as his wife during his own struggle for survival as an unconventional painter in Shanghai.

In *The Fisherwoman*, however, Bu Wancang treated this happy ending and seemingly blessed marriage as an extravagant Broadway musical. As we see in the film's finale, the "bride" Qiong Zhu is clothed in a Western wedding gown and rides with Cui Shijun in a car that roars through barren farmland. Embraced in the groom's tender arms, Qiong Zhu is singing fervently with a full orchestra accompanying her on the soundtrack. Yet in this Hollywood-style melodramatic farce we also catch a glimpse of Qiong Zhu's muddy, bare foot, a grim reminder of her pitiable real-life condition as a peasant girl. In any event, the movie was a big hit in 1943, for the Qiong Zhu character was played by Zhou Xuan (1918–1957), a well-liked Chinese female singer nicknamed "golden voice" by her fans.⁹ In my view, Zhou Xuan's star power only added the aura of fairy tale to Bu Wancang's *The Fisherwoman*, a film that for the most part dealt with the sufferings of China's peasantry. In this movie, to be sure, a love-stricken romance is out of place in a setting of rural Chinese society, yet this same "modern" Chinese fairy tale continues to unfold in Yang Fudong's *Liu Lan*. As we have witnessed in *The Fisherwoman*, Qiong Zhu follows Cui Shijun all the way through to bid farewell, which indicates her attachment to the man that is emblematic of the Chinese Enlightenment. While in a beautiful long shot from *Song of the Fishermen*, we also see Little Cat row her small fishing boat, trailing behind a gigantic steamship that her beloved

childhood friend He Ziyang has just boarded for a journey to the West. Therefore, in these two significant films from the 1930s and 1940s, a Chinese peasant woman's pursuit for a man of higher class and education is metaphorically represented as China's quest for modernity. It is within this "modernistic" framework of Chinese cinema that we should read the film text of Yang Fudong's *Liu Lan* together with Cai Chusheng's *Song of the Fishermen* and Bu Wancang's *The Fisherwoman*.

Xiao Zhiwei, a Chinese film scholar, pointed out that "[i]n China modernity has never been separable from foreignness."¹⁰ He also cited a Chinese writer of the 1930s as saying, "Anything foreign is modern, whether it be a social usage or a style of dress."¹¹ In this cultural context of 1930s China, both the He Ziyang and Cui Shijun characters stand for such a notion of "foreignness" that was, and still is, synonymous with Chinese modernity. As we have observed in *Song of the Fishermen* and *The Fisherwoman*, in a striking contrast to their rustic female lovers, the two well-educated young men (a venture capitalist who has studied abroad and a talented artist who is trained in oil painting) are always dressed in a spotless "Western suit" (*xifu*) and leather shoes, which indisputably shows their longing to identify with the West at the time. While in *Liu Lan*, the anonymous young man attired in a pristine white suit appears as a similarly "rhetorical figure" of this Chinese modernity, to borrow a Derridean term.¹² In fact, Matei Calinescu, in his classical study *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* has cautiously drawn this "face" of modernity in relation to the Other: "If we think that modernity came about as a commitment to otherness and change, and that its entire strategy was shaped by an 'antitraditional tradition' based on the idea of *difference*, it should not be difficult to realize why it balks when it is confronted with the infinite *repetition* and the 'boredom of utopia.'"¹³

Apparently, the He Ziyang and Cui Shijun characters were illustrative of such a Chinese modernity, which earnestly leaned over the West/Other. But Yang's *Liu Lan*, in my view, provides an effective critique of this problematic Chinese modernity, which is centered on "the idea of *difference*" or "*repetition*" in Calinescu's characterization. As we have seen, the young man in *Liu Lan* is unable to stay within a traditional community represented by Liu Lan and that mysterious old fisherwoman. He comes and goes repeatedly in spite of the girl's loving presence. In this respect, the young man appears to be what Slavoj Žižek has called "the foreign intruder, impossible to get rid of, incapable of remaining" in his critical allusion to Enlightenment and "the dynamic, rootless postindustrial society" that "directly generates its own myth."¹⁴ Since Chinese modernity has not been divorced from such an inexorable "foreignness" since the early twentieth century, Yang's *Liu Lan* casts grave doubt on this peripatetic "foreign intruder," a doubt that also can be felt in its two predecessors, *Song of the Fishermen* and *The Fisherwoman*.

As noted earlier, in Bu Wancang's *The Fisherwoman*, Cui Shijun, an artist trained in Western painting, represents Chinese Enlightenment associated with the May Fourth Movement of 1919: He teaches the fishing girl Qiong Zhu to read and write. And in Qiong Zhu's presence, Cui Shijun is always dressed in Western-style clothes that reflect his Western-educated background. But in a dream sequence in the 1943 movie, Qiong Zhu is happily pursuing Cui Shijun at a grassy foothill, and in her dream the beloved man is no longer an alienating foreign intruder but an amicable young Chinese peasant just like her. In other words, Qiong Zhu's subconscious induces her to love Cui Shijun as a man of her own social class, not as someone with a strange foreignness.¹⁵

Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest: A Destitute Escape into the Lost Paradise

On February 6, 2004, the Guggenheim Museum announced the short list for the Hugo Boss Prize for 2004, and among the finalists was Yang Fudong. According to the Museum's profile, "Yang Fudong's films and installations investigate contemporary China and its relationship to Chinese history, philosophy, and the environment as the culture develops into a capitalist economy."¹⁶ Yang Fudong was the third Chinese national in the past decade to enter the competition for this esteemed prize in the Western visual arts.¹⁷

Just recently, Yang's filmic works, such as *An Estranged Paradise* (*Mosheng tiantang*, 2002) and *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I* (2003) have aroused a rapt enthusiasm among a number of Western critics, who have found these black-and-white films "dreamlike, eerie and compelling."¹⁸ In their opinions, there is a strong stylistic bond between the film art of Yang Fudong and Chinese cinema of the 1920s.¹⁹ To me, Yang's work, unlike much of contemporary Chinese art, is strikingly apolitical and yet intensely psychological. In this sense, that vital connection between Yang's new filmic creation and a modern Chinese cinematic tradition determines both the content and form of his film art. However, the Chinese cinema of the 1920s is itself a cultural production of the so-called Shanghai modern, which "is not thoroughly modern, but modern in an uneven and over-coded way in that the very concept of the modern is always subject to fundamental suspicion, challenge, and critique."²⁰ So it is necessary to take a look at the "the Shanghai modern" cinema that provides a sustaining inspiration to Yang, a talented artist who was immersed in the great city of a modern China founded at the turn of the twentieth century.

According to Cheng Jihua, a Chinese film historian, in the decade from 1921 to 1931, a variety of Chinese movie studios produced about 650 feature films, most

of which were made by “men of letters of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School” (*yuanyang hudie pai*) in modern Chinese popular literature; “the contents of those films was no more than a refurbished version of the literature of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School.”²¹ Historically, the “men of letters” of this literary school were active between the 1911 Revolution and the 1919 May Fourth Movement, and their works established a new genre in Chinese literature—the “*yanqing xiaoshuo*” (novel of sentiment), which met with an enthusiastic audience of educated urban petty bourgeois. However, May Fourth intellectuals such as Lu Xun (1881–1936) were quick to condemn this popular art and its “refurbished version”—Chinese cinema of the 1920s, ridiculing the genre of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School as “talented scholar/rogue plus lovely lady/prostitute.”²² In September of 1931, the Communist Party in Shanghai determined “to march its troops into the front of cinema,” which soon became part of the “Left Wing Literary and Art Movement” that took the lead in the art world of 1930s Shanghai.²³ On the other hand, during the early 1930s the Kuomintang (KMT) government banned martial arts pictures in order to curtail superstition and promote modernity, and “strictly polic[ed] film’s ideological content.”²⁴ Seen from this historical perspective, we may define Chinese cinema of the 1920s as a “precommunism” and “precensorship” cinema. Or, to follow Cheng Jihua’s Marxian analysis, the production of 1920s cinema was “infiltrated by Mandarin Duck and Butterfly writers” who simply combined “feudalism” and “colonialism” with “[Western] imperialist erotic culture.”²⁵

It is this 1920s cinema freed of ideology and state censorship that has furnished a constant referent for Yang Fudong’s artistic creation. Thus we need to briefly examine the cinematic representations of the “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly” filmmakers, who were not yet subject to any ideological constraints by either communists or the KMT government as they were later on in the 1930s.²⁶ An illustrious example is the film *Sea Oath* (*Haishi*, 1921), an urban romance “showcasing modern fashions.”²⁷ The movie was directed by Dan Duyu (1897–1972), a self-taught filmmaker who was by profession a gifted painter of portraits of beauties rendered in commercial calendars and magazine covers. Dan Duyu also worked as screenwriter, cinematographer, and editor for *Sea Oath*, a film of “new love drama” that “first opened a way to modern romance in Chinese cinema.”²⁸ Dan strove for perfection in his use of lighting, camera angles, and composition, and he depicted the central female character (played by Yin Mingzhu, a Shanghai socialite renowned for her passion for foreign fashions and later Dan’s wife) as a beautiful star of the silver screen.²⁹ As *Sea Oath* first opened in a movie theater in Shanghai in 1922, the film’s “new story, new character, new custom, and new setting were all a selling point that attracted the city residents at that time.”³⁰ “[W]ith the success of *Sea Oath*, ‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’ writers and their works made a triumphant entry into movie circles.”³¹ However, Marxian critics were at odds with

Dan's filmic portrayal of a Chinese life that appeared too "Western" in costume design, domestic interior and architectural setting, which was "characteristic of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal Chinese social life."³²

Today we may regard Dan Duyu's pictorial approach as a daring attempt at "Shanghai modern"—that is, a cinematic representation of modernity that blinds to any political distraction. Several decades later, it seems, much of Dan Duyu's apolitical yet visual treatment is echoed in Yang Fudong's films, especially *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I*, in which well-dressed male and female characters again showcase modern fashions but against a splendid natural setting. So in this 2003 film shot by Yang Fudong in black and white, we discern not only a continued effort to represent what I would call a "belated" or "postsocialist" modernity, but also a new attempt at integrating culture into nature, an attempt most likely rejected by a "modern" filmmaker like Dan Duyu in the early 1920s.

As mentioned, it was Dan's wife Yin Mingzhu who played the central female role in *Sea Oath*, and she was considered the first female star in the history of Chinese cinema. A beauty in Shanghai's upper-class society, Yin represented everything "modern" in the eyes of urban inhabitants, especially young educated women. She went to the famous Girls' School of Chinese and Western Learning (Zhongxi nüshu) founded in 1892 in Shanghai, where she learned to swim, ride a horse and a bicycle, and drive a car. She loved to dress like a Western female movie star, for which she was nicknamed "Lady F.F." (Foreign Fashion) by her peers at the school. In this way Yin Mingzhu was born a cultural icon of "Shanghai modern," which was an amalgamation of a fine education in both Chinese and Western culture and a contemporary lifestyle. And "Lady F.F." became a quintessential figure of the so-called "*modeng nüxing*" (modern woman) to be emulated by every schoolgirl.³³ On that account, a new Chinese "modern" femininity was created on the screen through Dan Duyu's film *Sea Oath*, which surely challenged the old stereotype of "*xianqi liangmu*" (a good wife and loving mother) in Confucian terms.

In Yang Fudong's *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest*, although the two fashionably dressed young ladies appear as though they were the offspring of that kind of "modern woman," their imagery is not rendered as glorious as that of Yin Mingzhu from 1920s Shanghai. In my judgment, by adapting a third-century Chinese classical tale of the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove," Yang Fudong merely provokes an edgy and problematic relationship between these two young "chic" women and other male members of this group of "Seven Intellectuals" from the twenty-first century.

Historically, the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" were a group of Chinese male scholars, poets, artists, and musicians of the Western Jin dynasty (265–316) who banded together to escape from the hypocrisy and danger of the corrupt

official world to a life of drinking wine, playing music, and writing poetry. Their Taoist ideal meant following their impulses and acting spontaneously, and their outstanding collective characteristic was their sensitivity to the beauties of nature.³⁴ In this context, the two “trendy” women in Yang’s adaptation of the ancient tale is a significant gender revision designed to evoke male anxiety among this traditional scholars’ community. Yang Fudong parodied this historical narrative in order to speculate on a problematic “modernity,” which was incarnated by such “modern women” as Yin Mingzhu and her “postmodern” posterity.

Yang Fudong opens his black-and-white film *Seven Intellectuals* with the mystic and grandiose scenery of Yellow Mountain, a vista recognizable to contemporary Chinese travelers. In the following shot, however, we see five young men and two young women posing naked against this sacred “national” landscape, which seems at first glance out of context. But this “indecent” group portrait of the youth in the nude is a direct reference to the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove in third-century China, especially to a Taoist philosophy that they cherished and practiced at the time. As is widely known, the group’s most devout members, such as Ji Kang (223–262) and Ruan Ji (210–263), denounced the hypocrisy of so-called *mingjiao* (the Confucian ethical code), as the Western Jin ruling house used the code to suppress its political enemies. And they both advocated *ziran* (nature) as the elemental source of all being.³⁵ Liu Ling, another prominent member of the Seven Sages, was notorious for his heavy drinking,³⁶ which was said to be a Taoist way of seeking oneness with nature or the universe. And Liu’s exceptional notion of nature/the universe is revealed by a well-documented incident. One day at home a guest of Liu Ling accused him of being drunk and naked, to which Liu answered, “I regard the universe as my house, and my house as my clothing. How come you enter my trousers?”³⁷ Lu Xun cited this story in his now famous essay on the Seven Sages published in 1927, and he further pointed out that most members of the group would drink without clothes on, which in his opinion was a typical uninhibited “Western Jin demeanor” meant to protest the hypocritical *mingjiao*, including the Confucian dress code.³⁸ Against this background, the nude scene in the opening shot of Yang Fudong’s film reprises the Liu Ling spectacle.

However, in Yang’s “postmodern” drama that first reveres nature in purely Taoist terms, we soon see the “primordial” naked human actors of both sexes putting their clothes on, an act that seems to turn against the “natural” Taoist philosophy of the Seven Sages. This dressing scene is a long shot in which we can hardly discern what style of clothing those “postmodern” Seven Intellectuals are wearing. It is only after the film’s title in Chinese appearing in full screen that we see a close-up of a female character dressed in an elegant woman’s suit, followed by another close-up that shows a male character in an equally elegant man’s suit. A moment later, we learn that these style-conscious young men and women are



Figure 20. *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part 1*. Dir. Yang Fudong. 2003, courtesy of Shanghart Gallery and Yang Fudong.

on their way to the top of Yellow Mountain in a cable car—a fast and efficient “modern” means to approach nature that in my view would be much to the dismay of the Sages of the Western Jin, who were reputed for their “sensitivity to the beauties of nature.” In this sense, the scene of these young gentlemen and ladies being carried in a cable car actually induces a sudden “rupture” to the ancient myth of the Seven Sages. However, does this mechanized journey to nature imply a new “postmodern” path to an unknown paradise in the eyes of the men and women in Yang’s film? To answer this question, I’ll explore this seeming pilgrim path to nature/paradise that Yang’s Seven Intellectuals are to tread on.

As mentioned, just before this uncertain voyage begins, the Seven Intellectuals have performed a social ritual (dressing up) to become ordinary and “civilized” people rather than unclothed eccentric Taoist sages. During the cable car ride to the summit of Yellow Mountain, though, they all look up or down from the window in dead silence, showing none of the enthusiasm of a common traveler. Although all the Seven Intellectuals appear anonymous, there are two “couples” that are matched by a male and a female voice narration alternately on the screen. This circular audiovisual narrative structure initiates a thematic ambiguity that imbues the entire film with a dramatic symbolism to be analyzed. First, the male voice informs us that eight or nine years ago he came to visit Yellow Mountain, where he saw an old tree called “Yingkesong” (Pine of welcoming guest) and commented

that the picture of this famous pine tree at Yellow Mountain is hung in almost every Chinese house. The narrating man did not explain why the imagery of Yingkesong has been so popular with the Chinese people for decades. The average Chinese family has a picture of Yingkesong decorating their living room not out of their love for nature in general or Yellow Mountain in particular. On the contrary, the popularity of this image is sociopolitical: China's elderly Communist leaders, from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin, would pose with visiting foreign dignitaries in front of a screen of Yingkesong for publicity photos, which would appear on daily TV news broadcasts or on the front pages of official newspapers. In this context of media manipulation, I think, the image of Yingkesong serves as a national symbol of paternal authority and state power. (The male narrator in the film also mentions another motif that would appear together with Yingkesong in most pictures of the kind—the red sun, which symbolizes Chairman Mao in Chinese political culture.) Therefore, a visit to the famed pine tree itself on the sacred site of Yellow Mountain is all but a reverential pilgrimage. And we may consider a pilgrim's act to have his or her picture taken with this "national" sacred pine tree as "symbolic identification" with the paternal authority or state power, as Žižek would say in his writing.³⁹

After the male narrator points to the popular status of Yingkesong in a dreary voice, the camera soon pans to link the pine tree seen in the left middle ground to the Seven Intellectuals that emerge from the right foreground. In this way, Yang Fudong marks a relationship between each individual from the group and the national symbol. What happens next on this pilgrimage revolves around this perceptible correlation to the Symbolic in Lacanian terms.⁴⁰ (Later on in the pilgrimage all the Seven Intellectuals pose for the camera against the background of Yingkesong.) The man's narration then reveals an autobiographical detail about Yang himself as he draws a comparison between the scenery of a majestic Yellow Mountain and that of Hangzhou, an intimate place that is beautiful yet by no means "sublime." (Yang attended an art school in Hangzhou away from his family in Beijing for several years.) After this retrospective comparison, the male voice turns a bit ironic when he says, "Yellow Mountain is just a lofty monument made for worship." The male narrator casts doubt on the sanity of this "monument worship" associated with the Symbolic, which, as noted above, bespeaks paternal authority and state power. And this skepticism for a "sublime" Object/the Yellow Mountain also reveals a clue to the imagery of Seven Intellectuals as the disenchanting traveler that we saw from the outset of their journey.

In the film, a female narrator gives her own account of this same "awe-inspiring" Yellow Mountain, which contrasts sharply with her male counterpart, who seems to be preoccupied with a Yellow Mountain heavy with national symbolism. The woman tells us that she saw the mountain before in a postcard that looks, in her

words, “strange” and “phony.” However, as the woman reaches the towering peak of Yellow Mountain, she is “thrilled to jump down to bathe and die as if to fly in the sky.” This impulse to die, as she ponders in a tender voice, is all but “a joy, just like a flower that blossoms in an instant at such a beautiful place.” Although the woman merely contemplates a spectacular death and does not act it out, this feminine drive to perish sets forth a central theme of Yang’s *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest*. As the woman continues to recount her love for a man that will be leaving her soon, we realize that it is impossible to divorce the woman’s death drive from her sexual desire. The inseparability of her death drive and sexual desire may exemplify a universal human condition, which Žižek has characterized as “this deadly passion . . . this will to drown oneself in the night of *jouissance*, to leave behind the daily universe of symbolic obligations.”⁴¹ Accordingly, the female narrator in Yang’s film *does* explain further that she would not commit “passionate” suicide on the mountaintop out of concern for her family (“symbolic obligations”). At the same time, the woman confesses that she left her family to take a man as her lover, only to “have” this man for a week, a day, and even a minute; she claims, “If you leave next week, be my lover this week; if you leave tomorrow, be my lover today; if you leave next minute, be my lover this minute.”

An American critic has dismissed this kind of “demeaning” feminine discourse in Yang Fudong’s *Seven Intellectuals* as “a bit hokey.”⁴² Nonetheless, such a young woman’s remark as in Yang’s film is to me no more than a postmodern version of an early Chinese feminist text often found in “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School” literature. In 1914, for instance, Li Dingyi (1890–1963), a “Butterfly” writer, published a novel titled *Yun yu yuan* (The grievance of a broken jade), a tragic romance of so-called free love. In the novel, Xiaqing, a young female student at a Shanghai girls’ school, meets a man at a party; she is attracted to him and the two lovers are engaged without the knowledge of their parents. Yet Xiaqing states, “Marriage is where happiness endures in all one’s life. In this matter one ought to listen to parents’ advice, but one should also make his or her own decision.”⁴³ And she firmly believes that “freedom is natural rights, which cannot be violated even by one’s parents or the elder.”⁴⁴ In the novel’s characterization of Xiaqing, the young woman holds dear her new love by the month, day, and hour, as she says to her boyfriend, “I don’t understand why I feel lovesick without seeing you only for one day. I wish we were together to converse every month, every day, and every hour.”⁴⁵ The female narrator in Yang’s film speaks of love with this same “Butterfly” literary passion.

In Li Dingyi’s 1914 novel, the freedom-conscious Xiaqing attempts suicide in despair after her parents force her into a distasteful marriage.⁴⁶ Similarly, in Yang Fudong’s 2003 film, the female narrator mulls over a “euphoric death,” whereas another female character enacts a “symbolic demise” which concludes *Seven*

Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I (I'll discuss this final scene in a moment). In either case, it is the woman's sexual desire that seems to have carried her death drive into effect. Is this thematic semblance between the two works a "belated" reflection of Western modernity that endorses individual freedom? We are told that in the 1910s, under the direct impact of so-called Western learning (*xixue*), "Butterfly" romance and detective fiction flourished.⁴⁷ This may explain why in Li's novel the protagonist Xiaqing spoke the language of the French Revolution when she cited "natural rights" to defend herself against the paternal authority. (The French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* cites liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression as "imprescriptible natural rights."⁴⁸) Nearly a century later, however, in Yang's film, we find no such grand Western ideology to be referred to in support of a protagonist's personal choice to live or die. At first, Yang's female protagonist's impulse to die on the mountaintop may sound indeed "hokey" or even absurd. Yet in due course the Shanghai artist defines his male and female characters in relation to that paternal authority epitomized by the sacred pine Yingkesong.

This relationship to an invisible yet symbolic Father evokes an emotive paradigm that dictates the man's storytelling throughout Yang's film. As noted, the male narrator first mentions the well-liked pine tree in a reluctant tone, which sounds more like a complaint from a disenchanting traveler than a tourist's admiration. Later, we see a male protagonist and his female companion come under the pine to have their picture taken, a pilgrim's action to pay homage to the hallowed national symbol. At that precise moment we again hear the male voice familiar to us so far: "I'm thinking about my parents. When my father was ill, he looked so frail. I think I have failed to be a son because I cannot repay him for his kindness in years to come." This is no doubt a classical testimonial by a Chinese "filial son," or *xiaozi*, a central figure personifying so-called filial piety that forms the core of the Confucian ethical code. As we are told, however, the historical Seven Sages were the foremost opponents of this Confucian ethical code centered on "filial piety." Ji Kang was executed in 262 for his bitter condemnation of the Western Jin ruling elite that flaunted the banner of "governing the country by filial piety."⁴⁹ Before his tragic death, Ji Kang wrote a philosophical essay proclaiming, "One's self-esteem does not lie in his mind, thereby one must go beyond the Confucian ethical code and let Nature take its course."⁵⁰ In the Western Jin period, the differentiation between the Confucian ethical code and nature was an important issue discussed by scholars of the metaphysical school called *xuanxue* (also known as the mysterious or black studies). Ji Kang was one of those Taoist thinkers who believed that Confucian morals and institutions contradict each other and so only constitute human bondage. Hence Ji Kang and his peers advocated that one should conform to nature in disregard of classical Confucian tradition.⁵¹ Seen within

this metaphysical framework, Yang Fudong's devoted "filial son" seems to have betrayed the very ideal of nature that Ji Kang had defended with his own life. But is this antithesis to the ancient saga of Seven Sages manifest in Yang's film also the antithesis between nature and culture if viewed in a "postmodern" context?

As mentioned, in the opening sequence of the film, there is a splendid panoramic view of Yellow Mountain, followed by a scene in which naked young men and women are clothing themselves before the movie title, *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest*, appears on the screen. This introductory montage already gives nature superiority over culture; the actors are stripped of their own identity and exposed as almost nothing in face of almighty Nature. During this sequential montage, we also hear the somber background music with a jarring drum roll, a sound effect that is indeed forbidding! Prior to their performance, as it were, the actors possess nothing that may be deemed an indication of any civilized world. It is not until they complete their makeup that they are at last ready to play the legendary Seven Sages. But they dress in tasteful costumes that are somehow non-historical and even non-Chinese and which are in violation of the Seven Sages' times and culture. In Yang Fudong's cinematic adaptation of the time-honored story, each of the actors is arrayed like a debonair city dweller from 1920s Shanghai, keen to emulate an immaculately dressed Westerner, reminiscent of Yin Mingzhu or "Lady F.F." For this reason, I think, a masqueraded identity of "Shanghai modern" is conferred upon the actors playing the Seven Intellectuals in Yang's film, which again betrays the very ideal of the unorthodox Seven Sages in history. As noted earlier, the Seven Sages tended to drink unclothed to remonstrate against the Confucian ethical code, which insists: "A gentleman must dress properly."⁵²

In *Seven Intellectuals*, all the young gentlemen and ladies indeed "dress properly," but not to meet the criteria of the long-gone Confucian ethical code. Rather, their dress hints at "Shanghai modern," which itself is portrayed by Yang Fudong as problematic, or which "is not thoroughly modern, but modern in an uneven and over-coded way" from the viewpoint of the Chinese cultural critic quoted before. In any event, we have sensed in Yang's film that his overtly modish Seven Intellectuals are neither in accord with the Seven Sages from a historical perspective nor "tourists" in a modern sense of a leisure industry (e.g., a vacation booked through a travel agency), which is an integral component of modernity. The Seven Intellectuals seem to freely move about between a kind of disjointed time and space, but as I have pointed out before, their discordant relationship with history/nature/culture renders them more unwelcome intruders than modern tourists to be satisfied by whatever a local leisure industry would offer at the sacred site of Yellow Mountain. The film's female narrator complains of being like an indistinguishable tourist: "What everyone has is the same: a raincoat, a walking stick, and a hat with a tag of 'Yellow Mountain.'" However, this seeming

“tourist’s” vocal discontent is Yang’s strategic device to reinterpret the Seven Sages myth. In the discussion that follows, I will argue that the artist portrays his Seven Intellectuals as a postmodern Other, belonging in neither an ancient world of the Seven Sages (as the film’s title playfully assumes) nor a modern world of 1920s Shanghai (as the film’s characters, flamboyantly appearing in a foreign fashion characteristic of that most “Westernized” Chinese metropolis, would imply).

As we have seen so far, both the male and female protagonists address Yellow Mountain as a natural world that brings no joy—a sentiment contradictory to that of the historical Seven Sages. This natural world compels the man to worry about his ailing parents and drives the woman to the point of impulsive death. Throughout the film, the scenery of Yellow Mountain is shot in the dim light of heavy clouds and chilly mist, except for a few sunny moments. For instance, on a sunlit mountaintop, the seven hushed travelers have a picnic, a rare lighthearted scene reminiscent of such French Impressionist “open air” paintings as Claude Monet’s *Le Dejeuner sur l’herbe* (1865–1866). Perhaps Yang Fudong inserted this scene to invest the group with a bit of European gentlemanly artistic flair. Most of the time, though, the Seven Intellectuals walk under treacherous serpentine tree trunks shrouded in dark rolling clouds and mist. Or they emerge as if to be snatched from monstrous rocks which are about to devour them. Nature is rendered as hostile to these Seven Intellectuals, who have a trendy Western genteel appearance but without a self-assured Chinese philosophical mind. Moreover, the only other human figure that we encounter in the film is a passing peasant native of the Yellow Mountain region, whose baggy, traditional clothes contrast sharply with those of the modern, overcoded Seven Intellectuals. But this plain peasant easily dissolves into the landscape of Yellow Mountain to become part of nature, which embodies a central notion of Taoism unbeknownst to Yang’s Seven Intellectuals burdened with an unfamiliar modern culture.

Near the end of their journey along the peaks and valleys of Yellow Mountain, some of Yang’s Seven Intellectuals collapse under the tension between an inherent forbidding nature and an acquired alien culture. In a long shot, we see three gentlemen from the group lying on their back motionless in a steep rocky ravine at right, while from the left the two couples stroll over a mountain peak overlooking their “dead” colleagues below. At first glance, this staged, symbolic “death” may seem a bit sarcastic and out of context. But Yang Fudong enacts these men’s symbolic death to prepare the audience for a woman’s symbolic death that follows in the final scene of the film. A moment before the close of *Seven Intellectuals*, the female protagonist turns away from her lover in disappointment as the young man rambles about his parents’ standing under Yingkesong for a tourist snapshot. Afterwards we see all Seven Intellectuals pose for the camera, but one by one they are blurred out, except for the female protagonist that we encountered at the very

beginning of the film. In the next medium close-up shot, we see the young woman grow frenzied as the other Seven Intellectuals all vanish from the scene. Then the camera zooms in to show the woman's panic-stricken face up close, a haunting image that immediately engages the entire screen. In this contorted face we discern the woman's agony; left alone, she is at the edge of a suicidal nervous breakdown. (As we recall, such a feminine attempt at suicide or an impulse to die first occurs when a female protagonist reaches the summit of Yellow Mountain.) On the other hand, this final shot ranks the anguished woman with her male colleagues, who have fallen to their symbolic deaths in the ravine as witnessed previously.

Here, in this final scene of a woman's "death drive," Yang Fudong's camera shoots a strictly frontal view of the female character's face. This camera angle was widely used in the silent era of Chinese cinema during the 1920s. In, for example, *The Orphan in Snow* (*Xuezhong guchu*, dir. Zhang Huimin, 1929), there is an episode in which a newly wed young girl runs away from home and hurries to the railroad to attempt suicide. A moment before the tragic act, the distressed female protagonist sits on the tracks, directly facing the audience. Her frontal figure is shot in a medium close-up (comparable to the last scene of Yang's *Seven Intellectuals*), and the camera lingers to explore the actress's emotional import. The audience sees the girl's facial expressions change from hesitance to determination to exhaustion. This agonizing process is done without words; no subtitle is given to clarify the girl's feelings. Such camerawork was common to Chinese silent movies of the 1920s, and in the final scene of *Seven Intellectuals* Yang Fudong employs the same ingenious device of speechless communication. Since the artist allows no more first-person narration (which has been dominant in his film) to provide any clue to the young woman's grief in the final act, the ambivalent ending imparts his *Seven Intellectuals* with an openness for various cinematic and psychological interpretations.

I would read the final scene of Yang's film in relation to such 1920s silents as *The Orphan in Snow*, whose female protagonist, the distressed fugitive girl, is antithetical to Yang's self-absorbed grieving young woman. In the 1929 silent movie, a young man in a trendy overcoat jumps off his convertible and pulls the girl off the rail a second before the oncoming train hits her (a brilliant Chinese version of D.W. Griffith's cinematic "last minute rescue").⁵³ The girl escaped from home after she could not "comply with" (as indicated by the film's subtitle) her husband's bizarre sexual desire; she was forced to marry this dysfunctional man under the patriarchal system that ignores a woman's right to happiness. By contrast, the girl's "savior" is a gentleman by birth and education, and he takes her home to work as a family servant. However, the young man's father discharges the girl for being clumsy on the job and breaking things, and an evil man kidnaps the now homeless girl and keeps her captive, lusting for her as he had done when

attending her wedding early in the movie. After the girl brushes off his sexual advances, the wicked man locks her up in a cage with two poisonous lizards as big as snakes. Then the young gentleman comes to the girl's rescue a second time, after which she tells him, "Young master, since you saved my life twice, I am now at your command." The "young master's" previous expression of his love for the girl was the real cause for her dismissal, because the father would never approve of a love affair between master and servant. In this respect, the story of *The Orphan in Snow* is no doubt a "modernist" filmic text of the kind we have read earlier in "Butterfly" pop fiction such as Li Dinyi's *Yun yu yuan*: "Freedom is natural rights, which cannot be violated even by one's parents or the elder." By submitting herself to the young man, the girl in *The Orphan in Snow* typifies what I call a true "feminist" from 1920s China, who would fight the patriarchy with her own life.

If this "feminist" central character in *The Orphan in Snow* resolves not to comply with a man's sexual desire in cruel circumstances (i.e., her marriage and imprisonment), the young woman from Yang's *Seven Intellectuals* seems eager to gratify her lover's need at any price. As the female narrator puts it, "Why would a man love so many women just as weaving a spider's web? Is this so-called '[male] desire'? If so I want to confront this desire." This young woman is determined to confront (or comply with) such male desire, which is always almost promiscuous. As noted, the young woman would rather take her boyfriend by a week, a day, and a minute even though he is going away. Here in Yang's *Seven Intellectuals*, we sense a postmodernist and a postfeminist touch—that is, the young woman chooses to confront, not to evade, that burdensome and problematic male desire for "so many women." All through Yang's film, the female narrator discourses on this feminine dilemma and claims she still believes in "fate" and "constellation," no matter what happens in her relationships with men. By comparison, the male narrator constantly attends to his parents (i.e., the patriarchy system) and his own life. He categorically states, "To have a faith is a mistake," which, in my view, contradicts his own belief in the patriarchy; or perhaps what he means by "faith" is ideological systems such as socialism and capitalism. And the man does not resign himself to the "fate" that the female narrator tends to accept. What repels him most is that if "faith" or "fate" should impose on him, he would be distanced from his everyday human self.

Does such "hokey" dialogue sound like "vulgar philosophizing," in Žižek's analytical terms? Or is there any conceded sexual difference between the masculine and feminine discourses in Yang's film? Whatever it might be, this perceptible disparity in speech by the sexes should be taken into account. That is to say, in order to grasp the symbolism of Yang's film, we need to compare the difference in male and female discourse with a social and a psychological division among all Yang's *Seven Intellectuals*.

As noted, in this invented community of Seven Intellectuals, there are two male-female couples, which leaves the other three Intellectuals unaccompanied by the opposite sex during their pilgrimage to Yellow Mountain. It is this all-male segment of Yang's Seven Intellectuals that plunged to the symbolic death described earlier. For that reason, Yang seems to reaffirm a clichéd Chinese philosophical concept, i.e., the harmony between *yin* and *yang* (or woman and man), whose reverse is most likely to result in a symbolic death for the unpaired male Intellectuals. As I have pointed out earlier, Yang introduces women to provoke a sexual anxiety among this traditionally all-male community, and such a feminine intrusion would eventually break up a community symbolic of premodern Chinese masculinity as exemplified by the Seven Sages. But this postmodern feminine participation in a man's world does not bring about any woman's happiness, as the female narrator remains fearful of her lover's patriarchal proclivity all through Yang's film. Apparently, this feminine angst overshadows the film's final scene; at the end of their portentous journey, the female protagonist is to commit a symbolic suicide, to fall into the abyss of nothingness rather than a promised paradise.

Thus, as we have seen, Yang's *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I* begins with a dispirited group trip to the apex of Yellow Mountain, where the film also concludes abruptly with a single young woman's suicidal despair. But, a short while before this moment of "death and sublimation,"⁵⁴ there is a brief and rare scene of feminine joy that contradicts the film's overall gloomy ambiance. In it, the two young women dance together and smile at each other, leaving their cheerless male partners behind. I consider this women's dance a most significant visual metaphor for what Žižek calls *jouissance feminine*. As he explains it in both religious and Lacanian psychoanalytical terms, "far from prohibiting bodily passions (sexuality), the Church endeavors to regulate them. In its long history, it has also developed a series of strategies for 'domesticating' the excess of *jouissance* which cannot be contained in the paternal Law (say, the option opened up to women to become nuns and thus engage in a *jouissance feminine* of mystical experience)."⁵⁵ In this light, not only have the two women withdrawn from their male companionship, but they also rejoice in almost a "mystical experience" of female delight uninhibited by the patriarchy. Moreover, they form a feminine alliance against an oppressive paternal law, which discounts women's desire even in a loving relationship, as evinced early in the film. Women's regrouping ultimately splits this gender-exclusive group and thereafter subverts the masculine myth of the historical Seven Sages.

On March 9, 2009, Yang Fudong's video installation *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I-V* opened at the Asia Society in New York City. In the early evening of that day, I went to the opening of the Yang Fudong exhibition and looked for the artist in the Asia Society's elegant reception lounge decorated with Buddhist bronze statues. I did not find the artist in the crowd, so I walked

upstairs to view his *Seven Intellectuals* video, especially the latter parts of the work, which I had never seen. Similar to my visit to Tate Modern's *Time Zone* show in London five years before, I soon found myself sitting in a dark room of the Asia Society's galleries and watching *Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part V*, which lasted ninety minutes. In style, *Part V* was a tribute to both Chinese silent cinema from the 1920s and early 1930s and American film noir of the 1940s.⁵⁶ Since the filmic narrative of *Part V* was set in Shanghai, Yang used the city's Western-style architecture, especially its art deco interior,⁵⁷ as the major setting for his characters (Seven Intellectuals). The "chiaroscuro lighting with its patterns of light and dark as the quintessential noir 'look'"⁵⁸ was found in *Part V*, which endowed the work with a new global flair compared to *Part I*, discussed earlier. However, the most significant change occurs in the iconography of *Part V*. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in *Liu Lan* a young businessman with a suitcase is symbolic of modernity in 1930s China, whereas the true nature of that suitcase is the emptiness or nothingness of an aborted modernity. In *Part V*, all the Seven Intellectuals (including two female members) carry a similar suitcase, and yet toward the end of the film they hurl the suitcases into a huge crack of a bankrupt steel factory workshop. To me, this conclusion about the suitcase in *Part V* is consistent with Yang's earlier works, such as *Liu Lan*, where the suitcase eventually proved useless.

Later I met Yang Fudong outside the galleries. He told me it took five years for him to shoot *Part V*, and he appeared a bit worried that a New York audience would not understand his work (sitting in that dark room a while before, I had overheard a lady passing by laughing and saying, "weird!"). As Yang was busy talking with the museum staff that was arranging his next trip to Boston, I bid farewell to the artist and vanished into the chilly darkness of an early spring night in Manhattan.

Ning Hao's *Incense*

A Curious Tale of Earthly Buddhism

In the summer of 2006, *Crazy Stone*, a low-budget black comedy directed by Ning Hao, was an enormous success in China's domestic movie market and “an unlikely mainland hit” that “even brushed aside” Hollywood blockbusters such as *Superman Returns* and *Mission: Impossible III*.¹ *China Daily*, the Chinese government's English-language newspaper, hailed *Crazy Stone* as a film that “makes audiences laugh” and “Hollywood cry.”² Ning Hao is a talented young filmmaker who before his triumph of *Crazy Stone* was unknown to a Chinese audience that had been bombarded with Hollywood offerings for a decade. The director's two previous works, *Incense* (*Xianghuo*, 2003) and *Mongolian Ping Pong* (*Lü caodi*, 2004), were only shown abroad at international film festivals or in “art houses” in the West.³ In his first public interview with the CCTV anchor of *Xinwen huiketing*,⁴ Ning was teasingly called “a 29-year-old obscure director.”⁵ Yet the interview touched a serious issue that critics and movie audience had ignored, which is the director's “intense concerns with social problems—from peasant laborers' living conditions to laid-off factory workers' living environment.”⁶ As the CCTV anchor asked Ning, “There is a very realistic [social] background to your film, including the crime of fraud, the bankruptcy of a state-run factory, and the problem of capital. Were these issues related to your own life? How did you observe such things?” He answered, “I grew up at Taiyuan Iron and Steel Plant. . . . Many of my friends are factory workers, including a lot of my parents' friends. As a matter of fact, I know very well about the factory and I don't think those issues are really new to me. Just ask everyone: all of us understand the factory's current situation and see those problems which are not complex at all. So I film what I saw.”⁷

When the anchor inquired about the director's choice of Chongqing, a city in Sichuan province where his film was shot, Ning replied, “The glaring absurdity of the story [of *Crazy Stone*] can only be found in a place full of big changes and antagonistic contradictions. . . . Chongqing became a *zhixiashi*⁸ [in 1997], which is

developing rapidly. Against this background interesting things are taking place, and anything can happen here in the city. When we were looking for a location to shoot the movie, we sensed at once such an atmosphere there and hence the choice.”⁹ But the director's choice of location is not only sociopolitical but visual; he continued, “I sensed that atmosphere directly from the city's architecture. Looking from Luohan Temple (Luohansi), I saw instantly all kinds of buildings from three hundred years ago up to the present. Luohan Temple was probably a building from the Republic of China (1912–1949) or the early days of the People's Republic. Behind it are the glass walls [of skyscrapers]. The temple was not torn down so it coexists with those of [modern architecture]. Under such conditions, there must be people of all social strata living in those buildings, old or new. Because of this there is a possibility of contradictions and a story as well.”¹⁰

Clearly, a striking contrast between an old Buddhist temple¹¹ and new glass-walled high-rises in Chongqing had inspired Ning Hao. In fact, his *Crazy Stone* starts with a Buddhist “cue.” In a scene after the title credits, a developer asks a factory director to sign a foreclosure contract because the state-owned factory is bankrupt and unable to pay back the loan from the developer's firm, which is buying the land of the factory. Saying that the workers have not been paid for eight months, the developer advises the director, “Lay everyone off. This is doing a good deed to them (*zhe caishi zuo shanshi*). The sooner they die, the sooner they reincarnate” (*zao si zao chaosheng*). In this speech, the developer appropriates the Buddhist concept of “reincarnation” (*chaosheng*) to justify his wanton disregard for human life.¹² For him, the laid off workers will “shorten” their journey to the Buddhist heavens if they soon symbolically “die”—that is, their lifelong employment under socialism is terminated. No matter how callous the developer's discourse may seem, it conveys a grim reality in Chinese cities today. In a bestselling book titled *Zhongguo chengshi pipan* (A critique of Chinese cities), we read: In Chongqing, one in five employees of state-owned enterprises are laid off, which results from the government's unwilling policy of “reducing workforce and increasing productivity.” In 2003, 100,000 laid-off workers joined the army of unemployment, adding to the number of 400,000 laid-off workers before 2003. This figure is without doubt a disaster to Chongqing, a city that has a population of 32 million as of 2006.¹³ Thus the success of *Crazy Stone* lies in its gritty cinematic realism. The movie is not only a poignant portrayal of the life-and-death matter of unemployment, but a biting satire on the greedy realtor's misuse of Buddhism.¹⁴

In *Mongolian Ping Pong*, Ning Hao shoots a scene of a lamasery rising from the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, where the children protagonists ask the learned lamas about the mysterious ping-pong ball (which is unknown to the children in the movie). In two other scenes, a teenage lama plays with the young protagonists but never speaks a word. However, his silent presence hints at a living tradition in

the region. Since the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Mongolian parents have sent at least one boy to a lamasery, for they believe this child lama would do good for the family through his “reincarnation in the next life” (*laishi zhuanheng*).¹⁵ Buddhism is a constant theme or leitmotif in Ning’s work. In this chapter, I analyze his debut film *Incense* in terms of Buddhism as a living religion in contemporary China. As the new millennium begins, Chinese Buddhist leaders and scholars have advocated so-called Earthly Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) with regard to modernity and globalization. They consider it impossible for traditional Buddhism to “withdraw from the world” (*dunshi*) or evade the realities of globalization. As an alternative, they claim, Earthly Buddhism must enter the world (*rushi*) and partake in the modernization of religious institutions and social life. For them, a domain in alliance with Earthly Buddhism is Metropolitan Buddhism (*dushi fojiao*), which is a ready response to rapid urbanization in the country. Moreover, they strongly endorse environmental protection and balance.¹⁶ More recently, religious scholars outside China have also addressed the important issue of Earthly Buddhism, as illuminated by Charles B. Jones’ study of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism.¹⁷ In his study, Jones discussed the theologies of Taixu (1890–1940) and Yinshun (1906–), the two modern masters of Pure Land Buddhism who strongly advocated Earthly Buddhism.¹⁸ In Yinshun’s view, as Jones wrote, the historical Buddha left home to seek enlightenment, yet he did not take leave of the human world but “the narrow confines of family,” and he “made his way into the world of humanity as a whole with its troubles and travails.”¹⁹ And Yinshun believed that “this emphasis on human concerns and compassionate activity within the human sphere best suited the needs of the modern world.”²⁰ It is in this context that I examine *Incense* as a film text that deconstructs Earthly Buddhism, especially its current efforts to adapt to China’s economic reforms and capitalist globalization. To me, the film text of *Incense* also seems to concur with what Slavoj Žižek has lately said: the “very fact of capitalist globalization” is that “capitalism can accommodate itself to all civilizations, from Christian to Hindu and Buddhist.”²¹

A Broken Buddha, a Shattered Faith

In *Incense*, Ning Hao chooses an impoverished Buddhist monk and his ruined temple as a central theme. The film opens with a vista of a long, snowy country road under a vast sunny sky. This bleak winter landscape is a *mise-en-scène* which symbolically frames the monk’s existence and which seems to designate his irrelevance to human society. As a truck enters the road, we first hear the driver sing loudly in front and then we catch sight of the monk curling up in back. In the next shot, the truck driver unloads a flock of sheep onto a stage-like building in a

village, and the monk lifts up a box of incense—he is getting ready for his prayers at his temple during the Chinese New Year. On the top of the “stage” is a slogan from the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) that reads “Wishing Chairman Mao a Long, Long Life!” Apparently, the building was a place for political gathering in the village before, but now it functions as a center stage for economic activities—that is, a livestock shed where sheep are kept before butchering.

The subsequent shot is shocking. Methodically and slowly, a butcher slays a sheep with a knife. This horrific scene of animal slaughter tells of a significant role that the monk serves in this village community. The butcher's home is next to the monk's temple, so both men are good neighbors and friends. On his way back to the temple, the monk teases his butcher friend: “You are killing a living thing (*shasheng*) again!”²² To which the butcher replies, “Look at your dress! You don't even seem a human!” This bitter verbal exchange between the two friends is perhaps a daily routine to chase away boredom. The butcher makes fun of the “exotic” appearance of the monk's bald head and drab clothing, while the monk's accusation of “killing a living thing” is theologically legitimate. Given that all the villagers make a living by slaughtering sheep, he must maintain a temple to redeem their “sin.” However, this religious legitimacy will be in question in the next sequence of “a broken Buddha.”

Back in his room in the temple, the monk inspects a pair of worn-out shoes that needs repair. He looks around and walks to a chapel that houses a clay Buddhist statue. He finds a piece of cloth tucked under a tree branch that props up the crumbling Buddha. The audience can see that the cloth was put under the branch to prevent it from slipping away, which would cause the statue to fall. Seeing the gray color of the cloth that matches his shoes, the monk pulls the cloth from under the branch but makes sure the statue is fine. Then he burns incense and prays to the Buddha, seeming to “repent” for what he has done. The monk then returns to his room and mends the shoes with the cloth. Suddenly, a loud crash is heard off-screen. The monk rushes back to the chapel and is in shock; the clay Buddha has broken into pieces except for his head. Then we cut to a scene in which the despairing monk is holding the “severed” head of the Buddha. To the viewer, the monk's face and the Buddha head look eerily alike. Is the monk holding his own head that has survived the collapse but is “bodiless” now? And who is to blame for this terrible accident? Is this a symbolic “breakdown” of the Buddhist faith? Is the monk more concerned with his shoes than with the welfare of a sacred Buddhist icon?

In fact, the shattered statue is not a Buddha but an *arhat*. In Buddhism, an *arhat* is one who has attained enlightenment and is free of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. But there is difference between an *arhat* and a Buddha. The Buddha attains enlightenment by himself, while the *arhat* achieves the same goal by following the teachings of another.²³ Theravada Buddhism, in particular, considers

becoming an *arhat* as the goal of the spiritual process.²⁴ (Later in the movie, after his arrest for illegal “alms begging,” the monk tells the police that he was ordained in Foguang Temple in Huo county of Shanxi province and was following the path of an *arhat* in that spiritual process.) However, the difference between a Buddha and an *arhat* in *Incense* is more important visually than theologically. As the monk curiously resembles the *arhat* that crashed to the ground, we may see this collapse as a breakdown of the monk’s Buddhist faith. Actually, the accident presages the monk’s own moral and spiritual downfall toward the end of the film.

But the accident also shows how appalling poverty may hinder the monk from keeping up good works or achieving the goal of enlightenment, and the film text of *Incense* continues to present this pecuniary hindrance as a central motif. As noted, the monk is the only person in the village who runs the temple that redeems those who kill animals. So his survival is inevitably linked to the Buddhist statue, without which no worshipers would come and donate money to the monk for his services. The broken Buddha therefore needs to be repaired before the New Year, and that task requires funding. So the monk decides to get support from the local government. Before his first trip to town, the monk discovers that his bicycle is broken, and he turns to his butcher friend for help. The butcher has a younger sister who works as a schoolteacher in the village. In a sunny classroom full of noisy school kids, the sister, through a speaker at her desk, calls her brother to come home to fix the bicycle. She then lets all the students go home, but a boy lingers on and mimics her tone of voice until she orders him out. This lively episode indicates that the young woman shares the monk’s worry for the fallen Buddha and does everything she can to help him. Meanwhile the boy’s teasing hints at a warm relationship between the young woman and the monk. In a high-angle tracking shot that follows the classroom scene, we see the monk walking side by side with the schoolteacher in a courtyard, where children play around and watch the “couple” vanish into her house.

Inside the house, the brother is fixing the bicycle while the monk sits eating melon seeds offered by the sister.²⁵ Again we feel a daily intimacy among the monk, the butcher, and his sister. Though he lives alone in the temple, the monk is emotionally attached to a home that treats him like family.²⁶ The monk stares at the framed family pictures on the wall and asks the brother, “Is this a photo of your sister?” Without seeing what the monk is referring to, the brother answers, “It’s mine!” In a close-up shot, we see what the monk is looking at: a picture of a newborn baby whose gender is hard to determine. Next to it is a snapshot of the sister as a grown-up. In the movie, we never see the sister’s face because she is always wrapped in a scarf during her brief screen presence. This obscured view of the sister may imply that the young woman is an “illusion” framed in a photograph, elusive and unattainable to the monk, who is somehow attracted to her. (In fact,



Figure 21. *Incense*. Dir. Ning Hao. 2003.

during the exchange of harsh words between the monk and the butcher, the monk complains that he looks “inhuman” because no one “takes care” of him, while the butcher shouts back, “Get yourself a wife!” And the monk confesses, “I think your sister is a good woman.”)

A State and a Church for the Rich

The next long shot brings us back to that snowy country road. This time the monk appears as a lone traveler bicycling in the road with his back toward us, making his first trip to town to visit the government agencies. The monk walks into the office of the Section of Religion and meets with the section chief. He explains to the chief that he runs his temple to redeem the sins of his fellow villagers and that a temple without a Buddha is not functional (neither is a monk). The chief listens to him with sympathy but offers no help. He makes it clear to the monk that the state’s policy toward funding religious institutions is “*zhuada fangxiao*” (grasping the big and releasing the small). In other words, his Section of Religion can only use its limited funds to repair the big temples and must disregard the small ones.

The chief advises the monk to “return to secular life” (*huansu*) if the “situation” becomes unmanageable. (This same advice of “returning to secular life” is given to the monk time after time by other characters.) But the monk answers that he is incapable of doing anything other than being a monk. In the meantime, a well-fed, middle-aged woman enters the office with her boy. Both mother and child present “gifts” to the chief before asking for a help to repair a *Christian* church. Feeling uneasy at the new visitors, the monk leaves the room, and we watch the chief promise to fund the woman’s church repair work after the New Year. In this office, where staff members are playing cards on their job, the monk indeed looks “inhuman.” His stern face and austere monastic outfit seem so alienating to others, especially compared with the Christian mother and her son.

Just before the monk walks away, the chief gives him another piece of advice: “You may go and see Xiao An of the Section of Cultural Relics about your problem.” Puzzled by the chief’s recommendation (why the Section of Cultural Relics?), the monk walks through the governmental compound as instructed. We cut to the office of the Section of Cultural Relics, and a man’s sardonic voice is heard off-screen: “Xiao An! Who in your family goes to a monastery?” Ostensibly shaken by this reference to the buddhahood, Xiao An retorts, “Nonsense! And no one!” Yet the same mocking voice announces, “There is a *monk* waiting to see you!” Embarrassed by this encounter with the monk, Xiao An responds to his request for help with anger: “It’s none of my business!” while the monk continues to plead with Xiao An, “Without a Buddhist statue, how can I live?” The monk’s tender appeal seems to soften Xiao An, who finally suggests that his section is collecting “window frames” from antiquity, and that if the monk’s temple has such stuff he may bring it in for cash. Like the chief of the Section of Religion, Xiao An thinks that the monk’s temple is not worth saving, but its ancient assets or “cultural relics” might be profitable in China’s booming antiquity market.

Such a governmental stance on religions, Buddhism in particular, poses a true challenge to the monk, who is too confined to his temple to understand the outside world. In *Incense*, the monk’s visit to the government compound is staged like an unwanted alien intrusion, and the monk’s “inhuman” appearance surely does a disservice to his ability to raise funds whenever he meets people. On the one hand, the power of the state bureaucracy renders the monk helpless, and on the other, a veiled yet popular prejudice against the Buddhist religion deprives the monk of his rights to government assistance. In contrast, the amiable Christian woman receives the help denied to the monk. Such a social bias against Buddhism is most evident in the case of Xiao An, who feels insulted when a co-worker makes a crude joke about his family in connection with Buddhism.

While escaping from this hostile environment, the monk passes a room where the off-screen “cookhouse squad” (*chuishiban*) is rehearsing a New Year song²⁷

about man's efforts to overcome hardship and achieve success. One line from the song says, "A body without a soul is like a scarecrow." Though we may ignore those banal words on the soundtrack, we cannot discount the image of a scarecrow that comes into sight twice on the screen. In the opening credit sequence, the truck driver and the monk pass under a scarecrow standing in the open fields by the country road. When the monk returns to his village from his first trip to town, he stops by the scarecrow and removes its hat. We are baffled by the monk's strange behavior: would anyone in this world steal a hat from a scarecrow? However, the mystery is soon resolved after the monk's return to his temple. In the chapel we find a "new" Buddhist statue: the old severed head of the *arhat* is imposed on the scarecrow's body! The monk's first fund-raising trip ends up in a comic twist. He removes the scarecrow from the unattended fields and brings it to the temple to give the smashed Buddha a new body. In his film, Ning Hao uses this bizarre make-shift Buddha as a cinematic metaphor for Buddhism in general. Like the "soulless" scarecrow, Buddhism stands deserted in human society. The monk, in particular, is losing his relevance to the village community. Under the circumstances of personal poverty and government neglect, the monk is a Buddhist "scarecrow" who is doomed to fail in fulfilling his religious function.

The next day the monk takes a second trip to town. On the road he rides his bicycle and carries an old window frame he has taken from the temple (which is an act of sacrilege by the monk). Again, the *mise-en-scène* of a wintry landscape frames the diminutive figure of the monk, whose existence relies upon the mercy of government officials. Soon the monk shows up in front of the office of the Section of Cultural Relics. Xiao An looks at the window frame and seems satisfied. "It could be from the Qing dynasty," says Xiao An to the monk. But he gives the monk no cash (only after the New Year!) but a worthless "white receipt" (*bai-tiao*). Disillusioned at the state bureaucracy, the monk begins to wander about in a busy downtown street. Abruptly, we hear a solemn Buddhist sutra chanting on the soundtrack and in a long shot we see the monk walking toward a grand Buddhist temple. We then cut to the inside of the temple and find a tape recorder placed by the gate playing the sutra chanting, a task supposedly undertaken by monks. This mechanical recording of the human voice is, I think, an acoustic motif symbolic of Earthly Buddhism, which serves the faithful of the well-to-do middle class. At the suggestion of the chief of the Section of Religion, the monk comes here to seek help from the head priest, who was also a senior classmate (*da shixiong*) back in his training years.

The two monks meet in front of the temple gate lavishly adorned in gaudy red and gold. This well-kept temple proves to be an example of the state's policy that the chief had referred to as "grasping the big and releasing the small." While talking with the monk, the head priest is shining a brand new motorcycle with

a cloth. To his left is a huge screen wall with an enormous Chinese character *fo* (Buddha) written on it. This mise-en-scène is a quaint fusion of Buddhist ideology and modern technology, which epitomizes Earthly Buddhism, especially its close ally Metropolitan Buddhism. As the advocates of Metropolitan Buddhism have pointed out, a city monastery (*dushi siyuan*) has economic advantage because donations from the faithful are not the only revenue. Under the state's policy of self-sufficiency (*ziyang*), a city monastery can support itself by selling sutras, ritual implements, and other paraphernalia to pilgrims and tourists.²⁸ This viable "Buddhist economy" (*fojiao jingji*) may contradict the Buddha's teachings, but it is an effective means for a monastery to survive and even prosper in a market economy. In history, the Buddhist church has never been separated from the state in that "without depending on the state, the Buddhist service is hard to expand." It is a political doctrine adopted by the Buddhist church under socialism as well.²⁹ In this episode, the temple is typical of the city monastery that thrives on a self-sufficient "Buddhist economy." The monk's small temple in a poor village is bankrupt due to its lack of state funding, while the head priest's big temple is flourishing in a booming town because of wealthy donors and government support. Hence we see a Buddhist community divided between the rich townspeople and the poor villagers.³⁰ However, when the monk asks to borrow some money, the head priest refuses, alleging that his temple "business" is a bit slow before the New Year. And he suggests that the monk should desert his temple and come to stay in this one after the New Year, when he is taking office in another temple on Mount Wutai, the Holy Land of Chinese Buddhism. If the monk comes, says the head priest, he will have a share (*gufen*) in this temple, which has adopted the joint-stock system. The head priest's offer provides an easy solution to the monk's personal crisis of survival, yet the monk says, "I can't let a hundred year old temple ruin in my hands." The head priest answers coldly, "You can stay here for two hundreds years." In dismay the monk walks away and wonders what has become of his senior classmate with whom he had studied Buddhism.

Denied help by both the government agencies and the Buddhist establishment, the monk has to find some other means to raise money. On the street the monk sees a man posting a job advertisement on the wall. And he catches a glimpse of another man who is playing two-string Chinese fiddle music outside a house. A lady comes out of the house and gives the uninvited musician some money to send him away. Both men inspire the monk to see where he can "earn" his money. It is a free marketplace where everyone can work a job or sell his or her skills. The "enlightened" monk then hurries home, traveling on that snow-covered country road. Unexpectedly, he falls off his bicycle and plunges onto the roadside, an accident that signifies the monk's moral and spiritual downfall yet to come.

The Aborted “Alms Begging,” the Declined “Almsgiving”

Ironically, the monk's last trip to town also begins with a symbolic fall. In a long shot, we see the monk leave the village on a blue winter morning. The truck driver stands by the stage building, shouting at the monk, “Where are you going?” “Beg alms!” (*huayuan*) the monk responds with great confidence. A moment later the monk falls off his bicycle behind the stage building. This constant, awkward falling may indicate that the monk is an inadequate bicyclist who has no control of his vehicle. Yet, as we'll learn from the movie, the monk's continual falling stands for a failure of his alms-begging mission and his moral bankruptcy thereafter. In Buddhism, “almsgiving” (*dāna*) is a key virtue and a source of great merit for the faithful. Buddhist laymen and laywomen give alms to monks in order to accumulate such merit.³¹ For monks and nuns, begging alms is gathering food or other gifts from laymen and laywomen on the street. On his final trip the monk carries a begging bowl (*pātra*), a ritual implement used by monks to collect food on their daily almsround under Buddhist tradition.³² The day before, the monk had witnessed a capitalistic marketplace where everyone can make money by selling their expertise. Today he is going to beg alms—a rightful profession for a Buddhist monk in any society.

However, the monk's initial attempts at alms begging in the street prove disastrous. In a narrow alley, the monk comes upon two well-dressed young girls and starts to speak to them in a timid voice. Turning their faces away, the two girls dodge him like a disease. A moment later, the monk goes into a house in the alley but is thrown back by a barking dog. The frustrated monk soon reappears in a swarming downtown area, where he approaches a middle-aged man. The man listens to the monk's words of alms begging and asks, “Do you have a book of merit?” The monk answers “No,” and the man gives him fifty cents as a donation. Realizing his big mistake, the monk buys a notebook with a red flag on its cover and makes it into a “book of merit.” In the next scene we see the monk beg alms with his new “book of merit” in front of a fine house. A smiling old lady gives him plenty of cash after he assures her in the name of the Buddha that her pregnant daughter-in-law will give birth to a boy, not a girl as a recent hospital test showed. In this alms-begging job the monk seems to have achieved instant success, and he walks into a bank to exchange small bills for big notes. As the monk continues his alms begging in the street, a policeman stops him and takes him to a nearby station, where two officers interrogate him, asking if he has a “certificate of monk” (*dudie*). The monk answers “No.” He is taken away for detention until the police verify his identity with the villager head.

An officer brings the monk to a dimly lit room where three young prostitutes are watching a TV program about sexually transmitted diseases, which is required by the police. The officer orders the monk to join the prostitutes squatting against the wall on the left of the frame. The monk's arrival stirs up interest among the prostitutes, who begin to tease the monk by saying that he "looks more like a fortuneteller than a monk," a foretelling of what the monk will do after his release. Later, the girls mock him for watching the TV program "as a monk." In response, the monk moves across the room to the right of the frame so that he is sitting next to the TV, free of any accusation of "watching." However, the monk's new position is even worse, for he has positioned himself among the nude female mannequins on the floor, which have been confiscated by the police. The monk's initial breakaway from the living prostitutes invokes a symbolic act of spiritual purification, whereas his new alliance with the lifeless dummies forces him into a capitalistic fashion culture of explicit female sexuality. This entire "monk vs. prostitutes" sequence is filmed in a single long take. The camera's focus alters between the left and the right of the screen to show both parties, but it constantly registers the monk crouching amid the pretty faces and long legs of the female dummies. He looks quite embarrassed, holding his prayer beads as if to ward off the "evil spirit" of that capitalistic commercial culture.

Strangely, after the monk reinstates himself through this ironic split up, the prostitutes begin to take him seriously. They talk about the Buddhist faith and ask for the monk's opinion. He responds by preaching the Buddhist notion of karma: a person's good or evil deeds have consequences which are impossible to escape, and no one, not even the Buddha, has the power to exonerate the evil deeds.³³ The girls agree that bad people get punished but there are always exceptions. Although this conversation about karma is common among believers, it nonetheless re-establishes an agreeable relationship between the monk and the prostitutes. After a discussion, the prostitutes decide to raise three thousand yuan among their co-workers for the monk's project. Their motivation for this good deed is that since they are all sinners by profession, they must seek redemption by helping the monk rebuild the broken Buddha. In this way, they will be able to accumulate merit and avoid being punished by burning in hell.

Afterwards the officer returns to inform the monk that he is cleared and free to go. But, says the officer, his money is confiscated because the state law bans alms begging. He also orders one of the girls to go back to a karaoke bar where they work and bring back "fines" to the station. As the monk is leaving with his bicycle, the girl asks him for a ride. In the following shot we see an uplifting scene of them both riding together on the street, and we hope they can work out the "deal" they discussed earlier in the police station. When they arrive at the karaoke bar, the girl walks upstairs and asks the monk to come up with her. He first hesitates but then

follows the girl. Next we cut to a dark and sordid room of the karaoke bar, where the girl is speaking to her boss about the police's penalty and the monk's need for money. "What monk? Three thousand yuan?" the boss inquires. The girl hurries back to the staircase and finds the monk gone.

A Monk Turned Venture Capitalist

At that moment the monk seems to be caught in an impossible dilemma. The police take away the money he had rightfully "earned," while the prostitutes offer the money he is afraid to accept. In Buddhist doctrine, the money is permissible in either the case of the monk's alms begging or the prostitutes' almsgiving.³⁴ Yet both are prohibited by the state law, according to the police. Following the karaoke scene is a medium shot in which the monk stands alone by his bicycle on a crowded street corner, visibly shaken by a world so blind to his sufferings. In anguish the monk walks away, but he is soon stopped by a young man lurking around the street corner. The man asks the monk a favor: Can he play a fortune teller for his girlfriend who believes in the Buddha? He explains to the monk that the girl's parents don't approve of their relationship, so he needs help from the monk. This request seems to give the monk a new chance to exercise the power of his Buddhist religion, and the youngster hastily teaches him how to do his job. Then the young man tears up a note of one hundred yuan, stuffs half of it into the monk's pocket, and walks away. When he returns with his girlfriend, the monk blesses the couple as instructed. The girl leaves the scene happy, and the man gives the other half of the note to the monk. To our amazement, the street corner becomes a training ground for the monk, who is at this point willing to learn any skills to raise money. And he proves to be a quick learner in this new trade of "fortune telling."

With this easy money of one hundred yuan in hand, the monk buys a gilt figurine of the Buddha from a street vendor for only twelve yuan. ("Stick them together," says the monk to the vendor as he hands over the torn pieces of the note.) He also purchases a book on divination from another peddler, and the monk opens his own business of "Buddhist divination" on the street. The sign the monk sets up in front of his vendor reads *foyan kan shijie*, meaning "the Buddha sees the world." It soon attracts a few old men who demand that the Buddha tell their future. By using his Buddhist knowledge the monk attains another prompt success as he did with alms begging earlier in the day. However, a man sitting across the street is watching the monk closely. He has been a "blind" fortune teller in this neighborhood since before the monk arrived, and as more people are drawn to the monk's Buddhist divination, he grows apprehensive of losing customers. Unaware of this man's presence, the monk collects the cash from his clients in a bag and is

ready to go home—he has been miraculously transformed into a venture capitalist. Out of the blue, a group of neighborhood youths surround the monk and demand “taxes” from him. Without waiting for a response from the monk, they beat him up, seize the money, and run away. The “blind” man, while watching the situation, slowly removes his huge dark sunglasses and is evidently pleased. With disgust we realize that the man is not blind at all. He is just a leader of the street gang that has destroyed the monk’s last hope for raising money.

We then cut to a night scene of a New Year’s celebration in this thriving town. Amid the cheering crowd we cast a glance at the monk’s bruised face darkened with grief. He looks lost and withdraws from the sight. In a subsequent close-up shot, the monk’s fortune-telling sign—“the Buddha sees the world”—is burning, and we assume that the monk has given up all his efforts to rebuild the broken Buddha. The following scene begins with the monk sleeping in a sunny room, but the camera pans to show that this is the store of a coffin maker, who allows the monk to spend the last night here. This ominous *mise-en-scène* may suggest that the monk has turned into a “living dead”—a wrecked man utterly defeated by the brute forces of state, church, police, and gangster.

Before returning home, the monk stops by a shop and buys a new pair of leather shoes with money hidden in the shoes he is wearing. This seemingly innocuous purchase, however, reminds us that it was the monk himself who actually provoked the whole debacle of the broken Buddha. He was more concerned with his shoes than the well-being of a Buddhist icon, and it is this spiritual lapse that the monk has been vainly trying to redeem. In the next scene, we find the monk again trudging along the snow-covered country road under a huge clear sky. This infinite winter landscape of the road, the fields, and the skies makes the monk a small, lonely figure, about to fade away.

From the far right a red motorcycle minicab³⁵ enters the frame, coming out of nowhere and disturbing the tranquility of the scenery. The minicab is soon on the road and approaches the monk from behind. Seeing the monk’s bruised face, the cab driver is sympathetic. He offers the monk a ride home and says that he too is a Buddhist believer. Riding together in the car, the driver mentions to the monk that his neighbor’s wife has been paralyzed for years and is not getting cured, and he thinks the woman is possessed by an evil spirit. The driver asks the monk if he can help because the neighbor’s husband had asked him “to bring in an alms-begging monk” (*huayuan shifu*) whenever he sees one. The monk reacts to the driver’s appeal immediately: “Shall we go now?” The driver then makes a U-turn and heads back the other way. To me, this abrupt, spiral lift offer is sternly surreal. In a way, the red motorcycle car looks like a spacecraft from an American science fiction movie of the 1930s, while the driver’s call for help sounds like a plea from another planet. In *Incense*, the intrusion by a man from “outer space” and

the monk's ride with him is filmed like an alien kidnapping, but with the hostage's consent. Both the monk and the driver act as if they had reached a secret agreement of Buddhism.

Afterwards the film cuts to the same street where the monk's career as a venture capitalist had been cut short by the local gang. The following shot brings us into a shabby house in the neighborhood. In it, a sick woman is lying in bed while her husband is talking with the monk about the wife's incurable disease. He tells the monk that he had spent so much money seeking treatments for her in hospitals without success, and that he had asked a *fengshui* master and a Taoist exorcist to help but they both had let him down.³⁶ At that moment the driver joins the conversation and asks, "Is this the fault of man or house?" The monk replies, "It is that of house." For me, this is an answer the husband had expected, just as the young man had who paid the monk to "sanctify" the marriage between him and his girlfriend. The monk then gives another predictable *fengshui* speech: he detects something "wrong" in the ground when he first walks into the house. Up to this time the monk acts as if he were an expert on *fengshui*, which he is definitely not. As we recall, he learned of his fortune-telling skills on the street the day before. What happens next is, however, most surprising. The monk shows the husband the gilt figurine of the Buddha he had bought for twelve yuan and says, "This Buddha has been blessed by a master of Mount Wutai with a magic power."

As noted, Mount Wutai is the Holy Land of Chinese Buddhism, and the monk is using this religious reference to put a high price on the gilt figurine, which has never been "blessed" by anyone from Mount Wutai. So begins the monk's descent into transgression. When the driver asks a price for the figurine, the monk plays a "Buddhist" trick. He cites the most auspicious numbers of "3, 6, 9" and picks "3" as a final answer. The camera shoots the next scene through a window frame, where we see the three men sitting in silence. A second later, we hear the husband choke. Then we cut to a sunny courtyard outside the house where the monk is stashing the money with a sinister smile—he has gotten what he wants by becoming a swindler. From this moment on, the monk starts to resemble the "blind" fortune teller/gangster who orchestrated his brutal beating on the street the day before. Like the gangster who dupes customers with his faked physical disability, the monk gives the figurine a false religious identity to con a despondent husband out of three thousand yuan. In a long take that follows the courtyard scene, the monk is seen riding his bicycle on the country road back home. Earlier in the film, we have repeatedly seen the monk travel on this road but always with his back toward us. This time, however, the monk is coming at us head-on, as if to ask us to join in his "celebration." Before, we saw the monk fall on the road like an inadequate bicyclist, but now he rides his bicycle like a professional performer. In a bizarrely jubilant manner, he at times changes directions from right to left and even takes his hands

off the handlebar. On the soundtrack the gong and drum music of a Chinese opera accompanies the monk's "joy ride," which nonetheless unveils the true face of the monk at last. Not only does he take advantage of the misfortunes of others, but he revels in his own "success." For the monk, the Buddhist belief has become a facade, like the "blind" gangster's enormous sunglasses, which conceals his unscrupulous disposition.

In the film's final sequence, a brand-new statue of the Amitabha Buddha represents the monk's dubious success. Amitabha means "boundless light," and he is one of the most important and popular buddhas in the Mahayana School of Buddhism,³⁷ which holds that people who speak his name with faith are reborn in the western paradise of Amitabha.³⁸ This glorious gilt statue of the Amitabha Buddha contrasts sharply with the old broken one, which, as mentioned, is the image of a humble *luohan/arhat* resembling the monk himself. Before the opening ceremony takes place, the butcher comes to congratulate the monk, and he gives him a modern gadget called *changingji*, the sutra-chanting tape recorder that we saw earlier in the movie. The next close-up shot is the image of burning incense, followed by a critical scene that, I believe, forms the emotional core of the film text of *Incense*. In this scene, the butcher's sister is alone playing the sutra-chanting tape recorder in the same classroom that was once swamped with children but now is lamentably empty. In my judgment, the absent children embody a lost innocence and a blunt rejection of the monk, who has deviated from his Buddhist path and fallen into a moral abyss. In this light, even the sister's loyal support feels curiously empty—she has no one, not even children, to listen to that recorded sutra chanting. If Earthly Buddhism embraces modernity by substituting human sutra chanting for mechanical reproduction, it merely subjects itself to corruption rather than modernization. In reality, some monasteries have already abandoned Buddhist practices (such as meditating and reciting sutra) in favor of "economic efficiency" (*jingji xiaoyi*).³⁹

In the next medium shot, the monk is found leaning against a pole with a loudspeaker overhead, and the sutra chanting is blasting in the air. He seems to enjoy this "modernized" sutra chanting, a sacred duty that he should perform but which he shirks. When the monk returns to his temple, a small crowd of villagers gathers there, and the ceremony begins in a somber silence. The monk bows, burns incense, and prays to the Amitabha Buddha. The solemn ceremony reaches its peak when the monk steps out and holds up a mirror to refract the rays of sunlight onto the walls of his temple. Is this an attempt by the monk to bless the new Buddhist statue with "divine light"? Yet the monk's blissful endeavor is interrupted a moment later, and he turns around to see two men with a white van parked near his temple. The men are from the Bureau of Communications, there to survey the area, and they tell the monk that the temple is to be demolished to make way

for a new “road to riches” (*zhifulu*) for the villagers. The man then informs the monk that Xiao An of the Section of Cultural Relics has asked him to take back the old window frame because it is dated to the Republic (1911–1949) rather than the Qing dynasty, which means it is worthless. In a subsequent medium shot, we see the monk, stunned and wordless, standing against a wall with a huge Chinese character “*chai*” (demolish) written on it. This final twist in Ning Hao’s plot is brilliantly tragicomic. The monk, who has made every effort to save his hundred-year-old temple, is again crushed by a brutal capitalistic market force, the same force that has metamorphosed him from a devoted Buddhist monk into a pathetic venture capitalist.

Earthly Buddhism and Social Ecology

The monk’s eventual failure to preserve his temple is not caused by the government’s oblivion to religion. On the contrary, the monk is in conflict with his fellow villagers from the very beginning. When the monk first tells the butcher that he is going to ask the government for help, the butcher complains that the government “has not built the road yet.” In other words, the livelihood of the whole village—slaughtering sheep—can only survive in a marketplace accessible by a “road to riches.” So, in the final scene of *Incense*, the sutra chanting is still in the air, but the camera pans to again show the snowy country road, where we have witnessed the monk’s ups and downs throughout the movie. Similar to the empty classroom, this country road is without a traveler. If the villagers welcome this yet-to-come “road to riches,” the monk is surely not among them. His temple will be torn down even before the road is ever built. Therefore, a vexing question arises here: Is Buddhism relevant to people’s lives? In the film text of Ning Hao’s *Incense*, the problematic relationship of Buddhism to society is manifest in the image of the scarecrow, a central motif of alienation that challenges all religions in contemporary China.

In February 2007, a survey on faith conducted by Tong Shijun and Liu Zhongyu, two professors at the East China Normal University in Shanghai, was published in *Oriental Outlook Weekly*, a journal under the auspices of the Xinhua News Agency.⁴⁰ This survey found that in China, three hundred million people consider themselves religious and about two hundred million “are Buddhists, Taoists or worshippers of legendary figures such as the Dragon King and God of Fortune.”⁴¹ And 24.1 percent of the people surveyed said religion “shows the true path of life,” while 28 percent said it “helps cure illness, avoid disasters and ensure that life is smooth.”⁴² In view of this survey, Western media reported⁴³ that “China is seeing a religious revival”⁴³ and “religion has been enjoying a resurgence in China over the past 20 years, as Communist Party disapproval eased.”⁴⁴ Yet Liu Zhongyu

gives a different explanation: "After drastic changes in the past half a century, we now see a bewildering moral decline, apathy between people, estrangement. . . . All these have driven people to find new spiritual sustenance."⁴⁵ Liu Zhongyu attributes a rapid growth of religious population in China to social ills that force people to turn to religion for support. In *Incense*, for instance, the husband truly believes that Buddhism could help to cure his wife, while the monk tricks the poor man for his own material gain. In this case, the monk's devious deed is a bewildering moral decline from *within* a Buddhist institution. Therefore, Buddhism is cinematically likened to the empty shell of a scarecrow, which assumes a religious bearing but is devoid of any spiritual sustenance.

Ning Hao's harsh assessment of Buddhism in *Incense* might be compared with De Sica's critical assault on the Catholic Church in *The Bicycle Thief* (1948). As Millicent Marcus put it, "Just as the union failed to address Antonio's material plight, the Church offers no spiritual sustenance in his despair."⁴⁶ In Marcus' analysis, the Italian film is "a walk through Rome's social institutions, whose indifference to Antonio's plight forms De Sica's sociopolitical critique."⁴⁷ Similarly, the monk in Ning Hao's film hurries back and forth between government agencies and gets nothing. Worse still, his desperate plea for help from the "big" Buddhist temple meets with an equal institutional indifference. In the monk's plight, such a lack of institutional support from within a Buddhist community is far more demoralizing than that in *The Bicycle Thief*. According to Peter Bondanella, De Sica himself suggested that the "only remedy" to Antonio's suffering is the "support and love" that the protagonist "receives from his family," especially "the love between father and son."⁴⁸ So, despite Antonio's failed attempt to steal a bicycle, which horrifies his son Bruno, the boy, says Bondanella, offers "his father his hand before they both disappear into the alien crowd at the conclusion of the film."⁴⁹ In *Incense*, however, the monk is a loner who has no family support whatever, just as the male protagonist in the novel adapted by De Sica's movie.⁵⁰ Although the monk's only human contact to this world is the butcher and his sister, he is treated as a pathetic social outcast by all other characters in the film. In a sense, the monk's alienation is not his own, but that of the Buddhist religion, whose exotic bearing disaffects most people in a fast-changing Chinese society under economic reforms. As the monk is abandoned by his own Buddhist establishment, he finds no acceptance by other segments of society either. In *The Bicycle Thief*, Antonio's fall from grace is redeemed by Bruno's love, which, in Marcus' words, "makes the boy's generosity to the point of heroism."⁵¹ By contrast, the monk in *Incense* is all alone in the cold, harsh world where his moral failure is beyond redemption. From a Buddhist perspective, the demolition of the monk's temple metes out retributive justice for his transgression. He must suffer the consequences of the "bad" karma he has done to the husband.

In *The Bicycle Thief*, the Catholic Church is unable to offer spiritual sustenance to people suffering from the war.⁵² In *Incense*, both the state and the Buddhist church fail to assist ordinary people such as the husband (and even the monk himself). However, if Buddhism falls short on aiding the poor and needy in the film, it seems to have done well with the *nouveau riche* in real life. As Liu Zhongyu argues in his survey, it is naïve to think that poverty produces religion, and that if people get rich their zeal for religion would decline.⁵³ In fact, he points out that “the increased interest [in religion] is not a result of poverty, as a large portion of new believers came from the economically developed coastal areas.”⁵⁴ Liu’s widely publicized survey provides a broad backdrop to Ning Hao’s *Incense*, especially in the context of Earthly Buddhism. For instance, the head priest is a clear example of Earthly Buddhism, whose service is oriented to the needs of the prosperous “new believers.” His new motorcycle could be purchased with a fund from the temple’s sales and tourist revenue, or from a generous donation from the affluent faithful. Since he runs his temple efficiently, the priest is promoted to a higher office in a temple at Mount Wutai. This Earthly Buddhism is not only well connected to the wealthy, but also to the state. It is the chief of the Section of Religion who recommends that the monk see the business-savvy priest for help. And he makes a pledge of support for the well-off Christian woman, not for the destitute monk!

In a sense, the monk’s hardship is caused by his firm conviction of “no killing of living things,” one of “five rules” (*wujie*) in traditional Buddhism.⁵⁵ The advocates of Earthly Buddhism have recently tied this old notion to a new ecological concern. They contend that the five rules should be reinterpreted in the context of a modern society and that the notion of “no killing of living things” should be equated with environmental protection, ecological balance, and wildlife conservation.⁵⁶ On that account, we may identify the monk as an unwitting Buddhist ecologist. He sacrifices his personal life for redemption of the “killing of living things” by his fellow villagers, yet he compromises his faith by yielding to a capitalist market economy. By playing a phony *fengshui* master in the husband’s home, the monk runs afoul of another one of the five rules—that is, “no lying.” Therefore, we find that Earthly Buddhism is perhaps too eager to accommodate global capitalism by violating the fundamental principles of traditional Buddhism. In *The Bicycle Thief*, the Ricci character turns himself into a thief after he is denied justice. In *Incense*, the monk becomes a charlatan as soon as his venture capitalist cause brings success. So, in the final shot of the monk standing against the giant Chinese character “demolish,” director Ning Hao delivers a simple and balanced judgment: Even though he succeeds in rebuilding a broken Buddha, the monk will stand condemned under the Buddha’s law for his own offense to human decency.

Postlude

Chinese Artists and Filmmakers at the Beginning of a New Century

Ever since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, the country's rapid economic growth has made many Westerners wonder if China will pose a new challenge or even a threat to Western powers, especially the United States.¹ In the summer of 2005, *Newsweek* and *Time*, two reputable American magazines, each published a special report on China, titled "China's Century" and "China's New Revolution," respectively. Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International*, wrote, "China was big; but very poor. All that is changing. But now the very size and scale that seemed so alluring is beginning to look ominous. And Americans are wondering whether the 'China threat' is nightmarishly real."² In contrast to Zakaria's cry about the "China threat,"³ *Times* reporter Michael Elliot's account sounded a bit more objective: "If China's rise looks scary to some in the West, from Beijing's perspective it seems very different. At last, think China's rulers, the world is being put into proper balance. After 500 years during which China fell asleep, it is once more taking its rightful place among the great powers."⁴ China's rise to power, which is, according to Chinese president Hu Jintao, a "peaceful rise," has aroused much fear anyway among many in the West. A Hollywood film, *Syriana* (2005), recounts a complicated tale "about oil and money, America and China, traders and spies, the Gulf States and Texas, reform and revenge, bribery and betrayal"⁵ and, in particular, that "fear of China."⁶ In the movie, a reform-minded, Georgetown-educated Persian Gulf prince sells oil to the Chinese, which would damage American interests in the region. So the prince's royal vehicle is hit by a U.S. missile: "Take the target out!" orders a CIA senior officer toward the end of the film. Although such a Hollywood staging of a CIA assassination may seem simplistic or absurd, eliminating the target in a cinematic fantasy expresses a "fear of China."

Art Biennales and Film Festivals: The Dynamics of Cultural Globalization

For many Chinese and Western scholars, though, China's fast economic growth is to a great extent reshaping the country's political and cultural landscape. If a

process of capitalist globalization has benefited China's national economy, this same process has also integrated contemporary Chinese art and cinema into the world system, an integration sanctioned by Chinese authorities poised to redefine the nation's rightful place in what Peter Berger has called "cultural globalization."⁷ In 1996, the first Shanghai Biennale was held in the new Shanghai Art Museum, followed by the Guangzhou Triennial in 2002 and the Beijing Biennale in 2003 and 2005. In the eyes of most Chinese art critics and curators, the 1996 Shanghai Biennale marked a postmodern historic event that signified Chinese authorities' endorsement of contemporary Chinese art or avant-garde art, which had been prohibited from state museums all through the 1990s.⁸ In June of 2005, the Shanghai International Film Festival took place, and two prominent Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers, whose movies had originally been banned by the Ministry of Culture, were invited to appear at the opening ceremony broadcast on nationwide TV.⁹

The 2006 Shanghai Biennale seemed a true global cultural event: The curatorial team comprised critics and scholars from China, South Korea, Italy, England, and the United States, while the participants included internationally famed artists from twenty-three countries, among them Atelier Van Lieshout, Francesco Vezzoli, and Matthew Barney (and his wife, Bjork, the star of Lars von Trier's film *Dancer in the Dark*).¹⁰ The 2006 Shanghai Biennale attracted a huge audience from all over China. By November 5th, the day the Biennale was closed, 214,413 people had visited the exhibition, according to Li Lei, executive director of the Shanghai Museum, who considers the show one of the most important influential art biennales in Asia today.¹¹

Back in June 2005, the 51st Venice Biennale opened, with its first "official China pavilion to exhibit the latest works of the best contemporary Chinese artists," reported *China Daily*, an English-language newspaper published under the auspices of the Chinese government.¹² Among the artworks on display in the China pavilion was "a curious piece, the UFO," created by Du Wenda, a thirty-nine-year-old farmer from the country's Anhui province, who had been trying to produce a UFO of his own since 1999.¹³ The press, as well as a large international audience, went to watch the launch of the UFO, which was "to represent the trajectory of the Chinese economy in the 21st century."¹⁴ To everyone's disappointment, however, the homemade flying saucer refused to fly, "but the blades whirred, and there was [a] great gust of noise."¹⁵

In my view, this regrettable failure is still a global event that may symbolize something other than what China's rulers have currently hoped for, in particular, the country's economic rise in the new century as rendered by the special issues of *Newsweek* and *Time*. Michael Kimmelman, a reporter for the *New York Times*, called the Chinese pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale "a disappointment, visually

speaking.”¹⁶ And he suspected that the national pavilion was given “a handsome space” because “the Italian government is anxious to trade” with China.¹⁷ According to *China Daily*, the site of the China pavilion was indeed “one of the best of all venues” since it was located in the busiest block and next to the press center of the Biennale. So, said the governmental newspaper, it was impossible for the Chinese pavilion “to go unnoticed by both passing visitors and journalists.”¹⁸ Although the China pavilion was temporary, the Ministry of Culture was talking with the Biennale about the possibility of building a permanent one by 2007 to demonstrate “the influence of China’s political, economic and cultural establishment among the international art community.”¹⁹

If the unceremonious inauguration of the China pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale was a bit embarrassing to a new Chinese leadership that is determined to play a big and glorious role on the world stage, the unfortunate Biennale event may also reveal a conformist effort put forward by those participating Chinese artists who have grown into a new generation of Chinese nationalism or patriotism in this uncertain age of globalization. Artists Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, a married couple in their early thirties, were responsible for bringing Du Wenda’s UFO to the Biennale. They believed that the object was simply a metaphor for the Chinese farmer’s romantic ideals, and that any individual in today’s China who had the courage to realize his or her dreams should be able to do so.²⁰ However, such young Chinese artists’ idealism sounds historically familiar to us. During the “Great Leap Forward” movement led by Chairman Mao in 1958, illiterate farmers were encouraged to become “artists” who could paint and design everything from agricultural products on the ground to a satellite in the sky, which would “surpass” those of an advanced West. At that time, a popular Chinese expression—“launching a satellite” (*fang weixing*)—was a metaphor for any economic miracle such as a high-yield crop (*gaochan*) in the countryside. Against this historical background, Du Wenda’s ill-fated UFO seems to convey another metaphor that points to a return to China’s socialist past, especially Chairman Mao’s upsetting political legacy. However, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu’s seeming attempt to revive such a bygone socialist heritage should be considered as a new expression of Chinese nationalism, which, I think, intellectually confronts what Manfred B. Steger has termed “cultural globalization.”

Steger explains: “Cultural globalization has contributed a remarkable shift in people’s consciousness. In fact, it appears that the old structures of modernity are slowly giving way to a new ‘postmodern’ framework characterized by a less stable sense of identity and knowledge.”²¹ In China’s recent history, “the old structures of modernity” consisted of a Soviet-style socialism that had transformed the country since 1949, and that seems to continue to function even within “a new ‘postmodern’ framework” of capitalist globalization. Over the past three decades China has

undertaken capitalistic economic reforms, although its socialist political systems and cultural values are still very much at work in Chinese society today. To put it another way, the Chinese Communist Party maintains its hold on power by embracing capitalist globalization, but it never denounced socialism, as did Russia and Eastern European countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Therefore, a new trend of Chinese nationalism not only harks back to China's five-thousand-year ancient history but also to its thirty-year socialist inheritance. To me, the whole construction of a new Chinese pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale was a nationalistic "joint venture" by both the Chinese government and young artists like Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, whose avant-garde art works were barred just a few years ago.

Rachel Campbell-Johnston has remarked on this amazing global event: "This is a significant move. It indicates not only a new Western appetite for Chinese art but, more importantly, the changed attitude of the Chinese state. It has transmogrified from the enemy to the champion of free thinking artistic culture. And things can only go on from there as a generation of artists who, having lost faith in progress after Tian'anmen Square and emigrated abroad, are now being lured back by a new openness that has spelt economic boom."²² In this context, the China pavilion is evocative of a trendy Chinese nationalism, which, I believe, not only kindles the socialist imagination of young artists like Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, but also compels renowned scholars of an older generation to present China's rich philosophical traditions to a Western public. Wang Qiheng, a leading authority on *fengshui*, or geomancy, was invited to show his video evaluating a variety of sites for the national pavilions in Venice, which was perhaps the work best received at the China pavilion.²³ Unified by this postsocialist ideology of Chinese nationalism, the Chinese government and artists of a different background work as one to retain that rightful place in a global artistic culture, although such a combined endeavor may not be as successful as they had expected.

As I have noted, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu drew inspiration from China's socialist heritage in order to realize a humble peasant's fond dream under the gaze of a Western public. Yet in a China undergoing capitalistic economic reforms, people have suffered from an abrupt political and social transition that is beyond their comprehension. Slavoj Žižek has described a similar transition in a postcommunist Russia and Eastern Europe: "The catch of the 'transition' from Really Existing Socialism to capitalism was that people never had the chance to choose the *ad quem* of this transition—all of the sudden, they were (almost literally) 'thrown' into a new situation in which they were presented with a new set of given choices."²⁴ For most Chinese, such "given choices" in a postsocialist situation are often painful to abide by. It is this "postsocialist trauma" that has been inflicted on a Chinese society grappling with the bitter transition from socialism to capitalism, a common theme

in the Chinese avant-garde art and independent cinema discussed in detail in the introduction. As Chinese socialism is giving away to global capitalism,²⁵ Chinese society is most likely to be overtaken by what Steger has previously described as “a less stable sense of identity and knowledge” that points to “a remarkable shift in people’s consciousness” effected by capitalist globalization.

Earlier in 2005, three Chinese films entered various international competitions and won top prizes. In February, Fifth Generation director Gu Changwei’s *Peacock* was awarded the Silver Berlin Bear for best picture at the Berlin International Film Festival in Germany. In early May, the female director Li Shaohong’s *Stolen Life* won Best Narrative Feature at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York (two years earlier this prize had been awarded to Li Yang’s *Blind Shaft*). Later in May, Sixth Generation director Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Shanghai Dreams* took the Prix du Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in France. (All the three films tackle the problem of “postsocialist trauma” discussed in chapter 6).

In 2006, two Chinese films again won top prizes at international film festivals. One was *Luxury Car* (2006) directed by Wang Chao, which received Un Certain Regard Award at the Cannes Film Festival; the other was Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* (2006), which to everyone’s surprise took the Golden Lion for the best picture at the Venice Film Festival.²⁶ In both films, there is a father figure searching for a lost child, which is a significant thematic reversal of the cinema of the Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers,²⁷ in which the “lost souls” of a young generation



Figure 22. *Luxury Car*. Dir. Wang Chao. 2006.

roam aimlessly in a “fatherless and lawless space.”²⁸ In Wang Chao’s *Luxury Car*, the father figure is a man from a socialist past: in the mid-1960s he had graduated from Wuhan University (one of the best universities in China) but had been sent to the countryside for his political “mistakes.” He spent the next forty years as an elementary school teacher in a village and married a woman there. In the movie, the son first comes to the city of Wuhan to look for a decent job after a quarrel with the father (who even slaps his son’s face). Later the father sends his daughter to search for the son after he lost contact with the family. Finally the father arrives in the city to seek out the son himself. As it turns out, the young man has been lured by a gangster into an underground luxury car theft business. In a botched car robbery, he is run over by an Audi driven by a businessman. After he dies, the gangster takes his sister under his wing by installing her in his “entertainment” enterprise (a karaoke bar) and even becoming her “boyfriend.”

Here the movie’s English title “Luxury Car”²⁹ makes most sense: the Audi is a central motif around which the plot is developed.³⁰ The Audi is a capitalist object of “lure” for which the main characters commit crimes and die. When the mortally wounded son is carried into the robbed car and rushed to a hospital, he says to the gangster, “This is a really good car.” His last words are heard as he at last realizes his dream of riding in a luxury car, though he is dying. To me, this young man’s undying passion for an Audi is nothing but a renunciation of his father’s forty years of repression and poverty under socialism. In the film, however, the father is always kept in the dark as to what happens to his two children. He never learns that his son has died in a violent car robbery and his daughter works as a prostitute. Before returning to his village, the father is informed by a cook working at Wuhan University (where he studied forty years ago) that the son went to Shenzhen to join a friend. The father believes it is “good news” for the lost son, who has strayed from his parents and family for so long.

In the early 1980s, Shenzhen was chosen by Deng Xiaoping as one of China’s first experimental centers for market capitalism, and it was called the country’s first “Special Economic Zone.” Since then Shenzhen has been a dreamland for many young Chinese to find a better job and start a new life. As Ted C. Fishman has vividly portrayed it, “Shenzhen was where a migrant’s dreams of work, adventure, and love might come true; it was a place where one could escape the pressure of parents, family, and neighbors and get rich in one’s own way. It was a place where a young person in China could remake himself, or herself, in a land where the state otherwise dictated all one’s possibilities.”³¹ As we have learned, the son in Wang Chao’s *Luxury Car* did not make it to Shenzhen as his father had wished. But he did “escape the pressure of parents, family, and neighbors” by fleeing to Wuhan, where he paid for his “new freedom” with his life. In this sense Shenzhen serves as a symbolic object of “lure” in contemporary Chinese society, just as does an Audi.

They both represent the promise of “market capitalism” and a better life to many young Chinese.³²

The father in this Wang Chao film also has difficulty understanding his children’s dreams of freedom and happiness, yet he does not suppress them. His is a calm and resigned acceptance of what life is for his children. Unlike his son, who aspires to freedom, the father’s life is dictated by the state. When he finally reaches retirement age, he is asked to stay on for two more years because of a teacher shortage in the country, and he simply accepts the assignment without hesitation. So in the father’s case, socialism is undead, as he continues to observe all its rules (such as obedience to the state). But the father’s first encounter with market capitalism is no doubt a painful experience; the death of his son and the fall of his daughter will haunt him for the rest of his life. *Luxury Car* concludes with a medium close-up shot of the father standing in the corridor of a hospital and waiting to see his daughter’s newborn baby. Yet, as we have learned, the baby is the son of his daughter and the gangster. (Earlier in the movie, the gangster is sentenced to death for killing a policeman who first helped the father with his search for the son and later unveiled the truth about the Audi.) In this very last shot, we observe as the father’s emotional response to the childbirth shifts from fretful diffidence to contained felicity. Is he going to accept or reject this grandson, whose father actually led to the tragic doom of both his son and daughter? In any event, the father’s choice will be a traumatic one for he has to bear all the social consequences that come with this childbirth.

In Wang Chao’s previous film, *Anyang Orphan* (2000), a similar situation develops. A gangster is killed by a laid-off factory worker in a fight over a baby born by a prostitute. Afterwards the laid-off worker is sentenced to death for manslaughter and the prostitute is arrested and sent back home in the country by the police. In this earlier film, the prostitute makes a choice for her child’s dead “father,” as we see her vision of the condemned worker holding the baby in the final scene of the movie. In *Luxury Car*, however, this choice is left with the father (or the grandfather, to be exact), who belongs to another era of socialism and has practically no knowledge of the new world of market capitalism which has consumed the lives of his two children. In this respect, the father’s engagement with that market capitalism is what Žižek has called “trauma” that “designates a shocking encounter which, precisely, disturbs this immersion into one’s life-world, a violent intrusion of something which doesn’t fit in.”³³

On the other hand, this “unknowing” father figure in Wang Chao’s *Luxury Car* may also be read as the “undead remainder” of socialism in Žižek’s psychoanalytic terms: “The Freudian name for this ‘undead’ remainder is, of course, again *trauma*—it is the implicit reference to some traumatic kernel which persists as the obscene/monstrous ‘undead’ remainder, which keeps a discursive universe

‘alive’—that is to say, there is no life without the supplement of the obscene-undead spectral persistence of the ‘living dead.’”³⁴ In fact, all through the movie the father acts as if he is sleepwalking, like the somnambulist from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), a German expressionist cinematic masterwork. Like the somnambulist, the father in Wang Chao’s film is a paradigm of the “common man.”³⁵ He speaks few words and shows no emotion after seeing his daughter’s arm stabbed by a rival gang at the karaoke bar, or attending his wife’s funeral procession on a rugged country road. Since the new reality of market capitalism is incomprehensible to him, the father indeed looks like the “living dead” among all other characters in the film.³⁶ To me, however, the paternal figure represents the inert specter of a past socialism that is no longer capable of any action in face of catastrophe.

Compared with the two previous years, 2007 appeared to be less productive for Chinese moviemakers. But Wang Xiaoshuai’s *In Love We Trust* (*Zuo you*, 2007) won the Silver Berlin Bear for best screenplay at the Berlin International Film Festival, while Li Yang’s *Blind Mountain* (*Mang shan*, 2007) reaped the Grand Prix at the Bratislava International Film Festival in the Slovak Republic. In 2008, Jia Zhangke’s *24 City* (*Ershisi cheng ji*, 2008) was the only Chinese film that entered the competition for the Palme d’Or at the 61st Cannes Film Festival in May 2008, but it did not win. Jia himself had said of this work, “Since 2000, I have been wanting to make a film about how workers are affected by the transition from a planned economy to a market economy in China.”³⁷ The film’s title, *24 City*, refers to a luxury high-rise apartment complex in Chengdu in southwestern China, which replaced Factory 420, a munitions plant that had specialized for decades in making aviation engines.³⁸ Jia intended to make a documentary and conducted 130 interviews with factory workers, but he soon realized that the project could be “richer and more emotional” if he mixed “fact with fiction.”³⁹ Thus in *24 City*, Jia takes a new formal approach to his subject; “the emphasis shifts from watching to listening” and the movie “is awash in words—long, eloquent monologues, real and imagined, as well as liberal quotations from Yeats and Chinese poetry.”⁴⁰ As A. O. Scott and Manohla Dargis wrote in the *New York Times*, “Much as he did in *Still Life* (2006), about the Three Gorges Dam project that has uprooted millions, Mr. Jia is working at the border where fiction and nonfiction meet, which is where this fantastically surreal country itself seems to exist.”⁴¹ Although Jia “always wanted to break the barrier between documentary and dramatization,”⁴² the director’s new approach does not always work to his advantage.⁴³ Michael Bodey was doubtful of the Cannes Film Festival, saying that the reason for its reputation as “a global media event remains something of a mystery.”⁴⁴ And he was perhaps right to point out that “it rivals the Academy Awards as one of cinema’s greatest and most effective promotional tools, yet at its heart it remains an idiosyncratic festival with an official competition that remains largely unwatched.”⁴⁵ Among those top films in competition at

Cannes, Bodey observed, “Filipino director Brillante Mendoza’s *Service* is presently the worst film screened in competition, while Chinese auteur Jia Zhangke’s docu-drama *24 City* comes close.”⁴⁶ Bodey’s view was shared by Kirk Honeycutt, who wrote in *Reuters* that “Jia Zhangke’s *24 City* gives you food for thought about China’s modernization and the disposability of workers once their labors are done. Yet he chooses the most sleep-inducing method to do so.”⁴⁷ (Like Bodey, Honeycutt dismissed Mendoza’s film *Service* as “a 90-minute wallow in frighteningly bad sound and camerawork, nonacting, relentless degradation and sex.”⁴⁸) This “idiosyncratic” method of Jia has made his films “largely unwatched” not only at international film festivals such as Cannes or Venice,⁴⁹ but at home as well. In Beijing, Jia’s award-winning *Still Life* was shown in two movie theaters starting December 7, 2006, and yet by December 14 it was canceled altogether due to its box-office failure,⁵⁰ which has posed a difficult challenge to Jia and other Sixth Generation filmmakers.

Encountering the Undead: Postsocialist Trauma or New Capitalist Utopia?

The “postsocialist trauma” of transitions has also become a central imagery in Chinese avant-garde artists’ most recent works. For instance, Liu Jin’s *Wounded Angel* (2005) is a performative photographic series that depicts such postsocialist trauma. In one of the series, a barebacked young man with the white wings of an angel is hanging onto the eaves of a tall yellowish factory building as if to perch on the very edge of the cliff.⁵¹ The building’s steel pipes emit hot white steam that seems to threaten the man dangling in mid-air. Here the industrial setting is worthy of our attention: It is the now famous 798 Art District in Beijing, where abandoned socialist factory buildings have since 2000 been turned into artists’ studios, commercial art galleries (mostly run by foreigners), music and fashion publishing houses.⁵² However, the building in Liu Jin’s photograph is still in operation as a factory workshop, as evidenced by the sweltering vapor that has nearly devoured the “wounded angel.” So a crucial question should be raised: What is this “wounded angel” that is clinging to a socialist industrial past in the midst of the prosperous and capitalist 798 Art District, which has attracted tourists from all over the world, including many foreign dignitaries during their state visits to China?

The “wounded angel” is, I believe, symbolic of a Chinese working class that was long glorified under socialism but is now hastily disparaged in the face of global capitalism.⁵³ In this context, a web-published photograph titled *Chinese Workers Sleeping near the 798 District* should be read in juxtaposition to Liu Jin’s *Wounded Angel*. It shows these disparaged members of the Chinese working class



Figure 23. Liu Jin, *Wounded Angel*. Performance. 2005.

taking naps on the fringes of the 798 factory complex, which is nonetheless running in part at the present day.⁵⁴ In contrast to Liu Jin's allegorical imagery, these workers hang on the very edge of a factory workshop for real, with their entire livelihood depending on this derelict socialist industrial compound rather than on those sleek "capitalist" art galleries located in the same neighborhood. If a trendy art district or a Beijing SoHo is born from postsocialist industrial ruins such as the 798 factory complex, it is the Chinese working class that is impacted most. They have become almost irrelevant to a social space in which they have lived and worked for generations. However, after his visit to the 798 Art District in 2005, the American art critic David Spalding was right to ask this question: "Without its own SoHo, how can Beijing be taken seriously as a major economic player on the world stage?"⁵⁵ And he went on to say, "Beijing is undergoing transformation at present, rushing at breakneck speed to smash the 'olds' as it attempts to repurpose

itself as a cosmopolitan center for global commerce. But the city is caught between two worlds: a past that it is willfully forgetting and a glorious, utopian future that lies beyond its reach.”⁵⁶ In the 798 Art District Spalding had witnessed a past socialist dystopia that stands side by side with a “glorious, utopian future” of global capitalism.

Now Spalding is one of the international curators of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), which was founded by Belgian couple Guy and Myriam Ullens and opened on November 7, 2007. (On December 2, 2007, French president Nicolas Sarkozy met with Fei Dawei, then director of UCCA, during his state visit to China.) According to *China Daily*, China’s official English-language newspaper, UCCA is the first large art institute with foreign private funding to move into the 798 zone, and it “aims to be a catalyst for emerging projects in the new Chinese cultural scene” and “a point of reference in the international art scene” as well.⁵⁷ On August 2, 2008, Pace Beijing, a China branch gallery of PaceWildenstein, based in New York, opened in the 798 Art District. As Josh Gerstein of the *New York Sun* reported, “As impressive as the new [Pace] Beijing gallery is, new visitors are likely to be more astounded by the bustling crowd that descends on the 798 District every weekend. Thousands of Chinese, most of them in their 20s, pack the sprawling streets and alleys to peer at the latest art.”⁵⁸ Gerstein quoted the gallery’s



Figure 24. Pace Beijing, 798 Art District, Beijing, Summer 2008. Author photo.

spokeswoman as saying, “It makes Chelsea look provincial.”⁵⁹ Unlike the UCCA, which is a not-for-profit gallery,⁶⁰ Pace Beijing intends to sell Western art to collectors from China and Asia and help “Chinese artists whose work can be sold in New York and Western artists eager to show in Beijing.”⁶¹ As Leng Lin, president of Pace Beijing, put it, “Previously, we had to go to Berlin, London or New York to see things of global importance . . . now Beijing is an international city.”⁶²

In a wider sense, this “glorious, utopian future” for Beijing predicted by Spalding is perhaps what Žižek would call “the last grand utopia, the utopia of global capitalist liberal democracy as the ‘end of history’—9/11 designates the end of *this* utopia.”⁶³ As a developing country, China is nonetheless embracing this “last grand utopia” of capitalist globalization, just as the country had embraced a socialist utopia in its recent past.⁶⁴ In fact, that socialist utopia has also found its way into a very capitalistic “wonderland” of 798. However, this “wonderland” was not spared from the global financial tsunami that has hit China hard lately. Eugene Tang of Bloomberg.com reported, “Beijing’s 798 district, a tourist hotspot during the 2008 Olympics, has been almost a ghost town since summer, as the financial crisis sapped wealth and cut art purchases.”⁶⁵ And about forty art galleries in the 798 district “have closed in recent months because the rent remained high while sales plummeted.”⁶⁶

Just a couple of blocks from the UCCA, there is a bookstore named Juxiang Shuwu (Study of chrysanthemum fragrance), named after Chairman Mao’s study in Zhongnanhai, a residential compound in Beijing where high Chinese Communist Party leaders live and work.⁶⁷ This 798 bookshop is an outlet of Beijing Dongrun Juxiang Bookstore, founded by Mao’s granddaughter Kong Dongmei, who graduated from Beijing University and studied in the United States. As the president of Juxiang Bookstore, Kong endeavors to market so-called classical Red Culture (*hongse jingdian wenhua*): “I want to promote New Red Culture because traditions need to be inherited, and the youth should not forget history.”⁶⁸ Most of the books for sale in Kong’s 798 shop are about Mao’s past life and the Socialist Revolution, including Kong’s own book titled “Grandfather Mao Zedong in My Heart” (though it is said that Kong herself never met Mao in life). In the summer of 2008, I visited the bookstore a few times and was amazed to see that Andy Warhol’s “Mao Portraits” (in reproduction) filled the walls and columns inside the store. Indeed the bookstore exuded a historical aura of Mao’s socialist China: indifferent sales clerks and unwarranted secrecy—it was the only bookshop in 798 that put out a sign in English: “NO PICTURES.”⁶⁹

But, as I have argued, China’s transition from Mao’s socialism to global capitalism is a historical trauma that has affected many in the society, especially urban factory workers and rural manual laborer. In this respect, Zhou Hai is an artist who without doubt shares Liu Jin’s concerns for the “wounded” Chinese working



Figure 25. *Juxiang Shuwu* (Study of chrysanthemum fragrance). 798 Art District, Beijing. Summer 2008. Author photo.

class struggling in a market economy. His black-and-white photographs portray the harrowing conditions of steel workers and coal miners in a China currently lauded for its economic “miracle.” For me, Zhou Hai’s highly realistic picture series, titled *The Unbearable Heaviness of Industry*, exposes this less-known “underworld” of today’s China to us in the best tradition of documentary realism found in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927). In that German silent cinema masterpiece, Lang depicted a similar “underworld” or the so-called lower city where, wrote Siegfried Kracauer, “shut off from daylight, the workers tend monstrous machines. They are slaves rather than workers.”⁷⁰ In spite of this, Lotte Eisner believed that in Lang’s movie “[t]he working class is portrayed powerfully—slaves dressed in black, heads bent, anonymous creatures of labor walking through vaulted corridors . . . sharply outlined in ranks in which the individual no longer counts as a human being.”⁷¹ And Eisner pointed out, “*Metropolis* is a drama of the future, set around the year 2000.”⁷² It is those “slaves/workers” or “anonymous creatures of labor” that built a highly industrialized and capitalistic “utopian” city in Lang’s 1927 *Metropolis*.⁷³ Ironically, again and again we can see such machine-like slave laborers in most of Zhou Hai’s pictures that are datable to about the turn of the new millennium, as anticipated by *Metropolis*.

Zhou Hai himself also made a clear statement about *The Unbearable Heaviness of Industry*:

Industry provides the impetus for social development. The industrial establishments upon which modern civilization is built—such as steel-making—imposes a heavy toll on those who take part in the process. These people form the very basis of an enormous infrastructure; yet, they are also seen as outcasts having to endure pain, physical or mental, in this great industrial age. In this country, the road to full industrialization is gradually but surely unveiling itself. There was a time when people on this road felt great pride. Now a market economy pervades, and so does a sense of loss and frustration for the laborers.”⁷⁴

What the artist refers to as “a time when people on this road felt great pride” is socialist China before Deng Xiaoping’s 1979 reforms. So it is conceivable that the same working people or laborers are now feeling the heat of a market economy and overwhelmed by “a sense of loss and frustration” symptomatic of what I have termed “postsocialist trauma.” During China’s thirty-year-long “socialist construction” (1949–1979), one common notion in Marxist public discourse was that the working class, or laborers, were the masters of the state (*guojia zhuren*). However, this notion of laborers being masters was soon challenged by Deng’s reformist advocates. As Kalpana Misra put it, “the assertion that China was engaged in ‘socialist construction’ or was in any stage, primary or otherwise, of socialism was quite undermined by the skepticism introduced by reformist writings with regard to basic tenets, by their contention that socialism, public ownership, ‘laborers being masters,’ socialist construction, etc., were terms whose meanings had never been very clear to those who professed to implement them.”⁷⁵ But in that period, the Marxian master status of workers or laborers had been certainly implemented by artists and filmmakers of Socialist Realism who, as demanded by the Communist Party, were required to serve the “workers, peasants, and soldiers” (*gong nong bing*). But in Zhou Hai’s grim but truthful portrayal of the same class of workers, we see a dreadful fall from socialist master status into capitalist slavery.

In 1999 and 2000, Zhou Hai shot a series of individual and group portraits of coal miners from Hebi, a city in the central province of Henan, China. In these pictures, black-faced miners descend into a mine shaft each day and emerge from below exhausted, and miners work deep in a pit where the safety conditions seem deplorable. In several photos, miners huddle in a hoist as if they were slaves trapped in a cage—a dismal scene reminiscent of a bygone colonial epoch. Or, symbolically speaking, their daily descent and ascent is the in and out of that underworld of capitalist slavery that puts their lives at grave danger. It is widely

believed that China's mining industry is the world's deadliest; many people have died in floods, collapses, explosions, and other mine accidents every year, which now often hit the headlines in the Chinese press.⁷⁶ In early October 2005, a mine accident occurred at Hebi, where a gas explosion killed thirty-four miners and injured nineteen. Among numerous Chinese media reports on the Hebi accident, one begins, "Twenty-seven bodies in the coal mine explosion in central China's Henan Province have been raised up to the ground."⁷⁷ And a photo of the Hebi rescue mission published on the Web is captioned, "The dead body of the explosion victim is carried out of the pit in Hebi, October 3, 2005."⁷⁸ Such dire news coverage compels us to wonder if those Hebi miners who posed for Zhou Hai's photographic portraits years before have all survived the catastrophe. Or have any of them become victims whose bodies "have been raised up to the ground"—that is, their last "ascent" from the subterranean?

In December 2004, Mary Hennock, a BBC News business reporter, wrote, "China's vibrant economic growth is built on coal, the source of two thirds of the country's electricity. Digging out that coal cost lives of 15 miners a day in the first nine months of this year."⁷⁹ It is against the background of this heavy human cost that Zhou Hai photographed those Hebi miners who, in Hennock's view, have been paying for China's economic expansion with their lives. She also pointed out that in China there are "two kinds of mines: big, state-run mines, which are generally thought to be safer, and smaller private mines where the majority of deaths occur."⁸⁰



Figure 26. Zhou Hai, *Hebi, Henan*. Photograph. 2000.

Ironically, the latest blast happened at the No. 2 Coal Mine of the Hebi Coal Industry Corporation, a state-run mining group formed in 1957 and one of the major state-owned enterprises in the region. As for No. 2 Coal Mine, it was built in 1958 but was recently declared bankrupt by the state due to its depleted resources and obsolete equipment.⁸¹ The initial investigation of the No. 2 Coal Mine accident by the authorities indicated that mismanagement and violation of safety rules could have been one of the causes of the explosion, which claimed thirty-four lives.⁸² To me, such a mine disaster is a symptom of the postsocialist trauma meted out by a bankrupt state-run mine that somehow operated in defiance of rules and regulations. It is well-known that many mines, both state-run and private, still operate with little regard for safety. This is because “[f]at profits from China’s coal mine industry have created some overnight millionaires,” including local officials who invest in those state-owned mines and who “can prevent [safety] inspections.”⁸³ For miners, however, a great number of them are “former farmers whose land has been swallowed up by China’s economic modernization” so that “they have no choice but to go down the pit.”⁸⁴

In Zhou Hai’s many Hebi photographs, we see miners make their fateful daily descent with blank looks on their faces, and we detect a sense of luck in their silent stares as they resurface alive. In one picture, a robust young man carries a shovel on his shoulder and stands against a vast, misty country landscape. This natural setting points to the rural origin of the former farmers who are forced to leave their land to earn a living in “China’s mines that are the world’s deadliest.”⁸⁵ In my view, those miners powerfully portrayed in Zhou Hai’s work come to light as the living human sacrifice to the country’s booming economy. On February 23, 2009, Greg Baker and Gillian Wong reported from Gujiao, “One of China’s most modern coal mines was the scene of disaster yesterday, as a gas explosion killed 74 miners and left 114 injured.”⁸⁶ The blast occurred at the Tunlan Coal Mine in Gujiao, Shanxi Province, which “belongs to the state-run Shanxi Coking Group and had boasted an excellent safety record, with no major accidents in five years.”⁸⁷ The company is “the world’s second-largest producer of coking coal, used in the production of steel”⁸⁸ and “with sales revenues of more than 37 billion yuan in 2007.”⁸⁹ According to a high official in the government, 80 percent of the 16,000 mines operating in China are illegal, and the most serious accidents take place at such “illegal” mines.⁹⁰ Yet the Tunlan mine accident simply indicates that “mining is lucrative for those at the top—the owners of large mining companies are among the wealthiest in China.”⁹¹

On the other hand, these miners also emerge as a new type of working-class hero—the imagery that had been essential to Chinese art of Socialist Realism from the early 1950s through the late 1970s.⁹² Socialist Realism is a Marxist aesthetic doctrine that exalts the working class as representing a bright future rather than

a grim present-day reality. A 1972 painting, *The Mine's New Soldier*, successfully epitomized this doctrine and became a most influential and well-loved work of Chinese Socialist Realism during the 1970s.⁹³ In it, a pretty-faced young girl is dressing up for her new job at a mine seen in the background. She smiles radiantly and does not seem to worry about anything that could happen to a newcomer down in the pit. This cheerful image of a female miner perhaps shows Chinese Socialist Realism at its best, just as the grisly scenes in Zhou Hai's *The Unbearable Heaviness of Industry* "seem from the Industrial Revolution at its worst."⁹⁴ By comparison Zhou Hai's photography presents an aesthetic reversal of Chinese Socialist Realism manifested in *The Mine's New Soldier*. In his depiction, the "[b]lack-faced coal miners just emerged from hell, their eyes small points of white, might be deer caught in a headlight."⁹⁵ Zhou Hai's imagery of coal miners reveals the harsh realities of life in a postsocialist China, yet his camera treats his subjects compassionately—they are the true working-class heroes who confront death every day with calm dignity.

Challenging the Master Discourse in a Post-9/11 World: Politics, Culture, Truth

Since the turn of the new millennium, two well-established Chinese avant-garde artists, Huang Yongping and Xu Bing, have also approached the theme of death with a similar dignity, but not without a calm, Zen-like irony. In this sense, Huang Yongping's *Bat Project I–IV* (2001–2005) and Xu Bing's *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* (2004) have sparked controversy in the global political and artistic worlds today. In the former, Huang Yongping "reconstructed" the U.S. EP-3 spy plane that collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea on April 1, 2001, an incident that caused the death of a young Chinese pilot. In the latter, Xu Bing "deconstructed" a handful of dust he had gathered from the streets of Manhattan soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers. Therefore, the two works involve the tragic loss of human life—a complex subject few artists can handle with ease. And both Huang Yongping and Xu Bing intended to convey their concern for "power," which plays a significant role in these tragic events. In the discussion that follows, I first trace the extraordinary development of Huang Yongping's *Bat Project* from 2001 to 2005, and then I examine Xu Bing's *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* in the context of Buddhism and global politics.

The saga of *Bat Project* is well documented in the Walker Art Center's 2005 exhibition catalog titled *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective*,⁹⁶ from which I draw a brief outline here. On April 1, 2001, a U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance aircraft collided with a Chinese jet fighter over the South China Sea; the Chinese

plane was destroyed, with the pilot missing (he was reported dead later). After the collision the American spy plane landed at a military airport on Hainan Island. On May 29, 2001, Huang Yongping was on a plane from Paris to Shanghai, where a Chinese newspaper headline hit his eyes: “EP-3 to Return Home in Crates.” At that time the artist was invited to participate in an exhibition, *Transplantation in Situ: The Fourth Shenzhen Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition*, to be held at He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, China, which is near Hainan Island. In early July, the EP-3 was returned to the United States in a Russian-made AN-124 cargo plane, which marked the end of this event. However, like most of the Chinese, Huang Yongping was closely following the development of the story, and he decided to make a work of art out of it to keep the event going in China. From 2001 to 2003, Huang Yongping attempted to exhibit his installation *Bat Project* in China, which, in the artist’s own words, “looks like a parody or like the shadow of news event [of the EP-3 spy plane]” and “reflects an antithesis to the prevailing globalization and Americanism.”⁹⁷ Yet, strangely, this satirical artwork was prohibited from being shown in public due to a censorship jointly imposed by “nervous French, American and Chinese authorities.”⁹⁸ It was not until July 2005 that Huang Yongping’s *Bat Project III* was displayed at the Today Art Museum in Beijing, with the obscure

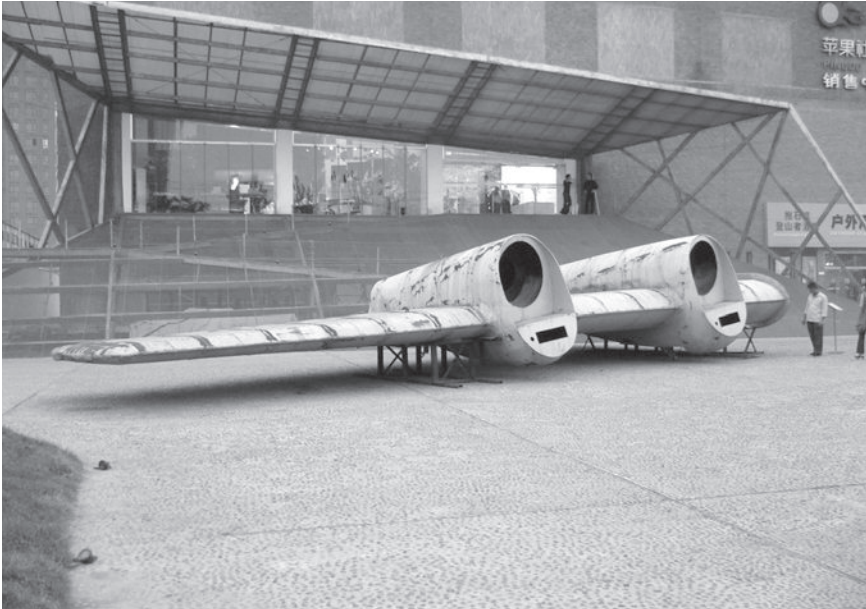


Figure 27. Huang Yongping, *Bat Project*. Installation. Today Art Museum, Beijing. Summer 2006. Author photo.

title *The Right Wing of a Plane*, which was part of a larger and “official” exhibition, *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art*, curated by Gao Minglu. *The Wall* opened on a hot and humid summer afternoon in late July at the Millennium Art Museum in Beijing, where I attended the ceremonious opening reception and afterwards rushed to the Today Art Museum to see the two “monumental” installations of Huang Yongping and Xu Bing. To my surprise, Huang Yongping’s work was mislabeled with the above-mentioned title and received little attention from the museum visitors on that muggy evening in Beijing. With all the “sensation” and “controversy” created by *Bat Project I* and *Bat Project II* in the previous years, Huang Yongping’s *Bat Project III* seems to have lost its power to thrill the audience.

As early as the spring of 2005, the Walker Art Center in the United States commissioned *Bat Project IV*, which was “the most ambitious” version of Huang Yongping’s infamous installation. The artwork was “a full-scale re-creation” of the EP-3’s “cockpit and fuselage incorporating part of the junked plane that the Walker bought, had cut apart and shipped to the museum for Huang’s manipulations.”⁹⁹ However, after the Walker’s *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective* opened in mid-October 2005, there seems to have been no critical response to *Bat Project IV* from the American art world, not to mention any international controversy that had surrounded the work for the previous four years. An anonymous commentator simply stated, “*Bat Project IV*, is here at the Walker. Frankly, this type of work, which involves countless letters, incidents, modifications, actions, and counter actions, all documented with memos, models, photos, and film, can be excruciatingly boring.”¹⁰⁰

Phillip Vergne, curator of the *Huang Yong Ping Retrospective*, nonetheless hoped that “the project will then have the opportunity to be brought before the public eye in order to enhance our understanding of the issues raised by the work and its consequences. Beyond the anecdote of the 2001 military incident, it points to a cultural shift associated with the emergence of China as a global political and economic force.”¹⁰¹ And he considered Huang Yongping’s work in general to be “consistent, ambitious and humorous, and sharply subversive,”¹⁰² and *Bat Project IV* in particular “very complex.”¹⁰³ As for the intricate “issues raised by the work,” Vergne did not specify, but what he termed “a cultural shift associated with the emergence of China as global political and economic force” seems to be well-illuminated by the *Newsweek* and *Time* special issues on the so-called China threat discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Interestingly, Peter Hays Gries, in his 2004 book *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*, actually gave a pseudo-psychological and cross-cultural analysis of what he called the 2001 “spy plane fiasco.” He wrote:

Culture does matter: cultural differences clearly played a major role in the Sino-American apology diplomacy of April 2001. But Chinese and Americans do not differ in kind: we are all, after all, human beings. The trick is to capture the ways both cultural differences and cultural commonalities work together to shape international relations. Recent experimental findings in cross-cultural psychology have revealed significant East-West differences both in reasoning about causes and about assessing responsibility. These are differences of degree, not kind, but they can help account for some of the disparate Chinese and American responses to the plane collision.”¹⁰⁴

And he suggested that “Chinese and American policymakers and pundits need to be aware of cultural differences.”¹⁰⁵

Ironically, both Chinese and American policymakers (and French as well) did not seem to mind any such cultural differences, as lamely explained by Gries, when they joined forces to prevent Huang Yongping’s *Bat Project* from any public display. To me, such an unprecedented solidarity between a “totalitarian” Chinese communist regime and two formidable Western “democracies” (i.e., American and French) in suppressing an individual artist is truly expressive of “cultural commonalities,” to borrow Gries’ words, especially in a post-cold war and post-9/11 era. In contrast to the rare international solidarity shown by the Chinese, American, and French governments, the same 2001 “spy plane fiasco” evoked a different kind of solidarity among ordinary Chinese people, as Suisheng Zhao described in his book *Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*:

The incident reinforced many Chinese people’s impression of the United States as a careless bully that threw around its weight without considering the feelings of people from other nations. . . . With this new incident, many Chinese became angry over American spying, saddened by the death of a pilot, and frustrated by President Bush’s unwillingness to apologize. At the root of their complaints was a sense of wounded national pride. China had suffered at the hands of foreigners before and was not prepared to suffer again.¹⁰⁶

Huang Yongping has been living and working in Paris since he left China in 1989. The artist, who is now a French citizen, may or may not share his former countrymen’s views of the spy plane incident, but he has defined his *Bat Project* as “an antithesis to the prevailing globalization and Americanism.” By and large, we have all learned of “the prevailing globalization” through our daily existence, but what is the “Americanism” to which Huang Yongping’s work is antithetical? In the dictionary, Americanism means “strong affection or support for the United States.”¹⁰⁷ In the aftermath of the 9/11 events, this kind of “strong affection or

support for the United States” seemed evident all over the world until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Back in 2001, however, all voices of “antithesis” were hushed by that “Americanism” in the dominant Western post-9/11 discourse of the “war on terror.” And Huang Yongping’s *Bat Project* was just one example of the antithetical voices silenced by what Žižek has described as the restored “innocence of American patriotism.” As he put it, “September 11 was used as a sedative enabling the hegemonic ideology to ‘renormalize’ itself: the period after the Vietnam War was one long, sustained trauma for the hegemonic ideology—it had to defend itself against critical doubts... until September 11, when the United States was a victim, and thus allowed to reassert the innocence of its mission.”¹⁰⁸ The censorship of Huang Yongping’s *Bat Project* is no doubt demonstrative of this reasserted American “hegemonic ideology” and “the innocence of its mission.”

Soon after the U.S. EP-3 spy plane incident, then Chinese leader Jiang Zemin demanded “a halt to U.S. surveillance missions near the Chinese coastline,”¹⁰⁹ which certainly had no impact whatsoever on the post-9/11 American “hegemonic ideology” that persists in keeping the whole world under its constant military surveillance. In this context, Huang Yongping’s *Bat Project* is an extraordinary voice against an America that is “at war with the world” according to T. D. Allman’s observations. He wrote, “Nations and people who once saw America as a global protector now see the United States as the greatest threat to civilized human values currently at large in the world.”¹¹⁰

In the pre-9/11 era, a Hollywood summer blockbuster film, *Enemy of the State* (1998), had already chastised this “America at war with the world” and even with its own people. In the movie, a former intelligence expert spoke of “worldwide surveillance” and “domestic wiretapping” in the name of the “war against terrorism” and “American patriotism,” which sound almost like today’s debate on these issues. More lately, at the 2006 Biennial of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Liz Larner, an American female artist, exhibited her installation titled *RWBs*, which was a monstrous heap of bent aluminum tubes in red, white, and blue. Blake Gopnik of the *Washington Post* commented that this work “comes closer to suggesting that the very notion of American patriotism has become hopelessly tangled and torn—or maybe always was.”¹¹¹ Interestingly, in one of Huang Yongping’s drawings for his *Bat Project*, the U.S. spy plane is also painted with red, white, and blue strips, a concept similar to Larner’s *RWBs*. In this connection, both Chinese and American artists pose a mocking challenge to the American “hegemonic ideology” in Žižek’s analytical terms.

On the other hand, Gopnik considered Larner’s *RWBs* an “elegiac” work because its “overall effect is of some Fourth of July cataclysm.”¹¹² In this respect, Paul Chan’s *1st Light* (2005), a digital animated projection at the Whitney Biennial, can be also seen as an “elegiac” commentary on the 9/11 events in New York

City. Paul Chan is a young Chinese artist who came to the United States from Hong Kong with his family when he was twelve. He grew up and was educated in America and has become very successful as an animation and video artist in recent years. The Whitney Museum's label for *1st Light* reads:

In *1st Light* (2005), Chan invokes religion as he speculates on the mechanisms of faith and belief. Here, a silent digital animation is projected onto the gallery floor. Simulating the kind of diffused and schematic imagery that might be cast—in light and shadow—through a glass window, the work offers a post-9/11 version of the Rapture. An electrical pole invokes both the everyday and the transcendent, its tangle of wires thwarting our reading of it solely as a crucifix yet insisting on the ubiquity of that form. As the rapturous ascension appears to take hold, a number of items are loosed from gravity's grip: cell phones, cars, sunglasses suddenly float upward and outward. Yet, impossibly, as these signifiers of material possession are rendered buoyant, human bodies begin to fall toward the ground in poses we know all too well from recent events, as though in pointed opposition to any dream of salvation.

To me, this “Christian” interpretation of Chan's work well exemplifies what David Simpson has termed the “framing of the dead” as part of the “9/11 culture of commemoration.” As he put it,

Framing, is a term whose double sense aptly captures the work of culture in both its positive and its less admirable operation. On the one hand, to frame is to give a structure and a context to events that may otherwise be without discursive, memorable, or bearable meaning. . . . On the other hand, as we know from movies and crime novels, to frame means to set up, to place the blame and punishment on an innocent person. In this sense also the dead of 9/11, and others, are being framed, exploited for purposes over which they and their families have no control.¹¹³

The Whitney Museum's interpretation of Chan's *1st Light* cited above is specially “framed” by what Amy Johnson Frykholm has called the “Rapture Culture” of American evangelicalism,¹¹⁴ a religious framework which even the Whitney Museum's liberal-minded curators could hardly resist.

As Frykholm delineates, this “Rapture Culture” is represented by a series of apocalyptic novels titled *Left Behind*, which traces the last years of life on earth. In the Rapture, Jesus returns to earth and take all believers with him to heaven, and the world they leave behind is plunged into chaos.¹¹⁵ She cites a *Time* magazine article saying that “sales of *Left Behind* increased 60 percent after the September 11

attacks.”¹¹⁶ And she notices that this article is in *Time* together with other articles about al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and suicide bombers, “giving the entire issue an apocalyptic and menacing tone.”¹¹⁷ Frykholm observes that other media references to *Left Behind* are often negative, including an editorial in the *New York Times* that “mentions *Left Behind* among the factors helping the Bush Administration create a ‘theocracy.’”¹¹⁸ And she believes that “*Left Behind* is part of a conservative movement that plays on people’s fear” and that it “places readers in a position of fear where they can be more easily manipulated by both religious leaders with a thirst for power and market forces that encourage them to take out their pocketbooks and spend as a means to allay fear.”¹¹⁹ The Whitney Museum curators have used precisely this post-9/11 fear-mongering “Rapture Culture” to “frame” Chan’s *1st Light*.

In my opinion, however, Chan’s *1st Light* is a flat rejection of this “Rapture Culture.” In this animated video work, we do see the harrowing scene of hell: The victims in the WTC towers are jumping to their horrible deaths. Yet there is an ironic split between the Whitney Museum’s evangelical “framing” of Chan’s work and the artist’s portrayal of a stark reality. In fact, Chan himself had no intention to “Christianize” such grisly events, and the artist claimed he did not want “to be Christian.”¹²⁰ In that case, we need to raise this question when we look at Chan’s *1st Light*: Is Chan’s work also a critique of the “9/11 culture of commemoration,” in Simpson’s terms?¹²¹

In Simpson’s view, this “culture of commemoration” is organized by the U.S. government and the media,¹²² and its sole theme is patriotism. However, in this patriotic culture of 9/11, any verbal or visual mention of the horrible deaths of the victims is considered taboo:

It is certainly doubtful to the point of implausibility to suggest that anything as rarified as patriotism was in the minds of those dying during the events of 9/11. . . . A few must have died instantly; others had the time to imagine the death that they were facing, presumably with a whole range of emotions from sheer terror to some measure of philosophical calm. Most of the recorded last messages that have been publicized were expressions of love. Some jumped, though they have been largely written out of the visual and official memories of the event.¹²³

It is against this political and cultural background that the Whitney Museum curators tried to “Christianize” the 9/11 attack in Chan’s *1st Light* as the “Rapture.” However, says Simpson, “So we call them at once victims and heroes, those who made a sacrifice and who were the objects of a sacrifice invented by others in the aftermath of their death.”¹²⁴ Obviously Chan rejects this 9/11 politics because

his own patriotism is that which Gopnic has characterized as “tangled and torn.” Chan stated, “The myth of America is still with me. I’m an immigrant and I love my country. I just hate it now. And maybe this is the best way to be.”¹²⁵ So in *Ist Light* the artist depicts the true fate of the victims without any political or Christian “elevation,”¹²⁶ thereby contesting the “culture of commemoration” that often evades reality.

In the days after 9/11, Žižek noticed such an evasion of reality on the TV screen and called it “derealization of the horror” by the Western media. While reporting on the World Trade Center collapse, said Žižek, the main media had shown “no dismembered bodies, no blood, no desperate faces of dying people”—a policy that was “in clear contrast to reporting on Third World catastrophes.”¹²⁷ To me, the entire “culture of 9/11” is a classic case of the “master discourse of imaginary idealizations and identifications,” which, to follow Lacan’s theory, is reproduced by the mass media.¹²⁸ I believe, though, that this media-controlled “master discourse” on 9/11 cannot sustain its claim without a challenge from artists such as Paul Chan and many others. In other words, Chan’s *Ist Light* seems to have answered Simpson’s call to critique that “culture of 9/11”:

Or should it be countered by a critique that is unwilling to accede to the convenience it affords the vested interests that initiate and organize the death of others and the destruction of their means of existence, who want nothing so much as an embarrassed silence? If words alone cannot cope with the reality of violent death’s assault on the category of realism itself, what about images?¹²⁹

The imagery of Chan’s *Ist Light* has no doubt “countered” the master discourse through its unflinching “realism,” as demanded by Simpson. However, Chan’s installation itself, said Christian Holland, also served as “a metaphor for mass media.” Holland noted that Chan used Plato’s allegory of the cave as the framework for his video projection so that the viewers became the prisoners of Plato’s cave when they entered the installation. And the rising telephone pole in the video seemed like a cross that suggested the “very ideology framing our current national debate” about the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Holland continued to point out:

The cross, the symbol of Christianity framing the debate, the debris and bodies become a shadow play of the “Rapture” on the cave’s wall. . . . Religion frames the public debate in the post-9/11 world, yet Chan shows us that it’s a hokey debate and in vain as there is much more to see outside the “cave.” The title *Ist Light* implies that the “light” in the cave or glow of the television is not the truth, as we often assume.¹³⁰

To me, Holland's reading of Chan's *1st Light* is ingenious and enlightening. The significance of Chan's *1st Light* exactly lies in its harsh criticism of the mass media, the "Rapture Culture," and the "culture of 9/11," all of which have worked together to conceal the truth since the first hours of the WTC terrorist attacks.¹³¹

Xu Bing's *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* is another installation that examines the 9/11 events, but the New York-based Chinese artist views the events from the perspective of an Eastern religion, Chan Buddhism. Xu Bing mentioned how Chan Buddhism came to his mind two years after the World Trade Center collapsed. On September 11, downtown Manhattan was covered with a gray and white dust, and Xu gathered some of it. At that time he did not know what to do with the dust, but he felt it was imbued with the meanings of life, times, and events. Two years later, Xu read a famous line from a Chan Buddhist poem: "As there is nothing from the first, where does the dust collect itself?" The poem reminded him of the dust he had gathered, and he used the dust of "9/11" to create his installation *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* The work was originally designed for a Chinese architecture biennale in 2002, but the Chinese organizers of the biennale considered the work too sensitive in Sino-American relationship after the



Figure 28. Xu Bing, *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* Installation. 2004, courtesy of Xu Bing Studio, New York.

9/11 terrorist attacks, so they rejected it. Two years later, Xu Bing submitted the work to the National Museum & Gallery in Cardiff for the 2004 Artes Mundi Prize Contest, and he won. From Xu's viewpoint, however, this work did not address the events themselves but explored a relationship between spiritual and material spaces: How can people from different religious beliefs and ethnic groups coexist and respect each other in this world?¹³² He also believes that Western and Eastern religions seem to arrive at a common point in regard to "dust." For instance, both Buddhism and Christianity hold this point of view: "Everything comes from dust and goes back to dust." ("In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."¹³³ Xu considers dust to be the most elemental and constant substantial condition that can no longer be changed.¹³⁴

The key Chinese Buddhist notion of *chen* (dust) is derived from *guna*, the original Indian concept, which has multiple meanings.¹³⁵ The Chinese term *chen* is a free translation for *guna* mainly in the sense of "a property or characteristic of a thing." Broadly speaking, *chen* implies a material thing or space. In Chinese Buddhism, *chen* also denotes "contamination" that results from holding onto illusory ideas and worldly things.¹³⁶ And the term *liuchen* or *shad samvrta* means the six qualities (dust) produced by the six objects and organs of sense, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and idea.¹³⁷ According to the Buddhist doctrine, there is no "dust" that exists beyond human consciousness; for that reason the "six dusts" are merely a reflection of the mind. But the "six dusts" can also "corrupt" the mind, thus violating the Buddhist law.¹³⁸ A classical Chan Buddhist poem gives a fair warning against the "six dusts": "Body should be like a *bodhi* tree,¹³⁹ and mind as clear as a bright mirror; both of them must be cleaned constantly: do not ever allow the dust to collect itself."¹⁴⁰

The last line of this poem echoes the line of poetry Xu Bing used for the title of his *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* Seen in this connection, we may consider Xu Bing's artwork as a witty Buddhist riposte to what has been said in the West about the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As the Chinese artist wrote:

Why did the World Trade Center crumble to dust all of a sudden and return to its primordial form of matter after losing balance in a single day? The reason was that too much purely man-made material energy had been gathered within one object. Although the cause of the events was a lost balance in geopolitical relationships, the primal source [for the events] was a violation of nature.¹⁴¹

For Xu Bing, the collapse of the World Trade Center was affected by a single factor: too much "man-made energy" concentrated in one object (i.e., the World Trade Center), which was a violation of nature or *ziran* as defined by the Chinese

Buddhist canon. In Chinese Buddhism, the term *ziran*, or “nature,” means that one should let nature take its own course and be divorced from any artificial creation.¹⁴² Such a Buddhist interpretation by Xu Bing may seem exceptional, but the Chinese artist is not alone in challenging the predominant Western discourse on the 9/11 events.¹⁴³

Like Xu Bing, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard believed that there was a “formidable condensation of all functions” in the WTC buildings,¹⁴⁴ which in his eyes represents “global power” as symbolized by the Twin Towers.¹⁴⁵ Baudrillard pointed out that “[t]he violence of globalization also involves architecture” because “the horror for the 4000 victims of dying in those towers was inseparable from the horror of living in them—the horror of living and working in sarcophagi of concrete and steel.”¹⁴⁶ In Simpson’s analysis, Baudrillard’s notion of the World Trade Center as “sarcophagi of concrete and steel” suggests “an explicit antihumanism” that the French philosopher found “in the towers and their implications,” which radically disagreed with Minoru Yamasaki, the Japanese architect of the World Trade Center. Yamasaki regarded his building as “a living symbol of man’s dedication to world peace.” However, as Simpson argued, his World Trade Center would not bring world peace “since what he brought looks rather more like a sword in the raised hand of a militant nation-state.”¹⁴⁷ Perhaps this is why Baudrillard called the collapse of the Twin Towers a “suicide” and “implosion”¹⁴⁸ that occurred from within that overly condensed “global power.”

As noted, Xu Bing’s work *The Dust* did not address the 9/11 events, but explored a relationship between spiritual and material spaces. Remarks by Baudrillard seem to complement the Chinese artist’s concern: “Moreover, although the two towers have disappeared, they have not been annihilated. Even in their pulverized state, they have left behind an intense awareness of their presence. . . . Their end in material space has borne them off into a definitive imaginary space.”¹⁴⁹ In this light, both Xu Bing’s *The Dust* and Paul Chan’s *1st Light* should be seen as works of art created from that “definitive imaginary space.” In Xu Bing’s case, in Baudrillard’s reference to the Twin Towers “in their pulverized state,” it is clear that the towers are *dust*. As we have just learned, the Buddhist concept of “dust” is a thing that corrupts mind and body. Moreover, according to an Indian Buddhist school of idealism, dust is an outward hindrance to Enlightenment, as it is described in the scriptures: “By nature mind is pure, and yet it is stained by outer dust.”¹⁵⁰ Thus the collapse of the Twin Towers and their current material form as dust must be understood as “an essential warning to mankind,” in Xu Bing’s own words.¹⁵¹

In late October 2006, an exhibition titled “Defamation of Character” opened at P.S.1 in Long Island City, New York, where I saw a photo collage titled *Cut/Uncut* (2006) by the famed American filmmaker and artist John Waters. In this work Waters depicted the 9/11 events from the viewpoint of a “satirist” needed in

the contemporary art world,¹⁵² and he juxtaposed the media images of a burning World Trade Center with stills from *Earth vs. Flying Saucers*, a 1956 science fiction film that shows a flying saucer crashing into the Washington Monument and Capitol Hill. Most of Waters' films and artworks are intended "to mock propriety, pop culture and snob culture in the name of fun and in the name of freedom."¹⁵³ Like Paul Chan and Xu Bing, Waters does not think of the 9/11 events along the "official" line, in particular the so-called clash of civilizations that George W. Bush or Tony Blair would refer to in their public speeches about "the war on terror."¹⁵⁴ To me, the artist seems to agree with Žižek, who has pointed out, "This notion of the 'clash of civilizations,' however, must be rejected out of hand: what we are witnessing today are, rather, clashes *within* civilization."¹⁵⁵ In this sense, Waters also agrees with Baudrillard, who views the World Trade Center collapse as "implosion."

So we may read Waters' photographic montages *Cut/Uncut* as such a "sequence" of "clashes *within* civilization" or an "implosion." From the top left, a flying saucer cuts into the Washington Monument, causing it to collapse, and a few people are fleeing the crumpled monument on the top right. In the middle, the World Trade Center is burning after the hit by the first plane, and the second plane is approaching the World Trade Center from the lower right like a gliding phantom. To the lower left the saucer finally approaches Capitol Hill and then smashes into the building. The last scene at lower right is the wrecked facade of Capitol Hill with a couple of "survivors" from the catastrophic "events." Viewed in this visual order, it is clear that the saucer "travels" around the Washington Monument, the World Trade Center, and Capitol Hill in a vicious *cycle* of violence. But the saucer's trajectory, which flies from the left to the right, is on a collision course with the hijacked plane, which advances from the right to the left. This reading of Waters' *Cut/Uncut* may seem fantastical, but it places the two attacking objects in a "clashing" parallel movement, which, I think, perfectly illustrates that "clash *within* civilization."

Citing Baudrillard, Simpson suggests that internal to our life system is to attribute violence to the Other, but it is this violence that we ourselves have dreamed of and predicted.¹⁵⁶ So, as Waters' photo montages demonstrate, a flying saucer smashing into the landmarks in Washington, D.C., has long caught the public fancy in America. And, as mentioned by Simpson, some people said in response to the World Trade Center collapse that it was just like a movie they had seen.¹⁵⁷ *Earth vs. Flying Saucers* is a science fiction film made almost a half-century ago, yet it somehow had "predicted" what was to happen in New York and the U.S. capital on September 11, 2001. In this context, Waters' cultural "framing" of the 9/11 events contrasts sharply with the Whitney Museum's "religious" framing of *1st Light* by Paul Chan, the Hong Kong-born Chinese artist who declares that "I don't want to be Christian" and that "within the institutions like museums and

galleries, I think art that engages with the social and the political invariably comes from a sense of desperation.”¹⁵⁸

Jiang Jie and Qin Yufen at the Today Art Museum: An Ultimate Feminine Touch

In October 2007, a large-scale exhibition of contemporary Chinese art was held at the Today Art Museum in Beijing. Titled “The First Today’s Documents 2007 Energy: Spirit Body Material,” the exhibition was curated by Huang Du, with Menene Gras Balaguer and Taro Amano contributing essays to the exhibition catalog.¹⁵⁹ The Today Art Museum is a privately funded and non-profit cultural institution where young and emerging artists from around the world are encouraged to show their new work. Sixty Chinese artists participated in Huang Du’s “Energy” show, among them two well-established female artists, Jiang Jie and Qin Yufen. According to Huang Du, Jiang Jie’s installation *Upperside and Downside* consisted of 282 golden glazed tiles or *liuliwa*,¹⁶⁰ a “custom-designed” building material used for the roofs of Chinese imperial palaces such as the “Purple Forbidden City” (Zijincheng).¹⁶¹ In Jiang Jie’s eyes, golden glazed tile was a symbol of power and wealth in China’s imperial past, yet nowadays it has become the symbol of an age of consumerism.¹⁶² For Jiang Jie, “Chinese feminist art is expected to be separated



Figure 29. Jiang Jie, *Upperside and Downside*. Installation. Today Art Museum, Beijing. 2007.

from male discourse,” so she wants to “establish a kind of female discourse” in her *Upperside and Downside*.¹⁶³ Jiang’s female discourse echoes that of Yin Xiuzhen, who too had used the roof tile as a symbol of power in *The Ruined City* nearly a decade before. In the “Energy” exhibition, Qin Yufen’s installation *Fictitious Architecture* was made up of “a hundred self-made magnified hangers which were bound one by one into a giant colorful work.”¹⁶⁴ So, as Sheldon Lu remarks, Qin “has been known for the ‘beauty’ and poetic quality of her installations.”¹⁶⁵

At noon on August 4, 2008, I received a phone call from Qin Yufen inviting me to attend the opening reception of her installation *Beijing 008* at the Today Art Museum. The *Beijing 008* art project was a collaboration between Qin Yufen and Aston Martin China, an English carmaker. For months Qin had worked closely with Ulrich Bez and Kenny Chen, chief executives of Aston Martin China, and Zhang Zikang, director of the museum, and Huang Du, the curator. In the early evening of that hot summer day, I arrived at the front entrance of the museum and found myself standing amid several Aston Martin luxury cars glittering in the sunset. For a while I wondered if it was also an Aston Martin auto show, and a few days later Huang Du told me that two of them were sold soon after the opening. I walked into the museum’s main gallery, where I was struck by Qin’s magnificent new work.¹⁶⁶ In Qin’s *Beijing 008*, a flashy red car, an Aston Martin V8 Vantage, stood as a main structure of her installation, which, curiously, was based on Stephen Hawking’s statement that “disorder increases with time because we



Figure 30. Qin Yufen, *Beijing 008*. Installation. Today Art Museum, Beijing, 2008.

measure time in the direction in which disorder increases.”¹⁶⁷ (A white sculpture of Hawking was hanging from the gallery’s ceiling.) Confronting the V8 Vantage was a giant tape measure built of steel and wood and covered with yellow silk. Both the tape measure and the car were set on a vast carpet imprinted with a map of the city of Beijing, which, in Dan Roth’s eyes, signified “the earth, while high above . . . fly a swarm of kites, a traditional symbol of the city.”¹⁶⁸ According to Qin Yufen, “Hawking’s quote operates on a number of levels, but for her it represented the ‘essentially mysterious nature’ of the 21st century.”¹⁶⁹ And Qin’s *Beijing 008* “celebrates the arrival of Aston Martin in China through a striking mix of traditional crafts, iconographic imagery and sculpture.”¹⁷⁰

My own reading of *Beijing 008* is, however, an “iconographic” comparison between Qin Yufen’s work and Lu Hao’s *Duplicated Memories* (as discussed in chapter 1). In both installations, we see the map of Beijing as a key constituent. But Lu’s map is a replica of the entire city map, while Qin’s map is a much abbreviated or symbolic one—that is, “the earth.” In Lu’s *Duplicated Memories*, hovering above the map are the translucent models of city gates suspended in mid-air like ghosts. In Qin’s *Beijing 008*, it is the ethereal figures of kites that fly over the carpet map. And Roth noticed that “each kite has been painstakingly made by hand, depicting the evolution of form from bird into sports car” in Qin’s installation.¹⁷¹ In my view, however, each kite in *Beijing 008* is just a skeleton without flesh or substance. A traditional kite in Beijing (and in China as well) has decorative papers mounted on the frame or skeleton, which ultimately turns into an image of a bird. In this cultural context, I think, Qin Yufen’s “skeletal” kites are as ironic as Lu Hao’s “ghostly” city gates—they symbolize Chinese traditions that are uprooted from “the earth” of Beijing (or China). Yet capitalist globalization is penetrating the earth in “the undeniably striking form of Aston Martin’s V8 Vantage.”¹⁷²

But is Hawking’s statement about “disorder” also prophetic of capitalist globalization? It seems so if the V8 Vantage veers into Qin’s gigantic tape measure, which in my view is a dark labyrinth where Qin “illuminated Hawking’s quote using bright yellow neon.”¹⁷³ This is indeed a feminine touch on the iconography of capitalist globalization, and I would see Qin’s *Beijing 008* as the same “female discourse” as that of Jiang Jie in *Upperside and Downside*. As I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, in Wang Chao’s *Luxury Car*, the Audi is a capitalist object of lure that ruins the female protagonist’s younger brother’s life. In Qin Yufen’s *Beijing 008*, the V8 Vantage still stands for that global capitalist lure, but this object of desire will be annihilated in the end in Qin’s dark labyrinth. (As we see in the James Bond movies, the Aston Martin is always dismantled as soon as Bond’s mission is accomplished.) In this sense, the labyrinth in Qin’s work is perhaps what Julia Kristeva might call “a *signifying space*, a both corporeal and mental space”¹⁷⁴ that is created by woman in this “mysterious” twenty-first century.

Notes

Introduction

1. For more information on this subject, see Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

2. Since the historic 1989 “China/Avant-Garde” exhibition, Beijing has been center stage for contemporary Chinese art, and the newly developed 798 Art District is a free space where young Chinese artists are able to display their most recent work. New York, on the other hand, is also a top venue for new Chinese art and cinema. The first major exhibition was Gao Minglu’s “Inside Out: New Chinese Art” held at the Asia Society in 1998, followed by individual exhibits in local art galleries and prestigious museums such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Guggenheim Museum. As for cinema, the city is a unique place to see independent films made by Sixth Generation directors, such as Jia Zhangke’s *Platform* (2000) and Wang Chao’s *Anyang Orphan* (2002) at Lincoln Center and the MoMA, respectively. Both films were banned in mainland China, as were many other films by Sixth Generation directors. In this respect, Beijing and New York both serve as a global cultural space that allows me to conduct this study.

3. On this subject, an impressive body of scholarly work has already been done, including Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Claire Huot, *China’s New Cultural Scene: A Handbook of Changes* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Sheldon H. Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Sheldon H. Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007); Liu Kang, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004); Gao Minglu, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Gao Minglu, *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art* (Beijing: Millennium Art Museum; Buffalo, N.Y.: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2005); Sheila Cornelius, *New Chinese Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002); Zhang Zhen, ed., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007); Paul Pickowicz and Zhang Yingjin, eds.,

From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). I frequently consulted these authors' writings while researching this book.

4. Within the single year of 2001 China became a member country of the World Trade Organization and Beijing was chosen to host the 2008 Olympic Games.

5. Gao Minglu, *The Wall*, pp. 43–44.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Andreas Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-garde and Post-modernism in the 1970s," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty, p. 228 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

9. Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 119.

10. Gao Minglu, *The Wall*, p. 68.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Calinescu, *Five Faces*, p. 122.

13. Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition," p. 231.

14. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 49.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

16. Gao Minglu, *The Wall*, p. 68.

17. Anita Chang, "Police Block Events Ahead of Tiananmen Anniversary," February 5, 2009, Associated Press, available at <http://www.google.com/hostednews>.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 61.

20. Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (New York: IconEditions, 1996), pp. 484–486.

21. It is still a most important national institution in China today.

22. Ye Ying, "Warhol in China (Wohuoer zai Zhongguo)," *Time Out Beijing*, issue 8, no. 143 (June 12–June 25, 2008): p. 29.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Jin Wei, "He Andi Wohuoer kan 1982 de Zhonghuo" (Looking at 1982's China with Andy Warhol), *Sheying zhi you* (Photographer's companion), issue 8 (August 2008): p. 73.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. See the Wikipedia entry for "Hongqi," available at <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

28. *Andi Wohuoer de zhexue: popu qishilu* (The philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and back again), trans. Lu Ciyang (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2008).

29. Jin Wei, "Looking at 1982's China with Andy Warhol," p. 72.

30. Ellen Pearlman, "Xu Bing with Ellen Pearlman," available at <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2007/09/art>.

31. Lance Esplund, “Made in China,” *New York Sun*, September 6, 2007, “Museums” section.
32. “Asia Society Presents First-Ever Museum Retrospective of Zhang Huan: (6 September Through 20 January 2008) in New York (MaximsNews.com, U.N.)” available at <http://www.maximsnews.com>.
33. Holland Cotter, “Art Boom in China Has Ripples Over Here,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2007.
34. David Barboza, “Provocateur’s Products Roll off the Assembly Line,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2007.
35. This information is taken from *Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film* (2006), PBS Home Video.
36. Again I borrowed this expression from *Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film*.
37. Barboza, “Provocateur’s Products Roll off the Assembly Line.”
38. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 144.
39. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 60.
40. Hal Foster, *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), p. 19.
41. Holland Cotter, “Chinese Art, in One Man’s Translation,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2007.
42. Victor Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), pp. 158–159.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 178.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
47. Zhang Zhen, ed., *The Urban Generation*.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
51. Jing Wang and Tanie Barlow, eds., *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 85.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
53. Gao Minglu, *The Wall*, p. 49.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
55. Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 243.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
57. Zhang Zhen, *The Urban Generation*, p. 10.
58. Tang Yuanhai, “‘Underground’ Movie Directors Emerge,” *China Today*, April 26, 2004, available at <http://www.chinatoday.com>.

59. "Film Regulator to Aid New Generation of Directors," *Shanghai Daily*, January 18, 2007, available at <http://www.chinadaily.com>.
60. Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reform*, p. 307.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
62. Wang and Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 52.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.
64. See Derek Elley's review of *Still Life*, available at <http://www.variety.com/> review.
65. Bernard Perusse, "Lives Altered by Three Gorges Dam," *The Gazette* (Montreal), September 21, 2007, available at <http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette>.
66. Kevin Laforest, "Dam'd: Jia Zhangke's Award-winning Film Takes Us Up the Yangtze River," available at <http://www.hour.ca/film>.
67. "Three Doubts About *Still Life*," available at <http://www.hongxiu.com>.
68. "Director Jia Zhangke Considers Suing Zhang Yimou's Producer," *People's Daily*, December 27, 2006, available at <http://www.english.cri.cn>.
69. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 124.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Sheldon Lu, "National Cinema, Cultural Critique, Transnational Capital: The Films of Zhang Yimou," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, ed. Sheldon Lu, p. 112 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
72. Wang and Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 31.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
74. Neil Young, "Northland Tales: 2007 Toronto Film Festival," available at <http://www.jigsawlounge.co.uk/film>.
75. Joel Martinsen, "SARFT Uncovers Poisoned Apple," March 28, 2007, available at <http://www.danwei.org/regulation>.
76. Gao Minglu, *Meixue xushi he chouxiang yishu* (Aesthetic narrative and abstract art) (Chengdu: Sichuan chuban jituan/Sichuan meishu chubanshe, 2007), p. 56 (my translation).
77. "Jia Zhangke: *Still Life* Is an Unplanned Project" (Jia Zhangke: Sanxia Haoren shi jihua wai de chanpin) *Guangzhou Ribao* (Guangzhou daily), September 12, 2006, available at <http://www.news.cn>.
78. Gao Minglu, *Meixue xushi he chouxiang yishu*, p. 57.
79. Clifford Coonan, "Three Gorges Expose Top Prize at Film Festival," *The Independent* (London), September 11, 2006, available at <http://findarticles.com>.
80. *Ibid.*
81. "Jia Zhangke: *Still Life* Is an Unplanned Project."
82. Sun Linlin, "The Venice Film Festival Adds *Still Life* to the Competition," *Gansu Ribao* (Gansu daily), September 5, 2006, available at <http://ent.gansudaily.com>.
83. "Biennale Cinema Director: Marco Muller," available at <http://www.labiennale.org>.

84. “Director Jia Zhangke Defends Use of Staged Scenes in Award-Winning Documentary,” *International Herald Tribune*, October 11, 2007, available at <http://www.ihf.com/articles>.

85. For an extensive discussion of Cai Guoqiang’s controversial work, see Kela Shang, “Rent Collection Courtyard: Fair Use Doctrine Revisited in the Context of Post-modern Visuality,” *Perspectives*, vol. 7, no. 4 (December 2006): pp. 223–247.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

87. The art historian Britta Erickson’s comment cited in Shang, “Rent Collection Courtyard,” p. 229.

88. Esplund, “Made in China.”

89. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 83–94.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

91. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 394.

92. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 91.

93. Liu Kang, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China*, p. 11.

94. Jonathan Watts, “Killing for Scratch on BMW Reveals China’s Wealth Gap,” China special report section, *Guardian*, April 8, 2004.

95. *Ibid.* In July 2007, at a public parking lot in Beijing, a woman suddenly sped up her car and knocked down two security guards after refusing to pay a five-yuan parking fee. Earlier in 2007, in the city of Suzhou during the Chinese New Year, a drunken businessman driving a Buick hit a cleaning woman riding her bicycle. The man accused the woman of “scratching” the side mirror of his car and demanded compensation. The poor woman was then forced to apologize and even kneel before the brute. *Beijing Wanbao* (Beijing evening news), July 20, 2007, section 20, “China News.”

96. “BMW Says Mainland China Vehicle Sales Up 38%,” available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/11/content>.

97. In the early 1980s David Hockney and Andy Warhol visited China while I was working at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Chinese Artists Association, and I was the tour guide and translator for these two artists.

98. Richard Gaul of BMW Group said, “We chose to start the tour with Kuala Lumpur, as in Europe we see the capital as a modern city with high appreciation for pop art culture combined with the availability of a world-class gallery.” “World Tour BMW art car collection kicks off in Malaysia,” *People’s Daily*, available at <http://www.peopledailyonline>.

99. While BMW has captured the Chinese market, low-cost Chinese cars have made a speedy entry into the European auto market. John Tagliabue reports, “European car dealers pay in dollars for the Chinese cars, yet are paid in strong euros when they resell them, pocketing nifty profits from exchange rates. ‘The game the Japanese mastered in 15 years, and Koreans in 10,’ said Nigel Griffiths, director of European light vehicle forecasting at Global Insight, ‘they will do in 18 months to 5 years.’” “Low-

Cost Chinese Cars Making Restrained Entry to European Market,” *New York Times*, world business section, July 13, 2007.

100. See the biographies of four artists in *Art in Motion*, exhibition catalog (Beijing: Long Match Space, 2006).

101. Lu Jie, preface, *Art in Motion*, exhibition catalog (Beijing: Long Match Space, 2006).

102. See catalog entry for Wang Gongxin’s video installation in *Art in Motion*, exhibition catalog (Beijing: Long Match Space, 2006).

103. Hai Mo, *Zhongguo chengshi pipan* (A critique of Chinese cities) (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2004), p. 174.

104. “Interview: Ning Hao Talks about His *Crazy Stone*” (posted in Action Asia Comedy Interviews), available at <http://www.twitch.interviews>.

105. Wang Chao’s *Luxury Car* won a “Special Regard” prize at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival.

106. See a review of *Luxury Car*, available at <http://findarticles.com>.

107. See an anonymous French review of *Luxury Car*, available at <http://www.cannes-fest.com/cine/films>.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Tuya’s Marriage* won the Golden Bear at the 2007 Berlin Film Festival.

110. In his earlier film, *Lunar Eclipse* (*Yueshi*, 1999), Wang Quan’an also used two different vehicles to contrast a bygone socialism and new Chinese capitalism: the male protagonist Hu Xiaobing comes from a working-class family and drives a taxi-cab, while the female protagonist Yana’s businessman husband, Li Guohao, drives a luxury car.

111. Wu Jiao, “Public Protest Clears Forbidden City of Starbucks,” *China Daily*, July 16, 2007.

112. Richard Spencer, “Web Battle to Ban Starbucks in Forbidden City,” *Telegraph* (London), January 19, 2007.

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*

115. “Starbucks Closes Chinese Palace Outlet,” *China Daily*, July 14, 2007.

116. Spencer, “Web Battle to Ban Starbucks in Forbidden City.”

117. For more information on this subject, see Suisheng Zhao, Chapter 4, “The Challenge of Chinese Liberal Nationalism: Personal versus National Rights,” in *Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 120–164.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

119. Liu Kang, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China*, p. 14.

120. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

121. See the Bulletin of HKGCC, February 2004 issue, available at http://www.chamber.org.hk.info/the_bulletin.

122. *Ibid.*

123. For more information on Jianlibao's recent misfortune, see Shu-Ching Jean Chen, "Downfall of a Chinese Entrepreneur," available at <http://www.forbes.com>.

124. Sheldon Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity*, p. 149.

125. Here I'm citing Howard Farber, an American collector of Chinese avant-garde art, who bought this picture in Wang Guangyi's *Great Criticism: Coca Cola* series for \$25,000 in 1996. Farber's forty-four works, including Wang's Coca-Cola painting, are valued at \$7 million to \$10 million and were auctioned at Phillips de Pury & Co. in October 2007 in London. Linda Sandler, "Chinese Coca-Cola Image May Fetch 50 Times Price Paid in 1996," available at <http://www.bloomberg.com>.

126. Zeng Min, "Is China the Real Thing for Coca-Cola?" *Shanghai Star*, February 18, 2000.

127. Ibid.

128. The words of the song were written by Jin Guolin, a twelve-year-old primary school student, and the music was composed by Jin Yueling, a nineteen-year-old factory worker from Shanghai. The song was first broadcast by the China People's Broadcasting Station in 1971 and became a national hit the following year. Chen Xinfeng, *Shidai liuxing feng* (Pop of the times) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2007), p. 126. Ning Hao's use of this children's song makes San Bao appear immature for his actual age.

129. The "disadvantaged community" (*ruoshi qunti*) consists of people such as the urban unemployed and rural migratory workers.

130. Coca-Cola has a close tie with the Chinese government and was an official sponsor of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Not long ago, the management of Coca-Cola hoped that China would become the largest market for its product after Brazil and Mexico. Toward the end of *Crazy Stone*, San Bao is seen drinking a Coke, which seems to redeem his past misfortune. I see this as a compromise offered by Ning Hao in his critical perception of Coke as an invading foreign object of globalization. Ning Hao's cinematic attack on Coca-Cola has not provoked a negative response from the American soft drink maker. In April 2007, however, an Italian film, *Seven Kilometres from Jerusalem*, sparked an angry protest from Coca-Cola Italia because the movie showed Jesus Christ drinking from a can of Coke offered by a jobless man in the desert. Richard Owen, "Coke Doesn't Convert on Road to Jerusalem," *The Times* (London), April 4, 2007.

131. Howard Slater, "The Child of Marx & Coca Cola: On Godard's *Masculin/Feminin*," available at <http://datacide.c8.com/text>.

132. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, eds., *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), p. 35. This is a fine collection of analytical essays by art historians and literary and film critics that explore the relationship between the traumatic and the visual in modern history, especially the relation between trauma and representation. I researched many authors' views on the subject of trauma in visual arts expressed in this volume.

133. Ibid., p. 36.

134. Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, pp. 204–208.
135. Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 162–163.
136. Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 121.
137. *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.
138. Zhang Zhen, Introduction, “Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of ‘Transformation’” (*Zhuanxing*), in *The Urban Generation*, p. 5.
139. *Ibid.*
140. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
141. *Ibid.*, p. 41, fn 13.
142. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
143. See Joshua Tanzer’s review of *Blind Shaft*, available at <http://www.offoffoff.com/film>.
144. Erick Eckholm, “Postcards from China’s Industrial Cauldron,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2003.
145. Howard W. French, “Carving Plight of Coal Miners, He Churns China,” *New York Times*, Saturday Profile, July 14, 2007.
146. *Ibid.*
147. Zhao Xiaohui and Jiang Xueli (Xinhua), “Coal Mining: Most Deadly Job in China,” available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>.
148. “At Least 34 Killed in China Coal Mine Explosion,” ABC report, October 3, 2005, available at <http://www.abcasiapacific.com>.
149. “China Issues New Legal Interpretation to Improve Coal Mine Safety,” Xinhua report, available at <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn>.
150. Mark Franchetti Shakhtinsk, Robert Winnett, and Holly Watt, “Miners Face ‘Suicide Mission’ Working for Mittal’s Empire,” *The Sunday Times* (London), June 10, 2007.
151. “In the aftermath of the September 2006 explosion, Mittal, accompanied by senior aides and local officials, met several of the families of the dead miners to express his condolences. One was Galina Knish, a nurse, mother of two and widow of Alexander, whose remains were so badly burnt and scattered so far afield that some of his body parts were found only two weeks after his funeral, causing the family to live through the added *trauma* [my italic] of having to bury him twice.” *Ibid.*
152. Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), p. 133.
153. Lawrence Sheets, “Putin Delivers Russia’s State of the Union Address,” NPR report, available at <http://www.npr.org>.
154. *Ibid.*
155. Richard Lourie, “Post-Traumatic Politics,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, available at <http://www.sptimes.ru>.
156. See Film Society of Lincoln Center’s program brochure, March 2005, p. 4.
157. Amy Tauin, “Women’s Work,” available at <http://www.villagevoice.com>.

158. Yuri Shevchuk, “The Bold Vision of Kira Muratova and Its Distorted Reflection in New York,” available at <http://eng.maidanua.org>.

159. Yomi Braester, “Tracing the City’s Scars: Demolition and the Limits of the Documentary Impulse in the New Urban Cinema,” in Zhang Zhen, *The Urban Generation*, p. 161.

160. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

161. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

162. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

163. Here I draw on Dai Jinhua’s excellent analysis of the scene from *No Regret about Youth*. Dai Jinhua, *Wuzhong fengjing: Zhongguo dianying wenhua 1978–1998* (A landscape in mist: Chinese cinematic culture 1978–1998) (Beijing: Beijing Daxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 216–217.

Chapter 1: Discourse and Displacement

1. The National Gallery of Art is one block away from this small gallery, which is part of the Secondary School of Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.

2. The man refused to continue working under the program director, who was a young woman trained as an art historian but who had no authority to order the man around, so an interview with the artists scheduled for that day was canceled. Typical of a situation in which a male refuses to work with a female superior, I witnessed not only the disturbed man’s unprofessional behavior, but also a deep misunderstanding of so-called China avant-garde.

3. Fredric Jameson, *Signature of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 164.

4. Hans-Peter Martin and Harald Schumann, *The Global Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Democracy and Prosperity* (New York: Zed Books, 1997), p. 20.

5. For more information on the subject of Beijing’s transformation, see Lilian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).

6. H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 483. A Chinese version of Arnason’s book came out in the summer of 1998.

7. Shu Jun, ed., *Jingcheng chishi* (Shameful things in Beijing) (Beijing: Jiuzhou tushu chubanshe, 1997), pp. 140–141.

8. This observation is based on the fact that the Beijing municipal government was corrupt under Chen Xitong, who served as mayor from 1987 to 1995. In July 1998, Chen “was sentenced to 16 years in prison for corruption and dereliction of duty.” “Official Receives 16 Years in Jail,” *China Daily*, August 1, 1998, p. 1. It’s worth noting that as the former mayor of Beijing, Chen Xitong alone was responsible for all the

imperial “big roofs” or pavilions added to new Beijing architecture, so Beijing’s people gave him the nickname “Chen Yiting” (Chen Pavilion), which in Chinese sounds much like his actual name.

9. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 98.

10. Shu Jun, *Jingcheng chishi*, p. 140.

11. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 36.

12. An advertisement for the Big Tower says, “It is said that in the great cities of the world such as Paris and New York, a nightlife facility... would be located in a bustling area of the city. For this reason, the Big Tower is conveniently located on the top floor of the China Garment Plaza.... Authentic French cuisine and dancing in the magnificent Palace of Versailles—plus smartly dressed waiters and eye-catching women—all lend to the omnipresent feeling of being in another country and to the attraction of warmth and romance.” *CAAC Magazine*, issue 3, no. 91 (1998): p. 90.

13. According to Shi Lu, a reporter for *Shopping Guide*, a weekly newspaper published in Beijing, the Big Tower is mostly a place for white-collar businessmen (both Chinese and foreigners) to entertain their clients or enjoy themselves on the weekend. *Shopping Guide*, March 27, 1998.

14. To my knowledge, the Big Tower is owned by the Ministry of Textile Industry, but it is run by a Hong Kong management firm called Jones Lang Wootton.

15. Lefebvre put it, “Today everything that derives from history and from historical time must undergo a test. Neither ‘culture’ nor the ‘consciousness’ of peoples, groups or even individuals can escape the loss of identity that is now added to all other besetting terrors.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 416.

16. Here I borrow Slavoj Žižek’s term in analyzing Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*: “a motel which epitomizes anonymous American modernity.” Žižek, ed., *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 231.

17. The original Mongolian word *hutong* means “water well,” and it began to be used for Beijing’s narrow streets during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). Nowadays the so-called *hutong* life resembles that of the old days in Beijing. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, pp. 28, 52, and 187.

18. The word *siheyuan* means walled courtyard houses, which are constructed with gray brick with gray roof tiles in two layers and which have windows made of thick translucent paper. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

19. Zhang Jianhua, ed., *Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti* (The critical problems facing China) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), p. 467.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 477.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 486–487.

22. Craig Clunas puts it, “One particular use of portraiture was in the rites of the ancestral cult... and indeed to Western curators and auction houses most formal portraits are referred to in everyday use as ‘ancestor portraits.’” Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 89.

23. According to Wang Jinsong, the couple actually lives in the store.
24. Xiao Zhenyu et al., *Yanglao Ni zhiwang shui?* (Providing for the aged: Who can you rely on?) (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1998), pp. 41–42.
25. Min Jiayin, et al., eds., *The Chalice and the Blade in Chinese Culture Gender Relations and Social Models* (Beijing: China Social Science Publishing House, 1995), p. 585.
26. Laurie Schneider Adams, *Art and Psychoanalysis* (New York: IconEditions, 1993), p. 118.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 117–154.
28. Zhang Jianhua, *Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti*, p. 481.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Chen Wei, *Beijing de danshen nanren* (A bachelor in Beijing) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998), p. 210.
31. Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), p. 330.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
34. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 184.
35. Zhang Jianhua, *Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti*, p. 519.
36. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 184.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
38. Zhang Jianhua, *Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti*, pp. 560–564.
39. *Ibid.*
40. As exemplified by Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) and his mistress Yang Guifei. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History China* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 123.
41. Zhang Jianhua, *Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti*, p. 560.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Rhoda Thomas Tripp, ed., *The International Thesaurus of Quotations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 570.
44. This is based on Xu Yihui's own interpretation.
45. Liang Xiaosheng, *Liang Xiaosheng huati* (A discourse on current affairs) (Beijing: Jiuzhou tushu chubanshe, 1998), pp. 54–68.
46. Tong Xun, ed., *Fojiao yu Beijing simiao wenhua* (Buddhism and Beijing's temple culture) (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1997), p. 106.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
48. The information is based on my interview with the artists included in the "Space and Vision" exhibition.
49. Zhang Kaiji, "It's Unnecessary to Imitate Hong Kong in Residential Building," *Beijing wanbao* (Beijing evening news), July 22, 1998, p. 11.
50. Chris Billing and Weijean Strand, "Ancient Beijing Falls to 'Progress,'" MSNBC News, June 19, 1998, posted at <http://www.msnbc.com/news>.

51. Masao Miyoshi, “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism over the Decline of the Nation-State,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993): pp. 726–751.

52. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 217.

53. Lawrence Chua, “XL in Asia: A Dialogue with Rem Koolhaas and Masao Miyoshi,” in *Collapsing New Buildings* (Distributed Art Publishers, 1997), p. 107.

54. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, p. 261.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 257–262.

56. The journalist Wang Jun has discussed this public debate over the three major buildings in detail in his new book, *Caifang ben shang de chengshi* (A city in the reporter’s notebook) (Beijing: Shenghuo zhishi dushu sanlian shudian, 2008), pp. 192–209 and pp. 219–252. As for sexually explicit nicknames, the “Egg” for the National Grand Theater was in fact a short form for “turtle egg,” or *wangbadan* in Chinese, “which is a local obscenity roughly akin to ‘bastard’ although actually more insulting.” See May-lee Chai’s review of Thomas J. Campanella’s book *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), available at <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/reviews/article>.

57. See Matthew Knight’s interview with Joseph Rykwert, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2008/TECH/science/06/12/Rykwert>.

58. Peter Spiegel, “China’s CCTV Network Gets Little Sympathy after Hotel Fire,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 2009, available at <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world>.

59. Geoff Dyer, “Beijing Fire Evokes Mixed Reactions,” *Financial Times*, February 13, 2009, available at <http://www.ft.com>.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Vivian Wu, “Images of Burning Hotel Become Latest Hot Cultural Icons,” *South China Morning Post*, February 16, 2009, available at <http://www.pressdisplay.com>.

62. Pierpaolo Barbieri, “Fire, Fire! The CCTV Fire in Beijing Underlines the Futility of Chinese Censorship,” *The Harvard Crimson* (online edition), February 22, 2009, available at <http://www.thecrimson.com>.

63. See a description of the CCTV headquarters by the OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture, which designed the building), available at http://www.arcspace.com/architects/koolhaas/chinese_television.

64. “China Central Television (CCTV) Headquarters, China,” available at <http://www.designbuild-network.com/projects/cctv>.

65. Robbie Moore reported, “Sometime in the spring of 2004, the Chinese authorities (a necessarily vague description) began to lose confidence in Beijing’s booming trade in Western architecture. In May, *The Times* claims Koolhaas’ CCTV tower was definitely deceased. It was, the newspaper reported, the personal decision of the new premier Wen Jiabao, demonstrating his authority by repudiating the previous regime’s obsession with mega-developments. Then Herzog & de Meuron’s Olympic stadium was put on hold, along with Paul Andreu’s National Grand Theatre, which had long

been the subject of fierce debate. By early September, half of the venues for the Olympics were scrapped or under threat. Then as a symbolic move against foreign architects, a new regulation was passed requiring them to enter joint ventures with local firms before they could take on Chinese projects.” Robbie Moore, “Left of the Forbidden City,” available at <http://www.specifier.com>.

66. Alex Pasternack, “Brave New Beijing,” *Guardian*, Friday, February 1, 2008, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2008/feb/01/beijing.architecture>.

67. Robin Pogrebin, “Embracing Koolhaas’s Friendly Skyscraper,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2006, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/16/arts/design>.

68. Wang Jun, *A City in the Reporter’s Notebook*, p. 247.

69. Pogrebin, “Embracing Koolhaas’s Friendly Skyscraper.”

70. CCTV is an abbreviation for China Central Television, which is China’s state-run broadcast company.

71. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 287.

72. Marc C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 76.

73. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 236.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 377.

75. Wang Jun, *A City in the Reporter’s Notebook*, p. 242.

76. “China’s Ten Money Burning Buildings in 2006,” available at <http://bj.house.sina.com.cn/news/2006-06-20>.

77. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, pp. 259–260.

78. “CCTV Main Buildings’ Hanging Arms Shook Hands,” available at <http://cctvenchiridion.cctv.com/special/20071228>.

79. Christopher Hawthorne, “China Pulls Up the Drawbridge,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2004, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/19/arts/design>.

80. Wang Jun, *A City in the Reporter’s Notebook*, p. 200. Zhang Kaiji was one of those celebrated architects who signed the letter.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

82. *Ibid.*, pp. 242–245.

83. For instance, the construction of the Bird’s Nest was recommenced in November 2004 after its convertible “roof” cover was removed from the original design. Wang Jun, *A City in the Reporter’s Notebook*, p. 228.

84. Robin Pogrebin, “I’m the Designer. My Client’s the Autocrat,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2008, available at <http://www.com/2008/06/22/arts/design>.

85. Sean Keller, “Bidden City,” *ARTFORUM* (Summer 2008), available at <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue>.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*

91. Here I use “new Olympic architecture” in a broader sense; those buildings built since the new millennium in Beijing are not necessarily Olympic venues but that of buildings representative of modernity.

92. Wang Wenmiao, “*Dream Weavers-Beijing 2008: A Refreshing and Moving Film* (Zhu meng 2008 xinjian ganren), *Beijing Evening News*, June 24, 2008, section 26.

93. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 23.

94. Pogrebin, “I’m the Designer. My Client’s the Autocrat.”

95. Ron Gluckman, “Beijing: Bold? Brazen?” *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, April 2004.

96. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 16.

97. Da Qiao, ed., *Tu shuo Zhongguo jixiangwu* (The illustrated interpretations of China’s mascots) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), pp. 52–54.

98. The British journal *Building* (Issue 23, 2008) reported, “China spent £313 million on construction in 2007 and plans to increase this by 8.5% between 2007 and 2010. This makes it the world’s biggest spender and fastest grower.” “International Markets: 10 Fastest Growing Markets in the World,” available at <http://www.building.co.uk/story.asp>.

99. Pogrebin, “I’m the Designer. My Client’s the Autocrat.”

100. Keller, “Bidden City.”

101. See Huang Du’s introduction in the catalog *Space and Vision: The Impressions of Transmuting Daily Lives in Beijing* (Beijing: Contemporary Art Gallery, 1998).

102. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 19.

103. Ted Plafker reported, “China’s now-abundant supply of capital” has made foreign investors feel less welcome “than they did a few years ago, especially in sectors with potentially strategic values, like railroads and power generation.” Ted Plafker, “Nationalist Fever in China Is Backed by Anger,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 27, 2008, available at <http://www.iht.com>.

104. Eric Samuel De Maré, *Photography and Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1961), p. 32.

105. On June 28, 2008, the National Stadium was declared “complete and fully operational.” Li Xinggang, a Chinese architect who had worked with Herzog and de Meuron on the project, spoke passionately about the stadium. Li first stressed that the bowl-shaped Bird’s Nest would help spectators focus on the bottom center of the container (or, the “womb”) and blend people and the structure as a whole. Then he added that an athlete, standing at the center of the stadium, would be touched by the audience’s cheers, which would lead him or her to success, and that is, Li concluded, the spirit of ancient Greece. “Beijing Olympic Venues Ready as Bird’s Nest Built,” available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-06/28/>.

106. For this image, see Bao Dong and Sun Dongdong, eds., *Notes of Conception: A Local Narrative of Chinese Contemporary Painting*, exhibition catalog (Beijing: International Art & Culture Foundation [IAC] of Spain and Iberia Center for Contemporary

Art, 2008), p. 49. According to the catalog, Li Qing painted a series of pictures on the subject of the Bird's Nest.

107. Moore said, "That's why the gentle bubble-like form of Andreu's National Theatre, and not the mad zig-zag of Koolhaas' CCTV tower, was really ground zero for the backlash of 2004." And he also described the theater as "elliptical in plan and sections." Moore, "Left of the Forbidden City."

108. Moore, "Left of the Forbidden City."

109. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, p. 258.

110. "French Architect's Plan for National Grand Theater under Scrutiny," *People's Daily*, August 11, 2000, available at <http://englis.people.com.cn>.

111. *Ibid.*

112. Jennifer Welker, "Drama Even Before the Show Begins," available at <http://www.shy-connection.com>.

113. Wang Jun, *A City in the Reporter's Notebook*, p. 197.

114. Li, Dray-Novey and Kong, *Beijing*, p. 178.

115. Pogrebin, "I'm the Designer. My Client's the Autocrat."

116. "French Architect's Plan for National Grand Theater under Scrutiny."

117. Keller, "Bidden City."

118. The "Ten Grand Buildings" were (1) the Cultural Palace of Nationalities, (2) the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution, (3) the Hotel of Nationalities, (4) the National Agricultural Exhibition Hall, (5) the Museum of Chinese History and Revolution, (6) the State Guest House at Diaoyutai, (7) the Beijing Workers' Stadium, (8) the Overseas Chinese Hotel, (9) the Beijing Train Station, and (10) The Great Hall of the People. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, p. 177.

119. *Ibid.*

120. See Huang Du's interview with Wang Guofeng.

121. *Ibid.*

122. *Ibid.*

123. Wang Guofeng, interview, June 13, 2008, in Beijing.

124. Isabel Hilton, "First City of the Future," *The Observer*, July 6, 2008, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul06/china>.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Ed Vulliamy, "The Nest Generation," *The Observer*, June 29, 2008, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2008/jun/29/olympicgames2008.china>.

127. Hilton, "First City of the Future."

128. "The 798 Art District Fully Upgraded," *Beijing Evening News*, section 4, July 3, 2008.

129. For a detailed discussion about the complete demolition of Beijing's city walls and gates under Chairman Mao's order, see Wang Jun, *Chengji* (Record of a city) (Beijing: Sanlian chudian, 2003).

130. Xiao Fuxing, "Qianmen dajie: tongdao Zhongguo de xinzang" (Qianmen Street: A path to China's heart), *Time Out Beijing*, June 12–25, 2008, pp. 14–15.

131. Hao Zhou, “Qianmen Street: Yesterday Once More,” *China Daily*, July 3, 2008, available at <http://www.chinadaily.co.cn./bizchina/2008-07/03/content>.
132. Ulrike Münter, “Lu Hao: A Translucent Leap in Time,” trans. Werner Richter, available at <http://chinesische-gegenwartskunst.de/pages/katalogtexte/lu-han-en.php>. The Manchus conquered Ming China and founded the Qing dynasty in the seventeenth century. The *ur-hu* is a two-stringed fiddle.
133. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, p. 43.
134. Zhu Zuxi, *Yingguo jiangyi: Gudu Beijing de guihua jianshe jiqi wenhua yuanyuan* (Building a state with an inventive mind: Ancient Beijing’s city planning and its cultural origins) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 157–158.
135. Keller, “Bidden City.”
136. Hao Zhou, “Qianmen Street: Yesterday Once More.”
137. Xiao Fuxing, “Qianmen dajie: tongdao Zhongguo de xinzang.”

Chapter 2: Beijing

1. Lilian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 178.
2. As Wang Jun noted, “The material deterioration of the Qianmen commercial district is the epitome of Beijing’s current conditions of old houses.” Wang Jun, *Caifang ben shang de chengshi* (A city in the reporter’s notebook) (Beijing: Shenghuo zhishi dushu sanlian shudian, 2008), p. 294.
3. “Restored Qing Dynasty Street Not Ready for Olympic Tourists,” AFP report, June 16, 2008, available at <http://afp.google.com/article>.
4. Mure Dickie, “Ancient Quarter Makes Way for Modern Antiquity,” *Financial Times*, June 17, 2008, available at <http://www.ft.com>.
5. Henry Sanderson, “Despite Promises, old Beijing Neighborhood Falls,” Associate Press report, June 16, 2008.
6. Dickie, “Ancient Quarter Makes Way for Modern Antiquity.”
7. *Ibid.*
8. Isabel Hilton, “First City of the Future,” *The Observer*, July 6, 2008, available at <http://www.gaurdian.co.uk/world/2008/jul06/china>.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing*, p. 237.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 237–238.
12. For more information on the subject, see Victor F.S. Sit, *Beijing: The Nature and Planning of a Capital City* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), pp. 304–306.
13. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 86.
14. See Fredric Jameson’s analysis of Theodor Adorno’s concepts of “natural” and “cultural landscape” in his *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 217–218.

15. Ibid.
16. Wang Yongbin, *Beijing de shangyejie he laozihao* (Beijing's commercial streets and old stores) (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 1999), p. 92.
17. Ye Xiaoyan and Dong Mei, "85 Years After: Xidan Archway Reappears (Shi ge 85 nian: Xidan Pailou chongxin liangxiang)," *Beijing Evening News*, July 12, 2008, section 5.
18. Yin Xiuzhen, interview with Gao Minglu, March 29, 2004, available at <http://arts.tom.com>.
19. Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature & Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 87.
20. Ibid.
21. In modern art, the term "ready-mades" means "[e]veryday objects selected and designated as art. The name was coined by M. Duchamp, whose first ready-mades included a snow shovel that he picked up on a snowy day in New York." See the entry for "ready-mades" in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2000), p. 1351.
22. For more information on this "Mao's Beijing," see chapter 6, "Mao's Beijing and Socialist Transformation: 1949 to 1976," in Li, Dray-Novoy, and Kong, *Beijing*, pp. 171–208.
23. Ibid.
24. Jameson, *Late Marxism*, p. 214.
25. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 113, 128.
26. Nicolai Ouroussoff, "In Changing Face of Beijing, a Look at the New China," *New York Times*, July 13, 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/13/arts/design>.
27. Wu Jingrong and Cheng Zhenqiu, eds., *Xin shidai han ying da cidian* (New Age Chinese-English dictionary) (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2007), pp. 1447, 1791.
28. Yin Xiuzhen, interview with Gao Minglu.
29. Sit, *Beijing*, p. 250.
30. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 166.
31. Ibid., p. 170.
32. Ibid., p. 247.
33. Ibid., p. 65.
34. Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*, pp. 87–88.
35. Ibid., p. 74.
36. Vincent B. Leitch, *Postmodernism: Local Effects, Global Flows* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 24.
37. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetics: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 155.
38. Edward Lucie-Smith, *ARTODAY* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), p. 165.

39. Ibid.
40. Exod. 35:25, 35.
41. Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ed. David Bevington (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), act 3, scene 1.
42. Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p. 115.
43. Ibid., p. 148.
44. Ibid., p. 116.
45. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 156.
46. Ibid., p. 156.
47. Lisa Tickner, "Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism," in *Visual Culture Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey, p. 45 (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).
48. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, p. 119.
49. Ibid., p. 119.
50. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 156.
51. Ibid., p. 14.
52. Ibid., p. 156.
53. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, p. 116.
54. Ibid., p. 119.
55. R. Richard Wohl and Anselm L. Strauss, "Symbolic Representations and Urban Milieu," *American Journal of Sociology* 64 (March 1958): p. 525.
56. See the term *huangtian* in Wu and Cheng, eds., *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary*, p. 675.
57. Li, Dray-Novoy, and Kong, *Beijing*, fig. 20.
58. Jeffrey Meyer, *The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. 177.
59. There are only three city gates that survive to this day: Qian Gate, Dongbian Gate, and Desheng Gate.
60. Sit, *Beijing*, p. 250.
61. As Jameson put it, "The postmodern is, however, the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses—what Raymond Williams has usefully termed 'residual' and 'emergent' forms of cultural production." Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 6.
62. Ibid.
63. Sit, *Beijing*, p. 358.
64. Ibid., p. 250.
65. *Beijing Evening News*, January 11, 1997, p. 1.
66. Henry Kissinger, "The Philosopher and the Pragmatist," *Newsweek*, March 3, 1997, p. 45.
67. About the so-called New Authoritarianism (*Xin quanwei zhuyi*), see Xiao Gongqin, *Zhongguo de da zhuanxing: Cong fazhan zhengzhixue kan Zhonguo biange*

(China's Transformation: Understanding China's reforms from a perspective of political science) (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2008).

68. Kissinger, "The Philosopher and the Pragmatist," p. 45.
69. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Bevington), act 5, scene 2.
70. Ibid.
71. Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 153.

Chapter 3: Globalism or Nationalism?

1. Zhang Hongtu's *Long Live Chairman Mao's Series #29 (1989)* appeared on the cover of the July 2008 issue of *The New Republic*, illustrating Jed Perl's article titled "Mao Crazy."

2. As Jennifer Weyburnribed described, "Zhang Hongtu is a true New Yorker. He tells you not only what subway to take to his studio, but on what end of the train to get off so that you will emerge from the most efficient exit. He is an avid museumgoer. And he is addicted to bagels—and not just any—Essa bagels, the city's best." Jennifer Weyburnribed, "Drawing on East and West," in *The Yale-China Review*, centennial issue 2002, p. 10.

3. Roberta Smith, "From Photos to Relics, Remembering the Unforgettable," *New York Times*, September 6, 2002, Art Review section. In it Smith commented on several exhibitions, including "In Memory: The Art of Afterward," held at the New York Historical Society, where Zhang Hongtu also exhibited.

4. Richard Bernstein, "No Sympathy for Terrorists, but Warning about Overreaction," *New York Times*, October 6, 2001.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 12–13.

8. Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*. See the description on the Verso book jacket.

9. Fareed Zakaria, "Why America Scares the World," *Newsweek*, March 24, 2003, p. 23.

10. John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 210.

11. As Fareed Zakaria says, "Gray's most sweeping charge is that global capitalism is flawed because it is a utopian idea, a product of Enlightenment visions of a perfect society." See his review, "Passing the Bucks," *New York Times*, April 25, 1999.

12. William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), pp. 467–468.

13. Greider, *One World, Ready or Not*, pp. 16–19.

14. Ibid., p. 333.

15. Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 198.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
18. According to the latest report by PERC (Political and Economic Risk Consultancy), “Most Asian economies are reluctant to ease existing protectionist barriers to trade, even the regional financial crisis shook Asian governments out of their resistance to change.” “Asian Countries Hold on to Protectionism,” *China Daily*, July 19, 1999, “World Business,” p. 6.
19. As Reuven Glick put it: “Within East Asia and Latin America, the distribution of private capital flows among countries has been highly concentrated. In East Asia, roughly half of the capital flows since 1990 was directed to China.” Reuven Glick, *Managing Capital Flows and Exchange Rates: Perspectives from the Pacific Basin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 2. And, according to a 1999 UN report, “More than 80% of the foreign direct investment in developing and transition economies in the 1990s has gone to just 20 countries, mainly China.”
20. Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, and Qiao Bian, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (China can say no) (Beijing: Zhongguo gongshang chubanshe, 1996).
21. Ma Licheng and Ling Zhijun, *Jiaofeng: Dangdai Zhongguo sanci sixiang jiefang shilu* (The confrontation: A faithful record of three movements of ideological liberation) (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998), pp. 283–306.
22. Holland Cotter, “Art That’s a Dragon With Two Heads,” *New York Times*, December 13, 1998, Art & Leisure, Section 2.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 316.
26. Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Hong Kong: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 108.
27. James Townsend, “Chinese Nationalism,” in *Chinese Nationalism*, ed. Jonathan Unger, pp. 22–23 (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).
28. Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*, p. 154.
29. China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 and hosted the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008.
30. Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*, p. 112.
31. Barmé, *In the Red*, p. 256.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 277–280.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 255–259, 275–277.
34. Zha Jianying, *China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers Are Transforming a Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 102.
35. Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 21.

36. Ibid., p. 22.
37. Gong Yuzhi et al., *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo* (Mao Zedong's reading life) (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1994), p. 196.
38. Nathan and Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress*, pp. 23, 33.
39. Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China*, p. 113.
40. Elisabeth Rosenthal, "China Students Are Caught Up by Nationalism," *New York Times*, May 22, 1999.
41. Rebecca MacKinnon, "China at 50: The Search for Identity Continues," available at <http://cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999>.
42. Robert J. Corber, "'You wanna check my thumbprints?': *Vertigo*, the Trope of Invisibility and Cold War Nationalism," in *Alfred Hitchcock Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzales, pp. 311–312 (London: British Film Institute, 1999).
43. Ibid., p. 302.
44. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xiii.
45. Ibid.
46. The Museum of Modern Art in New York acquired this artwork by Cai Guo-qiang in 2000.
47. See the Asia Society exhibition label for Cai's installation.
48. Ibid.
49. Seth Faison, "Rage at U.S. Is Sign of Deeper Issues," *New York Times*, May 13, 1999.
50. Rosenthal, "China Students Are Caught Up by Nationalism."
51. Faison, "Rage at U.S. Is Sign of Deeper Issues."
52. For instance, the 1996 bestseller *China Can Say No* expressed such nationalist emotion well before the 1999 May protests against NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.
53. Henry Kissinger, "The New World Disorder," *Newsweek*, May 31, 1999, p. 42.
54. I borrowed this term from Fredric Jameson. See his *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 187.
55. Michael T. Kaufman, "Solzhenitsyn, Literary Giant Who Defied Soviets, Dies at 89," *New York Times*, August 4, 2008.
56. *TransCulture La Biennale di Venezia 1995*, exhibition catalog (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1995), p. 102.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. "Coke Scare Blamed on Mass Hysteria," BBC Online Network, July 2, 1999.
60. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), Part II, sec. 4., pp. 269–316.
61. "The Translator's Preface," in *Li Madou Zhongguo Zhaji* (China in the sixteenth century: The journals of Matteo Ricci 1583–1610) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), vol. 1, p. 9.

62. Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p. 115.
63. Cotter, “Art That’s a Dragon With Two Heads,” p. 1.
64. George B. Parks, ed., *The Book of Ser Marco Polo The Venetian* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. xxviii.
65. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, p. 115.
66. Ibid.
67. *TransCulture La Biennale di Venezia 1995*, p. 102.
68. See the artist’s statement quoted by Chang Tianle in his article, “Masterminding the Rare Occasion,” available at <http://chinadaily.com>.
69. Ibid.
70. Duo Zangjia, *Xizang fojiao shenmi wenhua—mizong* (Tibetan Buddhist mythical culture—Esoteric Buddhism) (Lahsa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1995), pp. 153–154.
71. See 2002 Biennial Programs at the Whitney Museum of American Art, available at <http://www.whitney.org>.
72. Dean Murphy, “Chinatown, Its Street Empty, Quietly Begins to Take Action,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2001.
73. Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 64.
74. See Dan Cameron’s review, available at <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions>.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 276.
79. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
80. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 41–42.
81. Gray, *False Dawn*, p. 120.
82. I borrowed this expression from Yan Xuetong, who believed that “the Kosovo crisis was a war of values conflict.” See his essay “New Strategic Model Evolves,” *China Daily*, July 18, 1999, p. 4.
83. David Barboza, “The Wizard Behind Beijing’s Opening Night,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008.
84. Arthur Lubow, “The Pyrotechnic Imagination,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2008.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.

Chapter 4: New Chinese Cinema of the “Sixth Generation”

1. For more information on the “Sixth Generation” filmmakers, see Zhang Zhen, ed., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2007); and Shuqin Cui, “Working from the Margins: Urban Cinema and Independent Directors in Contemporary China,” in *Chinese Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, pp. 96–119 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005).

2. Dai Jinhua, *Wuzhong fengjing: Zhongguo dianying wenhua 1978–1998* (A landscape in mist: Chinese cinematic culture 1978–1998) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), p. 405.

3. *Huashang Bao* (Chinese commercial daily), February 9, 2001, available at <http://ent.sina.com.cn>.

4. A few days later Mr. Shan sold a film copy of *Beijing Bicycle* to an Italian businessman. The businessman heard about it through one of the art critics present at the viewing and was organizing a Chinese Culture Festival in Genoa scheduled for 2003.

5. Wang Zhen, “The Coming of the Age of Independent Filmmaking?” in *Xinwen zhoukan* (Weekly news), July 30, 2001, p. 58.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

7. For instance, the Sixth Generation director Jia Zhangke had an office in the basement of an old apartment building, where I interviewed him and saw his banned *Platform* (2000).

8. Dai Jinhua, *Wuzhong fengjing*, p. 408.

9. On September 29, 2001, Jia Zhangke’s *Platform* was given the first “public screening” in China. Yet the event took place at the French School attached to the French Embassy in Beijing. At the embassy’s entrance the director greeted the “chosen few”—mainly his personal friends and foreigners living in the city. Another possible access to such films is to view the pirated VCD/DVD copies of the unsanctioned Sixth Generation films, which circulate underground and are often of poor quality.

10. Jin Yuanpu and Tao Dongfeng, *Chanshi Zhongguo de jiaolü* (Anxiety of interpreting China) (Beijing: Zhongguo guoji guangbo chubanshe, 1999), pp. 5–6.

11. Andy Bailey, “Festivals: Generation X-6; Chinese Indies Take to the Streets,” available at *IndieWire*, <http://indiewire.com>.

12. Quoted in *Xiandai yishu* (Contemporary art), no. 3, May 2001, p. 21.

13. For a full discussion of this transformation, see Maurice Meisner, “Part Six: Deng and the Origin of Chinese Capitalism,” in *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), pp. 413–548.

14. Lu Shaoyang, “A Similar Color, A Different Temperature,” in *Xinwen zhoukan*, June 18, 2001, p. 63.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. For a fine analysis of this film, see Bérénice Reynaud, “Zhang Yuan’s Imaginary Cities and the Theatricalization of the Chinese ‘bastards,’” in Zhang Zhen, *The Urban Generation*, pp. 268–276.

18. As Shuqin Cui wrote, “the younger generation records its own understanding of history: with the father(s) absent from view, the street and the city become a stage where adolescents inscribe their own sense of history and experiment with the excitement of youthful impulse.” Shuqin Cui, “Working from the Margins: Urban Cinema and Independent Directors in Contemporary China,” in *Chinese Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, p. 117 (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005).

19. Dai Jinhua, *Wuzhong fengjing*, p. 411.

20. Another film by Zhang Yuan, titled *Sons* (1996), tackles this problem in a more critical manner, as Bailey remarked when the movie was shown at Lincoln Center in March 2000: “The most sobering of the Walter Reade screenings is Zhang Yuan’s *Sons*, a docu-drama about a real-life Beijing family contending with its patriarch’s abrupt, visceral descent into alcoholism and mental illness.” Bailey, “Festivals.”

21. Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 131.

22. As Dai Jinhua put it, the film art of the Sixth Generation “is about the young generation of *city flaneur* from the 1990s and marginal urban existences of every hue.” *Wuzhong fengjing*, p. 412.

23. Cf. Mark Deming’s plot synopsis of *Beijing Bicycle*, posted at <http://www.allmovie.com>.

24. Slavoj Žižek, Chapter 3, “Coke as *object petit a*,” in *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 21–40.

25. Mladen Dolar, “Hitchcock’s Objects,” in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, p. 32 (New York: Verso, 1992). Emphasis in original.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

27. For an in-depth discussion of these two films, see Zhang Zhen, “Urban Dreamscape, Phantom Sisters, and the Identity of an Emergent Art Cinema,” in Zhang Zhen, *The Urban Generation*, pp. 344–387.

28. See plot synopsis of *Suzhou River* by Jonathan Crow, available at <http://www.allmovie.com>.

29. Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, pp. 478–479.

30. Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 192.

31. As “Poppy” (Gene Tierney) said in Josef von Sternberg’s Hollywood classic *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941).

32. John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 141.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

34. Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, p. 479.

35. For a discussion of this “gift economy” as defined by Marcel Mauss, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 26–27.

36. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, this “gift economy” sometimes has a homosexual overtone: “And why is it necessary that the giver also be in the position of someone who has been robbed, so as to demonstrate clearly that he does not expect an exchange, not even a deferred exchange? It is theft that prevents the gift and the counter-gift from entering into an exchange relation. Desire knows nothing of exchange, *it knows only theft and gift*, at times the one within the other under the effect of a primary homosexuality.” *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 185–186. Interestingly, in this “gift granting” sequence of the film, Lily demands that Ma Bing kiss Mai Qiang after the former lost in their card game, and Ma Bing does it cheerfully.

37. Wolfram Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G. L. Campbell (London and New York: Routledge, 1983), p. 107.

38. Jim Yardley, “Games in Beijing Open With a Lavish Ceremony,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2008.

39. Edward Wong, “Chinese Man Kills Relatives of U.S. Olympic Coach,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2008; and Peter Fimrite, “American Stabbed in Beijing was Closely Connected to U.S. Team,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 10, 2008.

40. “Attacker of US Tourists Acted in Despair Over Failures,” Xinhua report, available at <http://www.chinadaily.comcn/china/2008-08/11>.

41. Andrew Jacobs, “Behind Murder of American in Beijing, a Tale of Despair and Dislocation,” *International Herald Tribune*, August 10, 2008.

42. Andrew Jacobs, “A Stabbing Rooted in Loss and Despair,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2008. This essay is a slightly different version of Jacobs’ article on Tang Yongming published in the *International Herald Tribune* on August 10, 2008.

43. Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 29.

44. Jacobs, “Behind Murder of American in Beijing.”

45. Reports on Tang’s murder of an American were censored in the Chinese media. Jacquelin Magnay, “China’s Media Censored over Stabbing,” available at <http://www.theage.com.au/world>.

46. Jacobs, “Behind Murder of American in Beijing.”

47. Shuqin Cui, “Working from the Margin,” in *Chinese Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, p. 110 (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).

48. Yardley, “Games in Beijing Open With a Lavish Ceremony.”

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. David Barboza, “The Wizard Behind Beijing’s Opening Night,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008.

52. Yardley, “Games in Beijing Open With a Lavish Ceremony.”

53. *Ibid.* Here Yardley refers to the use of wirework by Zhang Yimou in his production.

54. “Families Rocked by Beijing Stabbing,” available at <http://www.stuff.co.nz>.

55. About this issue of the “return of the real” in contemporary art and film, see Hal Foster, chapter 5 “The Return of the Real,” in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 127–168.

Chapter 5: Behind Chinese Walls

1. Director Wang Chao used the word “auteurist” during an interview with Cheng Qingsong on May 12, 2001, in Beijing; the Chinese transcript of the interview is available at <http://www.xmusics.net/files/news/2001-7/wangchao.htm>. The French “auteur theory” refers to “an approach to the study of film which holds that the director is the principal creative consciousness behind the film. . . . Critics whose work takes this approach, like André Bazin and, in the United States, Andrew Sarris, assume that films are the product of a single AUTHOR or auteur, whose ideas, values, and worldview the film expresses.” Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, eds., *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 21.

2. The story of *Anyang Orphan* is set in Anyang, a city in northern Henan province, China, but the film was shot in Kaifeng, in central east Henan.

3. Slavoj Žižek wrote, “China as the emerging superpower of the twenty-first century thus seems to embody a new kind of ruthless capitalism: disregard for ecological consequences, disregard for workers’ rights, everything subordinated to the ruthless drive to develop and become the superpower.” Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 147.

4. See Tom Vick’s review of *Anyang Orphan*, available at <http://www.allmovie.com>. Vick is a film programmer, writer, and filmmaker based in Washington, D.C.

5. Anyang is a city in Henan province, China. As the last capital of the Shang dynasty, it was known to its people as Shang but later referred to as Yinxu or “The Ruins of Yin.” Among the most important locations in this area are those at Xibeigang, where the royal tombs of the kings were first discovered in the 1930s, and at nearby Xiaotun, best known for its palace foundations, Neolithic pottery, oracle bones, and the tomb of Lady Fu Hao. Michael Dillon, ed., *China: A Cultural and Historical Dictionary* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), pp. 12, 370.

6. Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1999), p. 113.

7. Vick also detected in Wang Chao’s film some references to Roberto Rossellini, Robert Bresson, and James Benning: “The film’s general atmosphere and blighted

cityscapes recall the neo-realism of Roberto Rossellini, Chao's way of coaxing sensitive and moving performances from non-actors brings to mind Robert Bresson, and his long takes, rigorous visual compositions, and exquisite use of natural light and color bear something of a relationship to James Benning's experimental landscape films." See his review of *Anyang Orphan*, available at <http://www.allmovie.com>.

8. Mary Elizabeth Gallagher characterizes China's *danwei* system as "work-unit socialism": "The work-unit system ensured that labor mobility remained virtually nonexistent, in contrast to many other communist societies in Europe. The work-unit not only was the sole source of crucial life necessities, making it impossible for a worker to survive without his work-unit, but it also recorded and monitored for the state an individual's political attitude and behavior, both on and off the job." Mary Elizabeth Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 67.

9. Martin King Whyte, "The Changing Role of Workers," in *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, ed. Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, p. 177 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

10. Yunxiang Yan, "Of Hamburger and Social Space: Consuming McDonald's in Beijing," in *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, ed. Deborah Davis, p. 209 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

11. Jennifer Lin, "About Face: China's Economic Reforms Hit Hardest against Women," *Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 1998, Section 13, p. 9. Cited in Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), p. 548 n 45.

12. As Barry Naughton put it: "In the 1950s, women had difficulty entering the urban labor force.... But as strict limits on city growth came into effect after the mid-1960s and industrialization continued... female labor force participation rates increased steadily. By the late 1970s, almost all urban women entered the labor force after leaving school, and high female labor force participation became an essential characteristic of urban society." Barry Naughton, "Cities in the Chinese Economic System," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, ed. Deborah Davis et al., pp. 75–76 (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995).

13. Pan Suiming, "The Phenomenon of 'Misses Economy,'" in *Kexue Shibao* (Scientific daily), available at <http://www.mlist.myrice.com>.

14. Huangpu Qingshan, "About a Close Down of the Four Famous Mansions [i.e., brothels] in Beijing," available at <http://www.sd.cnifo.net>.

15. Zhong Wei, "Does 'Sex Industry' Boost a Corner of Chinese Economy?" in *Zhongguo baodao zhoukan* (China report weekly), available at <http://www.mlist.myrice.com>.

16. Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Migrants to Chinese Boom Town Find Hard Lives," *New York Times*, July 2, 2002, available at <http://www.nytimes.com>.

17. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844: Karl Marx and the Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp. 100–101.

18. Ibid., p. 100.
19. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (New York and London: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 199. Emphasis in original.
20. Ibid.
21. In Chinese *xiaojie* means “miss,” which is now a popular name for young women working in China’s expanding sex industry.
22. David Fraser, “Inventing Oasis: Luxury Housing Advertisements and Reconfiguring Domestic Space in Shanghai,” in *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*, ed. Deborah Davis, p. 30 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
23. See Tom Vick’s review of *Anyang Orphan*, available at <http://www.allmovie.com>.
24. Guanyin or kuan-yin is the Chinese female form of Avalokiteśvara (Bodhisattva of Compassion) in the Buddhist religion. For more information on this subject, see Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
25. Wu Jingrong and Cheng Zhenqiu, eds., *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2007), p. 1274.
26. In Indian philosophy, karma (Sanskrit “action” or “work”) is “the principle that a person’s actions have consequences meriting reward or punishment. Karma is the moral law of cause and effect by which the sum of a person’s actions are carried forward from one life to the next, leading to an improvement or deterioration in that person’s fate.” See the entry for “karma” in David Crystal, ed., *Penguin Encyclopedia* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 827.
27. Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, eds., *The Paradox of China’s Post-Mao Reforms* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 18.
28. Ibid., p. 325.
29. Ibid., pp. 324–325.
30. Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, p. 131.
31. A most recent cinematic representation of the Yellow River as a symbol of Chinese civilization is a Chinese TV series titled *Heshang*. Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang, *Deathsong of the River: A Reader’s Guide to the Chinese TV Series Heshang*, trans. Richard W. Bodman and Pin P. Wan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).
32. A cultural note: The Chinese term *tangzhuang* (Tang-style attire) has caused a misunderstanding among many. According to *Hanyu dacidian* (The unabridged Chinese language dictionary), *tangzhuang* has two meanings: (1) the Tang people’s dress, and (2) Chinese costume. Luo Zhufeng, ed., *Hanyu da cidian* (A dictionary of the Chinese language), vol. 1 (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1997), p. 1598. In this regard, what became a fashion is *tangzhuang* as defined in the second sense, which is Manchu-style men’s clothing called *magua* originating in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) but “redesigned” in modern times. As Stephen Wong points out in his *Asia Times Online* essay: “Discussion about *hanfu* [i.e., Chinese-style dress] started in 2001 after China hosted the APEC summit in Shanghai, where each participant was

presented with a *tangzhuang*, a Tang style suit. The clothing gained such publicity at the event that it was soon widely recognized as China's national costume. But *hanfu* lovers do not agree. They say *tangzhuang* is not the costume of the Han-dominated Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907), as its name suggests. Rather it's a variety of the costume of the Manchurians, who forced the Han people to wear it 300 years ago" (available at <http://www.atimes.com>).

33. Marx and Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 212.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

36. I borrowed this expression from William Greider. See his *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1998).

37. See the entry for "reincarnation" in Wendy Doniger, ed. *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1999), p. 913.

38. Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 86–87.

39. Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 149.

Chapter 6: The Imagery of Postsocialist Trauma in *Peacock*, *Shanghai Dreams*, and *Stolen Life*

1. See "Life in a Northern Town," a review of *Peacock* posted at <http://filmbrain.typedpad.com>.

2. "Antonov An-2 Colt," available at <http://www.warbirdalley.com>.

3. See the entry for "Third Front" in Michael Dillon, ed., *China: A Cultural and Historical Dictionary* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), p. 315.

4. Wu Jingrong and Cheng Zhenqiu, eds., *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2001), p. 19.

5. According to the cultural scholar Yang Dongping, the majority of well-paid skilled workers in Shanghai always believe they belong to the "middle class." *Chengshi jifeng: Beijing he Shanghai de wenhua jingshen* (Monsoon of a city: The cultural spirit of Beijing and Shanghai), rev. ed. (Beijing: Xinxing cubanshe, 2006), p. 242.

6. Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1999), p. 369.

7. *Ibid.*

8. John Gittings, *The Changing Face of China: From Mao to Market* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 141.

9. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 369.

10. See Tim Knight's review of *Stolen Life*, available at <http://www.reel.com>.

11. See Don Willmott's review of *Stolen Life*, available at <http://www.filmcritic.com>.

12. *Encarta Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 543.

13. Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 27.

14. The word *laogong* is a local dialect for “husband.” Wu Jingrong and Cheng Zhenqiu, *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary*, p. 933.

15. Dorothy J. Solinger has pointed out, “The termination in 1979 of the Cultural Revolution–era policy of sending city youth to the countryside meant that rusticated young people started returning home. That summer, the economic advisor Xue Muqiao proposed permitting young people to set up their own privately funded and operated enterprises to remove from the shoulders of the state the strain of creating jobs for them all. The party Central Committee’s assent to urban outside-the-plan employment in the summer of 1980 laid a foundation for private enterprise that peasants soon built upon as well.” Dorothy J. Solinger, “China’s Floating Population,” in *The Paradox of China’s Post-Mao Reforms*, ed. Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, pp. 226–227 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). Yanni’s mother, however, did not return to Beijing, probably because of her marriage.

16. As Gittings put it, “Changing attitudes toward family and sexual relations also contributed to the transformation of social attitudes during the 1990s, especially in urban China. Divorce soared and the annual number almost quadrupled from 319,000 to 1.21 million in 2000. Although the national rate of 10 per cent remained below the world average, it was deeply shocking to both many older Party members as well as traditionalists. However, arranged marriages—which both groups had favored—were on the decline as more young Chinese of both sexes insisted on choosing for themselves while sex before marriage became widespread.” Gittings, *The Changing Face of China*, p. 264.

17. Solinger, “China’s Floating Population,” p. 234.

18. See Don Willmott’s review of *Stolen Life*, available at <http://www.filmcritic.com>.

19. Solinger, “China’s Floating Population,” p. 238.

20. Gittings, *The Changing Face of China*, p. 275.

21. Benedict Carey, “Denial Makes the World Go Round,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2007.

22. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 168.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Chapter 7: Jia Zhangke’s Cinematic Trilogy

1. After 2000, Jia Zhangke’s major features have been *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiaoyao*, 2002), *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004), *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*, 2006), and *24 City* (*Ershisi cheng ji*, 2008). About Jia’s three films discussed in this chapter, see also Jason

McGrath, “The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke,” in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Zhang Zhen, pp. 81–114 (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

2. For more information, see Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

3. Deng's interview with Oriana Fallaci, *The Washington Post*, August 31, 1980, cited in Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 440.

4. Fenyang is Jia Zhangke's hometown, where the director filmed his entire *Xiao Wu* and part of *Platform*.

5. This 1995 film by Jia Zhangke is actually unknown to Western audiences that have admired his *Xiao Wu* (1997), *Platform* (2000), and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002); it is available on pirated VCD in China.

6. *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1995), p. 682.

7. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 468.

8. For a detailed discussion of such “villages” (where migrant workers live) in big Chinese cities, see Dorothy Solinger, “China's Floating Population,” in *The Paradox of China's Post-Mao Reforms*, ed. Merle Goldman and Roderick MacFarquhar, pp. 220–240 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

9. The market sequence in *Xiao Shan Going Home* echoes fairly what Meisner has vividly described: “The reappearance of petty private enterprise contributed to the liveliness of Chinese cities in the early Deng era, which foreigners contrasted to the austere and drab character of urban life in Maoist China. . . . Peddlers, hawkers, and tiny open-air restaurants were soon followed by high-rise hotels, nightclubs, and luxury boutiques—as well as beggars and prostitutes.” Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 455.

10. The capital city of Beijing, to borrow Meisner's words, “began to resemble large cities in most of the world, displaying those stark and painful contrasts between ostentatious wealth and grinding poverty that mark most contemporary capitalist societies.” *Ibid.*, p. 455.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

12. According to Meisner, this “boom” in big Chinese cities during the 1990s resulted from cheap labor provided by the country. As he put it: “Living in shantytowns and working for pitiful wages, they [the migrant laborers] supply much of the construction boom that has made Chinese cities appear modern and seemingly prosperous.” *Ibid.*, p. 468.

13. For more information, see Meisner, Part Three, “Utopianism, 1956–1960,” sec. 11, 12, and 13, in *Mao's China and After*, pp. 191–241.

14. For a discussion of this ancient “gift economy” in modern life as defined by Marcel Mauss, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 26–27.

15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 140.

16. Kracauer put it, “This gesture—recurrent in many German films—is symptomatic of the desire to return to the maternal womb.” See his caption for a scene from *The Street* (1923), in *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), fig. 22.

17. Mladen Dolar said of Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*: “[T]he most important and central to the film is the ring. *Shadow of a Doubt* could be schematically summarized as the journey of a privileged object, the circulation of the ring. It goes back and forth between the two specular protagonists, and their dual relationship can ultimately be seen as the background for this circuit of the object.” Dolar, “Hitchcock’s Objects,” in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, p. 34 (New York: Verso, 1992).

18. Meisner has pointed out, “The most distressing result of China’s ‘socialist market system’ has been the frighteningly rapid growth of extreme social and economic inequality. In less than two decades, China has been transformed from a relatively egalitarian society to one where the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished is among the widest and most visible in the world, a land far more inequitable than such celebrated models of Asian capitalism as Taiwan or South Korea.” Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, p. 533. In the movie, the “model entrepreneur” Xiao Yong is awarded a “foreign trip” (*chuguo*) to South Korea by the local government. Gengsheng, the drugstore owner, enviously informs Xiao Wu of this, but in disbelief insists that it must be North Korea—thus we see how he is totally out of touch with current realities!

19. “Jia Zhangke: Pickpocket Director,” in *Beijing Scene* 5, no. 23, available at <http://www.beijingscene.com>.

20. Lu Shaoyang, “A Similar Color, a Different Temperature,” *Xinwen zhoukan* (News week), June 18, 2001, p. 63.

21. *Xiao Wu* is the best example of this “fatalism” in Jia Zhangke’s work. In this film, Jia Zhangke borrowed a mid-1990s popular rock song titled “My Heart Rains” (*Xinyu*) as the theme song, which, strangely, “predetermines” Xiao Wu’s doomed love affair with Mei Mei. The song “My Heart Rains” is designed for antiphonal singing (perfectly suitable to a karaoke bar), so it is a musical dialogue between a man and his young female lover who is “to become the bride of the other” (in this emotional context, a more proper English translation for the Chinese title *Xinyu* should be “My Heart Bleeds”). In *Xiao Wu*, Jia Zhangke uses the melody of “My Heart Rains” on five consecutive occasions, which ultimately seal the tragic fate of the Xiao Wu character. The song is first broadcast on TV when Xiao Wu is drinking in a restaurant, depressed by Xiao Yong’s rejection. The song is heard a second time when Mei Mei asks Xiao Wu to sing along with her, but he fails because as a busy pickpocket he has no idea about a song so representative of the Hong Kong pop culture. Later Xiao Wu is able to sing the song alone in a public bathhouse right after lending a sick Mei Mei some help (the hot water bottle). In the movie, the two lovers sing the song together one more time just before Mei Mei becomes “the bride of the other” (i.e., she is procured by a handful of rich men as a shared sex slave). In this sense, the song “My Heart Rains” is used by Jia Zhangke not to convey Xiao Wu’s love, but his ineluctable alienation from the sworn

brother Xiao Yong and the “fiancé” (*duixiang*) Mei Mei, whose lives are all ruled by the brutal force of the Other—new Chinese capitalism.

22. Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 535.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 532.

24. See Elbert Venture's review of *Platform*, available at <http://www.allmovie.com>.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 125–126.

27. *Ibid.*, 236.

28. In reality, the elegant city wall and gate seen in the film are not from Fenyang but Pingyao, another town in Shanxi province, which is well known for its classical architecture of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

29. Meisner cited the Australian scholar Anita Chan by saying that “[t]he abuses suffered by workers in China . . . include: ‘forced and bonded labor; control of workers’ bodily functions and physical mistreatments; subsistence or below-subsistence wages; and a pervasive climate of violence.’” Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, p. 533.

30. Jia Zhangke, interview with the author, summer of 2001.

31. As Meisner wrote, a new Chinese market economy “requires the elimination of many of the social welfare and job guarantees of the Mao period. . . . Those who are employed often suffer from physically dangerous conditions of work, especially young and women workers who labor in hastily constructed private and ‘collective’ factories, where accidents and fires kill and maim workers in numbers unprecedented in modern industrial history.” *Mao's China and After*, p. 533.

32. Jia Zhangke told me that he added this piece of music right after hearing a crewman playing it in the course of final filming of *Platform*.

33. Howard Schumann, “Waves of Longing,” review of *Unknown Pleasures*, available at <http://www.cinescene.com>.

34. Cf. plot synopsis of *Unknown Pleasures* by Josh Ralske, *All Movie Guide*, available at <http://www.allmovie.com>.

35. J. Hoberman, “Film: New Dawn Fades,” *The Village Voice*, March 26–April 1, 2003, available at <http://www.villagevoice.com>.

36. See Ken Fox's review, “A Better Tomorrow,” available at <http://www.tvguide.com>.

37. See Ed Gonzales's review, *Slant Magazine*, available at <http://www.slantmagazine.com>.

38. Schumann, “Waves of Longing.”

39. See Kevin Lee's analytical essay, “Jia Zhangke,” available at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com>.

Chapter 8: The Video Works of Yang Fudong

1. As Michael Ignatieff pointed out, “When you turn on the television news these days, you often see a new kind of home video: hooded men with guns and knives in

the background and, in the grainy foreground, figures on their knees begging for their lives. They plead, they weep, they bow their heads and then, more often than not, they die. . . . Thanks to the news editors, we rarely if ever see the footage to its gruesome conclusion, but the full versions of these films, reproduced on CD's, sell by the thousands in the marketplace in Baghdad." Ignatieff, "The Terrorist as Auteur," *New York Times Magazine*, November 14, 2004, Section 6, p. 50.

2. Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Domination (American Empire Project)* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003); Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyu Davis, *American Dream, Global Nightmare* (London: Icon Books, 2004).

3. Cai Chusheng's *Song of the Fishermen* is the first Chinese film to have won a prize at the 1935 Moscow International Film Festival.

4. Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi* (A history of the development of Chinese cinema), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1980), p. 336.

5. Ibid.

6. As Frederick Engels said, "Labor—the main factor in production, the 'source of wealth,' free human activity—comes off badly with the economist. Just as capital was previously separated from labor, likewise labor is now in turn split for a second time: the product of labor confronts labor as wages, is separated from it." "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Miligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 187.

7. As has been suggested by Zhang Zhen, the image of a "reformist" modern man can also be seen in Sun Yu's *Wild Rose* (*Ye meigui*, 1931) and *Little Toy* (*Xiao wanyi*, 1933).

8. In China before the 1949 Liberation, the students dressed in "a jacket with three pockets without flaps and a narrow, stand-up collar, with western-style trousers to match." *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1997), p. 1417.

9. Guo Hua, *Lao yingtian* (Old moviedom) (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), p. 100.

10. Xiao Zhiwei, "Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade," in *Cinema and Modern Culture in Shanghai, 1922–1943*, ed. Zhang Yingjin, p. 193 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

11. Ibid.

12. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the International* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 117.

13. Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 66. Emphasis in original.

14. Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), p. 39.

15. This is a reversal of Judy's case in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. According to Robert J. Corber, the Judy character "hopes to make Scottie fall in love with her, despite her working class identity. But it is precisely that identity he tries to erase by making her over as the 'dead' Madeleine." Robert J. Corber, "'You wanna check my thumb-prints?': *Vertigo*, the Trope of Invisibility and Cold War Nationalism," in *Alfred Hitchcock Centenary Essays*, ed. Richard Allen and S. Ishii-Gonzales, p. 304 (London: British Film Institute, 1999).

16. See the Guggenheim Museum's press release for the short list of the Hugo Boss Prize 2004, available at <http://www.guggenheim.org>.

17. The other two Chinese artists were Cai Guoqiang from New York in 1996 and Huang Yongping from Paris in 1998.

18. Jane Perlez, "Casting a Fresh Eye on China With Computer, Not Ink Brush," *New York Times*, December 3, 2003.

19. See Judin Belot's profile of Yang Fudong, available at <http://www.judinbelot.ch>.

20. Zhang Xudong, "Shanghai Image: Critical Iconography, Minor Literature, and the Un-Masking of a Modern Chinese Mythology," *New Literary History*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2002): p. 143.

21. Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi*, vol. 1, p. 56.

22. Lu Xun, "A Glimpse at Shanghai Literature and Art," in *Lu Xun quanji* (The complete works of Lu Xun), vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1961), pp. 230–232.

23. Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi*, vol. 1, pp. 171–179.

24. Yingjin Zhang, "Industry and Ideology: A Centennial Review of Chinese Cinema," *World Literature Today*, October–December 2003, p. 9.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–57.

26. As Yingjin Zhang put it, "In general, film production in the 1920s was market-driven and relatively free from state interference because the Kuomintang (KMT) did not establish its central government in Nanjing until 1927." Yingjin Zhang, "Industry and Ideology," p. 9.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

28. Wang Xiaoyu et al., *Zhongguo danying shigang* (An outline history of Chinese cinema) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), p. 15.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

30. "A Chronology of Chinese Cinema," available at <http://yule.sohu.com>.

31. Wang Xiaoyun et al., *Zhongguo danying shigang*, p. 16.

32. Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi*, vol. 1, p. 46.

33. Zhuo Ying, *Liren xing: Minguo Shanghai funü zhi shenghuo* (Beauties on parade: The life of Shanghai women in the Republic of China) (Suzhou: Guwuxuan chubanshe, 2004), pp. 22–31, 50–60.

34. See the entry for the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, available at <http://www.britannica.com>.

35. Ren Jiyu, *Zhongguo zhexue shi* (A history of Chinese philosophy), vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1979), pp. 182–192.

36. In his life as a scholar Liu Ling wrote only one essay, titled “Jiude song” (Ode to the virtue of wine). Fan Wenlan, *Zhongguo tonshi jianbian* (A concise general history of China), vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1965), p. 286.

37. This story is cited by Lu Xun in his essay “Weijin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi” (On the Wei and Jin demeanor and its relationship to literature, drugs and wine), in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 3, p. 389.

38. Ibid.

39. As Žižek put it, “What one should introduce here is the elementary Lacanian distinction between imaginary projection-identification and symbolic identification. The most concise definition of symbolic identification is that it consists in assuming a mask which is more real and binding than the true face beneath it.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 139.

40. Slavoj Žižek, “Imaginary, Symbolic, Real,” in *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 9–28.

41. As Žižek put it: “Let us take Tristan and Isolde: where, in Hegel’s system, is the place for this deadly passion, for this will to drown oneself in the night of *jouissance*, to leave behind the daily universe of symbolic obligations.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 83.

42. Perlez, “Casting a Fresh Eye on China With Computer.”

43. Wu Runting, *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo yanbian shi* (A history of modern Chinese fiction) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 216–218. The translation of the Chinese text is mine.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 216.

47. Ibid., p. 7.

48. See entry for “natural rights,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia*, (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2000), p. 1133.

49. Ren Jiyu, *Zhongguo zhexue shi*, pp. 182–183.

50. Ibid., p. 187.

51. Zhang Shi-ying, “The Development of the Principle of Subjectivity in Western Philosophy and of the Theory of Man in Chinese Philosophy,” in *Man and Nature: The Chinese Tradition and the Future (Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Life Series III. Asia, Volume 1)*, ed. Tang Yi-jie et al. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1989), available at <http://www.crvp.org>.

52. Confucius, *Lunyu* (The analects), cited in the entry for *yiguan* (hat and clothes), *Cihai* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1979), p. 1915.

53. Zhang Zhen points out that Zhang Huimin’s *The Orphan in Snow* also invokes Griffith’s *Orphans of the Storm* (1921).

54. I borrowed this expression from Žižek; see his *Enjoy Your Symptom!* p. 1.

55. Žižek, *The Ticklish Object*, p. 297.

56. About American film noir, see Andrew Spicer, “Noir Style,” in *Film Noir* (London: Longman, 2002), pp. 45–63.

57. Art deco or “style moderne” was a movement in design, interior decoration, and architecture in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe and America. Typical motifs of art deco include stylized animals, foliage, nude female figures, and sun rays (which were all seen in Yang’s *Part V* video installation). *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2000), p. 93.

58. Spicer, *Film Noir*, p. 45.

Chapter 9: Ning Hao’s *Incense*

1. See “The *Crazy Stone* Craze,” available online at <http://www.cctv.com/program/cultureexpress>.

2. See Vivien Wang’s review, “*Crazy Stone* Makes Audiences Laugh, Hollywood Cry,” available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/entertainment>.

3. For instance, in July 2006, Ning Hao’s *Mongolian Ping Pong* was shown in the cinemas of two U.S. cities, Seattle and Washington, D.C. One year later, however, the DVD of the movie was one of “the hottest in town” in Beijing. See *Le Mingpai shijie* (Time out Beijing), June 2007, issue 115, p. 65.

4. The CCTV program is an imitation of NBC’s “Meet the Press.”

5. See “Ning Hao: The Stone Is Crazier than I,” interview with Ning Hao, broadcast on CCTV, August 8, 2006, available online at <http://news.cctv.com/wangbo>.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Zhixiashi* means a municipality directly under the central government. See Wu Jingrong and Cheng Zhenqiu, eds., *New Age Chinese-English Dictionary* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2007), p. 1992.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. Luohan Temple is much older than Ning Hao thought. It was originally built in the Song dynasty (960–1279) and was rebuilt in 1752 during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). In 1940 the temple was bombed by the Japanese and was rebuilt in 1945. In the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) five hundred statues of *luohan* (meaning *arhat*, “the worthy one”) were destroyed, and they were rebuilt in 1984. The temple was reopened to the public in 1986. See Ji Xianlin et al., eds., *Zhongguo chansi* (China’s Chan Buddhist temples) (Beijing: Zhongguo yanshi chubanshe, 2005), p. 274.

12. In the *Crazy Stone* officially released by Warner China Film HG Corporation, the English subtitle for this speech is far from a faithful translation: “Lay everyone off early. Give them time to find a new job. Now that would be a good deed.”

13. See Hai Mo, *A Critique of Chinese Cities*, p. 174, and Ma Yi, “Chongqing: China’s Monster Municipality,” available at <http://www.emerging-china.com>.

14. After the huge success of *Crazy Stone* in the summer of 2006, a Chinese critic pointed out that the movie is so popular among ordinary Chinese because it shows how much greedy realtors, who together with corrupt government officials control and manipulate the real estate market in almost every city in China, are hated nowadays. In the movie, the callous developer is shot to death by his boss, who is also killed by an international jewel thief from Hong Kong that he had hired to steal the “crazy stone”—the priceless green jade that is an object of desire for every character in the film.

15. See De Lege, *Nei Menggu lamajiao shi* (A history of Lamaism in Inner Mongolia) (Huhehot: Nemenggu renmin chubanshe, 1998), p. 153. In the past century, both Nationalist and Communist governments banned “the forced child lama.” *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 741.

16. See Huang Xiannian, “Dushi fojiao yu renjian fojiao taolunhui zongshu” (A summary of the conference on Earthly Buddhism and Metropolitan Buddhism), in *Dushi zhong de fojiao: Shanghai yufu chansi jinian jiansi 120 zhounian yantaohui lunwenji* (Buddhism in the metropolis: Proceedings of the symposium in commemoration of the 120th anniversary of the founding of Yufu Chansi in Shanghai), ed. Jue Xing, pp. 1–12 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2004).

17. See Charles B. Jones, “Transitions in the Practice and Defense of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism,” in *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, ed. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish, pp. 125–142 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

18. According to Jones, it was Yinshun who chose to use *renjian fojiao* (which is often rendered as “Humanistic Buddhism”) instead of *rensheng fojiao* (which means “Buddhism for Human Life”) as termed by his teacher Taixu. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

20. *Ibid.*

21. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 181.

22. In Buddhism, one of the “five rules” for monks and laymen is “no killing of living things” (*bu shasheng*), an important concept that I will discuss in detail later on in this chapter.

23. See the entry for *arhat*, in Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 18.

24. See the entry for *arhat*, in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2000), p. 86.

25. Melon seeds are a kind of holiday snack that people enjoy during the Chinese New Year.

26. In Chinese, monks and nuns are called *chujiaoren*, literally meaning “persons out of home.”

27. In most Chinese government facilities and “work-units” (*danwei*), there are “canteens” (*shitang*) where the “cookhouse squad” (*cuishiban*) prepares daily meals for employees.

28. See Jue Xing, “Dushi siyuan yu renjian fojiao jianxing” (The practice of the city monastery and Earthly Buddhism), in Jue Xing, *Dushi zhong de fojiao*, p. 15.

29. See Xu Wenming, “Dushi fojiao de zuoyong yu yiyi” (The role and significance of Metropolitan Buddhism), in Jue Xing, *Dushi zhong de fojiao*, pp. 90–92. The historic statement—“without depending on the state, it is difficult to expand the Buddhist service”—was made by Dao An (312–385), a renowned Buddhist leader and scholar of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420). The advocates of Earthly Buddhism regard Dao An as a role model for the modern Buddhist church. See Tong Liao, “Cong Dao An fashi tan renjian fojiao zhi jianshe” (Master Dao An and the building of Earthly Buddhism), in Jue Xing, *Dushi zhong de fojiao*, pp. 355–366.

30. According to a recent study, monks who work in a well-managed city monastery receive a stipend of several thousand yuan plus free accommodation, while monks from rural monasteries (*shanlin siyuan*) live in poverty and their daily meals are steamed buns, fried noodles, and rice soup. See Banban Duojie, “Jianlun dushi siyuan yu shanlin siyuan zhi bijiao” (A comparison between city monastery and rural monastery), in Jue Xing, *Dushi zhong de fojiao*, pp. 402–405. In *Incense* the wide gap between the rich and poor monasteries is exemplified by the head priest and the monk.

31. See Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 69.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–138.

34. Legend has it that Sakyamuni Buddha (565–486 BC) accepted donations from a rich prostitute in Vaisal, a city on the north bank of the Ganges River in India. See Du Jiwen, ed., *Fojiao shi* (A history of Buddhism) (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 27.

35. A motorcycle taxi is called *modi* in contemporary China. It is a refitted motorcycle that can take a few passengers. In Beijing it was banned in the summer 2006 but is still available in the suburbs of the Chinese capital and many other cities in China, especially in small towns and rural areas.

36. *Fengshui* (wind and water) is a traditional Chinese method of arranging the human world in auspicious alignment with the cosmos. Specialists in *fengshui* use instruments to determine the cosmic forces that affect a site for buildings. See the entry for *fengshui* in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia*, p. 570.

37. See *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1991), p. 5.

38. See John Powers, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), pp. 18–19.

39. See Song Lidao, “Dushi fojiao de xiandai yiyi” (The modern significance of Metropolitan Buddhism), in Jue Xing, *Dushi zhong de fojiao*, p. 81.

40. Xinhua has been the official news agency of the People's Republic of China since 1949.

41. See “Religious Believers Thrice the Official Estimate,” People's Daily Online report, available at <http://english.people.com.cn/200702/07>.

42. Ibid.

43. See “China Is Seeing a Religious Revival,” MWC News report, available at <http://mwcnews.net>.

44. See “Survey Finds 300m China Believers,” BBC News report, available at <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk>.

45. China Is Seeing a Religious Revival.”

46. See Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 65.

47. Ibid.

48. See Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1999), p. 62.

49. Ibid.

50. According to Marcus, the Bruno character is “an inspired addition to the literary source, the novel *Lardi di biciclette* by Luigi Bartolini, whose protagonist is a childless loner.” See Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*, p. 59.

51. Ibid., p. 75.

52. Marcus argues that in De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief*, “The Church’s charitable efforts are portrayed as not only inadequate to the task of rehabilitating a war-ravaged population, but downright dehumanizing in its wholesale approach to processing bodies and souls.” Ibid., p. 65.

53. See Lin Yiwei, “Dangdai Zhongguoren zongjiao xinyang diaocha (A survey of contemporary Chinese religious beliefs),” in *Liaowang dongfang zhoukan* (Oriental outlook weekly), February 8, 2007, issue 6, p. 29.

54. See “Poll Shows Almost One-Third of Chinese Consider Themselves Religious,” Canadian Press, available at <http://www.canada.com>. One of those wealthy “new believers” in Buddhism was Chen Xiaoxu, a former actress and business celebrity, who became a household name in China in the 1980s after playing the character Lin Daiyu in a TV series adapted from the Qing dynasty classic *Dream of the Red Mansion*. During the Chinese New Year of 2007, Chen Xiaoxu took the tonsure at a Buddhist temple in Changchun, capital of Jilin province, which became headline news in the media. In the public’s eye, however, Chen Xiaoxu’s conversion to Buddhism was a traumatic event. Many fans of the former actress felt sad at the news and they speculated that Chen must have had a terminal disease that prompted her conversion. Chen died of breast cancer in early May 2007. She was a generous donor to Jingang Temple in Lujiang county, Anhui province. In 2005 she spent 5.5 million yuan renovating the temple, an act of charity that won high praise from the locals. See Ma Jun, “Sister Lin’s Conversion Raises Issues of Materialism, Spirituality, Happiness,” available at <http://www.shanghaidaily.com>; and a report titled “Chen Xiaoxu Spending 5.5 Millions Rebuilding the Temple,” available at <http://news.tomcom>.

55. The “five rules” include (1) no killing of living things, (2) no stealing, (3) no sex, (4) no lying, (5) no drinking. See Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo fojia shi* (A history of Chinese Buddhism) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1981), p. 181.

56. See Yang Zenwen, “Renjian fojiao yu xiandai chengshi wenming jianshe” (Earthly Buddhism and the building of modern city civilization), in Jue Xing, *Dushi zhong de fojiao*, p. 27.

Postlude

1. Ted Fisherman, *China, Inc.: How the Rise of the Next Superpower Challenges America and the World* (New York: Scribner, 2005).

2. Fareed Zakaria, “Does the Future Belong to China?” *Newsweek*, May 9, 2005, p. 28.

3. Zakaria was a student of Samuel P. Huntington, a professor of international relations at Harvard University and author of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

4. Michael Elliot, “Small World, Big Stakes,” *Time*, June 27, 2005, p. 30.

5. See Roger Ebert’s review, available at <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com>.

6. See J. Hoberman’s review, available at <http://www.villagevoice.com>.

7. As Peter Berger explains, “There can be no doubt of the fact of an ever more interconnected global economy, with vast social and political implications, and there is no shortage of thoughtful, if inconclusive, reflection about this great transformation. It has also been noted that there is a cultural dimension, the obvious result of an immense increase in worldwide communication. If there is economic globalization, there is also cultural globalization.” Peter Berger, “Four Faces of Global Culture,” in *Globalization and the Challenges of the New Century: A Reader*, ed. Patrick O’Meara, Howard Mehlinger, and Matthew Krain, p. 419 (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

8. For an essential definition of Chinese avant-garde art, see Gao Minglu, chapter 1, “An Alternative Logic for Chinese Modernity,” section 2, “Chinese Contemporary Art and its Avant-Garde-ness,” in *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art*. Exhibition catalog (Beijing: Millennium Art Museum; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, 2005), pp. 43–48.

9. The 2005 Shanghai International Film festival invited Wang Xiaoshuai and Jia Zhangke, both Sixth Generation film directors, to attend the opening ceremony. Wang’s *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) and Jia’s *Xiao Wu* (1997) and *Platform* (2000) were not allowed any public screenings in past years.

10. “Hyper Design: 6th Shanghai Biennale 2006 Opens,” September 5, 2006, available at <http://www.artdaily.com>; and “Artnet News,” August 22, 2006, available at <http://www.artnet.com>.

11. Zhu Hongzi, “Constructing a Platform for Cultural Creation: A Review of the Sixth Shanghai Biennale,” available at <http://www.culture.people.com.cn>.

12. “Oriental Touch to Venice Biennale,” *China Daily*, June 11, 2005, available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>. In June of 2003, China established its national pavilion

at the 50th Venice Biennale, but the participating Chinese artists did not travel to Italy due to the sudden outbreak of SARS. In July, the pavilion was relocated to the Guangdong Museum of Art in the city of Guangzhou.

13. "Oriental Touch to Venice Biennale."
14. Charis Dunn-Chan, "Stellar Art at Venice Festival," *BBC News*, June 11, 2005, available at <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk>.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Michael Kimmelman, "Global Village Whose Bricks Are Art," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2005, available at <http://www.nytimes.com>.
17. *Ibid.*
18. "Oriental Touch to Venice Biennale."
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 75.
22. Rachel Campbell-Johnston, "An Explosion of China in Venice," *The Times* (London), June 8, 2005.
23. As Kimmelman stated, "I did like a video [by Wang Qiheng] at the end analyzing the *feng shui* of the biennale." Kimmelman, "Global Village Whose Bricks Are Art."
24. Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 121.
25. Mary Elizabeth Gallagher notes: "The transformation from socialism to state-led capitalist developmentalism was a reaction to domestic and international changes during China's first decade of reform.... Domestic factors include the way in which early reforms were sequenced and implemented. International factors include the rise of China's capitalist neighbors and the decline and demise of socialist models of economic development and reform." Mary Elizabeth Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism: Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 136.
26. See my discussion of Jia's *Still Life* in the introduction.
27. See chapter 4, "New Chinese Cinema of the 'Sixth Generation.'"
28. I borrow this expression from Danielle Bergeron's essay titled "Aliens and the Psychotic Experience," in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein, p. 308 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
29. The Chinese title of the movie, *Jiangcheng Xiari*, literally means "River city summer days," referring to Wuhan (where the story is set) and its location on the Yangtze.
30. About this motif, see also my discussion of *Luxury Car* in the introduction.
31. Fisherman, *China Inc.*, p. 90.
32. In my interview with director Wang Chao held in the late summer of 2006 I was told that BMW China was one of the funding institutions for his *Luxury Car*.
33. Žižek, *On Belief*, p. 47.
34. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), p. 98.

35. According to Siegfried Kracauer, the somnambulist Cesare is merely an instrument and an exemplar of the “common man” who “is drilled to kill and to be killed” under “such voracious authority” as “the German war government.” Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 64–65.

36. Wu Youcai, the actor who played the father in the movie, was strongly criticized by Professor Hao Jian at Beijing Film Academy for his “stilted” performance, which, I think, was probably intentional under Wang Chao’s direction.

37. Dennis Lim, “Chinese Filmmaker Jia Zhangke Takes New Approach with *24 City*,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 2008.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. A. O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, “Cannes Journal: Reality Rudely Intrudes In the Screening Room,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2008.

42. Lee Hyo-won, “Jia Zhang-ke Pushes Digital Docudrama,” *Korean Times*, August 24, 2008.

43. As I mentioned in the introduction, Jia’s documentary *Useless* (2007) was criticized for “staging” certain scenes.

44. Michael Bodey, “Cannes Fest Hits Above Its Weight,” *The Australian*, May 21, 2008.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Kirk Honeycutt, “Cannes Films Are a Tough Slog So Far,” *Reuters*, May 19, 2008.

48. *Ibid.*

49. According to some journalists’ reports, there were walkouts when Jia’s *Still Life* was screened at the Venice Film Festival in 2006 and *24 City* at Cannes Film Festival in 2008.

50. See Liu Bangbang’s blog, available at <http://blog.sina.com.cn/bangbangbang>.

51. The artist performed this role of “wounded angel” and actually hurt himself during the “acting.”

52. For an eyewitness report on the 798 Art District, see David Spalding, “Dream Factory, Rubbish Heap,” *Contemporary*, no. 72 (June 2005): pp. 30–35.

53. Gallagher describes the Chinese government’s new policy toward the working class in the transition from socialism to a free-market economy: “Workers were asked to accept these changes in state goals from socialism to competitive developmentalism [i.e., global capitalism] as a matter of course. When they did not accept it—for example, when they failed to find new jobs on their own, or refused to work in another sector that did not supply benefits, or stayed in their factory-supplied housing living on subsidies—they were disparaged.” Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism*, pp. 150–151.

54. The picture is available at <http://www.artnet.com>. For more information on the 798 factory complex, see Huang Rui, ed., *Beijing 798: Reflections on Art*,

Architecture, and Society in China (Beijing: Timezone 8 Ltd. and Thinking Hands, 2004), pp. 10–20.

55. Spalding, “Dream Factory, Rubbish Heap,” p. 32.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

57. “A Guide to the Top Galleries of 798,” *China Daily*, August 14, 2007.

58. Josh Gerstein, “An Art Powerhouse in Beijing: Chinese Art Scene ‘Makes Chelsea Look Provincial,’” *New York Sun*, August 4, 2008.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Belinda Goldsmith, “China Artists Join Dash for Cash,” *Reuters*, August 14, 2008.

61. Gerstein, “An Art Powerhouse in Beijing.”

62. Natasha Degen, “Great for the Walls of China,” *Financial Times*, August 30, 2008.

63. Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), p. 122.

64. According to Maurice Meisner, China’s capitalistic market reforms began in 1979 as soon as Deng Xiaoping came to power at the end of 1978. Maurice Meisner, Chapter 23, “Market Reforms and the Development of Capitalism,” in *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), pp. 449–482.

65. Eugene Tang, “Neon Names, Rusting Ship Take Over Beijing Art District: Review” (Bloomberg), February 23, 2009, available at <http://www.bloomberg.com>.

66. “China’s Art Market Hits Hard Times,” transcript of a radio story broadcast by *PRI’s The World*, February 3, 2009, available at <http://www.theworld.org>.

67. Lillian Li, Allison Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 45.

68. See an official profile titled “Kong Dongmei: Inherited Her Grandfather’s Character,” November 2, 2006, available at <http://www.womenofchina.cn/profiles/officials>.

69. Wang Guofeng told me his story about this “socialist” secrecy. Having learned about Wang’s photographic work that depicts Beijing’s famous architecture in Mao’s socialist era, Kong Dongmei approached him through a business associate of hers in November 2007, and she suggested a meeting be held at Wang’s studio in 798. Kong arrived at the meeting twenty minutes after her associate, who had come first to “check on” the surroundings of Wang’s studio. I had a similar experience with the bookstore’s female manager, whom I met during one of my visits. As photography is prohibited in the store, I asked her to provide me with some of their own photos, which I wanted to use as an illustration to this book. The manager promised to send it via e-mail, but she never did.

70. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 149.

71. Lotte Eisner, *Fritz Lang* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 83.

72. *Ibid.*

73. As Kracauer described, “The city built in his [Lang’s] film is a sort of super New York. . . . This screen metropolis of the future consists of a lower and an upper city. The latter—a grandiose street of skyscrapers alive with an incessant stream of air taxis

and cars—is the abode of big-business owners, high-ranking employees and pleasure-hunting youth.” Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 149.

74. Zhou Hai, “Introduction to *The Unbearable Heaviness of Industry*,” available at <http://www.zhouhai.com>.

75. Kalpana Misra, *From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism: The Erosion of Official Ideology in Deng’s China* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 192.

76. In 2004 there were 3,639 fatal coal mine accidents in China, and 6,027 miners died, and there were a further 2,675 accidents in the first six months of 2005. “Mine Accidents Kill 6,027 in China,” available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>; and “Gas Blast Kills 34 Miners,” available at <http://www.shanghaidaily.com>.

77. “27 Bodies Raised After Coal Mine Explosion in Central China,” available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com>.

78. “Coal Mine Explosion Kills 34,” available at <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>.

79. Mary Hennock, “China’s Miners Pay for Growth,” available at <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk>.

80. Ibid.

81. “Blast Kills 34 at the Hebi Coal Industry Corporation,” available at <http://news.qq.com> (Chinese).

82. “The Hebi Mine Disaster,” October 4, 2005, available at <http://www.xinhuanet.com> (Chinese).

83. “Officials Give Up Coal Mine Stakes,” September 27, 2005, available at <http://english.eastday.com>.

84. “Life Cheap in China’s Mines,” November 28, 2004, available at <http://news.bbc.uk>.

85. “At Least 34 Killed in China Coal Mine Explosion,” October 3, 2005, available at <http://www.abcasiapacific.com>.

86. Greg Baker and Gillian Wong, “Tragedy below Ground as Gas Blast Leaves 74 Miners Dead,” *The Scotsman*, February 23, 2009, available at <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com>.

87. Greg Baker, “Families of Chinese Miners Angered by Lack of Info,” Associated Press, February 23, 2009, available at <http://www.google.com/hostednews>.

88. Ibid.

89. “Mine Blast in Shanxi Leaves 74 Dead, Hundreds Injured,” available at <http://www.asianews.it>.

90. Edward Wong, “At Least 74 Miners Dead in China Blast,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2009, available at <http://nytimes.com>.

91. Ibid.

92. For more information on Socialist Realism in Chinese art, see Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

93. Wang Mingxian and Yan Shanchun, *Xin Zhongguo meishu tushi 1966–1976* (An illustrated art history of new China 1966–1976) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2000), pp. 149–151.

94. Erick Eckholm, "Postcards from China's Industrial Caldron," *New York Times*, August 2, 2003.
95. Ibid.
96. Philippe Vergne and Doryun Chong, eds., *House of Oracles: A Huang Yong Ping Retrospective* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Walker Art Center, 2005), pp. 60–79.
97. Ibid., p. 60.
98. Amy Carlson Gustafson, "In Ping's 'House,' the Doors Always Swing Open," available at <http://www.twincities.com>.
99. Lindsay C. Messenger, "Huang Yong Ping in Retrospect," available at <http://www.fluktor.de>.
100. "The Tortoise and the Hare: Huang Yong Ping and Andy Warhol Channel the World in Opposite Ways," available at <http://www.rakemag.com>.
101. Philip Vergne, "Why Am I Afraid of Huang Yong Ping?" in Vergne and Chong, *House of Oracles*, p. 31.
102. Messenger, "Huang Yong Ping in Retrospect."
103. Gustafson, "In Ping's House."
104. Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 109–110.
105. Ibid., p.112.
106. Suisheng Zhao, *Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 269.
107. See the entry for "Americanism," in *Encarta Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 56–57.
108. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003), p. 166.
109. Gries, *China's New Nationalism*, p. 109.
110. T. D. Allman, *Rogue State: America at War with the World* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), p. 1.
111. Blake Gopnik, "Red, White and Bleak at the Whitney Biennial, Grim Reflections on the Dispirit of the Times," March 2, 2006, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.
112. Ibid.
113. David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 87.
114. About this "Rapture Culture," see Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
115. Ibid., p. 3.
116. Ibid., p. 177.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Ibid.
120. Paul Chan, interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, in *Contemporary*, no. 84 (2006), pp. 34–37.

121. Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, p. 16.
122. Simpson says, “It remains an open question whether it is possible to take commemorative procedures out of the hand of the government and its media apologists and to fashion alternative ways to remember the dead and to invoke their deaths in the pursuit of nondestructive ends.” *Ibid.*, p. 89.
123. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
125. Paul Chan, interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, p. 36.
126. In a Christian mass, the priest raises one or both of the Eucharistic elements for the believers to view with adoration. See the definition for “elevation” in the Christian sense, in *Webster’s Third International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster Publishers, 1993), p. 735.
127. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 13.
128. For a discussion of Lacan’s notion of the “master discourse,” see Ellie Ragland, “The Discourse of the Master,” in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein, pp. 127–147 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
129. See Simpson’s discussion of the “Portrait of Grief” (a series of snapshots and brief obituaries commemorating the dead of 9/11) published in the *New York Times*, in his *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, p. 103.
130. Christian Holland, “Momentum 5: Paul Chan @ ICA,” available at <http://www.bigredandshiny.com>.
131. For more discussions on this issue, see David Ray Griffin, *Christian Faith and the Truth behind 9/11* (Louisville, Ky., and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Barrie Zwicker, *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-up of 9/11* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2006); and Frank Rich, *The Greatest Story Ever Sold: The Decline and Fall of Truth from 9/11 to Katrina* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).
132. See Xu Bing’s essay, “About My Installations *Where Does the Dust Collect Itself?* and *Tobacco Project*” (my translation).
133. Genesis 3:19.
134. Xu Bing, “About My Installations.”
135. *Guna* means a thing, a quality, a property, etc.
136. Cf. Chen Guansheng and Li Peizhu, eds., *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terms* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2005), p. 252; and Ren Jiyü, ed., *Fojiao xiao cidian* (A dictionary of Buddhism) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), p. 321.
137. Chen Guansheng and Li Peizhu, *A Chinese-English Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, p. 194.
138. See the entry for “six dusts” in Du Jiwen and Huang Mingxin, eds., *Fojiao xiao cidian* (A concise dictionary of Buddhism) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2006), pp. 260–261.
139. The historical Buddha attained enlightenment under the *bodhi* tree, which is a fig tree native to India. See the entry for “*bodhi* tree,” in *ibid.*, pp. 614–615.

140. See the entry for “*fuchen kanjing*” (whisking the dust and seeing the cleanliness), in *ibid.*, pp. 341–342.

141. Xu Bing, “About My Installations.”

142. See the entry for *ziran* (nature), in Ding Fubao, ed., *Fojiao da cidian* (A dictionary of Buddhism) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984), p. 520.

143. Xu Bing mentioned, “After the exhibition opened, this work was well received and won the Artes Mundi Prize as well, yet it also aroused a great deal of controversy.” Xu Bing, “About My Installations.”

144. Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 8–9.

145. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.

146. *Ibid.*, p. 45. As Simpson said, Baudrillard did not “endorse Yamasaki’s [the Japanese architect of the World Trade Center] founding idealism, finding instead an explicit antihumanism in the towers and their significations.” Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, p. 58.

147. See Simpson’s discussion of the World Trade Center towers as architecture, in his *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, pp. 59–61.

148. As Baudrillard put it, “The fragility of global power would not have been so strikingly proven. The towers, which were the emblem of that power, still embody it in their dramatic end, which resembles a suicide. Seeing them collapse themselves, as if by implosion, one had the impression that they were committing suicide in response to the suicide of the suicide plane.” Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, pp. 47–48.

149. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

150. Lü Zheng, *Indu foxue yuanliu lüejiang* (A brief introduction to Indian Buddhist schools) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1979), p. 268.

151. As Xu Bing put it, “Therefore, the 9/11 events signaled an essential warning to mankind, and I hope people will realize this more clearly through my work.” Xu Bing, “About My Installations.”

152. David D’Arcy, “John Waters: *Unwatchable*,” available at <http://www.greencine.com>.

153. *Ibid.*

154. As a U.S. foreign policy pushed by neocons such as Huntington and his pupils in Washington, D.C., the “clash of civilizations” thesis has been recently modified by George W. Bush and Tony Blair. Bush said in his “President’s Address to the Nation” on the fifth anniversary of September 11, “This struggle has been called a clash of civilizations. In truth, it is a struggle for civilization” (available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases>); Blair, in his “Clash About Civilization” speech given on March 21, 2006, declared, “This is not a clash between civilizations. It is a clash about civilization” (available at <http://www.number10.gov/output>).

155. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 41.

156. Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, p. 137.

157. *Ibid.*, pp. 128–129.

158. Hans Ulrich, “Paul Chan in the Uncertain States of America,” in *ART iT*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2006): p. 109.

159. Menene Gras Balaguer is director of Casa Asia, Madrid, Barcelona, Spain; and Taro Amano is chief curator of the Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan. Huang Du, *The First Today's Documents Energy: Spirit Body Material*, exhibition catalog (Beijing: Today Art Museum, 2008), pp. 61, 88.

160. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

161. Li, Dray-Novey, and Kong, *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City*, p. 24, 43.

162. Huang Du, *The First Today's Documents*, p. 264.

163. *Ibid.*

164. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

165. Sheldon Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 97.

166. I met Qin Yufen and her husband, artist Zhu Jinshi, in Berlin in 1998, and I had studied her works in the past decade.

167. Dan Roth, “What Do a Giant Tape Measure, a V8 Vantage and Stephen Hawking Have In Common?” available at <http://www.autoblog.com/2008/08/18>.

168. *Ibid.*

169. *Ibid.*

170. *Ibid.*

171. *Ibid.*

172. *Ibid.*

173. *Ibid.*

174. Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary and Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, p. 875 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

Chinese Glossary of Names, Titles, and Terms

an 安

Anyang yinger 《安阳婴儿》

Bai chai tu 《百拆图》

baitiao 白条

baji gongzizhi 八级工资制

Baoma 宝马

Beijing de dushen nanren 《北京的单身男人》

Beijing wanbao 《北京晚报》

Beijing zazhong 《北京杂种》

bian 变

bie mo wo 别摸我

Bu Wancang 卜万苍

Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生

Cai Guoqiang 蔡国强

caochuan jiejian 《草船借箭》

chai 拆

chaiqian 拆迁

changjingji 唱经机

chaosheng 超生

Chegongzhuang 车公庄

chen 尘

Chen Kaige 陈凯歌

Chen Wei 陈薇

chishi 耻事

cucao 粗糙

chuishiban 炊事班

Dai Jinhua 戴锦华

dalaoban 大老板

daligui 大立柜

Dan Duyu 但杜宇

danwei 单位

datieta 大铁塔

dawuding 大屋顶

Deshengmen 德胜门

diaodong 调动

dixia wuhui 地下舞会

Dongchun de rizi 《冬春的日子》

Du Wenda 杜文达

dudie 度牒

duixiang 对象

duli dianying 独立电影

dunshi 遁世

dushi bianyuanren 都市边缘人

dushi fojiao 都市佛教

dushi siyuan 都市寺院

Ershisi cheng ji 《24 城记》

fang weixing 放卫星

fanpiao 饭票

Feidu 《废都》

Fengkuang de shitou 《疯狂的石头》

fengshui 风水

Fenyang 汾阳

fojiao jingji 佛教经济

foyan kan shijie 佛眼看世界

fu hao 符号

fumu daren xiang 父母大人像

gaochan 高产

getihu 个体户

gong-nong-bing 工农兵

Gu Changwei 顾长卫

Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之

- guanxi* 关系
guanyin 观音
gufen 股份
 Gugong Bowuyuan 故宫博物院
guojia zhuren 国家主人
guoqi gaizao 国企改造
guoying 国营
 Gusu xing 《姑苏行》
 Haishi 《海誓》
 Hainan 海南
 Hangzhou 杭州
he 和
 He Jianjun 何建军
 Hebi 鹤壁
hexie shehui 和谐社会
 Hong gaoliang 《红高粱》
 Hong Hao 洪浩
hongse jingdian wenhua 红色经典文化
hou 后
huan 环
 Huang Du 黄笃
 Huangtu di 《黄土地》
huansu 还俗
huayuan 化缘
huayuan shifu 化缘师傅
huichun 回春
huijia guonian 回家过年
 Huozhe 《活着》
hutong 胡同
 Ji Kang 嵇康
 Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯
 Jiang Jie 姜洁
 Jiangcheng xiari 《江城夏日》
 Jianlibao 健力宝
jiaotong guize 交通规则
 Jidu hanleng 《极度寒冷》
jjian gongzi 计件工资
jingcheng san daguai 京城三大怪
jingji xiaoyi 经济效益
jingshen shiliang 精神食粮
jinyuqi wai baixu qi zhong 金玉其外
 败絮其中
jishi dianying 纪实电影
jixing de zuopin 即兴的作品
 Ju Dou 《菊豆》
 Juxiang Shuwu 菊香书屋
 Kongque 《孔雀》
ke chang tou 磕长头
labaku 喇叭裤
laishi zhuansheng 来世转生
 Lao jing 《老井》
 Lao She 老舍
laogong 老公
 Leng Lin 冷林
 Li Dingyi 李定夷
 Li Jianwu 李健吾
 Li Qing 李青
 Li Shaohong 李少红
 Li Yang 李扬
 Li Yanxiu 李彦修
 Liu Jin 刘谨
 Liu Lan 《留兰》
 Liu Xiaodong 刘小东
liuchen 六尘
liumang 流氓
 Longfusi 隆福寺
 Lou Ye 娄烨
 Lu Hao 卢昊
 Lu Xun 鲁迅
 Lü caodi 《绿草地》
 Luohansi 罗汉寺
 Man cheng jindai huangjin jia 《满城
 尽带黄金甲》
mamu 麻木
 Mang jing 《盲井》
 Mang shan 《盲山》
mingjiao 名教
mingong 民工
modeng nüxing 摩登女性
mofan qiyejia 模范企业家
mune 木讷
 Nanxiaojie 南小街
 Nanzhan 南站
neibu shitang 内部食堂
 Ning Hao 宁浩

- Peng Yu 彭禹
 Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书
 Qianmen 前门
 qianwei yishu 前卫艺术
 Qin Yufen 秦玉芬
 Qingchun wuhui 《青春无悔》
 Qinghong 《青红》
 qiyejia 企业家
 quanjiapu 全家福
 renjian fojiao 人间佛教
 Ruan Ji 阮籍
 sandai tongtang 三代同堂
 Sanxia haoren 《三峡好人》
 sanxian zhigong 三线职工
 sharen changming 杀人偿命
 shasheng 杀生
 shazi 傻子
 shengsi hetong 生死合同
 Shengsi jie 《生死劫》
 Sheying zhi you 《摄影之友》
 Shijie 《世界》
 Shiqisui de danche 《十七岁的单车》
 shitang 食堂
 Shoushang de tianshi 《受伤的天使》
 Shuini 水泥
 siheyuan 四合院
 sixiang jiefang 思想解放
 Song Dong 宋东
 Sun Yuan 孙原
 Suzhou he 《苏州河》
 Tan Dun 谭盾
 Taixu 太虚
 tangzhuang 唐装
 touting ditai 偷听敌台
 touzi 投资
 Tunlan 屯兰
 Tuya de hunshi 《图雅的婚事》
 Wang Chao 王超
 Wang Gongxin 王功新
 Wang Guangyi 王广义
 Wang Guofeng 王国锋
 Wang Jinsong 王劲松
 Wang Qiheng 王其亨
 Wang Quan'an 王全安
 Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅
 Weicheng 《围城》
 wenhuazhan 文化站
 Wu Ming 无名
 Wu Tianming 吴天明
 wudongyuzhong 无动于衷
 wujie 五戒
 wuni 忤逆
 xiagang 下岗
 Xianghuo 《香火》
 Xiao Wu 《小武》
 Xiao Shan huijia 《小山回家》
 xiaojie 小姐
 xiaojie jingji 小姐经济
 xiaozhi 孝子
 Xidan 西单
 xifu 西服
 xingfuwu 性服务
 xinwen huiketing 新闻会客厅
 Xinwen zhoukan 《新闻周刊》
 Xisi 西四
 xixue 西学
 Xu Bing 徐冰
 Xu Yihui 徐一晖
 Xuanwumen 宣武门
 xuanxue 玄学
 Xuezhong guchu 《雪中孤雏》
 yanda 严打
 yang 养
 Yang Fudong 杨福东
 yanghui 洋灰
 yanghuo 洋货
 yanqing xiaoshuo 言情小说
 Yige ye buneng shao 《一个也不能少》
 yiguo liangzhi 一国两制
 Yin Mingzhu 殷明珠
 Yin Xiuzhen 尹秀珍
 Yingkesong 迎客松
 Yinshun 印顺
 Yongdingmen 永定门
 Youchai 《邮差》

- youfu tongxiang* 有福同享
yumin 游民
yuanyang hudie pai 鸳鸯蝴蝶派
Yueshi 《月蚀》
Yuetan 月坛
Yuguang qu 《渔光曲》
Yujia nü 《渔家女》
Yun yu yuan 《陨玉怨》
zaosi zao chaosheng 早死早超生
Zhang Hongtu 张宏图
Zhang Huan 张洹
Zhang Huimin 张惠民
Zhang Jianhua 张建华
Zhang Kaiji 张开济
Zhang Ming 章明
Zhang Yimou 张艺谋
Zhang Yuan 张元
Zhantai 《站台》
zhe caishi zuo shanshi 这才是做善事
zhibai 直白
zhifulu 致富路
zhiqing 知青
zhixiashi 直辖市
Zhongfu Dasha 中服大厦
Zhongguo chengshi pipan 《中国城市批判》
Zhongguo mianlin de jinyao wenti
 《中国面临的紧要问题》
Zhou Hai 周海
Zhou Li 周礼
Zhou Xiaowen 周晓文
Zhou Xuan 周旋
zhuada fangxiao 抓大放小
Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮
zhulin qixian 竹林七贤
Zhumeng 2008 《筑梦2008》
zhuxuanlü 主旋律
Zijincheng 紫禁城
ziran 自然
ziyang 自养
Zuo you 《左右》
zuotai xiaojie 坐台小姐

Filmography

(Films are arranged chronologically.)

1921

Sea Oath (Haishi), dir. Dan Duyu

1931

Wild Rose (Ye meigui), dir. Sun Yu

1933

Little Toy (Xiao wanyi), dir. Sun Yu

1934

Song of the Fishermen (Yu guang qu), dir. Cai Chusheng

1943

The Fisherwoman (Yujia nü), dir. Bu Wanchang

1984

Yellow Earth (Huang tudi), dir. Chen Kaige

1987

Old Well (Lao jing), dir. Wu Tianming

Red Sorghum (Hong gaoliang), dir. Zhang Yimou

1990

Ju Dou (Ju Dou), dir. Zhang Yimou

1992

No Regret about Youth (Qingchun wuhui), dir. Zhou Xiaowen

1993

Beijing Bastard (Beijing zazhong), dir. Zhang Yuan

The Days (Dongchun de rizi), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai

1995

To Live (Huo zhe), dir. Zhang Yimou

Postman (Youchai), dir. He Jianjun

Rain Clouds over Wushan (Wushan yunyu), dir. Zhang Ming

Xiao Shan Going Home (Xiao Shan huijia), dir. Jia Zhangke

1996

Frozen (Jidu hanleng), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai

1997

Xiao Wu (Xiao Wu), dir. Jia Zhangke

1999

Not One Less (Yige ye buneng shao), dir. Zhang Yimou

2000

Lunar Eclipse (Yueshi), dir. Wang Quan'an

Platform (Zhantai), dir. Jia Zhangke

Suzhou River (Suzhou he), dir. Lou Ye

2001

Anyang Orphan (Anyang yinger), dir. Wang Chao

Beijing Bicycle (Shiqisui de danche), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai

2002

An Estranged Paradise (Mosheng tiantang), dir. Yang Fudong

Unknown Pleasures (Ren xiaoyao), dir. Jia Zhangke

2003

Incense (Xianghuo), dir. Ning Hao

Liu Lan (Liu Lan), dir. Yang Fudong

Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest Part I (Zhulin qixian 1), dir. Yang Fudong

2004

Blind Shaft (Mang jing), dir. Li Yang

Mongolian Ping Pong (Lü caodi), dir. Ning Hao

The World (Shijie), dir. Jia Zhangke

2005

Peacock (Kongque), dir. Gu Changwei

Shanghai Dreams (Qinghong), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai

Stolen Life (Shengsi jie), dir. Li Shaohong

2006

Crazy Stone (Fengkuang de shitou), dir. Ning Hao

Curse of the Golden Flower (Man cheng jin dai huangjin jia), dir. Zhang Yimou

Luxury Car (Jiangcheng xiari), dir. Wang Chao

Still Life (Sanxia haoren), dir. Jia Zhangke

2007

Blind Mountain (Mang shan), dir. Li Yang

In Love We Trust (Zuo you), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai

2008

24 City (Ershisi cheng ji), dir. Jia Zhangke

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