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THE CHINESE FILM INDUSTRY AFTER 1976

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After the "Cultural Revolution" in 1976, the Chinese film industry returned to normal. Between 1976 and 1979, most filmmakers returned to their film studios and began to reorganize the production system. After 1980, the Chinese film industry began to develop multi-dimensionally. The highlight of this development was the rising of a large number of young directors and their works, which became hits and attracted attention both at home and abroad. More and more Chinese films were seen at international film festivals, often winning the awards. This study focuses on the important period between 1976 and 1988 in the Chinese film history and its influence on the development of the Chinese film industry; it concludes with the discussion of the direction the Chinese film industry is heading in the future.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The problem of this study is that the development of the Chinese film industry since 1976 has experienced a very complicated course of events. The period between 1976 and 1988 is a very important historical period in Chinese film history; it will have a great influence on the development of the Chinese film industry in the future, but the Chinese cinema after 1976 has not been studied systematically. This study will fill the gap.

This study will analyze the development of the Chinese film industry from 1976 to 1988, the change of film concepts, the change of film style, and the appearance of the Fifth Generation of film directors. At the same time, this study will examine their impact on the development of the Chinese film industry.

Scope and Limitations

The time frame of the study will be limited to a period beginning in 1976 after the "Cultural Revolution," when

China began to come back with a strong film industry, to 1988 when Chinese films won awards at the International Film Festival and entered the international film market. This study will be further limited to an examination of aesthetic, economic, and social film history, and does not attempt to study the technical factors.

Method of Approach

The primary sources such as films and scripts, as well as literature published since 1976 and two secondary sources are used in this study. The main secondary source of information I used is Popular Cinema, a monthly film magazine, which is published by the China Film Distribution Company. It gives a good chronological description of the Chinese cinema situation. It is the voice of Chinese audiences.

Another source I used in this study is Contemporary Cinema. (1) It is a comprehensive film magazine, which is published every two months. It particularly stresses film theory, history, aesthetics, and criticism. It is the voice of filmmakers and critics.

Survey of Literature

Four related research books were found for my study. The first one is Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the

People's Republic, edited by George Stephen Semsel, and published by Praeger Publishers, New York. The book is a collection of five research papers. Among them, only Ma Ning's "Notes on the New Filmmakers" and Semsel's "The End of an Era" are related to the ten-year period being studied. Ma Ning particularly stresses the Fifth Generation of filmmakers, and Semsel just analyzes general changes of the Chinese film industry since 1984.

The second book is Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949, written by Paul Clark, published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. The author traces the historical development of the Chinese cinema after 1949, and stresses cultural and political influences.

The third book is Film & Politics in the Third World, edited by John D.H. Dawning and published by Praeger Publishers, New York. It contains two research papers about Chinese film. Accurately speaking, these two papers systematically study the films of a famous Chinese director --- Xia Jin. Kwok, M.C. Quiquemelle, and Timothy Tung primarily analyze the style of Xia Jin's works, and relate his works to the Chinese film industry.

The fourth book is Third Cinema in the Third World, written by Teshome H. Gabriel and published by UMI Research Press, Michigan. The author focuses on the ideology in the

Chinese film history before 1976 and introduces a little bit of film development after 1976.

In addition, many research papers were found in film magazines and trade papers, such as Film Comment, Films and Filming, New China, Screen, American Cinematographer, World Press Review, Sight and Sound, University Film Association Journal, Journal of Popular Film, American Anthropology, and Variety. But none of them systematically study this ten-year cinema history of China.

Definition of Terms

Filmmakers in China are classified into five generations according to their social and political background with reference to their educational experience. (2)

The First Generation : before 1930

The Second Generation: during 1930's and 1940's.

The Third Generation : with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the third generation of filmmakers was formed. They made their major films during the 1950's and 1960's, and some of them are still working in the film studios now.

The Fourth Generation : Those filmmakers who graduated from Beijing Film Academy before 1966 are regarded as the fourth generation. They are

considered as the main force among the Chinese filmmakers now.

The Fifth Generation : The directors of this controversial generation all graduated from Beijing Film Academy after 1982. They were called the hope of the Chinese film industry.

Background

Motion pictures were introduced to China right after Lumiere brothers' first public show in France in 1895. On August 11, 1896, Xu Garden, for the first time, projected the "western show" (the moving pictures) in Shanghai. (3) It was the earliest film projection in China. After that, film projection merchants from America, Spain and many other countries came to China one after another. They brought a lot of short films and introduced advanced film techniques to China.

China started to make films in 1905. In August, 1905, Jing-feng Ren, the founder of Feng Tai photo studios which was the earliest photo studio in Beijing, made the first Chinese film, DING JUN SHAN. (4) From then on, the Chinese film industry experienced a long and tortuous developing course.

Chinese film history is usually divided into five stages. (5) 1896-1931 is considered to be the stage of the

birth of the Chinese film industry. During this period, the mode of China's film production began to form, and many film studios appeared.

1931-1949 is considered the developing period in China's film history. In 1931, Star Film Studio made the first talkie film of China, SINGER RED PEONY. Between 1930's and 1940's, Chinese films appeared to be the real "Realism," and many excellent films appeared. Among them, ANGEL AT ROAD SIDE, RUNNING AT NIGHT, SOUND OF FISH LIGHT, SONG AT NIGHT, and SPRING RIVER FLOWS TO THE EAST are considered to be the representative works of Chinese "Realism" films. They were even earlier than Italian "New Realism." (6)

With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the film industry in China steadily developed until the eruption of the "Cultural Revolution." Between 1949 and 1966, most Chinese films were made for eulogizing the newly-established socialist system. Almost no films were imported from abroad, except for some socialist countries' films, such as USSR's. The social and cultural backgrounds of the filmmakers in this period were quite different. Quite a lot of them came from the existing film studios, which were controlled by Kuoming Tang before 1949. They had good filmmaking experience and handled the advanced techniques. There were also a lot of filmmakers who came from "liberated areas" (the communist base before 1949). Compared to the

former group, they had less experience and never had formal training, but they better fit the socialist system. Generally speaking, the filmmakers in this period were called the "third generation."

During the ten chaotic years between 1966 and 1976, Chinese film production came almost to a standstill. Only seven or eight features were made, and most of them were "Modern Liberation Model" opera films. (7) Numerous filmmakers were sent to the factories, armies, or countryside to be re-educated.

After smashing the "Gang of Four" in 1976, the Chinese film industry came back to life. Between 1976 and 1979, most filmmakers returned to film studios and started to reorganize the system. After 1980, the Chinese film industry began to develop multi-dimensionally. With the appearance of the successful new works, many new film directors began to be known. The debut of these young directors marked the entrance of the Chinese film industry into a new era. More and more Chinese films were seen at international film festivals. RED SORGHUM and OLD WELL taking first prizes at the Berlin International Film Festival and Japan Film Festival in 1988 proved that Chinese films have been recognized by the world.

In this study, the development of the Chinese film industry after 1976 is divided into three stages. The first will include the years from 1976 to 1979. It was a transitional stage. During this stage, China began to come back as a powerful film industry. The major concern of the films in this period was the "Cultural Revolution." The destruction and suffering of the "ten year's catastrophe" was an important theme. Filmmakers who worked in this period were mostly the third generation, with a few from the fourth generation.

The second stage will include the years from 1980 to 1987, during which the Chinese film industry developed in well-rounded way, and a Chinese film genre began to form. The fourth generation of filmmakers, who had completed their educations at Beijing Film Academy before 1966 and had no opportunities to put their skills into operation during the "Cultural Revolution," made their first batches of films. The major concerns of the films in this period were social problems.

After 1983, the first group of graduate students from the Beijing Film Academy since the "Cultural Revolution" finished their maiden works and put on one exhibition after another. Many critics called them "Chinese Author's Films." After ONE AND EIGHT and YELLOW EARTH won awards at home and

abroad, more and more "Author's Films" began to appear. These young directors were regarded by the world as the most promising young filmmakers. This generation, which was called the "Fifth Generation" of filmmakers, leaned toward formal innovation and experiment. Rejecting the primary literary qualities of the films, they attached great importance to cinematic qualities and relied heavily on visual elements and the dynamic interrelations between images and sound to express their perceptions. They moved Chinese film into directions previously unexplored. Although it lasted for only a short time, this period exercised such a far-reaching influence on Chinese film history that it would remain eternally and take a considerably important position in Chinese film history.

After 1987, the Chinese film industry went commercial. Although the Fifth Generation's films were praised highly abroad, they were criticized at home. It was said that their films were only for the "well-educated people" or "future people," not for the ordinary audience. Their films were not accepted by most of the Chinese audiences. Influenced by American and Hong Kong films, Chinese audiences preferred seeing action films, comedies, and melodramas instead of experimental films with deep meaning under the surface. For economic reasons, more and more action and comedy films were

made during this period. Chinese filmmakers began to wonder which direction to pursue next.

In December, 1988, Popular Cinema (8) published Xiao Xin's article "Does China Film Face Crisis?", in which the author raised an incisive question and expressed his anxiety about the direction of the Chinese film industry's development in the future. What is the future of the Chinese film industry? Does Chinese film industry need "film star system?" Through the analysis of the Chinese film industry's own features, this research tries to answer these questions.

NOTES

(1) Contemporary Cinema is a professional film magazine which is geared to the needs of the filmmakers, film lovers, critics, teachers and students of the Film Academy.

(2) Semesel, George Stephen, "Film in China: An Introduction." Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic (New York: Praeger, 1987) P.11

(3) Zheng, Ji-hua, A History of China Film Industry, 2 vols. (Beijing: China Film Publishing House, 1981), P.8

(4) Zheng, P.10

(5) Zheng, P.14

(6) In Zheng's A History of China Film Industry, the Chinese film industry before 1949 is divided into three periods according to social film history. These three periods are 1896-1931, 1931-1937, and 1937-1949.

(7) "Modern Liberation Model" films were the representative works of the "three-stress" principles, which insisted that of all characters, the positive should be stressed; of all positive characters, the heroic should be stressed; of all heroic characters, the main heroic character should be stressed.

(8) Popular Cinema is the most popular film magazine in China since 1953. The annual Hundred Flowers Film Award is held by this magazine.

CHAPTER II

RECOVERY PERIOD (1976-1979)

Distribution

After the fall of the "Gang of Four" (1) in 1976, it took the cinema a few years before getting itself back into action. At the beginning, no one knew very well how the political situation would develop, and the reorganization of the studios took time. During this period, three types of films helped fill the gap as the film industry recovered from the years of upheaval. Between 1976 and 1979, 300 pre-1966 films were re-released, while another 100 awaited distribution. Such films served as illustrations, for audience and filmmakers, of some of the past strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese film.

On the other hand, foreign films, from a wider range of countries than before, were distributed in China. After ten years of isolation from the rest of the world, the Chinese audience had their first chance to see foreign films, from which they noticed both the backwardness of the Chinese film industry and the backwardness of their material world. In a nation where access to foreign things was limited, audience flocked to these exotic works.

Beginning with the Spring Festival in 1979, some of the classic Chinese films from before 1949 reappeared on screen. The shows of THE SPRING WATER FLOWS TO THE EAST, SONG AT THE NIGHT, THE DAUGHTER OF A FISHERMAN and many other excellent films not only provided the chance to let the younger Chinese generation know the history of China and its film industry, but also shocked many film experts at home and abroad. They were so surprised to see that early in the 1930's, China had already made these so-called "realism films," which tried to reveal the social problems and present the common people's difficulties and lives. The appearance of these films was even earlier than Italian's neo-realism film movement.

Film Production

While old films were being re-screened, more and more new works were seen, expressing realism afresh, in an atmosphere evoking the Hundred Flowers period. (2) Two major categories could be perceived in this period: the first concerned films which exposed the drama of recent history, often inspired by the "literature of scars." (3) The major concern of the films was the "Cultural Revolution." The destruction and suffering of the "ten year's catastrophe" was an important theme. Furthermore, the "Gang of Four" served as scapegoats for all mistakes

made. These works realistically depict people's suffering and anxiety during the "Cultural Revolution." Typical films of the kind are THE SMILE OF THE TORMENTED MAN (Kunaoren de xiao, 1979) and VIBRATION OF THE LIFE (Shenhue de chanyin, 1979). THE SMILE OF THE TORMENTED MAN, directed by Yang Yanji and Deng Qimin, described a newspaper reporter's anxiety during the "Cultural Revolution." In many conditions, he had to write the articles for the newspaper against his will and the facts. He was praised by the leader, but he was blamed by the people. He could not be understood by readers or even by his wife. He was put in a tight spot. Finally he stopped telling lies to the readers. But as a result, he was put in jail. After the "Cultural Revolution," he came out of jail, and went back to work again. Through out the story, the film tries to reveal how serious a disaster the "Cultural Revolution" brought to people's souls. THE SMILE OF TORMENTED MAN implies strong criticism of high party members and control of the media for political purpose during the "Cultural Revolution." THE VIBRATION OF THE LIFE is about a young violin player's experience before, during, and after the "Cultural Revolution." Through the course of his leaving the stage and coming back to the stage, the film tries to reveal the disasters the "Cultural Revolution" brought to the intelligent populace.

During this period, there were many other realistic films released under this theme. IT IS NOT FOR LOVE (Bu shi weile aiqing, 1979) depicts three brothers' experience during the "Cultural Revolution" and their attitudes after the ten year experience. THE MAPLE-TREES (Feng, 1979) is a sad story about two young lovers. The "Cultural Revolution" destroyed their love and their lives. This kind of film also include BAMBOOS (Zhu, 1980), and RAINY NIGHT IN BAOSHAN (Bashan ye yu, 1980).

On the other hand, there were entertainment films on the most varied topics: crime stories, comedies, melodramas, adventure films, and filmed operas. These types of films answered a real need of the public. The public had an obvious desire to reject the revolutionary abstractions of the previous period's offerings and to return to various aspects of everyday life. Basing itself on realism once more, the cinema began again to talk about life, returning to all the subjects forbidden for over ten years, especially love. Thus, many films sought to describe detailed everyday life situations, but unfortunately the result was rarely at the level of aspirations, perhaps because the directors remained content with skimming over reality, which is presented very superficially, and also because they did not attempt to deal with the basic social problems. The typical works of this type are LOOK AT THIS FAMILY (Qiao zheyi

jiazi, 1980), TWINS COMES IN PAIRS (Talia he talia, 1979), and LUSHAN IDYLL (Lushan lian, 1980), which won all three film awards in 1980. (4) Because of "Revolutionary Art's" influence on film production, especially Jiang Qing's "Three Emphasis" arts principle during the "Cultural Revolution," although filmmakers tried hard to make films more realistic, they often continued representing reality in an artificial and false manner: the acting was theatrical and lacking naturalness; the set had no connection with the real life; the clothes were too proper; and the make-up was too intense. The Chinese film industry did not break through the old connection of the "Liberational Model Film" until the release of Xie Jin's THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN (Tianyunshan Chunqi) at the end of 1980.

NOTES

(1) The "Gang of Four" is called the anti-communist party group. Jiang Qing, the widow of late Chairman Mao, is the leader of this group. The other three members are Zhang Chun-qiao, Yao Wen-yun, and Wang Hong-wun.

(2) The "Hundred Flowers" art policy was first used by Chairman Mao in his speech in Yan'an in 1931. It has been the art policy in China since 1949.

(3) "Literature of Scars" began at the end of the 1970's. The central concern is that of the "Cultural Revolution," and the disasters it brought to the Chinese people.

(4) The prizes awarded in China each year are of three varieties: the Hundred Flowers Prize, which is awarded on the basis of postal votes by the readers of the film magazine Popular Cinema; the critic's award, the Golden Rooster Award, which is decided by a panel of experts, filmmakers, producers, screenwriters etc. The last one is the Government Award.

CHAPTER III

NEW ERA (1980-1987)

Return to Realism

In the 1980's, Chinese film began to directly reflect the concerns and problems of the nation. Many of the new films, like contemporary short stories and plays, were set in the "Cultural Revolution," or explained their character's current difficulties by reference to these years. After the sterility of the "model operas" and the "model films," (1) Chinese audiences could not accept those typical figures with "three emphasis" on the screen any more. They wanted to see the films which reflect the reality.

The release of THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN in 1980 shocked the entire film world. Following this example, A LOVE-FORSAKEN CORNER (Peiaiqing yiwan de jiaoluo, 1982), AT MIDDLE AGE (Rendao zhongnian, 1982), and many other realistic films appeared. These three films are considered the milestones of the Chinese realist film of the new period. They symbolize the great success of realism in recent Chinese film history.

THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN, directed by the most famous film director, Xie Jin, went back into the twenty

years from the anti-rightist struggle (2) in 1957 to 1978, when China was full of frustration and changes. The film traces three main characters' different experience and their living attitudes during and after the "Cultural Revolution, and tries to criticize the weaknesses of humanity. Jin Guo, in his article "The Achievements and Shortcomings of THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN," points out that the scenarist-director, not content with ordinary objective narrative methods, bravely opened a new path, finding a unique way of focusing on the inner world. To create a new aesthetic, he experimented with plot construction, narrating stories in the light of traces of each character's subjective thought.

(3) The film was highly praised by filmmakers and critics at the first Golden Rooster Awards. It won medals for Best Film, Best Director, Best Cinematograph, and Best Design. It also won the love of Chinese audiences. It won the fourth Hundred Flowers Awards for the Best Feature Film in 1980.

If THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN is important for opening a way to the restoration and advancement of realism, then A LOVE-FORSAKEN CORNER has even more significance. The film describes a people's life and love in an isolated area. They fight and struggle against their fates, but they finally lose. They have to follow the old tradition, which has been followed by hundreds of generations for thousands of years. It is a very sad story. The film won the Best

Scenario at the second Golden Rooster Awards in 1981. The plot of this film moved the audiences deeply and gave them much to think about. Xia Hong said that this film offered audiences both historical depth and realistic insights. (4)

In 1982, the Changchun Film Studio finished another realist film, AT MIDDLE AGE, which led realist Chinese films toward perfection. Its success was due, to a great extent, to Chen Rong's story of the same name, and to Pan Hong's excellent performance in the film. AT THE MIDDLE AGE, the best-picture winner of all three national film awards in 1983, is a typical post-Cultural Revolution film. It was the favorite domestic film among the intellectuals and well-received by the general population. The film portrays a typical middle-age intellectual Chinese's character on screen. The film is about an ophthalmologist, Lu Wen-ting, who has been sent back and forth between labor farms for "re-education" and the operating room, where she gives senior officials eye operations. She bears the rigors of her life without complaint. After the Cultural Revolution, she returns to the hospital and works even harder, despite her own misfortune and poor living conditions. Going from one operation room to another, getting by on little sleep, she eventually collapses of exhaustion. The film praises her sacrificial spirit --- give all you have but ask for nothing. The film reflects the middle-age intellectual's life and her

problems. The film touches on a significant social problem: for the first time in history, the position and role of intellectuals in the building of socialist modernization has been brought to the screen.

From THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN and A LOVE-FORSAKEN CORNER to AT THE MIDDLE AGE, Chinese films of the new era have been marching on the road of realism and are gaining in significance. After the release of these three films, more realist films appeared. Most of them reflect social problems or describe the contemporary life of the common people: their happiness and anxiety.

NEIGHBORS (Linju, 1982) and MANDARIN DUCK APARTMENT (Yuanyan Lou, 1987), directed by Zheng Dong-tian, are two typical films of contemporary life. NEIGHBORS depicts a group of people who live in the same building. They come from different backgrounds, but in this big family, they help each other and set up a new family. At the end of the film, each family moves to a new apartment, which has better facilities and environment, but they all yearn for their previous building. They have happy memories of living there. MANDARIN DUCK APARTMENT, from another angle, depicts five young couples's daily life. Although they live in the apartment, they will not be disturbed by kids yelling in the hallway, or worry about the stove anymore, they still have many other problems. Through a series of events, they find

that they still need help and understanding from each other.

In addition to these realist films of contemporary life, many films reflect the problems in the recent reform of China. *HOT-BLOODED* (Xue Zongshi Rede, 1983) describes a reformer's difficulties in reform of the factory. *YAMAHA FISH STALL* (Yamaha Yudang, 1986) and *ZHENZHEN'S HAIR SHOP* (Zhenzhen de fawu, 1987) describe the individual Chinese producer's bitterness and happiness. These films praise producers' pioneering spirit and their contribution to the reform of China and the Chinese people.

UNDER BRIDGE (Daqao Xiamian, 1983) is the story of a young girl who was sent to the countryside to be re-educated during the "Cultural Revolution." There she met and fell in love with a young boy who had also been sent to the countryside. He soon left China for Canada, and left the pregnant girl alone. A few months later, she got his first and also last letter from Canada, in which he told her that he had already gotten married to a wealthy woman. After the "Cultural Revolution," she went back to Shanghai and became a tailor. The tragedy of the girl's condition is obvious to the audience, because both sex and pregnancy out of wedlock are considered dirty and licentious by the Chinese. The unbearable humiliation of the girl and her child almost destroy her courage and faith in life until she meets a young man who, with extraordinary courage, wants to marry

her. This film won the Hundred Flowers Awards for the Best Film in 1983. When it was shown in Hong Kong and the U.S.A., it was highly praised by the critics.

During this period, there were also many realist films concerning the topic of the "Cultural Revolution." TEARSTAIN (Leihen, 1982), A CORNER IN THE CITY (Dushili de Cunzhuang, 1984), THE STORY THAT SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN PLACE (Bugai Fasheng de Gushi, 1985), OUR FIELD (Weman de Tianye, 1983), and LIFE (Ren Sheng, 1986) are all placed into this category.

In 1985, Lu Xiaoya's GIRL IN RED (Jeshang Luxing Hongqunzi) led Chinese realist films toward a higher stage. The film is about An Ran, a teenage girl who always talks candidly and wears a red skirt. During these years, most Chinese wore muted colors, thus, the color red symbolizes individuality. Because of her red skirt and strong opinions, An Ran is rejected by her schoolmates and teacher. The film makes its sympathetic plain when the girl disapproves of an unethical plan to get her into college, even though her beloved sister takes part in the scheme on her behalf. The film received strong response from the filmmakers, critics, and audience. It won the Best Picture of all three national China Film Awards, and was highly praised by film critics both at home and abroad. The film is considered as a symbol of the maturity of Chinese realist film.

Flourishing of the Chinese Film Industry

For the Chinese film industry, the 1980's were a harvest period. Since 1980, more and more film studios have appeared, and about 130 feature films have been made and released each year.(5)

In order to meet the needs of Chinese audiences, every film studio produced many entertainment films. Among them, comedy and Kung-fu are the most popular film genres in China. SHAO LIN TEMPLE (Shao Lin Si, 1983), BOYS FROM SHAO LIN (Shaolin Xiaozi, 1984), KING OF THE SOUTH BOXER (Nan Quan Wan, 1985), SILK COTTON KASAYA (Mumian Jiasha, 1986), and GRAVE ROBBER OF EAST-TOMBS (Dongling Dadao, 1988) are very popular Kung-fu films in these years. Most of the stories of these films went back to the Qing dynasty (1616-1911) or even earlier. Each film tells a moving story. Most of the time, the story is related to a famous event or a famous person in ancient Chinese history. At the same time, each film shows the audience one or two types of Kung-fu. Through viewing all of the movies, audiences can systematically know different sects of kung-fu. At the same time, the film tries to transfer the idea to the audience that justice can always beat evil. The purpose of kung-fu is not to attack, but rather to defend.

Another popular type of film is comedy. Since 1980, each film studio has produced many excellent comedies. These

films not only served as entertainment, but also served as a window, from which Chinese audiences could know people's work and life in different places and get to know their difficulties and problems. OUR NUBAISUI (Zanman de Nubaisui, 1982) and HAPPY DOOR (Xi Yingman, 1983), the Best Picture winner of Hundred Flower Awards in 1983, are the most famous films about people's life and work in the countryside. The film depicts how peasants work hard to get rich, and how they help each other to change the face of the poor village. CHEN HUANSHENG GOES TO DOWNTOWN (Chen Huansheng Shangcheng, 1982) is a story of a peasant's visit to downtown. Through his visit, the film tries to compare the huge differences between countryside and city, and let the audience know that in most areas of China, living conditions are still very bad; we must work hard to change this situation. THE CHARMING ORCHESTRA (Miren de Yueduei, 1985), on the other hand, shows the audience the great changes that happened in the countryside. Through the peasants' hard work, they became rich. But money is not everything. The peasants also need entertainment. This film describe the course of the set-up of a peasant's orchestra in the countryside, its difficulties, and its development.

At the same time when some films try to show the peasants' work and life in the countryside, many films pick up the "wait-for-job youth" as their hero or heroine in the

films. SUN SET STREET (Xizhao Jie, 1984), and TWO SONS RUN THE SHOP (Erzi Kaidian, 1988) are two typical films of this kind. The films try to express the difficulties and problems young boys and girls have in the city. They have no stable work or income. But they cannot stay at home to rely on their parents. They have to find their means of living. The films trace the course of their struggle for living, and conclude that under the open policy of government, those "wait-for-job" youth not only can support themselves by working hard, but also can help the government to solve many problems.

There have also been a lot of children's films produced in the 1980's. China has a special Children's Film Studio which produces about 6 to 10 children's films every year since 1980. Some of them are cartoons, but most of them are feature films concerning primary and high school students' study and life. One of the problems is that most of these films serve as an educational tool. So the films are more or less formulated, and preach a lot. You can clearly see these phenomena from the movies LITTLE FOOTBALL PLAYER (Xiaozuqiu Dueiyun, 1983), LONG LIVE YOUTH (Qingchun Wansui, 1983), and OUR CLASSMATES (Wu de Tongcumen, 1987).

Another very important aspect during this period is co-production. Since 1980, Chinese film studios have signed numerous contracts with Hong Kong, Japan, Italy, and U.S.A.

for film production, and finished many important films. Many films won awards at film festivals at home and abroad. SHAO LIN TEMPLE, BURN OF YUAN MING YUAN (Hueshao Yuan Ming Yuan, 1984), QUEEN MOTHER CIXI (Cixi Taihou, 1984), and NIGHT OF SHANGHAI (Yie Hanghai, 1983) won awards in Hong Kong. FIELD (Yun Yie, 1984) won the Hundred Flowers Award in 1988. CHINA RUN, a documentary feature film about Stan Cottrell's run across China, won the Best Documentary Film award at the Los Angeles Film Festival in 1987 (It is a 1988 Master's thesis film by Mickey Grant from the University of North Texas). THE LAST EMPEROR, co-produced with an American company, won nine Oscar awards in 1988. The success of these co-operation films not only raises the technique level of the Chinese film industry, but also helps to open the Chinese film market to the world and at the same time, leads Chinese films to the international film market.

Xie Jin's Film Model

Xie Jin, born in 1923, is one of the most famous and also the most important film directors in recent Chinese film history. From 1954, when he made his first movie SPRING IN THE WATER VILLAGE (Shuixiang de Chundian), to 1988, when his best film HIBISCUS TOWN was released, he made a total of 22 films. Among them, TWO STAGE SISTERS (Wutai Jiemei, 1964), RED WOMAN'S DETACHMENT (Hongse Niangzijun, 1966), THE

LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN, HERDSMAN (Muma Ren, 1983), GARLAND AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN (Gao Shangxia de Huahuan, 1984), HIBISCUS TOWN, and two other films won a total of 16 awards at home and abroad. Among them were two Golden Rooster Award, five Hundred Flowers Awards for the Best Film, and he won the title of The Best Film Director three times. This is unique in Chinese film history.

Because his films have been great successes and won the loves of Chinese audiences since 1954, especially since 1980, filmmakers and critics have begun to systematically study his filmmaking method and call it the "Xie Jin's Film Model."

First of all, Xie Jin believes that film, as the most popular entertainment tool, must win as much audience's support as possible. He declared that his films are for all the Chinese people. Xie Jin pays careful attention to the selection of the script. He believes that a good script can make an excellent film half a success. Unlike other directors, Xie Jin always uses scripts which are adopted from excellent or award winning novels. Most of them touch social problems with which people are most concerned at that time. TWO STAGE SISTER, THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN, HERDSMAN, THE GARLAND AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN, and HIBISCUS TOWN are all good examples. This first step decides the fate of the movie.

At the same time, he uses "story" to attract the audience. The plot is tortuous and moving; there is always a large climax. Xie Jin likes big reunion endings. He believes that this is also the desire of the audience. You can clearly notice this distinguishing feature from his 22 films. There is no exception. It is commonly said that the mood of most of his films are serious and most of the films have a strong political tendency. But he always makes his movies in a lively style and expresses the political opinions lyrically. This is his biggest invention.

In addition, Xie Jin believes that the success of the film depends on the plot and character of the film. Hence in the course of filmmaking, Xie Jin never misses the chance to provide plot and character on screen. He is famous for his "social-realistic tearjerker." (6) From THE RED WOMAN'S DETACHMENT and THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN to HIBISCUS TOWN, Xie Jin has provided the audience with a common ground, the darkened theatre, where all, young and old, men and women, can have a good cry without the feeling of shame or embarrassment. Xie Jin's films succeed in offering an effective remedy for the nation's psychological health. Xie Jin is known as a woman's director, who has the knack of bringing out the best appearance as well as acting ability of an actress. Most of the heroines in Xie Jin's films are traditional Chinese women's figures. They were born and grew

up in China. They have traditional moral excellence and through them, the films highly praise China's traditional virtues.

In the form of filmmaking, Xie Jin follows the traditional Hollywood film model. He stresses movement of the shot, emphasis of the shot, and the use of montage.

However, although he has been very successful during these years, Xie Jin's films are limited by his ideas guiding his artistic creation and the film concept. The limitation of his ideas influence the depth of the film, and the limitation of film concepts influence his searching for other art forms. In 1986, Popular Cinema published an article "Talking about Xie Jin Film Model." Through the analysis of Xie Jin's works and their influence on the audience, the author raise a key question which concerned the whole film circle and the audience. "Is Xie Jin's film model the developmental direction of the Chinese film industry?" Controversies about Xie Jin's film model began in film circles. Many filmmakers believe that it is the direction of the Chinese film industry. However, many new concepts also appeared, which challenged Xie Jin's model. The main stream of the challengers is the so called "Fifth Generation" of directors in China.

NOTES

(1) "Model Opera" and "Model Film" are the special terms used during the "Cultural Revolution." Every art work had to follow this form. "Model Opera" stresses "three emphasis" in the art work, that is the emphasis of a representative event, the emphasis of a representative character, and the emphasis of a representative figure.

(2) "Anti-rightist Struggle" was the revolutionary movement led by Chairman Mao in 1957. The spearhead of the movement was directed at those intelligent persons who pointed out the mistakes which the Communist Party made.

(3) Jin Guo, "The Achievements and Shortcomings of the LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN," Film Culture, March 1981.

(4) Xia Hong, "Film Theory in the People's Republic of China: The New Era," ed. George Stephen Semsel, Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1987). P.40

(5) Clark, Paul, Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). P.186

(6) Tung Timothy, "The Work of Xie Jin: A Personal Letter To the Editor," ed. John D.H.Downing, Film & Politics in the Third World (New York: Praeger Publisher, 1987) P.200

CHAPTER IV

THE FIFTH GENERATION OF FILMMAKERS

Introduction

Since 1983, with the success of a group of films at home and abroad, a new generation of Chinese filmmakers has appeared. They are the so called "Fifth Generation" of film directors. Ma Ning describes them in this way:

The Fifth Generation, as they have come to be known, lean toward formal innovation and experiment. Rejecting the primacy of the literary qualities of films, a tradition in Chinese filmmaking, they attach great importance to cinematic qualities and rely heavily on visual elements and the dynamic interrelations between image and sound to express their perceptions. Although they continue to draw on literary sources, they no longer use melodrama as the main structuring principle, but instead start with a potential story and in the process of telling it, fragment it into many small units. Such fragmentation turns films finished product into film as process so that the cultural voices that speak it are revealed. In that sense, their films are not so much stories as discourses commenting upon the border cultural and political context from which they came. (1)

The Fifth Generation directors have some common features. They were all born in the 1950's, and grew up with the new China. As the generation that grew up with the cultural revolution, they both suffered and benefited from it. Each of them has an unusual story about their past. Most

of them were sent to the countryside, factories, or army to be re-educated. This unusual experience made them mature and meditative. One can clearly see the influence of their personal lives on their works. One of the most important feature of these directors is their strong political commitment. Almost all of their films have a strong sense of history and mission. Their aim is to create a new vision of reality. You can clearly feel this from their innovative works. ONE AND EIGHT concentrates on the negative characters and normal human feelings, which had not been allowed to be presented in the Chinese cinema since 1949; YELLOW EARTH depicts the miserable living conditions of the peasants in the outlying districts of China and the influence of traditional feudalism on them; RED SORGHUM, on the other hand, describes the wild nature, hatred, and love of human beings. Through their works, these young directors try to critique the traditional cultural values which have proven to be a strongly resistant to the reform and change of Chinese society.

However, despite the fact that they are all listed under the term "The Fifth Generation," these young directors' works are totally different from each other, and also different from the previous generations. They showed a distinct, individual style, and this style was decided by the artist's ideology. This ideology, in turn, shows the

difference between artists in understanding reality and also reflects the artists' different views in looking at the function of film media in expressing the artists' ideas. You can easily tell this from their works. In this chapter, four of these young directors and their works will be introduced as representatives, from which a further understanding can be gained of this generation's features and its far-reaching influence on Chinese film history.

Zhang Junzhao And ONE AND EIGHT

Zhang Junzhao, born in the early 1950's, was a student of the Directing Department of the Beijing Film Academy. During the "Cultural Revolution," he spent five years in the army. Before he entered the Beijing Film Academy, he was a staff member of a theatre in Urumqi, Xinhjian province. After he graduated, he was assigned to the Guangxi Film Studio, which is a small film studio in China and lacking in good equipment and good filmmakers. But it is this film studio that gave young directors a chance to explore the experimental films. In 1983, along with Zhang Yimou, the winner of the best camera person prize in the Golden Rooster Awards in 1983, Zhang Junzhao finished his maiden work, ONE AND EIGHT (Yige he Bage), which is based on a narrative poem by the late poet Guo Xiaochuan. This film caused strong repercussions among the film circle. Many critics praised

their innovation on film language, and affirmed the great significance of the film in Chinese film history. However, the Central Film Bureau completely negated the film. Members of the Bureau pointed out that the film had serious ideological problems. It had to be modified before it could be released to the public. After two years of hard work, the film was finally ready to show the public in 1985.

The film is set in a particular period of history --- the anti-Japanese war in 1941. In a military prison of the Eighth Route Army, Wang Jin, a company political instructor, is suspected of being a spy for the Japanese, and jailed along with eight criminals: three bandits, three deserters, a Japanese spy, and a landlord who poisoned a well. Because the Japanese begin the mopping up operation in the communist base, the Chinese troops must move constantly. In this condition, the unit guarding the prison has to take the prisoners along on a night march and hope to break through the enemy blockade. During this march, Wang Jin does his best to revive sense of duty in his followers and persuades the criminals to cooperate with the unit in spite of his own problems. However, the situation begin to become serious when they are surrounded by the Japanese. Cut off from the main force, it is impossible for this unit, with the chained prisoners, to break through the enemies surrounding them. The prisoners have become a big obstacle in their move. At

this moment, Xu Zhi, the security officer, orders the prisoners to be executed. But when it is Wang Jin's turn, those who believe him innocent ask the officer to spare his life and have further investigation. Wang Jin knows that it is impossible to prove his innocence under this condition. He must make a decision; otherwise, the whole unit will be destroyed soon. He decides to sacrifice himself. When he says to the officer and the soldiers of the 8th Route Army, "Please don't waste time; kill me with knife, and save the bullet to shoot the Japanese," the whole unit is deeply moved by his offer. The officer decides to fight at the front and leave the prisoners in the rear. However, the situation is getting worse. More and more soldiers die at the front. The death of the soldiers stirs those criminals to great indignation. They want weapons to kill the Japanese. Xu Zhi finally frees Wang Jin and others so that they can take part in the battle. They fight bravely. The chief bandit and the deserters kill a lot of Japanese and lay down their lives in the battle. The others, in two separate groups, reach the safety at last.

Towards the end, however, there is a key scene that totally infuriated the film authorities. In it, one of the bandits, who has only a single bullet left, uses it to kill the nurse who has been traveling with him and who is threatened with rape by the Japanese patrol that has

captured her. This was felt to be too downbeat and had to be changed. The final copy ends with the prisoner using a full magazine of bullets to shoot all the Japanese and rescue the nurse.

To judge the plot, ONE AND EIGHT is just another war story one can often see on the Chinese screen. But one can sense the difference immediately when it is viewed. It is different from others in genre. First, the film depicts the images of a group of people, who have not been represented before, from a positive point of view. Although they are a bandit and deserters, they are human. This concept is best reflected in the last fighting scene. Second, the film, for the first time, depicts the internal struggle among the Chinese Communist Party which victimized many innocent people. Last, the visual representation of ONE AND EIGHT differs from other films made by a former generation. The film tries to use black and white to express a certain kind of mood.

The film is, no doubt, a challenge to the traditional Chinese point of view of the revolution. Although it ended up being criticized and revised, the freshness it brought to the Chinese screen will not be neglected. Zhang Yimou's words sum up this section: "Our simplest and most practical aim is to innovate. As the saying goes, 'the son need not look exactly like the father.' Each generation should have

its own ideas and aspirations." (2)

Chen Kaige And YELLOW EARTH

Chen Kaige, born in the early 1950's, is from a famous artist's family. His father, Chen Huaikai, had been a famous film director in China. When Chen kaige was 15 years old, along with his parents, he was sent to Yan'an, the south border of China, to be re-educated. Later he joined the army. Before he entered the directing department of the Beijing Film Academy, he was a worker in a factory in Beijing. After he graduated, he was assigned to the Beijing Film Studio, the biggest film studio in China, to work. There he spent two years as assistant director to Zhang Huaxun. Later, after the show of ONE AND EIGHT, he found that the small studio was better for his career. In 1984, he went to the Guangxi Film Studio. Cooperating with Zhang Yimou, he finally finished this historically-significant work in Chinese film history, YELLOW EARTH.

In 1985, YELLOW EARTH won four international festival prizes in Hawaii, Nantes, Spain, and Locarno. It is considered a companion piece to ONE AND EIGHT. Certain features of ONE AND EIGHT persist: "Cinematography noted for still shots and expressive composition; meaningful mise-en-scene; minimal plot and characterization; strange or unusual narrative strategies; and, most important of all, deviation

from the standard treatment of Chinese materials." (3) But YELLOW EARTH has been ostentatiously overlooked by China's domestic film awards. The pressure comes from the Film Bureau. They believe that the film should not depict the backwardness of China and the Chinese people's miserable life, their poverty and their ignorance.

The film is set in the same historical period as ONE AND EIGHT. But the anti-Japanese war recedes into the background. The story is very simple. In 1939, the 8th Route soldier Gu Qing is sent from the Communist base Yan'an to the arid north of Shan'an Province (known as Shanbei) to collect folk songs. He reaches a village on the northern bank of the Yellow River during a wedding ceremony and is shocked by both the prevailing degree of poverty and the pride of the youth. He finds lodging in a local farmer's cave. There he establishes relationships with the farmer's daughter Cuiqiao, a teenage girl, and her brother Hanhan. However, after he leaves, promising to return for her, her father persists in her marriage to a much older man she doesn't know. Rather than submit, she determines to run away and goes south to Yan'an. But as she makes her night crossing of the Yellow River, singing the song that Gu taught her, her voice breaks off in mid-syllable. A few month later, when Gu returns to the village, he finds that the girl's father is leading the massed villagers in prayers

for rain to the Dragon King. The film ends with the scene of Hanhan's struggling against the movement of the crowd and trying to reach him. But Gu Qing seems ever further away.

It is a simple story, but never a mundane one. Ma Ning makes the following statement about it: "The melodramatic potential of the story is very strong, but the visual and aural elements of the film are so strikingly different from what precedes it that no spectator will fail to perceive the "other" meanings for which the director has taken pains to break with the norm to express." (3)

YELLOW EARTH poses a number of issues that intrigue both censors and audiences. First, the film seems to be ironic: the soldier's failure to bring about any changes (whether material or ideological) in the face of invincible feudalism and superstition among the masses transgresses socialist literary standards and rejects the official signified standards. Second, the censors were highly dissatisfied with the film's indulgence of poverty and backwardness, projecting a negative image of China. Still, there were no politically offensive sequences to lead to full-scale denunciation and banning. But with its ambiguities, YELLOW EARTH had better luck with the Film Bureau when compared to ONE AND EIGHT. Finally, for the audience accustomed to tear-jerking melodramas, such as the works of Xie Jin discussed in the last chapter, YELLOW EARTH

is not interesting. It uses faces, glances and reaction shots to reveal characters and relationships. Many Chinese audience believe that the film misses most of the opportune moments for dialogue and tension, and is thus, unnecessarily opaque and flat. Nevertheless, when the film premiered at the 1985 Hong Kong International Film Festival, it was lauded immediately as "an outstanding breakthrough," "expressing deep sentiments poured onto one's national roots" and "a bold exploration of film language." Such an enthusiastic reception modified the derogatory official reaction towards the film, and in turn, prompted audiences to give it some box-office support.

Aesthetically speaking, in the film, Zhang Yimou's camera work is excellent for its still shots of a vast, barren world of hills and valleys with a sparse population living in the caves. The camera seldom moves except in two scenes: the drum ritual in Yan'an, and the prayer ritual at the end. The film uses a lot of static photography which creates a heavy and stagnant mood.

YELLOW EARTH also draws upon traditional Chinese peasant paintings. All shots were taken either early in the morning or late in the evening, so that the sky looks gray and oppressive, the earth, yellow and foreboding, and the contours of every object sharper than usual. For the interior scenes, such as evening in the cave, the director

uses oil lamps as the main source of light, one in the foreground and one in the background, so that the contours of the old peasant are striking. The use of lines and strokes to portray figures instead of nuances in color or shades is typically Chinese.

What Chen Kaige achieves in this film, more than Zhang Junzhao's ONE AND EIGHT, is conceptual art rather than realism or naturalism. Most important are the ideas, not the appearances. What the camera leads the audience to see is not landscape, characters, or rituals, but the history of Chinese civilization. The film leads audience to ponder why this ancient nation and culture should lag behind others in modern times.

Tian Zhuangzhuang and His Films

Tian Zhuangzhuang, born in the early 1950's, came from a famous artist's family. His parents were a famous actor and actress in Chinese film history. He loved art when he was young, but the "Cultural Revolution" broke his dream. During the "Cultural Revolution," both his parents were criticized, and he was sent to the countryside to be a farmer. Later, he joined the army. Before he entered the Beijing Film Academy, he was a photographic technician in the Beijing Agricultural Film Studio. During his studies at the Film Academy, his artistic ability began to appear. His

short film SMALL COURTYARD was widely praised by his teachers and classmates. After he graduated from the college in 1982, he was assigned to the Children's Film Studio to work. He has finished a lot of excellent films; among them, ON THE HUNTING GROUND, and HORSE THIEF best represent his view of ideology. Ma Ning describes him in this way:

Of all the new filmmakers, Tian Zhuangzhuang is the first to look at life in the minority regions of China with new perspectives and insights. ON THE HUNTING GROUND deals with the importance of law in structuring life on the inner Mongolia grassland, and HORSE THIEF explores the relationship between religion and men in Tibetan society. With strong anthropological and sociological content, those two films have brought renewed energies to the traditional minority genre. (4)

ON THE HUNTING GROUND can be regarded as a discourse on law. The narrative can be divided into three major sections. The first deals with Wansen Zabu's poaching and punishment. The second describes how Zabu discovers Baya's danger and brings townsfolk to his rescue. And the third section tells how each main character errs, then comes to terms with his mistakes and asks forgiveness. The violation and preservation of Zasa (Zasa means law) constitutes the basic narrative of the film. What the director emphasizes is not the causality of the events, but the characters' attitudes toward them.

In an interview with Tian Zhiangzhuang, he said that ON THE HUNTING GROUND subtly delineates the cruelty of

existence among human beings. On the hunting field, human beings kill animals. They have to obey the certain rules or laws: What to kill, what not to kill, who finds it first, or who kills it first... There is always a law to follow. The one who breaks the rule will be punished. While on grassland, the environment of human being's living, the relationship among human beings is more cruel than that with the animals. Robbing, internal strife, revenge, and killing are not restrained by any law. Here, law or rules, virtue and morality seem very weak and a sham. On the contrary, between human beings and animals, the intuitive knowledge, morality, belief and friendship can be sublimated. But those relationships between human beings is often strangled. It is a terrible tragedy in the world. (5)

HORSE THIEF portrays a man's relationship to religion in Tibet. The main character, Rolbu, has been a horse thief. He is considered to be a dirty man and cannot be accepted by society. Because of his son's death, he believes that it is God's punishment. He decides to stop stealing horses and become a member of society. He and his wife try to be accepted through their devotion to religion. However, unlike characters granted forgiveness in ON THE HUNTING GROUND, his repentance is rejected by society. In his exile, his wife bears him another son. In order to prevent his wife and son from starvation in the winter, he steals two horses and

sends them to the lowland. While his wife and son reach safely, he is caught and severely beaten by the owners of the horse.

Ma Ning points out that in HORSE THIEF, Tian Zhuangzhuang continues his exploration of the complex relationship between superstructure and infrastructure by shifting his attention to religion and how it controls life in Tibetan society. (6) In this film, the director is not so much concerned with the character's fate as he is in how religion determines his perception of the world and affects his personal life. Through the movie, Tian tries to reveal the relationship between nature, human being and God. Unlike European history, which had been ruled by the Pope for a long period, no period in Chinese history has been ruled by God. Hence, the relationship between human beings is that of ruler and ruled. However, the ruler always appeared in the name of God. When the ruled people prostrate themselves before "God," the nature of the people will be, no doubt, distorted. But when the image of "God" is scrambled in the eyes of human beings, people can raise their heads, and the honor of human being is truly returned.

ON THE HUNTING LAND and HORSE THIEF describe not only the stories of Mongolian or Tibetan. They are the stories of human beings. Every Chinese who experienced the "Cultural Revolution" always finds himself in these two films. Using

Tian Zhuangzhuang's own words, "These two films are autobiographies of all contemporary Chinese people."

Zhang Yimou and RED SORGHUM

Zhang Yimou, born in 1951, is from a middle-class family. Like other Fifth Generation directors, during the "Cultural Revolution," he was sent to the countryside to work for three years, and then worked in the factory for seven years. During this period, his only hobby was photography. In 1978, the Beijing Film Academy for the first time reopened after the "Cultural Revolution." His friend encouraged him to sign up for the examination. However, the minimum age limitation was only 22, and he was over 27 at that time. He did not want to lose this chance, so he wrote a letter to the Central Film Bureau and sent some of his photographic works. Fortunately, after their reading his letter and seeing his works, they believed he was a person of extraordinary ability and decided to accept him. In 1982, he graduated from the Beijing Film Academy and was assigned to the Guangxi Film Studio.

He is not only an excellent photographer, but also an excellent actor and director. As a camera person, he took part in the shooting of ONE AND EIGHT, YELLOW EARTH, BIG PARADE, and won The Best Photographer of the Golden Rooster Awards in 1983. As an actor, he played the leading character

in Wu Tianming's film, OLD WELL, and won The Best Actor at the Tolky International Film Festival in 1987. Then he began his directorial career. In 1988, he finished his maiden work RED SORGHUM, which won the Golden Bear Award at the West Berlin International Film Festival.

RED SORGHUM, depicting the story of "my grandfather" and "my grandmother," says Zhang Yimou, happened in a remote village in northern China in the 1930's. It is a love story, but it is different from the traditional one. "My grandfather" murders "my grandmother's" husband, whom "my grandmother" does not love but hates (but nobody confirms this) and "kidnaps" "my grandmother" in the bright red sorghum field on her way back home. The red sorghum witness a man's crazy but sacred and solemn possession of a woman. There they conceive "my father." Later, the Japanese come and trample the red sorghum field. They kill "my uncle Luehan" and "my grandmother."

Like the works of other directors of the Fifth Generation, RED SORGHUM also evoked a strong response in China. In 1988, the film won the Best Film Award of the Hundred Flowers Awards and the Golden Rooster Awards, and Zhang Yimou himself won the title of the Best Film Director. RED SORGHUM was highly praised by the film critics and also won the support of a large number of audiences. In addition, the winning of the international film award, no doubt,

supported the film's box office appeal in China.

Zhang Yimou said: "I want to reveal the impassioned and forceful living attitude. I want to express the high and distant sky, and the deep of the earth." (7) These feelings are deeply expressed in his film. The red sun, red sky, red sorghum, and red sorghum wine are all used to express these feelings.

In this film, the red sorghum wine is wonderful and marvelous. It is the flowing red sorghum field, and the field is the solidified red sorghum wine. Hence, the men who come from the red sorghum field all have red sorghum wine's strong characteristic. Although they are poor and backward, they never influence these people's confidence and justice. They hate the feudal marriage, which has sacrificed endless girls' lives. In the scene of "jolting the Jiaozi," they use a boorish song to express their wrath feeling. On the other hand, in the scene of the wine ceremony, their song expresses their happiness.

Later, the Japanese come. The song of wine becomes their pledge. Also in this bright red sorghum field, the lives of these people brighten when they rush to the Japanese truch. With a sound of blowing of the bomb, these wine workers walk into a real "red world." "My grandfather" became a status symbol, which symbolizes our unsundered nation.

The red sorghum field makes bright red sorghum wine, and then becomes wine workers' bright red blood, and finally raises this bright red national spirit to a high level. All these are lively represented in Zhang's film in the form of the red color. The film uses red color to describe a dignified, ardent, and shocked picture of living struggle, and is a paean to China's national spirit.

At the time when the film was highly praised by the critics and audiences, there existed another opposing opinion. In June, 1988, Popular Cinema opened a special column to discuss this film. Under the title of "The Ponder Caused By RED SORGHUM Phenomenon," Popular Cinema published various critical articles on this film and also on this generation. Among them, Yang Ping's article "After Seeing RED SORGHUM" represents the opinion of this group of people.

(8)

In Yang's article, he said that apart from the words "dirty," "ugly," and "dishonor of the nation of China," which are used to criticize the film, the most serious weakness in the works of this whole generation must be noticed. He believes that under the theme of "self-examination," the Fifth Generation's "new wave" films support the trend of evading reality. In YELLOW EARTH, Chen Kaige tries to explore the cultural soil, on which China relied for a long time. But this exploration is further

based on the filmmaker's deep self-abased ideology. The cruelty in HORSE THIEF, the hesitation in SEABEACH, and the helplessness in BLACK CANNON INCIDENT, all express this ideology. This self-abased ideology develops to its peak in Chen Kaige's film CHILDREN KING. It expresses Chan Kaige's thorough despair.

In RED SORGHUM, Zhang Yimou depicts a group of people in wild nature. He tries to tell people not to worry, not to feel disheartened. We should live like our hero ancestors who dared to love, hate, and die. At the surface, Zhang Yimou seems to thoroughly negate "self-abased" ideology. But as a matter of fact, it is the expression of this ideology from the opposite angle.

From YELLOW EARTH to RED SORGHUM, the criticized attitude of the Fifth Generation has been very cruel. But their weakness appeared at the same time with their works. They overuse aesthetics and the tragedy of life to reveal the progress of society. However, the result of the criticism will not provide a living philosophy which people can follow. Thus, after seeing the films, the audience cannot help but ask "what does the film bring to this sophisticated and hard society?"

More Comments On The Fifth Generation

These young directors are called the Fifth Generation of film directors, and their films are considered to be

exploring works. Many experts believe that their exploring is only limited in style, artistry, and means of expression. However, it is believed that the basic difference from the other generations is their venting of feelings. It is not the venting of individualism. It is the venting of the whole generation.

The "Cultural Revolution" brought to this generation a big disaster. They lost a lot, but at the same time, gained a lot from it. Hence, they look at the world and society more coldly than the other generations. Unlike the Fifth Generation, the works of other generations intend to educate and change people's ideas. Sometimes, they also express their feelings, but it only stays in sentiment and the memory of the old times. The works of these generations try to reveal China's suffering, and use this suffering to arouse people's enthusiasm, while the works of the Fifth Generation try to reveal the source of the suffering, and use this suffering to lead people to pondering and self-examination.

Generally speaking, the works of the Fifth Generation have some common characteristics: The combination of narrative and lyric, the combination of long take and montage, and the combination of documentation and expression. Their creative method in their films can be clearly noticed.

However, the Fifth Generation is facing serious difficulties in China now. Most of their works are not accepted by the Chinese audience. There exists a gap between them. It is in the commercialized world, most of the time, that they have to sacrifice their points to satisfy the needs of the censor and audience. But surely through their hard work, they can finally make excellent movies which both satisfy the audience and express their own opinions.

NOTES

(1) Ma Ning, "Notes on the New Filmmakers," Ed. George Stephen Semsel, Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987) P.72

(2) Film Art Reference Material 8 vols (Beijing: China Film Association, 1985).

(3) Ma Ning, P.77

(4) Ma Ning, P.86

(5) Chen, Ken, "Interview with Tian Zhuangzhuang," Popular Cinema, 2 (Spring, 1988) P.20

(6) Ma Ning, P.88

(7) Xue, Xiao, "The Red Color Extravagant," Popular Cinema 6 (Summer, 1988) P.3

(8) Yang, Ping, "After Seeing RED SORGHUM," Popular Cinema 7 (Summer, 1988) P.9

CHAPTER V

GOING COMMERCIAL

With the development of the Chinese film industry, another noticeable problem appeared. Since 1979, the number of admissions to cinemas has decreased by 1,000,000,000 every year. (1) The rise of television in China in recent years is, no doubt, a main reason. Since 1980, China began to popularize television. Until 1988, almost every family in most of cities had at least one TV set. But the crisis of the audience's disappointment with Chinese films seriously has influenced the Chinese film industry. Although filmmakers have been trying hard to satisfy the audience's needs, the situation has still not gotten better. Since 1985, Chinese film experts have started to discuss reasons for the decreasing attendance at the box office. When Chinese directors wrote, for the first time, the words "thrilling," "tense," "bright," and "relaxed" in the advertisement, a wave of commodity economics began to lash the country. In August, 1987, Popular Cinema published an audience member's letter to the editor, in which Muo Zhong, a ticket seller of one theatre in Shanghai, compared the audience's extremely different attitudes toward the Chinese

movies and the foreign movies according to his observation in the theatre, and raised a very incisive question: Why don't the audiences like the Chinese movies?" (2) From then on, Popular Cinema received a lot of film critics' and audiences' letters on this topic. They raised various questions and gave different opinions.

There are four main trends in the discussion. The first trend advocates making entertainment films. It is believed that this is the only way to attract the audience back to the theatre. Under this prerequisite, filmmakers are encouraged to make stories, abandon political influence, and make more thrilling, musical, and comedy films. Many filmmakers affirm that entertainment films are the main stream in Chinese film development.

The second trend advocates making experimental films. Most of the advocators of this trend are Fifth Generation directors and their supporters. They believe that only "good" films can raise the appreciation level of the Chinese audience, and push forward Chinese film into the international film world. They do not denounce entertainment films, but they point out that there must be some people who make experimental films in China; this is their duty. Maybe they are not accepted by audiences now, but history will witness their contribution to the development of the Chinese film industry.

The third trend advocates making films which can suit both refined and popular taste. The representative director of this group is Xie Jin. One of the opinions which is against this trend is: the audience can be divided into different levels; audiences from different levels have different tastes and different demands; it is impossible for them to enjoy the same movie. However, looking at the facts in the Chinese film history, it is evident that there existed a lot of excellent films which suited audiences from different levels. *SPRING WATER FLOWING TO THE EAST*, *RED WOMAN'S DETACHMENT*, *FEBRUARY IN EARLY SPRING*, *THE LEGEND IN TIANYUN MOUNTAIN*, *MIDDLE AGE*, and *HIBISCUS TOWN* are all convincing examples.

The fourth trend advocates the "Star System." It is believed that the star system is one of the most effective ways of attracting the audience back to the theatre in the shortest time. In September, 1988, Popular Cinema published Huang Tin's article, "China Needs Star System," in which she listed many names of film stars in Hollywood's film history and their contributions to the development of the film industry. She believed that advertising and increasing stars' salaries are the first steps. (3) These discussions in the film circle have been lasting quite a long time, and they are still continuing. In 1987, the crisis of the film industry began to mitigate. At the

beginning of 1988, the box office attendance began to increase. There are three main reasons for this phenomenon. First, since 1985, many cities in China have started to build or re-build theatres with better facilities and conditions. This helped to keep attendance high. Second, since 1986, foreign-film-weeks have been held in most of big cities in China. Among them, American film week, Japanese film week, French film week, and Soviet film week were warmly welcomed by the Chinese audiences. The shows of foreign films did attract a large number of viewers to the theatres. However, the most important reason for increased attendance was the release of a large number of entertainment films in 1988. According to the record of the China Film Distribution Company, among the 150 films released in 1987 and 160 released in 1988, entertainment films made up 55 and 60 percent of the total films, respectively. (4) This indicates that there were about 80 entertainment films shown in Chinese theatres in 1987 and about 100 in 1988.

However, with the appearance of the large amount of entertainment films in China, another crisis is coming. In 1988, for the first time in Chinese film history, a few movies even did not sell a single print for distribution. This "black signal" sounded the alarm to the Chinese film industry. According to further investigation, it was found

that in 1988, more than 35 percent of films failed to sell up to 40 prints (in China, selling 100 prints can only cover the film production expense). Among them, except for a few experiential films made by directors of the Fifth Generation, most were entertainment films. These films made up to 50 percent of the total entertainment films in 1988. (5) Why did it happen? What does this phenomenon tell us?

In December, 1988, Popular Cinema published Xiao Xin's article, "Does the Chinese film industry face crisis?" in which he incisively critiqued the commodity movie tendency. (6) He pointed out that in the front of the economic challenge, many Chinese directors and filmmakers surrendered to money. In order to satisfy some audience's vulgar interest, they made many rough and slipshod films regardless of most of the audience's demands and social effects. Some of these films might get profit in a short time, but the audience will be bored with them pretty soon. According to 1989's film report, it can be clearly seen that many action, comedy, and thrilling films, such as LOVE STORY IN DRUM TOWER (0 print), THE CRAZY TOWN (41 prints), GIRL VILLAGE (14 prints), and THE GUEST FROM CALIFORNIA (25 prints), have already been abandoned by audience. (7) The number of distribution prints of these films fully proved this.

However, in contemporary Chinese society which is controlled by commodity economics, filmmakers have to

consider how to win the box office; otherwise, the film industry cannot exist. The famous film director Qian Jiang pointed out that the film industry in China is facing a serious economic challenge now, but a more serious problem the Chinese filmmakers are facing is the possible big regression of film art in China. (8) Where should the Chinese film industry go? This is the central question, which concerns the Chinese film industry and the whole Chinese people.

NOTES

(1) Jin, Zhongqian, "From The Number Of The Copies To See The Film Industry." Popular Cinema 1 1989, P.2

(2) POPULAR CINEMA, 8 1987, P.2

(3) Huang, Tin, "China Needs Star System." Popular Cinema 9
1988, P.4

(4) Jin, P.2

(5) Jin, P.2

(6) Xiao, Xin, "Does the Chinese Film Face Crisis."
Popular Cinema 12 1988 P.2

(7) Jin, P.2

(8) Xiao, P.2

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Since 1976, the Chinese film industry has experienced great changes and made a great achievements. After a very short recovery period from 1976 to 1979, the Chinese film industry began to enter a new era. Between 1980 and 1987, the Chinese film industry produced about 150 feature films every year, and many excellent works appeared. Among them, YELLOW EARTH, THE LEGEND OF TIANYUN MOUNTAIN, UNDER THE BRIDGE, and HIBISCUS TOWN won the awards in the international film festival.

After 1983, the appearance of the Fifth Generation film directors brought the Chinese film industry new life, and led Chinese film into the international film market. The winner of the international film festival awards, YELLOW EARTH, OLD WELL, AND RED SORGHUM, established the position for Chinese films in the international film industry, and at the same time introduced Chinese culture to the world.

Since 1987, with the influence of commodity economics to the Chinese film market, the Chinese film industry became commoditized. Every film studio tried to produce profitable

films in order to tide over economic difficulties. The result was that in order to satisfy some audiences' vulgar interests, film studios produced large numbers of rough and low-grade films under the title of entertainment. Facing this challenge of the commodity economy, the Chinese film industry began to wonder which way to go. Thus, controversy on the direction of the Chinese film industry started.

Conclusion

As the tool of mass communication, one of the most important features of film is its mass audience characteristic. As an audio-visual arts, the films must be popular and easy to understand by different people from different levels and with different backgrounds. In addition, films viewed as commodities mean that they must show a profit at the box office. Hence, films must win as much audience support as possible. In order to improve box office profits, and attract large audiences back to the theatre, the basic need is to study the psychology of the audience: the concept of their aesthetic, the regularity of their appreciation, change, and development, and what they are most concerned with during special times. Only in this way, can the Chinese film industry produce excellent films which will be accepted and enjoyed by the mass audience.

I agree with the ideas of making entertainment films

and experimental films. But they should not be in the main stream of the Chinese film industry. The set-up of the "star system" can possibly help the box office, but it is limited. Time has changed. The flourishing age of Hollywood worship of idols and stars has never come back. Thus, it is not the most effective way to solve the film crisis.

In conclusion, I think that the making of films which can suit both refined and popular tastes is the direction of the Chinese film industry. It should be the main trend; but at the same time, it should also encourage experimentation. Without experimentation, the Chinese film industry will not develop.

The research for this thesis was finished in May, 1989. By June, 1989, many important events had taken place in China. The suppression of the student's movement by the government indicates a change in the political climate in China. Recently, an "Against Capitalism Freedom Tendency" movement started again in China (a movement under the same name took place in 1984, and it was mainly limited to mass communication areas such as press, film, and television), and it, no doubt, will influence the Chinese film industry. Where will the Chinese film industry go in the future? Nobody knows; but I am sure that nobody would like to see another retrogression of the Chinese film industry. I wish the Chinese film industry would continue to develop under

the "Two Hundred Flower" art policy (the art policy advocated by Chairman Mao in the 1950's), and win more International Film Festival awards in the future.

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