REVOLUTIONARY MELODRAMA: TALES OF FAMILY, KINSHIP, AND THE NATION IN MODERN CHINA

by

SHUANGTING XIONG

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures
and the Division of Graduate Studies of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2022

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Shuangting Xiong

Title: Revolutionary Melodrama: Tales of Family, Kinship, and the Nation in Modern China

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures by:

Roy Chan	Chairperson
Maram Esptein	Core Member
Alison Groppe	Core Member
Bryna Goodman	Core Member
Michael Allan	Institutional Representative

and

Krista Chronister	Vice Provost for Graduate Studies

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Division of Graduate Studies.

Degree awarded June 2022

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Shuangting Xiong

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures

June 2022

Title: Revolutionary Melodrama: Tales of Family, Kinship, and the Nation in Modern China

Revolutionary Melodrama: Tales of Family, Kinship, and the Nation in Modern China investigates the seemingly paradoxical pairing of "revolution" and "melodrama" and the vital role the melodramatic mode played in shaping modern aesthetics in China. Where melodrama is commonly understood to disavow revolutionary change and maintain the status quo, I argue that revolutionary melodramas function as emotional pedagogies in which abstract revolutionary ideas and ideals are made emotionally legible, and political solidarities more possible, to the masses. By deploying melodrama as an analytical category, this dissertation focuses on three representative manifestations of revolutionary melodramatic aesthetics at the micro-level of individuals and families.

Each chapter of my dissertation draws together different media across three key historical moments in twentieth century China: the iconic May Fourth novel *Jia* (1933), the music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* (1945) created in wartime Yan'an, and the model opera film *The Red Lantern* (1970) produced during the height of the Cultural Revolution. In their reappropriations of the melodramatic mode, these texts deploy the affective trope of family and kinship to articulate alternative affiliations and create a passionate revolutionary collective capable of making socio-political change.

Revolutionary Melodrama shows that aesthetic texts can be more than a mere reflection of what people's thoughts and feelings at a given historical moment; they are also mediated experience of history and modernity that can actively shape the affective meaning of family/kinship and transform existing structures of feeling at the same time. On the other hand, while the melodramatic mode provided a powerful, dichotomized trope that can be mobilized in different historical circumstances for varied ideological purposes, it ultimately failed to transcend these sets of dichotomies. Revolutionary melodrama oscillates between personal *si* feelings and public/social *gong* passions, between the particularities of familial and kinship bonds and the universality of the nation-state, and yet is never able to truly transcend such dichotomies.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Shuangting Xiong

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Renmin University of China, Beijing, China

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Chinese, 2022, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, Asian Studies, 2017, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, English, 2015, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, English Language and Literature, 2013, Renmin University of China

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Twentieth Century Chinese Literature and Culture
Film and Media Studies
Affect Theory and Aesthetics
Late Imperial Chinese Literature

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, 2017-2022

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Oregon Humanities Center Dissertation Fellowship, Fall 2020

Asian Studies Graduate Award, Asian Studies, University of Oregon, 2015

PUBLICATIONS:

Xiong, Shuangting. "*The Legend of the Red Lantern* (红灯记, *Hongdeng ji*, 1970)." In *The Lexicon of Global Melodrama*, edited by Heike Paul et al., 143-146. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the writing process, especially writing the dissertation during the pandemic, I became increasingly aware of our minds and bodies' vulnerability and therefore dependency on others. I am forever grateful to the affective kin relations, fictive and literal, that have sustained me during these difficult times. This dissertation therefore is a product of the collective network of care and support, emotionally and intellectually, I received over the past nine years.

First, I am incredibly grateful to my advisor, Roy Chan, whose guidance, feedback, and support have helped me to become a better thinker and scholar, and more importantly a better human. This work would not be possible without our many conversations and exchanges. His brilliance and eloquence are forever humbling, and a model for the kind of scholar I would like to become.

I would also like to thank Maram Epstein for providing generous support, encouragement, and mentorship over the years. Her feedback has the magic power of organizing messy ideas into well-articulated words and paragraphs; it helped shape the project into what it is today. I am indebted to Bryna Goodman's intellectual guidance and her help in making the transition from English to Asian and China studies. Her thorough comments and feedback on my work have challenged and helped me to be a more rigorous and careful scholar. I also consider myself fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Michael Allan whose challenging questions always push me to search for more. Special thanks are due to the late addition to my committee, Alison Groppe, for accepting to become my reader and organizing the writing workshop that helped me to make progress with my writing.

I would like to thank the Oregon Humanities Center, which provided me with financial support and a term off teaching in Fall 2020 so I could work exclusively on my dissertation. I am also grateful to my home department, the Department of East Languages and Literatures, and the Minority Recruitment Funds granted to Roy Chan for offering travel grant so I could conduct research on the reception of model operas during the Cultural Revolution at the Shanghai Municipal Archive in Shanghai, China in Summer 2019.

Many heartfelt thanks also go to my friends, my affective kin—Jun Lang, Pearl (Kwan Yin) Lee, Martha Ndakalako, aka my slay sister, Elise Choi, Simeng Hua, Ying Xiong, Yi Yu, Clay Chou, Ai-ting Chung, and Sabrina (Yunzhu) Tao. Thank you for the many joyful conversations, walks, hikes, and the bouncing of ideas. The strong network of care and support that we build over the years has nourished and sustained me. And let's not forget about my four-legged daughter and best friend, Mira, for being the perfect dog and for the wonderful companionship.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, Zhengming Xiong and Qiuxia Duan, neither of whom received college education, for supporting my decision to attend graduate school and pursue a doctoral degree in the US. Their unconditional support and never-ending love gave me strength and self-worth. The immense debt of gratitude I owe to them is the perfect explanation of the affective ethics of kinship. I am forever indebted to them and can only hope that I will be able to repay their love and care. This dissertation, I hope, would be a starting point.

To my parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S REVOLUTIONARY ABOUT MELODRAMA? ….. 1

II. BETWEEN RESIDUAL AND EMERGENT, EXCESS AND NORM: ARTICULATING A REVOLUTIONARY STRUCTURE OF FEELING IN BA JIN'S *JIA* 46

Between Residual and Emergent: *Jia* as an Affective Archive 56

Naturalizing a New Normative Regime of Emotions and Desires 64

Articulating a Revolutionary Structure of Feeling..... 73

III. PUTTING *MELOS*- BACK IN DRAMA: *THE WHITE-HAIRED GIRL* AS A NEW NATIONAL MUSIC-DRAMA AND THE RETHINKING OF REALISM IN WARTIME CHINA..... 83

The Debates on "National Form" 87

Rethinking (Theatrical) Realism and the New-Music Dram 99

Melodrama, Affective Power, and Audience Reception 120

The Hybrid Mode of the Melodramatic, Realist, and Fantastic in *The White-Haired Girl*..... 124

IV. THE OPERATIC-MELODRAMATIC CRESCENDO: REDEFINING FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN *THE RED LANTERN* 137

"Class *qingyi* Outweighs Mountain Tai": Revolutionary Kinship Reevisioned.... 143

Familial Intimacies, Affective Bonds, and the Melodramatic Mode..... 159

From Type to Model, From Socialist Realism to 2RRs..... 170

V. CODA: MELODRAMA AS DIALECTICS WITHOUT SYNTHESIS ….. 185

REFERENCES CITED …..... 191

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. *The Red Lantern*: Granny Li and Tiemei offer Huilian corn meal with three characters enclosed in one frame 154

2. Granny Li, Tiemei, Huilian and her mother-in-law framed in a long shot..... 154

3. A medium shot emphasizes Huilian's shock upon learning their generosity. 154

4. A medium shot amplifies the mother-in-law's shock and gratitude for their generosity. 154

5. Li Yuhe gives advice. 157

6. Li Yuhe sings an aria to give his advice on which road to take to stay safe. 157

7. Li Yuhe wraps a scarf around Tiemei's neck. 160

8-13. The scene of recounting the revolutionary history of the family 162

14. The female body transformed: Tiemei with clenched fists 165

15. Granny Li sings an aria to urge Tiemei to carry on their family legacy and continue the revolution. 165

16. The revolutionary gaze 165

16. The execution scene 169

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S REVOLUTIONARY ABOUT MELODRAMA?

I was born in an extremely poor peasant family. I suffered endless tortures and pains in the old society. Yet under the nurture and guidance of the loving Mother, the Chinese Communist Party, I became a soldier in the national defense and an honorable Communist Party member. I must be prepared at all times to sacrifice everything of myself for the ultimate interests of the Party and class until my last breath.

Lei Feng, *Lei Feng's Diary*[1]

This is the life story of Lei Feng, an orphan who later became a soldier of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), told in his diary. The authenticity of this diary and even Lei Feng's existence were called into question in later years since his creation occurred through the concerted efforts of the party/state propaganda apparatus. One of the most significant efforts was the "Follow the Examples of Comrade Lei Feng" 像雷锋同志学习 mass campaign initiated by Mao Zedong in 1963 that erected Lei Feng as an iconic socialist hero for mass emulation. Lei Feng's diary was "discovered" after his death and published by the PLA Literature and Art Press as *Diary of Lei Feng* (*Lei Feng riji* 雷锋日记) in the same year. However dubious, the creation of a semi-fictional hero that perfectly embodied socialist ideals for mass emulation is meaningful in helping us understand how it prefigured the promulgation of a more radical model culture during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).[2]

[1] Diary entry of December 27, 1960. *Lei Feng riji* (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1964), 34.

[2] Wendy Larson in her comparative study of the diary of Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, a faithful disciple of Freud, and Lei Feng's diary, points out that for diaries that were written under heavy influence of ideological imperatives, in this case Freud's theories and Maoism, we should interpret them as "windows into ideological constructs" rather than revelations

Because of Lei Feng's identity as an orphan born into a poor family, the trope of family reoccurs throughout his writings. Lei Feng constantly talks about how the Party is like a benevolent mother and the enormous debt of gratitude as well as loyalty he owes to the Party/Mother. The quoted passage above constructs a narrative of the teleological development of the ideologically charged "I"—from a poor peasant child to a soldier and Party member "under the nurture and guidance of the loving Mother, the Chinese Communist Party." Lei Feng's diary very much reinscribes the Party-state's official narrative of a history divided into a pre-liberation era of bitterness and suffering and a post-liberation era of prosperity and happiness. The melodramatic themes of suffering and victimhood get brushed over for the ultimate realization of the collective identification of the singular "I." The Party as a loving and nurturing mother figure leads the first-person narrator to find meaning and an identity as a soldier and Communist Party member, a socially legible identity that in turn rendered Lei Feng intelligible as well as emulatable to millions of people in China.

Similarly in the eponymous narrative film *Lei Feng* (dir. Dong Zhaoqi, 1964) that chronicles the loyal soldier's various good deeds, he characterizes his seeming altruism as simply the act of a son fulfilling his obligation toward his family although he does not have a biological family. When asked why he chooses to donate a large amount of money to a village affected by flood rather than to send it back to his own family, Lei Feng

---

of an authentic inner self. Larson, "The Freudian Subject and the Maoist Mind: The Diaries of Hermine Hug-Hellmuth and Lei Feng," *Psychoanalysis and History* 13.2 (2011), 157-180. The radical version of model culture of the Cultural Revolution is discussed in chapter three of this dissertation.

answers: “No. I have a family. The Party and Chairman Mao are my parents. The People’s Commune is my family. All of China is my family. Now that my family here is affected by the flood, I have the right and responsibility to help them with my donation […] What parent wouldn’t accept a son’s good will?” With the Party and Mao as his parents, the nation as his family, Lei Feng is no longer orphaned but finds a strong sense of belonging in this new form of kinship/family.

The replacement of the biological family and kinship with a revolutionary family in the face of the former’s dissolution—often as a result of China’s ordeal of modernity filled with traumas of war, violence, turmoil and various forms of domination—did not begin with the Chinese Communist Party but eventually became a common trope in many revolutionary texts created under the auspices of the Party and/or socialist state. The film historian Zhang Zhen notes the proliferation of the figure of orphan in early Shanghai film melodramas, partly influenced by D. W. Griffith, the alleged father of American film melodrama, and his *Orphans of the Storm* (1921). Zhang reads the imagery of orphan and destruction of familial and kinship relations as indicative of the aforementioned traumatic condition of modernity which resulted in a state of what Georg Lukács calls “transcendental homelessness.”[3]

However, before revolutionary texts hold up revolutionary family/kinship as the solution to the transcendental homelessness of modernity, many more literary and cultural

[3] Zhang Zhen, “Transnational Melodrama, *Wenyi*, and the Orphan Imagination,” *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (Columbia University Press, 2018), 83-97.

texts also attempted to reconcile the individual with collective belonging, and many ended in the aesthetic modality of melodrama. It is important that we trace and understand this part of Chinese aesthetic history. Hence in this Introduction, I first delineate a brief aesthetic and cultural history of melodrama in China in conjunction with the well-established history and definition of melodrama within Euro-American film studies to define melodrama as a mode. Needlessly to say that this history is by no means exhaustive but rather highly condensed—a genealogical study of the genre of melodrama in any cultural context is a project in itself and out of the scope of the current project. The second part of this introduction connects the concepts of melodrama, family/kinship (particular) and the nation-state (universal), and affect/emotion in order to explain why they ineluctably get tangled together as part of evolving modernity. This dissertation investigates the vital role the melodramatic mode played in shaping modern aesthetics in China, an area that still remains understudied; it tells the untold story of melodrama and Chinese modernity.

To accomplish this aim, let us begin with the most conventional definition and theorization of melodrama. Melodrama proper refers to a type of stage play that came into being in the late eighteenth century in France, which subsequently spread to America, Britain and other European cultures. It is characterized by its romantic and sentimental plot, histrionic performance style, and use of music (*melos* in Greek, meaning music or song) that accompanies it to intensify the situations presented on stage. Melodrama as theorized by Peter Brooks as well as scholars before him has certain

discernible features that include: "the indulgence of strong emotionalism, moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety."[4] Brooks was one of the first scholars to rehabilitate this pejorative term—due to its anti-realist excess and associations with popular entertainment, i.e. lowbrow culture—to study Balzac and Henry James's nineteenth century realist novels; he therefore defines melodrama as a mode capable of moving across various media. Inspired by Brooks's endeavor, recent revisionist scholarship on melodrama by film scholars such as Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill conceptualizes melodrama as a mode rather than a more narrowly defined genre—an approach this dissertation also uses.

As a mode, melodrama has certain epistemological functions. Brooks calls melodrama "a peculiarly modern form" that arose as an aesthetic reaction to the destabilization of social order and the moral vacuum left by the dual deposition of Church and Monarch, a search for the Sacred in a secular world, and a reaction to the Enlightenment and its excessive rationality prior to Romanticism.[5] Neither a conservative nor progressive cultural form, melodrama is a "radically democratic form" that "striv[es] to make its representations clear and legible to everyone."[6] Moreover, the

[4] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 11-12.

[5] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, *Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 14-17. "A peculiarly modern form" appears on page 14.

[6] Ibid., 15.

epistemological function of melodrama in response to processes of modernization and experience of modernity entails more than generating moral legibility. Melodrama as a mode triangulates modernism and realism, as Gledhill forcefully argues in her introductory essay to a volume of essays on melodrama, for it has one foot in social realism and everyday life and one foot in the search for value and meaning while acknowledging the limitations of language to represent reality. Melodrama takes a third route apart from a realism that believes in language's ability to represent reality and the explanatory power of human sciences and a modernism that works to expose the naiveté of such faith.[7] It came on stage to fill a gap in bourgeois epistemology in the post-Enlightenment era.

More importantly, produced and operating within the confines of dominant bourgeois ideology, melodrama has been identified as quintessentially a bourgeois genre for its main focus on the domestic sphere, the bourgeois family, the suffering of the powerless and innocent (often children and women), and feminine sentimentality that works to resolve social contradictions inherent in the capitalist system at the personal/familial level.[8] As Linda Williams points out, melodrama captures the social

---

[7] Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation" in *Home is Where Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (BFI Publishing, 1987), 5-39. The false opposition between realism and melodrama will be discussed in greater detail later.

[8] Christine Gledhill points out that the dual alliance of the family as a bourgeois institution and family as the sphere of women in melodrama films easily led to the identification of melodrama with bourgeois ideology and with women. "The Melodramatic Field," *Home is Where Heart Is,* 12. In another essay in the same volume, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith also identifies melodrama as a bourgeois form centering on the life of the bourgeoisie and viewing everyone as equals. See "Minnelli and Melodrama" in *Home is Where Heart Is*, 70-74.

realities of pervasive injustices (race, gender, class) produced by capitalist modernity and features victimhood and suffering of the innocent, not to change the status quo but to achieve "a felt good," "[a] compromise of morality and feeling."[9] This is why Gledhill comments that "melodrama addresses us within the status quo, of the ideologically permissible."[10] The temporal mode of melodrama is essentially nostalgic, emphasizing suffering of the innocent and siding with the powerless to argue for a return to an idyllic past to protect innocence.[11]

The endings of melodrama, however, often remain ambiguous. Many film scholars have commented on denouements of melodrama as attempts to resolve social conflicts that in fact sow doubt and leave certain things unresolved. They question whether the final recognition and reward of virtue is emotionally satisfactory to the audience. For instance, a film scholar argues that unlike other Hollywood films with ideological cohesion, the contradictions explored in melodrama are not resolved either in a real present or in an ideal future.[12] In devising a more complex feminine viewing position, Linda Williams observes that "unlike tragedy, melodrama does not reconcile its audience to an inevitable suffering" and that "the female hero often accepts a fate that the

[9] "Melodrama Revised," 53-55, qt. on 55.

[10] "The Melodramatic Field," 38.

[11] Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," 21.

[12] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama," 74.

audience at least partially questions."[13] Melodrama, therefore, even in its conventional bourgeois form, can offer some kind of social critique, however subtle it might be.

Based on these issues discussed so far, we get a glimpse of melodrama's complex relation to politics and social reality. Melodrama as an artistic mode is particularly adept at capturing social realities of pervasive injustices produced by capitalist modernity; it draws attention to those structural socio-political problems, not to solve those problems but to resolve them at the level of personal or familial concerns, and in doing so maintains the status quo. However, precisely because of melodrama's power to dichotomize, its siding with the poor and powerless, it could become conducive to bringing about revolutionary change. A number of scholars working in various disciplines have noticed the revolutionary potential of the melodramatic mode "to dichotomize swiftly, to identify targets, to encapsulate conflict," as well as its affinity with leftist politics.[14] In other words, the intensified suffering and victimhood of the oppressed and the innocent featured in melodrama make overthrowing the forces of oppression a *moral imperative*. Melodrama infused with leftist political theory, or what the political theorist Elizabeth Anker calls "left melodrama," promises a different kind of

[13] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, edited by Nick Browne, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 42-88, qt. on 47.

[14] The quote comes from Jane Gaines's "The Melos in Marxist Theory" in *Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*, edited by David E. James and Rick Berg, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 56-71, qt. on 59. The Soviets for instance experimented with melodrama in the 1920s in order to create a new revolutionary Soviet theater. Cultural leaders such as Maxim Gorky (1892-1936) thought melodrama could serve as a model for creating the new revolutionary theater precisely because of the features of melodrama mentioned before. See Daniel Gerould, "Melodrama and Revolution" in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, edited by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1994), 185-98. See also next footnote.

freedom and emancipation.[15] But it cuts both ways: the melodramatization of politics can serve reactionary purposes as well, as Anker's compelling analysis of the "melodramatic political discourse" in the post 9/11 political climate in America shows how such a discourse can galvanize national sentiment on a perceived injury to legitimate state violence and serve the fantasies of freedom and sovereignty.[16]

Equipped with these sets of distinct epistemic and ideological functions, the melodramatic mode was more ready to take over the bourgeois society in a post-sacred world. What contributed to melodrama's global proliferation and cross-cultural adaptability, or what some scholars have termed "a global vernacular," was Hollywood cinema's encounter and adaptation of this mode/genre.[17] Hollywood cinema inherited a set of stylistic codes, structural features, and thematic concerns, as well as the model for characterization, especially the use of fixed types, from European melodrama.[18] Its

---

[15] Elizabeth Anker, Chapter 6 "Left Melodrama" in *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 203-224.

[16] Anker, *Orgies of Feeling.*

[17] Miriam Hansen uses the term vernacular modernism to account for a wide range of "cultural and artistic practices that register, respond to, reflect upon processes of modernization and the experience of modernity" with "vernacular" highlighting the everydayness, mass-produced circulation of these practices and their translatability and promiscuity in each local contexts. Hansen posits classical Hollywood cinema as the first global vernacular for mass consumption. See Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 6.2 (1999), 59-77. Both Hansen and Zhang Zhen also argue that early Shanghai films functioned as vernacular modernism both on the aesthetic sensibility level and on the structural/thematic level. Zhang points out that early Shanghai cinema had to negotiate between an elite culture of the May Fourth and its lofty ideals and the mass-produced vernacular modernism of Hollywood, a negotiation resulted in the proliferation of "translatable" genres or "body genres," such as the melodrama, the martial arts film, and horror, translated from many different cultural contexts, Chinese and non-Chinese. These genres made sense to the mass audience and enjoyed enormous popularity. Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 349. See also Hansen, "Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism," *Film Quarterly* 54.1 (2000), 10-22. A more recent study of melodrama in turn-of-the-century Japanese fictions went further in asserting melodrama as a mode emerged prior to Hollywood cinema as the global vernacular. Hannah Airriess, "Global Melodrama and Transmediality in Turn-of-the-Century Japan," *Melodrama Unbound* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 69-82.

[18] This point is made by Thomas Elsaesser in his classical essay "Tales of Sound and Fury" published in 1972 (reprinted in *Home is Where the Heart Is*) that connects Hollywood cinema with its "antecedent" i.e. European

encounter with and adaptation of melodrama on screen made this genre a globally recognizable and translatable vernacular modernism—one of the main sources of influence for early Chinese cinema.

Melodrama has held profound impact on Chinese cinema since its inception. Once it had taken hold in Chinese culture, melodrama, and especially family melodrama, became highly adaptable across genres and media, and remained a central part of Chinese early cinema in the 1920s, realist cinema in the 30s and 40s, and socialist realist cinema in the 50s and beyond. Scholars have attributed the formation of early Chinese melodramatic films to both Hollywood melodrama and China's own melodramatic tradition, including traditional opera and popular romantic genres such as "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" fictions that flourished in urban areas in the early to mid-twentieth century.[19] The public screening of D. W. Griffith's films in Shanghai triggered a "Griffith fever" and many ensuing imitations. The quick growth of feature-length narrative films in China in the 1910s-20s, as Zhang Zhen points out, was due to the popularity of various

melodrama. See "Tales of Sound and Fury" in *Home is Where Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill (BFI Publishing, 1987), 43-69. For a more in-depth discussion of how melodrama's types influenced Hollywood cinema's characterization, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), 13.

[19] Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen* and "Transnational Melodrama, *Wenyi*, and the Orphan Imagination." Traditional Chinese dramas are extremely melodramatic with a clear didactic message as well. For example, Andrea Goldman uses melodrama as theorized by Peter Brooks to describe the type of uncompromising conflict between good and evil prevalent in most early Qing dramas. Goldman's analysis of various abridged performance editions and scene selection productions (*zhezi xi*) reveals that the restoration of social order at the end was often omitted from the performance repertoire, and the scenes with vigilante heroism and excessive emotions were particularly popular among the audiences. She therefore suggests that the audiences' sympathies lie with lower class characters and find appeals in the sentimental excess of such scenes; the social vision and critique in the original play manuscript was lost in the commercial production. Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 145-174.

American, French, and other imported films of diverse genres, subject matters, and styles. Chinese audiences were attracted to films that featured "ethical dilemmas involving family and romance" and "many plot twists and turns," two features that D. W. Griffith's film melodramas aptly exemplified, leading to the phenomenal popularity of his films in Shanghai.[20]

However, absorbing plot twists and themes of family and romance cannot explain fully melodrama's appeal to Chinese filmmakers and urban audiences—progressive and left-leaning filmmakers in Shanghai chose the genre for explicit and implicit political reasons. The revolutionary potentialities of melodrama were particularly pronounced in the case of twentieth-century China, given that the subjugation of the Chinese people under both Western and Japanese colonization and a traditional patriarchal system produced pervasive suffering and victimization. Even prior to a full-fledged and politically committed left-wing cinema movement, many progressive filmmakers in Shanghai in the 1920s and early 30s sought to use the medium of cinema for social reform as well as for the propagation of Enlightenment ideals of equality and freedom.[21] The left-wing cinema of the 30s was predominantly preoccupied with the representation of the suffering poor and marginalized in the semi-colonial metropole of Shanghai. Committed to the awakening of mass political consciousness, many of the iconic left-wing films experimented in various ways with montage to shore up the contrast between

[20] Zhang Zhen, "Transnational Melodrama," 91.

[21] Zhang, "Transnational Melodrama"; Yeh, "*Wenyi* and the Branding of Early Chinese Film."

the innocent, yet powerless, oppressed class, and the evil and all-powerful oppressor.[22] But in these film melodramas, there is no real solution to structural injustices.[23] And in terms of the representations of family and kinship in 1930s Shanghai cinema, Xiao Liu aptly summarizes that on the one hand the dissolution of biological family and kinship in these films serves as the most abject accusation of social disparity, "but on the other hand, the proposal of kinship as the resolution to social conflicts is problematic."

Xiao Liu, therefore, in her study of the narrative film *The Red Detachment of Women* (1960, dir. Xie Jin) as a revolutionary melodrama and its gender politics, uses "revolutionary melodrama" to distinguish *The Red Detachment of Women* (1960, dir. Xie Jin) from conventional bourgeois melodrama.[24] Unlike the 1930s Shanghai family melodramas and their Hollywood counterparts that "often end with a climax of female victims' emotional outbursts and a call for the rectification of justice," such emotional outburst does not constitute the climax of revolutionary melodrama.[25] But rather, "suffering must be transformed into a consciousness of class—in this case, an

[22] Left-wing filmmakers were drawn to Soviet montage theory and technique was partly because of the aura that came with the October Revolution and the establishment of the first socialist regime. Their engagement with Soviet montage cinema, however, serves more than merely tokenized political statements but a sustained formal experimentation key to the articulation of its political content. We may recall the famous opening montage sequence of *Street Angel* (dir. Yuan Muzhi, 1936) that consists of 69 shots of Shanghai. Another prominent example is the juxtaposition of shots of female indentured workers devouring extremely meager food during lunch break with shots of a pack of hens pecking grains on the ground in Shen Xiling's *Cry of Women* (*Nüxing de nahan*) (1933), which clearly harks back to Eisenstein's montage sequence of the mass slaughter and slaughter of the bull in *Strike* (1925).

[23] We may recall the tableau at the end of *Street Angel* where the older sister, a prostitute, dies, and the police are still searching for them. None of the issues featured in the film, such as poverty, social inequality, exploitation, and human trafficking, etc. are solved.

[24] Xiao Liu, *Red Detachment of Women*: Revolutionary Melodrama and Alternative Socialist Imaginations," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26.3 (2015), 116-141.

[25] Ibid., 123.

identification with the revolutionary family."[26] Liu argues that the construction of revolutionary/socialist family in the film questions and critiques the forced separation of production and reproduction, the domestic and the public under a capitalist system. Building my conceptualization of revolutionary melodrama on Liu's work, this dissertation makes clear that revolutionary melodrama refuses to disperse larger social and political issues into purely personal and familial concerns. It fundamentally challenges the problematic treatment of kinship and romance in conventional melodrama in which the maintenance of romance and familial intimacy constitutes the panacea to ameliorate universal suffering.

While Liu draws the connection between 1930s Shanghai left-wing cinema and socialist cinema, there were other precursors to the full manifestations of revolutionary melodrama in the socialist period. One of the moments when the revolutionary potentiality of the melodramatic mode became fully realized in works of art for revolutionary and propagandistic purposes was during the second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), also known in China as the War of Resistance against Japan. The exigencies of the war made the mobilization of the masses and appealing to their tastes the primary goal for works of art. As we will see in Chapter III, confronted with this historical reality, intellectuals responded by rethinking the failure of the May Fourth tradition to reach the masses despite its goal of being an enlightenment movement to

[26] Ibid.

educate them. This also triggered a rethinking of the kind of nineteenth-century European critical realism promoted by the May Fourth generation and the incorporation of romanticism in artistic creation. These aesthetic and philosophical debates resulted in hybrid artistic products that contain elements of realism, romanticism, and melodrama to produce maximum affective and political efficacy.

Socialist cinema after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 continued to amplify the revolutionary tendency of melodrama and reappropriated the tradition of early Shanghai cinema and its favored genre, the family melodrama. The reappropriation is most prominent in the representations of family and kinship: these socialist film melodramas project a new vision of revolutionary kinship that can replace or is an even better form of kinship than biological kinship.[27] In other words, the dissolution of the nuclear family/biological kinship network no longer entails inevitable suffering of individuals belonging to that network, rather in its place a revolutionary family/kinship that transcends biological connection is formed. Model operas, produced during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977) and made into films, present the culmination of such a radical redefinition and reenvisioning of family and kinship as one based on class, as analyzed in Chapter IV.

From this brief history of melodrama's discernible manifestations in aesthetic texts across media in first seven decades of twentieth-century China, we detect the

[27] For the most recent study of socialist (family) melodrama, see Jessica Chan, Chapter 2 "Literature on Screen: Recasting Classical Hollywood Narration in Family Melodrama," in *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics and Internationalism 1949-1966* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris), 54-86. Chan's work will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

continuity and evolution of this artistic mode even though melodrama was not necessarily the term writers, artists, and intellectuals used. This leads us to the question of whether we can use a "Western" term, melodrama, to discuss the aesthetic history of China. While scholars such as Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh specifically argue against the use of the term "melodrama" in discussing the history of Chinese cinema and assert that we should replace it with the indigenous term *wenyi*, Zhang Zhen proposes to view the Chinese term *wenyi* and melodrama as "transnational familiars," noticing the many similarities of *wenyi* films and melodrama as well as Hollywood melodrama's influence on early Shanghai cinema.[28] This dissertation therefore conceptualizes melodrama as a mode with its unique set of epistemic functions, discursive conventions, and aesthetic features in order to overcome the so-called pitfalls of cross-cultural analysis, identified by many area studies scholars, of deploying a (Western) concept that may or may not have an equivalent in another culture.[29] Melodrama is indeed a global vernacular that has been

[28] In an earlier article, Yeh specifically argues against the use of melodrama in the study of Chinese cinema and instead posits the native terminology *wenyi*, a term translated from Japanese *bungai* 文藝 into China, referring to initially literary works translated from foreign sources, as a more suitable concept. See Yeh, "Pitfalls of Cross-cultural Analysis: Chinese *Wenyi* Film and Melodrama," *Asian Journal of Communication* 19.4 (2009), 438-452. In a later article "*Wenyi* and the Branding of Early Chinese Film," Yeh continues to add on her earlier take on the conceptions of *wenyi*. Drawing from a wealth of primary sources, Yeh points out that *wenyi*, with its original denotation of the import of Western literature and its translations was an integral part of "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" fiction, and was associated with "taste, refinement and cosmopolitanism" (72). This elevated association was later used to promote *wenyi* film's social status and artistic quality. *Wenyi* film refers to film adaptations of foreign literature or its Chinese translations; as a whole it propagated concepts of humanism, equality and freedom as a result of translating those lofty ideas embedded in Japanese and western literature. Yeh again reiterates that we should use *wenyi* to replace *melodrama* as the term to study Chinese film and film historiography. Yeh, "*Wenyi* and the Branding of Early Chinese Film," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6.1 (2012), 65-94.

[29] Even though many scholars such as Ma Ning have used the term melodrama to study Chinese cinema in the 1980s, the most challenging problem for these scholars is that melodrama does not have an equivalent Chinese term. They have tried to find equivalent Chinese terms to translate melodrama. Melodrama takes various names such as *qingjieju* (情节剧 plot drama), *tongsuju* (通俗剧 popular drama), *wenyipian* (文艺片 literature-art film), *lunli qinqing pian* (伦理亲情片 ethical family feeling films) and *langman aiqing pian* (浪漫爱情片 romantic love films). See Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*, 81. As discussed before, Yeh is against the use of melodrama in Chinese film historiography. The problem lies in a narrow definition of melodrama as a generic category and therefore the necessity

adapted and translated into local cultural contexts, which in turn adds more complexity to the original term.

It is more useful, therefore, to consider melodrama not as a generic category but as a multi-generic, multi-media mode, not as a mode of excess vis-à-vis the norms of realism but an intrinsic part of realism. Gledhill and Williams have argued against the false opposition between realism and melodrama. Building her work on the important connection between realism and melodrama made by Gledhill (discussed earlier), Linda Williams contends that we should not understand melodrama as excess but the norm and intrinsic part of classical Hollywood cinema.[30] Commenting on the versatility and adaptability of melodrama as a mode, Gledhill writes: "the notion of modality, like register in socio-linguistics, defines a specific mode of aesthetic articulation adaptable across a range of genres, across decades and across national cultures."[31] Melodrama as a mode may cross into its neighboring modes such as realism, romance, comedy, a process which creates certain subgenres that evolve according to changing historical circumstances and specific national cultures.[32] Freeing melodrama from narrow generic definitions, Gledhill and Williams emphatically argue for the significance of melodrama, as part of an evolving modernity, in changing the course of dramatic and media histories

to find an equivalent genre in the Chinese context.

[30] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 42-88.

[31] Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000), ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 221-243, qt. on 229.

[32] Gledhill, "Prologue: The Reach of Melodrama," *Melodrama Unbound*, xiv.

as well as its crucial role in understanding modernity and dramatic fictions in modernity.[33]

Building my work on all this body of recent revisionist scholarship on melodrama, I deploy melodrama as an analytical category to examine more than a half century's Chinese cultural and aesthetic history so that we gain a better understanding of melodrama and its relation to Chinese modernity. This approach also allows us not to be limited to one medium but to obtain a certain freedom to examine how the melodramatic mode has shaped the course of the complex dramatic and media histories, following Gledhill and Williams's suggestion, in China. In the twentieth-century Chinese context in particular, the synchronic development of different literary modes of realism, romanticism, modernism, and socialist realism makes a clear demarcation of modalities almost impossible. Film scholars Michael Berry and Mary Farquhar point out that Chinese cinematic realism has always been a mixed mode that sustains itself through constant incorporations of the melodramatic and the romantic in various forms.[34] Chinese socialist cinema, in particular, developed a hybrid mode consisting of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism that incorporates melodramatic elements.[35] All of this is true for literary texts as well. As the discussion of Maoist aesthetics in Chapter III and IV shows, at the very heart of the theoretical discourse of Maoist aesthetics is the

[33] Gledhill and Williams, Introduction in *Melodrama Unbound*, 2.

[34] *China on Screen*, 79.

[35] Jason McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema." *Opera Quarterly* 26.2-3 (2010), 343-376.

melodramatic mode's search for truth and meaning, a theoretical discourse that informed all aspects of Communist cultural production.

Already a somewhat hybrid mode, melodrama in the Chinese context is infused with a healthy dose of critical realism and romantic heroism that offer strong social critique, a call for action, and harbor a utopian desire for a better future through such action.[36] To further Linda Williams's comment that "[w]hat counts in melodrama is the feeling of righteousness, achieved through the sufferings of the innocent,"[37] I suggest that the feelings of pity and hatred achieved through the sufferings of the innocent and oppressed to propel social change—reform and revolution—constitute a revolutionary melodramatic aesthetics. While bourgeois melodrama eases universal suffering via the remedy of romantic love or other normative forms of family relations, revolutionary melodrama rechannels personal and collective feelings of pity and hatred evoked by the sufferings of the innocent and oppressed into political action and social change, thereby transforming the personal and private and its relation to the political in that process. Revolutionary melodramatic texts go beyond generating feelings of righteousness and the recognition of virtue and common suffering. They identify, through moral polarization, the oppressive classes as an evil that must be struggled against and overthrown. The victimization of the innocent younger generation in Ba Jin's novel *Jia* does not just

[36] I am aware that I am excluding certain types of melodrama that are more conservative or "bourgeois" in nature. The film *Tomboy* (化身姑娘 *huashen guniang,* 1936) discussed in Berry and Farquhar's book for instance presents such a case in which the reconciliation of Confucian family traditions embodied in the grandfather figure with the future generation, the granddaughter is brought about by the birth of a real grandson, a male heir.

[37] "Melodrama Revised," 62.

evokes pathos, as the analysis in Chapter II shows, but serves as a call to break the traditional family system. The suffering of the peasant girl Xi'er persecuted by the evil landlord in *The White-Haired Girl* is ultimately a catalyst for the overthrowing of the oppressive class, discussed in Chapter III. Such faith in the social function that literature and art *can* and *should* perform characterizes modern Chinese literature and art.[38]

Revolutionary Melodrama: Tales of Family, Kinship, and the Nation in Modern China uses melodrama as an analytical category to help articulate three representative manifestations of what I take to be revolutionary melodramatic aesthetics. Each chapter of my dissertation draws together different media across three key historical moments in twentieth-century China: the iconic May Fourth novel *Family* (1933), the music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* (1945) produced in wartime Yan'an, and the model opera film *The Red Lantern* (1970) produced during the height of the Cultural Revolution.[39] These texts are all centered on family and kinship because the affinity between family and kinship as affective space and set of relations on the one hand and melodrama (of which family melodrama is a major subgenre) on the other is by no means incidental. In their

[38] The belief in the didactic function of literature, poetry in particular, was an intrinsic part of Chinese aesthetic tradition. Footnote 69 and 70 discuss this in greater detail.

[39] Historians usually divide the so-called ten years of the Cultural Revolution into the first three years of the most radical phase and the ensuing restorative phase. Rebecca Karl for instance divides the ten years of the Cultural Revolution into the first phase 1966-1968 characterized by mass movements on the ground and the second phase 1970-1978 characterized by the rebuilding of party-state apparatus, restoration of political order, and waning down of revolutionary enthusiasm. The forces of restoring order in fact started as early as 1967. See Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History* (Duke University Press, 2010). Yiching Wu similarly points out that the effort to contain and suppress radicalism began as early as the spring of 1967. The demobilization, recentralization, and bureaucratic containment that characterized the reform era, i.e. post-socialist era, can be observed even in the height of the Cultural Revolution. See Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (Harvard University Press, 2014). See also Pang Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning*.

reappropriations of the melodramatic mode, these texts deploy the affective trope of family and kinship to articulate alternative affiliations and create a passionate revolutionary collective capable of making socio-political change. I argue that revolutionary melodramas function as emotional pedagogies in which abstract revolutionary ideas and ideals are made emotionally legible and binding, and political solidarities made more possible, to the masses.

By foregrounding the affective function of revolutionary melodrama, I am echoing another scholar's recent reassessment of Peter Brooks's authoritative study of melodrama. In his essay anthologized in *Melodrama Unbound*, Matthew Buckley, a scholar on modern and early modern British and European theater and drama, endeavors to foreground the affective aspect of melodrama to debunk Brooks's famous proclamation that melodrama is a drama of morality, a drama that came on stage to reconstitute a moral world shattered by the deposition of the Monarch and Church.[40] Buckley instead points out that when melodrama emerged as a named form of art at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was "a cosmopolitan hybrid" that was rooted in and developed from pre-Revolutionary work produced all over Europe, including sentimental drama, opera, gothic literature, and popular spectacles of all kinds. He detects a shift toward affective aesthetics in modern arts: "the arrival of melodrama marks the culmination, not the beginning, of *a sustained movement toward affective aesthetics* that

[40] Buckley, "Unbinding Melodrama," *Melodrama Unbound*, 15-29.

can be traced through the mainstream of drama, theater, and music—indeed, through the arts generally—at least as far as the Reformation" (my emphasis).[41] Regarding the supposed misconception of melodrama as a morality drama, Buckley argues that the importance placed on sensation and spectacle outweighed the importance placed on moralism. Melodrama's popularity and commercial success was indebted to its affective appeal, often done through the exploitation of the audience's moral feeling and extravagant spectacles. "The criterion of feeling and emotional effect—the demand that we be moved, not instructed" is what distinguishes melodrama, argues Buckley, from other dramatic and artistic forms.[42]

Decades ago, Marston Anderson in his classic study of realism in modern Chinese literature discusses in depth the moral implications and affective dimensions of realist works. Anderson particularly pays attention to how catharsis—defined by him as the purge of unpleasant emotions of pity and terror evoked by the depiction of the suffering of the socially marginalized—operates in realist works.[43] As Anderson puts it, "realist works induce the emotion of pity only with the ultimate intention of purging it through

[41] Ibid., 22.

[42] Ibid., 27.

[43] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (University of California Press, 1990), 19-24. Anderson argues that catharsis rarely appears in traditional Chinese fiction or only appears for didactic purposes. Therefore, catharsis is an effect unique to modern realist fiction. In this section, the author also discusses how emotion in traditional Chinese poetry and aesthetics is fundamentally different from Western notions of emotion as private and subjective. Anderson writes: "the author was understood less as an autonomous creator than as a vessel or channel through which the patterns of nature and society manifest themselves" (13), and that "poetry is a vessel through which stream emotions that are thought to be essentially shared and public, as manifestation of communal and universally available human emotions rather than private, antisocial passions" (19). I will return to the point that emotion/affect is social.

catharsis."[44] By depicting suffering, however, realist writers became complicit in reproducing the violence and oppression they sought to decry. Anderson's close readings of Lu Xun's short stories shows Lu Xun's high level of self-awareness and his critique of such cathartic operations in realist narratives. Anderson's discussion of the cathartic operation of realism is essentially a forerunner of my discussion of melodrama, its moral imperative, and the role emotion plays in aesthetic texts even though he did not use the term or analytical category of melodrama. However, the Aristotelian model of catharsis and Anderson's use of it entail the purge of emotions and restorations of rationality which may have overlooked the affective efficacy and pragmatic dimension of melodramatic-realist narratives. As discussed before, melodrama produces a feel good, a compromise—rather than catharsis—and leaves certain things as well as feelings unresolved. Moreover, revolutionary melodrama in particular identifies, through moral and affective polarization, the oppressive classes as an evil that must be struggled against and overthrown and rechannels emotions of pity and hatred into action.

Rather than deploying the cathartic model to understand how melodramatic-realist narratives operate, I attempt to thread together the moral, affective, and practical dimensions of the melodramatic-realist aesthetics by suggesting that moral instruction and affective efficacy do not have to be an either/or situation or occupy opposites of the spectrum. After all, emotion is fundamental in making moral judgment. Revolutionary

[44] Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 95.

ideas and ideals, as the analysis of each aesthetic text in each chapter shows, are revealed as much through ideological indoctrination as *felt* affect. *Revolutionary Melodrama* therefore aims to show that revolutionary melodramas deploy the affective trope of family and kinship and function as emotional pedagogies, and in doing so, they helped to redefine the affective meaning of family/kinship in different socio-historical contexts. Precisely because traditional Chinese culture treated the biological family and biological kinship as the naturalized site for affection and ethical obligation as crystalized in the truism "blood is thicker than water" (*xuenongyushui* 血浓于水), it became the most contested site for the meaning of modernity and the possibilities of transforming sociality that go beyond heredity. The next section parses out the interconnections of melodrama, family and kinship, and affect/emotion as part of evolving modernity in China with the modern nation-state as the ultimate expression of a universal community.

Unlike the case of bourgeois melodrama that attempts to resolve yet trivializes larger social inequalities by reducing them to the personal/familial level, family as the most important social institution in China was never "trivial" but remained an integral part of the state political structure that informed people's lives in fundamental ways. The *Great Learning*, one of the Neo-Confucian Four Books, states that "only when families are regulated are states well governed."[45] The parallel structure of *zhiguo* 治國 (governing a state) and *qijia* 齊家 (regulating a family) is predicated upon an analogy of

[45] This translation is from *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1, edited by William Theodore de Bary et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 115.

state and family that was deeply rooted in the Confucian political and social thought.[46] China's encounter with modernity had to grapple with the age-old paradigm of the parallel structure of family and state. As early as the last decade of nineteenth century, thinkers such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) called for family reform, especially the importance of having healthy and educated women to procreate a strong, physically and mentally, future generation and thereby ensure the survival and strength of the nation. The full-scale attack on traditional Chinese culture, Confucian values and ideals in particular, and the institutions of arranged marriage and the traditional patriarchal family it supported, however, did not occur until the New Culture Movement (1915-1923).[47] May Fourth radicals promoted the conjugal family (*xiao jiating*) ideal along with other cultural ideals, largely originating from the West, in its place as the necessary means to rejuvenate the nation. Viewing themselves as successors to the May Fourth legacy, the Chinese Communist Party also became a strong

[46] The term "Confucian" is used here with certain caveats. Scholars in early China studies such as Michael Nylan have long argued that it is impossible to speak of any systematic schools of thought, Confucian, Mohist, Daoist, etc. in this period. Nylan's important work on textual histories of many transmitted texts shows that those texts were heavily revised in the Han. See Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (Yale University Press, 2001) and "Classics without Canonization: Learning and Authority in Qin and Han" in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, vol. 1, edited by John Lagerwey (Brill, 2009), 721-776. It is therefore more accurate to translate *ru* 儒 as classicists or classical thinkers, who went back to classical texts to envision and devise an administrative system for the Han imperial court. Quoting Nylan, Miranda Brown points out that the ruler-father analogy was only established by classical thinkers in the mid-Western Han (ca. 100 BCE), and her study of political discourse and mourning practice in Eastern Han (25-220 CE) reveals more rifts in the supposedly seamless analogy, the assumed perfect alliance between filial obligation and official duties. Even within the parameters of prescriptive theory, classical texts themselves presented contradictory views on mourning, which resulted ever more contradictory interpretations among the classicists. In practice the three-year mourning rites were rarely observed precisely because it would prevent official from fulfilling their public duty. See Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (State University of New York Press, 2007). By the late-imperial period, however, it became possible to speak of an orthodoxy and state ideology, i.e., Neo-Confucianism (*lixue* 理學), and the use of the term "Confucian" is justified here. More importantly, to reflect the cultural denunciation of Confucius and "Confucianism" (*rujiao* 儒教) since the May Fourth as the perceived culprit for all the social ills of China, this study still uses and evokes the term "Confucian."

[47] See Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (University of California Press, 2003), 1-3, 6-8.

advocate for gender equality and women's rights in the Communist-controlled, mainly rural areas during the 1930s and 1940s and later during the People's Republic of China, even though in practice gender equality was rarely realized. China's coming to terms with modernity therefore was obsessed with the intertwined Family and Woman questions, which in turn shared a close affinity with the challenges of nation building and nationalism.[48]

Closely tied as they are, the relationship between the family and the modern nation-state has always been an uneasy and contentious one. The relationship was often viewed as antagonistic in the sense that the traditional family and familial ties must be dismantled in order to build a nation that consists of equal citizens and civil relations. A nation requires a new political subject, a universal abstract subject with equal status before the law.[49] Viewed from this perspective, family stands for the particular, the opposite of universal ideal; norms of kinship and the regulating forces of the family impinge on and violate individual freedom and agency. This was the "original sin" of the traditional family that came under ferocious attack by the May Fourth intellectuals. And

[48] The takeaway point is that we cannot have a clear distinction between the private and public spheres in the Chinese context. As Susan Glosser observes, the conjugal family (*xiao jiating*) ideals promoted either by May Fourth radicals, the KMT, or the CCP differed significantly from the Western notion of privatized family because it was highly integrated into the project of nation building and reaffirmed the cultural tradition of the family-state analogy, "the framework and foundations of traditional Chinese political culture" (6). Glosser thus is explicit in her criticism of both nationalists and communists' failure to go beyond the state-as-family framework, which ended upholding patriarchal hierarchies that May Fourth radicals initially set out to upend. Glosser here shares a similar stance with a strand of feminist criticism that criticizes nationalism for legitimating patriarchal hierarchies embedded in old socio-political structures rather than challenge or change them. For similar work in the study of modern China, see Lydia Liu, "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*" in *Body, Subject, Power in China*, edited by Angela Zito and Tani Barlow (University of Chicago Press, 1994), Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Duke University Press, 2004).

[49] Modern political theory on equality and personhood has its roots in the Christian idea of brotherhood and French Revolution's *fraternité* as the modern revival of that idea.

worse, as the legal scholar Teemu Ruskola points out, the West has long interpreted the predominance of family law in China as the absence of law, "impeding the evolution of civil relations on a universal basis, structured by the laws of property and contract— the twin pillars of a market order."[50] This interpretation has also provided a powerful explanation as to why capitalism failed to develop in China indigenously.[51] Again family and kinship were seen as the impediment to modernity, defined as capitalist modernity in this case.

A nation consisting of equal and abstract individuals and predicated solely on political rationality, however, may have a difficult time appealing to the masses who supposedly form this very nation. If we agree with Haiyan Lee's major contention in her book *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* that the modern self is primarily an affective self and that the construction of modern nationalism requires such a subject capable of sympathizing with her fellow compatriots,[52] how might that feeling, affect, emotion, sympathy, or pathos be created, fostered, and propagated? And by whom and what? Family as the most "natural" form of belonging and the site for fostering intimacies and affective bonds became a useful rhetorical and conceptual framework to concretize an otherwise abstract and imagined affiliation. National

[50] Ruskola, *Legal Orientalism: China, the United States, and Modern Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 61-62.

[51] Ibid., 61.

[52] See the Introduction Chapter and Chapter 6 in *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

belongings and affiliations were often articulated through the rhetoric of family and kinship. The frequent use of the Chinese word *tongbao* (同胞, literally "of the same placenta") during the second Sino-Japanese War best illustrates how a metaphor performs the work of conceptualizing abstract national affiliations as concrete familial filiations.[53] Likewise in literary and aesthetic texts such as the model opera, *The Red Lantern* (discussed in Chapter IV)—a highly melodramatic operatic text—we see this rhetoric being deployed time and again in a moment of national crisis: the Li family, their neighbors, the proletariat and all Chinese people suffering under the rule of the Japanese are configured as all kin (*qinren* 親人). The highly affective rhetoric of family and kinship has been utilized time and again in the conceptualization and construction of the nation in modern times.

To foreground this vital role affect and family/kinship play in the discourses of nationalism, *Revolutionary Melodrama* chooses kinship as a thematic thread and conceptual framework in addition to *jia* (family-home). More importantly kinship is a social construct that incorporates broader networks of relations, emotional ties, and *ethical* obligations. It also entails, as the queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman aptly points out, bodies' vulnerability and therefore dependency upon others; caretaking, nurture, affective labor, often gendered, are central to forming and maintaining kin relationships with or without biological connection. Kinship is "the technique of renewal," "the

[53] For a more detailed discussion on *tongbao* as a metaphor and its conceptual function, see Zhuo Jing-Schmidt, "Metaphor in Chinese: Cognition, Culture, and Society" in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Chinese Language*, edited by Chan Sin-wai, (Routledge, 2016), 629-644.

process by which bodies and the potential for physical and *emotional attachment* are created, transformed, and sustained *over time*" (my emphasis).[54] It is in the ethical obligations and possibilities of renewal and extension over time that a kin relationship as an affective bond, in the absence of biological/physical bond, is distinguished from any other voluntary bond, such as friendship.

The affective and ethical valences of kinship fit particularly well with the traditional Chinese cultural conceptualization of the self as a node in a lattice of relationships regulated by rituals and bounded by ethical obligations toward others.[55] While Claude Lévi-Strauss marveled at how the Chinese had devised a nominal system to name and place everyone on the kinship network, what he ignored was the more important ethical aspect of kinship in the Chinese system in which kinship bonds were coded in ethical expectations by using words such as *xiao* 孝 (filial love and obligation toward parents), *jie* 節 (loyalty toward ruler or fidelity toward husband), *ti* 悌 (brotherly love), and *ci* 慈 (paternal love).[56] Classical texts such as the *Analects* emphasize the

[54] Freeman, "Queer Belongs: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, edited by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 298.

[55] This point has been made by several early China scholars, for instance, Erica Brindley's *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2010) and "Part III Kinship" in K. E. Brashier's *Public Memory in Early China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014).

[56] Making use of the work of the sinologist Marcel Granet, Lévi-Strauss has extensively dealt with the Chinese kinship system in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. The Chinese kinship system, according to Lévi-Straus, has successfully devised a nominal system of terms to vertically place the Ego within the genealogy and horizontally within the collateral generation as well as corresponds with the mourning system in which the length of mourning is determined by the degree of closeness on the kinship network. See especially 325-336 in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (*Les Structures Élémentaires De La Parenté*), translated by John Richard Von Sturmer John and James Harle Bell, and edited by Rodney Neddham (Boston: Beacon, 1969).

[56] What distinguishes the feeding of horses and dogs and feeding one's parent, according to the Master, is the feeling of reverence (敬 *jing*). See *Lunyu* 論語 II. 7 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2013), 129.

importance of both the action of feeding one's living parents and performing mourning rites when they are dead on the one hand and the feeling of reverence for one's parents and grief of the loss of them on the other. The ancestral cult requires regular sacrifices made to dead ancestors and thereby ensures they do not suffer a second death, i.e. the symbolic death. This further embeds the relational self in a larger web of genealogical relations over time.[57] Confucian ethics might be termed "affective ethics," which view ritual practices as means of externalizing and visualizing the innate and inner affection one has toward a superior on the network of kinship and social relations.[58] In other words, such ritually sanctioned emotions and performance of these emotions remain predominantly upward oriented. The ritual system and kinship network predicated on distinctions were instrumental in maintaining a hierarchical social order and therefore fundamentally contradicted an egalitarian vision of society that emerged with the promise of modernity.

Revolutionary Melodrama suggests that one of the shared goals of Chinese literary and cultural modernity was the attempt to transform the traditional hierarchical family and kinship structures that were bound up with affective significance and ethical obligations into a new matrix of affective and ethical kinship relations to create a community of equal citizens who may not have a biological connection. Such an attempt

[57] For an extensive discussion on ancestral worship and how ancestors were remembered and commemorated by the living in early China, see K. E. Brashier, *Ancestral Memory in Early China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

[58] For a more detailed discussion on how early texts such as the *Analects* and the *Mencius* naturalized filial piety, see Maram Epstein, *Orthodox Passion: Narrating Filial Love during the High Qing* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 49-52.

relies and plays on the dual property of kinship as a result of biological consanguinity and genealogical descent on the one hand and yet possessing the ability to ultimately transcend and transform biology as a mode of relationality on the other. The interrelated trope of kinship and family is powerful in conjuring the nation into being precisely because of the connotations of consanguinity and common descent however mythic and constructed they may be. On the other hand, texts such as the novel *Jia,* present the nation as a far better alternative form of kinship and belonging than the biological family which is found lacking. Aesthetic texts centering on family and kinship create the textual space in which these issues can be tested and debated, where different modalities of solidarity and affiliation and possibilities of transforming sociality can be imagined, formed, and articulated.

This dissertation chooses family and kinship not only as thematic threads and analytical categories but also as relations, processes, constructed fictions realized through language and rhetorical practices, and fictional spaces where intimacies, affective bonds, and alternative kinship relations are imagined, formed, and reconfigured.[59] The boundary between *literal* and *metaphorical*, between *real* and *imagined*, between *natural* and *artificial/cultural* constantly blurs in each text. Close analyses of each aesthetic text, therefore, will attend to those moments of tensions, instability, and indeterminacy.

[59] This particular methodological take on family and kinship is indebted to Ruskola's insight in *Legal Orientalism* where he defines family as "a language," "an idiom for describing relationships," a language "that constitutes the so-called family as family in the first place" (62). Pierre Bourdieu's constructionist view of family as socially and discursively constructed, as "a realized social fiction," has also been vital to my methodological conceptualization of family. See Bourdieu, "On the Family as a Realized Category," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13.3 (1996), 19-26.

Family as the fictional space of affective bonds is also key to one of the foci of this dissertation, i.e., to discuss affective medium as well as affect's relation to aesthetic form.

This conceptualization could not have been possible without the recent theoretical interventions made by social and anthropological theory and queer studies that aim to challenge and question the bio-essentialism of previous kinship studies. Early anthropological understandings of kinship recognized it as a social construct rather than biological fact, a matter of culture rather than nature, or to use Gayle Rubin's words, "an imposition of cultural organization upon the facts of biological procreation."[60] Even though he takes the biological family to be the "natural" family, Lévi-Strauss in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1967) foregrounds the social nature of kinship that manifests itself not in the biological family or parent-child relation but in the alliances created and maintained through the exchange of women. The Straussian kinship model is not only inherently sexist and compulsorily heterosexual as Gayle Rubin's feminist critique makes clear, it also leaves biology unchallenged as David Schneider points out in *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984).[61]

Early anthropological theories of kinship, as problematic as they were, sowed the radical potential for later queer theorists to challenge its bio-essentialism and view certain basic life forms and relations as socially, discursively and culturally constructed.[62] In its

[60] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, edited by Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 27-63, qt. on 35.

[61] Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984).

[62] Elizabeth Freeman in her seminal work to bridge kinship theory and queer theory points out the "the queerness" in traditional kinship theory lies in its understanding of kinship as social rather than biological. See "Queer Belongs:

critique of heteronormativity and the notions of family and intimacy presupposed by heteronormativity, queer theory has strongly opposed a naturalized notion of the biological family and kinship as the only legitimate and recognizable form of family and kinship.[63] Scholars in critical race studies and postcolonial studies have long pointed out what we believe to be the most *natural* and the defining property of human nature—(hetero)sexual romance, familial affections, intimacy, and etc.—are in fact epistemic legacies we inherited from the Enlightenment.[64] These insights helped me see how the matrix of family has been inscribed in the modern epistemic management of modernity itself. My approach builds on the queering of the concept of kinship to articulate alternative forms of belonging and affiliation that *exceed* heterosexual couplehood, biological reproduction, and the nuclear family as the basic societal unit.[65]

Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," 295-298.

[63] As David Eng points out, radical queer theory always maintains a sustained critique of the institutions of family and marriage. The emergence of queer liberalism however leaves the normative assumptions of intimacy, family, marriage, and kinship unchallenged and instead conforms to those norms—what Lisa Duggan calls "homonormativity." It abandons radical queer politics in favor of "a domesticated vision of family and kinship, one predicated on the conjugal family and its Oedipal arrangements as the only legally recognized and tenable household structure" (31). See Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

[64] Scholars such as Lisa Lowe and David Eng have pointed out the emergence of bourgeois notions of intimacy and domesticity engrained in the right to property in Europe and America was made possible precisely by racialized labor whose existence was brushed away by the Enlightenment discourse of universal human freedom. Lisa Lowe argues that bourgeois intimacy premised on a clear distinction between public and private was produced by what she calls "the intimacies of four continents"—"in the sense that settler colonial appropriation with enslaved and indentured labor founded the formative wealth of the European bourgeoisie" on the one hand, and "in the sense that colonized workers produced the material comforts and commodities that furnished the bourgeois home" on the other (30). Building on Lowe's intervention, David Eng's critique of queer liberalism that conforms to a liberal logic of inclusion and normative assumptions of family, kinship, intimacy, etc. reveals again how race and struggles for racial justice are erased and consigned to the past in that process. This willful forgetting of race has persisted into present day's articulation of colorblindness See Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015) and Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship.*

[65] In the same essay, Freeman argues that we should not do away with the concept of kinship all together but to redefine and transform what kinship is. Freeman responds to the conceptualization of gay kinship as voluntary crystalized in the phrase "chosen family" or "chosen kinship" by discussing Kath Weston's classic *Families We Choose: Gays, Lesbians, Kinship* (Columbia University Press, 1991) that exposes "choice" as a liberal fantasy and inaccessible to non-white, non-middleclass queer subjects. Freeman therefore downplays the voluntary side of kinship but highlights our bodies'

Despite its radical potentials, modern, i.e. Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, reappropriations of traditional notions and practices of kinship to articulate egalitarian visions, such as Romanticism's redefinition of the old Christian universal brotherhood and the French Revolution's notion of *fraternité,* must be discussed with a critical lens. The idea that all men are brothers, as with any ideas of universalism, tends toward abstraction and loss of meaning all together.[66] Underneath the seemingly idealistic universalism is a logic of exclusion inherent in kinship as an epistemological tool relying on distinctions between kin and non-kin, between knowledge and anonymity, between proximity and distance. Under the ideal of a community of free and equal citizens, certain bodies came to represent and be associated with the nation more than others.[67] We may well heed a queer theorist's warning of the danger and impossibility of bridging and reducing the alterity of the other to sameness, of making kin of everyone, and the violence inherent in such attempts.[68]

The tensions between the power of biological consanguinity and the desire to transcend biological determinism are what makes kinship as a concept and practice particularly productive for my interrogation of Chinese *tongbao* revolutionary kinship

---

vulnerability and interdependency in her redefinition of kinship.

[66] For a detailed discussion of the critique of the abstract nature of the revolutionary notions of universal fraternity, see Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship: 'Measure for Measure,' Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 18-19.

[67] This point is built on Sara Ahmed's insightful analysis of how rhetoric, such as the saying of "the nation mourns," functions to call into being certain (national) subjects and their objects and produce certain emotions. See *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 13.

[68] See Christopher Peterson, *Kindred Specters: Death, Mourning, and American Affinity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1-35.

structures. It is precisely because of the complex and problematic nature of kinship as a concept and practice in both Western and Chinese cultures and its complex and somewhat paradoxical relation to modernity that kinship performs such interesting intellectual work. The trope of family and kinship, literary or metaphorical, is essential to modern Chinese literature, film, and culture, and it more often than not manifests itself in the melodramatic mode. In literary and other aesthetic texts, family is usually the primal site in which people form emotional attachments and affiliations; when the biological family is found lacking, alternative kinship relations are formed in its place. Fictional texts are particularly adept at imagining and creating different modalities of solidarity and affiliation and at transforming sociality, which requires a way of reading that attends to those moments when feelings are created, awakened, stirred, and passed/passing through body to body. We will be surprised to learn that the most intense revolutionary passion is usually engendered by a surrogate maternal figure.

In conceptualizing family and kinship as affective space and relations, I wish to foreground that affect too is rooted in the body, mobile and relational. While many scholars of affect theory distinguish affect from emotion, this study uses them more or less interchangeably while highlighting the following specificities of affect. Affect emphasizes the body's capacity to act and to be acted upon. It does not suggest a radical alterity to rationality but might be more useful to be understood as feeling as thought and

thought as feeling.[69] Unlike emotion which originated from Latin *emovere*, meaning to move, to move out, affect does not emanate from an inner subjectivity but is tied to/oriented toward certain material and imaginary objects (also another affect, another body), encountering them, to be affected by them, to be made feel certain ways by them, and circulates through objects and bodies.[70] Affect therefore is relational and social. Conceptualizing affect in this way fits well with the Chinese aesthetic tradition that believed in the affective power of aesthetic texts such as poetry. At first glance, it may be at odds with the *shiyanzhi* 詩言志 model (poetry expresses intent) in which the natural imagery (*jing* 景) serves merely as the means to give expression to the poet's inner state of mind or emotion (*qing* 情). The *shiyanzhi* model inevitably privileges the interior. [71] However as many scholars of Chinese literature have pointed out, literature, or *wen* 文, is

[69] This point comes from Jonathan Flatley's insightful reading of Raymond Williams "structures of feeling" in *Marxism and Literature* in which structure of feeling emphasizes the affective elements of consciousness and has not yet precipitated into systematic ideology. I will discuss Williams's structure of feeling in more detail in the next paragraph. For Flatley's discussion of the concept of structures of feeling, see *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 24-27.

[70] Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth in their insightful introductory essay to a volume of essays on affect theory have conceptualized affect as "*forces* or *forces of encounter*" (2). See "An Inventory of Shimmers" in *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Duke University Press, 2007), 1-25.

[71] The famous passage from the Former Han text "Great Preface to the Mao Text of the *Book of Poetry*" (*Shi* da xu 詩大序) clearly illustrates this: "Poetry is where the heart's intent goes. What is still in the heart is intent; what is expressed in words is poetry. Emotion [*qing*] is stirred inside and manifests itself in words" 詩者，志之所之也，在心為志，發言為詩， 情動於中而行於言. This passage presupposes the a priori existence of the mind and emotions which then verbalize into poetry. As scholars Zong-qi Cai and Shengqing Wu in their recent article observes, citing the same passage, that *qing* and *zhi* were originally synonymous, referring mostly to affective responses to the sociopolitical situation rather than subjective emotions. And yet by the time of Lu Ji 陸機 (261-303) and Liu Xue 劉勰 (ca. 465--cs. 522) *qing* had already displaced *zhi* as the affective origin of lyric poetry. Ling Hon Lam points out that later discussions on Chinese poetics and aesthetics have been profoundly influenced by the Preface and "inadvertently affirm the superiority of the emotive interior." See Lam, *The Spatiality of Emotion in Early Modern China: From Dreamscapes to Theatricality* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 3, and Zong-qi Cai and Shengqing Wu, "Introduction: Emotion, Patterning, and Visuality in Chinese Literary Thought and Beyond," *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 6.1 (2019), 1-14. The same Preface also emphasizes the didactic function as well as affective power of poetry: "Therefore, nothing rights what is wrong, nothing moves heaven and earth, nothing touches the gods and the spirits as much as poetry can" 故正得失，動天地，感鬼神，莫近于詩.

understood in traditional Chinese aesthetic philosophy as a vessel through which patterns of the universe manifest themselves and therefore are fundamentally non-subjective.[72] Emotions in classical poetry "are thought to be essentially shared and public, as manifestation of communal and universally available human emotions rather than private, antisocial passions."[73]

This study thus rejects the interior and deeply psychologized model of affect/emotion and instead follows Sara Ahmed's suggestion that emotion moves through the circulation of objects.[74] *Revolutionary Melodrama* will suggest that the circulations of the melodramatic mode and melodramatic texts helped to produce socially legible emotions that redefined and reconfigured the discourse and debates over the affective meaning of family life and kinship relations in twentieth-century China and beyond. The conceptualization of affect as social also fits well with the Marxist literary theorist Raymond Williams's concept of "structure of feeling."

Williams used structure of feeling as an alternative way of talking about how existing cultural and social structures mediate our lived, affective life other than or before these social experiences are "precipitated" into fixed ideology or fixed social forms and

---

[72] Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 18-20. Angela Zito translates wen as "naturally occurring text-pattern." In her study of Qing dynasty imperial rites and literati culture, Zito forcefully argues that during the eighteenth century, cultural/textual production by *wenren* literati, especially on *li* ritual, came to possess the same, if not higher, moral authority as ritual performance and was seen as the route to sagehood. Zito, *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 217-218.

[73] Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 19.

[74] In suggesting that emotion moves through the circulation of objects and that it is not necessarily emotion itself moves and circulates, Sara Ahmed is modifying Silvan S. Tomkins's contagion model in which emotion is treated as property that can be had and passed on. See Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.

institutions. It is an approach that tries to undo the antinomy between objective social structure and subjective individual experience and agency. It is also an approach that tries to undo the false opposition between emotion and reason, between feeling and thought; structure of feeling therefore is "thought as felt and feeling as thought" that is still emergent, in process and yet to be articulated.[75] Williams's definition of structure of feeling is his attempt to amend the "habitual past tense" of social and cultural analysis that fails to account for lived social experience, the here and now of subjective and personal experience and feeling under formation in the process.

Williams specifically defines structures of feeling rooted in lived experiences as social and material. Subjective and personal experiences may be idiosyncratic, but because they are actively lived "in real relationships," they constitute what Williams terms "practical consciousness" that is always material and social.[76] Structure of feeling therefore has a temporal dimension not only in the sense of its emergent formation but also an epochal/qualitative change that distinguishes itself from qualities of social experience in other historical generations or periods. This temporal dimension is tied to the interrelations of the residual, the dominant, and the emergent aspects of any given culture (culture as a process as defined by Williams) in a given historical period.[77]

---

[75] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

[76] Ibid., 130-131.

[77] Viewing culture as processes, Williams devises the residual and the emergent to help think about dominant culture. The residual refers to experiences, meanings, and values lived and practiced on the basis of previous social or cultural institution or formation. The emergent refers to new experiences, new meanings and values, new relationships that are continually created. The residual and the emergent coexist with the dominant and contest and resist it (oppositional or alternative to dominant culture). At any given moment, all three are interconnected and interacting with each other. For instance, the dominant constantly seeks to incorporate the residual and the emergent. Ibid., 121-127. This is why I

Williams uses the example of changes in language and literary style to illustrate such qualitative changes and insists that "the specific qualitative changes are not assumed to be epiphenomena of changed institutions, formations, and beliefs, or merely secondary evidence of changed social and economic relations between and within classes."[78] Because of the social nature of structures of feeling, while some of them might be idiosyncratic, it is possible to speak of the structures of feeling of a class or group in certain historical period,[79] for example, the structure of feeling of the peasantry in the 1930s and 40s northern rural China, as discussed in the Chapter III.

In deploying the concept of structure of feeling and highlighting affect's social nature, I attempt to read the aesthetic texts under consideration in this study, a corpus of works that are highly melodramatic narratives about family, kinship, the nation, and revolution with strong affective intensity, as archives of the affective experiences of modernity and modern history.[80] Through the examinations of these texts, this study wishes to explore how the aesthetics of the melodramatic mode centering on family and

---

believe Haiyan Lee's use of structure of feeling, while thought provoking, remains problematic. Apart from the question of whether complex human emotions and historical and discursive constructions of emotion can be organized into neatly demarcated schemes such as "the Confucian structure of feeling" and "the enlightenment structure of feeling," Lee's (mis)use of structure of feeling also ignores the temporal aspect of cultural process emphasized by Williams—that there is no clear-cut demarcation and that the residual, dominant, and emergent coexist and in that process help to define each other.

[78] Ibid., 131.

[79] Ibid. 134-35.

[80] This point is indebted to Lauren Berlant's method of treating film and other forms of recording as documents that "archive" otherwise ephemeral experiences and "track" them as they unfold and emerge in time. Berlant's conceptualization of time and the temporality of the present "as a process of emergence" draws directly from Raymond Williams's concept of structure of feeling that is still emergent, in process and yet to be articulated. See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

kinship relations surfaced and resurfaced time and again from literary revolution to revolutionary literature and reconfigured those imaginaries in varying conditions. This was not so much a coincidence as overdetermined by the historical and cultural circumstances of twentieth century China just outlined in the introduction.

This emphasis on historical interconnections of aesthetics, emotion, and politics in revolutionary works marks this project's contribution to body of recent scholarship on revolutionary literature and culture. This body of recent scholarship distinguishes itself from earlier historical and factual scholarship that often denies those works' aesthetic value.[81] Some of the major interventions this new generation of scholars has made are that they have no interest in being stuck in the stale debate on whether works of propaganda have aesthetic value/quality without questioning the very parameters of how the concept of beauty is defined.[82] These scholars therefore do not try to separate

[81] This new scholarship includes but is not limited to Krista Van Fleit Hang, *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), Max Bohnenkamp, *Turning Ghosts into People: "The White-Haired Girl", Revolutionary Folklorism and the Politics of Aesthetics in Modern China* (diss. 2014), and Pang Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning: Artistic Production during China's Cultural Revolution* (Verso, 2017). These three monographs are listed here because they are directly related to the focus of three of the chapters in this dissertation, Chapter Two on *The White-Haired Girl* in the Yan'an period, Chapter Three on early PRC, and Chapter Four on *The Red Lantern* and the height of the Cultural Revolution. Earlier scholarship on Communist culture and art mentioned here include *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, edited by Bonnie S. McDougall (University of California Press, 1984), David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford University Press, 1991), Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (University of California Press, 1994). A recent monograph written by a historian, Brian James DeMare, on Communist drama troupes and performances that toured the countryside of North China in the 1920s to early PRC presents another important historical study. As the author clarifies, it is a study of "dramatic performance as an expression of political culture as opposed to its artistic or aesthetic qualities" because according to Perry Link these works' aesthetic qualities would be inherently compromised due to the fact that they were created to influence audience (13). See DeMare, *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (Princeton University Press, 2000). Such a naïve and reductive view of the complicated relationship between aesthetics and politics is shocking to say the least, but as an empirically grounded work DeMare's book is useful in supplementing important historical evidence when needed in the second chapter of this dissertation.

[82] The autonomy of art presupposed in Kantian philosophy of aesthetics, for instance, renders any grafting of literature and art onto politics unacceptable to critics. Link and DeMare's take on revolutionary literature mentioned in the previous footnote is such a case in point.

aesthetics from politics, or try to depoliticize aesthetic texts. In a similar vein, they reject a normative assumption about the deviancy of Maoist visions of modernity and the type of aesthetics embedded and articulated in them. They instead try to make sense of cultural production under Maoist aesthetic principles and read those texts on their own terms. They treat theoretical writings produced by Chinese literary and cultural theorists, including Mao himself, seriously and bring this body of theoretical knowledge in conversation with both the primary text and Western theories, a method this study also deploys.[83] Global circulations of resources, people, and ideas have already precluded the possibility of a pure "Chinese theory," and instead we should, as these scholars suggest, create a cross-cultural dialogue that treats the West and non-West as equal and coevals. Another important intervention these scholars make is that their works no longer assume that state power is necessarily repressive, monolithic, or hegemonic and that the people are passive recipients of a culture spoon fed to them.[84] Following their lead, this study also rejects an oppression/resistance binary framework.[85]

---

[83] Max Bohnenkamp's discussion of Zhou Yang's influential synthesis of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism in relation to Soviet influence and Zhou's sponsorship of *The White-Haired Girl* is a case in point. Bohnenkamp's work will be discussed in detail in Chapter III. Bohnenkamp, *Turning Ghosts into People: "The White-Haired Girl", Revolutionary Folklorism, and the Politics of Aesthetics in Modern China*. 2014. Chicago University, PhD dissertation.

[84] Pang Laikwan for instance has forcefully argued that when considering artistic creations during the Cultural Revolution we must conceptualize a structure that is not only vertical or hierarchical but also horizontal with agency, activism, production and circulation at the bottom. See Pang, *The Art of Cloning*. Krista Van Fleit Hang's book similarly shows that the concept of "the people" was constantly negotiated during the early years of PRC, the process of literary production involved cooperation among writers, government official, and people in the countryside, and it was by no means "a monolithic system forced on unreceptive citizens." Van Fleit Hang, *Literature the People Love*, qt. on 8.

[85] The power of this binary framework is truly far-reaching. DeMare's recent monograph mentioned in previous footnote is still keen to provide a historical account of how the drama troupes "did their best to resist the ever-growing reach of the PRC state" (i).

Drawing on this body of recent scholarship on revolutionary culture, *Revolutionary Melodrama* sets out to interrogate how aesthetic texts create the textual and affective space to reimagine and reconfigure family and kinship in relation to the national and socialist revolution. Furthermore, this dissertation also attempts to explore more general questions that deserve our attention: What is it about the aesthetic mode of melodrama that operates as an almost transhistorical affective force? What might its permutations and manifestations in each historical circumstance tell us about important questions such as aesthetics' relation to politics and social reality, and the role aesthetics plays in mediating the relation between politics and emotion? How might a theory of Chinese revolutionary melodramatic aesthetics that aims to propel social change through feeling help us rethink the well-established theorizations of melodrama and affect as well as of modernity?

With the hope of exploring and perhaps offering some tentative answers to those questions, this study is divided into three main body chapters. The first chapter begins with the May Fourth New Culture movement and Ba Jin's iconic novel *Jia* (1933) that epitomizes the May Fourth generation's denunciation of the traditional family. This chapter reads the tension between the residual affective ethics of the traditional kinship system and the emergent revolutionary structure of feeling. This tension is fought out in the normalizing and naturalizing force of emotion through discursive construction of the narrative that argues for the replacement of the residual by the emergent. This chapter argues that the high level of melodramatic tears and victimhood represented in the novel

is absolutely necessary for the novel to constitute an aesthetic that aims to act as a public manifesto and accusation against a decaying tradition. I also show how the melodramatic mode gets mobilized in different historical circumstances for varied ideological purposes. And yet what this emergent new society and the social relations embedded in it look like remains ambiguous in *Jia* and many other of Ba Jin's works. This chapter uses the concept of structure of feeling to highlight the temporal and historical dimensional of emotion/affect: emotion/affect is social and it is possible to speak of the feeling of an epoch, as we will see how the affective meaning of family and kinship changed over time from the May Fourth to the 1950s after the Communist revolution had won.

Chapter III moves out of the urban settings of the May Fourth to the hinterland of rural China where traditional beliefs and norms of kinship still held sway, and where a melodramatic polarization of morals had long been part of religious tales and local opera repertoire. This chapter examines the creation of the new music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* (1945) and its melodramatic mode in relation to folk culture, the search for *minzu xingshi* (national form), and the rethinking and redefinition of realism in wartime China that eventually created a Sinified socialist realism. This chapter uses *The White-Haired Girl* as a case study to show how the mode of the romantic and the melodramatic become synthesized with the realist mode to produce a highly integrated form of mass theatrical work. This mass theatrical work reappropriates popular religious beliefs, worldviews, and structures of feeling associated with the peasantry in order to disseminate new revolutionary ideas and ideals embedded in a revolutionary structure of feeling.

Continuing to situate theatrical works in the context of theater reforms in twentieth century China, the third chapter examines how one of the best-known revolutionary model operas produced during the height of the Cultural Revolution, *The Red Lantern* (1970), continues the construction of imaginaries of revolutionary family that transcend biological connection in socialist cinematic and literary texts. Through close analysis of the opera film that attends to its form and medium specificity, this chapter argues that *The Red Lantern* has radically redefined and reenvisioned a new form of revolutionary kinship based on affective class kinship and mutual care. Affective bonds heightened in the opera film due to its medium specificity and the utilization of the melodramatic mode are vital to the continuation of the revolution both in the diegetic world of the film and in the real world. This chapter will also include a more extensive discussion of the melodramatic mode and its relation to realism, socialist realism, and Maoist revolutionary romanticism. It is by no means accidental that melodramatic elements figure so prominently in socialist art informed by principles of revolutionary romanticism. It is precisely because melodrama wrests "the true" from "the real" that it resonates so perfectly with Maoist revolutionary romanticism that contends socialist art should depart from reality to capture a more idealized reality, the truth hidden beneath the surface of reality.

The Coda (Chapter V) turns to Ba Jin's essays written after the Cultural Revolution and some well-known post-socialist/post-revolutionary film melodramas when the crescendo of revolutionary zeal finally exhausted itself. As someone who was

persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and suffered the personal trauma of losing his beloved wife, Ba Jin wrote those essays as testament, as eulogy, as memorial to suffering, personal and collective, to history, to lives lost, and to the loss of his beloved wife and destruction of their nuclear family *xiao jiating*. This narrative of trauma and suffering became the dominant mode of discourse as intellectuals were recuperated by the state and regained discursive power. In other words, melodrama returned. This sentiment is echoed in post-socialist cinema as well where the dominant style of Chinese cinema abandoned the radical model of opera film and went back to the classical Hollywood style of realism. We witness a complete rejection of the ideals and aesthetic demands of revolutionary art in all aspects of cultural production. In these film melodramas, the family returns as the basic economic unit, the safety net, and the ultimate fulfilment of heterosexual romance and personal happiness. Revolution and political campaigns actually are the cause for people's suffering such as in the case of Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* (1987). Women are once more mothers, wives, daughters, and caretakers rather than revolutionaries.

This sole focus on victimhood and suffering however bespeaks a deeper failure to address the uneasy relationship between intellectuals and the masses that the Communist revolution attempted to transform. Reading Ba Jin's essays is a way to rethink the individual and collective experiences of modernity and history and the multiple modes of feelings—class hatred, revolutionary zeal, personal tragedy, romantic passion, and so on. Certain feelings get normalized, even abused at certain points, and then cast aside and forgotten. Revolutionary culture downplayed sexual and romantic love; these came back

with a vengeance to dismantle revolutionary passions. Scholarship written in the post-Mao era in China and the West has always privileged the personal, subjective, and inner feelings over collective and social sentiments. This project hopes to engage with aesthetic texts that bear testament to such multiplicity and not to vitiate any one particular mode.

CHAPTER II

BETWEEN RESIDUAL AND EMERGENT, EXCESS AND NORM: ARTICULATING A REVOLUTIONARY STRUCTURE OF FEELING IN BA JIN'S *JIA*

Partly triggered by Ba Jin's tearful reaction to a new production of the renowned drama *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu* 雷雨, 1934) by the eminent dramatist Cao Yu 曹禺 (1910-1996), the Western educated aesthetician, literary critic and then a professor at the prestigious Peking University Zhu Guangqian 朱光潛 (1897-1986) wrote a scathing essay in response. Entitled "Literature of Tears" (*yanlei wenxue* 眼淚文學), Zhu's essay aimed to criticize "literature of tears," or *littérature de larmes* in French, i.e., works that cater to the sentimental needs of the audience.[1] The author denigrates shedding tears as one of the many base, bodily pleasures (*kuaigan* 快感), equivalent to other base pleasures such as sex and drugs. The influence of Kant's aesthetics and his distinction between aesthetic judgement and bodily pleasure is evident here. Kant distinguishes aesthetic judgement or the faculty of judging of the beautiful, which is *disinterested* and *free*, from "satisfaction in the pleasant" that "entirely rests upon sensation."[2] Zhu Guangqian, still very much a Kantian aesthetician at this point, clearly resented the naïve equation of literary and

[1] Zhu Guangqian, "Yanlei wenxue," *Dazhong zhishi* 1.7 (1937), 46-48. In context for Zhu's scathing article was that earlier Ba Jin published a short essay in *Ta Kung Pao* 大公報 to express his fondness of the drama *Thunderstorm* and that *Thunderstorm* made him cry four times.

[2] Kant*, Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hefner, 1956), 161, 166. Kant's famous conceptualization of aesthetic judgement as "disinterested pleasure" comes from this section of *Critique of Judgement*. Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgement builds on the distinction of three kinds of pleasures occasioned by different objects: the satisfactions of taste in the beautiful, the pleasant, and the good. Only pleasure in the beautiful is *disinterested* and *free* because it does not involve a purpose like the satisfaction in the good does, nor does it depend on sensation like the satisfaction in the pleasant does. See also Paul Guyer, *Kant and Claims of Taste*, 2nd edition (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 110-119, 151-160.

aesthetic texts' ability to move readers to tears with high aesthetic quality. While acknowledging that crying is part of human nature, the author reveals that the Romantic period and the proliferations of sentimental literature made shedding tears a necessary aesthetic criterion and popularized "literature of tears" and sentimental heroes like Werther in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. No wonder that Plato calls for the banishing of poetry and poets from the ideal city of the Republic, Zhu continues to explain, because "the poet caters to human's depraved propensity for sentiments and tears and utilizes sentimental materials to stimulate (*ciji* 刺激) the audience, making them gain the pleasure of satisfying their fetish for pity (*ailian pi* 哀憐癖)."[3] As a result, people lose their masculinity (*zhangfu qi* 丈夫氣) and their personality becomes feminized (*nüxing hua* 女性化) and inactive.

The limits of sentimental literature, therefore, lie in its resulting in inaction, its failure to effect any actual social change according to Zhu. The author gives the example of a Russian aristocratic woman sitting in her carriage, reading a novel depicting social suffering of the poor and is subsequently moved to tears while the groom of her carriage freezes to death in front of her. This point echoes Marston Anderson's take on the cathartic effect of realism in which emotions of pity and terror felt by the reader are purged and therefore fail to effect any social change as discussed in the Introduction chapter. However, for an academically trained aesthetician under the strong influence of

[3] Zhu Guangqian, "Yanlei wenxue," 47.

Kantian aesthetics like Zhu Guangqian, the cardinal sin of a literature of tears lies in its inability to produce aesthetic perception (*meigan* 美感) and instead produces only momentary satisfaction of pleasant bodily sensations (*kuaigan*). Tears are an impediment to great artistic work, and therefore must be eradicated, the author emphatically advocates, to make way for the creation of truly great work.

Unsurprisingly, Ba Jin's response to Zhu Guangqian's scathing essay patently lacked its interlocutor's theoretical and philosophical sophistication and erudition. In his response, while frankly admitting he never had a formal college education and therefore was only a "shallow and crude" youth compared to Zhu Guangqian the erudite scholar and a university professor, Ba Jin tries to appeal more to "common sense" and "human nature"—that it is common for people to shed tears when they feel touched by something, that shedding tears is "the natural outpouring of human emotions" (*renlei ganqing de ziran liulu* 人類感情的自然的流露).[4] Appealing to a somewhat uncritical assumption about human nature and what is natural seems to be Ba Jin's stock trick. In a response to the criticism voiced by the New Sensationalist writer Shi Zecun 施蟄存 (1905-2003), who accused Ba Jin's writings of lacking formal quality and use of the unsophisticated first-person narrative, Ba Jin stated the following reason as to why he wrote novels: "I only felt a kind of passion (*reqing* 熱情) that needs to be let off (*faxie* 發洩), a type of sorrow (*beiai* 悲哀) that needs to be disgorged (*tulu* 吐露). I never had time to think about what

[4] Ba Jin, "Xiang Zhu Guangqian xiansheng jin yige zhonggao," *Zhongliu* 2.3 (1937), 139-143, qtd. on 139. Despite the humble façade of claiming himself as a "shallow and crude" youth, Ba Jin spent the rest of the essay in nitpicking certain technical errors Zhu made in some of his works.

form I should use. I write novels to appeal (to a higher authority or court of justice) (*shensu* 申訴) and to commemorate (*jinian* 紀念)."[5] Ba Jin then describes himself the writer as a *tool* (*gongju* 工具), as if he was a puppet driven by certain forces, whose "hands could not stop but write swiftly on the paper, enabling many people to speak out (*shensu* 申訴) their pains through [his] pen."[6] In the Postscript to a 1952 republication of the novel *Jia*, Ba Jin repeats again the image of the writer as puppet, forced to write against his will: "I did not write novels to become a writer, but past life forced me to pick up a pen."[7]

The spontaneity of emotional outbursts takes on a life of its own and becomes the agent while the writer loses their autonomy and becomes an instrument, according to Ba Jin's own elucidation. The trope of the writer/subject being a puppet, voicing other people's voices and emotions and/or controlled by external and internal emotions, reoccurs throughout Ba Jin's fictional and non-fictional writings. Characters in Ba Jin's novel *Jia* (1933) for instance, are described as "gripped" (*zhuazhu* 抓住) constantly by overwhelming emotions. Such a trope presents a view of the subject rather distinct from the conceptualization of the modern subject as autonomous and rational. Ba Jin's view of the emotional non-subject would uncannily support the literary theorist Rei Terada's challenge to what she calls the "expressive hypothesis" in the theories of emotion in the

[5] Ba Jin, "Zuozhe de zupou," *Xiandai* 1.6 (1932), 863-867, qtd. on 863.

[6] Ibid., 864.

[7] Ba Jin, "Xinban houji" [Postscript to the New Edition], *Jia* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013), 355-358, qt. on 355.

Euro-American philosophical tradition, i.e., the hypothesis that emotions emanate from the interior of a subject and express externally. The theorist suggests instead that emotions in fact depend on non-subjectivity, and that theories of emotion, even posited in classical Enlightenment thoughts, are always already post-structuralist or deconstructive by nature.[8] As Terada boldly puts it, "we would have no emotions if we were subjects."[9]

But of course, there are subjects in Ba Jin's novel. *Jia*, as the most iconic work of the May Fourth period that attacked the traditional family system and institution of arranged marriage, touted the individual freedom to choose one's marriage partner. The freedom to choose one's marriage partner is symbolically meaningful in many modern cultural contexts, precisely because it is seen as expressions of individual will of the autonomous modern self.[10] Meanwhile this romantic autonomous modern self is also bound up with broader forms of sociality and ultimately the nation. As Haiyan Lee argues, the romantic individual conceptualized in the enlightenment structure of feeling of the May Fourth period is also the premise upon which new visions of human

[8] "The discourse of emotion from Descartes to the present day describes emotion as nonsubjective experience in the form of self-difference within cognition." Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the Death of the Subject* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3. Descartes has also been identified as the originator of the physicalist theory of emotion that reduced emotions to a subjective awareness of always passively experienced feelings in the body, located in the lower faculty of body. Emotions are "'things' that happen to us, we are overwhelmed" by them, they 'explode' in us, they 'paralyze' us, we are 'hurt' by them, and they 'threaten to get out of control.'" Owen M. Lynch "Introduction: Emotions in Theoretical Contexts," *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 5.

[9] Terada, *Feeling in Theory*, 4.

[10] For a discussion of free marriage and individual freedom in the May Fourth period, see Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 96. For Russian intellectuals such as Chernyshevsky and his peers of the nineteenth century, marriage had highly semiotic and cultural significance: it was deemed as "a stimulus for action," "the ultimate realization of real life," and more significantly an act of free will; it represented a man/woman's self-assertion and ability to act that distinguishes a positive hero from the inability and indecisiveness of the superfluous man. See Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 90-108, 115.

solidarity, be it nation or society, can be imagined;[11] or as an earlier scholar has pointed out, May Fourth melancholy fiction about romantic love is intricately linked to modern nationalism.[12]

Rather than dismissing Ba Jin's claim of human emotions as natural as merely a naïve belief, this chapter argues that the set of assumed unmediated and natural emotions depicted in the novel is powerful precisely because it naturalizes a new regime of emotion and has the capacity to transform and articulate an emergent structure of feeling in a transitional period between tradition and modernity. A melodramatic tearjerker like *Jia* is precisely the kind of sentimental literature that Zhu Guangqian critiqued. And despite the accusation of lack of formal sophistication made by Shi Zecun, *Jia*, along with the other two novels *Chun* 春 (1934) and *Qiu* 秋 (1935) in the *Torrent* 激流 Trilogy, were immensely popular since its initial publication and reached more readers than any literary works produced by May Fourth writers.[13] In a letter to Ba Jin written by a reader

[11] Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 96.

[12] John Fitzgerald, *Awaking China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 92.

[13] *Jia* was first serialized under the title of *Torrent* 激流 in *Shibao* 時報 in Shanghai in 1931 for nearly a year and then was published as the novel entitled *Jia* 家 by *Kaiming shudian* 開明書店 in 1933. The novel became immensely popular and was reprinted by *Kaiming shudian* for over thirty times over the next decade. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, *Renmin wenxue chubanshe* 人民文學出版社 first published *Jia* in 1953, a version that became the official edition used in school curriculum and for translations into foreign languages. From 1953 to the 2000s, the *Renmin wenxue* official edition was reprinted over ninety times with a total number of over four million copies in circulation. See *Zhongguo xinwen wang*, https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cul/news/2008/10-16/1414967.shtml Accessed on Apr. 30, 2022. For a detailed discussion of the publishing history and different editions of *Jia*, see Jin Hongyu, "*Jia* de banben liuyuan yu xiugai," *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 3 (2003), 239-256. The English translation of *Jia* in this chapter is based on Sidney Shapiro's translation *Family* (Prospect Height, IL: Waveland Press, 1989). All the translations of *Jia* are based on this abridged version with my modifications, and the footnote will indicate both the page reference in the original Chinese version published by Renmin wenxue chubanshe and in this translated version. For those passages not included in the abridged, the translation is all mine.

in the 1980s who was also an intellectual and writer himself, the reader professes his avid love for this novel over a span of more than four decades and writes: "when a writer gave his heart to his reader, it would inspire (*guwu* 鼓舞) the reader as well as make the their feelings (*ganqing* 感情) *boil* like a pot of boiling water. The reader then would go on fight for the good and beautiful in life. Isn't this precisely the power of art?"[14] The reader also commented that even if Ba Jin did not point out a clear path forward for young people at the time of the novel's creation, many youths only went on to search for "revolutionary paths" (*geming de daolu* 革命的道路) after reading works such as *Jia*—the destruction of an old system is a necessary premise for "the birth of something new" (*xinsheng* 新生).[15]

This reader response evinces most forcefully the affective and pragmatic efficacy of an overtly sentimental and melodramatic realist novel like *Jia*. Unlike most realist narratives where the narrator remains an external and impartial observer to the world narrated, the narrator/author of *Jia* is heavily emotionally invested—by Ba Jin's own admission he wrote the novel to cry out "J'accuse" against a dying system.[16] When rereading the novel once again in 1952, the author again acknowledged that "inside the book my personal love and hatred (*geren de aizeng* 个人的爱憎) are truly too deep" and

[14] Tao Xiaozu, "Mantan sange *Jia*," *Dangdai wentan* 5 (1985), 2-7, qt. on 3.

[15] Ibid., 3.

[16] In the Preface to the tenth edition written in 1937, Ba Jin explains his motive for writing the novel *Jia*: his intense love toward all those lovely young lives destroyed transformed into more intense hatred, and therefore he must write to shout "j'accuse" to this cannibalistic system and save those who can still be saved. See Ba Jin, "Guanyu *Jia* (shiban daixu): gei wo de yige biaoge" [About *Jia* (Dedication in Place of a Preface for the 10th Edition): To a cousin of mine], *Jia*, 342-354, qtd. on 346.

therefore it was a work full of defects.[17] However, rather than branding the novel as a failed realist work, this chapter takes the function of emotion in *Jia* seriously, a work that enjoyed enduring popularity, captured the zeitgeist, and resonated with many educated young readers in that historical moment, and yet has rarely received serious scholarly attention partly due to its melodramatic excess.[18] This chapter seeks to make sense of the melodramatic excess and the presence of an emotionally invested and partial author/narrator in a realist novel.

Jia is a representative work of the May Fourth generation's denunciation of the traditional family and call for a radical break with tradition. Like all the other melodramatic texts discussed in this study, it relies on the melodramatic mode that features suffering and victimhood to not only produce moral-emotional indignation but also to establish a new normative regime of emotional experience. This new normative regime of emotions and desires is based on heterosexual romance and companionate marriage—the basis on which families (now defined as the *xiao jiating* nuclear family rather than the traditional extended family) should be formed—as well as on a humanist universal ideal of a non-hierarchical social relations and kinship relations. It functions

[17] Ba Jin "Xinban houji," *Jia*, 355-356.

[18] The only monograph in English on Ba Jin and his work is written by Olga Lang, a monograph that mainly focuses on the biographical information of the author and general discussions of Ba Jin's major works. See Olga Lang, *Pa Chin and His Writings: Chinese Youth between the Two Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). Rey Chow's reading of *Jia* remains to this day the most sophisticated, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. The canonization of Jia and many other Ba Jin's literary works in the literary history of the PRC did generate a huge amount of scholarship on Ba Jin and his oeuvre, but those types of scholarship written in Chinese all repeat the same cliché argument, with some variations, that *Jia* is a typical May Fourth "anti-feudal 反封建" work.

similarly to what Lauren Berlant theorized as an "intimate public," a mediated space, often occupied by women, in which a common worldview and emotional knowledge is shared and a sense of social and collective belonging projected.[19] However, unlike the ambivalent relation the intimate public engendered by consumer culture in a capitalist society has with politics, the political agenda of a text like *Jia* is clear: to rebel against an oppressive hierarchical system and dismantle the traditional family system. I argue that the overtly melodramatic and sentimental narrative functions not only to evoke pathos and hatred but serves as a public call to dismantle the traditional family system. The high level of melodramatic tears and victimhood is absolutely necessary for the novel to constitute an aesthetic that aims to act as a public manifesto and accusation against a decaying tradition. As evidenced in the enormous popularity of the novel and the many impassioned letters written by young readers to Ba Jin about how the novel inspired them to rebel against and depart from their own "feudal family," the melodramatic novel's revolutionary call to action did effect social change.[20]

More importantly, as an affective archive of a transitional historical moment, *Jia* captures the tension between the residual affective ethics of traditional kinship system and the emergent revolutionary affect (however vaguely defined and imperfectly inhabited), between individual autonomy and ethical demands of social bonds (family,

[19] Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American* Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), viii.

[20] One of the young readers who corresponded with Ba Jin was Xiao Shan 萧珊 (1917-1972), who later became the wife of Ba Jin.

kinship, citizen), and between the overflowing spontaneity of supposedly *natural* emotion (formlessness, excess) and the cognitive work emotion performs to establish and legitimate a new structure of feeling and perception (form, norm). The seemingly naïve belief and claim of emotions as *natural* is powerful precisely it naturalizes a new regime of emotion and has the capacity to transform and articulate a new structure of feeling.

This chapter uses Raymond Williams's concept of structure of feeling to highlight the temporal and historical dimensional of emotion/affect: emotion/affect is social and it is possible to speak of the structures of feeling of a social group/class and of an epoch.[21] Viewing culture as process, Williams deploys the residual and the emergent to help think about dominant culture. The residual refers to experiences, meanings, and values lived and practiced on the basis of previous social and cultural institutions or formations. The emergent refers to new experiences, new meanings and values, new relationships that are continually created. The residual and the emergent coexist with the dominant while contesting and resisting it (alternative or oppositional to dominant culture).[22] At any given moment, all three are interconnected and interacting with each other, and the dominant constantly seeks to incorporate the residual and the emergent especially when the emergent poses opposition to the dominant.[23]

---

[21] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 134-35.

[22] Williams also points out that blurry boundary between the dominant and the emergent: to answer the question of if certain cultural practice is simply a new phase of the dominant culture or the creation of something new, i.e., the emergent, remains tricky. Williams, *Marxism and Liter*, 123.

[23] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121-127. See also Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso, 1997), 40-45.

This chapter therefore reads the tension between the residual affective ethics of the traditional kinship system, embodied by the oldest brother, and the emergent revolutionary affect, embodied by the youngest brother and to certain extent the second brother and Cousin Qin, and also by the narrator.[24] This tension is fought out in the normalizing and naturalizing force of emotion through discursive construction of the narrative that argues for the replacement of the residual by the emergent. And yet what this emergent new society and the social relations embedded in it look like remains ambiguous in *Jia* and many other of Ba Jin's works. Just as the reader acknowledged that *Jia* did not offer a clear path forward for youths at the time, the revolutionary future is never depicted in the novel and remains truly emergent and yet to be articulated.[25] As an affective archive, *Jia*, between its initial edition published in 1933 and its official edition published in 1953, documents and showcases how the affective meaning of family and kinship in relation to larger social identities such as class and the nation changed over time. It captures the profoundly ambivalent and yet-to-be-articulated structure of feeling of a society undergoing drastic transformations under modernity, transformations felt most keenly at the level of personal, and at the same time social, emotions.

Between Residual and Emergent: *Jia* as an Affective Archive

[24] This reading is excluding any discussion of the emotional life of the older generation in the family because no access is given to their interiority. *Jia* is very much a book about the emotional life of the younger generation.

[25] The next two novels in the trilogy still are still confined to the domestic life of the gentry family rather than the depiction of what happens after younger generation leaves home.

Set in the early 1920s when the revolutionary fever of the May Fourth movement was at its height, *Jia* captures the tension between the ethical demands of social bonds (family, kinship, citizen) and individual autonomy, between the residual affective ethics of traditional kinship system and a new regime of emotion informed by new conceptions of individual freedom, gender relations, sexuality, and forms of sociality. Much of the plot of *Jia* revolves around three romances, two failed and one successful, between the first brother Juexin and their cousin Mei, between the third brother Juehui and the maid Mingfeng, and between the second brother Juemin and cousin Qin, an educated and rebellious "new woman." Juemin and Qin, with the encouragement and help from the third brother, eventually elope together to escape an arranged marriage. Through their avid consumption of May Fourth journals such as the *New Youth*, the three brothers of the Gao family are in close touch with the fervors of the May Fourth New Culture movement and the new ideas and ideals, such as equality and democracy, it promoted. While the two younger brothers enjoy more freedom to put into practice these new ideas and ideals, the first brother, being the oldest son and grandson, must sacrifice personal happiness in service of the larger family. He thus continues to "read journals and newspapers about new ideas while living the old life."[26] The oldest brother therefore embodies the residual affective ethics of traditional kinship system, and this traditional affect is fundamentally at odds with the emergent structure of feeling embodied by the two younger brothers.

[26] *Jia*, 33; *Family*, 43.

Even though the character of the first brother is clearly depicted as a typical submissive "non-resistant" character who wholeheartedly believes in and practices Tolstoy's "Non-Resistance-ism" 无抵抗主义, there is a moment in the narrative when his voice takes over the narrative to explain how he willingly chooses to shoulder the filial obligations of the big family out of the love he has for his parents. The revelation comes when the third brother Juehui gives another one of his sermons on resistance and pursuing personal happiness. Juexin responds by telling how their dying father passed on, full of tears, the burden of taking care of his younger siblings and says: "I am willing to be a sacrifice (*xishengzhe* 牺牲者)… I was quite willing (*ziyuan* 自愿) to assume the burden Father left me…."[27] Juexin also shares the close relationship he had with their deceased mother and the story of how they used to keep each company at night when the mother would tell him the pains and sufferings she endured after her marriage into the Gao family. "I would then either shed tears in response, or talk to please her until she returned a smile. I would say that I would study hard, so that I could rise to the position of Director of the Censorate and Circuit Inspector, in order to bring upon her honor and glory, and then she would have her vindication," Juehui continues.[28] Juehui, the filial son, therefore is not forced into fulfilling his filial obligations by an oppressive system but is interpellated into a filial subject through the intersubjective emotional experience he has shared with his deceased mother.

[27] *Jia,* 82; *Family,* 96.

[28] *Jia,* 83; *Family,* 98.

Upon hearing the story, even the preachy Juehui is on the brink of bursting into tears while the other characters in the room start to shed tears. It is these moments of familial intimacies and affective reactions that raise the specter of the emotional cost of abandoning kinship bonds and the ethical obligations encoded in them in the pursuit of individual freedom and happiness. It is much easier for the two younger brothers who have shared no such intimate relationship with any members of the family, except for maybe among themselves to physically depart from the family compound, cut ties with blood relatives, and pursue their own personal happiness, whereas the older brother is more thoroughly embedded in the affective ethics of kinship bonds.

In his non-fictional writings, Ba Jin also wrote about the enormous emotional costs that came with the kind of heroic break from the traditional family advocated by the May Fourth generation. In an essay entitled "My Third Brother Li Yaolin" for instance, Ba Jin tells the tragic story of his brother giving up his dream of forming a *xiao jiating* and any chance of personal happiness, to send financial support to people back home (*laojia* 老家) despite his own penury. The author feels the guilt most keenly as he witnesses his brother shoulder the unbearable burden while Ba Jin himself was breaking his connections and therefore responsibility to his "feudal" and decadent old family.[29] The heroic action of breaking with tradition is always imbued with a melodramatic excess of suffering and victimhood and a tragic sense of emotional guilt and loss in Ba

[29] Ba Jin, *Suixiang lu* [collection of random thoughts] (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 2005), 417-418.

Jin's writings in general. This tells us another side of the story of the iconoclastic and heroic break from tradition and the traditional family of the May Fourth generation: the family and its affective interpellation always come back to haunt the individual who has escaped.

We see this sense of being caught in between in the novel as well: even the most rebellious character with the spirit of *fankang* in *Jia* inhabits a certain degree of the affective ethics of traditional kinship and family system. This is made most obvious in the deathbed scene of the grandfather. This section had undergone substantial revision from the initial publication in 1933 to the later official edition in 1953. In the earlier version, the grandfather and Juehui share an emotionally intense moment of intergenerational intimacy and mutual affection, whereas the later official version is distinctly marked by a lack of emotion and affective reaction on both sides. The scene begins with the grandfather, who is dying, summoning the grandson Juehui to his bed. Both versions describe Juehui's surprise to find the stern grandfather now behaving in such a warm and amiable way. The following part is translated from an earlier edition:

> "You're a good boy. I adore you very much." Grandfather said with great effort and smiled. He extended his right hand from the quilt to hold Juehui's hand. Juehui was *touched* (受了感動), moved his body closer to the bed, and kneeled down on the stool by the bed, letting grandfather's cold hand touch his forehead.
>
> "You're very good." Grandfather repeated with his feeble voice. "They say that you have a peculiar disposition…You must study your books well. Don't learn from them."
>
> … [The Grandfather begins to ask about the second brother, who at this point had already eloped with Cousin Qin to escape the arranged marriage planned by the grandfather]

> Juehui noticed a change in Grandfather's voice and saw that tears shone in the corners of his eyes. Juehui felt he himself were about to cry as well.
>
> "I was wrong. I have been unfair to him. I want to see him again. Bring him home quickly…I won't make any trouble for him." Grandfather wiped his eyes. And all of a sudden, he saw tears were running down Juehui's face, so he said movingly (感動地說), "You are crying…You're very good…Don't cry. My illness will be cured soon…Don't cry. Young people should often feel happy. Crying too much is bad for your health…You must study your books well and be a good person…Then after I die, I will still be happy in the other world."
>
> At this point, Juehui's *feelings exploded* (感情爆發). He could bear it no longer; he put his head on Grandfather's hand and started to cry.[30]

We see in this scene how tears and emotion are contagious and have the power to *affect*. The sight of tears in the corners of the grandfather's eyes triggers an affective reaction in Juehui who feels he is also on the verge of crying; upon hearing the materialization of the grandfather's eventual death, emotion can no longer be contained and has to be *expressed* from the body via an explosive outburst of tears. Significant changes were made in the later official edition that can be characterized as an erasure of emotion and affective reaction on both sides: first, there's no physical touch between the grandfather and grandson, and no mention of the grandson's affective reaction (受到感動); second, seeing the tears in the grandfather's eyes elicits no affective reaction, and throughout the scene Juehui never feels the urge to cry and does not cry; and third, the grandfather never admits that he was wrong nor makes it clear that he is willing to change the arranged marriage plan, and therefore remains irredeemable. The quoted passage in the earlier version contains a rare focalization through the grandfather's perspective in which he

[30] *Jia* (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1949), 434.

sees the tears gushing down the grandson's face—the great patriarch is for once no longer the object of the younger generation and everyone else's veneration, fear, and hatred.

This intimate moment of emotional intensity shared between the grandfather and Juehui is presented as *natural* expressions of *genuinely felt* emotion, marking a significant distinction from ritualistic displays of emotion which are treated in *Jia* to be hypocritical and insincere. We may recall here Ba Jin's response to Zhu Guangqian's criticism in which he argues that it is common for people to shed tears when they feel touched by something and that shedding tears is "the *natural* outpouring of human emotions" (人類感情的自然的流露).[31] Because they are mandated by ritual, tears shed at a funeral were suspect. Immediately after the teary deathbed scene, the description of the funeral rites takes on a satirical tone. It is mainly through the focalization of the two younger brothers Juemin and Juehui as well as the narrative voice that those ritualistic displays of emotion are exposed as farcical and hypocritical. The narrative voice tells us teasingly that the women's orchestrated crying at the grandfather's funeral turns into "a kind of art" (一种艺术) and often misses the cue to begin and end; more often than not the crying is just shrieking without tears. Juehui refers to the rituals performed by Buddhist and Taoist monks as "*gui baxi*"—ghostly tricks, and he could not care less about the 大殓 encoffining ceremony because to his mind he had already bid farewell to the grandfather

[31] Ba Jin, "Xiang Zhu Guangqian xiansheng jin yige zhonggao," 139.

in that genuine moment of emotional exchange. The two young brothers also find donning mourning clothes and performing rituals particularly amusing and farcical:

> The two brothers were set to work "returning courtesies." In other words, whenever a visitor kowtowed to the spirit of the departed, they were required to do the same, while a Master of Ceremonies intoned, "Thanks from the Filial Sons and Grandsons." Then all would rise to their feet and grin at each other sheepishly at the silliness of it all. The boys couldn't help smiling to themselves, too, when they saw their elder brother and uncles decked out in mourning clothes—a hempen crown with a long filial streamer trailing behind, a white mourning gown covered by a wide hempen vest, straw sandals—holding a mourning staff, lowering their heads, and walking with solemn tread. To the two brothers it was like a *farce* (滑稽戲).[32]

The affective ethics of traditional society, which viewed ritual practices as means of externalizing and visualizing the innate affection one has toward a superior in the network of kinship and social relations, is at odds with the emotional and cognitive world inhabited by the two young brothers.

Passages like these where the narrative voice and perceptions of the younger generation merge exemplify the May Fourth intellectuals' attack on a traditional society rooted in ritual practices and ritualistic displays of emotion as fundamentally hypocritical. As Rey Chow's reading of *Jia* points out, partly due to the Romantic preoccupation with "truth" (*zhen* 真) that was common in many of the May Fourth writings, the novel denounces melodramatic, ritualistic public displays of emotion as disingenuous and depicts only spontaneous and internal thoughts and emotions as something "genuine" that

[32] *Jia*, 293; *Family*, 294.

contain "truth."[33] Rey Chow is right in noting that the novel is making certain value judgments on types of emotions and the ways to express them through figural consciousness and narrative voice. The preoccupation with *zhen* and the attempt to construct a clear moral world of right and wrong are also at the heart the melodramatic mode. Alongside the melodramatic excess of tears, suffering, and victimhood, the novel attempts to establish and naturalize a new normative regime of emotions and desires informed by new conceptions of individual freedom, gender relations, sexuality, and forms of sociality.

Naturalizing a New Normative Regime of Emotions and Desires

As discussed in the previous section, much of the plot of *Jia* revolves around three romances. Heterosexual romance and companionate marriage are undoubtedly held up as the inherently good in the novel; they are also, as in many other May Fourth texts and revolution-plus-love stories, the narrative engine that drives the plot and character development. Romance functions more than tearjerking tragic love stories to hook the audience; it also naturalizes a normative regime of emotions and desires: certain emotions and desires are presented and seen as natural, normal, and inherently good whereas

[33] Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 99-100. However, Chow is wrong to say that in terms of premodern literary conventions, there is a clear gendered divide in the ways to express emotion in fiction: while emotional restraint, valorized in traditional literature, especially in classical poetry, is only accessible to male intellectuals who "have for a long time had access to the practice of art," women often have "to resort to violent, improper ways of expressing themselves" (102). Many women did write perfectly restrained poetry and genres other than fiction. Also in the novel emotional outbursts are by no means limited to women but are expressed by men frequently. The older brother, Juexin, who shoulders most of the filial responsibilities and remains subservient to the many unreasonable demands of the older generation, for instance, cries just as much as the next female character. His frantic pounding at the door that separates him from his wife dying while in labor is as melodramatic as the women's performative wailing at the grandfather's funeral. Both male and female characters constantly find themselves being "gripped" (*zhuazhu*) by overwhelming emotions.

certain emotions and desires are denigrated as inherently unnatural, perverse, and evil. This section turns to how *Jia*, through melodramatic polarization, attempts to establish and naturalize a new normative regime of emotions and desires informed by modern conceptions of individual freedom, gender relations, sexuality, and forms of sociality. The following analysis shows that *Jia* deliberately argues against the affective ethics of traditional society that required ritually sanctioned emotions and performance of these emotions to remain predominantly oriented upward toward a superior in the network of kinship and social relations. Instead, the husband-wife-child nexus of nuclear family takes precedence over the emotional bonds of the extended family, showing how the non-hierarchical kinship network consisting of equal citizens of the nation (emergent) can and should supersede a hierarchical kinship structure (residual).

The conflict over different forms and affective meanings of family relations is most evident in the relationship the first brother has with his deceased parents, his own wife and child, and the extended family and kinship network. The extensive narration by Juexin himself of how he was loved by both parents ("he grew up in an environment of love") in Chapter Six would be quite an anomaly in a traditional gentry family since ritually sanctioned emotions should remain predominantly oriented upward toward a superior in the network of kinship and social relations. We see the conflict over how to bring up Juexin's newborn child between Juexin and other members of the family: Juexin insists on having his wife breastfeed and bring up the child rather than hiring a wet-nurse,

a decision unheard of in a wealthy gentry family that evokes much criticism.[34] Although trapped in an arranged marriage, the arrival of a child seems to bring the self-sacrificial brother some familial intimacy and happiness:

> Every night, after his wife and child had retired, he would sit beside them, feasting his eyes on the baby sleeping in its mother's arms. The child's face made him forget about himself completely, and he only felt boundless love. He could not resist planting a kiss on the baby's satiny cheek and uttered a few vague words. Those words *did not have any meaning*, but they gushed *naturally* from his lips like water from a fountain. They were merely expressions of gratitude, hope, and love. (my emphasis)[35]

The love that a father feels toward his newborn child is *natural* and takes the form of natural force of water, and it is so powerful that it cannot be described in language with semantic meaning.[36] What is evoked here is the signature technique in melodrama of the use of non-verbal, non-semantic elements such as music and tableau to convey powerful emotions.[37] Similarly in a love scene between Mingfeng and Juehui that occurs in the garden, for a long time they simply "stare[d] at each other, conversing only using their eyes, and these meanings could not be expressed in language."[38] When the non-verbal nature of emotion gets conventionalized in melodrama via such expressions, such technique, while risking falling into clichés, also provides a common knowledge in the

---

[34] *Jia,* 33; *Family*, 44.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Rey Chow also notes the Romantic concern with "truth" is reflected in the titles of Ba Jin's novels that evoke natural forces, e.g., *Fog*, *Rain*, *Thunder*, *Lightning, Spring, Autumn,* etc.

[37] See Peter Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 58.

[38] *Jia*, 64.

appreciation of figural emotions. Emotions are most powerful when words cannot describe them, and in *Jia* such powerful and natural emotions help to normalize the new regime of emotions and desires.

The aesthetic and narrative modality of melodrama also predetermines that this inherently good new regime of emotions and desire, spanning heterosexual romance, companionate marriage, and intergenerational familial bonds within the heterosexual family, must be persecuted and destroyed in order to generate the moral-emotional indignation that in turn would generate action and propel social change. Romance and conjugal bliss in *Jia* seem to offer the promise of the amelioration of suffering, only to be taken away by the decaying cannibalistic system and the various agents who are complicit in that system. The romance between Juehui and Mingfeng is cut short by Mingfeng's suicide, an extreme reaction to being forced to be married off as the concubine to the old Master Feng. Juexin's conjugal bliss ends abruptly with his innocent wife Ruijue dying from childbirth, a tragic death caused by an arbitrary decision of the older generation based on superstition. Both female characters, Mingfeng and Ruijue, like all the typical female characters in melodrama, virtuously endure and reconcile themselves to their inevitable suffering. Upon hearing the decision that Ruijue must leave the household compound and move outside the city to give birth, based on a superstitious belief that the "curse of blood-glow" 血光之灾 of childbirth will cause the dead body of Master Gao to bleed, neither the husband nor the wife put up a fight. The narrative voice tells us that "he accepted the decision meekly; he did not say a single word to resist

(*fankang* 反抗). In his whole life, he never said any words of resistance (*fankang de hua* 反抗的话) to anyone…It never occurred to him that such forbearance might be harmful to others."[39] Ruijue also consigns herself to the fate of unjust suffering as pathetic crying is her only means of objection: "Ruijue made no complaint. She only cried. She expressed her resistance (*fankang*) in crying. But it was no use. She hadn't the strength to protect herself, and Juexin hadn't the strength to protect her either. She could only submit."[40] The narrative voice, while sympathetic to their suffering, clearly is not reconciled to the choice they have made; it chastises Juexin for not considering the harmful consequences of his action of "non-resistance," a knowledge the narrative voice clearly possesses.

Here lies the fundamental difference between melodrama and tragedy, as Linda Williams aptly puts it: "melodrama does not reconcile its audience to an inevitable suffering," and the fate that the female hero accepts in melodrama is at least partially questioned by the audience,[41] and in this case questioned by an equally emotionally invested narrator as well. The narrative voice here takes on the figural idiom of the preachy third brother who evokes words such as *fankang* constantly and it sounds almost identical to one of his condemnations of the submissive nature of the first brother. The realist narrator cannot maintain their detached objective stance, or more likely, Ba Jin never intended to maintain such a stance in the first place. In this sense, the aesthetic

[39] *Jia,* 297; *Family* 296.

[40] *Jia*, 298; *Family* 296.

[41] Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 47.

modality of melodrama does help the novel to function as a public accusation against the evils of the traditional society. In reality, *Jia* did inspire many educated young people to leave their natal family and therefore effect certain social change.

The melodramatic polarization of inherently good emotions versus perverse desires is most evident in the treatment of the sexual hypocrisy of the older generation. Through the focalization of the perspectives of the younger generation, views that the narrative voice seems to support, certain traditional cultural and sexual practices are questioned and treated as scandals. For instance, the socially acceptable practice of consorting with *dan* actors who impersonate women, a common practice that marked the social status and cultural capital among the gentry class, shocks the younger generation and is seen as sexually perverse and morally hypocritical.[42] Such sexual hypocrisy is questioned by the youngest brother Juehui who wonders how the professed cause of defending morals (*weidao* 衛道) by the members of the Confucian Association 孔教會 and their *fengya* (romantically-inclined) affairs is not paradoxical.[43] The theatrical feast put on to celebrate Master Gao's sixtieth birthday presents such a scandalous moment that drives the two young brothers Juemin and Juehui to escape the family compound.

[42] In the last quarter of eighteenth-century in Qing Beijing for example, the emergence and proliferation of a new genre of writing called *huapu*, i.e., guidebooks to boy actress and other activities of opera in Beijing usually written by marginalized literate men, was built on the connoisseurship of female impersonators. Literati connoisseurship, as many scholars have pointed out, is always more about self-representation and self-fashioning of the author, the social distinction achieved through his unique taste and sensibility, rather than the object of love. See Andrea Goldman, *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 17-60.

[43] *Jia,* 53.

This scene is narrated through the perspectives of the two young brothers, which then becomes merged with the narrative voice:

> Those three days were a new experience for them. Although they ordinarily disliked their family compound, at least they were familiar with it. Now, during the celebration, it changed beyond recognition. It became a theater, a market-place—crowded with people, noisy, full of unnatural grinning faces… Here a band of zither-playing blind musicians chanted birthday greetings; there another group sang lewd verses to the accompaniment of two string fiddles. Still a third group performed behind a curtain; the leering tones of the male and female voices were highly erotic; inexperienced young people were not permitted to listen.
> …
> When an opera was over, the actors who had been rewarded had to drink with them at their tables, still wearing their make-up and costumes. The honorable gentlemen fondled the performers and filled them with wine; they behaved with such crass vulgarity and ugliness that the younger people would never have dreamt of, and the servants whispered among themselves.[44]

The theatrical event literally turns the family compound into a theater, whose defamiliarizing and alienating effects with its overtly sexual content make the younger generation extremely uncomfortable. We are also told the stark contrast of the audience reception: certain parts of performance are so raunchy that they would bring "blushes to the women and the young people in the audience and smirks to the middle aged and older men." The older generation of men from the gentry class clearly are behaving crudely in a sexually improper and deviant way in the eyes of the younger generation as well as the servant class.

[44] *Jia*, 239; *Family*, 245-246.

When it comes to heterosexual romance and marriage, certain types of marriage and romance, that is consensual marriage between a man and a woman of similar and appropriate age, are represented and valorized in the novel as inherently good and worth pursuing while others are excluded from this new normative regime. Mingfeng's forced marriage to an old man is unjust not only because it violates individual freedom and agency but also because it is sexually deviant. The figure of the young *yitaitai*, the concubine of the grandfather, for instance, is reduced to a misogynistic caricature. Her appearance in the novel is always reduced and fragmented to her overly powdered pale face and the unpleasantly strong scent of wearing too much makeup (脂粉香) on her body. Her adamant proposition, based on a superstition, of moving the wife of Juexin outside the city that directly leads to the tragic death of the innocent woman makes her complicit in the cannibalistic system. Unlike Mingfeng and many young female characters in the novel, she is someone who clearly does not deserve gender liberation or equality. Equally irredeemable is the prostitute figure whom Keding, the fifth son of Master Gao and a prodigal, has an affair with. The first appearance of the prostitute is depicted mainly through the eyes of two male characters, first Keming, the third son, who takes such an offence at the prostitute's presence and equates it with sexual promiscuity and moral debauchery, and second, Keding who is sexually aroused by her. The narrator also tells us that "her coquettish glances constantly hovered over Keming's face."[45] Both

[45] *Jia,* 171.

in the eyes of the feudal moralist and the narrator who holds revolutionary sympathies for the socially oppressed and marginalized, the prostitute and the desire for her body represent sexual perversion. In other words, the revolutionary sympathy for the socially oppressed and marginalized only extends to certain men and women.

In a later essay written in the 1950s, however, Ba Jin did reflect upon the characterization of Chen Yitai, Concubine Chen, and the issue of attributing the blame for Ruijue's demise on her. Ba Jin explained that in all of his written work, he believed that the blame must be placed on the system (*tizhi* 体制) rather than on an individual (*geren* 个人). Ba Jin seems to negate here the embodied aesthetics of melodrama where larger social forces and injustices of a system, be it capitalist or feudal, are embodied by individual character types.[46] Rather, he lays the blame squarely on the system. Ba Jin explained that he did not believe that Chen Yitai was "a bad woman completely devoid of conscience" 丧尽天良的坏女人 and tried to provide a rationale for her behavior that she was very much the product and victim of her upbringing and circumstances: because she was a sold into concubinage as an orphan of a poor family and mistreated by everyone in the household expect for Master Gao, after the Master's death, she would naturally leap to his protection and naively believes in superstition.[47] Ba Jin's change of heart can be also explained by the change in historical circumstances and the types of structures of

[46] Christine Gledhill in a recent article on melodrama succinctly summarizes the common critique of melodrama that it "displaces 'real' social relations into the 'private' emotions and personal problems of individuals" particularly through its embodied aesthetics. Gledhill, "Melodrama's 'Modern'," *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 48.2 (2021), 162-179.

[47] Ba Jin, "Tan yingpian de *Jia,*" *Dazhong dianying*, 20 (1957), 36.

feeling associated with them. By the 1950s, the Communist revolution had already popularized a class-informed structure of feeling that insisted on sympathetic if not completely positive treatment of the laboring masses in fictional work and viewed entirely negative representations or caricatures of people of the lower class as problematic, a view that certainly transformed Ba Jin's previous personal feelings toward certain characters and people in real life on whom those character were based.[48] This change particularly illustrates the temporal and historical dimension of lived emotions that unfold and change over time.

Articulating A Revolutionary Structure of Feeling

While companionate marriage and heterosexual romance are valorized in the novel, they are by no means presented as a panacea to ease the suffering or right the wrongs in such an unjust system. As I have argued so far, the promises of ameliorating suffering via heterosexual romance and marriage are taken away by a decaying cannibalistic system and the various agents such as the concubine who are complicit in that system. This melodramatic polarization constitutes the aesthetics of the novel as a public accusation rather than serve to refract social injustices into private realm of personal romance and familial relations as is typical of the melodramatic mode.

Yet despite creating a critical dichotomy between the private and the social/public in Jia, Ba Jin fails to create a fictional vision in which the revolutionary social supersedes

[48] Chen Yitai was based on an old concubine in the Li family, whom Ba Jin (Li Yaotang) disliked immensely. Ibid., 36.

the private. After the dismantling of the traditional family system, neither *Jia*, nor in the two later sequels in the trilogy, depict what kind of ethical life an individual must inhabit and how such an ethical life should be embedded in new social relations.[49] This section analyzes Ba Jin's attempt to articulate a revolutionary structure of feeling—even though the vision of what the revolution actually is and what the new social life should look like remains unarticulated in the novel. Such a revolutionary structure of feeling is therefore only an *oppositional revolutionary affect* that only exists in the rebellious reaction against the traditional family system. As we shall see, Ba Jin elides sexual desire (the thermodynamic impulse behind romance) with revolutionary desire. *Jia* therefore is also an affective archive for the broad desire to transfigure the libidinal drive into revolution and the rechanneling of *si* 私 (personal, private; selfish, partial) desires in the embrace of *gong* 公 (communitarian; public, publicly sanctioned; benefiting the greater good) passions. It prefigures later revolutionary narratives that elide romantic love as a central plot element and redirect libidinal drives into revolutionary energy through a process of sublimation.[50]

[49] *Chun* and *Qiu* continue to depict the struggles of more members of the younger generation to rebel and break free from the traditional family. Some succeed and some fail. Only by the end of *Qiu* does the "feudal" family finally fall apart.

[50] Jason McGrath in his study of socialist cinema makes this point that while borrowing from classical Hollywood narration, socialist cinema differs from it in its suppression of romantic love as the central plot. McGrath, "The Communist Have More Fun! The Dialectics of Fulfillment in the Cinema of the People's Republic of China," *world picture* 3 (2009), accessed February 6, 2020, http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_3/McGrath.html. See also Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

The case of the third brother Juehui is a prominent example of how the redemptive power of romance is questioned and how the dichotomy between the private romantic feelings and the social/public passions is reinscribed. Juehui's indecisiveness causes him to constantly oscillate between fulfilling romantic desires and social responsibilities. Early in the narrative, Juehui's interior monologue shows that he is someone who holds certain naïve ideas about the dichotomy between family and larger society:

> "Can a man have a home while the Huns are still undefeated?" (匈奴未滅，何以家為) Although he didn't usually care for that hoary aphorism, it now seemed to contain a miraculous solution to all his problems. He boldly shouted it aloud. … What the cry meant to him was that a real man ought to cast off family ties and go out into the world (抛弃家庭到外面去); he should perform great deeds on his own. As to what kind of deeds these should be, he had only the vaguest notion.[51]

"Can a man have a home while the Huns are still undefeated?" 匈奴未滅，何以家為 were the famous words attributed to Huo Qubing 霍去病 (140-117 BCE), the famed general of the Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE-8 AD) who won several military victories over the Huns. When asked of his opinion on the mansion the emperor built for him, he uttered the above words to signal that defeating the Huns took priority over having a home. Prior to this moment, Juehui contemplates how the injustices of the low status of Mingfeng has divided them and prevented them from forming a union, but he ultimately takes a fatalistic view and chooses to do nothing. He wants to "cry out against the unfairness of

[51] *Jia*, 12; *Family*, 21.

this fate, to fight it, to change it." Then he says to himself, "It could never be. That sort of thing just can't be done." The oscillation between action to make change and inaction that occurs in Juehui's head only reconciles him to a passive acceptance of the injustice. What exactly the idea of going out into the world entails remains vague for him; the idea never extends beyond solving the frustration he encounters in his romantic life at home. Society seems to be a substitution for the frustrated romantic love at home, and we are told that as "his mind was filled with the vision of an ideal society, he forgot completely the pure love of the young girl."[52]

Even his supposedly vehement love for Mingfeng is found to be somewhat inadequate. This becomes particularly clear after Mingfeng is betrothed to marry the old man and subsequently commits suicide, and Juehui does not know the betrothal or her suicide at the moment. While oblivious to his lover's death, Juehui already begins the process of forgetting her:

> But Juehui's mind kept going back to Mingfeng, and thinking of her made him tremble inwardly. … No, after pondering the matter all night, he was ready to let her go. It was a painful decision, but he felt that he could carry it through. There were two things in the back of his mind with which he was already consoling himself for such a decision: one was that he wanted to devote himself entirely to serving society; the other was that a person of his position could never really marry a bondmaid—his petty bourgeois pride would not permit it.[53]

[52] *Jia*, 182; *Family*, 189.

[53] *Jia*, 207; *Family*, 223.

Again lofty and vague ideas of going out to the world or serving society become the excuses for the male character to let go of the object of his desire rather than fight against an unjust system that keeps them apart. Does Juehui think himself as a petty bourgeois? Is he aware of the limits of his class stance? Probably not. Such a critical stance is only known to the narrator and not to the figural consciousness. The narrative voice here becomes critical of the character and intrudes to give us a class analysis of the character's choice: that his petty bourgeois pride does not allow him to actually marry a bondmaid despite the humanitarian leaning 人道主义 of the third brother. Moments like these when the narrative voice intrudes to offer critical analysis of a figural mind remind the reader again and again of the limits of this transitional text in that even the most positive characters in the novel have an imperfect ability to inhabit the revolutionary structure of feeling.

While the rebellious Juehui inhabits the revolutionary structure of feeling somewhat imperfectly, he is nevertheless resolute in his pursuit of "better serving the society." Frustrated in the fulfilment of his romantic desires, Juehui devotes all of his energy to into editing a journal that aims to propagate ideas and ideals promoted by the New Culture movement. In that process, he has also "drifted further away from his family" (他跟家庭却离得更远了).[54] The following passage best illustrates how the

[54] *Jia*, 181; *Family*, 188.

narrative elides sexual desire, located in the domestic setting, with revolutionary desire, located in society outside of the confines of the family-home *jia*:

> There was one other person. Every time Juehui thought of her, his heart melted with tenderness. He knew at least one person in the compound loved him. The girl's selfless devotion was a source of constant happiness to him. Whenever he looked into her eyes—more expressive than any pair of lips, burning with the flame of pure love—he felt a kind of *desire* (欲望) surge in his breast. All the world was in those eyes; in them he could find his life's purpose. At times he was so overcome by emotion, he wanted to cast everything aside for their sake; he felt they were worth sacrifice.
>
> But when he walked out into the world, entered his new environment, met with his new friends—his vision widened, he could see the great world before him; it was there his red blood of youth (青年的热血) could find a place for its relief (发泄); it was there that existed the kind of work worth self-sacrifice. Life was not so simple; he knew that well. Comparing the wide world with a girl's eyes was really too silly. How could he give everything up for them?[55]

The libidinal desire is re-channeled through a more public and collective form of affective social bond—a friendship with the editorial staff of this magazine as well as with people he has never met across the nation who read and write to the magazine. The verb *faxie* 发泄 was used by Zhu Guangqian in his criticism of "literature of tears" for the shedding of sentimental tears when reading "literature of tears" is the same verb used to describe the relieving (*faxie*) of the sexual and other physical energies (*kuaigan*). The trope of desire and emotion as the natural force of water that is mobile and thermodynamic returns here. Terada describes the paradoxical Kantian *apatheia* where one person's lack of emotion or affectlessness "excites emotion in another" as an

[55] *Jia*, 182; *Family*, 188-89.

"economic law of emotive thermodynamics," or in Kant's original words: "the total amount of feeling is not diminished by the affectlessness of a noble mind."[56] Emotion/passion and bodily fluids here follow a similar law of thermodynamics whereby one form of emotion/bodily fluid/energy does not disappear or get destroyed but changes into another form. This point challenges the cathartic model of emotion in realism argued by Marston Anderson. As discussed before, melodrama produces a compromise—rather than catharsis—and leaves certain things as well as feelings unresolved. Moreover, revolutionary melodrama in particular identifies, through moral and affective polarization, the oppressive classes as an evil that must be struggled against and overthrown and rechannels emotions of pity and hatred into action.

The outlet for Juehui's frustrated libidinal desire is the action of composing essays propagating revolutionary ideas. In the process of editing the journal and corresponding with readers over all the country, Juehui finds a new form of social bond, be it friendship or kinship. And this new form of kinship is particularly refreshing and invigorating for Juehui compared to the stifling environment of his own family. The imagined community of the nation therefore offers an alternative form of kinship and belonging that is not based on blood relations, a far better alternative in this case than the biological family.

The embrace of this imagined community culminates in Juehui's resolute departure from his family at the end of the novel. On the one hand, the novel ends with

[56] *Feeling in Theory*, 84.

the heroic action of leaving the family-home on a note full of hope, and the revolutionary future of the new society exists temporally and spatially somewhere else ("那里 there") and raises the specter of its untenability on the other hand. The trope of feeling/emotion that possesses and grips subject returns, and this time, the emotion is unknown:

> The past seemed like a dream. All that met his eye now was an expanse of deep green water, reflecting trees and hills. On the boat a few sailors plied long sculling oars, singing as they worked.
>
> *A new feeling* (一种新的感情) gradually *gripped* (抓住) him. He didn't know whether it was joy or sorrow, but one thing was clear—he was leaving his family. Before him was an endless stretch of water sweeping steadily forward, bearing him to an unfamiliar city. *There, all that is new is growing* (在那里新的一切正在生长). There existed a new movement, the masses (群众), and some young and passionate friends with whom he stayed in correspondence but had never met.
>
> This river, this blessed river, was taking him away from the home he had lived in for eighteen years to a city and people he had never seen. The prospect dazzled him; he had no time to regret the life he had cast behind. For the last time, he looked back and said "goodbye" softly. He turned to watch the on-rushing river, the green water that never for an instant halted its rapidly advancing flow.[57]

The image of the river as a metaphor for time connects the past, present, and future in one continuous body of moving water; the water moves forward just as history moves forward and carries the character to an unknown future. Juehui ultimately turns his head forward to this unknown future, this prospect of the new—"all that is new is growing." I have translated this sentence in the present tense to highlight the use of "正在" as well as to suggest that the perfect alignment of the narrative voice and figural consciousness—what the narrative tells us is exactly what goes on in Juehui's thought. Juehui at this point

[57] *Jia*, 333; *Family*, 329.

finally fully embodies the revolutionary structure of feeling that the narrative voice also inhabits. And yet neither Ba Jin nor Juehui envisions how an individual becomes re-embedded in new social relations in a new society free of the evils of the oppressive traditional kinship system. What kind of ethical life should this individual inhabit in relation to others in the society? What are the affective ethics of a revolutionary society? These questions remain unanswered in *Jia*. The Communists would later provide their answers and visions that also proved to be untenable and would ultimately reinscribe the old dichotomy of *si* versus *gong*.

Created at a transitional period between tradition and modernity, *Jia* as an affective archive aptly captures the tension between the residual affective ethics of traditional kinship system and the emergent revolutionary affect (however vaguely defined and imperfectly inhabited). This tension is fought out in the normalizing and naturalizing force of emotion through the discursive construction of the narrative that argues for the replacement of the residual by the emergent. As an affective archive, *Jia* also reflects the broad desire to transfigure the libidinal drive into revolution and the rechanneling of *si* 私 desires in the embrace of *gong* 公 passions. The aesthetic and narrative modality of melodrama that features emotional excess and victimhood helped the novel to function as a public accusation against the traditional family system in order to effect social change. This chapter hopes to show that aesthetic texts can be more than a mere reflection of what people thought and felt at the time—admittedly it can reflect given thoughts and feelings to certain extent—but as a mediated experience of history

and modernity that can actively shape the discourses of family and kinship and transform existing structures of feeling at the same time. The affective and pragmatic efficacy of literary texts would become the predominant concern during the wartime period in the 1930s and 1940s when a new revolutionary culture emerged.

CHAPTER III

PUTTING *MELOS*- BACK IN DRAMA: *THE WHITE-HAIRED GIRL* AS A NEW NATIONAL MUSIC-DRAMA AND THE RETHINKING OF REALISM IN WARTIME CHINA

In the official narrative of the creation of a new revolutionary literature and culture, *The White-Haired Girl* (*Bai Mao Nü* 白毛女) has occupied a monumental place and been hailed as the cornerstone of and the first step toward the creation of the "New National Music-Drama" (*minzu xingeju* 民族新歌剧).[1] Immediately after its debut in Yan'an in 1945, an editorial feature in *Jiefang ribao* (解放日报 Liberation Daily), the official newspaper of the wartime Chinese Communist Party (CCP), extensively discussed *The White-Haired Girl*'s formal innovations as a work of *geju* and that it "has opened a pathway toward the creation of a new music-drama."[2] After watching a stage performance of *The White-Haired Girl* in Hong Kong in 1946, the Symbolist poet and revolutionary radical Feng Naichao 冯乃超 (1901-1983) wrote the following comment to affirm the general laudatory assessment of the music-drama: "to say that *Bai Mao Nü* is 'a *geju* of the national form,' 'the first *geju* of China,' and 'a milestone in the

[1] For instance, the *History of Modern Chinese Literature*, a standard college textbook from the 1980s used in higher education curriculum in China made the following assessment of *The White-Haired Girl*: "*The White-Haired Girl* laid the cornerstone for the new national music-drama of our country. Built on the foundations of the artistic practice of a mass art, it continued the traditions of folk song and dance, at the same time drawing upon our nation's classical dramatic heritage and that of Western opera, to invent, on the basis of the *yangge* play, a new national form, opening a vital pathway towards the creation of a new type of musical drama." Tang Tao and Yan Jiayan, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979), 229.

[2] "Guanyu *Bai Mao Nü,*" *Jiefang ribao*, July 17th, 1945.

development and progress of people's art,' these statements are not exaggerated."[3] However, Feng's conclusive evaluation of *The White-Haired Girl* in this essay is that it pointed to the directions that future new music-dramas should follow, not that the play itself was a finished "New Music-Drama." While applauding its artistic breakthroughs, the critical consensus at the time of its debut and later years was that it had laid the foundation for the creation of the "New National Music-Drama, not that the dramatic work had already achieved it. The creators of *The White-Haired Girl* on various occasions unanimously expressed their dissatisfaction with this music-drama and reflected on aspects for improvement.[4] The music-drama then underwent substantial revisions after each public performance, incorporating a wide variety of suggestions and criticisms from the audience, the Party leaders, and many other writers and literary critics.[5]

The White-Haired Girl, as a new genre of music-drama in the making, presented a qualitative leap from the previous new *yangge* model, adapted by the Lu Xun Academy from traditional folk song-and-dance tradition of *yangge* 秧歌, or "rice-sprout-songs," that had been very popular and successful in Yan'an and the Sha'an-Gan-Ning border

[3] Feng Naichao, "Cong *Bai Mao Nü* kan zhongguo xingeju de fangxiang," *Dazhong wenyi congkan* 3 (1948), 45.

[4] See Zhang Geng, "Guanyu *Bai Mao Nü* geju de chuangzuo," *Bai Mao Nü*, (Beijing: Qingnian chubanshe, 2000), 212-14, Ma Ke and Qu Wei, "*Bai Mao Nü* yinyue de chuangzuo," *Bai Mao Nü*, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962), 245-47.

[5] *The White-Haired Girl* underwent three major revisions, the first in Zhang Jiakou in 1946, the second in the Northeastern region in 1947, and then in Beijing in 1949. Act Four that portrayed Xi'er's life in the cave was deleted from the play, which condensed the play to a five-act play. See He Jingzhi and Ma Ke, "Preface," *Bai Mao Nü*, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962), 1.

regions.[6] It was Zhou Yang 周扬 (1907-1989), the leading Marxist theorist, literary critic, and then the head of the Lu Xun Academy, who raised the possibility of creating *The White-Haired Girl* as a "new revolutionary national music-drama" (*geming de minzu xin geju* 革命的民族新歌剧) after viewing the initial rehearsal of the first act.[7] The initial draft written by Shao Zinan 邵子南 (1916-1955) resembled more of a narrative poem featuring the regional opera *qinqiang* 秦腔 as its main musical style and was soon dismissed. In his criticism of the initial draft, Zhou Yang not only proposed the task of creating a revolutionary new music-drama to the creative team but also brought forth the famous theme of "The Old Society turned people into ghosts, but the New Society turns ghosts back into people" (*jiu shehui ba ren bicheng gui, xin shehui ba gui biancheng ren* 旧社会把人逼成鬼，新社会把鬼变成 人). Acting on the suggestions of Zhou Yang, the eminent drama theorist and head of the Lu Xun Academy's theater department Zhang Geng 张庚 (1911-2003) appointed the young poet He Jingzhi 贺敬之 (1924-) and the writer Ding Yi 丁毅 (1921-1998) to draft the script and lyrics of *The White-Haired Girl.*

[6] On the Spring Festival of 1943, in response to Mao Zedong's "Talks," the Lu Xun Academy piloted a new type of *yangge* to disseminate new revolutionary ideas and ideals while utilizing this folk form. The immediate success of the new *yangge* engendered a proliferation of more *yangge* works and more performances by propaganda troupes to cover a wider range of geographic locations, known as the *Yangge* Movement. For a detailed study of the New *Yangge* Movement in Yan'an, see David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

[7] According to the account given by Jia Ke 贾克 (1919-2007), an instructor and researcher of music at the Lu Xun Academy, the first rehearsal of *The White-Haired Girl* was put on in the auditorium hall of the Academy for Zhou Yang and other leaders of the Academy. Jia's impression of the initial rehearsal was that there were too many elements of the old forms. The rehearsal received heavy criticism due to over-featuring of the regional opera *qingqiang* and other traditional forms. Zhou Yang gave the suggestion of creating "a new revolutionary national music-drama" that differed from both traditional Chinese opera and Western music-drama. See Jia Ke, "Yetan geju *Bai Mao Nü* de chuangzuo," *Xin wenxue shiliao* 3 (1996), 65-66. Jia Ke's account was corroborated in "The Creation and Rehearsals of the Music-Drama *The White-Haired Girl* in Yan'an," an article written by two scholars who collected various materials on the production history of *Bai Mao Nü* and interviewed main participants in its creation and early audiences at the Lu Xun Academy. The general opinion after the initial rehearsal was that a script based on a narrative poem was ill-adapted as a stage performance. Zhou Yang then encouraged the production team not to capitulate to old things but instead to create new artistic forms with national spirit, forms that reflected the new thoughts and feelings of the people. See Xiang Yansheng and Zhu Ping, "Geju *Bai Mao Nü* zai Yan'an de chuangzuo yu paiyuan Part 1," *Renmin yinue* 8 (1995), 5.

Where did the concept of "New National Music-Drama," sometimes shortened to "New Music-Drama," come from? Why did the creative team at the Lu Xun Academy abandon the highly successful and enormously popular *yangge* model for an artistic project that was more experimental and Western?[8] The two immediate intellectual and discursive contexts that informed the concept of "New National Music-Drama" were the debates on "national forms" (*minzu xingshi*) and the debates on "New Music-Drama" (*xin geju*). In this chapter I explore how the various discursive formations within the debates on "national form" and "new music-drama" sought to rethink and redefine the May Fourth movement and its legacy in radically different historical circumstances. By situating the creation of the music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* within its aesthetic, intellectual, and politico-historical contexts, this chapter shows that the music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* as a product of as well as a testing ground for the aesthetic and philosophical tendencies and concepts—an increasing awareness of audience reception and a redefinition of realism that foregrounds affect and praxis in particular—emerging in the pre- and mid-war period. These debates on aesthetic and philosophical tendencies and concepts were as much a response to the historical conditions in China at the time as a part of global circulations of the varied articulations of those ideas and concepts. During this time, the melodramatic mode of narration permeated artworks for revolutionary and

[8] As Max Bohenkamp's survey of the use of the Chinese term *geju* in the 1920s and mid-1930s reveals, *geju* was mostly used in cultural and intellectual journals to refer to Western opera. The composers for the music of *The White-Haired Girl*, Ma Ke and Qu Wei, held Western opera, Wagner's opera in particular, as a superior and already perfected model to emulate while lamenting that China had yet to create their own Wagnerian opera. See Ma Ke and Qu Wei, "*Bai Mao Nü* yinyue de chuangzuo jingyan," *Bai Mao Nü*, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962), 245.

propagandistic purposes precisely because of the mode's capacity to produce moral and emotional legibility via affective polarization. The last part of the chapter performs a close reading of the text of *The White-Haired Girl* to show how the modes of the romantic and the melodramatic become synthesized with the realist mode to produce a highly integrated form of mass theatrical work that appropriates existing religious beliefs, worldviews, and structures of feeling associated with the peasantry in order to displace them with new revolutionary ideas and ideals.

The Debates on "National Form"

The debates on "national form" began within the left-wing literary circles but eventually developed into a nation-wide discussion from 1939 to 1941. As He Guimei astutely points out, the debates on "national form" were not so much a question of form as a reassessment of the May Fourth movement and its legacy in a radically different historical circumstance, a rethinking of the nature and goals of modern Chinese literature at a critical historical juncture.[9] The debates arose from Mao Zedong's call for "national form" and the sinification of Marxism in his speech delivered at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Chinese Communist Party in October 1938.[10] In his call to abolish Party

[9] He Guimei, *Zhao Shuli wenxue yu xiangtu zhongguo xiandaixing*, (Taiyuan, China: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2016), 55. He identifies the debates on "national form" and Mao's Yan'an Talks as the two major discursive events that shaped "contemporary literature" (*dangdai wenxue* 当代文学).

[10] When Mao called for national form, it was highly possible that he was aware of the attempts to reconcile Marxist/socialist internationalism with nationalism and various nationalities that existed within the boundaries of former Russian empire and now the Soviet Union. Within the Marxist tradition, various theorists attempted to discuss the role of nationalism in the proletariat revolution that was international in nature and to reconcile the contradiction between communism and nationalism. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg presented two opposing views. Luxemburg spoke adamantly against national self-determination and maintained that national struggles damaged and therefore must be exorcised from the international proletariat revolution. For Luxemburg's theory on nationalism and socialist internationalism, see *The National Question – Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg*, translated and edited by Horace

dogmatism and "foreign eight-legged essays," Mao replaced them with "a Chinese style and manner, pleasing to the eye and to the ear of the Chinese common people" (*wei zhongguo laobaixing suo xiwenlejian de zhongguo zuofeng yu zhongguo qipai* 为中国老百姓所喜闻乐见的中国作风与中国气派).[11] "Chinese style" (*zhongguo zuofeng*) and "Chinese manner" (*zhongguo qipai*), though not having direct connection with literary and art forms in Mao's initial conception, soon became the highest standard for the discussions of national forms of literature and art, constantly evoked by various participants in the debates. The historian David Holm has suggested that Mao's call for a style that is "pleasing to the eye and to the ear" (*xi wen le jian*) later shaped the CCP's cultural policy that strongly favored theatrical forms with both visual and auditory effects, such as the adapted version of the traditional folk *yangge* as well as music-drama.[12]

B. Davis (Monthly Review Press, 1976). See also A. Walicki, "Rosa Luxemburg and the Question Nationalism in Polish Marxism (1893-1914)," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 61.4 (1983), 565-582. Lenin, on the other hand, espoused the right to self-determination and viewed national revolution as the necessary transition to the emancipation of all working-class people. He wrote in "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (1916): "Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede" (Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm). Stalin's theoretical contribution to the question of nationalism and communism largely fell in line with Leninism. His famous formulation "national in form, socialist in content," which originated in his speech delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in May 1925 (https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/05/18.htm), eventually became the guiding principle for Soviet cultural policy. Many Chinese left-wing intellectuals made direct reference to Stalin's famous slogan and Mao's call for national form. Wei Bo 魏伯 (1912-1984) for instance noticed the common call for national forms, referring to Stalin and Mao as "two giants of the West and the East." The poet Xiao San 萧三 (1896-1983) referred to Stalin's "national in form, socialist in content" as the golden rule for all cultural workers. See Wei, "Lun minzu xingshi yu dazhonghua," in *Wenxue de "minzu xingshi" taolun ziliao*, edited by Xu Sixiang (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2010), 52, and Xiao, "Lun shige de minzu xingshi" in the same anthology, 20. Wei's essay was originally published in *Xixian wenyi* 西线文艺 (Literature and Art in the Western Front) in October 1939; Xiao's essay was originally published in *Wenyi tuji* 文艺突击 (Literature Assault) in June 1939.

[11] The translation is from Stuart Schram's *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 173.

[12] Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 54.

Much of the debates on national form also revolved around, or as Holm puts it, were in fact a continuation of the problem of "massification" (*dazhonghua* 大众化) and the use of "old form" (*jiu xingshi* 旧形式), which was the subject of extensive discussions in the pre-war period.[13] The debates on "massification" and the use of "old form" were an immediate reaction to the failure of the May Fourth movement to reach the masses as well as a rethinking of its iconoclastic rejection of all traditional forms.[14] However, even among those who adamantly advocated for full-scale utilization of old forms to form the basis of a new Chinese national culture, whom Holm has categorized as "cultural populists," some cautioned against total and uncritical acceptance of old forms and defended the May Fourth tradition.[15] The Communist intellectual Chen Boda 陈伯达 (1904-1989), for instance, felt the need to reaffirm the "fruitful results" (*guoshi* 果实) of the New Literature Movement and argued that "new forms do not come into being from nil but from the sublation of old forms."[16] In an often cited essay entitled "The Basic

---

[13] David Holm, "National Form and the Popularization of Literature in Yenan," *La Littérature Chinoise au Temps de la Guerre de Résistance contre le Japon (1937-1945)*, edited by Fondation Singer-Polignac, (Paris: Editions de la Fondation Singer-Polignac. 1982), 218.

[14] The phrase "The use of old forms" *(liyong jiu xingshi* 利用旧形式) was itself the subject of the debates as well. Because *liyong* in Chinese carries a somewhat negative meaning, Lu Xun in his essay on old forms written in 1934 advocated "selective use" (*caiqu* 采取) instead. Communist intellectuals such as Chen Boda and Ai Siqi opted for "utilize" (*yunyong* 运用).

[15] David Holm in his detailed study of the debates of national form in Yan'an detects a wide range of opinions and summarizes these opinions into three major groups: 1) the cultural populist group that consisted of members of the New Enlightenment Movement (1936-1937) such as Chen Boda and Ai Siqi, the poet Ke Zhongping, and Sha Kefu. These cultural populists were in favor of large-scale use and creative refashioning of "old forms" as the basis for Chinese national culture; 2) the May Fourth cosmopolitan group that included intellectuals like Zhou Yang, He Qifang, Zhang Geng, and Xian Xinghai who defended the May Fourth tradition and its emulation of European literature and were anxious about the use of "old forms"; 3) Wang Shiwei who adamantly spoke against any use of "old forms" and viewed them as feudal and backward. Wang Shiwei's extreme take soon was under attack from all sides and became marginalized and fell into obscurity.

[16] Chen, "Guanyu wenyi de minzu xingshi wenti zaji," *Wenyi zhanxian* 1.3 (1939), 24. The German term *Aufhebung*, translated as "sublation" in English and *yangqi* 扬弃 in Chinese, is a key and yet complex concept in Hegel's dialectics

Principles of Employing Old Forms" published in the same issue of *Wenyi zhanxian* 文艺战线 (Literary Battlefront) as Chen Boda's essay, Ai Siqi 艾思奇 (1910-1966) asserts that to promote the use of old forms is not to "negate" (*fouding* 否定) the achievements of the new literature since the May Fourth; on the contrary, the new literature is in need of finding other "life sources" (*quanyuan* 泉源) to continue developing in a new historical period so that it could avoid the fate of becoming "dead" like classical Chinese literature.[17] In the meantime, intellectuals like Ai Siqi were also quick to point out the limits of May Fourth literature. Ai criticized the May Fourth movement for its failure of "going deep into the masses" (*shenru minjian* 深入民间) as an enlightenment movement that set out to awaken the people; due to its nature as a predominantly urban cultural movement, it was never established on the basis of the real masses.[18]

The May Fourth movement's estrangement from the common people despite its goal of creating "literature for the common people" (*pingmin wenxue* 平民文学) did not go unnoticed among the more cosmopolitan intellectuals who were deeply steeped in the May Fourth tradition. Zhou Yang published an article "Some Views on the Use of Old Forms in Literature" in the initial issue of *Zhongguo wenhua* 中国文化 (Chinese Culture)

---

and later Marx's dialectic materialism. *Aufhebung,* meaning "to cancel" and "to preserve" in German, refers to the process by which two opposite sides (thesis and antithesis) simultaneously cancel and preserve one another, and ultimately transcend into something new (synthesis). See Ralph Palm, *Hegel's Concept of Sublation: A Critical Interpretation* (2009), Catholic University of Leuven, PhD dissertation.

[17] Ai Siqi, "Jiu xingshi yunyong de jiben yuanze," *Wenyi zhanxian* 1.3 (1939), reprinted in *Yan'an wenyi congshu: wenyi lilun juan* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1983), 592-600. The quote is on page 599.

[18] Ibid., 597.

to express his views on the use of old forms and made the following comment on the May Fourth:

> The new literature, as a literary movement to overthrow the aristocratic literature of the minority and establish a literature for the majority of common people, developed under the banner of "the integration of literature and the masses" (*wenyi yu dazhong de jiehe* 文艺与大众的结合). It therefore cannot sit by and watch its estrangement from the common people till this day; it cannot wait until the society is reformed, the people culturally elevated and their taste improved, to have the people willingly accept it. It must make itself useful in the reform of the society and elevation (*tigao* 提高) of people's cultural taste. This useful impact cannot only affect its existing intellectual readership but needs to reach as widely as possible the masses which it has not yet gained favor with.[19]

Zhou Yang's comment here has highlighted the dilemma of the enlightenment project that the May Fourth New Culture Movement set out to accomplish: its ensuing elitism and alienation from the masses contradicted its initial egalitarian aspirations. It therefore must reorient itself toward the masses.[20] Zhou's comment also anticipated Mao Zedong's dialectical conceptualization of "popularization" (*puji* 普及) and "elevation" (*tigao* 提高) in "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" (1942), which could be seen as Mao's attempt to solve the dilemma of popular enlightenment. Zhou Yang was highly aware of the limits of a top-down enlightenment model in which the uncultured and backward masses would eventually be educated enough to appreciate the cultural production of advanced intellectuals. Such limits however were lost on intellectuals such as Hu Feng 胡风 (1902-1985), another key participant of the debates on "national form"

[19] Zhou Yang, "Dui jiuxingshi liyong zai wenxue shang de yige kanfa," *Zhongguo wenhua* (1940), reprinted in *Yan'an wenyi congshu: wenyi lilun juan*, 612-622. Subsequent references are to this edition.
[20] This dilemma of enlightenment later would play out in Mao's formulation on "popularization" (*puji* 普及) and "elevation" (*tigao* 提高) as well.

in the Guomindang (GMD) capital Chongqing, who adamantly defended the May Fourth tradition and emphatically espoused the May Fourth New Culture movement's fundamental break from past "feudal culture."[21]

Whether the May Fourth movement represented a resolute break from traditional Chinese literature or a selective continuation of certain literary legacies was a major point of contention. Many intellectuals attempted to reconcile the iconoclastic May Fourth with certain aspects of traditional Chinese literature and culture while maintaining the "newness" and breakthroughs of the May Fourth. They tried to distinguish living folk forms still enjoyed by common people in everyday life, i.e. the good old forms, from the dead classical literature of the ruling elite, i.e. the bad old forms.[22] Zhou Yang expressively defined *jiu xingshi* as something that fell into the former category rather than the latter.[23] He gave the example of the May Fourth movement modeling its version of vernacular language (*baihua* 白话) on traditional vernacular fiction.[24] He Qifang 何其芳 (1912-1977) went so far as to argue that new literature since the May Fourth was "the proper development of old literature" (*jiuwenxue de zhengdang fazhan* 旧文学的正当发展).[25] Both critics pointed out that early May Fourth vernacular fiction and poems bore a

[21] Hu Feng published a series of essays on national form in 1940 that were then anthologized into a booklet entitled *Lun minzu xingshi wenti* (论民族形式问题 On the Question of National Form). *Lun minzu xingshi wenti* was collected in the second volume of *Hu Feng pinglunji* (胡风评论集 Critical Essays of Hu Feng) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984). Subsequent references are this edition of *Hu Feng pinglunji*, vol.2.

[22] See for instance Zhou Yang, "Dui jiuxingshi liyong zai wenxue shang de yige kanfa," He Qifang "Lun wenxue shang de minzu xingshi," and Xiang Linbing, "Minjian xingshi de yunyong yu minzu xingshi de chuangzao."

[23] Zhou Yang, "Dui jiuxingshi liyong zai wenxue shang de yige kanfa," 614.

[24] Ibid., 615.

[25] He Qifang, "Lun wenxue shang de minzu xingshi," 654.

clear resemblance to the styles and formal conventions of old vernacular fiction and traditional vernacular poetry. However, as Zhou Yang remarked, old forms as products of a simple and self-sufficient socioeconomic system would be incapable of expressing the complexities of modern life. Precisely because new literature made various adaptations to old forms to express modern life in China, Zhou reasoned, those forms were no longer *old* but should be considered *new*.[26]

Zhou Yang's point reveals that the affirmation of the instrumental value of old forms in creating a new national culture was laced with varying degrees of skepticism on the part of cosmopolitan May Fourth intellectuals. Zhou Yang argues in the same essay that the use of old forms is to help the new form develop and progress, "for the sake of its own popularization and elevation."[27] The use of old forms therefore would involve a complex process of reforming their ideological content as well as artistic qualities with the ultimate goal of "negating old forms," because after all old forms are products of "old social structure" and "rooted in old worldviews." Zhou Yang viewed the use of old forms as a transitional middle step toward "the highest integration of art and the masses" (*yishu yu dazhong zhi zuigao jiehe* 艺术与大众之最高结合). It was a pragmatic move "in response to the demands of the objective situation and the needs of the war" to serve as

[26] Ibid., 615.
[27] Zhou Yang, "Dui jiuxingshi liyong zai wenxue shang de yige kanfa," 614.

"an artistic weapon for mass propaganda and education" rather than "an experiment or exploration in artistic form."[28]

Hu Feng in particular exhibited a high degree of hostility toward traditional culture that marks him as an outlier among intellectuals who at least attempted to reconcile the May Fourth movement with certain forms of traditional culture. Instead Hu emphasized the May Fourth New Culture movement's revolutionary nature by insisting on calling it "the May Fourth Literary Revolution Movement" (*wusi wenxue geming yundong* 五四文学革命运动). For intellectuals such as Zhou Yang, He Qifang, and others to define the May Fourth as a development out of traditional culture, their opinions represented nothing short of heresy for someone like Hu Feng who viewed such redefinition as "an emasculation of its [the May Fourth] revolutionary views."[29] The source of May Fourth new literature was "real social struggles" and "living social relations" rather than preexisting literary and art forms of the Chinese nation, Hu argued. May Fourth literature therefore "established a categorically new stance, fundamentally different from feudal literature and art."[30] By pointing to "real social struggles" (*xianshi shehui douzheng* 现实社会斗争) and "living social relations" (*huode shehui zhu guanxi* 活的社会诸关系) as the source for the development of the new literature and art, Hu Feng

[28] Ibid., 621.

[29] Hu Feng, "Duiyu wusi geming wenyi chuantong de yi lijie," *Lun minzu xingshi wenti*, 235.

[30] Ibid.

believed that modern Chinese literature could continue to develop by simply following the May Fourth tradition without seeking alternative sources.

In the opinion of Hu Feng and his contemporary intellectuals, the question of the sources (*yuanquan* 源泉) for the creation of a new national form was one of the most fundamental determinants of the course of development of modern Chinese literature at a critical historical juncture. Xiang Linbing 向林冰 (1905-1982) was the first one to bring up the notion of "*zhongxin yuanquan*" 中心源泉 (central source) in the discussions of the national form. In the essay entitled "On the Central Source for National Forms" published in the *Ta Kung Pao* in March, 1940, Xiang argues that folk forms (*minjian xingshi* 民间形式) should serve as the central source for the creation of a new national form. Xiang's contention was heavily contested by eminent intellectuals, including Mao Dun and Hu Feng.[31] Mao Dun responded with heavy criticism, branding the seemingly rich and diverse Chinese folk forms as monotonous products of a backward feudal society, and therefore folk forms should not be the main source for national form. Mao Dun proposed a four-way eclectic approach instead to establish the new national form: absorbing the good part of traditional culture, foreign classical literature and new realism, the May Fourth tradition, and the reality of the ongoing national revolution.[32] Mao Dun's stance was representative of many May Fourth intellectuals' deeply rooted suspicion toward the

[31] Xiang's contention was immediately attacked by Communist intellectuals in Yan'an such as Guo Moruo, Pan Zinian, and Guang Weiran.

[32] See Mao Dun, "Jiu xingshi, minjian xingshi yu minzu xingshi," *Zhongguo wenhua* 2.1 (1940), reprinted in *Yan'an wenyi congshu: wenyi lilun juan*, 641-649.

use of old forms. Hu Feng in particular, as someone who drew a clear distinction between the May Fourth tradition and traditional art forms, objected to Xiang's assertion and to the notion that "new materials originate from the embryos of the old" (*xinzhi fasheng yu jiuzhi de tainei* 新质发生于旧质的胎内).[33]

While both Hu and Xiang deployed Marxist-Leninist dialectics and Marxist literary criticism to account for the development of literary forms, they arrived at drastically different conclusions. Directly referencing Lenin's definition of materialist dialectics, also quoted in Mao's "On Contradiction," Xiang contends that form and content are "the unity of opposites" (*duili de tongyi* 对立的统一), and like any opposites, they exist in contradiction. Xiang uses Stalin's "national in form, socialist in content" formula to justify his dichotomization of form and content in this particular essay. The rationale is that "the development of any content must overcome the contradiction of its form and generate a new form befitting its content" and that "it is through and only through such internal struggles of form and content that the development of literature and art gains its driving force."[34] The formulation of "new wine in an old bottle" (*jiuping zhuang xinjiu* 旧瓶装新酒) according to Xiang simply amplifies the contradiction of form and content and can serve as a catalyst for the development of literature and art, i.e. the creation of a new national form. The "new wine in an old bottle" formula therefore is a

[33] Xiang wrote, "New materials originate in the embryos of the old, and they achieve independent existence through the self-negation of the old materials." See Xiang, "Lun 'minzu xingshi' de zhongxin yuanquan," originally published in the *Ta Kung Pao* Battlefront Supplement on March 24, 1940, reprinted in *Wenxue de "minzu xingshi" taolun ziliao*, 156-159. The quote is on page 156.

[34] Xiang Linbing, "Minjian xingshi de yunyong yu minzu xingshi de chuangzao" *Zhongsu wenhua* 6.1 (1940), 66.

scientific method informed by materialist dialectical view of the historical development of literature and art.[35]

To counter Xiang's argument that new artistic form could arise from within, Hu Feng quotes the following passage from the eminent Marxist literary theorist and philosopher Georg Lukács's (1885-1971) foundational essay "Narrate or Describe?" (1936) on theories of narrative and realism:

> New styles, new ways of representing reality, though always linked to old forms and styles, never arise from any immanent dialectic within artistic forms. Every new style is socially and historically determined and is the product of a social development.
> 表现现实的新的风格、新的方法，虽然总是和以前的诸形式相联系着，但是它决不是由于艺术形式本身固有的辩证法而产生的。每一种新的风格的发生都有社会的历史的必然性，是从生活里面出来的。(original emphasis)[36]

Hu Feng here conjures a not-so-accurate translation of "social development" as *shenghuo* (life) to point to "life" as the only source for new artistic forms, echoing the materialist aesthetics of Chernyshevsky that was later extensively discussed and developed by Zhou Yang and directly informed the Communist cultural policy of "entering into life" (*shenru shenghuo* 深入生活). This materialist approach to aesthetic form rejects the idea that any aesthetic form can develop from internal contradiction as Xiang believed. This theoretical foundation allows Hu Feng to identify "living social relations" as the source for the development of new literature and art, a point that was echoed at the time by many other

[35] Ibid., 67.

[36] Hu Feng, "Guanyu 'xinzhi fashengyu jiuzhi de tainei' 'yizhi xingshi'—yige wenyishi de faze wenti" *in Lun minzu xingshi wenti*, 222. The translation in English here comes from Luckács's essay "Narrate or Describe?" in *Writer and Critic: and Other Essays*, edited and translated by Arthur Kahn (Merlin Press, 1978), 119.

left-wing intellectuals such as Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, and others who embraced a realist aesthetics and pointed to social reality as the central source for literature and art. Hu Feng's subsequent assessment of the May Fourth movement saw the revolutionary nature of the May Fourth movement as a given because the movement was built upon anti-colonial, anti-oppressive "real social struggles." Therefore, according to Hu, new literature and art of the May Fourth tradition had the capacity of renewing and developing itself as long as it continued to anchor itself to social reality.[37]

Just as the term "sublation"—a key concept in Hegelian dialectics and Marxist dialectic materialism—was evoked by Chen Boda, the debates between Hu Feng and Xiang Linbing showed Chinese leftist intellectuals' various attempts to grapple with the historical development of literature and art via the theoretical framework of dialectics. What Hu Feng failed to see, however, was precisely the new social struggles and new social relations under formation catalyzed by the War of Resistance. While many intellectuals responded to the exigencies of the war and mass mobilization by rethinking the failure of the May Fourth tradition to reach the masses, intellectuals like Hu Feng failed to recognize the dilemma of the enlightenment project of the May Fourth. There was a prevailing sense among Chinese intellectuals at the time that as social reality progressed, preexisting forms would lose their capacity to capture that social reality. The urgent question of how to render the reality of the War of Resistance facing writers and

[37] Hu Feng, "Duiyu wusi geming wenyi chuantong de yi lijie," *Lun minzu xingshi wenti*, 235.

artists alike was not merely an ontological and epistemological one, but also one about praxis— how to represent an "actuality" that is able to act and to bring the masses to act on that reality. How might a realist aesthetics reorient itself toward social utility rather than a mere obsession with the truthful representations of reality and its own ontological stance?

Rethinking (Theatrical) Realism and the New-Music Drama

In addition to the debates on national form, massification, and the use of traditional forms, another immediate historical-intellectual context that informed the discussion on the creation of the "New National Music-Drama" was the various theater reform movements that spanned over the first three decades of the twentieth century. The reform of theater, as one of the most effective mediums for political propaganda and agitation, was high on many wartime Chinese intellectuals' agenda. Dramatists, critics, intellectuals across the political spectrum in both Nationalist-controlled and Communist-controlled areas debated heavily the notion and creation of the "New National Music-Drama." These debates shared many of the common threads of the discursive formations on national form outlined in the previous section. And yet as Max Bohnenkamp in his summary of the history of modern Chinese theater reform points out, the "New Music-Drama" was probably one of most intensely debated theoretical concepts and yet particularly elusive to pinpoint in practice.[38]

[38] Bohnenkamp, *Turning Ghosts into People: "The White-Haired Girl", Revolutionary Folklorism, and the Politics of Aesthetics in Modern China*. 2014. Chicago University, PhD dissertation, 201.

These debates did, however, mark a shift from the exclusive promotion of spoken drama and the type of realism associated with it in the 1910s and 1920s to a more eclectic and creative approach to theater reform with an increasing awareness of audience reception and the affective power of works of art. The exigencies of the war made the mobilization of the masses and appealing to their tastes the primary goal of dramatic art, and any work of art. Western musical-theatrical traditions such as opera, melodrama, musical comedy, and other "lesser forms" were considered as models for China's "New Music-Drama." These debates, as Bohnenkamp points out, were particularly preoccupied with the questions of how the formal and technical aspects of music-drama would affect audience reception and how the creative process should accordingly be organized.[39] This entailed a rethinking of nineteenth-century European critical realism championed by the May Fourth generation and the creation of a new model of literary and cultural production that takes into the account the affective power of aesthetic forms and different modes of audience reception in order to solve the dilemma of the enlightenment project of the May Fourth. As a popular form since its birth on stage in post-revolutionary France, melodrama, prized for its accessibility and intense emotionalism, seemed a viable way to solve such a dilemma.

The rethinking and redefinition of realism of course did not originate with reforming the medium of theater though it eventually impacted theater reform in China

[39] Ibid., 217-18.

from the 1930s and on. Theater reform movements in turn pushed the theoretical parameters of realism, or theatrical realism as conceived by Western theatrical tradition as well as May Fourth intellectuals' adaptations of it. The rethinking came from the growing sense of critical attitude toward and disappointment with nineteenth-century European critical realism which had been much valued and promoted in the previous decade, even among those intellectuals who fully endorsed the value of realism in literature and art and its enshrined doctrine that art should reflect social reality. In his classic study of the introduction of realism into China in the May Fourth period, Marston Anderson makes the following observation: "Critical realism, which had been adopted in China as a tool for revolution, became suspect precisely for its failure to advance the communal ends of that revolution."[40] The abandoning of individualism in favor of collectivism as well as the change in the representations of the masses marked a fundamental shift in the intellectual context in post-May Fourth China whereby critical realism's inherent dichotomization between the intellectual/observer "I" and the observed laboring masses "they" began to be undone.[41]

Zhou Yang in the early 1930s took issue with critical realism precisely because of its inability to offer any solutions of "positive construction" other than exposing the foulness and weaknesses of a society. Zhou revealed the epistemological and creative

[40] Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism*, 74. Anderson also points out that in the early years of the May Fourth New Culture movement, writers were less concerned with the techniques of realism to establish mimetic verisimilitude than use it as a tool for social reform and social change.

[41] Ibid., 201-02.

impasse at the heart of critical realism: the distance and external stance realists maintain with their subject matter renders them unable to look internally at their own creative principles; it is in the passivity (*shoudong xing* 受动性) and pure contemplative nature (*guanzhao xing* 观照性) of critical realism that lie the historical limits and creative impasse of critical realism.[42] Partly because of his disappointment in critical realism and its failure to bring about revolution, Zhou Yang began to introduce the most recent theoretical debates on Socialist Realism happening in the Soviet Union into China in the early 1930s with a strong preference for the synthesis of realism and revolutionary romanticism in Socialist Realism.

In a 1934 essay entitled "Realistic and Romantic" (*xianshi de yu langman de* 现实的与浪漫的), Zhou Yang attempts to expand the boundary of realism and to dismantle a mechanical demarcation of realism and romanticism. The author names some of the best known literary classics that consist of stories of ghosts, monsters, and the fantastic, including Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Balzac's *The Wild Ass's Skin*, as well as Gogol's *Overcoat*, and brands these writers as "the greatest realist writers in literary history" (124).[43] As long as the writer does not treat the objective reality as reflections of a "spirit" or "idea," and as long as their knowledge of the objective reality originates from the objective reality, Zhou Yang argues, their literary work, even though fantasized and

[42] Zhou Yang, "Xianshi zhuyi shilun," *Zhou Yang wenji* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), vol.1, edited by Ma Liangchun et al., 155. Translated as "Thoughts on Realism" by Catherine Pease Campbell in Kirk A. Denton, ed. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1996), 335-344.

[43] Zhou Yang, "Xianshi de yu langman de," *Zhou Yang wenji,* vol. 1, 124.

romanticized, still remains works of realism. As a theoretician who subscribed to Marxist materialism, Zhou Yang turns idealism, the philosophical base that fermented romanticism, on its head. A new and progressive realism thus should transcend the old boundary and endeavor to synthesize romanticism:

> Progressive literature should inherit the spirit of realism and put both feet firmly on the ground of reality—this is beyond doubt. But at the same time, it must step over the boundary of the old realism and treat romanticism as a necessary aspect of its artistic creation. Here romanticism is only a constitutive part of realism rather than an antithetic trend.[44]

Here the author places the primacy on realism and objective reality while arguing for the necessity of incorporating romanticism into realism. Romanticism is viewed as a panacea for the problems of "old realism," i.e. nineteenth-century critical realism.

The influence of Soviet Socialist Realism is evident in Zhou Yang's reassessment of romanticism and its relation to realism. As Katerina Clark explains, the official adoption of Socialist Realism in the early 30s as the only legitimate type of literature marked the abandonment of a purely positivist verisimilitude in favor of the revolutionary romanticism and the heroic.[45] A key part of the theoretical formation of Socialist Realism rested precisely on the contrast between an old reactionary and idealistic romanticism and a new revolutionary romanticism teeming with heroism as formulated by Maxim Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov.[46] It is no surprise that the heroism of revolutionary romanticism

---

[44] Ibid., 125.

[45] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Indiana University Press, 1981), 33-34.

[46] Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 60-61. Zhdanov for

proved to be particularly appealing to Chinese intellectuals and revolutionaries in the early 1930s who found themselves confronted with the dark reality of failed revolutions and the encroaching threat of Japanese imperial military power. In "Thoughts on Realism" (*xianshi zhiyi shilun* 现实主义试论), evoking Gorky, Zhou Yang argues that distinct from negative romanticism, positive romanticism strengthens human will and awakens "the heart of resistance" (*fankang xin* 反抗心) against all oppressions.[47] After an explicit criticism of critical realism (discussed in previous paragraph) and a challenge to the conventional understanding of romanticism as the opposite of realism, Zhou ends the essay with a reflection on the timeliness of romanticism for the collective "we," writers, intellectuals, and/or the Chinese people, who faced with a historical moment of darkness. In the opinion of Zhou Yang, the dark reality of China at the time was also filled with "Heroism" and "Pathos" (English in original) and therefore could provide a fertile ground for the growth of romanticism.[48] Paradoxically romanticism for Zhou would involve portraying empirically existing heroism and pathos. "Realistic and Romantic" similarly offered a critique of critical realism that merely depicted the ugly, unheroic, negative, and dark side of reality, thereby justifying the necessity of incorporating the heroic and the

instance in his speech delivered at the First Soviet Writers' Congress in August 1934 famously contrasts the new revolutionary romanticism with the old that "depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes, leading the reader away from the antagonisms and oppressions of real life into a world of the impossible, into a world of utopian dreams." Soviet literature based on Socialist Realism, Zhdanov asserts, "stands with both feet firmly planted on a materialist basis, cannot be hostile to romanticism, but it must be a romanticism of a new type, revolutionary romanticism." See Andrei Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature—the Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature," *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 21-22.

[47] Zhou Yang, "Xianshi zhuyi shilun," 162.

[48] Ibid., 162.

romantic into realism. For Zhou, this type of realism had only spread pessimism whereas positive and heroic romanticism would serve as an antidote and encourage people to make change and embrace revolution.[49]

Zhou Yang's endorsement of romanticism in realist aesthetics, however, entails more than a mere adherence to the tenor of Soviet Socialist Realism, a term that was still in the process of being defined by the literary establishment in the Soviet with all its ambiguities and uncertainties.[50] As Bohnenkamp points out in the chapter on Zhou Yang's sponsorship of the creation of *The White-Haired Girl* and the politics of the fantastic in revolutionary literature, Zhou's endorsement of romanticism in his theoretical writings explains why he defended the validity of the story as a revolutionary text when it was initially criticized for being too fantastic.[51] In addition to defending the revolutionary nature of *The White-Haired Girl*, Zhou Yang's comment that the narrative is "rich in romanticism, has a truthful significance, and can help further the aims of class-education" also has highlighted romanticism's function in revealing "truth." The inclusion of romanticism in realism as discussed before would therefore not only overcome the limits of critical realism but also reveal the truth about reality, a task that was not accomplished by nineteenth century critical realism according to Zhou.[52] The idea that there exists a

[49] Zhou Yang, "Xianshi de yu langman de," 126.

[50] For a detailed account of the debates on SR and uncertainties associated with the terminology, see Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic,* 41-65.

[51] was "rich in romanticism, has a truthful significance, and can help further the aims of class-education." See Xiang Yansheng and Zhu Ping, "Geju *Bai Mao Nü* zai Yan'an de chuangzuo yu paiyuan Part 1," *Renmin yinue* 8 (1995), 7. Also cited in Bohnenkamp's dissertation, 98.

[52] Again echoing Gorky, Zhou writes, "Its [19th century realism] greatest merit lies in the critical light it has shed on the customs, traditions, and behavior of the bourgeoisie, but owing to the hindrances and deficiencies attached to the

hidden and higher reality, or the essence of reality, which is distinct from the appearance of the immediate reality and cannot be comprehended without the proper epistemological tool and/or aesthetic form, was key to the kind of realist aesthetics articulated by Zhou Yang and another contemporaneous Marxist literary critic and philosopher Georg Lukács. Lukács and his concepts of totality, type, and realism had an enormous influence on Soviet thinkers and the debates on Socialist Realism for his direct involvement in *Literaturnyi Kritik* (Literary Critic), a journal created in Moscow for theorizing Socialist Realism, as well as his engagement with progressive Marxist philosophers and aestheticians such as Mikhail Lifshits.[53]

What animates Lukács and Zhou Yang's realist aesthetics, I argue, is a dialectically informed view of reality, namely, to view reality as processes and perpetually in motion. Both theorists saw in romanticism an aptitude for capturing a dynamic reality and transcending the constraints of space and time, an aptitude crystalized in *type* (*dianxing*) that is both representative and prophetic. Type thus functions as a form of spatiotemporal concentration within realism and provides an epistemological tool by which the mind gains insights into reality. The concern with literature's ability to reveal the hidden truth or essence of reality led both theorists to reject a purely mimetic, photographic representation of empirical reality and insist on the necessity and validity of romanticism and the typical to reveal the essence of reality.

---

authors' worldview, it has by no means reached the points of *reflecting the truth of life*" (my emphasis). "Xianshi zhuyi shilun," 155; "Thoughts on Realism," 338.

[53] Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, 72.

In "Realistic and Romantic," Zhou Yang devotes an entire paragraph to the necessity for writers to create "the typical":

> "Realism, apart from details and being real, should also truthfully convey typical characters in typical circumstances." This is truly an axiom with the highest wisdom. Writers therefore must possess the ability to typify (*dianxing hua* 典型化) and generalize (*pubian hua* 普遍化) the phenomena of life. What the writer endeavors to show is not life itself but rather the truth about life. The typical is not ready-made for our picking; it comes from the typical, the idiosyncratic, and the common abstracted and distilled from the many things in life by the writer.[54]

The quote in this paragraph is from Engels' letter to the English novelist Margaret Harkness in 1888 in which Engel formulated his conception of the typical—a common source of influence for both Zhou Yang and Lukács. While placing the primacy on life, or the objective reality, Zhou Yang is also a firm believer in human agency and the creative power of the writer, again a quintessentially romantic endorsement of the writer and their creative power.[55] The typical is a product of the writer's creation, and it is a concentrated synthesis of the typical, the idiosyncratic, and the common. In other words, the typical is both unique and general, idiosyncratic and common. In *The White-Haired Girl*, the main protagonist Xi'er is a common peasant girl not without her distinct personality. Her experience is both unique and common since it could happen to any peasant oppressed and victimized by the landed class. The fact that public performances

[54] Zhou Yang, "Xianshi de yu langman de," 126.

[55] In "Thoughts on Realism," Zhou Yang also highlights the importance of imagination in the creation of art: "Only after the source materials of reality has passed through the crucible of artistic imagination and fantasy can it be molded into works of art," and this is the reason why "new realism not only cannot reject romanticism but has to accept romanticism as one of its intrinsic elements." See "Xianshi zhuyi shilun," 162; translation modified from Catherine Campbell's translation in *Chinese Literary Thought*, 343.

of *The White-Haired Girl* encouraged numerous peasant women to come forward to name the landlords who raped them, that old male peasants cried after seeing the music-drama for they too had the tragic experience of being forced to sell their own daughters, bespeaks the power of representation and of the typical.[56]

Lukács's criticized naturalism and modernism because both abandoned the typical in favor of "the average" and therefore lost the ability of the typical in realism to capture the dynamic development of reality. For Lukács, "the typical" means a concentration of social forces and relations already moving toward social change; "the typical" is presented in critical realism "by concentrating the essential determinants of a great social trend."[57] Type as a concentrated form that embodies social relations has a specific function to fulfill, that is to demystify and de-reify the illusionary, immediate reality created by capitalism. The theory of reification developed by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* defines the phenomena of reification as social relations between people appearing as relations between things, and furthermore the capitalist system appearing as a finished product, a fixed reality, or the second nature.[58] Thus truly great realist literature must seek to dismantle such illusion and reveal a hidden and higher reality, or the essence of reality. Naturalism's abandoning of the typical in favor of the average, its advocating of external and intricate descriptions instead of the essence and

[56] Zhang Geng, "Huiyi Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui qianhou 'Luyi' de xiju huodong," *Yanh*e 3 (1962), 7.

[57] Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), 168.

[58] Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 83-222.

concentration, therefore entails the loss of the dialectic unity of social forces and the individual; naturalist writers, such as Zola, with their positivist and scientific observation, their photographic descriptions of the surface or parts of reality, offer no penetration of a deeper reality, in which case the author simply becomes a passive spectator[59]—a critique that Zhou Yang leveled against critical realism.[60]

While Lukács's realist aesthetics functions as a force to denaturalize capitalism through representing it as processes, Zhou Yang advocated a more active role for literature with proleptic temporalities to play in human history and revolution. In "Realistic and Romantic," Zhou Yang explains that the typical, the artistic epitomizing (*yishu de gaikuo* 艺术的概括) can be a form of "prediction" (*yujian* 预见).[61] The writer points to something that is still in an embryonic stage, imperceptible to the people, and manifests and exaggerates it to them, just as Turgenev created Bazarov, the nihilist, before nihilism became a dominant intellectual trend in Russia. Zhou Yang continues: "Progressive writers must observe the reality in the movement of history…He does not only have to depict those things that already exist in reality but must also depict that which could exist in reality."[62] In doing so, Zhou Yang reasons, such work can encourage people to endeavor to realize those could-exist things. Here we observe the classic dichotomy between

[59] Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 91-3; "Narrative or Describe?", 131-32.

[60] For Lukács, realism only becomes passive after the defeat of the 1848 revolution in various European countries whereby many intellectuals and realists retreated from active participation in society to become mere passive observer and spectator. See *Studies in European Realism*, 140. However, for Zhou Yang, nineteenth century critical realism never succeeded in revealing the truth of reality.

[61] Zhou Yang, "Xinashi de yu langman de," 126.

[62] Ibid., 127.

what is and *what ought to be* at the heart of Socialist Realism that Katerina Clark aptly summarizes in *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. For Zhou Yang, the proleptic temporality in literary text has a particular function to fulfill, that is to inspire people to embrace revolution and transform reality.

The pragmatic turn in the redefinition of realism was particularly prominent in the debates on theater reform and new music-drama precisely because of the public nature of theatrical performance and spectatorship and its potent political efficacy. The proliferation of highly melodramatic propagandistic dramas, known as the "War of Resistance drama" (*kangzhan ju* 抗战剧), made critics and dramatists increasingly aware of the utility of dramatic work in mass mobilization on the one hand, and deeply concerned with the deterioration in the quality of those works on the other. The issues of the use of old forms, of Westernization versus developing a national form, and of the role of art and realism in a moment of national crisis were all present in the debates on theater reform and new music-drama. A look at the discursive formations in Yan'an and in GMD-controlled areas reveals a fundamental shift in both theory and practice of theater reform in wartime China.

As someone with profound theoretical and practical knowledge, Ke Zhongping 柯仲平 (1902-1964), the Communist intellectual and poet and a leading figure in the Border Region People's Drama Troupe 边区民众剧团, spearheaded the pragmatic turn in redefining the relationship of realism and aesthetic form to social reality. The Drama Troupe was founded in 1938 as a direct response to Mao's call for "national forms" and

cultural populism, and Ke joined the debates on the "New National Music-Drama" in 1939. As a cultural populist, he remained a strong proponent of the use of folk culture and art forms in the creation of a new revolutionary literature and culture. In an article published in *Wenyi tuji* 文艺突击 (Literary Assault) in 1939, a major magazine on literature and arts in Communist base areas, Ke Zhongping foregrounds the close affinity between emotion and music and the emotional efficacy of the medium of traditional opera. In the section under the title of "Creating the New National Music-Drama" (*chuangzao xin de minzu geju* 创造新的民族歌剧), the dramatist begins by noting the interpersonal and communicative function of singing in communicating feelings and intent (*qingyi* 情意) to one another. Even though less frequently used than naturally occurring spoken language, he argues, singing in music-drama with its vivid and poeticized language is able "to convey" (*chuanda* 传达) "the feelings, thoughts, and activities existing in reality" (现实中存在的情调，思想，活动).[63]

More significantly for Ke Zhongping, music-drama with its stylization and poeticization would serve the cause of realism: a stylized and poeticized form does not "distort reality" (*waiqu xianshi* 歪曲现实); on the contrary, it deepens people's understanding of reality.[64] This is because "people have been moved by it [music-drama], and therefore in the state of being moved it is easier to understand reality."[65] The author

[63] Ke Zhongping, "Jieshao chalutiao bing lun chuangzao xin de minzu geju," *Wenyi tuji* 1, (1939), 57.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

here highlights the emotional efficacy of music-drama and treats the state of being emotionally moved as a necessity to a more thorough understanding of reality. As David Holm aptly points out, cultural workers and propagandists in Yan'an had long prized adding songs to visual performance to heighten the emotional responses that could in turn elicit mass political activism.[66] Contrary to the Enlightenment model of epistemology based on pure rationality, for Ke Zhongping, emotion plays a key epistemic function and serves as the first step toward political activism. The cause of realism for Ke is of course a pragmatic one: the ultimate goal of the new music-drama, he argues, is to help the masses understand the reality of the War of Resistance, and more importantly, to mobilize them to participate actively in the War of Resistance.[67] To accomplish the task of creating the new national music-drama rooted in a newly defined realism, the author has promoted an eclectic incorporation of both foreign artistic traditions and traditional Chinese theatrical legacy in the creation of a new national music-drama. Ke puts out an impassioned call for the creation of a *grand* (*daxing* 大型) music-drama with "Chinese manner" (*Zhongguo qipai* 中国气派), a direct reference to Mao's speech, to accomplish such a task. During his leadership at the People's Drama Troupe, Ke particularly advocated for innovative ways of utilizing folk music and regional operas,[68] and as he suggests in this article, progressive composers must utilize a small portion of existing

[66] Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 236.

[67] Ke Zhongping, "Jieshao chalutiao bing lun chuangzao xin de minzu geju," 57.

[68] For a more detailed account of the operations of the Border Region People's Opera Troupe and their experiment with the Shaanxi regional opera *qinqiang*, see Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 66-70.

folk music in the composition of an entire work of music drama. This is exactly what the composers did with the music of *The White-Haired Girl*, and the creation of *The White-Haired Girl* eventually realized Ke's dream of producing China's own grand national music drama.

The emphasis on grandeur, or the size of a production, deserves further attention. The creation of the music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* was significant precisely because it was the first substantial and comprehensive work produced under the guidance of Mao's Yan'an Talks and a timely arrival to mend the shortcomings of its precursor the *Yangge* Movement. Despite the enormous success the *Yangge* Movement had gained, creators became increasingly dissatisfied with the form of *yangge*, even in the reformed new *yangge* form. One of the limits of new *yangge* was the small size of its production. Zhou Yang wrote an authoritative assessment of the recent the *Yangge* Movement in Yan'an after viewing a cluster of *yangge* performances performed by both professional troupes and amateur common people for the celebration of the Spring Festival of 1944. Zhou pointed out in his assessment that the *yangge* play (*yangge ju*) was "a drama of small form," and therefore "the depth and scope of the themes it able to deal with were rather limited."[69] While affirming the achievements of the *Yangge* Movement, Zhou Yang regarded it as a catalyst for the creation of something more grand, namely the national new music-drama. He wrote, "it [new *yangge*] will be an important base and

[69] Zhou Yang, "Biaoxian xin de qunzhong de yidai—kan le hunjie yangge zhihou," *Zhou Yang wenji* vol.1, 444.

moving force to the creation of a grand "national new music-drama" and "new spoken drama."[70] Zhou Yang also pointed out that *yangge* plays had yet to create typical characters (*dianxing renwu* 典型人物); the inability to create typical characters due to the limits of its form required the search for a new form.[71] Zhou's opinion falls closely in line with Mao's dialectical conception of popularization (*puji* 普及) and elevation (*tigao* 提高) in the Yan'an Talks.[72] The New *Yangge* Movement therefore represented a successful process of popularization, however the part of elevation remained to be realized. The creative team at the Lu Xun Academy began the creation of *The White-Haired Girl* with the goal of creating a new play that was "grand and further elevated based on existing foundation" to commemorate the convening of the Seventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.[73]

The search for the right model for the creation of a new national music-drama drew much attention outside of Yan'an as well. A short essay entitled "The Music-Drama of Tomorrow" (*mingri de xingeju* 明日的新歌剧) written by the eminent dramatist Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩 (1889-1962), published just months before the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War in 1937 nicely summarizes the current debates around *xin geju* and

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 445.

[72] The original quote is: "our elevation, is elevation on the basis of popularization; our popularization, is popularization under the guidance of elevation 我们的提高是在普及基础上的提高；我们的普及是在提高指导下的普及. " Mao, "Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotan hui shang de jianghua." Web, accessed on October 15, 2020. https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-194205.htm

[73] Zhang Geng, "Huiyi Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui qianhou 'Luyi' de xiju huodong," 10-11.

laments the lack of systematic discussion on this particular issue. According to Ouyang's account, there were two opposing camps with regard to the creation of a New Music-Drama—the "Old Drama" (*jiuju* 旧剧) camp and the Westernization camp. The "Old Drama" camp proposed reforming traditional Chinese opera as the basis for a new music-drama, whereas the Westernization camp argued that Western music should serve as the guidelines for creating the new music-drama.[74] Ouyang Yuqian, as one of the co-founders of the National Drama Movement (*guoju yundong* 国剧运动) in the 1920s and a firm believer in the value of reformed traditional opera, fell somewhere in between those two camps. He argued that the creation of the "New Music-Drama" should be based on reforming traditional opera as well as adopting existing models in Western musical theater. One of the models that the dramatist thought should serve as a model for Chinese new music-drama was melodrama, left as an untranslated English term.[75]

Ouyang's proposal of melodrama as the model for Chinese new music-drama echoed a contemporary drama critic's similar proposal published earlier in the Guangdong based newly established drama magazine *Xiju yishu* 戏剧艺术 (The Art of Drama*)*. In this article entitled "The Creation of Chinese New Music-Drama," the drama critic Chen Hong advocates melodrama (again untranslated) with its combination of both singing and speech as the form that Chinese new music-drama should take. The critic valued melodrama for its ideal combination of singing and speech—with an emphasis on

[74] Ouyang Yuqian, "Mingri de xin geju," *Xiju Shidai* 1.1 (1937), 69.

[75] Ibid., 71-72.

the former—that distinguished itself from Western operas' mere singing form and spoken drama's mere speech form.[76] He brings up the notion of music-drama at the beginning of the article as the highest form of "integrated art" (*zonghe yishu* 综合艺术), which explains the difficulty of its creation and the fact that China at the time still did not have its own *geju*.[77] The author viewed the replacement of traditional forms of theatrical performance—or as the author derogatively called "drama of gongs and drums" (锣鼓戏)—that people in the countryside still enjoyed so much with the new music-drama as a necessary means to eradicate those poisonous "feudal thoughts" (*fengjian sixiang* 封建思想) and "patriarchy-clan-based thoughts" (*zongfa sixiang* 宗法思想) embedded in those types of dramas.[78] With the use of orchestral music, melodrama's status as *geju*, despite the presence of speech in it, was well justified, Chen reasoned.[79] Though not entirely against the use of Chinese traditional operatic music, Western orchestral music, for Chen, clearly defines what *geju* music-drama should be, or at least aspires to be. In the remaining part of the article, the critic continues to elaborate on how to reform the four aspects of music-drama, script, music score, band, and performers, introducing certain common Western operatic techniques and practices as the model to emulate and the remedy for the monotonous repertoire of tunes in "old drama."[80] The author's

[76] Chen Hong, "Zhongguo xin geju de chuangzao" *Xiju yishu* 1.1 (1937), 8. The model of melodrama referred to here, which supposedly combines singing and speech, remains unclear since stage melodrama in the 19th century Europe and America did not necessarily involve singing, only musical accompaniment.
[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 9-10.

[80] Ibid., 10.

valorization of Western music and its operatic tradition would undoubtedly place him in the Westernization camp.

Ouyang Yuqian on the other hand took a more eclectic approach to finding the right form for the creation of the new music-drama. While concurring with Chen's advocacy for melodrama as the model for new music-drama, particularly valuing its many plot twists and popular (*tongsu* 通俗) narratives, he cautioned against setting up a preexisting European form as predetermining standards applied to Chinese theater. Ouyang in the same article gives a short history of melodrama, explaining that melodrama was in fact *Drame* in France, a kind of dramatic form that was neither tragedy nor comedy; rather it was a kind of popular (*tongsu*) and sentimental (*shanggan* 伤感) drama. He continues, "it travelled from France to Britain when Sentimentalism was in its reign in eighteenth century. It was then when the use of music was added to help intensify emotion (*shanqing* 煽情), and therefore renamed "Melo-drama."[81] Ouyang Yuqian, like Chen Hong, particularly favored the combination of music and spoken dialogue on equal footing in Melo-drama. He argued that new music-drama should feature plot twists and accessible narratives as melodrama had done, however melodrama did not have to be the only model for emulation.

The emphasis on accessibility and the intrigues of plot reveals the concerted efforts made by wartime Chinese intellectuals to appeal to a wide range of audiences.

[81] "Mingri de xin geju," *Xiju Shidai* 1.1 (1937), 72.

This marked a significant shift from the May Fourth's somewhat elitist approach to theater reform and its subsequent failure to reach a wider audience. Hu Shi, a representative of the May Fourth disparaging views of *xiqu*, or traditional Chinese operas, famously called them vestiges (*yixing wu* 遗形物) in his retelling of the evolutionary history of drama, Chinese and Western. Hu contended that Chinese drama must eradicate all the vestiges, including music, singing, dancing, painted face, stylized gait (*taibu* 台步), and acrobatics in order to become *modern*.[82] And yet the kind of spoken drama and realistic/naturalistic performance style promoted by May Fourth intellectuals reached few audiences; the majority of both urban and rural population remained under the sway of traditional operas, including Peking opera and various regional operas, in other words "Old Drama." Zhang Geng, once a member of the Left-Wing Dramatist Association and a key figure who oversaw the production of *The White-Haired Girl*, concluded in 1939 that the May Fourth effort to reform theater failed to reach the masses, the very bottom of the nation, and therefore failed to create China's own "national new culture."[83] Even though the left-wing drama movement reoriented theater reform toward the problem of massification in both theory and practice, Zhang pointed out, the movement focused solely on the content of representing the real life of the masses and neglected the question of form, resulting in the disappointing consequence that the goal of creating drama for the

[82] "Wenxue jinhua guannian yu xiju gailiang," *Xin Qingnian* 5.4 (1918), 313. For a more detailed discussion on Hu Shi's view on traditional drama, see Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings* (University of California Press, 2007), 123-125.

[83] Zhang Geng, "Huaju minzuhua yu jiuju xiandaihua: dui Lu Xun yishu xueyuan tongxue de baogao," *Lilun yu xianshi* 1.3 (1939), 92.

masses, of the masses, and by the masses remained largely a slogan.[84] Zhang therefore emphatically called for a stop to the denunciation and exclusion of traditional dramatic forms in theater reform efforts and set the famous parallel goal of "the nationalization of spoken drama and the modernization of old drama" (*huaju de minzihua yu jiuju de xiandaihua* 话剧的民族化与旧剧的现代化) as the guiding principle for the current as well as future theater reform movements.

Traditional dramatic forms, once branded derogatorily as "Old Drama" and cast aside in the May Fourth evolutionary discourse of drama reform, now entered the purview of reform-minded dramatists and intellectuals during the wartime precisely because of their long-enjoyed popularity. The debates on the use of old forms attempted to rewrite the temporality of aesthetic forms and redefine literary modernity, to rethink tradition and modernity, and to negotiate between national culture and world history, between particular local conditions and universal enlightenment ideals (liberation, equality, etc.). However, the suspicion of old forms as the remnants of a bygone era along with traditional worldviews embedded in them that may not translate well into modern and revolutionary ideas and ideals bespeaks the dilemma that Chinese intellectuals faced with the project of enlightenment. "To elevate based on popularization and to popularize while elevating" as formulated by Mao therefore provided a possible solution to this dilemma.

[84] Ibid., 93.

Melodrama, Affective Power, and Audience Reception

At the heart of the project of enlightening the masses, of course, is the recognition of the masses as the subject of history, or the idea that they can be made into subjects with new political consciousness. With theater reform during a time of national crises in particular, the urgency of the war rendered an ever-keener awareness to audience, now considered the new political subject in the making. Dramatists and intellectuals were increasingly aware of dramatic forms' ability to elicit emotional and psychological responses from audiences and therefore the importance of maximizing that affective power. Chen Boda once equated the affective power of a dramatic work and its ability to reduce thousands of people to tears with creating a new national form of literature and art.[85] Similarly on the other side of the political spectrum, critics and intellectuals on the GMD's side were also concerned with utilizing aesthetic form for war efforts and mass mobilization. Peng Xingcai 彭行才 (1919-), for instance, a dramatist and high-ranking official serving at the Ministry of Education for the Nationalist government, stipulated the power to affect a crowd as a key criterion to judge the quality of a piece of dramatic work.[86]

[85] Chen Boda, "Guanyu wenyi de minzu xingshi wenti zaji," 7. The particular dramatic work Chen referred to was the street play *Lay Down Your Whip* (*fangxia ni de bianzi* 放下你的鞭子). For a more detailed analysis of this piece of dramatic work, see Chang-Tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (University of California Press, 1994), 55-64.

[86] Peng later became the head of the Department of Drama at the National Taiwan University of Arts after the Nationalist Party settled in Taiwan. In this article, Peng used the English word "crowd" for "*qunzhong*."

Peng's article published in a Nationalist government-sponsored journal that aimed at popularizing the education of drama and other arts to the masses, particularly focused on melodrama's psychological and emotional manipulation of audience. This article was based on a lecture on audience psychology delivered at the recently formed National Central Mass Education Center (*guoli zhongyang minzhong jiaoyu guan* 国立中央民众教育馆) by Peng in Chongqing in 1943.[87] Peng highlighted drama's closer affinity to the public than any other medium and its ability to affect audiences. The consumption of dramatic works was more public than reading a novel or reciting a poem which is normally done by a solitary individual in one's study, Peng reasoned. Even though literary works possessed affective power (感动力 *gandong li*), they nonetheless oriented only toward an individual in each circumstance, whereas a play put on stage could "affect" (感动 *gandong*) hundreds and thousands of audience members at one place and in one time.[88]

For a large chunk of the article, Peng Xingcai delves into the details of several characteristics of crowd mentality, often quite disparagingly, and how dramatists can cater to that mentality within reason. He compares the War of Resistance drama (抗战剧

[87] A complete script of this lecture was then published under the title of "Audience Psychology" (*"Guanzhong xinli"*) in *Social Education Tutorials* (*Shehui jiaoyu fudao* 社会教育辅导), a journal founded by the National Central Mass Education Center (*Guoli zhongyang minzhong jiaoyu guan*) in 1943, an institution directly established by the Ministry of Education of the Nationalist government in 1942 in Chongqing. According to the Chinese Periodicals Database for the Republican Period, this is a journal that aimed at popularizing the education of drama and other arts to the masses.
[88] Peng, "Guanzhong xinli," *Shehui jiaoyu fudao* 1 (1943), 132-33.

kangzhanju) to melodrama, both of which are similar in their typified and often oversimplified characterization:

> Take Melodrama (in original English) as an example. The author is in the habit of portraying two antagonistic sides as typical characters, one as the invincible "hero," and one as the evil "villain". Just as in the War of Resistance drama, one character is the clever leader of the guerrilla, whom the audiences revere and applaud, and one character is the evil Japanese, whom the audiences despise and curse.
> Common crowds lack critical judgment, are unable to observe a performance impartially, and therefore they either entirely sympathize with a character or entirely hate a character. Regardless of their stance, the judgment is not formed according to rationality.[89]

The association of crowd mentality with irrationality came from the many crowd psychology theories translated into China in the early twentieth century, institutionalized in elite universities, and popularized by general-interest magazines and newspapers.[90] The denigration of crowd phenomena by crowd theorists such as the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931) held special appeal for those on the political right.[91] While the left saw the crowd as the revolutionary masses with the power to dismantle the oppressive social system, people on the right saw them as a dangerous threat that must be brought under control.[92] The author here, as someone who was very much part of the

[89] Ibid., 138.

[90] For a detailed history of the translation, reception, and institutionalization of crowd psychology theories in modern China, see Xiao Tie, *Revolutionary Waves: The Crowd in Modern China*, 25-33, 41-49 (Harvard University Press, 2017).

[91] For instance, the GMD official and scholar Zhang Jiuru developed systematic views on crowd psychology in the 1920s and 1930s, whose work was then taught at various military academies. Zhang shared with many other Chinese crowd theorists their distrust of crowd and *qunzhong* (crowd) as an anomaly in need of state governance. See Xiao, *Revolutionary Waves*, 49-56.

[92] For a detailed study of the view of the crowd and the relation of the individual to the political masses/crowd within the leftist intellectual discourse, see Xiao, *Revolutionary Waves*, 91-102.

educational establishment of the Nationalist government, exhibits similar disparaging views of the crowd while offering rational explanations for its inner workings so as to provide ways to control and manipulate their mentality for certain political goals, in this case the patriotic mobilization of the masses for war efforts during the height of the War of Resistance.

On the note of polarized audience reception as a result of polarized characterizations, Peng immediately gives the example of Chinese audiences' reception of *La Dame aux Camélias* in which they cannot stand any disparaging views on the female protagonist Marguerite Gautier and bear no sympathy for Armand's interfering father. The author argues that such polarized reaction cannot come from a place of rationality but rather the audience's juvenile urge and partisan mentality to take sides, to sympathize with one side and despise the other.[93] Polarized audience reactions as a result of polarized and oversimplified characterization, the author notes, is very much an integral part of the formulaic conventions (*chengshi* 程式) of Old Drama, i.e. traditional Chinese drama; therefore, the side the audience sympathizes with always triumphs in the end to form a happy ending of *grand reunion* (*da tuanyuan* 大团圆).[94]

The author later gives a real example of how audience emotions can be contagious. During the performance of a Resistance drama in Anhui, despite the fact that the Japanese on stage were not actual Japanese, one audience urged audience members to

[93] Peng, "Guanzhong xinli," 138.

[94] Ibid.

attack the Japanese and the rest followed, and the actors who played the Japanese sustained severe injuries. Similar anecdotes of affective audience response and incidents of attacking the villain on stage occurred in many of the War of Resistance dramas and land reform dramas put on stage in Communist base areas. The final execution scene in the land reform drama *Liu Hulan* incited such strong affective response from the audience that some soldiers began throwing rocks and firing their guns at the villain on stage.[95] The main creator of the music-drama *The White-Haired Girl*, He Jingzhi noted how the boundary between stage performance and real life began to blur when peasants started to call actors by their stage name and curse the actors who played the villains after viewing *The White-Haired Girl*.[96] Zhang Geng recalled that peasants were particularly unsatisfied with the ending of *The White-Haired Gir*l in which the evil landlord Huang Shiren is not executed. The creative team then made changes to the ending to accommodate the intense hatred peasant audiences, who were demanding justice, felt after viewing the performance.[97]

The Hybrid Mode of the Melodramatic, Realist, and Fantastic in *The White-Haired Girl*

Previous scholars have attributed the success of this particular piece to its utilization of folk forms and folk beliefs. Meng Yue in her seminal study of the history of

[95] This incident was recorded in a local gazetteer in Shanxi, quoted in DeMare, *Mao's Cultural Army*, 2.

[96] He Jingzhi, "Bai Mao nü de chuangzuo yu yanchu," 155.

[97] Zhang Geng, "Huiyi Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui qianhou 'Luyi' de xiju huodong," 11.

The White-Haired Girl has argued that the music-drama version of *The White-Haired Girl* relies on a "popular ethical order and moral logic" (民间伦理秩序和道德逻辑) to gain political legitimacy. The crimes of the landlord are egregious and irredeemable precisely because he has violated the sanctity of the family on a New Year's Eve.[98] Max Bohnenkamp argues that *The White-Haired Girl* represents what he calls "revolutionary folklorism" in which revolutionary culture legitimizes itself based on the claims of the cultural authenticity of folk culture while simultaneously reshaping folk culture and the consciousness of the peasantry to disseminate modern and revolutionary concepts.[99] In the second chapter of his dissertation, Bohnenkamp discusses in great detail the role of the fantastic in a realist narrative such as *The White-Haired Girl* in which the fantastic is not negated by the logic of realism but pre-figures the real, in which "the imagination of the fantastic from traditional Chinese folklore and literature" is appropriated "in a particular manner in order to present a new symbolic representation of reality that could motivate different allegiances and actions than those governed by tradition."[100] Building on this previous scholarship, I wish to point out the prominence of the melodramatic mode in *The White-Haired Girl* that features strong emotionalism and moral polarization between the oppressed class represented by the innocent peasant family and the

[98] Meng Yue 孟悦, "*Baimaonü* yanbian de qishi: jianlun Yan'an wenyi de lishi duozhixing," *Zai jiedu: Dazhong wenyi yu yishi xingtai*, edited by Tang Xiaobing (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2007), 55-57.

[99] Bohnenkamp, *Turning Ghosts into People*, 78.

[100] See Chapter Two "The Politics of the Fantastic and the Adaptation of Socialist Realism in Zhou Yang's Sponsorship of *The White-Haired Girl*" in *Turning Ghosts into People*, 91-166. The quote is on page 97.

oppressive propertied class represented by the evil landlord in addition to its use of the fantastic and the realistic. The moral-emotional efficacy of the melodramatic mode comes from utilizing existing popular religious beliefs, worldviews, and structures of feelings (largely structured and informed by kinship relations) associated with the peasantry and meshing them with the emotional and political imperative of the revolution.

The music-drama version of the story roughly follows the storyline of the earlier written narrative: the peasant Yang Bailao finds himself yet again unable to pay the annual rent to the landlord Huang Shiren who forces Yang into selling his only daughter, Xi'er. After Yang commits suicide out of shame and guilt, Xi'er is enslaved and then raped by the landlord. She toils day and night in the Huang household and suffers constant abuse from the landlord's mother. The landlord duplicitously hints to Xi'er that a marriage between them would take place in the beginning of Scene Three while covertly he plans to get rid of her, as her pregnant body makes the illicit sexual affair impossible to hide. With the help of another sympathetic housemaid, Xi'er manages to escape into the mountains. In the following years, she lives in a cave, living off offerings people made in a nearby temple, during which her hair turns white. Meanwhile rumors about the sightings of the White-Haired Immortal begin to spread among the villagers. In Scene Four, Xi'er confronts the landlord and his servants who have come to the temple to make offerings to the White-Haired Immortal. Mistaken for a ghost, Xi'er accepts the misidentification at the moment, unleashes her vengeful wrath, and swears to devour the landlord. The last Scene of the drama features the return of the Red Army and ends with a

climactic scene of public accusations and collective reckoning by the peasants of the landlord's evil deeds.

As we can see from the synopsis of the drama, the narrative revolves around and proceeds through the violent termination of kinship ties and reconstitution of alternative kinship bonds, or even the false promise of forming kinship ties through marriage. The following analysis of the text will demonstrate that the melodramatic mode of narration centering on kinship and its affective and ethical implications channels much of the emotional intensity of the music-drama. Class hatred is generated through the emotional categories and affective intensity of kinship bonds so as to render a new and revolutionary regime of emotions legible to the peasantry.

The revolutionary music-drama begins with the domestic bliss and intimacy between the peasant girl Xi'er and her father Yang Bailao, as well as the intimate community formed by Xi'er's family and their fictive kin—their neighbors and other peasants. In other words, it begins in a "space of innocence," which Linda Williams identifies as an important feature of melodrama,[101] a space soon to be invaded by the villain—the evil landlord, in this case. This beginning also presents a stark contrast to melodramatic traditional operas where kinship ties are often hierarchical and rarely reciprocal.[102] The intimate scene where Yang Bailao ties Xi'er's hair with a piece of red

[101] Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodrama of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 28.

[102] For instance, in the famous Yuan drama *The Injustices to Dou'E* 窦娥冤, Dou'E the filial daughter-in-law wholeheartedly devotes herself into caring for her mother-in-law who rarely shows any affection toward Dou'E.

ribbon was reproduced as a photographic image in later publications and circulated widely, and eventually became the iconic stock image of the music-drama.

Much of the emotional ties and reciprocity is embodied in the materiality and circulation of food and objects among members of the community even though the circulation is governed by the logic of zero sum: Yang Bailao has to spend every single dime he obtains from selling the bean curd to buy that piece of red ribbon and two pounds of flour to make New Year dumplings; Dachun, the potential fiancé of Xi'er has to exchange two pounds of rice for one pound of meat. However, the logic of zero-sum, the scarcity of food and other material comforts in an individual peasant's family, has little bearing on the generosity and act of giving among members of the community. The first scene of Act I revolves mostly around everyone pulling together whatever resources they have to fulfill the ritualistic act of dumpling making for the celebration of the New Year. The play begins with Xi'er anxiously awaiting the return of her father on New Year's Eve, after he had been driven out of their home to avoid the ruthless debt collector working on behalf of the landlord. As Xi'er waits, she prepares cakes for him using the maize flour just given to her by their kind neighbor, Aunty Wang. This form of sociality based on mutual care presents a stark contrast with the propertied class who has accumulated an abundance of food and material wealth in their household with the hope of exploiting even more from the peasants. As the landlord Huang Shiren brazenly brags: "Our barns are bursting with grains, /So who cares if the poor go hungry."

The landlord's act of breaking up the communal and kinship bonds on a New Year's Eve therefore is particularly unforgivable. Ironically in the narrative poem version of the story written by Shao Zinan, the landlord coaxes Yang into entering a marriage contract by promising to form an affinal kinship though the marriage between himself and Xi'er. Huang Shiren says to Yang: "If I take her into my household, then you and I will be relatives and I'll take care of you in your old age, all the way up to the end. If you're still worried about it, we can just have Mu Renxing act as a go-between and go up the mountain for three days to make offerings at the temple. I'm still a bachelor, so who can say I won't take her as a proper wife?"[103] The landlord's seemingly sincere proposal of marriage implies an ethical obligation on his part as the future son-in-law to fulfill his filial duties of taking care of his father-in-law, obligations he promises to fulfill once they become kin through marriage. Such a promise does succeed in luring Yang Bailao, who is deeply touched by the generosity of the landlord, into signing the contract to appoint Xi'er as a maid servant in the Huang household with his handprint. The proposal of forming affinal kinship ties functioning to erase the violence of corporeal dispossession may have unwittingly revealed violent dispossession (of property, of body, etc.) in the name of kinship. After all, as many feminist scholars have pointed out, marriage is another form of transaction and trafficking of women.[104] We later learn as the narrative

[103] Shao Zinan published the narrative poem "Bai Mao nü ren" in Chongqing in 1946 after he left the creative team at the Lu Xun Academy. The English translation here is from Bohnenkamp's translation of the narrative poem which he has included as an appendix in his dissertation. Bohnenkamp, 319.

[104] For instance, Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, edited by Linda Nicholson (Routledge, 1997), 27-63.

unfolds that Huang's promise of forming kinship ties through marriage and fulfilling ethical obligations is of course completely false—he is only interested in fulfilling his sexual desire. The creators of *The White-Haired Girl* at the Lu Xun Academy, when reworking the earlier narrative into a dramatic piece, changed this particular detail into Yang being physically forced to sign the contract against his own will because they thought that creating too weak a peasant character contradicted the Maoist message that the peasantry constituted the revolutionary class.[105]

The concern with characterization and representing weak and deeply flawed peasant characters was particularly prominent in the characterization of the protagonist Xi'er. As Zhang Geng recalled in his recollection of the process of creating *The White-Haired Girl*, in an earlier version of the play after Xi'er is raped by Huang Shiren and becomes pregnant, Huang again offers his false promises of marriage and material comforts as a result of entering the marriage bond, and Xi'er believes him and shows a willingness to submit to him. Many took issue with this particular arrangement and pointed out that the character Xi'er would never forget the class hatred or her desire to avenge the murder of her father, and such an arrangement therefore distorted her character. Only a minority of people thought women in that particular situation might have the same thought and same reaction as Xi'er does and that Xi'er's response was believable. This short episode was eventually deleted from later versions.[106] This

[105] Zhang Geng's account of the creation history of *The White-Haired Girl* confirms the attempts to create characters more in line with Mao's mass politics. Zhang, "Huiyi Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui qianhou 'Luyi' de xiju huodong."

[106] Zhang Geng, "Huiyi Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui qianhou 'Luyi' de xiju huodong," 11.

controversy over Xi'er's characterization illustrates the gradual erasure of character flaws in the process of creating positive and more idealized characters in alliance with the doctrine of Socialist Realism. More importantly, such a revision reveals the uncompromising nature of the melodramatic mode: class struggle and the intensity of class hatred as a result of an earlier violation of kinship bond between father and daughter have precluded the possibility of forming an inter-class kinship tie. Class hatred and avenging for one's kin are conflated and become one and the same. In other words, kinship ties cannot transcend class lines in this text; an inter-class kinship relation is ontologically unformed.

The melodramatic overt villainy of the landlord and his family and cronies lies in the thrice-committed violation of the sanctity of kinship bonds: first, taking physical possession of Xi'er displaces her from her natal family and severs her ties to her living blood relations; then, the violence of dispossession causes the untimely death of the father; and finally, in preventing Xi'er from performing the proper mourning rites for her newly deceased father, those evil agents also sever her genealogical ties to her dead father. In the act when Xi'er is first forced to enter the Huang-clan household, she remains silent throughout the act except for a highly emotional aria in which she laments the fact she cannot perform the mourning rites for her father: "Who'll wear mourning clothes for my dad? /Who'll break the clay pot at his funeral?" (Act II, Scene I).[107] As the

[107] The breaking of a clay pot 摔老盆 was a funeral rite in northern rural China usually performed by the eldest son or grandson. The meaning of this particular ritual is somewhat controversial.

only child of Yang Bailao, Xi'er therefore has to fulfill the filial duty of performing mourning rites that were normally assigned to the son. The landlord's mother, a caricature of a seemingly pious but hypocritical Buddhist believer, orders Xi'er to take off her mourning clothes for she thinks mourning clothes are inauspicious. Act I and II narrate the decimation of kinship structures of an innocent peasant family and their community by the evil propertied class, which ultimately raises the question of justice.

Through an ironic use and play with the folk belief in *li* 理, reason or principle, as the bearer and arbiter of justice, the first two acts are asking: What happens when the secular principle on which a society builds itself is inherently unjust and the heavenly principle fails to intervene? The landlord uses the concept of *li* to point out the righteousness of his action of collecting debt owed to him: "With reason *li* one can travel the world; without reason one cannot make a step. Even if you argue and reason with Heaven, the debt that you own me still needs to be paid!" (Act I, Scene II). In both secular and heavenly terms, to repay the debt one owes to the landlord as a tenant peasant is in accordance with *li*. Later when Old Man Zhao tries to reason with the lackey and debt collector of the landlord Mu Renzhi by pointing out how unreasonable it is to take Xi'er away on the first day of the new year and prevent her from performing the mourning rites for her newly deceased father, the debt collector responds by pointing to the written contract and says: "What is principle? This is principle!" (Act I, Scene IV). To obey a legally binding contract is in accordance with *li*. When Yang Bailao attempts to find a higher authority to seek justice, to argue and reason (找个地方说理去), the

landlord's lackey aptly points out the magistrate is a friend of the landlord and their household is the yamen. Faced with a corrupt legal system, the peasants have no way of seeking justice, of speaking *li*. The miscarriage of justice has been a common theme in many Chinese traditional dramas and narratives. However, unlike the ending of premodern dramas where a just magistrate or heavenly forces intervene to right the wrongs, the music-drama shows that the task of rooting out injustices lies on the back of the peasants themselves under the political and military leadership of the Communist party. The text of *The White-Haired Girl* therefore disseminates revolutionary notions of political subjectivity and agency through an ironic use of the folk belief in *li* and a discussion of traditional notions of justice. The new moral order established by this melodramatic story displaces 天 *tian* (Heaven) with peasant revolutionary energy as the ultimate agent of justice.

As Bohnenkamp forcefully argues, couched in the naïve folk beliefs in justice and the supernatural is the prophetic tone that predicts the inevitable arrival of revolution; the fantastic therefore pre-figures the real defined in the realm of human action and class struggle. As in the realist aesthetics of Zhou Yang and Lukács, an aesthetic representation should be capable of comprehending and capturing the dialectic movement of history and thus predicting the destiny of the future. Before the final scene of reckoning with the landlord and his crimes, the idea that the day of reckoning *will* come is constantly evoked by various peasant characters. Old Man Zhao sings an aria at the end of Act I as a concluding and prophetic comment: "Let us remember how many people the Huang

family has killed. Their day of reckoning will come! A day will come when dynasties are replaced and eras change (*gai chao huan dai* 改朝换代)" (Act I, Scene III). Even though the old peasant puts his hope on a cyclical dynastic change rather than revolutionary ushering in of a new era, he nevertheless is right in predicting the change of power structure that comes with revolution in which the powerless is able to seek justice. When dissuading Xi'er from committing suicide after she is raped by the landlord, the older peasant woman Auntie Zhang, a surrogate kin relation for Xi'er at this point, directs her attention to the future: "I'll look after you, and later on we two will live together. The day will come when we shall avenge your father." The collective reckoning or "settling account" (*suanzhang* 算账) in the final scene (Scene Five) of the music-drama does fulfill the prophetic utterances made by these peasants.

However, prophetic utterance and folk beliefs will remain unfulfilled and unrealized because behind the prophesy lurks the risk of the oppressed class's tragic succumbing to exploitation, thereby foreclosing the action of a heroic uprising against oppression. The creators of *The White-Haired Girl* therefore increased the "rebelliousness" (*fankang xing* 反抗性) of many of the peasant characters to shore up the spontaneous revolutionary nature in the peasantry. They added the scene where the two young peasants fight against the landlord's lackey and have to flee as a result of their "unlawful" action, which then leads them to join the Eighth Route Army, the former Red Army. Xi'er's famous aria sung after she escapes the landlord's household into the mountains repeats the first-person pronoun four times as the subject and agent of the

character's own will and action: "I will not die. I shall live! /I shall get revenge. I will live!" (Act III, Scene III). Then in Act IV Scene I, Xi'er confronts the landlord and his servants who have come to the temple to make offerings to the White-Haired Immortal and are scared by the sighting of the ghostly Xi'er. Xi'er accepts the misidentification of her as a ghost at the moment, and unleashes her vengeful wrath. It is by assuming the identity of a supernatural being that Xi'er first unleashes her power as an avenger for class oppression.

Here lies the fundamental difference between a conventional melodrama and revolutionary melodrama: the feeling of righteousness is not enough in righting the wrongs in the universe of the text; the moral necessity to confront and purge evil in melodrama requires the overthrow of the oppressive ruling class, i.e., the violent act of revolution. Abstract ideas of Marxist class struggle are repackaged in *The White-Haired Girl* into the concrete forms of the easily identifiable dichotomy of the evil of the landlord class and the suffering and victimhood of the innocent peasant family. The first half of the dramatic narrative revolves mainly around the polarization between the inherent good of the affective kinship bonds, formed by father, daughter and other fictive kin in the community, and the evil of disrupting those bonds. This affective polarization makes the overthrow of the forces of oppression a moral and political imperative and legitimates the revolution led by the Communist party in the second half. As such, the kind of affective kinship represented in this text is conducive to the public good and revolutionary cause. The rural hinterland the CCP retreated to was a place where

traditional beliefs and norms of kinship still held sway, and revolutionary ideas and ideals must thus be concretized in melodramatic moral polarization that highlights the evil of the oppressive class's disruption and destruction of kinship bonds which are idealized to be inherently good.

The revolutionary potentialities of the melodramatic mode "to dichotomize swiftly, to identify targets, to encapsulate conflict"[108] made it an ideal aesthetic form for mass emotional pedagogy and mobilization during a time of national crisis. The intensified suffering and victimhood of the oppressed and innocent featured in the melodramatic mode makes the overthrow of the forces of oppression a moral imperative, an imperative that could serve well the demand for mass mobilization and revolutionary change. The discursive shift and the pragmatic turn in the rethinking and redefinition of realism and the legacy of the May Fourth in the context of theater reform in wartime China further facilitated the effortless entrance of the melodramatic mode into the realist mode. Very much a product of these wartime debates on philosophical and aesthetic concepts and praxes, *The White-Haired Girl* presented an experiment, if not a realization, of a hybrid melodramatic-romantic-realist mode in which revolutionary truth is revealed as much through ideological inculcation as *felt* affect and emotion. This hybridization would take a more radical turn during the Cultural Revolution in the productions of model theatrical works.

[108] Gaines, Jane. "The Melos in Marxist Theory." *Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*, edited by David E. James, and Rick Berg (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 59.

CHAPTER IV

THE OPERATIC-MELODRAMATIC CRESCENDO: REDEFINING FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN *THE RED LANTERN*

The revolutionary model opera *The Red Lantern* (*Hongdeng ji*) was one of the several model theatrical works, known as *yangbanxi*, produced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It was part of the state-sponsored collective theatrical productions to answer Mao Zedong's call for continuous revolution. Due to its enormous critical and popular success, *The Red Lantern* became the first model theatrical work selected to be made into a film for wider promulgation and emulation, and the official film version was released in 1970. Set during the second Sino-Japanese War, the opera centers on a family of revolutionaries, the Li family, working with a network of underground Communists to guard and pass on secret codes, using a red lantern, in order to win the fight against the Japanese. In the most dramatic moment, which occurs mid-narrative, the Li family is revealed to share no biological relation. After the father and grandmother are executed by Japanese forces, the granddaughter, who has now come to the knowledge that she is not related to them by blood, willingly chooses to carry on their fight and continues the revolution in their wake.

From this short synopsis of the story, we may see that *The Red Lantern* relies on many key aesthetic as well as narrational features of the melodramatic mode, including excessive emotionalism, familial intimacy, moral polarization, suffering of the innocent, sudden revelation, stylized performance, and the use of music to intensify the emotions in

display on stage and on screen. As discussed in the Introduction, melodrama has had profound impact on Chinese cinema since its inception. Melodrama, in particular family melodrama, became highly adaptable across genres and media and remained an intrinsic part of Chinese early cinema in Shanghai, left-wing cinema in the 1930s, and later socialist cinema after the establishment of the PRC (1949). More recent scholarship on PRC socialist cinema has made explicit the continuation as well as refashioning of the genre of family melodrama, favored by the 1930s left-wing cinema, in the 1950s and 1960s socialist cinema. As discussed in the Introduction, Xiao Liu, in her study of *Red Detachment of Women* as a revolutionary melodrama, argues that the construction of revolutionary/socialist family in the film fundamentally challenges the forced separation of production and reproduction, the domestic and the public in a bourgeois society.[1] Building her work on Liu's scholarship, the second chapter of Jessica Ka Yee Chan's monograph on Seventeen Years cinema specifically focuses on the appropriation of Hollywood mode of narration and family melodrama for revolutionary and socialist purposes. The common themes of heterosexual romance and family in Hollywood melodrama, as Chan insightfully points out, are embedded within broader networks of support and ideologically in line the Party in socialist cinema.[2] These scholars highlight the construction of imaginaries of revolutionary family in socialist cinema that transcend

[1] Liu, "*Red Detachment of Women*: Revolutionary Melodrama and Alternative Socialist Imaginations," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26.3 (2015), 116-141.

[2] Chan, Chapter 2 "Literature on Screen: Recasting Classical Hollywood Narration in Family Melodrama" in *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics, and Internationalism (1949-1966)* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019), 137-205.

biological kinship and challenge the bourgeois dichotomization of the domestic and the public depicted and reinforced in conventional family melodrama.

The opera film *The Red Lantern*, as this chapter will show, illustrates the culmination of revolutionary melodrama in twentieth-century China, i.e., melodramas that seek not to resolve social injustices and contradictions on the level of personal or familial concerns but to *effect* action and social change. In his seminal study on Cultural Revolution opera films and the realist tradition in Chinese cinema, Jason McGrath points out that the productions of these opera films marked the culmination of a formalist shift in Chinese revolutionary cinema in which highly stylized performance and melodramatic modes of narration replaced earlier mimetic cinematic realism.[3] It is by no means accidental that the melodramatic mode figures so prominently in socialist art informed by principles of revolutionary romanticism. It is the demand of the melodramatic mode "to go beyond the surface of the real to the truer, hidden reality"—to use Peter Brooks's words[4]—that resonates so well with the Maoist aesthetics of a revolutionary romanticism that contends art should depart from surface reality to depict a higher, more idealized reality, to reveal the truth hidden beneath reality.[5] In other words, in the very theoretical

[3] McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema." *Opera Quarterly* 26.2-3 (2010), 343-376. Chinese revolutionary cinema is loosely defined by McGrath as filmmaking efforts that were historically associated with the Chinese Communist Party or sympathetic to the Communist cause, which included 1930s Shanghai left-wing cinema and later socialist cinema after 1949.

[4] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 2.

[5] McGrath, 349-350. Mao's original quote was "life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." Mao, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893-1945*, edited by Kirk A. Denton (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 470.

discourse of Maoist aesthetics we detect the essential element of melodrama. In practice, the melodramatic mode, both as an artistic/narrational mode and an aesthetic theory, continued to inform socialist cultural production. In the instance of film production, the melodramatic mode provided socialist cinema "a moral anchor," through which hidden moral meanings were revealed and history was propelled "forward and upward to a higher moral plane."[6]

The promotion of the synthetic combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism beginning from 1958 also led to model theatrical works' downplaying of suffering of the innocent and prioritizing instead the idealization of heroic figures and their action, which differed from earlier revolutionary melodramas such as *The White-Haired Girl* studied in previous chapter.[7] One of the reasons that contributed to this shift to the primacy of revolutionary action was because of the endorsement of the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism by Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), the central figure who sponsored and closely supervised the production of these works. Jiang Qing, in keeping with the tenor of 2RRs (revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism), demanded that literature and art should not "exaggerate or extol suffering" (*xuanran huo songyang kunan* 渲染或颂扬苦难

[6] Jessica Chan, *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema*, 182.

[7] For a detailed historical account of the creation of the famous synthesis and its relation to Socialist Realism, see Yang Lan, "'Socialist Realism' versus 'Revolutionary Realism Plus Revolutionary Romanticism,'" *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, edited by Hilary Chung, et al., (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 88-105. As Yang Lan points out, 2RR during the Cultural Revolution took a more unrelenting stance than before on the positive portrayal of heroic characters.

) but should instead promote "revolutionary optimism" (*geming de leguanzhuyi* 革命的乐观主义).[8] We see in a text like *The Red Lantern* how quickly emotions such as grief are transformed into revolutionary action, pathos transformed into action—the dual property of melodrama as famously formulated by Linda Williams.[9]

This chapter examines how one of the best-known revolutionary model operas, *The Red Lantern*, continues the construction of imaginaries of revolutionary family in socialist cinematic and literary texts that transcend biological connection. Where in earlier revolutionary melodramas, such as *The White-Haired Girl*, revolutionary cause still needs to rely on the codes and moral order of traditional kinship bonds to legitimate itself, *The Red Lantern* fundamentally challenges naturalized notions of biological family and kinship. Through close analysis of the opera film that attends to its form and medium specificity, this chapter argues that *The Red Lantern* has radically redefined and reenvisioned a new form of revolutionary kinship based on affective class kinship and mutual care. Affective bonds heightened in the opera film, due to its medium specificity and the utilization of the melodramatic mode, are vital to the continuation of the revolution both in the diegetic world of the film and in the real world.

Seen from the perspective of the history of theater reform in modern China, the launch of model theatrical production during the Cultural Revolution has been viewed as

[8] Jiang Qing, "Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao" [Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing], *Hongqi* 9 (1967), 19.

[9] See Williams, "Melodrama Revised," *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, edited by Nick Browne (University of California Press, 1998) and *Playing the Race Card: Melodrama of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 28-30.

a further radicalization of theater and rejection of the earlier *xin geju* (new music-drama) model under which *The White-Haired Girl* was produced.[10] However, the principles of searching for maximal aesthetic appeal and expressivity evidenced in the creation of *The White-Haired Girl*, as Max Bohnenkamp elucidates, continued "to inform expectations for maximal formal unity and spectacular monumentalism that were hallmarks of the model works of the Cultural Revolution."[11] Building on the previous chapter, the second part of this chapter attempts to situate model theatrical works in the history of theater reform in twentieth-century China, focusing on the aesthetic continuities and discontinuities of (socialist) realist aesthetics articulated by intellectuals like Zhou Yang in the 1930s and its relation to Maoist revolutionary romanticism and the melodramatic mode. In doing so, this part of the chapter wishes to show that model theatrical works, by utilizing the operatic-melodramatic mode, came on stage to resolve the many issues facing theater reform before 1949 and during the Seventeen Years period; they were as much continuations of the search for maximal expressivity and affective and aesthetic appeal as disruptions of previous artistic practices and aesthetic experiments.

[10] Max Bohnenkamp, "Neither Western Opera, Nor Old Chinese Theater: The Modernist 'Integrated Art-Form' and the Origins of the Maoist 'New music-Drama,'" in *Rethinking Chinese Socialist Theaters of Reform: Performance Practice and Debate in the Mao Era*, edited by Chen, Xiaomei, Tarryn L Chun, and Siyuan Liu (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 55. See also Fu Jin 傅谨, *Xin zhongguo xiju shi 1949-2000* (Changsha: Hunan Meishu chubanshe, 2002).

[11] Bohnenkamp, ibid., 55-56.

"Class *qingyi* Outweighs Mountain Tai": Revolutionary Kinship Reenvisioned

A literary scholar passes on the following judgment when assessing the discourse of class affection and kinship in model operas:

> The model operas not only did not allow any space for romance between man and woman but also repressed affection among blood relations. Characters in these operas are devoid of normal human nature (*ren de zhengchang shuxing* 人的正常属性) and left with only class consciousness and class sentiments. They are characterized as revolutionaries with hardened mind and hardened emotion from inside and out, speaking a revolutionary discourse that lacks human touch, and as a result those characters lack authentic relatability.[12]

Such a normative judgment is representative of the many criticisms of model operas that were launched after the end the Cultural Revolution and continued to today. It also epitomizes a return to a supposedly universal humanism that privileges heterosexual romance, familial affections, and intimacy as the defining property of human nature. The demarcation of the private and public spheres in the epistemology of the Enlightenment, emerged in the eighteenth century, played a central role in the making of the European man as the modern liberal subject. As discussed at length in the Introduction chapter, scholars in critical race studies and postcolonial studies have long problematized and challenged the epistemic assumptions we inherit from the Enlightenment and accept as "natural." Their scholarship makes clear that the emergence of bourgeois notions of intimacy and domesticity engrained in the right to property in Europe and America was

[12] Zhu Keyi 祝克懿, *Yuyan xue shiye zhong de "yangbanxi"* (Kaifeng, China: Henan University Press, 2004), 283.

made possible precisely by racialized labor whose existence was brushed away by the Enlightenment discourse of universal human freedom.[13] Their work not only denaturalizes and historicizes the normative things that we, including the quoted literary scholar, take to be natural and part of human nature, ("romance between men and women," "affection among blood relations," etc.) but also reveals how the false universality of liberal humanism ineluctably puts race, gender, and class inequalities under erasure.[14]

The conceptualization of a universal human nature was specifically rejected and criticized by Mao Zedong's in his 1942 Yan'an Talks. Mao contended: "[T]here is only human nature in the concrete, no human nature in the abstract. In class society there is only human nature of a class character; there is no human nature above classes."[15] Mao's strong critique of the bourgeois universal humanism and its abstract nature unmoored from social reality of class struggle came from a direct influence of Marx, and for that matter Hegel as well.[16] He referenced Marxism-Leninism himself in the talks to remind

---

[13] See footnote 59 in Introduction.

[14] Another key major intervention Lowe and Eng's scholarship offers, I believe, is that intimacy is by no means apolitical and private but intricately embedded in the state and (neo)liberal political economy. Their insight will help me examine the politics of intimacy in the model operas.

[15] Mao, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," 478.

[16] Marx dismantled formal equality of liberalism on multiple occasions. One of the most memorable moments might be his discussion of the struggle over the normal length of the working day in "The Working Day" chapter in *Capital Volume I* in which he asserts the famous quote, "Between equal rights, force decides" (344). Marx's immanent critique always begins with the presuppositions of the stance he is critiquing, and in this case the liberal premise that the workers have the right to sell their labor and the capitalists have the right to exploit them. The subsequent history that unfolded was a history of class struggle and each class's attempt to assert influence on the legislative branch. The battles of the economic sphere were also fought on the political ground between different political forces. For Hegel's concept of abstract right as right without content and particularity, see Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). Contemporary political philosophers and theorists have long identified the logic of abstract or formal equality as the premise of liberal democracy or representative democracy. Lisa

those so-called bourgeois humanists, who were promoting "love" and other bourgeois ideals such as freedom, that their "love" and other ideals were in fact "love in the abstract, and also freedom in the abstract, truth in the abstract, human nature in the abstract."[17] Mao's condemnation culminated in the following statement that negated the existence of universal and transcendental "love" in a class society: "[A]s for love, in a class society there can be only class love."[18]

What then might a concrete love or class love look like? Following Mao's anti-universal-humanism theoretical principles, the creators of model theatrical works also explicitly rejected, in the creation of aesthetic texts, this bourgeois notion of human nature, human affections, and social institutions, including its basic social unit of expression—the family. A discourse of "class camaraderie" (*jieji qingyi* 阶级情义) was created to challenge the form of family and kinship relations purely based on biological connection. The creators of *The Red Lantern* explicated that in order to foreground the Communist Party's extremely close relationship with the people, they specifically "put three working-class members with different family surnames (*yixing* 异姓) into one family, and this family is also a proletarian revolutionary combating collective (*wuchan*

Lowe aptly points out that liberal democracy relies on an "abstract and identical universality," a representable equality and samenesss, and therefore ignores all forms of inequality (race, gender, class) and subjugates alternative cultures. See Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). The political theorist Wendy Brown points out that modern democracy since its inception never included nor guaranteed substantive equality. As she lucidly puts it, "modern democracy has never pledged equality except in the most formal sense of representation (one person—one vote) or equal treatment before the law (not a necessary entailment of democracy, rarely secured in practice, and irrelevant to substantive equality)" (51). See Brown, "We Are All Democrats Now…" *Democracy in What State?* edited by Giorgio Agamben et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 44-57.

[17] Mao, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," 463.

[18] Ibid.

jieji de geming zhandou jiti 无产阶级的革命战斗集体) that radically breaks (*chedi juelie* 彻底决裂) with all old and traditional ideas."[19] To fault the model operas for not portraying romance and familial affections and thus creating characters devoid of humanity therefore is to impose a set of normative assumptions that the creators of *The Red Lantern* specifically denounced. Such a critique also fails to recognize a radical redefinition of family and kinship that these model theatrical works attempted to articulate. As I have argued before, model theatrical works such as *The Red Lantern* no longer needed to rely on the moral order coded in traditional and biological kinship bonds to lend legitimacy to the revolution. Instead, it rejected and challenged those naturalized notions of family and kinship.

The Red Lantern, an opera film that centers on a revolutionary family with no biological connections and features a narrative laden with rhetorics of family and kinship, provides us with an optimal entry point to explore how the model opera redefines family and kinship and represents a class kinship that replaces a biological kinship. Contrary to previous scholarship that contends there is a blatant lack of familial intimacies represented in model opera works,[20] this part of the chapter makes clear that *The Red Lantern* foregrounds the intimacies and affective bonds among the three generations of

[19] China Peking Opera Troupe, "Wei suzao wuchan jieji de yingxiong dianxing er douzheng—suzao Li Yuhe yingxiong xingxiang de tihui," *Hongqi* 5 (1970), 51.

[20] In addition to scholars like Zhu Keyi, Xiaomei Chen, for instance, argues that women portrayed in model opera works are "deprived of womanhood, motherhood, and the intimacies of family life," and they are portrayed in this way because they are revolutionaries (75). However, this is not an accurate characteristic for all model operas, or at least not in *The Red Lantern* in which familial intimacies are foregrounded. See Chen, Chapter two, "Operatic Revolutions: Tradition, Memory, and Woman in Model Theater," in *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China*, 75.

the Li family as well as among people from the proletarian class. Such affective intimacies are vital for the revolution and for its continuation; in this cinematic space, affective intimacies are no longer consigned to the private sphere but traverse both the private and the public/political. The medium specificity of the opera film further heightens and intensifies emotions not only by its histrionic performance but also the moving camera's ability to capture facial expressions and body language.[21]

The recent theoretical interventions made by social theory and queer studies have challenged and questioned naturalized notions of family and kinship, or the so-called bio-essentialism of kinship studies. Their interventions allow us to see class kinship not as *unauthentic* or *unnatural*, manufactured and sanctioned by the state propaganda machine merely for the sake of serving the revolution, but rather as an alternative form of kinship, and the model opera film *The Red Lantern* as a site where such an attempt to articulate and construct that alternative takes place. Seen in this light, Xiaomei Chen's positing of the biological family as the "natural" family and the Li family as the "culturally constructed" or "imagined" family in her reading of *The Red Lantern* seems critically naïve, even though I concur with her contention that this particular work does aim to demonstrate "the revolutionary family is more cohesive and meaningful than a biological

[21] Jason McGrath forcefully points out that the operatic mode of performance, as one type of the histrionic performance style, is fundamentally different from a Hollywood mimetic or verisimilar performance style. And there is always a strong element of melodrama in Maoist revolutionary romanticism. See McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema." The film scholar Zhang Ling also does an excellent and in-depth analysis of the formal and aesthetic aspects of *The Red Lantern* in her article "Revolutionary Aestheticism and Excess: Transformation of the Idealized Female Body in *The Red Lantern* on Stage and Screen," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 12.1 (2010), 67-92. Many of the formal analyses in this chapter draw from McGrath and Zhang's groundbreaking work.

family."[22] It is therefore important to ask: To what extent is the so-called "natural" family also a cultural construct that has gone through a process of naturalization? To what extent are all forms of family and kinship culturally constructed and socially instituted? The French social theorist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu argues that the family as a social body constructs a "family feeling" that is key to the unity and continuation of the family as an instituted unit: "The family is the product of a labor of *institutionalization*, both ritual and technical, aimed at durably instituting in each member of the instituted unit feelings that will tend to ensure the *integration* that is the condition of the existence and persistence of the unit" (original emphasis).[23] Such repeated institutional labor produces and maintains family feelings, including "conjugal love, parental and maternal love, filial love, brotherly and sisterly love, etc."[24] Bourdieu's insight on the ritual/performative function of language in instituting certain feelings we normally associated with family and in socializing each individual in the family dispels the myths of natural family and familial affections; it will also help us explore how *The Red Lantern* as a performative text utilizes the rhetoric of class kinship to *realize* a new form of family and kinship relations and how affective labor initiates the child into the collective goal of revolution and ensures the continuation of the revolution.

---

[22] Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 129.

[23] Bourdieu, "On the Family as a Realized Category," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13.3 (1996), 22.

[24] Ibid.

The constructionist approach to kinship and family, however, should not be taken to vitiate or invalidate individual's yearnings for love and sense of communal belonging, however constructed, contingent, and arbitrary they may be. Queer studies that inquire into the history of sexuality and history of queer people often carry an affective register.[25] Queer studies' anti-heteronormative critical impulse as well as its constructive and sympathetic bent is particularly helpful in rescuing the alternative vision of family and kinship articulated in *The Red Lantern* and other socialist texts from the re-normalizing forces of history in the post-socialist era. If the weighty pain of history for queer life and queer writing is felt in the difficulty or even impossibility of striking a balance between "unspeakable" and "punishable desire" and collective life, between the personal and "the movements of a total system,"[26] in revolutionary model operas, however, the feelings and affect that are being forged were not unspeakable but socially intelligible and politically legitimate at the time. A revolutionary self is always in perfect sync with the collective and with "the movement of a total system."[27]

---

[25] For example, Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) and Christopher Nealon's *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). What Nealon calls "foundling texts" are texts metaphorically orphaned and exiled from sanctioned experience, i.e. participation in heterosexual family and communities based on heterosexual families, but nevertheless seek new forms of sodality and affiliation, "a reunion with some 'people' or sodality who redeem this exile and surpass the painful limitations of the original 'home'" (2). For Hart Crane, this new form of sodality lies in a Whitmanian brotherhood; for Willa Cather, it is achieved through an imagined genealogy and affective identification with the "ancient people." See Nealon, Chapter One "Hart Crane's History" and Chapter Two "Feeling and Affiliation in Willa Cather" in *Foundlings*.

[26] Nealon, *Foundlings*, 13.

[27] For detailed discussion of revolutionary self and a revolutionary model of conceptualizing the self, see Wendy Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

However, because that legitimacy and intelligibility has been turned into an aberration "devoid of human nature," this chapter offers a recuperative reading of the radical construction of family, kinship, along with familial intimacy and affect in *The Red Lantern*. It explores how this radical form of family and kinship based on class is envisioned and constructed and how different modalities of solidarity and affiliation are created in the model opera. The following close reading of the opera film shows that there are three forms of class kinship constructed in *The Red Lantern*, the revolutionary family at the center of the narrative, a revolutionary and communal kinship constituted by the proletarian class, and a national kinship formed by Chinese compatriots (*tongbao* 同胞), who also constitute the oppressed class, suffering under Japanese rule. The deployment of metaphorical rhetoric such as *qingjuan* 亲眷 (kin) and *tongbao* literalize and ontologize kinship relations based on class as well as national identity. In all three forms of kinship, affective bonds play a vital role in its constitution.

The (melo)dramatic revelation of how this revolutionary family came to be formed is one of the most significant climaxes of the film. The revelation of the truth of the Li family comes after Li Yuhe's arrest. Granny Li reveals to Tiemei that the three of them are not blood relations but form an adopted family in the face of extreme circumstances of a failed workers movement. Li Yuhe becomes the adopted son of Granny Li whose husband was killed during the brutal suppression, and together they have saved and raised the orphaned Tiemei whose biological parents were also massacred in the strike. The process through which the Li family is formed is a process of voluntary elective

affiliation rather than filiation. The creation of the Li family is the effect of a political crisis, not the reverse, and the positive subject of the family only emerges with the negation of a political struggle and termination of biological/marital kinship ties. This is therefore a family imbued with political significance since its inception.

However, it is worth pointing out that even though the Li family is a family based on class kinship, a biological logic nevertheless persists. At 4'14'' into the film after Tiemei exits the stage, Li Yuhe sings a soliloquy praising Tiemei's capability in managing the household that ends up in a biological analogy:

> She's a good girl! 好闺女!
> She peddles goods, collects cinders, 提篮小卖拾煤渣，
> Carries water and chops wood. 担水劈柴也靠她。
> Competent in all she does, a poor man's child 里里外外一把手，
> Soon learns to manage the house. 穷人的孩子早当家。
> Different trees bear different fruit, 栽什么树苗结什么果，
> Different seeds grow different flowers. 撒什么种子开什么花。

During the Cultural Revolution the last two lines became enormously popular among Red Guards who used this line to discredit and attack those born into "black" families, such as landlords, the bourgeoisie, counterrevolutionaries, etc.[28] The appearance of the bloodline theory in early years of the Cultural Revolution that professed one's class and revolutionary purity were determined by that of one's parents also epitomized such a biological determinism. We could argue that Tiemei's status as a legitimate revolutionary

[28] Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 130.

heir is already predestined by her birth. This, however, is not to erase Tiemei's agency in the process of her subject formation, of her transformation from an innocent child to a true revolutionary, a point to which I will return later.

On a broader level, the class kinship emanates from the Li family and extends to all the revolutionaries and proletarians who are each other's kin. The gruel stall scene begins with Li Yuhe singing "Seeking my kin in the junk market, / I have hidden the code in my lunch box" (破烂市我把亲人访，/饭盒里面把密件藏). Li is referring to the Communist contact he is supposed to find as his "kin." Then when the Communist contact, the Knife-Grinder, first appears on the scene, he echoes Li's kinship discourse by singing: "Looking around for my kin" (为访亲人我四下瞧). The revolutionary brotherhood and sisterhood in *The Red Lantern* are transferred from a metaphorical level to a literal and ontological level through language: they are not just like your kin but they *are* your kin.

The revolutionary kinship as a superior form of kinship, whose ontological existence is realized by language and rhetoric, is further made clear in Tiemei's aria that became one of the most renowned arias in model theatrical works. Early in the opera film, Tiemei is able to catch on what is actually going on—all those "uncles," like her father, are revolutionaries:

> I've more uncles than I can count; 我家的表叔数不清,
> They only come when there's important business. 没有大事不登门。
> Though we call them relatives, we never met before,
> 虽说是，虽说是亲眷又不相识，

Yet they are closer to us than our own relatives; 可他比亲眷还要亲。
Both dad and granny call them our own folk; 爹爹和奶奶齐声唤亲人，
I can guess part of the reason why: 这里的奥妙我也能猜出几分：
They're all like dad, 他们和爹爹都一样，
Men with red, loyal hearts. 都有一颗红亮的心。

Tiemei's aria crystalizes that all the revolutionaries who share similar commitment to the revolution symbolized by the red heart are closer to each other than actual kin. The performative façade they take, i.e. claiming to be each other's kin in order to avoid suspicion in a wartime period, provides a trope through which a form of class kinship can be *realized*. It is a form of kinship more meaningful and intimate than biological kinship, as made clear in one of most important arias sung by Li Yuhe: "People say that blood family outweighs all, / But class camaraderie outweighs Mount. Tai, I know" (人说道世间只有骨肉的情义重，依我看阶级的情义重于泰山). Throughout the opera film, trope is more than just a linguistic feature; it becomes an action that makes actual actuality.

The intimate relationship between the Li family and their neighbors is also articulated through a trope of family and kin relations. Upon hearing the crying of the neighbor, Huilian's baby child, Granny Li and Tiemei decide to offer corn meal to alleviate the starving baby's suffering even though both families are impoverished, a situation worsened by Japanese invasion. Granny Li states: "With the wall between us we're two families. If we pull it down, we'd be one" (有堵墙是两家，拆了墙咱们 就是一家子), with Tiemei adding that even if with the wall they are still one family. Throughout the scene, the camera deploys long shots or medium long shots that are able to include all

the female characters in one frame with the only exception of two medium shots that amplify Huilian and her mother-in-law's emotional reaction to such generosity.

Fig. 1 *The Red Lantern*: Granny Li and Tiemei offer Huilian corn meal with three characters enclosed in one frame

Fig. 2 Granny Li, Tiemei, Huilian and her mother-in-law framed in a long shot

Fig. 3 A medium shot emphasizes Huilian's shock upon learning their generosity.

Fig. 4 A medium shot amplifies the mother-in-law's shock and gratitude for their generosity.

These long and medium long shots capture characters' interactions and simultaneously create a communal space in which a strong sense of solidarity among all the female characters can be fostered. Through physical acts such as touching and holding hands, a clear sense of female intimacy is also conveyed. The camera rarely isolates any character except for the two medium shots that emphasize a specific character's emotional reaction. There are thus fewer cuts in this scene, ensuring the continuity of their interactions is not disrupted. Later Huilian reciprocates Li family's altruistic generosity by impersonating Tiemei to confuse the spy and assisting Tiemei to deliver the secret code to the guerrilla army in the mountains.

The non-biological-kinship-based sisterhood and/or motherhood is a common trope that occurs in many revolutionary texts. This common trope revolves around an older female figure taking on the nurturing and protective role of a surrogate mother or sister for the young, inexperienced, traumatized, and sometimes orphaned female protagonist under the circumstances of the most abject oppression. For instance, Auntie

Zhang in *The White-Haired Girl* Xi'er, the older maid Honglian in *Red Detachment of Women*, the older female revolutionary Lin Hong imprisoned with the female protagonist Lin Daojing in *The Song of Youth*, to name just a few, are all paradigmatic examples of this nurturing female role type. These affective relationships formed between female characters function therapeutically in curing the emotional trauma the female protagonist has endured, and sometimes pedagogically in educating them into future revolutionary with proper class consciousness. In her analysis of *Red Detachment of Women* as revolutionary melodrama, Xiao Liu suggests that the "nonkinship-based sisterhood" between the female protagonist Qionghua and Honglian reflects the emergence of "a new regime of morality and human relations," that is a new revolutionary family, to replace the dissolution of Qionghua's own biological family.[29] This imaginary of the new revolutionary family differs fundamentally from 1930s Shanghai left-wing cinema's use of the trope of family and kinship, which Liu summarizes as "on one hand, the disintegration and alienation of kinship becomes the most pathetic accusation against social disparity; but on the other hand, the proposal of kinship as the resolution to social conflicts is problematic."[30]

In comparison with the affective and intimate all-female interactions, Li Yuhe's interaction with a fellow Communist contact takes on a more paternalistic tone even though he is concerned with the comrade's safety. Physical contact is limited to an

[29] Liu, "*Red Detachment of Women*: Revolutionary Melodrama and Alternative Socialist Imaginations," 126.

[30] Ibid., 198.

impersonal handshake (fig. 5). Within the same shot, the camera follows Li Yuhe as he takes a step up and begins imparting safety advice to the comrade, and isolates him as the sole character on screen.

Fig. 5 Li Yuhe gives advice.

Fig. 6 Li Yuhe sings an aria to give his advice on which road to take to stay safe.

Li remains foregrounded and separated from his surroundings and other characters throughout the entire aria. Towering over and giving invaluable advice to everyone else, Li, not unlike Mao, is the ultimate caring father figure not only for Tiemei but also for

every revolutionary and every Chinese.[31] Zhang Ling, in her study of the formal aspects of the model opera film *The Red Lantern*, also notes that the number of close-ups of Li Yuhe abruptly inserted is exponentially more than those of Li Tiemei and Granny Li, and therefore often disrupts the continuity of time and space in the cinematic world.[32] The foregrounding of Li Yuhe as the central heroic character through excessive close-ups, among many other cinematic techniques, undoubtedly shows a faithful adherence to the principles of "Three Prominences" (*san tuchu* 三突出).[33]

It comes as no surprise then that the central hero figure inhabits perfectly both the class consciousness and national sentiment, and the national sentiment and the Chinese nation is articulated through the rhetoric of family and kinship, a foundation upon which a nation can be imagined and envisioned. In the gruel stall scene, as Xiaomei Chen observes, the sufferings of those unrelated workers as a result of Japanese invasion unite them as one big family with "a shared Chinese identity."[34] Li's speech on this occasion

---

[31] Yomi Braester also notices the resemblance between Mao Zedong and Li Yuhe in their "larger than life" characteristics, and that "Li provides a model for adoration akin to Mao." Braester, *Witness Against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 112.

[32] Zhang, "Revolutionary Aestheticism and Excess," 73.

[33] The "Three Prominences" was first formulated by the musician and later Minister of Culture Yu Huiyong 于会泳 in May 1968 as follows: "Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters; among the main characters, give prominence to the most important character, the central character." The definition came from Yu Huiyong's essay "Rang wenyi wutai yongyuan chengwei xuanchuan Mao Zedong sixiang de zhendi" [Let the stage of art be the everlasting front to propagate the thought of Mao Zedong], published in *Wenhui Bao* (Wenhui daily) on May 23, 1968. Then in November 1969, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, then a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee slightly modified and thus standardized the definition: "Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the heroic characters; among the heroic characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters." See Lan Yang, *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998), 29.

[34] Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 131.

again employs a trope of familial relations: "So many compatriots are suffering and fuming with discontent, / Struggling under iron heels they seethe with wrath" (有多少同胞怨声载道，铁蹄下苦挣扎仇恨难消). The trope of "*tongbao*" crystalizes the notion that people of the same nation are brothers and sisters born by the same biological parents. The stage direction here describes an intersubjective moment Li Yuhe shares with those suffering workers: he "shares their feelings and sings '*xi pi liu shui*'" (感同身受，唱"西皮流水"). One's ability to identify emotively with his or her co-nationals, to share their feelings, is absolutely crucial to the formation of a collective consciousness in this imagined community that we call nation.[35] In the diegetic world of the opera film, the class kinship reorganizes how people relate to each other; it is instrumental in the formations of affective bonds and collective identities among the oppressed class.

Familial Intimacies, Affective Bonds, and the Melodramatic Mode

As discussed before, the affective bonds fostered among members of the oppressed proletarian class are distilled and concentrated in the microcosm of the Li family. This part of the chapter turns to the intimacies and affective bonds among the three generations of the Li family. How do affective bonds heightened in the opera film due to its medium specificity shape the subject formation of Tiemei and ensure the continuation of the revolution? How does the revolutionary family reproduce itself when heterosexual coupling is no longer at the center of the family? How do intimacy and affect function in

[35] For a detailed discussion of the relationship between sympathy and the formation of the nation-state and collective consciousness, see Haiyan Lee "Sympathy, Hypocrisy, and the Trauma of Chineseness," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 16.2 (2004), 76-122.

relation to revolution and politics? Are they mutually exclusive as many aforementioned scholars believe? In order to become a revolutionary, does one must negate and be deprived of intimacies of family life?

As soon as the film begins, it establishes Li Yuhe as a caring and loving father. He wraps a gray scarf around Tiemei's neck the moment he sees her on the stage while the sounds effect indicates a windy and cold weather.

Fig. 7 Li Yuhe wraps a scarf around Tiemei's neck.

From this early moment in the film, Tiemei already is not confined in a domestic space as most female characters in traditional Chinese operas were, and the intimacy between the father and the daughter is also displayed outside of the private household. In scene five, right before Li Yuhe leaves the household, Tiemei reciprocates Li's act of caring and wraps the scarf around Li's neck. The scarf, through exchange and reciprocity, forges a strong emotional bond between the father and the daughter. On the formal level, the

cinematic medium also contributes to the intensification of emotions. Due to "the photographic realism of the cinematic medium" that "animates the décor and objects and imbues them with a significance nearly equivalent to that of human characters," Zhang Ling explains, the cinematic space changes characters' relations to the setting including objects in the setting. Consequently, props such as the grey scarf are able to "increase the emotional expressivity of body language."[36]

The intimacies and emotional bonds between Granny Li and Tiemei are rendered more prominent through numerous acts of touching, hugging, and shedding tears together. The sudden melodramatic revelation of the true identity of this adopted family forms one of the most significant emotional and affective climaxes in the opera film. After the arrest of the father Li Yuhe by Japanese forces, a couple of medium and medium-long shots of the grandmother and the granddaughter Li Tiemei hugging each other and shedding tears have significantly slowed down the tempo of the narrative for an elongated moment of grief (fig. 8), leading to the climactic moment of revelation. Through the revelation scene, the camera frames both Granny Li and Li Tiemei within the same shot for most of time with only the occasional intercut to Tiemei's reaction, highlighting the character's strong emotional response (fig. 11). In a *nianbai* (stylized speech) section, Granny Li tells the story of the family and reveals to Tiemei that the three generations of the Li family are not related by blood but have chosen to form an

[36] Zhang, "Revolutionary Aestheticism and Excess," 81.

adopted family in the face of extreme circumstances of a failed workers movement. Li Yuhe becomes the adopted son of Granny Li whose husband is killed during the brutal suppression, and together they have saved and raised the orphaned Tiemei whose biological parents are also massacred in the strike. For the major part of this scene, the audience adopts the perspective of the granddaughter, listening to and learning the truth of how this family with no biological connection came to be formed, a vital lesson of political education that will transform Tiemei as well as supposedly millions of audiences into revolutionary subjects with proper political consciousness (fig. 8-13).

Fig. 8-13 The scene of recounting the revolutionary history of the family

More importantly, what accompanies the granddaughter Tiemei's transformation, throughout the revelation scene, from an innocent child to a resolute revolutionary with proper class consciousness is the grandmother's constant touching and caressing that function therapeutically to ease the traumatic shock (fig. 8&10). When Granny Li then sings an aria to urge Tiemei to carry on their family legacy and continue the revolution, Tiemei gladly accepts such a mission and completes her transformation. Affective bonds and intimacies between grandmother and granddaughter in the diegetic world of the film therefore are vital to the continuation of revolution, ensuring the reproduction of a revolutionary heir. Before Scene Five "Recounting the Family's Revolutionary History," Tiemei is cast in the role type of *huadan* 花旦, a "vivacious girl from an ordinary household or of extroversive disposition."[37] As McGrath and Zhang point out, certain characteristics of traditional Peking Opera such as role types were adapted to the model opera films even though they were downplayed.[38] In the first thirty minutes of the film,

[37] Zhang, "Revolutionary Aestheticism and Excess," 71.

[38] McGrath, 355, Zhang, 71-74.

Tiemei's mischievous facial expression on occasions and vivacious performance style are indicative of her role type as *huadan* as well as her identity as an innocent girl. After hearing Granny Li's recounting of the history of how the red lantern has been passed down from generation to generation in the family as a symbol of revolution and workers movement, Tiemei contemplates her family history and the meaning of the red lantern. In traditional Chinese opera, the age of sixteen is the age of sexual awakening such as that experienced by Du Liniang in *The Peony Pavilion*. *The Red Lantern* plays with the same trope, and yet instead of being sexually awakened, Tiemei is politically awakened:

> Granny has told me the story of the red lantern, 听罢奶奶说红灯，
> The words are few, but meaning is deep. 言语不多道理深。
> Why are my father and uncles not afraid of danger?
> 为什么爹爹、表叔不怕担风险？
> Because they want to save China, 为的是：救中国，
> Save the poor, defeat the Japanese invaders. 救穷人，打败鬼子兵。
> I realize I should act as they do, 我想到：做事要做这样的事，
> And be a person like them. 做人要做这样的人。
> I am seventeen, no longer a child, 铁梅呀！年龄十七不算小，
> I should share my father's worries. 为什么不能帮助爹爹操点心？
> If he's carrying a thousand-pound load, 好比说：爹爹挑担有千斤重，
> I should carry eight hundred. 铁梅你应该挑上八百斤。

With one long take, the camera tracks the singing and movement of Tiemei, presenting the audience with a smooth and continuous viewing experience approaching real theatrical viewing experience. In this take, the camera's ability to isolate and focus on one single character accompanies the theatrical prominence rendered by her performance and presence in the center of the stage; together they intensify the moment of Tiemei's political awakening. It is also at this moment that Tiemei's body language transforms.

The clenched fists that were assigned to *wusheng* 武生 or *wudan* 武旦 in traditional Chinese opera are now part of Tiemei's body language.

Fig. 14 The female body transformed: Tiemei with clenched fists

Fig. 15&16 Granny Li sings an aria to urge Tiemei to carry on their family legacy and continue the revolution; ends with a revolutionary gaze

Similar to the long take that records Tiemei's monologue-style aria and marks her subject formation, the entire aria where Granny Li urges Tiemei to carry on their family's revolutionary legacy is also shot in one take to maximize the continuity of the performance. Within this one shot, the camera zooms in and out twice from a medium-long shot that included both characters on screen to a medium shot that isolates Granny Li. The camera lingers on Granny Li as she sings "a debt of blood must be pay in blood" 血债还要血来偿. Here the cinematic space reinforces stage space to isolate the character so as to allow spectator's attention to solely focus on the character and on her emotions occupying the center of the camera frame. Again this relies on the film medium's ability to amplify and intensify emotions on display. The last rhyming word "*chang*" gets dragged out and lasts for more than twenty seconds, and the shot ends with a final pose of a revolutionary gaze.[39] Time is thus suspended, allowing the audience ample time not only to read and appreciate Granny Li's words and emotions as something with ultimate meaning and truth but to appreciate and revel in the virtuosity of the performance. This moment best illustrates how modernized and revolutionized Peking model operas made use of the long tradition of connoisseurship and emphasis on spectacles rather than plot-driven developments in traditional Peking opera.

[39] The revolutionary gaze, also known as the "socialist realist gaze" defined by the film scholar Stephanie H. Donald, was a common technique used in Soviet cinema. The object of such an off-screen gaze is beyond the diegetic world of the characters, nor does it exist in the world of the audience. It points to an ideological Truth or ideal future that can only be accessed by the true revolutionaries depicted on screen at the moment. See Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 62. See also McGrath, "Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema," 347-48.

This moment also illustrates now melodrama structures and punctuates the flow of narrative into indivisible semantic units. Both melodramatic performance style and the performance style of traditional Chinese operas, as McGrath points out, are non-mimetic, non-realist performance style, characterized by its punctuation of the flow of motion into discrete semantic units so that the audience can "read" it.[40] Granny Li and Tiemei's intimate gestures are posed and held for an extended period of time, emotions elongated by the arias, allowing the audience ample time to read and appreciate their emotions and intimacies as something that contains meaning and truth, or to use Peter Brooks's classic phrase—as "the true wrested from the real."[41] The melodramatic mode's function in revealing the "moral occult," or "to go beyond the surface of the real to the truer, hidden reality,"[42] aligns well with the Maoist aesthetics of revolutionary romanticism that contends art should depart from surface reality to depict and reveal the truth hidden beneath reality.

Emotions and intimacies as something that contains the ultimate meaning and truth function also, as I have argued before, to ensure the reproduction of a revolutionary heir. As I have pointed out before, what accompanies Tiemei's transformation in Scene Five "Recounting the Family's Revolutionary History" from an innocent child to a resolute revolutionary with a proper class consciousness is Granny Li's constant touching and

[40] McGrath, ibid., 359-360.

[41] Brooks, 2.

[42] Ibid., 2.

caressing that have a therapeutic function, making a traumatizing experience more bearable. Affective bonds and intimacies between grandmother and granddaughter in the diegetic world of the film therefore are vital to the continuation of revolution and to the reproduction of a revolutionary heir. During the execution scene, affective intimacies among the three generations of the Li family traverse to a most public and political space (fig. 17). It is also at this moment that Li Yuhe passes the family heirloom of the red lantern to Tiemei and establishes her as the legitimate heir of the revolution. The affective labor of Granny Li and Li Yuhe thus ensures the reproduction of a revolutionary successor. In other words, there are both an ideological interpellation and affective interpellation at work in the narrative that complete Tiemei's subject formation. If Li Yuhe were an abusive father, would Tiemei still be willing to follow his example? If the relationship between Tiemei and Granny Li were estranged, would Tiemei still choose to recognize them as her kin after knowing they are not related by blood? The answer is probably no. Premodern dramas that valorize martyrdom such as *The Injustice to Dou E* where the younger generation suffers constant abuse from the older generation and yet is willing to martyr themselves, when compared with *The Red Lantern*, would undoubtedly strike the audience as unrelatable and therefore lack propagandistic efficacy.

Fig. 17 *Execution scene*

In this sense, intimacies and affect are political and have a political function to ensure the continuation of the revolution in the diegetic world as well as in the world of the audience. The revolutionary truth therefore is revealed in *The Red Lantern* as much through ideological indoctrination as through *felt* affect. Just as emotional bonds and intimacies between the grandmother and granddaughter ensure the continuation of the revolution in the opera film's diegetic world, the heightened affective power of revolutionary melodramas is supposed to mobilize the audience to model themselves on those revolutionary heroes and to continue the revolution as well. Numerous reports in the 1970s on how *The Red Lantern* moved countless audience members to tears, including Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing, may seem to have corroborated the affective and political efficacy of this specific opera film. More importantly, ordinary Chinese citizens time and again reenacted key moments from the opera, performed their part as revolutionaries, and faithfully carried out Mao's call to perpetuate the revolution.

Identity, performance, and revolution thus became inseparable. The logic of model culture in the PRC relied precisely on the emotional intensity and depiction of exemplary revolutionary heroes featured in model theatrical works to *move* and *transform* its audiences, so that they, too, would model themselves on these revolutionary heroes. To fully make sense of the model culture as a key part of the Communist culture in China, we need to situate model theatrical works in the history of theater reform in twentieth-century China and trace the evolution of the realism-romanticism nexus and Chinese revolutionary culture in relation to the melodramatic mode.

From Type to Model, From Socialist Realism to 2RRs

As outlined in Chapter III, theater reform movements that began in early twentieth century took more eclectic and creative approaches during the wartime with an increasing awareness of audience reception and the affective power of dramatic arts. The success of the Yan'an model during the wartime granted itself a high level of legitimacy to serve as the model for creating mass theatrical works and modernizing traditional Chinese theater from 1949 and on. Peking opera *Jingju* reform at Yan'an, though with the same hope to create a new democratic and revolutionary culture, never reached the kind of monumental status that the new music-drama *The White-Haired Girl* came to occupy.[43] The need and efforts to reform theater continued after the establishment of the

[43] The drama historian Xing Fan in her study of the model theatrical works begins by situating model opera in the context of theater reforms since the Yan'an period to the 1960s. The creation of two reformed *Jingju*, *Driven to Join the Liang Mountain Rebels* 逼上梁山 and *Three Raids at the Zhu's Village* 三打祝家庄, encountered numerous technical and artistic problems and never reached the kind of popularity the creators hoped to achieve. *Driven* was eventually left out of the permanent repertory of professional *Jingju* troupes in the PRC. Xing Fan, *Staging Revolution: Artistry and Aesthetics in Model Beijing Opera during the Cultural Revolution* (Hong Kong University Press, 2018), 13-27.

People's Republic of China, known in the official language as the "Seventeen Years Theater Reform" 十七年戏改.

However, despite the various efforts to reform traditional opera in the early decades of the republic, Mao on multiple occasions in 1963 voiced his increasing dissatisfaction with the state of cultural production in the socialist era, *xiqu* in particular, that it was laden with "feudal content" and lagged behind the time of modern socialism.[44] Jiang Qing was particularly vexed by the sheer number of traditional operas that only portrayed ancient aristocrats and ruling elites rather than peasants, workers, and soldiers of the new socialist regime. Jiang famously criticized the dominance of outdated subject matter in traditional opera: "On the opera stage, it is all emperors, kings, generals and ministers, scholars and beauties, ox-ghosts and snake-demons."[45] Critics reasoned that to reform traditional drama one must include contemporary themes as well as the events happening during the socialist era.[46]

---

[44] Mao's two directives (*pishi* 批示) were published in the Party theoretical journal *Hongqi* (*Red Flag*) in 1967. The first *pishi* issued on December 12, 1963 voiced Mao's dissatisfaction with the current state of artistic production for their failure to produce socialist cultural content, specifically criticizing the departments in charge of theater *xiju* production. The second *pishi* in 1964 criticized culture organizations and institutions' distance and alienation from the workers, peasants, and solders, and their powerholders for being bureaucratic masters. *Hongqi* 9 (1967), 8-9. See also, *Yangbanxi biannian yu shishi* [A Chronicle of Model Opera of Chinese Cultural Revolution], edited by Li Song (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2012), 47, 58.

[45] Jiang Qing, "On the Revolution in Peking Opera" (*Tan Jingju geming*), translated by Jessica Ka Yee Chan, *The Opera Quarterly* 26 (2010), 455.

[46] The call for works of art to portray the years after the liberation and contemporary life is crystalized in the slogan "Portray the Thirteen Years" (*daxie shisannian* 大写十三年 1949-1962), brought up by the mayor and Party sectary Ke Qingshi (1902-1965) in 1963.

It was against this backdrop of calling for radical approaches to reforming traditional opera that the Modern Peking Opera Trial Performance Convention 京剧现代戏观摩演出大会 was held in Beijing in the summer of 1964. Several operas shown at the festival would soon become model theatrical works, or *yangbanxi*, under the tutelage and close supervision of Jiang Qing, including *The Red Lantern* (*Hongdengji* 红灯记) presented by the China Peking Opera Company. The Peking opera version of *The Red Lantern* was based on the Shanghai opera (*huju* 沪剧) *The Red Lantern* (*Hongdengji* 红灯记) performed by the Shanghai Aihua Hu Opera Troupe, which in turn was adapted from a hugely popular feature film titled *The Revolution Has Successors* (*Ziyou houlairen* 自有后来人) released by the Changchun Film Studio in 1963. After viewing the Hu opera version, Jiang Qing decided to adapt it into a Peking opera and passed the mission to the China Peking Opera Company. Weng Ouhong 翁偶虹 then was commissioned to write the script and A Jia 阿甲 to direct it.[47] Due to its enormous critical and popular success, the official version of *The Red Lantern* soon became a model example of how to modernize and revolutionize Chinese traditional opera, and it was the first model theatrical work selected to be made into a film for wider promulgation and emulation.

Following the guiding principle of "Restoring the Stage, Beyond the Stage" (*huanyuan wutai*, *gaoyu wutai* 还原舞台, 高于舞台), model opera films were not mere

[47] Later due to conflicts of opinion with Jiang Qing, the two creators were dismissed from the creative team of *The Red Lantern*, and Jiang Qing took over. On the official script published by *Hongqi* (红旗 Red Flag) in 1970, the authorship of *The Red Lantern* appears as a collective adaptation by the China Peking Opera Company.

visual documentations of stage performances but involve complex processes of remediation and negotiation between the two different mediums of theater and cinema.[48] The efforts, in theory and in practice, to reconcile the differences between cinema and opera did not begin with the making of model theatrical works but emerged with the flourishing of the genre of opera film (*xiqu dianying* 戏曲电影) in the early decades of the People's Republic of China. As Weihong Bao points out, theoretical debates on opera film in the 1950s and early 1960s were unparalleled in their fixation on form and medium specificity. The emphasis on medium specificity, however, intentionally or unintentionally reinforced the dichotomy of film as inherently realistic and Chinese opera as expressive (*xieyide* 写意的), symbolic (*xiangzhengde* 象征的), and formulaic (*chengshihuade* 程式化的).[49] The conceptualization of Peking opera as pure aestheticism and an antithetical opposite of Western mimetic realism, as the drama historian Joshua Goldstein points out, began in the Republican era as a result of the epistemological shift that imposed a rigid distinction between reality and representation.[50] The eminent drama theorist and cultural entrepreneur Qi Rushan 齐如山 (1875-1962) played a key role in formulating and popularizing such a dichotomy in the early republican era.

[48] The film scholar Zhang Ling argues that cinematic means of expression such as close-ups, indicative camera angles, trach shots, etc. in *The Red Lantern* have enhanced the affective power of the stage performance. See Zhang, "Revolutionary Aestheticism and Excess," 67-92.

[49] Bao Weihong, "The Politics of Remediation: Mise-en-scène and the Subjunctive Body in Chinese Opera Film," *The Opera Quarterly* 26 (2010), 256.

[50] Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. (University of California Press, 2007).

We could view the production of model opera films during the Cultural Revolution as the culmination and continuing reform of the genre of opera film. The summaries and reflections on the production of nine model theatrical works written by filming crews of each film studio attest to the lengths to which each creative team went to attend to the medium specificity of opera and film and to reconciliate the differences of the two modes of expression—the operatic and the cinematic. These reflections highlighted the techniques used to adapt the medium of film to the operatic means of expression. The following passage offers a case in point:

> We strove to integrate the camera movement and editing with the singing, speech, styled body movement, and acrobatics (*chang nian zuo da* 唱念做打) of Peking Opera. The point of decoupage (*jingtou jianjiedian* 镜头剪接点) should be concurrent with accentuated movement of the actor, with the stressed note of the music or percussion. And the beginning and anchoring point and speed of the camera are determined based on the performance of the actors and the melody of the music. In doing so, the rhythm of the film becomes integrated with the rhythm of the drama, dance, and music under the guidance of the creative principle of "Three Prominences" (*san tuchu* 三突出).[51]

Key methods of cinematography and editing were used to fit the operatic expression that relied much on percussion instruments to punctuate the dramatic flow and on the styled movement of actors' physical body to express emotions and achieve successful characterization.

[51] "Geming yangbanxi yingpian shezhi zongjie huibian neibu cailiao" [The compiled summary of the production of revolutionary model opera films for internal use], in *Xuexi geming yangbanxi ziliao huibian* (1974), edited by the Modern Literature Research Group at the Gansu Normal University, reprinted in *A Chronicle*, 383.

Two cinematographic methods, namely close-up and long take, were deemed by the filming crews as particularly adept at making the revolutionary heroes more heroic and more prominent. Close-ups were used for the *liangxiang* (striking a pose) and other moments of heightened emotional response; long takes and track shots were used for preserving the continuity of stage movement. Frequent shot dissections utilized often in Soviet cinema became the target of criticism and were seen as a bad example that disrupted the continuity and flow of performance, and therefore counterintuitive to the *suzao*, i.e. the creating or molding, of revolutionary heroes. The creators used the example of Li Yuhe's nine-minute aria only cut into eleven shots to illustrate the importance of uninterrupted cinematic viewing experience.[52]

The attack on Soviet cinema and its signature technique and theory of montage, now all lumped under the derogative term of "Soviet Revisionism" (*suxiu* 苏修), was more than just a consequence of the geopolitical context of the Sino-Soviet fallout. In her study of Chinese filmmakers and theorists' theoretical and practical engagements with Soviet montage theory in the early 1930s and during the Seventeen Years period (1949-1966), the film scholar Jessica Ka Yee Chan points out that these engagements had always been adapted to the specific historico-political contexts of the time.[53] Eisenstein's montage theory that departed from Pudovkin's orthodox conception of montage as building bricks and conceptualized montage primarily as conflict or collision never

[52] Ibid., 384.

[53] Jessica Ka Yee Chan, "Translating Montage: The Discreet Attractions of Soviet Montage for Chinese Revolutionary Cinema," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 5.3 (2011), 197-218.

gained much traction in China, even though both Eisenstein and Pudovkin's works were translated into Chinese around the same time. Chan's study shows that while facing the problem of making films accessible to the mass audience in the rural area, Chinese filmmakers eventually reinvented montage in the Seventeen Years to encompass both Soviet montage and Hollywood continuity editing, also called Hollywood montage sequence, that condenses time and space and achieves narrative economy and continuity. In other words, Chinese socialist cinema abandoned the more radical Eisensteinian approach to montage in favor of accessibility and narrative economy. The emphasis on accessibility that was once the focus of the theoretical debates on theater reform during wartime was also prominent in the creation of a new socialist cinema. The creators of model opera films in their aesthetic endeavors also continued this tradition of popularizing and massifying literature and art. The goal of creating all forms of art (drama, film, literature, etc.) for the masses, of the masses, and by the masses envisioned by left-wing and revolutionary writers and artists remained at the heart of Chinese aesthetic modernity.

The creators of model opera films, under the guidance of Jiang Qing, were therefore less concerned with the rigid dichotomy between symbolic art and realist art than utilizing certain cinematic techniques as well as revolutionary romanticism to enhance the prominence (*tuchu* 突出) of revolutionary characters. This shift of aesthetic concerns might be explained by the fact that revolutionary Peking operas were already modernized and revolutionized to a certain extent so that they were less formulaic and

more conducive to the medium of film. Also the medium of opera, with its existing conventions of roles types, is more conducive to creating revolutionary characters.

The creation of type, or typical character, became the main aesthetic goal for revolutionary literature and culture since the 1930s when Zhou Yang first began to introduce the concept of type from Soviet Socialist Realism. We see a continuation of the ideas on aesthetics articulated by Zhou Yang in the 1930s decades later in the Cultural Revolution. In a speech delivered by Jiang Qing at a forum on cultural work for the army, she emphatically stated:

> We must create heroic characters of the workers, peasants, and soldiers; we must create typical characters. Chairman Mao said, "life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." Do not limit ourselves to the portrayal of real people and real events. … Our writers must concentrate and generalize from their accumulated life experience, and in doing so create a variety of typical characters.[54]

This became the most important document to guide the production of model theatrical works and other kinds of artistic creation during the Cultural Revolution. Jiang Qing's quote from Mao's Yan'an Talks laid the theoretical foundation for revolutionary romanticism which contended that art should depart from surface reality to depict a higher, more idealized reality, to reveal the truth hidden beneath reality. Just as Zhou Yang argued in the 1930s that the typical was a product of the writer's creation rather

[54] Jiang Qing, "Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing," *Hongqi* 9 (1967), 22.

than something already existing in empirical reality, Jiang Qing also projected a clear refusal to capitulate artistic creation to mere empirical reality and the logic of realism. Realism in this case was defined as something that completely succumbed to empirical reality. In the same speech, Jiang Qing contended that cultural workers must utilize the synthesis of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism and reject both bourgeois critical realism and naturalism. Here we witness how the set of philosophical and aesthetic issues that confounded intellectuals and artists from the 1930s persisted into the Cultural Revolution, a vicissitude that might best be characterized as the change from type to model, from socialist realism to the synthesis of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism.

The aesthetic demand of creating typical characters in revolutionary arts that was first articulated by theoreticians such as Zhou Yang in the 1930s remained an intrinsic part as well as a heatedly debated issue of realist aesthetics in the Chinese context. When Zhou Yang first introduced Soviet theoretical debates on socialist realism into China in the 1930s and promoted the creation of type or typical characters in literary works, he conceptualized type as something with a proleptic function, which could encourage people to realize things that had yet to be materialized and inspire them to embrace revolution and transform reality (see the discussion in previous chapter). To imbue type with a proleptic temporality and inspirational power sowed the seeds for later reiterations of the exemplary power of the model to represent the present as well as a more ideal future and inspire people to continue the perpetual revolution. In an essay in which

Richard King examines the major theoretical debates over typicality and traces its genealogy from the 1930s to the Cultural Revolution, he reveals that there are mainly three points of contention: 1) whether typical characters should be *representative* or *exemplary* like the preeminent revolutionary heroes and heroines in model theatrical works; 2) what proportion of *individuality* 个性 or *universality* 共性 typicality should have—a focus of Hu Feng and Zhou Yang's heated debates on typicality in the 1930s; and 3) whether typical characters are "social types" representing the *zeitgeist* of the age and circumstances that produced them, and therefore transcending class, or they are "members of a specific social class engaged in a struggle with other classes"[55] The creation of exemplary heroic characters in model theatrical works therefore marked the fundamental shift of typicality from the representative to the exemplary, or the redefinition of type as model.

Even though many scholars have made the connection between the PRC's model culture and the emphasis of traditional Confucian teachings on modeling oneself on exemplary models/setting up oneself as a model for everyone else to imitate, Pang Laikwan lucidly points to the fundamental differences between these two: Maoism's emphasis on action and changing the world is fundamentally at odds with a Confucian moral order that relies on self-cultivation and remaining steadfast, i.e. inactive, in the face of a decaying moral world. Instead, as Pang points out, the Soviet practices of identifying

[55] Richard King, "Typical People in Typical Circumstances," *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*, edited by Wang Ban (London and Boston: Brill, 2011), 185-204, qtd. on 187.

common individuals (workers, soldiers, cadres, etc.) as motors of social change as well as models for emulation exerted much more direct influence on the PRC case.[56] In the 1920s, the Soviet propaganda machine made a shift from focusing on dogmatic teachings on materialism and class struggle to featuring individuals as agents for social change.[57] Zhou Yang, when arguing for the exemplary power "typical characters" to inspire people to model themselves upon it, quoted the following words by the Soviet political leader Georgy Maksimilianovich Malenkov: "The power and meaning of realist art lies in its ability to discover and represent common people's noble spirit and typical and positive characteristics, to create vivid artistic images of common people that are worthy of being a model (*mofan* 模范) for imitation (*xiaofang* 效仿)."[58] This is a quotation that appeared multiple times in Zhou Yang's writings and speeches in the 1950s. As Zhou continued to explain, the reason why literary and artistic works needed to create positive heroic characters was to for them to become the model (*bangyang* 榜样) for the people to struggle against reactionary and backward forces.[59]

What animates Marxist literary theorists such as Georg Lukács and Zhou Yang's realist aesthetics, as suggested in the previous chapter, is a dialectically informed view of reality, namely, to view reality as processes and perpetually in motion. Both theorists saw

---

[56] Pang, *The Art of Cloning*, 84-89.

[57] David Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 5, 72, 97.

[58] Zhou Yang, "Wei chuangzao gengduo de youxiu de wenxue yishu zuopin er fendou," *Zhou Yang Wenji*, vol.2, 250. The quote is from Malenkov's report at the 19th Convention for Party Representatives.

[59] Ibid, 251.

in romanticism an aptitude for capturing a dynamic reality and transcending the constraints of space and time, an aptitude condensed in *type* (*dianxing*) that is both representative and prophetic. Type, originating from dramatic concentration in the Western theater tradition, functions as a form of spatiotemporal concentration within realism and provides an epistemological tool by which the mind gains insights into reality. The concern with literature's ability to reveal the hidden truth or essence of reality led both theorists to reject a purely mimetic, photographic representation of empirical reality and insist on the necessity and validity of romanticism and the typical to reveal the essence of reality, a rejection continuously followed by other Communist cultural leaders such as Jiang Qing.

As the philosopher and Marxian literary critic Darko Suvin in his study of Lukács's concept of "typical character" points out, Lukács's definition of type, influenced by his reading of Greek tragedy and other dramatic genres, was primarily concerned with condensation and intensification.[60] Type as a concentrated form can be seen in the following quote from *The Historical Novel*: "the singling out of the significant factors from the entire complex of reality, their concentration, and the creation out of their connexions of an image of life upon a heightened level."[61] Suvin also detects a discernible amount of idealism in Lukács's concept of typicality for the evocation of elevation, concentration, and essence places Lukács in closer affinity with German

[60] Suvin, "Lukács: Horizons and Implications of the 'Typical Character,'" *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986-87), 97-123.

[61] Quoted in Suvin, 106, from Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 147.

idealists such as Schelling rather than a self-proclaimed materialist.[62] Type as "an image of life upon a heightened level" defined by Lukács aligns well with Maoist revolutionary romanticism that stated: "life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life."

Type as "an image of life upon a heightened level" also fits well with the conventions of role types in tradition Peking opera, along with its melodramatic polarization, renders the medium more conducive to the production of high moral and ideological legibility. The political and affective efficacy of a text like *The Red Lantern* also comes from the ideological function of the type or model as I just discussed. In model opera, the type or model adopted role types in traditional opera to obtain an even higher level of moral and ideological legibility. Just as I have argued so far that the type *dianxing* as a key aesthetic demand of revolutionary arts has particular ideological functions to fulfill, all three generations of the Li family are all highly idealized, typical characters. As typical heroic characters, they function to inspire and transform their audiences so that the audiences, too, would model themselves on these revolutionary heroes.

The melodramatic mode that serves to articulate moral truth via emotional and affective indulgence, a point theorized by scholars such as Peter Brooks and Christine

[62] Suvin, ibid., 109.

Gledhill, is best then suited to reveal the hidden truth or essence of reality. In the modern world characterized by the dissolution of moral order and communal ties, melodrama is a mode that never gives up on the search for meaning and truth. Christine Gledhill argues, it is a mode that has one foot in social realism and everyday life and one foot in the search for value and meaning while acknowledging the limitations of language to represent reality. The function of the melodramatic mode to reveal what Brooks calls the "moral occult," that is "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality" fits well with Maoist revolutionary romanticism's preoccupation with truth.[63] The stylized performance and punctuation of emotive music used in melodrama allow the audience ample time to read and appreciate their emotions and intimacies as something that contains meaning and truth, as "the true wrested from the real."[64] The demand of the melodramatic mode "to go beyond the surface of the real to the truer, hidden reality"[65] nicely supplements a dynamically conceived realist aesthetics and revolutionary romanticism that also demand art depart from surface reality to depict a higher, more idealized reality and to reveal revolutionary truth on a higher moral plane.

The kind of revolutionary realist aesthetics articulated by Zhou Yang and many other revolutionary theorists attempted to solve the limits of critical realism by combining

[63] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 5.

[64] Ibid., 2.

[65] Ibid.

realism with romanticism. In this combination, type became the concentrated figure imbued with a proleptic temporality and inspirational power. This laid the foundation for later reiterations of the exemplary power of the model to represent the present as well as a more ideal future and inspire people to continue the perpetual revolution. Further, the main contention that typical characters do not come directly from empirical reality but are a product of human imagination and creative power, as discussed in the previous chapter as well as in Jiang Qing's speech, led to highly idealized portrayal of revolutionary heroes in the Cultural Revolution that no longer needed to anchor itself in historical reality. This of course entails loss of historicity, and revolutionary past, now very much idealized, can only appear as myths.[66]

[66] See also McGrath, 370-372.

CHAPTER V

CODA: MELODRAMA AS DIALECTICS WITHOUT SYNTHESIS

> Having not listened to "*yangbanxi*" for many years, I almost forgot about them. But during the Spring Festival, I accidentally overheard someone singing *yangbanxi* on their own, and it made my hair stand on end (*maogu songran* 毛骨悚然). I then had a succession of nightmares (*e'meng* 噩梦) in the following couple of days—I am very familiar with these kinds of dreams in *a certain period*. They [the dreams/nightmares] seemed to have close connections with *yangbanxi*, and for me, those two are connected.
>
> Ba Jin, "*Yangbanxi*"[1]

The vague expression of "a certain period" here of course refers to the ten years of the Cultural Revolution. Referring to those ten years as a nightmarish dream became a common trope in fiction and non-fiction writings after the Cultural Revolution.[2] On the one hand, branding those ten years of chaos and violence as nightmares registers the unspeakable trauma and suffering that those individuals, mainly intellectuals, endured during the Cultural Revolution, and yet to ontologically negate those ten years as something un-real, i.e., a dream, points to the failure to think through the Cultural Revolution as a lived, historical actuality on the other. And as a result, Ba Jin, among many others, retreated to the family as a haven for the individual during social and political turmoil. The violation of the inherently good and sacred familial bonds again became necessarily evil.

---

[1] Ba Jin, "*Yangbanxi*," *Suixiang lu*, 594.

[2] See a detailed discussion of the rhetoric of dream in modern Chinese literature and the use of the dream trope in post-Cultural Revolution fiction by Zong Pu, see Roy Chan, *The Edge of Knowing: Dreams, History, and Realism in Modern Chinese Literature*, esp. Chapter 5 "Dream Fugue: Jiang Qing, the End of the Cultural Revolution, and Zong Pu's Fiction," (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

One of the essays Ba Jin wrote after the Cultural Revolution was "In Memoriam of Xiao Shan 怀念萧珊," a memoriam to his wife Xiao Shan, who was persecuted and denied treatment during the Cultural Revolution because of her association with Ba Jin, and died of cancer in 1972 as a result. The writing of the memoriam did not take place until six years after Xiao Shan's death. This meant for Ba Jin that she was never properly mourned—both in the sense of the actual funeral and in Ba Jin's writing. At the funeral, few people showed up and "there was no eulogy, no mourner, only the sound of heartbreaking weeping."[3] Ba Jin's attempt to write something after returning from the crematorium, despite "fifty years' habit of unburdening emotions (*ganqing*) by resorting to pen and paper," yielded no words at that moment.[4] Thinking back to the treatment of ritualistic public displays of emotion as disingenuous in *Jia* and many other May Fourth writings, Ba Jin here seems to have become an adamant supporter of the use of ritual in performing proper mourning.[5]

The many essays Ba Jin wrote between 1978 and 1987, anthologized in *Suixiang lu* [collection of random thoughts], in a sense are ritualized writings of testament, eulogy, and memoriam to the immense personal and collective suffering during the Cultural Revolution, to the many lives lost, including the loss of his beloved wife and the destruction of their nuclear family *xiao jiating*. In other words, the melodramatic themes

[3] "Huainian Xiao Shan," 24.

[4] Ibid., 15.

[5] In this essay, Ba Jin also mentioned the many funerals he attended, describing how he stood in silent tribute and saluted (*xingli* 行礼 lit. performing rites) the deceased, all of whom were persecuted to death by the Gang of Four.

of suffering and victimhood returned, and this time the villains were the Gang of Four, the rebels who called themselves "revolutionaries," and many others who abused power in the name of "revolution."

This sentiment was echoed throughout literary and cultural production in the post-Cultural Revolution period. We witness a complete rejection, in all aspects of cultural production, of the ideals and aesthetic demands of revolutionary art discussed in previous chapters, including the eliding of heterosexual romance and familial intimacies with revolutionary *gong* passions. In response to the puritanic suppression of sexuality of the Maoist period, "erotics-as-liberation" emerged as resistance against such suppression and against the over-politicized Maoism during post-Mao era.[6] Revolutionary culture downplayed family and romance; these came back with a vengeance to dismantle revolutionary passions. Especially within the medium of cinema, family melodrama featuring familial conflicts, ethical dilemmas, and heterosexual romance combined with Hollywood style of realism became the dominant mode of filmmaking in the 1980s.

In these film melodramas, the family returns as the basic economic unit, the safety net, and the ultimate fulfilment of heterosexual romance and personal happiness. Women are once more mothers, wives, daughters, and caretakers rather than revolutionaries. For instance, the narrative film *In-Laws* (1981, dir. Zhao Huanzhang), a representative family melodrama made in the 1980s, features family conflicts in a village in rural China. The

[6] Wendy Larson, "Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution," *Modern China* 25.4 (1999), 423-450.

main female protagonist who drives the plot development is the older sister-in-law, a shrew like figure. The older sister-in-law is jealous of the younger sister-in-law and constantly schemes to acquire more material gains from the family—truly embodying the spirit of the free market economy. She also refuses to take care of the father-in-law, who as a result suffers abusive treatment from the daughter-in-law. Her transgression is eventually punished by the physical violence of her husband—a slap on the face—and the threat of divorce and loss of her children. Met with such a defeat, she finally realizes her mistakes, completely changes her wrong ways, and becomes a filial daughter-in-law, a loving wife and mother. The film ends with a "happy ending" in which the extended family lives harmoniously together. An example of revolution as the cause for people's suffering is Xie Jin's renowned 1987 feature film *Hibiscus Town*. The female protagonist of *Hibiscus Town* is an entrepreneur, whose successful enterprise has led to her suffering during the Cultural Revolution. The film portrays how various political campaigns during the Cultural Revolution have disrupted people's daily life and have brought the thriving town to desolation and misery, undoubtedly an allegory for the fate of the nation in those ten years. The restoration of the proper socio-political order after the Cultural Revolution and the long-waited marital union between the male and female protagonists at the end of the film fall into the conventions of grand reunion (*da tuanyuan*) of traditional Chinese (melo)drama.

The return of conventional family melodrama and the sole focus on victimhood and suffering, however, bespeak a deeper failure to address the uneasy relationship

between intellectuals and the masses and the dichotomy between the private/personal and the public/social that the Communist revolution attempted to transform. *Revolutionary Melodrama* therefore has examined the various attempts in aesthetic texts to reconcile the particularities of family/kinship with the universality of the nation-state. Revolutionary melodramas oscillate between the two ends and often argue for the latter to supersede the former, or even argue that family and the state are one and the same.

How these attempts to reconcile the individual with collective belonging (with the nation-state being the ultimate expression of a collective community) in literary and cultural texts ended in the aesthetic modality of melodrama is the focus of *Revolutionary Melodrama*. It tells the story from the profound ambivalence toward traditional and new structures of feeling in a May Fourth transitional text, through the wartime period that put much emphasis on the affective and pragmatic dimensions of realism and literary work, and to the culmination of revolutionary melodrama in Cultural Revolution model theatrical works in which personal feelings merge in perfect sync with social and public revolutionary passions. The aesthetic and philosophical debates responding to changing historical conditions, analyzed in the study, led to the creation of many hybrid artistic products that contain elements of realism, romanticism, and melodrama in order to generate maximum affective and political efficacy. *Revolutionary Melodrama* shows that aesthetic texts can be more than a mere reflection of what people's thoughts and feelings at a given historical moment; they are also mediated experience of history and modernity

that can actively shape the affective meaning of family/kinship and transform existing structures of feeling at the same time.

While the melodramatic mode provided a powerful, dichotomized trope that can be mobilized in different historical circumstances for varied ideological purposes, be it the iconoclastic attack on tradition, national salvation, or socialist revolution, it ultimately failed to transcend these sets of dichotomies. In other words, melodrama with affective intensity and transformative power is the *dialectics without synthesis*. The Communists made the most radical attempt to subsume the particularities of familial and kinship bonds under the universal logic of the nation-state ("All of China is my family," according to Lei Feng). Once the experiment failed, private desires and individual families came back to replace revolutionary *gong* passions. Revolutionary melodrama oscillates between personal *si* feelings and public/social *gong* passions, between the particularities of familial and kinship bonds and the universality of the nation-state, and yet is never able to truly transcend such dichotomies.

REFERENCES CITED

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Ai Siqi. "Jiu xingshi yunyong de jiben yuanze." In *Yan'an wenyi congshu: wenyi lilun juan*, edited by Jin Ziguang et al., 592-600. Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1983.

Anderson, Marston. *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990.

Anker, Elizabeth. *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Airriess, Hannah. "Global Melodrama and Transmediality in Turn-of-the-Century Japan." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 69-82. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Ba Jin. *Jia.* Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013.

———. *Family*. Translated by Sidney Shapiro. Prospect Height, IL: Waveland Press, 1989.

———. *Suixiang lu* [collection of random thoughts]. Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 2005.

———. "Tan yingpian de *Jia.*" *Dazhong dianying*, 20 (1957): 35-38.

———. "Xiang Zhu Guangqian xiansheng jin yige zhonggao." *Zhongliu* 2 no. 3 (1937): 139-143.

———. "Zuozhe de zupou." *Xiandai* 1 no. 6 (1932): 863-867.

Bao, Weihong. *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915-1945.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

———. "The Politics of Remediation: Mise-en-scène and the Subjunctive Body in Chinese Opera Film." *Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2010): 256-90.

Barlow, Tani. *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

———. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Berry, Chris and Mary Farquhar. *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

Bohnenkamp, Max. "Neither Western Opera, Nor Old Chinese Theater: The Modernist 'Integrated Art-Form' and the Origins of the Maoist 'New music-Drama.'" In *Rethinking Chinese Socialist Theaters of Reform: Performance Practice and Debate in the Mao Era*, 34-61, edited by Chen, Xiaomei, Tarryn L Chun, and Siyuan Liu. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021.

———. *Turning Ghosts into People: "The White-Haired Girl", Revolutionary Folklorism, and the Politics of Aesthetics in Modern China*. 2014. Chicago University, PhD dissertation.

Bordwell, David and Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge, 1985.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "On the Family as a Realized Category." *Theory, Culture & Society* 13 no. 3 (1996): 19-26.

Brandenberger, David. *Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011.

Brashier, K. E. *Ancestral Memory in Early China*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011.

———. *Public Memory in Early China.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014.

Brindley, Erica. *Individualism in Early China: Human Agency and the Self in Thought and Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.

Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976.

Brown, Miranda. *The Politics of Mourning in Early China*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Brown, Wendy. "We Are All Democrats Now…" In *Democracy in What State?* edited by Giorgio Agamben et al., 44-57. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Buckley, Mathew. "Unbinding Melodrama." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 15-29. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Cai, Zong-qi and Shengqing Wu. “Introduction: Emotion, Patterning, and Visuality in Chinese Literary Thought and Beyond.” *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 6 no. 1 (2019): 1-14.

Chan, Jessica Ka Yee. *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics, and Internationalism (1949-1966).* London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019.

———. “Translating Montage: The Discreet Attractions of Soviet Montage for Chinese Revolutionary Cinema.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 5 no. 3 (2011): 197-218.

Chan, Roy Bing. *The Edge of Knowing: Dreams, History, and Realism in Modern Chinese Literature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.

Chen, Boda. “Guanyu wenyi de minzu xingshi wenti zaji,” *Wenyi zhanxian* 1, no. 3 (1939): 23-24.

Chen, Hong. “Zhongguo xin geju de chuangzao.” *Xiju yishu* 1 no. 1 (1937): 8-10.

Chen, Xiaomei. *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002.

China Peking Opera Troupe. “Wei suzao wuchan jieji de yingxiong dianxing er douzheng—suzao Li Yuhe yingxiong xingxiang de tihui” [Struggle for the creation of a proletarian typical hero: some reflections on the creation of the heroic image of Li Yuhe]. *Hongqi* 5 (1970): 50-53.

Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Chow, Rey. *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Denton, Kirk A. ed. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1996.

Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk. *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

Elsaesser, Thomas. “Tales of Sound and Fury.” In *Home is Where Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*. Edited by Christine Gledhill, 43-69. London: BFI Publishing, 1987.

Eng, David. *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Epstein, Maram. *Orthodox Passion: Narrating Filial Love during the High Qing*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Fan, Xing. *Staging Revolution: Artistry and Aesthetics in Model Beijing Opera during the Cultural Revolution*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018.

Feng Naichao, "Cong *Bai Mao Nü* kan zhongguo xingeju de fangxiang." *Dazhong wenyi congkan* 3 (1948): 43-45.

Fitzgerald, John. *Awaking China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Flatley Jonathan. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Freeman, Elizabeth. "Queer Belongs: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory." In *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, edited by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, 295-314. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Fu, Jin. *Xin zhongguo xiju shi 1949-2000*. Changsha: Hunan Meishu chubanshe, 2002.

Gaines, Jane. "The Melos in Marxist Theory." In *Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*, edited by David E. James and Rick Berg, 56-71. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Gerould, Daniel. "Melodrama and Revolution." In *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, edited by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, 185-98. London: BFI, 1994.

Gledhill, Christine. "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation." In *Home is Where Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 5-39. London: BFI Publishing, 1987.

———. "Melodrama's 'Modern'." *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 48 no. 2 (2021): 162-179.

———. "Prologue: The Reach of Melodrama." In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, ix-xxv. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

———. "Rethinking Genre." In *Reinventing Film Studies*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 221-243. London: Arnold, 2000.

Gledhill, Christine and Linda Williams. “Introduction.” In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 1-11. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Glosser, Susan. *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Goldman, Andrea. *Opera and the City: The Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.

Goldstein, Joshua. *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. “An Inventory of Shimmers.” In *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 1-25. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

“Guanyu *Bai Mao Nü.*” *Jiefang ribao*, July 17th, 1945.

Guyer, Paul. *Kant and Claims of Taste*, 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Van Fleit Hang, Krista. *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Hansen, Miriam B. “Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism,” *Film Quarterly* 54 no. 1 (2000): 10-22.

———. “The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism.” *Modernism/modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 59-77.

He, Guimei. *Zhao Shuli wenxue yu xiangtu zhongguo xiandaixing*. Taiyuan, China: Beiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2016.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Helgel’s Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Holm, David. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

———. “National Form and the Popularization of Literature in Yenan.” *La Littérature Chinoise au Temps de la Guerre de Résistance contre le Japon (1937-1945)*, edited by Fondation Singer-Polignac, 213-46. Paris: Editions de la Fondation Singer-Polignac. 1982.

Hu Feng. *Hu Feng pinglunji*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984.

Jia Ke. “Yetan geju *Bai Mao Nü* de chuangzuo.” *Xin wenxue shiliao* 3 (1996): 65-66.

Jiang Qing. “Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao” [Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing], *Hongqi* 9 (1967): 11-20.

———. “On the Revolution in Peking Opera” (*Tan Jingju geming*), translated by Jessica Ka Yee Chan, *The Opera Quarterly* 26 no. 2-3 (2010): 455-59.

Jin, Hongyu. “*Jia* de banben liuyuan yu xiugai.” In *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 3 (2003): 239-256.

Jing-Schmidt, Zhuo. “Metaphor in Chinese: Cognition, Culture, and Society.” In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Chinese Language*, edited by Chan Sin-wai, 629-644. London: Routledge, 2016.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*, translated by J. H. Bernard. New York: Hefner, 1956.

Karl, Rebecca. *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History.* Duke University Press, 2010.

Ke, Zhongping. “Jieshao chalutiao bing lun chuangzao xin de minzu geju.” *Wenyi tuji* 1 (1939): 53-57.

King, Richard. “Typical People in Typical Circumstances.” In *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*, edited by Wang Ban, 185-204. London and Boston: Brill, 2011.

Lang, Olga. *Pa Chin and His Writings: Chinese Youth between the Two Revolutions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967.

Larson, Wendy. *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009

——. “The Freudian Subject and the Maoist Mind: The Diaries of Hermine Hug-Hellmuth and Lei Feng.” *Psychoanalysis and History* 13.2 (2011): 157-180.

——. “Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution.” *Modern China* 25 no. 4 (1999): 423-450.

Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Lenin, Vladimir. "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (1916). Web, accessed September 2020, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jan/x01.htm.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (*Les Structures Élémentaires De La Parenté*), translated by John Richard Von Sturmer John and James Harle Bell, and edited by Rodney Needham. Boston: Beacon, 1969.

Lei Feng. *Lei Feng riji*. Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 1964.

Liu, Lydia. "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*" in *Body, Subject, Power in China*, edited by Angela Zito and Tani Barlow, 45-67. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Liu, Xiao. "*Red Detachment of Women*: Revolutionary Melodrama and Alternative Socialist Imaginations." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26 no. 3 (2015): 116-141.

Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

———. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Lukács, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.

———. *Studies in European Realism.* Translated by Edith Bone. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964.

———. *Writer and Critic: and Other Essays.* Edited and translated by Arthur Kahn. London: Merlin Press, 1978.

Luxemburg, Rosa. *The National Question – Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg*. Translated and edited by Horace B. Davis. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976.

Lynch, Owen M. "Introduction: Emotions in Theoretical Contexts." *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, edited by Owen M. Lynch, 3-35. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Ma, Ke and Qu Wei. "*Bai Mao Nü* yinyue de chuangzuo." In *Bai Mao Nü*, 245-47. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1962.

McGrath, Jason. "Cultural Revolution Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema." *Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 2-3 (2010): 343-376.

———. “The Communist Have More Fun! The Dialectics of Fulfillment in the Cinema of the People’s Republic of China.” *world picture* 3 (2009), accessed February 6, 2020. http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_3/McGrath.html.

Mao Dun. “Jiu xingshi, minjian xingshi yu minzu xingshi.” In *Yan’an wenyi congshu: wenyi lilun* juan, edited by Jin Ziguang et al., 641-49. Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1983.

Mao, Zedong. “Zai Yan’an wenyi zuotan hui shang de jianghua.” Web, accessed on October 15, 2020. https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-194205.htm

———. “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art.” In *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893-1945*, edited by Kirk A. Denton, 458-484. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Nealon, Christopher. *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before* Stonewall. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Nowell-Smith, Geoffrey. “Minnelli and Melodrama.” In *Home is Where Heart Is*, edited by Christine Gledhill, 70-74. London: BFI Publishing, 1987.

Nylan, Michael. “Classics without Canonization: Learning and Authority in Qin and Han.” In *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, vol. 1, edited by John Lagerwey, 721-776. London and Boston: Brill, 2009.

———. *The Five “Confucian” Classics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.

Ouyang Yuqian. “Mingri de xin geju.” *Xiju Shidai* 1, no. 1 (1937) : 69-74.

Owen, Stephen. *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Palm, Ralph. *Hegel’s Concept of Sublation: A Critical Interpretation* (2009), Catholic University of Leuven, PhD dissertation.

Pang, Laikwan. *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production during China’s Cultural Revolution*. London and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017.

Paperno, Irina. *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Peng, Xingcai. “*Guanzhong xinli*.” *Shehui jiaoyu fudao* 1 (1943): 132-39.

Peterson, Christopher. *Kindred Specters: Death, Mourning, and American Affinity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Robin, Régine. *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." In *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, edited by Linda Nicholson, 27-63. London: Routledge, 1997.

Ruskola, Teemu. *Legal Orientalism: China, the United States, and Modern Law.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Schram, Stuart. *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971.

Shell, Marc. *The End of Kinship: 'Measure for Measure,' Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Sources of Chinese Tradition, edited by William Theodore de Bary et al. Vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.

Stalin, Joseph. "Speech delivered at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in May 1925." Web, accessed September 30, 2020.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1925/05/18.htm

Suvin, Darko. "Lukács: Horizons and Implications of the 'Typical Character.'" *Social Text* 16 (Winter 1986-87): 97-123.

Tang, Tao and Yan Jiayan, ed. *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shi*, vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1979.

Tao, Xiaozu, "Mantan sange *Jia*." *Dangdai wentan* 5 (1985): 2-7.

Terada, Rei. *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the Death of the Subject*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Walicki, A. "Rosa Luxemburg and the Question Nationalism in Polish Marxism (1893-1914)." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 61 no.4 (1983): 565-582.

Wang, Ban. *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Wei, Bo. "Lun minzu xingshi yu dazhonghua." In *Wenxue de "minzu xingshi" taolun ziliao*, edited by Xu Sixiang, 51-65. Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2010.

Williams, Linda. "Melodrama Revised." In *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, edited by Nick Browne, 42-88. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

———. *Playing the Race Card: Melodrama of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Wu, Yiching. *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

———. *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: Verso, 1997.

Xiang, Linbing. "Minjian xingshi de yunyong yu minzu xingshi de chuangzao." *Zhongsu wenhua* 6, no. 1 (1940): 66-68.

Xiang, Yansheng and Zhu Ping. "Geju *Bai Mao Nü* zai Yan'an de chuangzuo yu paiyuan Part 1." *Renmin yinue* 8 (1995): 4-7.

Xiao, San. "Lun shige de minzu xingshi" *Wenyi tuji* 6 (1939): 4-6.

Xiao, Tie. *Revolutionary Waves: The Crowd in Modern China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Yan'an wenyi congshu: wenyi lilun juan. Edited by Jin Ziguang et al. Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1983.

Yangbanxi biannian yu shishi [A Chronicle of Model Opera of Chinese Cultural Revolution], edited by Li Song. Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2012.

Yang, Lan. *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1998.

———. "'Socialist Realism' versus 'Revolutionary Realism Plus Revolutionary Romanticism.'" In *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, edited by Hilary Chung, et al., 88-105. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996.

Yeh, Emilie Yueh-Yu. "Pitfalls of Cross-cultural Analysis: Chinese *Wenyi* Film and Melodrama." *Asian Journal of Communication* 19, no. 4 (2009): 438-452.

———. "*Wenyi* and the Branding of Early Chinese Film," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6, no. 1 (2012), 65-94.

Yu, Huiyong. "Rang wenyi wutai yongyuan chengwei xuanchuan Mao Zedong sixiang de zhendi" [Let the stage of art be the everlasting front to propagate the thought of Mao Zedong]. *Wenhui Bao*, May 23, 1968.

Zhang, Geng. “Guanyu *Bai Mao Nü* geju de chuangzuo.” In *Bai Mao Nü,* 212-14. Beijing: Qingnian chubanshe, 2000.

———. “Huiyi Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui qianhou ‘Luyi’ de xiju huodong,” *Yanh*e 3 (1962): 5-12.

Zhang, Ling. “Revolutionary Aestheticism and Excess: Transformation of the Idealized Female Body in *The Red Lantern* on Stage and Screen.” *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 67-92.

Zhang, Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

———. “Transnational Melodrama, *Wenyi*, and the Orphan Imagination.” In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*, edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, 83-97. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Zhdanov, Andrei. “Soviet Literature—the Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature.” In *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers’ Congress*, 21-22. New York: International Publishers, 1935.

Zhou, Yang. *Zhou Yang wenji*. Vol.1-5. Edited by Ma Liangchun et al. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984.

Zhu, Keyi. *Yuyan xue shiye zhong de “yangbanxi”*. Kaifeng, China: Henan University Press, 2004.

Zito, Angela. *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.