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Power and Trauma in Chinese Film: Experiences of Zhang Yuan  
and the Sixth Generation

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ciated trauma that limits the capacity for self-reflection and creates rigid, defensive, and even paranoid postures. If the current situation is an endless unanalyzed loop of enactments, revealing the unmetabolized trauma of statelessness, what can be done?

I would suggest that American citizens, as opposed to European or Israeli, have a special responsibility to consider their opinion on this conflict and let their voices be heard. Only America has the leverage to resolve and mediate this conflict. The site of dialogue should be revisited under pressure from the US and its citizenry because it is the largest financial, moral and military supporter of Israel. If talks are not held leading to a political solution, then not only will the loop of violent recriminatory acts continue, but the Palestinians will continue to suffer the indignities of occupation, the character of the State of Israel will become more and more closely identified by the world as that of a colonial oppressor, and there is the risk of a regional war which could spiral out of control. That war may be even more extensive given the geo-political needs and aspirations of members of the Bush Administration to build a coalition of States who agree to support and overturn the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Therefore, the interests of Americans, far as they may seem from the sordid Middle East conflict, may also be at stake.

If a dialogue could ensue and the US lends its “observing ego” and creates a “potential space” then perhaps some of the mutual

fear, hopelessness, revenge and anger could be set aside. Both sides could then safely mourn their fantasies of omnipotence: Israel’s of a State that includes the West Bank and Gaza, and Palestinians could mourn the idea of a State that includes Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Eilat. Eventually, perhaps, the settlement and occupation policies of the Israeli government in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinian policy of promoting statehood through violence and bombings, would cease. Both parties could begin to define their core identities in terms of what they themselves choose and not on what the other is “forcing” them to become. Israel could get on with being an unbesieged free country instead of expending all its energies on ruling and controlling an angry people. Israel could avoid the risk of configuring part of its own identity on that of an aggressive, superior occupier, unfairly victimized by the suicide bomber. Palestinians, too, could leave behind ways of thinking about parts of their national identities as martyrs and victims of Israel. They could pursue nation-building and democratic institutions unfettered, and divest themselves of an identity partly built on oppression.

Terrorism and revenge would then cease to be the main defining characteristics of both communities, as they are at present. The subjectivity of the other party could be recognized, as mutual dialogue replaces terror with a political, negotiated solution in a co-constructed conversation.

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## POWER AND TRAUMA IN CHINESE FILM: EXPERIENCES OF ZHANG YUAN AND THE SIXTH GENERATION

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*Shannon May*

Soon after Zhang Yuan’s first film, *Mama*, was released in 1990 the State-owned Film Distribution Corporation pulled all prints without explanation. After independently financing, filming and exhibiting *Beijing Bastards*, Zhang was officially banned from feature production in 1994 by the Chinese government. Other artists were directed not to work with him; companies were ordered not to rent equipment to him. Zhang was branded a disseminator of “spiritual pollution.”<sup>1</sup>

As the first film since the nationalization of the industry in 1951 to be made entirely outside of the State system, Zhang’s *Beijing Bastards* marks a new movement in Chinese film. Even before the first shot, the audience is warned that a new form of filmmaking has emerged. At the beginning of each Chinese film produced since 1951, two standard

frames appear in sequence: the government issued license number followed by the name of the State studio responsible for the project. *Beijing Bastards* lacks the frame displaying the distribution license number. Centered in the following frame is not the name of one of the sixteen State studios, but rather Beijing Bastards Raw Shot Production Group. By taking this name for both the film and the production group—Beijing Bastards—Zhang implicates himself as well as his filmic practice as an illegitimate but unwilling-to-be-denied offspring of Beijing. The double metonymic practice that uses “Beijing” simultaneously to refer to China as a whole and to the CCP’s seat of power complicates the title. Zhang and the narrative encapsulated in his film are not only bastard sons of the Chinese nation, but of the official Party line as well. Moreover, the characters I have translated as “raw shot,” *shelie*, also convey multiple meanings: while foreshadowing the unfinished quality of the film, the phrase also carries the double image of film as a raw, tearing edge and a festering wound. Zhang and his peers—the filmmakers of the new Sixth Generation<sup>2</sup>—announce themselves and their films as a fissure rending its way through the Chinese cultural and political landscape.

In his first post-1994 project, Zhang not only flouted the ban against his work, but the taboo against homosexuality as well. Through *East Palace West Palace* Zhang indelibly links his own forbidden position as an independent

filmmaker with that of the tortured homosexual at the center of his film. After reading an article in Beijing’s *Life News* about an AIDS research institute that used police to force gay men to fill out surveys, Zhang focused on the oppression and discrimination that gay men face:

When I first began the script, there were a lot of characters: policemen, sociologists, gay men. As I wrote, I found the key to all this was power, and the connection between sex and power. Why did the police have the power to make these people talk about their lives? Why would the gay men reveal their private lives to the police? (Interview)

In Zhang’s final script there are only two characters: A Lan, the homosexual, and Shi Xiaohua, the policeman. Zhang made it clear during our interview that while the film’s surface reflects sexually charged interactions between a gay man and a police officer, the significations of the film go far deeper than that. He confides: “I love my country and I love the Party just as A Lan loves the policeman” (Interview).

A Lan’s love of the policeman, Shi, is repeatedly expressed through sadomasochistic fantasies in which A Lan is always the one being dominated. Zhang’s statement during our interview parallels the dialectical phrasing of A Lan’s own avowal of devotion to the policeman, Shi: “The convict loves the executioner. The thief loves the jail keeper. We [homo-

sexuals] love you [policemen]. There is no other choice.” These words bring to mind Judith Herman’s work on the psychology of victims of long term psychological trauma, in which she argues that systemic and repetitive methods of inflicting psychological trauma induce the victim to form a bond with the perpetrator. She concludes that “These methods are designed to instill terror and helplessness, to destroy the victim’s sense of self in relation to others, and to foster a pathologic attachment to the perpetrator . . .” (88). Her description well captures the mix of compulsion and desire felt by A Lan—and Zhang—for the human incarnation of the power that labels them as the dregs of society.

As he recalls his childhood to Shi, A Lan revels in the memory of being chastised by his mother: “When I was bad, she always used the same threat: ‘be good or the policeman will come to get you.’ I loved that sentence. The policeman was coming to get me! I waited.” A Lan is disturbed not by the threat of punishment, but rather by the fact that the threat was never fulfilled. Just as A Lan is compelled to seduce the policeman, so Zhang is drawn toward the Party/State. Even though A Lan has been previously “treated” for his homosexual “illness” through emetic therapy, he continues to frequent the park, knowing the police will question, and possibly arrest, him. Rather than acting in ways to avoid both mental and physical punishment, A Lan seeks it out.

Zhang and his peers in the Sixth Generation continued to make independent films throughout the 1990s despite knowing that such action was explicitly forbidden. Set against the silence and repression of post-Tiananmen China, Zhang's *Beijing Bastards* focuses on *liumang* culture,<sup>3</sup> and in particular, rock star Cui Jian, whose music became the soundtrack for the demonstrations in Tiananmen. In doing so, Zhang nearly begs the State to punish him for his impudence. While awaiting the CCP's announcement on his fate, Zhang did not lie low, but rather made a clandestine short on the Tiananmen Incident as well as a true-to-life feature on the madness and dysfunction of a Beijing family. After receiving his punishment—banned from working in the industry—Zhang continued to challenge the foundations of the PRC's system of control.

The very title of *East Palace West Palace* marks the symbolic realm of the film as the discourse between the center and the margin, the official and the banned. As alluded to in the first scenes of the film, the title refers to the slang term used by gay men for the bathrooms on either side of the Forbidden Palace, the mythic seat of State power in the center of Beijing. The choice of this location flouts the CCP's taboo against homosexuality by placing the proscribed Other at the heart of the PRC's Self.

Through A Lan's attempt to seduce Shi, Zhang explores the nature of the disavowed to return,

the fragments to seek wholeness. Inversion of the victim-abuser-rescuer dialectic<sup>4</sup> begins from the outset when A Lan gives the policeman who will become both his captor and prey an off-balance kiss. In the darkness of the garden-park, the shot holds A Lan as he turns to face the blinding flashlight in Shi's hands. While the focus of the shot is on A Lan, Shi's profile remains within view. A Lan's lips give a glimmer of a smile as Shi's arm reaches to his shoulder and he is chastised for his homosexual pursuits. The over-the-shoulder shot changes abruptly as Shi pushes A Lan out of the frame. The next cut interjects another officer berating other gay men as "dregs of society." The scene cuts to a silhouetted A Lan and Shi stumbling along the covered walkway. As the tracking shot pulls back, A Lan and Shi turn toward the camera. Shi's arm holds A Lan gruffly about the shoulder. As A Lan jerkily turns into Shi's body and struggles to place a kiss upon his cheek, the shot collapses into a close-up of the two men's faces. The camera cuts to Shi's shocked face. He is silent. Even as focus is turned to Shi and a confrontation is depicted in the narrative, A Lan remains in the frame. The shot continues as Shi walks forward, edging A Lan off-screen. The camera then jumps to a close-up of A Lan's face: his eyes glisten, his mouth smiles. As he backs away, he nibble-licks his finger. Simultaneously, Shi is pulled back on-screen, his back to the camera. The camera cuts again to a close-up of Shi's face. Silent and still,

eyes wide and glazed, he looks to be in a trance.

Not only has the camera united the two men in film, but Shi's silence in the scene also reveals his own desire—and impotence. As the PRC's frontline against homosexuality, Shi should have immediately arrested A Lan. Not only is he a homosexual, but he is also predatory—worst of all, his prey is a representative of the CCP's power. That Shi remains still and silent reveals a confused pleasure rather than the uncontrolled rage the film has constructed as what one would expect from someone in his position. While the camera first creates the classic subjective view of Shi gazing at A Lan after the kiss, the next cut takes a close-up of Shi's face. The camera does not, however, complete the second subjective cycle; it does not return to the object—to A Lan. Shi's ability to possess his desired object is undermined.

Although A Lan is diegetically framed as the enunciator of the narrative due to extensive use of flashback, he is also depicted as impotent. Each of his flashbacks relates attempted sexual experiences. In each he is silent. He cannot speak to his only female crush in middle school; he does not respond to the male factory worker who encourages the other workers to beat him after sex; he undresses silently and then lies quietly on his stomach awaiting his male teacher. However, we discover that he is only playing a role in these flashbacks; they are told to draw out the latent sadistic desire A Lan reads in Shi's eyes. Despite his self-

described passivity in both social and sexual roles, A Lan is the instigator of social and physical contact with Shi. If A Lan did not act out in full view of Shi, the policeman would not come.

Despite construction of mutual desire, discrepancies between the incarnations of the two men's fantasies are evinced in the scene in which Shi forces A Lan to dress as a woman. Although A Lan faces Shi in the frame, the policeman barks that A Lan must "put on these [women's] clothes so that I can see your real face." Notably, A Lan's back is to the spectator. Even as Self and Other unite in subject-object desire, the nature of the desire is split off and repressed. Shi cannot see A Lan as a man. By forcibly demanding the pretense of sexual difference, Shi is refusing to see A Lan as a reflection of himself. To accept A Lan as a man while succumbing to his own desire would force Shi to admit that in a profound, primal sense he and A Lan are the same: the Other is the Self. To see A Lan as a man is to be unable to hold on to a definitive delineation between oppressor and oppressed. Such bivalent vision would force Shi consciously to relinquish his (assumed) sole possession of the phallus. He cannot accept such a castration. On the contrary, A Lan's love is based on a reflexive recognition of himself in Shi. He identifies as both seduced and seducer, tormented and tormenter. Shi's need to maintain a sexual power differential, however, disrupts A Lan's identification. When Shi keeps clamoring for A Lan to put on the women's

clothes confiscated from a local transvestite, A Lan cries "This is not what I want."

Shi's inability to see A Lan as a reflexive image of himself parallels the CCP's inability to recognize Zhang (and his peers) as an integral part of the Chinese self. If the State were reflexively to share in Zhang's cinematic fantasy by endorsing the vision in his films, the State would be unable to cling to its dominant position. It would no longer be able to perceive itself as both the enunciator and executor of China's moral and political imperatives. And so Zhang must still be repudiated. Just a few days before the 1996 Ministry of Radio, Film and Television regulations<sup>5</sup> explicitly prohibiting film production not in cooperation with the studio system came into effect, Zhang smuggled the negatives of *East Palace West Palace* to France for post-production. Humiliated by Zhang's continued defiance and success, including the selection of *East Palace West Palace* as an official entry in the *Un Certain Regard* division of the 1997 Cannes Film Festival, the Chinese State confiscated Zhang's passport upon his return to China from Hong Kong on April 10, 1997.

Even Zhang's second official banishment from the film industry could not silence him. Zhang's continued seduction and torment of the State culminated in his cooperation with the State-owned Xian Film Studio to release his first domestically distributed film in a decade. *Seventeen Years*, focused on the return of an estranged daughter to her parents

after seventeen years in prison, opened to sold-out, teary-eyed audiences in December 1999.

From the marginalized periphery, Zhang returns. And awaits the policeman.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Deng Xiaoping defined spiritual pollution at the Second Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee in October 1983 as "all varieties of corrupt and decadent ideologies of the bourgeoisie and other exploiting classes . . . distrust of the socialist and communist cause and the Communist Party leadership," qtd. in Ok-senberg, Sullivan and Lambert 401.

<sup>2</sup>The term "generation" has been used by Chinese film historians to catalogue film directors into periods, taking into account both the time when a director first began making films as well as directorial style and production methods. A new generation is marked by an abrupt stylistic change that tends to coincide with the graduation of a new class of directors from the Beijing Film Academy. The previous five periods are generally accepted as: 1905–1932, 1932–1949, 1950–1960, 1960–1980, and 1980–1992. Once labeled as a member of a particular generation, a director is known as being of that generation regardless of the length of his career.

<sup>3</sup>Traditionally, *liumang* is a pejorative term denoting immoral and offensive behavior, conjuring images of gangsters and hooligans. After Tiananmen, China's disillusioned youth appropriated *liumang* as the code word for the alienated urban rebel who seeks to distance himself from State culture and its official definition of terms. *Liumang's* previous negative associations with dishonesty and criminality have been superseded by attributes such as individualism, defiance, and independence.

<sup>4</sup>See Layton 130 for discussion of the vectors along which victims of prolonged trauma tend to construct relationships, in particular the triangulation of victim, abuser, and rescuer.

<sup>5</sup>On July 1, 1996 the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, the regulatory agency that then oversaw the activities of the Film Bureau and the Film Distribution Corporation, issued a new 64-article system of regulations. In order explicitly to prohibit work outside of the official studio system, the regulations required that no film could be produced, distributed, exhibited locally or abroad, or imported without prior approval at all censorship levels. While vague, the 1996 regulations do outline seven content areas that would be forbidden: anything that endangers the Chinese State, discloses state secrets, libels or slanders others, or promotes pornography, feudal superstition or excessive violence. As if the vagueness of the first six prohibitions were not enough to give the censors free reign, the seventh taboo was listed simply as "other content forbidden by state regulations." Punishment for those filmmakers who violate the regulations include fines ranging between five to ten times any profits gained from illicit productions and the possibility of criminal prosecution.

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## THE NAME OF THE ROOM: CHILD PSYCHIATRY AND ECONOMIC RATIONALISM

*Michael Plastow*

In public child psychiatry in Victoria, Australia, we are currently having to justify to those who fund our services even the most basic requirements for the conditions in which we and our allied health colleagues are able to carry out our clinical work. Currently we are undergoing a process of having our services divided into smaller teams and re-located to small clinics in community settings. While the advantages of this process for better accessibility of our services is evident, this process occurs with insufficient thought and planning as to what constitutes a critical mass for a team that is sustainable. The needs of professional contact with our child psychiatry and other medical and non-medical colleagues have essentially not been considered.

In this context of re-location, it has been put forward that child psychiatrists or clinical staff working in the field of child psychiatry do not need an office or designated space in which to perform their clinical work. From the point of view of the policy makers who determine our funding, it is sufficient to have an office space that is shared with other clinicians and a few designated interview rooms. Part of the rationale used to justify the assertion that we do not require designated offices is the idea

that in fact we should be spending most of our time out in the "community" where the "real" work is, along the lines of some specialized outreach and crisis services.

Thus the logical extrapolation of such policies is that it is sufficient for the clinician to have a car and a mobile phone in order to go to where the patients, or rather, "consumers" are. Furthermore, it implies that all clinicians are the same and work in the same ways, and thus fails to recognize the diversity and specialization in clinical practice. So why do child psychiatrists and other clinicians insist on having not just their own room to work in, but their own designated room, and that the room be a stable and a predictable one?

In many Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in this state, clinical staff are already required to share offices and have access to only a limited number of de-personalized interview rooms to see their patients or clients. Such rooms, moreover, may or may not be available at the moment in which the child psychiatrist or other clinical staff wish to use them. In some country centers the CAMHS staff are obliged to share interview rooms with their colleagues from the adult mental health services whose requirements for the clinical encounter are far different from that of the clinician working with children and adolescents. Moreover, the traumatizing effect of the behavior of certain adult mental health patients on these children is not considered.