Notes

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

2 Anderson.

INTRODUCTION

3 Jia.
4 *Yule xinwen*, “Jia Zhangke.”
5 My language here may evoke Jacques Lacan’s concept of the Real, but it is not my intention to fit my argument into his system. I do, however, see a homology between his distinction between reality and the real and those of other modern thinkers—for example, Alain Badiou’s contrast between knowledge and truth—and I consider such distinctions, like cinema itself, to be characteristic of modernity, with its urge to assimilate all into a reasoned totality, on one hand, and its acknowledgment of the contingency of knowledge and the limits of knowability, on the other.
6 Walter Goodman, “China’s ‘Yellow Earth,’” *New York Times*, April 11,
1986. For one example of Jia’s later criticism of Chen Kaige and his generation of filmmakers, see Berry, Speaking in Images, 192.


8 “Fifth Generation” refers to the first group of filmmakers to graduate from the Beijing Film Academy after it reopened following the Cultural Revolution.

9 See chapter 6 for a more detailed consideration of Yellow Earth. On a personal note, it was the shock of viewing this film in an undergraduate course taught by Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang in the early 1990s that, as much as any other single event (though Hou Hsiao-hsien’s Dust in the Wind [Lianlian fengchen 恋恋风尘, 1986] from the same course also comes to mind), instilled in me a lasting fascination with Chinese cinema.

10 For reasons that will become apparent, I favor the term xieshizhuyi 写实主义 as a generic translation for realism. In fact, the more official forms of modern Chinese realism, particularly those associated with Communist aesthetics, tended to use the alternative term for realism xianshizhuyi 现实主义, a modern neologism imported from Japan. More recently, jishizhuyi 纪实主义 (“recording the real-ism” or “on-the-spot realism”) has been used to indicate a documentary-style cinematic realism. Xieshi 写实 (inscribing the real) itself dates at least to Liu Xie 刘勰 (aka Yanhe 彦和), a fifth-century literary aesthetician, but it was not revived as a key term until the modern era.


12 As Vera Schwarcz puts it, in the Daoist tradition, zhen “is used as a synonym for authenticity, or more accurately for the person who strives to align his gaze in a way that the inner and outer correspond to each other.” Schwarcz, Colors of Veracity: A Quest for Truth in China, and Beyond (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), 27.

13 The character also had spiritual connotations; for example, a description of Buddhist practitioners in the popular Ming dynasty vernacular novel Journey to the West includes the line 习静归真 xi jing gui zhen, which the

Awareness of the potential gap between reality and description is hardly a new issue in Chinese thought. Debates about the relationship between 实 (reality) and 名 (name) go back well over two thousand years, to the pre-Qin and Han eras. For a discussion of 实 in ancient philosophy, see Alexus McLeod, “Pluralism about Truth in Early Chinese Philosophy: A Reflection on Wang Chong’s Approach,” *Comparative Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2011): 38–60.


I limit this book to fiction film on the rationale that documentary presents a distinct (though obviously related) set of issues. With an already dauntingly broad scope in considering the history of feature-length fiction film in mainland China, I leave to others the consideration of Chinese documentary cinema (which lately has been getting much scholarly attention) as well as Chinese short and avant-garde films (which largely have not). Likewise, the current work does not attempt to cover the related yet distinct cases of Sinophone cinema in Hong Kong or Taiwan.


The evidence simply does not support such a view of pictorial representation in general. As Paul Messaris has put it, “unlike the conventions of written language or, for that matter, speech, pictorial conventions for the representation of objects and events are based on information-processing skills that a viewer can be assumed to possess even in the absence of any previous experience with pictures.” Conducting a comprehensive review of cross-cultural psychological and anthropological studies of human (and even animal) perceptions of optical illusions and pictures, J. B. Deregowski concluded that, although many aspects of pictorial comprehension are learned, “pictures are clearly not arbitrary


27 André Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?*, 3–12 (Montreal: Caboose, 2009). In this book, I quote this translation from the French by Timothy Barnard rather than the looser one by Hugh Gray that is more readily available in the United States in Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 1:9–16. However, in the notes, I give page references for both translations for the convenience of readers who have access only to the latter (here cited simply as “Gray” after the first mention). For more on the question of the “indexicality” of film, see the special issue of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007), edited by Mary Ann Doane, which is devoted to the topic.

28 Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 8. (Gray, 14.)


30 As Stephen Prince puts it in his *Digital Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012), through careful design of visual cues, a moving image can be “perceptually
realistic” even while being entirely “referentially false” (32). Prince proposes the term *perceptual realism* in his earlier article “True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory,” *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1996): 27–37.


40 Perkins, 24.

41 Perkins, 17, 31.

42 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 159.


Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 125.


Franke, 3–4.

See the two volumes of Franke for a rich sample of the Western lineage. As for apophatic thought in the Chinese tradition, *emptiness* plays a central role in many schools of Buddhist thought, as expressed, for example, in the Heart Sutra, which insists on the inseparability of emptiness (*kong* 空) and form (*se* 色). Within Daoism, the famous opening lines of the *Dao De Jing*, “The way [dao] that can be spoken of is not the abiding way / The name that can be named is not the abiding name” (道可道非常道, 名可名非常名), offer, in just twelve syllables/characters, perhaps the most concise expression of apophatic philosophy in any tradition.


Of course, any claims for a distinctively “Chinese” style of cinema must be approached with great caution, and Fei Mu should be appreciated more for his unique vision than for some ethnically essentialist aesthetic his films supposedly embody. See James Udden, “In Search of Chinese Film Style(s) and Technique(s),” in A Companion to Chinese Cinema, ed. Yingjin Zhang, 256–83 (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

For example, a study that included forms of avant-garde cinema displaying, say, abstract plays of light and shadow on the screen or scratches made directly on the emulsion of a filmstrip might invoke a category like material realism, in which realism means, as Linda Nochlin has put it, “truth to the nature of the material,” “which is indeed one of the, if not the chief, foundation stones of Modernism.” Nochlin, Realism (London: Penguin, 1971), 230. One could also distinguish a category of transmedial realism(s), involving the mimetic remediation of one medium in another; for example, in his own typology of cinematic realisms, Berys Gaut uses the term photorealism to name CGI techniques that are designed to cause a computer-generated image to resemble not so much a real object as, more specifically, that object as photographed in traditional cinematography—including artifacts like imitated motion blur, film grain, or lens flares. Gaut, A Philosophy of Cinematic Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 66–67.

Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 10. Gray’s translation renders the sentence as “On the other hand, of course, the cinema is also a language” (16).


Quoted in Elsaesser, 10. Barnard renders the passage as “In art, realism can obviously be created only out of artifice,” while Gray translates it as “But realism in art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice.” Bazin, “Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation,” 227. (Gray, 26.)


Cavell, xiii, 105.

Cavell, 104–5.

Cavell, 104.

Cavell, 105.

Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 42.


Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 42, 43.

Rodowick, 43.

The limitations of the language metaphor are evident from film theory’s dalliance with and then retreat from a linguistics-based film semiotics during the 1960s–70s, exemplified by Wollen’s chapter “The Semiology of the Cinema” in *Signs and Meanings*, and Christian Metz’s *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Even Wollen sought to use a broader semiotics to distance cinema from the “exaggerated” analogy with verbal language (140).


Schweinitz, 33, xiv.

Schweinitz, 50.

Schweinitz, 35.

John Hill makes a very similar point about British realist cinema: “Films which were accepted as ‘realistic’ by one generation often appear ‘false’ or ‘dated’ to the next. Thus, the working-class films of the British ‘new wave,’ which initially appeared so striking in their ‘realism,’ now appear ‘melodramatic’ and ‘even hysterical’ to at least one modern critic.” Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 58. The same could be said for some of the more noted 1950s Hollywood films featuring realist “method actors” (*On the Waterfront, Rebel without a Cause*, etc.): they may have seemed strikingly real to their initial audiences, but later generations may even be tempted
to giggle at performances and situations that now appear artificial.

81 Schweinitz, *Film and Stereotype*, 38–39.
82 Schweinitz, 40.
83 Andrew quotes Serge Daney: “The *Cahiers* axiom is this: that the cinema has a fundamental rapport with reality and that the real is not what is represented—and that’s final.” Andrew, *What Cinema Is!*, 5.

1. ACTING REAL IN CHINESE SILENT CINEMA

2 Zou, 141.
3 Zou, 142.
4 Zou.
5 Zou, 139.
9 Balázs, 14–15.
11 The actual photo was by Yao Guorong 姚国荣 of the C. H. Wang Photo Studio 王开照相馆, which specialized in publicity stills for established and aspiring actors, among other things. According to his granddaughter, Yao selected and enlarged the photo himself when an unnamed person involved with organizing the funeral requested an image of the star for that purpose. See Zhang Yi, “Wang Kai zhaoxiangguan sheyingshi Yao Guorong houren tan lao zhaopian beihou de gushi” [C. H. Wang Photo Studio photographer Yao Guorong’s descendant tells the stories behind old photos], *Xinmin wanbao* [Xinmin evening newspaper], January 19, 2007.
12 In fact, the character Wei Ming was loosely based on a real woman who committed suicide, the screenwriter and film actor Ai Xia 艾霞, adding to the uncanny hall-of-mirrors effect: actor Maggie Cheung plays the actor Ruan Lingyu, whose actual suicide echoed the screen suicide of her character Wei Ming, whose fictional suicide was based on that of the actual person Ai Xia, herself an actor and writer of fiction.


14 New Women uses a separately recorded soundtrack with sound effects, music, and some dialogue, but the film as a whole still plays mostly as a silent film, with intertitles.


17 Chang.


19 Ellis, 58.

20 During her prime years at the Lianhua film studio from 1930 to 1934, Ruan Lingyu appeared in an average of 3.4 films per year.

21 Ellis, Visible Fictions, 99.
22 Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 37. This famous Godard quote is often cited, but, it seems, never with the original source documented, including by Perez.

23 Robert Warshow, quoted in Perez, 29.


27 Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 9. (Gray, 15.) As in the introduction, where available, I use Barnard’s translations of Bazin rather than the looser ones by Hugh Gray that are more readily available in the United States, but I cite Gray’s translations of the same passages in parentheses in the notes.

28 For a fuller discussion of the film and the intervention it makes into broader debates on society and culture, see Kristine Harris, “*The Goddess*: Fallen Woman of Shanghai,” in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, ed. Chris Berry, 128–36 (London: British Film Institute, 2008).

29 Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 98.


31 Yingjin Zhang makes this argument about *The Goddess*, which is seen as an essentially sadistic narrative that enacts the removal of the threat of women’s sexuality as represented in the figure of the prostitute. Kristine Harris in part counters this view through an analysis of the film’s visual rhetoric and the director’s stated motivations for making the film. See Yingjin Zhang, “Prostitution and the Urban Imagination: Negotiating the Public and the Private in Chinese Films of the 1930s,” in Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai*, 160–80, and Harris, “*The Goddess*.”


33 Hansen, “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience,” 181.

34 In general, I find the Greta Garbo comparison to be a stretch. Ruan seems...
to have more in common with Hollywood silent stars like Lillian Gish and Janet Gaynor—her acting tending toward understatement and her sexuality wrapped up with a sort of vulnerable innocence—than with the flamboyant performance style and take-charge eroticism of Garbo.

Yingjin Zhang has a similar reading of a slightly later scene, in which Ruan’s smiling visage is superimposed on an extreme long shot of the neon cityscape at night. Zhang observes that here, “Shanghai is fantasized as an alluring prostitute smiling directly at the audience against a background of skyscrapers and flashing neon lights.” However, because the shot in question clearly is set up as a point-of-view shot from the perspective of Ruan’s future pimp, representing his fantasy and the beginning of his designs on the protagonist, in my view, the audience is more likely to experience dread than erotic pleasure in viewing it, having already been cued to sympathize with the heroine and to despise the thug. Zhang, “Prostitution and the Urban Imagination,” 169.

Gu Kenfu, “Yingxi zazhi fakanci” [Introducing Shadowplay Magazine], in 20 Shiji Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan [Selected works of twentieth-century Chinese film theory], ed. Luo Yijun (1921; repr., Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2003), 1:4–5. Hongwei Thorn Chen has completed a draft translation of the essay, and I largely borrow his English renditions in this chapter. Victor Fan points out that a more literal translation of bizhen would be “approaching reality,” which introduces a set of complications not unlike those I find in “inscribing the real” (xieshi 写实) in the introduction. See Fan, Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).


Gu.

Balázs, Béla Balázs, 14. Emphasis original.


Gu, 5–6.


For an analysis of mimesis and semiosis as intertwined aspects of literary realism, see Armine Kotin Mortimer, *Writing Realism: Representations in French Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). The question of the status of mimesis in traditional Chinese aesthetics is a thorny one, and the answer depends largely on how one defines the term, as well as whether it is considered to be the function of art or simply one aspect of artistic representation. In a study of Chinese literary thought, for example, Ming Dong Gu argues that “expressionism” was “the mainstream,” but that “mimetic representation” nonetheless was long present as “an undercurrent.” Gu points out that in addition to “primary imitation”—or art directly imitating nature or “reality”—traditional Chinese aesthetics certainly put a high value on “secondary imitation,” in which previous works of art, rather than reality itself, are imitated. Indeed, such a conception of mimesis would collapse “convention” into “realism” insofar as conventions themselves can be the object of mimesis. Gu, “Is Mimetic Theory in Literature and Art Universal?,” *Poetics Today* 26, no. 3 (2005): 475, 477.

Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 146–47. I thus disagree, as argued in the introduction, with any view that entirely discounts the claims of the ontological realism of film and argues instead that in cinema, the effect of mimesis is produced solely through semiosis, as Mortimer has argued is the case in realist literary fiction (see the previous note).

The one notable exception was the 1913 film *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (*Zhuangzi shi qi* 莊子試妻), in which director Li Minwei 黎民偉 had his own wife, Yan Shanshan 嚴珊珊, play the minor role of a maid—though the main female role, that of Zhuangzi’s wife, was still played by a male actor.


For a more thorough discussion of these developments, see Chou, “Staging Revolution.”

Zheng Zhengqiu, “Xinjujia bu neng yanxi ma?” [Can xinju actors not act in film?], in *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* [Chinese silent film], ed. Dai Xiaolan (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 906–7 (including following quotations in this paragraph). My translations are adapted from a draft translation by Jessica Ka Yee Chan.


Wan Laitian, “Tan neixin biaoyan” [On interior performance], originally


53 For an English translation, see Li-li Ch’en, *Master Tung’s Western Chamber Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 14–19.

54 Even this detail is well within the norms of classical Hollywood continuity. For example, in *To Have and Have Not* (Howard Hawks, 1944), an early shot/reverse-shot exchange between the Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall characters is mediated by an inserted shot of the club owner Frenchy, who stands in the doorway between them and amusingly traces with his own gaze their smoldering first looks.

55 The first quote comes from his *Visible Man* (1924) and the second from *The Spirit of Film* (1930), both of which are in *Béla Balázs*, 38, 109.


57 Balázs, *Béla Balázs*, 33–37. The section ends with a contrast between theater, in which “even the most important face is never more than one element in the play,” and film, in which “face becomes ‘the whole thing’ that contains the entire drama for minutes on end” (37).


60 By the 1920s–30s, many film critics in both China and the West were crediting Griffith with having “invented” the close-up. This clearly is not accurate, because filmmakers like George Albert Smith had begun experimenting with the technique as early as the end of the 1890s. Nonetheless, Griffith’s reliance on closer shots of actors during his Biograph years, and in particular the correspondence between shot distance and performance—with closer shots employed to capture significant emotions—was unprecedented and became a building block of the classical Hollywood style.


62 Zheng Junli, “Ruan Lingyu he ta de biaoyan yishu” [Ruan Lingyu and her performing art], originally published in *Zhongguo dianying* [Chinese film], no. 2 (1957); reprinted in He Keren, *Ruan Lingyu zhi si* [The death of Ruan Lingyu] (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986), 160.

63 Balázs, *Béla Balázs*, 35. James Naremore also has analyzed in detail

Balázs, Béla Balázs, 104. Emphasis original.

Gish set the template for any female character in silent film who wishes to convey forced cheerfulness in the face of patriarchal oppression. One of her most famous moments, remembered simply as “the smile,” occurs in *Broken Blossoms* (D. W. Griffith, 1919), when her character’s overbearing father orders her to smile despite her inner sadness. She consequently pushes the corners of her mouth up with her fingers to manufacture a fake grin for her father’s benefit. The fake smile also was a key theme in the Li Lili star vehicle *Daybreak* (Tianming 天明; Sun Yu 孙瑜, 1933). Li’s character, Ling Ling, upon arriving in Shanghai from the countryside, disapprovingly remarks to her friends about her puzzlement over the smiles of some streetwalking prostitutes she sees: how can such defiled women act so happy? Much later, after Ling Ling has met with catastrophe and been forced into prostitution herself, she learns firsthand that the smiles are merely coerced performances of cheerfulness. By the over-the-top ending, in which Ling Ling smiles sweetly in the face of a firing squad about to execute her for aiding a revolutionary, the full irony of her performance is clear.


Gran, 251.


*Jin Ping Mei*, literally “gold vase plum,” a detailed and complex novel
by an anonymous author centering on the household of a merchant, circulated in manuscript form in the late 1500s and was first published in 1610. The authoritative five-volume translation by David Tod Roy renders the title as The Plum in the Golden Vase (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997–2015).

For translations of many of the primary documents in these movements, from the late Qing through the May Fourth Movement and beyond, see Kirk A. Denton, ed., Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Eugene Y. Wang, “Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency,” in Chinese Art: Modern Expressions, ed. Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 133. In this indispensable essay, Wang notes the irony that Xu Beihong was most vociferously advocating Western-style realism as the path to modernity in Chinese art at precisely the time when cutting-edge European art was abandoning “mimetic illusionism” during the height of the 1920s modernist avant-garde (103).

David Der-wei Wang, “In the Name of the Real,” in Hearn and Smith, Chinese Art: Modern Expressions, 29–30.

“Sketch conceptualism” is Wang’s translation of xieyi in “Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency.” Here I favor the more general translations as just “conceptualism” or “expressionism” mainly to extend the concept from drawing and painting to performance aesthetics, making a parallel between the dichotomy of xieshi/xieyi (realism/expressionism) and that of mimesis/semiosis.

Wang, “In the Name of the Real,” 34.

Xin qingnian [New youth] 5, no. 4 (1918).

The most famous of the latter is of course Beijing opera, but it should be noted, first, that Beijing opera was in fact a relatively modern development in the history of Chinese drama (having emerged only in the eighteenth century and become widespread only in the nineteenth) and, second, that it only was elevated to the status of a “national” art form in the twentieth century, before which it was just one regional style among many—though one with growing popularity.


81 Ji Yun, “Actor and Character,” in Fei, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance*, 89–90.
82 Ji, 90.
83 It should be noted that China did have relevant precursors to the new model of scientific objectivity in its own intellectual history, most notably in the *kaozheng* or “evidential” school of textual scholarship that had been ascendant at the height of the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
85 Shih. Emphasis original.
88 Chen, 3.
89 Wang, “Fate of ‘Mr. Science’ in China,” 33.
90 Wang, 38.
91 Wang, “Discursive Community,” 106.
92 Gu, “*Yingxi zazhi* fakanci,” 6–7. What I have translated here as “show” is actually *xiechulai* or literally “to write out”—using the same character for “write” or “inscribe” as in the term for realism, “inscribing the real,” mentioned earlier.
93 Gu, 5.
95 Daston and Galison, 60.
96 Daston and Galison, 63. Daston and Galison present, for example, the case of Arthur Worthington, who, for two decades, attempted to sketch the exact geometrical patterns made by the splashes of droplets hitting a liquid surface by observing the phenomenon with a quick flash of light and then drawing what he thought he had seen—beautiful, perfectly symmetrical splash shapes. Only when he finally photographed the same phenomenon in 1894 did he discover to his horror that the “real” splashes captured by the camera looked nothing like his drawings but were instead always significantly marred by unpredictable asymmetries and irregularities (11–16, 154–63).
NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

98 Daston and Galison, 187.
99 Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image”; Cavell, World Viewed; Rodowick, Virtual Life of Film. See my discussion of these ideas in the introduction.
101 Vaughan, 65, 66.
102 Vaughan, 66–67.
103 Vaughan, 65.
109 Chou, 78.
110 Quoted in Chou, 79.
111 Chou, 85–86.

2. SHANGHAIING HOLLYWOOD IN THE 1930S

3 Cavell, World Viewed, 104; Rodowick, Virtual Life of Film, 42–43.


9 My thanks to Jonah Horwitz and (indirectly) Ben Singer for directing me to this earlier precedent.


11 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the broader issues raised by applying the term *melodrama* to the Chinese context, but it raises fascinating questions concerning translilingual practice and the transcultural application of theoretical concepts to categorize works of art. The distinction between melodrama as a historical film *genre* and a transhistorical narrative *mode* is meant partly to address such questions. See, for example, Christine Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre,” in Gledhill and Williams, *Reinventing Film Studies*, 221–43. For a view of melodrama as both an indigenous and a translated aesthetic in Chinese

This film adaptation played at the Carlton Theatre in Shanghai and received a short notice in *Shenbao* on October 26, 1923.


Zhang, *Amorous History*.


Zhang, *Amorous History*, 35.


A similar plot twist—the arranged marriage partner turns out to have been the actual love interest all along—occurs in the 1927 Soviet film *Women of Ryazan* (Olga Preobrazhenskaya and Ivan Pravov).
23 A 1962 interview with Fejos, reprinted in the booklet accompanying the Criterion Collection Blu-ray release of the film, includes this quote: “There was, by the way, the O. Henry twist in *Lonesome*, that at the very end, it was found out that the boy and girl lived side by side in the same rooming house, but they never knew about each other. It sounds corny, but let’s say that it was high corn.”


25 Shen goes on to say that he preferred to turn the characters into “a pure and naïve young couple.” Shen Xiling, “Zenyang zhizuo Shizi jietou” [How did I make *Crossroads*?], originally published in *Mingxing banyuekan* [Mingxing bimonthly] 8, no. 3 (1937); reprinted in Chen Bo, ed., *Zhongguo zuoyi dianying yundong* [The Chinese left-wing film movement], 395–97 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1993). Translation drafted by Jessica Ka Yee Chan.

26 A French version (*À moi le jour, à toi la nuit*) by the same director and featuring the same female lead actor (Käthe von Nagy) was released at the same time, still set in Paris but with all dialogue in French. See Nataša Durovicová, “Vector, Flow, Zone: Towards a History of Cinematic Translatio,” in Durovicová and Newman, *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, 99. I have not been able to determine which version was more likely to have been seen by either Shen Xiling or his friend who suggested the plot idea.


29 Zhao Dan, the actor who played Lao Zhao, stated that he borrowed an acting technique for a specific scene in *Crossroads* from Greta Garbo in Cukor’s *Camille*. See Ni Zhenliang, *Zhao Dan zhuan* [Zhao Dan biography] (Beijing: Chuanjie chubanshe, 2007), 79. Another possibly key cinematic precedent was a French adaptation of *La dame aux camélias* directed by Fernand Rivers and Abel Gance in 1934 and starring Yvonne
Printemps. The film appears to be no longer extant, and I have not been able to determine exactly when or if it was screened in Shanghai, but stills and movie posters from the film show Printemps wearing a black dress that is similar to the one Zhiying wears in her dream, suggesting that it could also have been a source for Shen Xiling’s imagination and an object of his parody. The Chinese adaptations included two called *New Camellia* (*Xin chahua* 新茶花; Zhang Shichuan 张石川, 1913 and Li Pingqian 李萍倩, 1927) and one titled *Women of Easy Virtue* (*Yècao xianhua* 野草闲花; Sun Yu, 1930).


31 In this sense, the satire in this scene resembles the *kuso* aesthetic of parody videos in contemporary Taiwan and mainland China. As Nishant Shah has shown in the case of the BackDorm Boys videos, the objects of humor in the videos are not so much the “original” Backstreet Boys or the “real” Chinese college boys as “the projected selves or desired selves that they are expected to either appropriate or aspire to. The *kuso* exaggerates the differences between these two, celebrates the obvious flaws in them and makes them available as a public spectacle.” Shah, “Now Streaming on Your Nearest Screen: Contextualizing New Digital Cinema through Kuso,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 3, no. 1 (2009): 26.


33 For a discussion of this, see Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality*, 25–26.

34 Lu Xun, “Yizhe fuji” [Translator’s notes], *Mengya yuekan* [Sprout monthly] 1, no. 3 (1930): 27–33.


36 Xia Yan, “Ruanxing de ying lun!” [A hard critique of softness!], in *Xia Yan dianying wenji* [Xia Yan collected writings on cinema] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2000), 1:28.

37 Xi Naifang [Zheng Boqi], “Dianying zuiyian—bianxiang de dianying shiping” [A critique of cinema—or, a criticism of contemporary cinema, 1933], *Mingxing* 1, no. 1 (1933): 1-4.
38 Xia Yan, “Zai Shizi jietou zuotanhui shang de fayan” [Talk at the forum on Crossroads], in Xia Yan dianying wenji, 1:88.
39 Schweinitz, Film and Stereotype, 22.
40 Schweinitz, 30.
41 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 79–80, 152–53.
42 Plantinga, 96–97.
43 Plantinga, 96.
44 Another Hollywood precedent for the shot is Buster Keaton’s The Cameraman (codirected by Edward Sedgwick, 1928), which had used a similar technique, though with fewer floors than 7th Heaven.
46 Yeh, 150, 250n35.
47 David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 159.
49 It might be argued that the ending of Yuan Muzhi’s Street Angel in fact fits one of the templates of classical Hollywood, namely, what Linda Williams categorizes as “sad-ending melodramas,” which include the “‘social problem’ films without optimistic endings.” However, such a convention more accurately describes, for example, the melodrama Spring River Flows East (Yi jiang chun shui xiang dong liu 一江春水向东流; Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生 and Zheng Junli, 1947), discussed in the next chapter, which ends with the suicide of its main protagonist. Street Angel is much odder, in that much of it is not a melodrama at all but a romantic comedy, and the ending features not the tragic finality of the death of its main character but rather the seemingly random death of a side character with no resolution of the fates of the main protagonists. Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” in Refiguring American Film Genres, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 59.
mark at the end of the film would be used again in *Eight Thousand Li of Clouds and Moon* (*Baqian li lu yun he yue* 八千里路云和月; Shi Dongshan 史东山, 1947) and in *Bitter Love* (*Ku lian* 苦恋; Peng Ning 彭宁, 1980).

This particular film trope—the rising of the dead, sometimes through double exposure—itself has several precedents in Western cinema, including *The Three Musketeers, J’accuse* (Abel Gance, 1919), and *Der müde Tod* (*Destiny*; Fritz Lang, 1921).


Hill.

Hill.

Hill.

Hill, 55–56.

Examples of these include *Twin Sisters* (*Zimeihua* 姊妹花; Zheng Zhengqiu 郑正秋, 1933) and, to some extent, *The Goddess*. See also Laikwan Pang’s discussion of the “bright tail” ending in Shanghai left-wing films. I should note that she includes in her list of “bright tail” endings some films that I on the contrary am labeling as lacking resolution. My rationales are that some of those, such as *The Big Road* (or *The Highway* as she translates it) and *Crossroads*, hardly have endings that could be described as “blissful,” even if they do encourage persistence in struggle, and that Pang herself argues that the “bright tail” does not provide unity through closure but rather gives the narrative “a new beginning” at its end. Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932–37* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 207–8.


Xia, “Zai Shizi jietou zuotanhui shang de fayan,” 87–91. (Zheng Boqi’s remarks are included in the same source.)


Pang, 206.


Plaks.

Plaks, 343.

Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction (*yuanyang-hudie xiaoshuo* 鸳鸯蝴蝶小说) refers to popular middle-brow entertainment fiction of the 1910s–20s that drew on both the Chinese cultural tradition and Western


69 Eisenstein also emphasized that he thought montage was a tool of realistic narration, but in a different sense than I ultimately will take it here, as he referred not to the ability of montage to create fissures but to its capacity for helping to present a unified theme. See Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 10–11. My thanks to Tara Coleman for pointing out this connection.


71 On the similar newsreel documentary-style inserts during a song sequence in *Big Road*, see Chris Berry, “The Sublimative Text: Sex and Revolution in *Big Road* (The Highway),” *East-West Film Journal* 2, no. 2 (June): 66–86.

72 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 51.

73 Eco, *Open Work*.

74 The fissures in these films thus recall the Brechtian technique of “interruption” analyzed by Walter Benjamin, a method of narration that “works against creating an illusion among the audience” and “compels the spectator to take up a position towards the action.” Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso, 1998), 99–100.


76 Hansen, “Cinema of Sun Yu,” 221.

77 Hansen, “Mass Production of the Senses,” 335, 340.

3. REALISM AND EVENT IN POSTWAR CHINESE CINEMA


2. Yao, 4.


5. Thompson.


7. Pickowicz, China on Film, 80.


9. Pickowicz, China on Film, 150–51.


15. Williams, 58.


17. The one exception is an interlude of slightly over twenty seconds in
which Sufen is briefly waylaid by a police officer when she flees home from the mansion after curfew.

In the Guangzhou periodical’s essay on the film cited at the beginning of this chapter, for example, the author complains that Sufen’s death would only have been necessary in pre–May Fourth China and that in the post–May Fourth reality, permanently breaking off with her husband and soldiering on with her life as a single mother should have been the option pursued rather than suicide. Yao, “You Yi jiang chun shui xiang dong liu, Songhua Jiang shang kan yishu de zhenshi,” 4.

Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” 69.


Steve Neale, “Melodrama and Tears,” Screen 27, no. 6 (1986): 8, 22.


Pickowicz, China on Film, 86–87.

Pickowicz, 78.

Gilberto Perez, The Eloquent Screen: A Rhetoric of Film (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 203.

Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” 67.


For more on its reception and citations of typical reviews at the time, see Carolyn Fitzgerald, Fragmenting Modernisms: Chinese Wartime Literature, Art, and Film, 1937–1949 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 172–73.


35 Technically, one might say that ellipses cannot occur within a scene because temporal continuity is one of the defining characteristics of a scene (as opposed to a sequence). However, that is precisely what makes these ellipses so remarkable: that they happen as if within an otherwise continuous scene (though not necessarily within a continuous shot, as would be the case with a briefer jump cut).


37 The only exceptions would be those few experimental feature films that unfold in “real time,” for example, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948), Mike Figgis’s *Timecode* (2000), or Alexander Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* (2002).

38 This would be the sort of “striptease” argument made, for example, by Slavoj Žižek: the idea that sex is most powerful in cinema when suggested or indicated indirectly in various ways, whereas when shown explicitly, it becomes merely a mechanical, prosaic, or ugly display that fails to capture the desiring subject’s jouissance. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 171–91.

39 David Der-wei Wang also associates the ellipses within this scene with uncertainty, observing that they function “to intimate the passage of time and the pressure of prolonged uncertainty of the conversation.” Wang, *Lyrical in Epic Time*, 294.


43 Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang), “Sealed Off,” in *The Columbia Anthology of*
NOTES TO CHAPTER 3  357


44 Fitzgerald, Fragmenting Modernisms, 169, 210–16.


46 Fan, Cinema Approaching Reality, 134.

47 Zhang, “My Writing,” 439.

48 Fitzgerald, Fragmenting Modernisms, 174–214.

49 This fact is driven home by a comparison of the film with its 2002 remake by Tian Zhuangzhuang (which has the same Chinese title but is usually cited in English as Springtime in a Small Town), which largely repeats the plot of the original but drops Yuwen’s voice-over narration, resulting in her character coming much closer to the stereotype of a villainous femme fatale.

50 In Obsession, there is an equivalent scene in which the adulterous couple have this conversation: “I’ll stay here. I’ll put up with it [pause] until [pause].” “Until what?” “Until I don’t know when.” The fantasizing of the husband’s death in The Postman Always Rings Twice is more blunt. Frank vocalizes a wish that Cora’s husband would die in a car crash, and she replies, “You didn’t mean that. You were joking!” In Double Indemnity, when Walter Neff, insurance salesman and soon-to-be lover of femme fatale Phyllis Dietrichson, teases her about anticipating—or possibly planning—her husband’s death when she asks about taking out a life insurance policy for him, she protests with “Please don’t talk like that,” “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” “Are you crazy?” and “That’s a horrible thing to say.” Later, of course, they carry out the murder together.


54 See esp. André Bazin’s essays “Cinematic Realism and the Italian School

ASL figures for these and many other films are available at the Cinemetrics Database, http://www.cinemetrics.lv/database.php.

Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, 2:66. (This essay is not available in the newer collection translated by Timothy Barnard.)


Eco, *Open Work*.


Jing Yingrui, “Wo kan Xiao cheng zhi chun” [My view of Spring in a Small Town], in *Xiao cheng zhi chun de dianying meixue: xiang Fei Mu zhi jing* [The cinematic aesthetics of *Spring in a Small Town*: An homage to Fei Mu] (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 1996), 12.

Daruvala, “Aesthetics and Moral Politics,” 175.

Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality*, 111.


Pickowicz, *China on Film*, 192.

Chen Baichen 陈白尘 was the lead writer, though the film’s opening credits list five more cowriters, including the director Zheng Junli and the actor Zhao Dan. See Cheng, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 244.

Cheng, 243.


The film never directly mentions Xu’s status as a concubine rather than Hou’s first wife, but it makes clear that his main residence and family are in Nanjing.

Wang, “Crows and Sparrows,” 83.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 4  359

73 Lukács, 38.
74 Lukács.
75 Wang, “Crows and Sparrows,” 86.
76 Cheng acknowledges that the film includes “acidic political satire,” and Wang describes the sequence introducing Hou Yibo as “couched in satiric terms.” Cheng, Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, 248; Wang, “Crows and Sparrows,” 86.
78 Leyda, Dianying, 174.
79 Bordwell et al., Classical Hollywood Cinema, 61.
80 Bordwell et al., 45.
81 Bordwell et al.
82 Bordwell et al., 29.
83 Bordwell et al.
84 Bordwell et al., 57.
85 Bordwell et al., 58.
86 George V. Kachkovski, Daniil Vasilyev, Michael Kuk, Alan Kingstone, and Chris N. H. Street, “Exploring the Effects of Violating the 180-Degree Rule on Film Viewing Preferences,” Communication Research 46, no. 7 (2019): 948–64.

4. PRESCRIPTIVE REALISM IN REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA OF THE SEVENTEEN YEARS

4 I by no means intend to say that Hollywood films are unsaturated with
political and ideological messages, only that Mao-era revolutionary films are much more up front about the political arguments they are making.


21 Qu, 49.

22 Mao, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum,” 469.

23 Zhou Yang, “Thoughts on Realism,” in Denton, Modern Chinese Literary Thought, 338.

24 Zhou, 337. Zhou Yang’s formulations serve as an example of how aesthetic debates among Chinese Marxists were connected with those among Western Marxists. His warning regarding penetrating reality’s outer layer is similar to Georg Lukács’s exhortation just two years later that a genuine realism should grasp objective reality “as it truly is,” rather than merely confining “itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface.” Lukács, “Realism in the Balance,” in Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and Georg Lukács, Aesthetics and Politics (London: Verso, 1977), 33.


27 Donald.


31 Quoted in Robert H. Stacy, Russian Literary Criticism: A Short History (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 188.


33 Zhou, “Thoughts on Realism,” 336.

34 Zhou, 343.

35 Mao, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum,” 470.


37 Brooks, 5.

38 Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism with Shores: The Conventions for the
Positive Hero,” in Socialist Realism without Shores, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, 27–50 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997). In the Soviet literature examined by Clark, the protagonist/apprentice is usually a young man, but in the Chinese films we will consider, it is more often a woman.

39 Berry, Postsocialist Cinema, 56–57.
40 Berry, 61.
41 Berry, 29.
42 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 96–97.
43 Plantinga, 96.
44 Chan, Chinese Revolutionary Cinema, 143.
45 Donald, Public Secrets, Public Spaces, 59–60.
46 Berry, Postsocialist Cinema, 56.
47 The nondiegetic quality of the flag is eased somewhat by a cut to a close-ups of waving red flags that begins the following scene—and the film’s final sequence—but they clearly are different flags that lack the hammer-and-sickle icon of the flag shown in the previous scene’s cutaway.
49 Donald, Public Secrets, Public Spaces, 62, 59.
50 Berry, “Sublimative Text,” 79.
51 Wang, Sublime Figure of History, 123.
52 Wang, 124, 127.
53 The contrast between Daojing’s desolate individualism at the beginning of the film and her fulfillment through collective belonging at the end was first analyzed by Dai Jinhua and discussed further by Ban Wang. See Dai Jinhua, Dianying lilun yu piping shouce [A manual of film theory and criticism] (Beijing: Kexue jishu chubanshe, 1993), 175–76, and Wang, Sublime Figure of History, 136.
54 Available in English as Yang Mo, Song of Youth (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978).
55 This exact romantic scenario—a couple in a rowboat surrounded by weeping willows—can be found, for example, in Bardleys the Magnificent, a John Gilbert vehicle directed by King Vidor in 1926, and the more general trope of young lovers meeting in a park is deployed in classics of 1930s Shanghai cinema, such as Love and Duty, Spring in the South (Nanguo zhi chun 南國之春; Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, 1932), and Crossroads.
56 I have personally tested this in classes in which I show the scene out of
context without English subtitles and ask random non-Chinese-speaking students to guess what happened.


58 See, e.g., Stephanie Hemelryk Donald’s analysis of the way *Yellow Earth* subverts the “socialist realist gaze” in *Public Secrets, Public Spaces*, 60–62.


60 Williams, *Screening Sex*, esp. 33–53.


62 Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” 54.

63 Such a display occurs in *The Cheat* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1915), *The Loves of Carmen* (Raoul Walsh, 1927), *Wild Girl* (Raoul Walsh, 1932), *Toni* (Jean Renoir, 1935), *Criss Cross* (Robert Siodmak, 1949), and *Human Desire* (Fritz Lang, 1954), to name only a few examples by leading directors covering five decades before *Red Detachment of Women* was made.

64 Yizhong Gu counts no fewer than seventy “films representing onscreen martyrdom in a direct and orthodox way” among a sample of more than three hundred Mao-era films. Gu, “Myth of Voluntary Death,” 43.

65 At the time of this writing, the scene in question can be accessed as “Sands of Iwo Jima Flag Raising” at https://youtu.be/-2Ym1rmWr3s.

66 Emily Wilcox has made a similar, perhaps on first glance surprising comparison between Chinese comic dance performances of the Seventeen Years and American television of the 1950s, both of which are instances of “a broader pattern of international post-WWII mass entertainment culture” that “reinforced the basic stories—typically fantasies—upon which an idealized form of national identity was constructed.” Emily Wilcox, “Joking after Rebellion: Performing Tibetan-Han Relations in the Chinese Military Dance ‘Laundry Song’ (1964),” in *Maoist Laughter*, ed. Ping Zhu, Zhuoyi Wang, and Jason McGrath (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019), 57.


5. SOCIALIST FORMALISM AND THE END(S) OF REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA


2 This, for example, is the explanation promulgated by the best-selling but widely discredited biography *Mao: The Unknown Story*, by Jung Chang and Jon Holliday (New York: Random House, 2005).


5 Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, and Wang Hongwen 王洪文.

6 In what is widely considered the founding work of “scar” fiction, the short story “Class Counsellor” (“Ban zhuren” 班主任 by Liu Xinwu 刘心武, 1977), for example, a conscientious educator tries to “save the children who suffered at the hands of the Gang of Four” (167). The story refers to Jiang Qing as the “white-boned demon” (157), a villain from the Ming dynasty classic novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji* 西游记). The story appears in the English anthology *The Wounded: New Stories of the Cultural Revolution*, 77–78, trans. Geremie Barmé and Bennett Lee, 147–78 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1979).

7 As chapter 4 details, the *socialist realist gaze* was coined by Donald in her book *Public Secrets, Public Spaces*.

8 See the introduction for discussions of these categories of cinematic realism.


10 Landsberg.

11 Landsberg.

12 Landsberg, 17.

14 Rosen, 19.

15 Rosen, 172.

16 Rosen, 170.

17 Rosen, 182.


20 Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 33.


23 Schweinitz, *Film and Stereotype*, 40.

24 Schweinitz, 51.


28 Zou Rong, who published a call to arms titled *The Revolutionary Army* (*Geming jun* 革命军) in 1903, died in prison at age twenty in 1905. Two years later, pioneering feminist and revolutionary Qiu Jin was arrested and beheaded in her hometown for her writings and for helping to plot an uprising. Accounts of those cultural icons as well as Perovskaya’s influence in China can be found in Jonathan Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895–1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 77–93.
The *Daybreak* scene was in part a remake of Greta Garbo’s execution scene in *Dishonoured* (Josef von Sternberg, 1931), as is detailed in Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism,” *Film Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2000): 19.


The 1974 color remake is available on DVD with English subtitles under the alternative title *Guerrillas Sweep the Plain*.

The term *suppositional* (*jiading* 假定) tends to be used to describe the mise-en-scène of the play as a whole, whereas *subjunctive* (*xuni* 虚拟) tends to refer to the type of gestural pantomime used by the performers. For a fuller discussion of suppositionality, see Jason McGrath, “Suppositionality, Virtuality, and Chinese Cinema,” *Boundary 2* 49, no. 1 (2022): 263–92.

Such an aesthetic of suppositionality and standardized poses rather than realism was precisely what early Chinese film theorist Gu Kenfu condemned as inferior in Chinese drama compared to the new, more intrinsically realist medium of film, as discussed in chapter 1.

Pang Laikwan documents that in 1970, the same year that the first film spinoffs of *yangbanxi* were released, a stunning 245, or 62 percent, of the 393 book titles in arts and literature published in China were connected to *yangbanxi*, including scripts, music scores, and photo collections. Pang, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production during China’s Cultural Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017), 91.

Tom Gunning distinguishes a “cinema of attractions” that focuses on presenting spectacles to an audience from the classical “cinema of narrative integration,” in which the telling of a story takes priority, in his “Cinema of Attractions.” Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar argue that Chinese opera films and martial arts films, including those of the *yangbanxi*, constitute a cinema of attractions that extends throughout

In the film as a whole, 57 percent of the shots have mobile framing.

My analysis of this scene supports Chris Berry’s argument that while there is “a consistent cinematic poetics for the film versions of the models,” nonetheless, in comparison to the initial ones, the later model opera films showed a “more evolved” and “more dynamic” style, including an ability to “use the camerawork to move the audience more directly into the mise-en-scène, creating a more 3D and less flat experience.” Chris Berry, “Red Poetics: The Films of the Chinese Cultural Revolution Revolutionary Model Operas,” in *The Poetics of Chinese Cinema*, ed. Gary Bettinson and James Udden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 44, 45.


The rejected modes included alternative socialist ideas like the “truthful writing” (*xie zhenshi* 写真实) advocated by censured writer and literary theorist Hu Feng 胡风; the antidogmatic idea of a “broad path of realism” (*xianshizhuyi— guangkuo de dao lu* 现实主义—广阔的道路) suggested by Qin Zhaoyang 秦兆阳; the “deepening of realism” (*xianshizhuyi shenhua* 现实主义深化) and use of believable “middle characters” (*zhongjian renwu* 中间人物) promoted by the author, critic, and cultural official Shao Quanlin 邵荃麟; and the criticism of the emphasis on narratives of war (“the smell of gunpowder”) by playwright, screenwriter, and former deputy minister of culture Xia Yan 夏衍—all of which Jiang Qing and her allies grouped together and dubbed as a “black anti-Party and anti-socialist line.” All this is laid out in “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art of the Armed Forces with Which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ching,” *Peking Review*, no. 23 (June 1967): 11. While the “Summary,” widely believed to have been authored by Jiang Qing herself, was published in June 1967, the forum itself had taken place in February 1966. An excellent discussion of it can be found in Richard King, “Great Changes in Critical Reception: ‘Red Classic’ Authenticity and the ‘Eight Black Theories,’” in *The Making and Remaking of China’s “Red Classics”: Politics, Aesthetics,*
and Mass Culture, ed. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, 22–41 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017).

44 For an early study of these Cultural Revolution critical denunciations of other modes of realism, see Mowry, Yang-pan hsi, 42–59.


46 Pang, Art of Cloning, 92.

47 Pearson, Eloquent Gestures.

48 Pearson, 25.

49 Xing Ye, “Pingyuan youji dui xiugai ji” [Account of revision of Guerrillas on the Plain], Bai nian chao [Hundred year tide], no. 5 (1999): 74–77.

50 Xing, 76.

51 Xing, 75.

52 Pang, Art of Cloning, 92.

53 Xing, “Pingyuan youji dui xiugai ji,” 76.


55 Bazin, 33–34.

56 Xing, “Pingyuan youji dui xiugai ji,” 76.

57 In the opera version, the Japanese commander’s name has been changed to Kameta, and of course he is played not by Fang Hua but by an opera performer.


59 Pang, Art of Cloning, 102.

60 Pang, 103. On the temporality of the Cultural Revolution, see also Barbara Mittler, A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), 380–84. Mittler complicates the view of the later years of the Cultural Revolution as only monotonous repetition by pointing out that many artists felt there was a significant artistic opening up beginning in the early 1970s, when, for example, more artistic exchanges with other nations resumed.

61 The “three prominences” is the Cultural Revolution artistic formula requiring that, in a fictional drama, the positive characters stand out from among all the characters, a group of heroic characters stand out from among the positive characters, and a single great hero stands out from among the heroic characters. For an analysis of how this played out in the poetics of the yangbanxi films, see Berry, “Red Poetics,” 36–39.


63 Clark, 57.
64 Barbara Mittler shows that although it was coined in November 1966, before the number of model works expanded, the label “eight model works” was not commonly used until after the fall of the Gang of Four, in a way that falsely compressed the number of works that were consumed to reinforce the new official narrative of artistic constriction and stagnation during the Cultural Revolution. Mittler, A Continuous Revolution, 47.

65 Clark, Chinese Cultural Revolution, 56. The next chapter discusses a 1983 film set in the Cultural Revolution, River without Buoys (Meiyou hangbiao de heliu 没有航标的河流; Wu Tianming 吴天明), which has a scene in which the protagonists plead to be excused from a required public viewing of a yangbanxi film on the grounds that they have already seen it so many times.


67 Clark, Chinese Cultural Revolution, 259.


69 Yurchak, 25.

70 Yurchak, 10.


72 Lefort, 211.

73 Wang Hui, China’s Twentieth Century: Revolution, Retreat and the Road to Equality (London: Verso, 2016), 155.


75 Lefort, 137.

76 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 10.

77 Bazin, “Myth of Stalin in the Soviet Cinema,” 34.

78 Maurice Meisner, Marxism, Maoism, and Utopianism: Eight Essays (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 156, 163, 164.

79 Meisner, 156, 168–69.

80 Meisner, 170.

81 Meisner, 183.

82 The term used during the Cultural Revolution was jixu geming 继续革命, though it obviously relates to the earlier Trotskyist concept of “permanent revolution,” which had been translated as buduan geming 不断革命.

84 Pickowicz, China on Film, 86–87.
88 Gaines, 59–60.
89 The only model opera film that does not end with a tableau vivant is Raid on the White Tiger Regiment (Qixi baihu tuan 奇袭白虎团; Su Li 苏里, 1972). Of the other nine model opera films, five use a track-in during the shot, one has a track-out, two have no mobile framing, and one (Fighting on the Plain) uses a zoom-in. Note that the model ballet films are not included here, because they do not tend to end in tableaux vivants. Note also that one video version of Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy that is now available substitutes freeze-frames edited together with what feel like jump cuts for the tableau vivant plus track-in of the original film. These freeze-frames are made from the original shot, and I have not been able to determine when this version was created and circulated.
91 The entire script of the Fighting on the Plains yangbanxi is available at http://www.360doc.com/.
93 Sypher, 262.
94 Sypher, 266.
95 Sypher, 267.
99 Ban Wang, The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in
NOTES TO CHAPTER 6  371

Twentieth-Century China (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 134.
100 Roberts, Maoist Model Theatre, 72.
101 Berry, “Red Poetics,” 36.
103 Thompson, 135.
104 Mittler, A Continuous Revolution, 30.
106 Keathley defines the “cinephiliac moment” as “the fetishizing of fragments of a film, either individual shots or marginal (often unintentional) details in the image, especially those that appear only for a moment.” Keathley, Cinephilia and History; or, The Wind in the Trees (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 7.
107 Mullarkey, Philosophy and the Moving Image, 158.
109 See, e.g., a musician’s comments in Mittler, A Continuous Revolution, 22.
111 Xing Fan, Staging Revolution: Artistry and Aesthetics in Model Beijing Opera during the Cultural Revolution (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018), esp. 239–58.

6. A LONG TAKE ON POST–SOCIALIST REALISM

1 “Scar literature” or “literature of the wounded” (shanghen wenxue 伤痕文学) was one of the first new movements in literature following the Cultural Revolution, appearing first in 1977 and continuing into the early 1980s in various forms, including in a number of “scar” films. It allowed for public expression of the traumas and dislocations of the Cultural Revolution and introduced elements of humanism and individualism that distanced it from the revolutionary cultural forms of the Mao era.
2 The Four Modernizations—of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology—were advocated by Zhou Enlai as early as the 1960s but became undisputed national policy only after Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978. The initial “scar” stories of 1977–78 would speak not of the Four Modernizations but of the better days to
come under the tenure of Hua Guofeng 华国锋, who briefly led China immediately after the Cultural Revolution.


4 Schweinitz, Film and Stereotype, 22.

5 Schweinitz, 110.

6 Schweinitz, 115.


10 Berry, Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China.

11 Yingjin Zhang, “Rebel without a Cause? China’s New Urban Generation and Postsocialist Filmmaking,” in The Urban Generation: Chinese

12 Berry, Postsocialist Cinema, 5.
13 McGrath, Postsocialist Modernity.
14 McGrath, 129–64. An earlier version of the same chapter appears in Zhang, Urban Generation, 81–114. I should acknowledge that Yaohua Shi used the closely related term postsocialist hyperrealism to describe the style of certain films of the second half of the 1990s, but my use of post-socialist realism asserts a much wider application. Shi, “Maintaining Law and Order in the City: New Tales of the People’s Police,” in Zhang, Urban Generation, 316–43.
19 Zhang and Li, “Tan dianying yuyan de xiandaihua,” 40.
20 Zhang and Li, 44.
21 Zhang and Li, 44.
22 Zhang and Li, 40–41.
23 Zhang and Li, 45.
24 Zhang and Li, 46.
26 Zhou Chuanji and Li Tuo, “Yi ge zhide zhongshi de dianying meixue xuepai: Guanyu chang jingtou lilun” [An attention-worthy school of

27 A graduate of the Beijing Film Academy who attended in the early 1990s once told me that Bazin was more foundational in the curriculum than any other single film theorist.

28 These figures do not take into account the variable coverage of certain journals in the database over the decades, but the point remains that interest in Bazin certainly appears not to have diminished in the twenty-first century compared with earlier years.

29 Schweinitz, Film and Stereotype, 238.

30 Schweinitz, 247.


32 My aversion to using “generation” as the primary way to categorize Post-Mao Chinese films comes partly from the immense variability of the Fifth Generation’s films over time. Taking as examples its three most prominent directors—Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and Tian Zhuangzhuang—their early films had much more in common with contemporaneous films of the Fourth Generation than with the melodramas of the Cultural Revolution aimed at Western festival audiences that the same directors would make in the 1990s—Farewell My Concubine, To Live, and The Blue Kite, respectively—or the martial arts epics they would make another decade or so later, that is, The Promise (Wuji无极; 2005), Hero (Yingxiong英雄; 2002), and The Warrior and the Wolf (Lang zai ji狼灾记; 2009), respectively.


34 Ni, 166.


38 These included Dong Cunrui 董存瑞 (Guo Wei 郭维, 1955), Railway Guerrillas (Tiedao youjidui 铁道游击队; Zhao Ming 赵明, 1956), and Land Mine Warfare (Dilei zhan 地雷战; Tang Yingqi 唐英奇, Xu Da 徐达, and Wu Jianhai 吴健海, 1962). I have written more about the link to Dong Cunrui in Jason McGrath, “Post-socialist Realism in Chinese

Berry, *Speaking in Images*, 87.


Walter Goodman, “China’s ‘Yellow Earth,’” *New York Times*, April 11, 1986; Goodman, “‘Big Parade,’ Celebration by the Chinese Military,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1988. Goodman, for example, does not even grasp *Yellow Earth*’s basic message about Cuiqiao’s fate and the irony of the line “It’s the Communists who save the people” in the song she sings.


Silbergeld, *China into Film*, 20.


“White telephone” is a metonym deriving from the lavish interiors that were the frequent settings for these films.

For more discussion of this, see McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*, 136–47.


56 Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 60.

57 Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*.


59 André Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language,” in Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, 102–3. Emphasis mine. (Gray, 37.) As in earlier chapters, where available, I use Barnard’s translations of Bazin rather than the looser ones by Hugh Gray that are more readily available in the United States, but I cite Gray’s translations of the same passages in parentheses in the notes.

60 This comparison is pursued through close readings of films from the two eras in Augusta Palmer, “Scaling the Skyscraper: Images of Cosmopolitan Consumption in *Street Angel* (1937) and *Beautiful New World* (1998),” in Zhang, *Urban Generation*, 181–204.


Semsel et al., *Chinese Film Theory*, 59–75. Following notes provide page numbers for the original and the translation, in that order.

64 Yang, 19–20; 63.
65 Yang, 26; 69.
66 Yang, 26; 72; Kracauer, *Theory of Film*.
67 Hang, *Literature the People Love*, 75.
68 Lukács, *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, 43.
69 Lukács.
70 Lukács, 132.
73 Wikipedia defines *mumblecore* as “a subgenre of independent film characterized by naturalistic acting and dialogue (sometimes improvised), low-budget film production, an emphasis on dialogue over plot, and a focus on the personal relationships of people in their 20s and 30s.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mumblecore.
74 I take the term “minor” ellipses—in which relatively unimportant plot points are skipped over and left for the audience to deduce as they follow the larger story—from David Desser’s analysis of ellipses in the films of Yasujiro Ozu. Desser, “A Filmmaker for All Seasons,” in *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Gary Needham (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 20–21.
77 Barmé and Minford, *Seeds of Fire*, 259.
80 Zhang and Li, “Tan dianying yuyan de xiandaihua,” 46.
83 David Bordwell, “Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film,” *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 16, and Bordwell,
For example, two of Zhang Yimou’s most well-known earlier films—Red Sorghum (Hong gaoliang 红高粱; 1987) and Raise the Red Lantern (Da hong denglong gaogao gua 大红灯笼高高挂; 1991)—both had ASLs of around ten seconds, while two of his most famous later films—Hero and House of Flying Daggers (Shimian maifu 十面埋伏; 2004)—had much lower ASLs of around four seconds. (Statistics taken from the Cinemetrics Database, https://cinemetrics.uchicago.edu/database.php.)

André Bazin, “The Evolution of Film Language,” 101. (Gray, 36.)

André Bazin, “De Sica: Metteur en Scène,” 76.


See David Bordwell’s definitive chapter on “parametric narration” in Bordwell, Narrative in the Fiction Film, 274–310.

Notable examples include The Opium War (Yapian zhanzheng 鸦片战争; Xie Jin 谢晋, 1997), The Founding of a Republic (Jianguo daye 建国大业; Huang Jianxin 黄建新 and Han Sanping 韩三平, 2009), The Founding of an Army (Jianjun daye 建军大业; Andrew Lau 刘伟强, 2017), and Operation Red Sea (Hong Hai xingdong 红海行动; Dante Lam 林超贤, 2018).


Schudson, 215.


For an extensive reading of the character of Du Lala as an “exemplary model” for the market age, reminiscent of those of the Mao era, see Marco Fumian, “Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion: Exemplary Literature,
100 Giovacchini and Sklar, *Global Neorealism*, 11.

### 7. CHINESE CINEMATIC REALISM(S) IN THE DIGITAL AGE

1 The earliest known film produced in China was the silent opera film *Dingjun Mountain* (*Dingjun Shan* 定军山; Ren Qingtai 任慶泰, 1905), no copies of which remain today.
3 Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*; Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*; Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*.
5 Chen Xihe, “Xuni xianshizhuyi he houdianying lilun” [Virtual realism and post-filmic theory], originally published in *Dangdai dianying* [Contemporary cinema], no. 2 (2001): 84–88. The essay is collected as the final entry in the authoritative *Bainian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan* [Selected works of one hundred years of Chinese film theory], ed. Ding Yaping (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2002), 2:720–36. Here I will cite the original article. Translations are my own.
6 Chen, 86.
7 Chen, 87.
10 Manovich, 295.
In an interview included as a special feature on the film’s international DVD release (Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2010), director John Woo confirms that for most of the shot, the bird, the ships, and the river are all “CG’d.” According to Wu, his producer warned him that it may be the most expensive shot in film history, helping to make *Red Cliff* the highest-budget film ever produced in Asia up to that time.


It should be noted that Gu Kenfu’s claim is questionable in the first place, because even in classical cinema, it was always possible to use stunt doubles, editing, or compositing techniques like rear projection to depict characters doing things that the actors playing them were not actually doing themselves.

Zhang Nuanxin and Li Tuo, “Tan dianying yuyan de xiandaihua” [On the modernization of film language], *Dianying yishu* [Film art], no. 3 (1979): 40.


Berry, *Jia Zhangke on Jia Zhangke*, 165.

Williams, “Melodrama Revised.”

Williams, 60–61.

Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*, 47–74.


Interestingly, whereas the sacrifice of the individual to the collective in *The Wandering Earth* is final, in *Interstellar*, following his plunge into a black hole, the hero gets to reappear, completely unharmed, in a hospital to be reunited with his estranged daughter, with the film making little attempt to explain this good fortune.

Crockett, “*Camera as Camera*,” 118.


Turnock, 269.


Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 117.


Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, 47.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

46 Chris Berry and Lisa Rofel, introduction to Berry et al., *New Chinese Documentary Film Movement*, 9.

47 Berry and Rofel, 10.

48 Tom Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 36.


50 Berry, *Jia Zhangke on Jia Zhangke*, 51.


52 Berry, *Jia Zhangke on Jia Zhangke*, 90–91.


54 Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 42.


57 Berry, *Jia Zhangke on Jia Zhangke*, 99–100.

58 For a lengthier discussion of these films and others depicting the Three Gorges project in some way, see Jason McGrath, “The Cinema of Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam in Feature Film and Video,” in *Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art*, by Wu Hung with Jason McGrath and Stephanie Smith, 33–46 (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2008).

59 These details of production were related by the director when he was present for a screening at the Hong Kong Science Museum in March 2013 during the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

60 Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 7. (Gray, 13.)


CONCLUSION


2 Time travel within a single shot is not unique either to this film or to contemporary digital cinema. Daniel Morgan gives several examples of it going back decades in his *The Lure of the Image: Epistemic Fantasies of the Moving Camera* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 18–19.

The film’s English subtitles translate these lines more prosaically as “It is impossible to retain a past thought, to seize a future thought, and even to hold onto [sic] a present thought.”


Stewart, “Interview.”

https://grasshopperfilm.com/film/kaili-blues/.

Bi Gan explains the shooting process in the Film at Lincoln Center Podcast cited in note 5.


Koepnick, 45, 189.

Koepnick, 22.

Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 44.


Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 44.

Perez, Material Ghost, 21. Gunning, too, rejects “the nonsensical position that we take the cinema image for reality, that we are involved in a hallucination or ‘illusion’ of reality.” Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 44.

Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 45.


Mullarkey, 61, 57. Emphasis original.


Ghosh, 33.
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