Mainstream Culture Refocused

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Notes

Introduction

1. Kewang was well received among the population when it appeared around 1990 and 1991. It was hailed as the first Chinese shinei ju (literally, “indoor drama,” which refers to the way in which the drama was shot). The popularity of the drama also generated critical attention. In English writings alone, critical responses include Jianying Zha, “Yearnings”; Lisa Rofel “Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics in China”; and Wu Di and Lisa Pola, eds., Class and Gender Debates over the Television Soap Opera “Aspirations.” After Yearnings, dramas such as Beijingren zai Niuyue (A Beijinger in New York, 1993), Yangniu zai Beijing (Foreign babes in Beijing, 1995), Yongzheng Wangchao (The Yongzheng court, 1998), and Zouxiang gonghe (Marching toward the republic, 2004) have generated critical attention outside of China. See for example, Sheldon Lu, “Soap Opera in China: The Transnational Politics of Visuality, Sexuality, and Masculinity”; Lydia Liu, “Beijing Sojourners in New York: Postcolonialism and the Question of Ideology”; Xueping Zhong, “Multiple Readings and Personal Reconfigurations against the ‘Nationalist Grain’” (an essay partially about A Beijinger in New York); and Ying Zhu, “Yongzheng Dynasty and Chinese Primetime Television Drama.” In China, much more critical attention has been given to television drama, be it individual hits or various “new” trends. I will describe some of the major responses when discussing specific subgenres and dramas.

2. There have been sporadic publications on Chinese media and television in the last two decades, but not until very recently have there been book-length publications on the phenomenon of television drama. Most of them are studies by media studies scholars. See James Lull, China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance; Mike Chinoy, China Live: People Power and the Television Revolution; Michael Curtin, Playing to the World’s Biggest Audience; Ying Zhu, Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market; Ying Zhu, Michael Keane, and Ruoyun Bai, eds., TV Drama in China; and Ying Zhu and Chris Berry, eds., TV China.


4. For a discussion of “codes,” see, for example, Robert Allen, “On Reading Soaps.”

5. It was not until I had completed the first drafts of this manuscript that most of the publications mentioned in note 2 on Chinese television drama came out. My book treats television drama as a complex cultural form within the larger contexts of both contemporary and modern Chinese history.


8. Recent articles on individual dramas have analyzed and interpreted layers of complex social, cultural, and ideological meanings and contradictions. See notes 2 and 3.

9. It is important to acknowledge here that postmodern theories, developed in the postindustrial West, have made the questioning of the high-low cultural hierarchy possible. The study of ethnography and of “everyday life” informed by cultural anthropology has offered a significant contribution to scholarly recognition of the importance in understanding “mainstream popular culture.”


11. Some Chinese critics are beginning to argue that this tendency is indicative of tensions in the West in which cultural struggles between nobility and the bourgeoisie continue, with the latter overtaking the former in power position while also inheriting the former’s hierarchical sense of culture. See, for example, Cheng Wei, Zhongchan jieji de haizimen (Children of middle class); Wang Xiaoyu, “Yichang wenhua de guangrong geming” (A glorious revolution of culture).


15. See Cheng Wei, Zhongchan jieji de haizimen, and Wang Xiaoyu, “Yichang wenhua de guangrong geming.”

16. I must emphasize that I do not mean there has been no scholarly attention paid to mainstream popular culture. What I refer to is the tenacious tendency, or discomfort, on the part of scholars in the humanities when it comes to mainstream popular cultural texts.

17. On the one hand, the dominant class’ ideology is transmitted via a populist-apparent trajectory thanks to the commercialization of the technology-aided mass media. What appears to be populist, at the same time, is in actuality hegemonic, controlled, and manipulated via commercialized mass media governed by the interests of capital. Mainstream (popular) culture, in other words, is simultaneously populist appearing and yet hegemonic. On the other hand, starting from the early twentieth century, the various avant-garde—modernist—arts and literature emerged as resisting forces against the rising power of mass-produced popular media and their representations, only to be canonized later back into the mainstream (elite) culture. Thus the formation of “mainstream popular culture” in the West has itself always been full of tensions and contradictions.
18. In Bauman’s discussion, he does not seem to be concerned with the “teloes” of cultural structure and praxis. Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*.

19. I quote Williams extensively here not only because he is one of few major cultural theorists in the West who ventured into discussions of television and television drama and offered valuable observations, but also because of his interest in understanding the structural implications of this cultural form.


21. Ibid., 50.

22. Ibid., 53.

23. Ibid., 50.

24. Ibid., 53.

25. Ibid., 53.

26. Exceptions include media-study scholars and media critics such as Bill Moyers, whose program can be seen on PBS.

27. Numerous discussions of television culture (including television drama) have been published in China. So far, however, most remain in the form of short critical reviews or essays in which critics offer shorthand commentaries on either a phenomenon or a popular drama. In recent years, some scholars in the field of communication and media studies have approached the study of television culture from perspectives informed by Western communications and cultural studies.


29. Ibid., 4.

30. Ibid., 14.

31. I notice a change in Bai’s view in her recently published article “‘Clean Officials,’ Emotional Moral Community, and Anti-Corruption Television Dramas.” There she notes the role of writers in television drama production in China. At the same time, however, the state-market dichotomy remains a dominant view in her discussion. See Ruoyun Bai, “‘Clean Officials,’ Emotional Moral Community, and Anti-Corruption Television Dramas.”

32. Yin Hong, “Chongtu yu gongmou—lun zhongguo dianshiju de wenhua celüe” (Conflicts and collaborations: on the cultural strategies of Chinese television drama). The English version is Yin Hong, “Meaning, Production, Consumption: The History and Reality of Television Drama in China.”

33. Ibid., 8.

34. Jing Wang, “Introduction.”


37. *Fazhan shi ying daoli* is a famous slogan attributed to Deng Xiaoping, allegedly made during his famous *nan xun*, or tour of the south, in 1992 against the backdrop of the fallout of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident and its political aftermath. On both concrete and symbolic levels, this slogan became the motto for the subsequent economic “takeoff,” as the Communist Party–led state embarked on a “development” oriented market reform while leaving political reform on the sidelines.


40. Though intellectual debates in China in the last decades have been simplistically labeled as being between the “new left” and “liberals,” a fuller understanding of the issues debated requires us to look beyond mere labels. See the discussion in Chaohua Wang, ed., *One China, Many Paths*; Wang Ban’s review of *One China, Many Paths*, in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*; Mark Leonard, “China’s New Intelligentsia”; Qin Hui, “Dividing the Big Family Assets”; Xudong Zhang, *Whither China?*; and Wang Hui “Depoliticized Politics.”


42. Ibid., 175.


44. *Zhongguo dianshi hongbishu*, 181.

45. Because of the lack of television sets, access to television broadcasting was a privilege in China throughout the 1960s. Television remained a highly limited medium through the end of the 1970s. Starting from the early 1980s, as possession of a television set became a popular “obsession,” content production including commercials for television was poised to become a major cultural industry.

46. *Zhongguo dianshi hongpishu*, 162.

47. Ibid., 179.


49. *Zhibo fenli* (separation of production and broadcasting) refers to television stations no longer being the only content producers (as most used to be). The practice of “separation” began in the 1990s in China, although media critics in China today continue to debate what it means, how it has been practiced, and what problems it has caused. See Li Peng, “Guanyu zhibo fenli” (About *zhibo fenli*).

50. In the late 1970s and early 1980s when television industry was being jump-started, television stations in China were organized into a four-level structure: national (CCTV), provincial (including Beijing and Shanghai), city, and county. That structure, known as *siji ban dianshi*, or, roughly, four-level governments making television, was set up mainly to expand coverage. Stations at the lowest level have functioned mainly as transmitting stations and rarely make programs of their own except perhaps local news. From the early 1990s, there have been increasing calls to restructure the system, and the result has been a variety of new structural models such as the so-called Beijing, Shanghai, and Hunan models.


52. For further understanding of how private production companies work and do not work, see *Jiexi Zhongguo mingying dianshi*.

53. The notion *zhuxuan lü* is said to have been coined by photographer Song Haiyan in 1987. Shortly after that, debates followed concerning the notions of *zhuxuan lü* and *duoyuanhua* (multiple-ism). It was not until 1994, when Jiang Zemin, the then secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party, put forward the notion *hongyang zhuxuan lü, tichang duoyuan hua* (literally, “to expand the main melody and promote diverse subject matter”) at the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Mei Lanfang (http://blog.sina.com.cn/S/blog-4cc721ef0000anj.html).
54. The notion of *wenyi wei gongnongbing fuwu* originated in Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature” in 1942.


56. There have been continuing criticisms leveled at the realist tradition in Chinese literature. My discussion here is fully aware of the existing arguments.

57. *Hexie shehui*, or (build a) harmonious society, is a slogan created, promoted, and upheld by the Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao leadership when it came into power in 2002. For more information on this leadership, see John Wong and Lai Hongyi, eds., *China into the Hu-Wen Era: Policy Initiatives and Challenges*; Sujian Guo and Baogang Guo, eds., *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*.

58. Since the rise of television drama as a major cultural phenomenon, there has been constant state censorship to curb the popularity of certain subgenres. Attempts at curtailing the popularity of anticorruption dramas and police-crime dramas and decisions to remove imported dramas from prime-time slots are examples of the tensions between the official controllers of cultural production and those who produce cultural texts. The constant censoring acts on the part of the official cultural authorities at the same time indicate that there have been constant attempts, either driven by the market or caused by a mixture of factors, at breaking official controls, rules, and boundaries in the making of television drama.

59. There is often tension among certain groups of practitioners—writers, directors, and actors—whose artistic sense continues to be oriented to still-prevalent hierarchy-oriented value judgments. Ambivalence toward popular culture continues to be shared by scholars in certain circles of academia.

60. After I wrote this, I noticed the similar point made by Jing Wang using the phrase *deng xia hei*. She ends her introduction to *Locating China* with some cautionary remarks: “I would caution us against treating all organized and planned spaces in contemporary China as devoid of transformative potentials. This is not just a theoretical issue. In real life, Chinese have a saying ‘The most invisible place is the spot right underneath a light.’” *Locating China*, 28.

61. In the 1980s, television dramas that were adapted from well-known contemporary authors’ works, including *Jinye you baofengxue* (Upcoming storm tonight, 1985) by Liang Xiaosheng and *Cuotuo suiyue* (Times idled away, 1983) by Ke Yunlu. Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, writers whose names are closely (and controversially) related with television drama include Chi Li, Wang Hailing, Wan Fang, Lu Tianming, Zhang Chenggong, Zhou Meisen, Zhang Ping, and Hai Yan. To a lesser extent, well-known writers such as Zhang Kangkang, Tie Ning, Ah Lai, Wei Ren, and others have also seen their works adapted to television drama.

62. There have been periodic discussions in China about the role of writers in television drama. See, for example, Xie Xizhang, “Dianshiju ‘Zhang Damin de xingfu shenghuo’ de wenhua pingxi” (A cultural analysis of the television drama *Zhang Damin’s Happy Life*); Du Qingchun, “Zouxiang wenhua shengchan de jingdian wenben zai
shengchan” (The popular cultural industry’s reproduction of classics); Zhang Yi, “Shashibiya hua yu dianshiju jingping” (Shakespeare-ization and good television drama); and Shu Jinyu, “Remen dianshiju: ming zuojia men bu maizhang” (Television drama as big hits: famous writers’ cool responses). The writer of the last piece reports that, despite their expressed contempt toward television drama, writers like Chi Li, Wang Shuo, and Liang Xiaosheng, have all directly or indirectly participated in television production.

63. The perennial debates on “realism” in the Chinese context are indicative of academic critics’ anxiety over the impact of “mainstream” culture and its alleged conservative ideological tendency.

64. Examples of the consideration of television as an art form can be found in articles and books published in the 1980s and 1990s in China. They include such magazines as Zhongguo dianshi (Chinese television), Dianshi yishu (Television art), Yingshi yishu (Art of film and television), Dangdai dianshi (Contemporary television), and Dianshiju (Television drama), and such books as Song Jialing, Dianshiju yishu lun (Theory of the art of television drama); Yang Tiancun, Dianshiju chuangzuo lun (On creating television drama); Lu Haibo, Dianshiju meixue (Aesthetics of television drama); Zeng Qingrui and Lu Rong, Zhongguo dianshiju de shenme yishu (The aesthetics of Chinese television drama); Zhong Yibing, Zhongguo dianshi yishu fazhanshi (History of Chinese television art); Wu Suling, Zhongguo dianshiju fazhan shigang (A historical outline of Chinese television drama); and Xu Hong, Dianshiju shenme tezheng tansuo (An exploration of the aesthetics of television drama).

65. Examples include such premodern classics made into television dramas as Hong-lou meng (Dream of the red chamber, 1987) and Xiyou ji (Journey to the west, 1986) as well as modern classics such as Sishi tongtang (Four generations under one roof, 1985; original novel by Lao She).

66. Like the movie-related magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, contemporary television-related magazines must be recognized as a major component of television as a cultural industry and cultural form. By “television guilds” I refer to organizations that call themselves dianshi yishujia xiehui or dianying dianshi gongzuozhe xiehui (association of television artists or association of television and film professionals). Some of the major television magazines are sponsored by one such association but funded by a particular television station. In fact, most of these magazines are published by a television station. This has to do in part with the control of publication in China, where no business can form an independent publishing house without being attached to a state-owned or state-sponsored publishing entity—hence the collaborations between “associations” and television stations. Even with such controls in place, there are at least fifty-odd television-related magazines, ranging from magazines purely for entertainment to somewhat scholarly ones.

67. Imported dramas from the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Japan, and Hong Kong were among the first seen on television that aimed mainly to entertain. For discussion of imported foreign television dramas in the 1980s, see Junhao Hong, The Internationalization of Television in China: The Evolution of Ideology, Society, and Media since the Reform; Junhao Hong, “China’s TV Program Import 1958–1988: Towards the Internationalization of Television?”; and Junhao Hong, “Penetration and Interaction of Mass Media between Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Mainland China: Trends and Implications.”
Generally speaking, a series refers to a collection of episodes whose stories begin and end within one episode; only the characters and their professions remain the same. A serial, in contrast, is a collection of episodes with a developing central story. Raymond Williams gives a clear definition in his discussion of television drama in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form,* 54.

By the end of 2002, in major cities in China, through cable and depending on which city one is in, a household can have access to twenty-five to forty channels, including the eleven specialized channels from the CCTV, several channels from local and provincial stations, and many more satellite channels from other provinces. Since then, the number of the channels on CCTV alone has increased to sixteen. In some regions, many households now receive more than fifty channels on average.

Since television programming in China is not divided by “seasons” as it is in the United States, showing television dramas is a yearlong business, punctuated by what are deemed to be important anniversaries, which in turn are followed by dramas with related subject or themes. The restructuring of television stations in recent years has created additional time slots to be filled, and many are being filled with none other than television drama, either new shows or reruns. On CCTV alone, at least four of its sixteen specialized channels show television drama daily with Channel 1 (Zhongyang Yitai) and Channel 8 (Dianshiju Pingdao) having the privilege of the first run of a new show in prime time (6:00–10:00 p.m.). The other two channels show reruns outside prime time, with a few additional channels also including drama in their programming. In any given location, many households have access to dozens of local and satellite channels in addition to CCTV that also show television dramas. Pirated copies of hit shows or shows that promise to be popular are readily available on various street corners in cities where small-time vendors of pirated DVDs and VCDs lurk. Though according to surveys many—particularly students and young and middle-aged professionals—do not bother to watch most of the television dramas, television dramas are still the second most watched type of program in China (next to television news and “news magazines”), and surpass film as the major source of visual dramas.


This piece of information came from some of the people—script writers, directors, and producers—I interviewed in Beijing in 2003 and 2004. It is difficult to find an official figure, and most likely there is none, for not only do companies come and go, but there is no official entity that keeps count.

According to those I interviewed, one of the fears in producing a television drama is that a finished product may never be broadcast even if it is purchased by television stations. This happens all the time, often for unpredictable reasons, some political, some commercial, and some simply whimsical.

A few studies make direct reference to “melodrama” in the contemporary Chinese cultural context. See, for example, Yuejin Wang, “Melodrama as Historical Understanding: The Making and Unmaking of Communist History,” and Lisa Rofel’s “Yearnings: Televisual Love and Melodramatic Politics.” My study resembles these discussions in recognizing the complexity of “melodrama” but argues for a more focused understanding of melodrama as a narrative mode.
75. For fuller discussions on “melodrama and modernity,” see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts.*

76. Given the limited scope of this book, I am unable to explore the relationship between Chinese melodrama and Chinese modernity, but the issue remains a viable one for future investigation.


80. Ibid., 37–47.


82. Ibid., 38–39.

83. Ibid., 51.

84. I do not mean to say, however, that there has been no experimentation with the visual. Li Shaohong, a female director of both film and television, has produced two television dramas, *Daming gongci* (Palace of desire, 1999) and *Juzi hongle* (As tangerines turn red, 2002), in which she has experimented with such visual elements as costumes, the use of color, makeup, and other components of the mise-en-scène. Such experimentation, however, is rare.

85. For the earliest mentions of *zhuxuan lü* in China, see Ai Zhisheng, “Jinyibu duan-zheng chuangzuofangxiang, fanrong dianshiju yishu” (Continue to follow the correct direction in flourishing the art of television drama); Chen Zhiang, “‘Zhuxuan lü’ yijie” (One interpretation of “main melody”); and Liu Xiliang, “Hongyang zhuxuan lü, tichang duoyang hua” (Promote main melody and encourage variation). For an early discussion in English of “main melody,” see Claire Conceison, “The Main Melody Campaign in Chinese Spoken Drama.”

86. Almost every Chinese article or book I have seen that names and lists television drama subgenres names them differently. While some list “history drama” (*lishi ju*), costume drama (*gu zhuang ju*), martial arts drama (*wuxia ju*), and emperor drama (*huangdi ju*) separately, for example, others list all of them under either the rubric of *guzhuang ju* or *lishi ju.* Depending on the focus of a critical piece, some would disdainfully identify all dramas set in the Qing dynasty as *bianzi ju,* or pigtail dramas (in reference to the Qing male hairstyle). Some critics list *hunyin jiating ju* (family-marriage drama) and *shenghuo ju* (everyday-life drama) separately; others further separate *nüxing wenti* (women’s problem) dramas, depending on how a story is organized. Some dramas are grouped under *jingfei jun/pian* (cop drama), and others are not because they devote their narrative focus mainly to the inner workings of different levels of officialdom, thereby exposing various types of (relatively) higher-level corruption. Last but not least,
while dramas about the former Communist Party leaders or military “heroes” from the various phases of the Communist revolution (known as hongse jingdian, or red classics) and those about the “positive” aspects of everyday life have generally been labeled as zhuxuan lü, a close examination may raise the question of what “main melody” really means. The list of inconsistencies continues.

87. As already noted, during much of the 1980s, most popularly received dramas shown on television came mainly from two sources: (1) imported dramas from such countries and regions as Japan, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, and Hong Kong; and (2) domestically produced adaptations of classic novels. The political upheavals in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the subsequently accelerated economic reforms changed, among other things, the landscape of the production, broadcasting, and consumption of television drama. Genre expansion in television drama is indicative of this change.

88. Jeffrey Kinkley, Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China: The Return of the Political Novel.

89. There have been studies in English on Kewang (Yearnings, 1990), Beijingren zai Niuju (A Beijinger in New York, 1993), Yangniu zai Beijing (Foreign babes in Beijing, 1995), Yongzheng wangchao (The Yongzheng court, 1998), and Zouxiang gonghe (Marching toward the republic, 2004). See also note 2.

90. For example, a crime drama can be identified as a jingfei ju/pian (literally, “cop and criminal drama”) but can also be identified as a she’an ju (drama of legal cases). In the latter case, some of the dramas may be identified as anticorruption dramas.

Chapter One: Looking through the Negatives


3. There is a “past-looking tendency” in many of the fifth-generation films in which the filmmakers examine such issues as “tradition,” “modernity,” and “revolution.” Critics have viewed their choice of topics as “allegorical,” and most of the readings have been in that vein, regardless of whether the critics agree with Fredric Jameson or not. For studies of the fifth-generation filmmakers, see Chris Berry, ed., Perspectives on Chinese Cinema; Rey Chow, Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema; Jerome Silbergeld, China into Film: Frames of Reference in Contemporary Chinese Cinema; Xudong Zhang, Chinese Modernism: Culture Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema.


6. It is interesting to note that, on commenting on Ermo, many of my students see the “harmful” effects of television on rural China. What they tend to miss is the contradiction in the representations of Ermo the character, including the fact that, as a
rural woman, Ermo does not seem to fit their stereotypes of Chinese women, who are supposed to be submissive, homebound, and not interested in making money. What is missing in this kind of reading is a historical knowledge that recognizes and understands (even if critically) the changes brought about by the socialist revolution and postsocialist reforms to the lives of women, in this case, in rural China. As in most cultural texts on contemporary China, the “revolution temporality” is unavoidably present regardless of whether or not it is intended.

7. As one of the best-known contemporary “urban generation” or “new generation” filmmakers in China, Jia Zhangke has been reviewed, interviewed, and written about internationally. Examples include Shuqin Cui, “Negotiating In-Between: On New-Generation Filmmaking and Jia Zhangke’s Films”; Kevin Lee, “Jia Zhangke”; Xiaoping Lin, “Jia Zhangke’s Cinematic Trilogy: A Journey across the Ruins of Post-Mao China”; Jason McGrath, “The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic”; and Ban Wang, “Epic Narrative, Authenticity, and the Memory of Realism: Reflections on Jia Zhangke’s *Platform.*”

8. Among quite a few written mentions of Sun Wukong in Mao’s works (including *On Contradictions* [Mao dun lun], the best known is Mao’s poem “A Reply to Guo Moruo” (“Qilü: he Guo Moruo”), written in 1961.

9. These two slogans were widely circulated throughout the 1990s. *Yu shi ju jin* was coined during the era of Jiang Zemin in the 1990s, a period marked by an explosion in economic development and a neoliberal ideology of “free market” and “modernization” in support of developmentalist social and economic policies.


11. *Shanghai tan* was later chosen as one of the ten best made-in-Hong-Kong television dramas of the 1980s.

12. I was revising this chapter when the Wenchuan earthquake occurred in Sichuan Province. As I was watching this film again two weeks after the earthquake, I was struck by the eerie similarity between the devastating scenes of the earthquake and the demolished sites shown in this film. The fact that both are located in Sichuan made the similarity even more striking.

13. It is interesting to note that in 2008 reruns of what are known as *jingping dian-shiju*, or television drama classics, were programmed by many major television stations including Central Chinese Television (CCTV). See Huang Qing, “Weihe jingpingju chongbo yu yan yu lie?” (Why is there an increasing interest in reruns of television drama classics?).

**Chapter Two: Re-collecting “History” on Television**

The unique feature of this introduction is its attention to debates, carried out in China by Chinese critics about the drama.

2. “All history is contemporary (history)” has become such a frequently quoted and circulated statement that, like many frequently used proverbs, its origin appears to be irrelevant in its use. Nevertheless, the “dictum” is said to come from the Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). See Angelo A. De Gennaro, *The Philosophy of Benedetto Croce: An Introduction*. The following quote from De Gennaro’s book makes the same point: “The practical need that is at the basis of every historical judgment gives history the character of ‘contemporary history’ because though facts are remote or very remote, history always refers to the need and to the present situation in which those facts propagate their vibrations” (46).

3. In the development of (what in English is termed) local operas in traditional China, over time many such operas developed repertoires about historical and legendary figures and borrowed textual materials from one another and staged them in their particular theatrical style. In modern times, the introduction of Western-style spoken drama (at the turn of the twentieth century) broke the dominance of traditional (musical) theater and their repertoires, and made it possible for dramas to deal with contemporary or modern issues. Both Beijing opera (a theatrical form that originated from two regional local operas and evolved into its own form in the Qing court in the eighteenth century) and many local operas have continued to enjoy a modern presence, and many of their repertoires continue to be based on legendary and historical stories, with a few even finding their way into film. Modern writers such as Guo Moruo and others have tried creating history drama for both traditional and modern-drama theaters. During the Mao era, especially toward the beginning of that era and during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), “history” as represented by *di wang jiang xiang* (emperors and their generals and ministers) and *caizi jiaren* (traditional scholars and beauties) was criticized for not representing the spirit of “socialist realism” and was subsequently forced to disappear for about a decade. But after the Cultural Revolution, “history drama” returned with a vengeance, mostly on television, where “history” will be repeatedly re-collected and put on display.

4. It was not until the development of Western-style drama, *huaju* or spoken drama, that Chinese theater became “traditional.” “History drama,” in this sense, is a modern phenomenon.


6. Huo Yuanjia is a historical figure (1868–1910) known for his martial arts skills and for founding Jingwu Men (or Jingwu Tiyu Hui, a sports club emphasizing excellence in martial arts) in 1910 in Shanghai. Since his untimely death (presumably caused by poisoning), Huo Yuanjia has become a legendary figure in popular culture, especially in film and television: perhaps the two visual media best able to render martial arts in a way that attracts viewers’ interest. There have been a number of films and television dramas bearing his name. The 1981 version of the Hong Kong–made twenty-episode...
television drama was an instant success when it was shown on the mainland. Generations of Chinese today continue to remember the song that opened and ended each episode. For discussions of songs written for television dramas, please see Chapter 6 in this book.

7. Chen Zhen is believed to be a fictional character based on a number of people known to be related to Huo Yuanjia.

8. He Xiaobing, “Dianshiju ‘bianzi xianxiang’ guan kui” (A close look at the “phenomenon of pigtails” in television drama), 22–26. Conflicting dates have been given for the television dramas Dream of the Red Chamber and Journey to the West. He Xiaobing as well as Shao Qi, the author of Zhongguo dianshiju daolun (An introduction to Chinese television drama), date the two dramas as appearing in 1986 and 1987, respectively. The Wikipedia and Baidu baike on the Internet, among other sources, date the former as 1987. I follow the “popular” convention of dating it at 1987 (see http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki and http://baike.baidu.com/view/2571.htm).

9. The Chinese search engine Baidu lists 208,000 entries about the 1987 production of the television drama Dream of the Red Chamber. The passing away in 2007 of Chen Xiaoxu, the actress who played Lin Daiyü in that production, and the recent publication of Ji yi Honglou (Remembering Honglou) by Ouyang Fenqiang, who played Jia Baoyu, are two of the latest events that have revealed detailed information about the making of the drama.


11. The publication of “history novels,” or lishi xiaoshuo, by Eryuehe (pen name of Ling Jiefang) in the 1990s would become another inspiration and source for making emperor dramas. Some of the “seriously told” emperor dramas are adaptations from Eryuehe’s novels such as Yongzheng huangdi (Emperor Yongzheng, 1988), Kangxi dadi (Kangxi the great emperor, 1990–1992), and Qianlong huangdi (Emperor Qianlong, 1994–1996).

12. The former includes Wu Zetian (Empress Wu Zetian, 1995), Yongzheng wangchao (The Yongzheng court, 1998), Da ming gongci (Palace of desire, 2001), Kangxi wangchao (The Kangxi court, 2001), Qianlong wangchao (The Qianlong court, 2003), Xiaozhuang huanghou (Empress Xiaozhuang of the Qing dynasty), and, most recently, Han wu da di (Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty, 2004) and Qin Shi Huang (First Emperor of the Qin dynasty, 2003/2007). The playfully told dramas may or may not be titled after an emperor. They include Huanzhu gege (Princess Huanzhu) I, II, III (each is an independent long serial); Kangxi weifu sifang ji (Emperor Kangxi traveling undercover) I, II, III, IV, and V; Tiezui tongya Ji Xiaolan (Clever-and-sharp-mouthed Ji Xiaolan) I, II, III; Fengliu caizi Ji Xiaolan (Ji Xiaolan, the gifted talent, 2001); and Zaixiang Liu Luoguo (Prime minister Liu Luoguo, 1994).

13. See Susan M. Pearce, Museums, Objects and Collections; Susan M. Pearce, On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition. Quotation from Lydia Chiang, Collecting the Self: Body and Identity in Strange Tale Collections of Late Imperial China, 4–7.

15. Examples of critical commentaries on the emperor-drama phenomenon in China can be found in such journals and magazines as Zhongguo dianshi (Chinese television), Beijing dianying xueyuan xuebao (Journal of the Beijing Film Academy), Zhongguo guangbo yingshi (Chinese radio, film, and television), Dianshi yishu (Art of television), Dianshiju (Television drama), and many more.

16. I presented a paper on this issue titled “From Army Nurse to ‘Emperor Dramas’: Gender, Cultural and Political Implications of a Woman Director’s Career” at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, March 22–25, 2007, Boston.

17. Jingying, or elite, was a positive term during the 1980s, referring to the return and ascendance of intellectuals to the cultural center after the Cultural Revolution.

18. The heated nature of Chinese intellectual debates is said to have begun with Wang Hui’s article “Dangdai Zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti,” or “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity,” published in 1997. The English translation of the article is included in Wang’s China’s New Order, edited by Theodore Huters. Although intellectual debates in China since then have been at times personal, the passion is indicative of the coexistence of different political positions and ideological persuasions among contemporary Chinese intellectuals and the fact that there is actually nothing “depoliticized” in their debates.

19. During the 1980s, market forces remained rather negligible compared with the state’s role in the management of such media as television and film. There were also experiments by “elite” intellectuals using film and television for cultural criticism. Heshang, or River Elegy (1988), a six-episode television show, is a good example. Neither fiction nor a documentary, this show was a televisial version of intellectual musings about what intellectuals perceived to be the “ills” of the remnants of traditional Chinese culture and the need for China to modernize.


21. Music, films, literature, and television dramas from Hong Kong and Taiwan were among some of the early cultural products imported into the mainland in the 1980s. From the early 1990s, in addition to exchanges of cultural products, an increasing number of artists started traveling between the three regions, and they generated more transregional cultural exchanges. On the mainland, such cross-regional cultural exchanges generated anxiety among elites and cultural critics over the gang tai hua, or Hong-Kong- and Taiwan-ization, of Chinese culture.


23. At times, scholars have chosen to identify this kind of transregional cultural exchange under the general term “transnational.” See, for example, Sheldon Lu, ed., Transnational Chinese Cinemas; Sheldon Lu, China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity.

24. The actress Zhao Wei who played Xiao Yanzi became an instant household name after the first Huanzhu gege series. The fame also turned her into a public villain a few years later when she covered herself in a Japanese flag during a fashion show. As an actor, Zhao Wei has had trouble moving beyond her initial success. None of her subsequent roles in film or on television won her the kind of recognition that the character Xiao Yanzi did.

26. The three television dramas about these three Qing emperors are rough adaptations of Eryuehe’s (Ling Jiefang’s) novels.

27. It is generally understood that the entire project of the Shi ji (which used to be called the Taishigong shu, Taishigong ji, or Taishi ji—Taishi being the position of the officially appointed historian) was conceived by Sima Qian’s father Sima Tan, who reportedly told his son that he must try his utmost to complete a history book. What Sima Qian completed was a book of 5,125,600 words (in classical Chinese) that covers about three thousand years of history all the way to the reign of Emperor Wu.

28. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

29. In Chinese: “他建立了一个国家前所未有的尊严。他给了一个族群挺立千秋的自信。他的国号成了一个民族永远的名字。”

30. In addition to Ban Wang’s The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China, some of the most recent musings about this and related issues include Bonnie S. McDougall, Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century; Sabina Knight, The Heart of Time: Moral Agency in Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction; and Wendy Larson, From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in Twentieth-Century China.

31. Given that this is a perennial issue in modern Chinese intellectual discourse, it is fair to suggest that all studies of modern Chinese history address the issue of how to understand modern Chinese experiences. Recent discussions that offer new interventions to Foucauldian-genealogy-informed historiography in the China field include Wang Hui, Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi (The rise of modern Chinese thought); and Ban Wang, Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China.

32. For an extensive discussion of this issue, see Ban Wang, Illuminations from the Past.

33. Ibid., 23.

34. Ibid., 24.

35. Ibid., 25.

36. There have been numerous critiques in China of the so-called emperor drama or history drama. Examples include Liu Ping, “Zai lishi yu xianshi de qihedian shan” (Between history and reality); Yue Peng, “Qinggong xi zouhong manshuo” (Some thoughts on the popularity of the Qing court drama); Liu Yan, “Yongzheng wangchao: lishi wenben de wenhua chanshi” (The Yongzheng Court: a cultural interpretation of a text of history); Wang Jinhe, “Fan’an yue fan yue luan: ye tan Yongzheng wangchao” (Confusion increased: also about The Yongzheng Court); Wang Wei, “Jiaowang guozheng de Yongzheng xing-xiang” (Overly corrected image of Yongzheng); Zhang Dexiang “Yongzheng wangchao sanwei” (Three flavors of The Yongzheng Court); and Chen Mo, “Qingtingju jiazhi dao-xiang toushi” (An examination of value guidance in the Qing court drama).
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Zhang Yiwu, “Bei ‘zhuanhuan’ he bei ‘tidai’ de xin wenxue” (New literature that has been transformed and replaced).
42. The fact that Lu Xun has remained one of the most studied modern Chinese intellectuals has not always sat well with a variety of groups both inside and outside of China. And yet this fact also conversely proves his importance precisely in continuing to provoke debate.
44. See Wang Hui, *Fankang juewang* (Struggle against despair); Qian Liqun, *Jujue yiwang* (Refuse to forget); Qian Liqun, *Yu Lu Xun xiangyu* (Encounter Lu Xun); Ban Wang, “Tradition, Memory, and Hope: Lu Xun and Critical Historical Consciousness.”
45. For a short critique of Zhang Yimou’s *Hero*, see Ban Wang, “Epic Narrative, Authenticity, and the Memory of Realism: Reflections on Jia Zhangke’s *Platform*.”

Chapter Three: In Whose Name?

1. *Cangtian zai shang* was written by Lu Tianming, already a well-known writer by then, who is also the script writer of the drama. It is said that it took quite some time before the script was approved and the drama was shot and produced. In addition to Kinkley’s writing on Lu Tianming and his works, see Lu Tianming’s blog for related information about the writer. Pieces in Chinese related to *Heavens Above* include “Fanfu zuojia Lu Tianming: wo jiushi yao xie zhege shidai de shiqing” (Anticorruption writer Lu Tianming: I insist on writing about things that happen in our own times); “Caifang Lu Tianming” (Interviewing Lu Tianming). See also Jeffrey C. Kinkley, “The Trendsetter: Lu Tianming’s *Heaven Above*.”
2. In 2004, the Guangdian Zongju (the State Administration of Broadcasting, Film, and Television) reportedly rejected 40 percent of the 308 crime-oriented television drama proposals and put out a new regulation that prohibited anticorruption dramas, cop dramas, and crime dramas from being shown in prime-time slots (http://www.people.com.cn/GB/yule/1018/2421436.html).
3. In addition to Jeffrey Kinkley’s *Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China: The Return of the Political Novel*, Ruoyun Bai has also written on similar issues, specifically on the anticorruption televiusal subgenre. See Ruoyun Bai, “‘Clean Officials,’ Emotional Moral Community, and Anti-Corruption Television Drama.”
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Ibid., 8.
7. Some of my discussion in this chapter overlaps with Kinkley’s but I have a different perspective, mainly because much of the thinking in this chapter was developed independently before the publication of Kinkley’s book. I presented an earlier version
of this chapter at the conference “Towards an Age of Rights: Chinese and International Perspectives,” Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, February 1–2, 2008.

8. Some of Zhou Meisen’s novels are Zhigao liyi (The highest principle, 2000), Zhongguo zhizao (Made in China, 2001; renamed Zhongcheng, or Loyalty, when adapted for television), Juedui quanli (Absolute power, 2002), and Guojia gongsu (Sued by the state, 2003).

9. See Kinkley’s discussion of the “fall” of the anticorruption novel in the section “The Fall” in his introduction to Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China, 18–21.


11. For discussions of the social conditions of the late 1980s, see, for example, Wang Hui, “The Historical Conditions of the 1989 Social Movement and the Anti-historical Explanation of ‘Neoliberalism,’” in his China’s New Order, 46–77.

12. “Marketism” is a translation of the Chinese word “shichang zhuyi” used by contemporary Chinese intellectuals who argue that the notion of a “free market” is itself ideological. See, for example, Han Shaogong’s article, based on a speech at Suzhou University, “Lengzhan hou: wenxue yu xiezuo xin de chujing” (After the Cold War: new context for literature and creative writing).

13. The film was adapted from the novel Jue ze by Zhang Ping, one of the few writers in Zhou Meisen’s league with regard to writing about politics and the corruption of officialdom. For a discussion of Zhang Ping in English, see Kinkley, Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China.

14. Including a cynical realization that, instead of helping lessen corruption, the officially organized promotion of anticorruption films such as Shengsi juezhe helped benefit the creators and producers of the film, illustrating that “socially correct” and politically acceptable cultural products can also enjoy market benefits. The box-office total from the film reportedly exceeded 1.165 hundred million RMB (http://ent.sina.com.cn/film/chinese/2000-10-14/19263.html).

15. It is a pity that, other than reviews and spontaneous online debates, which tend to be abrasive and not conducive to thoughtful discussion, most televisual texts do not receive adequate critical attention. In addition to a few books written in Chinese on the history of television drama, scholars like Yin Hong have begun to write more about the subject. See, for example, “Yin Hong, Yang Daihui: Zhongguo dianshiju yis hu chuantong” (Yin Hong and Yang Daihui on the artistic tradition of Chinese television drama) (http://medial.people.com.cn/GB/5258393.html).

16. Indeed, I would argue that if aspects of these dramas were to be studied, examined, and discussed—critically analyzed—they could well function as cultural texts for furthering critical examinations of the social, political, and ideological issues in contemporary China. The fact that critics dismiss them as lowly popular cultural entertainment along with media’s promotion of such dramas as pure entertainment constitutes a Chinese version of hegemony that prevents the complexities of the issues in such dramas from being fully examined and discussed.

17. See Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China for Kinkley’s discussion of Zhou Meisen, which is less extensive than his discussion of Zhang Ping.

18. It is interesting to note that the new regulation regarding the status of anticorruption dramas states as a criticism that some “anticorruption” dramas were really not
about corruption but about the inner workings of officialdom, treating corruption only as a tangible example of a problem (http://www.people.com.cn).

19. No official count exists. The unclear definition of related subgenres including cop dramas, crime-related dramas, and anticorruption dramas also makes it difficult to count.

20. Among these dramas, the best known include (1) several Zhou Meisen dramas such as *Zhongcheng* (Loyalty, 2001), *Zhigao liyi* (The highest principle, 2002), *Juedui quanli* (Absolute power, 2004), and *Guojia gongsu* (Sued by the state, 2003); and (2) crime-oriented dramas such as *Daxue wuhen* (Snow-covered, 2001), *Hongse kango naixin* (Red carnations, 2001), *Gongan ju Zhang* (The police chief, 2002), and *Hei dong* (Black hole, 2001). Those of the second type were so popular that their successes generated imitations such as *Lanse ma llian* (Blue lilies), *Gongan juzhang II* and *Gongan juzhang III* (The police chief II and III), and the so-called *hei xilie*, or black series—there are no less than ten dramas with the word *hei* (black) in their titles; examples include *Hei jin* (Black money), *Hei fen* (Black powder), *Hei bing* (Black drug), *Hei qiang* (Black guns), and *Hei wu* (Black fog). Many in the “black series” were penned by Zhang Chenggong.

21. There are still reruns of old anticorruption dramas outside the prime-time slots and mostly by local or satellite stations that are not watched by the majority of viewers.

22. For discussion of “good” officials in contemporary popular anticorruption narratives, see Kinkley’s book and Ruoyun Bai, “‘Clean Officials,’ Emotional Moral Community, and Anti-Corruption Television Dramas.”

23. See, for example, Yu Xingzhong, “Qiangshi wenhua, eryuan renshi yu fazhi” (Hegemonic culture, binary-oppositional epistemology, and rule by law).

24. There are numerous articles on issues regarding China’s SOEs. Some recent writings include Yashang Huang, *Selling China: Foreign Direct Investment during the Reform Era*, and Liu Rixin, “Guoyou qiye de guoqu, xianzai he jianglai” (SOEs’ past, present, and future).

25. *Daxue wuhen* has been translated into English under several titles including *Pure as Snow* by Ruoyun Bai and *The Blizzard Leaves No Trace* by Kinkley. My own translation, “Snow-Covered Traces,” though it has a different emphasis is closer to Kinkley’s in meaning.

26. This drama is based on a novel of the same title by Zhang Chenggong.

27. *Jidushan bojue* is both the Chinese title of the French novel *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* and the name of its main character (the title of the book is also translated as *Jiushan enchou ji*). It is among the nineteenth-century French, English, and Russian novels popular with young Chinese growing up during the Mao era.

28. In addition to official corruption, there is a newly coined term in Chinese that refers to other kinds of corruption, *ya fubai*, or subcorruption (or derivative corruption). It usually refers to the abuse of power by those whose profession allows them to seek personal gain. They include those in the medical, teaching, and media professions.

Chapter Four: Beyond Romance

1. For discussions of the evolution of the category of youth in modern China and on its various implications, please see Frank Dikotter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in...*


4. For information about what went on at Versailles, see standard texts on modern Chinese history including John Fairbank, *China: A New History*, and Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*.

5. Since the mid-1980s, questioning May Fourth has been one of the major scholarly trends in Chinese studies circles in the West. Like all historical movements, May Fourth may be subject to critical reevaluations for a long time to come, all the reevaluations informed by their own historical conditions and ideological stance. This latest round of critical attacks on the May Fourth movement stems from a shift in Western academia toward revolutions and radical social movements including non-Western nations’ struggles for national independence.

6. For a recent discussion of “revolutionary spirit,” see Wendy Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in Twentieth-Century China*.


8. For more discussion of youth in the 1980s and 1990s, see James Farrer, *Opening Up: Youth Sex Culture and Market Reform in Shanghai*; and Jieying Xi, Yunxiao Sun, Jing Jian Xiao, eds., *Chinese Youth in Transition*.

9. Pan Xiao, “Ren sheng de lu a, zenme yuezou yuezhai” (Why life’s path is becoming narrower and narrower).

10. It is important to note that many of the same writers and critics, such as Zhang Chengzhi, Han Shaogong, Ah Cheng, and Li Tuo, to name just a few, have begun to reevaluate their own thinking and writing in the 1980s. Three decades of economic reforms and rapid “modernization” in China have generated new questions that have prompted many of them to rethink their earlier views. See for example, Zha Jianying, *Bashi niandai fangtanlu* (Interviews about the 1980s). Many of these and other writers’ additional reflections can be found on the Zuoan website http://www.eduww.com.

11. For a discussion on “eating a bowl of youth” (chi qingchun fan), see Zhang Zhen, “The ‘Rice Bowl of Youth’ in Fin de Siècle Urban China.”

12. Even though not all of the dramas from Korea are strictly of the “youth-idol” type, the television (together with the film) industry in Korea, nevertheless, has established itself as a powerhouse for generating shows that are not only popular in Korea, but also in other parts of East Asia (Japan, mainland China, and Taiwan). Most of these shows center on young characters and star some of the most well-known young Korean actors and actresses, whose beauty, though often the result of skilled cosmetic surgeries, has defined the most desired look for young people in these countries and regions.

13. The phenomenon of the “youth-idol drama” began in the early 1980s with importations of dramas from outside of China. The most notable example is the 1982 broadcast of the Japanese drama whose Chinese title is *Xueyi* (Blood in question). Its success
not only inaugurated what would later be known as qingchun ouxiang ju, or youth-idol dramas, but also made the young actors Yamaguchi Momoe and Miura Tomokazu two of the earliest youth idols in post-Mao China.

14. Qiong Yao's fiction was introduced into mainland China around 1981 and generated the so-called Qiong Yao xianxiang, or Qiong Yao phenomenon. Early-twentieth-century “middle-brow” literature refers to the so-called Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature and other similar writings popular among city dwellers in Shanghai. Qiong Yao's “romance” novels, incidentally, can be set in either modern or unspecific “premodern” settings. When her gege novels (gege is a Manchu word for female, which tends to be translated as “young women, misses” in Chinese and today is often used in Chinese to refer specifically to daughters born into the Qing court or royal families) are adapted into television dramas, because of their settings and their “playful nature,” they are categorized as emperor dramas of the xishuo type. For a discussion of Qiong Yao in English, see Miriam Lang, “San Mao and Qiong Yao, a ‘Popular’ Pair.”

15. For a discussion of the DVD market for television drama, see Rong Cai, “Carnivalesque Pleasure: The Audio-Visual Market and the Consumption of Television Drama.”

16. Regulations issued in 2000 by the State Administration of Radio and Television (Guojia Guangbo Dianshi Ju) stipulates that only 15 percent of prime-time slots should be devoted to imported television programs. See Zhu Guoliang, “Huangjin shiduan ‘fengsha’ yinjin ju” (Limiting imported dramas in prime time).

17. See, for example, Yu Bing and Wen Ye, “Zhongguo qingchun ouxiang ju weishenme re bu qilai” (Why Chinese youth-idol drama does not attract viewers’ interest); Ni Xueli and Zhang Cui, “Ganǐa de Zhongguo qingchun ouxiang ju” (The embarrassing Chinese youth-idol drama). For a discussion in English of a related type of drama, see Ya-chien Huang, “Pink Dramas: Reconciling Consumer Modernity and Confucian Womanhood.”

18. This claim mainly refers to the imitations produced in the late 1990s. Fen dou (Strive for success, 2007) is one recent example that is said to be “realistically” dealing with the lives of the young white-collar workers who were born after 1980 (the post-1980 generation).

19. See part 3, “Production, Reception, and Distribution,” in Zhu, Keane, and Bai, TV Drama in China, for discussion, in English, of some aspects of the reception issue. Also see Zhongguo dianshi guanzhong xianzhuang baogao (Reports on the viewership of Chinese television); Liu Yan and He Ru, “Dianshiju bianpai celüe yu guanzhong manyidu” (Television drama programming and viewers’ satisfaction).

20. Zhao is the director of a few hit television dramas, including Guo ba ying (Play to the fullest, 1993), Dong bian ri chu xi bian yu (East sunshine, west rain, 1996), Yong bu mingmu (Eyes forever open, 1999), Xiang wu xiang yu you xiang feng (Like fog like rain also like wind, 2000), Na shenme zhengjiu ni, wode airen (With what to save you, my loved one, 2001), and Biele, Wengehua (Good-bye, Vancouver, 2002). His meticulous attention to mise-en-scène and other visual elements to provide an up-to-date “modern” glamour has helped establish him as a weimei (beauty for beauty’s sake) type of director.

21. The two of them have also collaborated from time to time (on Eyes Forever Open and With What to Save You), but dramas based on Hai Yan’s fiction, including the ones directed by Zhao, are usually identified with the writer (as opposed to the directors).
22. Born as Si Haiyan in 1954, Hai Yan is a self-claimed amateur writer, working as an upper-level manager of the Beijing Jinjiang Hotel Group (among other business titles). He is reported to have joined the army at the age of sixteen and later worked in the line of public security before becoming a manager. Through writing, he has become a famous figure in popular culture, and his success is uniquely symptomatic of the era in and about which he writes—few writers in China have had a writing career like that of Hai Yan, who owes his literary success (in terms of popularity) solely to the success of the television drama adaptations of his novels, a success that has in turn secured him celebrity status both in the print media at large and on the Internet. Because of his success, he has also become a legendary figure with a life experience that in part reflects the Chinese history of the past sixty years. Since first publishing Plain-Clothed Cops (Bianyi jingcha) in 1985, Hai Yan has written nine more novels, seven of which have been adapted into television dramas. He is also known to have participated in the planning (ce hua) of other dramas.

23. Hai Yan has participated in some of the adaptations of his novels, including Jade Goddess of Mercy and With What to Save You, My Loved One.

24. Such sentiments have been evoked and examined in recent studies of late Qing and early Republican history and culture. Because of an ideological orientation in the development of this trend, recent studies hold such sentiments to be more complex and less radical and one-dimensional than those produced by what is now termed the May Fourth movement. The irony is that when such sentiments reappear in contemporary Chinese culture mixed with additional historical and cultural legacies, they may not be seen as the real heir of that early middle-brow literature.

25. With regard to why certain television dramas become popular, one should be aware of possible deals involved in generating media hype. Recent court cases against some officials at the Chinese Central Television Station (CCTV) who were accused of receiving bribes for the broadcasting rights of certain television dramas are a reminder of such possibilities. When it comes to the Hai Yan phenomenon, additionally, it is not unlikely that the formula and content of his stories were fine-tuned by more than just the writer himself before they were brought to the television screen. Back-room manipulation (cao zuo) may well be part of the game. Nevertheless, these factors are not sufficient to explain the popularity of Hai Yan’s dramas (and other dramas identified, sometimes falsely, with his name). Within the context of the rapid social and economic transformations brought about by the market reforms in which questions of value, virtue, and what it means to be “good,” “real,” and “sincere” seem to have been pushed aside, Hai Yan dramas, their ideological clichés notwithstanding, appear to have touched a cultural nerve by bringing these seemingly outdated issues back. One is compelled to wonder about the structural implications in the representations in Hai Yan’s dramas and between this dramatic world and the everyday reality of the viewers who seem to be drawn to that imagined world.

26. For discussions in English of the late-twentieth-century and early-twenty-first-century Chinese “urban generation” cinema, see Zhen Zhang, ed., The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century.

27. Rey Chow, Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films.

28. Many of Wang Shuo’s stories portray so-called da yuan youngsters (1) who were “military brats,” (2) who were a few years younger than the Red Guard generation, (3)
who went to middle and high school during the Cultural Revolution, and (4) many of whom also went to the countryside toward the later part of the Cultural Revolution. One of his novellas, Dongwu xiongmeng, was adapted as Yangguang canlan de rizi (In the heat of the sun, 1996), a film about Mao era youth.


30. “我们浪费掉了太多的青春，那是一段如此自以为是、又如此狼狈不堪的青春岁月，有欢笑，也有泪水；有朝气，也有颓废；有甜蜜，也有荒唐；有自信，也有迷茫。我们敏感，我们偏执，我们顽固到底地故作坚强；我们轻易的伤害别人，也轻易的被别人所伤，我们追逐于颓废的快乐，陶醉于寂寞的美丽；我们坚信自己与众不同，坚信世界会因我而改变；我们觉醒其实我们已经不再年轻，我们前程或许也不再是无限的，其实它又何曾是无限的？曾经在某一瞬间，我们都以为自己长大了。但是有一天，我们终于发现，长大的含义除了欲望，还有勇气、责任、坚强以及某种必须的牺牲。在生活面前我们还都是孩子，其实我们从未长大，还不懂爱和被爱。”

31. Wendy Larson offers an interesting discussion on Lei Feng that is closely related to this point. In her somewhat imbalanced discussion pairing Lei Feng with Ah Q in Chinese revolutionary discourse, she seems to downplay the role of lixiang, or idealism—also a part of the “revolutionary spirit”—which is related to but goes beyond the “Lei Feng spirit.” See Wendy Larson, “Revolutionary Discourse and the Spirit: From Ah Q to Lei Feng,” in From Ah Q to Lei Feng, 77–113.

32. Ever since the first appearances of “positive” remembrances by former educated youth, critics have dismissed them as nostalgia. See Qiu Xinmu, “’Zhishi qingnian shangxi xiayuan’ yanjiu zongshu” (A summary of the research on the rustication movement of educated youth).

33. It is interesting to note that 2008 was the fortieth anniversary of the rustication movement, but, unlike in 1998, this anniversary was hardly mentioned in the media in China.

34. Larson, From Ah Q to Lei Feng, 111.

35. Shibing tuji, scripted by Lan Xiaolong (based on his 2003 novel of the same title) and directed by Kang Honglei, was a 2006 production aired in 2007.

36. Shibing tuji literally means “soldiers make a sudden attack.”

37. On the Internet there are sites where words, phrases, or sentences uttered by Xu Sanduo are listed by enthusiastic fans. Among them perhaps by now his most famous expression is bu paoqi, bu fangqi, or never give up and never give in. This slogan was picked up and took on a life of its own during the rescue and recovery operation immediately after the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008.


40. Wang was born into a peasant family in Hebei Province in 1984. Between the ages of eight and fourteen, he lived at the Shaolin Temple. He went to Beijing after his years at the temple and worked as an extra and a small-time actor. At the age of sixteen, he
was discovered by Li Yang, who placed him in *Blind Shaft* (*Mang jing*). The success of this film won Wang notoriety, and he has since appeared in some well-known films and television dramas. It was not, however, until his portrayal of Xu Sanduo that Wang Baoqiang became a household name. For more information, see http://baike.baidu.com/view/764555.htm.

41. Each of these individuals came from different times in the communist revolutionary period: Lei Feng (1940–1962) died during the Mao era; Huang Jiguang (1930–1952) died during the Korean War; Dong Cunrui (1929–1948) died during the Second Civil War (1945–1949); Zhang Side (1915–1944) died in Yan'an. During the Mao era, they became known as "revolutionary heroes."

Chapter Five: Also beyond Romance

2. Ibid.
4. Xie Jin (1923–2008) studied drama and directing during the 1940s. He started directing films in the late 1940s and became a film director stationed in Shanghai after 1949. After the success of *Nülan wuhao* (Woman basketball player number five) in 1957, he went on to make three more films in the 1960s. He resumed filmmaking in 1974 and made three films during the Cultural Revolution and thirteen more films after the Cultural Revolution. Despite the popularity of his films, Xie Jin's melodramatic style drew criticism from critics. Examples include Zhu Dake, "The drawback of Xie Jin's Model," and Li Jie, "Xie Jin's Era Should End."
5. These three women writers began to write in the 1980s but became household names in the 1990s when their subject matter—women's personal experiences in conjunction with the rapid changes in their everyday and materially oriented lives—attracted popular interest.
6. There are many discussions on the *yin sheng yang shuai* issue both in English and in Chinese. To name just a few, see Yuejin Wang, "*Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and Desire*"; Ling Zhu, "A Brave New World? On the Construction of ‘Masculinity’ and ‘Femininity’ in *The Red Sorghum Family*"; and Xueping Zhong, *Masculinity Besieged?*
8. In critiquing the Communist Party’s gender-blind gender-equality policies, many critics went so far as to negate the revolutionary—and, by extension, the social—component in the formation of women’s self-identity in socialist China. The call for restoring women’s “femininity” by many critics was accompanied by an unquestioned acceptance of the separation of “the social” from “female identity.”

9. I have argued elsewhere that the narrowing of the meaning of “womanhood” can be traced through women’s literature in the three decades since the late 1970s, when Chinese women writers, in their critique of the shortcomings of the Communist Party–led women’s liberation, turned to what is essentially a bourgeois imaginary of womanhood for “women’s essence.” See Xueping Zhong, “Who Is a Feminist? Understanding the Ambivalence towards *Shanghai Baby*, ‘Body Writing,’ and Feminism in Post–Women’s Liberation China.”

10. Chi Li is a Wuhan-based writer who began to publish in the 1980s but did not become known until the 1990s. The story that secured her name in the contemporary Chinese literary scene is “Fan niao ren sheng” (Vexed everyday life, 1987) in which the male protagonist Yin Jiahou is portrayed as being trapped by his everyday activities at home and at the factory, which, the story appears to imply, keep a man from being able to do more important things (that a man should be doing). It is interesting to note that, when *Comings and Goings* begins, the figure of Yin Jiahou can be found in Kang Weiye, the male protagonist in this drama, and Kang’s story is almost like a sequel in that it is about how, after Kang becomes a successful businessman, he faces new possibilities and new vexations that Yin Jiahou would not have dreamed of.

11. The reference to the Fulian here reveals several gender-politics-related issues. First, it betrays the author Chi Li’s bias against the organization, a bias shared by many intellectuals, men and women. It is a bias based on two by-now-familiar views: the Fulian is an official organization and as such it mainly answers to the state’s gender policies, and the Fulian is responsible for repressing expressions of “femininity.” As a result, when representing Fulian-related issues, including portraying those who work for it, women writers like Chi Li tend to resort to a set of stereotypes. Duan Lina and her colleagues embody such stereotypes. For information on the Fulian, see Ellen Judd, *The Chinese Women’s Movement between the State and Market*, and Hongmei Shen, “All-China Women’s Federation: A Party Representative or Feminist Organization?”

12. Here, the original author Chi Li and the drama both echo the view that the party-led women’s liberation movement was a top-down movement in which women’s sexual differences were neglected and rendered subservient to male-centered revolutionary causes and nation-building endeavors. For reexaminations of this view, see Lin Chun, *The Transformations of Chinese Socialism*; Xueping Zhong, “Women Can Hold Up Half the Sky: A ‘Fourth-Told’ Tale.”

13. Wang Hailing is best known for writing about marriage and its problems in contemporary China. Her representative works include *Qian shou* (Holding hands, 1999), *Zhongguo shi lihun* (Divorce Chinese style, 2004), *Xin jiehun shidai* (Marriage in the new era, 2006), and *Daxiao de nüer* (Senior colonel’s daughter, 2007), all of which have been adapted into television dramas.

14. See, for example, “Wang Hailing: wo dui hunyin hen jiji” (Wang Hailing: I am positive about marriage) (http://yule.sohu.com/20040913/n222005209.shtml). This
interview took place when *Divorce Chinese Style* first appeared and some critics questioned Wang for blaming women for the failure of their marriages. Wang responds to that criticism in this interview. Also see “Wang Hailing bu fu zhuannia tiaoci, wei ‘li hun’ bianjie” (Wang Hailing does not agree with critics and defends *Divorce Chinese Style*) (http://ent.sina.com.cn/2004-10-7/0704524349.html).

15. When *Yearnings* first appeared, it generated much critical response from Chinese women intellectuals, especially with regard to the portrayal of Liu Huifang, the female protagonist of the drama.


**Chapter Six: Listening to Popular Poetics**


2. During the celebration of the 2009 Chinese New Year, Channel 3 of CCTV aired a concert in which the thirty most popularly selected songs from television drama were performed.


4. Ibid., 73–74.

5. Ibid., 77.

6. Ibid., 70–71.


9. The best-known example is probably “Yiyongjun jinxingqu” (The march of the volunteers), composed for the film *Fengyun ernü* (Children of the storm, 1935), which is now the national anthem of the People’s Republic of China. “Siji ge” (Four seasons), sung by Zhou Xuan in *Malu tianshi* (Street angel, 1937), has remained popular in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

10. The music for “The March of the Volunteers” was composed by the well-known composer Nie Er and the lyrics by Tian Han, a well-known left-wing playwright of the 1930s. For a discussion in English on this song, see Robert Chi, “The March of the Volunteers: From Movie Theme Song to National Anthem.”


12. It must be noted that films like *Yellow Earth* (dir. Chen Kaige, 1984) and *Beijing Bastards* (dir. Zhang Yuan, 1993) use songs or music as a major part of their narratives. Nevertheless, none of the songs (other than the ones by Cui Jian in *Beijing Bastards* that...
were already known before the film) has been performed or has lived on beyond the film. This largely has to do with the fact that Yellow Earth did not have a widespread viewship, and Beijing Bastards was not publicly distributed in China.

13. The change in the rise of one cultural form (television drama) and the decline of another (film) in mainstream culture is directly related to the structural changes in the two industries and to the role of the market. At the same time, the shift involves both a continuation in the practice of composing songs for visual narratives and a difference in how songs are used and how they are written, composed, and sung. An obvious difference is that in television dramas most of the songs are placed at the ends of an episode (as piantou ge, or opening songs, and pianwei ge, or closing songs), as opposed to somewhere in the middle of a film (in which case they are generally known as dianying chaqu, or songs that occur in the middle of a film). Increasingly, given the need to shorten the opening, many dramas only have an ending song to accompany the credits at the end of each episode. The placement of songs reflects the different ways these two forms of visual narratives are produced and consumed. As such, song placement is also part of the meaning-making mechanism in these visual narratives, something that affects what gets expressed in a song and how that expression is composed not only through lyrics but also through music.

14. For information on the importation of foreign programs, see Junhao Hong, The Internationalization of Television in China: The Evolution of Ideology, Society, and Media since the Reform.

15. A term originally associated with Yearnings, daxing shinei ju was a Chinese phrase coined at the time in reference to the model of American daytime “soap opera.” This identification was later dropped, perhaps because most dramas have not been shot in the way American daytime dramas are made.

16. Within the modern context (since the late nineteenth century), there has occurred what can be identified as the elite’s (or intellectuals’) appropriation of “popular culture” especially in terms of cultural forms ranging from popular fiction, theater, film, music, and television. Depending on the prevailing academic trends or what ideological persuasions prevail, scholars of China in the West have offered varied evaluations of the political implications of various Chinese elite appropriations that have occurred in different modern historical periods.

17. In recent years intellectuals in China have started reexamining the “culture fever” movement of the 1980s and the “modernization” imaginary manifested in this movement. Many have argued that the marketism of the 1990s was in essence “logically” connected with the intellectual discourse of the 1980s. It is because of this connection that intellectuals themselves actively supported, participated in, and benefited from the developmentalism-oriented market reforms. See, for example, Zha Jianying, Bashi niandai fangtanlu (Interviews about the 1980s); Gan Yang, Bashi niandai wenhua yishi (Cultural consciousness of the 1980s); Wang Hui, “Xin ziyou zhuyi” de lishi genyuan jiqi pipan—zai lun dangdai Zhongguo dalu de xiangtong yu xiandaixing wenti” (Critiquing the historical resources of “neoliberalism”).

18. The last four lines in the opening song, “Bless Good-Hearted People” (“好人一生平安”): “谁能与我同醉,相识年年岁岁,咫尺天涯皆有缘,此情温暖人间.”

19. From the middle of “Long Ago Years” (“悠悠岁月”): 漫漫人生路,上下求索,心中渴望真诚的生活,谁能告诉我,是对还是错,问询南来北往的客。恩
怨忘却，留下真情从头说. It is not easy to convey the meaning of the title of this song in English. The word “悠” (you) refers to the distant past with a touch of nostalgia but nevertheless also suggests that the past always consisted of both good and bad. Music by Lei Lei; lyrics by Yi Ming.


21. The Chinese original is as follows: 看不尽，繁华万里/转瞬间落日残烟/图昌盛，百年一梦/看兴衰，弹指挥间. Music by Zhang Qianyi; lyrics by Zhao Daming.

22. The Chinese original is as follows: 数英雄，论成败 / 古今谁能说明白 / 千秋功罪任评说 / 海雨天风独往来 / 一心要江山图治垂青史 / 也难说身后骂名滚滚来 / 有道是人间万苦人最苦 / 终不悔九死落尘埃 / 有道是得民心者得天下 / 看江山由谁来主宰. Music by Xu Peidong; lyrics by Liang Guohua.


24. Some scholars, in their examination of Western “historiography,” have pointed out that, at least in North America, the study of Chinese history was traditionally relegated to departments other than history departments and was identified as part of the study of “Chinese civilization.” For more information, see Q. Edward Wang and George G. Iggers, eds., Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective; Lin Chun, “Introduction: Modernity and the Study of China.”

25. Given the structural changes in cultural production in the decades after the 1980s, many of these songs function in a public way, more than other cultural forms such as literature, experimental arts, film, and theater, in expressing sentiments that are in effect paradoxically socially critical of the age of roaring economic development.

26. Opening song of Heroes Have No Regrets (英雄无悔). The original is as follows: 除了真情，我还能给你什么 / 除了善良，我还能爱你什么 / 除了勇气，我还能留住什么 / 除了伤痛，我还能忘记什么 / 梦想让我们一次次选择 / 又让我们一次次错过 / 真心把我们紧紧连在一起 / 除了误会，我们还能对它，能对它说什么. Music by Cheng Dazhao; lyrics by Li Meng.


31. Su Xiaoming became a household name in 1980 after she sang “Jungang zhiye” (As
night falls on a naval port) in a nontraditional way. At the time, she was a singer from the
Navy Performance Troupe (Haizheng Wengongtuan). Her singing style generated much
debate, but today she is known as the mainland Chinese singer who introduced tongsu
changfa: singing in a “pop manner.”

32. Deng Lijun (1953–1995) was a legendary singer originally from Taiwan whose
singing style and whose songs became widely (and wildly) popular in Taiwan, Hong
Kong, and the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. She was
introduced and popularized in China at the time when Deng Xiaoping became the top
leader in the Chinese Communist Party and when he promoted the open-door and
reform policies. People jokingly referred to them as “Xiao Deng” (the young Deng) and
“Lao Deng” (the old Deng), with the former being listened to at night (Deng Lijun) and
the other during the day (Deng Xiaoping).

33. From The Police Chief (公安局长). Chinese original: 还有没有，一段往事能
回首 / 记忆注定伤痛的心让那岁月穿透 / 还有没有，一段往事能挥走 / 沉默教会
孤独的你找到忘记的借口 / 还有没有，可以信任的朋友 / 真诚铸就最初的爱让那
时光倒流 / 还有没有，可以感受的温柔 / 善良相信诺言还在那是铭记的理由 / 无
怨无悔，真情不变 / 诫伴一生 / 哪怕荆棘挡住前路看不清是迷雾 / 未来的手牵着
你，你还要走 / 没有尽头不能停留，一生别无所求. Music by Xiao Zhe; lyrics by
Liu Yunlong.

Epilogue

1. In Chinese, xue refers to xueshu, which usually means scholarship. In this case,
however, it refers to the academy, specifically the structural and ideological changes
that have taken place in universities and the fact that higher education as an institution has
become part of the power establishment.

2. He shang, or River Elegy (1987), is a six-episode televisual essay originated by a
group of scholars, including Su Xiaokang and Wang Luxiang, who criticized “traditional
Chinese culture” allegorically and celebrated “Western civilization” (xifang wenming). In
many ways, this television show is representative of the mind-set of Chinese intellectuals
of the 1980s, who imagined and directly argued that the West was the answer to China's
problems. For scholarly responses to this televisual text, see, for example, Su Xiaokang
and Wang Luxing, Deathsong of the River; and Jing Wang “He Shang and the Paradoxes
of Chinese Enlightenment.”

3. Among the earliest challengers of the “modernization” and “modernity” imaginary
are He Qinglian’s Xiandaihua de xianjin (Pitfalls of modernization, 1998), and Wang
Hui's “Dangdai Zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing” (Contemporary
Chinese thought and the question of modernity). Both articles help mark the beginning
of the late-twentieth-century intellectual debates in China.

4. In recent years, Western scholars have begun to notice post-1980 intellectual debates
in China. See Ted Huters' introduction to Wang Hui, China's New Order, 2–39; Kang
Liu, “Is There an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization? The Debate about Modern-
nity, Postmodernity, and Postcoloniality,” in Globalization and Cultural Trends in China,
23–45; Xudong Zhang, ed., Wither China?; Xudong Zhang, Postsocialism and Cultural
Politics; Sujian Guo and Baogang Guo, eds., China in Search of a Harmonious Society;

5. These debates are most active and intense on the Internet. Websites representing different ideological persuasions among intellectuals (mostly writers, critics, and academics) and ordinary netizens is an ongoing reality in today’s China. Such websites include www.xschina.org, www.wyzxsx.com, www.eduww.com, and www.tecn.cn, representing various positions and perspectives.