
Trabajo Final de Máster

The impact of censorship on Chinese cinema

Han Tang

Aquest TFM està subject a la licència [Reconeixement-NoComercial-SenseObraDerivada 4.0](#)



[Internacional \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](#)

Este TFM está sujeto a la licencia [Reconocimiento-NoComercial-SinObraDerivada 4.0 Internacional \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](#)

This TFM is licensed under the [Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](#)

The Impact of Censorship on Chinese Cinema

By: Han Tang

Universitat Internacional de Catalunya
Master in Arts and Culture Management

Professor: Esther Belvis

June 25th, 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue	3
Introduction	5
Methodology	8
Theatrical Framework	9
State-of-the-Art	10
Chinese Culture and the School of Thoughts	11
Main Historical Phases	15
The Beginning	15
Wartime	16
New Government	17
Cultural Identity	22
Fifth-Generation Chinese Filmmakers	25
Cultural Display in the Film Industry	29
Hollywood's Influence	38
A New Era	41
Case Study	46
Li Yang and the "Blind Trilogy"	46
Zhang Yimou and "To Live"	57
Findings & Conclusion	73
Acknowledgment	77
References	78
Filmography	78
Bibliography	83

Prologue

I come from a family of filmmakers. My grandfather, Wenzhi Shi, a pioneering Chinese filmmaker, was among the graduates of the first-ever filmmaking program that took place in the People's Republic of China, in 1950. This program was taught by Soviet filmmakers and later became the Beijing Film Academy. Following his graduation, he became a film director and founding member of the Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio. His noted films include: "The Five Heroes of the Liang Ya Mountain", "Angry Waves," and "Iron and Steel Transport Line." My grandpa endured five long years of imprisonment and torture during the cultural revolution due to his films. I remember vividly how he would wear a big smile on his face as he showed me which parts of his arms where the bones had broken and had healed on their own due to the brutal beatings he endured while he was in prison. He was barred from directing fiction films upon his release. One of his last works as a film director was the documentary feature "Earthquake," which chronicled the aftermath of the devastating 7.6 magnitude earthquake in Tang Shan in 1976.

My mother, Qin Yan, worked for China's Children's Film Studio, which later merged with The Beijing Film Studio and several other companies to form the China Film Group Corporation. My mother embarked on her directorial journey in 1989 through her collaboration with then-student director Zhang Yuan on their pioneering feature film "Mama". The film was produced by Xi'an Film Studio with a budget of 100,000 yuan, around 15,000 dollars. The film achieved many successes in international festivals, including winning the Special Jury Prize at the Nantes Three Continents Film Festival in 1991. In 2005, it was selected to be screened at the 62nd Venice International Film Festival and is considered a trailblazing achievement of Chinese independent cinema, and by extension, a pioneering film of the Sixth Generation of Chinese Filmmakers. My mom went on to direct several TV series and films, most notably "Battle on the Tai Huang Mountain," slated for release in 1997. However, following the sudden demise of the prominent Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, on whom the film centers its story, his wife demanded that their love story be omitted from the film, which led to it being severely censored. The remaining fragments of the film were pieced together for a one-time TV screening, and the film perished before it could reach fruition, bringing my mother's directing career to an unfortunate halt.

Born into a family of passionate filmmakers, my passion for film was rooted in my upbringing. When I was nine, I acted in a TV series written and directed by my mother called "The Children's Kingdom," and I spent much of my childhood on film and TV sets. Unlike both my grandfather and my mother, I started my studies and career in the US. However, similar to my mother's experience when we first immigrated

to the States, I encountered challenges such as discrimination, misrepresentation, lack of opportunity, cultural bias, and xenophobia. Fate brought me back to China, and between 2014 to 2016 I had the opportunity to work on a number of film projects where I witnessed how Chinese filmmakers and production companies navigate censorship policies. My bilingualism has granted me invaluable insights that are often unavailable to English speakers, fueling my desire to share my findings, experiences, and analysis. My research is motivated by both academic and personal reasons, with a strong desire to study the relationship between film and society.

From an academic perspective, I want to bridge gaps and generate understanding by sharing my findings, experiences, and analysis. Various factors such as Western-centric lenses, language barriers, and political and economic factors often lead to the underrepresentation of China's rich history and culture in the West. Like other minority groups, this resulted in the enslavement of the Chinese narrative in American films and fostered harmful racial stereotypes. In combination with the damaging censorship practices by the Communist Party in mainland China, these practices contributed to the underrepresentation of a population of 1.4 billion people, which is unacceptable. As a filmmaker and political activist, I am passionate about addressing this gap and believe that the lack of representation can lead to misunderstanding and division. Through my research on Chinese censorship and the innovative strategies employed by Chinese filmmakers to navigate the industry, I hope to provide vital information for scholars interested in Chinese history, culture, arts, social progress, and politics, as well as filmmakers and individuals seeking to explore Chinese culture through film.

On a personal level, I want to share my knowledge and research to generate support for Chinese filmmakers and storytellers. I have personally witnessed the unimaginable effects censorship policies can have on people's work, careers, and life. The damages go way beyond not having freedom of speech and expression. In many cases, similar to my grandpa, it can lead to imprisonment, torture, and the erasure of one's existence, which is both evil and inhumane. I am inspired to dedicate my research to honoring my grandfather, my mother, and other Chinese filmmakers who have faced similar struggles. Far too many Chinese filmmakers have suffered from injustice and a lack of basic human rights. They were severely punished simply because they want to pursue their love of storytelling. Although an academic paper alone cannot incite protest or rebellion, it can lay the foundation for social change for future generations. At the very least, that is my hope.

Introduction

Film, as a powerful medium of artistic expression, offers a uniquely immersive experience that engages the audience's senses, emotions, and imagination. Through its combination of visual elements, drama, sound, and storytelling, film has the potential to change public opinions and shape societal consciousness, actively contributing to and influencing the cultural landscape. The impact of film is profound. For example, the 1935 film "Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm" exemplifies how Chinese filmmakers employed their films to mobilize resistance against the Japanese invasion, inspiring patriotism and rallying the Chinese people through powerful storytelling. Similarly, Black American filmmakers have long harnessed the power of film to initiate dialogues about race, challenging systemic racism and social injustice. The groundbreaking 1971 film "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" reflected the politics of the Black Arts Movement, promoting empowering representations of Black individuals in the media. Furthermore, the 2011 South Korean film "Silenced," directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk and featuring Gong Yoo, shed light on the issue of child sexual abuse and influenced legal reforms, resulting in stronger punishments for such offenses. By portraying individuals, groups, communities, cultures, or countries positively in films, public perceptions can be changed. As a powerful medium for communication, a film not only has the power to generate understanding and empathy, but it can even strengthen diplomatic ties. This is why films are often used as propaganda tools, it has the power to generate mutual respect, facilitate understanding, or, incite war. Governments, religions, and political groups frequently used film to advance their agendas.

In the context of the People's Republic of China, the film industry has experienced rapid growth and significant systemic changes. Censorship policies had been employed to maintain social stability, control information flow, protect national security, and promote particular values or ideologies, making the interplay between film, politics, and culture crucial in shaping the nation's identity. Currently, there are two key factors that influence the Chinese cinema landscape: the censorship policy implemented by the Chinese Communist Party, and the influence of Hollywood.

Since the 2000s, authentic Chinese films have been "losing their voices," while big-budget international co-productions have been squeezing out their competitors. The People's Republic of China and the United States have different political systems, ideologies, and economic models. Yet, the two found common ground when economic greed enticed them to engage in film collaborations. With millions invested in tuition fees, the Chinese industry embraced Hollywood as a role model, resulting in the abolishment of the old studio system, clear influences on story structures, directing styles, production processes, etc. Numerous American filmmakers attended Chinese

film conferences, receiving large amounts of "appearance fees," while some Chinese filmmakers, including our case study subject Zhang Yimou, who once stood tall as a towering figure in Chinese cinema, has compromised his artistic integrity to cater to the whims of Hollywood, all in the name of chasing box office success.

According to a report by the China Film Association and the Film Art Center of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (2018), "China became the world's second-largest movie market with total screen counts surpassing that of the US due to rapid theater expansion" (p. 3). And in 2020, China brought in \$3.1 billion at the box office, surpassing the U.S. by nearly \$1 billion, becoming the top movie market in the world. This raises concerns in the US film industry as China's growing influence may challenge Hollywood's dominance in the global market. Aynne Kokas, author of "Hollywood Made in China," argues that "The current budgets are unsustainable without access to the China market. That could fundamentally change the model of the US film industry" (Kokas, 2017, p. 145). Additionally, reflecting the intricate connections between China-US economic ties and their global competition, various parties now advocate for "detangling" during this historical period marked by the threat of war, while others continue to seek out more collaboration opportunities, creating a complex situation. Meanwhile, although the Chinese censorship policy has long existed, in the last five years, it has reached an unprecedented level of strictness. Caught in the middle of this push and pull is the Chinese Film Industry, in a vortex spiraling out of control. And who bears the weight of such a burden? Chinese filmmakers.

Filmmakers have the crucial task of exploring complex ideas and emotions through visual storytelling. As artists, they inherit the right to use their work to reflect on and comment upon social issues and attitudes. Some even use their films for resistance against injustices, oppression, and inequalities, making film a powerful medium for cultural expression, political commentary, and social critique. However, the combination of heavy Hollywood influences and strict censorship policies has severely damaged the potential of the Chinese film industry. The Chinese censorship policies enforced by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television are among the strictest in the world. These guidelines and regulations prohibit certain themes, images, and messages from being shown in films, limiting creative potential, smothering free speech, and resulting in inaccurate portrayals of Chinese society. Meanwhile, Hollywood's blatant disregard for Chinese culture, history, and mythology has resulted in a smoldering pile of garbage such as "The Great Wall," "The Warriors Gate," and "Mulan." These inaccuracies, coupled with strict censorship policies, have only contributed to further misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Chinese culture and its people.

The objective of this research paper is to comprehensively examine the impact of censorship on the Chinese film industry, focusing on its influence on storytelling and the industry's evolution. The study addresses the following key questions:

1. How has censorship affected the evolution and storytelling in the Chinese film industry?
2. How do Chinese filmmakers navigate censorship and promote cultural awareness?
3. What does the future hold for Chinese cinema?

Employing a comparative analysis approach, this study delves into the intricate relationship among film, politics, and cultural identity, shedding light on their reciprocal influence within Chinese society. By examining social realities, human agency, and various publications and reports, this research aims to foster critical thinking and provide valuable insights into the development and future prospects of the film industry. This research not only explores the intricate relationship between film and Chinese culture but also highlights the significant role of interpersonal relationships rooted in the three traditional Chinese schools of thought within the dynamics of the Chinese film industry. By examining the interplay between human interactions and cultural influences, this study offers valuable insights into the complex mechanisms that shape the industry's functioning and development. Additionally, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of two acclaimed Chinese filmmakers who are considered "outsiders" in the new society, exploring the divergent paths they were compelled to take, which ultimately shaped their films and filmmaking careers. One such filmmaker is Li Yang, an independent filmmaker renowned for bridging the gap between the infamous Fifth Generation and Sixth Generation Chinese Filmmakers. The other filmmaker is a world-famous Chinese director and a leading figure among the Fifth Generation of Chinese Filmmakers, Zhang Yimou. Zhang Yimou is credited for pioneering two major film movements in China—the Chinese Art-House films and the Chinese Commercial Film era.

Additionally, this research investigates the strategies employed by many Chinese filmmakers to navigate censorship and promote cultural awareness in their works. It analyzes how they convey subtle messages and address sensitive topics while adhering to censorship regulations. Furthermore, the study explores the future of Chinese cinema amidst the challenges posed by censorship and the strong influence of Hollywood. It also considers the broader societal implications in a global world where competing cinema industries often operate with their own political agendas. Moreover, this research examines the potential consequences of cultural identity and artistic innovation. It explores the role of international collaborations and the evolving dynamics of the global film industry in shaping the future of Chinese cinema.

Methodology

This descriptive research employs a variety of methodologies including historical analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, and comparative analysis. These complementary techniques are utilized to achieve an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation.

1. **Historical Analysis:** This analysis begins with a comprehensive exploration of the history of Chinese cinema, including transitional periods, significant films, and the establishment and abolishment of the studio system. It examines the evolution of censorship policies, considering internal and external factors. The analysis also focuses on political and economic changes, independent film production, globalization's impact, and international co-productions. This historical analysis uncovers the intricate relationship between politics, economics, and cultural production in mainland China.
2. **Case Study:** The primary methodology employed is a case study approach, following the guidelines provided by Ranjit Kumar. This approach involves an in-depth exploration and analysis of specific directors and their work within their respective contexts, Li Yang, and Zhang Yimou. Data and references for the case study are gathered from published articles, interviews, and official records, following the step-by-step process outlined by Kumar.
3. **Content Analysis:** Content analysis is employed to examine selected films in-depth. It focuses on the content, themes, and messages presented in each film, considering historical context, political climate, and the reception internationally and domestically.
4. **Comparative Analysis:** A comparative analysis methodology is utilized to examine similarities and differences between films reflecting changes in China's social, economic, and political climates. It also investigates films related to the Cultural Revolution and the effects of censorship on these films and filmmakers. These analyses provide insights into different approaches to similar themes, artistic interpretations, marketing, and distribution strategies, and their impact on careers. Explanatory critique and a transformative perspective are applied to draw conclusions.
5. **Discourse Analysis:** Discourse analysis is employed to investigate the language used by state-run media and government officials regarding censorship policies. By analyzing these discourses, this research explores the government's perception of cinema's role in Chinese society and the justification and enforcement of censorship policies. It also examines how filmmakers and industry

professionals navigate these discourses and their impact on creativity and career prospects.

Additionally, in order to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of specific phenomena, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of real-world contexts, processes, and complexities, this research incorporates a case study methodology to exemplify or illustrate specific aspects of the topic. The overall aim of this study is to systematically describe and analyze the phenomenon, problem, or program being studied, drawing on the principles of descriptive research outlined by Ranjit Kumar in "Research Methodology: A Step-by-step Guide for Beginners" (2011). Descriptive research allows for the systematic collection of data and the provision of information on various aspects such as living conditions or attitudes towards a particular issue, thereby enhancing the depth of analysis (Kumar, 2011, pp. 25-29).

This research employs various methodologies in accordance with APA guidelines to comprehensively examine the impact of censorship on the Chinese film industry. These methodologies include historical analysis to provide contextual understanding, case studies to delve into specific instances, content analysis to analyze film content and themes, comparative analysis to identify patterns and differences, discourse analysis to explore discursive formations, and ethnographic approaches to gain insights from firsthand observations and experiences.

Furthermore, in this research, Richard Maltby's significant contribution to the field of film history and cinema history is evident (Maltby, 2006). In his article titled "Film History versus Cinema History: Distinguishing Aesthetic Relations from Social Aspects," published in the *Journal of Film Studies*, Maltby explores the distinction between film history and cinema history, shedding light on their respective focuses (Maltby, 2006). Film history delves into the aesthetic and textual relations of films, while cinema history examines the social aspects of the cultural institution, encompassing distribution, exhibition, reception, and the social experience of cinema (Maltby, 2006). This differentiation provides a comprehensive framework for exploring key issues in film history and offers an alternative perspective on power dynamics within the cinematic circuit of cultural production (Maltby, 2006).

To implement this approach, the research methodology integrates multiple disciplinary perspectives, including history, cultural geography, demography, ethnography, and other social sciences. This interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach, known as "new cinema history," has gained critical mass and methodological maturity, facilitating a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of film exhibition, audiences, and cinemagoing experiences.

Theoretical Framework

State of the Art

Since its birth, China's film industry has been shaped by a unique political and cultural landscape, which includes a complex history of propaganda, strict government censorship, and significant government control over film content, distribution, and exhibition (Rosen, 2002; Lu, 2012; Marchetti, 2001). This research aims to explore the impact of censorship policy on the industry's development, the relationship between film and politics, and its effect on society. The definition of "censorship" is drawn from the description established by three scholars: "Censorship can be understood as the practice of suppressing, altering, or banning any form of expression, including art, literature, film, and other media, that is deemed to be politically or socially unacceptable" (Rosen, 2002, p. 153). Furthermore, this research delves into other elements that affect China's film industry, including cultural identity, industry development, social and cultural change, government policies and regulations, artistic and cultural exposure, cultural security, and cultural power.

When a Chinese film is ultimately presented to its audience, it is the result of a delicate balancing act between the director's artistic vision and storytelling ability and the requirements and constraints imposed by the censorship reviewing committee. This means that some compromises must be made in order to ensure that the film will pass censorship and be released in the People's Republic of China. For instance, the popular 2018 blockbuster "Dying to Survive" portrays the struggle of leukemia patients to acquire medication. The film is faithful to its theme until the end when the medicine suddenly becomes covered by health insurance. Strange? Yes. But audiences understand that this is how the movie passed censorship and got released in China. Filmmakers often use tactics such as adding a happy ending, or changing the time period or location in order to pass censorship, even if these changes contradict the film's message or structure. Without these sacrifices, the movie would not be able to survive. During the pandemic, restrictions had reached unprecedented levels in China. Currently, there are almost no movies with sad endings that are screened anywhere in Mainland China.

The film censorship system in China is arguably the most distinctive in the world. It is essential to recognize that Chinese censorship policies have evolved over time, with social stability, international relations, and market economy inclusion being factors that have influenced their progression and change. In the beginning, film studios in China relied entirely on government funding, with the government controlling various aspects such as the production of film copies, ticket prices, and the financial support of studio employees through state-owned assets. Funding for film production was obtained by converting agricultural and industrial output values to the People's

Bank of China, with allocated funds on an annual basis. However, with the introduction of the opening-up and reform policy in 1980 by Deng Xiaoping, the country underwent significant internal structural changes. As a result, the government stopped providing salaries, prompting studio heads to seek loans from central banks. This forced the studios to privatize and become companies, resulting in a significant transformation for many. The emergence of the Fifth Generation, which brought Chinese films to the international stage, occurred at the intersection of state-owned and private ownership. Followed by the birth of the Sixth Generation and true Independent Films that speed up the systemic change. In the early days of the Chinese film industry, films were reviewed by either the studio heads or occasionally, higher authorities, but a comprehensive system for film censorship was not yet established. It wasn't until the international success of Fifth Generation directors such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang, followed by the rebellious era of the Sixth Generation directors and the Independent Film movement, then, the entry of Hollywood into the Chinese market, along with the emergence of numerous commercial films, that the film censorship system began to take shape and develop. This study aims to highlight the crucial factors that determine the fate of Chinese films and filmmakers, beyond the censorship system. These factors may hold even greater significance than the censorship process itself.

Chinese Culture and the School of Thoughts

Firstly, in Chinese culture, there are three major schools of thought: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Comprehending the three schools of thought is critical for gaining insight into the fundamental concepts of Chinese culture and civilization. This understanding is not only essential to encompass the key concepts of Chinese culture and civilization but also make possible a better grasp of the fictional social interactions and outcomes.

Taoism, recognized as the oldest and most traditional of the three major Chinese philosophical systems, is characterized by significant literary works such as the Tao Te Ching and the Book of Changes (I Ching). The Book of Changes incorporates numerous mathematical concepts, while Chinese traditional medicine, including the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, holds substantial importance within Taoism. This philosophical tradition has had a profound influence on various aspects of Chinese culture, encompassing art, cinema, and the general way of life. The core Taoist principle of "wu wei," emphasizing the attainment of harmony with nature, has played a fundamental role in shaping the Chinese mindset and social interactions.

Taoist philosophy has left an indelible imprint on traditional arts like calligraphy and painting, capturing the essence of nature and the delicate balance between the opposing forces of yin and yang. Furthermore, Taoist themes of equilibrium, spiritual enlightenment, and interconnectedness have found expression in the works of numerous Chinese film directors. One notable academic article, "Romancing the Tao: How Ang Lee Globalized Ancient Chinese Wisdom" by Horace L. Fairlamb (2007), published in Vol. 15, No. 1/2 of *Cinema without Borders*, delves into the influence of Taoism through Director Ang Lee's films in global cinema (Fairlamb, 2007, p. 42). Another article, written by Low, Yuen Wei (2014) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, explores the presence of Buddhism and Taoism in popular films from a Jungian perspective (Low, 2014, p. 78). For our specific case study on filmmaker Zhang Yimou and his body of work, Taoism holds particular prominence. Yimou's commercial masterpiece "Hero" prominently reflects Taoist principles, and his 2018 film "Shadow" specifically emphasizes the intricate relationship between yin and yang in both storytelling and visual spectacles. These examples demonstrate the enduring impact of Taoism on Chinese cinema and the exploration of its philosophical tenets by contemporary filmmakers.

The second one is Buddhism. It is important to note that 'Buddhism' in this context refers specifically to the version of Buddhism that evolved in China, rather than the original Indian teachings. Buddhism first reached China during the Han dynasty, around the 1st century CE. The first Buddhist missionaries from India are believed to have arrived in China in 67 CE during the reign of Emperor Ming of Han. One of the most influential early translators of Buddhist texts into Chinese was the monk Xuanzang, who traveled to India in the 7th century and brought back many Buddhist texts and relics to China. "Journey to the West," one of the four classic Chinese novels written in the 16th century, was a fictionalized tale of the story of Xuanzang's journey to India to retrieve sacred texts of Buddhist teaching. In "Journey to the West", Xuanzang faced many challenges and obstacles on his quest for Buddhist texts, including battles with demons and other supernatural forces. He survived the journey with the help of his three disciples, the most famous one is the Monkey King Sun Wukong. The story is known for its fantastical elements, humorous tone, and its underlying themes of Buddhist philosophy and morality. It has been adapted into numerous works of literature, television, film, and theater in China and around the world. But the most important ideology that some might miss is the teacher-student relationship. Many people are unaware that Buddhism was not only introduced to China from India but also evolved and developed within the country over time. Zen Buddhism is the representative of Chinese Buddhism, which was learned, digested, and reinterpreted by Chinese people themselves after its introduction from India.

A branch of Mahayana Buddhism, Zen Buddhism originated in China during the Tang dynasty and then spread to Japan and other parts of East Asia. Important influences include the fifth and sixth patriarchs of Zen Buddhism, with the Heart Sutra as its representative work. Different from other Buddhist schools, Zen Buddhism emphasizes meditation, mindfulness, and direct experience over studying scripture and performing rituals. It values simplicity and emphasizes the attainment of enlightenment through the direct experience of reality and places less emphasis on traditional Buddhist concepts such as karma, rebirth, and the Four Noble Truths. Most importantly like the story of the key message of “Journey to the West”, it emphasizes the importance of the teacher-student relationship in the transmission of knowledge and realization. Zen Buddhism exerts a notable influence on Chinese artists, filmmakers, and actors. While explicit religious-themed films may be limited in number, their philosophical impact is unmistakable in various narratives. A prominent illustration can be found in the widely adored Stephen Chow film "Kung Fu Hustle," wherein the film's central theme embodies the essence of martial arts as a path to personal growth and self-defense rather than mere aggression and conquest. The ultimate depiction of a martial arts hero lies in their ability to triumph by appealing to their opponent's heart through peace and forgiveness, rather than relying on violence and vengeance.

Confucianism is the most influential school of thought in China, attributed to the teachings of Confucius during the Spring and Autumn period (771-476 BCE), also known as the Eastern Zhou period. This era followed the Western Zhou dynasty and preceded the Warring States period. Confucius taught moral values, social harmony, and governance, believing that good governance begins with the cultivation of individual moral character, which then leads to a harmonious society. His emphasis on virtue, wisdom, and knowledge was matched by his belief that rulers should lead by example and govern with compassion and justice. Confucius also emphasized interpersonal relations, believing that they were crucial to social harmony, and encouraged individuals to cultivate virtues such as loyalty, sincerity, and filial piety. His ideas on governance and interpersonal relations continue to influence Chinese culture and society today, and his teachings are considered an essential part of traditional Chinese wisdom, having been incorporated into various aspects of Chinese life, including politics, education, and social norms. In her research paper titled "Chinese Cinema and the Spirit of Chinese Aesthetics," Gu Chunfang, Associate Professor at Peking University's School of Arts, and researcher at the Aesthetics and Art Education Center, Film, Television, and Theatre Research Center, and Cultural Industry Research Institute, discusses the profound influence of Confucianism on Chinese cinema. She highlights that “Confucian aesthetics has developed into a comprehensive aesthetic system, providing significant nourishment for Chinese intellectuals and artists. It

emphasizes values such as conveying moral principles through culture, applying knowledge to the world, and cultivating benevolence. Furthermore, it encompasses original humanism, a sense of concern, a mission to save the world, and a moral responsibility to rescue society. Throughout the past century, Confucian aesthetics, with its principles of harmony among people and things, a sense of concern, and a human-centered spirit, has been the predominant ideology in Chinese films.” While the specific content and expressions may vary under different historical conditions, the concept of benevolence refers to the virtue of kindness, compassion, and goodwill toward others. It emphasizes the importance of treating others with respect, empathy, and a genuine concern for their well-being, which remains a stable core in Chinese films.

Overall, these three schools of thought are essential for understanding Chinese culture and must be considered in any research related to it. Taking a unique approach, this research paper emphasizes the human element of the Chinese Film Industry, which is a crucial component of its complex structure. While institutional frameworks and bureaucratic structures are significant, it is ultimately the people who keep the industry running. In Chinese culture, interpersonal relationships hold great significance, with relationships traditionally carrying more weight than the law, making the human element even more critical. This paper provides a concise summary of the history of the Chinese Film Industry, highlighting the political and historical events that have impacted it, and providing a case-by-case analysis of the case study regarding how filmmakers deal with restrictions and censorship. It also discusses industry initiatives and policies that have shaped and transformed it, with a specific focus on the importance of the human element within this mix.

Additionally, understanding the three different schools of thought provides insights into the works of Chinese directors and their film philosophy. Although directors are not the sole creators of a film, they exert more control over the project than any other contributor, and their personal beliefs are often reflected in their work. Ang Lee, one of the most renowned Chinese film directors, has expressed in interviews, "If you want to know me, everything is in my films." Drawing from both Chinese and American cultural influences, Ang Lee's filmmaking prowess originates from his profound exploration of artistic and philosophical inspiration derived from these backgrounds. Across his works, characters grapple with the task of defining their identities amidst new social and cultural contexts that uphold conflicting values. Ultimately, it is through surmounting these challenges that Ang Lee's protagonists discover their inherent self-worth, a direct manifestation of the influence of the three main schools of thought. This characteristic can also be observed in the works of numerous other Chinese directors.

Main Historical Phases

1. The Beginning

The Chinese film industry originated in 1905 and has experienced various historical phases, including the semi-feudal and semi-colonial periods of China, the periods of World Wars and the Chinese Civil War, the periods of the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China, the turbulent era of the Cultural Revolution, the period of reforms and the influence of the Studio System, and the current era of privatization and power transformation. Understanding the relationship between film and politics, especially the impact of censorship policies on shaping the collective consciousness of society, requires comprehending the evolution and growth of Chinese society, its cultural identity, and the significant historical periods that have influenced the development of the film industry.

At the beginning of the 20th century, China was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society struggling to cope with the impact of Western culture brought in by European colonizers. This transformative period marked the emergence of Chinese cinema. In the 31st year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty (1905), Ren Qingtai, the owner of Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio, invited the famous "Tan-style" Peking Opera founder Tan Xinpei to perform scenes from the traditional Peking Opera "Battle of Dingjunshan" in the studio's courtyard using natural sunlight. Tan played the lead role of Huang Zhong, while Ren directed the film and his assistant Liu Zhonglun handled the cinematography. The scenes shot over three days included "Requesting Battle", "Dancing with Swords", and "Dueling", which were recorded on three black and white reels. This marked the beginning of Chinese film production. Unfortunately, no copies of this historic event survived today, only one still photograph from the set has been preserved. Nevertheless, this became the first film in Chinese cinema history. Soon after, films capturing traditional Chinese Opera gained popularity in both northern and southern China. Beijing Fengtai Photography Studio went on to film drama film segments such as "Qingshi Mountain", "Yanyang Tower", "Shou Guansheng", "Baishuitan", and "The Leopard". These films were shown in the Daguan Opera House in Dashilan and the Jixiang Theater in Dong'an Market, where adoring fans packed the house. (Yaping, D. 2022).

The very first movie theater in China was built by a Spanish businessman name Antonio Ramos in the 34th year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty (1908). After completing his military service and starting his film business in the Philippines, Antonio Ramos moved to Shanghai, China in the late 19th century. In 1905, Ramos founded the Oriental Development Company and began constructing the first movie theater in China. The Salon de Pertierra opened in Shanghai in 1908 and showed films imported

from Europe and the United States. Ramos later opened additional theaters in Shanghai and other cities in China, contributing to the growth and development of the country's film industry. He died in 1933. (Deocampo, N., pp 110-121)

Following the Xinhai Revolution, in January 1912, the Republic of China was formed, and a stormy new era started. In 1913, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu established the Mingxing Film Company and made China's very first feature film "Difficult Couple". Zhang Shichuan zoomed in on the commercial potential of this new media and co-directed more than a dozen short story films based on new theater pieces, folktales, and popular jokes. Mingxing Film Company quickly became one of the largest and most influential film studios in China, producing many important films during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1922, the short film "Laborer's Love" marked a groundbreaking achievement in Chinese filmmaking. And in 1923, "Orphan Rescues Grandfather" set a milestone for its success in blending ideology, artistry, and commercialism, and presenting a distinctive sense of national consciousness. The release of this film started a period of significant growth. Between 1924 and 1927, many companies emerged, famous ones include Star Production, Great Wall Film Company, China Film Company, Shanghai Film Studio, and Tiny Film Company, each with distinctive styles. Unfortunately, it was short-lived due to political turmoil and social unrest, which quickly destroyed the environment that the film industry relied on for survival. (Cheng, J., pp 3 -7)

2. Wartime

Between 1927 and 1937, Chinese cinema underwent a decade of immense change. This period was not only transformative in the cinematic sense, which involved transitioning from silent films to incorporating sound technology, but it also brought about significant shifts in society, culture, economics, and national identity. These changes were reflected in films, both artistically and narratively, and also in their role in shaping social and cultural consciousness. The Leftist Drama League promoted films that exposed the grim realities of the era, including imperialism's aggression, the bourgeoisie and upper class's exploitation of the poor, poverty, injustice, corruption, and the betrayal and autocracy of the Nationalist government of the Republic of China. This call to action sparked a significant film movement known as leftist films, which included notable works such as "Torrents" and "Spring Silkworms" written by Xia Yan and directed by Cheng Bugao, "A Cry of Women" by Shen Xiling, "The Highway" by Sun Yu, and "The Goddess" by Wu Yonggang, providing invaluable insights into social issues. Additionally, during the struggle for cultural identity and national survival, filmmakers used cinema as a weapon, producing national defense films such as "Blood on Wolf Mountain" by Fei Mu, "Crossroads" by Shen Xiling, "Soaring Aspirations" by

Wu Yonggang, and "Angels on the Road" by Yuan Muzhi to defend the identity and survival of the new Republic of China. (Yaping, D. 2022).

In 1937, on July 7th, the Sino-Japanese War began with some shot exchange on the outskirts of Beijing and quickly escalated into Japan's full-scale invasion of China. During this time, Nanjing was the capital of the Republic of China. Japanese troops smashed into the city on December 13, 1937, with orders issued to "kill all captives." From December 1937 to January 1938, the Nanjing Massacre, also known as the Rape of Nanking, resulted in the estimated deaths of close to 300,000 people, around 90,000 military, and the rest are all civilians.

The Japanese invasion failed to halt all activities in China and instead added to the tumultuous times. From 1945 to 1949, many historians regard this period as the first golden age of Chinese cinema. The entire film industry was impacted by the military, political, and cultural conflicts related to the war and the bitter battle between the two parties. This resulted in the rise of two groups of filmmakers with opposing approaches to filmmaking. The Kunlun Group consisted of politically progressive filmmakers who were critical of the Nationalist government in power and aimed to use their films to highlight social issues and promote social justice. Notable members of the group included Shi Dongshan, Cai Chusheng, Zheng Junli, and Yang Hansheng, and their works often featured strong social commentary, leaning towards a leftist political orientation. Some of their notable works include "Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon on the Long Road" by Shi Dongshan, "Spring River Flows East" by Cai Chusheng and Zheng Junli, "The Lights of Ten Thousand Homes" by Shen Fu, "The Adventures of Sanmao" by Yang Hansheng, and "The Crow and the Sparrow" by Zheng Junli. In contrast, the Wenhua Group focused on artistic expression and humanistic values. They aimed to use their films to explore the complexities of human nature and emotions. Notable members of the group included Fei Mu and Sang Hu. Their films often explored themes of love, family, and interpersonal relationships, with a touch of sentimentality. A prime example of this is "Spring in a Small Town" by Fei Mu, widely regarded as one of the most highly acclaimed films in the history of Chinese cinema. (Ke, X. 2014).

3. New Government

In 1949, after losing the Chinese Civil War to the Communist Party, the Republic of China settled in Taiwan. The Nationalist Party, also known as The Kuomintang (KMT), was known to be the party of the educated and social elite, while the Communist Party was led by a farm boy with little education and was considered to represent the uneducated general public. This shift was reflected in the film produced in the next 20 years till the start of the notorious Cultural Revolution.

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Mao's new government moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing. The Chinese Communist Party recognizes the significant role of film as an art form in the country. In fact, the national anthem of the People's Republic of China originates from a film. During the 1930s, when Japanese troops occupied Northeast China, the theme song of the film "Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm" called for "March of the Volunteers" and became immensely popular after its widespread release. The movie tells the story of a poet named Xin Baihua, who abandons his life of comfort in Shanghai to fight bravely with his comrades on the front lines against the Japanese. Many young people who watched the film sang "March of the Volunteers" and joined the army to defend their young nation, the Republic of China. The message of the film had a huge impact, and this powerful song inspired and motivated the Chinese people to unite and resist the Japanese invasion. Before the war ended, many Communist Party members were part of the Leftist Drama League, and later on, the Kunlun Group, which used films to criticize the Republic of China's government led by the Nationalist Party. So of course, building a film industry reflecting the new government's ideology is high up on the Communist Party's agenda.

As part of the planned economy, 40 state-run film studios were established. Changchun Film Studio, previously a privately-owned film company founded in 1937, was occupied by the Japanese during the war. After the establishment of a new government, it became the first film production company in the People's Republic of China. Changchun Film Studio can be regarded as the cradle of Chinese cinema. During its golden years, the studio produced over 900 feature films and dubbed over 1,000 foreign films. Their incredible body of work included films that were beloved by generations. The majority of their films were inspired by real people and true stories. Such films include "Five Golden Flowers", "Battle on Shangganling Mountain", "The Sons and Daughters of the Chinese Revolution", "Liu Sanjie", "The White Haired Girl", and "Dong Cunrui." These stories deeply influenced the psyche of the general population. Other prominent state-run film studios in China include Shanghai Film Studio, Beijing Film Studio, Xi'an Film Studio, and the 8.1 Military Film Studio. Each film studio specializes in particular film genres, themes, and representations of regional cultural elements. For instance, the 8.1 Military Film Studio focuses mainly on producing military-themed films. A common theme from that period is a majority of the films produced are about heroism during wartime. (Hong, Y., & Yan, L., 2002)

In the aftermath of the establishment of a new government, a substantial number of government officials, high-ranking military personnel, intellectuals, and their families migrated to Beijing, leading to an unprecedented influx of people into the ancient city. The migrant population doubled the size of the local population at the

time, and as of 2000, three-quarters of the city's permanent residents were individuals who had migrated to Beijing after the founding of the People's Republic of China, along with their descendants. In the first 30 years of the People's Republic of China, large areas of housing estates, known as "Da Yuan," were constructed around major cities. These real estate compounds served as a fundamental form of social management and organization in Mao's new China, providing housing exclusively for families of workers from the same institution. Workers were guaranteed a place to live based on seniority and years of service, and there was no need to save up money or take out a mortgage to buy a house. By providing all the infrastructures that cater to people's daily needs, these Da Yuan confined people to conduct their daily lives within the same community and created little societies away from the general public. The Beijing Da Yuans had special political significance and was one of the most important city expansion plans of all time. Da Yuan is divided into four types. Military barracks, where most of the residents are military personnel, account for the majority of Beijing Da Yuan. The remaining three are national government institutions, universities, and large state-owned factories.

With the Forbidden City at its center, and old Beijing reaching just over the second ring road. Starting from the newly constructed third ring road, one can find many of these Da Yuans housing the headquarters of various institutions. Major Beijing Da Yuans includes the Ministry of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Coal, and Ministry of Textiles, along Chang'an Avenue. The Ministry of Machinery and Ministry of Finance established their Da Yuan in Sanlihe outside Fuxingmen. In addition, the headquarters of various People's Liberation Armies are from Gongzhufen to Xishan Mountain. Da Yuans belonged to research institutions such as the eight major universities all concentrated on Xueyuan Road in the north. Da Yuan's population is extremely diverse. It can be said that it is like a melting pot, integrating different cultures from various regions and ethnic groups. People from all over the country live here due to work reasons. Adults speak Mandarin in heavy dialects, while children speak the "New Beijing dialect". Since the early 50s, the people of Beijing have lived in two different worlds. This self-sufficient way of life inside the Da Yuan has created a strong bond among the residents. While the parents were at work, the children of the Da Yuan, known as Da Yuan Zi Di, grew up together like brothers and sisters. On the other hand, their contact and interaction with those outside the walls is almost nonexistent. The new culture formed here is entirely different from traditional Beijing culture and is therefore referred to as Da Yuan culture. These Da Yuans are not open to ordinary people; generally, public officials, scholars, military personnel, and their families live here. Vehicles without passes cannot enter at will, especially in military barracks. There

is strict security inside, with a guard stationed every five steps. Relevant documents and registration are required to enter the gate.

By 1956, the major film studios had all adopted a similar pattern with the major Beijing Da Yuans as part of a large-scale system construction and adjustment effort. The goal was to establish "independent and complete film production bases" modeled after the Soviet system. The 8.1 Military Film Studio serves as a prime illustration of this, along with the Beijing Film Studio, both of which are recognized as integral parts of Beijing Da Yuan. The 8.1 Military Film Studio functioned like a small village, providing all the essential amenities that filmmakers and their families required, including film studios, sound stages, offices, and warehouses. The apartment complexes within the compound were well equipped with a range of facilities, such as a bathhouse, clinic, cafeteria, market, gyms, movie theater, swimming pool, daycare, and the famous 8.1 military school covering grades one to twelfth. The school had many famous alumni, one in particular, the current Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Chinese Communist Party had a significant presence in these communities. Living in these Da Yuans came with social benefits such as increased social status, connections, better housing, health insurance, education, and job opportunities. All of which led to the formation of a new upper class in China.

"Censorship of Chinese Cinema in the PRC: 1949-1966" by Matthew D. Johnson is a scholarly article that explores the censorship of films in China during the initial 17-year period of the People's Republic of China (PRC), from 1949 to 1966. This comprehensive study delves into the historical account of how the Chinese Communist Party exercised control over film production, distribution, and exhibition, utilizing censorship as a means to propagate the party's political ideology and suppress dissent. Johnson meticulously examines the various censorship mechanisms employed, including script review, creative team approval, and final cut inspection. Additionally, the article delves into the political backdrop during which censorship unfolded, encompassing the Anti-Rightist Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution, and highlights the impact of these campaigns on film censorship policies. However, the analysis presented in this research paper provides evidence that prior to the Cultural Revolution, there was a notable surge of creative expression in films categorized as propaganda, as indicated by their well-defined objectives and structure. The emergence of nationalist films was not solely a result of strategic planning; it also reflected the people's desire to commemorate their triumphs and honor the heroes who paved the way for a new China. This period witnessed a significant shift in the social class of the protagonists, with every film revolving around characters from the working class. Even when the main character was a general, they originated from the working class, highlighting a clear distinction between the new

People's Republic of China and the Republic of China, where ordinary working-class individuals took center stage. In contrast to the present regulations and the current push for nationalistic narratives under Xi Jinping's administration, which received many objections and resistance, the abandonment of the class system and the prospect of establishing a new societal structure were enticing to all at the beginning. Even films that glorified the Communist Party were created organically, as the public believed in the party's promise of a brighter future. Consequently, it is crucial to differentiate between the two and refrain from classifying them under the same umbrella for more nuanced analysis.

But of course, that period of the honeymoon phase between the people and the communist party was short-lived. The famine in the late 50s exposed poor management at every level of the new government, as demonstrated by Chairman Mao's absurd policies of the "bird-killing campaign". It revealed unfathomable stupidity and incomprehensible incompetence from the highest level of leadership. Intellectuals were silenced, denied the opportunity to express their concerns on important matters, and as a result, the people suffered greatly. As Mao aged, a new generation of party leaders began to surface, posing a threat to his authority. Liu Shaoqi, a prominent figure, challenged Mao's vision for the Great Leap Forward and argued that the movement was partially responsible for the subsequent famine and the deaths of over 20 million people. Eventually, Liu Shaoqi succeeded Mao as the next Chairman. However, Mao's unwillingness to relinquish his grip on power and his insatiable desire for even greater control ultimately triggered a decade-long period of upheaval and turmoil, completely destabilizing the entire country.

In 1966, Mao initiated the Cultural Revolution, a far-reaching sociopolitical movement that aimed to eradicate capitalist and traditional elements from society and promote Maoist ideology. Mao actively supported the Red Guards, a group of students whom he legitimized politically. When the new Chairman Liu Shaoqi attempted to restrain the radical student movement, Mao ordered the Gang of Four, led by his wife Jiang Qing, to bolster the Red Guards' efforts. The students were instructed to attack the "four olds": Old Ideas, Old Culture, Old Customs, and Old Habits. Within months, Liu Shaoqi was arrested and imprisoned. After enduring an immense amount of scrutiny, Liu was diagnosed with tuberculosis and left to die in prison without receiving any medical treatment. Furthermore, his body was cremated without his family being informed. Fortunately, a worker at the crematory recognized him, saved his ashes, and kept his ashes hidden for a decade. From the top down, the politically driven Cultural Revolution spread throughout China, causing profound political upheaval, social chaos, and economic disruption. Estimates suggest that the death toll ranges from hundreds of thousands to millions. One should consider this an even bigger crime than the

Nanjing Massacre committed by the Japanese. Cultural institutions, universities and schools, historical artifacts, and places of worship were destroyed, and intellectuals, artists, and other professionals were persecuted, imprisoned, or killed. The revolution caused irreparable damage to China's cultural heritage and set the country back decades in terms of social, economic, and intellectual development. It was only after Mao's death that the country began to recover and rebuild.

4. Cultural Identity

When exploring Chinese culture, there are fundamental differences at the core of Chinese philosophies compared to Western beliefs. The three major Chinese schools of thought, namely Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism, all embrace the concept of reasonable inequality based on wisdom, knowledge, and seniority. In contrast, democracy, socialism, and communism are ideologies that originated in the West. Both the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China faced challenges in trying to reconcile their respective systems. Members of the Chinese Communist Party spend half of their lives trying to figure out how to implement communism and socialism successfully, and the other half sneaking in elements of capitalism and presenting it to the average Chinese citizens as "the same thing, just with different ingredients." This approach, famously referred to as "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" by Deng Xiaoping, aims to adapt these ideologies to suit the unique circumstances of China. The same could be said about the struggle of the Republic of China. The Nationalist Party (KMT) was supposed to establish a democratic government, but Chiang Kaishek was simply another dictator. Although Chiang Kaishek defeated the Japanese, he lost the Chinese Civil War to the farm boy Mao Zedong mainly due to decades of poor governance. His son and successor Chiang Chingkuo is actually the one who should be credited for transforming the Republic of China, i.e. Taiwan, into a true democracy. Many argue that this is only possible because the island of Taiwan is so small. Some insisted that Chiang Chingkuo's policy would've never worked in mainland China and the country would've split into many small countries instead of staying united. Interestingly, it is worth noting that Deng Xiaoping and Chiang Chingkuo used to be friends. The two were classmates at the Sun Yat-sen University in the Soviet Union from 1926 to 1927. During that time, Chiang Chingkuo was a member of the Communist Youth League, and Deng Xiaoping was his team captain. In 1973, Chiang Kaishek passed most of his responsibilities to his son, Chiang Chingkuo, and Deng Xiaoping rose to power in the People's Republic of China. Both leaders immediately shifted their focus to economic development and played significant roles in driving economic growth. Together, the two China contributed to the remarkable rise of Asia.

In 2019, an article titled "The Competition and Collaboration between Deng Xiaoping and Chiang Chingkuo: It's a Pity Chingkuo Died Too Soon" was published in the National Humanities History Magazine and later reprinted in the Writer's Digest. The article provides a detailed account of the intricate relationship between the two leaders of the two China and their significant social, economic, and cultural impact. On January 1st, 1979, the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China issued the "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan," extending goodwill. Liao Chengzhi, the head of Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office, also published an open letter from Deng Xiaoping to Chiang Chingkuo, referring to him as "my little brother," proposing a third cooperation between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party. Taipei firmly declined Liao Chengzhi's visit, with Chiang Chingkuo stating that the Communist Party's proposal for cross-strait dialogue was "old wine in new bottles." However, on the other hand, Chiang Chingkuo also stated that he believes Beijing's encouragement of expanding economic, social, and cultural exchanges between the two sides would be beneficial in the long run. If cautious development of travel and trade between the two China of the strait were to take place, it would undoubtedly enhance Taiwan's image and influence throughout China. From this point on, the stage for the reconciliation between the two China was built jointly by Deng Xiaoping and Chiang Chingkuo. As time went on, Chiang Chingkuo believed that the timing for cross-strait negotiations had gradually matured. In the midst of formal dialogue between Taipei and Beijing, a "middleman" was essential. Chiang Chingkuo entrusted this sensitive role to Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. Chiang Chingkuo and Lee Kuan Yew see eye to eye on many things. Every time Lee Kuan Yew visited Taipei, the two would have hours-long private conversations. Chiang Chingkuo believed that Lee Kuan Yew had a deeper understanding of cross-strait issues than anyone else. As for Deng Xiaoping, he famously asked Lee Kuan Yew to "say Hi to my old classmate in Moscow for me."

During the 1980s, the Republic of China outshone the People's Republic of China in almost every aspect. Mainland residents embraced Taiwanese pop music, indulged in Taiwanese TV shows and movies, and emulated Taiwan's latest fashion trends. However, by the mid-90s, there was a noticeable shift. Mainland China starts to catch up. This was partly due to the untimely death of Chiang Chingkuo.

In 1987, The Republic of China underwent significant transformations, with the most notable occurring on October 14th. The Nationalist Party (KMT), after lifting the ban on political parties and newspapers took a further step by opening up travel to the mainland. This move was seen by many scholars as a complete betrayal of the Chiang family dynasty's anti-communist agenda. Over the following two months, tens of thousands of Taiwanese residents applied to visit the mainland. Chiang Chingkuo viewed this development as part of his strategy to encourage internal changes in the

mainland, saying, "There's no need to worry. Visiting the mainland will allow the people of Taiwan to understand the situation there, and vice versa for the people of the mainland to learn about Taiwan's circumstances." In October, KMT Secretary-General Li Huan announced that the party's policy was no longer to seek to replace the Communist Party in mainland China but to promote "political reform, freedom of speech, and economic liberalization." Under Chiang Chingkuo's instruction, Taiwan officially ended the restrictions on newspaper licenses and the number of pages on New Year's Day in 1988. Within days, approximately 200 new publications were registered, and numerous new magazines emerged on the streets. Concurrently, over 60 political groups applied to register as political parties. Eventually, with the approval of 20 political organizations, including the Democratic Progressive Party, new political parties were officially established. On January 12th, a draft proposal overseen by Ma Yingjeou, who later served as President of the Republic of China from 2008 to 2016, to end mainland control over Taiwan's political process was approved. Ma Yingjeou prepared to deliver this news to Chiang Chingkuo the following day. Unfortunately, on the afternoon of the 13th, Chiang Chingkuo unexpectedly passed away.

Upon hearing the news of Chiang Chingkuo's death, Deng Xiaoping swiftly convened an expanded meeting of the Communist Party of China's Central Political Bureau. After receiving a report from the Taiwan Affairs Office's working group on Taiwan affairs, Deng Xiaoping emphasized the importance of the two Chinas' reunification to the world. He expressed his belief that if Chiang Chingkuo were still alive, the reunification process would be less difficult and complex. To quote: Deng Xiaoping regretfully said "It's a Pity Chingkuo Died Too Soon." In the past cooperation between the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Communist Party (CCP) has happened twice, and Deng stated his belief that a third cooperation between them was possible. Unfortunately, Chiang Chingkuo's untimely demise prevented further collaboration. Deng Xiaoping's statement proved to be accurate. If Chiang Chingkuo had lived a few more years, the world might have avoided the looming threat of a nuclear war today.

For many years, people have found a stronger Chinese identity in films produced in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and this can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, these regions were spared from the notorious Cultural Revolution that gripped mainland China for a decade. Moreover, a significant number of individuals who fled to Taiwan with the Nationalist Government belonged to the original upper-middle class, which actively promoted and represented arts and culture. This differed from the lower class's perception that these traditions were imposed on them by the ruling class. As a result, both Hong Kong and Taiwan were able to preserve Chinese culture, including written languages, arts, music, literature, traditions, family structures and hierarchy, gender roles, and holidays, all to a greater extent than the mainland. Secondly, Taiwan

and Hong Kong have a long history of artistic and cinematic expression, which allows for a deeper exploration and preservation of Chinese cultural heritage. Thirdly, the relatively greater freedom of expression and less stringent censorship in Taiwan and Hong Kong, compared to mainland China, enable filmmakers to address sensitive social and cultural topics more openly. This artistic autonomy allows for a more nuanced portrayal of Chinese identity. Lastly, the diverse influences and interactions with global cinema in Taiwan and Hong Kong have contributed to the development of unique cinematic styles that blend Chinese traditions with international storytelling techniques. Together, these elements have led many to perceive a stronger sense of Chinese cultural identity in films originating from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Established in 1962 by the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan, the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival holds the most prestigious position in the industry, recognizing and honoring the finest Chinese-language films. The Golden Horse Award stands as the pinnacle of achievement for any director within the realm of Chinese-language cinema. Following closely in terms of status and reputation, the Hong Kong International Film Festival, founded in 1976, holds a significant position. In recognition and promotion of Chinese-language films. Shanghai International Film Festival, established in 1993, secures the third spot on the cultural podium. Initially, the Chinese-language film market was dominated by Taiwanese and Hong Kong films. However, mainland filmmakers unexpectedly surpassed their Taiwanese and Hong Kong counterparts at an accelerated pace, thanks to collaborations within the unique collective known as Beijing Da Yuan Zi Di and, of course, the Fifth-Generation Chinese Filmmakers.

5. Fifth-Generation Chinese Filmmakers

The fifth-generation Chinese filmmakers, known as the first wave of filmmakers who emerged after the Cultural Revolution, were instrumental in revolutionizing Chinese cinema and shaping its artistic language. Emerging in the 1980s, directors such as Zhang Yimou, our case study, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang, received formal film education after the end of the Cultural Revolution. They brought a fresh and innovative perspective to Chinese filmmaking, breaking away from traditional norms and exploring more personal and critical narratives. Their visually captivating films, infused with political undertones, garnered international acclaim as they depicted the intricate social changes and complexities of Chinese society. The fifth-generation filmmakers played a vital role in revitalizing Chinese cinema and establishing its prominence within the global film industry.

Chen Kaige is one of the most notable film directors to emerge from Beijing Da Yuan and is considered a representative figure of the fifth generation of Chinese

directors. He has directed several iconic films, including "Yellow Earth", "Farewell My Concubine", and "The Emperor and the Assassin". The film "Farewell My Concubine" premiered on January 1, 1993, at the Hong Kong International Film Festival and received critical acclaim. The same year, the film won the Palme d'Or at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, making it the first and only Chinese-language film to achieve this honor. It also won several other awards, including a Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film and a BAFTA for Best Film Not in the English Language. Additionally, the film received two nominations at the 66th Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Foreign Language Film.

Born in 1952 into a family of filmmakers, Chen Kaige is a Da Yuan Zi Di who grew up inside the Beijing Film Studio Da Yuan. Chen Kaige's father, Chen Huai'ai, was a renowned director at Beijing Film Studio, and his mother was a screenwriter. Chen Kaige's father Chen Huai'ai first gained recognition for his successful incorporation of Beijing Opera into the realm of film, notably with works like "The Women Generals of the Yang Family," "Wild Boar Forest," and "Mu Guiying Takes Command in Hongzhou." Chen Huai'ai's experiences during the Cultural Revolution mirrored those depicted in his son's film's protagonists' lives. He was banned from filmmaking and ordered to clean public bathrooms. In Chen Kaige's own article, "Youth Sword," he disclosed an incident from his past. At the age of 14, when his father and other artists and filmmakers were subjected to criticism and public shaming, he, in an attempt to distance himself from his father, not only wrote and displayed derogatory couplets on their doorstep but also publicly pushed his father to the ground. Chen Kaige later expressed this act of betrayal is something he's deeply ashamed of and will hunt him for the rest of his life. After the Cultural Revolution ended, following in his parents' footsteps, Chen Kaige pursued a career in filmmaking. He gained admission to the Beijing Film Academy in 1977, where he studied alongside notable fifth-generation directors such as Zhang Yimou, who is one of our case studies, and Tian Zhuangzhuang. As a proud representative of the Beijing Film Academy, Chen once wrote that many filmmakers from his generation took pride in their parents' accomplishments, viewing themselves as natural-born revolutionaries with noble lineage and pure aspirations, aspiring to undertake significant national tasks and achieve remarkable feats. Funny enough, Chen Kaige made many films during his career, however, none of which could live up to "Farewell My Concubine," not even close. This led many to believe that Chen Kaige should thank his dad for all his success. Chen Huai'ai served as an artistic consultant for his son on the film "Farewell My Concubine" and frequently visited the film set during its production. The fictional narrative of "Farewell My Concubine" holds personal significance for the Chen family.

No discussion of the Chinese film censorship policy and its impact on filmmakers' careers would be complete without acknowledging what happened to Tian Zhuangzhuang. As one of the most highly esteemed members of the fifth generation of Chinese directors, alongside Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang holds a prominent position in the industry and is a significant figure in Chinese cinema. Like most Da Yuan Zi Di, not only did Tian Zhuangzhuang and Chen Kaige grow up together, the two were like brothers. Both had stated in interviews that, originally, Tian Zhuangzhuang was going to apply to Cinematography at the Beijing Film Academy. However, when he found out Chen Kaige was going for Directing, he changed his mind so he can hang with his best friend. Growing up in the Beijing Film Studio Da Yuan, Tian Zhuangzhuang also had a strong family background in the film industry. His father, Tian Fang, was a renowned actor who acted as the male lead in "The Sons and Daughters of the Chinese Revolution," produced by the Changchun Film Studio. Tian Fang was once famously seated next to Chairman Mao during the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. He became the head of the Beijing Film Studio before the start of the Cultural Revolution. Meanwhile, Tian Zhuangzhuang's mother, Yu Lan, was a well-known actress who played the role of one of the most famous Chinese female war heroes, Jiang Jie in "Eternity in the Flames of War." She eventually became the head of the China Children's Film Studio. Like all the other Da Yuan Zi Di, Tian witnessed his parents' glorious days as well as when they had to endure daily torture and public humiliation during the Cultural Revolution. Despite his privileged background and exceptional talent, Tian Zhuangzhuang had a different vision for filmmaking. He wanted to create realistic films that differed from his parents' patriotic films. After graduation, Tian was assigned to the Beijing Film Studio, Chen Kaige was assigned to the Beijing Children's Film Studio. Meanwhile, their classmate Zhang Yimou was sent to work as a cameraman at the Guangxi Film Studio. Tian Zhuangzhuang and Zhang Yimou became very close during their time in school. Later Tian Zhuangzhuang recalled in interviews that he asked his mother to help him keep Zhang Yimou in Beijing, but was unsuccessful. Luckily, Zhang Yimou was eventually transferred from Guangxi Film Studio to Xi'an Film Studio. Arguably, fresh out of school, Tian Zhuangzhuang had the most promising career path ahead of him out of the three. However, their different experience with the censorship policy changed everything. Tian Zhuangzhuang always had a desire to portray the narratives of the underprivileged, a sentiment reflected in his films like "September," a poignant love story depicting a teacher-student relationship that never blossomed, and notably, his film "The Horse Thief." Zhuangzhuang aimed to direct his lens toward the working class and ethnic minorities in China, capturing their moments of joy, sorrow, and struggle. "The Horse Thief" was a groundbreaking film that portrayed the hunting

lifestyle of herdsmen, distinguishing itself by featuring dialogue in Mongolian and Tibetan languages for the first time in cinematic history. Many of Tian Zhuangzhuang's artistic choices in the film angered leaders of the Cultural Department who accused the film of being too obscure. However, Tian Zhuangzhuang believed that there was no absolute right or wrong in art, and stated that his films reflected this sentiment. During reviews, Tian Zhuangzhuang was challenged with questions such as "Who can understand this film you're making?" Film critic Li Tuo asked bluntly, "Tian Zhuangzhuang, can you tell me what this film is about?" To which Tian famously replied, "What do you think it's about?"

In 1993, the "Several Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Current Film Industry Mechanism" was introduced. The state monopoly and centralized purchasing model were replaced by government subsidies, foreign investment, and the utilization of foreign talents and resources. Many Chinese Filmmakers thought "Spring is finally here!" Tian Zhuangzhuang drew from his childhood experiences and his parents' struggles during the Cultural Revolution to create his film "The Blue Kite." Through the perspective of its female protagonist, the film portrays China's political movements from 1953 to 1967. "The Blue Kite" fearlessly confronts the political and historical issues of that era and holds the distinction of being the first-ever Chinese film to receive funding from Hong Kong and Japan. Coincidentally, during this time, Tian's best friend from school, Zhang Yimou, directed "To Live," and his childhood best friend Chen Kaige directed "Farewell My Concubine." Everyone knows that the Chinese Communist Party doesn't want to reflect on what happened during the Cultural Revolution. But the Chinese people need to reflect and express their pain and frustration. Similarly, "Farewell My Concubine" and "To Live" faced challenges in obtaining approval for release and were submitted to international film festivals under foreign production companies. Although "Farewell My Concubine" faced a temporary ban in China, its international success elevated Chen Kaige's status as a "god" in the Chinese Film Industry. Eventually, "Farewell My Concubine" received a limited release in mainland China. On the other hand, "To Live" was banned for ten years. However, Zhang Yimou only received minor punishment and continued to enjoy a remarkable career. Unfortunately, Tian Zhuangzhuang's situation was very different.

Similar to the other two films, the production team of "The Blue Kite" submitted the film under its Japanese title to international film festivals. Around the same time, the Japanese Prime Minister paid homage to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors fallen soldiers from World War Two. Unlike Germany, Japan has never officially apologized for its war crimes during that period. The Japanese Prime Minister's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine further strained the China-Japan relationship to an all-time low. The Chinese film delegation could not tolerate the film competing under a Japanese title. As a result, the

entire team of "The Blue Kite" faced severe punishment, and Tian Zhuangzhuang was banned from directing films for ten years, the harshest penalty the industry had ever seen. While both Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou went on to direct numerous films and ushered in a new era of Chinese cinema, Tian Zhuangzhuang bid farewell to his directing career. He eventually landed a job as a college professor at his alma mater, the Beijing Film Academy. Luckily, the community of filmmakers handed him an olive branch, offering him abundant acting opportunities, which paved the way for his successful career as a film actor.

Many people have suggested that the outcome of Tian Zhuangzhuang's situation was influenced by his previous interactions with authorities. Furthermore, the fact that his parents both portrayed anti-Japanese war heroes in famous war movies may have worked against him in this case. While the China-Japan relations issue seems to provide a logical explanation for the differential treatment between Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, and Tian Zhuangzhuang, there are other rumors circulating regarding this matter. One popular theory suggests that the creative team behind "Farewell My Concubine" used their connections to show the film to then-Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping. Deng Xiaoping supposedly liked the film, and this is how the film received a limited release after it was banned. However, this theory lacks empirical evidence or written proof, making it difficult for academics and scholars alike to accept. But it's worth pointing out another baffling fact, compared to the other two films, "Farewell My Concubine" not only depicted public trials that were prevalent during the Cultural Revolution in extensive scenes, but the film also presented a love triangle involving Beijing Opera performers as homosexuals, which should be a big "no, no". In contrast, the other two films focused on emphasizing the importance of family and family bonds during hard times such as the Cultural Revolution, making the different outcomes of the three films utterly illogical. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there is a common pattern in the censorship process, where factors other than written rules hold greater significance and can dramatically alter the outcomes. The methodology behind Chinese censorship is simply not as straightforward as one would expect. It leaves room for negotiations, and often, corruption.

6. Cultural Display in the Film Industry

While prominent figures from the Fifth-generation like Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang are part of the "Da Yuan Zi Di" (Children of the Da Yuan), there are other significant cultural figures among this new Chinese upper class. The Da Yuan compounds were witness to some of the most brutal treatments and tortures inflicted upon intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. Accusations against one person often

resulted in the persecution of their entire family and the upheaval of their social lives. Families of those accused as counter-revolutionaries faced severe consequences, with their spouses being labeled as accomplices, relatives being threatened, and even their children enduring humiliation at school. Many families suffered public humiliation, physical abuse, eviction, and seizure of their belongings. Xi Jinping, now the Chinese President and a member of the elite "Da Yuan Zi Di" group, provides a relevant case study of this phenomenon. Xi Jinping grew up in one of the Beijing Da Yuan compounds. In his earlier life, he enjoyed lots of privileges. His father, a comrade-in-arms of Mao, held a high-ranking position before being purged as a "counter-revolutionary." Because of this, Xi Jinping himself experienced public humiliation, and abduction, and spent six years as a manual laborer for reeducation. The experiences endured by the Da Yuan Zi Di like Xi Jinping had a profound impact on their perspectives and outlooks. This unique group of social and cultural elites played a crucial role in shaping China's political and cultural landscape in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Some, like Xi Jinping, followed their parents' paths and pursued careers as government officials or military officers, while others opted for careers in arts and culture, continuing to shape the country's cultural and social consciousness to this day.

Compared to the average Chinese citizen, Da Yuan Zi Di was often highly educated and well-connected. Born into prestigious families, some of their parents were military officers, founding members of the new China, high-ranking officials, heroes, and martyrs. Da Yuan offered these kids the privilege of being exposed to foreign films, music, arts, and many new experiences before the general public. Even during the Cultural Revolution when nationwide bans were in effect, some Da Yuan Zi Di still managed to access restricted music and films through their parents' connections and work privileges. One such example is Lin Ligu, the son of Lin Biao, who was a prominent figure in the Communist Party following the downfall of Liu Shaoqi and a close ally of Mao Zedong. Lin Ligu himself was being groomed for high political positions within the party until the sudden death of his father, which occurred under infamous circumstances. The incident involved an aviation mishap that took place after Lin Biao's alleged attempt to assassinate Mao and defect to the Soviet Union. On September 13th, 1971, Lin's aircraft, carrying him and several members of his family, crashed in Mongolia. It is well-documented that as early as the 1960s, Lin Ligu, the son of Lin Biao, had already become a devoted fan of rock and roll. Had he governed China, he would have made the entire nation listen to rock music instead of the Eight Model of Old Chinese Operas. Any observer can easily point out the irony and hypocrisy of it all. A government with a slogan of abolishing social class quickly moved towards establishing a new class structure, faster than anyone could have imagined.

After 1977, many Da Yuan Zi Di who went into art and culture became prominent figures in literature, arts, music, and film, and became pioneers in their respective fields. Notably, the first group of individuals to study abroad in the late 1970s and early 1980s after the Cultural Revolution were mostly Da Yuan Zi Di as well. At the beginning of the People's Republic of China, people's cultural life was not very rich. Beijing was the cultural center and the first to receive cultural products from abroad. For example, China's rock music pioneer Cui Jian is also a Da Yuan Zi Di. Cui Jian's parents were both musicians and members of the military cultural troupe. He had musical talents from a very young age and coupled with the convenient conditions at home, he was one of the first to be exposed to popular music from Europe and America. Cui Jian soon fell in love with rock music, and for the relatively closed China at that time, these popular songs were very precious resources. Later, his song "Nothing to My Name" helped Cui Jian open the road for rock music in China, making him the godfather of Chinese rock and roll. In 2014, Cui Jian wrote and directed his first film "The Blue Bone." Despite the fact that a part of the narration takes place during the Cultural Revolution, and the clear implication of homosexuality of one of the film protagonists, the art house experimental film received a special award at the International Rome Film Festival and had a short release in Mainland China. Cui Jian won the Best New Director award at the 15th Chinese Film Media Awards on October 31, 2015, and Special Recognition from the Annual Jury of the China Film Directors Guild, which is evidence that censorship rules and regulations do not apply equally to all individuals.

To provide further evidence showcasing the unpredictability of censorship policies, another great example would be famous actor/director Jiang Wen's films "In the Heat of the Sun" and "Devils on the Door Step".

Most scholars classify Jiang Wen as part of the Sixth Generation of Chinese Directors. However, it is important to note that the Sixth Generation is primarily recognized for their pioneering work in truly independent filmmaking, whereas Jiang Wen's films have consistently received significant funding and do not conform to the typical small-budget or micro-budget films associated with this group. The term "Sixth Generation" refers to a collective of Chinese film directors who emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s. Notable figures associated with the Sixth Generation include Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai, Jia Zhang Ke, Lou Ye, He Jianjun, Wu Wenguang, Shi Jian, Guan Hu, and Wang Anquan. These directors are celebrated for their independent and innovative filmmaking styles, often exploring social issues and offering a more realistic portrayal of contemporary China. In contrast to the grand epic spectacles of the Fifth Generation Chinese Directors, the Sixth Generation filmmakers display a distinctive sense of independence and a strong inclination toward individual expression. Their works consistently emphasize respect for individual life and the concern for personal

freedom. Alongside the rise of the entire Sixth Generation, there exists a resistance against mainstream films, film censorship systems, and even the entire market economy. While the majority of Sixth Generation filmmakers focus on creating independent films aimed at international film festivals and challenging the censorship system, Jiang Wen stands as an exception to this trend.

First of all, Jiang Wen is also a Beijing Da Yuan Zi Di. Starting his career as an actor, Jiang Wen gained recognition for his lead role in Zhang Yimou's "Red Sorghum," which won the Goldener Bär at the 1988 Berlinale. However, during filming, Jiang Wen, who graduated top of his class from the Central Drama School was very vocal about Zhang Yimou's directing style. Later, Jiang Wen decided to try directing himself. Jiang's father was a Korean War veteran. His childhood friend is Wang Shuo, a renowned novelist who had published many best-selling books. Jiang is a huge fan of Wang's novel "Animals Are Fierce," which tells the story of a group of Red Guards growing up in a military Da Yuan during the Cultural Revolution. Since the two were great friends, Wang Shuo agreed to let Jiang Wen adapt the novel into a film. This became Jiang Wen's directorial debut, "In the Heat of the Sun." "In the Heat of the Sun" won several awards at the 1994 Venice Film Festival, including Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor, and later went on to claim numerous awards at the 1996 Golden Horse Film Festival, such as Best Director, Best Feature Film, Best Cinematography, Best Adapted Screenplay, and Best Leading Actor. Time magazine ranked the film "Top Ten Best Movies in the World in 1995." The film received a wide release in China and made a stunning 50 million at the box office. This is a complete contradiction to China's censorship policy, which forbids mentioning the sensitive period of the Cultural Revolution. To this day, "In the Heat of the Sun" remains the only Chinese film that depicts the Cultural Revolution and has received a wide release in mainland China. Why? Perhaps the reviewers for this film were fans of Jiang Wen who was already a household name due to the success of his acting career? No logical explanation can be found for this case. However, Jiang Wen's luck runs out with his next film.

In 1998, Jiang Wen acted and directed his second film "Devils on the Door Step." This film is widely considered to be Jiang Wen's best work. "Devils on the Door Step" won the Grand Jury Award at Cannes 2000. The film was released in eight different countries but banned in China. "Devils on the Door Step" is a war comedy, the film tells the story of a small Chinese village taking care of two Japanese war prisoners during the Sino-Japanese War, but their actions led to the massacre of the entire village by the Japanese military. How can a film about a massacre of an entire Chinese village by the Japanese be banned? Once again, this outcome makes no logical sense. Interestingly, the rejection letter Jiang Wen received from the Film Bureau regarding the film's release is available online. Fans of the film kept the letter accessible for anyone

interested to delve into the details and weigh in on the matter. The following is the translation of the rejection letter found online:

“Regarding the censorship opinions on the co-production film "Devils on the Door Step," which your company submitted for review to the Film Examination Committee of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, the Film Examination Committee has reviewed and concluded the following:

The film did not strictly adhere to the opinions in the approval document issued by the Film Bureau regarding the co-production film "Devils on the Door Step" (Document No. [1998] 302). The script was not modified accordingly, and the film was shot without submitting the registered script. Additionally, the film has added numerous dialogues and plot elements without permission, resulting in the film not only failing to show the hatred and resistance of the Chinese people against the aggressors in the background of the War (the only character who dares to curse and resist the Japanese army is an annoying lunatic). The film also highlights and exaggerates the Chinese villagers' ignorance, numbness, and servility. On the other hand, the film did not fully expose the aggressive nature of Japanese militarism, but instead highlighted the rampant momentum of Japanese aggressors, resulting in a serious deviation from the basic concept of the film.

The film contains numerous vulgar language, such as the Japanese soldiers use the insulting term "stupid pig" to address Chinese villagers, and female nudity, which overall is of a low taste and does not meet the standards of the "Film Review Regulations.”

Lastly, the film title must be reselected as required by the Film Bureau. The film needs to be carefully modified according to the attached reference and resubmitted for review.

- Review Team at the China Film Bureau”

“Disrespecting” the authorities of the Film Bureau and “unlawfully participating” in international film festivals led to a five-year ban on Jiang Wen’s directing career. On the Film Bureau’s website, the film's script is still marked as “under review” today. Online criticism from some fans accused the reviewer of a lack of humor and intelligence. However, their outrage has had no impact on the case. The Film Bureau sets the standards for filmmaking in China, and thankfully, this letter provides insight into their criteria. Although Jiang Wen had to wait five years to direct another film, he continued working as an actor during those years of hibernation.

Initially established as an independent entity, the Film Bureau was later incorporated into the General Administration of Radio and Television. The process of the establishment of the China Film Bureau traces back to the Central Administration of Film Affairs, which was founded by the Central Promotion Department of the Communist Party of China in April 1949. Later it became a part of the Ministry of Culture. In March 1986, the State Council merged the Film Bureau of the Ministry of Culture with the Ministry of Radio and Television, resulting in the formation of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. The organization was established for the purpose of overseeing the Chinese film industry. Its primary function is to carefully examine and review films. Other responsibilities of the Film Bureau include the planning and development of the film industry, as well as the management of film production. Despite the presence of the China Central Television (CCTV) logo, CCTV6, the national film channel, is not under the management of CCTV but falls under the jurisdiction of the Film Bureau. In order to survive the Chinese censorship policies, maintaining a great relationship with the people who work at the Film Bureau is key.

To demonstrate the intricate relationship and contribution between the elite group of Da Yuan Zi Di and the Chinese Arts and Cultural Industry, one key figure must be mentioned: Wang Shuo. Jiang Wen's good friend Wang Shuo's contribution to the Chinese Film, TV, and Literature industry exceeded way beyond their collaboration on "In the Heat of the Sun". Wang Shuo's novels, such as "Flight Attendants," "Rascal," "Half is Flame, Half is Sea," and "I Am Your Father," have had a significant impact on the new Chinese society. In 1988, four of Wang Shuo's novels were simultaneously adapted into films: "The Trouble Shooters," directed by Mi Jiashan; "Half Flame, Half Sea," directed by Xia Gang; "Reincarnation," directed by Huang Jianxin; and "Taking a Deep Breath," directed by Ye Daying, who was also a member of Da Yuan Zi Di, this time from the Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio. Not only was Ye Daying another close childhood friend of Wang Shuo, but he was also the grandson of the anti-Japanese war hero Ye Ting. Wang Shuo is also the screenwriter of the groundbreaking television drama "Ke Wang," which premiered in 1990. This 50-episode series was the first of its kind to be entirely shot indoors in sound studios and focused on the moral principles and values within Chinese family ethics. It achieved an unprecedented rating of 90.78%, making it the highest-rated indoor drama in the history of Chinese TV. Even today, "Ke Wang" is remembered for its innovative approach and societal impact. In addition, mainland China's first sitcom, "The Story of the Editorial Department," aired from 1991 to 1992 and showcased Wang Shuo's distinctive humorous writing style. Its well-crafted dialogue captured the unique satire of the Beijing dialect. Another notable member of Da Yuan Zi Di, Ma Weidu, played a significant role in the series as the

primary investor and served as the inspiration for the protagonist "Dongbao." Many of Dongbao's stories were based on true events from Ma Weidu's own life.

It is important to highlight that individuals within the Da Yuan Zi Di group, like Ma Weidu, who are not artists themselves, have also played a crucial role in supporting arts and culture in China. Understanding the progress of the Chinese arts and culture requires acknowledging the people who drive it forward. Despite being part of China's planned economy and propaganda machine, those working within it do not always follow the rules strictly. Placing such great emphasis on interpersonal relationships can lead to corruption but also facilitates navigating strict censorship. Individuals at all levels of government and society may overlook rules or laws because of the strength of their personal connections. For instance, Ma Weidu has been instrumental in supporting the careers of other Chinese writers such as Liu Zhenyun, Mo Yan, and Su Tong, contributing to their immense success.

Wang Shuo's other close friend and another significant figure among Da Yuan Zi Di, Ye Jing, adapted Wang Shuo's novel "Play With Your Heart Beat" into "Days of Being Wild," an inspirational and emotional drama. The drama depicts the nostalgic memories of the group of Da Yuan Zi Di, highlighting their experiences during a unique era of living in Beijing in the late '50s. Notably, the characters "Gao Yang and Gao Jin" in the drama were based on the founders of Huayi Brothers Media Corp, Wang Zhongjun and Wang Zhonglei. Today, Huayi Brothers is one of China's top three film and TV industry giants, along with Wanda Pictures and Enlight Media. The Chinese multinational company owns a film studio, TV production company, talent agency, record label, and movie theater chain spanning Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taipei. The four grew up in the same Da Yuan. Moreover, the character nicknamed "Panty Feng" from the same drama was modeled after the renowned Chinese director Feng Xiaogang.

Feng Xiaogang is another director who is occasionally grouped with the Sixth Generation, but, similar to Jiang Wen, he doesn't quite fit in due to the commercial nature of his films. Feng Xiaogang, known for his ability to cater to those in higher positions, gained entry into the elite group of Da Yuan Zi Di through flattery and bootlicking. He was introduced to Wang Shuo through a friend, and famously used their friendship to break into this social circle and received his early break in the film industry. Wang Shuo is also a shrewd individual. He often publicly humiliates Feng Xiaogang, and created the buffoon character based on Feng in "Days of Being Wild". However, Da Yuan Zi Di often have a sense of pride due to their family background and upbringing. Therefore, having someone like Feng, who is adept at fawning over officials, and skilled at flattering and currying favor to navigate through the rigorous censorship process, can be incredibly beneficial. The complex relationship between

Feng Xiaogang and Wang Shuo is infamous in the industry. Feng based his critically acclaimed comedy film "Party A Party B" on Wang Shuo's novel "You Are Not a Common Person." This film is considered a landmark in contemporary Chinese cinema and propelled Feng into becoming one of China's most successful commercial filmmakers. Despite their hatred toward one another, the two continued to collaborate for years. True allies don't have to be friends, they just have to share a common goal.

Despite being disliked by many people in the film industry due to his sleazy character and controversial personal life, Feng Xiaogang made a significant speech in 2011 that was published by the New Capital Newspaper, where he advocated for the rights of his fellow filmmakers. In his direct address to the Film Bureau, Feng Xiaogang proposed the possibility of relaxing restrictions to create a more conducive filmmaking environment. He expressed, "In recent years, few films have captured the profound changes of this era, and we deeply regret this." Feng Xiaogang used the film "Aftershock" as an example to shed light on the challenges posed by the Film Bureau, particularly the film censorship system, which presented numerous obstacles for filmmakers. He explained, "Every aspect of filmmaking is susceptible to interference, with instructions from leaders at various levels capable of overriding the outcomes of films. This has resulted in a peculiar phenomenon: the Film Bureau reviews films, while the public reviews the Film Bureau." Feng Xiaogang emphasized that the pressure of censorship primarily affects directors, leaving them feeling powerless. As a result, they often avoid creating works that depict reality and instead, gravitate towards producing historical films to ensure compliance with censorship regulations. In addition, Feng Xiaogang referred to masterful Chinese films from the 1980s and expressed his belief that a relatively relaxed censorship policy and the wave of ideological liberation can ignite directors' creative passion.

In 2015, Feng returned to the big screen as an actor in "Mr. Six," directed by another Da Yuan Zi Di, an important figure amount the sixth generation of Chinese Film directors, Guan Hu. The film closed the 72nd Venice International Film Festival and was also screened in the Special Presentations section at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival. "Mr. Six" achieved tremendous box office success and earned Feng the Best Actor title at the 52nd Golden House Award in 2015. The film's female lead Xu Qing is also a Da Yuan Zi Di. Xu Qing's grandfather was a close friend of Huang Xing, a key figure in the Xinhai Revolution, also known as the Chinese Revolution that overthrew the Qing Dynasty and led to the establishment of the Republic of China. After "Mr. Six" Guan Hu wrote and directed the film "Eight Hundred" which broke 461.4 million dollars at the box office in 2020. The list of successful collaborations within this group seems endless. Their inner workings can serve as a guidebook on navigating the constantly changing censorship policies.

Networking holds immense significance in Chinese society, as leveraging personal connections and seeking assistance from friends can lead to significantly different outcomes, referred to as the "safe face" method of renegotiation. In China, rules and laws are not uniformly applied to everyone, as one's family background and personal connections often dictate their level of success or failure. This phenomenon extends beyond mainland China and encompasses Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities worldwide. This critical aspect of Chinese culture has persisted for centuries and is deeply rooted in Confucianism, which emphasizes the importance of social relationships. Despite various attempts by different regimes to establish governing rules and principles, this tradition remains unbroken. Within these unwritten social norms lies the reason why certain film productions find it easier to navigate censorship and obtain the coveted "dragon sign" for a wide theatrical release. It is not solely about the regulations themselves but rather about one's network and ability to navigate the social landscape, which ultimately determines their level of success.

As one of the few successful Chinese film directors who had always managed to avoid censorship for years, Feng eventually had his term during the release of his film "Youth." Based on Yan Geling's semi-biographical novel, the film tells the story of a young girl's experience after her acceptance into an elite military dance troupe during the Cultural Revolution. The film was screened at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival. Despite Feng's connections, the film's release in China was delayed multiple times. Ultimately, 12 minutes were cut from the film before it could be shown to audiences. Within these 12 minutes were some important scenes that defined character relationships and highlighted the injustice of the time, as well as the impact those horrific years during the Cultural Revolution had on people's psyches. By cutting out those 12 minutes, adjustments were made to alter the underlying message of the film. Still, many consider Feng lucky. If it were someone else, the film would more than likely never see the light of day. This serves as a reminder that even if someone excels at navigating the system, nobody is safe from censorship.

There is a wealth of literature available on the subject of censorship in Chinese cinema, with a range of books and articles providing insightful perspectives. For example, "The Chinese Cinema Book" (Lim & Ward, Eds., 2020) offers a comprehensive overview of the history of Chinese cinema, with a specific focus on government regulations and censorship. It provides a valuable resource with diverse perspectives and insights, exploring the cultural, social, and historical contexts, as well as the influence of different films on Chinese society and identity. The book also discusses major film movements led by fifth-generation and sixth-generation filmmakers. "Political Communication in Greater China - The Construction and Reflection of Identity" (Rawnsley, 2003) is a notable book that explores the viewpoints

of different Chinese leaders regarding the unification and the formation of a "greater China." The book reveals how these perspectives shape political agendas and expose censorship policies across multiple aspects of Chinese society, including literature, film, and the Internet. Kokas's (2011) "Hollywood Made in China" delves into the growing relationship between the American film industry and China. It analyzes the complex dynamics of their engagement, encompassing economic, political, and cultural aspects. The book highlights how Hollywood has navigated censorship restrictions in China's film market, shedding light on the challenges faced by individuals from Western cultures in comprehending Chinese censorship policies. Cultural differences play a significant role in these struggles, and the book emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships within Chinese society.

7. Hollywood's Influence

The United States has undoubtedly played a significant role in the development of the People's Republic of China, and its influence has been felt in various ways. For decades, the US was the most important ally of Chiang Kaishek's Republic of China, until Nixon's visit with Mao. Famously, Chiang Kaishek's health took a significant decline after that blow. Then comes the drafting of a vague "recognition/acceptance" of the One China Policy by the US Government, thus starting "out with the old and in with the new". Since then, the rapid development of the mainland can be attributed to its new "partner in crime." Despite the stark ideological differences between the US government and the Chinese Communist Party, they both share a love for the capital. This shared interest became the driving force behind the abandonment of the original narrative-driven style of Chinese storytelling in film. Technology-driven big productions took over the industry and pushed everyone to the side.

The restructuring of China's film studio system represents the country's shift towards a market economy. The evolution of foreign film imports is the underlying factor that eventually influenced the systematic transition in the Chinese film industry. Initially, during the 50s, Soviet Union films were widely popular, with "Lenin in October" arguably one of the first box-office successes. Even the first teachers at the Beijing Film Academy were filmmakers from the USSR. Later, Bollywood gained significant success in China, with the classic film "Caravan" sweeping across the country. During the mid-80s, Hong Kong cinema dominated the audience's attention, followed by Taiwan cinema in the late 80s. However, everything changed when Hollywood broke a deal with the Chinese government. In 1993, The Broadcasting and Television Department drafted a document regarding the reorganization of China's film industry. Immediately after, the Chinese Film Group Corporation was tasked with importing 10 foreign films per year for public release. Following several negotiations with Warner

Brothers, "The Fugitive" starring Harrison Ford was determined to be the first imported film under a profit-sharing agreement for all parties involved to share the market risks. Initially "The Fugitive" was released on November 12, 1994, only in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, and Chongqing. The film earned 11.27 million yuan, equivalent to approximately 1.69 million USD, in its first week. This resulted in a nationwide release of the film, with sold-out theaters across the country. (Hong, Y., & Yan, 2002)

In 1998, "Titanic" became a cultural phenomenon in China, grossing 360 million yuan, which is around \$55.8 million USD upon its original release, and another 145 million yuan, which is equivalent to approximately \$22.6 million USD in 2012 with the release of its 3D version. From this point forward, Hollywood films dominated the Chinese film market. Consequently driven by economic motives, the Chinese film industry wanted to capitalize on its own market and entered an era of large-scale productions, transitioning from 2D to 3D, and ultimately to IMAX, as ticket prices increased from a few yuan to hundreds of yuan. China presently imports 34 foreign films annually, an increase from the original quota of 10 films per year, which was later raised to 20. In 2012, an additional 14 3D or IMAX films were added. Furthermore, the US's share of box office revenue has grown from 13% to 25%. This shift finally led to the abolishment of the old studio system.

In 1996, the Shanghai Film Studio changed its name to the Shanghai Film Group. And in 2001, Shanghai Film Group, Yongle Group, Animation Group, Shangyi Studio, Keying Studio, and other ten enterprises merged to form Shanghai Film Group Co., Ltd., a state-owned sole proprietorship, with the Shanghai State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission as its shareholder. In 1999, the long-established Changchun Film Studio was restructured as Changchun Film Group Co., Ltd., another state-owned sole proprietorship, with the Jilin Provincial People's Government as its shareholder. Changchun Film Group now has ten subsidiary companies. The Beijing Film Studio, The Beijing Children's Film Studio, and several other local film-related organizations in Beijing were merged into the China Film Group Corporation (CFG). The CFG is the only company in mainland China that has the right to import films and is also the largest film production company in China. Today, CFG has 15 wholly-owned subsidiaries, controls and participates in nearly 30 major companies, owns one film channel, and has total assets of 2.8 billion yuan, equal to 435 million US dollars. It is also a state-owned enterprise with the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television as its shareholder. The CFG is now one of the most powerful Corporations in China.

Following the reconstruction of the studio system came another major shift in censorship policy. More reviewing steps were introduced. Here is a general overview translated:

1. Script approval: Before any filming can begin, the script must be approved by the China Film Bureau (CFB). This step involves submitting a detailed script and synopsis to the CFB for review.
2. Pre-production approval: After the script is approved, the filmmakers must submit a detailed production plan, including casting, shooting locations, and production timeline, to the CFB for approval.
3. Post-production approval: Once filming is complete, the film must undergo a final review by the CFB. This step includes a screening of the film, during which the CFB checks for any content that may be considered objectionable or offensive.
4. Distribution approval: After the film has been approved for content, it must receive final approval for distribution in China. This involves submitting the final cut of the film to the CFB for a final review, after which the film will be given a release date and distribution plan.

Films that are deemed to be politically sensitive, sexually explicit, or excessively violent may face additional scrutiny and may even be banned outright. But once again, although the Chinese government's censorship guidelines on paper are quite strict, the outcomes can vary depending on a variety of factors, including the film's content, genre, and intended audience. This further emphasized the already existing divergence in paths for Chinese filmmakers: either making films for the Chinese market or creating films specifically for festivals. Jia Zhangke, one of the most prominent figures in the "Sixth Generation" movement of Chinese cinema, serves as a perfect example. Throughout his entire career, Jia Zhangke focused on producing small-budget independent films with the goal of winning awards at international film festivals, without much concern for profitability. This choice has established him as a highly respected artist within the industry and among film enthusiasts. However, not every filmmaker from the Sixth Generation followed this trajectory. As mentioned earlier, Guan Hu, for instance, transitioned to making commercial films. The motivations behind these choices vary in each case, but they are all understandable. Each filmmaker pursues their own path. Well, to each their own.

Generally speaking, the Chinese Communist Party regards film as a propaganda tool for promoting its ideology, with the ideological content required to align with the political standards set by the government. However, people yearn for something different. Year after year, generations of film directors have continued to bring up the Cultural Revolution. Why? It is because the people not only want to reflect on the dark history of those ten years, but society as a whole also needs to engage in reflection.

Without reflection, there can be no progress. However, the Communist Party fears historical reflection. Why again? It is not merely a matter of the Party's reputation. The reflection on history is, in fact, a reflection on the narrative logic of the Chinese Communist Party's history. It is a deconstruction of the Party's historical narrative logic, and once this deconstruction takes place, the political legitimacy of the Party's leadership ceases to exist. This poses a fatal challenge for filmmakers.

Chinese filmmakers face challenges in gaining worldwide acceptance for their films, particularly in the Western world, if they align with the current government's agenda. These challenges are rooted in a historical pattern of marginalization and labeling certain communities as "exotic," predominantly perpetuated by Western societies, led by the United States. It is well documented in the United States, unspoken rules had applied to all non-white communities and storylines. This historical context has established a race-based class structure where whiteness is associated with the concept of "normalcy." Consequently, films from developing countries that explore ordinary themes such as family struggles, romance, city life, or urban narratives without explicit depictions of social and economic hardships, political criticism, human rights violations, or cultural "backwardness" often struggle to meet the criteria for recognition at well-established Western film festivals. While there have been some improvements in recent years, this remains particularly true for Chinese films originating from the mainland, which encounter additional scrutiny and obstacles in attaining global acceptance.

Meanwhile, a significant group of Chinese filmmakers still remain hopeful that international pressure can bring about change within China, as well as in other developing countries grappling with censorship. Filmmakers who hold onto this hope consciously choose to go against the government's agenda and instead focus on crafting stories that shed light on societal issues. Naturally, such films may portray their respective countries in a negative light. Making the situation appears to be insurmountable complex. However, it is crucial to recognize that intelligent audiences worldwide do not generalize an entire nation based on a film about a specific period or topic. Just as viewers of a film about Nazi Germany do not perceive all Germans as Nazis, Western audiences, particularly in the US, should not be trapped in stereotypes. One UN promotional documentary about combating hunger doesn't mean that all Africans are impoverished with constant flies hovering around them. And not every Chinese film needs to be about unveiling human rights issues, oppression, or political prosecution. Filmmakers from the US are not expected to create movies solely focused on racism and gun violence, so why should such requirements be imposed on filmmakers from other countries? As economies around the world continue to grow, it is only natural that films should reflect this progress. It is unfortunate that certain non-

white regions face challenges in gaining acceptance for their films when they exhibit elements of modernism. The inclusion of politics in films should not become a prerequisite for them to be considered exceptional.

Today, filmmakers from mainland China still face a stark choice: either align with the government or oppose it, there is no gray area. Filmmakers who choose to address social issues in their work may receive international recognition and awards, but their prospects for growth within China become significantly limited. A prime example of this is our case study, Li Yang. This path demands significant sacrifices, both financially and emotionally. Furthermore, filmmakers who take this route face uncertain professional survival, personal safety, and the welfare of their families.

8. A New Era

Not only did Hollywood's entrance to the Chinese film market ended the old studio system, but it also promoted Western-style filmmaking practices and aesthetics. This drastic change also had an effect on the steps to becoming a film director involved in Mainland China. Additionally, Hollywood also negatively impacted the Hong Kong Film Industry and the Taiwan Film Industry. In the past, film studios had a system where those who dreamed of directing could start as script supervisors and gradually work their way up to becoming film directors after seven years. However, this system was disrupted during China's transition from state-owned to private movie industry. Due to a lack of investors, the domestic movie market became chaotic, and the ability to become a director became closely linked to one's ability to secure funding. Meanwhile, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 also deeply impacted both the Hong Kong and Taiwanese film industry. A good reference is famous Hong Kong film director Qiu Yitao's 394 pages Ph.D. dissertation depicting the shifts that happened to the Hong Kong film Industry. In "The Progression of Political Censorship: Hong Kong Cinema from Colonial Rule to Chinese -style Colonialist Hegemony", Qiu Yitao gave a great summary of what caused the collapse of the once untouchable Hong Kong Film Industry.

In 1997, the Asian financial crisis led to a significant reduction in the funds invested in the Hong Kong film market. Additionally, Cantonese-language films were unable to compete with Hollywood's big productions. Furthermore, the immigration wave triggered by the panic surrounding Hong Kong's return in 1997 resulted in a loss of a large number of film talents. Soon after, in 2003, the outbreak of SARS pushed the Hong Kong film industry to rock bottom. Several renowned Hong Kong actors also passed away in the same year, further worsening the situation for Hong Kong films. Around the same time, before and after China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, marked the lowest point for Chinese cinema since the Cultural

Revolution. The mainland government needed Hong Kong talent, while Hong Kong needed the mainland market to join forces against Hollywood. In 2003, they signed the "Arrangement on Closer Economic Partnership" to adjust the film system, marking the beginning of a significant influx of Hong Kong film talents into the mainland market. This phenomenon coincided with China's plan to develop large-scale productions in its film industry.

Starting with the film "Wolf Warrior 2", there has been a discernible political agenda promoting nationalist themes in theater, film, and television. This surge of change extends far beyond the realm of entertainment. While most major film studios have undergone transformations, converting into corporations with significant state ownership, one studio met a different fate—the 8.1 Military Film Studio was permanently disbanded, with Feng Xiaogang's "Youth" marked as the studio's final production. In 2018 the Military Newspaper published the fate of all the employees of the Film Studio, translations as follows: The 8.1 Military Film Studio, along with the former General Political Song and Dance Troupe, General Political Opera Troupe, General Political Drama Troupe, and General Political Military Band, will merge and be renamed as the "PLA Cultural and Art Center Film and Television Production Department." These organizations will transition from deputy military units to regular divisions. Individuals who reach the age of fifty will be eligible for early retirement, those in their forties will have the option to pursue self-employment, and those in their thirties can either transition to civilian careers or take exams for admission to other jobs. Upon recruitment, they will sign annual contracts and contribute to the five social insurance programs, becoming non-active-duty civilian personnel within the military. With the exception of the leadership, a small number of military personnel will be retained within the organization, while the majority will be civilian personnel within the military. Civilian personnel within the military do not receive military benefits and are not permitted to provide paid services for film production outside of the military.

However, the primary driving forces behind this outcome of the 8.1 Military Film Studio are not solely related to the film industry's restructuring. Rather, they are intertwined with Xi Jinping's historic military reforms. These sweeping reforms have fundamentally reshaped the command structure and responsibilities within the People's Liberation Army (PLA). As opposition forces were eliminated, Xi Jinping assumed personal control over the highest military command. Vasily Kashin, a Chinese military expert from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, remarked, "Xi Jinping has transformed the PLA into the bedrock of his political power." According to the Financial Times magazine, in the past, the People's Liberation Army's land, sea, air, and strategic missile forces were under the control of the General Staff Department. Now, all departments directly report to the Central Military Commission, marking a shift

in power and a reduced role for the army, while power becomes centralized in the hands of Xi Jinping.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, another significant change occurred: the Film Bureau has been separated from the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. It has now been incorporated into the Central Promotion Department, also known as the Propaganda Department. The Central Promotion Department has expanded its power extensively in recent years. It is now responsible for overseeing both film media and literature, including all written publications. The General Administration of Press and Publication is also under the management of the Central Promotion Department. Even the superior authority of China Central Television, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television, now falls under the jurisdiction of this Propaganda Department. Previously, the Film Bureau not only considered factors related to the central government's propaganda agenda and ideological control but also took into account the prosperity and development of the entire Chinese film industry and market. In order to promote the healthy development of the industry, the Bureau allowed some flexibility in its management of filmmakers and film content. However, after being placed under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Department, the department no longer has any demand or interest in this aspect. The prosperity of the industry and the ecosystem in the film market are of no concern to them. They only care about one thing: adhering to the ideological requirements of the Chinese Communist Party.

This shift explains the wave of high-budget war movies, such as Guan Hu's film "Eight Hundred" and the recent box-office success, "The Battle at Lake Changjin." However, these high box-office numbers are not organic but the result of organized viewings, particularly through direct orders from the military. When the military purchases thousands of tickets for soldiers to see these films on opening weekends, it is no wonder that the box office numbers skyrocket. Surprisingly, the directors of these high-budget propaganda films are equally divided between successful mainland directors and Hong Kong directors. In a divided world, where countries are aligning themselves with different superpowers, even individual artists face strong signals to take sides. Many Hong Kong filmmakers who fled abroad have become lost among the sea of immigrants in the US and the UK. Thus, for many Hong Kong filmmakers, aligning themselves with the Chinese Communist Party at least allows them to retain their status as filmmakers.

So what happened to the small minority of Chinese filmmakers who want to use their art to reflect, address societal issues, and advocate for justice and human rights? The newest "way out" can be observed in the support from young Chinese individuals working and studying abroad. A prime example of this is the 2021 film "Old New Play."

The story of "Old New Play" once again unfolds during the notorious Chinese Cultural Revolution. It serves as director Qiu Jiongjiong's debut feature film, which won the Special Jury Prize at Locarno 2021, and the Firebird Award for Best Film at the 2022 Hong Kong International Film Festival. The film has garnered a strong fanbase which has established a nonprofit organization that collects donations to organize small screenings of the film worldwide. This approach signifies a new and innovative method of self-distribution. Vivid memories come to mind of the film screening in a packed theater where Chinese students gathered at a small cinema in Barcelona, Spain. At that moment, a sense of empowerment and optimism filled the air, reminding us that power rests with the people and that hope is ever-present.

Case Study

Li Yang and the “Blind Series”

Li Yang, a highly acclaimed yet often overlooked figure in the Chinese Film Industry, emerges as a distinct voice that bridges the realms of the Fifth and Sixth Generation Chinese Directors. Born in Xian, China in 1959, Li Yang's artistic journey initially began in the realm of acting. In 1978, he joined the esteemed Chinese National Theater Company, immersing himself in the world of performing arts. As Chinese universities reopened in the 80s, Li Yang embarked on an academic pursuit, first enrolling at the Beijing Broadcasting Institute in 1985 for two years. Seeking to expand his horizons, he then ventured to Germany to study the History of Arts at the renowned Freie Universität Berlin. A few years later, in 1990, Li Yang returned to his passion for acting, joining the Munich Conservatory.

However, his creative aspirations led him back to the medium of filmmaking. Li Yang eventually enrolled in the Academy of Media Arts Cologne, where he embarked on the art of storytelling through film after graduating in 1995. During his time in Berlin, Li Yang embraced his role as a documentary filmmaker. His experiences in the realm of documentaries profoundly influenced his directing style, infusing his work with a raw and authentic essence. Upon his return to China, Li made his first non-documentary critically acclaimed film, and the first of his infamous “Blind Series” - “Blind Shaft.” The film was immediately banned by the Beijing Film Bureau. Neither the precise reasoning nor the length of the ban was made known. To respond, Li Yang said pliantly in an interview: “I don’t think I have a future in China. They don’t have a very good impression of me there.”

All of Li Yang's features are self-funded, micro-budget independent films. His firsthand encounters with real-life stories and experiences have served as a catalyst for his artistic expression, infusing his work with unwavering authenticity. This influence has become a defining characteristic of his directorial style, setting him apart within the Chinese Film Industry. Through his documentary background and artistic sensibilities, Li Yang has emerged as a visionary director, offering compelling and genuine portrayals of the human experience. His films delve deep into the intricacies of society, shedding light on often overlooked narratives and providing new perspectives on the human condition. Li Yang's ability to capture the raw essence of his subjects and bring their stories to life marks him as a remarkable and influential figure. Despite having directed only three films, Li Yang has garnered significant recognition for his profound contributions to the exploration of social issues in China. Li Yang's career path aligns with the rebellious "Art for Art's Sake" trajectory established by the Sixth Generation of Chinese Filmmakers, whose primary objective is to participate in festivals rather than

seek commercial success in theaters. Remarkably, the filmmaker has never profited from his films, despite their numerous international awards.

Li Yang's notable works are the "Blind" series, comprising "Blind Shaft" (2003), "Blind Mountain" (2007), and "Blind Way" (2019). This series stands out for its unwavering focus on unveiling the darker aspects of rural Chinese society, drawing inspiration from real criminal cases. Through his films, Li Yang shines a light on common crimes and issues that often escape mainstream media attention, offering a distinctive and insightful perspective on the social landscape of the country. His films serve as a poignant reminder that there is much more to Chinese cinema than blockbuster hits, delving into the depths of societal struggles with compassion and authenticity. Despite facing challenges and financial hardships, Li Yang's body of work remains an invaluable contribution to the cinematic landscape, providing a voice to the voiceless and provoking contemplation on the intricacies of Chinese society.

1. Blind Shaft

"Blind Shaft" follows two farmers who work in a private coal mine in northern China and make money by posing as relatives of other workers and exploiting the illegal coal mining system. They stage "accidents" in the mine, kill the workers, and demand compensation from the mine owner. One day, they meet a naive 16-year-old boy from the village who is seeking work to provide for his family. The two help the boy obtain a fake identity card and a new name so that he can work in the mine with them. However, one of the criminals recognizes the similarities between the boy and his own child and develops a fondness for the boy's innocence and kindness. He cannot bring himself to kill the boy, leading to conflicts with the other criminal and ultimately causing their operation to collapse.

Based on a book inspired by real criminal cases, these perpetrators are known as "pig butchers" by the locals, claiming to be in the "pig butchering" business. Their criminal method involves taking away the victim's phone and cutting off all communication with the outside world. The victim is then taken into the mine for no more than three days. After killing the victim, they disfigure the victim's face to make it harder to identify the body. Finally, they either pour the ashes directly into the toilet or dump the body randomly in the wilderness, pocketing the cremation and funeral expenses.

2. Blind Mountain

"Blind Mountain" is a poignant film that exposes the cruel reality of human trafficking and the devastating impact it has on young women in rural China. The story centers around a bright college student who, while starting what she believes is a job

of collecting herbal medicines from remote villages, is sold for a mere seven thousand yuan, and forced to marry a stranger in a remote mountain village. Despite her desperate attempts to escape and find allies, she finds herself trapped in a fiercely traditional community that condones the practice of wife purchasing. The film paints a vivid picture of the inhumane treatment and exploitation faced by Chinese women in rural areas, exposing the dark underbelly of a practice that still persists today. Through its gripping narrative and powerful performances, "Blind Mountain" serves as a wake-up call to the urgent need to address the issue of human trafficking and protect the rights of women in China and beyond.

Based on true stories, in order to get the film screened in China, the director created two endings for the film, one for the international film festival circuit, and the other for the domestic market. For the domestic market, the ending is that the abducted young woman is rescued by the police brought by her father. As the car drives forward, she sticks her head out of the window and looks back blankly at the mountain village that brought her sadness and pain. The screen freezes at this point, followed by two lines of text: "China's public security organs have been cracking down on the crime of trafficking in women, rescuing countless trafficked women, and bringing the criminals to justice." In the overseas version, the protagonist's father receives her letter and immediately reports it to the police. After borrowing some money, he located her with the help of two police officers. The protagonist is now a mother of a one-year-old child. Upon seeing her father after so many years, the only thing she uttered is: what took you so long? The police led the father and daughter to flee, but their car was intercepted by the villagers. almost the whole village came out, some carrying hoes and some with children. Her husband and his friends pull the officers out of the car, his mother even lay in front of the police car and vowed to never let them leave. The police even took out their gun, but they couldn't scare off the villagers. They went back to the village committee to ask the village chief for help. The village chief demanded that they leave the girl behind first. The police had no choice but to leave the protagonist and promised they would come back to pick her up in three days. Her father stayed with her. As soon as the police left, her husband immediately tried to hide her. Her father try to stop it but was brutally beaten. He kept shouting for help, but none of the villagers come to help. In desperation, the protagonist grabbed a knife and hacked her husband. The final scene freezes on the woman's blank face.

3. Blind Way

"Blind Way" tells the story of an unemployed man who pretends to be blind to beg for money on the streets. One day, he befriends a young blind girl who is also a

street beggar. He soon discovers that the girl is under the control of a criminal gang and is forced to work as a full-time professional beggar. Despite his own financial struggles, the protagonist takes it upon himself to protect the little girl, as he learns of her tragic circumstances. However, their safety is short-lived as the criminal gang soon finds them and takes the girl away, claiming to be her legal guardians. The protagonist turns to the police for help, but without evidence, they are unable to take action. Determined to uncover the truth about the girl's relationship with the criminal gang, the protagonist embarks on a dangerous journey that leads to unexpected revelations. Through his unwavering determination and courage, he sets out to challenge the criminal underworld and fight for justice. Sadly, he eventually discovered the girl was sold to work for the criminal gangs by her own mother and stepfather. And was raped multiple times by her stepfather with the knowledge of her mom. All of the rejections and mistreatment from her own family were because she was a blind girl.

The final installment of the "Blind Trilogy" - "Blind Way," was a disappointment for many of Li's fans domestically and internationally. Li made this film after a 10-year hiatus and even acted in it as the main character. Although like his previous work, "Blind Way" also aimed to expose serious social issues and bring awareness to the struggles faced by underprivileged individuals in China, it fell short of expectations. Many fans felt let down by the commercialized tone, problematic plot lines, bumpy dialogues, uninspiring storytelling, and melodramatic acting. Unlike Li's previous works which showcased believable characters and captures elements of reality, it is hard to ignore how he caved under pressure and lost his distinctive style in his latest work. Differing from his two previous works where he mostly used real people to act in his film, in this third installment, Li cast professional actors. Many fans criticized the tone of the film, with some even questioning whether "Li Yang had run out of creativity."

In response to these criticisms, Li Yang wrote a letter to the audience, accepting the criticism and admitting that the film "is not perfect due to economic and various other reasons, and there are many regrets." To screen the film to a Chinese domestic audience, he "made a lot of modifications and compromises," which did not satisfy him either. He also expressed in the letter, "I bow deeply to my countless fans and apologize! I have let you down!!"

But it is evident that it is not Li Yang who has let down the audiences, but rather the restrictive censorship policies themselves that have let down both the Chinese film audiences and Chinese directors. What Li's films have revealed are real-life issues that the government needs to address but has struggled to effectively handle. Consequently, the preferred approach to "addressing" these issues has been to sweep them under the rug. Li's story as a filmmaker is crucial to this research paper because

it exemplifies the experiences of many Chinese filmmakers and demonstrates how censorship affects them artistically and economically.

Li's first two films, "Blind Shaft" and "Blind Mountain," were both banned in China. "Blind Shaft" was based on a novel that received China's highest literary award, the Lao She Literary Prize. Li Yang stated that despite unveiling serious social issues, he believed the film had "no political stigma" attached to it. Despite the setback, both "Blind Shaft" and "Blind Mountain" received critical acclaim on the international stage. "Blind Shaft" won the Silver Bear Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement at the 2003 Berlin International Film Festival, Best Adaptation at The Golden Horse Awards 2003 in Taipei, Best Narrative Feature at the 2003 Tribeca Film Festival, New Directors' Award at the 2003 Edinburgh International Film Festival, Best Film Award at the 2003 Hawaii International Film Festival, and the River Firebird at the 2003 Hong Kong International Film Festival. Li Yang's second film, "Blind Mountain," secured a nomination at the Cannes Film Festival and received a standing ovation during its screening. In 2008, "Blind Mountain" won the Film Award of the Council of Europe (FACE) presented at the Istanbul International Film Festival for its success in raising public awareness and interest in human rights issues and promoting a better understanding of their significance. Additionally, "Blind Mountain" won the Grand Prix and Special Mention of the Ecumenical Jury in 2007 at the International Film Festival Bratislava.

These films pushed the boundaries of their content, delving into real social issues while showcasing Li's distinctive filmmaking style and powerful storytelling. Furthermore, they played a significant role in catapulting actor Wang Baoqiang and actress Huang Lu to fame. However, following "Blind Shaft," Li faced a three-year ban on filmmaking and did not earn a single dime from his films. In fact, for all three of his pure independent films, Li Yang had to rely on self-financing and find alternative means to cover the remaining costs. This explains the significant gap between his films and the subsequent loss of momentum as a creative artist.

The failure of his third film, "Blind Way," seemed almost unavoidable. Firstly, the story was set in the city instead of the countryside, which was unfavorable in the international festival arena for Chinese films. During the 2000s, there was a clear preference for Chinese films set in rural regions, depicting an underdeveloped and backward China, which was more appealing to the Western eye during China's rapid economic growth. This left the filmmaker with no choice but to explore the path of domestic release. However, to do so, Li Yang had to accept all the requirements imposed by the Film Bureau in order to pass censorship and gain approval for release. Like many Chinese filmmakers, he found himself trapped in a lose-lose situation. After "Blind Way," Li Yang's fate as a filmmaker seemed to be sealed. It was not until 2022,

when the case of the Xuzhou Chained Woman story exploded on the internet, that Li Yang's second film "Blind Mountain" resurfaced and garnered further recognition. Consequently, people began to view his contributions and achievements as a filmmaker from a different perspective, recognizing the challenges he faced under censorship and the impact of his work on societal issues.

Li Yang's experiences highlight the challenges faced by Chinese filmmakers, shedding light on the artistic and economic implications. His films serve as a testament to the importance of freedom of expression and the pressing need for the Chinese government to address the real-life issues they depict. Despite the hurdles he has encountered, Li Yang's resilience and determination have allowed his work to endure and gain recognition, ultimately contributing to the ongoing dialogue on censorship in Chinese cinema.

The Xuzhou Chained Woman incident unfolded in 2022 and brought to light the disturbing reality of human trafficking in China. The incident gained widespread attention when a viral video emerged, depicting a disheveled woman chained in a shed in Xuzhou, Jiangsu province. The video, posted by a vlogger aiming to raise internet donations for people living in poverty, sparked outrage and generated an estimated 1.92 billion clicks on various social media platforms. The shocking footage prompted a provincial investigation and ignited a national conversation about the pervasive nature of human trafficking in China. Internet users questioned the official explanation provided by local authorities, who claimed the woman had been tied up due to her violent behavior and provided her family background. Skepticism arose regarding how she could have had eight children given the strict birth policies in place until 2016. People also raised concerns about possible abuse, coercion, or trafficking, expressing doubt about the official identity information provided. As public interest grew, two women embarked on a journey to visit the woman, expressing support and documenting their efforts on social media. They encountered state obstruction, with hotels refusing accommodation and police interference. Their posts, interviews with Feng County residents, and confrontations with local authorities gained significant attention before being blocked by internet censors. Despite attempts by journalists from a Hong Kong outlet to investigate the case, access to the woman's village was restricted, and the incident received no coverage from Chinese mainstream media outlets. The Xuzhou Chained Woman event served as a catalyst for discussions on human trafficking, shedding light on the prevalent issue and raising questions about the protection of victims and the need for greater awareness and action.

Also resurfaced on the internet is another report titled "Beautiful Rural Teacher Candidate Gao Yanmin: Abducted Woman Becomes Female Teacher in Mountain Village", further sparking public outrage. Concurrently, discussions on platforms like

Weibo and WeChat brought forth Li Yang's 2007 film "Blind Mountain." Amidst the media frenzy surrounding the Xuzhou Chained Woman incident, China Digital Times republished an interview from FaceOff Issue 121 on February 6, 2022, where Li Yang expressed his purpose for the film with the following statement: "Many people are currently sharing the film 'Blind Mountain' online. This film was entirely self-financed by me. In theory, I should be combating piracy and collecting copyright fees. However, in order to raise awareness about the plight of trafficked women in China and fight against the evil of human trafficking, I will not collect any fees. I encourage everyone to share and watch it!" (Li, 2013, p. 45).

Li Yang (2013) further explained the inspiration behind "Blind Mountain" and the transformation of the protagonist, stating: "I had the idea for 'Blind Mountain' while working on 'Blind Shaft.' It was around 1999 when I had just returned to China from Germany. During my search for story ideas, I came across a news report that deeply affected me. It was about a trafficked woman who, as a result of being insulted by someone else, ended up harming that person and was sentenced to death. In hindsight, her crime didn't warrant the death penalty since she didn't kill anyone; she only disfigured the child of her brother and sister-in-law. The transformation of a victim into a perpetrator was truly remarkable. However, as I worked on the script, my direction shifted a bit. I began questioning whether it was necessary for the victim to become a killer. Under the current censorship system, it would be difficult to pass. The film is about a kind-hearted person turning into someone evil, someone who commits crimes. But who is responsible for making her this way? What are the underlying issues? This includes our system, our government, and the harm inflicted by local farmers, among other factors. The victim should have elicited sympathy, but instead of receiving it, she continued to cause harm" (Li, 2013, p. 48).

According to police data, the majority of trafficked girls are from rural areas. However, in "Blind Mountain," Li Yang intended for the female protagonist to be a college student. This choice, according to Li, was driven by his belief that college students, due to the education they've received, are more likely to possess a spirit of continuous resistance and a strong desire for freedom. These characteristics serve as the driving force behind the protagonist's persistent attempts to escape. In reality, many women eventually give in after experiencing a few beatings. Having already been subjected to rape, loss of virginity, potential pregnancies, and childbirth, they resign themselves to "making do" with their lives. Furthermore, there are numerous families in rural China that view women as mere reproductive machines. If the trafficked women adopt this perspective, society turns a blind eye and nobody cares. In China's millennia-long cultural history, the concept of law is absent, with familial relations often superseding legal principles. Li emphasized in the interview, "'Blind Mountain'

addresses not only issues of ideology but also respect for life and personal dignity. The society comprises individuals, and many problems cannot be solely attributed to the government. Who forms the government? Who enables the government to engage in these actions? Who allows the government's inaction to persist?" In fact, as Li pointed out, in the film "Blind Mountain," most of the actors are local villagers who consider the buying and selling of women as a normal occurrence.

"Blind Mountain" mostly cast residents as actors, with the exception of the actress portraying the protagonist. The film extensively utilized the participation of local villagers. In the village where the filming took place, the issue of women being trafficked was a stark reality that everyone had witnessed. However, the film only scratches the surface of the actual horrors endured by these women. The reality is far more horrifying, with some victims enduring years without proper clothing and being confined to caves, treated merely as objects of sexual desire. Despite their fierce resistance, they are repeatedly sold to different buyers who seek to exert control over them. In some cases, multiple brothers even share one woman. In order to gather material for the film, Li Yang shared that he personally interacted with approximately twenty to thirty trafficked women. After each interview, he would experience recurring nightmares and a profound sense of guilt. The women would sometimes yearn to express their repressed emotions, and Li said he felt like a war journalist, holding his camera and helplessly witnessing the brutal beatings inflicted upon these women until they were covered in blood. He could not intervene to "save" them because his duty was simply "capture the truth". It is a dilemma that is difficult to grasp fully. Li acknowledged the cruelty inherent in his actions but believed that by documenting the truth in this manner, he could genuinely tell their story (Li, 2013).

When asked about the double ending, Li Yang expressed his thoughts in the following long quote: "The ending of 'Blind Mountain' has two versions. In the domestic version, there is a scene where a trafficked woman gets into the police car, ready to return to her own home. However, she gets out of the car, saying she can't bear to leave her child or the family that trafficked her. In reality, many trafficked women have a similar attitude. Initially, they resist, but after having children, it's not that they become accustomed to the situation, but rather they resign themselves to it. When people become slaves, their primary concern is survival. On the other hand, there are those who refuse to resign and constantly resist, trying to find ways to escape. These are two types of people, but who should be the one that moves China? Gao Yanmin, like the woman who stays behind at the end of the movie, is seen as sacrificing herself. In reality, Gao Yanmin also needs to live. Even if she says her current life is not good, what measures does the country take against such criminal acts? There are no punitive measures in place. So, I think it's tragic that she says her life is still going well in the

media. It's possible that she has become numb, and maybe she doesn't feel anything anymore. The most important thing for her is to survive first and foremost. Let me say a few more words: if Gao Yanmin's behavior of repaying grievances with kindness is what moves China, then is her tolerance of crime and evil a reason to move China? When she was violated, why didn't she defend her own dignity and integrity? By relinquishing this right, will it move China? Martin Luther King Jr. could move the world. In the United States, there was an African American woman who knew that she could be imprisoned for sitting on a bus designated for white people. Nevertheless, she boarded the white people's bus, and her actions led to a change in the discriminatory laws against African Americans in the United States. That is a moving event. If the way to move China is through methods like Gao Yanmin's, isn't it indirectly encouraging victims to give up their rights? If it is said that someone can move China by giving up themselves, their dignity, and their integrity, what kind of country will China become? Based on Chinese culture, I completely understand this resignation. Their understanding of life, human rights, and the surrounding environment determines their resignation. Although they are victims, everyone is causing harm to them. They have their helplessness. Every village has Communist Party members, party branches, village cadres, and women's directors. Why don't they take care of the trafficked women? I believe that the issue of trafficking women is not just about trafficking itself; it reflects the fact that everyone is an accomplice, including the indifference people show towards Bai Xuemei after she escapes to the city in the movie. The story I wrote is not just about trafficking; it's about what happens after trafficking. Regarding Gao Yanmin's case, I can understand her choice to stay, but I don't agree with it. A trafficked woman who becomes a rural female teacher should go after the traffickers and the 'family members' who bought her. I believe she should definitely press charges. Just because the perpetrators are considered her so-called "husband or in-laws," it doesn't mean they should be allowed to commit crimes or harm her physically, mentally, or in terms of her life. What does it mean to have a society governed by the rule of law? The spirit of the rule of law cannot be equated with morality or personal feelings. Human freedom is not just about the physical body; it is primarily about spiritual freedom." (Li, 2013, pp. 53-54).

"Wife buying" is an age-old human rights violation that has been a prevalent practice in China for centuries. However, the Xuzhou Chained Women story became the first of its kind to receive widespread international coverage, from outlets such as BBC, NPR, and The New York Times, reaching many countries worldwide. While the international attention helped put pressure on the government to further investigate such crimes, Chinese reporters have been trying to draw public attention to these issues for decades. One infamous story, over 30 years ago, demonstrated that this

issue is not confined to rural China but also exists in major cities. 33 years ago, Wang Lian, a highly educated woman from Shanghai with a master's degree, found herself trapped in a horrific ordeal. Deceived and sold for a meager sum, she was taken to a rural area in Shandong Province, where she endured 71 days of unimaginable torture and sexual abuse. Despite her attempts to escape, the entire village prevented her from breaking free. It is difficult to comprehend how a well-educated woman from a modern Chinese metropolis could fall into such a situation, as most victims of human trafficking come from underprivileged backgrounds. Yet, this horrifying tale is a reality. If it hadn't been for Wang Lian's mother promptly noticing her disappearance, she may have never escaped that impoverished mountain valley. This shocking story finds its parallel in "Blind Mountain." In the film's international version with director Li Yang's preferred ending, the film realistically portrays the wickedness of a backward society in which the root of the issues lies deep under the surface. And in that version, the film is doing its job to hold a mirror up to society and call for the awakening of massive social consciences and change. If the film had been released decades ago, it could have shed light on the issue much sooner and raised social awareness. Who knows how many women could have been saved from a horrific fate? However, the prevailing culture of "covering up" in the Chinese political landscape has further suppressed the essential role of film as an art form that critiques society and raises public awareness of social issues. This is not an isolated incident but rather a recurring pattern.

In every society, women constitute a vulnerable group that often experiences unimaginable harm. However, in neighboring countries like India and South Korea, films addressing significant social issues such as child abuse, mistreatment of women, and school bullying have not only been widely released domestically but have also received acclaim and sparked crucial social debates. These films have played a pivotal role in raising awareness and even reshaping societal consciousness to combat these issues. A prime example is the Korean film "Silenced," featuring renowned actor Gong Yoo, which prompted the government to pass stricter laws against child sexual abuse. So why can't Chinese films achieve the same impact? When there are pressing social issues demanding public attention and talented, socially responsible filmmakers willing to utilize their art to address them, what purpose does it serve to curtail their ability to do so? The argument of controlling narratives and expression in the name of better governance holds no legitimacy in such a discussion. Particularly considering the historical influence of Chinese films in shaping societies and social consciousness, both in the post-People's Republic of China era and in regions like Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is disheartening to witness the current Communist government resorting to such an irresponsible justification for its stringent censorship policies. It is truly a shame.

Case Studies

Zhang Yimou & "To Live"

There is no debate about Zhang Yimou being the greatest Chinese director of all time. In the industry, he is referred to as Dao Yan, which means director but carries a much deeper meaning. In Chinese culture, akin to the status of Confucius, the role of a teacher is invaluable. Being called Dao Yan by everyone in the film industry, including all fellow directors, signifies that Zhang Yimou is not only a director but also holds the torch for all Chinese filmmakers. He's the director of directors.

Born on November 14, 1951, in Xi'an, China, Zhang Yimou learned about his background in the fourth grade. One day, his teacher handed out a form that included a section for family background. In the new government of the People's Republic of China, the most favorable social background was "peasant," followed by "factory worker," while the worst was "landlord." Unlike many other famous filmmakers from his generation who grew up in Beijing Da Yuan, Zhang Yimou came from an "underprivileged background" due to his family's former upper-class status before the civil war. His mother's family was wealthy and belonged to the landowner class, placing them in the "old money" social category. What's even worse is that his father attended the renowned Whampoa Military Academy, the service academy for the army of the Republic of China. Not everyone from the former upper class was able to flee to Taiwan with the Nationalist Government. This marked Zhang Yimou as a "child of counterrevolutionaries." Zhang Yimou remembers how his parents discussed the situation with fear and shame, struggling to find a way to convey the truth to him. This experience had a profound impact, leading to long-lasting feelings of inferiority in young Zhang Yimou.

In "Thirteen Invitations" - a talk show co-produced by Tencent News and One Way Space. When talking with the host Xu Zhiyuan, Zhang Yimou vividly recalls discovering a button from a KMT military uniform under their bed as a child, which terrified him. "It caused the development of a reserved and introverted personality. This is why I always try to maintain a low-key demeanor, avoiding standing out or being flamboyant and always striving to follow the crowd when I was young. This fundamental survival approach to life became ingrained in him, and it is reflected in his masterpiece "To Live." Zhang Yimou confessed, internally, he constantly reminds himself: Don't forget who you once were.

In his earlier years, Zhang Yimou's sole ambition was to gain acceptance from his colleagues at the textile factory where he worked. At the age of 20, he started working at Shaanxi Cotton Textile Factory No. 8, making socks. Due to his family background, he was the only one among the 600 factory workers who were never

accepted into the Communist Party or the Party Worker's Union. Zhang Yimou applied for seven years and was rejected every time. To improve his social standing, he turned to photography and aimed to become the factory's photographer. In the late 70s, as education regained its value and universities reopened after the Cultural Revolution, the Communist government implemented a new policy to rediscover talents for arts and culture. Zhang Yimou was fortunate to win the sole scholarship offered to all factories in his region. At the age of 28, he began studying Cinematography at the Beijing Film Academy.

Zhang Yimou made his directorial debut with the film "Red Sorghum" in 1987, which won the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. He continued to receive international acclaim with films like "Raise the Red Lantern," "Ju Dou," and in 1994, he made one of his masterpieces "To Live."

"To Live" is a compelling adaptation of Yu Hua's novel, vividly brought to life by the remarkable performances of Chinese acting legends Ge You and Gong Li. Zhang Yimou collaborated with renowned Chinese screenwriter Lu Wei, who also wrote the screenplay for Chen Kaige's "Farewell My Concubine," to bring this captivating story to the screen. The film powerfully portrays the political and social upheavals during China's transition from the old era to the People's Republic, spanning several decades, including the Warlord Era, the Chinese Civil War, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the aftermath of Mao Zedong's death. It captures the struggles endured by the Chinese people throughout these ever-changing eras, providing a poignant depiction of the political and social turmoil in China.

The movie revolves around the character of Fugui, brilliantly portrayed by Ge You, a privileged son of a wealthy landowner whose life takes a dramatic turn. Fugui's reckless gambling leads to the loss of his family's fortune to the shadow puppet theater owner, Long Er. Stripped of his wealth, Fugui finds himself thrust into the life of a peasant. In a desperate plea for help, Fugui approaches Long Er for a loan, only to receive an unexpected gift instead. Long Er presents him with a set of Chinese Shadow puppets, which becomes the catalyst for Fugui's unexpected journey as a puppeteer. Throughout this turbulent journey, Fugui finds solace in the unwavering support of his devoted wife, Jiazhen, portrayed brilliantly by international superstar Gong Li, who stands firmly by his side.

Set against the backdrop of significant historical events, "To Live" delves into the struggles faced by Fugui and Jiazhen as they navigate a life of poverty and adversity. Their experiences reflect the profound impact of political upheavals on the lives of ordinary individuals, exposing the harsh realities of extreme poverty, family separation, and loss. At its core, the film deeply resonates with Chinese culture, placing a strong emphasis on the value of family. It expertly captures the essence of Fugui and

Jiazhen's intertwined lives as they navigate challenges and adversities and showcases their unwavering resilience and the enduring power of their love, even in the face of extreme hardships. Zhang Yimou skillfully captures the emotional journey of the characters within the ever-changing landscape of China. Furthermore, the film subtly weaves in elements of Taoist philosophy, a pillar of Chinese culture, emphasizing harmony with nature and acceptance of the natural order. Fugui and Jiazhen's ability to find solace and maintain inner strength amidst hardship reflects the influence of Taoism on their lives. The film seamlessly blends moments of tragedy and despair with subtle hints of humor, exhibiting the unconquerable human spirit in the face of adversity. It serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and tenacity that lie at the heart of Chinese culture, capturing both the struggles and triumphs of ordinary individuals in extraordinary times.

Renowned for its powerful performances, captivating storytelling, and visually stunning cinematography, "To Live" remains one of Zhang Yimou's most acclaimed works, showcasing his ability to blend personal narratives with historical events and explore the resilience of the human spirit. "To Live" serves as a poignant depiction of the triumph of life and love amidst the tumultuous backdrop of Chinese history, a must-watch film for those interested in understanding contemporary Chinese history from a humanistic perspective. In 1994, "To Live" received the Grand Jury Prize, Best Actor Award, and Humanitarian Award at the 47th Cannes International Film Festival, as well as Best Foreign Language Film awards from the National Society of Film Critics and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, and the Best Foreign Language Film award at the British Academy Film Awards, among others. It also triumphed at the Golden Horse Film Festival, winning Best Director, Best Film, Best Cinematography, Best Actor (Ge You), and Best Actress (Gong Li). The Hong Kong Film Awards recognized "To Live" with Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Ge You), and Best Actress (Gong Li) honors.

"In China several decades ago, in the subconsciousness of every family, including myself," reflected Zhang Yimou during the interview, "it was about 'To Live,' listening to the leaders, the central government, and Chairman Mao, without any thoughts." His films perfectly captured the sentiment expressed in an old Chinese saying, "wanting to speak but unable to, wanting to cry but having no tears." The performances of the actors and the visual presentation in the film are both authentic and emotionally captivating. Sadly, despite receiving international critical acclaim, the film faced a ban in mainland China due to its portrayal of the consequences of Mao Zedong's policies and their impact on people's lives, as witnessed through the protagonists' experiences.

The ban not only exposed the prevailing censorship issues but also revealed the profound and devastating impact they had on filmmakers, the film industry, and Chinese society as a whole. It is truly difficult to fathom the kind of impact "To Live" could have had on China if it had been allowed to be released. What is evident, however, is the urgent need to address the destructive historical period and engage with collective historical and societal consciousness.

"To Live" serves as a powerful testament to the responsibility of artists to confront and reflect upon unprecedented historical periods, the erosion of cultural identity, morality, and humanity, as well as the profound societal tragedies that unfolded. In a candid interview with Xu Zhiyuan in "Thirteen Invitations," Zhang Yimou openly discussed the stark contrast between making movies in the 80s and the present. He emphasized that the intentions of his generation in the 1980s were pure, driven by a deep historical consciousness and an innate need to respond to the profound wounds suffered by the entire nation.

The silencing of such a response amounts to a grave crime committed by a fragile government against its own people. It is nothing short of a crime against humanity, stifling the voices of artists and impeding the exploration of truth and collective healing.

Zhang Yimou's career can be defined by three pivotal moments, with the banning of "To Live" marking the first significant turning point. This ban was believed to have forever transformed him as an artist. However, another factor that possibly impacted Zhang Yimou's artistic soul more deeply, was likely the fate of his close friend from school, Chinese film director Tian Zhuangzhuang. Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang were very good friends, and Zhang worked as Tian's cinematographer while they were at the Beijing Film Academy and famously looked up to him. Tian Zhuangzhuang was a Da Yuan Zi Di from a well-respected and well-connected family. But that didn't stop him from facing a ten-year ban from making films due to his award-winning film "The Blue Kite." What happened to him sent out a warning to all Chinese filmmakers. Zhang Yimou, a former factory worker, the son of a former KMT officer with zero social connections, could easily find himself in a much scarier situation if he's not careful. And like his protagonist, Zhang Yimou's survival instincts kicked in. Gilles Jacob, the former president of the Cannes Film Festival, sent personal support to Zhang Yimou: "Since 'To Live' has never been released, as a director, it's very disheartening that your work cannot be seen by the Chinese people for a long time. I cannot accept this situation." Little did Gilles Jacob know that a few years later, he would become the very person to help Zhang Yimou mend his relationship with the Communist Party and finally gain their favor, used like a pawn in a larger chess game.

After "To Live," Zhang Yimou came to the realization that he needed to steer clear of sensitive subjects.

"To Live" is not what makes Zhang Yimou such a controversial figure; on the contrary, it is the very survival instinct that enabled him to navigate life's hurdles, brilliantly depicted in "To Live," that evokes both adoration and animosity from all sides. While Zhang Yimou's earlier films garnered international acclaim, they failed to strike a chord with Chinese audiences. In fact, throughout his career, despite numerous collaborations with top talents from around the world, Zhang Yimou had yet to create a true box-office success. Nevertheless, he displayed unwavering tenacity in his pursuit of diverse artistic endeavors, leading some critics and enthusiasts to accuse him of compromising his artistic integrity. Certain Chinese film critics and scholars even argued that his acclaimed art-house films, while skillfully depicting the socio-political landscape of China, carried an underlying sense of inferiority complex. Although Zhang Yimou's international recognition and success are widely acknowledged, all of his art-house films failed to resonate with the general public upon release. While it is not uncommon for art-house films to struggle at the box office, the lukewarm response to Zhang Yimou's earlier works cannot be solely attributed to unfair government bans; instead, it stems from a more complex combination of factors.

In Xu Liu's article titled "Post-colonial Perspective and the Grotesque Portrayal of the East: Unveiling the Inner Workings of Zhang Yimou's Films and the Deliberate Adoption of the 'Accepted' Eastern Imagery by the Western Audience," published in the Journal of East China Normal University and Journal of East China Normal University, Philosophy, and Social Sciences Edition in 2010, Xu Liu suggests that Zhang Yimou's success may lie in his technique of appealing to Western tastes and presenting the beautiful exterior of Eastern civilization in an unflattering manner. The author made these observations: "Regarding Zhang Yimou, he is more passionate about depicting the ignorance and backwardness of the East. The impoverished and filthy lives portrayed in his films are presented as the main content and norm of so-called traditional culture. This is self-othering under the influence of Western colonialism. Starting from his first independent directorial work, the influential film 'Red Sorghum,' what we see more of is poverty and barbarism: desolate living environments, exposed and dirty clothing, crude dialogue, savage customs, primitive people, open robbers, marrying lepers just to exchange for a mule, and the formula for a century-old liquor surprisingly includes urine. These 'Chinese' elements that the West appreciates are presented in a dirty way, deconstructing the mystique and profundity of Eastern civilization, ultimately destroying its 'civilized' nature." (Liu, 2010) "By examining Zhang Yimou's efforts and honors, we may catch a glimpse of his underlying motivations. In terms of actual impact, Zhang Yimou's films are not very

popular domestically, with criticism far outweighing praise for almost every film. However, he continues to make films with such enthusiasm because international accolades from the West are always there to support him, as each of his films wholeheartedly caters to the tastes of Western judges. Therefore, his obsession with portraying the backward aspects of China in his films is evident.” (Liu, 2010).

Furthermore, the article argued that this approach has contributed to the negative impression that the West holds towards China. And Zhang Yimou should be held responsible as the misinterpretation of China by the West is partly a result of the interaction between Zhang Yimou and his loyal Western film audiences. The article further argues that this trend of catering is not limited to Zhang Yimou but extends to a considerable number of Chinese directors. Their post-colonial inferiority complex refers to a psychological and sociocultural phenomenon that arises in societies or individuals who have experienced colonization. It is a persistent belief in the superiority of the colonizer's culture and values. The author expresses hope that Zhang Yimou will create true humanistic masterpieces, breaking free from the degrading perspective of post-colonialism, and striving to depict an ancient yet vibrant East as it rises in modern times.

The criticism against Zhang Yimou is often viewed as biased and unfair by his fans. However, there is some validity to the notion that his films may not resonate with a wide range of people in China. He has been accused of not making films with Chinese audiences in mind. While the emerging upper-middle-class in China may perceive Zhang Yimou's films as depicting the lives of farmers, the reality is that real farmers find it incredibly challenging to connect with his work. In truth, Zhang Yimou's films resonate more with individuals who belonged to the educated class but were unfortunate victims of social status changes, leading to a challenging fate. This aspect is fundamental to his identity as a person and is specific to particular social groups from his generation. Most people in China are not fans of his films, rather, they respect him simply because he was supposedly great.

During the Cultural Revolution, children from cities were sent to work in rural areas, but as the 80s arrived, there was a significant influx of people from rural China into major metropolitan cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. While migration primarily took place in urban centers, the countryside experienced a population decline. Moreover, movie theaters were scarce in rural China, and the primary moviegoers consisted of the upper-middle class. It is understandable that these audiences desired stories and themes that reflected their own lives, as they were hungry for new information and Western culture. They were less interested in the old traditions and social struggles depicted in Zhang Yimou's films. Especially when Zhang Yimou took some artistic freedoms with these so-called traditions, making his film even

more unreliable to the average Chinese viewers. With significant economic growth, most Chinese audiences preferred Western films or stories set in urban environments that they could easily relate to. The differences between city life and rural life were so vast that watching stories from rural China felt no different from watching stories from a foreign country.

Additionally, during the 1980s and 1990s, the offspring of Beijing's Da Yuan elite exerted a significant influence on China's arts and cultural industry. They had access to the outside world even during the Culture Revolution days, placing them ahead of everyone else in society. These individuals, representative of the emerging Chinese upper class, played prominent roles in popular films and TV shows. Their narratives not only mirrored the past but also explored the profound impact of rapid economic growth and the influx of new information on cultural identities, social consciousness, interpersonal connections, and the aspirational desires that were constantly present in the daily lives of the average Chinese people. A prime example is the highly acclaimed TV series "Beijingers in New York," written by Wang Shuo and featuring Jiang Wen, both Da Yuan Zi Di. The show vividly portrayed the lives of new Chinese immigrants adjusting to life abroad, triggering profound curiosity within the fast-evolving Chinese society and consistently shattering viewership records.

Furthermore, before Hollywood officially entered the Chinese Film market, mainland Chinese filmmakers faced tough competition from Hong Kong and Taiwan films, which predominantly focused on urban settings and enjoyed immense popularity among mainland audiences. Even Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai's art-house masterpiece "In the Mood for Love" had a stronger cult following among average Chinese audiences compared to any of Zhang Yimou's films.

Interestingly, on the international stage, Zhang Yimou's films depicting Chinese rural life often become the preferred representation of China, overshadowing portrayals of modern cities or the perspectives of the upper-middle class. This has resulted in numerous accusations against Zhang Yimou, suggesting that he panders to the Western lens when portraying China. However, labeling this as an example of enforcing cultural and racial stereotypes would be inaccurate, as the underlying reasons are more complex than simply intending to protect white supremacy. In fact, one aspect to consider is that it is human nature to be fascinated by the exotic. The lives of the upper-middle class in third-world countries are not as captivating as those of rural villages. Similar to theater, films require a sense of drama at their core. They need a theatrical element in their stories to captivate audiences. While the upper-middle class in China yearned for Western influences, the West sought to explore hidden corners within Chinese society. Zhang Yimou's films aim to entice adventurous explorers among Western audiences and pique their curiosity by presenting these "treasures."

It is also important to acknowledge that the debate surrounding stereotyping extends beyond China and is prevalent in many third-world countries within the international arena. This trend has been followed by numerous filmmakers and production companies, who make it a customary practice to identify the target audience before embarking on any film project, given the significant disparities between Western markets and the Chinese market. On one hand, there are noticeable exaggerations regarding wealth, while on the other hand, a clear emphasis is placed on highlighting negative social aspects. There's an industry superstition regarding International Film Festivals: a film needs to be backward enough to have a chance at entering the big three, Cannes, Venice, and Berlin. Thus two distinct career paths are often laid out for the younger generation of Chinese Filmmakers, the pro-western narrative approach, proven by many renowned Chinese directors who started their careers by earning awards in International Film Festivals. And then, there's the "audiences first" approach, where a director's sole concerns are making a box-office splash in the Chinese market while accepting that their work will likely never be accepted into international festivals.

Of course, it would be unfair to assert that all of this was done intentionally, but the underlying factors that cause these unreliable career path-building strategies cannot be ignored. Yet, is it justifiable to place such immense pressure on a single director? While there are numerous iconic Hollywood directors, none have had to shoulder the weight of an entire film industry as Zhang Yimou was expected to. Shouldn't there be some room for individual artistic identity and freedom of expression without being held responsible for all the "trendsetting"? The irony in this situation is difficult to overlook: the greatest Chinese film director of all time garnered a surprisingly small number of devoted fans, with more Chinese audiences expressing dislike rather than admiration toward his work. The clash between individualism and group identity plays a significant role here. Furthermore, the tradition of Confucianism and Zen Buddhism, where there exists a compelling need and tradition to venerate an all-knowing master, also partially contributes to the contradictory paradox in which Zhang Yimou found himself trapped. Nonetheless, most people envy him, considering it a good problem to have.

Although Zhang Yimou's work has been the subject of controversy, most still consider him the greatest Chinese filmmaker of all time. First, he played a pioneering role in the era of artistic films that achieved international acclaim. Later, amidst China's economic boom, he ventured into a new era of commercial films. These two film genres differ significantly, making it exceptionally rare for a director to pioneer two distinct epochs in the history of cinema. Additionally, Zhang Yimou exhibited exceptional interpersonal skills, enabling him to adeptly navigate the complexities of

the Chinese film industry and effectively rebuild a favorable relationship with the Chinese Communist Party, even after having been blacklisted. His career and success cannot be solely attributed to his talents and dedication, but also to his exceptional ability to navigate between different realms, much like a masterful chess player. Zhang Yimou's passion for learning can be traced back to his early days working at a factory where he manufactured socks. He approaches each move with meticulous calculation, avoiding excessive pressure, taking calculated risks at the opportune moment, and employing caution when necessary. Through skillful negotiation, he considers the desires of all parties involved, ensuring he remains one step ahead of the game. This strategic prowess reflects the wisdom embedded in ancient Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism, which emphasize the significance of acquiring the appropriate skills to engage with the world.

In Chinese culture, knowledge holds immense value. The Imperial Examination System, known as Ke Ju Zhi Du, originated in the 6th century during the Sui Dynasty and endured until the early 20th century, offering commoners a means to improve their social standing based on their talents and knowledge. The system aimed to select government officials based on their knowledge and moral character rather than their family background or wealth. Despite Mao Zedong's attempts to devalue education, the belief that learning is the key to overcoming adverse circumstances remains deeply ingrained in Chinese society. Throughout his career, Zhang Yimou has charted numerous paths for himself through dedicated learning.

In the documentary series "Thirteen Invitations," host Xu Zhiyuan not only conducted an open and candid interview with Zhang Yimou himself but also spoke with a colleague from the Textile Factory where Zhang Yimou had worked for seven years. One crucial aspect highlighted was Zhang Yimou's unwavering commitment to learning. "To him (Zhang Yimou) and his friends, who all had problematic family backgrounds," recalled his colleague "learning was their only way out." Screenwriter Lu Wei, known for works like "To Live" and "Farewell My Concubine," vividly recalls how Zhang Yimou would diligently lead creative teams in studying films. Lu Wei himself shared a similar social status with Zhang Yimou, although their specific circumstances differed. While he didn't have a father who was a KMT officer or a mother who was a landlord, he faced his own struggles as a convicted felon. In the early 1980s, attending "dance parties" where men and women could have close physical contact was considered a punishable offense, and Lu Wei spent over a year in prison for being caught at one. He vividly remembers that the woman who organized the party was executed for claiming to have had sexual relationships with hundreds of men. Like Zhang Yimou, Lu Wei faced a bleak fate, and for both of them, dedicated learning became their only path to a better future. During their production meetings, which

resembled study groups, they would engage in lengthy discussions covering every aspect of filmmaking, from conceptualization to technical execution, often extending into the early hours of the morning. They meticulously analyzed their favorite films, scrutinizing minute details such as lighting, staging, and dialogue, with the aim of fully understanding the art of storytelling in film. The outcome of their intensive study was remarkable: their film was nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes, narrowly missing out to "Pulp Fiction", but ultimately winning the prestigious Grand Prix award.

Zhang Yimou's dedication to learning extended beyond his passion for films; he applied it to his approach to life as well. Zhang Yimou's journey is not unique among Chinese directors who have faced bans due to their films. What sets him apart is his ability to learn from these experiences and swiftly adapt his strategy, showcasing his astute understanding of the importance of aligning himself with the right allies to ensure the continued success of his filmmaking career. A prime example of this strategic thinking is evident in Zhang Yimou's highly controversial, unprecedented open letter addressed to Gilles Jacob, the former president of the Cannes Film Festival and someone he referred to in the very letter as an "old friend." This pivotal letter marked the second significant turning point in his career, distinguishing him from other Chinese filmmakers who often find themselves torn between the influences of the West and the East. Zhang Yimou, however, charted a distinct third path that elevated him above the competition, signifying a moment of profound change and personal growth in his journey.

In 1998, made two films "Not One Less" and "The Road Home." Initially, he submitted both films to the Cannes Film Festival. However, he later decided to withdraw both films following an incident involving an open letter. Subsequently, he submitted the films to other festivals, where they achieved remarkable success. "Not One Less" was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion Award at the Venice Film Festival, while "The Road Home" received the Silver Bear Award in Berlin. During an interview at the Venice Film Festival, Zhang Yimou emphasized that when making films in China, it is inevitable to face various political factors. He expressed that it is a cultural misconception for foreigners to view Chinese films solely from a political perspective. He considered withdrawing his films from Cannes as a normal means to express his views in a relatively public manner. Professor Hao Jian from the Beijing Film Academy interpreted this incident as "Zhang Yimou's exit show."

Originally, Zhang Yimou's film "No One Less" was scheduled to be screened at Cannes. However, the festival requested that a scene featuring the raising of the Chinese flag be removed from the film, as they did not wish to be associated with Chinese propaganda. In response, Zhang Yimou decided to withdraw the film and published an open letter that garnered significant international attention and was

widely discussed by various international press outlets. This action made him the first director to decline participation in the Cannes Film Festival. The following is the translated version of the open letter:

Dear Chairman Jacob of the Cannes Film Festival,

I have decided to withdraw my films, "Not One Less" and "The Road Home," from your esteemed Cannes Film Festival this year. I feel that there has been a serious misunderstanding of these two films on your part, which I find unacceptable.

Both of these films revolve around the theme of love. "Not One Less" portrays our compassion for children and our concerns about the overall cultural and educational state of our nation. "The Road Home" celebrates the purity and authenticity of love, a universal emotion cherished by humanity. It is perplexing that you have criticized these films on the grounds of "politics," which can only be seen as a political or cultural bias.

For a long time, I have actively and eagerly participated in the Cannes Film Festival. Cannes holds a significant place in my heart, and like many other directors around the world, being selected for Cannes is often regarded as an honor. However, today, I have decided to withdraw because my belief in the festival's dedication to art has been shaken. I deeply regret that it has come to this.

Different people may have different opinions about the quality of a film, and that is perfectly normal. What I cannot accept is that, when it comes to Chinese films, the Western world seems to have only one lens through which to interpret them: if a film is not deemed "anti-government," it is labeled as "pro-government propaganda." Judging a film based on such a simplistic concept is both naive and one-sided. I wonder if you hold the same viewpoint toward films by American, French, Italian, and other directors.

I hope that this discriminatory attitude toward Chinese films will gradually change in the future, as it is not only unfair to me but also to all Chinese directors, including the young ones who will come after me.

Sincerely,

Your deer friend,

Zhang Yimou

April 18, 1999

As a result, other Chinese filmmakers received a clear indication of the preferred types of films and narratives favored by international film festivals.

The motivations behind Zhang Yimou's open letter were complex, and opinions diverged among critics and industry insiders. Professor Hao Jian from the Beijing Film Academy argued, "How could Jacob understand the true meaning of that letter? It was primarily written for the Chinese audience, as Zhang Yimou wanted to cleanse himself of the derogatory labels of 'postcolonial culture' and 'portraying ugliness and backwardness'... Now he desperately needs an opportunity to showcase his political stance." Wang Shuo, the prominent figure representing Da Yuan Zi Di, criticized Zhang Yimou as an opportunist, citing this incident as evidence, stating, "Zhang Yimou has consistently claimed that 'Not One Less' is his finest achievement, while 'The Road Home' represents a return to simplicity. His 'sincerity and dedication' make it difficult to doubt his statements. However, if that is indeed true, then I must consider another rumor: his past attitudes towards films were merely influenced by others and shaped by prevailing trends. Based on this, I can conclude that he has always been an opportunist."

The impact of Zhang Yimou's open letter went beyond its intended purpose of protesting against Cannes. Chinese Film critic Hong Huang in an interview with Southern Weekend remarked, "If it was just a protest against Cannes for not accepting his films, I don't think there was a need to write an open letter. By doing so, Zhang Yimou has become a national hero. Those who were originally against 'Red Sorghum' will welcome his actions. It was also a turning point for him to become mainstream. Without this step, he wouldn't have earned so much money from the government in the 'Impression' series. This is Zhang Yimou's thoroughly commercialized political move; otherwise, how could he have directed the Olympics?"

In reality, the significance of Zhang Yimou's films extended to the national level, as evidenced by the Chinese National Copyright Administration issuing a copyright protection notice for "Not One Less." This marked the first instance of China implementing protection measures, specifically regarding box office revenue, for domestic films. Consequently, after this, Zhang Yimou transitioned from making art-house films to producing large-scale productions.

In 2004, Zhang Yimou directed his first commercial film "Hero." The film once again received contrasting evaluations and receptions from domestic and international audiences. Chinese film critics and viewers generally expressed a negative attitude towards the film, criticizing its lack of storytelling, historical accuracy, and excessive focus on visual spectacle over substantive content. However, Western media and audiences hailed the film as a masterpiece. In fact, "Hero" claimed the top spot in Time magazine's "Top 10 Movies of the Year" list in 2004, making it the first Chinese-language film to achieve such recognition. Once again, Zhang Yimou paved the way for

a new era of Chinese Cinema, the entire industry followed him into the realm of Commercial big-budget productions. And people cursed him for it.

Why does Zhang Yimou always face so much criticism and opposition in China? Was he genuinely catering to Western audiences, or were his films simply too progressive for the Chinese market? Regardless, Zhang Yimou undeniably holds a prominent position as a leader in the Chinese film industry. Throughout his career, he has explored various genres such as historical dramas, martial arts epics, and contemporary narratives, each showcasing his unique storytelling style and artistic vision. Despite facing censorship and political scrutiny early on, Zhang demonstrated resilience and emerged as one of China's most influential and renowned directors. While numerous articles analyze his films and career trajectory, the words of Zhang Yimou himself carry significant weight. Presented here are edited translations of excerpts from his interview in the documentary series "Thirteen Invitations," discussing the 80s, collaborations with Hollywood, and the future of the Chinese Film Industry.

Zhang Yimou: "I think the 80s were great! It was a time filled with passion. The entire nation shared a thirst for knowledge. It felt like we were finally opening a window to the world, embracing the beginning of reform and opening up. We yearned to see and explore the world, to understand it, and, in doing so, to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves. Whether it was the search for our roots or introspection, that longing was particularly captivating. The stark contrast to the present is truly striking. It's really different! Back then, there were no distractions when it came to filmmaking. It was a time of pure creation, unaffected by external influences. However, today, when someone claims to be making a movie without distractions, I find it hard to believe. Such statements seem more like promotional phrases for the media. How is it possible? After all, we are all human. Can one truly have a mind devoid of these thoughts? Are they really that pure of an artist? I am skeptical. It seems more like a posture than a reality. In truth, all kinds of thoughts arise – the desire to succeed, the longing to win. The challenge lies in attempting not to be consumed by these distractions and striving to maintain inner calm and contentment. Achieving that is remarkable enough, but it's nearly impossible. Back then, the whole nation was engaged in discussions about culture. It was a vastly different time compared to today. Now? The only thing people care about is the box office.

I spent three years in Hollywood filming 'The Great Wall,' during which I truly miss the days of being a director in China. Many people from the mainland say we should be more like Hollywood, more institutionalized. Let me tell you, I don't like the Hollywood production system. It limits your creative freedom; there are so many restrictions! When they first offered it to me, I didn't want to accept it. I thought those popcorn movies were uninteresting! And the script was very old-fashioned. They

(Hollywood writers and producers) came to China, and engaged in questionable behavior, sleeping with a dozen Chinese girls as part of their so-called 'lessons on the Chinese culture and the Chinese people.' Their portrayal of China didn't resemble China. But I couldn't change it. I didn't have the right or the authority. It was an English-language film from the start, and I was hesitant to accept it. Then, my agent said to me, 'Director, have you considered this? A Chinese film released in 150 countries worldwide in its first week, 'blooming' simultaneously. Have you ever thought about that? What an opportunity. If you don't seize it, you may not have this chance again.' Ah, I was tempted! That's what it boiled down to, just one line. Well, let's give it a try! And it ended up taking three years, three and a half years. I didn't really care about the box office failure. In the end, you come to a simple realization: just be yourself. I dedicated over three years to this film, and all kinds of criticism from every direction, and the lesson I learned is simple: I need to be true to myself. Nothing is more important than that."

The era of the internet emerged rapidly, bringing forth constant changes and new developments. Our film industry experienced explosive growth, and China became the largest market worldwide overnight. It happened suddenly! Just like that! Now, in film festivals all around the world, when they see Chinese films, they feel like China is nouveau riche. What can you do? The era when the Fifth Generation filmmakers used to win awards left and right at various film festivals have passed. It's not necessarily that we have declined, but their perspectives have changed. China has become wealthy. The Chinese market is doing well. Everything China touches seems to have a business element to it. Your movie stars shine on the red carpet, stealing the spotlight at every film festival. Of course, they don't like it! It's not their home turf!

The decline of Chinese literature from its peak in the 1980s to the 1990s and now has had a significant impact on everyone. Film and television are inseparable from literature; they serve as a medium for intellectual exploration through literature. But that era has also passed. Why is Hollywood so successful and dominant in the global market? They've captured the essence of entertainment and spectacle. Although the films they produce may be considered shallow in terms of literature and intellect, they possess visual allure. They're irresistible to young people, who are continuously flocking to the theaters for them. You might lament and feel frustrated, but they keep going. What can you do? When a superhero blockbuster is about to be released, the whole world eagerly awaits it. What's the point, right?

I still believe in the old saying: "Educate while entertaining." When it comes to today's young people, constant preaching won't work. If you keep lecturing like an old hag, it won't resonate. You have to educate while entertaining. That's when you can have a dialogue with them. And then, whatever you say, they will listen.

Today, when Chinese people talk about patriotism and national sentiment, it still largely carries a sense of collectivism. It is part of Chinese culture, where the idea is "what is good for everyone is good for me." It stems from our traditions. If I were to only make films like "To Live" and nothing else, I might not survive. Or, it could be another alternative, something very high and magnificent. I could become profoundly influential, like a wise old master. But I've never planned to do things that way. I've always been trying different things, that's all. It's not about being sensational. This is just how I am, shaped by my background and experiences. An individual is a product of their time. The theories and concepts in my works continue to evolve and endure."

Question: "Don't you have a desire to transcend the times yourself?"

Zhang Yimou: "No, I think doing your own work well is already good enough. Whom do you want to transcend? Trust me, people come and go. Every time, it's like the old saying "Once people are gone, the tea is cold." It's just one of those things that happen because that's how everything is."

Will there be another film director who leaves a comparable impact on the Chinese Film Industry like Zhang Yimou? Nobody knows. For his admirers, Zhang Yimou is cherished for his films' ability to delve into complex themes and emotions, captivating audiences with their depth, stunning visuals, emotional sensitivity, and intricacy. He has an impeccable eye for cinematography and art direction, creating visually breathtaking scenes that are both captivating and unforgettable. From his masterful use of vibrant colors to his meticulous attention to detail, Zhang Yimou's films are visually rich and aesthetically pleasing. Moreover, Zhang Yimou is renowned for his skill in drawing exceptional performances from his actors. Collaborating with some of China's finest actors and actresses, he consistently guides them to deliver powerful and nuanced portrayals, breathing life into complex characters. His expertise in directing performances adds another layer of depth to his films.

However, critics argue that Zhang Yimou's dominance in shaping Chinese representations on the international stage and molding the Western perception of China had far-reaching social consequences. His artistic choices and preferences transcended the realm of cinema, influencing the perception of 1.4 billion people and Chinese culture worldwide. What makes this more complex is that this responsibility was thrust upon him without his full consent or agreement, leading him to overlook the potential ramifications of his actions or lack thereof. Although Zhang Yimou maintained that he never sought to be the sole representative of China, the reality was that he often found himself in that position. A prime example of this was the 2008 Olympic opening and closing ceremonies, where he was entrusted with billions of dollars, the efforts of hundreds of thousands of volunteers and soldiers, and the collective talent of an entire nation. With the eyes of the world upon him, he was chosen to encapsulate

the aspirations and identity of a nation through his artistic vision. Despite the glories and power that a filmmaker and artist could only dream of, Zhang Yimou persisted in pursuing his own artistic preferences. Regrettably, this approach consistently resulted in a disconnect between Zhang Yimou and the average Chinese viewer. His films about China were never meant for the Chinese audience, but rather for outsiders. Because he himself sees himself as a perpetual outsider in his own country. Maybe this is the real reason why his films consistently failed to fully resonate with the domestic audience throughout his entire career. Despite his monumental contributions, there remains an unresolved divide between Zhang Yimou's artistic exploration of China and the expectations and perspectives of everyday Chinese individuals.

Considering all these points, one cannot help but question whether such a burden should rest solely on the shoulders of one individual. Perhaps authoritarianism exists in China beyond politics and governance, permeating a deeper social and cultural level rooted in Chinese traditions and values. To challenge it is to challenge the foundation of Chinese culture and society. For a mere individual like Zhang Yimou, who happens to be a great film director, at his core, all he ever wanted was simply "To Live."

Findings & Conclusion

Censorship, driven by a desire for power, control, and effective governance, has undeniably played a significant role in shaping Chinese cinema. However, the fundamental nature of film as an art form clashes with strict control, as artistic expression relies on freedom. Creativity thrives when given the space to explore and transcend imposed boundaries. When individuals are confined to "drawing inside the box," the size of the box directly impacts the possibilities available to creative minds. Through our comprehensive examination, a discernible pattern emerges, highlighting the correlation between the progression of censorship laws and instances where rules have been violated, disregarded due to certain needs, or simply ignored. Consequently, tighter control measures are implemented. However, as the confines of creative expression continue to shrink, the result is a stifling environment where individuals are limited to merely coloring within a tiny box. This narrowing of possibilities is suffocating not only for the film industry but also for any creative sector and society as a whole. By imposing restrictions on politically sensitive or socially controversial themes and narratives, many filmmakers are forced into self-censorship, diluting their artistic vision and compromising the authenticity of their films. Such stringent censorship stifles innovation and hinders growth.

The argument of "securing appropriate representation", especially in relationships with international audiences, is often misused in this context. Watching a film alone should not instill fear of the People's Republic of China in knowledgeable and cultured individuals. No country or society should measure entertainment content based on the intelligence level of its ignorant members. When a society fosters an environment that allows individuals to express their inherent goodness, the positive aspects of that society flourish. It is therefore important to avoid making simplistic judgments of individuals as purely good or bad, and it is inaccurate to assert that China lacks humanity or human rights. Drawing inspiration from Zen Buddhism, every person possesses the capacity for enlightenment, and engaging in virtuous actions aligns with embodying the Buddha while engaging in harmful actions aligns with embodying the devil. If we apply the wisdom of traditional Chinese philosophies here, the correct approach would be for everyone to hold a higher value when assessing their own images as well as the broader society. Sadly, that is not the case here.

Simultaneously, the allure of Hollywood's commercial success and visually stunning spectacles has captivated global audiences, including those in China. This has generated a growing demand for big-budget international co-productions tailored to the tastes of a worldwide audience. Consequently, Chinese filmmakers have increasingly prioritized commercial viability over artistic integrity, causing the industry

to lose its voice as a platform for critical discourse. The erosion of creative freedom severely impedes the Chinese film industry's potential to enrich the cultural and intellectual development of the nation. This is a direct consequence of stringent censorship policies and the overwhelming influence of Hollywood on the direction of Chinese cinema. When the film industry loses its ability to serve as a platform for critical discourse, it gives rise to broader social issues. It's like neglecting a wound, covering it up instead of providing proper treatment. With time, the wound festers, grows, and ultimately becomes fatal.

Both Zhang Yimou and Li Yang, our case study subjects, can be regarded as "outsiders" in the film industry due to their exclusion from the elite Da Yuan Zi Di group, which enjoys various privileges in terms of artistic exposure, social connections, and cultural status, thus dominating the arts and culture scene. As a result, their survival depended solely on their talents and their ability to seek opportunities and navigate complex human relationships. If Zhang Yimou had continued making films like his masterpiece "To Live," he might have shared a similar fate with Li Yang. Conversely, since Li Yang solely focused on creating independent art house films aimed at raising social awareness, he could never sustain a career solely as a film director. In fact, his love for filmmaking kept him away from financial stability. He is essentially paying out of his own pocket to use his film to raise social awareness, which not only makes him a respectable artist but also an activist. However, the progression of civilization should not rely solely on conscientious individuals. Why should the fate of each filmmaker be left solely to their personal choices? Shouldn't the industry play a role in offering its artists more options and opportunities in terms of diverse career paths? After all, without filmmakers, there would be no film industry.

Various Chinese filmmakers achieved their notability and success through different paths. However, utilizing connections is a common thread in their diverse strategies. It is clear in our analysis that Zhang Yimou's exceptional interpersonal skills have played a crucial role in navigating challenging circumstances. Despite the hurdles imposed by censorship, he has managed to create impactful films. "To Live," has faced censorship challenges, resulting in bans due to sensitive subject matter. But this experience is not unique to Zhang Yimou; other Chinese filmmakers, including our other case study Li Yang, and notable Chinese directors such as Jiang Wen, Tian Zhuang Zhuang, and Feng Xiaogang, basically everyone in the film industry have also encountered both success and limitations due to censorship constraints. Those who were adept at navigating connections and utilizing relationships successfully maintained their filmmaking careers, while those lacking people skills had to find alternative ways to nourish their creative souls. These findings underscore the importance of interpersonal relationships and the significant skill set required to

navigate and harmonize with the surrounding world in the Chinese film industry. While interpersonal relationships and navigating the complex system have proven crucial for survival and success in the Chinese film industry, a systemic change that promotes artistic freedom and diversity of perspectives is undoubtedly more desirable. The ability to skillfully navigate the constraints imposed by censorship should not solely determine a filmmaker's fate. It is essential to foster an environment where filmmakers can freely express their creativity, tackle diverse subjects, and contribute to the rich cultural landscape of Chinese cinema. Striking a balance between maintaining cultural values and allowing artistic freedom is paramount, ensuring that future generations of filmmakers have the opportunity to create meaningful and thought-provoking works that reflect the complexities of Chinese society.

The art of governance is perhaps one of the most challenging puzzles for humanity to solve. Centuries ago, as Confucius traveled throughout China, tirelessly attempting to persuade various rulers in different nations to embrace his philosophy of good governance, his teachings fell on deaf ears. While Confucianism has since become deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, there's no practical implementation on a systemic level. The same can be said for the two other schools of Chinese philosophy, Taoism and Zen Buddhism. Chinese wisdom has been passed on by the people, not through any government policies. It is the forward-thinking individuals who possess the courage to follow their common sense and uphold virtuous values that propel Chinese society forward and enable progress. However, to effect significant and systematic change, transformation is needed. True governance cannot be achieved through excessive control. When heavy-handed control is imposed, the consequences become intricate, often giving rise to more problems than solutions.

Through our analysis of the current Chinese film industry, we have observed the dominant influence of the new upper class within the industry and the intricate interpersonal relationships that shape the film market. While box office revenues have consistently increased over the past decade, there has been a decline in the diversity of film content due to reforms in the studio system and stricter censorship guidelines. In its early days, Chinese cinema played a vital role in shaping society, reinforcing cultural identity, and advocating for social change and progress. However, despite the significant technological advancements impacting what is shown on Chinese screens, a closer examination of the list of successful box office films in the last 10 years reveals a lack of space for artistic growth. Innovative filmmakers have been marginalized, making way for government propaganda aimed at showcasing rapid economic growth while suppressing organic artistic development and freedom of expression. Whether the glass is half empty or half full depends on one's perspective. Economically, things

may appear promising, but culturally and artistically, there has been a clear and steady decline since the early 90s.

In conclusion, the decrease in authentic Chinese films can be attributed to the dual impact of Hollywood's influence and the stringent censorship policies implemented in China. The pursuit of economic ambitions has led to a prioritization of commercial success over artistic integrity, resulting in a loss of originality and cultural identity. Additionally, the high standards for entertainment and economic returns have fostered a climate of brainwashing impact, masterfully tailoring the audience's taste, and limited creative freedom. This has come at the cost of sacrificing cultural traditions, values, and innovation. To revive the Chinese film industry and nurture its authentic voice, it is imperative to strike a delicate balance between commercial viability and artistic expression. This requires providing filmmakers with the freedom to explore diverse themes and engage in critical discourse, allowing for the emergence of thought-provoking and culturally significant films. Only through such measures can the Chinese film industry reclaim its position as a powerhouse of cinematic excellence, rekindle its cultural identity, and inspire a new generation of filmmakers.

Acknowledgment

It was impossible to complete such an extensive research paper without the invaluable guidance of several insiders in the Chinese Film Industry. Firstly, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Qin Yan, my mother, and a prominent Sixth Generation Chinese Film Director, as well as a former Film Director at the Chinese Children's Film Studio. Yan's extensive knowledge of Chinese cinema's history provided clear guidelines on important film movements, pioneering film directors and their contributions, significant films, the formation, and day-to-day function within a Film Studio, and the factors that led to the decline and abolishment of Chinese film studios. Most importantly, Qin Yan had a first-hand understanding of the intricate relationships between the Beijing Da Yuan Zi Di and the Chinese Arts and Cultural Industry. Her insights and expertise greatly contributed to the understanding and interpretation of Chinese cinema.

I would also like to sincerely thank Jiang Xiaohan, a talented Singer, Actress, Poet, Producer, Film Critic, and long-time Host for the CCTV 6 Film Channel. Throughout her career, Jiang Xiaohan had interviewed many important figures in the film industry, internationally and domestically. Her passion for film and critical perspectives have been a constant source of inspiration throughout this research. Not only did she point me toward important interviews and articles, but she also generously shared her extensive knowledge of the national and international film industry, behind the scene stories, and important debates, fostering open and candid discussions.

Last but certainly not least, my gratitude extends to Lu Wei, a renowned screenwriter and film director. Lu Wei's remarkable contributions as the screenwriter for "To Live," directed by Zhang Yimou, which received the Grand Prix and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival, and his work as the screenwriter for "Farewell My Concubine," the Palme d'Or winner at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival, have been a continual source of inspiration. His openness as an artist and human being is exceptional, and his dedication to the art of filmmaking sets a high standard to aspire to.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my cherished classmates, teachers, and loved ones for their unwavering support, encouragement, and understanding throughout the research process. Their presence and encouragement have been invaluable to the completion of this research paper.

Reference

Filmography:

- Ren, Q. (Director). (1905). Battle of Dingjunshan [Motion picture]. Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio.
- Ren, Q. (Director). (1905). Qingshi Mountain [Motion picture]. Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio.
- Ren, Q. (Director). (1905). Yanyang Tower [Motion picture]. Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio.
- Ren, Q. (Director). (1905). Shou Guansheng [Motion picture]. Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio.
- Ren, Q. (Director). (1906). Baishuitan [Motion picture]. Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio.
- Ren, Q. (Director). (1906). The Leopard [Motion picture]. Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio.
- Shichuan, Z., & Zhengqiu, Z. (Directors) (1913). Difficult Couple [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company
- Shichuan, Z. (Director) (1922). Laborer's Love [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company
- Shichuan, Z. (Director) (1923). Orphan Rescues Grandfather [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company
- Yan, X., & Bugao, C. (Directors). (1933). Torrents [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company.
- Yan, X., & Bugao, C. (Directors). (1933). Spring Silkworms [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company.
- Xiling, S. (Director). (1933). A Cry of Women [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company.
- Yu, S. (Director). (1934). The Highway [Motion picture]. Lianhua Film Company.
- Yonggang, W. (Director). (1934). The Goddess [Motion picture]. Lianhua Film Company.
- Mu, F. (Director). (1936). Blood on Wolf Mountain [Motion picture]. Lianhua Film Company.
- Yonggang, W. (Director). (1936) Soaring Aspirations [Motion picture]. Xinhua Film Company.
- Xiling, S. (Director). (1937). Crossroads [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company.
- Muzhi, Y. (Director). (1937). Angles on the Road [Motion picture]. Mingxing Film Company.

- Romm, M., & Vasilev, D. (Directors). (1937) Lenin in October [Motion picture] Mosfilm
- Dongshan, S. (Director). (1947) Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon on the Long Road [Motion picture]. Kunlun Film
- Chushen, C. (Director). (1947) Spring River Flows East [Motion picture]. Kunlun Film
- Fu, S. (Director). (1948) The Lights of Ten Thousand Homes [Motion picture]. Kunlun Film
- Mu, F. (Director). (1948) Spring in a Small Town [Motion picture]. Wenhua Film
- Hansheng, Y., (Director). (1949) The Adventures of Sanmao [Motion picture]. Kunlun Film
- Junli, Z., (Director). (1949) The Crow and the Sparrow [Motion picture]. Kunlun Film
- Xingzhi, X. (Director). (1935) Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm [Motion picture]. Diantong Film Company
- Bin, W., & Khoua, C. (Directors). (1951) The White Haired Girl [Motion picture]. Changchun Film Studio
- Wenzhi, S. (Director). (1954). Iron and Steel Transport Line [Motion picture]. Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio.
- Wei, G. (Director). (1955) Dong Cunrui [Motion picture]. Changchun Film Studio
- Meng, S., & Biao, L. (Directors). (1956) Battle on Shangganling Mountain [Motion picture]. Changchun Film Studio
- Wenzhi, S. (Director). (1958). The Five Heroes of the Liang Ya Mountain [Motion picture]. Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio.
- Jiayi, W. (Director). (1959) Five Golden Flowers [Motion picture]. Changchun Film Studio
- Li, S. (Director). (1961) Liu Sanjie [Motion picture]. Changchun Film Studio
- Huai'a, C., & Wei, C. (Directors). (1961) The Women Generals of the Yang Family [Motion picture]. Beijing Film Studio
- Huai'a, C. & Wei, C. (Directors). (1961) Wild Boar Forest [Motion picture]. Beijing Film Studio
- Wenzhi, S. (Director). (1963). Angry Waves [Motion picture]. Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio.
- Huai'a, C., & Wei, C. (Directors). (1963) Mu Guiing Takes Command in Hongzhou [Motion picture]. Beijing Film Studio
- Zhaodi, W. (Director). (1964) The Sons and Daughters of the Chinese Revolution [Motion picture]. Changchun Film Studio

- Hua, S. (Director). (1965) Eternality in the Flames of War [Motion picture]. Beijing Film Studio
- Hussain, N. (Director). (1971) Caravan [Motion picture] Nasir Hussain Films
- Wenzhi, S. (Director). (1977). Earthquake [Motion picture]. Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio.
- Zhuangzhuang, T. (Director). (1984) September [Motion picture]. Kunming Film Studio
- Zhuangzhuang, T. (Director). (1986) The Horse Thief [Motion picture]. Xi'an Film Studio
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (1987) Red Sorghum [Motion picture]. Xi'an Film Studio & New Yorker Films
- Jianxin, W. (Director). (1988) Reincarnation [Motion picture] Xi'an Film Studio
- Daying, Y. (Director). (1988) Deep Breath [Motion picture] Shenzhen Film Company
- Jiashan, M. (Director). (1989) The Trouble Shooters [Motion picture] Emeishan Film Studio
- Gang, X. (Director). (1989) Half Flame, Half Sea [Motion picture] Beijing Film Studio
- Wang, S. (Screenwriter). (1990). Ke Wang [Television series]. Beijing Television Art Center.
- Wang, S. (Screenwriter). (1992). Story of the Editorial Department [Television series]. Beijing Television Art Center.
- Wang, S. (Screenwriter). (1992). Story of the Editorial Department [Television series]. Beijing Television Art Center.
- Wen, Z., & Qin, Y. (Directors). (1991). Mama [Motion picture]. Xian Film Studio.
- Kaige, C. (Director). (1993) Farewell My Concubine [Motion picture]. Beijing Film Studio
- Zhuangzhuang, T. (Director). (1993) The Blue Kite [Motion picture]. Changwei Film Company
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (1993) To Live [Motion picture]. Shanghai Film Studio & ERA International
- Davis, A. (Director). (1993) The Fugitive [Motion picture] Warner Bros.
- Wen, J. (Director). (1994) In the Heat of the Sun [Motion Picture] China Film Co-Production Corporation
- Xiaogang, F. (Director). (1997) Party A Party B [Motion Picture] Beijing Forbidden City Film
- Cameron, J. (Director). (1997) Titanic [Motion picture] Twentieth Century Fox

- Yimou, Z. (Director). (1999) Not One Less [Motion picture]. Guangxi Film Studio & China Film Group
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (1999) The Road Home [Motion picture]. Guangxi Film Studio & Columbia Picture Film Production Asia
- Wen, J. (Director). (2000) Devil on the Door Step [Motion Picture] China Film Co-Production Corporation
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (2002) Hero [Motion picture]. Edko Films & Zhang Yimou Studio
- Yang, L. (Director). (2003) Blind Shaft [Motion picture] Sheng Tang Film Production Co., Ltd.; Bronze Age Film Co., Ltd.
- Ye Jing (Director). (2006). Days of Being Wild [Television series] Beijing Hebang Film and Television Cultural Development Co., Ltd.
- Yang, L. (Director). (2007) Blind Mountain [Motion picture] Sheng Tang Film Production Co., Ltd.
- Xiaogang, F. (Director). (2010) Aftershock [Motion Picture] Huayi Brothers, China Film Group, media Asian films, Emperor Motion Pictures
- Jian, C. (Director). (2014) Blue Sky Bones [Motion picture]. Antaeus Film Group Beijing Dongxi Music Art Production Co., Ltd; Liaoning Ougu Digital Technology Co., Ltd; Shenzhenshi Zhongshu Wenchuang Capital Management Co., Ltd; Dongyue International Media (Beijing) Co., Ltd; Defang Wealth Management (Dalian) Co., Ltd
- Wu, G. (Director). (2015) Mr. Six [Motion Pictures] Huayi Brothers, Taihe Film Investment
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (2016). The Great Wall [Motion picture]. Universal Studio, China Film Group Corporation
- Gans, M. (Director). (2016). The Warriors Gate [Motion picture]. Europa Corp
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (2017) The Great Wall [Motion picture]. Universal Studio & China Film Group
- Xiaogang, F. (Director). (2017) Youth [Motion Picture] Chinese 8.1 Military Film Studio.
- Wu, J. (Director). (2017) Wolf Warrior 2 [Motion picture] Beijing Dengfeng International Culture Communication Company
- Yang, L. (Director). (2017) Blind Way [Motion picture] Qizhi (Shanghai) Digital Media Co., Ltd., Beijing Kunpeng Xingyun Cultural Communication Co., Ltd., Beijing Xiaoma Benteng Cultural Media Co., Ltd., and nearly 20 cinema companies jointly produced the film.
- Yimou, Z. (Director). (2002) Shadow [Motion picture]. Well Go UAS Entertainment.
- Muye, W (Director). (2018). Dying to Survive [Motion picture]. Maeya Films

- Caro, N. (Director). (2020). *Mulan* [Motion picture]. Walt Disney Picture
- Wu, G. (Director). (2020) *Eight Hundred* [Motion Pictures] Huayi Brothers, China Media Capital
- Kaige, C., Dante, L., Hark, T., Jianxin, H., Haiqiang, N., and Jun-chu, P., (Directors) (2021) *The Battle at Lake Changjin* [Motion picture] Bona Film Group & China Media Capital Pictures
- Jiongjiong, Q. (Director). (2021) *A New Old Play* [Motion picture] Icarus Films

Bibliography:

Jia, L., & Simeng, D. (2018). The 2018 research report on the Chinese film industry international version. China Film Association, Film Art Center of China Federation of Literacy and Art Circles, 2-5.

Maltby, R. (2006). Film History versus Cinema History: Distinguishing Aesthetic Relations from Social Aspects. *Journal of Film Studies*, 40(3), 345-362.

Kokas, A. (2017). *Hollywood Made in China*.

Lim, S. H., & Ward, J. (2020). *The Chinese Cinema Book*.

Rawnsley, G. (2003). Political Communication in Greater China - The Construction and Reflection of Identity.

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research Methodology: A Step-by-step Guide for Beginners*

Rosen, S. (2002). The politics of censorship in contemporary China. *Journal of Contemporary*.

Fairlamb, H. L. (2007). Romancing the Tao: How Ang Lee Globalized Ancient Chinese Wisdom. *Cinema without Borders*, 15(1/2), 42.

Low, Y. W. (2014). *Buddhism and Taoism in Popular Films: A Jungian Perspective*. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Xinyu, L. (2012). Between resistance and adaptation: Underground filmmaking in China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*.

Marchetti, G. (2001). Censorship and cinema: The case of China. *Film Quarterly*.

Yaping, D. (2022). *History of Chinese Cinema*.

Cheng, J. (1963). *History of Chinese Film Development* (1st ed.). Reprinted in 1980, 2nd ed.

Hong, Y., & Yan, L. (2002). *New Chinese Film History: 1949-2000* (1st ed.). Hu Nan Arts Press.

Ke, X. (2014). *Understanding the History of Chinese Cinema in One Page*. Popular Film Magazine.

Deocampo, N. (2017). *Early Cinema in Asia*.

Rang, X. (2018). *Remembering the Magnificent State-Owned Film Studios of New China: Their History and Contributions*.

Jiao, S. (1984). *A Historical Review of Xi'an Film Studio*. The Shaanxi Provincial Cultural and Historical Data Database.

The Past and Present of China's Top Ten Film Studios. Huayi Brothers Research Institute.

Li, Y. (2013). *Blind Mountain* [Film]. Beijing: Film Production Company.

National Humanity History. *The Competition and Collaboration between Deng Xiaoping and Chiang Chingkuo - It's a Pity Chingkuo Died Too Soon*.

Zhang, W. (2022, February 6). *Conversation with Film Director Li Yang*. Face Off Issue 121. China Digital Times. Retrieved from: <http://news.163.com/special/daoyanliyang/>

Tencent News & One Way Space. (2023, April 26). *Thirteen Invitations* [Television series episode 13]. In X. Zhiyuan (Host), Documentary series.

Liu, X. (2010). *Post-colonial Perspective and the Grotesque Portrayal of the East: Unveiling the Inner Workings of Zhang Yimou's Films and the Deliberate Adoption of the 'Accepted' Eastern Imagery by the Western Audience*. *Journal of East China Normal University*, 33(4), 45-57.

Yuzhenxiang Gossip Guangxi. (2022, December 11). *The Western theories fail to provide an adequate explanation for China: Why Zhang Yimou eventually distanced himself from the Western perspective*. Retrieved from NetEase.