

The Formation of Chinese Art Cinema

Li Yang

The Formation of Chinese Art Cinema

1990–2003

palgrave
macmillan

Li Yang
Department of Foreign
Languages and Literatures
Lafayette College
Easton, PA, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-97210-7 ISBN 978-3-319-97211-4 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97211-4>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018954496

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover credit: fergregory/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Cover design by Aki Nakayama

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To Weijia, Brooke, and Lenny

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The seeds of this research project were sown during the weekly Chinese film screenings with my graduate advisor Sung-Sheng Yvonne Chang and my fellow graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin in the early 2000s. Those hard-to-find films, courtesy of Dr. Chang's personal collection, with the likes of He Jianjun's *Postman* (1995), Jia Zhangke's *Xiao Wu* (1997), and Wang Xiaoshuai's *So Close to Paradise* (1998), filled me with excitement and left a deep impression on me. Even with the passage of time, which is necessary for a researcher to see the nature and spot patterns of a new cultural phenomenon, that initial enthusiasm toward these films, the filmmakers, and the movement behind them is still there. I hope it is palpable between the lines and across the pages of this book.

This study first took the form of a PhD dissertation at the University of Texas at Austin. My dissertation supervisor, Dr. Chang, not only exposed me to the subject of my critical inquiry, but also offered me steady guidance and unwavering support through my dissertation writing and well beyond my graduation. For her academic integrity, devotion to her students, and grace, she will always be the role model I look up to. I am very grateful to my dissertation committee member Thomas Schatz, whose scholarship inspires my research. His keen observations and straightforward comments always push me to think more logically and write more clearly. My thanks also go to committee members Kirsten Cather and Lynn Wilkinson, whose thorough and insightful comments benefited my revision immensely. Yomi Braester of the University of Washington was my gracious outside reader. His kind encouragement and comments are sincerely appreciated.

At Lafayette College, the Provost's Office never spares support for junior faculty members. My colleagues in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures provide me with the most nurturing environment to develop my dissertation into a book. I thank Michelle Geoffrion-Vinci, Sidney Donnell, Markus Dubischar, George Rosa, Juan Rojo, Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, Han Luo, Katie Stafford, Roxanne Lalande, Anna Duhl, Daniel Quiros, Amauri Gutierrez-Coto, Mary Toulouse, Valeria Sajej, Richard Shupp, Christa Keister, Lucy Swanson, Olga Rodriguez-Ulloa, and the incomparable Joli Mellette. I also benefited enormously from the intellectual companionship and advice given by the colleagues in the Asian Studies Program: Paul Barclay, Robin Rinehart, Ingrid Furniss, Seo-Hyun Park, Il-Hyun Cho, David Stifel, Larry Stockton, and Naoko Ikegami. Across and outside of Lafayette College, I am grateful for the friendship and encouragement of Qin Lu, Ge Xia, Eric Ho, Xiaodong Fan, Joy Zhou, Tingting Kang, Jia-yan Mi of College of New Jersey, and Shaohua Guo of Carlton College. In China, Xiu Limei of Peking University, Liu Yuqing of Southwest University, and Zhou Hongyan of South China Normal University went to great trouble to find the Chinese articles I needed. No words can adequately express my gratitude.

Several Lafayette students have worked with me through the college's EXCEL Scholar program over the years. Their contributions in research and editing are indispensable to the completion of this project. A big thank you to Loujing Pan ('14), Samantha Nichols ('16), Andrew Tuck ('16), and Ivan Rudd ('17)! I am especially thankful for Sean Cavanagh ('18), who worked by my side during the entire last stage of writing and revision.

Shaun Vigil and Glenn Ramirez at Palgrave Macmillan guided this project through the publication process with patience, efficiency, and professionalism. It was a delight to work with them. I appreciate the suggestions of three anonymous reviewers that made the manuscript stronger. All remaining mistakes are of course my own.

Finally, I am indebted to my parents, Yuan Tianqun and Yang Zhenhua, who not only offered me eternal spiritual support, but also came to the United States to live with me for extended periods of time and helped with the housework. My mother-in-law, Zhang Xufang, and father-in-law, Xu Xuewen, gave me the same generous assistance in order for me to finish writing. I hope I have made all four parents proud. My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Weijia, daughter, Brooke, and son, Lenny Xu, to whom this book is dedicated. Weijia has always been my rock. Brooke and Lenny were literally born and raised along with this book project (they grew much faster, though). Now you see what Mommy had been working on at the computer, and yes, you have helped!

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1	
	Part I	Institutions	39
2	The Socialist Film System	41	
3	The Separation of Production	65	
4	Institutions of Consecration	89	
	Part II	Aesthetics	123
5	In the Mix: The Early Sixth Generation Cinema	125	
6	The Impulse to Record: The Neorealist Style	157	
7	The World of Psychological and Symbolic Complexity: The Expressionist Style	191	
	Conclusion: Pursuing Film Art in the Era of Reform	213	
	Index	221	

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	Annual box office revenue of the Chinese film industry (1997–2017) in 100 million RMB. Source: <i>China Film Yearbook</i> (1997–2011), <i>Research Report on the Chinese Film Industry</i> (2012–2018)	56
Fig. 5.1	The four consecutive shots of inanimate objects in <i>The Days</i>	139
Fig. 5.2	The son lies on bed in <i>Mama</i>	143
Fig. 5.3	The mother wraps up the son in <i>Mama</i>	144
Fig. 5.4	A shot of the tree from the son’s point of view in <i>Mama</i>	145
Fig. 5.5	The videographer’s hands—an example of his first-person perspective in <i>Suzhou River</i>	147
Fig. 5.6	The Suzhou River in <i>Suzhou River</i>	148
Fig. 5.7	A twisted vision of the Oriental Tower in <i>Suzhou River</i>	149
Fig. 5.8	Mudan appears in the narrator’s lenses in <i>Suzhou River</i>	151
Fig. 5.9	Courier Mada (left)—an example of the realist shots in <i>Suzhou River</i>	153
Fig. 5.10	Pink neon lights in Meimei’s room in <i>Suzhou River</i>	154
Fig. 5.11	A glamorous Shanghai seen from the phone booth in <i>Suzhou River</i>	155
Fig. 6.1	Xiao Wu is locked on the street in <i>Xiao Wu</i>	168
Fig. 6.2	The onlookers fill the screen from Xiao Wu’s perspective in <i>Xiao Wu</i>	169
Fig. 6.3	The last scene of <i>Platform</i>	176
Fig. 6.4	Xiao Wu decides to confront his friend, but changes his mind in <i>Xiao Wu</i> . He manages to steal again to prepare a wedding gift for his friend	180

Fig. 6.5	Sanming walks uphill in <i>Platform</i>	181
Fig. 6.6	Yin Ruijuan stands alone in <i>Platform</i>	182
Fig. 6.7	Cui Mingliang makes a fire in <i>Platform</i>	183
Fig. 6.8	Zhongping fights in the hospital—a typical scene staged in depth in <i>Platform</i>	183
Fig. 6.9	A brawl is happening in the store while the pictures stays static in <i>Platform</i>	184