The Might of the People: Counter-Espionage Films and Participatory Surveillance in the

Early PRC

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The increasing penetration of surveillance technology in everyday life as well as the wide spread concern for national security in the face of global terrorism in the past decade has not only boosted surveillance studies in general but also fostered critical attention on surveillance cinema. Aside from film narratives and the new realist aesthetics informed by pervasive surveillance in contemporary societies, issues pertaining to the mutual implication of cinema and surveillance are of particular interest to film and media scholars. For instance, Sebastien Lefait in his study of contemporary film and TV programs suggests that cinema engages surveillance structurally through its fictional creation of surveillance microcosms. In the meantime, being a reality-capturing device, the cinematic apparatus "translates the problem of the ambiguity of the visible into terms of mediated watching," which is also a matter at the heart of surveillance (ix). Similarly, Catherine Zimmer states that surveillance cinema is not simply one of the recurring

tropes or iconographies of surveillance, but also concerns "the multiple mediations that occur through the cinematic narration of surveillance, through which practices of surveillance become representational and representational practices become surveillant" (2).

Rather than pursuing epistemological affinities between surveillance and cinema, however, this chapter returns to those questions of cinema's political role in the actual surveillance culture that contributes to the production of subjectivity desired in a particular socio-historical context. Specifically, it will take as its case study the Chinese counter-espionage films (*fante pian*), a burgeoning film genre in the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) during the heyday of the Cold War.

Through an examination of cinematic narratives and formal strategies in relation to the prevalent geopolitical discourses and the two political campaigns to suppress counterrevolutionaries in 1950s China, this chapter aims to shed light on how this particular genre was configured into a surveillance culture predicated upon the political mobilization of the masses and in turn modelled participatory surveillance — a mode of surveillance in which the masses act as surveillance agents instead of surveillance subjects in order to safeguard national security. Although participatory surveillance promoted and practised in the early PRC shaped the vigilant and responsible socialist subjectivity and thus became an essential dimension of socialist modernity, it has long been neglected due to the popularization of and obsession with the Orwellian totalitarian panopticism in the West. It is hoped that this study of historically situated social and cultural practices of surveillance in the early PRC will not only demystify the Western imagination of surveillance in socialist states as homogenous, repressive practices but also help offset the discursive asymmetry in the current field of surveillance studies which has hitherto been dominated by Western models or metaphors of surveillance and their underlying social values of liberal individualism.

The Counter-Espionage Film and the Political Campaigns

The years between the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 saw an increasing integration of cinema into the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s mammoth project of nation building and socialist construction. Being well aware of cinema's unique capacity to influence hearts and minds, the Communist government developed an annual production quota system and started to allocate specific subject matters to state-owned film studios in 1950 (Xiao and Zhang, 23). By 1953 the nationalization of the Chinese film industry had been completed. Guided by the Party's overarching cultural policy that "literature and arts should serve the people," film studios in major production centers such as Changchun, Beijing and Shanghai as well as the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s August First film studio produced a large number of feature films with the aims of propagating socialist ideology and the Party's political priorities and satisfying the needs of the workers, the peasants, and the soldiers. Alongside feature films dealing with such topics as revolutionary history, ethnic minorities, agriculture and industry, a steady stream of counter-espionage-themed movies (*fante pian*) were produced throughout the early years of the PRC.[1]

Unlike spy films produced in commercially-oriented film industries, Chinese counter-espionage films demonstrate no consistent narrative patterns. They display differing degrees of narrative sophistication and stylistic maturity and vary greatly in length.[2] Some films such as *Shenmi de lüban* (*Mysterious Travelling Companions*, dir. Lin Nong & Zhu Wenshun, 1954) and *Bingshan shang de laike* (*Visitor on Ice Mountain*, dir. Zhao Xinshui, 1963) are set in remote frontier regions inhabited by ethnic minorities. The depiction of PLA soldiers' heroic efforts in the frontier to thwart international intrigue combined with the cinematic representation of local customs and ethnic landscapes made these films immensely popular among Chinese audiences.[3] Other counter-espionage films are set in urban centers where a diverse mixture of social classes and the constant influx of visitors from abroad render the city vulnerable to subversion and

infiltration. The port city Guangzhou, as it is adjacent to Hong Kong, proved to be a favorite location for filmmakers and serves as the backdrop of quite a few films including *Yangcheng anshao* (*Secret Guards in Canton*, dir. Lu Jue, 1957)*, Xu Qiuying anjian* (*The Case of Xu Qiuying*, dir. Yu Yanfu, 1958), and *Genzong zhuiji* (*On the Trail*, dir. Lu Jue, 1963). Still other counter-espionage films, such as *Huxue zhuizong* (*Track the Tiger into Its Lair*, dir. Huang Can, 1956), *Yingxiong hudan* (*Intrepid Hero*, dir. Yan Jizhou & Hao Guang, 1958) and *Qianshao* (*Outpost*, dir. Daoerji Guangbu, 1959), employ the narrative devices of double infiltration and double identity. In addition to the plotline of overseas spies sneaking into mainland China and lurking in the cities, these films provide another plotline where the resourceful and brave protagonist infiltrates the enemy's camp — a place full of temptation and danger — in order to search for espionage plans. The films in these two sub-categories, though small in quantity, adeptly employ montage and narrative twists in creating a suspenseful atmosphere and building high tension in the audience. They invited some interesting discussions of genre-related issues at the time of their release and have since been regarded as the harbinger of a self-conscious thriller genre in the PRC.[4] There exists yet another type of counter-espionage films which obviously cross over into the children's film. Films such as *Pibao* (*The Briefcase*, dir. Wang Lan, 1956) and *Yudao zhi zi* (*The Son of A Fishing Island*, dir. Xu Yan, 1959) construct social imaginaries around the ideal revolutionary successor through concentrated depictions of children's active participation in ferreting out spies and safeguarding public security.[5]

Despite its heterogeneous features, the counter-espionage film with its narrative focus on tracking down hidden spies constitutes a particular cultural discourse of surveillance framed by Cold War geopolitics in general and by the CCP's two political campaigns against counterrevolutionaries in the 1950s in particular. As is well known, the CCP's state-building project is imbricated in the unfolding of Cold War geopolitical order. Despite Mao Zedong's proclamation of the founding of the PRC in October 1949, the civil war between the Soviet-back

CCP and the US-backed KMT (Chinese Nationalist party) was hardly over. In fact, the young PRC soon found itself stranded in a grim geopolitical situation. The remnants of the Nationalist army still occupied much of South China, as well as many of the provinces and outlying dependencies in the West and Northwest. After the nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek retreated to the island of Taiwan in December 1949, it continued to implement its national policy "opposing Communism and resisting the Soviet" (*fangong kang'e*) and prepared to "counterattack the Mainland" (*fangong dalu*). As the Cold War was turning hot in 1950, Mao sent millions of Chinese People's Volunteers Army soldiers to the Korean battle front to fight against US imperialists. In the late 1950s, border crises in both the Taiwan Strait and Sino-Indian border erupted. The social anxiety about national security and stability aroused by the ongoing Cold War found its obvious expression in the counter-espionage film, as evidenced by its depiction of porous borders, literal and metaphorical. Whereas films including *Jiaoyin* (*Footprints*, dir. Yan Jizhou, 1955), *Tianluo diwang* (*An Inescapable Net*, dir. Gu Eryi, 1955) and *Track the Tiger to Its Lair* use either geographical landmarks or the character of overseas returnees to indicate the existence of geopolitical "Other," films such as *Jijing de shanlin* (*Quiet Forest*, dir. Zhu Wenshun, 1957) and *On the Trail* present realistic depiction of border crossings — for instance, ordinary folks walking across the border of Hong Kong and Chinse mainland and even military dropping KMT spies in the PRC's territory.

What deserves attention is that the CCP also skilfully utilized the binary logic and oppositional rhetoric of the Cold War to justify the tramping down of social conflicts and the cleansing of body politic. It is no accident that the production of counter-espionage films picked up speed from 1949 to 1959 when the Party's two political campaigns against counterrevolutionaries unfolded.[6] The first campaign, known as *zhenfan yundong* (Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries), was waged from July 1950 to the summer of 1953 against the backdrop of land reform and China's entrance into the Korean War. As the CCP's first political

campaign to consolidate the new communist regime, *zhenfan* focused on identifying and eliminating counterrevolutionaries who commit criminal offences "with the purpose of overthrowing the people's democratic regime and destroy the people's democratic cause" (Anon., 2). The designated targets of this campaign included secret agents, spies, and various actual or "intended" active counterrevolutionaries including bandits and robbers, local bullies and tyrants, and leaders of religious sects, although in reality it was hard to differentiate and classify actual counterrevolutionaries and "intended" active counterrevolutionaries. The second campaign, *sufan yundong* (Campaign to Eradicate Hidden Counterrevolutionaries), started as an expansion of the previous campaign against intellectuals who opposed the Party in June 1955 and ended around October 1957.[7] As another regime-consolidation endeavor, this campaign aimed to eliminate suspected reactionaries within the party at all levels of state bureaucratic organs and the people's organizations in order to strengthen the Party's centralized leadership over economic, legal and security organizations. Despite being primarily an extensive bureaucratic purge, the necessity of the *sufan* campaign was justified by Mao's famous 1956 speech "On Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" for the sake of deterring foreign invasion and subversion. Using Cold War rhetoric, Mao alerted his audience to the persistent, antagonistic contradiction between the Chinese people and their enemies: "The U.S. imperialists and the Chiang Kai-shek clique are constantly sending in secret agents to carry on disruptive activities. Even after all the existing counter-revolutionaries have been combed out, new ones are likely to emerge. If we drop our guard, we shall be badly fooled and shall suffer severely."

When it comes to the cleansing and purification of the body politic, surveillance has long been deployed at a variety of different historical moments and locations. Anxieties and fears invoked or inflicted upon individuals in the implementation of surveillance by police officers, security staff and prison guards have been identified as essential for institutionalized surveillance to maximize its efficiency and disciplinary power. In her study of the CCP's political campaign

against counterrevolutionaries, political scientist Julia Strauss also takes note of the affective state of the individual elicited in the specific context of mass campaign. She argues that the efficacy of the campaign resides in the party-state's deployment of terror in tandem with paternalism: the state bestowed paternalist care, in the forms of normative incentives and material benefits, on "those whom it deemed to be within the realm of revolutionary society," unleashed terror against "those beyond the pale of revolutionary society," and deployed "the coercive power to make both stick" (81). Placing an emphasis on coercive statecraft, Strauss' concept of "paternalistic terror" not only implies a vertical, hierarchical structure of state power but also directs attention to the restrained subjectivity interpellated by the Party via the use of terror. As a consequence, it plausibly reinforces popular imagination of an authoritarian China that struggles for total domination of its population through centralized forms of surveillance.

It is necessary to stress that the aforementioned political campaigns were driven forward not only by the CCP's exercise of coercive power but also by the Party's masterful creation of consent and skilful mobilization of mass support through its long-tested mass line work method (*qunzhong luxian*).[8] During the two campaigns against counterrevolutionaries, public exhibitions were held in various cities to instruct people of the severity of counterrevolutionary activity;[9] anti-counterrevolutionary cartoons and popular songs were created by both professional and amateur artists;[10] counter-espionage films[11] and fictions[12] were widely disseminated to enhance awareness of the struggle against counterrevolutionaries. In towns, villages, and major cities across the nation, the masses were mobilized to inform against suspected counterrevolutionaries and to attend mass accusation meetings where public denunciation of counterrevolutionaries was staged and fear was struck into the hearts of their sympathizers.[13] In his report on the campaigns to suppress counterrevolutionaries made in 1956, the Minister of Public Security, Luo Ruiqing, stressed that carrying out the mass line was one of many valuable experiences that ensured the success of both *zhenfan* and *sufan* campaigns. He claimed,

As long as we mobilize the widest masses of the people especially those who are still wavering ideologically and those who are ideologically backward, enhance their political vigilance and improve their ability to discern counterrevolutionaries, we will lighten up all the dark corners so that none of counterrevolutionaries can escape the scrutiny of our masses.

Mobilizing the masses to become surveillance agents rather than defining them as surveillance subjects (persons about whom information is sought or reported) characterizes the dominant paradigm of surveillance, namely, *participatory surveillance*, in the early PRC. Despite their common focus on participation, participatory surveillance practised by Chinese citizens in the 1950s differs drastically from participatory surveillance that has become an integral part of our contemporary digital realities. The latter, as discussed by many media scholars, is made possible by the convergence of digital technology and telecommunications and is embedded within a larger digital culture shaped and sustained by user participation. As an increasing number of people expand their everyday activities and social interactions onto social media platforms, personal narratives and images, information, and other data shared in participatory online environments not only empower individuals as they build their social relationships and their subjectivities but also make mutual, voluntary, and horizontal surveillance ever so easy, leaving open questions about the social, ethical and political implications of our present-day participatory surveillance.[14] On the contrary, participatory surveillance practised in the early PRC is by no means predicated upon the existence of any technological infrastructure. To a large degree, it harks back to the fundamental meaning of surveillance as "processes in which special note is taken of certain human behaviours that go well beyond idle curiosity" (Lyon, 13). As a social practice largely driven by the CCP's political campaigns and as a form

of what the CCP calls "the people's democratic dictatorship,"[15] participatory surveillance downplays the technical means of surveillance or even dismisses technologized surveillance, a type of surveillance that has exclusionist connotations due to its heavy reliance on communication technologies, detection techniques and other scientifically informed technical knowhow.

Encouraged and implemented in the CCP's reign of revolutionary terror, participatory surveillance in 1950s China became an effective mechanism for maintaining social order as well as a technique for shaping socialist subjectivity. Its existence and prevalence demystify the entrenched assumption that a totalitarian state mainly relies on panoptic surveillance to exert its control over masses of people. The differences between these two surveillant schemes are apparent. Panopticism, which was envisioned by Michel Foucault and popularized by George Orwell as a model of the workings of power for a modern, particularly, totalitarian, state system,[16] focuses on the disciplinary power of the all-penetrating and all-pervasive gaze on the presumably passive subject of the gaze. In contrast, participatory surveillance evokes individual agency in fulfilling his or her responsibilities of being a vigilant socialist citizen. If the architectural figure of panopticism is Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison, then the diagram of participatory surveillance, corresponding to the popular Chinese expression of unavoidable retribution and punishment — "Heaven's net is vast; its mesh is loose but leaves out nothing" (*tianwang huihui, shu er bulou*)[17] — takes the shape of a vast network, with socialist citizens serving as interconnected knots of revolutionary force. In addition, whereas the gaze and a consciousness of the uneven distribution of visibility and invisibility enforce disciplinary power in panoptic surveillance, bodily practices including the act of observing, tailing, and reporting create disciplinary technologies in the scheme of participatory surveillance.

In addition to political speeches and official newspaper editorials, discourses and narratives of participatory surveillance found their way into counter-espionage films produced

in the early PRC, especially those intended as auxiliary materials for the campaigns to suppress counterrevolutionaries. One such example is the film *Renmin de juzhang* (*The Might of the People*). Produced in 1950 by Kunlun film studio as a timely response to the party's political demand, the film received a warm welcome upon its release and was screened during the *zhenfan* campaign across China.[18] Thus, it provides a good case study to illustrate key aesthetic characteristics of the counter-espionage film and to understand the role of cinema as constitutive of a socio-historically specific surveillance culture in the early PRC.

Cinematic Articulation of Participatory Surveillance: *The Might of the People*

Directed by Chen Liting and scripted by Xia Yan, the film *The Might of the People* is set in Shanghai in the transition period between the eve of the nationwide liberation and China's entrance into the Korean War. Typical of the narratives of the counter-espionage film, *The Might of the People* is premised upon the necessity of using surveillance to counter the KMT's severe threat to New China's national security and socialist construction. Within the film narrative, the KMT, not willing to accept its defeat, orders its secret agents and remnant forces in mainland China to make every attempt to gather intelligence and to create great social disturbance. Thanks to the assistance of ordinary folks, the PRC's public security officers eventually uncover hidden spies and hunt down all enemies of the state.

Intended as a pedagogical material for the *zhenfan* campaign, *The Might of the People* encodes in both its title and its narrative the CCP's official policy on soliciting mass support to crack down counterrevolutionaries. The original Chinese film title *Renmin de juzhang*, which literally means "the giant palm of the people," employs the common Chinese figurative speech of palm to indicate both the intensity of control and the pervasiveness of power derived from the people's democratic dictatorship (see Fig. 1).[19] At the end of the film, the political slogan "Suppress ruthlessly counterrevolutionary activities; defend economic construction in New

China and safeguard the fruits of the victory of the people!" is strikingly superimposed onto the closing credits, hammering home the CCP's clear and concise political message.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1. Metonymizing people power through *Renmin de juzhang* (*Giant Palm of the People*) in original poster imagery for *The Might of the People* (here taken from the DVD cover, publisher: Emei dianying zhipianchang yinxiang chubanshe, 2006).

The uniqueness of the film is easily identifiable. Unlike conventional spy films, the development of narrative in this film is neither plot-driven nor character-driven. Instead of focusing on specific crises and heroic individuals' creative solutions to these crises, *The Might of the People* reflects upon the form of surveillance in socialist China through its narrative and film aesthetics.

Early in the film, the chief villain, Zhang Rong, a KMT secret agent is introduced to the audience. Pretending to be a worker activist in a protest against the KMT's closing down of a cotton mill just before the Communist liberation of Shanghai, Zhang is arrested by the KMT and then put in a prison where he wins the trust and admiration of a hot-blooded young man named Huang Zihe. After the liberation, Zhang continues to disguise himself as a progressive worker in the cotton mill where he seizes all opportunities to incite internal strife. He continuously intimidates one of his former accomplices, the timid and apprehensive worker Li Fusheng, to sabotage vital machines in the factory. In the meantime, taking advantage of the gullible Huang and the latter's affection toward his innocent sister Zhang Xinghua, Zhang Rong manages to gather important production information about a steel plant and supplies it to his superior. As a result, the KMT launches a successful air raid against the steel plant, causing civilian casualties and obstructing steel production, which was to support Chinese military forces in the Korean War. Since the audience is well informed of the true identity of the villain and the KMT's plot from the outset, the central question of the film narrative then becomes how Zhang Rong and

other counterrevolutionaries are to be ferreted out and brought under the power of the people. In fact, much of the film narrative subverts western, especially Hollywood-engineered, impressions of surveillance as technologically driven, standardized practices and instead calls the audience's attention to the formation of surveillance.

Specifically, the film employs dispersed narratives as well as innovative cinematography to foreground the formation of an ever-expanding network of citizen surveillance in socialist China. Compared with its contemporary films, *The Might of the People* features an unusually large number of characters from all walks of life. In addition to KMT secret agents and counterrevolutionary bandits, there are public security officers, veteran soldiers, workers, union activists, craftsmen, and office clerks with varying degrees of ideological maturity and political sensibility. At various moments, the film digresses from its narration of spy intrigue and shifts its focal point onto individual characters who would become integrated into the vast surveillance network, thus producing dispersed narratives of the individual's motives and choices behind participatory surveillance.

Female characters prove to be essential nodal points in this citizen surveillance network. One of such characters is Xinghua, the hard-working, tender and loving girl of humble origins. Earlier sequences in the film show that although she disapproves of her brother's bad inclination, she is genuinely concerned about him. When Zhang Rong returns home safely from prison, Xinghua is relieved and is quick to believe her brother's justification of his previous infamous conduct as carrying out underground work for the Communist army. After a scene showing the devastating aftermath of the air bombing, the film digresses to Xinghua's story. At their humble home, Xinghua begs Zhang Rong to report their elderly mother's disappearance to the police, but her request is abruptly rejected by the sullen-looking brother. Becoming suspicious, Xinghua quickly checks her brother's wallet while he is away. She is obviously taken aback when she finds a few American dollar bills and an instructional note for carrying out sabotage inside his

wallet. What follows is a scene full of emotional intensity set at a hospital. The ashamed Xinghua confides her brother's true identity to her beloved man, Huang Zihe who has suffered a severe injury during the bombing. Upon hearing Xinghua's words, a fury of self-indignation comes upon Huang Zihe as he begins to realize that his naivety and trusting nature have made him an unknowing accomplice to the counterrevolutionary crime. Only a few minutes earlier, he had vouched for Zhang Rong when his old friend, the chief public security officer Xue Jiaqi, inquires about the leak of steel production plans. With its focus placed on supplementary characters' shame, remorse, and self-reproach, this film sequence draws our attention to the responsibility of socialist citizens as well as the consequence of failures in vigilance performance. The scene is significant also because it serves as a turning point of the entire film. It is in this scene that the surveillance network starts to take shape thanks to strong interpersonal bonds. Instead of reporting directly to a local public security bureau, Xinghua reveals important information about the counterrevolutionary to the person she loves and hence trusts. Because of mutual support, ordinary people become more resolute in participating in surveillance to root out hidden spies and saboteurs. Huang is jolted out of his complacency and naivety by Xinghua's confession; in turn, his integrity and uprightness stimulate Xinghua to place greater priority on collective interests over her blood relationship. After this scene, the girl is seen to take a more active part in monitoring her brother's secret activities.

If Xinghua's involvement in surveillance is out of her own volition, then the cooperation of the other female character Jin Xiu with public security officers can be regarded as a hard-won participation. Working at a local stock exchange office as a bookkeeper, Jin Xiu, with her hair well-coiffed and makeup carefully applied, is a typical "petty urbanite" in Shanghai. She minds her own business and is concerned only with worldly matters. When Zhang Rong delivers explosives hidden in a biscuit tin to the stock exchange office, she gives no heed to the person in front of her but takes out a biscuit to taste. After Zhang Rong is exposed as a spy, the film

digresses into an episode about Jin Xiu, as she holds important clues about the espionage ringleader. Being held at a police station for questioning, Jin Xiu shows an indifferent attitude. Although a hot-tempered public security officer repeatedly urges her to provide information, she abides by the principle of "being worldly wise and playing it safe" and refuses to name the person who asked her to cash a check as payment for Zhang Rong — the suspected ringleader of a KMT counterrevolutionary organization in Shanghai. To her surprise, instead of punishing her for her non-cooperation, the chief public security officer Xue offers her comforting words, encourages her to put the people's interest first, and then releases her from the police station. Upon returning home, Jin finds out that two PLA soldiers have been looking after her young child. Before leaving, these friendly soldiers ask her to check whether household items are in their proper places and remind her that it's counterrevolutionary spies who have caused grave damage to the state and caused her much trouble. Impressed by the Communist officers' new workstyle and touched by the PLA soldiers' sincerity, Jin Xiu finally goes to the public security bureau and hands in a gold ring as well as a pad of American dollars deposited by the suspect. The significance of this episode about Jin Xiu lies not only in the fact that she provides crucial clues which enable security officers to identify and track down the crafty mastermind behind counterrevolutionary activities but also in that she becomes converted into a conscientious participant in the network of citizen surveillance, or in the officer Xue's words, "returns to the side of the people."

While episodic dispersed narratives of minor characters thematically highlight the pervasiveness of participatory surveillance, cinematography used in *The Might of the People* ingeniously contrasts participatory surveillance with technologized surveillance. Whereas aerial shots and military maps — the common surveillance methods that privilege vision and visibility — are utilized in scenes featuring the KMT's aggression, active, horizontal camera movement is used at various points of the film to connect disparate characters together, thus visually

weaving an expansive network of surveillance. For instance, the film opens with a series of aerial shots, showing the Park Hotel, the Garden Bridge (both famous Shanghai landmarks), a large crowd thronged at a big cotton mill's closing-down sale, and a busy downtown strip with bustling traffic (see Fig. 2). Accompanied by fast-paced music played by string instruments as well as the screech of air-raid sirens, these quickly cut, swirling aerial shots unmistakeably foreground an overhead surveillant gaze which transforms the cityscape from places to targets. The caption on screen "The Eve of the Liberation of Shanghai" cues the audience to link the surveillant gaze with the aerial perspective of military aircraft and to interpret the looming threat as the KMT's suppression before its final debacle. The KMT's technologized surveillance is further elaborated in a sequence revolving around military preparation for bombing the steel plant. It starts with a close-up shot of the spymaster's hand quickly typing telegraphic codes and then cuts into an extreme long shot of landscape which is blurred by quick panning and directional shifts of the camera. After signaling a change in geographical setting, the camera stops on a KMT air traffic monitor inside a watchtower, giving out orders to get aircrafts ready to fly their bombing missions. This image dissolves into the next shot that shows the monitor's contact on the other end of the phone, reading out geographic coordinates. The screen is soon dominated by a large-scaled map, and a quickened human action of map-measuring and map-marking is shown to the audience. An imminent bombing of the steel plant is then indicated by an ingeniously designed multilayered montage: a close-up shot of the typist's hand is superimposed onto the encircled target area on the map zoomed towards the audience, which is complemented by voice-over narration of geographical coordinates — the decoded telegraphic message (see Fig.3). Through the superimposed images and the overlapping telegraph-typing sound and verbal commands, this shot collapses geographical boundaries and establishes the causal link between espionage activity and the KMT's military attack. The sequence culminates in a long shot of dense white smoke arising from the city. Thus, the film provides a subtle critique of technologized

surveillance, a kind of surveillance that heavily relies on communication, devices, and data, by linking it with danger and destruction.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Figure 2. Images of Shanghai's Park Hotel and the Garden Bridge in the opening sequence to *The Might of the People* (Kunlun Film Studio, 1950).

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

Figure 3. Technologized surveillance employed by counterrevolutionary KMT powers in *The Might of the People* (Kunlun Film Studio, 1950).

In contrast, *The Might of the People* displays an affirmation of participatory surveillance. Quick cutting between adjacent spaces in conjunction with horizontal camera movement is used to follow watchful citizens' monitoring activities and to implicitly suggest interconnectedness between ordinary folks. This is best illustrated by an episode featuring the concerted efforts made by a shoemaker, a skinny, boyish looking PLA soldier and ordinary residents to watch over a suspicious occupant in a neighbourhood. The scene opens with a medium shot of an old shoemaker in the foreground, supposedly at an entrance to a residential compound. In the background stands a middle-aged woman with a child in her arms. Taking a hint from the shoemaker who just turned his head around, the woman hurries away. Now we see the spymaster, who has aroused the shoemaker's suspicion, entering the frame and rushing headlong towards the end of the alleyway. The next shot shows a young woman knocking on the door of the spymaster's apartment, obviously passing the warning from the middle-aged woman to the person inside. The camera then sweeps from right to left, revealing the space inside the door — a spacious living room (see Fig. 4). The leftward movement continues until the camera shows the young PLA solider who has disguised himself into a shoemaker's apprentice dressed in

overalls and then stops at the evidence he has just uncovered: a telegraph device, a few pamphlets as well as sheets of telegraph codes on the table — belongings that verify the suspicious occupant's identity. Hearing knocks on the door, the soldier quickly puts what he has discovered back to a moveable block inside the windowsill. This scene is quickly cut into a shot of a staircase outside the apartment. When the "apprentice" is about to descend the stairs, he sees the spy suspect walking up towards his apartment. The quick-witted boy immediately shouts out asking "Whose shoes are these?" and a woman downstairs quickly responds in order to cover for him.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Figure 4. A neighbour intervenes in *The Might of the People* (Kunlun Film Studio, 1950). Note that the panning camera movement in which this moment occurs includes a cheat shot that takes viewers inside the door, demonstrating both the lateral imbrication of participatory surveillance and its inescapability.

As encoded in the film's cinematography as well as narrative, the ordinariness of surveillance methods and surveillance agents is the main feature of participatory surveillance. Dispensing with any surveillance technology, vigilant citizens simply watch, observe, seek, and gather information of their suspect. Their surveillance practices are embedded in everyday activities and are carried out in the quotidian space, in contradistinction with technologized surveillance deployed by enemies of the state. Suffice it to say, aesthetic and narrative strategies employed here are well in line with the CCP's mass-line formulation of policy on the suppression of counterrevolutionaries. In various occasions, the party singled out "isolationism" and "mysticism" — the belief that only a minority of security experts can take on the task of detecting counterrevolutionaries — for criticism and condemned them as "the remnant influence of the thought of the reactionary ruling class." It stressed that the guiding principles on public security work in New China were bound to be different from those in Old China. Specifically, the exclusive and elitist nature of pre-liberation public security work was derived from the deep

feeling of fear that the ruling class harbored toward the masses, whom they had previously oppressed and exploited. By comparison, the interests of the national security organs and of the people in socialist China were aligned. It was only natural for public security officers to widely solicit mass support and rely on the masses to maintain national security and social stability. There is no doubt that by de-technologizing surveillance, *The Might of the People* expediently accentuates the people's power.

Apart from confirming the shoemaker's initial suspicion and detecting the spy, the cooperation and assistance among ordinary people depicted in this episode is of equal importance. As much as a mechanism of social control, participatory surveillance is shown as a form of sociality. It is this intrinsic sociality of participatory surveillance that distinguishes it from compartmentalized traditional surveillance in pre-industrial societies, despite their common reliance on unaided senses for scrutinizing human behaviour. In the meantime, this sociality is inseparable from, and in a sense constitutive of, a process of subjectivization in which individuals make their conscious decisions and ethical choices in response to the party's call of duty, hence turning themselves into socialist subjects.

As is manifested by *The Might of the People*, a balance between conveying official ideology and enhancing the genre's artistic value, which Chinese filmmakers strove for, is hard to achieve. While weaving a narrative net of disparate characters getting involved in surveillance work to clean out counterrevolutionaries, *The Might of the People* suffers from the limitations of abrupt disruption in the narrative flow and lack of in-depth character development. Nevertheless, *The Might of the People* presents a valuable account of surveillance that would enrich our understanding of the diversity of meanings and forms of surveillance in the long history of modern surveillance. Offering a cinematic articulation of participatory surveillance promoted and practised in the socialist China, the film ushered in a shift in the social function of spy films in Chinese film history from entertainment to a means of political mobilization. [20] More

importantly, it draws attention to a particular vision of participatory surveillance that is intensely political because of its intimate link with socialist ideology and its illustration of civic responsibility.

Conclusion

While perpetuating the ideological polarities of the two opposing camps of socialism and capitalism, Chinese counter-espionage films produced amidst the CCP's political campaigns to suppress counterrevolutionaries in the early PRC present varied narratives of how ordinary people assist public security officers in detecting and catching counterrevolutionary spies and hence defend the fruits of socialist construction. As the meeting point of cultural production and political movement, they provide a valuable lens for analyzing surveillance culture in the early years of the PRC. The 1950 film *The Might of the People*, which foregrounds the formation of citizen surveillance network, well illustrates the key elements of socialist surveillance culture. Thematically and structurally, the film not only condemns technologized surveillance but also points to its alternative — a participatory mode of surveillance that relies on individual citizens' enhanced political consciousness and participation in surveillance.

The ethical concern with surveillance in relation to the construction of vigilant socialist subjectivity, an issue broached by *The Might of the People*, continues to characterize the distinction between the commercially oriented spy films and the counter-espionage films produced in socialist China. As the political campaign against counterrevolutionaries developed into a political purge around 1955, Chinese counter-espionage films underwent modifications to raise vigilance against deeply hidden counterrevolutionaries. In addition to foreign imperialists and KMT officers and special agents in various disguises, counterrevolutionaries now included overseas Chinese traveling to China for family visits and backward citizens who degenerate into the accomplices of KMT secret agents. In films such as *An Inescapable Net*, *Track the Tiger into*

Its Lair, and *Quiet Forest*, enemy espionage agents become so hidden that their true identities are not revealed until well into the narrative. Meanwhile, public security officers, who are often party members, perform more heroic feats and demonstrate a high level of intelligence and leadership capabilities. Although the plots of the counter-espionage film became more complex over time, participatory surveillance remained an important building block of the film narrative. Minor characters such as primary school students, maids and housewives are shown as vigilant citizens who often provide a vital piece of information that enable public security officers to catch the spies.

Aside from narrative and aesthetic uniqueness, these Chinese counter-espionage films prompt us to pay close attention to the social, political and historical conditions which give rise to a particular form of participatory surveillance that relies on political mobilization and mass participation for safeguarding the young PRC's national security and the fruits of socialist construction. Being simultaneously shaped by and constitutive of the politicized surveillance culture engineered by the CCP, these films offer culturally and historically specific discourses of participatory surveillance, which not only predate but also differ drastically from the current discussion of participatory surveillance within the broader contemporary digital culture, thereby affirming the necessity of historicizing surveillance in order to unlock the complex multiplicity of forms of surveillance in practice. Moreover, through its cinematic trope of network and collaboration, the Chinese counter-espionage film subverts the analytic dyad of "social control/individual resistance" predominant in Western discourses of surveillance, and instead, highlights the intertwined relationship of "social control/citizen responsibility." In short, cultural articulations of surveillance produced within socialist China offer an interesting and powerful counterpoint to Orwellian critique of socialism. They demonstrate that a socialist state could well rely on the mobilization of participation and the cultivation of vigilance rather than the repressive panopticism to implement its governance.

NOTES

[1] The majority of counter-espionage films were produced by state studios under the quota system. Two notable exceptions are *The Invisible Battlefront*, which was made by CCP-led Northeast Film Studio on the eve of nationwide liberation in 1949 and *The Might of the People*, a film produced by the privately owned Shanghai Kunlun film Studio in 1950.

[2] Although the counter-espionage film was not conceived as an industrial strategy in Chinese socialist cinema, hence not a film genre in a strict sense, genre criticism lends film scholars a useful tool to explore the relationship between ideology and Chinese counter-espionage films. See Esther Yau, "Leixing yanjiu yu lengzhan dianying: jianlun 'shiqinian' tewu zhencha pian" (Genre Study and Cold War Cinema: Comments on Spy Detection Films of the Seventeen Year Period), *Dangdai dianying* (*Contemporary Cinema*), no.3 (2006): 74-80; Gong Yan and Huang Lin, "Leixing de xiujian yu gaixie: shiqinian fante pian li de xingbie yu zhuti (The Maintenance and Modification of Genre: Gender and Themes in the Counter-espionage Film During the Seventeen Year Period), *Beijing dianying xueyuan xuebao* (*Journal of Beijing Film Academy*), no.5 (2013): 7-11.

[3] The ethnic elements in these films elicited enthusiastic responses from audiences, as evidenced by audience letters to the popular film magazine *Masses Cinema*. See Chen Gang, "Cong fante xinpian suo xiangdao de yixie wenti: jianping *Genzong zhuiji* yu *Bingshan shang de laike*" (Questions Inspired by Recent Counter-espionage Films: *On the Trail* and *Visitor on Ice Mountain*), *Dazhong dianying* (*Masses Cinema*), no.6 (1963), 37-44; Yi Bing, "Yibu xinying biezhi de fante yingpian: *Bingshan shang de laike* guanhou" (Thoughts on Viewing *Visitor on Ice Mountain*: A New and Original Counter-Espionage Film), *Dazhogn dianying* (*Masses Cinema*), no.10 (1963):12-13.

[4] Discussions of the thriller genre appeared in major film magazines from 1958 to 1963. For instance, Jin Lüqu, "Jingxian yingpian chuangzuo de qilu: Ping yingpian *Xu Qiuying shijian*" (The Thrill Film Going Astray: *The Case of Xu Qiuying*), *Zhongguo dianying* (*Chinese Cinema*), no.12 (1958):59; Wang Qi, "Guanyu jingxian fante yingpian chuangzhuo zhong de wenti" (On the Problems Arising from the Creation of Counter-Espionage Thrillers), *Dazhong dianying* (*Masses Cinema*), no.4 (1959), 71; Wu Yinxun, "Guanyu jingxian pian" (On the Thriller Film), *Dianying wenxue* (*Film Literature*), no. 12 (1963):62-65.

[5] Existing studies of counter-espionage films demonstrate a special predilection for counter-espionage thrillers, but largely neglect this type of counter-espionage films.

[6] Generally speaking, counter-espionage films made in the 1950s supplied many propaganda materials for the political campaigns against counterrevolutionaries. As these campaigns wound down, the production of counter-espionage films from 1960 to 1965 was more concerned with experimenting with film genres and entertaining the masses than responding to the immediate political demands.

[7] For an introduction of the *sufan* campaign, see David Bachman, *Bureaucracy, Economy and Leadership in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15; see also Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After* (New York: The Free Press, 1999),122-24.

[8] The mass line, which is aptly summarized in the phrase "from the masses to the masses," is a political, organizational and leadership method developed by the CCP. Predicated upon the idea that the Party's survival depends on mass support, the mass line refers to a process of consultation and continual adjustment of policy. For detailed discussion of the mass line, see Brantly Womack, *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 68-70.

[9] Reports on exhibitions on counterrevolutionary activity appeared in both local newspapers and the official police magazine *Renmin jingcha* (*People's Police*).

[10] For instance, on September 12, 1955, *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*) reported that cultural workers in Wuhuan, the most important city in central China, were engaged in creating anti-counterrevolutionary works. Similar cases can be found in other parts of China in this nationwide political campaign.

[11] According to *People's Daily*, at the start of the campaign against counterrevolutionaries, mobile film projection units brought counter-espionage films to the mines, factories and local government bureaus for screening. See "Jiaqiang fangjian fangte xuanchuan: *Wuxing de zhanxian* deng yingpian zai ge changkuang xunhui fangying" (Strengthen Propaganda Work on Guarding Against Enemy Agents and Counterrevolutionaries: *The Invisible Battlefront* and Other Films Toured Around Mines and Factories), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), July 18, 1950.

[12] Counter-espionage fictions were published in literary magazines and as printed copies throughout the early years of the PRC. In addition to serving as pedagogical materials, they had undeniable entertainment value. It was reported that some counter-espionage thriller fictions were so entertaining that they drew many readers away from erotic fictions. See Xie Yun, "Mantan fante jingxian xiaoshuo" (A Ramble on Counter-espionage Thriller Fictions), *Jiefangjun wenyi* (*PLA Literature and Arts*), no.3 (1957): 30-34.

[13] At the outset of the *zhenfan* campaign, some cities inserted the clause "Report counterrevolutionaries" into local regulations of patriotism. See "Fangshou fadong qunzhong kongsu yu jianju fangeming fenzi" (Broadly Mobilize the Masses to Denounce and Inform Against Counterrevolutionaries), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 21 May 1951. For mass mobilization in the campaigns against counterrevolutionaries, see also Julia Strauss, "Paternalist Terror: The Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and Regime Consolidation in the People's Republic of China, 1950-1953," 96.

[14] For an introduction to the term "participatory surveillance" and its different usages in contemporary media studies, see Fernanda Bruno, "Surveillance and Participation on Web 2.0" in Kirstie Ball, Kevin Haggerty and David Lyon, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012), 343-351. See also Anders Albrechtslund, *Participatory Surveillance: Sharing Our Life Online* (London: Ashgate publisher, 2014).

[15] Mao Zedong expounded this idea in his speech "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship" delivered on June 30, 1949. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_65.htm (accessed 6 April 2016). Mao maintains that the people's democratic dictatorship combines democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries. This phrase was later incorporated into the 1954 constitution of the PRC, which defines the state power as the people's democratic dictatorship.

[16] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) and George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004).

[17] This phrase was originally used by Lao Tzu to describe the Tao of Heaven in *Tao Te Ching*. See Michael LaFargue, *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching: A Translation and Commentary* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 126. It was later incorporated into popular discourses on justice in China.

[18] It is hard to trace the reception of the film in 1950. However, according to Zhu Anping's memoir, the film received a warm welcome upon its release and had a good impact on audiences during the *zhenfan* campaign. See Zhu Anping, "Renmin liliang huicheng *Juzhang"* (The Strength of the People Forms a "Giant Palm"), *Dazhong dianying* (*Masses Cinema*), no.10 (2013): 38-39.

[19] "Palm" in Chinese is often used to refer to control and power. See Ning Yu: "Figurative uses of Finger and Palm in Chinese and English," *Metaphor and Symbol*, v.15: no.3 (2000): 159-75.

[20] Commercial spy films thrived from the wake of the Sino-Japanese War to the founding of the PRC. The most prominent director of this genre is Tu Guangqi. See Zhiwei Xiao and Yingjin Zhang, eds., *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 141.

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